

FIRST, TRANSMIT OR PRESERVE?

The permanence of genius loci

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Abstract. *The place's spirit* is signaled through the *mnemonic loci*, due to the meaning that some tangible assets have to a certain human group, influenced by the intangibility surrounding them. Man produces *culture* in two kinds of assets: tangible and intangible in a closed circle, which, through time it is transformed into a support structure *hoard* for today's man's knowledge of his history. It allows him to identify with the members of his society, to prop the *thrill to live* in a particular place, and distinguish the contents of his *patrimony*. Facing an unaware community, it appears impractical to first protect and preserve, and then to pass on; most necessary it becomes to first transmit and later preserve. It is necessary to establish procedures by means of an efficient educative system before the conservation processes for its later appropriation. Here, a proposal is presented.

The spirit of the place amongst material and non material

The elements built by some images considered symbols or figurative signs become undecodable to our plain sight nowadays, and they undoubtedly leave us curious in regard of their purpose of meaning. In a first impulse we try to settle explanations in an individual sense similar to, for instance, abstract art in our times. The use of symbols in the expression of human being is as old as his existence on Earth, since it was the elemental language used to communicate information to others.

The *Spanish Golden Century* was transmitted to America with an important load of symbolisms and the finality to achieve a better colonization of the place. In that era, emblems were produced in which allegoric-symbolic senses –primarily for Iberian regime celebrations– are used, with the final purpose to maintain a cohesive population, also today's and common need in the various types of government. In that time

symbolisms were expressed through architecture, literature, and fundamentally hieroglyphics. Another part is supported on ecclesial literature to frame both vices and virtues such as the purposely theme of the Fear of God, understood from a subjugating perspective of the Church at the moment, and that turned out to be efficient to keep the people under an obedience regime. Then, the handled topics are linked to the *principio regidor del estado* (RODRIGUEZ, 1995) [state's ruling principle].

The field of symbols has been little explored. Fernando Rodríguez de la Flor (1995) has made some analysis about it, and in his book *Emblemas, Lecturas de la imagen simbólica*, he relates a document produced by Andrea Alciati named *Emblematum liber alciatiano*, published back in 1531 under the sponsorship of the Jesuits by the name *Omnia Domini Andrea Alciati Emblemata*, which was utilized in New Spain schools, and marks a role model to achieve “(...) una yuxtaposición de lo figurativo y lo legible” [... a juxtaposition of that figurative and that legible]; the produced document has such impact that turned out to be an ideal instrument towards the counter reformist ideology.

The emblematic is associated to politics, and it is here where the work of Diego Saavedra Fajardo, the *Idea de un príncipe político-cristiano* ([Idea of a politician-Christian prince] finds its greater echo. The forms of Christian-politic expression have a strong development in this moment of the “(...) primeros humanistas del Renacimiento; es decir: como una compleja articulación de dos códigos, el plástico y el lingüístico, combinados en un mismo campo de representación y cumpliendo la palabra siempre una función de *anclaje* o de *relevo* con respecto a la imagen.” (RODRIGUEZ,1995) [... first humanists of Renaissance; in other words: as a complex articulation of two codes, plastic and linguistic, combined in a single representation field and the word always carrying out an anchorage or replacement function towards the image].

Rodríguez de la Flor rescues a draft called *Allegoría del establecimiento de la iglesia en el Nuevo Mundo*, dated in 1579 by Diego Valadés, for his *Rhetorica Christiana*. Several figures can be observed in it, and specially one holds a sphere on the right hand, which is linked in a text to the right end of the cross referred to the third chapter of the Epistle of St. Paul to the

Galatians, quote: “La Escritura, previendo que Dios justificaría a los gentiles por la fe, anunció con antelación a Abraham esta buena nueva: *En ti serán bendecidas todas las naciones.*” (**BIBLIA DE JERUSALEN,**) [“And it was because scripture foresaw that God would give saving justice to the gentiles through faith, that it announced the future gospel to Abraham in the words: *All nations will be blessed in you.*”]

The sphere means the world, but in a political perspective, since this letter of St. Paul is used occasionally as a support for Spanish allegoric representations, and it does not justify a thing in a religious way. (AMADO, 2002)

The places of memory, or *loci mnemotecnicos*, have been produced since old days; in fact, they are the ones that prop up the *genius loci*, or place geniality.

We speak then, about the *art of memory* through the mnemonic symbols but also through an *art of oblivion*, as we can infer this is frankly a social manipulation by means of symbols.

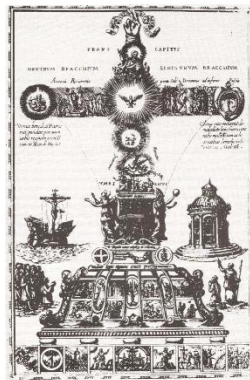


Figure 1. Allegory of the establishment of the Church in the New World by D. Valadéz 1579

The Genius Loci and the places of the memory

Becomes necessary to opt for basing the existence of patrimony from a historical-psychological point of view; perform analysis that are scientific and do not turn out to be subjective, conditioned and molded to the interests and needs of a few groups of society, to prevent social reactions from being

manipulated towards the appropriation processes and preservation of patrimony in its historical context. Nevertheless, it is difficult to opt for objectivity, since according to Alfonso Tecla (1999): the majority of analysis, even if they are proposed according to our expert vision, are as subjective and psychologically conditioned as any other aspect of human effort, having as a result that the scientific processes mold to the interests and needs of society. It is to say, in this process we find that it is possible to modify stimuli without modifying the perception since according to Alfredo Ardila (1979):

“La percepción implica la creación de categorías perceptivas, y consecuentemente es posible modificar determinados parámetros de los estímulos sin que la percepción correspondiente se modifique; a este fenómeno se ha denominado constancia perceptual.” [The perception implies the creation of perceptual categories, and consequently it is possible to modify determined parameters of stimuli without having the corresponding perception being modified; this phenomena has been denominated perceptual constancy.], which makes it possible to manipulate consciously or unconsciously, the social reactions within a scientific process.

In this game of perceptions and conservationist visions with manipulations to where it suits better for whom is performing the research, it is possible to positively influence in such way, that the transmission of the meaning of patrimony stands for the effective regional appropriation and preservation before a world with a non-contextualized global vision that joins, as it is the case of Cultural Itineraries, in different paths that make it worldlier it but at the same time particularize it in such luck that to affirm a homogeneous presence of the *genius loci* among all of them becomes complicated, as the itineraries are a “*suma de los elementos que lo integran y que le confiere su sentido*” (CIIC, 2008) [sum of the elements that integrate it and bestows its sense] reason why we can consider it as a whole, with a greater value than an isolated element like places located in different latitudes, diverse climates, and thus, customs, ways of life that even though they are related, they are different.

Could it be possible to talk about different levels of place geniality: a microgeniality and a macrogeniality? It has been spoken that the place's spirit in the case of Itineraries considers the whole that compiles it (SUAREZ,2006), with what is possible to agree only viewed from a macrovision, since at the moment of watching closely each element confirming such itineraries, we find important variables pointing out diversity among every good, between one community and another, between customs, in such way that this local spirit could be conceived in a microgeniality range.

In a small population in North Mexico called Valle San Bartolomé, founded in the late XVI Century, among several elements there can be found one that particularly calls upon the attention: a series of hands as ornamental endings for a building corner, identified as *Consistorial House* (CALDERON,2003) basically due to its urban location and some excavations indicating a possible slaughterhouse activity; activity controlled by the authorities. Some modillions in the shape of a quart sphere are sustained by several pairs of hands adorned by one or two mitres or *infulae*; element indicating a certain level of power that may have been deforced (kept) in this house.

To identify the meaning of a figure without knowing who conceived it, is equal to take the risk of choosing, in one out of a hundred or more meaning possibilities, the motives that lead o place in a determined site such image. Taking a chance, we mention again some concepts used during the *Golden Century* with the purpose to transmit some kind of knowledge that we could call both the *art of memory* and *art of oblivion*, since, isn't it during the conquering period the time in which the conceptual structure of the natives was to be changed?

The representation of isolated hands is often used in Spanish XVI and XVII Century engravings. They have been figuratively represented for alchemy, astrology, and even as demonological references, such as the so called *hand of glory*. Then again the *shrine hand* representing the hands of the souls in purgatory is closer to mnemonic. The representations of the mnemonic hand as a place of memory vary from musical pedagogy to pious

meditation, and in there, a mute language in concordance with the diverse divisions framed in them, is generally enclosed (RODRIGUEZ, 1995)



Figure 2. Hand on bracket in Consistorial House

The hand as a metaphor has been present in the configurations of the *luliano* tree. According to this proposal, it exists a connection between the tree and the hand by means of a diagram in which system is developed as branches in a continuous bonding starting from a central shaft. This relates it in a representative level to phylactery that in a way leads us to discover that the mitres have a pagan source, and they were two laces that the gentile priests wore at the moment of the ceremony; this filtered into the catholic religion, and *infulae* were also called the two large band of the Episcopal tiaras. This leads to think that the representation on the modillions of *Consistorial House* have indeed an *infulae* shape, nevertheless its placement pending from the hand is better related with phylactery, and with that to the scriptures... and why not? with the passage located in figure 1 relating to St. Paul and the Galatians.

A representation of this nature, bonded to St. Paul, is found in the Cathedral of Sevilla, the hand that holds the apostle on the right side of the orange tree patio entrance door (GOMEZ, 2001). A simple hand that holds the apostle, and in the inside of the Cathedral, an image of Saint Ferdinand,

king and saint, holds in hi hand a sphere: the world. St. Ferdinand was unifier of kingdoms, and if he did live during the XIII Century, he was canonized until the XVII Century; dies in Sevilla, port for the Occidental Indies. Will this character be the one in the main idea of the political-Christian prince? It just may.

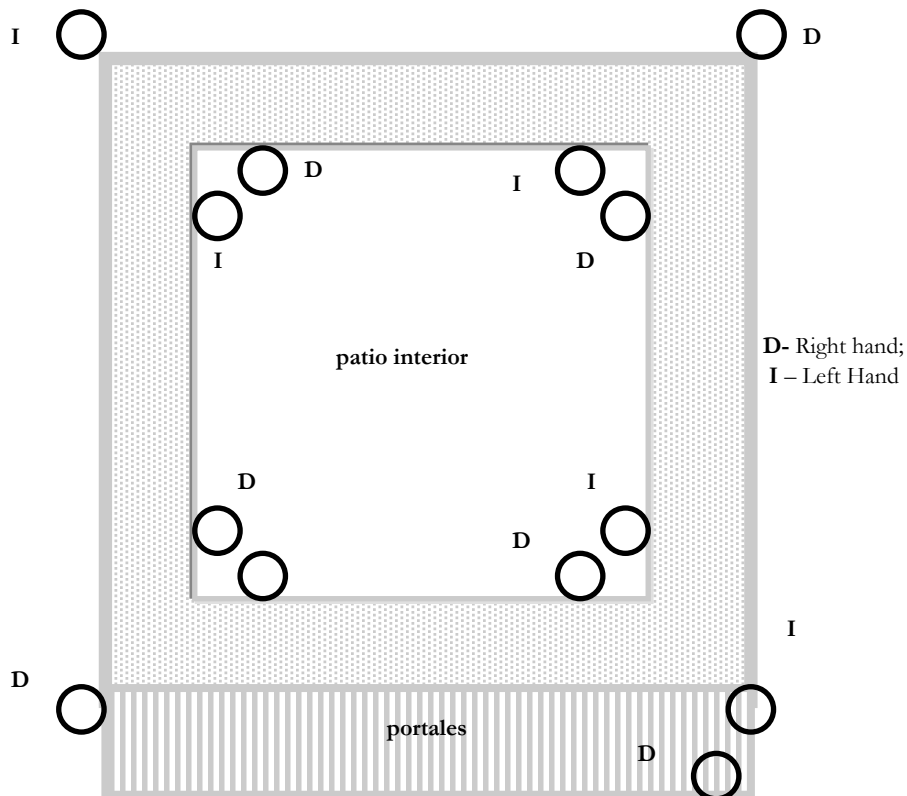


Figure 3. Location graphic of hands in Consistorial House

D. Saavedra Fajardo, when writing *Idea de un príncipe político-cristiano representada en cien empresas* [Idea of a political-Christian prince represented in a hundred ventures], proposes the idea of utilizing figures that may work as *deceptive memory* in the *science of ruling* (RODRIGUEZ, 1995). Once begun the XVIII Century, it is no longer good the manipulation by the use of images, as all the questionings leading to the period of Illustration begin.



Figure 4. Hands in the Cathedral of Sevilla.

Something that may have influenced in a prolonged way in the use of symbols in America was the need of evangelization as well as people control. The Ignatian exercises, previous to the foundation of the *Compañía de Jesús* in 1540, utilize hands to carry in them information about meditation, evangelic texts or Way of the Cross stations. This is translated into what Rodríguez de la Flor (1995) mentions as the adaptation of an artificial memory to the Christian use, and it is overturned into what is called the *compositio loci*, or the composition seeing the place, which helped as a psychological type of renovation leading to early practices of psychoanalysis, as it is known nowadays, where “el ‘poder de la imagen’ manifiesta su plena virtualidad en la escena oculta de un ‘teatro interior’.” [‘the power of image’ manifests its full virtuality on the hidden scene of an ‘interior theatre’].

The voiceless images make us search their possible significance. This one of the hand with the *infulae* or phylactery, of political and Christian power at the same time, perhaps from the highest ecclesial level, as if the sponsors or doctors of the Church were supporting the building –since both pairs of hands holding the exterior are placed facing towards the North plaza and where the portals are– leads us to a more earthly and necessary reality. We can say that all of that is tied up in a sustaining strength: kingdom, the authority of the king that upholds the law, and simultaneously, law upholding the order. The *infulae* or phylacteries are the ropes that tie and the hand what sets the order line in the world. In a place that could have been the *Consistorial House* was, like in all Spanish Kingdom, the place where order was made known.



Figure 5. North (main) front of Consistorial House.



Figure 6. Left: North (main) front of Consistorial house; right: location of hand marked in red

However, this element that very well can be related with a whole system developed during the mentioned Golden Century, is not found in any other place in the State of Chihuahua, Mexico, or even Spain, according to the conversations held with Dr. Gomez Piñol (2001). It is a completely local representation that gives another dimension to the place's spirit, but it bonds it to a macrovision at the moment of its creation.

To transmit the place's spirit: the opportunity for appropriation

If not transmitted, the place's spirit may not longer exist. For this reason, protection is unnecessary; it becomes a danger and the preservation processes an absurd, that will make disappears the patrimony little by little.

To educate is the basis to achieve the appropriation and later preservation of patrimony. Dr. Francisco Abundis (2008) declares that in Mexico City the education median locates among 7 and 9 years of study, and in select neighborhoods, it rises to 12 years, and with this statistic is virtually impossible to relay on a criteria to choose for anything freely –for instance–,

the result of public opinion is inherent to the processes generated the State's function guided by personal and partidary interests.

In these days, the vision of patrimony and its effective conservation is being affected by the lack of appropriation of its sense and content, as well as by the inefficient intervention processes made by those who take decisions either particulars or government representatives.

The problematic stated then, need to review the possibilities for an effective conservation of patrimony before a global world vision like in emergent countries as Mexico, moved under mere political or economical interests, not considering patrimony as an inherent part of social development, history and its context, with superficial interventions processes that indicates a concern for preservation, but deficient.

In these conversations giving chance to encounters of ICOMOS nature about the sense of patrimony, we agree that the patrimony's sense is placed in its own essence (COMITE CANADIEN, 2008). If we loose our patrimony we also loose part of our community spirit. In the Mexican State of Chihuahua, loss of patrimony is considerable due to causes imputable to unawareness and the influence of alien models, among others. For this, a possible model to control the deficient processes of intervention and impulse the appropriation and preservations ending up in interventions adequate to the needs and characteristics of patrimony assets in which's goal be the lobbying and execution of Cultural Patrimony, would be the institution of a Center For The Investigation and Lobbying of Cultural Patrimony with its headquarters in the City of Chihuahua, integrated with the participation of private initiative and government, following the administrative structure of the already existing Investigation Centers of the North of the Country, since there is no current organism who efficiently controls these processes, its location would make ideal to interrelate with diverse areas of the center-north of the country and the south of the United States

To educate, to develop projects and to stay in a line that supports the sustainable human development would be some of their main goals since we have seen throughout this document, the place's spirit can interpret itself in a macrovision or in a microvision and in as much we do not demonstrate it

we will lose little by little the notion of our existence like human beings in this world and moment.

For that reason, the idea to preserve and later to transmit, becomes inefficient in countries like ours since when not existing appropriation of that geniality, that spirit and the conservation processes will not be efficient and either lasting is thus necessary first transmit and later preserve.

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