SMARTICON: A DIGITAL ECO-SYSTEM FOR CULTURAL HER-ITAGE. ICONOGRAPHIC CONVERGENCES IN ART AND IN WORLD RELIGIONS

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Abstract

The recovery of the history of humanity goes through the comprehension of ancient testimonies handed down to us in artistic representations.

The innovative tool par excellence is the technologies.

Smarticon is an Italian patent for method in charge of studying historical analysis (originated from the morphology of the concept), of examining the phenomenology analysis (which results in the typology and exceeds it) and to the comparative research (which allows to arrive at the hermeneutics).

The comprehension of the transitory meaning of each event is entrusted to the historian who, by re-composing the phenomena, is also able to codify the ***comparative*** meanings.

INTRODUCTION
Globalization in the world of art: needs and solutions

With the rooting of a mentality increasingly oriented towards globalization, the need to adapt to modern times also consolidates in the world of culture.

The communication "towards an integrated approach to Cultural Heritage for Europe" (European Commission Brussels, 22.7.2014 COM (2014) 477 final: ec.europa.eu/culture/policy/culture-policies/ cultural-heritage_en.htm), has underlined how the Cultural Heritage sector assumes strategic relevance also from an intersectoral point of view and how such peculiarity is able to nourish new areas and *business* models that harbinger employment and professional growth.

These new models also represent the instrument of excellence to promote sustainable development, the strengthening of scientific and technological bases and social cohesion.

To achieve the aims, the fundamental need is to create an ***eco-system*** that is able to create a pole of convergence between synergies of different nature, which also *interact* with those belonging to different cultures.

In fact, innovation and development are stimulated by *comparison, sharing, integration, implementation and modulation between* different *competences and systems*.

The *eco-system* represents the essential prerequisite in order to create the conditions for the competitiveness of the Cultural Heritage industry and for the pursuit of strategic objectives.

Smarticon: method for the enhancement of Cultural Heritage both from a historical and economic point of view.

To create an *eco-system* dedicated to the Cultural Heritage sector means to enable a platform for the organization and fruition of the ***assets*** and ***resources*** from which *knowledge and enhancement* arise.

It is a fundamental condition that the conservation of Cultural Heritage derives both from the point of view of *preservation of the material* that constitutes the good, and from the point of view of the recovery of information that derive from the *cognitive heritage* recovered by experts and attributable to the artifact in question.

Through the harmonization of the cognitive heritage it will be possible to access to the comprehension of the complex scenario from which the good originates and aspire to its *codification and enhancement* under the **historical, iconic and economic aspect**.

The Cultural Heritage projected towards a planetary humanism

"*Apparently, the criticism* (intended as interpretation and evaluation, the round is an explanatory insert of the writer) *opposes to the comment* (intended as exegesis, erudition: a set of principles and criteria aiming to the coding of the original), *as the analysis of a visible form to discover a hidden content. But being such a form the one of a representation, the critics can not analyze the language if not in terms of truth, exactness, property or expressive content*". (M. Foucault, Le mots et les choses, Paris 1966; it: *Le parole e le cose*, Milan 1967, p.95).

The coding of the message expressed in the art object will allow us to examine the multiplicity of "*languages*" that determine its individual forms of expression.

Apparently without reciprocal connections, they will reveal the rhetoric of a plurality of interconnections that testify how man's nature places the human being at the centre of a planetary humanism, where the space between the ethnic and social differences assumes an almost trifling value.

The non-obvious relationships will be revealed through the analysis of the *tropes*, that is, of the different relationships that the "words" of a "discourse" may assume within the same representative content.

The eco-system thus conceived will re-evoke the truth and the balance of things, until it re-establishes the *virtues of the discourse* and highlights the *concomitances* between apparently different cultures.

Religions in the world

The great historian Arnold Toynbee highlights that there is no culture or civilization that has abstained from any form of religious belief.

Therefore the nature of the human being is that of the *homo religiosus* which resulted in traditions that have demonstrated not only the need for "*truth*", but also the ambition to pursue that "*germ of eternity*" that dwells in each of us.

Victor Hugo wrote: "*We must say it and say it again, it is not a need for novelty that torments the spirits, it is a need for truth; and it is immense*".

In fact, the numerous forms of religious expression testify the common prospect of generating hope in man and of projecting his soul towards the research of absolute Truth, the harbinger of eternal salvation.

The religions of the world, therefore, can be compared to the trunk of a millennial tree from which many ramifications and new sprouts arise, which however are nourished by the same *lifeblood*.

Nathan Söderblom (1866-1931) Lutheran archbishop, theologian and historian of religions, focused on the experience of Man who interprets the divine through the multiplicity of religious experiences that, on the basis of our concept of *"religious globalization",* can be interpreted like the ramifications of our tree.

The comprehension of this complex scenario therefore lies in the definition, interpretation and related application which derives from the analysis of the *tropes*.

One of the aspects that makes essential the need to valorise Cultural Heritage consists in the *comprehension* and, therefore, the codification of how the *homo religiosus* has interpreted, for example, mana, that spiritual power, that "... vital force intrinsic in things for which they flourish, grow and bear good fruits. "(V. Grottanelli, *Ethonologica, L'uomo e la civiltà*, III, Milan 1965, p.404). This force represents the perception of a reality that goes beyond the one of this world, from which the divine sentiment originates. It is worth remembering, then, with Mircea Eliade, one of the greatest historians of the religions of all time, that "through the experience of the sacred, the human spirit has grasped the difference bet-

ween what is revealed to be real, powerful, rich and meaningful, and what is devoid of these qualities: the chaotic and dangerous flow of things, their apparitions and their fortuitous disappearances empty of meaning ... In short, the 'sacred' is an element in the structure of consciousness, and not a stage in the history of consciousness itself. At the most archaic levels of culture, *living as a human* being is in itself a *religious act*, because feeding, sexual life and work have sacred value". (*Histoire des croyances et des idees religieuses*, Paris 1976; tr.it. *Storia delle credenze religiose*, Florence 1979, page 7).

In the context, the artistic expression plays a fundamental role, since it represents the "*language*" through which these ideals were expressed and thanks to which today we get reminiscence.

Nevertheless it is reasonable to affirm that iconography in artistic representations interprets the critical aspect of the concept to which it refers; but also the *comment related to the encoding of the content* hidden in the artifact, to which is entrusted the task of passing on (through the *representation*), t*he language of truth, of accuracy and the expressive content* of a past era.

In this complex scenario Smarticon arises as a *scientific method* in charge of the "*hierarchical*" ordering of the information and its relative coding.

It is from this synergy that the *ecosystem of cultural heritage* comes to life and nourishes itself, projecting itself towards a planetary humanism, aspiring to that innovative reorganization of knowledge which represents the fundamental passage to trace the *iconographic parallelisms* and socio-cultural meeting points between different civilizations: the comprehension of the transitory propaedeutic meaning to the encoding of **comparative** meanings.

Paradoxically, it is almost "accessory" how a god is idealized; because the essential point of the question of the religions in the world is how mediation leads to eternal salvation and how to convince oneself that this condition corresponds to the truth of things. From this point the search for evidence that may lead to testify, in tangible form, the belief in a religious phenomenon, arises.

The religious message in art: parallelisms and iconographic convergences between the sacred and the profane

A considerable quantity and variety of Cultural Heritage, through the symbolism intrinsic in the artefacts of art, interprets the *religious phenomena* of every age.

The research for the divine is the foundation that joins man in the religious experience, which transcends the earthly life and which nourishes the spirit through the hope of eternal salvation.

Therefore, in the modalities of interpretation of the *religious phenomenon*, the *patrimony of humanity* is materialized, which it expresses itself and is handed down through the communication tool par excellence: *the iconographic symbolism in the artefacts of art*.

This awareness imposes a great challenge: to be able to face the need to perceive by intuition and grasp the "*truth*"; as the codifing of "*languages*" implies the comprehension of the modalities through which *homo religiosus* of every age deals with, interprets and solves the enigmas of life and the disappointments of the human soul.

However, the theoretical concepts get exponentially complicated in the moment in which arises the need to translate the theoretical passage into the concreteness of the image; since iconography is not always explicit and, very often, the allegorical meanings are hidden behind ancient customs that are forgotten today.

Smarticon allows to arrive to the comment intended as an analysis of the visible form, aimed at *discovering the content* hidden in the artefact through the discovery of connections recovered with the *analysis of the tropes*.

Renaissance art, for example, testifies how *homo religiosus* has been able to translate into exquisitely profane background themes, profound Christian concepts: because it is through the beauty and harmony of forms that one reaches the supreme "reasoning" which is proper to the idea of divine perfection.

The Christian message contained in them can be codified through the comparison of *symbolic correspondences.*

The hermeneutics of language in art with a profane background can also be interpreted through the comparison of the **hierophany** (presence and revelation of a sacred or divine element) which expresses, through the artistic representation, *the power of the good that overtakes the forces natural*.

For this reason, the hierophany intrinsic in the representation of an object of art becomes a pretext to express the **supreme theophany**, as a sensitive manifestation of divinity.

Hermeneutics has the task of unveiling the comprehension of the "latent" message, conceiled beyond the image and hidden behind the "occulting veils" of time.

In art, both sacred and profane, the hierophany coincides with the *symbol* that interprets the role of an instrument in charge of expressing a *revealing concept* that, in religion, transcends from the human dimension to flow into the *myth* that connects man (fragile and corruptible) with the world of *divine perfection*: that supernatural universe so excellently represented in the nature proper of *legends* and *myths*.

These arguments offered a great variety of choices. An example for all is the struggle between a superior and an inferior principle (divine and animal world) personified by "*Mars tamed by Venus*" or "*the monsters*" encountered by Hercules during his fatigues. Both expressed the continuous tension of the human soul suspended between *virtues and vices*: man, tending towards good, was incapable of aspiring to perfection and was often threatened by the danger of falling back towards the irrationality dictated by the instinct.

Here it is not possible to exhaustively discuss the examination of the potentiality of the method and the synergies that can arise from its constant implementation.

Therefore, below, we will limit ourselves to illustrate two examples that explicit how it is possible to make the research of **comparative meanings** between apparently unconnected cultures, emerge.

Iconographic convergences. The Mandala and the hyperuranion: micro and macro cosmos, meditation and transcendence

The geometric forms of the mandala, the cosmograms, represent the passages and the respective rituals of the meditation path as well as the testimony of man's ability to crush evil and reach enlightenment and eternal salvation: concepts also reaffirmed in the Yamantaka depicted in the act of crushing a buffalo under his feet, which interprets the ambivalent identity of destroyer and destroyed.

The Mandala
In Sanskrit the word "mandala" means circle or cycle.

Originally the meaning coincided with that which possesses the essence (la) and the totality (manda).

The mandala is a diagram that shows the structure (and unity) of micro and macrocosm of the inner and external world. Its configuration represents the path to achieve **illumination**.

The basic structure is shaped as a temple (or palace) with a door on each of the four sides. The transcendental inhabitants appear at the centre of the composition and each detail occupies a space respecting a precise ritual, which translates into a *meditation* exercise.

The hyperuranion
According to the Neoplatonists, the world was organized in concentric spheres, whose extremes were Hyperuranion intended as the divine world and matter, understood as an animal world.

One of the most exhaustive artistic interpretations of these concepts is in the illustration of the Earth at the centre of the Creation in Martin Luther's Bible dated 1545.

Thanks to the philosophical speculation, the most noble and elected spirits can experience happiness and reach the knowledge of the true after death. Man, endowed with reason, can choose whether to rise to the divine world or descend to the animal world, or even keep himself in an equidistant balance. This choice is accomplished through the *mediation* of love and beauty.

If we compare the iconographic interpretation proper of the mandala with the engraving that represents the hyperuranian in Luther's Bible, we can realize how the two exegeses reveal and highlight irrefutable coincidences in the collocation of the figure of the man interior within the cosmos.

In fact, hyperuranian is that metaphysical dimension merely spiritual described by Plato.

In this place, without space or time, the immutable and perfect ideas reside and they can only be reached by the intellect and precluded to all that is earthly and corruptible.

Even in the Mandala the transcendent inhabitants, engaged in meditation, search for the way that will lead them to divine enlightenment and salvation.

These passages, although subordinated to various reinterpretations, explicit the same concept with a certain coherence: *the mystical experience is communion with the mystery beyond any visible or sensible form*. It is differentiated and subordinated not only according to the social and cultural environment from which it draws its origins but, above all, according to the metaphysical and philosophical influence proper to the context in which it is generated.

The Supreme Lord, Saviour of Heaven and Creator of all things, will therefore open the doors to Paradise rather than to Nirvana; to the Indian Brahman (source of mystic salvation and explanation of the world) rather than to the Shang-ti of the classical chinese sources or to the Ahura Mazda of the Iranian Hvarenah, where its power and its splendor symbolize the nature of the Mazdean cult.

Even the Islamic religion, apparently far from the concepts of religion that unite humanity towards the sharing of eternal illumination, bases its proper belief on the same presuppositions. The latter will distance itself from the usual observance of the religious traditions in the rest of the world because of the *modalities* of interpreting loyalty to the Koran and to the Prophet Muhammad: namely to intend how the State of Medina should represent the absolute model of every Islamic state to which one should submit. This concept also represents the knot that explicits the conflict between traditionalist Muslims or fundamentalists and reformist or secular Muslims.

*The Earth at the centre of Creation
in an illustration of the Luther's Bible 1545*

Tibetan Mandala

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The role of light in religions: parallelisms between oriental and western iconography.

The importance of light as a divine source represents the main iconographic link between different cultures and interprets the representation of the supreme entity.

Over the centuries, references to the image of God have been shaped according to a multiplicity of socio-cultural "rules", however the presence of light as a divine source has remained the "ontological" principle by antonomasia.

In the East the anthropomorphic image of Buddha appears around the 1st century AD in northern India and its rich iconography refers predominantly to spiritual enlightenment that will guide the devoted in his path of faith.

The interpretation of the divine in the source of light, then, is shared in the mind of every human being, shaping itself in the specific context that will personalize the vision subordinating it to a specific supreme entity.

Just think that of the halos of the saints, which are found in the pre-Christian depictions of the gods of the Olympus, in the Hellenistic funerary stele as a deference to the world of the afterlife and that were handed down by the Buddhist empire Kushan, to Mithraism, to the pharaohs: a common reference to numerous religious phenomena. The halo reproduces the image of the sun as a source of light, of life and as a symbol of the achievement of eternal salvation and of the truth thanks to meditation and faith. It also is reflected in the celestial phenomena, in the metaphysics of light (the first form of material reality that constitutes the essence of everything), in the zodiacal signs and much more.

Detail Vajrabhairava Mandala
Yuan dynasty (1271–1368)Metropolitan
Museum New York
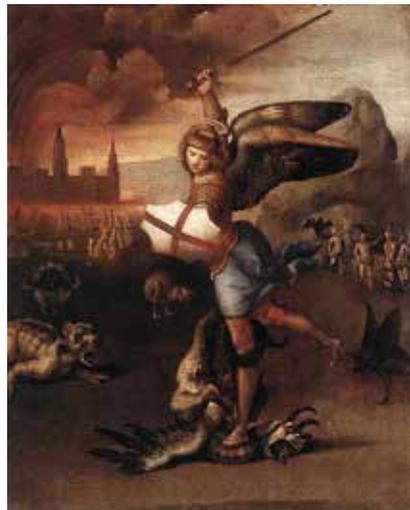
Saint Michael and the dragon
Raffaello Sanzio, Louvre Paris

Divine illumination, meditation and overcoming the fear of death from the East to the West

The *Buddha Yamāntaka* and *St. Michael who crushes the devil*.

The characteristic iconography of Yamāntaka portrays him with the head of a buffalo, symbol of Yama, death. The antaka, instead, means "exterminator of death" (an common aspect to all the Buddhas, since they interrupted the cycle of rebirth: samsara).

Yamāntaka interprets the awakening from death, the achievement of salvation and immortality, to which one can arrive only after having followed the path of meditation and wisdom through the journey of the Mahayana practitioner, to the point of reaching *enlightenment*.

Yamāntaka symbolizes the overcoming of fear for death because this figure simultaneously impersonates death and rebirth (the eternal salvation). It ends up by "exorcising" the perception of fear and allows it to be metabolized as an intrinsic and concrete existence generated exclusively by the "*ignorance*" of earthly conventions: *enlightenment destroys death*.

The sword, in fact, the customary attribute of the Yamantaka, alludes to the defeat of ignorance.

In Western art the legends, mostly medieval, which tell the stories of the saints sauroctoni (murderers of scary dragons), are very frequent. Just to mention, first of all, St. George, but also Teodoro, Silvestro, Margherita, Marta (who tamed him). The legend of the Archangel Michael who fought against the apocalyptic dragon was also very flourishing.

Vajrabrabhairava Mandala
Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368)
New York, Metropolitan Museum

Detail
Vajrabhairava Mandala

Paolo Uccello
Saint George and the dragon, 1464 about.
*National Gallery London*

The hair of Buddha

Some coincidences, influences and iconographic are evidences in the representation of manufactured goods in Eastern and Western art.

An example of philosophical and artistic parallelism is expressed in the comparison between the image of Buddha and a bust of a Roman general in porphyry, of the 2nd century AD. kept at the Borghese Gallery in Rome.

The ushnisha and the urn are the most important attributes (the laksana) that refer to the spiritual perfection of the Buddha as a cosmic man (mahapurusa) and are those protuberances on the head and between the eyebrows.

The image of this Roman general, who has his hair gathered in an oriental hairstyle, alludes to the value of the Roman leader and it exalts the virtues of supreme wisdom.
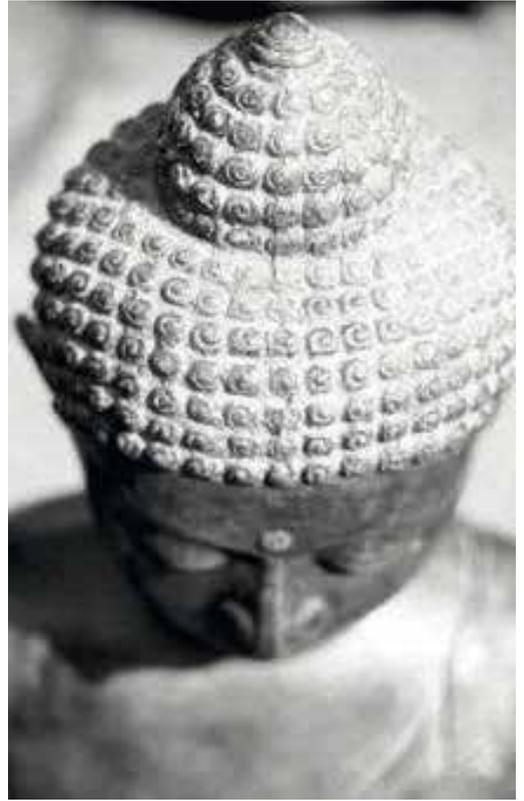
Comparisons between the image of Buddha and the bust of a Roman general of the 2nd century AD kept at the Galleria Borghese.