

Images and imagination in Modern Western knowledge

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Abstract

This article discusses the function and role of mental dynamics in the reception of images according to the philosophical theories available to the cultural universe of the Classic, Middle and Modern Ages in the West including Brazil. It highlights the meaning of such philosophical grounds for the discussion on the notion of image and imagination in modern times, as well as their application to rhetorics. In the Brazilian context, the contributions by Jesuit Antônio Vieira stand out. It finally shows that in the theories discussed here, the functioning of imagination as a mental phenomenon is approached in an integrated manner with the remainder of mental processes including the senses, memory and understanding, emotions and will; imagination is an indispensable element in the path of knowledge, and it is always referred to images within the multiple dimensions indicated by the specific cultural universe.

Keywords

Imagination; Images; Rhetorics

Introduction

The present study discusses the notions prevailing in modern times about the influence of images on the mental dynamics of listeners. In this context, we approach the traditions that most directly influenced Brazilian culture, and for this purpose we suggest some itineraries of sources that dealt with images and imagination in the Western and Brazilian culture in modern times. In the latter case, the strong influence of Jesuit thought must be highlighted, which as previous studies showed,¹ considered *imago* as a sensory, emotional and intentional vehicle within the unitary framework of the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition.² Such tradition in turn, represented itself as conveying an older conceptual universe, some of whose conceptions remained long and might still be recognized in the Brazilian cultural universe of the modern times that thus became the conceptual foundations of the ideas and practices proper to it.

Aristotle: imagination and the internal senses

Greek philosophy developed two main conceptions on imagination and its role in the apprehension of images. One was elaborated by Plato and defines imagination as a passive and receptive power of the contents conveyed by the external senses; the other was formulated by Aristotle and stresses the active nature of imagination. The latter exerted strong influence on the ideas transmitted to Brazil in modern times.³

Aristotle's philosophical psychology depicts the workings of imagination as integrated with the mental dynamics as a whole. It is a matter of a continued motion involving all five external senses, as well as the internal ones, to know: imagination, memory, phantasy, cogitation, and the common sense. The data harvested by the external senses are re-presented internally by the internal senses and after reaching and mobilizing the emotions, to the understanding and will.

Imagination mediates between sensory perception and thought. In *On the Soul* (4th century BC), Aristotle defines imagination as the motion due to the activity of sensory perception. He further describes the connections of imagination with the remainder of the soul powers with high precision. Its action is determined by the will, "because it is possible for us to produce something before our eyes, as those who based on memory produce images"⁴. We might imagine something without perception, as e.g., in dreams, when things appear to us although we do not see them with the eyes.

¹ Marina Massimi, *Palavras, Almas e Corpos no Brasil Colonial* (São Paulo: Loyola, 2005).

² Giovanna Zanlonghi, *Teatri di formazione* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2002).

³ Massimi, *Palavras, Almas e Corpos*.

⁴ Aristotle, *De Anima*, pres., trans. and notes M.C.G. dos Reis (São Paulo: Editora 34, 2006), 110.

Although sensory perception is always true, imagination might be false. In his conception about the mental dynamics, Aristotle addresses the important relationships established between memory and imagination:

“We might ask how it is possible when the modification of the spirit is present, but the thing is absent, to remember that which is not present. Evidently, one must think that the impression produced by means of sensation in the soul and the part of the body implied in sensation is like a kind of painting, the possession of which becomes memory. As a fact, motion causes almost as if a streak of sensation in the spirit.”⁵

Augustine: imagination integrated within the individual’s mental dynamics

Remarkable for its influence on the medieval and modern Western tradition, are the conceptions on image and imagination by Augustine of Hippo (354-430), who deals with human knowledge and images in several of his philosophical and theological writings.

His point of departure is an inquiry on how human beings might know: not only educated people with access to books, but also the illiterate. In order to answer to this question, Augustine focuses on the mental dynamics by means of which human beings know; as a fact, this matter became the central problem in his thought.

In *On the Teacher* (396),⁶ Augustine attempts at an answer by stating that each human being retains in his memory the images of the things perceived by the senses and contemplated by the intellect, so that upon hearing the corresponding words he might recognize the things thus indicated. This is why we may learn when we read a text or look at an image: “We carry these images in the recesses of memory as a kind of teachings about the things previously perceived by the senses, and by contemplating them in good conscience we do not lie when we speak”⁷. For this reason we may have in us references of things not directly perceived, but that somehow are ours and might be shared with other people.

Images mobilize the mental power of memory. Upon looking at some scene, for instance, we are able to recognize the event that such image represents because it is linked to a content already stored in our memory. In *On the Trinity* (422), in which Augustine elaborates a unitary theory of mind and the personal subject where the mental powers (memory, emotions, understanding) operate jointly, the efficacy of images in mental dynamics is once again related with memory: “what a localized thing

⁵ Aristotle, *Parva Naturalia*, trans., introd. and notas G. Serrano (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1993), 69; all translations where performed by *Circumscribere* Editorial Board.

⁶ Augustine, *O Mestre*, ed. and trans. N.S. Pinheiro (São Paulo: Landy, 2002).

⁷ Augustine, *A Trindade*, trans. A. Belmonte (São Paulo: Paulus, 1985), 102.

represents to the corporeal sense, the image of a body present in the memory represents to the soul's sight"⁸.

In *On the Trinity* Book XI, Augustine discusses the relationship between memory, namely "internal sight" (i.e., an individual's awareness of what he is feeling), and will, and the role the latter plays in the formation of images. After asserting that the image kept in the memory and the expression formed in the individual's "internal sight" are as similar as to become identified one with another, Augustine observes that when an individual's attention is removed from the image, the latter does not remain. Thus, the role will plays is decisive, because "it leads the souls' sight from here to there in order to inform it and link it to the thing"⁹. When the will is fully focused on a given internal image, "such similarity is found between the corporeal figure impressed on the memory and the remembered expression, that not even reason itself is able to distinguish whether that which it sees is an extrinsic body or a thought formed inside itself"¹⁰.

Augustine reports on cases of "people who seduced or frightened by an exceedingly vivid representation of visible things, exclaimed suddenly as if they were actually participating in or suffering such actions"¹¹. The same applies to dream images, as well as to the case of the person who imprints several images of sensory objects on the "soul's sight" and believes he is actually perceiving them. Such "imaginative impressions" do not only occur "when the soul has a strong wish and fixates its eyes on them", but also due to the fear that "compels to deal with them, even unwillingly"¹². Thus, "the stronger fear or desire is, the more attentive one looks" at things. Augustine then describes the mental and physical path followed by images to acquire efficacy: they act on the soul levels of the senses, memory, emotions and will, but also by means of the intermediation by the body.

In regard to the relationship between imagination and memory, it is worth to remember that according to Augustine, memory is the essential locus of "internal man", this is, of the awareness of oneself, because we are only able to learn about our mental experience by means of memory. Based on the materials kept in the memory, imagination may build endless images under the direction of the will: "For instance, I just remember one [type of] sun, because I have only seen one, as, indeed, only one exists. However, if I would so want, I might imagine, I might be informed by memory, which makes me remember [...] And thus I remember it the way I saw it, but imagine it as I want"¹³. Within this relationship between memory, imagination, and will there is room for possible mistakes: "since the shapes of things are corporeal and sensorial,

⁸ Ibid, 346.

⁹ Ibid, 345.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, 346.

¹³ Ibid, 356.

sometimes the soul is mistaken when it thinks that they are outside as it judges and thinks they are inside, [...] not because of the untrustworthiness of memory, but due to the mutability of imagination"¹⁴.

Augustine also discusses the influence of heard words on imagination and memory, and describes the dynamics of such connection in full detail. When I hear something, "I represent to myself the images of the bodies that the narrator wants to signify by means of his words and sounds. Thus, I think such images, not by remembering, but by listening"¹⁵. Nevertheless, a closer look shows that memory intervenes also in this case: "because I would not be able to understand the narrator and would not have remembered each one of his sentences" if there would not be correspondence with "some generic memory kept by it. For instance, if someone tells me that a hill was deforested and then sown with olive trees, he is telling something I am able to remember about the images of hills, forests and olive trees"¹⁶. Thus, we always have recourse to memory, "to find there the mode and measure of all shapes represented by the thought. No one can think a color or a corporeal shape that he has never seen; a sound he has never heard; a flavor he has never tasted; an odor he has never smelled; a bodily contact he has never felt"¹⁷.

Thomas Aquinas: imagination between sensation and cognition

Upon emphasizing the importance of the senses in the process of knowing, several authors stressed the mediation performed by imagination between the senses (inherent to the body) and will and understanding.

Among such authors, Anselm (1033-1109) discusses in *Proslogion* (1077-78)¹⁸ the following question: how may God be a subject of the senses when He is not a body? This is, Anselm inquires on how something that does not belong with the sensory world and is not sensory reality might be known through the senses or, how might one circulate between the corporeal and sensorial, and the spiritual dimensions. Anselm answers that sensitivity is a part of the process of knowledge and as such, "feeling is knowing or more simply, it serves to knowing (he who feels, also knows according to the properties of the senses, as by means of sight we know the colors and by means of taste we know the flavors)"¹⁹. Therefore, "it is not incoherent to state that somehow we feel all we somehow know"²⁰. This argument associating sensitivity and knowledge of

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, 357-8.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Anselm, *Proslogion*, trans. A. Caretta, & L. Samarati (Novara: Europia, 1994).

¹⁹ Ibid, 73.

²⁰ Ibid.

suprasensorial entities contains the foundations of the theory that states that feeling is the cornerstone of knowing.

Anselm's disciple Thomas Aquinas (122-1274), in *Summa Theologica* (1265-1273)²¹ and treatise *Disputed Questions on Truth* (1261-64),²² put forwards a theory of knowledge grounded on Aristotle's doctrine asserting that man's full rational knowledge is grounded on the sensitive soul. Thus, he goes back to the Aristotelian idea of the intermediating role imagination plays between sensation and cognition.

In the first part of the *Summa*, Aquinas deals with knowledge and its relationship with the mental dynamics: first the external and then the internal senses, next he approaches the study of the intellectual powers, this is, reason, and finally he discusses whether intellectual knowledge might be acquired from sensory things. This is the place for the intermediating role of images, scenes, dramatizations, metaphors, as well as of words: shortly, the use of sensorial stimuli to trigger the process of knowing. Upon discussing knowledge also within the scope of theology, Aquinas states that it is convenient "to present a truth by means of images" using metaphors, because "it is natural for man to rise to the intellectual [level] by means of the sensorial [level], because all of our knowledge begins by the senses"²³.

In *Disputed Questions on Truth*, he seeks to answer to the question on whether there might be falseness in the senses, and within this context he describes the process of knowing:

"Our knowledge, which has its departure in the senses, follows this order: it begins by the senses and finishes in intelligence, thus, the corporeal senses are somehow in the middle-point between things and intelligence. Compared to things, they are something like spiritual-intellectual, compared to spiritual knowledge, they are like things."²⁴

In regard to sensorial apprehension, Aquinas asserts "there is some apprehensive power that apprehends the sensorial image of things, as if it were a sense specially created for this purpose when sensorial things are present. There is another power able to apprehend the sensorial image of things when they are absent: this is imagination"²⁵. Upon distinguishing between perception and imagination, he adds, "the senses always apprehend things such as they are in reality unless there is some hindrance in the organs or in transmission. Conversely and as a rule, imagination

²¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Suma Teológica*, org. C.P. de Oliveira (São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 2001), Part I, Quest. 1, Art. 9º.

²² Thomas Aquinas, *Questões Discutidas sobre a Verdade*, trans. L.J. Barauna (São Paulo: Nova Cultural, 2000), Quest. I.

²³ Aquinas, *Suma Teológica*, 152.

²⁴ Aquinas, *Questões Discutidas*, 121-2.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 124.

apprehends things different from how they are, because it apprehends absent things as if they were present”²⁶.

Jesuit philosophers: the influence of will on imagination

The transmission of Thomist thought to Brazilian culture was intermediated by philosophers belonging to the Society of Jesus, more particularly by those associated with the Arts College of Coimbra.²⁷ At the end of the 17th century, these modern interpreters of Aristotelian-Thomist theory stated that man might only know by means of the body: sensory data are harvested by the external senses and then processed by the internal ones (imagination, cogitation, memory and common sense), resulting in the formation of a “phantasm”. Cogitation is *ratio particularis* because it manifests at the sensory level some elements reporting to the essence (universal). The action of thinking requires the presence of the images deposited in the memory, where they are stored always ready to wake up upon the request of imagination. Will presupposes knowledge, but also depends on the sensory appetite that in turn, follows imagination.

Therefore, as a function of the soul-body union, the pre-rational sphere of the external and internal senses, appetites and passions interferes deeply with both knowledge and free will. Will in turn might also act on the appetites to orient them and discipline them, it treats them as “*cives*” of the soul rather than as servants, thus, they are “politically” rather than “despotically” submitted. The path to accomplish the soul’s political ruling passes through the senses, which intermediate between intellect and will.²⁸

The emphasis on the influence of will on the dynamics of imagination also derives from Augustine, who was a further source of inspiration for Jesuit philosophy. Augustine’s ideas were transmitted in modern times by Franciscan thinkers, among others, from which we might mention friar Bonaventure of Bagnoreggio, author of *Itinerario mentis in Deum* (1259) and a theologian and philosopher of the Order of Friars Minor. He described the path to the knowledge of God as a stair that progressively involves all the levels of the mental and spiritual human dynamics, which are mobilized by their interaction with the world. He qualifies the sensory world as “a mirror through which we arrive to God the Creator”²⁹. Bonaventure’s thought inspired Jesuit philosopher and theologian Roberto Bellarmino (1542-1621).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Manuel de Góis, *Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis Societati Iesu, in tres Libros de Anima* (Veneza: Amadino, 1602).

²⁸ Zanlonghi, *Teatri di formazioni*.

²⁹ Bonaventure, *Obras Escolhidas*, org. Luis A. de Boni, trans. L. Boni, J. Jerkovic, & Frei S. Schneider (Porto Alegre: Escola Superior de Teologia São Lourenço de Brindes; Caxias do Sul: Sulina, 1983), 48.

The idea that the senses and the images derived from them might lead man to the knowledge of divinity paves the road for practices where images are used as a vehicle leading from the visible to the invisible, and whose importance for the medieval and modern Catholic cultural tradition has been widely documented by Lina Bolzoni.³⁰ Upon investigating popular preaching, this author found a “recurrent rhetoric structure” endowed with a “visual version” that gave rise to a domain of precise correspondence between words and images.

Paolo Aresi and Gabriele Paleotti: imagination from the perspective of rhetorics

The close collaboration intertwining Catholic theology, sacred rhetorics and sacred art in modern times suggests and corroborates cultural (including religious) practices that use images and activate persuasion with communicative purposes.

In order to understand the contemporary discussion on the role of images and imagination, it is worth to remember the influence exerted by some writings by humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam (1469-1536),³¹ where he criticized the use of images and adornments in churches. This criticism had several reasons: first, and as pointed out by Martin Luther (1483-1546), it means to embellish the physical body while dismissing the live body represented by the bodies of the poor; second, and as stressed by Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), superstition attributes magical powers to images and statues. Such writings gave rise to strong reaction: Erasmus was attacked by Louvain’s and Sorbonne’s theologians, who condemned him as a heretic and a Lutheran in 1526, whereas his writings were included in the Indexes of Forbidden Books.

On these grounds, it not difficult to understand why the reformation of Western Catholicism prescribed by the Council of Trent (1545-1563) as a response to the serious situation triggered by the Protestant schism reassessed the importance of the sacred images produced by artists for the sake of religious education as a function of the fidelity to the religious and theological truth of their contents and of them being understood by the illiterate. The Tridentine decree *De invocatione, veneratione et reliquiis sanctorum et sacris imaginibus* from 1562 confirms the traditional doctrine on the reverence of images as a function of the prototypes they represent – thus refuting the accusations by Protestant iconoclasts – and places the pedagogic-educational importance that sacred figurative art has for Christian life in the foreground. One of the more active Council fathers was Carlo Borromeo (1538-1584), who wrote in 1577 a treatise devoted to liturgical reform entitled *Instructiones fabricae et supplectilis*

³⁰ Lina Bolzoni, *La rete delle immagini* (Torino: Einaudi, 2002).

³¹ Giuseppe Scavizzi, *Arte e architettura sacra: Cronache e documenti sulla controversia tra riformati e cattolici (1500-1550)* (Reggio Calabria: Casa del Libro Editrice, 1981).

ecclesiasticae; chapter XVII (*De sacris Imaginibus picturisve*) regulates the format and use of sacred images according to Tridentine rules.³²

The rules shaping the recourse to images in preaching, on the other hand, were laid down by handbooks on sacred rhetorics. Paolo Aresi (1574-1644) was one of the most significant representatives of the rhetoric art inspired in the Council of Trent. In his treatise *Arte di predicar bene*, from 1627,³³ he describes the psychological mechanism implied in knowing by means of images, which are able to represent things as if they were present so that the internal powers might delight in them.³⁴ According to Aresi, images are able to call the attention to them at the same time that serve the power of memory: "The more sensorial and fit for the delight of the eyes things are, the more they are able to move the intellect and to remain imprinted in the memory. Images represent things as if they were sensorial to us, as if they were present and seen by us, and thus they have the power to awaken our memory."³⁵

Aresi observes that images lend an efficient support to the process of memory:

"It seems to me that this is the difference between learning with and without the use of memory; it is the same as the difference between riding a horse and walking; a walker tires soon and is only able to accomplish a part of his journey, conversely, a rider virtually does not tires and arrives much more quickly where he wants to go. Similarly, memory without the help of sensory things represented to the imagination remembers some things by walking just by its own power, it tires easily and stops along the road, because it is not further able to remember. However, when it has resource to images, it virtually does not tire and driven by images arrives happily to its destination."³⁶

Reasserting the traditional purposes of sacred rhetorics (*docere, delectare* and *movere*), Aresi stresses the fact that preaching acts on all the powers of human dynamics: "consider what the things are that cause delight to the intellect, will, sensory appetite and external senses, because by pondering on such things a preacher will induce pleasure in his listeners"³⁷. Therefore, metaphoric language represents things in a way that "it seems that one sees the thing before one's eyes – rather than listening – even when it is something in the past"³⁸. Because the sense of sight is the main

³² Carlos Borromeo, "Instructiones fabricae et suppelectilis ecclesiasticae", in *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento: Fra manierismo e controriforma*, org. Paula Barocchi (Bari: La Terza, 1960), vol. 3, 1-46.

³³ Apud Erminia Ardissino, *Il barocco e il sacro: La predicazione de teatino Paolo Aresi tra letteratura, immagini e scienza* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2001).

³⁴ Erminia Ardissino, "Immagini per la predicazione: Le "imprese sacre" di Paolo Aresi," *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa*, 34, n° 1 (1998): 3-25.

³⁵ Apud Ardissino, *Baroco e sacro*, 22.

³⁶ Ibid, 23.

³⁷ Ibid, 67.

³⁸ Ibid, 112.

cognitive organ: the external world is represented to the intellect and imagination by its intermediation.

The dispute on sacred art between Catholics and Protestants enhanced the attention paid to images within the Catholic milieu: the polemics concerned the representation of Christ, namely the meeting point between the human and the divine. According to the Protestants, the nature of the Redeemer could not be represented, conversely, to the Catholics, since Christ is not divided in two natures but is hypostatic union (person), whoever looks at his painted image will not just see his body, but also his person.³⁹

The strong persuasive power attributed to painting and the use of images by the Catholic reformation is documented in the guidelines indicated by the Council of Trent's theologians and in normative documents that allowed for such orientations to be applied in Brazil, especially the *Constituições Primeiras do Arcebispado da Bahia*, promulgated in 1722 by Bahia archbishop Dom Sebastião Monteiro da Vide.⁴⁰

Due to its influence also on the *Bahia Constitutions*, it is worth to mention a book by Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane* (1582). Here Paleotti stresses the importance of images on the grounds that they enter the soul of the faithful more efficiently than words, and lead them to believe the truths that cannot be proven by reason through visual experiences. Upon considering the universal value of images, he appeals to Aquinas' doctrine and states that images must first cause pleasure and that the experience of pleasure is related with the beauty of images. The pleasure caused in us by images has three levels: sensory, rational, and spiritual.

Upon discussing sensory pleasure, Paleotti states "as to the senses [...] the sight receives enormous pleasure and a wonderful feeling when it contemplates paintings due to the variety of colors, shadows, figures, adornments and all the represented things, such as mountains, rivers, gardens, towns and so forth"⁴¹. As to "the pleasure of reason", "in addition to the specific taste each one might experience according to the quality of the represented things [there is] an universally recognized element"⁴², because at the level of reason, when we see something beautiful, we also want to learn from it, imitate it. Therefore, one might say that imitation is a part of the knowing process and it consists in "knowing how to learn things and then to know how to become them"⁴³. Therefore, when facing a painting we might learn through it to the point of somehow becoming that which it represents. Paleotti describes a third level of

³⁹ Paolo Prodi, & Carla Penuti, *Disciplina dell'anima, disciplina del corpo e disciplina della società tra medioevo e età moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994).

⁴⁰ Sebastião M. Da Vide, *Constituições Primeiras do Arcebispado da Bahia*, org. B. Feitler, & E.S. Souza (São Paulo: Edusp, 2010).

⁴¹ Gabriele Paleotti, *O Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane* (Roma: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002), 72.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

pleasure born out of spiritual knowledge, which does not derive only from the apprehension of the scene represented by a painting, but also from a wider-scoped intellectual attitude related with the full meaning of such scene, that Paleotti (and the philosophical and theological tradition he represents) calls contemplation.

The sensory experience afforded by images operates at deeper levels of the soul. Inspired by Augustine and Aquinas, Paleotti asserts “images come to help the three powers of our soul: intellect, will and memory”⁴⁴. Indeed, “images instruct our intellect as if they were popular books, because the people may understand by means of painting that which scholars understand by means of books”⁴⁵. The sight of devotedly painted images enhances the will’s positive desires and awakens a wish to imitate the represented subject. Memory allows for images to become fixated: “voluntary memory is awakened in us by the use of images”⁴⁶.

Repeated exhibition of images or scenes favors such dynamics and allow for a closer approximation to the model due to a stronger impression, as if the spectator would be actually present to the represented character. The spectator is thus modified in his mental dynamics by images or scenes, and thus begins to identify with the represented thing or to feel that he participates in the represented thing. Indeed:

“[...] upon admiring an image, several thoughts are formed in us. The first is turned to its matter, which is assessed by its value, its richness, colors, and so forth. The second might be turned to the technical capacity [manifested by] the drawing and its precision. The third is turned to the images that cause the effect of representing an actual thing and thus, we no longer allude to the work as mere matter or figure, but to the thing the images represents, and here we turn to our own attention. In this third mode, we look at images no longer as mere figures, but as acts of representation.”⁴⁷

To look at images in such a way does not mean to merely look at simple figures, but it is an act: the act of representation from a perspective that seems close to the theory that Franz Brentano will elaborate in the 19th century.⁴⁸ Paleotti continues by stating “it is not a matter of two different acts seeking two different purposes, but of one single act turned to one single goal even when somehow it posits a difference between the image and that which is imagined”⁴⁹.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 65.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 96-7.

⁴⁸ Franz Brentano, *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkte* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1874).

⁴⁹ Paleotti, 98.

The effects caused by images are not merely restricted to the level of the mental dynamics (sensory impressions, representations, emotions and motions of the will), but they pass through the mental level and reach the body:

“According to the statements of philosophers and doctors, on the grounds of the notions created in our phantasy from actual shapes, so strong impressions are created in us that they cause visible alterations and signals in the body itself. An example of this phenomenon is supplied by everyday experience, which presents us with bodily parts visibly marked by spots and figures: wine, fruits, parts of animals, and so forth.”⁵⁰

The appropriation of the theories on imagination and images formulated by Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas performed by these early modern authors within the context of church oratory became an important pattern for the practice of preaching and more generically, for the cultural phenomena characterizing modern Brazil.

Brazilian sacred oratory: image and sacrament, imagination and undeceiving

Alcir Pécora observed that the sacramental model is at the basis of Antônio Vieira’s approach to the knowledge of reality of. Vieira is an exemplary figure that embodies in colonial Brazil “the characteristic motion by which that belonging to God, and thus transcendent and indeterminate by nature [...] takes visible species existing in the world of material determination and imprints his Being’s unique and personal substance on them”⁵¹.

This motion is qualified as sacramental because the Eucharistic sacrament is its sign par excellence: “Eucharist, under the species of bread and wine that transubstantiate into the body and blood of Jesus Christ thus becomes the sub species hidden presence of the divine on earth”⁵². The sacramental mode is “the privileged manner how transcendence establishes its communication with the universe of beings created according to its image”⁵³. We have already discussed how this position was based on the ideas of authors from the first centuries of the Christian era and restated by the Council of Trent. Such modality of manifestation of the divine on worldly reality has a mysterious connotation, because although the divine being is present in matter, such presence is little explicit: “the transcendent sacraments by his presence some things in the sensory world to which, however, he remains invisible”⁵⁴.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 80.

⁵¹ Pécora, *Teatro do Sacramento*, 113.

⁵² Ibi.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

For this reason, Vieira's post-Tridentine thought stress the essential role human beings play as subjects of knowledge. Indeed, man might become an interpreter of the divine enigmatic language by means of worldly signs. According to Vieira and contemporary Catholic thought, the place of man is established by his desire to be and to know, as well as by the affirmation of his freedom: free will is responsible for the decision on the mode applied to the interpretation of reality. The mediation by signs that signal, but that also hide from sight allows for a non-deterministic posture, where Being is not imposed on human knowledge but proposes Himself to it, whereas such proposition includes the choice and the adventure of human freedom. "Deceit" is a consequence of the several places where human freedom might possibly be regarding reality: the sight of a sign might deceive us and make us interpret it as if it were the whole thing to which it alludes; deciphering of signs might be deceitful "to the point of restricting the Being's desire to its immediate field of visibility and thus, unfortunately exclude his substance and purposefulness from him"⁵⁵.

This involves making the sensory world absolute, and to unduly interrupt the process of knowing, which moves from the sensory to the universal and spiritual levels. Such interruption implies a disordered motion of the mental dynamism that actualizes the process of cognition: an emphasis on the senses and sensory appetites or emotions over the operations of the understanding and will. The latter would no longer be in the control of the joint action of the mental powers to order and guide them to their end.

Thus, knowledge is "undeceiving", this is, a release from the possible deceit implicit in the external appearance of things. The notion of being deceived by the world is commonplace in the 16th and 17th centuries, and it means to attribute eternity to transient things, stability to provisory ones, while dismissing the fact that beings are analogies of Being.

If the worldly reality might not be understood in itself because it is nothing but an expression of the indefatigable divine activity that sustains it, the sacred is made explicit also by means of images. From this perspective, the use of images as allegories or metaphors in speech is not mere embellishment, but expresses "the prose of the world to be investigated in the world of Biblical prose"⁵⁶. It is thus confirmed Saint Bonaventure's doctrine that depicts the world as a mirror full of lights that reveal divine wisdom. Preachers, as well as all those devoted to the conversion of men know very well how to read such signs, and thus are masters in the knowledge of the true being of reality. Preaching does not only convey, but also promotes knowledge by making each listener an actor in the process of "undeceiving".

Reading of images thus reports to the workings of an imagination that is an integral part of human beings. According to the Jesuit tradition, the composition of

⁵⁵ Ibid, 114.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

images by means of the operation of imagination is oriented by the map supplied by Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* (1548).⁵⁷ The point made by Vieira in *Sermão do Demônio Mudo* from 1661 is: "Inside our phantasy or imaginative power that inhabits the brain, the images of all things that entered us by means of the senses and that the philosophers call species are kept as a secret treasure"⁵⁸. The order and composition of images must be ruled by judgment, this is, understanding guided by some criterion or guideline. Were the operation of imagination be delivered to the uncontrolled dynamics of the sensory appetites, the images kept in the memory could be composed in a deceitful manner. "Deceit by self-pride" acts as a "mute demon" that "orders and composes them as suits best to it, paints and represents inside our imagination that which might incline, awaken and attract its appetite"⁵⁹.

Conclusion

To summarize, in the cultural universe of Brazil in modern times, the workings of imagination as mental dynamics must be always understood in relation with the meanings that images assumed as phenomena expressing the requirements, ideas, values and practices proper to culture. In turn, this connection between imagination and images is shaped by a historical process whereupon the notions elaborated by the classic and medieval Western traditions were transmitted, appropriated and interpreted as a function of problems, frameworks and postures proper to the emerging modern times.

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⁵⁷ Pierre-Antoine Fabre, *Ignace de Loyola: Le lieu de l'image. Le problème de la composition de lieu dans le pratique spirituelles et artistiques jésuites de la seconde moitié du XVI siècle* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales; Librairie Philosophique Vrin, 1992).

⁵⁸ Antônio Vieira SI, *Sermões* (Porto: Lello & Irmão, 1993), vol. 1, 1173.

⁵⁹ Ibid.