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Studi di storia del collezionismo
e della storiografia artistica

Rivista telematica semestrale

LE IMMAGINI VIVE
coordinamento scientifico di Carmelo Occhipinti

L'età moderna
a cura di Carmelo Occhipinti

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EDITORIALE

CARMELO OCCHIPINTI

Vide da lontano un busto grandissimo; che da principio immaginò dovere essere di pietra, e a somiglianza degli ermi colossali veduti da lui, molti anni prima, nell'isola di Pasqua. Ma fattosi più da vicino, trovò che era una forma smisurata di donna seduta in terra, col busto ritto, appoggiato il dosso e il gomito a una montagna; e non finta ma viva; di volto mezzo tra bello e terribile, di occhi e di capelli nerissimi; la quale guardavalo fissamente; e stata così un buono spazio senza parlare, all'ultimo gli disse: «Chi sei?»

G. LEOPARDI, *Dialogo della natura e di un islandese*

Poco prima che si chiudesse l'anno 2013, nel sito internet di «Horti Hesperidum» veniva pubblicato il *call for papers* sul tema delle «Immagini vive».

Nonostante la giovane età della rivista – giravano, ancora, i fascicoli delle sole prime due annate –, sorprendentemente vasta fu, da subito, la risposta degli studiosi di più varia formazione: archeologi, medievisti, modernisti e contemporaneisti. In poche settimane, infatti, il nostro *call for papers* si trovò a essere rilanciato, attraverso i siti internet di diverse università e istituti di ricerca, in tutto il mondo. Risonanza di gran lunga inferiore, nonostante l'utilizzo degli stessi canali, riuscivano invece a ottenere le analoghe iniziative di lì a poco condotte da «Horti Hesperidum» su argomenti specialisticamente meglio definiti come quello della *Descrizione di tutti i Paesi Bassi* (1567) di Lodovico Guicciardini (a proposito dei rapporti artistici tra Italia e Paesi nordici nel XVI secolo), e del *Microcosmo della pittura* (1667) di

Francesco Scannelli (a proposito del collezionismo estense nel XVIII secolo).

Evidentemente era il tema in sé, quello appunto delle «Immagine vive», a destare una così inaspettata risonanza. Tanta risonanza si dovrebbe spiegare – mi sembra – in ragione di una nuova e sempre più diffusa esigenza, molto sentita ormai da parte degli studiosi di storia artistica (sollecitati, più o meno consapevolmente, dagli accadimenti del mondo contemporaneo): l'esigenza, cioè, di indagare certa qualità 'attiva' che le immagini avrebbero posseduto nel corso della storia, nelle epoche, nei luoghi e nei contesti sociali e religiosi più diversi prima che esse diventassero, per così dire, gli 'oggetti' – in un certo senso 'passivi' – della moderna disciplina storico-artistica, prima cioè che le stesse immagini si 'trasformassero' in 'reperti', diventando, così, non necessariamente qualcosa di 'morto' (rispetto a una precedente 'vita' perduta), bensì diventando, in ogni caso, qualcosa di 'diverso' da ciò che originariamente esse erano state. Già per il solo fatto di essere 'guardate' sotto una prospettiva disciplinare come quella della storia dell'arte, che è vincolata a proprie istanze di astrazione e di scientificità (in funzione, per esempio, delle classificazioni o delle periodizzazioni), le immagini non hanno fatto altro che 'trasformarsi': ma è vero che, per loro stessa natura, le immagini si trasformano sempre, per effetto della storia e degli uomini che le guardano, e dei luoghi che cambiano; tanto più, oggi, le immagini continuano a trasformarsi per effetto dei nuovi *media* i quali, sottraendole a qualsivoglia prospettiva disciplinare, ce le avvicinano nella loro più imprevedibile, multiforme, moderna 'vitalità'.

Il fatto è che, immersi come siamo nella civiltà nuova del digitale – la civiltà delle immagini virtuali, de-materializzate, de-contestualizzate che a ogni momento vengono spinte fin dentro alla nostra più personale esistenza quotidiana per ricombinarsi imprevedibilmente, dentro di noi, con i nostri stessi ricordi, così da sostanziare profondamente la nostra stessa identità – ci siamo alla fine ridotti a non poter più fare a meno di questo flusso magmatico che si muove sul *web* e da cui veniamo visceralmente nutriti, e senza il quale non riusciremmo proprio a decidere alcunché, né a pensare, né a scrivere, né a comunicare, né a fare

ricerca. In questo modo, però, le immagini che per via digitale, incessantemente, entrano per così dire dentro di noi sono immagini del tutto prive della loro materia, del loro stesso corpo, perché internet, avvicinandocene, ce le impoverisce, ce le trasforma, ce le riduce a immateriali parvenze. Ma così diventa addirittura possibile – ed è questo per molti di noi, come lo è per molti dei nostri studenti, un paradosso davvero mostruoso – diventa possibile, dicevo, studiare la storia dell'arte senza quasi che sentiamo più il bisogno di andare a vedere le opere d'arte, quelle vere, senza cioè riconsiderarle concretamente in rapporto, per esempio, all'esperienza nostra del 'paesaggio' di cui esse sono state e continuano a essere parte: non può che venirne fuori, ormai, una storia dell'arte fatta di opere ridotte alla parvenza immateriale la quale, distaccatasi dalle opere d'arte 'vere', non conserva di esse alcuna idea di fisicità, né possiede la benché minima capacità di coinvolgimento emotivo che derivava anticamente dalla 'presenza', dalla 'corporeità', dal rapporto col 'paesaggio' e col 'contesto', nonché dalle tradizioni e dai ricordi che, dentro quel 'paesaggio', dentro quel 'contesto', rivivevano attraverso le immagini, vivevano nelle immagini. La storia dell'arte ha finito per ridursi, insomma, a una storia di immagini 'morte', staccate cioè dai contesti culturali, religiosi, rituali da cui esse provenivano: in fondo, è proprio questo tipo di storia dell'arte, scientificamente distaccata dalla 'vita', a rispecchiare bene, nel panorama multimediale e globalizzato che stiamo vivendo, il nostro attuale impoverimento culturale.

In considerazione di quanto detto, questa miscellanea sulle «Immagini vive» è stata pensata anzitutto come raccolta di testimonianze sugli orientamenti odierni della disciplina storico-artistica la quale – oggi come non mai afflitta, per di più, dall'arido specialismo accademico che l'ha ridotta alla più mortificante inutilità sociale –, ambisce, vorrebbe o dovrebbe ambire, alla riconquista dei più vasti orizzonti della storia umana, nonché alla ricerca dei legami profondi che uniscono il passato al presente e, dunque, l'uomo alla società e le civiltà, seppure lontane nello spazio o nel tempo, l'una all'altra.

Ebbene questi due fascicoli della V annata (2015) di «Horti Hesperidum», ciascuno diviso nei due tomi che ora finalmente presentiamo, raccolgono i contributi di quanti, archeologi, medievisti, modernisti e contemporaneisti, abbiano voluto rispondere al nostro *call for papers* intervenendo su argomenti sì molto diversi, però tutti collegati a un'idea medesima: quella di verificare, nel passato come nel presente, una certa qualità 'attiva' che sia storicamente appartenuta, o appartenga, alle immagini.

Esattamente come lo enunciavamo nel sito internet di «Horti Hesperidum», alla fine del 2013, era questo il contenuto del nostro *call for papers*:

La rivista semestrale «Horti Hesperidum» intende dedicare il primo fascicolo monografico del 2015 al tema delle “Immagini vive”. Testimonianze letterarie di varie epoche, dall'antichità pagana all'età cristiana medievale e moderna, permettono di indagare il fenomeno antropologico dell'immagine percepita come presenza “viva”, capace di muoversi, parlare, interagire con gli uomini.

Saranno prese in particolare considerazione le seguenti prospettive di indagine:

1. Il rapporto tra il fedele e l'immagine devozionale
2. L'immagine elogiata come viva, vera, parlante, nell'*ekphrasis* letteraria
3. L'iconoclastia, ovvero l'“uccisione” dell'immagine nelle rispettive epoche

Ora, una siffatta formulazione – cui ha partecipato Ilaria Sforza, antichista e grecista – presupponeva, nelle nostre intenzioni, le proposte di metodo già da noi avanzate nell'*Editoriale* al primo numero di «Horti Hesperidum» (2011), dove avevamo cercato di insistere sulla necessità di guardare alle opere d'arte secondo un'ottica diversa da quella più tradizionalmente disciplinare che, in sostanza, si era definita, pure nella molteplicità degli indirizzi metodologici, tra Otto e Novecento. Allora, infatti, ci chiedevamo:

Ma sono pienamente condivisibili, oggi, intenzioni di metodo come le seguenti, che invece meritano la più rispettosa storicizzazione? Ri-

muovere ogni «ingombro leggendario», auspicava Longhi, che si frapponesse tra lo storico e le opere. Considerare queste ultime con il dovuto distacco scientifico. Guardarle «in rapporto con altre opere»: evitare cioè di accostarsi all'opera d'arte – come però sempre accadeva nelle epoche passate – «con reverenza, o con orrore, come magia, come tabù, come opera di Dio o dello stregone, non dell'uomo». Negare, in definitiva, «il mito degli artisti divini, e divinissimi, invece che semplicemente umani». Queste affermazioni, rilette oggi alla luce di nuove esigenze del nostro contemporaneo, finiscono per suonare come la negazione delle storie dell'arte in nome della storia dell'arte. Come la negazione degli uomini in nome dello storico dell'arte. Come la negazione dei modi di vedere in nome della *connoisseurship*. Come la negazione, in definitiva, della stessa 'storia' dell'arte. Infatti la storia ha davvero conosciuto miracoli e prodigi, maghi e stregoni, opere orribilmente belle, sovrumane, inspiegabili, e artisti terribili e divini. Lo storico di oggi ha il dovere di rispettare e comprendere ogni «ingombro leggendario», senza rimuoverlo; dovrebbe avere cioè il dovere di sorprendersi di fronte alle ragioni per cui, anticamente, a destar «meraviglia», «paura», «terrore» erano i monumenti artistici del più lontano passato come anche le opere migliori degli artisti di ogni presente. Quell'auspicato e antiletterario distacco scientifico ha finito in certi casi per rendere, a lungo andare, la disciplina della storia dell'arte, guardando soprattutto a come essa si è venuta trasformando nel panorama universitario degli ultimi decenni, una disciplina asfittica, non umanistica perché programmaticamente tecnica, di uno specialismo staccato dalla cultura, dalla società, dal costume, dalla politica, dalla religione».

In effetti, dalla cultura figurativa contemporanea provengono segnali ineludibili – gli odierni storici dell'arte non possono non tenerne conto – che ci inducono a muoverci in ben altra direzione rispetto alle indicazioni enunciate da Roberto Longhi nelle sue ormai lontane *Proposte per una critica d'arte* (1950) alle quali ci riferivamo nell'appena citato *Editoriale* di «Horti Hesperidum» del 2011. Pensiamo, per esempio, a quanto si verificava in seno alla 55^a Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte della Biennale di Venezia (2013), quando artisti e critici dovettero condividere il bisogno di ritrovare la fede – quella fede che, anticamente, era così sconfinata – nel 'potere' delle immagini, e di ritrovare, tentando di recuperarla dal nostro passato, «l'idea che l'immagine

sia un'entità viva, pulsante, dotata di poteri magici e capace di influenzare, trasformare, persino guarire l'individuo e l'intero universo»: d'altronde una tale idea non la si poteva affatto ritenere estranea alla tradizione culturale da cui noi stessi proveniamo nonostante che la modernità 'illuministica' abbia tentato di cancellarla, respingendola come vecchia, come appartenente a una «concezione datata, offuscata da superstizioni arcaiche».

Così, persino sulle pagine del catalogo della stessa Biennale del '13 (come pure su quelle dell'11, dove era fatta oggetto di rimpianto addirittura la potenza mistica di cui in età medievale era capace la 'luce', contro il buio introdotto da una deprecata età dei 'lumi'), l'urgenza di un rinnovato sguardo sul passato e sulla storia era già di per sé un fatto sorprendente e audace: tanto più se, per contrasto, ripensiamo all'altrettanto audace rifiuto del passato che lungo il XX secolo fu provocatoriamente mosso, in nome della modernità, da parte delle avanguardie e delle neo-avanguardie.

Del resto, «la parola 'immagine' contiene nel suo DNA, nella sua etimologia, una prossimità profonda con il corpo e con la morte: in latino l'*imago* era la maschera di cera che i romani creavano come calco per preservare il volto dei defunti»: ma visto che gli uomini del nostro tempo se ne sono dimenticati, serviva ricordare ai visitatori della Esposizione Internazionale che il mistero primigenio della scultura funeraria era, ed è, quello «di opporre alla morte, all'orizzontalità informe, la verticalità e la rigidità della pietra»³.

Di fronte a questa nuova disponibilità dei 'contemporaneisti' nei confronti della 'storia', gli storici dovrebbero, da parte loro, tornare a cercare nel contemporaneo le motivazioni della loro stessa ricerca. Sottratte alle rispettive dimensioni rituali, magiche, funerarie, devozionali e religiose – quelle dimensioni che la civiltà moderna, multimediale e globalizzata ha tentato di annul-

¹ *La Biennale di Venezia. 55ª Esposizione d'arte. Il palazzo enciclopedico*, a cura di M. Gioni, Venezia, Marsilio, 2013, p. 25.

² *Ibidem*, p. 25.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

lare definitivamente – le immagini sono diventate vuoti simulacri, come paiono esserlo quando le si vedono esposte, scientificamente classificate, dietro le vetrine o dentro le sale dei musei al cui interno esse hanno finito per arricchirsi di significati nuovi, certo, ma diversi da quelli che molte di esse possedevano al tempo in cui – citiamo sempre dal catalogo dell'esposizione del '13 – «magia, miti, tradizioni e credenze religiose contavano quanto l'osservazione diretta della realtà»⁴.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

IMAGE, DEVOTION AND *PARAREPRESENTATION*:
APPROACHING BAROQUE PAINTING TO
NEUROSCIENCE, OR A WAY TO BELIEVE

MARLA DO CARMO R. MENDES

*What the mind absorbs by the ears
stimulates less than what it is presented through the eyes,
and what the viewer can believe and see by himself.*

HORATIO, *Ars poetica*, 180-82.

Communication is built up in words and images: the idea is transmuted into a symbolic message to the other, who perceives, understands and assimilates it. Communication generates a vital symbiosis based on sharing of concepts, knowledge, emotions and feelings, essential for the development of individuals and society and, ultimately, for human survival.

First of all, reality is a mental construction. Is the human brain that forms the notion of the self and of the world, the awareness of existing in a certain temporal and spatial context, well integrated with other individuals also conscious of themselves. The innate human necessity to extrapolate and to represent the abstract world of his mind leads to a constant creation of symbolic languages that materialize the individual becoming, by showing to the eyes and to the understanding of others the inner self as a result of a being that exists, thinks and feels.

Horti Hesperidum, V, 2015, II 1

The baroque pictorial object as the language of the total persona

Body, mind and spirit converge by this way on the images of Time. The Baroque period was characterized by an unprecedented recourse to image, increasing its symbolic charge to the maximum exponent in order to instigate feelings and devotions, with the ultimate intent to guide and strengthen people's faith. The mentors of the Counter-Reformation were pioneers in the fields of Image Theory, by taking the image to the limit as projection of the mind, and as representation of the concepts formed in it; but in these times the image acquired a new attribute, perceived as a 'visual word' that beyond teaching also aimed to shape the pith of the human spirit. David Freedberg in his book *The Power of Images*, briefly defines the bond that is established between the image and the man, throughout history, saying that

People get sexually excited when contemplating paintings and sculptures; broke them, mutilate them, kiss them, cry before them, thrilled and incited to revolt. Express gratitude to them, expecting to feel high and moving up to higher levels of empathy and fear. Always responded in these ways and still respond, in societies we call primitive and in modern societies; in the East and West, in Africa, America, Asia and Europe¹.

Setake the analysis of ten paintings to understand which perceptual mechanisms underlying the visualization of religious images, in the Baroque and Counter-Reformation periods, and its feature as spiritual pedagogues, is to unravel how the religious image and its attributes were wisely modeled to instigate feelings and expand devotions centered in one faith, working as meta-languages that aimed to communicate with an ultra-tangible reality².

¹ FREEDBERG 2010, p. 19. Our translation.

² This thematic is being developed by the authoress within the scope of the PhD thesis, entitled *The Word of Image: ideologies, functions and perceptions in Baroque pictorial lan-*

We currently live absorbed in images: a visual culture which was based in the Counter-Reformation. The triad *nihil inordinatum*, *nihil profanum* and *nihil inbonestum* enacted in the XXV Session of the Council of Trent concerning to the religious imagery drew the kind of symbolic content that should be represented, in a way not to disperse the souls from the Catholic Church and from the eternal salvation. The intent to guide imagetically the believer in a specific way beyond the mundane reality takes us to the use of symbolic and pictorial resources that aimed stimulating mental constructions in the individual, in which the spiritual self would review with its desires and beliefs. In fact, our individual reality is based, first of all, on the planes of mind and consciousness, and the notion of soul is also created in the same way in the brain: this is the place of the holistic being par excellence, the one who perceives reality as a whole, without distinguishing between the physical, mental and spiritual plane. It is the place where the *homo religiosus* resides. In the book *The Mystical Mind*, the psychiatrist Eugene d'Aquili and the neuroscientist Andrew Newberg clarify this notion of the soul which is, likewise, a mental construction:

[...] if there is a soul that can be experienced, our only experience of it is likely by means of the human brain and therefore the human mind. After all, we have no method of experiencing the world, which includes the soul, other than through our senses, emotions, and thoughts. These are certainly functions of the mind and brain. Thus, even if there is a sensible soul, our cognitive and emotional experiences of it must be mediated ultimately by the brain³.

Under these assumptions, understanding the Baroque pictorial object as a reflection of the communication process focused on the total *persona* – whom aggregates on itself the idea, the message and the apprehension – is closely linked to the symbolic code that the object is loaded with. As will be seen, is in its

guage in Portugal (1668-1750), at the Art History Institute, Faculty of Humanities, University of Lisboa.

³ D'AQUILI, NEWBERG 1999, p. 22.

morphologies, properties and meanings that resides the key that opens the door to the ontological dialogue that triggers on the individual empathy, devotion and spiritual transformation.

Ten paintings, ten lessons to believe

The ceiling of the main chapel of the Church of Our Lady of Conception in Covilhã (Portugal), worship place from the disappeared Convent of St. Francis, takes part of the imaged program designed to this place; created between 1699 and 1701, there were not only major contributors the conventual monks, but also the patron of this main chapel, the Viscount of Barbacena Jorge Furtado de Castro do Rio e Mendonça⁴, and the Bishop of Guarda of that time, D. Rodrigo de Moura Teles. Thought according the counter-reformist ideology – having as central theme the Immaculate Conception of Mary – in its whole exceeds the mere doctrinal nature and fully assumes its conversion character, expressing it clearly on the ceiling and on its ten paintings⁵.

Covilhã lived, in those times, under a strong wool manufacturing activity, enriching people and consequently promoting artistic patronage⁶; the fact that in the village existed a considerable number of new-christians did urge a more incisive approach to the effectiveness of the christian faith, and the preservation of good Catholic customs. In this context, the Franciscan monks held a prominent role, as well as the convent and above all the church itself, where the population converged with great devo-

⁴ Jorge Furtado de Castro do Rio e Mendonça, 2nd Viscount of Barbacena, was the mayor of Covilhã between 1678 and 1708, year of his death. He was married to Countess Anne Louise de Hohenlohe, daughter of Louis Gustav, Count of Hohenlohe nobleman next of the Emperor Leopold I.

⁵ See MENDES 2009.

⁶ At this time, several pictorial programs arose in the village of Covilhã, such as the painted ceiling of the Chapel of Calvary, decorated with panels with scenes from the Passion of Christ, and with a more secular speech the painted ceiling that exists in the House of Morgadas allusive to the Discoveries and to the Five Continents then discovered (SERRÃO, MENDES, SILVA 2009).

tion to the cause of the Immaculate, symbol of a recently restored country.

To this factor adds the presence of D. Rodrigo de Moura Teles⁷ in the diocese, between the years 1694 and 1704⁸: man of strong catholic convictions, graduated in Canons by the University of Coimbra and *Curtain's Sumilber*⁹ of the King Pedro II, his apostleship was heavily influenced by the ideology of *Jacobeia*, a profoundly mystical religious movement characterized by an ascetic divestiture and sense of personal and spiritual union with Christ Calvary sufferance; it defended as the only way of salvation a beatitude existence, by the abandonment of bad customs and worldly experiences considered vicious, this is a doctrine which its proponents seek to pass on to all mankind. The *Jacobens* considered themselves apostles of this spiritual path of salvation by incorporating the image of Christ's suffering, and by considering it as the unique possible way for the remission of sins.

To the figure of D. Rodrigo de Moura Teles is associated the Viscount of Barbacena Jorge Furtado de Castro do Rio e Mendonça: the mayor of Covilhã held the patronage of the main chapel of the conventual church, responsibility inherited from its predecessors that in that location were buried. He resided, at the time, in the village of Penamacor, but the visits to Covilhã

⁷ «D. Rodrigo de Moura Teles was born in Vale de Reis, on January 26th, 1644. Doctorate in Canons at the university of Coimbra, was chief treasurer and canon of Évora's Cathedral; Member of the Mesa da Consciência e das Ordens since 1677; *Curtain's Sumilber* of the King D. Pedro II since 1678. In 1679 took charge of the redemption of the captives in Meknes, which mission fulfill promptly. In 1690 he was elected Rector of the University of Coimbra, a position that was confirmed by royal provision of July 28th, 1690. In 1692 refused the miter of Lamego, because wanted to continue in the rectory of the university. In 1694 he was nominated Bishop of Guarda, dignity which was confirmed on June 21st of the same year. He took possession of the diocese on August 25th and received ordination in Lisbon on November 14th of the same year. In June 1695 entered on Guarda, and promptly made a pastoral visit» (ALMEIDA 1930, p. 629). Our translation.

⁸ PAIVA 2006, p. 580. This bishop was, in 1704, nominated as Archbishop of Braga, where he remained until the time of his death, in 1728.

⁹ Expression with origins in french and spanish terms *sommelier* and *sumiller*; it defines who is chief or superior in various departments or ministries of the palace.

were regular and near was the relationship with the bishop¹⁰. D. Rodrigo was in Covilhã and in the Convent of St. Francis, according to the author of that time Frei Agostinho de Santa Maria, and to this place the bishop ordered a new image of the Immaculate Conception to be included in the tribune of the main chapel, whose *décor* was, at the year of 1699, refurbished, and all works financed by the Viscount:

Is this Sacred Image articulated, and with dresses, standing with hands raised, with height of six feet, and great beauty, and the Monks serve it with great devotion, and it is with much veneration and decency. [...] About the origin and principles of this sacred image, it was made by order of the Illustrious Bishop of Guarda D. Rodrigo de Moura Telles, at the present Archbishop of Braga¹¹.

The main chapel imagetical program includes an altarpiece in gilded woodwork *National Style* with the image of the Immaculate Conception on the tribune; on the lateral walls of the main chapel are four paintings representing four Saints of the Order of St. Francis (on the left St. Bonaventure and the *Doctor Subtilis* Duns Scotus, and on the right St. Bernardino of Siena and St. Anthony of Lisboa)¹²; on the ceiling, ten paintings with allegorical representations of Divine Love (fig. 1). This is a speech that stands out for its erudition, in a time when the image was teeming pedagogy in line with the strictest Tridentine decrees, the bishop should promote, as the main responsible, the conversion and the salvation of the souls in his diocese.

Three characters enact these ten paintings: an Angel, a female figure representing the Soul, and a Heart. A dialogue is established between them, centered on the theme of Christ's Passion, and at the organ is assigned the main role. In the image we may see a general view of the ceiling (fig. 2): on the first paint-

¹⁰ It is known, by consulting the Parish Registers, that D. Rodrigo visited repeatedly the village of Penamacor as Bishop of Guarda, depriving with the Viscount at his residence and sponsoring the baptism of one of his children.

¹¹ SANTA MARIA 1707-1723, p. 115. Our translation.

¹² SERRÃO 2007, p. 241.

ing, above and on the left of the figure, is represented the episode of the Garden of Olives, reported in the Gospel of St. Luke¹³: presents us a kneeling Soul holding the Heart, which receives inside the drops of blood that flow from the forehead of the Angel; also represented is a goblet in the upper left corner of the representation, that radiates light in the direction of the Soul; the second painting shows us the Soul represented facing the observer, resignedly exposing the Heart on the top of a column, and the organ is plagued by the Angel, an allusion to the story of the Gospel of St. John¹⁴; the next painting, third in the reading line, presents the Angel facing the viewer, holding a veil in which is represented the face of Christ in a clear reference to the episode of Veronica, of the Stations of the Cross; the fourth painting shows us the Soul squatting, putting the Heart at the center of a crown of thorns, which holds the Angel – reports us to an episode in the Gospel of St. Mark¹⁵, where Christ is crowned King with an identical crown; the fifth representation displays the kneeling Soul, represented in a side view, with the Heart in her hands which content gives to drink to the Angel, who also holds the organ – a report described in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark¹⁶, in which is given wine mingled with myrrh to drink to Jesus; from the Gospel of St. Luke¹⁷ emerges the sixth painting, in which the Soul takes the Heart in her hands, with the organ tied with a rope and pulled by the Angel. The upper part of the imagetical program of this ceiling consists of four paintings, and contains representations pertaining to Calvary episodes: in the lower right side of the figure is the seventh representation, which refers to Christ's crucifixion, the kneeling Soul holds the Heart, while the Angel proceeds to the martyrdom of the organ, as Jesus in the Golgotha as reported in

¹³ GOSPEL OF ST. LUKE 22, 44.

¹⁴ GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN 19, 1.

¹⁵ GOSPEL OF ST. MARK 15, 17-18.

¹⁶ GOSPEL OF ST. MARK 15, 23.

¹⁷ GOSPEL OF ST. LUKE 23, 26.

the Gospel of St. Luke¹⁸; the eighth painting alludes to the moment of the Resurrection and to the Gospel of St. John¹⁹, with the kneeling Soul, represented in a side view, lifting the Heart, whose image is reflected in a mirror that the Angel holds, and which reflects the Five Wounds of Christ. The last two paintings, ninth and tenth respectively, refer to the elevation and exposure of the Cross: the first presents the Heart pierced by ropes and hanging on a cross, which is being supported by the Soul; the last painting represents the kneeling Soul holding the Heart, while the Angel inserts a cross in it.

The School of the Heart: teaching the mind and the heart through the lessons

The set of this ten paintings reveals a discourse that goes far beyond mere visual pedagogy: it concentrates in itself a message resorting to the image of Christ humanized in the believing heart, fulfilling the promise reported in the Book of Ezekiel: «I'll give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I'll remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh»²⁰. The three figures represented contains a strong symbolic charge, substantiated by the text of the book whose emblems have proved to be the visual and theoretical source of this ceiling's pictorial program²¹: the book *Schola Cordis, sive, Aversi a Deo cordis ad eundem reductio, et instructio*²², from the benedictine monk Benedictus Jacobus van Haeften²³.

¹⁸ GOSPEL OF ST. LUKE 23, 33-34.

¹⁹ GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN 20, 29-30.

²⁰ BOOK OF EZEKIEL 36, 26.

²¹ MENDES 2009, pp. 89-117. This study presents a new and profound research about this subject.

²² This book was first published in Antwerp in 1629. Knew great fame and was reprinted several times and translated into English, German and Spanish. This Benedictine monk was also the author of the book *Regia Via Crucis*, with first edition in 1635.

²³ Benedictus Jacobus van Haeften was a theologian and writer, and was prior of the Monastery of Afflighem, in actual Belgium. He was born in Utrecht in 1588 and died

This manual consists of four books of substantial ascetic content; at first, van Haeften declaring a phrase that, under the point of view of perception and therefore of devotional experience, will be strategic in this present study, to understand both aspects at that time:

Scopus mihi in hoc Opere non alius fuit, quam Imaginibus, oculos; versibus, aures; ipsis denique Lectionibus, animum & COR oblectare, instruere & permovere²⁴.

The four books are divided in the following order of thematics: «Praevia ad Doctrinam Cordis Introductio», «Aversi Cordis ad Deum Conversio & Directio» [our translation: «The Adverse Heart that Converge in God's Direction»], «Dei erga Cor humanum beneficia», e «Exercitatio Cordis in Christi Passione». They contain quotes from authors such as Aristotle, St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure and from the Holy Bible, and the engravings, *facit* by Boethius Bolswert, starting in the second book, in a total of fifty-five, illustrating the theme of each lesson.

The first book introduces the doctrine of the Heart: the reader should know the importance of targeting the heart to God, because according to the author the organ is «Caloris ac spirituum vitalium, sine quibus nec motus, nec sensuum functio obiri potest, officina & scaturigo est Cor»²⁵ – an extremely important definition to understand the symbolism of the Heart in the Tridentine Catholic context, as the place where the soul and the body converge and praise God. In the second book, start the climbing of the ascetic Heart, initially characterizing what is adverse to God and showing how the organ should be cleansed from the mundane. The third book shows the ways how the Heart can contact God, and highlights the benefits for the soul of the communion with chastity. Finally, the fourth and final

in Spa in 1648. His writings reflected a profound reflection on the Rule of St. Benedict, with particular emphasis on obtaining eternal salvation.

²⁴ HAEFTEN s.d., p. 10.

²⁵ HAEFTEN s.d., p. 2.

book explains how the heart, by living itself the Passion of Christ, may achieve perfection, and consequently ensure the eternal salvation.

The ten emblems that were represented on the ceiling of this main chapel belongs to the fourth book, and were chosen for their direct visual connexion to episodes of the Passion, showing great concern for a logic of speech easily perceptible by the viewers (fig. 3). This is evidenced by the choice of the emblems to transpose the ceiling, which was not linear: the first painting from the Gethsemane episode corresponds to the engraving No 40 from the Lesson I «BALNEUM CORDIS EX SUDORE SANGUINEO»; to the second painting is associated the engraving No 42 and the Lesson III «FULCRUM CORDIS, CHRISTI COLUMNA»; to the third painting corresponds the emblem No 45 and the Lesson VI «PICTURA CORDIS EX SINDONE VERONICAE EXPRESSA»; the fourth painting, was inspired by the engraving No 44 and by the Lesson V «SEPIMENTUM CORDIS CORONA SPINEA»; to the fifth representation corresponds the emblem No 46 and the Lesson VII «COR PHIALA CHRISTO SILENTI»; the sixth painting corresponds in the book to the engraving No 41 of the Lesson II «VINCULUM CORDIS, EX FUNIBUS CHRISTI».

The painting at the lower right side of the imagetical program, which represents the crucifixion, corresponds to the book's engraving No 47 from the Lesson VIII «COMPUNCTIO CORDIS CLAVO TIMORIS DEI»; the eighth painting has as its source the emblem No 54 that illustrates the Lesson XXV «SPECULUM CORDIS IN QUINQUE VULNERIBUS»; the ninth representation on the ceiling corresponds in the book to the emblem No 48 from the Lesson IX «CORDIS INS CRUCE EXPANSIO»; and finally the tenth ceiling painting is originated from the engraving No 49 of the Lesson X «CRUCIS IN CORDE PLANTATIO».

Teaching the minds, converting the hearts, living the images

The relationship previously established, shows that the message contained in this pictorial set stands out from the mere concept

of visual catechesis: beyond telling a story, reveals that the believers can, by printing the suffering of Christ in their hearts (and consequently in their minds), transfiguring themselves the image of the Redeemer incarnate, in body and spirit. This was the main concern of counter-reformist mentors and image theoreticians of that time; St. Ignatius of Loyola was a pioneer in this matter, about the affirmation of the importance of mental imagery in religious experience: from the visualization of real images and personal memories, St. Ignatius associated with these, in his *Spiritual Exercises*, the meditation, by inducing in the believer the ability to build interior images, imitations of Christ alive²⁶ – making the invisible visible in every person. This belief that the images would be more effective than words in the awakening of emotions and in enhancing memory has been theorized by figures like St. Gregory or St. Bonaventure, but it was St. Ignatius who revitalized and popularized techniques of mental impression of images model, making them objects of personal love and devotion.

This empathic meditation centered on the individual believer is the motto of the *Schola Cordis*, and its symbolism of the Heart as the place where Christ lives is reinforced by the writings of the Archbishop of Milan Federico Borromeo²⁷, who reflects in his treatise *Sacred Painting* the aesthetic qualities and the rules to be applied on the images by the artists, with clear explanations about what effect these should cause in the believer:

²⁶ «Indeed, from early Christian texts on meditation until the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola, that was conceived and publicized the act of meditation as a concrete parallel the act of image making. The meditator should represent scenes mentally the same way that the painter represents real world scenes. [...] The meditator imitates Christ (for example) equal to the painter who copies a model; and this is so precisely because Christ is a man, as one of us» (FREEDBERG 2010, p. 196). Our translation.

²⁷ Cousin of the Archbishop of Milan Carlos Borromeo, paradigmatic figure of the Tridentine reforming spirit. Federico was born in Milan on August 16th, 1564 and died in the same city, on September 22nd, 1631. Was also Archbishop of Milan, and figure of continuity with regard to the counter-reformist precepts of the Church. He founded in Milan the Ambrosian Library.

[...] in fact, I treat painting and sculpture as if they were one and the same art. I will try, in what I discuss and teach, to comply with the decree of the Sacred Council of Trent that ordered bishops to give people instructions about the mysteries of the faith and sacred stories. It ordered bishops to do so not only with words but also with paintings or other visual media, since images, by working on both rational and emotional levels, can stimulate people to reflect on the articles of the faith²⁸.

The power of the image, in this period, united itself faith, reason and emotion. It was important that people understand and assimilate the revealed message because it turned the heart of every believer in the cornerstone of the catholic faith: people gave life to the image and lived the image, and this was the modern *devotio*. At a time when the knowledge of the human visual system, and of the perceptual mechanisms underlying images apprehension, not go besides results of direct observations of the effect that they provoked, to understand how the same visual language unified the masses, and how the images were manipulated in order to instill personal and generalized empathy proved to be important to realize the concept of visual culture in Trento: a populated universe of meta-languages that elevated the human spirit.

The Heart as 'visual word'

In this context, this ceiling is paradigmatic: the focus on the symbol of the Heart proved to be a simple and effective language, able to fully represent Christ incarnation in the believer, elevating him beyond its existential armour. The Heart is linked, since immemorial time, to symbolism of life and the organ was, in these Baroque times, the figuration of the interior space, the house of the soul, the place of God's Love²⁹. The association of

²⁸ BORROMEO 2010, pp. 3-5. The bold on the citation is ours.

²⁹ There were several books about the theme of the Heart and of the Divine Love, which proliferated from the mid XVI century. From a mystique developed by St.

the Heart with the Angel and the Soul also contributes to the elevation of the organ to an extra-terrestrial level, because these last two personages belong to an imaginary that is not of this world, because of its ethereal attributes: the Angel's wings, and Soul's asexual appearance. Through the episodes staged by these three figures the believers were transported beyond the everyday reality, momentarily apart from the fleeting human existence, immersed in a religious experience *in illo tempore*³⁰.

In those ten representations, the message of the book manifests as 'visual word' revealed in these archetypal characters, by showing the model: Christ and His Passion. The morphology of the Heart itself proves that this model should be internalized in the core of every believer, transmuting this place where the vital relationship between the human and the divine is realized: from the books of emblems where the Heart is the central theme, we consider three generic types of representation: the hollow Heart type half-cap (usually with representations inside), the Heart with a top opening in which is a flame, a cross or both, and the Heart massive or with top opening without any decoration; this last one, initially on the book and after on the ceiling, reflects in it the entire human genus, prone to vices and virtues but object of God's love, and aim of redemption by the model of the Son – a message with an erudite content but through image easily understood and assimilated.

Augustine and enhanced by personages such as St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, the representation of the Heart was greatly explored in the baroque ascetic literature, such as par example *Cor Iesu amanti sacrum* (1585-86), of Anton Wierix, or *Pia Desideria* (1624), from Hugo Hermann.

³⁰ A notion by Mircea Eliade, who defends that «all rituals develop not only a consecrated space, ie, in an essentially separate space from the profane, but in also in a “sacred time”, “at that time” (*in illo tempore, ab origine*) in which the ritual was first performed by a god, a hero or an ancestor» (ELIADE, 2000, p. 35). Our translation.

Image, devotion, emotion and pararepresentation

So, devotion is closely linked to the concept of imitation, which is expressed in this Heart: indeed, the Counter-Reformation mentors knew that the image should show and inculcate in the individual the models of the Catholic faith, as a mirror of piety to touch the intellect and imagination. The representation of emotions was the extremely important at baroque time, and Federico Borromeo dedicated an entire chapter in his *Sacred Painting*, referring to the importance that painters should give to descriptions of the Holy Scriptures and to the virtues and merits of the saints. And notes that

Proper depiction of the emotions will, in the end, provide considerable advantages. After all, reverence toward God and the Saints – as well as praise, imitation, fear, sorrow, and hope – are precisely the emotions or stirrings of the soul that sacred images can arouse. When images excite our minds and stir them with lively inspiration, they can be said to be alive and breathing³¹.

This concept of living image was later explored by David Freedberg in his book *The Power of Images*: sensation strongly linked to the cognitive processes, is based on the human natural tendency of giving *anima* (soul) to the images with which we have established some sort of emotional attachment – to representing in the images tears, sweat, blood, suggesting life by the look and through the facial and body movements originates some sort of empathy established as we review in them our humanity³²:

³¹ BORROMEIO 2010, p. 41.

³² The neurologist Vilayanur Ramachandran, professor at the University of California, presents in his book *The Tell-Tale Brain*, a reflection of what distinguishes us as humans. From characteristics imminently human – laughing, crying, articulate language, abstract thinking, awareness of life and death – makes an analysis based on clinical cases, and on concepts of Neurophysiology. The major focus of this book is given to the mirror-neurons, cortical structures that the author indicates have been responsible for the humanization phenomenon (see RACHAMANDRAN 2011).

The painting will move the soul of the beholder when the people painted there each clearly shows the movement of his own soul [...] we weep with the weeping, laugh with the laughing, and grieve with the grieving. These movements of the soul are known from the movements of the body³³.

Thus, the human beings have an innate necessity to reflect and to materialize visually in the created images their own consciousness, rational and emotional. The verisimilitude and realism, associated with emotional load and movement of the figures, are indeed critical factors for understanding the messages inscribed on the baroque images – even though they are constituted by meta-languages and even though they are effectively *pararepresentations*³⁴. To better understand the process, the author Vítor dos Reis clarifies that

So, it is easier to understand the emphasis given by the Baroque to the connection between the subject as an observer and as a believer. In his mind, this observer/believer builds imaginatively, in the act of spiritual meditation, a visual idea of the invisible and unrepresentable, based on their memory of the visible and represented [...]. Thus, the visible arises in the representation of the invisible and the compounds which are represented, organized and integrated to constitute a compelling, believable and, not least, acceptable and *recognizable* by every observer / believer as a representation of that other not visible world³⁵.

In addition of the necessity of a symbol easily *recognizable*, and part of a present reality, it must also enroll in a context whose speech is presented logical: the Passion of Christ. Are these assumptions that are confirmed, in these ten paintings of this ceiling.

³³ ALBERTI 1972, p. 80.

³⁴ The word *pararepresentation* refers to representations of entities that belong to a sacred plane, but who have human characteristics and interact in the plan of emotion/imagination with those who believe in them.

³⁵ REIS 2006, p. 51. Our translation.

The representation of two ethereal figures, but with human aspect, associated with the strong symbolic significance of the Heart that incarnates the figure of Christ, gives to this ceiling a huge animic dimension projected by the observer/believer that sees itself in it, and whose lessons wants to assimilate and also to represent in the daily live. The human brain functions as an inner eye, and the understanding of the world is a reflection of what is apprehended; as well referred Borromeo, «[...] human beings want to see and contemplate their own different mental dispositions – dispositions that are solely human»³⁶. The meanings of the figures represented are projections that reveal the desires and beliefs of those who see them through the emotions, while they're projecting in these the presence of the divine that inspires the hope of eternal salvation.

So, to represent images easily *recognizable* to the human intellect is a necessary condition for the described above; the concept of living image belongs to many different cultures and beliefs, and as reinforces David Freedberg

[...] Western literature contains an extraordinary number of references to paintings and statues with a vital semblance demonstrated in different ways: sweat, bleed if someone strikes or boiling oils and other healing substances. [...] Shortly, they betray their inert nature and act as animate beings³⁷.

Understand the religious image not only as an imitation but also as a projection is essential factor to understand how men and women react before it. Indeed, the religious images when consecrated and/or exist within a sacred space, are automatically elevated to the status of *pararepresentations*, because the belief in the sacred drives the emergence of a different mental state on those who contemplates³⁸. And it is from the believer that depends the answer on the animated image: it is imperative to be-

³⁶ BORROMEIO 2010, p. 39.

³⁷ FREEDBERG 2010, p. 324. Our translation.

³⁸ GOMBRICH 2002, p. 97.

lieve, and believe in the supra-reality therefore assigned to it. Through believing, the images are no longer appearances and are assumed, by the believer, as realities – because they embody this supra-reality, in which the divine is expressed³⁹.

To understand this phenomenon of living images, the myth of Pygmalion expressed in an allegorical way the power of the image as projection of desires of the individual who contemplates it⁴⁰ – allegory that later triggered the *Pygmalion effect* (also known as *Rosenthal effect*, in the area of psychology of perception); it consists in how we relate to our expectations and our perceptions of reality with reality itself, by being the results constantly shaped by us according with our hopes in relation to what surrounds us⁴¹. Therefore, the expectations we project in the image are directly proportional to the beliefs that we place on it: believing that the image is a divine personification is so, in the context of religious imaginary, fundamental – it is the expectation, which we called faith that creates the illusion⁴².

Thus, the devotional sentiment gathers itself the concepts of imitation and projection: imitation, because the image is made in 'our image and semblance' and so is inserted in a physical reality that we perceive; and projection, because it can reflect our inner self⁴³, in the way that faith indicates us⁴⁴. The Baroque is

³⁹ GOMBRICH 2002, pp. 84-85.

⁴⁰ See STOICHITA 2006. This is an excellent manual for understanding the image as simulacrum of reality.

⁴¹ The *Pygmalion effect*, also known as *Rosenthal effect*, was named by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson, important American psychologists, authors of a major study that focused on how teachers expectations affect students performance. The method is simple: teachers who have a positive view of students tend to stimulate the good side of them, and the best results; teachers who have a negative view of students adopt postures that end up adversely impair the performance of these. This effect is even also known as *self-fulfilling prophecy*, because who does the prophecy is actually who makes it happen, affecting as well the relations in all fields of life, as on later studies Rosenthal amply document.

⁴² GOMBRICH 2002, p. 171.

⁴³ About the representations of the inner self in art and in Baroque literature, see FLOR 1999, pp. 201-231.

⁴⁴ In this aspect the sermon was essential in these times: through speaking, believers were guided by the strong power of suggestion, which appealed to the contents

paradigmatic in this context because the image itself goes beyond feeling through the representation of emotional expressions, whose ultimate aim would be to lead the believer to a pious existence: something that is well expressed in this ceiling, and even more if compared to the visual source, the ten emblems of the book *Schola Cordis*.

The religious image as the shape of the believer

Rudolf Arnheim states that «the expression only exists where there is a spirit to be expressed»⁴⁵: in the human case, the movements/expressions from the face and body are visible mirrors of the states of mind, and their representation plays an important role in the visual arts. Happiness, sadness, surprise, anger, are «passions [...]; however they show the eyes, as well as in color and changes of countenance, which are immediate object of vision»⁴⁶. On this study and on this ceiling, comparing with the engravings, in addition to checking an accentuation of the theatricality of the figures, we can note that the same facial expressions were changed and highlighted, searching for a whole scenographic effect. An effect which, however, is consistent with what was intended to be visually clear: we now know that the human mind is ruled by the principle of simplicity, and using the words of Arnheim, it was essential resorting to a visual language in which «things are presented to us in a way that the senses can easily imagine them and therefore easily remember them»⁴⁷.

Although the visual source is achromatic, in the transposition to the ceiling there was a concern to accentuate the emotional effect of the characters: in the first painting, the figure of the An-

stored in individual memory relating them with religious symbols presented in the collective memory, and expressed in the image.

⁴⁵ ARNHEIM 2007, p. 438. Our translation.

⁴⁶ ARNHEIM 2007, p. 439. Our translation.

⁴⁷ ARNHEIM 2007, p. 47. Our translation.

gel is represented with a greedy countenance manifested in a slight drooping of the eyebrows and dull look expression that does not exist in the visual source. For greater effectiveness of the message, also formal changes are evident: the Soul, represented in the engraving on his back, on the ceiling was represented in profile to the observer – in order to make it *recognizable*.

Identical changes occur in the second painting on the ceiling: a condescending expression of the Soul, which removes the look from a Heart about to be scourged in the column, does not appear in the engraving, in which is clearly represented an alienated Soul from the organ. Formally, the ceiling figure of the Angel presents an intentionally twisted head to show the figure to the viewer in profile, as well as the body of the Soul was curved to reinforce the approach to the column. In the third painting, both characters are represented with melancholy looks of devotion, which are directed to the image of Christ revealed in the Heart caressed by the Soul, with the organ represented on a table; it is not in the emblem, but we can see this also in comparison with the table on the painting, that suffers a perspectival change in order to make the figure of Christ on top perceptible to the observer.

Also the fourth painting is not an exception to the rule: in addition to being strengthened, on the ceiling, the emotional charge of the figures, here was also intentionally centered the scene, with the Heart to be placed on a square base in order to elevate it from the ground plane and center it in the composition. In the fifth painting, formal amendments were made mainly in the background, by representing the scene of the three crosses of the Calvary; the visual gap between the figures presented on the original engraving was also, in the painting, amended, by reinforcing the idea of rapprochement between both characters.

The sixth painting also presents changes concerning to the visual source: in the engraving, the Angel has his face represented looking directly at the reader; on the ceiling, his face is represented in profile, as well as the Soul, driving both looking to the Heart as element of communion that unites them. In the seventh painting there are not noticeable differences regarding to

the visual source – because the original composition was clear enough in regards to the episode portrayed: the Crucifixion; however, the eighth painting shows alteration in the figure of the Soul, which is represented in the emblem on the back and on the ceiling is represented in profile (respecting once again, the concern of making a *recognizable* image).

The ninth painting presents us, comparing to the engraving, unquestionable changes to achieve a clearly message to be transmitted on the ceiling: while in the painting the cross was raised obliquely to a correct perception of the figure, with the Heart represented facing the observer, in the emblem the cross is based on the floor plan and the organ deformed by the perspective; identical change in the tenth and last painting, in which the cross was inserted into the Heart and was represented obliquely (respecting the viewing angle relative to the nave of the church), and the figure of the Soul, which is represented in the emblem on the back, is once more represented in the painting in profile. In both paintings remained a concern to express emotions in the faces and gestures, and the color – as Arnheim refers above as «passions» – is also a crucial contribution.

About this fact had also the Counter-Reformist mentors the perception: Borromeo referred to it in Chapter II of his *Sacred Painting*, dedicated to the representation of the pious sentiment, saying that «Colors are like words: once the eyes see them sink into the mind just as do words heard by the ears»⁴⁸. In fact, the color greatly stimulates the human visual system and the cerebral cortex, and is a decisive contribution for the imitation and projection conditions mentioned above to be confirmed and to cause on the believer the desirable effect. The color is essential in the sense of corporeality, and the three-dimensionality that it suggests leads the brain to recognition.

All the visual appearance of what surrounds us is due to the existence of light and color perception, i.e., the configuration of objects is revealed to us by the ability of the visual system to distinguish areas of different brightness and chromaticity. Color

⁴⁸ BORROMEIO 2010, p. 45

and light are just two inseparable conditions of our perception of reality, and the same rule is true on a pictorial object's reading and apprehension.

It is very difficult to analyze chromatically a pictorial object in a reliably way: in addition to other factors⁴⁹, the analysis is conditioned by the constant interaction between the various colors that compound a painting, and we can't say that a color really is on a truly way, because it is always determined by its context; likewise, we must consider that the perception of color varies slightly from individual to individual, on the specifics of each visual system and on the particular way that everyone reacts to light. Thus,

[...] the identity of the color does not lie in the color itself, but is established by relationship. We are aware of this mutual transfiguration which makes each dependent color support all the others, in the same way that the stones of an arch are related to each other to stay in place. But while the stones counterbalances the reciprocal weight physically, the color network in interaction is created only by the eye, and this subjectivity - completely different from the vigorous forms of objectivity - gives them the quality of appearances⁵⁰.

Thus, the color is not an intrinsic property of the object, but a construction that appeals to the individual, to his physiology, his experiences, his emotions, his memories; ultimately to his entire cortical system.

As already mentioned, having as source an achromatic visual object, we note that in the transposition to the ceiling there was a concern to give more prominence to the chromatic characters – the ones which carried the message. Due to this condition, the backgrounds, in turn, are indeterminate scenarios, not to

⁴⁹ In a chromatic analysis, we must take into account the luminous variations of the environment where the pictorial object exists, which interferes with the shade of color; likewise, the action of time also causes chemical changes in the dye, as must also be taken into consideration the use of varnish, material which tends to get darker as time absorbs the dust.

⁵⁰ ARNHEIM 2007, p. 351. Our translation.

take away the believer's sight from those important characters. It is too risky to attribute a symbolic meaning to the colors used (because the palette chosen was not homogeneous), but we note a predominance, according to color theory, of the contrast of warm and cool⁵¹, strongly linked to the notion of expressiveness; this contrast is defined based on the sense of color temperature that causes tension, in the same manner that «awakens in us the same reaction as heat stimulation does [...] simply because the expressive quality in question is biologically stronger and more vital in the context of temperature»⁵². This is the contrast that drives to a higher perceptual dynamism, manifested in a sensation of visual proximity of a warm color, and a spatial distancing of a cold color⁵³, providing a sensitive antagonism that instigates feelings and emotions. This notion, if applied to this ten paintings and attending to the religious spirit of Baroque times, demonstrates that the triad composed by the Angel, the Soul and the Heart would visually stimulate, and consequently also on the cortical level, the observer/believer, by the incidence of the use of the chromatic pair red/blue (hot/cold). Similarly, is also inherent to the concept of expressiveness the notion of spatiality and the contrast of light and dark, which simulates volumes by manipulating the color value⁵⁴. Generating three-dimensionality, arises the necessary condition to the figures represented to approach effectively to the real, becom-

⁵¹ There are seven color contrasts: contrast of saturation, contrast of light and dark, contrast of extension, contrast of complements, simultaneous contrast, contrast of hue and contrast of warm and cool. Contrast is the phenomenon when two distinct differences may be being perceived in the comparison of two chromatic effects.

⁵² ARNHEIM 2007, p. 360. Our translation.

⁵³ «The warm color appear closer and increases the objects, while the cold depart them from us and reduce them; the first are positive; the last are negative» (BAY s.d., p. 14). Our translation.

⁵⁴ «It is considered that white is the highest value in brightness and clarity, and at the opposite extreme lies black, the absence of light; the value of a determinate color can be changed it is mixed white or black, and this is the principle used in the simulation of the three-dimensions: the light areas approaches visually, and the dark areas indicate depth; thus, this effect gives corporeality to a pictorial form, making it recognizable, approaching it to the real» (MENDES 2009, p. 162). Our translation.

ing «[...] enough by the use of this robust effect to create an analogy with reality»⁵⁵.

The living images as the neural expressions of devotion

After the previously described, it is clear that the religious imagery, and the devotional sentiment that believers renders to it, all depends on our mental reality and brain physiology; this is an unquestionable condition today, but in the Baroque times was completely unknown. However, it is assumed that in the structure of the cortical system, almost nothing has changed from then until now, so cognitive processes, today widely studied, may be applied with some confidence in the perception of baroque pictorial objects. This is an important new approach to the study of images, combining Art History and Neuroscience; as says David Freedberg:

The traditional divide between the sciences and the humanities has long been seen in terms of the tension between naturalist and materialist views, on the one hand, and sensitivity to contextual and social constraints, on the other. But this conventional dichotomy collapses in the face of the evidence for the neural bases of empathetic engagement with works of art⁵⁶.

The link between the images of all time is the empathy that is generated between them and the one who sees, expressed through the mutual language of emotion and movement. These last ones are the two basic conditions to unveil visual images, and in particular art objects, and their intrinsic particularities. The Art History has, until today, neglect the preponderant role of emotion, although this is, at all times, an integral part of what

⁵⁵ REY 2006, p. 310. Our translation.

⁵⁶ FREEDBERG 2011, p. 339.

is considered art⁵⁷. The same is applied to empathetic feelings for the visual image, and particularly to the religious image.

The importance of the neural processes that underlies to both situations was already implied in the work of Theodor Lipps and Maurice Merleau-Ponty⁵⁸, but it was Antonio Damasio who began to unravel the neural substrate of human emotion. In his book *Descartes Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, the author focuses on how the physical responses, and particularly the movement, can trigger emotional states. In his later studies, he had concluded that our brains, if faced with emotional exteriorizations from other person, tend to reorganize in order to place themselves in a hypothetical similar state and by assisting an identical emotional stress: thus suggested a theory of empathy, established the relationship between people and what they perceive.

Of unquestionable importance to this theory was the discovery of mirror-neurons, by the neurophysiologist Giacomo Rizzolatti and colleagues, from the University of Parma: a single type of neurons that exist in the motor cortex, which stimulate the adoption of similar behavior when observing actions of others, and which prove to be crucial to understanding the cortical processes that underlies the relation to our responses to the world we live in, including those triggered by religious images⁵⁹. Vittorio Gallese, a neuroscientist of the same Italian university, went further: from the discovery of Rizzolatti, concluded that mirror-neurons are not only responsible for understanding the actions of others, but as well as the intentions behind it⁶⁰. The researcher defends that action, emotion and feeling are the result of these mechanisms, revealing the individual as an embodied simulation, decisive condition for organization and communication for living in society.

⁵⁷ «All visual art is expressed through the brain and thus the organ must obey laws in its conception, execution and appreciation» (ZEKI 2005, p. 19). Our translation.

⁵⁸ FREEDBERG 2011, p. 340.

⁵⁹ See RIZZOLATTI 2006.

⁶⁰ See FREEDBERG, GALLESE 2007.

Some conclusions

Revealed the importance of the role of individual memory⁶¹ and of the mental constructions of reality, the theory of mirror-neurons applies perfectly to the concept of spiritual *imitatio* so in vogue during the Baroque period, in which images, in addition to teach, should show the model to follow. In the case of the ceiling presented in this study, is the heart of the individual which is represented in the figure of the Heart, incorporating the believer in the universal image of Christ. He's who the believer must embody in order to obtain eternal salvation – an intention that goes far beyond what was intended with the traditional representations of the Passion of Christ.

So far we found that our perception of the world that surrounds us, as also while being *homo religiosus*, is based on the neural processes that rules, after all, our place in the world. Even the notion of soul is created and lived on the mental plane, and this is the same plane that this part of ourselves is reflected in the images to which we render devotion, in which we project ourselves and in whom we believe. We create and see the images 'in our image' and this fact simplifies and make understandable the meta-realities that our religious universe is built.

The believer, incarnating the Heart of Christ, symbol of the *unio mystica* and of the eternal life, makes him the object of God's love and transforms him ontologically. Between a believer and the image-prototype of the divine, an inherence is established based on devotion that the first lends, by the believing that the image is as vivid as the one who contemplates it; living Christ, giving our life professing Him at the core of our being is the greatest proof that we are, also, formed of mentally constructed meta-realities that require being shaped in our resemblance –

⁶¹ «When we recall a scene from the Bible, for example, and recognize what the scene represents, whether in whole or part, on the basis of accretions of experience and emotions that arise from our personal historical associations with such a scene, or we may react viscerally and corporeally in ways that seem to precede memory» (FREEDBERG 2011, p. 338).

ultimately composing the whole imagetical world as *pararepresentations*: «The image has no life itself; it acquires its liveliness solely from the face of whom it represents»⁶².

⁶² FREEDBERG 1996, p. 71.

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Captions

- Fig. 1. General view of the imagetical program of the main chapel in the Church of Our Lady of Conception in Covilhã. Photo by the authoress.
- Fig. 2. View of the ten paintings of the ceiling of the main chapel in the Church of Our Lady of Conception in Covilhã, with scenes of the Passion of Christ. Photo by the authoress.
- Fig. 3. The ten emblems of the book *Schola Cordis*, in which the ten paintings of the ceiling were inspired.



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