



A Jesuit Aesthetic?

Thinking the Sensible and the Practice of Art in the Early-Modern Society of Jesus

Paris (Charenton), Médiathèque du Patrimoine et de la Photographie
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The rich bibliography on Jesuit art or the art of the Jesuits (whether commissioned or produced by them) should be noted, with a focus in recent years on its manifestations in Jesuit educational institutions and on the question of the ornamental and decorative devices of their churches, the architectural aspect having already been the subject of numerous studies. It is also important to emphasise the development of research on a certain way of thinking about the image that the members of the Society of Jesus were able to develop from various sources of inspiration. All these works testify to the great interest in their contribution to a modern iconology and to the flowering of so-called “baroque” art.

Nevertheless, a blind spot remains in this landscape: that of what might be called a Jesuit aesthetics, which must be understood here in the etymological sense of a thinking of the sensible, rather than a thinking of art, which cannot be confused with a theory of the image, even though these two fields are closely linked and therefore cannot be thought of separately.

It is important to broaden the focus to approach the question of art – which is not really theorised in Jesuit literature, with some exceptions (such as Possevino's *Tractatio de poesi et pictura humana* or the *Trattato della Pittura e scultura* d’Ottonelli, written in collaboration with Pietro da Cortona) – but also of ornament (defended in particular in Bellarmine’s *Disputationes de Controversis*), through different ways that consider it in the wider field of a spiritual, pedagogical and apologetic culture that summons the sensible and thinks the image/art in terms of effects.

The aim of this conference is to examine the particularities of the Jesuit conception of the sensible, which can be discovered through a variety of writings, starting with those specific to the field of spirituality (in particular through the question of the application of the senses in Ignatian spirituality, as well as through the debates around mysticism), and crossing these approaches with those of rhetoric in order to fully grasp how the Christian tradition and that of Antiquity were articulated. It is also worth exploring the field of polemical works devoted to the image, without neglecting the strictly theological aspect, where the question arises more discreetly, or that of devotional literature. Indeed, it is at the crossroads of these different sources that we can identify a thinking which does not present itself as a body of doctrine, but has its roots in Christian anthropology and psychology as well as in a theology of the visible. It will also be possible to specify the contours of this thought by paying attention to other types of literature, such as illustrated technical treatises (perspective, optics, catoptrics) due, for example, to the fathers Aguilon, Dubreuil, Kircher, Schott, Traber and Friar Pozzo, where the sensitive effect is thought of in terms of the spectator’s receptivity.

In order to move away from an approach strictly centred on a supposedly Jesuit *modo nostro* in this issue, it will be important to take into account the various inspirations drawn from other spiritual/intellectual currents and to account for the place of the Jesuit contribution, far from being

isolated, in a prehistory of aesthetics and (good) taste, in the sense that the term will be given from the 18th century onwards.

In addition to the exploration of texts, the conference will also explore the relationship between these texts and the works produced by/for the Jesuits. The aim is to shed light on these works through a framework of thinking, while showing that the latter is also influenced by the evolution of the arts between the 16th and 17th centuries, both in Europe (Italy, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Portugal, etc.) and in the American and Asian territories where the Jesuits carried out their missionary vocation and developed a dual strategy of adaptation to local artistic traditions combined with the importation of European plastic canons.

Proposals for papers (maximum 200 words, with a short bio-bibliographic presentation) should be sent by **March 31 at the latest** to cecile.vincent-cassy@cyu.fr, ralph.dekoninck@uclouvain.be and antonin.liatard@u-bourgogne.fr

Authors of selected proposals will be notified by 30 April. Presentations should not exceed 30 minutes and may be published after selection. The conference organisation will cover the travel and accommodation costs of the speakers.

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