Image, imagination and memory in Giordano Bruno's art

One of the most evident features of Bruno's art is its complexity and its multiple uses. It has mnemonic applications, both for the memory of things and for the memory of words, applications useful for invention – for discursive thinking and for the elaboration of arguments; apart from these, there are logical -mnemonic methods and structures that are given a role in the process of noetic ascent.

As pointed out by scholars like P. Rossi and F. Yates, Bruno's art is the result of an encounter of three traditions: Neoplatonism, Lullism and the ciceronian art of memory. In the art of memory we find both methods derived from the classical art of memory, using images and places, and combinatorial methods derived from Lull's art. The methods of composition and argumentation also combine a Lullist concept of invention with the use of places and images derived from mnemonics; in texts like the first part of *The Shadows of Ideas* and the *Sigillus Sigillorum* he tries to integrate in a Neoplatonic theory of knowledge a number of logical-mnemonic methods derived from the general art of the lullist tradition. The various applications of the art have different aims, and there is a variety of roles attributed to memory and to imagination, depending on the philosophical traditions from which the arts derive.

In my dissertation I discuss each application of Bruno's art, focusing on the way he explains from a psychological perspective, the mental operations connected to each of them and particularly on the roles he attributes to memory and to imagination**.**

The first two of Bruno's mnemonic works are composed of texts with more practical aims and more technical in character, treating mnemonic methods and exercises of invention (*Ars memoriae, Ars reminiscendi, Explicatio triginta sigillorum*), accompanied by sections that are considered to be more theoretical, that discuss the possibilities and the limitations of human knowledge (the first part of *De umbris idearum* and the *Sigillus Sigillorum*). However, the latter sections also contain instructions on how one may attain a superior level of knowledge. Bruno's theory of knowledge, in fact, cannot be separated from the context of the art and from the concept of art: the first part of De umbris idearum and the Sigillus Sigillorum are both presented as arts (a "general form" of the art, or an "art of arts"). It is, however, true that the aims of these

arts are different from those of the art of memory or of Bruno's arts of invention, which are meant to improve specific faculties and skills.

In the first chapters I discuss the role of imagination and memory in these "general" arts, that aim at perfecting all the faculties of the soul and to gain access to a superior mode of knowledge. I argue that the role of memory in this art is related to the construction of mental models similar to logical-mnemonic systems of the general arts, which are meant to help organize the psychic content. Some of the models that Bruno suggest for this purpose involve the use of images, and are similar to logical or mnemonic devices that he discusses in the context of the art of memory or in his *ars inventiva*. However, in *De umbris idearum*, he tends to associate memory with intellect and to describe it as a faculty working with abstract contents rather than with images. I argue that such differences are the result of the fact that Bruno uses concepts from different traditions in order to explain the role of memory and of mnemonic-like exercises in relation to the epistemological aims of this art. The logical-mnemonic arts developed as a result of the synthesis between Lullism and the ciceronian art of memory, offer him a way of explaining how memory can contribute to the construction of a single system or structure in which all knowledge can be ordered. But, as the cognitive process associates to this art involves leaving behind the sensible experience and the sensible images in order to move closer to the ideas, Bruno needs a concept of memory for which the image is not as important it is for the memory on which the mnemonic arts are based, which is a faculty of the internal senses. The alternative that Bruno can turn to is the concept of intellectual memory form the Aristotelian psychology, which is the ability of the intellect to retain universal species, and probably the concept of intellectual memory developed by Marsilio Ficino in the Platonic Theology XV, 16, where Ficino stresses, just like Bruno in *De umbris*, that it is not the association with a sensible image, but the abstract character of a content, that makes it stable and easily retained.

In the mnemonic treatises, it is the psychology of the internal senses that offers Bruno most of the concepts he needs to explain the mental functions as a result of which the information is translated into images and organizes in coherent structures and artificial constructions like the mnemonic *loci*. *Phantasia* and *cogitativa*, the faculties that are placed in the ventricles of the brain anterior to memory, according to Avicenna, are responsible for the sensible and the emotional content of the information that is to become an object of memory. Apart from the fact

that it deals with the emotional content of images, the cogitative has another role that is essential for the functioning of memory, specifically for recollection: its job is to find coherence, or, if necessary, to create it artificially, and to order the information accordingly before it can be memorized. To create coherence artificially is necessary mostly when one is dealing with information that cannot be the object of rational understanding, like when one has to memorize foreign words of phrases the meaning of which is unknown. In order to explain psychologically how it is possible to recollect a material without the intervention of the rational faculties (as Aristotle describes recollection as a kind of reasoning), Bruno introduces a mental function called *scrutinium*, that belongs to the cogitative. Its role is to process information of this sort, to artificially impose on it the structure and the coherence that otherwise would result from the rational understanding or the logical structure of the material. The functions of the internal senses discussed by Bruno are an original elaboration of the traditional psychology, an attempt to develop his own theory of the internal senses in order to explain in psychological terms the mental operations involved in the art of memory. As a result, a number of the psychological functions of faculties that he describes are actually inspired by mnemonic principles and methods.

In regard to the exercises of invention Bruno doesn't give elaborate psychological explanations. However, he explains the workings of the imagination with the aid of two metaphors, the seal of the "Painter" and that of the "Sculptor" form the *Explicatio triginta sigillorum*. The Painter represents the role of the imagination in the mnemonic exercises: the construction of sensible images of abstract contents, by means of simple and often arbitrary associations. The sculptor is a metaphor of a more complex role of the imagination, which I have called *rhetorical*: it is related to the figurative expression of meaning, and it is not limited to sensible of visual images, but includes a variety of tropes and figures. This quality of the imagination, that allows it to derive any meaning from any content, image or word, allows Bruno to come up with an application for invention based on a series of arbitrarily chosen words or images that function as common places from which arguments can be derived. Bruno demonstrated how this method can be used to compose a philosophical poem on the eternity of the world, using as places of invention the words of a verse form the Aeneid. The result is that both the content and the figurative form of the argumentation are elaborated simultaneously and in relation to the same common places. One can say that these common places achieve simultaneously the task of the dialectic process of invention and the rhetoric art of style.

As a result of the role it attributes to images in the process of composition, Bruno comes close to an understanding of invention comparable to the one humanist dialecticians had, particularly Agricola. In the composition of a discourse, Agricola gives an equal importance to the formal correctness of arguments, and to the means by which a discourse can communicate and persuade; moreover, both there aspects are treated in the same phase of the process of composition, invention, with the aid of the same common place.

But this form of "fantastic logic" is in some respects different from Bruno's understanding of "invention in general" (*inventio generaliter dicta*), for which his main reference is the general art of Lull. The applications in which images act as places of invention, replacing the logical and metaphysical categories of the general art, are only considered to be suitable for the composition of discourse that seeks to peruade. The *ars inventiva*, on the other hand, is a universal method that allows one to demonstrate anything with the highest degree of certitude, according to general principles. In methods of invention of this type, the images are merely auxiliary, their role being mainly mnemonic: the abstract categories and general principles on the basis of which the argumentation is structured and developed are associated with images, often in an arbitrary manner; however, these images play no part in the actual elaboration of the arguments. In other cases the images contribute to the elaboration of the arguments, but only in association with the general principles that they illustrate. Generally speaking, the relation between the image and the content tends to be more arbitrary in the mnemonic use of images, and the mnemonic applications tend to use visual images like statues or dynamic scenes. In the applications that use images as places of invention, such images tend to work in a way that brings them closer to the rhetorical tropes and figures.

The synthesis that results from the encounter between lullism and the ciceronian art of memory taking place in the 16th century makes possible and also necessary a confrontation of these two arts, in regard to their cognitive value, the faculties they train and the type of information or mental content that they work with. The necessity to establish a relation and a hierarchy between them is visible not only in Bruno's work, but also in that of Bernanrdo de Lavinheta, who is, according to Paolo Rossi, the first lullist who attempted a synthesis between the art of memory and the lullian art. In his mnemonic treatise and in his commentary on the art of Lull Lavinheta is faced with two problems that are also visible in Bruno's work: (1) to explain the relation between

the mnemonic practice based on the classical art of memory, and the logical-mnemonic constructions derived from the art of Lull; (2) to find a definition of "art" can be applied to the general art of Lull.

Both Lavinheta and Bruno tend to associate the art of memory derived from the rhetoric (ciceronian) tradition to a kind of mechanic memorization of a content that cannot be the object of rational understanding or reflection. Lavinheta distinguishes this art form another mnemonic system in which the information is arranged and retained according to the logical and metaphysical categories of Lull's art – a mnemonic system that organizes knowledge based on the categories of knowledge and of reality. The superiority of this system lies in the universal nature of his principles and in its cognitive value. Bruno also distinguishes a general form of the art, one in which logical-mnemonic systems like the one conceived by Lavinheta may even have a role to play, but the general character of the art has a different meaning for Bruno than for Lavinheta.

Both Lavinheta and Bruno are faced with the challenge of finding a notion of art applicable to their own concept of general art – one that can include both the speculative and the practical / productive aspect of knowledge. Lavinheta, who tries to explain the Lulian art using the concepts of the Aristotelian philosophy, finds the solution in the concept of art from Metaphysics I, where Aristotle uses the term "art" to refer to describe a form of knowledge that has access to universals, but has particulars as its object. For Lavinheta, art defined in this way includes all forms of knowledge, both the speculative and the practical.

For Bruno the distinction between the practical and the speculative faculties of the soul is not valid. For Plotinus and Ficino, nature is the lowest part of the world soul, its role is to give form to matter and life to bodies. It does not have the capacity for knowledge or contemplation; Plotinus, followed by Ficino, allows it an obscure form of imagination. Bruno argues that intellect and nature, or intellect and sense, are one and the same principle. The irrational faculties of the soul, that give form to matter and life to the bodies, the sensation and the human discursive faculties, are manifestations of the same immanent intellect.

Keywords:

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