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Children's drawings of gods: An Intercultural Approach

Pierre-Yves Brandt

Drawings of Gods: A Multicultural and Interdisciplinary Approach of Children's Representations of Supernatural Agents

(Research project in progress / Grant : Swiss National Science Foundation n°CR11I1_156383)

Currently, 6504 drawings

- Japan: 143 drawings collected in public and buddhist schools (2003-2004)
- Switzerland: 1028 drawings: 727 drawings in public schools and churches + 301 in « Mystères de l'Unil 2014 » (Open Days of Unil / children + adults)
- Russia: 753 drawings in public schools and orthodox parishes
- Romania: 394 drawings in public schools
- USA: 982 drawings (Kevin Ladd collection, 1987)
- Iran: 3'032 drawings collected in public and private schools
- Nepal: 13 drawings collected at home
- The Netherlands: 158 drawings collected in school and at home (download in progress)
- Brazil: 1 drawing (more than 200 drawings / download in progress)

<http://ddd.unil.ch> (Dandarova et al. 2016)

Studying the representation of God with the technique of drawing

- Developmental aspect
- Religious representations studied in their cultural environment
- The task to draw god results in a complex object which combines cognitive aspects with graphic/space organisation and cultural codes
- Has certain similarities to the study of language (religion = symbolic system)

Princeps study: Harms 1944

- USA
- 3-6 years (800 children) : « fairy tale » stage
- 7-12 years (800 children) : realistic stage
- 12-14 years (> 4000 children) : individualistic stage

The study of Hanisch 1996

- Germany
- 1471 children between 7 and 16 years old with religious education (Heidenheim, Western Germany) vs 1187 children between 7 and 16 years old without religious education (Leipzig, East Germany)
- Anthropomorphic representations (all ages):
 - 57,8% in Heidenheim (415 boys + 435 girls)
 - 87,5% in Leipzig (451 boys + 588 girls)

Percentages of anthropomorphic representations per ages

Age	Heidenheim	Leipzig
7 years	93,2	96,2
8 years	83,8	92,5
9 years	89,7	95,2
10 years	70,3	91,9
11 years	61,1	89,7
12 years	54,4	97,1
13 years	51,8	84,6
14 years	38,2	79,4
15 years	33,1	73,5
16 years	21,1	76,2
Total	57,8	87,5

Two factors revealed by this study

- The factor of age (developmental aspect)
- The factor of religious education
- The interaction between these two factors

Conclusion: anthropomorphic representations decrease with age and religious education

Japanese children drawing Kami

(Brandt, Kagata, Gillièron, 2010)

- Pictures from children between 7-8 years, 10-11 years, 13-14 years
- Task : « When I say Kami (God), what can you imagine? Can you imagine something? If you can now, could you draw (it) ? »
- Part of a broader study

Hypotheses

- Japan: Anthrop. repres. < Non anthrop. repres.
- Anthropomorphic representations :
Buddhist schools > non Buddhist schools
- Proportion of anthropomorphic representations diminishes with age
- Masculine Kamis > feminine Kamis

Population (Japan)

age	7-8 years (7.1-8.9)	10-11 years (10.1-11.9)	13-14 years (13.0-14.6)	total
boys <i>(Buddhist school)</i>	20	20	13	53
boys <i>(public or private school)</i>	9	10	10	29
girls <i>(Buddhist school)</i>	10	10	10	30
girls <i>(public or private school)</i>	10	10	10	30
total	49	50	43	142

Table: Number of subjects according to age, sex and school

Type of Kami according to children ages (Japan)

	Type of Kami		
Age	Anthropomorphic	Non anthropomorphic	Total
7-8 years	45	4	49
10-11 years	47	3	50
13-14 years	31 [12 in Buddhist schools]	12 [11 in Buddhist schools]	43
Total	123	19	142

Chi 2 [2] = 11.33; p = 0.003

Type of Kami according to children ages : Buddhist schools (Japan)

	Type of Kami		
Age	Anthropomorphic	Non anthropomorphic	Total
7-8 years	28	2	30
10-11 years	28	2	30
13-14 years	12	11	23
Total	68	15	83

Chi 2 = 19.024; ddl = 2; p = 0.000

Percentages of boys and girls representing god as feminine

	Country/region	N	Boys %	Girls %
Hanisch (1996)	Germany	2658	1%	7%
Dessart et al. (unpublished)	Switzerland	329	0,6%	1,2%
Ladd, McIntosh & Spilka (1998)	USA	968	6.8 % of sample	
Brandt, Kagata Spitteler & Gillièron Paléologue (2009)	Japan	143	≈ 4%	38%
Dandarova (2013; unpublished)	Russia/Buryat	213	0,9%	15,4%
Dandarova et al. (unpublished)	Russia/Slavic	292	0%	2,6%

Feminine representations of god by Buryat girls



ru08_bo_f_rx_11_00_na_



ru08_bo_f_rx_11_10_el_

Feminine representations of god by Japanese girls



jp03_to_f_pf_07_01_ka_

J'ai dessiné Dieu (Kami sama) gentil. Ce dieu (Kami sama) est très tendre. Mais elle est belle et très tendre.



jp03_to_f_pf_10_06_yu_

Elle est dans le ciel, très gentille. C'est une fille avec des cheveux longs frisés, et qui porte un vêtement bleu et des chaussures bleues.



jp03_to_f_pf_13_06_sa_

C'est Dieu au féminin aux cheveux blonds qui souhaite le bonheur, porte une robe décolleté froufrou de couleur bleu clair.

A first main result: Four factors

- Cognitive development
 - Religious education
 - Cultural background
 - Child's sex
-
- Inhibition effect of cultural background on the gender factor would not have been detected without intercultural study

Content of the representation: cultural aspects

Strategies used by children for representing supernatural agents

- reception of traditional representations typical for the culture in which the child is socialized
- intercultural contacts and reception of representations from foreign cultures
- hybridization process
- using iconographic codes for representing supernatural agents available in the medias or in arts
- innovations beyond iconographic codes available in the social environment

Reception of traditional representations typical for the culture in which the child is socialized

- E.g. in the short film
 - Bouddha in Japan or in Buryatia
 - A cross (with Jesus or not) in traditionaly Christian countries
 - etc
- and also in Iran...



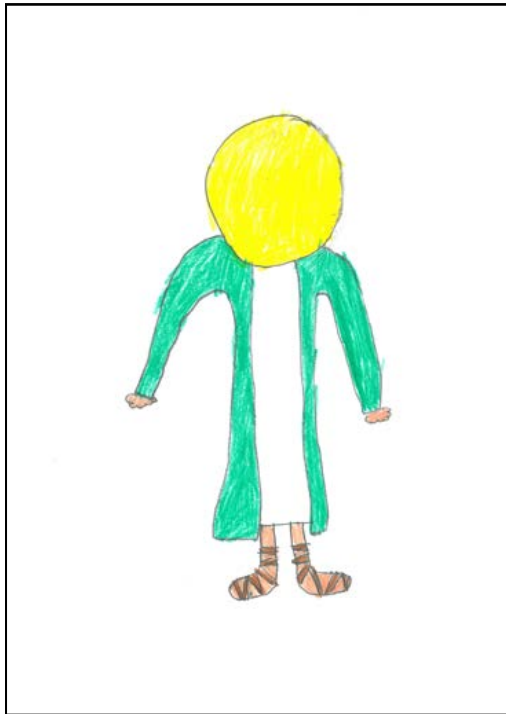
ir14_te_f_pr_9_04_me
|

I drew God holding a shield to keep Imam Hossein and his family safe.



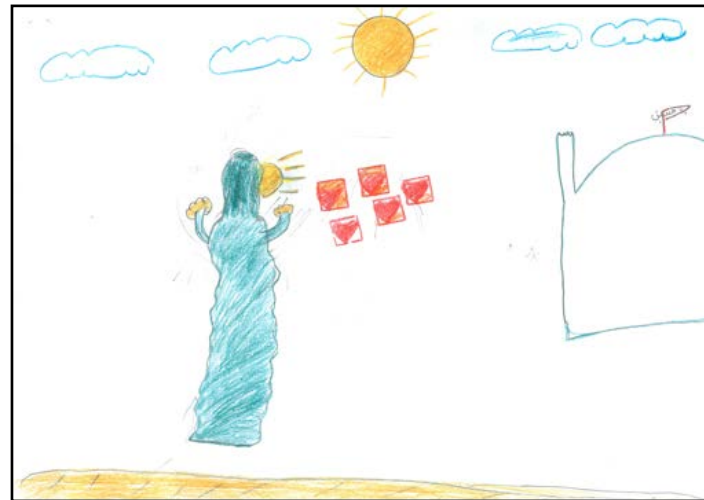
ir14_te_f_ph_9_0
8_naz

We could see God by his creatures.



ir14_te_f_pr_8_09_sar

I could draw
Imam Hossein

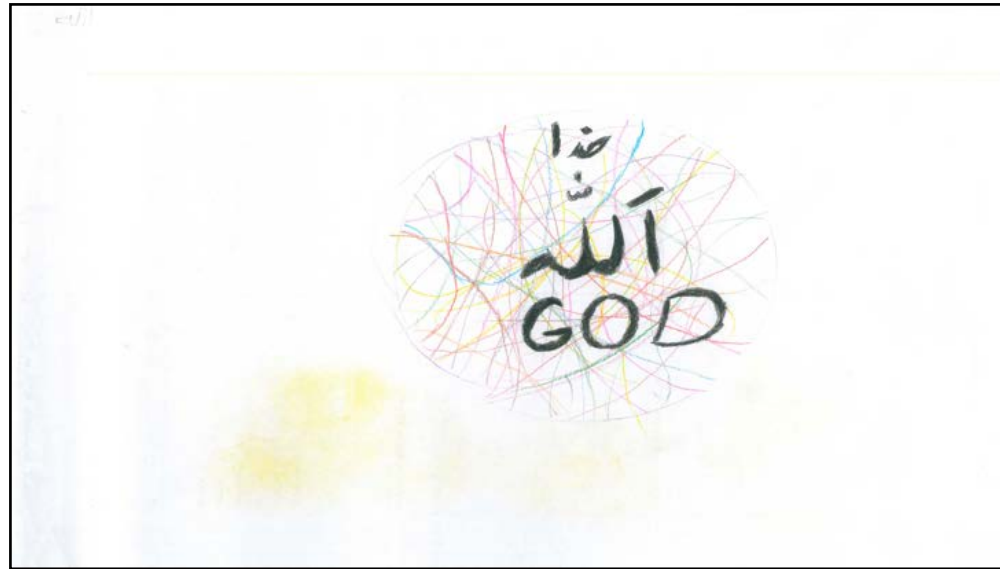


ir14_te_f_pr_9_05_san
The Imam, Mosque the
house of God



ir14_te_f_pe_8_04_han
I drew the prophet

ir14_te_f_ph_10_11_sar
I drew a picture thaht God
did all of those and he is
very beautiful and kind



ir14_te_m_pl_13_02_art

I drew different names of God

Intercultural contacts and reception of representations from foreign cultures

- Japanese child from a Buddhist school drawing Maria
- Swiss child drawing Lakshmi
- Russian children drawing Ancient Greek gods...

Représentations traditionnelles provenant d'une culture étrangère



- Mary in Japan

- I drew Mary shining in a lot of light from the clouds. The sky is blue and beautiful. She sings in chorus

- jp04_nr_m_rx_10_10_ky

Représentations traditionnelles provenant d'une culture étrangère



- Lakshmi in Switzerland

- Draw a Hindu lady who in her left hand has gold falling, adds two white elephants next to her, and she stands on a large lotus flower !

- ch09_vd_f_pb_12_00

Representations of ancient gods: Poseidon



ru08_bo_m_rx_10_00_s
an :

« My drawing describes God and his assistant. He stands up and his assistant down. God has a crown. He has a powerful fire power. He holds a trident and below him there is a large ocean. »



ru08_bo_m_rx_10_00
_bou :

« I drew god. God is above in the sky near the sun. He looks at the earth, he looks at us. »

[Trident]



ru09_bo_m_px_10_0
6_se :

« This is Poseidon. He is the god of water. He is very angry against human beings and he has come out of the water. »



ru08_bo_m_rx_10_07
_och :

« Poseidon walks on the sea. I drew God like Poseidon. Behind him there is the coast, with a fortress a little further on. The birds fly away, the sun is radiant. »



ch14_vd_f_pm_10_10_jul:

« He is tall and has white hair »

Intercultural contacts and reception of representations from foreign cultures

- Japanese child from a Buddhist school drawing Mary
- Swiss child drawing Lakshmi
- Russian children drawing Ancient Greek gods...
- and also in Iran...



« it's for the Christians »

ir14_te_f_pda_12_02_ati

If you look around, you
could feel God completely

Process of hybridization

- Elements of traditional representations typical for different religious systems , including (or not) the one in which the child is socialized, are combined



ir14_te_f_pda_12_02_shc

If you look around, you
could see God

A mix of symbolic
representations taken from
different religious backgrounds

Using iconographic codes for representing supernatural agents available in the medias or in arts

- cartoons (e.g. manga)
 - films
 - books for children (e.g. illustrations of fairy tales)
 - toys derived from cartoons, films, etc
-
- e.g.: representation of angels used in books or movies created for children



ir14_te_f_pa_12_00_yeg

I drew the light of God
and angels were flying
around it and throwing
flowers.



ir14_te_f_pa_11_10_has

I drew a girl while praying
and thanking God and
angels were around her.
And they admired her.

Innovations beyond iconographic codes available in the social environment

- beyond iconographic codes (traditional, present in art, films, cartons, etc) for representing supernatural agents...
- innovation does not mean that the solutions found are idiosyncratic
- Other children can « invent » the same solutions
 - A face in the sky (... and in the light)
 - The light illuminating from above
 - The beauty of nature
 - The divine presence in the heart
 - A helping hand
- Thus, the same innovation can be find on an international level
- These solution are sometimes really creative, innovative



A face in the sky



ir14_te_f_pk_9_11_yas

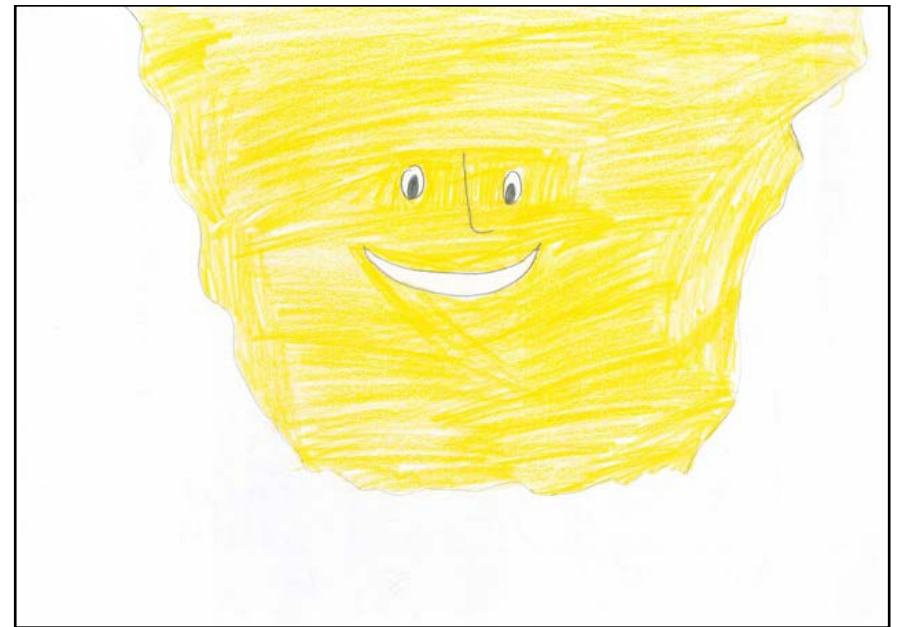
God had came to chek flowers,
grassland, tree and a mountain, in
order to solve problem if ther was
any problem.

ir14_te_f_ph_10_08_zah

The nature
God gifts
The light of sun, the tree, the
flower, the dust



**A face in the sky,
and in the light**



ir14_te_f_pda_12_
03_diy
God is like light

ir14_te_m_pd_10_06_far
God



The light illuminating
from above

ir14_te_f_pda_12_07_via

If God's light is still above
the world, there is still hope
for life.



I drew Mary shining in a lot of light from the
clouds. The sky is blue and beautiful. She sings
in chorus

jp04_nr_m_rx_10_10_ky



ir14_te_m_pd_9_09_ari

God is light and is every
where



ir14_te_f_pa_11_06_han

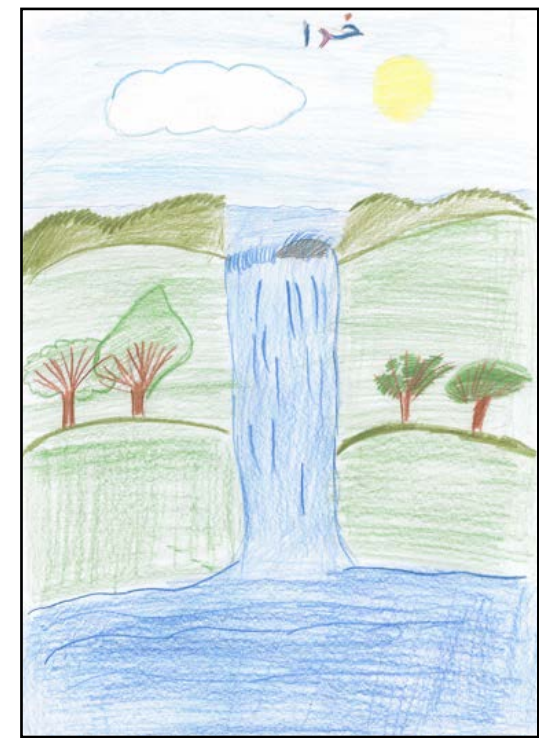
The subject : God
I drew this painting,
because I love God.
I always thanks God.
God has given us a lot of
gifts.
God! I love you.

The beauty of nature (that God has created)



ir14_te_f_pa_11_04_mel

The subject: God
I drew God and his gifts



ir14_te_f_pa_12_04_del

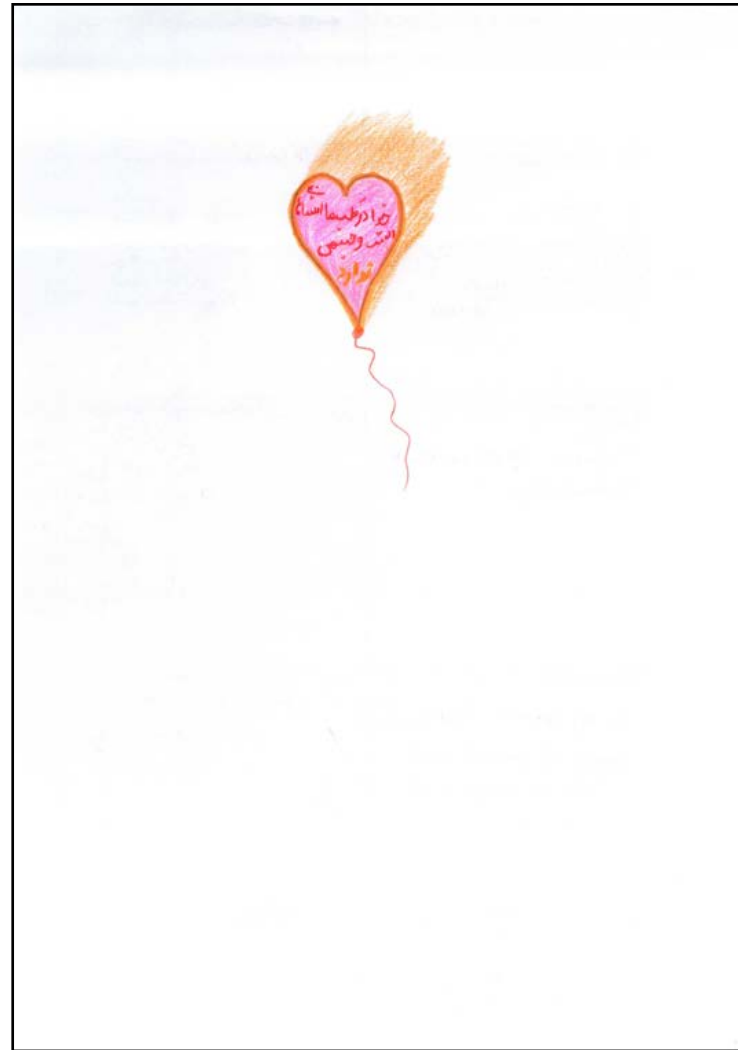
I drew a river, a hill and
the sun which showed
the beauty of God's
creatures. Everything
begins from a single
point and it's God.

The divine presence in the heart



ch10_ge_f_rt_14_11_aur

God is in every heart
that beats



ir14_te_m_pqa
_13_01_key

In my opinion,
God is in
hearts of
people and he
has no body
that could be
drawn



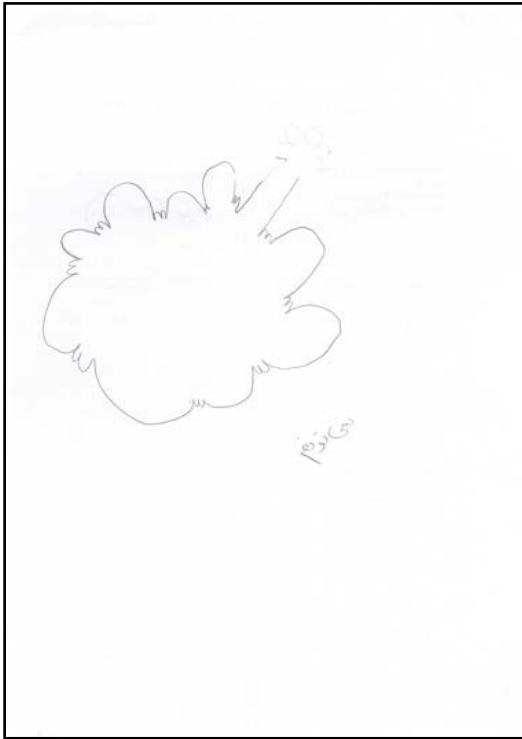
ir14_te_f_ph_12_00_sah

God is very larger even than
planet Earth

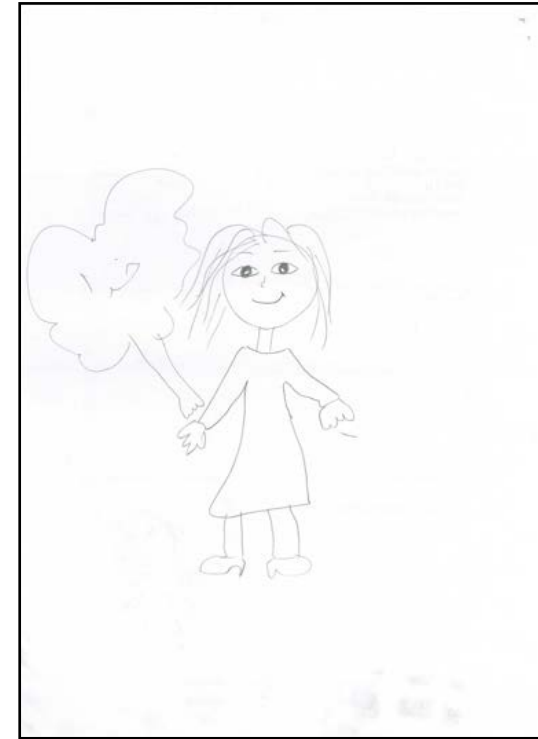


ir14_te_f_pk_10_04_bit

I drew big picture to show the greatness of God.
God is great and he is everywhere. I painted him with yellow, blue and other colors. I wanted to show God is kind.
Maybe it is funny, but I think my painting is showing characteristics of God.



ir14_te_f_pda_13
_01_ran
Greatness



ir14_te_f_pg_13_02_
mit

God is everywhere
with me

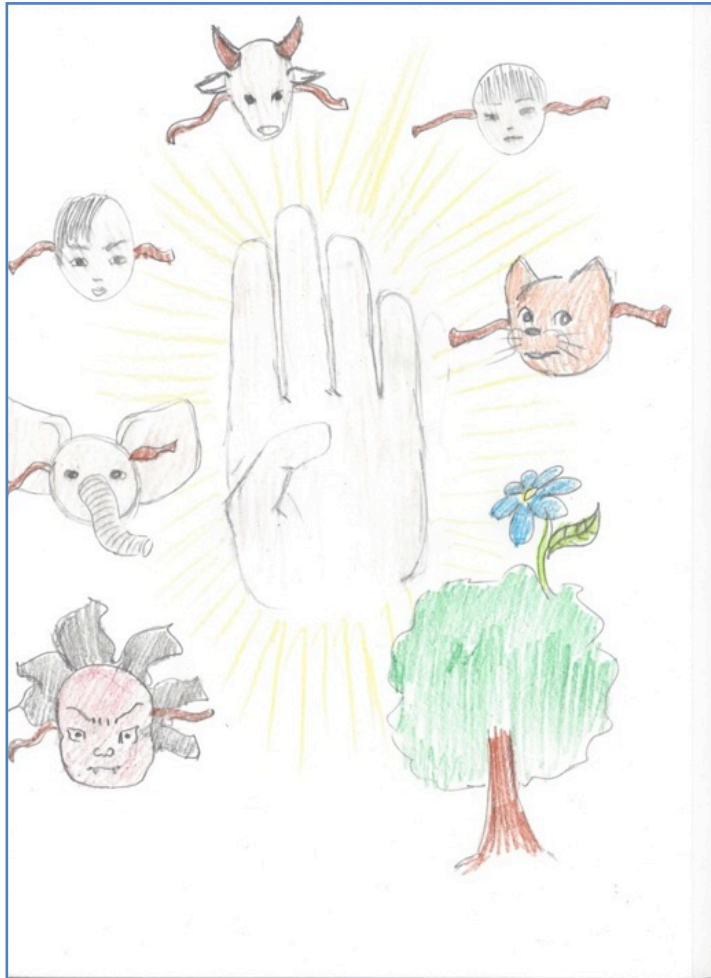
Symbolic representation: the hand



I drew God who gave me the hand to show me the way I must follow. There is a path that goes straight and after a while there is another path but it is not the path that I have to follow and that is why God is with me, he shows me by where I have to go.

ch05_ju_f_pr_11_02_li_

Symbolic representation: the hand in Russia



ru15_bo_f_px_14_07_tou

The idea of my drawing is that God is unique. It's just that he comes to everyone under different appearances. I drew this hand because I noticed that there is a similarity between Christian gods and Buddhist gods: it is that they all hold their hands in this way in which certain fingers are bent. Around the hand are masks that God puts



ru15_bo_f_px_14_03_mas

I can not imagine god, but he exists and that's why I drew just one hand with a girl's hand, as if he is there and can help us.

A really innovative one...

ir14_te_f_pg_13_00_jin

God was taking care of his creatures
like an umbrella in thunders.

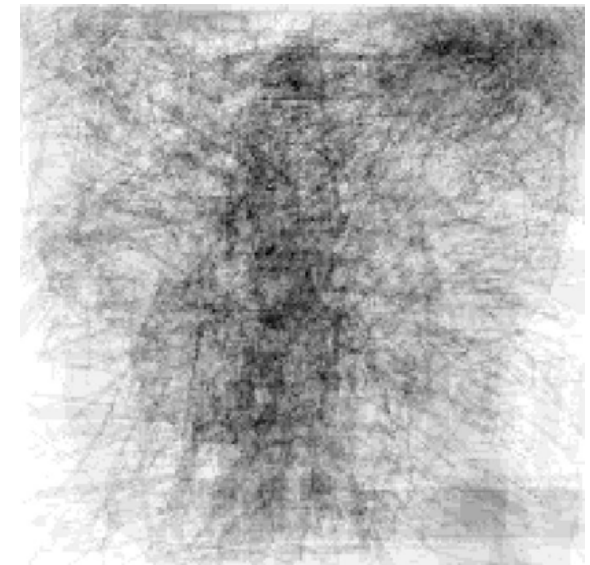
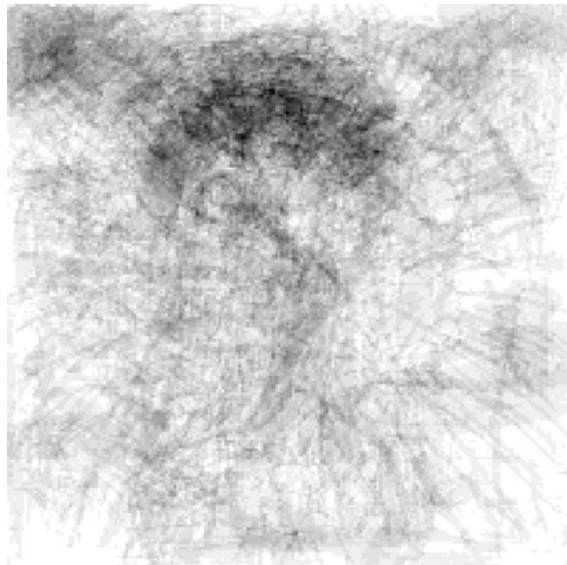
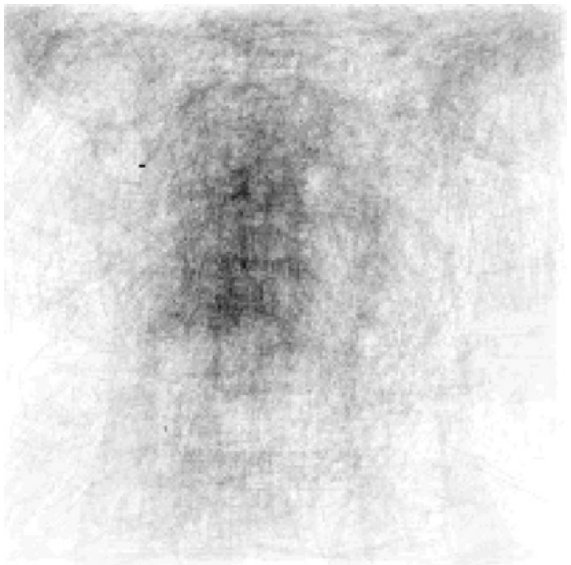
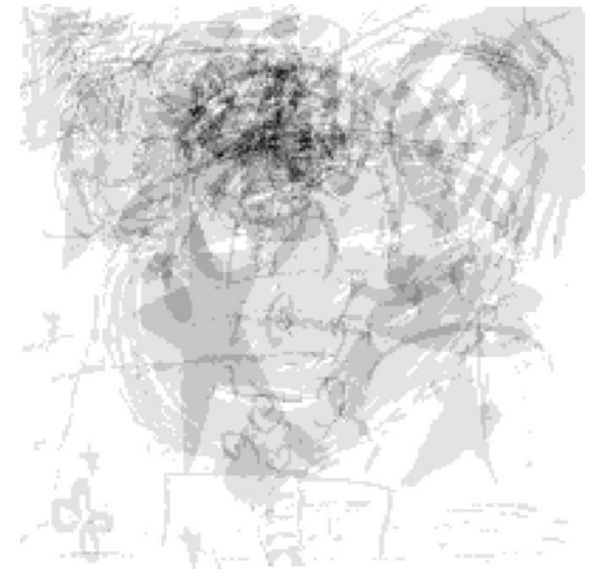
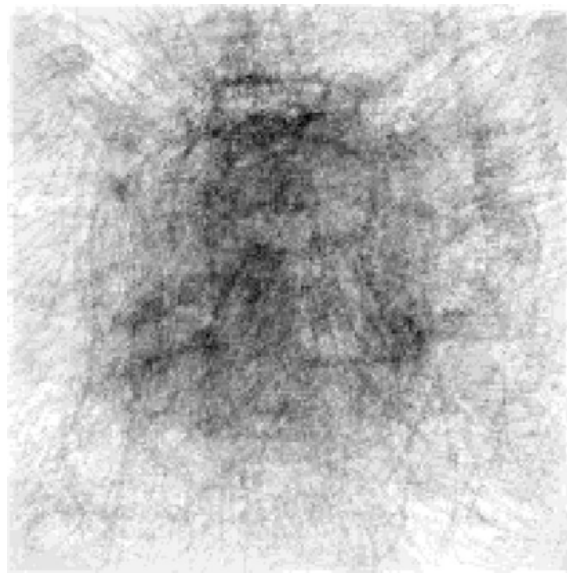


به نظرمی خداوند مانند چتری
در طوفان موافق به گاشن است.

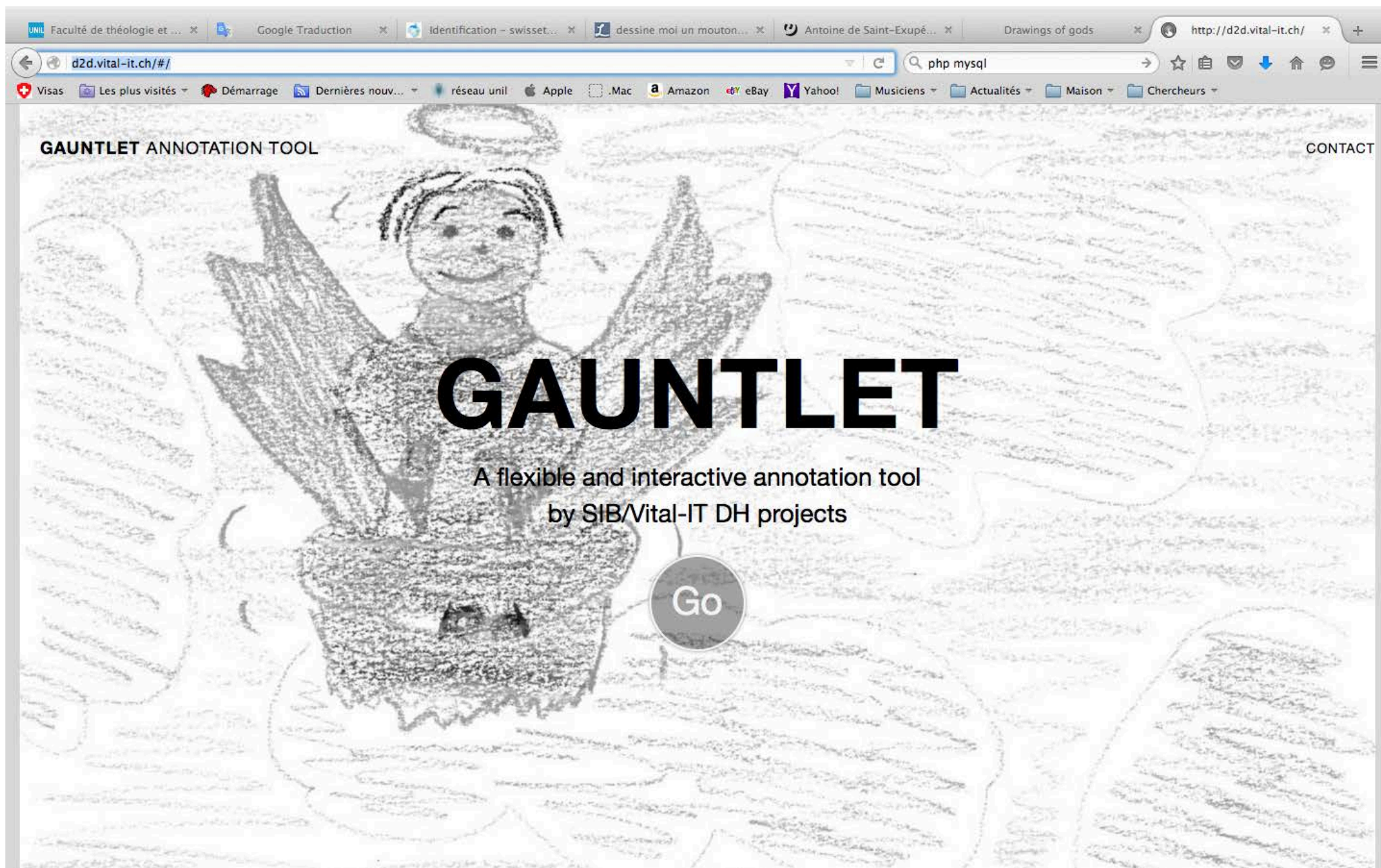
Image processing analyses

?

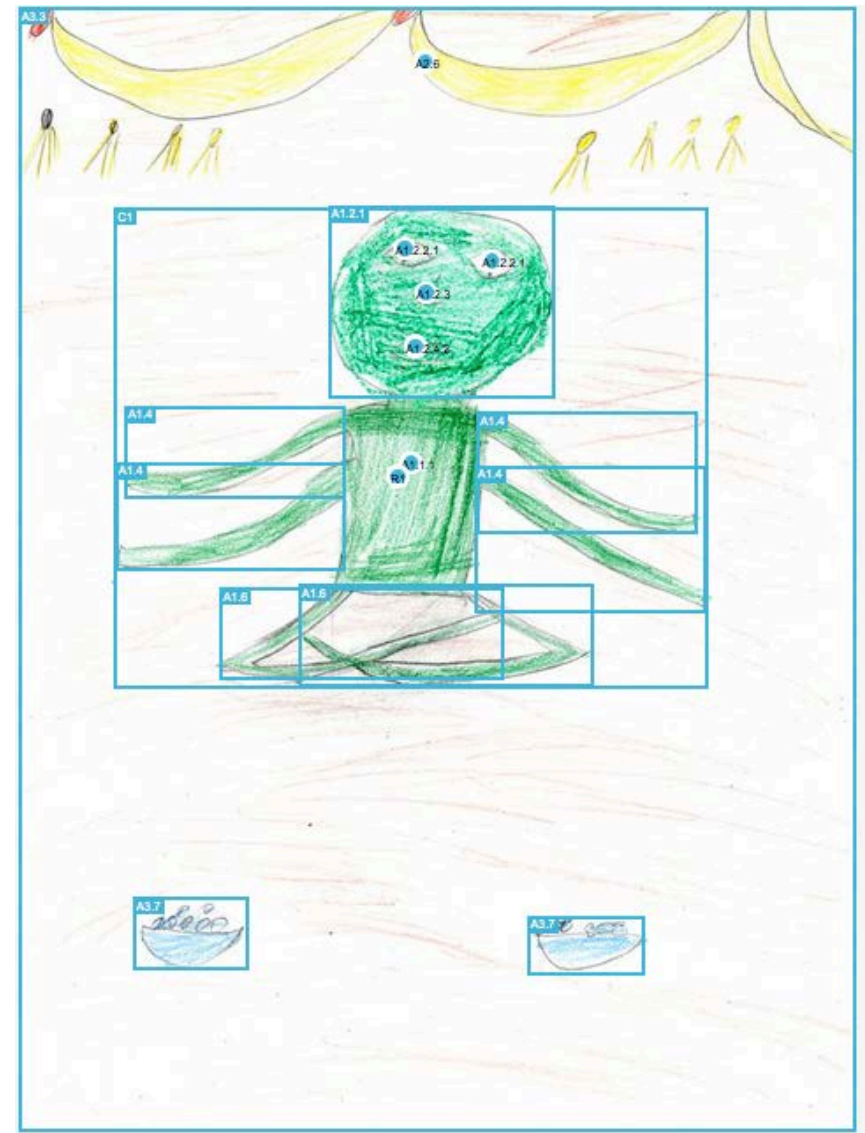
- Early attempts by Ksenia Konyushkova (2014)
 - Gravity center
 - Color palette
- Expected next step: technical tools and algorithms for pattern recognition
- Developed by Christelle Cocco in collaboration with Images and Visual Representation Group, EPFL, dir. Sabine Süsstrunk



Yellow color intensity among different countries. Upper row: Switzerland, Japan, Romania. Lower row: Russia Buryatia, Russia St-Petersburg, USA. (Konyushkova et al., unpublished)



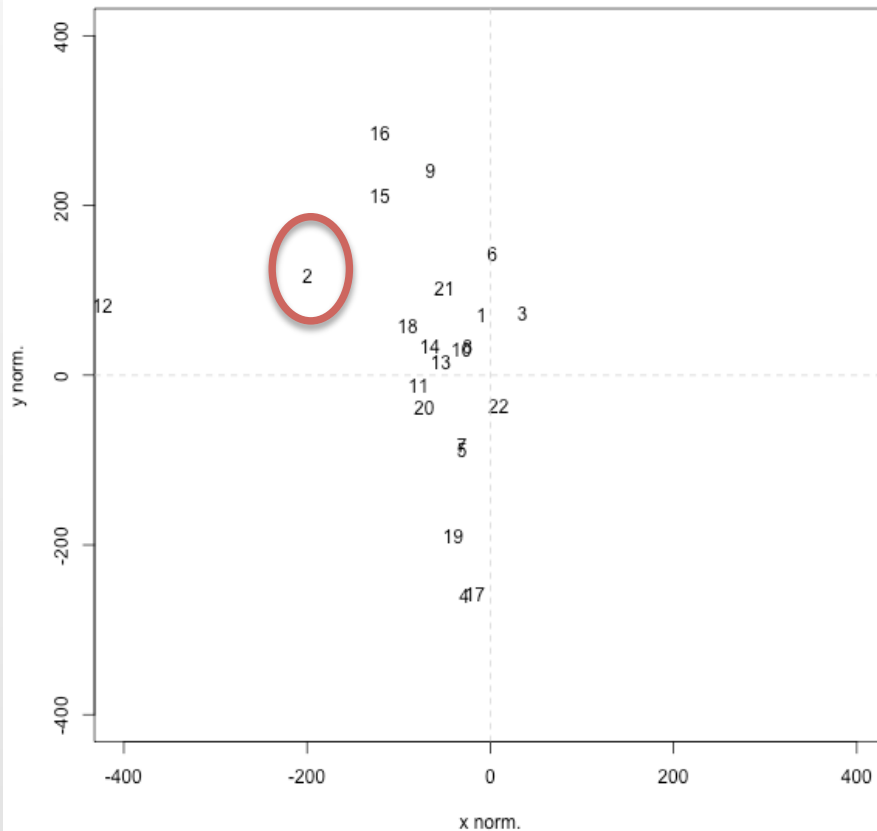
Annotated images



Preliminary statistics with Gauntlet (by Martial Sankar)

E.g.: Where are the figures (R1) located in drawings?

Scatterplot of figures coordinates



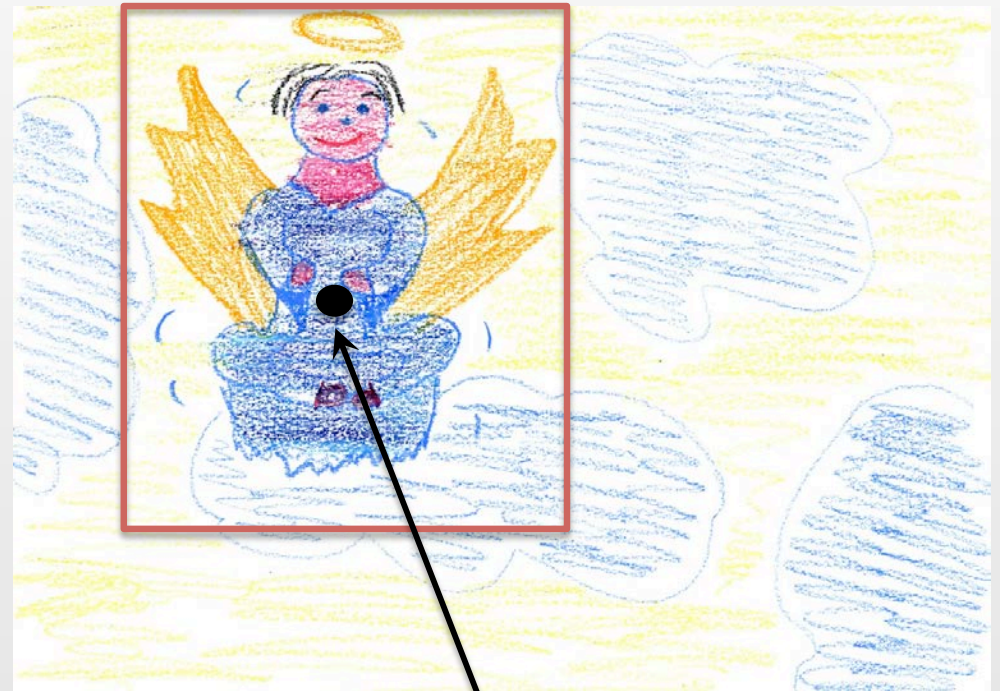
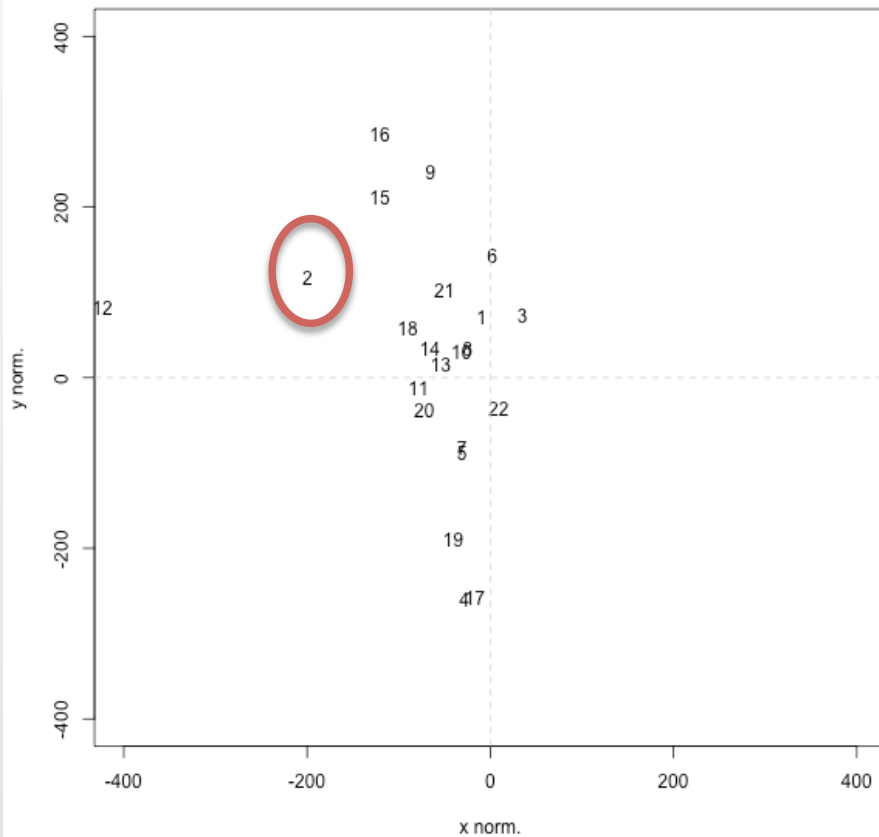
Each dot corresponds to a figure of a drawing in our data subset (c.f. R1_geometric_with_ID.csv)

The point coordinates represent the center of mass of the figures we annotated in Gauntlet with a box.

Coordinates are normalized according to the center of the images to avoid bias due to the landscape/portrait formats.

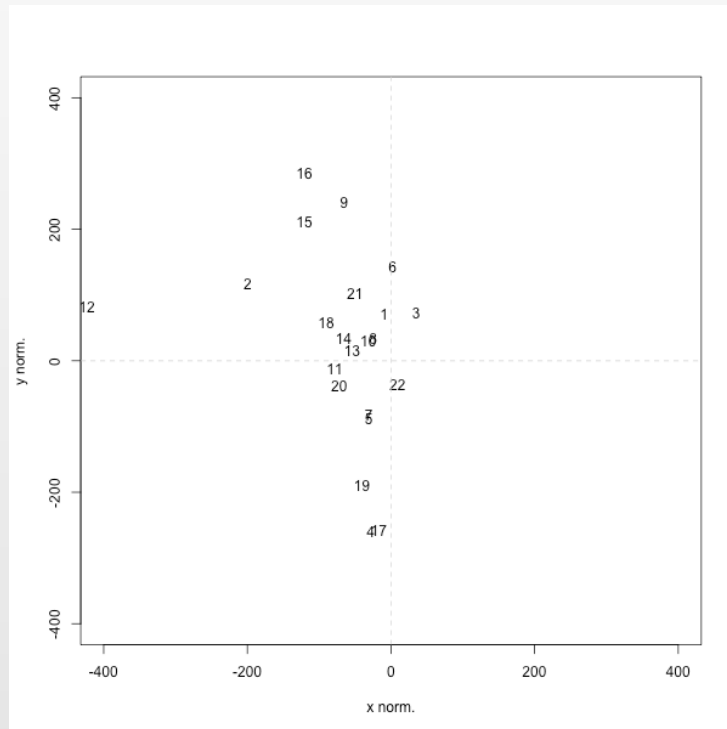
Example with figure object 2

(in ch05_ju_f_pr_11_00_nor-r.jpg c.f. R1_geometric_with_ID.csv)

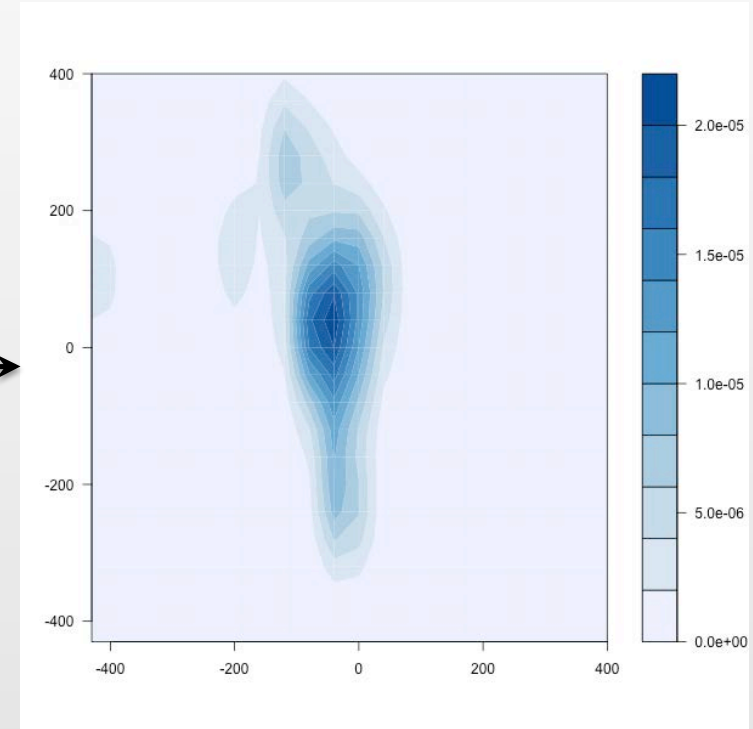


Center of mass

The figures (R1) are drawn on top-left very close to the centre of the image



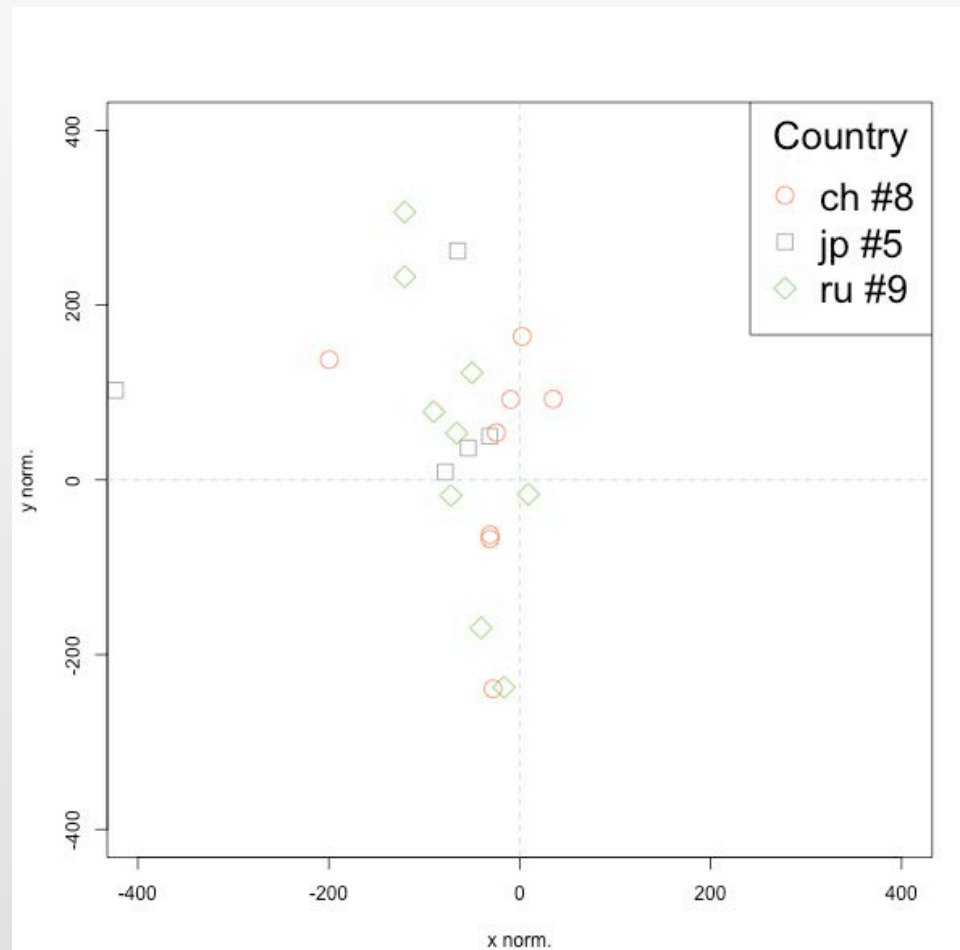
Scatterplot representation



Density representation

The darker the blue color, more dense are the number of points

More variations on the vertical axis for Russian drawings

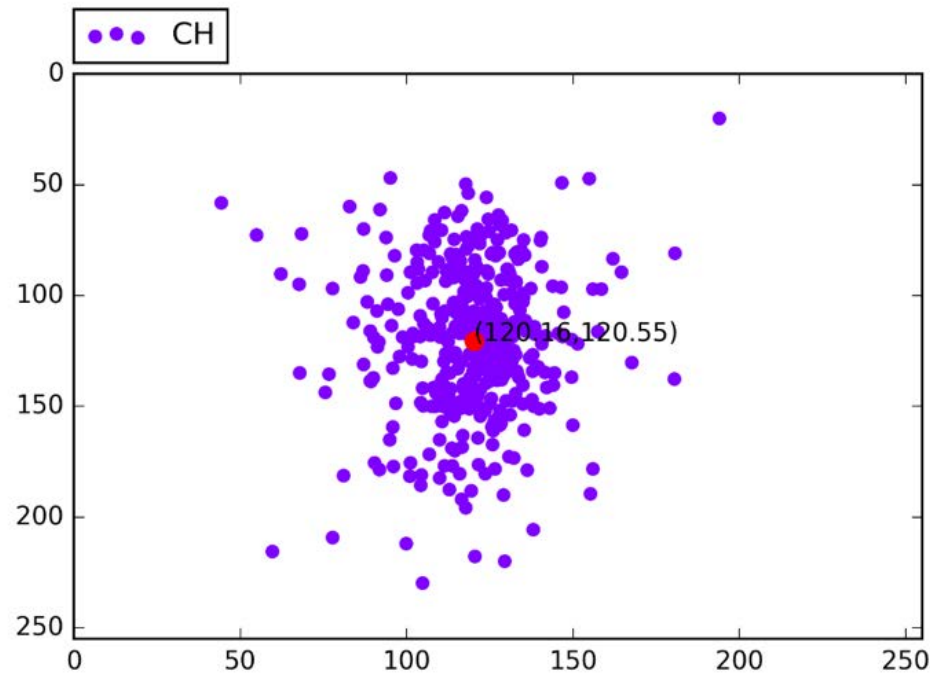


Composition of the representation: Gravity center of the drawing

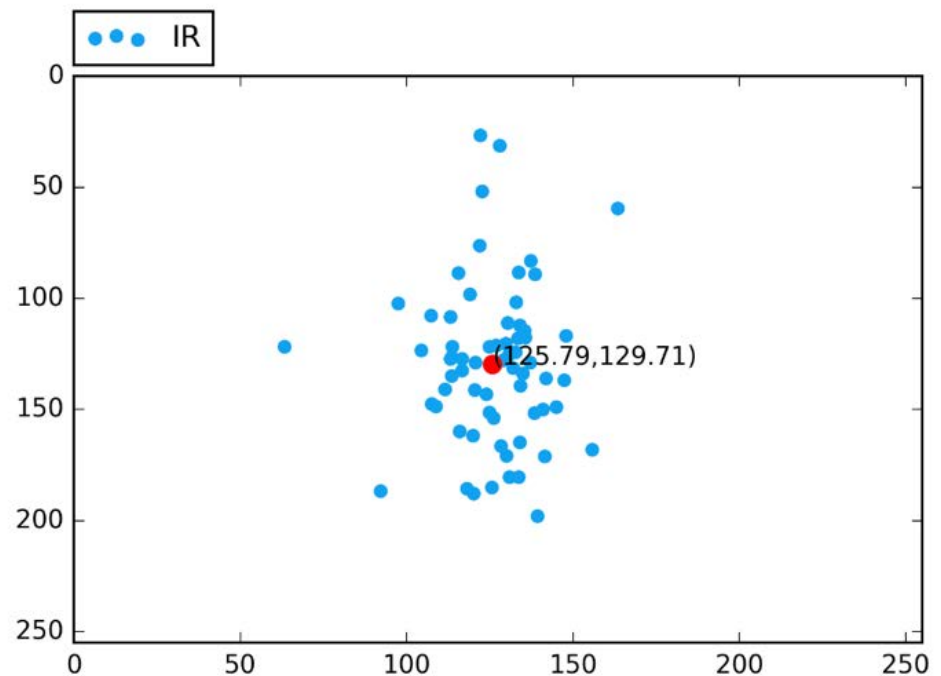
- Generally, children are centering their drawings (Winner, 2006)
- Is it also the case for drawings of god...
- ... or heavenly connotations of god's concept would influence the position of gravity center of the drawing...
- or of the figure of god in the drawing?

Gravity center of the drawings

Comparison of two samples: Swiss and Iran



N = 447

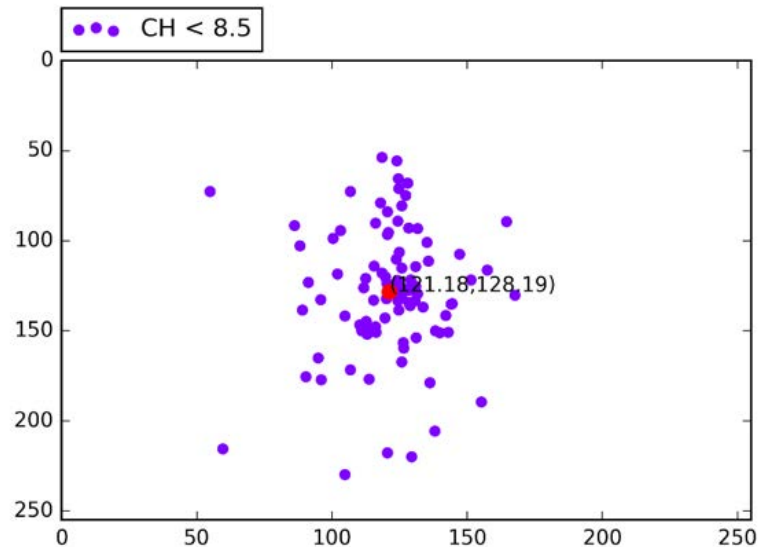


N = 66

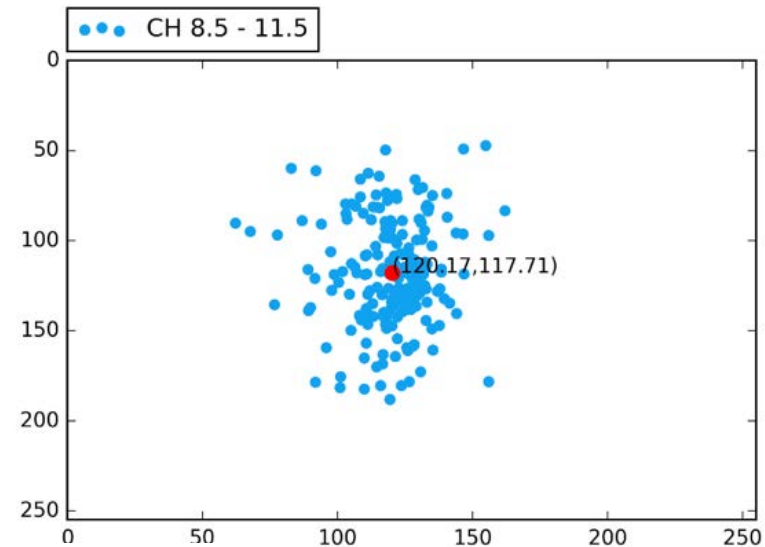
Gravity center of the drawings according children's age

Swiss sample is splitted in 3 subsamples

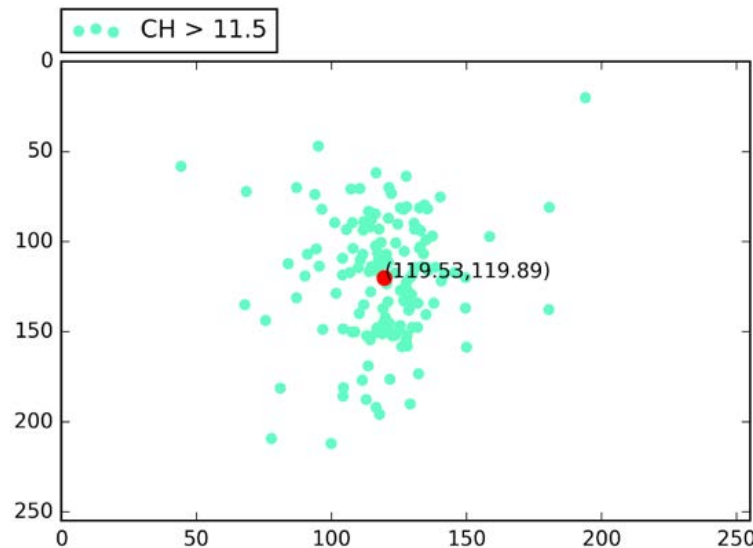
(data analyzed by Dr. Christelle Cocco and Gregory Dessart)



N = 30



N = 207

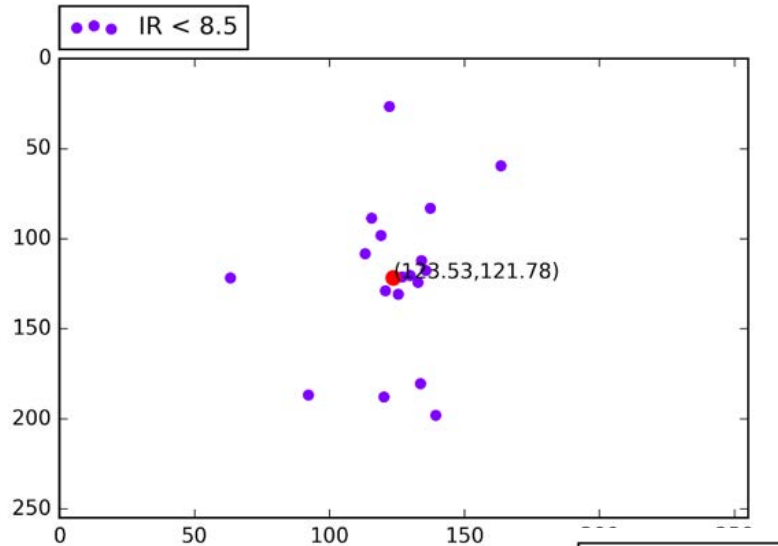


N = 150

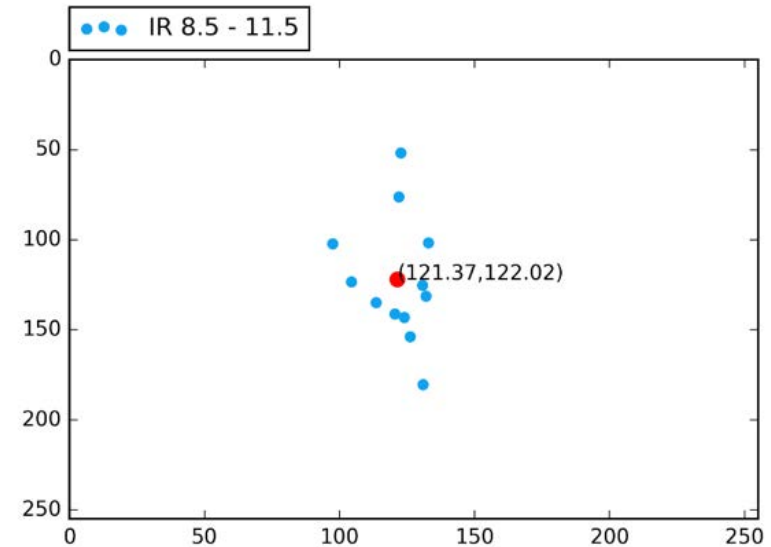
Gravity center of the drawings according children's age

Iranian sample is splitted in 3 subsamples

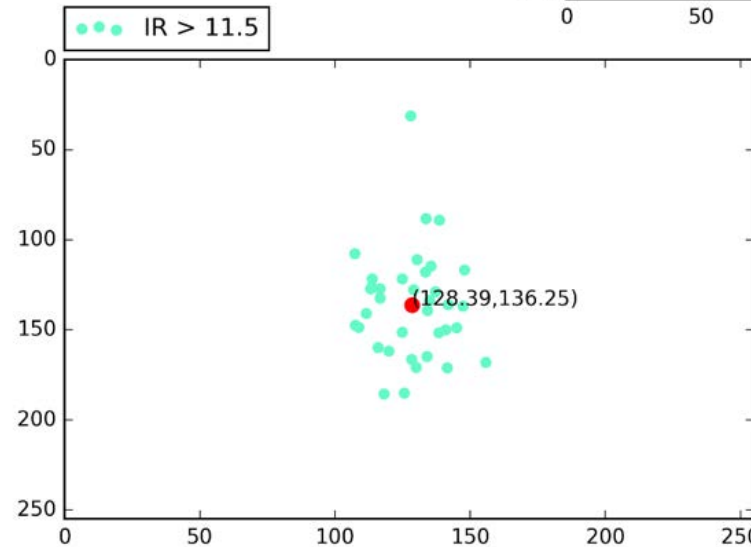
(data analyzed by Dr. Christelle Cocco and Zahra Astaneh)



N = 18



N = 12



N = 36

Conclusion

Role of school in terms of religious education

- Give access to the cultural background necessary for decoding religious signs, and for interpreting the meaning of the religious objects, artefacts, etc, present in the public space
- Help understand the challenges related to religious diversity (within culture and at the global level)
- Not to reduce religions (only) to their doctrinal aspects
 - Consider also practices, rituals, artifacts, etc

Conclusion:

Role of religious institutions in religious education

- To assume their own vision of the world and to show what sense of human existence emerges from it.
 - To thematize the references, proper to the religious tradition of which they are claiming, which form the basis of living together and the reception of difference
- These tasks can be carried out either in a school setting or in a religious community (parish, church, mosque, yeshiva, temple etc.)

... and...

If certain among you are interested ...

- ... in the study of children's representations of God
- ... in collecting children's drawings of supernatural agents
- ... and more generally...
- ... in the construction of the psychological identity ...

... it is with pleasure that I would meet with you during this conference !

Thank you for your attention !



Pierre-Yves.Brandt@unil.ch

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