

L I S A N Y B E R G

Aesthetic Manifestations in Religious Practice — a Basic Grammar

The purpose of this paper is to discuss some aspects on function in relation to aesthetic manifestations in religious practice. The main point of argument is that the relationship between the meaning of the aesthetic object and its subject can successfully be described by using the grammatical terminology of the pronoun. This creates a taxonomy with an open enough structure to allow interpretations from various fields of research to be compared on equal grounds on their merits as interpretations. The following discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of iconographic method of analysis versus function is accompanied by an example from the Christian context chosen on several merits, one being that the subject matter appears to have been clearly established. A neglected source is introduced and questions on interpretation, function and appropriate terminology are raised, all serving as an introductory discussion.

The aesthetic manifestation as such is keyed by its prime quality of visuality and its position in the religious community. It may consist of a punctual object like a mask, a painting, a sculpture or an object extended in time and space such as a ceremony, a dance or a ritual to mention a few. The subject is an agent such as a beholder or a participant. The term aesthetic manifestation as such is understood to be etic and serves here as a collective word without implications that these objects were initially valued primarily on their aesthetic qualities.

The fact that the function of the object is so closely related to its subject matter, contents and meaning has rightfully placed the methods of iconographic analysis in a pivotal role in the field of religious iconography. An iconographic analysis renders one interpretation. A reconsideration of the same material from another angle is likely to produce different conclusions than the first. The dialogue between iconographers thus tends to be focused on which one of the many suggested interpretations is the correct one.

Manifestations working and thriving within a religious context can rarely be narrowed down to having but one subject or agent. Taking a hypothetical painting as an example there is a commissioner, such as an individual, a religious governing body or a ruler clothing a political message in a religious disguise to mention but a few options. Following the commission the painting is generally circulated within the contemporary religious community in question and agents from within that community, as well as from outside, will be exposed to the contents of the painting. As time goes by the painting may be given other functions as the historical context alters and changes. Aesthetic manifestations in religious practice, as a whole, have proven to be of the surviving kind due to tradition, custom or valuable materials. With few exceptions, a discussion on function in religious iconography ought to involve a minimum of at least two different agents, each demanding a separate analysis.

This dilemma of the one interpretation against the many possible agents has been carefully considered by the author of this paper during work on a doctoral dissertation on the 18th century interior decorating of Lutheran churches in Sweden and Finland. An approach is suggested which provides the means whereby several different interpretations can be applied to the same object. The pronouns in grammar serve as indicators of a relationship that resembles that of the aesthetic object and its agents. The pronoun also has a confirming character. Both of these qualities are of interest to the issue of this paper.

In general terms the commissioner in the earlier example with the painting might suggest a personal relationship, but the painting can also mirror the commissioner, in one way or another, and thus it can be said to have a reflexive function. Possessive function suggests a strong tie of ownership between the subject matter and the commissioner and if the subject matter makes a strong statement it can have a demonstrative function. Many paintings with a similar motif that are found within the same cultural context and where additional sources are scant, are often labeled simply to be decorative. In a pronominal terminology this is equivalent to a relative function. Within each functional heading there can be as many interpretations as a critical reading of the source material gives credit to. Vital to the specific use of this terminology is the mindful selection of relevant criteria that constitute the various links of relation and the need to carefully identify the agents.

The long and fruitful quest for a wide variety of pragmatic methods in the field of history of religion clearly shows the possibility to formulate criteria and parameters that not only regard the religious

human being as a biological sum but also take into account the synergistic effects of the religious experience on and in the human being. Within the field of history of art the discussion on visual theory has purely been based on behavioristic foundations. The structural outline above resembles that of various models from another related field of research, communication theory. In order to widen and open up this abstract marketplace of interpretations the terminology of communication theory has here been abandoned in favor of the more neutral pronominal terminology with several advantages to the scholar seriously interested in function.

In 1934 Erwin Panofsky published the first proper case study wherein he used iconographic analysis in order to show that objects of art carried with them an intrinsic, deeper and sometimes hidden meaning (Panofsky 1934). Panofsky thereby inaugurated what may very well be one of the longest, most fervent and heated iconographic discussions concerning the contents and meaning of a painting within the Western tradition.

The painting he used is the same as will be considered here, a double-portrait painted 1434 by Jan van Eyck, the court painter of Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy. The panel-painting is believed to depict the Italian-Flemish fabric merchant, Giovanni Arnolfini, a resident of Bruges in Flanders. The Arnolfini's had arrived in Bruges in the 1420's and had rapidly risen to fame and fortune as the prime supplier of fabrics to the ducal palace. The Cenami family had a generation earlier established themselves as indispensable bankers, first in Paris and 1381 in Bruges, prosperously serving the king of France and the dukes of Burgundy.

The painting may very well qualify to be included within the framework of religious iconography on the grounds of its subject matter. In brief Panofsky stated that the subject matter is a marriage, probably a clandestine marriage, a marriage performed in secrecy. He stressed some particularities such as the location within a private home, the mirror reflecting the witnesses standing at the doorway in front of the couple, the splendor of fabrics displayed and the symbolic meaning of spiritual and secular items located in the room. There were several embezzlements in this early study, which have been duly pointed out and discussed over the past sixty years. All in all the scholars have proposed four different types of marriages and several types of betrothals. There were also questions raised as to the authenticity of the couple causing Peter Schabacker to interpret this as a morganatic marriage, a marriage wherein a noble or royal person marries a person of lower rank who is not entitled to take noble or royal titles, an interpretation soon questioned and abandoned

(Schabacker 1972). The question of the subject matter, whether a marriage or a betrothal, appears to have been finally settled in 1994 by the American art historian Edward Hall (Hall 1994). Through a very thorough analysis after the precepts of the Annales School, in an inverted micro-historical way, he firstly concentrates on the institution of marriage and of betrothal and secondly he investigates the implications suggested by the central gestures in the painting, the touching of hands and the uplifted right arm of the man. He concludes that there is nothing mysterious at all about this subject matter. It is a perfectly legal betrothal of the highest form, performed with a solemn oath, according to the practice in the Italian town Lucca, the hometown of the Arnolfini and the Cenami families. The touching of hands is a characteristic feature in this region in conjunction with a betrothal, the uplifted arm being the sign of the solemn oath. Minor differences are, according to Hall, credited to the couple assimilating local Flemish traditions. (Fig. 1)

Despite Edward Hall's outstanding interpretation and the time this panel painting has been discussed, it appears that every possible form of marriage and betrothal has been considered but the *unio mystica*. This is remarkable when the writings of the most influential Flemish mystic of the time and region, Jan van Ruysbroeck, are taken into account. He was born in 1293 in Ruysbroeck close to Brussels. In 1304 Jan left the village and moved to Brussels, where he was ordained a priest 1317. During all his stay in the city he was closely connected to the church of St Gudula, today St Michael's, and it is while serving here around the 1330's in the capacity of a chaplain that he wrote his first treatises *The Kingdom of Lovers*, *Dat rike der ghelieven*, and *The Spiritual Espousals*, *Die ciergeit der gheesteliker bruloch*. In 1343 Ruysbroeck and two of his colleagues left St Gudula in order to settle down in a solitary life in a place they called Groenendaal. The land was ducal property and given to the brethren by the duke. Because of ecclesiastical pressure in 1350 they took on the Rule of St Augustine with Jan serving as the first prior of the monastery. He died on 2 December 1381 and was canonized in 1909. The spiritual profile of Groenendaal monastery came to be totally dominated by Jan van Ruysbroeck's teachings until it was closed in the late 1700s. The literary works by Jan van Ruysbroeck are presently being published in a text critical edition *Opera Omnia*. Groenendaal Monastery is situated close to Brussels *en route* to Bruges on the border between Flanders and Brabant. From 1432 and onwards, when the monastery received personal and substantial financial support and protection by Philip the Good himself, the monastic life

flourished and four new houses were created evenly located in Flanders and Brabant (Verhelst 1976: 63).

Jan van Ruysbroeck was contemporary with mystics such as Meister Eckhart, Gregorius Palamas, John Tauler, Bridget of Sweden, Catharine of Siena and should not be confused with his namesake, the influential ducal architect, who was in the duke's service in the mid-1400s. The mystic Jan van Ruysbroeck wrote extensively in the vernacular and in the literary style of his day, used by Petrarch as well as Chaucer, called petrarchism. The main feature of the style was to describe and ascribe human and divine qualities to objects and phenomena of nature, mainly gems, precious metals and stones but also fire and ice. Ruysbroeck wrote on the mystic life and experience mainly for a monastic reader. However, his teachings were widely read, copied and spread already during his lifetime through a number of books and several letters.

Ruysbroeck distinctly differs from his contemporary fellow mystics in that the *unio mystica* is viewed not only as a going in but also as a going out of the mystic experience in order to bring the effects of that experience into everyday living, continuing and improving in going about the everyday business of work. The mystic experience is not a once in a lifetime event, but a continual progressive path of going in and going out. This very pragmatic view of *unio mystica* is dressed by Ruysbroeck in the most didactic language and prose. In his book *The Seven Enclosures, Vanden seven sloten*, he likens the three lives of the mystic experience, the active, inner and contemplative life, to the reading of three books. Active life is the first book which he describes as having brownish pages that are written on with blackish ink. Inner life, the second book, is a life in Christ with white pages and red letters, symbols of the purity and blood of Christ. In the third book, on the contemplative life, the colors are blue and green with writing in gold.

5 "Every evening as you come before your bed, you should read through three little books, if you have the opportunity, and should always carry them with you. The first little book is old, ugly and dirty, written in black ink. The second little book is white and lovely, written in red blood. The 10 third is blue and green, written entirely in fine gold.

First of all, read through your old book, that is, your old life, which is

15 sinful and imperfect both in yourself and in all mankind. To do this, enter into yourself and open the book of your conscience which shall be open and manifest to God and the whole world at God's judgment. 20 And so, examine, test and judge yourself now so that you shall not be condemned then. You should look into and examine your conscience on how you have lived and 25 on what you have committed: in words, actions, desires, reflections,

and thoughts; in disorder, in false
 30 fear and false hope, false joys and
 false sorrows; in instability and lack
 of self-mortification; in duplicity
 and hypocrisy; in disorderly action
 or omission; in following the senses
 outwardly and in consenting to
 35 sensuality within; in pleasure and
 comfort; in all things that are prac-
 ticed unreasonably and contrary to
 charity; (anything) against the
 commandments, against the counsels,
 40 or against the most dear will of
 God. These things and the like are
 so numerous and so manifold that
 no one but God alone can know
 them. They stain, disfigure and
 45 dirty the face of the soul, for they
 are written with (black) ink, that is,
 with the lust of flesh and blood and
 with disordered earthly inclina-
 tions. You should be displeased
 with yourself in this regard, and,
 50 with the publican, fall prostrate
 before your heavenly Father and
 before his eternal mercy, and say
 with the prophet: "Lord, I have
 55 sinned. Have mercy on me, a poor
 sinner. Grant me the water of tears
 and genuine contrition in my heart,
 (water) in which I may wash my
 soul's face from my sins, before I
 60 rise up before your eyes. Lord, give
 me your grace and your favor with
 which I may adorn and beautify my
 face to please you. Lord, grant me
 willingness and zeal so that I may
 65 ceaselessly be renewed in your
 service and in your praise." If you
 wish to acquire this, remain lying
 on the ground, strike your breast,
 cry, call out and weep; do not raise
 70 your eyes but disdain, humble, and
 annihilate yourself, and remind
 Him of His mercy. Do not cease
 before He answers you and speaks
 true peace and genuine joy in your
 heart. Then He shall remove from
 75 you anxiety and fear, doubt and
 dread and everything in you dis-
 pleasing to Him, and He shall give

you faith, hope, and trust in Him
 for all things that you need in time
 80 and in eternity. Then you shall
 desire to live for Him and to be
 faithful (to Him) until your death.
 Herewith, lay down the old book.

Rise up, then, on your knees,
 85 with gratitude and with praise.
 From out of your memory, reach for
 the white book written in red let-
 ters, that is, the innocent life of our
 90 Lord Jesus Christ. His soul is inno-
 cent and plenitude of all grace, fiery
 red with burning love; His body is a
 glorious radiant white, brighter
 95 than the sun, all lacerated by lashes
 and bathed with His precious blood;
 those are the red letters which are
 signs and documents for us of His
 righteous love. The five large
 100 wounds, however, are capital letters
 with which begin the chapters in
 the book. Read these letters written
 on His venerable body with great
 compassion. The love which lives in
 His soul, however, you should recall
 105 with interior fervor. Shun and flee
 the false world, for He has opened
 His arms and wants to receive and
 embrace you. Make your dwelling in
 the caverns of His wounds as the
 110 dove does in the caverns of the rock.
 Place your mouth on His opened
 side; smell and savor the heavenly
 sweetness which flows from His
 heart. Consider how your champion
 and giant has fought for you even
 115 unto death, and has overcome your
 enemies; the death of your sins He
 has put to death by His death; he
 has paid your debt and purchased
 and acquired for you His Father's
 120 inheritance with His blood. He as-
 cended before (you), opened the
 gates and prepared the place of
 eternal glory for you. Herein, you
 should rightly take delight and bear
 125 the love and passion of your dear
 Lord in your heart, so that He lives
 in you and you in Him; then the
 world shall be a cross and great

130 distress for you. You, however, should desire to die and to follow your beloved into His kingdom. Herewith, the white book is read through.

135 Then stand upright and lift your eyes to heaven. Open your mind to God and consider the third book which is blue and green, written with fine gold, whereby we understand an eternal heavenly life. For
140 the heavenly life is bright, sky-blue, like the hyacinth stone. This brightness is threefold and in this brightness appears a green color, with which the brightness is
145 adorned in manifold ways. The first heavenly brightness is sensible. With it, God has filled and illuminated the highest heaven, just as the whole world is filled and illuminated by the brightness of the sun.
150 In this heaven, we shall, with Christ, the angels and saints, live and reign eternally, body and soul; and each body bright according to the nobility of its merits. The least bright is seven times brighter than the sun, impassible, swifter than thought, lighter than air, and subtler than sunshine. In the bright-
160 ness of heaven and in the brightness of the glorious bodies, the green color is manifest, which is like the stone we call jasper. We shall see the greenness with our
165 bodily eyes, that is, all the outward good works that were ever done or ever shall be done, unto the end of the world, in whatsoever manner it might be: in dying, in living, in
170 martyrdom, in humility, in purity, in generosity, in charity, in fasting, in keeping vigil, in praying, in reading, in singing, in manifold penances and in all virtuous acts without number. See, this is the lovely green color which shall enrich the glorious bodies, to a greater or lesser degree, everyone according to his efforts, merits, and dignity.

180 The second brightness of eternal life is spiritual. It fills and illuminates all intelligent eyes in heaven with knowledge and wisdom to recognize all inward virtue; and in this
185 brightness a green hue displays itself like that of a stone they call smaragdus, that is, a green emerald beautiful and green and lovely to intelligent eyes beyond anything
190 one might recall. By this, we understand enrichment, fruit, and all differentiation of virtue. This is the most beautiful and the loveliest hue of the kingdom of heaven. As we
195 examine the virtues, together with their fruits, at closer range, and as we dig deeper, the lovelier and more beautiful they are to consider. This is how they are compared to the
200 precious gem called smaragdus: the more one sculpts and digs into it, the more it delights the eye. Thus each saint is like the emerald, bright and green, beautiful, gracious and glorious, more or less,
205 (each) according to his own nobility and merits. This is why God has manifested the glory of the kingdom of heaven to the saints in the green color of the precious emerald. The
210 third heavenly brightness is divine, and is nothing other than the eternal wisdom and brightness which is God Himself. This brightness embraces and surpasses all created
215 brightness. Compared with the bright wisdom of God, all creaturely knowledge in heaven and on earth is less than that of candlelight in the radiance of the sun, in the
220 middle of summer. Therefore, all intelligences must yield to the incomprehensible brightness and truth that is God. In the divine
225 brightness a green hue appears which is incomparable, for it is so gracious and glorious that all vision is lost in gazing at it and is blinded and loses all its judgment. Thus
230 your third book is a heavenly life

with threefold brightness and greenness: the first sensible, the second spiritual, the third divine. And this book is entirely written in fine gold, for each loving inturning into God is a verse written in gold. The brightness of our book is genuine knowledge of God, of ourself, and of virtue. Manifold modes, differentiation and exercise of virtue make up the green hue of our book. But interior desire, loving adherence (to God) and divine union are eternal verses written in gold in our heavenly book. This is why, in Revelation, our Lord compares the heavenly life to the sapphire, or to the rainbow, for these two consist of many hues. The sapphire is yellow and red, purple and green, mixed with gold-dust. So also the rainbow is made up of many colors, just as the saints have manifold modes and differentiation of virtue, all mixed with gold-dust, that is, penetrated with love and united in God. And everyone who loves stands before God's presence with his book, bright, green, lovely and glorious.

260 Therefore, lift up your heart above all the heavens and read these books. They are full of glory: outwardly in the senses because of their great actions; inwardly in the spirit because of their manifold modes and practice of virtues; and above all, they are lifted up in God in an enjoyment of love. If you are dead to yourself in Christ, and to all things, and risen with Him in a new eternal life, and seek and savor the things that are above and eternal. Watch over your seven enclosures and note well your three books, even though you may not completely finish reading or entirely look through the third book, for the glory is measureless and so bottomless that one cannot completely see through it. Thus it resembles the smaragdus which also cannot be seen through. Drink, savor and become inebriated; lean over in your stronghold, and rest and sleep in eternal peace." (Ruysbroeck 1981: 200-218)

This excerpt from the conclusion of Vanden seven sloten shows Ruysbroek's experienced knowledge of every minute detail of the *via mystica* and his agile ability to describe to the reader the various physical and mental techniques necessary in order to reach the ultimate mystic level. In lines 97-102 is also found a rare reference to one particular use of the, often very artistically fashioned, capital letters of, for example, an illuminated manuscripts. The study of one of these ornaments is likened to the considering of the wounds and sufferings of Christ and can, according to Ruysbroeck, serve as a preparatory vehicle in the mystic process.

The portrait is now to be reconsidered. A color analysis provides interesting information. What according to Ruysbroeck is part of the active life finds its correspondence in the framework of the room, the furniture, the overall brownish impression of the interior, the painter's signature on the wall and above all in the depiction of the male figure. Having stepped out of his shoes he stands at the center of attention in the room. His stockings are stained with dirt and he is

dressed in a brown mantle made of exquisite and costly fur. On his head he is wearing a large black hat. The Ruysbroeckian inner life finds a counterpart in the most expensive red fabrics dominating most of the interior of the room crowned by the centrally placed white head-covering of the lady. The third level of the mystic experience is visually conceivable first and foremost in the exclusive green overdress, lined at the edges with golden fur, that covers the blue underdress. Through the window to the left of the painting the blue sky is visible as well as the tree, with green leaves and red flowers. The impression of the couple is that of passiveness and inactivity. Their eyes don't meet, but appear to be directed elsewhere beyond the frame of the painting. But when looking in the mirror, where the backs of the couple are reflected, an opposite impression is obtained. The couple are active, almost on the verge of taking a step towards their visiting friends, as these enter the room through the open door. (Fig. 2) The characteristics of the teachings of Ruysbroeck, the going in and the going out of the mystic experience, and his detailed and didactic description of the different mystic levels, are all distinctly visible in the Arnolfini portrait.

One more detail deserves attention. Linda Seidel, another American art historian, has a very interesting interpretation of the area around the mirror. She refers to the praxis of the local notary as she interprets the mirror and adjacent items on the wall as visible signs of notary authenticity. In this case the signature on the wall by Jan van Eyck who, Seidel notes, had local as well as ducal notary license, indicates that the painting can be conceived as a pictorial form of a formal and binding contract with the duke as acting party. One of the things she also finds an explanation to in notary praxis is the lit candle. Seidel refers to the notary who would have a lit candle on the table as long as the contract was not fulfilled. Through the window can be seen the daylight, the barely visible tree outside that has leaves and some kind of either berries or flowers. It is apparently late spring or early summer. Seidel, in commenting on her sources writes: "Thus, there is no written text for which Jan's painting could serve as illustration" (Seidel 1993: 22). There is no reference to Jan van Ruysbroeck or Linda Seidel might have found the following, from lines 216 to 221, worth considering, "*Compared with the bright wisdom of God, all creaturely knowledge in heaven and on earth is less than that of candlelight in the radiance of the sun, in the middle of summer.*" (Ruysbroeck 1981: 214)

Apart from the similarities between the painting and Ruysbroeck's text *The Seven Enclosures*, these may be purely accidental. There would at least have to be support in other paintings from the same

period. Jan van Eyck himself made several paintings that easily work within the framework of Ruysbroeck's schedule, mainly religious motives commissioned by a donor or the duke painted in the late 1430s. But a most conclusive and interesting picture is a small contemporary miniature made in Groenendaal monastery that strongly supports the hypothesis of a contemporary Ruysbroeck color coded iconography referring to his mystic teachings on *unio mystica*. (Fig. 3)

Inscribed within a brownish frame is depicted an outdoor event where two male persons, in monks' habits, are sitting. The landscape is somewhat rough with one large, twisted tree at the left and two smaller trees to the right of the painting. The background is to the upper 3/4ths covered with a red color field decorated with a diagonally checkered pattern. In each large rhombic intersection a four-petal flower is depicted. The two men are not idle in this green pasture, but busily engaged in scribal activities. The monk to the right is copying from a small writing tablet at his left that carries a green sheet of parchment, onto a large white sheet that he writes on with red ink. The monk to the left, sitting under the large tree, is writing on a larger writing tablet, onto which a green sheet of parchment is fastened. He is writing with letters of gold. His left hand is not only holding the handle of the writing tablet, but it is also taking a small white, flat object out of an incision in the flower-covered background. In front of the rhombus above the one with the cut, a white bird is seen coming towards the monk. The overlapping character of the compositional areas can be studied as the monk to the right is sitting partly on the brown frame, partly on the green grass, having his scribal desk placed entirely on the frame. The same process is visible also in the branches from two of the trees, that are poking out of the composition into the frame. Finally one more detail that must not be overlooked, the small stream of water flowing out from a well, depicted right at the center just above the bottom frame.

The active, inner and contemplative life are given distinct visibility in this miniature as well as the going in and the going out. The necessity of going out is underlined by the activity of the monks as well as by the choice of mode of representation of the scribal motif. This subject is generally depicted as an indoors not an outdoors event. The scribal activity of the right monk is placed as a bridge between active and contemplative life in very much the same way as could be observed in the Arnolfini portrait, where the male, representing active life, is bridging over to contemplative life, the lady in her green dress, by the touching of hands. This gesture, the touch, finds a counterpart in the Ruysbroeckian teaching on *unio mystica*. The actual point

when the mystic experiences the transition from the inner life into the contemplative life is the most important event in the mystic practice. That is according to Ruysbroeck described with the word *gerinen*, which translates into English with a word describing its effect, *touch*. The entrance into the contemplative life is felt like someone touching and there are several passages in Ruysbroeck's writings that could serve as an example. From *The Seven Enclosures* the following example has been chosen:

"If you wish to exercise yourself in the fourth mode with more interior fervor, you shall experience, at the depths of your faculty of love, the touch of the Holy Spirit as a living fount, with veins of eternal sweetness welling up and flowing out. And in your faculty of understanding, you shall experience the gleaming irradiation of the eternal sun, our Lord Jesus Christ, with divine truth. And the heavenly Father shall strip your memory and bare (it) of images, and shall urge, draw, and invite you to his exalted unity. Look, there are three heavenly doors to His treasures, which God opens to the loving soul." (Ruysbroeck 1981: 182)

The Arnolfini portrait is generally assumed to have been commissioned by Arnolfini himself, a hypothesis strongly supported by Edward Hall. But Linda Seidel raises the poignant question about the role of the duke, Philip the Good. The duke appears, from a Ruysbroeckian perspective, to be far more involved in the making of this portrait and perhaps also in the other Jan van Eyck paintings that can be successfully interpreted according to Ruysbroeck's color code of the *via mystica*. The duke's interest in Groenendaal, his political ambition to expand and unify his territories, especially Flanders, and the fact that he had in 1432 taken upon him a financial obligation with regard to the care and keep of the monastery, become vital keys in the future discussion of this painting. One fact to be seriously considered is the personal financial difficulties that Philip the Good struggled with about 1434 and onwards. The Groenendaal monastery burnt down to the ground in 1435, but was according to the records rebuilt almost immediately with the financial support from the Dean of Bergen-op-Zooms, Willem Braen, the Dean of Antwerp, Anselmus Fabri, the Dean of Cambrai, Cornelis Proper and by Philip the Good (Verhelst 1976: 62). The question of who paid the duke's share in the swift rebuilding of Groenendaal Monastery may be closely linked to these paintings that carry such a strong attachment to the Ruysbroeckian color schedule existing at the monastery. A final word of caution is appropriate with regard to this apparent development of a specific Groenendaal color code within and without the monastery.

Ruysbroeck may not be the initial inventor of this order of the colors and what they should represent, that may have come from elsewhere. Too little is known and future research will undoubtedly have to focus on some of these processes.

To further the discussion of this portrait is beyond the aim and purpose of this paper. The example above has shown some of the strengths of the iconographic and iconologic analyses, but has also displayed some hazards. This painting can be given several functional attributions. If the Arnolfini and Cenami families contributed financially to the ducal projects at Groenendaal, before as well as after the great fire, under the pretext of some kind of mutual agreement not to be publicly spoken of too loud, the painting would to the duke be personally confirming, in that he did not have to give up his ambition on Groenendaal and demonstratively, this is how it was done. To Arnolfini there is also a personal confirmation, he did the right thing and the actual betrothal must not be forgotten. But there is also a reflexive confirmation in that the character of a truly good person is somehow understood, so well expressed by Ruysbroeck in lines 163–175, 190–198, 203–207 and 216–221, where the good acts, the enrichment and fruits are seen as outward manifestations of a virtuous life lived and the comparison with bright wisdom as contrasted to the bleak, single and only candle. If Arnolfini is the commissioner these last personal qualities would have indicated a possessive function and confirmation.

The discussion on the function of an aesthetic manifestation within a religious context will greatly benefit from referring the object not only to one subject and one only, but to as many as can be substantially supported in the critical reading of available sources. What is gained by the proposed functional terminology is advantageous. A discussion is hereby inaugurated that can use the results of, as seen above, several very different interpretations on their merits as qualified interpretations, as well as handling new and not previously considered sources, each one indispensable and each one contributing to further the understanding and the processes involved. This necessitates a neutral terminology, such as the grammatical terminology of the pronoun, as has been suggested in this paper.

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Figure 1. Jan van Eyck, 1434.
The Arnolfini double-portrait. The National Gallery, London.

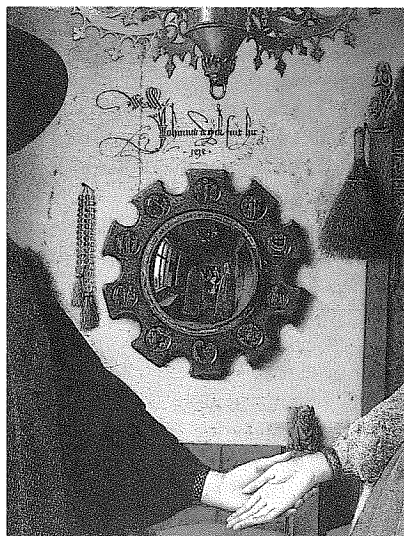


Figure 2. A detail of the mirror in
the Arnolfini portrait. Jan van
Eyck, 1434. The National Gallery,
London.

Figure 3. Jan van Ruysbroeck, to
the left, and a fellow scribe.
Manuscript from Groenendaal
Monastery, early 1400s. ms.
Bruxelles, B.R.19295-97, fol.2
verso. Copyright Belgian Royal
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