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THE MEANING OF THE MERODE ALTARPIECE

presented by

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has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Masters degree in the History of Art

Molly J. Smith

Major professor

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THE MEANING OF THE MERODE ALTARPIECE

By

Jack Hamilton Williamson

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

THE MEANING OF THE MERODE ALTARPIECE

By

Jack Hamilton Williamson

Scholars have been unsuccessful in identifying the triptych's main theme because their methods (1) treat individual iconographs/panels rather than overall programmatic meaning, (2) rely almost exclusively upon textual sources outside the artwork to establish these isolated and often divergent iconographic significations. A corrective method of visual content analysis is thus employed in this thesis to uncover "indigenous iconographic relationships": a pattern language extending throughout the program which houses the main theme and serves to modify conventional iconographic meanings. Joachimism, a millennialist impulse arising within Augustinian spiritual tradition, and Franciscanism specifically, is thus deemed to inform the main theme: the Annunciation represented is of Christ's second (not first) incarnation and the dawning Spiritual Age which Joachim prophesied. The direct spiritual illumination which men were to receive during this Age is believed to occur experientially for the viewer through a guided process of "iconographical reading" whereby, incrementally, the viewer mystically enters God's spiritual tabernacle.

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1982

This thesis is dedicated to my parents,
Marjorie and Edward Wallon, and to
my wife, Johanna.

Into the inmost life of man
The senses pour their wealth
The spirit of the world beholds
His mirrored image in the eye of man,
That eye from which that spirit
Must still renew its power

Rudolf Steiner
(verse for the week of
23-29 March)

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I would like to additionally thank Laara Cassells, who typed the tables and much of the first draft of the thesis, and Violeta Abarius, whose stamina and perseverance saw the final typing of the manuscript

through to completion.

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PREFACE

The present study attempts to gain access to the meaning of the Merode Altarpiece. Meaning, as here understood, consists of two types. The first type of meaning is the artwork's intentional content, that is, what the artist consciously meant the work to convey to the viewer. The second type of meaning is the non-intentional content of the artwork, that is, the significance the work takes on when related to some aspect (cultural, social, artistic, etc.) of its historical context which it was not the intent of the artist to convey (e.g. the elongated twisting forms of Michaelangelo's slave sculptures may acquire special meanings when compared to later Mannerist artworks, but these were not intended by Michaelangelo). It is, however, the intentional content of the altarpiece with which this thesis will be primarily concerned. The review of the former research on the altarpiece in thesis chapters two and three indicates the need for focusing on intentional content. These chapters reveal the failure of the research to identify the main theme of the Altarpiece: the primary vehicle for the artist's intentional meaning.

Chapter three in particular seeks to explain why the main theme has eluded detection by earlier scholars so that a corrective method of investigation can be developed and applied to the altarpiece. It is concluded that the difficulty lies with certain fundamental limitations inherent within the common aim and method employed by these scholars. Briefly stated, the limitations consist in the predisposition of these scholars to investigate single symbols and to seek the source

of the meaning of each in written documents external to the artwork, as opposed to examining overall programmatic meaning which consists of contextual meanings legislated by iconographic relationships within the program itself. Because, by definition, all subject matter and secondary themes throughout an artwork are subordinated to the main theme, one must investigate the relationships existing within the entire program to discover this central theme. In that many of these relationships are expressed visually, the use of a method which systematically employs visual observation, inventory, analysis, and interpretation is therefore necessary.

In chapter four, a visual inventory of the three panels of the altarpiece is conducted and a visual pattern language utilizing color, form, shape, movement, and the positioning of symbols is revealed. Among other things, the very existence of this pattern language demonstrates the incorrectness of those studies which have claimed that the panels of the altarpiece are an additive pastiche of, essentially, separate artworks. But beyond this, the existence of a unifying pattern language is taken to indicate the presence of that primary prerequisite for a main theme: a single coordinated artistic intent. Furthermore, the pattern language is shown to itself operate as a kind of 'indigenous iconography' embedded within the visual program of the altarpiece. For example, a number of individual symbols to which previous scholars have assigned specific, textually-derived meanings, are found to be related to one another on the basis of a connecting visual pattern. The symbols therefore gain a unified contextual meaning in which they all participate and which is quite different from the conventional meaning of each symbol taken in isolation. It is in this unified level of meaning that the main

theme of the altarpiece is found to be operative.

Chapters five through seven thus pass beyond chapter four's observation of pattern in its formal aspect to an analysis and interpretation of the meaning of these indigenous iconographic relationships. These chapters therefore proceed to examine the altarpiece through the balanced use of textual sources contemporary with the artwork, which establish conventional iconographic meaning, and visual content analysis, which discovers modifications of these conventional meanings. By these means, the altarpiece's sub-themes are first isolated, are then seen to reveal their meaningful relationships to one another, at which point the main theme underlying all of these begins to emerge. Also by these means, the spiritual traditions of which the altarpiece is an expression are identified. I believe this constitutes an important advance over the previous studies which have not demonstrated an interest in the exact sources and nature of the underlying religious beliefs but have generally assumed these beliefs to be synonymous with the catholicism and liturgy of the late medieval Church. The thesis seeks to establish, however, that Christian mystical traditions and ideas figure prominently in the development and use of the altarpiece.

Finally, in the latter part of chapter seven and in chapter eight, some important implications the main theme may hold for a revised understanding of the role and self-concept of the artist, of the possible intentions behind the Early Netherlandish School of panel painting, and of the Renaissance in the North are pursued. Because the thesis explores several areas which are quite new to Early Netherlandish art historical research and because the major conclusions of this study are also without

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I. BASIC INFORMATION CONCERNING THE MERODE ALTARPIECE

A. Provenance

The subject of this study is the Merode Altarpiece, a fifteenth century Flemish triptych which is presently part of the Cloisters Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City (Figures 1 and 27). The work was purchased for the Cloisters in 1957 by the John D. Rockefeller Fund. Prior to its purchase, the altarpiece was for two generations the property of the Merode family. They acquired it by inheritance from the Prince d'Arenberg who had purchased the painting in Brugges in 1820.¹ It is believed that the altarpiece was originally commissioned by a man named Ingelbrecht who lived in Malines. The respective family coats of Ingelbrecht and his wife (Calcum) are thought to be represented in the two stained glass sections of the main window depicted in the central panel of the altarpiece.²

Scholarly consensus holds that the Merode triptych is one of the outstanding monuments of the Early Netherlandish school of panel painting which developed in the second, third and fourth decades of the fifteenth century. We can also say that the work was one of the most influential paintings of the school, having been produced by one of the school's founders around the years 1424-1426, a date based primarily on the use of stylistic criteria. Two copies of the central panel of the altarpiece executed by contemporary artists, exist in museums in Brussels and Kassel, and portions of its subject matter and iconography are apparent in the great altarpiece in the City of Ghent painted by the school's other founders, the brothers Van Eyck, and completed in 1432.³

B. Artist

As the painted panels of the altarpiece were neither signed nor dated⁴, the artist was referred to by Bode, as early as 1887, as simply the "Master of the Merode Altarpiece".⁵ Later, in 1898, Von Tschudi renamed him the "Master of Flemalle"⁶ because of the identification of the artist with the painter of several panels in the Städelisches Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt. These panels were thought to have originated from an abbey in Flemalle, the original existence of which is now doubted.⁷

In 1909, the great Dutch art historian, Hulin de Loo, first suggested that the artist who was being identified as the Master of Flemalle was in fact the Master Painter of Tournai, Robert Campin.⁸ A long and heated controversy developed over the next several decades, fed by regional pride, as to whether the altarpiece was by Campin or one of his students, namely, the great painter of the school's middle phase, Rogier van der Weyden.⁹ One faction contended that, as an early work in Rogier's oeuvre, it could be expected that the painting would somewhat resemble his Master's style and technique. This hypothesis has been shown implausible and there is now an established consensus that the altarpiece was painted by Robert Campin of Tournai¹⁰, the city in which an Ingelbrecht family - quite possibly the donors themselves - was recorded in 1427 as having investments.¹¹

Robert Campin (b. ca. 1375-79 Valenciennes - d. April 26, 1444 Tournai) settled in Tournai and is recorded as Master Painter of the City in an entry of 1406. He bought a home there in 1408 and obtained citizenship in 1410.¹² In the next decade he is known to have headed a large and successful workshop where his reputation as a great teacher attracted talented apprentices such as Jacques Daret and Rogier van der Weyden

(Roger de La Pasture). Both of these men subsequently became luminaries of the succeeding generation of Flemish panel painters, especially Rogier, who was to become the official City Painter of Brussels in 1435.¹³

The year 1423 was very eventful for Campin. He became Dean of the Painters Guild and is recorded as being a member of one of the city's governing councils. He was involved, that same year, in a revolt by the craft community which temporarily displaced the ruling patricians. On their return to power in 1428, Campin was prosecuted for his role in the political uprising. He was again prosecuted in 1432 for the misdemeanor of keeping a mistress, for which he finally made appropriate reparations.¹⁴ Except for some more routine entries in the civic records, this constitutes the extent of our knowledge concerning the artist based on contemporary written documents.¹⁵

C. Physical Description

The present dimensions of the triptych's panels are H. 25-3/16" x W. 24-7/8" (61 cm. x 64 cm.) central panel, H. 25-3/8" x W. 10-3/4" (61 cm. x 26 cm.) left wing panel and H. 25-3/8" x W. 10-5/16" right wing panel, although the doubt has been expressed that these are not the original panel dimensions.¹⁶ When open, the entire framed altarpiece thus measures approximately H. 29-7/16" x W. 59-3/8" (calculated with a 2-1/8" wide frame). It is only in this locked-open state that the work may be viewed at the Cloisters, for it does not appear to be a "working" triptych. This is probably because the altarpiece features no painted panels on the fronts of the wings which would be visible only when the triptych was in the closed position. Such exterior wing panels were

characteristic of many triptychs and polyptychs of this period (e.g. Campin's Betrothal of the Virgin in the Prado Museum). One is led to conclude, therefore, that these panels were either lost, or less likely, were never conceived as a necessary part of the total composition.

The three panels of the altarpiece are of oak, and upon them a ground mixture of chalk and animal glue was applied, allowed to harden, and sanded smooth to achieve a brilliant porcelain-like finish. After any under-drawings were made, oil glazes were applied to the white ground in successive layers.¹⁷ The luminosity, fuller range of coloristic effect, and realistic modelling which this major technical innovation in the history of oil painting allowed, was inextricably wedded to the essential aims and character of the Early Netherlandish school. By transcending the constraints imposed by tempera (pigment utilizing an egg binder), with its flat, and by comparison, dull color, a lucent quality was obtained which allowed a naturalistic representation of light, form, detail, and three-dimensional space itself. The new medium was thus developed to support a revolutionary new vision of visible reality which is now identified as a key characteristic of this school of panel painting.

D. Description of Visible Subject Matter

1. introduction

The following description of the Merode Altarpiece is based chiefly upon the study of color photographic reproductions, one of which is accurate in scale. I have personally seen the original painting as it is displayed in the Spanish Room of the Cloisters, a period setting which

is perhaps akin to the work's original environment,¹⁸ and which contains contemporary objects similar to those depicted in the painting; namely, a candlestick, vase, double-spouted laver, and wooden bench. Natural light from the south enters the Spanish Room's two large windows, one of which is located several feet directly to the left of the altarpiece. Spotlights in the ceiling provide competing but needed additional illumination. However, the study of reproductions has proved necessary, not only because of the need for on-going reference, but also because close inspection of the original is made virtually impossible without special curatorial arrangement because of ropes which effectively separate the viewer from the artwork by a distance of several feet.

In preparing to describe the altarpiece, it is necessary to first express my conviction that it is in the fundamental nature of sustained observation that, in the mere act of identification, description can evolve largely of itself towards a penetration and grasp of the ideas, themes, and meaning behind the artwork. The following description seeks to impart both an accurate accounting of those elements visibly present in the three panels of the artwork while conveying at least a small portion of the experience or 'effect' these objects exercise upon the viewer. In so doing, it is not my intent to in any way add subjectively to the content. On the contrary, to ignore the emotional and aesthetic tonality of the artwork's compositional elements would describe them only fractionally.

2. center panel

The near-square central panel of the Merode triptych presents us with a fifteenth-century bourgeois Flemish interior in which, by all

appearances, the great Christian event of the Annunciation is represented: the Archangel Gabriel is shown in the process of announcing to the Virgin Mary that she is to become mother to the Son of God. In the adjoining right-hand panel, Mary's husband, Joseph, works quietly in his carpenter shop. In the panel on the left, we see a garden enclosed by a tall stone wall. A man and a woman seemingly behold the Annunciation through an open door. The fact that the figures in both wing panels are bodily turned toward the central panel serves to focus all attention upon the unfolding mystery of the Annunciation itself.

Two figures dominate the scene of the Annunciation: the half-kneeling/half-standing Archangel Gabriel on the left, robed in white with a blue sash embroidered with gold thread, and the partially reclining Mary on the right, robed in red and absorbed in reading a book. Their respective white and red sculptural forms powerfully inhabit an interior space which is remarkably well-lit for its few windows. This abundance of light is only matched by the endless array of domestic objects dispersed with equal thoroughness throughout the room. The room ranges in color from light tan-cream walls to the dark reddish-brown masses of the wooden window shutters, ceiling and floor, and the scorched stone of the fireplace niche. A sixteen-sided, near-round table made of seven parallel planks of wood, mediates in color and value between the light and dark browns of the room and also between the cool and warm robes of Gabriel and Mary.

At the panel's upper left-hand corner, above and behind the Archangel's head, a tiny nude figure bearing a miniature cross is beginning its diagonal descent in the direction of the Virgin, having apparently emanated with a seven-rayed pencil of light from the intersection of a leaded Greek cross in an oculus window above. The descent,

seemingly coordinated in time with Gabriel as he lifts his right hand in a combined gesture of blessing and bestowal, is to apparently terminate in the lap of Mary where a sheen of light outlines a five-pointed star on the folds of her mantle.

The fluttering pages of a book lying open in the path of the descent upon the table next to Mary, and the purl of smoke rising from the table's just-extinguished candle, suggest that a sudden rush of wind is advancing, like the babe, towards the Virgin. The book, its pages astir, rests upon a green bag with red trim and draw strings, and from under one cover a scroll lies partially unravelled with a few inches of its parchment hanging over the table's edge. It has been conjectured that the book may be the Old Testament,¹⁹ or parts of the Old and New Testaments of which the Virgin's book is a concordance.²⁰ Her volume has also been identified as a prayerbook.²¹

The line of the babe's descent is further reiterated in two other prominent visual diagonals. The first of these paths begins at the bronze laver which is centered precisely within the upper left-hand quadrant of the panel. This laver features two spouts which are fashioned in the likeness of dragon's heads. This polished vessel hangs suspended on a chain within a stone niche framed by a Gothic trilobated arch. At the base of this opening, the rim of a masonry basin which captures water poured from the laver is seen to extend out from the wall, but is partially obscured from our sight behind the Archangel's head. To the immediate right of the laver niche a long white linen towel with two blue horizontal stripes is vertically draped over a red towel rack. The rack features polished metal fittings and its horizontal arm is capped with a medallion fashioned in the form of a lion's head.

Beginning, then, at the laver set deep in its niche, the eye is led back into the space of the room along a diagonal path which passes along the hem of the towel, its red rack angling toward the Virgin robed in red, and on through a perfect line of objects on the table en route to the Virgin herself and the book she holds before her. This row of objects includes the aforementioned bronze candlestick, the base of which lies at the exact center of the panel, and an exquisite white porcelain pitcher covered with a delicate pattern of blue lines. Out of this vessel rise two lily stalks in bloom between which a third stalk climbs, expectantly in bud.

Along with the open book, this triad of objects inhabits the right side of the table, the top of which seems tipped steeply toward us. Like paperweights, these objects seem to hold this floating disc down. However, because they crowd the right side of the disc, they also threaten to spin the pin-wheel-like table top downward, in clockwise rotation (ramifying the other descending diagonal thrusts), if not for Gabriel whose hand overlaps the opposite rim of the table. Acting as a visual anchor, the Archangel's hand arrests the impending rotation and keeps all poised in a dramatic, Discobolus-like intensification of the moment. The result is that a strong current of tense anticipation offsets the otherwise deep contemplative stillness of the room. The scene's third and last major diagonal is formed by the back of the wooden bench upon which Mary leans. The line begins at the lower right of the panel and rushes in steep ascent up to the rear wall of the room, catapulting the eye through the room's perspectively shallow and compressed space toward the chamber's only point of release - a tall window with open shutters - and through it to the calm expanse and uncluttered freedom of the blue sky beyond. The

window itself is divided into four rectangular openings which surround a sash-work Latin cross. The two upper openings contain stained glass in which coats-of-arms are featured. The two lower openings are partially covered by a half-shutter on one side and an intricate lattice-work screen on the other. The bench itself consists of a footrest and carved arms, each of which feature both dog and lion figurines.. On the seat of the bench is a blue cloth which falls to the floor, with a matching blue pillow upon which Mary appears to lean her left arm.

Behind the bench, at the right hand edge of the panel, an immense fireplace dominates the wall with its shallow, but darkly scorched aperture. Before it, a perforated wooden board, its holes plugged with decorative studs, serves as a firescreen, and perhaps signals the fireplace's temporary disuse. Black andirons flank this screen, each with an ornately carved rosette. Above, in the panel's upper right-hand corner, corbel figures of a man and woman with distressed expressions on their tiny faces are seen to dress the upper part of the fireplace. Positioned between and slightly above these figurines, on the mantle front, two candle-spike fixtures are in evidence, only one of which holds an unlit, cream-colored taper.

To this inventory some other observations may be appropriately added. The first of these concerns the representation of the objects which punctuate the picture space at regular intervals. Like the room's other articles, for example, the bronze laver is depicted so convincingly and with such painstaking care and devotion, that its very substance and weight become a visually palpable reality. The collective result of such details is that the viewer is drawn into a miniature cosmos of rich and varied form and texture impressions which incrementally build and

fuse into a seamless revelation of phenomenal existence. This remarkable sense of presence is largely orchestrated by the sensation of light-suffused atmosphere.

As already mentioned, the amount of light in the room does not seem to tally with the few windows which are in evidence. However, individual instances of multiple shadows within the chamber's interior offer a partial explanation for this phenomenon. The laver itself casts a double shadow as a result of the twin sources of light thrown by the oculi to its left. It will be noticed that the laver reflects these windows in its own polished surface as does the bronze candlestick on the nearby table. It is when we pass on to observe the other instances of multiple shadows which are cast by the towel, window shutters, and bench, that another light source suggests itself. In each of these three cases, a triple shadow is cast, and in each instance the light sources are the oculi in probable combination with the open doorway in the wall behind Gabriel, the edge of which is just barely visible.

The bench, with its extreme foreshortening, and the table, with its top tilted up toward the picture plane, offer the observer a commonly defined oblique plane or incline upon which the eye is coaxed to virtually "step" from painting foreground to background, and thus into the very space of the room itself. In concert with this, the abruptly foreshortened recession of the room's right and left walls result in a space which is, in depth, more like a niche than a room. The collective effect is that the viewer is drawn into the room while the compartment seems to simultaneously reach out and embrace the viewer. Accompanying this, undistracted observation is met with the strong impression that the firmly-modelled objects are successively gaining in three-dimensional presence and advancing toward us. The tension created by a lack of a

clear subject-object division, which mathematical perspective paintings have accustomed us to, is at the same time balanced by a powerful sense of intimate calm which pours itself into the viewer as his attention anchors itself at different points within the chamber.

3. right wing-panel

Flanking the right side of the center or Annunciation panel is the Joseph panel of the altarpiece. The panel shows an unevenly lit interior similar in vertical dimension to the Annunciation chamber, although slight differences in the orientation of the ceiling and wall planes are apparent. It could be argued that the rear wall, cloaked in shadow but for some unshuttered windows, shares the same plane as the rear wall of the Annunciation compartment, and except for a workbench which departs radically in perspective, we are inclined to assume that this room is part of the same house which Gabriel and Mary inhabit.

Seated on a high-backed bench of pine, or some other light-hued wood, is the white bearded figure of Joseph who is predominantly clad in a mantle of rough brown fabric. The figure may be identified as Joseph because of his activities as a carpenter and because he seems to inhabit the same house as Mary. This marital tie is further reinforced in several other ways. The complementary arcs which bound the right side of each figure's form call for closure. Also, both figures are of about the same scale and height, both look downward, both wear blue and red fabrics (Mary's mantle and pillow, Joseph's shirtsleeves and turban), and both are seated on benches which send the eye back through the space of their respective rooms and beyond them through open windows. With the diminutive occurrences of red and blue in Joseph's head-dress and sleeves,

and the pastel echoes of these hues in the roofs and facades of the distant window scene as the only exceptions, the panel is a predominant brown which plays itself out in a countless range of textures and values.

We see Joseph intently drilling the fourth of a series of holes in a rectangular piece of wood. This object's purpose is not clear and it has been alternately identified as a spikeblock²², baitbox lid²³, mousetrap²⁴, firescreen²⁵, rod-holder²⁶, winepress strainerboard²⁷, and a warming pan cover²⁸. Other tools of the carpenter's trade are spread on the workbench in front of Joseph. We see, for example, a hammer, two bladed instruments, a pair of pincers, some woodshavings, what appears to be a white pebble with a bean-like shape, loose nails as well as a dish containing nails, an awl, and a box-like contraption similar in design to a device sitting on a ledge outside Joseph's window. These last items have so far been identified as carpenter's planes²⁹, or as mousetraps³⁰.

These tools help to identify the room as the shop of a carpenter, an identification which is strengthened by the aforementioned window ledge which has been recognized as a possible display shelf for shop wares.³¹ Beyond the shelf we see a large market-square-like expanse bordered by city shops and houses, and streets with people bustling about and attending to the everyday business of life. Our view of this scene is afforded by the room's three windows, each of which is shown in a different degree of openness. To the left, a window with a closed lower half-shutter. At the center, a window fully open, its shutter - like that of its neighbor - suspended from the ceiling by means of a hanging wooden gravity-latch. And to the right, a partially opened third window, its shutter hinged along the vertical like a door, and its shadow falling

against the adjacent wall of the chamber which is depicted on the right side of the panel.

The other objects in this shop lie on the floor at Joseph's feet. These consist of a hand-axe embedded in a log, a short wooden rod with one end on the floor and the other propped upon the aforementioned log, and a footstool with a long wooden-handled saw similarly propped upon it. Just behind this group of objects Joseph's shoes are visible beneath the brown hem of his cloak, each sporting what has been identified as a wooden patten or overshoe.³² ,

4. left wing-panel

Opposite the Joseph panel, to the left of the Annunciation, is the donor's wing of the altarpiece. The space depicted is that of an outside garden which adjoins the house. The garden's tall brick wall visually continues the plane established by the rear walls in the Joseph and Mary panels, thereby establishing a sense of continuity between all three panels.

In the foreground we see a man and a woman who kneel on a bare patch of ground and face a set of three steps which mount to an open door on the right. The door is of light wood, is studded with nails, and features a pair of ornate metal hinges along with an inset metal locking mechanism in which one of two keys on a ring is inserted, its partner left dangling. The door, which seems almost to project - in *trompe l'oeil* fashion - past the picture plane as though to penetrate our own space, roughly corresponds to the vertical doorway opening just visible in the wall behind Gabriel in the central panel (the door is, in fact, a bit too short for an exact match).

Through this door the male donor peers, while the female behind him kneels with lowered glance. The pair is dressed in the clothes of the wealthy burgher class, not those of aristocracy.³³ The man holds a shaggy black beaver hat with a rosebud tucked in the hatband³⁴, and a ring is evident on his fourth finger. No ring, however, is visible on the fingers of the female's hands³⁵ which appear laced in prayer as they clasp a red string of rosary beads. On his belt, the male donor carries a black purse which incorporates double lunnets and clasps in silver ornament along with a dagger³⁶ which penetrates its scabbard by piercing the flap of the purse. The female donor wears a black robe which parts in the front to reveal a burgundy dress gathered by means of a black sash and featuring sleeves with elongated flowing cuffs edged with gold thread and lined with a white, subtly striped fabric or fur, presumably ermine. A white cowl frames her face, and is draped so as to cover the neck-line of her dress. The back of her form is abruptly shorn from view by the frame. To her right is a patch of green grass covered by forget-me-nots, violets, and daisies.³⁷

Behind the donors, a sward of green grass runs to the base of a high wall of brown stones which encloses the garden they occupy. Against the wall, next to the profile of the male donor, a rosebush in bloom is seen to climb toward a walkway, an upper wall with three crenellations next to this walkway, and a small horizontal patch of cloud-strewn sky above that. To the left of the crenellations, a small second-storey gatehouse with open doorway, stepped gables, and a trilobated window spanned with sash pieces in the form of a Latin cross, faces onto the garden area. Four birds perch upon the walkway and gatehouse and have been identified as (from left to right) a European robin, a magpie, a goldfinch, and a sparrow.³⁸

Beneath the gatehouse stands an arched, dark brown solid wood gate, reinforced by latticed cross-beams. On its left side, a small, man-sized door within the gate itself has been pulled open, and a distant street-scape with tall facades and a rider on a white horse is visible. To the left, and inside the gate, stands a man who is apparently responsible for its opening, the fingers of his left hand still touching the edge of the just-opened door. He wears a long brown beard, a gray and blue coat and shirt with a badge in the region of the heart, a purse hanging at his side, red hose, and he holds a large-brimmed brown hat in his right hand. The hat is lifted up in such a way that a gesture of humble reverence is suggested as he looks in the direction of the center panel. Although both he and the garden wall are clearly positioned on a plane back beyond the rear wall of the Annunciation chamber, so that the man could not possibly witness the event of the Annunciation, his reverent demeanor nonetheless contributes significantly to the tone of veneration which links the donor's panel to that of the Annunciation. This becomes important when discrepancies between this panel and the other two panels of the altarpiece are noticed.

In essence, these discrepancies consist in differences in the representation of scale, space, and formal composition. For example, the donors are larger in scale than their counterparts in the other panels. Also, the relative scale of objects are in disproportion, such as in the case of the oversized rosebush and birds, or the underscaled second-storey gatehouse. Such difficulties of scale are not, however, found in the other panels of the triptych. Also, comparatively flatter, less sculptural forms characterize the donor's panel, along with a less plastic and more homogeneous space. The final effect is a somewhat less

active and visually dynamic composition.

In conclusion, the dual and often contrary perceptions of rapid movement and utter stillness we met with in the center panel, are only perhaps the more obvious of an entire series of extremes which are mingled throughout the full three panel program. These contraries include the actual representation or suggestion of enclosure and openness, detailed clarity and mystery, the mundane and the transcendental, and tension and harmony. These polaric qualities impart a vitality to the whole which no doubt helps to account for the work's power to engage and its revered position among the works of early fifteenth century Northern art. But these same factors have also contributed to the triptych's enigmatic character, and the conflicting scholarly assessments this character has spawned for over a century.

E. Description of Concealed Subject Matter Discovered Through Infra-red and X-ray Photography

Infra-red and x-ray photographic examination of the Merode Altarpiece³⁹ indicate that a number of changes were made during the execution of the painting.

1. center panel

In the center panel of the altarpiece, the three windows have been overpainted. They originally displayed a traditional (for that time period) gold ground which had been achieved through the application of yellow glazes over silver foil.⁴⁰ In addition, the two oculus windows were originally 1/4 inch lower than they now appear.⁴¹ Examination has also revealed that the legs of Mary's bench were originally longer.⁴²

Another object depicted in the center panel which has received minor revisions is the firescreen, its holes being respaced for the apparent sake of greater regularity.⁴³

The figures also underwent some modifications. Changes were made in Gabriel's hair, mouth, and the contour of his hip.⁴⁴ In particular, the Archangel's face was made rounder and his hairline was arched to "suit a contemporary ideal of the high forehead"⁴⁵. Also, Gabriel's diadem originally rested a bit higher on his brow and the back of his head was initially somewhat smaller than it is now.⁴⁶

The face and head of Mary received more dramatic revisions. Her eyes originally looked upward⁴⁷, meaning that they looked leftward, in the general direction of Gabriel, rather than being downcast as they presently appear. Her head was slightly turned to the left as well. Her nostrils were originally a bit lower, and like the mouth, they were placed a bit left of their present position, the mouth being slightly tilted as well. Mary's left eye was also positioned slightly lower, and the hair at her left temple was represented as swept back rather than as hanging vertically down, as it does now.⁴⁸ Mary's face was also originally less oval and appeared more energetic and alert in consequence of a more angular jawline and larger, less pointed chin.⁴⁹

2. right wing-panel

Examination of the Joseph panel reveals that only one change was executed. This minor alteration involved lowering the left front leg of Joseph's workbench 7/16 of an inch.⁵⁰

3. left wing-panel

The donor's panel exhibits the largest number and most extensive revisions of all three panels. Starting at panel top and moving down, x-rays reveal that behind the clouds above the wall there was originally a skyline consisting of some very tall architecture as indicated by a series of roofs, dormers, and chimneys⁵¹, "placed diagonally to bracket the composition"⁵².

Further down the wall itself there is evidence that some stones framing the entrance gate had at one time received strong illumination from a background light source presumably "off stage right". Consonant with this, the ashlar jambs of the gateway were originally in shadow.⁵³ The figure next to the gate was painted over the wall, although it was not at that time an unusual practice to superimpose small painted details such as this as opposed to reserving an area of white, unpainted ground, as was done in the case of larger compositional elements.⁵⁴ Beyond the gate, through the open door, a tiny figure which was subsequently over-painted was shown next to the white horse.⁵⁵

Just below this open door, examination has disclosed that the head and body of the donatrix, or female donor, was superimposed over an already painted area instead of being painted upon a blank reserved zone. This is evidenced by a slight extension of background masonry underneath her veil⁵⁶, and by instances where the paint of her burgundy red garment has flaked off to reveal the green grass of the garden lawn beneath. Since the black paint of the male donor's coat has been shown to have no such green paint beneath it, the data suggest that the donatrix was added later.⁵⁷ Inspection has demonstrated, however, that the male donor's head was reworked and that the bodies of both donors underwent slight

revisions in height.⁵⁸ Finally, the open foreground door was slightly elongated at top and bottom with rows of nails also added after the extension was made.⁵⁹

I. NOTES

¹James J. Rorimer, Note, Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin 16 (Dec. 1957), p. 116.

²Theodore Rousseau, Jr., "The Merode Altarpiece," Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin 16 (Dec. 1957), p. 116.

³Rorimer, p. 116. Also, Suhr provides technical evidence for the contemporaneousness of the Brussels version with the original, William Suhr, "The Restoration of the Merode Altarpiece," Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin 16 (Dec. 1957), p. 144.

⁴Mojimir S. Frinta, "The Authorship of the Merode Altarpiece," The Art Quarterly (1968), p. 247.

⁵W. Bode, "La Renaissance au Musee de Berlin, III, L'ancienne ecole flamande," Gazette des Beaux-Arts, 2^e periode, 35, (1887), pp. 209-220, 423-34, as cited by Lorne Campbell, "Robert Campin, the Master of Flemalle and the Master of Merode," The Burlington Magazine 116 (Nov. 1974), p. 638, N. 64.

⁶Hugo von Tschudi, "Der Meister von Flemalle," Jahrbuch der Königlich Preussischen Kunstsammlungen (1898), pp. 8-34, 89-116 as cited in Campbell, p. 638, N. 62.

⁷Campbell, p. 638.

⁸This identification was made by H. de Loo in his article, "An Authentic Work by Jacques Daret, Painted in 1434," Burlington Magazine 15, (1909) p. 202ff. according to Erwin Panofsky, Early Netherlandish Painting I (1953; rpt. New York: Icon Editions, Harper & Row, 1971) note 4 to page 154, as given on p. 419 of that volume.

⁹The same "Rogelet de la Pasture" who apprenticed in Campin's Tournai workshop between the years of 1427 and 1432 (Panofsky, ENP, p. 155).

¹⁰This attribution is strengthened by the fact of the known acquaintanceship between Jan Van Eyck (and most likely Hubert Van Eyck, too) and Campin, witness Jan's visit to Tournai on the Feast of St. Luke, the Patron Saint of painters, in 1427. As Van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece features iconography drawn from the Merode Altarpiece, the acquaintanceship of the artists offers a likely mode of iconographic transmission, in which case Campin would qualify as the equally likely artist of the Merode Altarpiece, the source of that transmission.

¹¹Rousseau, p. 125.

¹²Campbell, notes 1 and 4, p. 638.

¹³Panofsky, ENP, p. 155; Margaretha Salinger, "Campin", Encyclopedia of World Art (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1960 ed.).

¹⁴Salinger; Panofsky, ENP, p. 154; Rousseau, p. 117.

¹⁵For a more extensively detailed account of the documentary evidence concerning Campin's life, see the thorough chronology which Campbell gives, pp. 634-638.

¹⁶"... the original sizes of these three panels do not appear to have been fully preserved... not all the edges of the panels can be assumed for certain to be original; for instance, the right-hand edge of the left-hand wing is inconclusive. The lower and upper edges of all three panels are certainly original." (Mojimir S. Frinta, The Genius of Robert Campin, The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1966, p. 27.

¹⁷Suhr, p. 143, shows a cross-section diagram of the successive layers of such painted panels: varnish (natural resin), paint film (oil and pigment), the ground (mixture of chalk and animal glue), and oak panel. See also Panofsky, ENP, pp. 150-153, for a detailed account of this oil technique.

¹⁸This would assume that the artwork was commissioned for or displayed in a domestic setting (domestic chapel?) as opposed to a church.

¹⁹Shirley Neilsen Blum, Early Netherlandish Triptychs: A Study in Patronage (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 9.

²⁰William S. Heckscher, "The Annunciation of the Merode Altarpiece: An Iconographical Study," Miscellanea Jozef Duverger, (Ghent, 1968), p. 52.

²¹Frinta, "Authorship", p. 258.

²²Margaret B. Freeman, "The Iconography of the Merode Altarpiece," Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin 16 (Dec. 1957), p. 138.

²³Meyer Schapiro, Note ["A Note on the Merode Altarpiece"], Art Bulletin, 41 (1959), p. 327f.

²⁴Irving L. Zupnick, "The Mystery of the Merode Mousetrap," Burlington Magazine 108 (Mar. 1966), p. 130.

²⁵Heckscher, p. 48; Frinta, "Authorship", p. 261.

²⁶Charles Isley Minott, "The Theme of the Merode Altarpiece," Art Bulletin 51 (Sept. 1969), N. 14, p. 268.

²⁷Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, "The Mystic Winepress in the Merode

Altarpiece," Studies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Painting in Honor of Millard Meiss, I, eds. Irving Lavin, and John Plummer (New York: New York University Press, 1977), p. 298f.

²⁸Panofsky, ENP, p. 164.

²⁹Zupnick, p. 129.

³⁰W. Bode, Gazette des Beaux-Arts, 2nd. ser., 32, 1887, p. 218 as cited by Meyer Schapiro, "Muscipula Diaboli", The Symbolism of the Merode Altarpiece, "Art Bulletin" 27 (1945), N. 2, p. 182; Schapiro, "Muscipula" (1945), p. 182; Panofsky (1953), p. 164; Freeman (1957), p. 137; Heckscher (1968), p. 48; Minott (1969), p. 268.

³¹Zupnick, p. 129.

³²Rousseau, p. 123.

³³Rousseau, p. 125.

³⁴Rousseau, p. 125.

³⁵Rousseau, p. 123.

³⁶Rousseau, p. 126.

³⁷Freeman, p. 136.

³⁸Helmut Nickel, "The Man Beside the Gate," Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin 24 (Apr. 1966), p. 243.

³⁹For extended interpretations of infra-red and x-ray photographs of the Merode Altarpiece, consult Frinta, Genius, pp. 13-28, and Frinta, "Authorship", pp. 247-265.

⁴⁰Suhr, p. 144.

⁴¹Suhr, p. 144.

⁴²Frinta, "Authorship", p. 258f.

⁴³Frinta, "Authorship", p. 261.

⁴⁴Suhr, p. 144.

⁴⁵Frinta, Genius, p. 21.

⁴⁶Frinta, Genius, p. 21.

⁴⁷Heckscher, p. 55.

⁴⁸Frinta, Genius, N. 10, p. 20.

⁴⁹Frinta, Genius,

⁵⁰Suhr, p. 144.

⁵¹Frinta, Genius, p. 24.

⁵²Frinta, "Authorship", p. 261.

⁵³Frinta, Genius, p. 24.

⁵⁴Rousseau, p. 126.

⁵⁵Frinta, Genius, p. 23.

⁵⁶Frinta, Genius, p. 23

⁵⁷Suhr, p. 144.

⁵⁸Frinta, Genius, p. 23.

⁵⁹Frinta, Genius, p. 23.

II. REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON THE ALTARPIECE

A. Introduction

The following overview focuses on the major scholarly contributions published on the Merode Altarpiece. These contributions - most of which are in article rather than book form - span, approximately, the last four decades, a period which saw the accomplishment of important advances in the formal-stylistic, iconographical, and laboratory analysis of historical artworks. These methodological and technological innovations in the practice of art history exercised a revolutionary effect upon the discipline as a whole, and often resulted in the re-evaluation of art-historical periods, schools, and individual artists. This was the case with the School of Early Netherlandish panel painting in particular. These advances in analytical technique served to produce the following studies which are still regarded as the basis for current opinion about the Merode Altarpiece.

Almost every study of the altarpiece tends to focus upon a single panel, and finds - whether expressly stated or not - one dominant theme in that panel. It is therefore possible to present each panel, its theme, and its corresponding research in succession. By so doing, it is also possible to segregate the previous researchers and their conclusions into camps which, I believe, have previously gone unrecognized. In general, the studies arrange themselves into the following three groups:

1. studies focusing on the center panel and the theme of the Annunciation as an ostensible event and a fulfillment of prophetic destiny within the context of history
2. studies focusing on the right wing-panel and the theme of

- the prefiguration of things occurring after the Annunciation
3. studies focusing on the left wing-panel and its thematically tangential relationship to the other two panels

B. Center Panel

Those studies which find the altarpiece's primary significance rooted in the subject matter and iconographic content of the center panel generally emphasize that the Annunciation is represented as an ostensible event co-extensive in space and time with the viewer. Some of these studies lay stress upon the spatial attributes of the event's environmental setting, while others emphasize the aspect of time. Of the latter, the dramatic process of the event figures prominently, and attempts are made to determine the exact moment of the Annunciation which is actually being depicted. Scholars in this latter group may also believe that the Annunciation is represented as an incident within the larger context of history. They essentially see the Annunciation as a dramatic turning-point, the manifest elements of which are brought to their prophetically destined fulfillment within the temporal stream of physical events.

In the 1953 paradigmatic work of scholarship on Early Netherlandish painting by Erwin Panofsky¹, the author stresses the important role which setting plays in the depiction of the Merode Annunciation, thereby emphasizing the Annunciation as an event manifest in space and time. According to Panofsky, the center panel's domestic interpretation of the theme of the Madonna of Humility was dictated by a new interest in naturalism characteristic of early fifteenth century Flemish art. However, this interest in the natural world was cleverly reconciled with the supernatural content of Christian subject matter through the innovation of

"disguised symbolism".

This innovation allowed a domestic object such as a pitcher or towel to take on hidden or disguised religious connotations while fully retaining its position in the ostensibly utilitarian scheme of everyday existence. As interpreted by Panofsky, these symbols serve, in effect, to intensify the event itself by elaborating the role of its principle player: the pot of lilies on the table is a symbol of the Virgin's chastity; the laver and basin at the back of the room refer, by way of the Song of Solomon, to her purity; the lions on the armrests of her bench refer to the Throne of Solomon (I Kings X, 18 ff.), and thus to Mary as the Throne of Wisdom. Likewise, the candlestick which holds the candle (itself a symbol for Christ) is a metaphor for the Virgin who is becoming the receptacle for the Son of God.

Although Panofsky welcomed the interpretation advanced eight years earlier by Meyer Schapiro which identifies Joseph's mousetraps (right wing-panel) as prefigurative of Christ's Crucifixion and man's Redemption, he continues to emphasize the immediate nature of the Annunciation. For him, the domestic attributes of Joseph and the artist's quest to represent three-dimensional space (despite a decorative treatment of the two-dimensional picture plane inherited from the Gothic or International Style) serve only to further emphasize the Annunciation as an occurrence independent of other events removed in place and time.²

In Charles Minott's article of 1969³, the staging of the Annunciation is also seen to be of central importance, although now "staging" is understood in a far broader sense and incorporates the concept more in its sense as a verb than a noun. Minott focuses not so much on the props themselves, but on the unfolding of the drama during

which the actors are just beginning to assume their positions. For example, where Panofsky dwells on the immediacy of the event, Minott sees the occurrence as the imminent fulfillment of historical expectations, an almost present moment dramatically intensified by virtue of its relation to historical precedents. For Minott, the Annunciation is being staged on the basis of the historical promise of a Messianic coming, and is in a sense representative of those precedents much as the flowering plant embodies within itself the seed from which it springs.

Minott holds that in the Merode Altarpiece, the Annunciation is represented as having not yet occurred: Gabriel's message has not been received by the Virgin nor is she yet aware of the Archangel's presence. Indeed, Minott believes that the viewer is confronted with the last moment of the old epoch, or Old Testament Era, as opposed to the new Christian era of the New Testament. He also believes that the theme of advent, of promise not yet manifest, is the unifying theme of the altarpiece, and that the notion that the artwork is simply an elaborate devotional picture of the Annunciation is inaccurate.

Although the author alludes to symbolism contained in the right and left wing-panels to buttress this thesis, the study essentially rests on an interpretation of the exact moment depicted in the center panel. The ax, saw, wooden rod and footstool represented at the lower edge of the right wing-panel are seen to refer to biblical predictions made by the Hebrew prophet Isaiah, and are thus in keeping with the theme of advent and the promise of the Annunciation just about to occur. However, on the basis of interpretations of the wing panels, Minott sees the theme of advent as encompassing the prefiguration of both the beginning and end of the Christian mission; that is, the Annunciation and birth as well as

the Passion and the Second Coming, rather than merely the birth of Christ. Hence, inasmuch as Minott relates the right wing-panel symbols of ax, saw, rod and footstool on the one hand, and the left wing-panel symbol of the gateman on the other, to the fulfillment of primarily post-annunciation events, I will save discussion of these interpretations until we pass on to the treatment of these panels.

It is, however, appropriate to mention here that Minott does attach prefigurative significance to certain center panel objects. The laver and towel are seen, as opposed to Panofsky's assessment, as symbols of the beginning and ending of Christ's Passion in that the laver may refer to Christ's washing of His disciple's feet, the water of which Augustine compared to the blood of Christ which fell on the ground at the Crucifixion; and the linen towel which may refer to the linen grave clothes which wrapped Christ's body. The descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a tiny infant with a cross, also depicted in the center panel, is believed to signify not only the Holy Spirit but Christ's Second Coming as well. In this, the author closely follows the observation made by Meyer Schapiro in an article of 1945. Schapiro there pointed out that instead of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, the tiny naked figure of a child with a cross is represented as passing through the window on seven rays, thus signifying not only Christ's virgin birth by the long established metaphor of light passing through glass without damaging it, but also prefiguring the coming Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Redemption. Originally seen as unorthodox in representing Christ's substantial form before the birth, the symbol gained acceptance but was seldom used in later medieval art.⁴

In brief discussion the altarpiece receives in Shirley Neilsen Blum's

1969 book⁵, the author, like Minott, maintains that the Annunciation has not yet transpired. In support of this interpretation, Blum asserts that Gabriel has not yet captured Mary's attention, has not yet fully raised his hand in a gesture of address, nor has the descent of the Holy Spirit proceeded closer to Mary than the book which lies beside her on the table with its pages just beginning to flutter with the Spirit's approach.

Carla Gottlieb, in an article published in 1970⁶, also maintains that the Annunciation is in process and has not been completed. As evidence for this she points to three details in the center panel. First, the Christ Infant descending on the sun's rays has not yet reached the Virgin. Second, the table's sixteen sides refer to the prophets of the Old Testament and is to be understood as a Hebrew altar which, with the imminent Incarnation, will come to symbolize a Christian altar and is appropriately adorned for this moment with a bible, a candle, and a vessel. And third, the stormy sky visible through the chamber's large window in contrast to the sunlit sky presumably behind the two oculus windows is supposedly a pictorial metaphor for the wrathful Ancient of Days becoming the God of Mercy through the Incarnation. For Gottlieb, the second and third details symbolize the Old Testament era giving way to the New Testament era. Also, in Christian exegesis, the rain from such storm clouds often represents the descent of Christ into Mary, therefore strengthening the Incarnational aspect of the Annunciation.

Though the Annunciation has not yet been completed, Gottlieb disagrees with Minott's interpretation that the central theme of the altarpiece concerns Advent. She believes that the Annunciation is the main theme of the altarpiece and supports this claim by almost exclusive attention to the central panel. Believing the symbolism was probably dictated to Campin by an ecclesiastical advisor, her interpretation begins

with the assertion that the Annunciation room is not a domestic chamber. Despite the presence of domestic features like the fireplace, coats-of-arms, and adjoining carpenter shop (which are left unexplained), the chamber is a sanctuary or shrine. The liturgical niche or 'piscina', its laver, the white linen, the altar, the three steps (donors' panel) which lead up to the altar platform and are an established feature of ecclesiastical architecture, and Gabriel's raiment which is likened to a deacon's, all indicate a shrine in which the Mass is to be celebrated. The deacon, in fact, serves as an assistant to the celebrant of the Mass where Jesus Himself will officiate as priest. Also, the long bench upon which Mary leans, by accident or intent, is consistent with ecclesiastical benches which were placed next to the altar in early Christian Byzantine churches.

The chamber, then, though identified as the Virgin's Hortus Conclusus, is a shrine. The key, dangling in the door of this chamber (donors' panel), features the monogram of Christ (IHC), and identifies the shrine as His. This is carried through in the symbolism of the chamber's two oculus windows. Gottlieb sees the windows as symbolizing the two natures of Christ, as the circle without beginning or end was a metaphor for God and the circle with a cross inside is a nimbus, an attribute of Christ Himself. Christ's ownership of the chamber is further reinforced by the fact that Gottlieb attaches baptismal significance to the piscina, and claims that it is therefore a symbolic reference to Christ rather than to Mary's virginal purity as other scholars have commonly supposed. However, in that this Annunciation picture does not feature a sanctuary which contains, as part of its liturgical paraphernalia, a tabernacle for the Host but instead depicts the Christ child incarnate as symbol of the Host in descent, the chamber itself becomes the tabernacle. Otherwise,

Gottlieb maintains the picture would be representing Christ Incarnate prior to the Annunciation which would be heretical.

Finally, to this Eucharistic interpretation of the room as tabernacle, Gottlieb adds the notion of the room as bridal chamber. She bases this identification on the Song of Solomon Canticle of the Old Testament which outwardly represents a lover who courts his bride to be. Christian exegesis interpreted the Canticle as signifying either the Marriage of Christ to His Bride, the community of the faithful (Church), or to His Bride, the individual human soul. The exegetes also held that it referred to both the Incarnation and Second Coming of Christ. In correlating the center panel chamber with Solomon's bridal chamber, however, Gottlieb only deals with the Incarnation and Bride-as-Church interpretations and fails to comment upon the other two meanings. For her, the wooden raftered ceiling and latticed window of the Annunciation room are in harmony with similar features described in Solomon's bridal chamber. And like the Bridegroom of the Canticle, Christ is supposed to view His Beloved within the Annunciation room through the latticework window behind Mary. At this point, however, Gottlieb fails to clarify whether we are to understand the Virgin as His Beloved, and suggests instead that the room now signifies the bodily flesh Christ is about to assume through the Incarnation. Here, as in other instances, Gottlieb forwards evidence without drawing clear conclusions about the altarpiece itself. Another criticism is that in establishing the Song of Solomon as a symbolic source for the altarpiece, Gottlieb admits the Canticle was traditionally understood to symbolize both the First or Second Comings, but only applies the former meaning. Yet, while having ignored the latter meaning entirely, she still will not grant that Minott's Advent/Second Coming interpretations

may also apply.

Finally, unlike some other scholars yet to be discussed, Gottlieb believes that all programmatic revisions were tied to and supportive of the symbolic content of the center panel.

However, there is another small group of art historians who believe that the Annunciation has occurred. Two of these scholars take this point as the primary focus of their interpretations of the center panel. A third, Margaret Freeman, I shall mention first for a single comment on the issue. Freeman states that the candle standing extinguished on the table possibly symbolizes the fact that, with the completion of the Annunciation event, God has become man.⁷

In Mojimir Frinta's examination of the Merode Altarpiece, first in a chapter of his book of 1966⁸, and then in a subsequent reworking of this material into article form in 1968⁹, the author concludes from x-ray and infra-red photographic evidence drawn from the center panel that, among other modifications, the alteration of major importance is that of the Virgin's eyes. In the present state of the panel, Mary is depicted as looking downwards. However, her eyes were at one time represented as looking in the direction of Gabriel. For Frinta, the change signifies that the artist had originally portrayed the Annunciation at its dramatic peak, just as the Archangel had begun to speak. Frinta also sees, unlike Blum's interpretation cited above, that Gabriel's right hand gesture indicates that the Archangel has begun to deliver his message. Frinta concludes that the artist decided to sacrifice the psychological dynamism of the original confrontation between the two figures for the more poised, dignified, and quiet meditative quality of the composition as it now exists.

Frinta's other comments on the center panel also deserve mention.

In his book of 1966¹⁰, the author expresses his suspicion that the clouds, seen through the Annunciation chamber's window, when compared with those of the adjacent panels, indicate that the chamber may be on the second floor rather than at ground level. He also observes the use of light as a "stimulant of mood", and that a fresh clean light is shown which casts, however, warm brown shadows in triple and quadruple bunches, thus suggesting multiple sources of light. These shadows - which differ from those cast by Gabriel and Mary - cause Frinta to conclude that the artist constructed the room and its contents from separate, individual studies, rather than from a single actual room.

It is in William Heckscher's article of 1968¹¹, however, that the drawing of complex thematic implications of the alteration of Mary's glance is aggressively undertaken. As in Minott's investigation, Heckscher addresses all three panels of the altarpiece and in so doing produces a study with two major thrusts: a focus on the precise moment of the Annunciation process shown, and an exposition of prefigurative symbolism throughout the altarpiece. As with Minott, I will reserve treatment of Heckscher's investigations beyond the center panel until discussion of those panels in the later sections of this chapter.

Unlike Minott, Blum and Gottlieb, Heckscher insists that the Annunciation has just occurred. On the basis of (presumably) the same x-ray data that Frinta consulted, which depicts the Virgin Mary with eyes raised in a room with gold windows, Heckscher contends that the original composition, planned and executed by Campin and his advisor, suffered unauthorized and drastic revisions which seriously compromised the originally unified primary painted program. The author feels that this initial program depicted the Annunciation as an accomplished event because the Virgin was not reading but made eye-contact with Gabriel;

because her pose - on the basis of a passage in the writings of St. Bernard - suggests the Annunciation has occurred; because the extinguished candle - signifying the consummation of Mary's union with God - and the direction of the curl of smoke suggest that the candle was just blown out by the upright head of the Virgin; and because the gold windows could suggest nighttime (Heckscher does not explain how), that time of day traditionally assigned to the Annunciation.

Heckscher sees the raised glance as fundamental to the fact of the Annunciation as an accomplished event, the fact of which other center panel symbols are predicated upon. For example, Heckscher sees the consummated union of God and the Virgin Mary as the prefigurative prototype for the chaste Christian marriage of the New Era just begun. Specifically, the Old Era is symbolized by the dark chasm of the fireplace ("caminus") which carries reference to the "mouth of Hell" and the darkness of the Synagogue, in opposition to the light of the Church of the New Era. The fireplace's corbel figures of a man and woman in distress provide a further contrast between marriage under the old dispensation, and the lion and dog figures of the bench which separates Mary from the fireplace and upon which she rests. Both animals express the marital virtues of fortitude and fidelity, and Heckscher cites the long-established iconographic tradition of which these figures are part. He also gives a special place to the firescreen which further separates Virgin and fireplace, but because he believes that Joseph is engaged in the manufacture of a similar firescreen, I will delay the discussion of this part of Heckscher's hypothesis until the next section.

C. Right Wing-panel

Those studies which take the right wing-panel as their focus share the conviction that the idea of the prefiguration of things to come is the primary theme of the Merode Altarpiece. Although they agree with the center panel studies just discussed, and see the Annunciation as being of principal importance, these right wing-panel studies go one step further. For them, the iconography of the right wing-panel is held to emphasize the Annunciation as prefigurative of events which occur after the Annunciation - the sacrifice of Christ and the redemption of man - rather than the Annunciation celebrated as a turning point between the Old and New Eras or as an event in itself. The distinction thus drawn may be expressed as follows:

center panel: The Annunciation generally seen as a present moment (i.e. as coextensive with the viewer) in terms of that which precedes it; as a fulfillment of past expectations

right wing-panel: emphasizes the Annunciation as a present moment in terms of that which follows it; as standing at the threshold of an entire cycle of future events.

The first study to focus exclusively on the right wing-panel and to emphasize the prefigurative significance of its iconography, was written in 1945 by Meyer Schapiro.¹² In this article, Schapiro attempts a full explication of two small box-shaped objects, similar in design and taken to be identical in purpose, which are depicted as lying upon Joseph's workbench and the shelf outside his window.

Schapiro identifies the objects as mousetraps, and bases this attribution on that forwarded by Bode in a Gazette des Beaux-Arts¹ article of 1887. Schapiro then makes the original observation that the symbolic meaning of the mousetraps is derived from St. Augustine's metaphor which draws an analogy between Christ's cross and a mousetrap on which the bait of the Savior's human flesh and the Crucifixion itself served to capture and vanquish the devil. In a more obvious way, Schapiro points out, the center panel's tiny figure of a "soul-homunculus" Christ child with cross, depicted in diagonal descent towards the Virgin Mary (thus replacing the Holy Spirit represented in the form of a dove), also prefigures the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Redemption.

Schapiro then discusses the relationship of the mousetrap to Joseph. Not only does Joseph, as carpenter, build these symbolic devil-traps, but in his role as husband to the Virgin, tradition held that he helped in the devil's deception and capture by hiding the fact of the miraculous virgin birth which the devil might have suspected had Mary been unwed. Schapiro traces this familial, domestic aspect of the saint, along with the unusual prominence the artist has afforded him in terms of scale and proximity to Gabriel and the Virgin, to the influence of a new interest in Joseph contemporaneous with the altarpiece. Active in the first decades of the fifteenth century, this cult was headed by two influential conservative church reformers who had held posts in Flanders; Peter d'Ailly (1363-1425) and his onetime pupil, John Gerson (1363-1429).

Finally, Schapiro extrapolates secondary meanings of the mousetraps. On one hand, the mousetrap is a domestic fixture and is an instrument of cleanliness. For this reason, Schapiro believes that, like the towel and basin of water in the center panel, the mousetrap participates in the symbolism of purity which refers to the Virgin. On the other hand, in

the Middle Ages the mouse acquired erotic and diabolic associations, and on the basis of a Freudian psychoanalytic interpretation, Schapiro maintains that the mousetrap must therefore represent subconscious and repressed erotic desires and lofty spiritual content simultaneously.

Although Schapiro's identification and interpretation of the right wing-panel's two box-shaped objects was accepted by scholars for almost two decades (Panofsky, 1953; Freeman, 1957), Irving Zupnick challenged the identification in an article of 1962¹³, while still supporting the panel's essential prefigurative significance as established by Schapiro. Due to the fact that no documentary evidence exists to support or disprove the mousetrap attribution, Zupnick suggests that these objects may be identified, with equal justification (and lack of historical evidence), as carpenter's planes. In a response published six months later¹⁴, John Jacob produced evidence which strongly suggested that the objects in question were not carpenter's planes, and by means of a wooden reconstruction of the "mousetrap" represented on Joseph's workbench, was able to catch a mouse. Subsequent studies (Heckscher, 1968; Minott, 1969; Lavin, 1977) consistently reaffirm Schapiro's mousetrap identification and Augustinian interpretation of its significance.

In the aforementioned 1963 article by Charles Minott, which focuses in part on the center panel, the ax, saw, rod, and footstool shown at Joseph's feet are interpreted on the basis of biblical, apocryphal, and Augustinian texts as instruments used by God to overthrow the devil and, as such, as reinforcements of the mousetrap symbolism. Specifically, the ax represents the preaching and redemption through baptism of John the Baptist, the saw signifies Isaiah and his messianic prophecies, and the footstool and rod refer to Joseph and his role in the incarnation of

the Messiah. As such, these instruments refer to events leading towards the fulfillment of Christ's mission on earth, and Minott sees them primarily as symbols of man's salvation through the advent of Christ. Consistent with this, Minott also sees the white pebble on Joseph's workbench as that referred to in Revelation 2:17 and Isaiah 6:6; salvation symbols of purgation and innocence. Finally, Minott also sees a prefigurative thrust to the altarpiece because the Advent theme (treated above in the discussion of the center panel) is felt to extend to the advent of Christ at the end of the world as well as the Christian era itself as an advent or 'pascha' (spiritual presence of Christ in the world), and especially because the descent of the Christ infant with a cross in the center panel is a clear portent of Christ's next appearance on earth.¹⁵

To return briefly to the mousetrap theme, the skepticism expressed by Irving Zupnick and cited above regarding the Schapiro identification, did not prevent Zupnick from asserting - in that same article of 1966 - that the small rectangular board into which Joseph is drilling holes may however be a "maze-like trap" for mice which utilizes dowels. He cites historical evidence of a mousetrap consisting of a rectangular board, and perhaps dowelling (but certainly no maze, and the example is quite dissimilar from his own speculative version). Zupnick also questions Schapiro's belief that Joseph's domestic aspect derives from Gerson's special veneration of Joseph, and proposes the secular influence occupational guilds were exerting at this time as a more plausible source. However, this alternate mousetrap theory continues to support the Augustinian mousetrap metaphor Schapiro originally proposed, and therefore advocates the prefigurative significance of the Annunciation.

A number of other interpretations of Joseph's board, though at

variance with one another regarding its identity and purpose, are generally in agreement concerning its prefigurative symbolism. Only two interpretations of this board fail to see any prefigurative significance. In Panofsky's book of 1953¹⁶, which concentrated more on the significance of the center panel of the triptych, the author tentatively suggests that the board which Joseph perforates resembles the lid of the footwarming stool represented in the seventeenth century Dutch painting by Vermeer entitled *The Milkmaid*, a device which could presumably be activated by placing a pan of steaming water beneath a ventilated footrest. The domestic connotations this attribution shared with the interior objects in the center panel were apparently sufficient justification for this interpretation. Secondly, in the Minott article cited above, the author casually proposes in a footnote entry¹⁷ that the board may be a rack to hold the rods of Mary's suitors..

The majority of scholars have, however, seen the board in prefigurative terms. Margaret Freeman, in an article of 1957¹⁸, interprets the object as a spikeblock, a piece of wood studded with exposed nail points. In fifteenth century Netherlandish illustrations, such objects hang from Christ's belt-sash, striking his legs and feet as he carries the cross up to Golgotha. In an article published two years later, Charles de Tolnay gave support to the spikeblock thesis.¹⁹ But, in the Zupnick article discussed above, the author objects that there are no spikes shown in the right wing-panel that would fit the holes which Joseph drills, and that Freeman's interpretation is difficult to accept because it sees Joseph preparing instruments of torture for his own son.

In 1959, Meyer Schapiro identified the perforated board as the lid of a box in which live fish could be stored as bait.²⁰ The only

corroborative historical evidence he was able to offer was a Netherlandish manuscript illumination of 1440 in which an almond-shaped container with a perforated lid is shown floating on a pond. Schapiro assumed that the object was a container for storing live fish (not shown) and also that these fish are being kept alive for use as bait. This latter point is essential to his contention that the Merode Joseph is depicted in the act of constructing a bait box, and that the idea of bait and captured fish²¹, as the fish is a symbol for Christ, carries the same prefigurative meaning as do the mousetraps in the same panel.

The interpretation of Joseph's board forwarded by Marilyn Lavin in an article of 1977²², expands the scope of the altarpiece's prefigurative symbolism. Lavin's identification of Joseph's object as the center-board of the strainer of a small winepress serves to symbolically encompass not only Christ's Passion and Crucifixion, but man's redemption through the Eucharistic sacrifice enacted in the Mass upon the altar as well. The winepress is seen to represent the concept of Christ as the Mystic Winepress, a metaphor which is part of a European visual iconographic tradition dating back to at least the twelfth century and rooted in passages in Isaiah and Augustine.

I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. (Isaiah 63:3)

In this tradition, Christ is shown being crushed in a winepress while the blood from His wounds is captured in a Eucharistic chalice below. As Lavin points out, the board Joseph works upon is the focal point of the panel; it is where Joseph concentrates all his energy and attention. It is therefore logical that it should serve as the keystone

of the iconographic program as well. Therefore, whereas Lavin believes that previous interpretations of the board (Freeman, Schapiro, Zupnick, Minott, and Heckscher) merely repeat ideas embodied elsewhere in the altarpiece, her interpretation carries the general symbolism of the artwork to a higher level by including Eucharistic associations. Such associations become especially relevant within the context of an artwork intended to adorn an altar and become part of the Eucharistic rite as it was there practiced and experienced.

In the seventh and final interpretation made to date concerning the board's identity and purpose (though Lavin's is chronologically the most recent), William Heckscher's article of 1968²³, which takes the center panel as its primary focus, offers yet another possibility. While the symbolic meaning Heckscher discovers still occupies the prefigurative category, it varies from the more standard Passional-Redemptive varieties encountered above.

In this article the author identifies the board into which Joseph drills as a fireplace screen in the making, similar to the one depicted in the center panel with its holes filled with solid nails with painted heads. As was discussed in the previous section on the center panel, Heckscher saw the screen mediating between the Virgin (New Era/light of the Church) and the sooty fireplace representing the Old Era, Synagogue, and even the "mouth of Hell". In that the screen thus protects the Virgin from this demonic chasm, the fact that Joseph is supposedly engaged in its manufacture, reinforces his role as a devil-deceiver and protector of his wife and his child to be. In the former section, reference was made to Heckscher's conclusion that the fireplace's corbel figures and the lion and dog figures occupying the Virgin's bench prefigured marriage

under the New Law in contrast to marriage under the Old Law. He also pointed out that the ideal of this new Christian marriage, the union of the Virgin with God, had its counterpart in the chaste marriage of Joseph and Mary. Heckscher cited the cult of Joseph, to which Schapiro had earlier referred, as the unquestionable thematic source of such ideas. Therefore, by virtue of Joseph's role as participant in this New Era marriage, another form of prefigurative symbolism may be said to exist in the Joseph panel. This prefigurative marriage symbolism must also, by implication, be extended to Joseph's firescreen-board itself. This is because the firescreen in the center panel, by protecting Mary, protects the marital prototype as well.

D. Left Wing-panel

Unlike the center and right wing-panels, the interpretations of the left wing-panel generally find that its content is tangential to that of the center and right wing-panels. The two versions of this interpretation see the panel as either supporting important themes introduced already in the other panels, or as superficial and detracting from the rest of the program. Both types of interpretation have arisen because the left wing-panel is generally believed, on the basis of both stylistic and x-ray/infra-red photographic evidence, to differ substantially from its original state because of several possible additions. In consequence, the panel is demoted in significance so that it either does or does not respond to themes these scholars see embodied elsewhere. The fact that the left wing-panel is seen to be less important than the other two panels of the triptych may also reflect the general belief that donors in a painting occupy a secondary position to the main action.

1. the panel as programmatically consistent

The initial attempts to deal in an iconographically and technically substantive way with the left wing-panel appeared in 1957 in the form of three articles in the Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin. These articles were occasioned by the acquisition of the altarpiece in 1957 and its subsequent restoration by William Suhr. The restoration itself, which included laboratory and x-ray analysis, demonstrated that the panel had probably undergone extensive additions.

William Suhr showed that where the red garment worn by the donatrix had flaked, the green background color of the grass showed through, unlike the donor where the space had been reserved.²⁴ Because it was unusual to overpaint an area as large as that needed for the female donor, she seems to have been added to the composition later.

In the companion article by Theodore Rousseau, the author points to the windows in the center panel, where blue sky and two stained glass family crests were painted over an originally gold ground consisting of yellow glazes over silver foil. The coats-of-arms, representing most likely the families of the donor and donatrix, were thought to have been added at the same time the donatrix was squeezed into the composition. According to Rousseau, this occurred either when the bachelor/widower had become married or, because the woman wears no wedding ring, when they were betrothed. For this reason, Rousseau believes that the bearded man shown standing next to the gate in the background is a marriage broker. Although the examination of the panel revealed that he was also painted over the grass and wall, which suggests that he was added upon the betrothal as was the donatrix, Rousseau reminds us that, for small figures of this kind, overpainting rather than reserving clean panel space was

the rule, and so cannot be taken as conclusive evidence that he was added when she was.²⁵

In the third of the 1957 articles referred to above, Margaret Freeman speaks of the left wing-panel as symbolically consistent with the center panel. According to Freeman, the open door, which apparently allows the donors to observe the Annunciation occurring within, contradicts passages in St. Bernard and elsewhere which describe the Annunciation chamber as closed. However, she does suggest that the door may have been represented as open to allow the donors to participate in the event. If this were the case, it would most likely reflect the influence of Jacobus de Voraigne's, The Golden Legend (Legenda Sanctorum, late 13th c.), which recounts how the Virgin opened the gate of paradise for all men which had been originally closed by Eve. Freeman sees the donor's panel setting as very consistent with the content of the center panel. The walled garden is a symbol of Mary's virginity, the rose is a symbol of her charitable love, and the rosebud tucked in the donor's hat may signify his devotion to the Virgin. Further, the rosebush climbing the garden wall refers to the martyrdom of Christ and his suffering on the cross and therefore possesses the prefigurative import we have seen associated with the other panels as well.²⁶

Helmut Nickel, in his article of 1966 which is devoted exclusively to an examination of the left wing-panel, also sees the enclosed rose garden as a parallel to the chamber of the Virgin. However, the focus of his study centers on the identity and symbolic function of the man shown beside the gate in the background.

Nickel begins by establishing that, on the basis of dress and direction of eyes, the previous identification of this man as a self-

portrait of the artist, a varlet/servant, or a marriage broker, must be discounted. He then shows that the wide cloak, rugged garments, and especially the gateman's purse and badge, indicate that he is a personal-municipal messenger of the City of Malines, from which the donor's and donatrix' families hailed according to the family crests represented in the center panel's window panes. This identification is further strengthened by the magpie which sits on a crenelation directly above the gateman's head, which is itself a symbol of the messenger.

The identification of the gateman as a messenger is especially significant because it relates left wing-panel themes to similar themes in the center panel. Specifically, because the messenger role applies to both the gateman and Gabriel, groups of figures in the donor's panel echo similar groups in its neighbor. For example, the bearded messenger stands in the rose garden just at the messenger Gabriel stands in the Virgin's chamber which is itself a symbolic correlate of the enclosed garden. A more significant parallel, however, is that the messenger stands in relation to the two donors outside somewhat as Gabriel stands to the two figures of Mary and Joseph within the house.

A further iteration of themes represented more fully in center and right wing-panels, also exists in the symbolism of the four birds perched upon the wall behind and above the donors. The magpie, as messenger, refers to the Incarnation, and the European robin, with the blood-red breast, the gold finch, which feeds on the thorny thistle, and the sparrow, which doesn't fall but for God's will, all stand for Christ's Passion. As such, the left wing-panel participates in the prefigurative symbolism dealt with in our previous discussions of the center and right wing-panels. Finally, Nickel points to the white horse which we see through the open door to the left of the standing messenger. The author identifies the

horse as a symbol of lust and believes that the fact that only the door, and not the larger gate of which the door is part, is open, is a sign that the garden/Virgin is protected from such influences.²⁷

In Minott's article of 1969, the gateman again serves to symbolically complement themes found in the other two panels of the altarpiece. For Minott, the bearded figure is Isaiah represented in the midst of his prophetic vision of the descent into Incarnation, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection of the Son of God, according to the apocryphal Ascension of Isaiah. Minott accepts Nickel's identification of the figure as a civic messenger, and points out that Isaiah was himself appointed God's messenger to Jerusalem. The twelve pearls surrounding the messenger's badge further constitute another municipal reference, specifically to Jerusalem, now in its aspect as the Heavenly City where the gates "were twelve pearls", as recorded in the Book of Revelation (21:21) which itself follows Isaiah 54. The identification of the gateman as Isaiah thus allows the theme of the Christian season of Advent, which Minott believes pervades the altarpiece, to resonate in the donors' panel as well.²⁸

Carla Gottlieb's 1970 article, discussed earlier, makes only a few references to symbolism beyond the central panel of the Altarpiece. The key hanging from the door of the donors' panel is identified as belonging to the outer gate. Its IHC monogram identifies the dwelling as belonging to Christ, into which the donors have been admitted by virtue of their gift of the altarpiece to the Church. The three steps before them lead to the central panel chamber which Gottlieb has identified as a shrine. These steps function, she believes, as the traditional three steps before the altar platform, serve to prepare man for the spiritual experience the

shrine permits, and may exegetically represent the martyrs and Virtues who ascend to God. She also identifies the gateman as the artist himself though she offers no reason for this assignation. Unlike the studies to be reviewed in the following, Gottlieb holds that revisions of the donors' panel are tied to and consistent with the symbolism of the center panel.²⁹

2. the panel as programmatically inconsistent

Studies which see the left wing-panel as more or less disconnected from the rest of the altarpiece find that the panel, in comparison to its neighbors, is weak or inconsistent on qualitative, stylistic, compositional, or thematic grounds. Two scholars have proposed that such failings are due to the fact that an artist other than Robert Campin painted this panel.

Heckscher's study of 1968 sees the panel as compositionally weak and serving as a disruptive influence to themes he believes are primary in the center panel. Citing that the panel has a number of obvious alterations and additions, he curiously identifies the bearded man in the background as both a marriage broker and as part of the original composition (despite Nickel's earlier evidence in favor of his identification as a civic messenger); the female donor he believes to be a later addition. The broker attribution is odd because the addition of the donatrix upon her betrothal/marriage to the donor would be the expected time to add the bearded man if he were indeed a marriage broker as Heckscher suggests. However, the problem her addition causes - in Heckscher's mind - is that upon the couple's betrothal/marriage, the

windows in the center panel were painted over with a sunlit sky and the stained glass crests of the donor's respective families. This meant covering the original gold which filled the windows and which Heckscher feels can be interpreted as indicating night, when the Annunciation is said to have occurred. He therefore believes that the overpainting is iconographically misleading.

Heckscher also sees that the donors are done in an "uninspired style" and that the wooden, nail-studded door to their right is poorly executed in comparison to the treatment of the wooden ceiling beams seen in center panel and right wing. He goes on to say that the key in the lock along with its dangling partner, may indicate that the door is about to be closed and locked. For Heckscher, this would make sense because the fact that the Annunciation chamber has an open door through which the donors may look is inconsistent with the chamber as a traditionally closed and private place. Again, the door opening out into the donors' panel is felt to detract from the thematic integrity of the center panel.³⁰ Margaret Freeman, in her earlier study of 1957, also felt that the open door was in conflict with the tradition of the Annunciation as having occurred within a closed chamber, as had been described by St. Bernard and others, although she tentatively offered the possibility that its position was either to allow the donors to participate in the event, or was a symbol of the Virgin's having opened the gate of paradise which Eve had closed, as Voraigue had put it in his book, *The Golden Legend*.³¹

The two studies by Mojmir Frinta (1966, 1968) rely heavily upon formal, x-ray, and infra-red photographic evidence to support the position that the donor panel must be differentiated from the rest of the

altarpiece as the work of another artist. On this basis, he groups the center and right wing panels and refers to them as 'A', while calling the left wing-panel 'B'. He believes that the original conception in A was adhered to in general whereas in B the original conception was altered radically. In support of this conclusion he points out that the donatrix was painted over a finished surface rather than a reserved area which is confirmed by the slight extension of masonry from the background wall which is visible through her veil. The fact that her head was painted on a patch of white paint which was purposely applied over the original painted ground to cancel it out also supports this contention. X-ray and infra-red photographs further reveal the existence of architectural shapes (roofs, dormers, chimneys) behind the painted sky in panel B's upper left hand corner. And finally, the large amount of pentimenti in B, as compared to the few instances of overpainting in A, is seen as yet another example of the radical alterations panel B sustained. However, for Frinta, these alterations do not mean that the original composition was harmonious with the A panels, but suggest instead that a less decisive, less able, and less experienced hand - probably that of a younger assistant - was involved.

These alterations are not the main focus of Frinta's study. The discontinuities between the A and B panels derive from a difference in artistic approach and conception. Although Frinta does detect an effort, on the behalf of this supposed second artist, to match and be consistent with the A panels - as in the appropriation of background buildings in the right wing-panel for the gateway vista, or the door opening used to link the donor and center panel which do not match in height - basic compositional disparities remain unresolved.

Frinta uses the younger assistant theory to explain why B is less successful than A, although it is in many ways more sophisticated. That is, B is seen by Frinta to be less archaic than A, reflecting a more advanced painterly conception of subtle color, homogeneous light diffusion, and convincing object textures, as was characteristic of the more advanced styles of Van Eyck or Van der Weyden. However, Frinta also sees that these conceptions were nonetheless applied in a less integrated and less masterly fashion than Campin achieved in the A panels. Frinta suggests that a younger assistant, more attuned to the developments of the second generation of the Flemish school, and perhaps working a decade later, could explain the differences. This would tally with the fact that most scholars, he says, feel that time elapsed between the execution of the A and B panels. For Frinta, elements like the "ghost architecture" and the gateway, were part of an original compositional scheme that was superseded or updated, as it were, when the altarpiece possibly changed hands. Frinta believes that drawings beneath the male donor's face indicate that the original donor was someone else. He feels that the original scheme was never fully completed and that when, as new owner, the presently depicted male donor assumed ownership, his face, the figure of his wife, and other alterations and additions - like the coats-of-arms in the center panel windows - were made. The contrasts Frinta cited run as follows.

First, the B elements, which reflect a more advanced stage of stylistic means, are seen to be more sophisticated in the use of color. In B, color is used to define shape (contour) rather than form (i.e. three dimensional extension through modelling), as in the A panels. Also in B, warmer colors are used, and their tonal range is both narrower

and subtler. In essence, Frinta sees the use of light as it affects color in B, as opposed to the use of light as it affects form in the A panels. Furthermore, in B, overlapping is a fundamental spatial device whereas overlapping is minimized in A. However, the quality of space is not as well orchestrated in B as in A. Panel B does not harmonize with the rather centripetal A panels. Besides exhibiting a flatter perspective and less sculptural object treatment, B's figural scale is larger than that applied in the A panels where Gabriel, Mary and Joseph are noticeably smaller. The objects in the left wing-panel are also inconsistent in scale with one another: the rosebush and gateman, who occupy the same plane, are horribly mismatched, as are the birds and the gatehouse upon which they perch, or the donor and the door in front of him. The door poses other problems as well, for it fails to coincide exactly with the opening through which Gabriel seems to have entered. In all, the spatial transitions are rough in B but smooth in A. Also, the placement of objects is somewhat haphazard in B as opposed to the deft placements of objects in the A panels. The overall effect is that the left wing-panel is less spontaneous and exciting than the more visually engaging and tightly woven tapestry of elements in the A panels.³²

Lorne Campbell's article of 1974 seems to take up Frinta's suggestion that the left wing-panel is the work of an assistant or pupil of Campin. Like Frinta, Campbell sees the panel as weak because of its incoherent design, mismatch of door to opening, improper scale relationship of objects depicted within the panel, and the rather shapeless mass of the donor himself. However, this leads him to quite different conclusions from those drawn by Frinta. For Campbell, the entire three panel work was executed by one "Merode Master", a pupil or assistant of

Campin. Although the donor panel is the weakest of the three, it is the only panel the Merode Master may be credited with. The tighter compositions of the other two panels are explained, Campbell feels, by the fact that they consist of borrowings from paintings by the Master of Flemalle alias Robert Campin, with which this student/assistant would have been familiar. Campbell thus believes that it is this additive conception which utilized portions of disparate paintings which explains why scholars have been unable to demonstrate the existence of a convincingly coherent iconographic program.³³

II. NOTES

¹Panofsky, ENP.

²Panofsky, ENP, pp. 141-143, 164, 165.

³Minott, pp. 267-271.

⁴Schapiro, "Muscipula", p. 183. In the article preceeding Schapiro's, Millard Meiss discussed the ray-through-glass simile in more detail. (Millard Meiss, "Light as Form and Symbol in Some Fifteenth-Century Paintings," Art Bulletin 27 (Sept. 1945), pp. 175-181.) According to Meiss, this symbolic image developed no later than the ninth-century (Meiss, p. 177) and several later medieval examples of its use are supplied, including that of St. Bernard: "Just as brilliance of the sun fills and penetrates a glass window without damaging it, and pierces its solid form with imperceptible subtlety, neither hurting it when entering nor destroying it when emerging: thus the word of God, the splendor of the Father, entered the Virgin chamber and then came forth from the closed Womb" (Meiss, p. 176). Meiss goes on to mention how, around the twelfth century, "the Holy Spirit acquires human form by entering the sacred chamber or temple of the Virgin" (Meiss, p. 177). Finally, it is pointed out that in late medieval paintings containing visual reference to this simile, the number of rays may vary from three, symbolizing the Trinity, to twelve. Seven rays, however, refer to the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, and it is this number which is represented in the Merode Annunciation as well as in the Washington Annunciation by Jan Van Eyck (Meiss, p. 178).

⁵Blum, p. 9f.

⁶Carla Gottlieb, "Respiciens per Fenestras: The Symbolism of the Merode Altarpiece," Oud Holland 85 (1970), pp. 65-84.

⁷Freeman, p. 134.

⁸Frinta, Genius, pp. 13-28.

⁹Frinta, "Authorship", pp. 247-265.

¹⁰Frinta, Genius, pp. 15, 17f.

¹¹Heckscher, pp. 37-65.

¹²Schapiro, "Muscipula", pp. 182-187.

- ¹³Zupnick, pp. 126-133.
- ¹⁴John Jacob, Letter ["The Merode Mousetrap"], Burlington Magazine 108 (July 1966), pp. 373f. (Fig. on p. 372).
- ¹⁵Minott, pp. 267-269.
- ¹⁶Panofsky, ENP, p. 164.
- ¹⁷Minott, N. 14, p. 268.
- ¹⁸Freeman, pp. 130-139.
- ¹⁹Charles de Tolnay, "L'autel Merode du Maître de Flemalle," Gazette des Beaux-Arts, 6^e Periode, 101 (Feb. 1959), pp. 65-78.
- ²⁰Schapiro, "Note".
- ²¹That is, if one reads Schapiro's meaning correctly as expressed in N. 9, p. 327, which is not altogether clear in its message.
- ²²Lavin, pp. 297-301 (and Figs. 1-8, vol. 2).
- ²³Heckscher, pp. 37-65.
- ²⁴Suhr, p. 144.
- ²⁵Rousseau, p. 125, 126.
- ²⁶Freeman, p. 135, 136.
- ²⁷Nickel, pp. 237, 238, 242, 243, 244.
- ²⁸Minott, pp. 269, 271.
- ²⁹Gottlieb, "Respiciens", pp. 68, 73, 84.
- ³⁰Heckscher, pp. 45, 46f.
- ³¹Freeman, p. 135.
- ³²Frinta, Genius, pp. 13-17, 23-25, 27, "Authorship", pp. 262-264, 248-250, 255-257.
- ³³Campbell, pp. 643-646.

III. INADEQUACY OF RESEARCH TO IDENTIFY THE MAIN THEME OF THE ALTARPIECE

A. Introduction

The salient characteristic of the research on the Merode Altarpiece is that it is fragmentary. It is fragmentary in its aims, methods, and results, for the reader of such research is left with an incomplete sense of the artwork. The present chapter will attempt to establish a critical foundation for this claim, and will be assessing the former research on the basis of its ability to identify the main theme of the altarpiece.

To begin, the fragmentary impression which the former research conveys of the altarpiece does not simply result from the fact that different scholars have offered different interpretations of the artwork. The problem is of a much more fundamental nature. With the following quotation as the only real scholarly exception, the basic question as to what is the artwork's organizing principle has been neither properly asked nor conscientiously pursued. In his 1969 article on the altarpiece, Charles Minott states:

Still missing from the many studies of the painting, however, is any evidence of a unifying theme that would link together all of its symbolic images. In fact, it seems never to have been suggested that such a theme might actually exist. Robert Campin is usually said to have worked in an additive style wherein detailed portions of his works join to form a whole that has an archaic lack of articulation. This stylistic approach has been equated with the artist's methodology in assembling symbol-bearing devices in the Virgin's room, in the garden forecourt where the donors kneel, and in St. Joseph's carpentry shop. But such an equation is misleading, and it has rendered inconclusive all attempts to interpret the symbolism of the elements thus isolated. The traditional interpretation of the Merode Altarpiece as simply an elegant devotional picture of the Annunciation, albeit with many unusual side-effects, must be revised.¹

In making this statement, Minott was referring to many of the

scholars I am about to review, and the footnotes in his article make explicit reference to the studies of Schapiro (1945, 1959), Panofsky, Nickel, Zupnick, Frinta (1968), and Heckscher.

Generally, the attention which research has given to the main theme ranges from an avoidance of the question of its existence, to weak and unsystematically formulated proposals, to outright denials that a thematic organizing principle even exists. Specifically, each past research study proposes one or more of three following possibilities:

1. an implied but unstated theme
2. a supporting theme which is mistaken for the main theme
3. uncertainty regarding the nature or existence of the main theme
(because supposed programmatic alterations render it inaccessible or because a main theme for the work is assumed to have never existed)

In the following, the studies within each of these three categories of 'thematic proposition' will be examined as separate groups.

B. Three Ways the Main Theme Has Escaped Proper Identification

1. main theme by implication, not demonstration

Only Panofsky's study of the altarpiece (1953) occupies this category. Underlying Panofsky's habit of treating the individual iconographic symbols (iconographs) of a program as separate entities without specific relation to one another, is the implication that these symbols are generally compatible in meaning because they share a common reference and origin. This common reference is to Christianity as represented in text, doctrine, and tradition. This implied but unstated "common reference"

is really a type of theme, although it is never overtly stated as such by Panofsky, and may be called the 'Christian common denominator'. It implies, contrary to historical evidence, that (1) a single, homogeneous doctrine of Christian thought existed at the time the altarpiece was painted, (2) that the artist subscribed to it, and (3) that such a body of unified thought must therefore stand behind and link all the symbols in the painted program. Having made this three-fold assumption, it became unnecessary for Panofsky to demonstrate that each symbol reflects a common tradition of belief. It is this imagined unified body of thought which for Panofsky takes the place of an outwardly stated theme or organizing principle for the painting.

A rendition of this same "common denominator" theme derives from Panofsky's theory of "disguised symbolism", which was described in the previous chapter. In that this theory of symbolism holds that many of the physical objects represented in the painting also participate in a text-based spiritual level of meaning and existence as well, a common thematic ground in which all objects are symbolically rooted is again implied. The net effect is, at best, to suggest that general thematic continuity exists within the artwork rather than a specific organizing principle which an overt demonstration would be needed to show.

By way of introduction to the following two thematic categories, it is important to realize that both Panofsky's interest in disguised symbolism and his method of analyzing each iconograph in relative isolation from the rest of a program's iconography created something of a revolution in the study of Early Netherlandish paintings. As a result, the following studies on the Merode Altarpiece which I will review all took their cue from Panofsky's model. However, the failure of all these

studies (including Panofsky's) to identify the main theme, as I will argue in more depth later on, has its origins in Panofsky's model as well. Briefly, this is because Panofsky emphasized the symbolic part rather than the symbolic whole, and it is in the symbolic whole that the organizing or central theme of any artistic production is to be found. By their very nature, then, I contend that the iconographic studies which Panofsky's example spawned, have been unable to achieve the breadth of vision required for the discovery of the altarpiece's main theme.

2. supporting themes mistaken for the main theme

Those studies which take a sub-theme for the main theme do so by confusing the latter with the apparent subject matter of the altarpiece: the Annunciation. This is problematic for two reasons. First, in artworks where complex symbolism is employed, multiple levels of meaning may be operative. As a result, the ostensible subject matter may be at variance with both major and minor thematic meanings. However, if the thematic meaning is different from the apparent subject matter, one must ultimately conclude that the subject matter has a different meaning as well. Secondly, without now revealing the conclusions of the present study, it is still necessary here to assert that there is reason to believe that the Annunciation, as usually understood, is not the main theme of the Merode Altarpiece, but is a sub-theme instead. Beyond this, the very fact that few studies have attempted to demonstrate that all iconography and all sub-themes vibrate to their favored theme, strains their credibility because, technically, a theme cannot even be assumed to be central without a demonstration of its universal presence throughout a program. The failure of individual research studies to (1) approach all

three panels of the altarpiece with equal thoroughness, and (2) to square their findings with those of other scholars, has meant that the rule of "universal presence", that is, that the proposed central theme is consistent with all other content, has never even been applied to their own thematic conclusions.

Our first group of scholars see the Annunciation as the main subject matter of the altarpiece and automatically take it to be the self-evident main theme of the altarpiece as well. They take the event at face value and without qualification, unlike other studies which haggle over whether the Annunciation has or has not yet occurred. Despite Panofsky's (1953) implicit "common denominator" theme discussed above, his study grants an equally implicit main theme status to the Annunciation itself. It does so in that Panofsky's emphasis on Christian tradition, and the logical centrality of Christ's Incarnation within it, causes his common denominator concept to fuse with the Annunciation subject matter he identifies in the Altarpiece, forming a practically seamless pseudo-thematic unit. Rousseau (1957) also seems to accept the Annunciation as pivotal as does Nickel (1967), whose study of the donors' wing identified ideas in that panel which he predicated upon the Annunciation theme in the central panel.

The rest of this group of scholars seem also to accept the Annunciation as the main subject and main theme, but do so with certain qualifications. Frinta (1966, 1968), Heckscher (1968), Blum (1969), Minott (1969), and Gottlieb (1970) emphasize the importance of knowing the exact moment of the Annunciation event depicted in the central panel, for this moment indicates how the theme of the Annunciation is to be understood. To Heckscher, for example, the moment and idea of 'conception',

and the contrast between the Old and New Eras is paramount. To Minott, the Annunciation-about-to-occur is merely a sub-theme of the theme of Advent. This is because the Annunciation is only the first of a series of three such Advents which he sees symbolized in the artwork. However, I include his study in the present category because according to my own findings advent, as understood by Minott, is still a secondary or support theme for the main theme. It should also be pointed out that Minott is the only scholar reviewed who explicitly speaks about the Merode Altarpiece as having a main theme. Gottlieb sees the Annunciation as the main theme of the Altarpiece but points to the Eucharistic and exegetical symbolism of the center panel which emphasizes the Annunciation as the transition from the Old to New Eras and the marriage of God to His Bride, the Church. However, she does not deal sufficiently with the triptych's other two panels, fails to test her results against those of other research studies, and arbitrarily dismisses alternate Bride symbolism which her exegetical sources present. Also, she admits that her sources simultaneously permit Advent as well as Annunciation-related interpretations of the altarpiece, pursues only the latter, but then rejects Minott's Advent findings without due cause. As will be shown, her Eucharistic marriage theme is only one of several supporting themes.

Schapiro (1945, 1959), Freeman (1957), Zupnick (1966), and Lavin (1977) also give implicit testimony of the centrality of the Annunciation in the altarpiece. The prefigurative symbolism they discover in the center panel and in the Joseph panel iconography is all related, they think, to the Annunciation as the thematic axis of the altarpiece.

The main problem with these studies is that the theme which each promotes as central is not shown to be consistently set forth in all

three panels of the altarpiece.

3. main theme as uncertain

There is a final collection of studies in which explicitly or implicitly, the existence of the artwork's central theme is placed in doubt. In the study by Panofsky (1953), in which no central theme is overtly cited but the "common denominator"/Annunciation theme is implicit, a third and possibly contradictory assertion is made. In speaking of the altarpiece Panofsky states, ". . . the Merode Annunciation strikes us as being primarily conceived in terms of surface relations and only secondarily in terms of space relations", and shortly thereafter observes that Campin, ". . . embroiders the pictorial surface into a decorative pattern so densely woven that we may speak of horror vacui. Every inch is covered with form."² In essence, Panofsky proposes the existence of a decorative organizational principle while having failed to offer a specific thematic one. The question as to whether formal-stylistic relations are predicated on thematic ones is not considered, tending to promote the long-standing notion that, in matters of "style", form and content are to be considered separately. If, in following Panofsky, one accepts that decorative continuity is not necessarily connected to thematic coherence, then the very existence and concept of a main theme is called into question. This is because a main theme informs all aspects of a program. As such, aesthetic content cannot be separated from thematic content, although the concepts of "decoration" and "style" attempt to do just that.

A common way in which the existence of a main theme is made doubtful is found in studies which challenge the presence or continuity of artistic intention within the painted program. Schapiro (1945) raises doubts

about the uniformity of intent, and thus theme, when he conjectures that the mousetrap in the Joseph panel carries sexual connotations which represent the repressed sexual feeling of the artist. Pseudo-psychological conjectures of this sort - which were once in vogue - are now generally recognized as false on the basis of method alone. They do not obey the rules of scholarly proposition or evidence in that they are presented as self-evident, and are often untestable by virtue of the fact that such observations do not arise out of, but are rather projected upon, the evidence. Also, it is not historically valid to automatically superimpose psychological characteristics observed in late-19th and 20th century individuals onto a man of the 15th century.

In addition, Schapiro fails to realize that his notions of the artist's repressed feelings implicitly contradict his own statements regarding the obvious instances of artistic intention within the triptych. For example, if as Schapiro claims, Campin knew of the sexual connotations surrounding mice, his choice to incorporate mousetraps into the picture would be a conscious one, and cannot then be attributed to repressed feelings or unconscious desires. A larger strain on our credibility, however, is the proposal that an artist who knew of these associations would wish to incorporate rather than ignore them if they contradicted the sacred subject matter and theme which he took such meticulous care in orchestrating. Hence, by suggesting unconscious iconographic meanings, Schapiro seems to depreciate the very concept of the main theme as an expression of the continuity of artistic intent.

Studies which may seem to question the altarpiece's visible program on the basis of x-ray and infra-red photographic evidence also may seem to challenge the continuity of intention - and therefore of theme -

within the painting. Suhr (1957) and Rousseau (1957) believed that x-ray evidence indicated that the female donor was added, her cramped positioning within the panel taken as further evidence that she was not part of the original thematic program. Frinta (1966, 1968) not only uses such evidence to confirm that the donatrix was not part of the original program, but believes that compositional and stylistic incongruities between the donor's wing and the other two panels imply that an original left wing compositional plan with only one donor (never fully completed) was supplanted by a new composition with two new figures. This second composition included, he claims, the significant incorporation of the owner's respective family coats-of-arms in the windows in the center panel, but was supposedly done over a decade later by one of Campin's younger assistants. Therefore, because the panel's original composition, conceived by Campin in concert with the center and right wing panels, was later altered by another artist, Frinta believes that the preservation of the original thematic continuity cannot be assumed. On the basis of x-ray evidence, Frinta also asserts that the glance of Mary was originally cast in the direction of the Archangel Gabriel. The depiction of the highest moment of the Annunciation drama - the reception of Gabriel's message - was therefore supposedly sacrificed when Campin turned the Virgin's glance downward so as to achieve a quieter and more meditative mood. However, as Frinta holds that this change was made by the original artist, it cannot necessarily be claimed that this compromised his ruling theme.

On the other hand, Heckscher (1968) fastens onto the same evidence and asserts that the change in glance was an unauthorized alteration made by a later artist to an originally unified thematic program developed by Campin and his ecclesiastical advisor. Heckscher also points to what

he interprets as this program's supporting iconography, which has survived intact (e.g. fireplace and corbel figures, lion and dog figurines on Mary's bench, Joseph's board), and argues backwards from the interpretation of this iconography to try to establish the primacy of Mary's raised glance. Heckscher holds that the replacement of opaque golden windows with ones which admit sunlight into the Annunciation chamber is inconsistent with the fact that, traditionally, the Annunciation occurred in a closed chamber at night. He goes on to maintain that it was beyond Campin's means to depict a nighttime scene and that despite the daytime effect this was the artist's real intent. Between his suggestion that an ecclesiastical advisor was necessarily involved, and his assertions that the iconography was altered and thus not originally intended, the continuity of artistic and thematic intent may seem doubtful. If one accepts Heckscher's proposal, the visible program as it now exists (along with those parts of it his study fails to treat) is at odds with what we will discover is the real programmatic intent, though Heckscher offers no motive for such changes. However, if one accepts as genuine the visible program as it presently exists, Heckscher's theory of the main theme disturbs this program and the thematic continuity it may contain.

Campbell (1974) goes the farthest of any scholar in denying the possibility of continuity of thematic intent within the triptych. He begins with the assumption that the representation of space is automatically a formal-stylistic rather than thematic attribute. Then, because different panels exhibit different types of space, he is forced to conclude that the altarpiece exhibits a variance in artistic style rather than a complexity of theme. Further, because the lack of an obvious compositional uniformity is taken to signify an absence of uniform intent as well,

Campbell consequently sees the altarpiece as the work of a lesser master, most likely a student of Campin. This unknown artist supposedly devised the compositionally and stylistically weak donor's panel, and borrowed heavily from his teacher's works for the center and right wing panels.

4. conclusions

Most of the studies just discussed put forth some suggestions as to the main theme for the altarpiece. In assessing these studies, I have had to be sensitive to instances where thematic inuendo indicated that thematic assumptions were being advanced in implicit but, nonetheless, verifiable forms. My purpose was therefore to critically document cases which could be said to contribute, to any degree, conclusions regarding the existence or non-existence of a central theme in the triptych. But, in so doing, I wished ultimately to reveal that these attempts, despite the valuable information they do supply, have been unsuccessful in supplying us with a viable main theme.

The reason for this failure was briefly alluded to above, and was characterized as a focusing on the part at the expense of a knowledge of the whole. The fact that many of the previous research studies focus only upon a single panel of the altarpiece, and do not reference their findings to those of other scholars, demonstrates how little interest there has been in the overall meaning of the altarpiece. Yet the problem does not only lie in the tendency of scholars to limit themselves to a single panel, but extends to the more fundamental predisposition to treat symbols separately. This failure to interpret symbols in their relationships to one another, is the single most critical failing of the studies here reviewed. At least partial recognition of this important point is

reflected in Carla Gottlieb's insight that:

. . . the symbolism found in the Merode Altarpiece cannot automatically be transferred to other pictures. The meaning of each motif in any painting has to be studied individually, and then only can the total be added up.⁴

It is this "adding up" which reveals those iconographic relationships which are so important to the specific, non-transferable meanings which individual artworks possess.⁵

Indeed, in the absence of a systematic demonstration of iconographic continuity throughout the entire program, our third group of investigations just reviewed were able to cast doubt upon the existence of a main theme. This creates a predicament for the investigator. Are we, for example, to conclude that past research is fragmentary because the artwork is itself incomplete? Or, is it fruitless to pursue thematic continuity because, even if one were to discover a theme, it would be impossible to determine whether it was a main or a sub-theme because alterations have robbed us of the primary criterion for testing a main theme: a complete program in which it can be shown to be present at all points? We must conclude that either the altarpiece appears fragmentary for the two reasons just given, or because the aims and methods of previous scholars are themselves too fragmentary to sufficiently penetrate to the level of the artwork's essential continuity.

In the following section, I will attempt to demonstrate that, in fact, fragmentary research aims and methods are responsible for this appearance of a lack of thematic continuity. Further, I will seek to show that there still exists a definite need to establish the presence and nature of the altarpiece's undiscovered central theme.

C. Fragmented Aims of Former Research

If we are to improve upon the findings of past scholars and discover the triptych's main theme, then we will have to improve our method of approach as well. To do so, the limits of former methods must be understood, and this can only be done by recognizing that the reasons for these limits lie within the underlying aims which these methods were constructed to serve.

Assumptions about the nature and purpose of art historical research - very often unspoken, if not altogether unconscious assumptions - have largely determined the kind of research methods art historians have employed. This is not only true for the present day, in which methods have been inherited by a generation which did not itself develop them. It applies as well to the 'originators' themselves (Panofsky being foremost among them) and the assumptions entertained by these nonetheless extremely dedicated scholars who helped build the discipline of art history into its present form during the first half of the twentieth century. As with many other disciplines which 'came of age' in the early decades of this century, science exercised a significant influence on art historians who were attempting to impart a sense of rigor to their field of study. A recent article on this phenomenon by Christine Hausenmuller stated that:

An undefined, uncritical popularity of the ideal of "scientific truth" could - and did - lead to the avoidance of problems that were inherently inimical to concrete modes of investigation. Such curtailment of the scope of humanistic inquiry in order to accommodate it to these unspoken values could not make art history a science, but it could well sap its vitality as a humanistic discipline.⁶

However, unlike other fields such as the social sciences, which made quite

conscious attempts to emulate the methodological exactitude and achieve the quantifiable results of science, art historians were unconscious of the extent to which science influenced their own thinking. I believe that this may be even more true today than it was then, as an examination of current art historical scholarship reveals the mastery more than the transformation of the earlier established methods. This dependence on earlier aims constitutes an impediment in the discipline today because when the real origins of the aims are not known, scholars become incapable of assessing them and take them to be self-evident.

Many of art history's underlying aims can be traced to a pervasive mode of thought which is characteristic of this century and which permeates both popular consciousness and most major fields of academic endeavor. This particular attitude of consciousness is only the most recent in the Materialist-Atomist tradition of thought which manifested itself most clearly in the fields of modern chemistry and physics.⁷ Arising primarily out of theories concerning the nature of physical matter, this mode of thought spread rapidly to other fields of inquiry as well, and continues to perpetuate the notion that all phenomena may be reduced to smaller constituent parts. One version of this far-reaching mental persuasion is known as Reductionism which holds that the true nature of a thing, at one level, can be known from an examination of its parts and subcomponents at a lower level.

The preference for intensive focus upon the single part rather than the larger whole is the cornerstone of modern scientific method and its dependence upon abstract rather than synthetic thought. This thought may be termed abstract in that it extracts (abstracts, isolates) a thing from its normal context in an effort to understand it in detail. Although

precise knowledge can result from such focused scrutiny, the method causes difficulty in assessing things in context, or even in returning the elements thus isolated to their original context. As a simple example of this the dissection of a frog may be considered. The professed goal of dissection is to understand life (the 'context') better. Yet the method (dissection), in isolating the part to be studied from the whole (i.e. killing the frog), forsakes the context at the very outset of the investigation. Indeed, it seeks the part at the expense of the whole. In art historical studies on the Merode Altarpiece, analysis of single symbols has provided valuable detailed information, but such analyses have been unable to gain a sense of the main thematic context out of which these single symbols grew.

Although I will attempt to show that such single-focus approaches are, by their very nature, incapable of arriving at the larger context or 'thematic whole' of an artwork, the specialist or atomistic approach (as I will alternately refer to it) guards itself against this accusation. This it does by adhering to the scientific model of knowledge which holds that final knowledge (i.e. knowledge of the whole) is achieved only by way of factual accumulation.⁸ Hence, art historical knowledge has been assumed to depend upon the accumulation of specialist studies until, one day, the whole picture (of a single artwork, of a school, etc.) will emerge. The problem with this model is that, important as specialist studies are, it assumes that a whole is equal to the sum of its parts. This reductionist concept of the whole is not true because there is a qualitative difference between the understanding of parts and whole. Gestalt Psychology has shown, for example, that the whole can actually be greater than the sum of its parts. Another problem which the assumption that

final knowledge will be the ultimate result of factual accumulation has had for art historical scholarship is that it encourages the researcher to delay asking essential questions about his evidence until the data base is 'sufficiently large'. In the case of scholarship on the Merode Altarpiece, the "essential questions" delayed have concerned the existence of the main theme. I suspect that because scholars of this work have assumed that so many more studies on the numerous single iconographs in the program would be necessary before the 'whole meaning' would emerge, that they automatically assumed that questions concerning overall meaning would be premature and would therefore be best postponed.

D. Fragmented Methods of Former Research

The uncritical acceptance of the scientific aim to analyze discrete 'parts' with the promise that specialist knowledge would lead to general, inclusive knowledge, caused art history to adopt equally fragmentary methods. This is exemplified by what I have chosen to call the lexical method of iconographical interpretation, and is apparent also in the three genera of this method: the descriptive, conventional, and agnostic fallacies.

1. the lexical method

The lexical method of iconographical interpretation is the procedure of seeking the meaning of a visual image or symbol, not within the artwork itself, but in literary sources contemporaneous with (or pre-dating) the artwork from which the image was supposedly derived. The practice has been characterized by Christine Hausenmueller as follows:

[The standard work on iconographical method for over a generation] typically treats each image as a separate problem with comparatively little discussion of the implications of their interrelations . . . Iconographic meaning [so conceived] is concerned with the meaning of conventional vocabularies of images defined by their reference to literary sources . . . [serving] to support a concept of the meaning of art that may be satisfactorily stated by establishing the source of the artistic image in literature.⁹

When applied exclusive of other approaches, the limitations of this method lead to a series of methodological and interpretative errors. The method's primary fault, from which I have derived the name, is that in going outside the artwork to a literary source for clues to a symbol's significance, one cannot assume there to be (a) an exact match, or that (b) even if there is a match, that other symbolisms are not operative in addition which modify the meaning suggested by the literary source. To believe there to be a fairly exact match is to believe in lexical signification only, that is, that every symbol or image has one meaning, regardless of changing contexts (e.g. the insistence by scholars that the board Joseph drills could not possess references to the Mystic Winepress, fireplace-screen, or spikeblock simultaneously, but could only symbolize one of these is but one of many cases in which single meanings have been arbitrarily favored in the methodological treatment of the Merode Altarpiece). This approach therefore ignores syntactical meaning, or that level of meaning which coordinates the interaction of separate iconographs. As the translator of languages knows, the identification of the individual (lexical) definitions of the separate words of a sentence cannot alone elucidate a sentence's meaning. Similarly, the syntactical interrelationships of an artwork's iconographs must be understood to disclose the meaningful relation of parts before overall meaning can be known. Because the communicator's main intent or overall meaning (in a

sentence or artwork) determines individual meaning (of separate words or iconographs), the ignorance of that main intent (main theme) in studies of the Merode Altarpiece means that even the conclusions of these focused studies of individual iconographs may be at best conditional, if not altogether false. Furthermore, the lexical method has caused many researchers to act as if conferred (relational) meanings do not exist.

In general, the lexical method has bred (or at least justified) the specialist study which focuses on one iconograph at a time, without sufficiently rising to a comprehension of the meaning of the whole). Consonant with this is the atomistic assumption that wholes are predicated on parts, i.e. that parts (individual studies) add up to wholes (final, cumulative meaning). This is, of course, not true, as the example of syntactical versus lexical meaning cited above demonstrates: it is the sentence meaning which determines the individual word (lexical) meanings (and their shadings), and not the reverse. However, the assumption that the whole follows the parts is nonetheless operative in those particular studies of the Altarpiece already reviewed, which seem to mistake a supporting theme for the main theme. In so doing, these studies generalize the particular lexical meaning of one or several iconographs to encompass the whole altarpiece without systematically checking their lexical significations against their syntactical, iconographic neighbors (as well as against iconographic meanings discovered by other scholars). This is not to depreciate the value of lexical identification. The discovery of iconographic relational or syntactical meaning depends upon a foreknowledge of individual iconographic meanings which lexical identifications help to supply. My point is that lexically derived meanings are always subordinate to relational meaning. This is because (1) the artwork is

itself an historic document which may surpass primary (lexical) sources in regard to information concerning itself, and (2) relational (syntactical) meaning is an expression of the main theme which may necessitate, for example, the radical alteration of the conventional lexical associations of two iconographs so that they better express a single main thematic intention.

As the syntactical comparison above makes clear, it is the use of the word in a particular sentence which determines the word's final meaning, not its conventional lexical definition. Yet, contrary to this, to go outside the artwork in search of the meaning of a symbol rather than to seek the relationship of the iconographic part to the iconographic whole (existing within the artwork) secretly contains a predilection for tradition over innovation. It should come as no surprise that Panofsky, in his attempt to establish that continuity of tradition from which iconography supposedly draws, constantly used the lexical method in his own research. It is the method's interest in linking single iconographs to historical traditions which causes it to ignore relational meanings which may supercede conventional significations with innovative ones. Hence, as Hausenmueller pointed out, the lexical approach emphasizes "conventional vocabularies of images". It is therefore unsuited to those cases where seemingly conventional iconographs are used in unconventional ways. The method thus has the problem of often obliging the researcher to establish iconographic linkages with traditions at the expense of internal iconographic-thematic continuity. This is precisely what happened when Heckscher insisted that the Annunciation panel had received 'unauthorized iconographic changes' (as opposed to purposeful programmatic adjustments) because the Virgin's chamber was sunlit. As may be recalled, Heckscher

felt that because the Apocrypha (lexical source) recorded that the Annunciation had occurred at night, the overpainting of the chamber's gold windows with ones showing sunlit clouds and sky could not be tolerated. He thus chose to disrupt the continuity of the ostensible program by saying it was altered in order to protect what in his mind was the continuity of lexical tradition. There are also some other specific problems to which the one-sided use of the lexical method can lead and which will be dealt with in the three sub-sections which follow.

a. the descriptive fallacy

This sub-category of the lexical method essentially holds that although an artwork's expression is in the visual mode, its actual meaning is apprehended by the viewer in an abstract language (verbal) mode. Naturally, as images are assumed to be ultimately traceable to written sources, their meaning must be capable of conversion back to a verbal mode of meaning. The verbal (textual) orientation of scholars (most of whom, unlike visual artists, verbalize rather than visualize ideas) is quite evident here. Unfortunately, the implication exists here to the effect that the artist really only 'mirrors' ideas. This is felt necessary because the symbolic ideas which the artist supposedly mirrors, it is assumed, must be sufficiently established and have a wide enough audience recognition to both justify and be capable of visual adaptation. But this confines the artist to the 'depiction' of established ideas as opposed to the possible innovation of new or unique ideas. Indeed, the concept of the visual artist, unlike the philosopher or writer, as an innovator of impressions rather than as an innovator of ideas, owes much to the descriptive fallacy (ultimately, the fallacy expresses the epistemological

contention that meaning is a language-based apprehension).

The common idea, as expressed in William Heckscher's study, that ecclesiastical advisors collaborated with artists in the creation of religious artworks sometimes involves the commission of the descriptive fallacy. This is because the implication is not only that the advisor 'checks' to see that the iconographical program is consonant with the aims of the patron, but that (1) it is consistent with written scripture (and thus lexically rooted in it), and (2) that the advisor, who is a verbalizer, designates verbal as opposed to visual concepts the artwork is to express, and which it is therefore reducible to. Although documented instances do exist in which the ecclesiastical advisor has played a major role in determining programmatic content, I have also encountered numerous instances in which art historians, in speculating that an advisor was involved, took this as an excuse not to explore relational iconographic meaning, claiming instead that the meaning of the program was undecipherable.

b. the conventional fallacy

The fallacy of conventionalism is a specific expression of the lexical method's bias toward tradition. As it obliges the artist to use iconography of a sufficiently universal currency to be widely recognizable, his role becomes that of a mouthpiece for established, orthodox ideas (which is sometimes but not always the case). This form of fallacy is an extension of the descriptive fallacy because if the artist is limited to following the leads of others he must conform to conventions and ideas set by them. (The main difference between the two is that the descriptive fallacy stresses the limits of visual expression, while the conventional fallacy insists on the material artists use as a result of these limitations.)

For example, as discussed previously, Margaret Freeman and William Heckscher variously cited sources in text and tradition which were at variance with the representation of the Annunciation. The half-opened door which allows the donors to behold the event conflicts with the Annunciation room as a traditionally closed chamber. The Annunciation depicted in a sunlit room contradicts the tradition that the Annunciation occurred at night. And the fact that Mary's head is lowered rather than raised - suggesting the Annunciation has not yet occurred - is inconsistent with other symbols within the chamber which indicate that the New Era, which the Annunciation ushers in, has already begun. Because of a strong predisposition towards convention at all costs, these scholars are hard put to account for these incongruities between image and text. As was noted, Freeman was able to suggest another convention (the Golden Legend passage which held that the Virgin had opened the doors to Paradise which Eve had closed) in an attempt to resolve the problem. Yet, in truth, because only relational meaning could substantiate the accuracy or inaccuracy of either lexical convention, Freeman's suggestion is just another in a long string of uncorroborated iconographic conjectures. As was mentioned above, Heckscher, rather than consider the possibility that there were perhaps thematically sound and consistent reasons why the Annunciation was represented during the daytime, why the chamber was open, and why the Virgin looked downward at her book, proposed that radical thematic alterations occurred although he could produce no motive for the changes themselves.

A more extreme form of the ability to discredit the artwork because it does not conform to expectations concerning the conventionality of iconographic and/or stylistic behavior was found in the aforementioned

study of the altarpiece by Campbell. Because he was unable to imagine that the spatial systems in the various panels of the triptych might be representationally rather than stylistically different, he concluded that the altarpiece was an additive pastiche of efforts and borrowings involving three separate artists. Conversely, the failure to discover thematic continuity housed in anything other than conventional iconography or style quite predictably leads to the 'additive accusation' because unconventional thematic vehicles go unrecognized.¹⁰ Rather than consider the possibility that continuity of theme and artistic intention exists, the inclination to hastily assert that "if I cannot see it, it does not exist" prevails, and the baby, so to speak, is thrown out with the bath water.

One more instance of the conventional fallacy can be usefully given here. As was mentioned earlier, Panofsky implied a kind of generalized main theme for the Merode Altarpiece which I referred to as the "Christian Common Denominator". This unstated thematic entity, implicit within his identification of the subject matter of the altarpiece, consisted in the more general idea that a liturgically catholic and relatively homogeneous doctrinaire Christianity constitutes the over-riding "thematic whole" to which altarpieces of this time refer. Not only is this assumption very conventionalistic, but in its assumption that Christianity of this time is either a doctrinaire or homogeneous body of belief, or that liturgical catholicism necessarily equates with popular early Netherlandish spirituality, the assumption is historically inaccurate as well.¹¹ The ultimate difficulty of the conventional fallacy goes beyond the fact that it is blind to artistic innovation. As this thesis will endeavor to reveal, the major problem with the conventional fallacy is that it

distorts the nature of history itself. In wishing to show how artworks express the traditions of the cultures of which they are part, I believe that historians of medieval art have sometimes simplified the rich diversity and troublesome contradictions of a highly syncretistic medieval spiritual culture into a comparatively static body of doctrine. Without such an artificially stable framework, they seem to sense, it would be impossible to tame the vast array of iconography and carry on the cumulative process of matching images to their lexical sources.

c. The agnostic fallacy

This fallacy arises when the lexical method of interpretation is applied to religious iconography. Because the researcher grafts the meaning onto the iconograph from sources external to it, he suggests by this very action that the experience of iconographic meaning is itself derivative, associative, and abstract. That is to say, that the experience may not be an actual perception of spiritual phenomena, but can only consist in the generation of feelings and ideas about spiritual phenomena (i.e. that is, an abstract rather than a primary experience). This suggestion is, in truth, but a projection of the researcher's own intellectual (derivative) method of ascertaining and experiencing meaning, and becomes absurd when applied to ritual objects (e.g. an altarpiece) which can involve, not merely abstraction, but a mode of viewer interaction which is both participatory and immediate. Therefore, in that this approach is influenced by the modern bias of science and rationalistic humanism in assuming that religious iconography must appeal to abstract (secondary) rather than to actual (primary) experience, the method invalidates itself in failing to conform to the necessary pre-condition that a research tool,

to be objective, must be value-free.

2. conclusions

This discussion of the lexical method and its underlying ideas demonstrates, I believe, how a fragmentary method which forsakes the whole for the part must, by its very nature, yield fragmentary results. In so doing, it transfers its own fragmentariness to its object of study (leading several researchers of the altarpiece to fallaciously conclude that their object of study was the source of this fragmentariness). Although the lexical method is quite useful for instances in which an artist drew only upon traditional iconographic conventions (so that the artist's intention perfectly mirrors the meaning those conventions carry), it proves inadequate in cases where an artist transcends the conventional associations of those iconographs (in fact, because the method is not capable of alerting its user when more than a conventional association is present, the iconographic conventions it discovers may really tell us more about tradition than about intentional thematic content). Clearly, the need exists for a method which can amplify the lexical approach. This method must be able to confirm that no supra-conventional iconographic meanings exist in instances where the lexical method is applied. More importantly, it must be able to identify those cases when unconventional iconographic meaning is present. This new method would therefore serve as both a safety check on and a corrective amplification of the lexical approach, complementing rather than displacing it.

E. Aim and Method of Present Study

1. 'indigenous iconography' and its discovery by visual content analysis

Perhaps the most serious injury the lexical method has dealt to art history in general, is that it tends to not focus upon, but in fact diverts focus away from, the viewer's primary experience of the artwork. This oversight has grave implications if we accept the idea that an artwork exists not as an independent physical entity, but only within the experiential context of viewer consciousness (once this premise is accepted, lexical art history loses the "art" of art history). Unlike the history of events, in which the most reliable form of evidence - personal eye-witness experience - is lost for centuries past, the history of art does not lose first-hand experiential evidence of this sort. This is because visual art, as an 'experience-able event', does not exist within time like other events. Rather, as stated above, given a receptive viewer, it exists as 'art' only within viewer consciousness, and may therefore generate itself as a 'first-hand' event within a viewer historically removed from it.¹²

Unfortunately, because the lexical approach continually diverts attention away from the immediate experience of the artwork, the discovery of the system of iconographic relationships in which the main theme dwells is not allowed to occur naturally. Only systematic observation and the analysis of visual content can correct this situation. Although visual analysis is assumed to be the stock and trade of art history, the type of analysis to which I am here referring is rare (in fact, as the next chapter shows, no scholar has conducted even a basic visual inventory of the altarpiece before drawing his or her conclusions).

Visual content analysis - as I will refer to it - is not to be confused with Formalist 'visual analysis' which examines, not thematic meaning, but the 'aesthetical physics' of expressive visual form and color. The aim of visual content analysis is to discover thematic meaning which is embedded in the visual program. This "visual programmatic meaning" I have referred to previously as "iconographic relationships". In truth, these relationships are often as sophisticated, complex - and usually more subtle - than are a program's individual iconographic symbols, and constitute an entirely new level of iconography. This level or type of iconography I call 'indigenous iconography', because it is determined by relationships within a specific program. It is therefore to be distinguished from lexical iconography (i.e. the type most studies concentrate upon) which is determined by reference to material (usually textual) outside a specific program.

Most often it is in the indigenous iconography that the main theme must be sought (except in amateurish works where symbols are borrowed rather than innovated). Lexical iconography, on the other hand, is very often where the program's sub-themes are introduced. Lexical iconography is limiting because the meanings are to a great extent fixed by tradition. Indigenous iconography, however, is really the only sphere in which the artist can shade, alter, personalize, reinterpret, or in some other way give special emphasis to these 'fixed' meanings. Indigenous iconography is thus, in a sense, like the speaker's pacing, inflection, and intonation which exist on a level far above the lexical definitions of the words he utters but which are the main vehicles whereby his intent becomes known. It is by these means that the listener discerns whether innuendo, double-meaning, irony, or even contradiction are intended. Likewise, indigenous

iconography is where the ruling thematic intent of the artist is made known. This is because, as a creator of meaningful visual compositions which are intended to 'unfold' during viewer observation, the artist could be expected to want thematic content recognition to be part of this unfolding process. As such, this understanding of such content would appropriately also unfold visually, and indigenous iconography is the only iconographic mode in which viewer understanding unfolds visually.

Because indigenous iconography may use any part of the visual program to achieve its ends, it can exist in innumerable forms. This is indeed why it is very often difficult to identify by the uninitiated analyst because it subtly modifies those relationships unique to a particular program. Indigenous iconography can therefore exist in aspects of an artistic program not usually understood to carry thematic meaning. Indigenous iconography can claim any part of an artwork or modify any iconographic symbol to conform to its meaning or serve its ends. Thus, even the artistic medium (paint, stone), the format of the artwork (triptych, fountain), or the formal-aesthetic attributes (color, shape, balance, etc.) can be used to carry meaning.

In sum, the method I will employ to discover the central thematic meaning of the altarpiece will involve the balanced use of (1) primary sources contemporary with (or pre-dating) the altarpiece to discover lexically-based content, (2) visual content analysis of the artwork itself to discover indigenous iconography, and (3) secondary sources, when appropriate, to provide factual or interpretive information. (A more indepth explanation of the art historical research model upon which these methods are predicated is presented in the Appendix which follows the text of this thesis.)

III. NOTES

¹Minott, p. 269.

²Panofsky, ENP, p. 165.

³I exclude Minott in this criticism. His displeasure with the other studies because they fail to systematically seek after a central theme carries a measure of authority not ascribable to our other scholars. This authority derives from Minott's observance of the basic rules of scholarly proposition and discourse. He defines the problem his study is meant to address. He tries to establish the relationship of his interpretations of single symbols or sets of symbols to their neighbors and the altarpiece as a whole. He also relates his findings to those of other scholars as well. He is honest about the limits of his findings and does not argue beyond the confines of his evidence. Indeed, after making what for those other scholars would be a more than a sufficient case for accepting the subject of Advent as the main theme, Minott demurs by saying that, "eventually" this can "probably" be shown.

⁴Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 83.

⁵Unfortunately, Gottlieb places more stress on individual symbols rather than on their interrelationships. Take for example, her belief that the Annunciation chamber is not a domestic interior but only a shrine, or her opinion that the chamber's piscina may not serve to reinforce symbols of Mary's purity but can only operate as a symbol of baptismal purity relative to Christ ("Respiciens", pp. 65, 67). These are just two of numerous instances which, as the thesis will show, demonstrate an inability to appreciate the artist's choice and orchestration of thematically and spatially proximal symbols for their power to resonate off of and reinforce one another so as to deepen and enrich viewer experience.

⁶Christine Hausenmueller, "Panofsky, Iconography, and Semiotics," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 36 (Spring 1978), p. 297.

⁷Though the tendency to think atomistically began with Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and Robert Hooke (1635-1703), no empirical facts were forthcoming until the experimentalist John Dalton (1766-1844), the father of scientific atomism. Soon after Dalton's formulation, and for the remainder of the nineteenth century, the atom came to be pictured as the smallest indivisible material unit similar to a tiny billiard ball. This picture was later displaced when the discovery of radioactivity led to the concept of the atom as consisting of sub-particles. Ernst Lehrs, Man or Matter: Introduction to a Spiritual Understanding of Nature on

the Basis of Goethe's Method of Training, Observation, and Thought (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1958), p. 47, 258.

⁸The equation of knowledge with the accretion of factual increments was particularly strong during the formative years of modern art historical aim and method. To take two examples: sociology, with the advent of World War I, became increasingly quantitative and "retreated behind a concept of science as value-free and concerned with amassing knowledge. Sociologists - and to a lesser extent, anthropologists - insisted that their major concern was not problem solving but data collection." (Gloria B. Levitas, ed., Culture and Consciousness: Perspectives in the Social Sciences, New York: George Braziller, 1967, pp. 10-14 of the editor's introduction.) A similar development occurred in the field of history as well. Although history straddled both the humanities and the social sciences, like many disciplines on this side of the Atlantic, the scientific came to outweigh the philosophical aspects, and history in the 1930's was predominantly a social science. In keeping with Science proper, individual gains were perceived as parts of a cumulative process of knowledge. (Oskar Handlin, Truth in History, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979; rpt. 1981, pp. 6-8.)

⁹Hausenmueller, pp. 289, 300 N. 27, 292.

¹⁰The invocation of the additive accusation (perhaps "additive pretext" would be more accurate) is not infrequent in matters of unconventional iconography. In Erwin Panofsky's analysis of the Ghent Altarpiece, numerous apparent iconographical discrepancies were cited (Panofsky, ENP, p. 214-230). However, as most of these occur within single panels and as the result of single - or at most - collaborative artistic intent, they are not easily explained away by virtue of an additive composition. However, two elements were singled out (the fact of the Father God in an All Saints picture, and two panels of musical angels), and because they did not square with conventional usages, the entire artwork was dubbed a pastiche. This was done, however, without accounting for the other clearly "non-additive" discrepancies which strongly suggested that not an additive but an unconventional and innovative intent was at work. The difficulty with this practice is as much in its effect as in its actual commission. It is like declaring someone prematurely dead: once they are buried, they are as good as dead. Similarly, once iconographic complexity is labelled additive, a disservice is done by inclining others to see disjunction where there is only complexity when, in truth, all possibilities have not been exhausted.

¹¹That art history sometimes operates outside the boundaries and rules of History proper becomes evident upon consulting a book by David Fischer which concerns itself with often committed errors of historical logic. Under four of the eleven major divisions (which cover a total of 112 types of historical fallacy), I have found seven types of fallacy which I believe are frequently committed in art historical discourse. Although there may be others, it may be useful to consult the discussions concerning: (1) Fallacies of Narration (esp. "tunnel history"; "fallacy of presentation"; "genetic fallacy"), (2) Fallacies of Causation (esp.

"fallacy of identity"; "fallacy of indiscriminate pluralism"), (3) Fallacies of Generalization (esp. "fallacy of the lonely fact"), and (4) Fallacies of Question-Framing (esp. "Baconian fallacy"), (David Hackett Fischer, Historian's Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought, Harper & Row, 1970, pp. 142, 135, 155, 177f., 175ff., 109f., 4ff.). I should note that the designations in this thesis chapter - "lexical method", "descriptive fallacy", "conventional fallacy", and "agnostic fallacy" - are my own categories and neither derive from, nor are represented in, Fischer's book.

¹²This argument, though here intended to apply to the visual arts, must hold good for all past art: music, poetry and prose, dance, etc., as their only existence is within the sphere of direct perception and experience.

IV. PATTERN AS AN INDICATOR OF THE PRESENCE OF A MAIN THEME

A. Principles of Main Themes

The search for the main theme in an artwork is predicated upon the linked concepts of main theme, masterwork (or masterpiece), and pattern. The central theme is an organizing idea that expresses itself within all the elements of an artwork. The main theme may be likened to the keystone of an arch under which all subordinate elements organize themselves. These subordinate elements, although varied in themselves, are joined together in their ability to vibrate in response to the main theme. As we have seen, several former studies of the Merode Altarpiece have been unable to recognize a central theme because they take diversity to indicate disharmony and the lack of unified artistic intent. In so doing, the essential nature of the artistic masterpiece is misunderstood.

A masterpiece, whether in literature, music, or the visual arts, does not merely present a random collection of ideas and sensations, but rather develops this material into a thematic whole utilizing the principle of unity-in-diversity. This particular principle is a feature of creative artistic genius, that powerful organizing intelligence which - as an extension of itself - consolidates a multitude of elements into a complex but consistent and well-orchestrated artistic product. The main theme is really the presence of this organizing intelligence made manifest through formal-thematic pattern within an artwork, as it finally exists, as an entity independent of the artist. The notion of a masterwork without a main theme, that is, without the expression of that powerful organizing (patterning) intelligence we associate with the master artist, is tantamount to a contradiction in terms. Nonetheless, previous

scholars have almost unanimously accepted the Merode Altarpiece as one of but a handful of Early Netherlandish masterpieces without sufficient corresponding interest in its main theme. This odd state of affairs, I believe, is due to the fact that in those artworks which are corroboratively held to be masterworks by scholars and laymen alike, the impress of the highly synthetic artistic genius so saturates the composition that an immediate, almost pre-conscious recognition of a powerfully cohesive artistic vision arises within the receptive viewer and is sensed prior to the conscious exercise of analytical observation. This sensed element which permeates the whole is none other than the formal-thematic pattern itself. Not only is it perceived before we become conscious of it, but it may even direct our process of becoming conscious of it. However, the very indigenous quality of this principle may also elude our conscious recognition of it. In such cases very often the thematic content of the pattern remains unconscious while the formal dimension of the pattern alone is perceived and, being thus taken as an independent phenomenon, is assumed to have an "aesthetic rationale".

In masterworks, as has just been mentioned, the creative artistic intent expresses itself in patterns which are simultaneously both thematic and formal. It is important to clarify that this division is somewhat arbitrary and should be recognized as existing more in the mind of the critical analyst than in the work itself. This is because the formal and thematic modes are merely representatives of the main intent, and that when these modes are successfully employed, they become 'transparent' in serving and expressing that single intent rather than their own individual differences. In fact, an important feature of masterpieces is that they give evidence of the artist's ability to tame the

separate thematic and formal vehicles so as to form a seamless compositional unity in which one voice rings clear.

Unfortunately, modern analytical habits of thought insist on separating the formal from the thematic despite the fact that it is only within unsuccessful artworks that these exist apart. In modern psychology, for example, the Behavioristic school severs external behavior from its interior causes. The Formalist school of interpretation has accomplished the same end in the sphere of art history and criticism by taking formal-aesthetic modes as ends in themselves. This characteristically twentieth-century habit of mind is not confined to historians of modern abstract art, as might be supposed, but is evident in the work of art historians who would not consider themselves Formalists. Too often formal relations are seen as manifestation of style, and thematic content is assumed to be absent. This is because "style" and "content" are still utilized as mutually exclusive concepts (although there have been some attempts to understand their common ground). Panofsky himself exemplifies this tendency to divorce form and content when he maintains that;

. . . the Merode Annunciation strikes us as being primarily conceived in terms of surface relations¹

and goes on to say of the altarpiece that the artist,

. . . embroiders the pictorial surface into a decorative pattern so densely woven that we may speak of horror vacui . . . [and that he also] . . . strove to affirm perspective space while still committed to a decorative interpretation of the plane surface.²

In truth, the densely packed panels to which Panofsky refers represent an intent going beyond representation for its own sake and which utilizes objects in a manner which is far from arbitrary. As will be

shown below, the very complex geography (pattern) of object placement signifies a purpose which is not simply decorative. Reflection on the content of previous chapters will reveal that Panofsky's lexical method of iconographical interpretation obliges him to invest specific objects with meaning at the expense of the intervening surface and spatial relations which are therefore divested of content and thus perceived as suited for decorative elaboration only. In that the lexical approach singles out and focuses exclusively upon individual iconographs, it is unequipped to detect the pattern logic of iconographic relations. This also explains why lexical studies have been unable to discover the main theme of the altarpiece because, as the main theme is the organizing principle of the artwork, it must exist within the 'organization' itself (i.e. the formal iconographic relational patterns of which the lexical approach remains unaware).

The pattern of development and articulation evident within a masterpiece implies 'growth', which may be defined as the change in form (over time) without loss (but rather emergence) of identity. In the realm of nature, the plant develops through the numerous stages of seed, stem, leaf, and blossom and yet remains one plant. Although painting is a spatial art, the artist is a being in time, and the artist's sense of identity, of continuity in time throughout diverse developmental stages, is present in the artist's products, regardless of whether they are spatial or temporal artworks like music or dance (also, the artwork is perceived, and unfolds for the viewer, temporally as well as spatially). The main theme of a masterpiece is thus the expression of the continuity (or pattern) of artistic intent which is itself a form of the artist's identity.

Accepting the fact that both continuity and complexity are primary attributes of the highly successful work of art, it becomes clear that any time seemingly contradictory elements are encountered within a composition, the art historian is obliged to seek a higher level of meaning and unity wherein both elements may coexist before disunity may be suspected. Fleeing from the artwork in search of lexical sources, however, thwarts the discovery of such higher levels of relational unity.

Heckscher's aforementioned insistence that the central panel of the altarpiece is a nighttime scene, despite its depiction as a sunlit room, is only one of many such instances. The presence of contrary elements, far from indicating discontinuity of artistic intent or unauthorized programmatic revisions, very often signals the investigator that (1) the main theme is yet to be found, (2) he/she is dealing with subordinate thematic material, and (3) that knowledge of the main theme may reveal that the elements in question are not necessarily contradictory at all but function instead in a complementary fashion. This is more than a form of scholarly courtesy to the artwork under investigation; it is a necessary prerequisite for the drawing of accurate conclusions. The studies of Heckscher, those which hold the altarpiece to be an additive pastiche or which assume the donatrix to be thematically irrelevant to the program, exemplify the failure to abide by the rule which holds that compositional inconsistency cannot be assumed (much less claimed in writing) without a systematic inventory of all compositional elements as a simple check against overlooking possible connections. As I will demonstrate, even the most basic visual inventory of the altarpiece was never conducted by these scholars, with the result that those visually manifest patterns which alone verify the existence of a single, consistent,

and unified artistic intent, have never been noticed.

B. The Citing of Pattern in Former Research

Besides the Panofsky quotation given above (page 88), pattern is rarely considered in the former research. The four studies which follow cite isolated instances of pattern but fail to draw substantive conclusions about its significance, or to pursue it as an indigenous mode of thematic meaning.

The existence of pattern - not its logic, but a description of its obvious and intentional presence - is also cited in Carla Gottlieb's reference to the "brilliant analysis of Flemallian art" in the 1933 study by O. Paecht. Gottlieb cites Paecht's observation of:

. . . the parallel orientation of adjacent objects in the surface pattern, a willful assimilation of their boundary lines to one another (niche base conforms to the neighboring edge of the table in the Merode Annunciation); the repetition of a form within a similar form somewhat like a magical box system (□ shape of fireplace, smoke, firescreen in the Merode Annunciation); and the erratic base line of the formal pattern or configuration (Gestalt) which is contrasted with rectangularity at the top (hems of garments versus beams in the Merode Annunciation).³

In the same article, Gottlieb notes the correspondence existing between the isolated magpie and the goldfinch and sparrow who stand next to one another, with the isolated gateman and donor couple represented below in the altarpiece's left wing-panel. However, without any further comment she labels the correspondence as "symbolic".⁴ Hence, beyond the perception that a repetition exists, no significance is understood.

Helmut Nickel's article of 1966 makes further casual references to correspondences between the gateman of the donors panel and Gabriel as well as between the enclosed garden and the closed (sic) Annunciation

chamber. He also draws attention to the apparent correspondence between the gateman-donor-donatrix triad in the donors' panel and, respectively, the Gabriel-Mary-Joseph figures in the other two panels. He even goes on to relate the magpie, robin, goldfinch, and sparrow of the donors' panel, to, respectively, the gateman, sunbeam Christ child, Mary and Joseph figures. However, Nickel fails to pursue the majority of these relationships beyond their lexical definitions. In the case of the apparent correspondence between the donor panel figures and Gabriel, Mary and Joseph, Nickel states that it forms

. . . in a secular way [,] a deliberate and perhaps slightly amusing contrast to the holy group of Mary, Joseph, and Gabriel - a contrast similar to that of the rustic shepherds and the elegant Three Wise Men in Adorations of the Child.⁵

Yet Nickel does not explain why such a "deliberate" secular-holy correspondence would be employed. He merely states that he believes it is employed, and that it strikes him as amusing.⁶

Brief mention may also be made of the study of the altarpiece by Mojmir Frinta. As discussed earlier, Frinta touched upon the different uses of color and painterly technique as they affected the senses of volume and light within the triptych. His essential thesis holds that in the left panel "color is used to build up form",⁷ whereas in the center and right panels, "color is used principally to reinforce the impression of shape and mass".⁸ And somewhat later in the same article he presents the same dichotomy again but specifically in terms of light,

. . . the artist who painted the right panels was apparently fascinated with light as it affects form; the artist who painted the left was interested in light as it affects color.⁹

These statements represent, therefore, the detection of certain formal or visibly perceptible patterns. The differences in these two patterns, however, caused Frinta to posit the existence of two separate artists for

the panels in question.

Finally, in another, later article by Carla Gottlieb, more metaphorical and exegetical correspondences are pointed out. As previously discussed, these include the idea that the center panel chamber is both a Jewish and Christian sanctuary which, on the basis of its correlation with certain passages in the Song of Solomon, from the Old Testament, is likened to a marriage-chamber and tabernacle for the Host.¹⁰ This four-fold identification or 'pattern of correspondence' is an example of thematic rather than formal correspondence, and therefore does not involve spatial relations as have the previous examples. A moment's reflection will also reveal that this 'pattern' is different from the metaphorical "disguised symbolisms" of studies which see objects as possessing dual meanings, which are also "correspondences" of a sort. For example, that the pot of lilies on the table of the center panel has been read as a symbol of Mary's chastity¹¹ does not represent a pattern of correspondence as does Gottlieb's sanctuary-marriage chamber-tabernacle example cited above. The former merely expresses a signification, for the concept of "chastity" is not an equal (and thus "corresponding") reality to the pot of lilies; rather, it is an abstraction associated with this object. That the center panel chamber would be either a Jewish sanctuary, Christian Shrine, nuptial chamber, and/or tabernacle for the Host, however, offers four equally representational realities which therefore may be understood as concordant with one another. As such, a four-tiered pattern of correspondence may be said to obtain. Remarkably, this is the only other instance of correspondence beyond those already mentioned which I am able to find in the former research studies of the altarpiece. I should also add that, compelling as it is

as an instance of pattern, Gottlieb's example represents an interesting but isolated examination of the center panel in which larger patterns, and contradictory elements cited in other studies, were not pursued to their point of resolution in a main theme.

These six instances (including Panofsky's) of pattern recognition, each occupying but a fraction of the study in which it appears, indicate both the lack of scholarly interest in pattern as a vehicle of intentional content, as well as the uneven and unsystematic treatment pattern has received in the rare instances of its treatment. Suffice it to say that none of these studies perceived pattern as a possible indicator of the artwork's main theme.

C. Examples of Pattern in the Altarpiece

In the following, examples of formally expressed pattern and correspondences within the altarpiece will be presented (pattern is here defined as a relationship based upon some form of common or shared attribute). The examples are representative rather than exhaustive, and they will not be interpreted in this chapter. Their existence is being shown at this point (1) to demonstrate the kind of information scholarly inventory and observation of the altarpiece should have sought, (2) as a preliminary indicator that a systematic intent links all panels, and (3) that this systematic intent justifies the suspicion that such formal continuity is a symptom of a level of undiscovered thematic continuity (i.e. the artwork's main theme).

There are four basic organizations of pattern within the altarpiece: (1) general pattern expressed by an all inclusive grid, and patterns

relating the center to wing panels; specifically, patterns existing between, and confined to (2) center and right wing-panel, (3) center and left wing-panel; and (4) pattern linking the wings only to one another, exclusive of the center panel.

These four basic kinds of organization include sub-types which follow certain rules and which may be categorized as follows:

a. symmetric grids:

patterns of intersecting vertical and horizontal axes which exist in two basic forms, (1) a primary grid which is almost symmetrical, and (2) a secondary but more visually obvious network which roughly corresponds to the primary grid although its interspacings or units are somewhat less regular

b. nodes:

points sited along specific gridlines

c. foci:

corresponding points or areas (such as represented objects) affiliated by virtue of standing in symmetric or mirror-image relation to one another (unlike nodes which relate to one another by virtue of being sited upon a common axis or gridline)

d. ensembles:

groupings of proximal representational objects with one or more shared attributes which serve as the basis for their special connection

e. paths:

where the linear, point-to-point movement of some force is depicted or suggested, and/or where the viewer's eye is guided along a specific linear route in response to some stimulus in the artwork's formal/thematic composition

1. general pattern

a. symmetric grids

Figure 2 illustrates the basic horizontal divisions of the grid used by the artist to divide the triptych into four lateral zones (the intersecting lines which form the grid will be discussed later). Each zone contains similar 'activities' or types of objects which seem to be grouped in a loose but nonetheless consistent manner. (Note: in the Figure overdrawings, solid lines represent lines/edges depicted in the painting itself, whereas dotted lines merely connect solid line lengths, depict paths, or encircle nodes or foci but do not correspond to actual lines or edges represented in the artwork itself.)

The upper and lower zones where ceiling or floors predominate in this figure act as "frames" for the two inner zones. The uppermost of these zones contains openings such as the open gate, gatehouse window and gatehouse door of the donor panel, as well as a substantial portion of the panel's open wooden door which the male donor looks through. In the central panel, this zone contains the oculus windows above and behind Gabriel, the laver niche opening, the partially unshuttered window, and the open fireplace. Finally in the right wing, the carpenter shop's

three open windows are also seen to occupy this zone. 'Opening' and, as we shall see later, 'passage' are thematic keynotes of this zone.

The zone below this contains five of the eight people or major players of the altarpiece (included: donors, Gabriel, Mary, and Joseph; excluded: white rider, gateman, and Christ child with cross). Hence, much of the dramatic action is concentrated in this zone.

Figure 3 shows the vertical divisions of the composition's more complex, alternate grid. In this grid, each wing-panel exhibits three vertical divisions while the center panel features four. This is the secondary, or more visually obvious vertical grid structure, discussed above. It is, however, less symmetric than the primary grid in which the main vertical axes are shifted to mathematically more correct positions. Examination of the numerous vertical lines/edges in the painting (all of which are not indicated through overdrawing in our Figure) reveals that the ten major zones of the grid are capable of even more subdivisions.

Examination will reveal that the "visually obvious" vertical grid-lines are usually object edges or vertical "seams" where dark and light planes or areas meet, as in the center panel where the chamber's wall planes meet in the corners.

However, Figure 4 illustrates the more symmetrically correct primary grid which shifts the vertical axes to the positions shown.¹² Also, the centermost vertical which runs through the cross and candlestick is just a bit right of actual panel center.

b. nodes

In Figure 5, the more symmetrically correct vertical gridlines are now shown with the panel's seven horizontal gridlines (A-G). Note that in the case of horizontal gridlines D and E, no solid lines or edges are depicted in the painting itself. These two lines, however, are implicit gridlines upon which nodes have been sited.

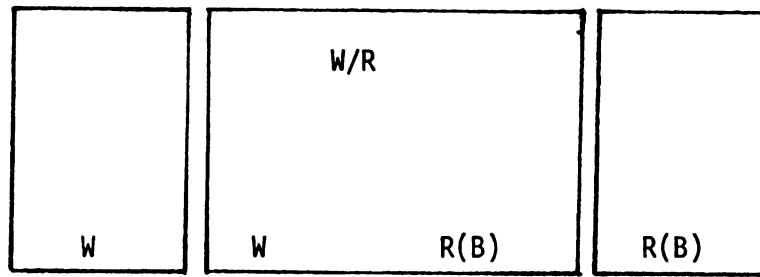
Specifically, Figure 6 isolates the gridlines upon which nodes seem to have been intentionally sited. Before listing these nodal entities, it is again necessary to stress that, in the center panel, the vertical section of the window's sashwork Latin cross is the "virtual" centerline of the panel in the same way as the candlestick base is the panel's "virtual" centerpoint, although it is about 1/4" right of dead center. However, despite this slight shift, it empirically serves as the panel's midpoint.

Taking node D3 as the centerpoint of the main panel, the laver (X1) and the corbel figure (X2) are seen to inhabit the center of their panel quadrants. They are related by virtue of either their latitudinal correspondence or their positioning on the panel's two corner-to-corner diagonals. In this sense, they might also be considered foci (i.e. corresponding points standing in symmetric relation to one another).

Gridlines D and E exhibit concentrations of nodal sitings. Reading from left to right on gridline D, these are seen to include, the donors panel doorlock (D1), Gabriel's hand (D2), the candlestick base (D3), the Virgin's head (D4), the fireplace screen (D5), and Joseph's head (D6). Reading from left to right on gridline E, one observes the donor's purse-dagger (E1), the center of the luminous star on Mary's mantel (E2), and the point of Joseph's drill (E3).

c. ensembles

Beyond the four lateral zones treated above and shown in Figure 2, there is another pattern of groupings which serve to connect all three panels of the altarpiece. The common elements in this pattern are the colors white (W), red (R), and blue (B). The logic of this pattern (see color photograph of triptych, Figure 27), is represented in the following diagram:



The distribution of color begins with the apex of an implicit 'color triangle' in the center panel. At the triangle's apex is the red towel rack with its white towel. This two-part color combination then becomes split, with the white going to the lower left hand corner and the triangle's base (Gabriel's mantle), and the red going to the lower right hand corner of the triangle (Virgin's mantle). This white corner then extends into the left wing and is picked up in the white head-dress and white ermine cuff of the donatrix. Conversely, the red of the Virgin's mantle, along with the blue bench cloth and pillow she leans against, extends into the right wing-panel, and is resumed in the red sleeves and blue turban of Joseph.

This particular pattern serves as the departure point for the discussion of center-to-wing panel relationships because, clearly, the white versus red (blue) split can also be taken as a device by which each wing

is related to the center panel (or vice versa) but not to one another.

2. center panel to right wing-panel relationships

a. ensembles

The center and right wing panels are linked by a series of significant shared representational attributes. Both panels depict rooms as opposed to the left wing which depicts an enclosed yet exterior garden.

Futhermore, the two main occupants of these respective chambers, Mary and Joseph, besides sharing a marital link, are also connected through the following attributes. First, as opposed to Gabriel and the donors, Mary and Joseph occupy precisely the same lateral spatial zone (Figure 9) which is bordered above by an implicit horizontal line (which connects the tops of their heads) and which is bordered below by Joseph's shoe tip and the lower hem of Mary's mantle.

The two figures are further connected by the similarity of their seated postures which are slightly turned to the left of the picture. The complementary arcs on the right hand edge of the form of each figure (marked in Figure 9) also serve to relate the couple. The fact that they are both engaged in activities requiring them to look downward (Mary reading her book, Joseph drilling his board) constitutes yet another reinforcing motif. The self-involved, internalized sensibility they share becomes even more pronounced when compared with the other group of altarpiece figures. The Archangel Gabriel, the donors, and even the gateman, as attentive watchers, are, by contrast, outward rather than inward in their bearing.

Finally, the special connection between the center panel and right

wing is apparent in the fact that both Mary and Joseph occupy spaces with remarkably similar object geographies. A table, a sitter, a bench, and a window figure prominently in each instance, and comprise what is unquestionably an intentional compositional juxtaposition devised by the artist. In each panel, the table is scattered with objects, and the backboard of the sitter's bench leads the viewer's eye to and through a window against which the far end of the bench abuts (delineated in Figure 7). Although these motions are part of an ensemble, they might also be considered singly as "paths".

3. center to left wing-panel relationships

a. ensembles

As pointed out above, Gabriel and the donors comprise an ensemble which, in contrast to that of Mary and Joseph, occupies a slightly higher but intentionally separate lateral zone (Figure 7). This grouping, as previously mentioned, further contrasts with the Mary-Joseph ensemble in demeanor.

However, the similar kneeling postures of the members of this ensemble, all facing to the right, are not the only sympathetic features of the two panels. Each panel represents a recessed wall niche; the niche-like effect of the partially closed garden gate and the laver niche behind Gabriel (the tri-lobated arch of which incidentally echoes the window in the second storey gatehouse). Also, the two donors and the gateman correspond in number, scale, and sex, to the three figures in the center panel: the male donor corresponds to Gabriel, the female donor corresponds to Mary, and the small gateman corresponds to the tiny Christ child

descending toward Mary on a sunbeam.

There is another aspect of the donors-gateman ensemble, however, which provides yet another link to the center panel. Specifically, a three-fold ensemble of shapes - comprised of the donors' heads and the round hat of the gateman (his head could substitute as well) - is repeated again in each of the two panels (delineated, Figure 8). The three silver lunettes (two large, one small) or the donor's purse also carry this motif (although in inverted form), as does the center panel ensemble of the two oculi windows in combination with the tiny Christ child (delineated, Figure 8).

Actually, the purse contains two variations of this particular motif. As discussed, one of these most nearly parallels the donor ensemble's two large circles with a small one in between. The other of these more nearly resembles the oculi-Christ ensemble: two large circles with a stream of shaft angling between them. This "shaft" is the dagger which obliquely penetrates the donor's purse-flap scabbard, and specifically corresponds to the small cross the Christ child similarly displays at an angle in the oculi-Christ ensemble.

Before treating the fourth category of pattern, it is worthwhile noting that in the three types just discussed, an interesting logic may be gleaned. This logic seems to conform to the three different states of openness of which the triptych was originally capable (we are reminded of its currently non-working display mode). That is, in most instances of center-to-wing correspondence, the relevant center-panel elements are located on that half of the center panel closest to the particular wing to which they relate. The resulting correlations can be expressed as follows:

<u>type of organization</u>	<u>state of openness</u>
1. overall grid pattern	1. open triptych
2. center to right wing patterns	2. left wing closed (i.e. right wing and right half of center panel exposed)
3. center to left wing patterns	3. right wing closed (i.e. left wing and left half of center panel exposed)

Without drawing any thematic conclusions from this at the moment, a strong impression of the non-arbitrary relationship of all three panels is imparted by such patterning, and an intent superseding the use of pattern for mere formal-decorative ends is quite evident.

4. wing-panel to wing-panel relationships

a. foci

Foci, or symmetrically positioned objects or shapes, are an evident part of wing panel interrelationships in three particular instances. The first of these involves two 'V' shapes which are formed, respectively, by the steps and path edge in the donors' panel foreground, and by the slanting saw and rod featured in the foreground of the Joseph panel (Figure 9).

The second of these instances constitutes subtly balanced correlations of elements which serve similar functions in both wings. Roughly, the door in the donor's panel obscures the garden background from view. In mirror image, the bench and lower half of the window above it in the Joseph panel also obscure the background (carpenter shop/townscape view) in contrast to the other two windows.

The third instance of complementary foci can be seen in the fairly symmetrical placement of the mousetrap on Joseph's shelf on the one hand, and the gateman on the other (the scene through the gate of a white horse with rider is also part of this unit as will be explained later). Both of these constitute small entities, and both the mousetrap and the gateman with his gate occupy the panel's middle distance between the foreground and background.

b. ensembles/paths

The mousetrap and gateman foci are also part of two larger complementary ensembles (which are simultaneously paths as well) located in both wings. The right wing ensemble consists of the two mousetraps and the imaginary path which joins them (Figure 10). This path coincides with the natural perambulation of the viewer's vision as he stands before the central panel, moves his eyes over to Joseph's bench, beholds its mousetrap and then looks up to the mousetrap on the shelf outside the shop window and on out to the streetscape beyond. The fact that the perspective of the carpenter's shop itself "places" the viewer to the left of the panel causes our path of sight to move diagonally, like the 'line' between the mousetraps themselves.

The left wing corollary to this is first echoed in a 'path' running between the gateman's and male donor's hats (Figure 10). Both hats have been respectfully lowered by their owners, and both hats correspond to the respective mid-ground and foreground placements of the two Joseph panel mousetraps. The diagonal path linking these two hats must be considered a path for other reasons as well. The open doors of the garden gate and Annunciation chamber help describe an implicit entry route which

begins at the open gate and comes forward to the open foreground door (Figure 10). Curiously, the viewer is given the impression of one continuous path which begins outside the garden gate, enters the garden and advances towards the foreground, enters and passes through the Annunciation chamber (thus staying within the foreground), and continues straight through the wall of the fireplace to the workbench of Joseph, where it departs up and out through Joseph's window, returning to the world outside and the distant background from which the journey originated.

Another set of ensembles/paths may finally be described. In the right wing, the ensemble under consideration consists of the partially opened window at far right, and the drill which falls in vertical line with it (Figure 11). In the left wing, the ensemble consists of the open gatedoor, the ermine cuff of the donatrix below it (which starts downward from the exact same latitudinal point as the drill at Joseph's breast (delineated, Figure 11), and may include the gatehouse window (the right edge of which is in perfect line with the right edge of the gatedoor opening).

The correspondences between these two ensembles are striking. Not only are they near stereoscopic reflections of one another, but their elements share several attributes in common. The gatedoor is a tall, narrow opening about the same width as the shutter opening. Also, the shutter is the only side-hinged one of those pictured in Joseph's workshop, thus linking it back to the opening swing motion of the gatedoor. Further, the point at which the shutter opening visually terminates (i.e. at Joseph's turban) is the same horizontal level at which the bottom of the gate-opening falls (covered from view behind the female donor's head). Again, because of the representation of "lines of force"

(the drill literally transfers a downward force to its point, and the flowing ermine cuff visually represents the line of gravitational fall), these ensembles function as paths also.

D. Conclusion

Even without an interpretation of these grids, nodes, foci, ensembles, and paths, it becomes clear that even minute elements within the altarpiece are far from arbitrary or accidental. At very least, the patterns observed call accusations that the altarpiece is an additive composition into serious question. These elements of pattern (such as nodes and foci) help to reverse Panofsky's claim that, other than through lexical means of identification,

. . . we have no way of knowing to what extent the . . .
objects in the picture, . . . } looking like nice still-
life features, may be symbols.¹³

On the contrary, the sheer ingenuity of the complex object and pattern geography strongly suggests that such elements are a vehicle for a meaning far beyond what has so far been proposed. The fact that these pattern devices are not arbitrary but obey a very precise set of rules, liken them to a language which carries within itself its own grammar and syntax. The task is to supply the missing message which these devices mutually conspire to convey. The task is to discover how such compositional and formal continuity is an expression of a unified thematic content.

We will begin with a re-examination and reassessment of the central panel to discover the thematic relationship of this panel to the wing panels. We will then go on to examine the special thematic relationship of the wing panels to one another and how this in turn qualifies the

meaning of the central panel and contributes to the final inclusive meaning of the altarpiece.

IV. NOTES

¹Panofsky, ENP, p. 165.

²Panofsky, ENP, p. 165, 167.

³Carla Gottlieb, "The Brussels Version of the Merode Annunciation," Art Bulletin 39 (Mar. 1957), p. 57 in reference to O. Paecht, "Gestaltungsprinzipien der westlichen Malerei des 15. Jahrhunderts," Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen 2 (1933), pp. 75-100.

⁴Gottlieb, "Brussels", p. 54.

⁵Nickel, pp. 242.

⁶Nickel, pp. 242-244.

⁷Frinta, "Authorship", p. 250.

⁸Frinta, "Authorship", p. 250.

⁹Frinta, "Authorship", p. 256.

¹⁰Gottlieb, "Respiciens".

¹¹Panofsky, ENP, p. 142.

¹²The significance of the shift of the center vertical (Figure 3) to the vertical of the center panel's sashwork Latin cross (Figure 4), will become apparent in Chapter 6 of this thesis. As to why the existence of the Figure 3 'vertical-grid' should be superceded (shifted), it should be said that the complexity of the program obliged the artist to use a variety of organizing devices. Figure 3 and 4 verticals serve, therefore, legitimate purposes, and my identification of a "shift" is to indicate the viewer-analyst's movement from the recognition of visually obvious to more visually subtle patterns of organization.

¹³Panofsky, ENP, p. 142.

V. PROCESS AS THE KEY TO THE MAIN THEME'S OUTER MEANING

A. Re-evaluation of the Center Panel

Most of the previous research on the altarpiece sees the main thematic action as occurring within the central panel. For this reason, the central panel is an appropriate place to begin the task of re-evaluating the artwork.

The first step of this task must be to ask what exactly is represented in the center panel. Past research studies have been unable to achieve agreement on even this basic question, and as the previous chapter concerning pattern has indicated, a number of relationships expressed in the panel are not explained by any of these former studies although one may safely assume that these interconnections do support some form of thematic meaning.

Despite a host of different scholarly interpretations, all studies may be divided between two fundamental positions concerning the Annunciation/Incarnation. Before examining these positions, it is however important to first make clear that both the Annunciation and Incarnation have always been understood as simultaneous - if not synonymous - occurrences. As the Gospel of St. Luke relates, the Archangel Gabriel announces to Mary:

. . . Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. (Luke 1:31)

At that moment, the Incarnation is believed to have taken place, which is why the feast of the Annunciation is celebrated on March 25th, nine months before the Christmas celebration of the Nativity. Yet it is the exact moment of the Annunciation process being depicted which has occasioned such great debate among several of these scholars. Charles Minott and

William Heckscher in particular represent the two positions especially well. Minott held that the event is depicted as having not yet happened, while Heckscher argued that - despite appearances - it has.

Each of these positions seems quite justified when we observe how the panel is laid out. In the previous chapter on pattern, it was seen how the closing of each wing (with the other wing left open) divided the center panel into two halves. Pursuing this division, if only the right wing is closed, one sees only the ready and expectant looks of the donors and Gabriel, the Christ child in descent, the pot of lilies (one still in bud), and the fluttering pages of the book on the table. All of these elements emphasize anticipation and expectation; that is, the coming or advent of Christ as was emphasized by Minott.

If, however, one closes the left wing of the altarpiece instead, leaving only the right half of the center panel exposed to view, one sees the extinguished candle (representing the transformation and ostensible eclipse of the divinity in assuming human form), and the star on Mary's lap, which - I will suggest below - also indicates that the Incarnation has occurred. Also visible in this particular state of the triptych's openness, is Joseph's workshop in which symbols of the Passion have been identified, thereby serving to further emphasize the Incarnation as an accomplished fact.

Yet, beyond these two opposing interpretations, a third possibility also exists. In that both advent and incarnation imagery are represented when the center panel is viewed as a whole, perhaps both Christ's advent and Incarnation are being intentionally shown in a purposely simultaneous fashion.

That this is indeed the case is first indicated by an examination

of the descent of the tiny Christ child in the role of the Holy Spirit. The child has barely begun its descent and yet the breeze which disturbs the pages of the book on the table beside the Virgin has nonetheless already advanced to this low point on the downward route. Clearly, this breeze, approaching the Virgin on the same path the child uses is, like the child, another symbol of the Word (Logos: Christ) emanating from God. Specifically, the breeze may be understood as both the Spirit of God and the Breath of the Word of God because "pneuma", in the original Greek translation of the Bible, means both "spirit" and "breath". Hence the Spirit, though having not advanced in the form of the child, has advanced in the form of "pneuma" (a double image which therefore supports both advent and Incarnation connotations). The same breeze has also extinguished the candle on the table in addition to having stirred the book's pages. Extinguishing the candle by means of this 'spirit-breeze' constitutes a most elegant visual artistic solution by Campin, because it depicts that incomprehensible aspect at the very core of the Mystery of the Incarnation: the Spirit in the apparent act of 'extinguishing' (transforming) Spirit. This is a completely divine action,¹ and for this reason Heckscher's suggestion that the Virgin has herself blown out the candle is visually and connotatively untenable.²

As indicated above, the five-pointed star of light we observe on the Virgin's lap signals that the Spirit Who emanates in the form of sunrays from the oculus window above, has arrived at Mary's womb. That this is so is quite possibly reinforced by the five-pointed star which I believe may be taken as a symbol for 'Man', and therefore as a representation of Christ in the process of assuming His human aspect. The evidence supporting this interpretation, though fragmentary, is reasonable

and may be cited as follows. The relation of the human figure to that of the pentagram dates back at least to Vitruvius, the Roman architectural writer of the first century A.D., whose statement on the inscribability of the human figure into the square and the circle was well known to the Middle Ages.³ This figure of the man within the circle, wherein the pentagram form is assumed by the outspread limbs, is perhaps best known to popular consciousness through Leonardo da Vinci's drawing of 'Vitruvian Man' and exists in numerous manuscripts of the Renaissance period. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (Cologne 1486 - Grenoble 1535) featured the pentagrammatic version of 'Vitruvian Man' in his book De Occulta Philosophia (1510), and "describes the pentagram as an emblem revealing the simplest, pure synthesis of the human figure".⁴ Further, the inverted pentagram has been used as a birth symbol. A sixteenth century baby's cradle (1579) has been found which features an inverted pentagram within a circle on the interior headboard and Christ's 'IHS' monogram on the exterior footboard. This is identical to a somewhat earlier cradle (1445-1503) which substitutes a six-pointed star for the Christ monogram.⁵ I believe that the inverted pentagram refers to the baby and the IHS/six-pointed star to Christ. If this were true, the two cradles would be identical except for the substitution of the six-pointed star for the Christ monogram.⁶ The significance I wish to point out is the connection of the star pentagram to birth. The northern rose window of Amiens Cathedral features a gigantic inverted tracery pentagram which carries Annunciation significations.⁷ However, that the five-pointed star on Mary's lap is not inverted does not necessarily detract in the least from the above interpretation.

One more piece of evidence may be presented to support the idea

that both the advent of Christ as well as the accomplished Incarnation are simultaneously represented in the center panel. Although Panofsky has stated that ". . . pictorial space is subject to the rules that govern empirical space",⁸ in contrast to the earlier High Middle Ages where

A non-perspective and non-naturalistic art, not recognizing either unity of space or unity of time, [could] employ symbols without regard for empirical probability or even possibility,⁹

he does qualify this by saying, "excepting, of course, the symbolic representation of spiritual events".¹⁰ Such an exception is the space of the Annunciation chamber, which, as the turning-point between Old and New Eras, is a Mystery which transcends the constraints of empirical space and time. Next to this profound Mystery, accepting the obvious cues provided depicting the apparent temporal coincidence of moments both leading up to and following the Incarnation therefore becomes relatively easy for the viewer.

Yet, taking the center panel as an inclusive representation of the Annunciation goes beyond accepting that two separate points in time (one before and one after the event) are shown. It obliges one to recognize that points of time are not being represented at all, and additionally, that we are witnessing instead the continuity of time throughout the entire event. That is to say, the entire descent and Incarnation is represented simultaneously. The idea of 'one point in time' - to which Minott and Heckscher (as well as others) were committed, and which is impossible to confirm because both 'points' are iconographically indicated - must be replaced by the concepts of synchronous (as opposed to linear) time and of 'process'. As Shirley Neilsen Blum said of the Merode Triptych:

I know of no other Annunciation that so visualizes the process of the Incarnation.¹¹

In fact, as will be demonstrated below, there is actually an organic threefold process suggested in the panel which consists of (1) the process of descent and impregnation, (2) the accomplished impregnation and incarnation, and (3) birth as the result of the process of incarnation. For reasons which will soon become clear, these will be referred to as the impregnation process, the marriage process, and the revelation process.

B. How Process is Emphasized in the Center Panel in Three Ways

1. the impregnation process

Representation of the process of impregnation in the center panel may be said to consist in a series of metaphors. These metaphors may in turn be divided into those which are 'gentle' and those which are 'aggressive'. Of the former, the most visually immediate is the emanation and descent of the Holy Spirit depicted as the miniature Christ child bearing upon His shoulder an equally tiny cross. As Figure 12 illustrates, the path of descent may logically be understood as a straight line connecting the 'point of emanation' (the leaded intersection of the oculus window from which the light rays originate) with the 'star of light' on the Virgin's lap. As Figure 12 also reveals, this path crosses above the book on the table, the pages of which are stirred by the Spirit's passing.

The path of descent is not, however, 'riveted' to only one route, for in the positioning of the pencil of rays and the Christ child, these elements allow for a more generalized and less 'point-to-point' manner

of descent as well (this must certainly be so if one is to understand the Spirit's passing as responsible for the extinguished candle, the wick of which does not lie upon the path depicted in Figure 12). Indeed, an alternate path of descent is strongly indicated by the incline of the Christ child's body itself. Figure 13 illustrates this more elevated line of descent, upon which the body of the Christ child, so to speak, 'rests', and which leads directly to the left page of the book which Mary holds; that page which the position of her head and hands clearly indicate she is in the process of reading.¹²

This second path of descent of the Spirit-Christ child to the page which Mary reads is of immense significance for the proper interpretation of the panel's dramatic action. In Annunciation pictures, the Virgin's

. . . most constant attribute is a book from which, according to St. Bernard, she is reading the celebrated prophesy of Isaiah (7:14), 'A young woman is with child (Vulgate: Virgo concipiet), and she will bear a son . . .'.¹³

But the Virgin is not merely reading the thoughts of Isaiah, for this is a prophecy engendered by God. Therefore, we must understand that she is reading the Word of God, that she is visually intaking the Word of God, meaning both the biblical as well as the Logos-Word of God which is Christ Himself. The representation of the Virgin reading is therefore a subtle but brilliantly apt metaphor of the Virgin intaking the divine Word as transmitted through (1) the agent of Gabriel (a sound as well as a visual image), and (2) the agent of light (visual-image).

The connection of the descent of the Spirit in the form of light (supported by both the pencil of light rays and the star of light on Mary's lap) with the 'internalization of light' through the eye - as in the act of reading - would be a most logical connection for a painter to

make, and the far-reaching implications of this for a reassessment of the very concept of the role of painting in the North will be discussed at a later point in this study. For now it may be observed that reading the book as a twofold metaphor for the absorption of both the Word and of the Spirit-as-Light is a meaningful extension, equally as gentle and subtle, as the Incarnation metaphor of the light ray which passes through glass without damaging it. In the book reading metaphor, however, the glass becomes the eye itself. This symbol is also consistent with the fact that, as a spirit, Gabriel can be interpreted as appearing to Mary as a non-material 'vision'. Hence, the theme of vision again operates as a gentle mode of transmission and reception. The fact that such 'vision' is an internal phenomenon, does not therefore oblige Mary to look up at Gabriel (as Heckscher insisted) in order that the event may be consummated. On the contrary, as Campin has depicted her eyes in such a manner as to be either open (reading) or closed (interior vision), both concepts of 'vision' are simultaneously expressed.¹⁴

In conclusion, I therefore believe that the alternate line of descent which brings the tiny Christ child to the very page which Mary reads (Figure 13) is an intentional device which reinforces the concept of the reading Virgin as absorbing the Spirit in the form of light (indeed, in the form of the very 'Spirit-light' which illumines both the page itself and its prophetic script). In fact, given that we are witness not to single points in time but to the organic unfolding of an entire event, we may well imagine that as we are watching the reading Virgin (absorbing the 'light-Word'), the star of light gradually appears and intensifies upon her lap, representing - not an outer light - but the inner presence of the incarnating Christ, steadily growing within

her womb. The importance of her absorbed reading leads me to therefore conclude that Heckscher's claim that an "unauthorized alteration" of the position of the Virgin's head and eyes occurred which changed a 'Virgin looking at Gabriel' to one that is reading seems completely unjustified.

As an addition to such 'gentle' or 'subtle' renditions of the impregnation process, more aggressive impregnation metaphors may also be found in the center panel as well. The inventory may begin by observing two series of 'nodes', one of which was discussed briefly in the previous chapter. Figure 14 depicts the five nodal entities sited on the intersecting axes (gridlines) in question. On the diagonal axis which occupies the donor's panel and extends into the upper left hand corner of the center panel, three nodes are evident: the intersection of the leaded oculus window cross from which the tiny Christ child proceeds, the lock of the door in front of the donors, and the male donor's purse-dagger. All three can be related to the theme of impregnation. The oculus window is pierced by the Spirit-light of the Holy Ghost on its journey to impregnate Mary; the key inserted in the lock of the door (itself permitting the "opening" of the closed chamber which, as already discussed, symbolically represented the formerly unpenetrated womb of the Virgin); and, the purseflap-scabbard which is penetrated by the blade of the donor's knife. Indeed, the very angle of this nodal axis is an almost perfect duplicate of that of the line of the window-to-star descent path in the center panel, and joining these two axes with the horizontal gridline at the bottoms of the panels results in a fairly regular isosceles triangle (Figure 15). The Trinitarian connotations of this triangle thematically support the Incarnation which one of its sides (the descent path) literally and visually participate in. This is because

the Incarnation involves the action of all three members of the Trinity; God dispenses the Son to Mary through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

But to return to Figure 14, on the horizontal gridline which spans the lower portions of all of the triptych panels we can also read, from right to left, the following nodes: the tip of Joseph's drill¹⁵, the center of Mary's star of light, and the blade of the donor's purse-dagger (which is common to both horizontal and diagonal axes). Each of these also carry impregnational significance. In fact, the donor's knife and Joseph's drill are very aggressive penetration symbols expressing physical force, especially when seen in contrast to the purposely non-physical 'light-through-the-windowpane' imagery discussed above.

That the drill is an intentional symbol of Mary's penetration by God becomes unquestionable when we discover that Joseph's drill is reiterated within the center panel as a hidden, or rather, indigenous piece of potent iconography. As reference to Figure 16 discloses, the line of the Spirit/Christ child's descent into Mary's womb is itself likened to a gigantic drill, similar in design to that belonging to Joseph. The round hand-knob of this 'indigenous drill' (as I will be referring to it) is the oculus window itself. The shaft of light from which the tiny Christ proceeds, and his path as well, both correspond to the shank of the drill which extends from the center of its circular knob. The arc of the shank, which serves as the handle of the drill and which Joseph is seen to grasp with his right hand, is echoed in the arc of the table upon which Gabriel has placed his own right hand (in apparent reiteration of that of Joseph). Hence, not only is the oculus window seen to carry a more clear-cut impregnation signification linking it even more strongly with the lock and dagger nodes discussed above

(and depicted in Figure 14), but the 'indigenous drill' itself - its tip on the star sharing the same gridline as Joseph's drill-tip - is seen to vigorously present in a single, cohesive image, the 'process' of incarnation. Already the thematic 'underside' of what at first appeared to be a series of curious and inexplicable formal patterns is starting to emerge. Also, motives for specific object placements are now seen to derive from thematic criteria far superseding Panofsky's notions, discussed earlier, of a formal composition predicated on "surface relations" and "horror vacui".

An important part of the significance the indigenous drill iconograph holds for the triptych at large, is in its implications concerning the figure of Joseph. Obviously, the attributes of the indigenous drill which impregnates Mary in the center panel must be transferable to the physically manifest 'model' for that drill presented in the Joseph panel, and thus to Joseph himself. Clearly, Joseph is being likened to God. Such a transfer of attributes is not inconceivable or without precedent. Actors in medieval Mystery plays assumed the roles of divine personages ranging from God, to His angels, to Saints themselves. In fact, it has been demonstrated that a triptych ascribed to Campin of 1438 and done for Heinrich von Werl, a professor at the University of Cologne, represents St. Barbara with attributes usually reserved for the Virgin Mary.¹⁶ The transfer of the aforementioned Godly actions to St. Joseph, therefore, seems to have been done in a like spirit.

A narrowing of focus further reveals the appropriateness of the comparison. Joseph as an artisan in his woodshop cast in the role of God no doubt embodies the notion of God as the divine craftsman. This concept, traceable all the way back to Plato's *Timeaus*,¹⁷ was prevalent in

the Middle Ages and compatible with the aspirations of the politically ascendant craft guilds - one of which Campin had become Dean of in 1423 - and which were themselves close to religious confraternities in nature. Also, these guilds operated in close connection with the Church in the case of commissioned religious artworks so that the religious significance and role of the artist was no doubt a source of pride. Closer analysis reveals that the actions of Joseph correlate with those of God the Father, right down to even the most subtle levels of symbolic refinement. For example, the knob of the drill at Joseph's heart recalls St. John's reference to Christ as:

. . . the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father . . . (John 1:18),

and the transfer of the Son in God's heart to the world through the 'indigenous drill' of the center panel is undeniably also a visualization of the love of God's heart:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son . . . (John 3:16).

This concept of Christ's emanation from the divine heart had a wide currency in numerous medieval writings. For example, the German Dominican and mystical theologian, Meister Eckhart (1260 - c. 1328), whose works were known of and read in the Netherlands,¹⁸ wrote:

The Son proceeds from the Heart of the Father without ever leaving the Heart.¹⁹

It is useful to note that the drill represents another dimension of God's love, and for that matter, of Joseph's love as well. The drill, and the entire process of Mary's impregnation which it represents, also expresses the love of God for the Virgin who is to later become, upon her death and Assumption, enthroned next to the Lord as His eternal Bride.

Joseph is, therefore, both Mary's earthly spouse, but additionally serves in the role of Mary's divine spouse.²⁰ The casting of Joseph in this important and dual capacity may very well owe something to the cult of Joseph which, as earlier discussed, Schapiro had strongly believed was an important source of the artwork's iconography. John Gerson (1363-1429), one of the leaders of the cult of Joseph who had held religious posts in Flanders, emphasized the domestic and bourgeois virtues of St. Joseph as a husband and artisan, rather than his supernatural aspects as a saint,²¹ and that Gerson thus

. . . turns from the mysterious, incomprehensible Trinity of dogma to the "divinissima Trinitas Jesu, Joseph et Mariae".²²

Yet despite Schapiro's insistence that the domestic side of Joseph was emphasized by the cult, the fact that Joseph is seen to participate in the 'divinissima Trinitas' in the role of God in the altarpiece contradicts Schapiro's domestic characterization of the Saint and supports the dual role of Joseph presented here. Indeed, the fact (pointed out by Schapiro), that Gerson, at the Council of Constance in 1416,

. . . proposed that Joseph be elevated to a rank above that of the apostles and next to the Virgin's; . . . [arguing] also for the institution of a universal feast of the Marriage of Mary and Joseph,²³

hardly supports a domestic interpretation of the Saint. In fact, the indigenous iconographic evidence strongly suggests that both domestic and supernatural aspects coexist in such conceptions about Joseph. Likewise, the dual role which Joseph plays in the altarpiece may in all probability be linked to this cult.

In that both the 'indigenous drill' of God and the drill of Joseph carry associations of impregnation and marital love, the discussion may now fruitfully turn to a more indepth examination of the latter.

2. the marriage process

So far we have examined the symbolism of the altarpiece as it relates to the process of the Virgin's impregnation. But a shift in emphasis allows one to focus upon the theme of marriage as a related but independent symbolic process in its own right.

From what we have gathered above concerning Joseph, we may say that the chaste marriage of Mary and Joseph also alludes to the chaste union of the Virgin and her divine spouse in which occurs a non-physical impregnation via the agent of light. That this marriage with God is as much an accomplished reality as that of its earthly counterpart is indicated by the tip of the indigenous drill stream at the star of light on Mary's lap which clearly shows that the marriage has been consummated. Yet, in the same way that it was earlier argued that both the advent of the Spirit and the accomplished Incarnation are simultaneously represented in the center panel, so it is possible to see the different stages of the marriage process as coexistent phenomena.

As already discussed, Carla Gottlieb, in her study of the altarpiece, relates how the center panel possesses features of the bridal chamber as described in the Song of Solomon. She describes how, according to Christian exegetical tradition, the Canticle was understood to represent (as she stresses) the marriage of Christ to His Bride the Church, having earlier mentioned that Mary was herself a symbol of that Church.²⁴ Although Gottlieb goes on to elaborate this relationship between Christ and His Church in Eucharistic terms, it is her commentary on the Canticle which is my main concern at this point. Specifically, attention is drawn to verse 2:9 which is understood by the exegetes to describe Christ standing, with great anticipation, outside the house of His Bride:

Behold he standeth behind our wall,
 Looking through the windows,
 Looking through lattices . . . 25

Gottlieb is led by this verse to interpret the lattice-work window, positioned almost directly behind Mary in the center panel, as an indication that from behind the shuttered half of the window Christ is looking at Mary, His Bride.²⁶ However, neither interpretation of the Canticle, nor Gottlieb's belief that Christ is looking through the lattices of the central panel chamber necessarily suggest that marriage has yet transpired.²⁷ Especially in the case of the altarpiece, I believe that it is not the marital, but the pre-marital courtship phase, which is being emphasized if this image of Christ peering through the lattices is to be understood as applicable.

As for the next phase of the marriage process - the actual wedding itself - we may consider the following. If, despite Helmut Nickel's identification of the gateman in the donor's panel as a municipal messenger, one is to allow this figure to act as a marriage broker as well (as Heckscher, cognizant of Nickel's study, was able to do; Heckscher, p. 48), an interesting possibility presents itself. The similarity of gateman and Archangel messenger roles has already been noted by Nickel, but does the correspondence perhaps go even further so that Gabriel is also likened to a priest officiating at the wedding of the Virgin and, in the role of God, Joseph? If this were the case, the gateman-donor couple triad of figures outside the dwelling would constitute a strong complementary outer reflection of the Gabriel-Mary-God triad and wedding ceremony which occurs within.

Gottlieb's identification of Mary's bench as the Bridal couch described in the Song of Solomon²⁸ brings this discussion to the next

phase of the process in which the marriage may be seen to be consummated. As previously stated, impregnation symbols such as the oculus window pierced by the light, both large and small drills, the Virgin's act of reading, and the star of light on her lap all help to underscore the fact that the Virgin's marital union with God has been sealed. Also supportive of the general marital theme is the other marriage iconography Heckscher identified as existing throughout the chamber. As previously discussed, these included such features as the dog and lion figurines on Mary's bench - representing the traditional Christian marriage virtues of fidelity and fortitude - and the fireplace's corbel figurines of a man and woman symbolic of marriage under the Old Law.²⁹ The sum total of all the marriage imagery in the panel may therefore be loosely tied to the different phases of courtship, wedding, and fulfillment. As such, we have been justified in speaking of the intentional representation of a marriage process, and not simply of 'marriage' as one idea among many.

3. the revelation process

If we can consider once again the indigenous drill stream of the center panel, it will be realized that the Incarnation is emphasized - in yet a third manner - as the process of God's self-revelation. Ultimately, this process is expressed in the Nativity or Birth of Christ; that point at which God becomes physically manifest as man. Although the Nativity of Christ is not depicted in the triptych, the process of God's self-revelation is nonetheless represented in an alternate form which will be eventually shown to signify Birth.

To recognize the operation of this third type of process in the altarpiece, it is necessary to return briefly to the figure and role of

Joseph in his carpenter shop. Closer inspection of the saint requires us to advance beyond our earlier assessment that the artist "likened" Joseph to God. More extensive analysis reveals that Joseph literally performs the actions of God, rather than merely reiterating them quaintly on the physical plane in what would have to be considered a state of dumb mimicry.

As Schapiro has commented, Joseph's presence next to the Annunciation is iconographically unusual.³⁰ However, when it is realized - in addition to the evidence already presented on the function of Joseph - that he represents God in His Holy of Holies (that most sacred and innermost chamber of the Jewish Temple or sanctuary), the logic of his proximity to Mary becomes ever more clear. In defense of this claim I will first point out that Joseph is represented in what appears to be a tiny chamber. Unlike the room of the Annunciation and outdoor garden, no door to this chamber is shown. This fact, combined with the chamber's relative darkness in comparison to the other panels (despite its windows which admit surprisingly little light into the space), is not inconsistent with the concept of the Holy of Holies as a closed chamber in which God the Father dwells.

The side-by-side representation of the inner sanctum of the Temple and the Annunciation chamber, which Gottlieb has identified as a Church by virtue of its "liturgical paraphernalia",³¹ is not without precedent in Campin's own work. His painting, *The Betrothal of the Virgin* (Prado Museum), contrasts the interior of the Temple with the exterior facade elevation of the Church, still under construction, which almost appears to grow out of the former. This same painting well represents the darker, inner aspect of the Synagogue in contradistinction to the lighter,

exteriorized and revealed nature of the Church as symbol of the New Era. This contrast may be said to also obtain between the light-filled Annunciation chamber and Joseph's shadowy carpenter shop. The comparison may be taken a step further, if we meditate on Gottlieb's statement that Mary is seated below, not upon, the 'Bridal couch' because the bench refers to her future Coronation and Enthronement next to Christ in Heaven.³² I previously drew attention to the fact (Figure 7 and related text) that the table, the seated (on the floor) figure of Mary, and the bench of the center panel echoed the distribution of similar elements in Joseph's panel. This repetition becomes significant when it is realized that Joseph's bench is likewise a throne, and that his high position as God is subtly apparent in that he is the only seated (or 'enthroned') figure in the triptych. Joseph must therefore be understood as God, within the innermost precinct of His heavenly Temple:

The Lord is in His Holy temple,
the Lord's throne is in heaven (Ps. 11:4)

Without leaving this divine residence, then, Joseph (as God) sends His messenger Gabriel to effect the Annunciation 'below'. Gabriel, with his hand on the indigenous drill (just like that of Joseph-God), literally becomes the 'Hand of God' within the earthly chamber of the Annunciation, who directs the indigenous drill towards Mary's womb. The drills in both panels are thus the same drill. The action of Joseph (as God) and the action of Gabriel are but the same action, such that Gabriel's words are God's "Word". Indeed, Gabriel appears to be gazing straight through the wall at the Master who guides him (this will become even more evident later on). It is, in a sense, as if we were observing the same process on two spiritual levels: the one at its source in God's chamber, the second by angelic proxy in the spiritual world which interpenetrates

the physical Annunciation chamber itself.

Finally, this honorific state of entronement is reinforced by the fact that, taken all together, the panels featuring the donors and Gabriel show figures who devotionally kneel while facing in the direction of Joseph-God. This sovereign position of honor is underscored by the simple fact that, unlike the gateman and male donor who have observantly removed their hats. Joseph is granted the singular distinction of wearing his turban. It comes as no surprise, then, to observe Joseph in the process of making a mousetrap, that Augustinian symbol of Christ's cross,³³ because we understand that, as God, the artisan is merely creating the symbolic archetypes for carrying out the inevitable cycle of events following from the Annunciation.³⁴ The mousetrap as cross, being created 'behind-the-scenes', so to speak, has a logical counterpart I believe in the thematically similar Image of the Trinity iconograph which depicts God the Father spiritually supporting the physical body (sometimes on the cross) of the Crucified Christ. Campin himself painted a version of the Throne of Grace (without the cross) which is in the Städelches Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt and he was undoubtedly aware of the common signification of these two symbols.

The theme of God the Father's 'hiddenness', which we have alluded to in different ways, plays a very important role in the altarpiece, and is a concept which is absolutely essential for proper understanding of Christian revelation. The hidden God of the Old Testament,³⁵ or Sabaoth, Lord of Hosts, was a stern war God in contrast to the merciful, loving, and revealed God of the New Testament.³⁶ This aspect of hiddenness also stands behind the dark versus light symbolism which was associated with the Old and New Testaments respectively.³⁷

The alternating instances of openness and closure in the altarpiece may also be seen to contribute to the thematic contrast between God the Father and God the Son. We have commented already, in a different capacity, upon Gottlieb's belief that the following verse from the Song of Solomon relates directly to the half-shuttered and half-latticed lower sections of the window in Mary's chamber:

Behold he standeth behind our wall,
Looking through the windows,
Looking through the lattices . . .
(Song of Solomon 2:9)

But we may also admit that the reference to the wall aptly describes the fact that Joseph (as God) appears to occupy a room located behind the wall of the fireplace. The wall as an impenetrable barrier may well be said to characterize the figure of God eclipsed from view in his Holy of Holies.³⁸ In contrast to the wall as a symbol of the hiddenness of God the Father, we may see the door as a symbol of the revealed God; God the Son. Christ in fact uses the door as a metaphor for Himself several times in the New Testament:

I am the door: by me if any
man enter in, he shall be
saved, and shall go in and
out . . . (John 10:9)

And again:

Behold, I stand at the door,
and knock, if any man hear
my voice, and open the door,
I will come in to him, and
will sup with him, and he
with me. (Rev. 3:20)

The representation of the door as a reference to Christ is used numerous times within the Merode Altarpiece, and one of these may at this point be mentioned. First, the dangling key of the large door in the donors' panel has been described by Gottlieb as featuring Christ's 'IHC' monogram. She

believes this key fits the gateman's door and so identifies Christ "as the owner of this dwelling".³⁹ One could go a step further and identify the door to which the key belongs as an allusion to Christ as well, especially because through that door is visible the symbol of Christ which is used in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 6:2, 19:11): the rider on a white horse (Figure 17).⁴⁰ The tiny sashwork cross in the gatehouse window directly above the horse and rider, I believe, reinforces this identification yet again.

The Father-wall, Son-door symbolism may again be seen in the windows of the Joseph panel as well as the Annunciation panel window which Gottlieb likened to an illustration of a verse from the Song of Solomon (Figure 1). If I were to accept Gottlieb's interpretation, I would do so with the following revisions. Whereas Gottlieb feels that Christ the Bridegroom stands behind the shuttered portion of the window, but is visible through the latticed section only to Mary,⁴¹ I would point out that not only is her back turned to the window, but that even if she did face the window, any figure standing behind the shuttered half would be equally as invisible to her as he would be to us. However, it could be posited that when standing behind the shutter the being would be hidden and therefore qualify as God the Father, but that when the same being became visible through the lattices He would thus become God-revealed or Christ. For, as the great thirteenth century Franciscan, St. Bonaventure, observed:

Christ the Son of God, . . . is
the natural image of the invisible
God . . .⁴²

Irrespective of the hypothetical presence of a being behind the closed shutter, however, I would maintain that the shutter and latticework

themselves symbolize the Father and Son respectively. This is first because of their contrast between closure and openness. Further, the latticework section of the window is strangely evocative - in its size and perforation - of the Board which Joseph works upon which has been identified by Marilyn Lavin as a strainer-board or Mystic Winepress; a symbol of Christ. In this respect, it is appropriate to say that I believe Campin uses his iconography in an intentionally polysemous (many-meaning) way, as should be evident in that many of the symbols identified so far in this study have been found to support multiple (though by no means vague) meanings. As such I believe the general similarity between Joseph's board and the latticework section of the window is an intentional non-lexical visual cue which allows for a certain transfer of meaning between these objects (I also would include the firescreen in this group in that it bears a certain family resemblance to Joseph's board, but of this I will speak later). But to return to the latticework itself; its identification with Christ also aids in the realization that Joseph's board, taken as Christ (and not merely as an allusion to Christ as the Mystic Winepress), correlates well with the drill as a vehicle whereby God disseminates Christ. In essence, Joseph's board - like Mary's star of light - represents Christ by virtue of the fact that (among other things) they both lie at the tip of an 'incarnational drill'.

Finally, the two sections of Mary's window may be seen to symbolize God and Christ because both are duplicated in Joseph's window. For the moment we may disregard Joseph's partially opened window furthest right and behind Joseph's bench. As previously indicated in Figure 7 and its corresponding text, visual examination reveals that as the back of Mary's

bench leads up to the frame of her two window openings, so the back of Joseph's bench may also be seen to 'contain' the two dominant windows of his chamber positioned to its left. Although this should serve as sufficient reason to treat his third window as distinct from the other two, it can also be noted that this third window is further segregated because (1) it is behind the back of the bench, (2) it is side-hinged like a door, or conversely (3) that the two windows in question feature shutters which swing vertically rather than laterally. Having described the basis on which a comparison can thus be made, I would draw attention to the fact that, as with Mary's windows, the lower portion of the one to the left is shuttered whereas its neighbor may be seen through. In point of fact, the mousetrap which is visible in the lower window portion (which I am claiming corresponds to the lower latticework window) has been identified by Shcapiro as a symbol of Chirst, just as I have suggested the latticework is.

Yet despite the emphasis on these two very different aspects of God, the continuity rather than the distinction of the divine persons is ultimately understood. This continuity is expressed in the popular Medieval metaphor:

God, the Son of God,
Comes forth from his bride,⁴³

and it is brilliantly represented in the visual metaphor of the drill. In this piece of indigenous iconography, the depiction of a continuous, metamorphic process from Father to Son serves to effectively present the continuity of identity between Father and Son. Likewise, the tradition to which both figures were associated - the Old Testament Era and the New Testament Era - were by no means viewed exclusively in adversarial terms as has been emphasized by some scholars.⁴⁴ Panofsky has pointed

out that Early Netherlandish artists even invented architectural metaphors for the two Eras - Romanesque for the Old, Gothic for the New - and sometimes combined these two in single paintings to "[stress] their continuity"⁴⁵ and "[express] a reconciliation of the present [New Era] with the past [Old Era]".⁴⁶ In fact, the transmission of God the Son from God the Father depicted in the altarpiece and which represents a smooth and meaningful transition may very well symbolize the continuity of Old Testament and New Testament traditions as well.

The process of the hidden Old Testament Father God becoming, through the very act of self-revelation, the revealed New Testament God the Son is dramatically represented in the iconographic accompaniment to the indigenous drill stream noted earlier.⁴⁷ To understand this, one may begin by focusing attention upon the contrast existing between the open gatedoor in the donors' panel and the tiny closed gatehouse positioned above it (Figure 17). As previously indicated, the open door has been identified as a symbol for Christ. Conversely, I believe that the gatehouse, with its totally dark interior signified by the tiny openings of a window and door which are black, relates very well to the hiddenness of the Father. The purpose this image serves in the donors' panel becomes quite clear when it is understood that the gatehouse represents a corollary to Joseph's chamber; the throne room from which the hidden God comes forth as Spirit, proceeding along the walkway to pierce the oculus window, enter the chamber of the central panel, and descend into the womb of Mary (Figure 18). This image masterfully expresses the transformational process which the Syrian monk of the Eastern Church, known to us as Pseudo-Dionysius, spoke of in relation to the Eucharistic transubstantiation of the Mass:

. . . This shows us, in a sensible manner and as it were in an image, how Christ Himself came forth from his mysterious divine sanctuary to take the figure of a man for the love of man.⁴⁸

We are also shown in this image how God reveals His Trinitarian Nature in coming forth. This nature expresses itself within the process of Incarnation in that (1) God is understood as the source of emanation, (2) the tiny Christ with His cross symbolizing the Holy Spirit is shown in the process of emanation, and (3) Christ is realized to be the fruit of that emanation. The at first deceptive fourfold image of the gatehouse next to the three open crenelations may be understood to represent God's essential unity of Persons. That is, despite the fact that the Godhead is triune, the oneness of God is greater than the separation of Persons (a doctrine Augustine insisted upon, and which the fifteenth century Augustinian churchman Nicholas of Cusa expressed as the simultaneous Oneness and Threeness of God).⁴⁹ The same basic fourfold symbol is also used in the small Annunciation painting by Jan van Eyck in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. In this painting, directly beneath a tablet-shaped representation of the Lord Sabaoth (Old Testament Father God) on a darkened wall, three similarly shaped arched grisaille glass windows are represented (note the symbolic dark/light contrast). Of this symbol, Panofsky has said:

This Godhead, triune in essence but not as yet in existence, unfolds Itself as the explicit Trinity in the act of the Incarnation, and this act is conceived as an emanation proceeding from above to below . . .⁵⁰

Clearly, the same significance may be lent to the fourfold symbol in the donors' panel, except that instead of the emanation from the One to the Three being from above downward, it proceeds from the gatehouse door,

past the three crenelations and through the oculus window on its way downward.

This 'dramatic entrance' of God into the Annunciation chamber, and thus into corporeal existence, possesses a certain theatrical element which may enlighten us as to one of its possible origins. The manifold elements of this image, including (1) the upper chamber with its divine occupant shielded from sight, (2) the entry into the Annunciation chamber from above, and (3) the shifts in elevation and movement between these two stations, all have a conceivable counterpart in the medieval religious theatre. Records indicate that in celebration of the Feast of the Annunciation on March 25, 1439 at the Church of the Annunciation in Florence, an elaborate reenactment of the Annunciation was performed. In the middle of the church in front of the rood screen was a platform with a bed and chair which was the home of the Virgin. Above this was a curtained platform representing heaven, inside of which resided God in Majesty. The curtains on this upper stage were opened at the appropriate moment and the Angel Gabriel descended by means of a harness, rope, and pulleys.⁵¹ Medieval audiences had no problem with performers occupying such 'sedes' or 'loci', as they were called, while action was occurring elsewhere on stage,⁵² and medieval street theatre often utilized scaffolds and platforms stretched along an avenue with the dramatic action moving spatially from one scene to the next.⁵³ This type of movement was also characteristic of plays within the church as is shown by the recorded instance of a veiled platform featuring a split near a curtain so as to allow for the fast entry by Christ on to the stage of action.⁵³ Valentin Denis, in his book on Van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece⁵⁴ (an artwork which I have already indicated incorporated iconography

drawn from the Merode Triptych) theorized that the separate chambered spaces of the panels of the Ghent Polyptych may have been derived in part from the separate "mansions" or stages of medieval street theatre; each with its own zone and type of dramatic activity. On the basis of the apparent influence of the medieval theatre in the case of the Merode Triptych, I am inclined to agree with Denis' thesis regarding panel zones and to admit that it may apply to the Merode Altarpiece as well. The fact that there are definite transfers of action occurring between all three panels perfectly embodies Denis' idea that separate panels operate like "mansions" under the likely influence of the theatre. Specifically, these "transfers" of dramatic action occur between, (1) the donors panel and center panel (observation through the adjoining door; gatehouse stream through the oculus window), (2) the center and Joseph panels (Joseph/God's drill as expressed through His agents Gabriel and the indigenous drill of the center panel), and (3) the Joseph and donors panels (the Joseph/God chamber as thematically synonymous with the gatehouse chamber). The three panels also testify to the strong connection between street and liturgical drama. Furthermore, the synthetic nature of Early Netherlandish painting which Panofsky has shown rose above all other arts but music, absorbing (as part of this process) architecture and sculptural forms into its own compositions, may now be seen to have assimilated the dramatic arts as well. The powerful cohesion between the triptych's panels which this travelling action reveals finally allows that Campbell's notion of the altarpiece as an additive pastiche of random paintings may be put to rest.

C. Conclusion

The foregoing reexamination of the center panel has led to a re-evaluation of the entire triptych. I have shown that a three-fold process is represented in this work which may be identified as signifying the different stages of the Incarnation: impregnation, marriage, and revelation. These three processes may be seen as being contained in the center panel or as corresponding to the donor, center, or Joseph panels, respectively. The latter distinction will prove especially useful for the next chapter and may be expressed in the following manner:

1. The donor panel may be identified not only with the process of impregnation, but even more with the pre-impregnation stage of courtship, Christ's approach or advent, and the expectation characterized by the faces of the donors themselves. Indeed, as the gatehouse stream indicates, the actual 'descent of the drill' (the very essence of impregnation symbolism), does not begin until the center panel.
2. The center panel is where the actual impregnation and subsequent Incarnation occur, and rightly represents the 'marriage' as opposed to 'courtship' process.
3. The Joseph panel may, on the other hand, be seen as the place where God's self revelation is represented - in its most concentrated form - by Joseph and his drill. For this reason, I am identifying this panel as the most integral representation (in a single panel) of the revelation process.

Yet, despite the foregoing re-evaluation and evidence, as far as the main theme is concerned, we are still only entitled to see the altarpiece as an elegantly complex Annunciation picture. The real question to ask at this point is: Why the emphasis on process? Indeed, momentary reflection on the theme of Annunciation strongly suggests that it could in fact be better represented by not emphasizing process. What, for example, could showing the polysemous process of the Incarnation give the viewer which showing the results of the Incarnation - the Life, Passion, Crucifixion, Resurrection of Christ - could not supply? Indeed, the static portrayal of such 'results', represented iconically like mute sculpture, would have provided a far more 'devotional' focus in that the viewer would have been able to contemplate - undistracted and at a cool distance - the Mystery of the Incarnation in its pristine and spiritual remoteness bridgeable only by faith. As we will see, the persistent emphasis on process which 'involves' and 'leads' the viewer originates from thematic purposes which transcend the ostensible or apparent subject of the Annunciation.

V. NOTES

¹The thorough divinity and utter incomprehensibility of this transformation is also expressed in somewhat different form in the widely known medieval metaphor: "God, the Son of God, comes forth from his bride" (Schapiro, "Muscipula", N. 14, p. 183).

²Heckscher, p. 59f. The representation of Annunciations in which the Virgin displays reciprocal action in response to this act of God (such as the inclining of her head or the folding of her hands in prayer) has been discussed by David M. Robb, "The Iconography of the Annunciation in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," Art Bulletin 18 (Dec. 1936), pp. 480-526. Responsive action is one thing; however, extinguishing the candle comes very close to a 'causative action' which I believe must be reserved for God alone.

³Panofsky, MVA, p. 90f, N. 64.

⁴J. Shouten, The Pentagram as a Medical Symbol: An Iconological Study (Nieuwkoop, Netherlands: De Graef, 1968), p. 52.

⁵Shouten, p. 32, 33.

⁶The fact that in one instance Christ is equated with a six-pointed star and in another with a five-pointed star need not be seen as contradictory. Remember, the five-pointed star is a symbol of Man. For the identification of Christ with the six-pointed star see below, note 112, chapter six.

⁷Agrippa's De Occulta Philosophia also features inverted pentagrammatic 'Vitruvian Men' within circles which, I believe, may be interpreted as 'man as macrocosm', versus the established symbolism of the upright pentagrammatic representations of 'man as microcosm' (when, however, the latter are contrasted with an upright man in a square with arms extended horizontally - as in the da Vinci version - the square stands for the microcosm, i.e. gravitationally balanced containment, and the circle for the macrocosm, i.e. expansiveness). That the inverted pentagram may have been logically used to represent child-birth follows, I theorize, from a kind of geometrical logic (see also, Jonathan Z. Smith, "Birth Upside Down or Right Side Up?" History of Religions 9 (May 1970), 281-303). Assuming the five-pointed star was taken to represent 'Man', an interesting situation occurs which I do not believe was lost on the Medieval mind. On the interior of any five-pointed star is a smaller, inverted pentagon-star, which may be taken as the inverted human form (still 'macrocosmic') of the baby within the womb: an almost cosmological symbol of Man as a being who generates himself, and one of the most quintessential symbols for 'Man' imaginable.

⁸Panofsky, ENP, p. 141.

⁹Panofsky, ENP, p. 140.

¹⁰Panofsky, ENP, p. 141.

¹¹Blum, p. 10 (emphasis hers).

¹²It should be noted that although it would be difficult to calculate the precise line of descent from the angle of the Christ child's bodily inclination as indicated in the small-scale photographic reproduction used for Figure 14, I have confirmed the accuracy of the angle of descent from a full scale photographic reproduction of the altarpiece.

¹³"Annunciation", James Hall, Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

¹⁴The relationship of the open book to the idea of 'vision' is, I believe, also supported by the following. The convention of a closed book held by the Virgin in pictures of the Annunciation was held to allude to Isaiah (29:11-12), "All prophetic vision has become for you like a sealed book . . ." (Hall, s.v. 'Annunciation'). Conversely, I believe that the open book may be taken to signify the experience of an "unsealed" interior spiritual vision.

¹⁵Although Schapiro has identified this object as a "gimlet" ("Muscipula", p. 186), I believe it to be a drill in both form and use, especially if the knob at the top rotates upon the shank.

¹⁶Panofsky, ENP, p. 173.

¹⁷Raymond Klibanski, The Continuity of Platonic Tradition During the Middle Ages (London: Warburg Institute, 1939), p. 34.

¹⁸"The sermons of Meister Eckhart were known in the Netherlands from the beginning of the fourteenth century; there is even a contemporary manuscript containing a translation of them into the Brabant dialect . . ." (Alfred Wautier D'Aygalliers, Ruysbroeck the Admirable, 1923; rpt. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1969, p. 283).

¹⁹Franz Pfeiffer, Meister Eckhart, Vol. 1 (Sermon 48), trans. C. de B. Evans (London: John M. Watkins, 1924-31; first ed. Leipzig, 1857), p. 170.

²⁰Schapiro saw the drill as a sexual symbol related, in some vague fashion, to the couple's relationship, but admitted that, "It is difficult . . . to fix precisely the meaning of . . . such sexual symbols in a painting . . . we lack, moreover, all knowledge of the life history of the artist and the donor, who dictated perhaps the presence of Joseph and his task" ("Muscipula", p. 186).

²¹Schapiro, "Muscipula", p. 184.

²²Schapiro, "Muscipula", p. 184.

²³Schapiro, "Muscipula", p. 184.

²⁴Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 75, 68.

²⁵Verse 2:9, Song of Solomon, as given in Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 76.

²⁶Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 79.

²⁷See William R. Smith and Henry W. Robinson, "Canticles," Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 5, New York, 1911, eleventh ed., where the Canticles are seen as representing various stages of love leading up to and including the joys of wedded life (vol. 5, p. 214), and not necessarily indicative of wedding songs at all (vol. 5, p. 214, N. 1).

²⁸Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 82.

²⁹Heckscher, pp. 50, 53f.

³⁰Schapiro, "Muscipula", p. 182, 184.

³¹Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 66.

³²Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 82f.

³³Schapiro, "Muscipula", p. 182.

³⁴As He is creating such objects from His eternal throneroom outside the stream of time, the fact of the Passional mousetrap's existence along side of the representation of the Annunciation does not prove contradictory because the two chambers are not coextensive in space or time (in fact, it could even be argued on this basis that as the mousetrap in God's chamber exists out of time, it is not 'prefigurative' in the true sense of the word).

³⁵Reflected in one of Moses' encounters with the Lord where he was permitted to only see the Lord's backside: ". . . and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen" (Exodus 33:23).

³⁶The tradition of a revealed and a hidden God found expression not only within Christianity. The Christian Gnostic, Marcion (fl. A.D. 144), posited a divine craftsman who was revealed in his creation along side a totally hidden and alien God (Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity, 1958; revised 2nd ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 1963, p. 141ff.), whereas the Father God Sabaoth of the Old Testament continued on in a remotely similar form in the Provencal and Spanish Kabbalabs of the 9th and following centuries. In these, God could be considered either in terms of His creation (revealed), or in terms of His relationship to His own nature alone. This latter impersonal, unrevealed, and hidden God was indeed unknowable save through deducing Him as the first cause, and was called 'Ein-Sof' meaning 'infinite'. Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah (New York: New York Times Book Co., 1974), p. 88f.

³⁷For more extensive discussions on these dark/light associations in both the middle ages and fifteenth century Netherlandish art, see Wolfgang Sieferth, Synagogue and Church in the Middle Ages: Two Symbols in Art and Literature, trans. L. Chadeayne and P. Gottwald (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1970); Margaret Schlauch, "The Allegory of the Church and Synagogue," Speculum 14 (1939), pp. 448-464; and Panofsky, ENP, pp. 132-140.

³⁸In Exodus, the inner part of the Arc of the Covenant is hidden from sight by a veil: "And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the arc of the testimony in thither within the veil: and the veil shall separate for you the holy space from the most holy" (Exodus 26:33). In subsequent mystical Jewish tradition (dating from the early Christian era to and through the medieval Spanish Kabbalah at the turn of the fourteenth century), the same theme is expressed for a like veil (called the "Pargod") is suspended before the throne chamber of God to protect His perfect hiddenness from sight of His own angels (Scholem, pp. 18, 373, 159).

³⁹Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 68.

⁴⁰In this identification I am in complete disagreement with the misguided assertion by Helmut Nickel that the horse is, of all things, a symbol of lust (Nickel, p. 244).

⁴¹Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 79.

⁴²St. Bonaventura, The Mind's Road to God [Itinerarium Mentis in Deum, ch. 6, 7], trans. George Boas (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1953; rpt. 1980), p. 42.

⁴³Schapiro, "Muscipula", N. 14, p. 183.

⁴⁴In fact, in chapter seven of this study evidence will be presented which suggests that a more harmonious attitude could have prevailed in certain quarters concerning Jewish-Christian relations.

⁴⁵Panofsky, ENP, p. 138.


⁴⁶Panofsky, ENP, p. 139.

⁴⁷The concept of Christ as the 'self-revealing Father' is ingeniously represented by Van Eyck in the figure of the Enthroned in the Ghent Altarpiece. For an explanation see chapter 6, note 105.

⁴⁸The full quote as given by Gottlieb reads, "Such are the teachings that the high priest reveals in accomplishing the rites of the holy liturgy when he publicly unveils the offerings that before were hidden; . . . this shows us, in a sensible manner and as it were in an image, how Christ Himself came forth from his mysterious divine sanctuary to take the figure of a man for the love of man" (Migne, P.G., 3, c. 444. c. as quoted in Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 74). The gatehouse-drill iconograph (Figure 18), in fact, supports Gottlieb's use of this quote to demonstrate the Eucharistic significance of the central panel more

effectively than her own data, for it offers more powerful visual evidence in support of her point that the Incarnation is being represented as thematically coextensive with the Eucharistic Mass being celebrated, in part, at the altar/table by Gabriel in his role as deacon (see Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 74, entire).

⁴⁹The entire seventeenth chapter of De Visione Dei (1453) by Nicholas of Cusa is devoted to a discussion of God's coexistent Unity and Trinity, and is entitled, "How God, Unless He Were One and Three, Could Not Be Perfectly Seen" (Nicholas of Cusa, The Vision of God, trans. E. G. Salter with intro. by Evelyn Underhill, New York: Frederick Ungar Publ. Co., 1928; rpt. 1969, pp. 80-87). See also note 50 this chapter.

⁵⁰Panofsky, ENP, p. 138. This fourfold image is also evident, for example, within Van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece in the form of a series of discs which adorn the bridle of the white foreground horse in the 'Judges' panel. The symbol is found again in the pelicans which are embroidered on the Enthroned Lord's "cloth of honor". There, the pelican pecks at her own breast from which three streams of blood spurt into the open beaks of her three young. In these two versions of the symbol, the tie between the One and the Three is represented quite literally through connecting lines () , and in the latter, the co-identity of Christ and God (as in the Enthroned Himself) is stressed because the pelican bursting its breast was traditionally a Christ-Crucifixion symbol (s.v. 'Pelican', Hall).

⁵¹William Tydeman, The Theatre in the Middle Ages: Western European Stage Conditions, c. 800 - 1576 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 66. Although this might lead one to assume Gabriel emerged from the gatehouse as well, I am inclined to reserve this path for the Spirit alone.

⁵²Tydeman, p. 60.

⁵³Tydeman, p. 90.

⁵⁴Tydeman, p. 58.

⁵⁵Valentin Denis, Jan Van Eyck: The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb, trans. Michael Langley (Milano: Arti Grafiche Ricordi, 1964).

IV. PROCESS AS THE KEY TO THE MAIN THEME'S INNER MEANING

A. Process and the Concept of the 'Mystical Marriage'

As expressed above, if the altarpiece's main theme were merely the Annunciation by Gabriel to the Virgin Mary of Christ's imminent birth, a more iconic representation would have better served to emphasize the event in and of itself in that the iconic mode most effectively elicits a purely devotional viewer response. This is because iconic or 'single-focus' representations allow the viewer a type of self-transcendent 'fixation' consonant with the concept of devotion as an affective subject-object relationship in which the object of devotion comes to totally dominate the subject's field of consciousness, a field from which the subject himself becomes excluded. If the overpowering mystery of the Annunciation were the core theme of the altarpiece, the artist could have done no better than to intensify the devotional impact by iconic means.

Interestingly, to numerous scholars of the Early Netherlandish School of painting, the jewel-like color and the precision with which the visible world is rendered in works of this school has resulted in the assumption that these are devotional objects par excellence. However, in the case of the Merode Altarpiece, the programmatic emphasis on process requires that this assumption regarding devotional content and viewer response be revised. In truth, the role which process plays in the program incites a level and type of viewer interaction with the program and a 'field of consciousness' in which the viewer is very much included by virtue of the act of mentally reconstructing the event portrayed. This is very different from the hypnotic transports usually

associated with intense states of devotion.

By depicting the process of the Incarnation, the viewer is in effect provided a 'script', by which he is coaxed to mentally re-enact what is being represented in a step-by-step fashion before him. This participatory role is peculiarly reminiscent of the other theatrical concepts in the altarpiece which were proposed in the last chapter, and might further suggest that the viewer's role is not merely that of a passive observer but may be compared instead to that of an actor within the drama. Yet if this were the case, the drama would not be that of the Annunciation and the role would not be that of Gabriel or Mary or Joseph. In the substitution of 'script' for scripture, the three processes of advent, impregnation/marriage, and birth/revelation would have to be metaphors for alternate processes and meanings beyond the Annunciation. As I have tried to argue, if such were not the case, and the Annunciation were the central theme and action to be understood, a mode of presentation which did not directly involve the viewer would have made more sense.

In fact, the existence and nature of these "alternate processes" is revealed if one (1) expands upon Gottlieb's interpretation of the center panel as a reflection of the Song of Solomon, (2) pursues the notion of the "Bride" in the Canticles as a symbol of the soul, and (3) further develops the concept of the "tabernacle" which Gottlieb associated with the center panel. As will be recalled, Gottlieb identified the panel as the marriage chamber of the Song of Solomon which the exegetes believed (according to Gottlieb) signified either God's marriage to the Church as the community of the faithful, or the individual soul. However, Gottlieb felt that only God's marriage to the Church was symbolized in the center panel. Confined to this interpretation, the altarpiece remains

nothing more than an elaborate Annunciation and Incarnation picture, which, however, the element of 'process' in the program would deny.

In actual fact, there are not only two interpretations of the 'Bride' of the Canticles, but four. These four categories are rooted in the original threefold system of the Alexandrian Church Father, Origen (A.D. 185? - 254?). This system of scriptural interpretation consisted of the literal meaning or sense of scripture, the moral, and the spiritual; each corresponding to the categories of body, soul and spirit respectively. Somewhat later, one of the Fathers of the Latin Church, St. Jerome (c. 347 - 419?) amplified the literal with the allegorical sense, and in subsequent systems a fourfold structure of exegetical meaning came to predominate.¹ The four levels of meaning were: (1) the literal sense, which took scripture at face value: e.g. Jerusalem as the City of the Jews; (2) the allegorical sense, which was figurative and in which the signifier referred to something not expressly mentioned: e.g. Jerusalem as the Church on Earth; (3) the moral or tropological sense: e.g. Jerusalem as a symbol for the Virtuous Christian; and (4) the spiritual or anagogical sense, which referred to future eschatological events: e.g. Jerusalem as the Church in Heaven.² The anagogical sense also was seen to include the more general meaning of elevating the reader to spiritual insight, and of leading him from that which is lower to that which is higher.³

Honorius (Augustodunensis) of Autun was the first medieval author to apply this fourfold typological interpretation to the Canticle. For him, the literal sense saw the wedding described as that of the Bridegroom, or Solomon to Pharaoh's daughter, Abishag the Shunammite; the allegorical sense took the union to be that of Christ to His Church; the

tropological sense (which is also the 'mystical' sense for Honorius) understood the marriage as signifying the union of Christ with the individual soul; and the anagogical sense interpreted the event as the future union of Christ with the blessed in Heaven.⁴ Of the three meanings (not including the literal) conceivably applicable to the Merode Altarpiece, Gottlieb seems to have known only of two, and of these was only able to apply one, the allegorical sense (the basis of this delimitation she never explained). However, an interpretative grasp of the altarpiece is greatly strengthened if the mystical sense is also pursued.

The mystical sense of the Bride of the Canticles was first expounded by Origen, who saw the Bride as the human soul itself. Specifically, for Origen, the figure of the Bridegroom represented the Word of God, with the Bride allegorically signifying the Church or mystically connoting the blessed soul longing for union with God. The Cappadocian Church Fathers followed Origen in their interpretation of the Bride. St. Gregory of Nyssa speaks of the soul adorned like a bride in preparation for its spiritual union with God, and St. Basil the Great, like Origen, sees the relationship of Bride and Bridegroom as the intercourse between Word of God and the soul.⁵ The Bride takes on a further meaning in the writings of St. Ambrose, where she signifies Mary in addition to representing the Church and the soul. Like Ambrose, St. Jerome was also to adopt this threefold designation.⁶

The designation of the Bride as both Mary and the Church conforms well to the marital role of Mary in the center panel of the altarpiece as the spouse of God (or Joseph-God) as described by both Gottlieb and myself. Yet it is in Mary as a symbol of the soul that the real key to the altarpiece may be found. For it is in this symbol that the bridge

between the program and the viewer exists, and therein the "alternate processes" may finally become clear. When Mary is understood as the symbol for the viewer's soul, Mary's marriage to God represents God's wedding with the soul of the viewer. By mentally re-enacting the three processes of the program, the viewer does not re-enact the literal drama of Gabriel's Annunciation to Mary, but rather becomes the central actor in the metaphorical drama of the soul's mystical marriage to God.

B. The Three Stages of the Mystical Marriage in Christian Tradition

The concept of the soul as the mystical bride of God had widespread currency among medieval theologians and writers such as St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Hugh and Richard of St. Victor, St. Bonaventure, and the Rhenish and Flemish mystics like Eckhart, Tauler, Suso and Ruysbroeck, to name but a few. As in the Merode Altarpiece, this marriage is often modelled after that of God and the Virgin. The German mystic Johannes Tauler describes this marriage and subsequent birth as follows:

And he who wishes this noble, spiritual birth to take place in his soul as in the soul of Mary, let him perceive what quality Mary had in her; there was a corporeal and spiritual mother. She was a bride, a betrothed virgin, and she was secluded, shut off from everything when the angel came to her . . . And now let us all make room within us for this noble birth; Let us become true spiritual mothers, so help us God.⁷

Traditionally, the mystical marriage of the soul to God was understood to follow the threefold process which was earlier identified within the program of the altarpiece. To reiterate, the approach, advent, or descent of the Holy Spirit was likened to the preparatory courtship phase. Next came the actual impregnation in which the union was consummated and was likened to the marriage phase. And, finally, the birth (as the

implicit fruit of this union) through which Christ is revealed in the flesh or, put differently, in which God reveals Himself through Christ, was likened to the revelation phase.

The conception of the approach of God and soul as a threefold process found its way into medieval Christian thought primarily through the writings of St. Augustine and later through those of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. The common source of both was the collection of treatises known as the Enneads; a body of introspective mystical writings by Plotinus (A.D. 204-270), an Alexandrian (later Roman) teacher and the main representative of the Neoplatonist School of thought. In Plotinus' system, the human can return in contemplation to the transcendent source of creation, the One or the Good, through a threefold process of intellectual and moral self-discipline and purification, illumination, and union whereby one "wakes to another way of seeing, which everyone has but few use".⁸

Indeed, it was after reading Plotinus that St. Augustine had his famous experience of mystical ascent and vision of God in A.D. 386, which he described in Book Seven of his Confessions.⁹ But, unlike Plotinus, who was a pagan philosopher and who never speaks about having a vision of the One in any of his four ascents, Augustine, a Christian, not only places the soul's vision of God at the peak of the ascent, but holds that the ultimate state of union with the Godhead is initiated through divine grace, and is not possible through the enduring and unaided effort of the seeker alone as Plotinus had maintained.¹⁰ For Augustine, the soul could descend into its own depths (likened also to an ascent) and there encounter the image of God in His Trinitarian aspect. Augustine's emphasis on the Trinity, and on the soul's access to God through a process

of purification, illumination or "vision", and union, became the fundamental components of the dominant mystical tradition in the middle ages.¹¹

The other major force in medieval Christian mystical tradition was, as already noted, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. In the twelfth century, through John Scotus Erigena's (alt. Eriugena's) ninth-century translations, the Dionysian corpus (Concerning the Celestial Hierarchies; Concerning the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy; Concerning Mystical Theology) first became widely known.¹² Following Plotinus, the Pseudo-Dionysius articulated a threefold mystical path consisting of purification, illumination, and perfection. The appearance of these works in Latin translation tended to complement rather than supplant the well established tradition of Augustinian spirituality (or Augustinian interiority, as it has often been called) which found expression in numerous medieval schools.

Notable among these was the intensely mystical School of the Abbey of St. Victor in Paris, an Augustinian House of Canons founded in 1108 and led by the eminent scholastic theologians Hugh of St. Victor (prior: 1133-1141), and Richard of St. Victor (prior: 1162-1173). The center of mysticism in the twelfth century, the monastery awakened popular piety on a large scale. The works of Hugh and Richard were influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius, and in turn exercised a significant influence upon mystical thought in subsequent centuries.¹³

The works of Richard also had a powerful effect on the mysticism of St. Bonaventure (1221-1274), and is apparent in the structure of his influential treatise on mystical ascent, Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum. Bonaventure's interiority draws also upon the Pseudo-Dionysius but derives ultimately from Augustine, for the Franciscan Order (of which he was

general: 1257-1274) has been characterized as the final great culmination of the Augustinian spiritual stream in the Middle Ages.¹⁴ Yet the Rhenish and Flemish mystics of the fourteenth century may also be said to have furthered important features of Augustinianism's mystical dimension.

The German mystics like Eckhart (1260 - c. 1328), and his pupils in Cologne, Heinrich Suso (c. 1296-1366) and Johan Tauler (c. 1300-1361), were of the Dominican Order which followed the rule of St. Augustine. They are distinguished by their speculative mysticism which, through Eckhart, draws upon Neoplatonic concepts and is influenced by the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius.¹⁵ Jan van Ruysbroeck (1294-1381), the father of Netherlandish mysticism, was prior of the Augustinian Canons at Groenendael near Brussels. He was aware of Hugh of St. Victor, from which he drew certain ideas (Hugh was himself a Fleming from the neighborhood of Ypres), and was of a much more practical mind than the speculative German mystics. Ruysbroeck concentrates on the process by which the mystical union is attained (unlike Eckhart who takes it as an ever-present fact to be realized).¹⁶ This is reflected in his numerous treatises, especially, The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, in which he makes constant reference to Christ as the Bridegroom who approaches the prepared or 'adorned' soul.¹⁷

All of these practitioners of Augustinian interiority subscribe to the three Christian Neoplatonic stages of (1) preparation, purification or purgation; (2) illumination; and (3) perfection or union. Although Ruysbroeck does not employ the traditional nomenclature in his writings, his stages of the Active, Interior, and Superessential life represent the purgative, illuminative and unitive states.¹⁸ St. Bonaventure speaks of


the soul which is purified-illuminated-perfected, and substitutes the synonymous concepts of purgation, illumination, and union at will.¹⁹ He further sub-divides each of these three categories into two separate steps so that a six-stage process of ascent results. In so doing, he borrows directly from the alternately six and three part systems of Richard of St. Victor.²⁰ Finally, the Victorines' three fundamental phases of interiorization process, as expressed in the stages of thought, meditation, and contemplation (*cogitatio*, *meditatio*, *contemplatio*), is derived in large part from the threefold Dionysian scheme of purification-illumination-perfection.²¹ It therefore becomes clear how firmly established this threefold process of the soul's ascent and marriage with God came to be among leading Augustinian thinkers and spiritual teachers in the years leading up to, and setting the stage for, early fifteenth century developments in the North.

Popular devotion along Augustinian lines was widespread in the Netherlands of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Its salient features were a dedication to a perfect common life and a community of love in contradistinction to the complicated ordinances and rigorous liturgical life characteristic of medieval monasticism. Further, interiority and the veneration of the Mother of God were also important features of this mode of piety.²² The Brethren of the Common Life, founded in Deventer around 1380 by Gerhard Groote (1340-1384) embraced the Augustinian inclination for interiority and the belief that the basis of perfection is self-knowledge, coupled with a preference for the devotion to the Eucharist and Passion of Christ.²³ A central aim of the Brethren was the education of a Christian elite, and scholarship along with the reading of devout literature was promoted through the production

of fine manuscripts.²⁴ Groote was greatly influenced by the Flemish mystic Jan van Ruysbroeck (d. 1381), and visited him and his Augustinian Canons at Groenendael. This experience so impressed him that he expressly instructed that many of the Brethren become Austin (Augustinian) Canons, with the result that the movement, in its spread throughout the low countries and Germany, came to divide into a more worldly alongside a monastic form. Of the latter, the famous and immensely influential Windesheim Congregation of Augustinian Canons regular (which grew to over one hundred houses in the fifteenth century) was founded in 1387 at Windesheim, twenty miles north of Deventer as a result of this direct wish of Groote (made before his death in 1384).²⁵

It is against this background of intense Augustinian spiritual activity in the North, and the heritage of Augustinian mystical thought and writing from which it drew, that the Merode Altarpiece may be most effectively understood. Unfortunately, no investigator of the altarpiece has previously considered the continuity of Augustinian tradition an especially important object of study. Instead of building up a coherent picture of the basic characteristics of Augustinian spirituality and the nuances it acquires in its successive elaborations at the hands of one thinker here, another school there, the basis upon which the Merode Altarpiece has been assessed may instead be likened to an oversimplified notion of liturgical Catholicism. This notion is oblivious to the subtle diversity of medieval religious schools and movements and their highly syncretistic modes of development and transmission.

This failure to investigate Augustinianism more thoroughly is very surprising due to the fact that the isolated efforts of a few scholars have confirmed its influence within the program of the altarpiece.

Schapiro's article of 1945 (years prior to the writing of the bulk of research studies on the altarpiece) clearly identified the mousetrap as an Augustinian symbol. A later article by Marilyn Lavin (1977) saw an iconographic reference to the Augustinian symbol of the Mystic Winepress in the board which Joseph drills. Indeed, my own identifications of the gatehouse with crenelated walk and the triangulation of gridlines which bridge left and center panels (Figures 18, 15) seem also to represent Trinitarian connotations characteristic of Augustinian doctrine. The figure of St. Augustine himself in Campin's painting of the Virgin and Child in Glory (Musee Granet, Aix-en-Provence) serves as yet another indication of the artist's connection with Augustinian circles. Campin's association with Van Eyck (which has still not received the scholarly examination it deserves) may have provided him with another possible source of Augustinian ideas. We know, for example, of the iconographic transmissions from Campin to Van Eyck. For instance, the two building shapes () and the face of the Virgin in Campin's painting of the Betrothal of the Virgin in the Prado Museum, as well as the laver and niche of the Merode Altarpiece (as previously mentioned), found their way into the Annunciation and Deesis panels of Van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece (1434). Yet this does not mean that deliveries of this type were by any means all in one direction. The climate of Augustinianism out of which Van Eyck himself seems to have worked is expressed in the Ghent Altarpiece, as identification of the Adoration of the Lamb panel of the Ghent Altarpiece as a new style or "Augustinian" Allerheiligenbilder (All Saints Picture)²⁶ makes clear when taken in concert with biographical information about both artwork and artist.²⁷ That Campin could have drawn from him as well is, therefore, just as likely as the evidence

strongly indicates that both artists simultaneously drew from some type of a common Augustinian spiritual stream or specific hybrid tradition. Also, it is especially difficult to believe that random pieces of iconography alone were all that these two pioneering giants of the Early Netherlandish School were able to share. It is to the nature of this tradition, as evident in the Merode Altarpiece, that I will now turn.

C. The Three Stages of the Mystical Marriage in the Center Panel

The notion of the marriage of the soul with God is predicated on the idea of encounter with God, characteristic of Augustinian Platonism, and understood as a process of interiorization wherein a man enters into the depths of his soul. This is also referred to as a descent into the soul by Augustine, a metaphor which is common in Christian and Jewish mystical literature as a whole (as Hugh of St. Victor puts it, "The way to ascend to God, is to descend into oneself").²⁸ A closer examination of the center panel, this time taking the Virgin as a symbol for the soul itself, will reveal that the general downward movement of the Holy Spirit toward Mary may be interpreted as just such a 'descent'. The process of descent or interiorization shown here as paralleling the Incarnation of Christ, is quite consistent with Augustine's belief that the Incarnation of Christ in the exterior world was to bring man back within himself where Christ could teach him as God and as Truth²⁹, and, therefore, that the Word made flesh led to God, the Word.³⁰ In returning thus to a visual observation of the center panel, it will be noticed that a deliberate chain of objects, or "nodes", are 'pierced' by an implicit diagonal line which begins in the center of the second oculus window and runs straight to the book of the Virgin and on to the firescreen to the

right of her (Figure 19). The six nodes are, in descending order (1) the laver, (2) the linen towel, (3) the pot of lilies, (4) the candlestick, (5) Mary's book, and (6) the firescreen.

The meaning of this sequence may be enlightened by references to the popular mystical treatise on interiorization coming out of the Augustinian tradition, written by the Franciscan Doctor of the Church, St. Bonaventure: the Itinerarium Mentis in Deum (variously translated as the Soul's Journey into God, or Mind's Road to God, etc.). Therein is described a six-stage process in which the soul is likened, among other things, to the Bride of the Song of Songs.³¹ An obvious virtue of this source is that it is consistent with the interpretation of the center panel as the Solomonic bridal chamber of the Song of Songs which was established by Gottlieb. Although I would not claim a direct one-to-one correlation between each of the stages described by St. Bonaventure and the six 'nodal' objects cited above, legitimate similitudes may be drawn. First, Bonaventure characterizes each step in the most complex and varied ways so that his meaning is not focused or precise. Secondly, he speaks of qualitative soul states which are not always convertible to single images or objects such as the nodal entities of the center panel. However, it is when the underlying structure is grasped, rather than the detail or digression so typical of medieval mystical tracts, that the basis for comparison becomes clear. The six stages are reducible to three pairs, each corresponding to purification, illumination, and union respectively.³² For Bonaventure, these three in turn correspond to the (1) body, and through it, the soul's connection to the material sense world which is loosened via 'purification', (2) the soul, which descends into itself, whereby, it receives vision or 'illumination', and (3) the

spiritual ascent and union achieved through contemplative grace.³³ It is within this paired threefold framework that the object-nodes of the center panel may be seen to correspond to Bonaventure's progressive interiorization and spiritualization of the soul.

To begin, we may first consider the oculus window from which the descent originates. The design of both this window and its neighbor represent a figure to which Bonaventure attaches great significance:

Perhaps more than any other medieval theologian, Bonaventure emphasizes the fact that Christ is the centre, or medium, of this circular process [of return to God] . . . Christ locates man's lost centre; and through his resurrection and ascension, he leads man back to the unity of the Father. This latter point is graphically depicted in the collatio through the geometrical figure of the circle whose centre is found by two lines intersecting in the form of the cross.³⁴

Though unaware of Bonaventure's use of the figure, Gottlieb also sees the windows as symbols of Christ, although for different reasons,³⁵ and believes:

The two tondi in Campin suggest that Christ's two natures are referred to: the unmanifest divine is signified in the farther roundel, the manifest human in the nearer, through which the Word has just passed and in passing was covered and clothed with the substance of the Virgin to become man . . . ³⁶

I too believe that both windows are references to Christ but that they are perhaps to be understood differently from what Gottlieb has suggested. As the first window is connected with the "indigenous drill", and the second with what I am claiming is the mystic descent of Christ into the human soul (although I believe the 'drill' is ultimately a metaphor for the mystic impregnation of the soul as well), perhaps the two descents may be read as an intentional contrast suggestive of the historical versus the mystical incarnations of Christ.

Following this line of thought, the first stage of the descent

would be that of purification, where the soul divests itself of its connection with the dross of that which is bodily and sensual. This preparation was likened by Augustine to a mirror (the soul) which is cleansed so that it may adequately reflect the image of God in His Trinitarian aspect. Subsequently, the symbol of the mirror came into constant use by medieval mystical writers to indicate the process whereby the purified soul passed over into the illuminative stage where it is capable of receiving spiritual visions. The laver and the towel in the center panel may be interpreted as representing the two increments of this first stage of purification. As Gottlieb has pointed out, the laver with its niche basin or 'piscina' and its towel is a symbol of "purification in baptism"³⁷. One might elaborate this further so that the water and towel, as suggested by Gottlieb, are not limited to a mere representation of the priest's "liturgical paraphernalia". I believe that they may also be taken individually to signify the administration of the baptismal water or ablutions, and the subsequently cleansed soul of the Baptismal candidate. The traditional white robe worn by the candidate for baptism itself symbolizes the purified soul filled with spiritual light³⁸, and may be likened to the white towel hanging next to the laver niche in the center panel.

Having passed through the first two of the six steps, the soul is now cleansed and ready to receive spiritual gifts. The pot of lilies is thus appropriately the third node on the line of descent. It represents the soul within which the threefold gift of the Trinity begins to bud, as represented by the three lilies.³⁹ This is a universal Augustinian image of the fructified soul. As Bonaventure says:

. . . we are led to the most blessed Trinity itself . . .
 When therefore the mind [i.e. soul] considers itself, it
 rises through itself as through a mirror to the contempla-
 tion of the Blessed Trinity . . .⁴⁰

This experience was at the very core of Augustine's doctrine of the
 nature of the soul and its developing relation to God:

. . . that image of the creator, that has been implanted
 immortally in its own immortality, must be found in the
 soul of man . . .⁴¹

And, on the basis of Augustine's own ascent, he described the phenomenon
 thus:

I wished, therefore, to ascend as it were by steps, and
 to seek in the inner man a trinity of its own kind . . .
 in order that we might come with a mind more developed
 by exercise in these lower things to the contemplation
 of that Trinity which is God . . . at least in an obscure
 manner and through a mirror.⁴²

The concept is encountered again in the writings of the Augustinian
 mystic Jan Van Ruysbroeck:

And our created being . . . is like unto God . . . [and]
 this likeness is one with the same Image of the Holy
 Trinity . . . and after this eternal Image, and this
 Likeness, we have been made by the Holy Trinity. And
 therefore God wills that we shall . . . reunite ourselves
 in a supernatural way with this image . . .⁴³

But the recognition of the reflection of God's triune nature in the
 mirror of the newly cleansed soul is merely a preliminary to the more
 complete dwelling of God in the 'prepared chamber' (Tauler quote above,
 page 147) of the mystic's soul. The increased presence of the divine
 in the soul both requires and/or results in a diminishing of the soul's
 own self-consciousness, of the mystic's own ego. In the literal inter-
 pretation of the panel as the Annunciation, the extinguished candle
 represents the transformed (or 'diminished', in a figurative sense)
 divinity of God as He becomes man. Yet in the metaphorical sense of the

panel, where one understands, not the process of God becoming man, but of man becoming God,⁴⁴ the snuffed-out candle flame signals the decrease in self-awareness and a corresponding awareness of and presence of the divine. Such a diminishment occurred even in the case of Mary as St. Luke's description of the Annunciation indicates:

. . . The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee . . . (Luke 1:35, emphasis mine)

The mystic, who has become a "spiritual mother" after the example of Mary (Tauler quote above, page 147) therefore experiences a like "overshadowing" of his own ego, whereby Christ is born within the soul. (Indeed, I am convinced that the use of the Madonna of Humility type in this context purposely equates the humility of Mary with the dampening of the ego, and that this is consistent with an interpretation of the 'type' itself as a representation of Mary as the 'New Eve' in contradistinction to the self-seeking egoism of the original Eve. Indeed, the trait of humility may even represent a kind of 'residual shame' for the act of her predecessor.)

This same meaning is sensed within the words of John the Baptist regarding Christ when he says, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30), especially when these words are understood within the context of Baptism which St. Paul continually likens to a dying into Christ wherein the new inner man is born.⁴⁵ Ruysbroeck expresses the same thought when he says:

. . . we and all our selfhood die in God. And in this death we become hidden sons of God, and find new life within us . . .⁴⁶

The concept of the soul's death in Christ, which I believe the extinguished flame represents, also explains why the vertical member of the sashwork

cross in the window of the Annunciation chamber is both a literal and thematic (symbolic) continuation of the vertical shaft of the extinguished candle itself (Figure 20). The exact alignment of both signals that, in arriving at the candle-node of the descent, and before entering into the stage of union with the Father, a threshold must be crossed. The threshold is that of death, and is compared with the death of Christ on the Cross wherein, God having become man in Christ, Christ was to again unite with the Father in death. Indeed, this is a specific part of the mystic ascent, for Bonaventure makes clear that:

The six stages of illumination . . . lead up to God,
[in]to Whom no one can enter properly save through
the crucified.⁴⁷

In this he follows St. John 14:6 (" . . . no man cometh to the Father, but by me"), and he quotes St. Paul in support of this requirement:

With Christ I am nailed to the cross, yet I live,
now not I, but Christ liveth in me.⁴⁸

Before passing from the stage of illumination to the phase of union, as represented by the next node, some final thoughts on the concept of the 'diminishment of the self' which this phase involves may be expressed. As discussed above (page 159, note 44), consciousness of the self is never entirely lost to the mystic, and the extinguished candle on Mary's table reflects this fact although it might at first seem to suggest total annihilation. Panofsky notes:

. . . the Marian symbolism of the candle itself seems to be superseded by another idea akin to St. Bridget's notion of physical illumination "reduced to nothingness" by the radiance of the light Divine . . .⁴⁹

Actually, the correct source of this notion is the Pseudo-Dionysius and his conception of the mystic's non-discursive comprehension of trans-earthly spiritual realities which, being beyond cognitive reference to

known reality, is likened to a state of conscious 'un-knowing'. As the Pseudo-Dionysius explains, the mystic:

[may] arise by unknowing towards the union, as far as is attainable, with Him who transcends all being and all knowledge . . . [and pass] through pure and entire self-abnegation, into the superessential Radiance of the Divine Darkness.⁵⁰

The extinguished candle may therefore represent the diminished but not eradicated consciousness which the soul possesses and which 'appears' as nothing in comparison to the superabundant brilliance of God's divinity.

Thus illuminated to the point that the soul is blind to itself, and having died to itself, the phase of union may be entered upon. The next node in our descent is the book from which the Virgin reads (incidentally, the line of descent leads directly to the page upon which she concentrates, the importance of which was discussed above in chapter five). As previously suggested, the reading of the book may represent the visual intaking of Christ through the spiritual light of the Holy Spirit, which illumines its pages and upon which He is borne. The union of Christ (and God) with the Virgin soul is thus depicted. Yet, as in the panel itself, this is a process just beginning, and it will not be until just before the Nativity itself that the full Incarnation of Christ within the Virgin will be accomplished. Further, it will not be until the Nativity of Christ in the flesh that the revelation of God as man may be said to occur. Although, as previously discussed, the historical birth of Christ is not here represented, the final union of the soul with God may still be suggested. That is, the return of the soul to God, considered as both a birth and a revelation (now of God to the individual seeker, rather than of God in the form of man to mankind),⁵¹

is possibly represented in the altarpiece in the form of the sixth and final node, the firescreen.

Both conceptually and visually, the book Mary reads is the link to the final union with God. Conceptually, the divine enkindling of the soul it represents leads to the more complete union. Visually, it is the crossing point or threshold where the line of descent is pointed, passing to and beyond it to the firescreen, and through it to finally pass up through the chimney (Figure 19). Put differently, at the book the Spirit has arrived at the lowest point of its descent (i.e. its incarnation in physical matter). But in thus continuing further onto the firescreen and upward, it now enters upon its stage of ascent back to God. This may be understood in two manners. First, taking the center panel and the indigenous drill stream as the Incarnation of Christ, the ascent represents the resurrection and Ascension of Christ back to God. This meaning is not, however, our chief focus here. The second manner of meaning pertains to the panel understood as the mystical spiritualization of the soul. In this manner, the descent of the divine into the soul now reverses its travel and initiates (i.e. by act of grace) what may be likened to an ascent, taking the transformed soul with it to the very source of divinity whereby union may be effected and the soul may see God 'Face to Face'.⁵² Ruysbroeck, for example, speaks of the Face of God which the mystic 'receives' in the unitive stage and enjoys as a feature of the 'God-seeing life' upon which he has embarked.⁵³ As I will propose in the following, this intimate encounter with God is accomplished by proceeding from the Virgin's book, to the firescreen, and on to the 'enthroned' Joseph-God in the right wing (whether one 'ascends' to God up the chimney, or penetrates the wall of the fireplace to discover God's

chamber behind is a mere technicality as both are iconographically legitimate ways of achieving the same end).

The firescreen itself is an important 'node' which is especially well-suited iconographically for its role as a transitional 'leaping-off point' for the soul's final passage towards God. In the context of the panel as a representation of Christ's Incarnation, the firescreen may be likened to the board upon which Joseph drills. Heckscher recognized the similarity of both board size and the pattern of hole-spacing which both objects share, but interpreted the firescreen as a device inhibiting rather than allowing passage.⁵⁴ Unlike Heckscher, I believe that in the same way that Joseph's board represents the nadir of Christ's descent, so the firescreen may also represent (like Mary's book) that point from which His ascent may begin. The possible Passional associations of Joseph's board (the holes as Christ's wounds, the wood as Christ's cross) underscore the fact that the nadir of Christ's descent into matter was marked by His death and entombment; turning-points from which His Resurrection and subsequent Ascension proceeded.

Taken within the mystical context of the panel, however, the firescreen may be seen to assume further significations which support the idea of ascent. First, the firescreen itself, operating as a node in concert with other iconographic stations, functions as a concretion of meaning. In this case, it must, therefore, be understood to draw within itself associations pertaining to the fireplace at large; that is, with fire. Fire is, taken at its most essential, that which transforms. The fact that early pre-Semitic altars were sacrificial hearths, and that later forms included the burnt-offerings altar and the incense-altar,⁵⁵ seems to indicate the continuous principle of fire as a means

whereby matter is transmuted or 'spiritualized' for reception or consumption by divine beings. With some reservations,⁵⁶ I would liken the fireplace to an altar whereupon the soul undergoes its final transformation and spiritualization. In particular, the fact that the back of the Virgin's bench entirely separates the fireplace from the rest of the room establishes the former as a special zone not unlike in feeling to the sense of 'staging' which an altar possesses. The length of the bench-back (or zone) is also consistent with the dimensions of rectangular altars. Finally, the fact that God, in the guise of Joseph, might be said to reside 'invisibly' behind the fireplace, completes the image of the altar at which (or behind which) the deity is present. In describing the final stage of the soul's ascent, Bonaventure emphasizes the desire of the mystic as follows:

. . . the wholly flaming fire will bear you aloft to God with fullest unction and burning affection. This fire is God, and the furnace of this fire leadeth to [God's Heavenly] Jerusalem; and Christ the man kindles it in the fervor of His burning Passion . . . ,⁵⁷

and in signifying both firey desire and Christ's death in the word "Passion", he thus continues:

. . . let us pass over with the crucified Christ from this world to the Father⁵⁸

The firescreen would thus seem to represent that fire by which the final stage of ascent is accomplished.⁵⁹ It stands at the end of the process whereas the laver, and the baptism with water which it represents, stands at the beginning of the nodal chain of mystic stations. The closure which this opposition between fire and water offers, and which helps to confirm the intentionality of the entire nodal sequence, is best summed up in the words of Christ:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit [i.e. the fire of the Holy Spirit; Luke 3:16], he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:5)

In this way does the soul enter the throneroom of God, or as Bonaventure himself put it:

. . . the microcosm [i.e. man] by six successive stages is led in the most orderly fashion to the repose of contemplation. As a symbol of this we have the six steps to the throne of Solomon . . .⁶⁰

D. The Three Stages of the Mystical Marriage in the Entire Triptych as the Three Zones of the Mystical Tabernacle

1. introduction

In her interpretation of the altarpiece's center panel, Carla Gottlieb saw the chamber as, among other things, the tabernacle of the Host, because otherwise the depiction of the Incarnate Christ child with cross before the Incarnation would have been heretical.⁶¹ Yet this is a very limited application of the concept of tabernacle which derives from the Jewish tabernacle described in the Old Testament. It is, in fact, the Old Testament tabernacle which is used by medieval mystical writers as a metaphor for the soul's process of interiorization and ascent. Indeed, the six-stage process Bonaventure outlines in his Itinerarium Mentis in Deum, and which has been linked to the process of descent in the center panel of the altarpiece, utilized this comparison. In his article on Bonaventurian symbolism, Evert Cousins speaks of how in the 'Itenerarium' (Ch. 5.1) Bonaventure

. . . introduces the symbol of the tabernacle to depict the entrance of the soul into its own depths. The symbol is drawn from Exodus, where a detailed description is given

of the tabernacle or tent that Moses prescribed to be built to house the ark of the covenant. As described in Exodus, the tabernacle has an outer court, an inner area or sanctuary in which a golden candelabra was placed; and finally, a most sacred innermost chamber, the Holy of Holies, in which the ark was housed. Upon the ark . . . was placed the propitiatory mercy seat, from which God was to communicate to men. All of these elements enter into Bonaventure's symbol. After contemplating the material world as a vestige of God, he bids the reader to enter into himself. Leaving the outer court of the external world, we now enter into the sanctuary of the tabernacle, that is into our own souls, where the light of Truth, as from a candelabra, will shine upon the face of our mind, in which the image of the most Blessed Trinity appears in splendor. After contemplating this reflection of God, we move deeper into ourselves, into the Holy of Holies, that is, into the contemplation of God Himself. [This consists, in part, of seeing God as] the mercy seat, which he appropriately sees as a symbol of Christ.⁶²

In considering this passage, we are reminded that the second stage, wherein the sanctuary is entered, corresponds to the illuminative stage discussed earlier in relation to the two iconographic nodes of the pot of lilies and the candle. As Cousins' description reveals, the sanctuary's candelabrum is linked to the appearance of the "most Blessed Trinity". Therefore, my former interpretation of the pot of lilies as the budding vision of the Trinity within the soul is further reinforced by the candlestick which stands next to it on the table in that the candlestick too may carry a Trinitarian reference. Also, the possibility that the nodal sequence is most likely rooted in Bonaventure's "Itinerarium" becomes all the more persuasive.

But another thing the Cousins' description reveals is that the central part of the tabernacle is considered the sanctuary, which is exactly what Gottlieb identified the central panel chamber to be.⁶³ Could the three/six stage process we have seen in the central panel and which Bonaventure likens to the three zones of the tabernacle, be applied

to the entire altarpiece as well? Even a preliminary visual and thematic assessment would indicate that this would be quite possible to do. The atrium, or outer court of the tabernacle, would correspond to the courtyard of the donors' panel. The central panel chamber, as identified by Gottlieb, would correspond to the sanctuary of the tabernacle. And the Joseph panel chamber, as has already been demonstrated on different grounds, would correspond to the Holy of Holies. Furthermore, the three activities Bonaventure assigns to the soul in its movement through the zones of this metaphorical tabernacle correspond to the three panels as well. In the outer court, the soul concerns itself with the vestiges of God in the external material world.⁶⁴ This relates to the donor panel courtyard which, although enclosed by a wall (and thus a distinct "zone" in itself), is still of the outerworld as the grass, flowers and open air demonstrate. In moving into the sanctum of the tabernacle, the soul meditates upon itself by virtue of having entered inside itself.⁶⁵ This relates to the movement from the donors' panel courtyard, through the open door,⁶⁶ into the inner Annunciation chamber. Finally, in the Holy of Holies, the soul enters into the contemplation of God.⁶⁷ Within the altarpiece, this corresponds to the soul's passage or ascent into the throneroom of the Joseph-God chamber, that workshop from which all creation proceeds.

This process, whereby, as Bonaventure says, "we may contemplate God not only outside of us but also within us and above us"⁶⁸ may be traced back to Augustine who had written:

You who are in the soul, are in the center; if you look below, there is the body; if you look above, there is God. Withdraw from the body, rise above yourself.⁶⁹

But it was from Richard and Hugh of St. Victor that Bonaventure derived

his six-staged system of three pairs corresponding to the material world, to the soul, and to God. And it was also from them that the metaphor of the tabernacle was borrowed, for both Hugh and Richard had written treatises on the tabernacle and alternately the ark, which was likened to the ark of Noah, as structural images which were to be built up within oneself as interior visions.

The six stages leading the soul to God which Richard of St. Victor had described and from which Bonaventure drew were:

(1) contemplation of visible and tangible objects; (2) study of the productions of nature and of art; (3) study of character; (4) study of souls and spirits; (5) entrance into the mystical region which ends in (6) ecstasy⁷⁰

These six stages resolved themselves, through a process of pairing, into the three basic contemplative states which both Richard and Hugh of St. Victor subscribed to. Both taught that the three stages of the contemplative life consisted of (1) 'cogitatio', in which the soul's eye sees God in the things of the world, (2) 'meditatio', in which the soul discovers God in itself, and (3) 'contemplatio', in which the soul gains a supernatural intuition of God and an insight into the inwardness of things.⁷¹ The separation of these three mental states was very important. For example, in discussing the difference between meditation and contemplation, Richard makes clear that the element of Grace (i.e. of God seeking man) offers the key distinction. In the following, Richard uses the metaphor of carrying the ark into the tabernacle to represent the soul's (i.e. ark's) passage from the meditative to the contemplative zone:

Contemplation belongs to the carrying forth of the Ark, [into the Holy of Holies], as meditation does to the exploration [of the Sanctuary]. Contemplation has one purpose, meditation another. The work of meditation is to seek out hidden things, that of contemplation to wonder

at clear truths. So then meditation is the careful investigation of hidden truth and contemplation the joyful wondering at transparent [i.e. divinely revealed] truth. But hidden things do become manifest, either through our meditation or by divine shewing. Therefore, where we have the presence of the grace of revelation we do not need the service of meditation. But where divine revelation is lacking . . . the findings of meditation are submitted to contemplation . . .⁷²

Richard, however, goes on to say elsewhere that contemplation itself involves the element of Grace, as when he speaks in terms of the entire threefold process:

It seems to me that the character of contemplation [taken as a general term and not as the specific stage of "contemplation"] varies in three ways. Sometimes it effects an enlarging of the mind, sometimes a raising and sometimes an abstraction of the mind. The enlarging of the mind is when the gaze of the soul expands widely and is intensely sharpened, but this in no way goes beyond the limit of human effort. The raising of the mind is when the activity of the intelligence, divinely illuminated, transcends the limits of human effort but does not go over into ecstasy, so that what it sees is above its powers, but the soul does not withdraw from its accustomed ways of knowing. The alienation of the mind (or ecstasy) is when the memory of things present withdraws from the mind and it moves by a transfiguration divinely wrought, into a strange state of soul unattainable by human effort. These three modes of contemplation are experienced by those who deserve to be raised to the height of that grace. The first is caused by human effort, the third only by divine grace, . . . In the first degree we build the arc as it were, . . . In the second degree just as the arc is lifted . . . [so] the ray of contemplation broadens . . . In the third degree the arc is placed in the Holy of Holies and set, as it were, inside the veil; so the point of the contemplative's understanding is drawn into the inmost depths of the mind and is secluded from the memory of external things by the veil of forgetting and abstraction.⁷³

In thus likening this process to the three separate zones of the triptych, the elements of the altarpiece and the phases of interiorization so far identified may be correlated as follows:

<u>trptych panel</u>	<u>tabernacle zone</u>	<u>stage of enlightenment</u>	<u>mode of consciousness</u>
donors panel	outer court	preparation	cogitation
center panel	sanctuary	illumination	meditation
Joseph panel	Holy of Holies	union	contemplation

A closer examination of each panel individually helps to confirm the truth of the above correlations and of the triptych's corporate significance as the mystical tabernacle.

2. the left wing panel as the tabernacle's outer court

The donors' panel has already been seen to correspond fairly well to the outer court or atrium of the Victorine symbol of the tabernacle. However, there are other elements as well which help to support this identification. That the donors' panel is here claimed to relate to the first stage of 'purification' or the 'preparation' for entry into the sanctuary, is supported by Gottlieb's interpretation of the three steps which lead up to the door of that sanctuary which "Aesthetically . . . prepare man for his spiritual experience".⁷⁴ Yet not only do they serve for the entry into the church sanctuary as Gottlieb believed, but also carry purification symbolism as well. Three ascending steps led up to the immersion tanks of early medieval baptisteries (often with a descent of four down into the font), and although fonts within the church replaced such specialized buildings after the ninth or eleventh centuries,⁷⁵ the already established baptismal significance of the center panel piscina serves to reinforce the steps as a possible baptismal reference.

Another sign which supports the identification of the donors' panel as the first of a three stage process, is the bird which sits atop the

gatehouse. It has been already shown that the basic three stages of mystical ascent could be further divided into two steps each so that six phases in all resulted, as was the case in Bonaventure's image of the six ascending steps of Solomon's throne. In that the gatehouse itself has been identified as such a throneroom, the six increments of its stepped gables may also signify the stages of the mystical ascent.⁷⁶ If this is accepted, then the magpie standing on the second step not only symbolizes the 'messenger' as Nickel had pointed out. Rather, as all birds in general are time-honored symbols of the soul, the magpie on the gable's second step may logically be assumed to signify the second of the preparation stage's two steps. Hence, the soul - as bird - is shown as having proceeded no further than the preparatory stage.

A final piece of evidence which identifies the donors' panel as the first stage or zone of the tabernacle is the presence of the occupants themselves. Jan Van Ruysbroeck, who incidentally had written his own treatise on the mystical tabernacle,⁷⁷ likens the soul's interiorization process to a categorization

. . . almost as old as Christian mysticism itself: that three-fold division of men into the 'faithful servants, secret friends, and hidden sons' of God, which descended through the centuries from Clement of Alexandria [d.c. 215]⁷⁸

According to this system, the "faithful servants" correspond to the soul's preparatory stage, and thus to the donors and the gateman. The faithful devotion of the two donors, and especially the gateman, who Nickel has identified as a messenger similar to Gabriel as divine messenger, fits well with the notion of their being "faithful servants of God".

3. the center panel as the tabernacle's sanctuary



The "sonship with God" or "the hidden sons of God" pertains to the illuminative phase of the mystical ascent, and therefore may be correlated with the center panel of the altarpiece. Even brief reflection upon what has been so far discovered about the center panel will confirm that, taken in its tropological or mystical sense, the depiction of the Incarnation signifies the impregnation of the soul by God, and thus the mystical experience of becoming sons of God, for as Meister Eckhart says:

. . . when the Father begets His Son in me, I am the same son and not another.⁷⁹

Indeed, as the former analysis of the extinguished candle and the cross positioned directly above it sought to demonstrate, the advent of Christ in the soul is attended by the death of the self (though not of consciousness - see again page 160). Thus, in crossing from the atrium (donors panel) into the sanctuary (center panel) and toward the Holy of Holies (Joseph panel), we must pass the mid-point of the panel where descent becomes ascent and where the threshold of death is symbolically crossed. Interestingly, the moment the candlestick-cross vertical is crossed, the traveler arrives at the star of light on Mary's lap which represents, not only the birth of Christ in the soul, but also new life:

. . . our old man is crucified with him (Rom. 6:6) . . .
ye have put off the old man . . . and have put on the
new man . . . (Col. 3:10)

The cross, or mid-point of the panel, serving as an important threshold in the panel as well, becomes most logical when seen in the context of the total altarpiece. For the cross does not serve only as the 'seam' of the panel, it is the very 'seam between the worlds' which meet in the middle panel.⁸⁰ The donors panel represents, alternately, the

physical world or body. The Joseph panel stands for the spiritual world, heaven, and the spirit. The central panel, however, represents the side of their convergence of 'marriage' (hence its function as a marriage chamber), and also represents the soul as that member of man's being which participates in and has access to both worlds.⁸¹ These designations are consistent with the symbol of the mandorla which, like the cross, signifies Christ as the bridge between two worlds. The mandorla (), a body-halo or aura in which Christ is often depicted in Christian art, results from the interlacing or 'overlapping' of the two spheres of earth and heaven ().

It is exactly for these reasons that the center panel may be seen to represent the mystical stage of 'Illumination'. The soul of the subject, which is the receptor of sense impressions from the outer world in Augustine's model of knowledge, may also become aware of spiritual realities. But this is a gradual process. After the initial preparation of the soul, whereby it becomes 'purified' and capable of finer perceptions than merely the heavier impressions conveyed by the senses, a new order of perceptions take their place beside the contents of sense perception. The soul of the individual at this stage, therefore, experiences a state of consciousness which is simultaneously aware of two levels of reality which, co-existing in one field of consciousness, may be said to 'overlap'. In an encyclopedia article on Christian Mysticism, it has been said:

In the state known as 'illumination' individual self-consciousness remains . . . and along with consciousness of selfhood there is the awareness of the world.⁸²

Only later, when the soul's spiritual organs of perception are more fully developed, will it be able to be receptive to spiritual impressions alone,

as is the case in the unitive stage of mystical development where contemplation supersedes meditation.

In the previous discussion of the six iconographic nodes of the center panel descent, the passing from candle to Mary's book was taken to signify the soul's movement from the illuminative to the unitive stage. However, when taken as the middle zone of the three panel tabernacle, the panel may be understood to represent the illuminative stage alone. In this sense, the reading Virgin is understood as the soul in the process of receiving a vision from above. So interpreted, the descent of the tiny sunbeam Christ into the virginally purified soul parallels the illuminative process as described by Richard of St. Victor. Richard likens the purification of the soul to the cleansing of a mirror, the soul itself being ". . . the foremost and principle mirror for seeing God."⁸³ Richard describes the illuminative process as follows:

When the mirror has been wiped and gazed into for a long time, a kind of splendor of divine light begins to shine in it, and a great beam of unexpected vision appears to his [the mystic's] eyes . . . the soul is kindled from above and is animated to see [within itself] the living light that is above it.⁸⁴

The fact that the Virgin is thus depicted in a state of illuminated vision, I believe, explains why the depiction of space is so different in this panel, especially in contrast to the donors panel. Frinta's and Campbell's theories about the difference in spatial representation both propose a different artist for the donors panel to account for what they perceive to be a stylistic disparity. In truth, the difference is one of representational intent and not style. The donors panel, which may represent the tabernacle's outer court, is where normal sense perception obtains because the mystical neophyte has not yet undergone a substantive

alteration of the soul or its perceptions. The center panel, however, can be interpreted as representing the soul. As such, the alteration of space carries thematic or representational meaning. In effect, we are being shown both the Virgin in the midst of a vision, as well as the effect that vision has upon the simultaneous perception of the sense world which accompanies such visionary experience at the illuminative stage. The fact that the quality of visionary experience is directly translated into the relationships within the visual field itself reminds us that the Virgin herself is in one sense no more than a metaphor for the viewer's own soul. As such, the center panel and its apparent spatial distortions may be considered as follows. Looking at the color reproduction of the center panel (Figure 27), imagine that the panel more closely approximates the comparatively 'normal' configuration of space (especially in its representation of depth) of the donors panel. Then imagine that your soul, having entered upon the illuminative phase of consciousness, beholds this same chamber through the 'lens' of this transformed consciousness. The distinction would thus have to be made that the artist is not representing the room as it would appear to normal consciousness, but rather as it is perceived by the illuminated soul.

That this is indeed the case is indicated by the fact that the room is depicted as if it were seen in a convex mirror. More accurately, it is depicted as if a convex mirror were used as an aid in constructing the spatial field. In a recent study by David L. Carleton,⁸⁵ the author demonstrates how in Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Wedding Portrait in London's National Gallery of Art (Figure 21), there exists a mathematically consistent system of perspective.⁸⁶ This "elliptical perspective",⁸⁷ as Carleton terms it, is typified by two vanishing points and a certain

curvature of the spatial field in which objects appear to move forward,⁸⁸ gaining a heightened sense of presence,⁸⁹ as well as by a flattening of the field via a decrease in the angle of orthogonal convergence.⁹⁰ As Carleton demonstrates through simulation and computer analysis, this effect could have been achieved through the specialized use of a convex mirror, a tool post-Eyckian artists are known to have employed.⁹¹ A comparison of the center panel of the Merode Triptych and the Arnolfini Wedding Portrait (see Figures 20, 21) will reveal similarities in terms of 'advancing objects' and the apparent flattening of spatial field via decreases in the angles of orthogonal convergence.⁹² Quite possibly, the artistic generation of the spatial field in the center panel of the Merode Altarpiece also was done by means of a convex mirror as well. Not only would this confirm that this type of spatial representation is not a purely stylistic phenomenon,⁹³ but it would also help to illuminate another possible piece of shared information or practice in the Campin-Van Eyck relationship. But even beyond this, it would provide important support for my interpretation of the center panel as the soul's mystical visionary experience. Although Carleton was unable to detect the underlying significance of a spatial field generated by use of a convex mirror, the reason should by now be evident. Such a field represents the vision experienced by the metaphorical 'cleansed mirror' of the purified soul itself, and thus employs a mirror in its construction.⁹⁴

4. the right wing panel as the tabernacle's Holy of Holies

The passage from the center panel or sanctuary of the tabernacle to the Joseph panel represents the final stage of the soul's mystical ascent

to God. This process may occur either in proceeding straight through the wall of the fireplace, or ascending to the throneroom via the fireplace's chimney, as has already been suggested.⁹⁵ One must, therefore speak of a number of thresholds which are represented within the altarpiece. The three steps and door of the donors panel lead from the outer zone of the tabernacle to its sanctuary. Likewise, the fireplace represents the threshold to the third and most secret inner sanctum in the third panel. However, it will be noticed that progressive entry becomes more complex the deeper one penetrates the tabernacle. Whereas the first threshold between the donors and center panel is relatively simple, the movement from the center panel sanctuary to the Joseph panel Holy of Holies is made increasingly difficult for the soul. For example, it was pointed out just above that movement past the cross itself (Figure 21) constitutes a threshold between the two worlds of earth (and earthly sense experience) and heaven (and spiritual experience). Logically, then, entry into the third zone will consist in purely spiritual experience and involves a threshold crossing merely in the act of leaving the sense world behind. This would mean that the cross and the fireplace both constitute thresholds. Yet I believe that a third threshold may be added to these two, and that it is possible to see these three collectively as one multi-layered gateway existing between the sanctuary and Holy of Holies. As suggested, this would be consistent with the notion that the second entry is more difficult than the first by virtue of the hiddenness and sacredness which intensifies as one nears the Divine.

The third sub-threshold, as it were, of the center panel, may be discovered by first reflecting upon the description of the tabernacle in the Old Testament Book of Exodus.

And the Lord spake unto Moses saying (Exodus 40:1) . . . thou [shalt] set up the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation (40:2). And thou shalt put therein the ark of the testimony, and cover the ark with the veil (40:3). And thou shalt bring in the table, and set in order the things that are to be set in order upon it; and thou shalt bring in the candlestick, and light the lamps thereof (40:4). And thou shalt set the altar of gold for the incense before the ark of the testimony, and put the hanging of the door to the tabernacle (40:5). And thou shalt set the altar of the burnt offering before the door of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation (40:6). And thou shalt set the laver between the tent of the congregation and the altar, and shalt put water therein (40:7). And thou shalt set up the court round about, and hang up the hanging at the court gate (40:8).

Through careful reading of these verses (and parallel descriptions in Exodus 40:19-30 and Chapters 26 and 27) the following spatial geography becomes evident:⁹⁶

<u>tabernacle zone</u>	<u>progressive sequence of outermost to innermost elements</u>	<u>verse in Book of Exodus</u>
outer court	{ threshold veil laver with water altar of burnt offering	40.8 40.7 40.6
sanctuary (tent of con- gregation)	{ threshold veil table and candlestick altar of gold for incense	40.5 40.4 40.5
Holy of Holies	{ threshold veil ark of the testimony mercy seat on top of ark	40.3/40.5 40.3/40.5 40.20

These three zones have been roughly incorporated into the three zones of the triptych with its outer court and gate in the donors panel, its table and candlestick in the center panel, and the mercy seat or enthroned God in the Joseph panel. However, the center panel seems to incorporate features of all three zones to some extent as well.

That all three zones are somewhat present in the center panel

coincides with the earlier interpretation of the six 'Bonaventurian nodes' present there. The alternating role of the center panel as either the entire tabernacle or the tabernacle mid-zone alone is thus one example of the polysemous nature of Campin symbolism which, like the tabernacle itself, consists of progressive strata of outer and interior symbolism. The center panel, therefore, incorporates within itself the laver of the outer court. Its table and candlestick are clearly features which help confirm the center panel's identity as the tabernacle sanctuary. And, if the fireplace wall is taken (as it should be) as that 'veil' which separates the sanctuary from Joseph's Holy of Holies, the fireplace itself may be understood as the incense altar which stands before the veil of the Holy of Holies. Indeed, given our former discussion of the fireplace as an altar symbol of ascent, this identification is a justified one. This is also true because of the popular Christian metaphor whereby the incense symbolized the prayers (souls also?) of the blessed ascending heavenward to God. So understood, the fireplace read as the incense altar corroborates the earlier interpretation of the fireplace as the sixth Bonaventurian node or stage in which the mystic's soul ascended toward God and the final state of Mystical Union.

Yet the table of the center panel, as Gottlieb argued, may also be taken as the Hebrew altar.⁹⁷ In this case, we would understand it as the altar appropriate to the tabernacle sanctuary, that is, the incense altar standing before the veil of the Holy of Holies. In fact, the wisp of smoke rising from the candle is not inconsistent with such an image. But what of the veil? If one visually extends the towel next to the laver across the room (Figure 22) it becomes the veil before

the Holy of Holies. That is, it becomes the "third sub-threshold" which combines with the cross and fireplace to render the mystic's entry into the Holy of Holies the last and greatest challenge of his ascent. That such an 'extension' was intended by the artist helps to explain why its lower edge is 'table-high' and why it seems angled so as to fall in perfect line with the table's pot of lilies and candlestick. Also, the fact that this image employs visual principles used elsewhere in the painted program, helps to show that the towel may represent the veil as here claimed. For example, it expresses movement and extension as we have witnessed in the Spirit's travel from the gatehouse across the walkway, and into the center panel chamber. Also, the veil utilizes the concept of 'spatial zoning' which the separate panels themselves represent.

The veil may be understood to fall either in line with the candle and in front of Mary, or to extend behind Mary (see alternate routes, Figure 22). The passage of the veil through the candlestick could possess a special logic. In the Bonaventurian nodal scheme, the passage from candlestick to book represented the movement from the illuminative stage (i.e. zone 2: tabernacle sanctuary) to the unitive stage (or zone 3: Holy of Holies). Hence, the separation of the two by veil would thus place Mary into the Holy of Holies (possibly, the shift of the veil from behind to in front of Mary represents this movement). It would thus serve to seclude her, as soul, with her spouse, Joseph-God. Richard of St. Victor spoke of this moment, using the ark as metaphor of the soul:

In the third degree [stage] the ark is placed in the Holy of Holies and set, as it were, inside the veil; so the point of the contemplative's understanding is drawn into the inmost depths of the mind and is

secluded from the memory of external things behind the veil of forgetting and abstraction.⁹⁸

Not only does this passage reiterate the fact, stated earlier, that the illuminative stage is characterized by a dual consciousness of external and spiritual realities whereas the unitive stage passes on to consciousness of the spiritual exclusively, but it also alludes to the self-transcendence or "forgetting" which is so important for the 'Bride's union with her Beloved'. This union is ultimately depicted in the suggested movement of the soul, or Mary, into Joseph's chamber as represented in Figures 23. Such a movement would bridge the frame between the panels, but it is permissible because many visual devices in the altarpiece bridge the frames such as gridlines (Figures 2, 5, 7, and 15), the Spirit's 'drill-path' from the gatehouse (Figure 18), and even the door which joins the courtyard and center panel chamber. This proposed movement of the Virgin into Joseph's chamber would accomplish several things. First, it would of course depict the soul's final passage into the Holy of Holies. Second, such movement would explain the instances of closure between the two figures (as discussed earlier - see Figure 7), why they occupy the same lateral zone, as well as emphasizing the marital relationship between Mary and Joseph. Yet further, bringing Mary into the Joseph panel serves to complete the triadic ensemble of two large circles with one small element inbetween which was discussed in chapter five. It will be recalled (see Figure 8) that the ensemble in question was first encountered in (1) the donors' heads and gateman's hat, (2) male donor's purse lunettes/knife, and (3) two oculus windows with Christ child between. With Mary's movement into Joseph's chamber, a like ensemble or complementary grouping is formed consisting of the head of Mother Mary, the head of Father God,

and the mousetrap outside the window symbolizing their Son.⁹⁹ (Note how the Joseph panel ensemble, because Mary's head is higher than Joseph's head, is the exact complement to the similarly offset donors' head ensemble - Figure 23.) The very process by which this ensemble is formed thus plays a role in its meaning. The Virgin is first united with her spouse, from which the fruit of this union (i.e. Christ) proceeds. The Incarnation is, therefore, represented yet again.

The constant elaboration and restatement of themes and ideas within varying and overlapping contexts is the vehicle of this masterwork's organic development. It is not dissimilar to the theme and variation we encounter in musical masterworks where alterations in key and rhythm deepen and enrich an otherwise familiar motif. Likewise, the tabernacle symbol here is brilliantly articulated and receives the most subtle shadings as it is applied to the center panel one moment and the entire triptych in the next. On a larger scale, the continual movement of the mind between the altarpiece's alternate associations is paralleled by the visual movement (indigenous drill stream, Mary's shift towards Joseph, etc.) of the work's indigenous iconography, the elements of which cohere, separate, and re-cohere with the organically meaningful consistency and virtuosity of a gradually unfolding musical composition. This type of polysemous orchestration is why it is absolutely necessary for the investigator to transcend the urge to lexically straight-jacket iconographs with a single symbolic meaning. On the other hand, an awareness that multiple meanings may exist does not give the investigator a blank check to superimpose significations randomly because polysemous iconography is not merely 'multiple'. Rather, it is 'organically diversified', and therefore, all meanings are intrinsically related.

The movement of Mary into the chamber of Joseph carries a further implication which will now be examined. The presence of Mary in the Holy of Holies allows the throneroom to be seen as a marriage chamber in its own right. This coincides with the earlier interpretation of the gatehouse of the donors panel as being both throneroom (Joseph's chamber) and marriage chamber. As was pointed out, features of this enclosure, viewed externally, tally roughly with the chamber in Van Eyck's Arnolfini Wedding Portrait (Figure 21), as presented and viewed internally. The comparison also helps to confirm that God's throneroom seen as the mystical marriage chamber was an indigenous iconographic type for Jan Van Eyck as well as Campin.

Van Eyck's use of a convex mirror to construct the spatial layout of the Arnolfini picture has already been discussed. I concluded that the mirror represented the divinely illuminated vision within the viewer's soul as it would appear if he were in the midst of the mystical marriage process himself. This meaning was applied to the center panel of the Merode Altarpiece but attaches to the Arnolfini portrait as well.

The marital theme of the Arnolfini picture has been demonstrated by Panofsky,¹⁰⁰ but no indication that this theme includes spiritual marriage symbolism has yet been given. However, I believe that the mirror on the rear wall of the chamber helps to support such a reading (Figure 24). The mirror may be seen to hang on the rear wall of the chamber directly above an empty seat. In fact, this mirror lies precisely where the head of a sitter on this bench would be, such that, by looking at the mirror, we see what the sitter would see. Indeed, assuming that this is the throneroom of the invisible God, the mirror indicates that he is present, for the mirror itself represents

"consciousness" (i.e. seeing) and thus may be taken to indicate the presence of the sitter.¹⁰¹ That God is indeed present is indicated by at least two other things besides the mirror. First, the sashwork cross in the window (readily apparent in its cross form in the mirror image of the room - Figure 24) suggests the presence of Christ in relation to the bride and groom, for as Christ Himself says:

For where two or three are gathered in my name [as
in marriage], there am I in the midst of them
(Matt. 18:20)¹⁰²

Further, the empty seat where God is supposed to be invisibly sitting, may be interpreted as the 'mercy seat'. This mercy seat was the throne where the invisible Father God sat in the tabernacle's Holy of Holies (Exodus 40:20). It is also featured, in the form of a small stool, in Van Eyck's Annunciation (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.). In an article of 1975, John Ward demonstrates that this stool/mercy seat serves as a throne for Christ as well as for the symbol of *Etimasia*: the preparation of a throne for Christ for His Second Coming.¹⁰³ Ward thus sees the empty seat as an unobtrusive but poignant symbol used to intensify the representation of Christ's coming within the painted program. It is therefore not too surprising to find the symbol of the mercy seat used again by Van Eyck in a context where it functions as the throne of the invisible God seated in His Holy of Holies. Yet, as Panofsky has shown that the single lighted candle in the chamber's chandelier indicates the presence of the divine in symbolizing the "all-seeing Christ",¹⁰⁴ it appears as if Van Eyck is again using the empty seat to signify Christ but now he does so in combination with a reference to the Father as well. Hence, the 'emptiness' of the seat would represent the hiddenness of the Father, as well as, not only the coming of

Christ, but the spiritual (thus invisible) presence of the Son.¹⁰⁵ The candle may, as a symbol of Christ's omniscience, also be seen to support the mirror as the representation of God's vision.

But the mirror also represents the viewer's vision, or rather, that of his soul as a 'mirror wiped clean'. The soul's absorption in God means that we become like God because our consciousness becomes (to a certain degree) co-extensive with God's consciousness. As Eckhart puts it:

The eye with which I see God is the same eye as that with which God sees me; my eye and God's eye are one eye, and one sight and one knowledge, and one love.¹⁰⁶

This clarifies, as Carleton pointed out in his study, why the Arnolfini panel is seen by the viewer as it would appear in a convex mirror.¹⁰⁷

That is, both the viewer of the painting and the enthroned God, simultaneously behold the interior as if in a mirror, the same mirror really - or more accurately - through the same soul-consciousness. The result is that we may understand the painting as representing, in the fullest sense of the word, the soul of the viewer beholding his own mystical marriage with God (symbolized by Arnolfini and his wife), in which God looks at the viewer as well as looking through the eyes of the viewer at Himself. In this way, as Richard of St. Victor put it, the viewer ". . . puts on that divine life."¹⁰⁸

This "divine life" is the same as what Ruysbroeck calls the 'God-seeing life' of the illumined contemplative soul.

But I still longed to know how we may become hidden sons of God, and may attain to the God-seeing life. And to this I have apprehended the following.¹⁰⁹

. . . we receive the Incomprehensible Light, which enwraps us and penetrates us, as the air is penetrated by the light of the sun. And this light is nothing else than a fathomless staring and seeing. What we are, that we behold;

and what we behold, that we are . . . , we are one life and one spirit with God: and this I call a contemplative life.¹¹⁰

We may, therefore, understand that the 'God-seeing life' simultaneously implies God's seeing and our own seeing of God. This contemplative stage which occurs when we have penetrated the throneroom of the tabernacle is doubtless what is being represented in the Arnolfini painting. It is further supported by the fact that a marriage is in process, because the 'God-seeing life' is the central feature of the 'spiritual marriage' as it was understood by the mystics; that is, a very distinct and specially defined state of the soul's mystical union.¹¹¹ The Arnolfini painting, therefore, presents the spiritual marriage experientially, and confirms that the symbol of the throneroom as marriage chamber was (to at least a limited extent) an established type. It is, therefore, more easy to warrant its use in the Merode's Joseph panel, along with the complementary indigenous iconography I have suggested.

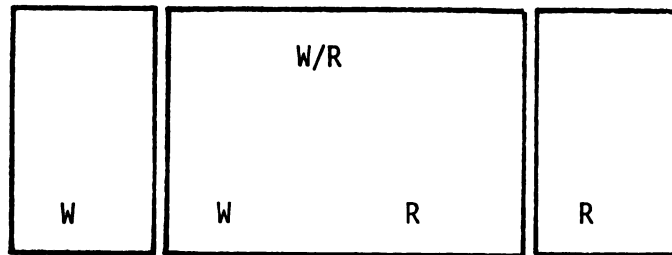
5. further implications

The foregoing strongly suggests that the process of mystical interiorization is visually represented as the progressive entry into the chambers or zones of the Jewish tabernacle. Also, the effect of pictorial space based on a convex-mirror-image in both the center panel of the Merode Altarpiece and the Arnolfini Wedding Portrait was proposed as a metaphorical allusion to the soul observing its own marriage to God. Yet, beyond this, the spatial programs of both of these painted panels have the effect of 'transporting' the viewer into the chambers in question. In both paintings, for example, the horizontal planes (e.g. table top,

floor, etc.) tend toward the vertical, with the effect of presenting a bird's-eye view rather than a straight-on view. Because such vantages would only be possible if the viewer were himself inside the room, the room actually 'draws' the viewer within itself. Inspection of the orthogonals in both the chambers also reveal that they, too, conspire to produce the same effect, for they are depicted as though from the vantage point of an occupant who stands within the room. In that these rooms have been identified as 'marriage chambers' in which God seeks man, the 'visual absorption' of the viewer just described may be seen as one manner in which God beckons his betrothed within.

In the center panel of the Merode Triptych, the spiritualization of the viewer by transporting him from the physical space he occupies into the spiritual space of the altarpiece is reinforced by other 'absorption' scenarios as well. One such scenario extends Gottlieb's Eucharistic interpretations of the center panel. As will be recalled, the panel was felt to represent either the drama of the communion service being celebrated at Mary's altar/table, or was itself symbolic of the container for the Host. However, I would further point out that these Eucharistic associations extend to its dominant white/red color scheme as well.

As was indicated in chapter four in our discussion on pattern (see page 99), the center panel contains concentrations of white (W) and red (R) which 'extend' from the towel rack down to Gabriel's and Mary's mantles and on into the respective wing panels. This was represented diagrammatically in chapter four basically as follows:



As the color brown (in varying light tan to deep dark red shades), which contains both red and white, is the dominant color of the painted program, the presence of red and white throughout the panels in more generalized form is evident as well. I believe that these two colors are intentionally used to symbolize, among other things, the white bread and the red wine of the Eucharistic communion.¹¹² So understood, these colors constitute a 'visual Eucharist' which - as with the 'Word' of Mary's symbolic book - is taken in through the eyes of the viewer standing before the altar. Yet, to ingest the Eucharist, is to oneself be 'ingested' by God, for as Augustine himself heard during his mystical ascent:

I am the food of grown men; grow and thou shalt feed on Me; nor shalt thou convert Me, like the food of thy flesh, into thee, but thou shalt be converted into Me.¹¹³

The same Eucharistic image is similarly employed by Ruysbroeck to describe mystical absorption:

The Fruit of God is the Son of God, whom the Father brings forth in our spirit. This Fruit is so infinitely sweet to our taste that we can neither swallow nor assimilate It, but It rather absorbs us into itself and assimilates us with itself.¹¹⁴

The Eucharistic reading of the panel's color scheme, therefore, also allows us to see how the viewer, now by means of yet another visual device, is 'absorbed' into the spiritual space of the chamber itself. The combined concepts of Christ's entry into the soul and of Eucharistic

assimilation which are present within the center panel is perhaps best expressed by Christ's words as recorded by St. John:

Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone listens to My voice and opens the door I shall come into him and dine with him and he with Me. (Rev. 3:20)

Hence, Gottlieb's interpretation of the center panel as a 'Eucharistic tabernacle' in which the dove descends into the soul (or 'upon the altar') conforms very well with the present interpretation of the panel's chromatic symbolism which incites the Eucharistic assimilation of the viewer into the altarpiece and ultimately into the Holy of Holies as if at God's behest.

If we are to accept this quite extraordinary Eucharistic innovation as part of the altarpiece's program, we must also recognize that the role of the altarpiece as an adjunct to the altar and Mass must be reinterpreted. To reiterate, the Merode Altarpiece is believed to function as a 'visual Eucharist' which absorbs, assimilates, and transmutes the viewer's being. It thus not only 'depicts' what occurs at the altar during communion, but extends that occurrence by helping the viewer consciously experience it. That is, instead of approaching the altar and receiving the bread and wine in merely a half-conscious celebration of the ritual, the participant is led to consciously penetrate the Mystery of the Mass. Now, simple faith is not enough, and merely allowing the Mystery to 'act upon' oneself is not sufficient. Instead, something further is being sought after. The advance the altarpiece effects is that it requires the participant to allow the Mystery to occur within the sphere of consciousness. With this, the level and quality of participation is significantly increased, for such Eucharistic 'spiritualization' involves a qualitative change and elevation of

consciousness.

The implications which such proposed ideas and usages of the altarpiece hold for the role of the artist and Church during the Northern Renaissance will be examined in the following chapter. For now, the artist's programmatic emphasis on the visual as a perceptual mode seen as so closely allied with consciousness that its manipulation (by the artist) could be used to effect a corresponding manipulation of consciousness itself will be briefly considered. The use of visual cues (e.g. the mirror) in the Arnolfini Portrait to simulate the 'putting on' of God's consciousness was, as we have seen, a way in which an alteration of the viewer's visual orientation helped the viewer to undergo a corresponding alteration of awareness suggestive of a mystical transformation of consciousness. Again, the earlier interpretation of the Virgin reading the book as a metaphor for the intaking of the 'Word' and 'light of the Spirit' also constitutes and represents a visual mechanism whereby the process of spiritualization is enacted.

The concept of the book is, I believe, also a model for the triptych itself, for a book is a mode of enlightenment through knowledge which must be 'opened'. The opened V-form of the Virgin's book is itself repeated in the similar 'V's' in the foregrounds of the donors and Joseph panels (as previously identified in Figure 10). Also, the previously discussed closed and opened symbolisms of Old and New Testaments is consistent with the closed and opened states of which the book is capable. I am inclined to believe that the themes of the hidden Father God and the revealed Son of God found in the altarpiece's indigenous iconography allow one to conclude that Mary's open book, representing the reception of Christ, also signifies Christ Himself as the 'open book'.

Yet the same closed and opened states refer to the altarpiece as well, so that like the book, when open, the altarpiece permits the absorption by/of Christ of/by the 'opened' soul. So understood, the fundamental hinged, three-panel format, represents a large 'picture book', so to speak, which has an inside and an outside. As such, the opening of this 'book', allows for our entry and assimilation into that inner spiritual space just as entering the tabernacle leads one from the physical forecourt of the tabernacle to the spiritual space of its Holy of Holies.

The sources of this proposed 'book metaphor', as we may refer to it, can only be examined briefly in this study. One may begin with the fact that panel painting may have been influenced by the tradition of book illumination (Van Eyck had been a book illuminator). Campin may have seen (or, in a sense, 'innovated') the closing altarpiece as a compatible extension of possibly extant associations which had grown up concerning books alone. Such associated meanings could have perhaps derived as elaborations of the concept of the open or 'unsealed' book as a symbol of revelation as found in the Book of Revelation:

And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book . . . sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming in a loud voice, who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof: . . . And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and read the book. . . (Rev. 5:1, 2, 4)

Another likely source for the concept of the book as a metaphor for the interiorization process could have been the Brethren of the Common Life. Their production of fine manuscripts, of which Campin was no doubt aware, their emphasis on the reading of devout literature, and their belief that knowledge/self-knowledge is the basis of perfection, could have easily resulted in the notion of the book as a metaphor for mystical interiorization.¹¹⁵ Indeed, one is led to consider the simultaneous

rise of the new devotion (*Devotio Moderna*) and the new art (*Ars Nova*) and wonder if the book metaphor they both may have shared is but one of other numerous possible correspondances.

The visual mode of the absorption or interiorization metaphors so far discussed - book, tabernacle, mirror, Eucharist - are not isolated phenomena but should be seen in relation to more general and long-standing traditions of visual meditation. Medieval memory systems which date back to Roman times, utilized the 'building' of internal architectural environments in one's imagination. This required one to imagine a series of rooms in which material to be recalled would be 'mentally deposited' in specific sequences. Remembering (re-membering) consisted in mentally walking through the rooms and consulting the material in question in the proper order.¹¹⁶

The Victorine tabernacle and ark meditations discussed above were likewise spatial images which the viewer built up in his mind. Of one of these Hugh of St. Victor says:

Now the figure of the spiritual building which I am going to present to you is Noah's Ark. This your eye shall see outwardly so that your soul may be fashioned to its likeness inwardly. You will see there certain colours, shapes, and figures which will be pleasant to behold. But you must understand these are put there, that from them you may learn wisdom, instruction, and virtue, to adorn [i.e. transform] your soul.¹¹⁷

The "figure" in question no longer exists but is described in detail in Hugh's treatise *De Arca Noe Mystica* (c. 1129-30). The drawing depicts a large circle, held by Christ, in which Noah's ark is schematically represented as if viewed from above. Specifically, three "nesting" rectangles, signifying the three stories (i.e. zones) of the ark, are surmounted by a square. This 'topmost' square at the apex of the pyramid is described as a central column which extends from the base of the ark

to its summit, and is conceived as both God and Christ.¹¹⁸ The person concentrating on this mandala-like form, thus proceeds by way of certain prescribed biblical associations towards this centermost square, and experiences a transformation of consciousness very much like that undergone by the soul which passes from the center panel, through the spiritual 'fire' of the fireplace 'altar', and ascends to a union with God through the chimney. As Hugh explains:

Let us picture to ourselves a human soul rising out of this world towards God and, as it rises, gathering itself ever more and more into a unity. Then we shall be able to see in a spiritual manner the form of our ark, which was broad at the bottom, and narrowed gradually as it rose, till at the peak it came to measure a single cubit only . . . We are gradually drawn toward a unity, until we attain even to that simple oneness, that true simplicity and everlasting changelessness, that is God.¹¹⁹

As Grover Zinn, in his study of this exercise puts it, this meditation is tantamount to a

- . . . personification of contemplation [which] portrays graphically the idea of the center as the goal of the mystic quest . . . Contemplation is an artisan who melts fragments of a vase [i.e. the elements of the pyramidal ark] so that the liquid can flow through a tube into the central square. The broken vase is the fragmented state of human desires and thoughts; the fire which melts is the fire of divine love; pouring the liquid into the square signifies the reformation and restoration of the Imago Dei within man.¹²⁰
- . . . As a symbol for Christ the central square represents the Mediator between the divine and the human. It becomes a point of transition from one mode of existence to another.¹²¹

This concept of the transition from one stage of consciousness to another via Christ as threshold, especially characteristic of Augustinian mysticism, is precisely what we previously saw the sashwork cross in the central panel to represent.

Finally, in the Augustinian mystic Nicholas of Cusa (discussed in note 101 of this chapter), a similar identification of visual perception with consciousness is entertained. In his De Visione Dei, Nicholas

observes:

I begin to behold Thee [God] unveiled, and to enter into the garden of delights!¹²²

Later explaining that:

. . . to behold God the Father, and Thee, Jesu, His Son, is to be in Paradise, and is glory everlasting. For he that stayeth outside Paradise cannot have such a vision, since neither God the Father nor Thou, Jesu, are to be found outside Paradise.¹²³

I therefore believe that a primarily Augustinian tradition of mental interiorization predicated upon the forming and manipulation of interior mental imagery existed, and that both Campin and Jan van Eyck are significant contributors to this stream. Perhaps one final source may be hypothesized as possibly contributing, like the 'book metaphor', to the notion of the triptych as an artform which symbolized the 'unsealing' of the soul. So understood, the opening of the wings of the triptych and the subsequent viewing constitute an outward movement corresponding to, and even inciting, the inward movement of the soul entering into itself.

The Closing Tabernacle may have been just such a prototype for the Early Netherlandish winged altarpieces. These portable 'boxes', consisted of a rectangular base upon which a central statue stood, and over which a rectangular 'ceiling' board of the same size was suspended. Both the floor and ceiling were connected to one another by means of a vertical backboard; all three being stationary. Hinged to either side of this backboard was a series of segmented and hinged vertical boards or wings which 'wrapped around' the stationary base and ceiling boards, thus serving to enclose the statue within its own box. These wing panels usually featured relief sculpture or narrative paintings which related

thematically to the central devotional sculpture. This basic type of closing tabernacle is thought to have probably appeared around the end of the thirteenth century, and an Annunciation tabernacle (end of fourteenth century) in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum in Munich depicts Gabriel behind Mary who kneels and reads her book.¹²⁴

The possible reasons such tabernacles could have served, in part, as models for the conception of the closing polyptych, as represented by the Merode Altarpiece, are as follows. First, in that Early Netherlandish painting - in its sculptural modelling of forms and its creation of architectural settings - 'absorbed' both architecture and sculpture in its rise as the penultimate artform in the North (music being the only artform above it), it is very possible that the sculptural tabernacle was directly superseded by a two-dimensional painted (yet still sculptural) version of the tabernacle (what we know as the closing polyptych) innovated by painters like Campin. The niche-like space of the central panel of the Merode Altarpiece and three-dimensional presence of its figures bears comparison with the central 'compartment' of the closing tabernacles as well as with the sculptured figures of their similarly narrative programs. More importantly, one is inclined to view the tabernacle as a sacred 'cube' of space intentionally set apart from the viewer's space. In a sense, this sacred precinct is spiritual space, and thus is always really 'closed off', even when it is 'apparently' open. As such, the viewer of the open tabernacle would have to 'think himself inside the 'closed' sanctuary of the tabernacle. Extraordinary as this may at first seem, contemplation will reveal that it makes a great deal of sense. The very fact that the tabernacle is designed to be closed speaks to its privateness as an expression of spiritual

'otherness'. As such, can it really ever sacrifice its spiritual essence and participate on an equal footing with mundane physical existence? Because I believe that the answer must almost certainly be 'no' to this question, I am obliged to maintain that such tabernacles were perceived always as closed, whether in fact they were or not. Likewise, the spiritual space of the Merode center panel (not co-extensive with that of the viewer but rather requiring that the viewer must be 'spiritualized' to enter) may be considered as also being 'closed' to those who cannot 'think themselves inside' it. The possibility that the closing tabernacle may have originally possessed such a meaning would render it a logical source for the Merode Triptych and its special conception of an illusionistic, interior spiritual space.

E. Conclusions

In this chapter I have pursued the 'inner meaning' of the main theme of the altarpiece. The threefold process examined in chapter five was therefore seen to conform to the three stages of the mystical marriage of the soul to God. Further, each stage of this marriage was seen to correspond, first to pairs of iconographic nodes in the center panel, then to each panel of the triptych itself. In this latter identification, the altarpiece was compared to the tripartite Jewish tabernacle which Augustinian mystics fastened upon as a metaphor for the soul's mystical interiorization and progressive ascent towards God. In the course of examining this metaphor, other iconographic types suggested themselves. These included conceptions of the Holy of Holies or throne-room of God as simultaneously representing the marriage chamber in which the special state of mystical (or contemplative) consciousness known as

the 'spiritual marriage' was attained. It was proposed that the use of convex mirrors to construct the interior space of the Arnolfini Portrait may have found a like use in the center panel of the Merode Altarpiece, and that the mirror (1) symbolized the soul observing its own marriage to God, (2) served as a way of equating the experience of visual perception with consciousness, and (3) was one of a series of visual 'absorption' devices inducing the passage of the soul into the spiritual world (picture space) where its union with God occurred. Other such 'devices' were also suggested, including the notion of the altarpiece (center panel) as a 'visual Eucharist' which 'feeds on' the viewer standing before the altar. Additionally, the conception of the triptych format itself as based upon either the Closing Tabernacle and/or the Book was discussed.

As far as the origins of such Augustinian iconography are concerned, a number of sources were identified. As discussed, the tabernacle metaphor seems to originate in the writings of Hugh and Richard of St. Victor. Campin may have had direct access to these writings or may have derived his use of the tabernacle from St. Bonaventure's Itinerarium Mentis in Deum, which draws directly upon the works of the Victorines. Another possible source for the tabernacle metaphor could have been the aforementioned early work of Jan van Ruysbroeck, The Spiritual Tabernacle, which was probably also based upon Hugh's mystical ark treatise(s).¹²⁵ Finally, the influence of the Brethren of the Common Life, which combined Augustinian interiority, an emphasis on the importance of the Eucharist, and commitment to the reading and production of devotional books (origin of triptych as 'book?'), and the mission of educating a Christian elite (origin of the Merode as a complex 'educational' tool?)

was also seen to constitute a possible influence.

Having thus examined the outer and inner meanings of the altarpiece it might be surmised that a sufficient amount of thematic closure has been obtained to justify stopping the investigation at this point. However, having thus come to understand the depth and complexity of the symbolic program, I must conclude that, what for other artworks would certainly constitute a full thematic development, is here naggingly incomplete. The effort to represent the outer physical-historical environment of fifteenth century Flanders as a self-sufficient reality while simultaneously incorporating into it an abstract spiritual plane of being and experience is such an obviously complex task that one must wonder at the underlying intention. In truth, what we witness in the painting is not merely the two poles of outer physical reality and inner spiritual reality as mutually exclusive domains. Rather, a great effort has been made to represent their inclusiveness. This is a point easy to overlook but which is central to understanding that this vision of reality represents an absolutely crucial advance over those previous religious images which emphasized, or strove to emphasize, the spiritual in and of itself. What has been characterized as the 'iconic' treatment of early medieval figures (as in the tympana of cathedral entrances) utilized non-naturalistic forms to stress spiritual events unadulterated by the earthly and mundane. Recognizable images (human countenances and clothing for angels, for example) were merely necessary devices by which to represent non-physical phenomena, and thus were understood as 'absolute symbols' - that is, symbols which deny all reference to the earthly objects used for their representation. That the Merode Altarpiece presents the soul's movement from the physical to the spiritual justifies

the addition of naturalistic to, if you will, 'spiritualistic' imagery. Yet the harmonization of the two goes a step further, for the relationship between the two rather than the exclusivity of each is stressed. An advance over the older symbolic intent must thus be recognized, for the physical phenomena which allude to spiritual phenomena no longer disavow their earthly associations. The point being made here is different than made by Panofsky regarding 'disguised symbolism', for Panofsky's conceptual concoction, described but never explained by its author, still suggests that a fully spiritual meaning is intended, for the participation of the symbol in the physical world serves little purpose in terms of the actual meaning of the symbol itself. I am proposing, on the other hand, that the physicality of the iconograph is actually part of its meaning, whereby a third inclusive meaning is added to its outer and its inner significance. In the following chapter, it is this inclusive meaning of the altarpiece which will be pursued.

VI. NOTES

¹Henry Chadwick, "Origen," Encyclopedia Britannica: Macropedia, 1977 ed.; John Chydenius, The Typological Problem in Dante: A Study in the History of Medieval Ideas (Helsingfors: Centralityckeriet, 1958), p. 31f.

²R. E. McNally, "Exegesis, Medieval," New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967 ed.

³s.v. 'anagoge', 'anagogical', The Century Dictionary: An Encyclopedic Lexicon of the English Language, 6 vol. (New York: The Century Co., 1914).

⁴Chydenius, pp. 113, 134. It should be noted that despite the fact that modern commentators sometimes assume that the 'mystical' sense is the same as the 'anagogical/spiritual' sense, Chydenius says Honorius sees the mystical sense as an aspect of the tropological. In this study, it will become clear that both Honorius' 'mystical' interpretation of the Cantic in which the Bride signifies the soul, and the 'spiritual' sense in which the same symbol leads the viewer to experience spiritual insight, are intended. Thus, my use of the 'mystical' sense involves both meanings.

⁵Chydenius, pp. 121, 122.

⁶Chydenius, p. 123.

⁷Johannes Tauler, Predigten, ed. Walter Lehman (Jena, 1923), I, 5. (Source as given in, Friedrich Heiler, "The Madonna as a Religious Symbol", orig. German in, Eranos-Jahrbucher 2; trans. Ralph Manheim in, The Mystic Vision: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, p. 368). In this statement, Tauler undoubtedly follows his teacher, Meister Eckhart, the boldest and most outspoken of the German mystics, when he says, "It is more worthy of God that He should be born spiritually of every Virgin, or of every good soul, than He should have been born physically of Mary" (J. M. Clark, Meister Eckhart: An Introduction to the Study of His Works with an Anthology of Sermons, London, 1957, p. 212, as quoted in Sidney Spencer, Mysticism in World Religion, New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1963, p. 250.) Although Eckhart's statement does make clear the similarity which was held to obtain symbolically between the historical and mystical incarnations of God, I chose Tauler's rendition as more typical of mainstream mysticism in as much as few mystics would have dared to suggest, as does Eckhart - even when speaking figuratively - that the historical Incarnation of Christ could be superseded in importance.

⁸Arthur H. Armstrong, "Plotinus," Enc. Brit. 1963 ed.

⁹Du Roy, O. J.-B., "Augustine, St.," NCE, 1967 ed.

¹⁰Frederick E. V. Fleteren, "Augustine's Ascent of the Soul in Book 7 of the Confessions," Augustinian Studies, 5 (1974), p. 55. Yet despite such differences, Augustine was deeply struck by the seeming concordance between the three levels of being of the Neoplatonic universe ("Nous" or spirit, soul, and material) and the Trinitarian structure of the Christian universe (which he did much to personally articulate), so that he was moved to concede that, "There are none nearer to us [Christians] than the Platonists" (Augustine, The City of God, trans. by Henry Bettenson, New York: Penguin Books, 1972; rpt. 1977, p. 304) as well as claiming that, "If these men (viz. the Platonists) could have had this life over again with us . . . They would have become Christians . . ." (Augustine, De Vera Religione, as given in City of God, N. 10, p. 304).

¹¹Du Roy.

¹²Henry O. Taylor, "Dionysius Areopagiticus," Enc. Brit., eleventh ed. Erigena (c. 800 - c. 877), court philosopher and theologian for Charles the Bald and head of the Palatine School at Aix-en-Provence, is the third major source of Christian Platonic ideas in the middle ages (along with Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius) as is being slowly recognized in current scholarly circles. Erigena's De Divisione Naturae (or Periphyseon, as it is sometimes called), is perhaps the most sophisticated and complex transformation of Plotinian Neoplatonism into a Christian system of world creation and redemption achieved in the medieval period. However, for the purposes of this study, an examination of the influence of Erigena as the third member of this medieval Christian Platonic triumverate would lead too far afield, and I have therefore chosen to limit my attention to Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius.

¹³"Hugh of St. Victor," Encyclopedia Britannica: Micropedia, 1981 ed., Richard of St. Victor, Richard of St. Victor: Selected Writings on Contemplation, Trans. Clare Krichberger (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 48; A. S. Pringle-Pattison and Evelyn Underhill, "Mysticism," Enc. Brit., 1963 ed.

¹⁴Pattison and Underhill; John A. Mourant, "Augustinianism," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, (New York: The Macmillan Co. & The Free Press, 1967).

¹⁵J. M. Clark, "Eckhart"; Elmer O'Brien, "Suso, Heinrich"; "Tauler, Johann"; Enc. Brit., 1963 ed. "Eckhart, Johannes," Enc. Brit., eleventh ed.

¹⁶Pattison and Underhill; Alfred Wautier D'Aygaliers, Ruysbroeck the Admirable (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1923; rpt. 1969), p. 237f.

¹⁷see John of Ruysbroeck, The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage; The Sparkling Stone; The Book of Supreme Truth, 1 vol., trans. from the Flemish by C. A. Wynschenk Dom, ed. and intro. by Evelyn Underhill (London: John M. Watkins, 1951).

¹⁸Adornment, pp. XXIV, XXX from the Introduction.

¹⁹Bonaventura, Mind's Road, pp. 29, 30.

²⁰Bonaventura, Mind's Road; Pattison and Underhill; and "Richard of St. Victor," Enc. Brit., 1963 ed.

²¹Richard of St. Victor, Selected Writings, p. 54 of Kirchberger's Introduction.

²²A. J. Ennis, "Augustinian Spirituality," NCE, 1967 ed.

²³The interest of the Brethren in imitating the human as opposed to the divine nature of Christ (which has so often been taken as an early symptom of pre-Reformation Humanism in the North), might be thought to inform the viewer of the altarpiece in assuming his role as an actor in the painted drama. I would, however, discourage the making of such an assumption. First, this is because the metaphorical level of participation, as discussed, precludes imitation on behalf of the viewer. Secondly, and most importantly, such an imitation of Christ's human aspects is absolutely contrary to the mystical nature of the viewer's seeking for the divine, as will become increasingly apparent as the chapter unfolds.

²⁴R. Garcia-Villoslada, "Devotio Moderna," NCE, 1967 ed.; Michael D. Knowles, "Brethren of the Common Life," Enc. Brit., 1963 ed.

²⁵Edward C. Butler, "Groot, Gerhard," Enc. Brit., eleventh ed.; Knowles.

²⁶Panofsky, ENP, p. 212ff.

²⁷The fact that the great grandfather of Elizabeth Borluut (the wife of the man who commissioned the Ghent Altarpiece and herself represented as one of the donors on the altarpiece's frontal) had founded the monastery of the Augustinian Eremites in Ghent (Elizabeth Dhanens, Van Eyck: The Ghent Altarpiece, New York: Viking Press, 1973, p. 40), coupled with the fact that Jan's daughter Livinia entered a convent of Augustinian Canonesses in Maaseyck in 1450 - a convent to which Jan had earlier donated a chasuble - (Panofsky, ENP, n. 3, p. 178 - given in 'Notes', p. 427) further confirms Jan's connection to, and movement within, Augustinian circles.

²⁸William Ralph Inge, Christian Mysticism (New York: Charles Scribners and Sons, 1899), p. 141.

²⁹Source given as Augustine, Lib. Arb. 3:10:30 in Du Roy.

³⁰Source given as Augustine, Serm. 141:1:4 in Du Roy.

³¹Bonaventura, Mind's Road, (Ch. 4.4), p. 29.

³²Bonaventura, Mind's Road, (Ch. 4.4; 1.4; 1.5, Prologue .3), pp. 30, 8, 9, 4.

³³See Bonaventura, Mind's Road, (Ch. 1.4), p. 8; Ewert Cousins,

"Mandala Symbolism in the Theology of Bonaventure," University of Toronto Quarterly 40 (Spring 1971), p. 188; and the further elucidation of these categories by reference to their source in the contemplative Victorine model as set forth in Richard of St. Victor, Selected Writings; "Richard of St. Victor," Enc. Brit., 1963 ed.; "Hugh of St. Victor", Micropedia, 1977 ed.

³⁴Cousins, p. 187.

³⁵Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 78.

³⁶Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 78.

³⁷Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 66f.

³⁸Geoffrey W. H. Lampe, The Seal of The Spirit: A Study in the Doctrine of Baptism and Confirmation in the New Testament and The Fathers (London: S.P.C.K., 1951; rpt. 1967), p. 112f.

³⁹Mary herself, as a symbol of the soul, represents this inasmuch as she was held to be the Templum Trinitatis, or "temple and sanctuary of the Trinity" (Panofsky, ENP, p. 132).

⁴⁰Bonaventura, Mind's Road, (Ch. 3.5), p. 26. This particular translation has the weakness of rendering "anima" as "mind" rather than "soul".

⁴¹Augustine, The Trinity (14:4;6), trans. Stephen McKenna, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1963, p. 417f.

⁴²Augustine, The Trinity (13:20;6) p. 407f.

⁴³Adornment (3:3), p. 172f.

⁴⁴There can be no objection to likening the mystical ascent to "man becoming God", for mystical writers continually refer to the apotheosis of the soul in such terms without, however, ever implying loss of real distinction between creator and creature. Eckhart thus says, ". . . I receive God into myself, and through love I enter into Him . . . We are transformed into God, so that we may know Him as He is." (J. M. Clark, Meister Eckhart: An Introduction to the Study of His Works with an Anthology of Sermons, London, 1957, p. 190, as quoted in Spencer, Mysticism, p. 241). Ruysbroeck likewise spoke about the seeming unity of the soul with God. Although ". . . we feel ourselves to be one with God . . . wherein we can nevermore find any distinction between ourselves and God", Ruysbroeck sees this as a feeling of no distinction rather than a reality of no distinction, for he continues, ". . . but our powers do not pass away into nothingness, for then we should lose our created being [i.e. real distinction]" (Adornment, Ch. 10 of the book, The Sparkling Stone, p. 209, 210). One often finds scholars (especially in encyclopedia articles) who take Ruysbroeck's 'no distinction' passage to mean that he supports a conception of total absorption and annihilation of the self. This is absolutely contrary to Ruysbroeck's intent. Not only would total loss of identity make it impossible for him to recount such an experience

(because there would be no receptor of the experience), but Ruysbroeck was ". . . specially concerned to make clear the vital distinction between his doctrine of the soul's union with God - a union in which the primal distinction between Creator and created is never overpassed - and the pantheistic doctrine of complete absorption in Him . . . preached by the heretical sects whose initiates claim to 'be God'" (Evelyn Underhill, Ruysbroeck London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1915, p. 49), i.e. the often Ticitious Brethren of the Free Spirit who Ruysbroeck virulently opposed.

⁴⁵"Know ye not, that so many of us were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 6:3), ". . . but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16), and again, ". . . ye have put off the old man . . . And have put on the new man which is renewed . . . after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:9, 10).

⁴⁶Adornment, ch. 9 of the book The Sparkling Stone, p. 202.

⁴⁷Bonaventura, Mind's Road, (Prologue .3), p. 4.

⁴⁸Galatians 2:20, as quoted in Bonaventura, Mind's Road, (Prologue .3), p. 4.

⁴⁹Panofsky, ENP, p. 143.

⁵⁰Dionysius the Areopagite, The Mystical Theology and The Celestial Hierarchies, 1 vol., England: Shrine of Wisdom, 1949, rpt. 1965, p. 9.

⁵¹Or, alternately, of man become God (mystic ascent) as opposed to God become man (Christ's birth). See again, note 44.

⁵²The experience of seeing God 'Face to Face', recounted continually in the Bible, is a central feature of Christian and Jewish mystical quests. Generally, it figures as a more important element in both early and late (medieval) Jewish ascent literature because the Hidden God of the Old Testament is of course not seen as self-revealing in Christ. Therefore, the gaining of such intimate contact without aid of grace and by dint of the dangerous ascent through the seven (sometimes more) spheres, each with its own angelically guarded and sealed gate, is more highly prized (see, for example, references to Merkabah (Throne) Mysticism in Scholem, Kabbalah; or, for more detailed investigation, Gershom Scholem, Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition, New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965, as well as the ninth century 'epic' of esoteric Jewish ascent literature, Hugo Odelberg, 3 Enoch ["The Hebrew Book of Enoch"], Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928).

⁵³Adornment, ch. 10 of the book The Sparkling Stone, p. 209f. This "God-seeing life" is in fact none other than the continuous or almost continuous mystical sense of union with God (St. Catherine of Genoa supposedly experienced it for 22 years) in which self-consciousness, the consciousness of the divine Presence, and an active life coexist, and which is referred to as the "Spiritual Marriage". (Spencer, Mysticism, p. 253ff.).

⁵⁴Heckscher, p. 48, 52ff. I find Heckscher's interpretation of the fireplace as the "Mouth of Hell" (p. 54) and as a reference to the "darkness of the Synagogue" (p. 55) from which the Virgin is protected by virtue of the firescreen to be entirely unacceptable. The interpretation is in conflict with the indigenous iconographic layout and left-to-right movements within the altarpiece, and it ignores the transitional and transformational associations hearths carry. Although his identification of the grisaille male and female corbel figures as a symbol of "matrimony before the era under Grace" (p. 51f.) tends to buttress his other ideas about the fireplace as a representation of the synagogue, etc., I believe they speak instead to a different meaning which can only be indicated in the briefest of forms. As these figures adorn the fireplace, I believe they participate in the redemptive - ascent symbolism of which the fireplace is part. In Christian and Jewish mystical literature alike, man was originally held to be double-sexed and androgenous, his nature becoming split with the Fall which resulted in its division into two sexes. In Christian esoteric tradition which numbers authors like Origen, Maximus the Confessor, Erigena, and later Boehme, for example, Christ represents the 'whole man' in which the sexes are reunited. I believe the corbel figures, as part of the tradition, represent the 'split soul' of man seeking the return to wholeness which redemption promises. Perhaps this is why these figures of a man and woman occupy perfectly a narrow lateral strip in the Merode which includes within its upper and lower boundaries the open door in the donors panel (where the white rider, or Christ, is symbolized) and, in the center panel, the two corbel figures. Although a full demonstration of this thesis would require a study far exceeding the limits of this footnote entry, examination of the following sources will provide sufficient basis for the claim: Mircea Eliade, Mephistopheles and the Androgene: Studies in Religious Myth and Symbol, trans. J. M. Cohen, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965); Eriugena, Periphyseon; and, in medieval Jewish tradition, The Zohar, trans. Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, 5 vol. (London: The Soncino Press, 1931-1935). See also note 112 in this chapter.

⁵⁵R. Macalister, "Altar," Enc. Brit., eleventh ed.

⁵⁶The later Christian altar preserves the concept of the altar as a type of threshold to the spiritual world, but reflects the notion of the loving New Testament God in the Eucharistic service, for with the possible exception of prayers offered up by the priest, the Christian altar is not where man sacrifices to God, but where God sacrifices (Himself) to man.

⁵⁷Bonaventura, Mind's Road, (ch. 7.6), p. 45.

⁵⁸John 13:1, as referred to in Bonaventura, Mind's Road, (ch. 7.6), p. 45.

⁵⁹The fact that no fire is burning in the fireplace does not necessarily contradict this interpretation. The lack of fire does not remove the fire association a firescreen or fireplace carries. Neither does it compromise the firescreen as a possible threshold metaphor. As will be recalled, Heckscher interpreted the firescreen as the very kind of object

Joseph was working upon. In this identification I concur. As our earlier interpretation of Joseph drilling as a symbol of God sending forth His Son into incarnation revealed, the board Joseph drills could represent the nadir of Christ's descent and His final death on the cross. Yet from that point Christ rose up and was resurrected. The use of the same board as a firescreen, as a symbol of that transformative, spiritualizing fire, is thus a very appropriate threshold symbol to site at the final node in the soul's mystical ascent.

⁶⁰Bonaventura, Mind's Road, (ch. 1.5), p. 9.

⁶¹Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 75.

⁶²Cousins, p. 189f.

⁶³Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 65ff.

⁶⁴Cousins, p. 189.

⁶⁵Cousins, p. 189.

⁶⁶Thus is the presence of the open door of the Annunciation chamber explained, putting to rest the earlier mentioned objections forwarded by Heckscher and Freeman.

⁶⁷Cousins, p. 189.

⁶⁸Bonaventura, Mind's Road, (ch. 5.1), p. 34.

⁶⁹Augustine, In evang. Ioh. 20:11, as given in Du Roy.

⁷⁰s.v. "Richard of St. Victor," Enc. Brit., 1963 ed.

⁷¹s.v. "Hugh of St. Victor," Micropedia, 1977 ed.

⁷²Richard of St. Victor, De Externatione Mali, 2:15, col. 1102 seq., as quoted in Richard of St. Victor, Selected Writings, p. 244.

⁷³Richard of St. Victor, Selected Writings, p. 183.

⁷⁴Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 73.

⁷⁵"Font," Enc. Brit., 1963 ed.

⁷⁶I believe that this six-staged throne related image is also used in Van Eyck's painting of the Rolin Madonna (c. 1432-34, Louvre, Paris). Close visual inspection will reveal that the horizontal line of the Virgin's knee upon which the Christ child sits corresponds to and overlaps the edge of the elevated walkway of the garden out behind her chamber. The six steps which lead up to this garden walkway are visible just to the left of the Christ child. The visual result is that the six steps appear to lead up to the Christ child who Himself seems to sit upon the walkway platform. As the Virgin with child is already depicted in the manner of

the 'Throne of Wisdom' type, the depiction of Christ upon the six-stepped Solomonic throne (Solomon is himself symbolic of wisdom) is a reinforcing and fully consistent image. It does, however, have the additional virtue of expressing the six-fold ascent to Christ and to the Throne of God. In that both Van Eyck and Campin chose to utilize the same essential image of the six-fold ascent, one may justifiably assume that a common Augustinian source (e.g. Victorines, Bonaventure) may obtain.

⁷⁷Called The Spiritual Tabernacle, this early work was probably inspired by the De Arca [Noe] Mystica of Hugh of St. Victor (Underhill, Ruysbroeck, p. 40).

⁷⁸Underhill, Ruysbroeck, p. 47. For some reason, Ruysbroeck (The Sparkling Stone, ch. 7-9) transposes these three levels from the traditional sequence of servants, sons, and friends: ". . . the threefold Way traversed by all great mystics [consists of] the Active Life through the Way of Purification, whereby men may become true Servants of God; the Inner Life, the Way of Illumination and of real Sonship with God; and the Contemplative Life, which is the Unitive Way whereby men may attain to true friendship with God." (From the editor's introduction to the Celestial Hierarchies in Dionysius the Areopagite, Myst. Theol. and Cel. Hier., p. 18f).

⁷⁹J. M. Clark and J. V. Skinner, trans., Meister Eckhart: Selected Treatises and Sermons (London, 1958), p. 174.

⁸⁰Helping to explain why the 'shift' from Figure 3 to Figure 4 grid, mentioned in chapter four, was necessary.

⁸¹This is the reason why the 'fallen soul' constitutes the target of all redemptive efforts, because it alone, unlike the body, is capable of ascent towards the spiritual pole. Augustine's charge, as given on page 167, well reflects this doctrine.

⁸²"Christian Mysticism", Micropedia, 1977 ed.

⁸³Richard of St. Victor, The Twelve Patriarchs (also known as Benjamin Minor), ch. 72, as quoted in Richard of St. Victor, Richard of St. Victor: The Twelve Patriarchs; The Mystical Ark; Book Three of the Trinity, trans. Grover A. Zinn, Jr., (London: S.P.C.K., 1979), p. 21.

⁸⁴Richard of St. Victor, Twelve Patriarchs, etc., (Benjamin Minor, ch. 72), p. 21.

⁸⁵David L. Carleton, Note ["A Mathematical Analysis of the Perspective of the Arnolfini Portrait and Other Similar Interior Scenes by Jan van Eyck"], Art Bulletin 64 (Mar. 1982), pp. 118-124.

⁸⁶Carleton, p. 124.

⁸⁷Carleton, p. 119ff.

⁸⁸Carleton, p. 123.

⁸⁹By virtue of the figure stating itself more strongly than the ground in the figure/ground relationship. As Carleton observes, a similar effect is achieved by the large Madonna in the comparatively small church in Van Eyck's *Madonna in a Church*, which seems to stem ". . . from a similar desire to cause objects of the composition to dominate their surroundings." (Carleton, p. 123).

⁹⁰Compare Figures 9 and 11 in Carleton, p. 121.

⁹¹Heinrich Schwarz, "The Mirror of the Artist and the Mirror of the Devout", Studies in the History of Art Dedicated to William E. Suida on His Eightieth Birthday, London: Phaidon Press, 1959, p. 90f., as cited in Carleton, p. 121, 122 n. 12.

⁹²Compare, for example, the similar effect upon the viewer exercised by the bed canopy at the upper right hand corner of the Arnolfini Portrait, and the fireplace 'entablature' at the upper right corner of the Merode's central panel. Also compare the steep floor plane of the Arnolfini Portrait with the steep floor and table-top planes in the Merode's central panel.

⁹³As Carleton himself points out, the notion that Jan van Eyck's space merely represents a "general inheritance of the oblique space of medieval painting" must be tempered by the fact that "there is a good chance that this special effect was intentional . . . and that this effect was derived from a convex mirror." (Both quotations from Carleton, p. 121.)

⁹⁴The central panel can be understood as representing a form of attenuated perception on other grounds as well. As reflection upon the difference between the spatial perception of the infant and the adult reveals, the gradual development of balance (being able to walk) and later on of a fully integrated adult ego-identity, corresponds to the symptomatic reflection of this developing ego in the changing spatial perception it experiences. For example, the baby reaches for the moon as if it were within reach, experiencing his environment as a varied and undifferentiated field of indeterminate depth. This field of impressions without meaningful hierarchy alters as the ego gradually emerges as the ruler, so to speak, at the top of a hierarchy of world perceptions, relationships and meanings (spatial and otherwise). This process may also be likened to the emergence of the 'figure' (ego) from the 'ground' (environment) as it develops towards adulthood. This adult stage of development is marked by the comparative stability of the 'figure/ground' relationship in which personal identity becomes as strong or stronger than its environmental context. The undefined quality of the early 'figure/ground' relationship is indeed apparent in children's art which passes from random scribbling to specific types of scribbles (some diagnostic systems see 17 types), to the emergence of distinct figures from the formerly undifferentiated field or 'ground' of scribbles. These figures subsequently become more representationally specific in the drawings of older children in which the spatial relationship between specific figures and their unitary ground ('background') are more finely developed. Essentially, as the child himself becomes more individualized and distinguishable from his environment, so do his figures become more specific and distinct from

the 'ground' of the picture plane. Thus, in coming into increasingly specific, clear, and focused relationships with the objects of the world, the accompanying alterations of the perceptual subject/object relationships can be understood as an indication of changes in the developing ego-identity and consciousness. On this basis, the subject/object relationship obtaining between the viewer and the center panel of the Merode Altarpiece signifies an alteration (perhaps "transformation" would be more accurate) of the ego or soul of the viewer. That the field represented may actually follow rules beyond those imposed by the possible use of a convex mirror is also evident. In an article on mysticism and depth perception (Bernard S. Aaronson, "Mystic and Schizophreniform States and the Experience of Depth", Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 6, no. 2 (Fall 1967), pp. 246-252), the author distinguishes between spatial perception resulting from aberrant perceptual states where the ego is threatened (schizophrenia, psychosis), and those in which it is heightened and not in a state of stressful disequilibrium. In psychotic type states where the ego is in jeopardy, the spatial field blurs, flattens and exhibits a lack of depth (p. 248ff. --I personally believe that this represents the jeopardized ego or 'subject-pole' being overtaken by the 'object-pole'; i.e. the decreased strength or continuity of ego no longer can maintain a clear subject-object relationship, and the phenomena become non-hierarctic and confused, much as the baby experiences. The lack of depth is thus the lack of a strong and well-defined ego-object relationship, expressed spatially, in which the ego cannot, as it were, 'hold the object at arm's length' with the result that the perceived object tends to 'invade' the ego's own space.). However, Aaronson found that mystical experience was typified by expanded depth (p. 248ff.), the "perception of objects as being in interaction with their surroundings and with the active properties of the space around them" (p. 251), the sense that "space seemed to extend through and beyond any physical limitations imposed on it" (p. 249), and that lines [edges] were more distinct, colors more intense, and sounds crisper (p. 249). The correlation between this second set of experiential phenomenae and the depiction of objects and space in the center panel of the altarpiece is striking. Indeed, the organic relation between objects and their space is such a pronounced feature of what has been referred to by past scholars (rather inadequately) as simply a 'sculpturesque' or 'decorative treatment', that the element of flatness may be reconsidered as a specially articulated type of depth rather than the lack of it. Also, the clarity of object contours, of lines, and the brilliancy of colors also conforms well to the attributes of heightened consciousness as described by Aaronson. It remains to be said that it is indeed unusual that these spatial effects in Early Netherlandish paintings have never been conscientiously considered as symptomatic of the religious states they were believed to depict or induce. Perhaps this is a result of the 'agnostic fallacy' (described in chapter 3), and the consequent failure to grant that such non-sense perceptible realities may indeed exist and, therefore, be open to experience (and representation) if certain conditions on behalf of the subject are fulfilled.

⁹⁵Passage through the wall would serve to support the implications drawn in chapter 5 concerning Figure 12 (i.e. that the visually implied movement (a) through the outergate of the donors panel, (b) through the door of the Annunciation chamber, (c) through the wall of its fireplace,

and (d) into Joseph's shop and (e) on out its window), helping to thereby explain the purpose of the 'great arc' suggested by the indigenous 'paths' in the donors and Joseph panels. On the other hand, movement up the chimney relates to the theme of ascent to God (especially as it is reflected in Apocryphal ascent literature and especially the 'throne-ascents' of Merkabah tradition - see note 52, this chapter).

⁹⁶Apparently, the tabernacle consists of three circular zones: the outer courtyard, the sanctuary (or tent of the congregation) within that, and the innermost circle, enclosed by a veil, where the ark of the covenant and mercy seat are situated. In the Merode Triptych, these zones are expressed laterally rather than concentrically.

⁹⁷Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 73.

⁹⁸Richard of St. Victor, Selected Writings, p. 183.

⁹⁹This image encourages us to assign an alternate Trinitarian significance to the oculus ensemble such that the emanatory window represents God, the other window Christ, with the Holy Spirit still understood as the babe in descent.

¹⁰⁰Panofsky, ENP, p. 201-203.

¹⁰¹The fact that the mirror presents a reversed image of the room may interestingly enough support the notion that God's consciousness is the opposite or reverse of our own. This idea was especially apparent in the contemplative and methodological tract, De Visione Dei (1453) by Nicholas of Cusa (1401-64). An Augustinian mystic who was educated as a boy by the Brothers of the Common Life at Deventer, Nicholas was greatly influenced by the great fourteenth century Rhenish and Flemish mystics and especially by the Pseudo-Dionysius. From the later, the unknowability of God (by means of reason) is adopted, and Nicholas continually refers to the Hidden God who resides beyond the 'Wall of Coincidence'. Not only is the idea of the opposite aspect of God of interest here, but also Nicholas' notion of the Father God who resides behind a wall as was discussed earlier in relation to Joseph in his chamber (see Nicholas of Cusa, The Vision of God, trans. E. G. Salter, with intro. by Evelyn Underhill, New York: Frederick Ungar Publ. Co., 1969; first publ. 1928, esp. pp. 80-87). Further, the mirror-like aspect of God's vision, as present in the Arnolfini Wedding Portrait, is also supported by Cusa's commentary on the divine vision: "Thine eye, Lord, reacheth to all things without turning. When our eye turneth itself toward an object 'tis because our sight seeth but through a finite angle. But the angle of Thine eye, O Lord, is not limited, but is infinite, being the angle of a circle, nay of an infinite sphere also, since Thy site is an eye of sphericity and of infinite perfection. Wherefore it seeth at one and the same time all things around and above and below . . . Thy glance, Lord, that thou quickenest every Spirit, and makest glad every saint, and putteth to flight every sorrow. Look then on me in mercy, and my soul is healed!" (The Vision of God, ch. 8, p. 38).

¹⁰²Although Christ said this to His disciples and was not referring

to marriage, it may perhaps be allowed to serve this purpose in that, in the same passage, he refers to these two or three as witnesses, as well as to the notion of binding union. In the Arnolfini Portrait, as Panofsky sought to demonstrate, the painting represented the 'witnessing' of the marriage ceremony by the painter (his signature - 'Jan van Eyck was here' - adorns the chamber's rear wall)/the two figures represented in the mirror's reflection. The theme of 'union' is evident when the verse is more fully represented: "Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven . . . For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:18, 20).

¹⁰³John L. Ward, "Hidden Symbolism in Jan van Eyck's Annunciations," Art Bulletin 47 (June 1975), pp. 196, 204, 206f.

¹⁰⁴Panofsky, ENP, p. 202.

¹⁰⁵The double reference to both Christ the Son and God the Father was also used by Van Eyck in the representation of the Enthroned in the Ghent Altarpiece. Not only does the double reference contain Augustinian overtones of the unity of Persons in the Trinity, but, more specifically, it expresses the fact that the mystic may only seek the Father through the Son (" . . . no man cometh to the Father, but by me", John 14:6). The reason for this, as touched briefly upon in chapter five (page 131), is that Christ is the Father God in the act of self-revelation, i.e. the One God is the Father God when hidden and is the Son when revealed. This is precisely what the Enthroned in the Ghent Altarpiece represents. Outwardly the figure is Christ Enthroned. Not only is this true because He conforms to John's vision of Christ in the Revelation (4:2; 20:11; 21:5; 22:4), but because the hem of His outer garment reads "King of Kings, and Lord of Lords" which are appellations of Christ in Revelation 19:16. Yet this figure of Christ raising His right hand is also God the Father, as is indicated by the banner on His undergarment which reads "Sabaoth", the Father God of the Old Testament (i.e. Lord of Hosts, Lord God of Sabaoth). Only when this figure is understood to be represented in motion does the dual identity become clear. With His right arm lowered, the undergarment is not pulled back and the Sabaoth banner is hidden from sight. In this state, only the figure of Christ is understood, as designated by the inscription on the hem of His outer garment. But when He raises His right arm, He pulls back His outer garment in the process and reveals His inner (hidden) identity as God the Father. That is, in truth - the figure tells us - that He is God the Father Who, in the act of revealing Himself as the Father, becomes God the Son (the revealed, the self-revealing God). Indeed, in the Merode Altarpiece, Joseph-God behind the wall dispensing Himself, as Son, to Mary through the indigenous drill represents the same thing. That is, that when God leaves His throneroom to enter the physical world, He appears in the form of Christ.

¹⁰⁶Clark, Sermons, p. 227 as given in Spencer, Mysticism, p. 242.

¹⁰⁷Carleton demonstrated this by constructing a scale model of the room, placing a convex mirror at its open end, and then photographing the image of the room in this mirror with a camera lens positioned where

the mirror represented on the chamber's real wall would be. The image obtained simulated the panel's odd spatial characteristics as it appears to the viewer of the painting (Carleton, "Mathematical Analysis", p. 122ff.).

¹⁰⁸Richard of St. Victor, Selected Writings, p. 228.

¹⁰⁹Adornment, ch. 9 of the book The Sparkling Stone, p. 201.

¹¹⁰Adornment, ch. 9 of the book The Sparkling Stone, p. 203f.

¹¹¹See note 53, this chapter.

¹¹²I believe that these colors also symbolize the marriage of the soul to Christ. This they do in the bread and wine of the Eucharistic service in which the soul is, in a sense, 'wedded' to Christ. But the colors signify the same 'wedding' in other contexts as well. For example, the symbolism of the white lily and the red rose, I believe, carry the same marriage symbolism. The two flowers are featured together in the Song of Solomon ("I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys", 2.1), thereby linking the colors of the center panel to the panel's already identified Solomonic symbolism. The lily and the rose also are found next to one another in many paintings by Van Eyck (e.g. in the Lamb panel of the Ghent Altarpiece, in the 'Marriage Crown' of the enthroned Virgin of the Ghent Altarpiece, in the background garden of the Rolin Madonna). I would propose that the lily represents Christ whereas the rose symbolizes His betrothed, the human soul. The lily as a symbol of Christ rather than of the Virgin's purity is indeed held to stem from the Song of Solomon verse given above (Ward, "Hidden Symbolism", p. 197, n. 7). In this identification, Ward is also supported by Gertrud Schiller and her monumental work, Ikonographie der christlichen Kunst, 4 vols., 1966-). Alternately, the rose is associated with Mary as the "rose without thorns", i.e. as sinless ("Rose", Hall). As Mary is the Bride of Christ, the marital connotations of the lily and rose become apparent. But the rose also is a direct symbol of the soul itself, and is so used, for example, in the Middle English Pearl poem (c. 1360-90), which speaks of the fallen soul as follows: "What thou hast lost is but a rose that flowered and failed . . ." (Pearl 23:5-6, Margaret Williams, trans., The Pearl-Poet: His Complete Works, New York: Random House, 1967, p. 275). Yet the flower symbolism may still be taken even further, for the petal pattern of the lily corresponds to the two interlaced triangles of the six-pointed star, whereas that of the rose is pentagrammatic (please note that the five-pointed star of light adorns the lap of Mary, robed in red and herself a symbol of the rose). Earlier, I identified this five-pointed star as a symbol of 'Man' (ch. 5). I would now further assert that Christ may be alternately symbolized by the six-pointed star. This would certainly explain the correspondance between the IHS monogram and the six-pointed star in the cradles mentioned in chapter five. But beyond the possible symbolic units here proposed, a still further marriage-related meaning may here obtain. Assuming that the lily symbolized Christ, the hermaphroditic nature of this flower may also have served a special symbolic role in the marital-redemptive aspect of Christ (as earlier alluded to in note 54 of this chapter). To reiterate, the Fall of Man was seen as

a fall from double-sexedness or perfect wholeness, into a division of the sexes. Erigena, following the Eastern Church Fathers in adopting this doctrine, quotes from Maximus the Confessor: ". . . there is neither male nor female when human nature is returned to its pristine state. For if the first man had not sinned he would not be suffering from the division of his nature into two sexes, but would be remaining without change in his primordial reasons in which he was created in the image of God . . . Lord Jesus united in himself the division of (our) nature, that is, male and female. For it was not in the bodily sex but simply in man that he rose from the dead." (Periphyseon, bk. 2, p. 33). This notion of Christ as the redemption of Man's sexually divided state (present in the writings of Origen, Maximus, Erigena, up through those of Jacob Boehme and William Blake), may very well have informed the thematic programs of Campin and Van Eyck as well as later Flemish artists (the Morrison Triptych, an early fifteenth century Flemish altarpiece in the Toledo Museum of Art, features much Eyckian iconography, and depicts a white horse, i.e. Christ, with a male and female rider, i.e. the 'wedded' or 'man redeemed to wholeness', mounted upon its back and headed toward a castle in the tower of which a pelican roosts, i.e. Christ's heavenly chamber.). So understood, the convention of featuring a male and female donor couple in altarpieces of this period and school would deserve reinterpretation. Although, as indicated in note 54, a full proof of this theory cannot be presented here, the major elements can be forwarded. My suspicion is that the donors in the Merode Triptych - as well as the male and female corbel figures - represent 'Fallen Man', and that the true 'marriage process' they await is the coming to wholeness of the split soul they represent. This is certainly borne out by the Arnolfini Portrait, for the painting has been seen to represent the soul's vision of its own marriage to God/Christ within His throneroom. However, the reflection in the mirror at the rear of the room shows two figures, one dressed in red and one in blue, who 'stand' where the viewer of the painting does. The conclusion to be drawn is that the viewer is seeing what these two figures see, or rather, that these two represent the soul in its 'married' and 'undivided' state. That they are dressed in red and blue is significant, and also indicative, I believe, of marriage. A wedding band with a red and a blue stone is worn by the Virgin in Van Eyck's painting of the Madonna with Canon van der Peale. The same painting features a reflection of a man with a short blue coat, red hose and a red turban (see D. G. Carter, Note ["Reflections on the Armor of the Canon van der Peale Madonna"], Art Bulletin 36 (Mar. 1954), pp. 60-62). This figure, presumably the painter, is also featured in the background of the Rolin Madonna, and closely resembles the painting of a Man with a Red Turban by Van Eyck which is thought to be a self-portrait. Does this clothing perhaps signify that Van Eyck himself had attained to the level of the mystical marriage? The fact that he painted the very experience of this mystical state in the Arnolfini Portrait would help support such a contention. (The aforementioned Morrison Triptych in Toledo also depicts a similarly clad figure in red turban, blue mantle, and red hose crossing a bridge and holding a small wooden panel - a likely reference to Van Eyck as a painter, and most likely drawn from the Rolin figure who stands on 'bridge-like' ramparts. The placement of the figure on a bridge, I believe to be a symbol of Van Eyck as an initiate who, via his spiritualized state, is able to cross the 'threshold' between physical and

spiritual worlds.) But to return to the Merode, the marital significance of these colors may also be indicated in that both Mary (soul) and Joseph (God) - whom we have already seen as symbolizing marriage on numerous levels - feature both hues (Mary's mantle and pillow, Joseph's undergarment and turban). I, therefore, believe that the white and red of the center panel may be held to exoterically indicate the Eucharistic union of the soul to God, while at the same time esoterically representing a chain of interconnected flower, geometric, and sexual symbolisms which support a special meaning of the concept of the 'redemptive marriage'. It may finally be noted that the contention that the donors may be taken together as a representation of 'Man' (or Fallen Man's bi-partite soul) argues against the theory that the donatrix is a compositional addition. This 'addition' theory will be contested on other grounds in chapter seven.

¹¹³Fleteren, "Augustine's Ascent", p. 47.

¹¹⁴Adornment, ch. 11 of the book The Sparkling Stone, p. 214f.

¹¹⁵Knowles, "Brethren", and Garcia-Villoslada, "Devotio".

¹¹⁶See Francis A. Yates, The Art of Memory (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

¹¹⁷Hugh of St. Victor, De arca Noe morali, I, 7, PL 176:622BC (as cited in Hugh of St. Victor: Selected Spiritual Writings, trans. by a Religious of C.S.M.V., intro. by Aelred Squire O.P., London, 1962, p. 52) quoted in Grover A. Zinn, Jr., "Mandala Symbolism and Use in the Mysticism of Hugh of St. Victor," History of Religions, (May 1973), p. 334.

¹¹⁸Zinn, "Mandala Symbolism", pp. 320-322.

¹¹⁹De arca Noe morali, IV, 6, PL 176:666 BC, quoted in Zinn, "Mandala Symbolism", p. 337, n. 72.

¹²⁰Zinn, "Mandala Symbolism", p. 338, following Hugh's De arca Noe mystica, IX, PL 696 D - 697 B (avail. in trans. in C. C. Mierow, "A Description of Manuscript Garret Deposit 1450, Princeton University Library, Together with a Collation of the First Work Contained In It, the De Arca Noe of Hugo de Sancto Victore", Transactions of the American Library Institute [for 1917] Chicago, 1918, pp. 27-55.

¹²¹Zinn, "Mandala Symbolism", p. 388.

¹²²Vision of God, ch. 7, p. 57.

¹²³Vision of God, ch. 21, p. 104.

¹²⁴Mojmir S. Franta, "The Closing Tabernacle - A Fanciful Innovation of Medieval Design," Art Quarterly 30 (Summer 1967), pp. 103- 117.

¹²⁵In her useful introduction to her book on Ruysbroeck, Evelyn Underhill presents brief synopses on each of the known works of this great Flemish mystic. Of this particular treatise she says: "The

Spiritual Tabernacle (called by Surius In Tabernaculum Mosis) - The longest, most fantastic, and, in spite of some fine passages, the least interesting of Ruysbroeck's works. Probably founded upon the De Arca Mystica of Hugh of St. Victor, this is an elaborate allegory, thoroughly medieval in type, in which the Tabernacle of the Israelites becomes a figure of the spiritual life; the details of its construction, furniture and ritual being given a symbolic significance, in accordance with the methods of interpretation popular at the time. In this book . . . I believe that we have [one of] the only surviving works of Ruysbroeck's first period; when he had not yet 'transcended images' but was at that point in his mystical development in which the young contemplative loves to discern symbolic meanings in all visible things." (Underhill, Ruysbroeck, p. 40). I have unfortunately been unable to obtain a translation of this work to verify that Ruysbroeck used the three-zoned tabernacle metaphor as we found was employed in the Merode Triptych (although it is fairly certain that, based on Underhill's description, Ruysbroeck used the same tripartite model, especially as Moses' tabernacle described in Exodus consisted of three zones). Nonetheless, I would like to thank Dr. Frederick Amrine of Harvard University for securing a partial copy of this treatise in Dutch so that such a determination could be made. Numerous circumstances, however, made an adequate translation of the relevant passages impossible.

VII. PROCESS AS THE KEY TO THE MAIN THEME'S INCLUSIVE MEANING

A. Introduction

To this point in our study, numerous ideas have been either identified or suggested as being active within the program of the altarpiece. These ideas have generally been seen to group themselves under the two major thematic units investigated so far. The ostensible or outer theme of the Annunciation was seen to come to expression in a threefold process. Following this, the so-called inner theme of the altarpiece was seen as an extension of this threefold process which came to serve as a blueprint for the mystical interiorization of the viewer's soul. Although a number of sources were identified which support the existence of these ideas and sub-themes, the main theme has not yet been identified.

If one refrains from jumping to the seemingly supportable conclusion that the mystical tabernacle and interiorization of the soul constitutes the main theme, the diversity of ideas and motifs proves troublesome. A main theme, by definition, should link all the elements of the program. Despite the masterful orchestration and general consistency of ideas so far identified in the artwork, one is still obliged to ask whether or not a more synthetic unity of meaning is possible. For example, could an 'umbrella theme', as it were, serve to encompass and reveal a more intimate relationship between the following conceptual and thematic attributes of the program: the role of Joseph, the theme of advent which Minott insisted was present, the use of pattern and indigenous iconography, the presentation of contemporary persons and places to express the long past Annunciation event, the role of the Old Testament era versus the New, Trinitarianism, and the concept of progressive revelation as well as the

themes of opening and closing?

If one is to resist the temptation to assume that the intellectual eclecticism of the artist is wholly responsible for bringing together all this material, then our method for establishing the main theme (in which this diversity of thought finds its common ground) is to look for a source or tradition which is all inclusive. The first step of this process has already taken place, for all the themes and ideas dealt with so far have been seen to either derive from or be consistent with the broad stream of Augustinian spirituality. Indeed, the existence of several specifically Augustinian symbols within the program was established. Yet the Augustinian spiritual tradition is exceedingly broad in its scope, and therefore does not in itself account for - to select but a few entries in the above list - the relation between pattern, the cult of Joseph, and the interest in exegetical concordances between the Testaments.

In search of a more specific and inclusive tradition, we would be aided by a review of what has so far been established. Two types of Augustinian influence have been delineated. The first type is mystical, and seems to derive from the writings of individuals, such as the Victorines, the Rhenish and Flemish mystics, or St. Bonaventure. Yet, all of these mystics have affiliations with specific religious Orders as well. Each of these formalized religious institutions constitute, therefore, a second type of influence. As the previous analysis of the altarpiece as a symbol of the tabernacle revealed, the primary influence was exercised by the Victorines and St. Bonaventure. Yet, as Bonaventure drew from the Victorines, he may be taken as a more inclusive source. Therefore, the Franciscan Order, which he entered in 1243 and became general of in 1256,¹ deserves closer scrutiny as a possible means of gaining insight into the

inclusivity of the altarpiece's central theme.

B. Franciscanism and Joachimism

The Franciscan movement was founded by Giovanni di Bernardone, called Francesco due to his father's travels in France, and later known as St. Francis (b. Assisi, Italy c. 1182, d. 1226). The Order originally began as a small group of Francis' followers around the year 1210 and was by intention a confraternity without the elaborate trappings which characterize monastic orders. As such, poverty, an imitation of Christ's life, and mendicant preaching could be pursued without the restrictions imposed by monastic life. But the rapid growth of the movement made St. Francis realize that formal organization was necessary, and the order of Friars Minor was subsequently decreed by papal bull in 1220. Three factions came to fruition within the order. At one extreme were, for lack of a better term, the party of relaxation, in which St. Francis' laws of poverty and prohibitions against the handling of money and owning possessions were not strictly adhered to. At the opposite extreme existed the faction of the zealots or 'Spirituals' (Fratricelli), who called for the very strictest adherence to St. Francis' rule of poverty, etc., and who were staunchly against the original institution having ever become an order at all. This faction was composed of the original followers of Francis, and its members were deeply influenced by the prophetic teachings of the Cistercian abbot, Joachim of Fiore. Between these two groups there existed what was by far the largest faction, that of the Moderates. As their title implies, this group was not for the relaxation of St. Francis' rule but, unlike the Spirituals, were sensitive to changes necessitated by the movement's organization and perpetuation as an established

monastic order. St. Bonaventure was a member of this middle group, and as General of the Franciscan Order from 1257 to 1274, was almost continuously engaged in attempts to resolve factionalist controversy so as to establish Franciscanism as a self-sustaining movement free of undue divisiveness.²

It is through an examination of the Spiritual Franciscans that the 'inclusive tradition' we are in search of becomes apparent. The Spiritual Franciscans were most greatly influenced by, next to St. Francis himself, the teachings of the Calabrian monk and abbot Joachim of Fiore (alt. Flora, Floris) who was born c. 1130/35 and died 1201/2. Joachim had worked out a system of historical interpretation by which he prophesied the advent of a new spiritual age. Among other things, this age would have an initiator and two orders of spiritual men who would appear. One of these orders would preach the message of this new age to the world at large. The Spiritual Franciscans saw themselves as this order, and recognized St. Francis as the herald Joachim held would mark the beginning of the new age.³

Joachim's prophetic vision of history was the result of three instances of spiritual illumination. The first is known of only through legend, though the second and third were recorded by Joachim himself. The second vision came to Joachim on Easter eve after an intense inward struggle over the meaning of the Book of Revelation. In the midst of this struggle he received a clear vision on the basis of which he worked out a complex pattern of two's, or concords, between the Old and New Testaments, and which recognized two advents which had given birth to these two historical ages. Yet, on Pentecost eve, when Joachim had been in a like struggle over the doctrine of the Trinity, he again received an

illumination. This Whitsun vision served as the catalyst for the development of his Trinitarian scheme of history. Joachim thus came to elaborate three historical epochs: an Age of the Father, or Old Testament era; an Age of the Son, or New Testament era; and an Age of the Spirit.⁴ Inspired by the Apocalypse of St. John (Book of Revelation), this Third Age was the same as the Millenium described therein, the thousand year reign of Christ on earth which preceeds the Last Judgement.⁵

Joachim saw this Third Age as the Seventh Sabbath Age,⁶ following, in part, the scheme of seven world ages which had been enumerated by St. Augustine. But although both Joachim and Augustine saw history as the unfolding of the divine world plan, Joachim saw the Millenium as occurring within history whereas Augustine eliminates from his scheme the thousand-year reign as an intermediate stage.⁷ Joachim's Easter-eve illumination, in which the Book of Revelation became known to him at a deeper level, very much influenced his vision of history as the progressive spiritual revelation of God and Trinity. For Joachim, the progressive opening of the seven seals described in Revelation corresponded to seven similar "openings" and sub-ages or "tempora" in history itself. Augustine, however, had adopted the 'recapitulation theory' which held that no progression occurs from seal opening to seal opening in the Book of Revelation.⁸ This theory held that the appearance of the rider on a white horse in the vision accompanying the opening of the first seal (Rev. 6:2) is the same vision (moment in time) of the rider who throws Satan into the abyss which marks the beginning of the Millenium (Rev. 19:11, 20:3), as is that when the rider finally vanquishes Satan on his return after that thousand year banishment which directly preceeds the Last Judgment (Rev. 20:10). But Joachim sees these as the separate

comings of Christ. First in the Incarnation, second at the opening of the Millenium, and third at the Last Judgment. For Joachim, the seventh Sabbath Age is the same as the Millenium on earth which culminates in the Last Judgment. But for Augustine, the Sabbath Age follows the Last Judgment. Unlike Joachim, Augustine thus saw only two dispensations, and a consumation of the world in a Sabbath Age which transcends history.⁹

For Joachim, Second Advent is marked by the first coming of Christ, and begins the Second Age or 'Status' (as Joachim referred to these ages). This Incarnation of Christ, in Joachim's scheme, corresponds to the opening of the first seal of St. John's Apocalypse and the appearance of the rider on a white horse Who is Christ. The opening of the sixth seal, as in Revelation, is a time of great tribulations: i.e. because Satan becomes evermore present in the world. But, with the opening of the seventh seal, the white rider returns and vanquishes Satan for a thousand years. With this, the Third Age of the Holy Spirit begins on earth.

According to Joachim, the Third Age proceeds from the first two ages.¹⁰ It is characterized by numerous signs and events. Because these ages occur within history, as the Second Age of the Son draws to a close (that age in which Joachim himself wrote), a great many disruptions were to occur as the sixth seal is opened and the Antichrist appears. Then, with the opening of the seventh seal, Christ will have His Second Coming and vanquish Antichrist. Yet, prior to this Second Coming, numerous changes prepare for this great event. Two orders of spiritual men were also to appear. One was to be an order of hermits, and the other would be a mediating order, operative in the outer world, who would lead men to the new spiritual plane dawning. Although Joachim did not eliminate the role of the Church in this Third Age, he did see the dominant role being

played by these two orders. The world of that age would be like a great monastery, and man would receive direct spiritual enlightenment through visions from the Holy Spirit. By implication, the mediating role of the Church was to change radically or be curtailed although Joachim was not specific as to what role it would play. He did, however, write that the existing Church founded upon Christ would yield to the coming church of the Spirit, and that the papacy and clerical hierarchy were limited to the Second Age. A strong implication was that the transition to the New Age would mean the liquidation of preaching and the sacraments when meditation gave way to knowledge of God by direct vision and contemplation. Also, the Age of the Spirit would express the unitive nature of love which the Holy Spirit represents. As such, Joachim saw this as a period which would see the conversion of the Jews, the uniting of the Eastern and Western Churches, and the widespread existence of the contemplative life which absorbs the active life (it will be remembered that the state of spiritual union is itself characterized by contemplation). This Third Age would also be characterized by a testament of sorts, just as the two former ages had been characterized by the Old and New Testaments. This would be none other than the "everlasting gospel" mentioned in Revelation 14:6. This gospel, unlike its predecessors, was not to be a written but a spiritual testament. It was to be received from the Holy Spirit and would take the form of an enlightened spiritual understanding of the Old and New Testaments.¹¹

Joachim was not too specific regarding the dates of each of the unsealings, and did not identify the historical actors who would fill the roles of Antichrist, and so forth. Joachim, himself a member of the Second Era, was speaking about events to come and thus his prophecies

possessed a somewhat generalized content. However, he did assign to each age a time-span of forty generations, and 1260 became generally recognized as the year when the opening of the seventh seal would occur. Because of Joachim's insistence that the Third Age was to take place within history, the door was left open both prior to and following 1260 for numerous Joachimist writers to take particular historical figures and events as the Antichrist, or as signs of the great tribulation occurring as a result of the opening of the sixth seal. Indeed, after 1260 was seen not to be the date of Christ's Second Coming, pseudo-Joachimist writers appeared in every century up to the seventeenth who claimed that the Millenium was at hand and pointed to specific personages and events in support of their claims.¹² Joachim, for example, had held St. Benedict to be the herald of the Third Status or Age. Yet the Franciscan Spirituals claimed this role for their founder, St. Francis. Although the Spirituals were undoubtedly the most organized and visible expression of the Joachimist impulse, there were various other groups and individuals which were proponents of Joachimism. A brief examination of the wide dispersion of Joachimist prophecy throughout Europe will demonstrate how powerful an influence the movement came to be in the North in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and will help to establish it as a possible source from which the Merode Altarpiece drew.¹³

C. The Breadth of Joachimist Influence

The impress of Joachimist influence in thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth century Europe is evident in two basic forms. First, this influence is reflected in the orders, sects, and individuals who laid claim to and promoted Joachimist prophecy. Secondly, the historical

events and personages which are interpreted as fulfillments of particular elements of that prophecy offer another way by which the breadth and impact of Joachimism may be gauged.

With the widespread sense that the Third Age was dawning, various groups either claimed to be or were identified as one of the two orders of Joachim's Spiritual Men. The Spiritual Franciscans and the Dominicans were most widely accepted, respectively, as Joachimist's mediating and hermit orders.¹⁴ Yet, in a less passionate form than that of the Spirituals, the Order of Augustinian Hermits (or Friars) was erratically claimed to be the more contemplative order. In 1334 the Augustinian Hermit, Henry of Weimar, writes in his history of his order of their role as "Joachim's ordo contemplantium".¹⁵ He then quotes from Joachim's tract, the Exposito, "There shall arise an order which appears new but is not, garbed in black habits and girdled";¹⁶ an exact description of the dress of the Augustinian Hermits. Later instances of this claim made by members of this order in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries also help to suggest that there may have therefore existed a fairly continuous Joachimist impulse within Augustinianism and that, as such, Augustinianism for Campin and Van Eyck may have been one possible channel of Joachimist transmission.¹⁷

Other sources of Joachimist thought in the North may have been the texts of the lay Franciscans. The extreme Joachimism of the Spiritual Franciscan, Peter John Olivi (d. 1298) was expressed in his own writings which were condemned at the Chapter General at Lyons in 1299. After that, these teachings arise within the vernacular texts of tertiary and lay groups which became consolidated as a Beguine sect in Toulouse in the years 1307-23.¹⁸ The question remains as to whether or not other lay and

tertiary groups were likewise influenced. The Beguines were a movement of lay Franciscans which started in Belgium in the twelfth century.¹⁹ Similarly, the Tertiaries were a great body of laity who were often married people, not bound by religious vows, who had avocations in the outer world. As mentioned above, St. Francis had originally wanted to create a great brotherhood rather than an order, but had consented to the more formal organization of his impulse when its spread came to require it. But Francis still allowed for the participation of the laity in the form of a third or 'tertiary' order behind the first two orders of the Friars and Nuns. This lay order he first called the "Brothers and Sisters of the Order of Penance".²⁰ The tendency later set in for members of this third order to live in communities and congregations, and 'Regular Tertiaries' (who took religious vows) as opposed to 'Secular Tertiaries' arose. Following the Franciscan example, tertiaries of other religious orders were founded,²¹ as witness the Windesheim Congregation and the Brethren of the Common Life. The influence of the Franciscans upon the latter is evident, among other things, in the production of the famous book, The Imitation of Christ, by a member of the Brethren (perhaps Thomas á Kempis although this attribution has been disputed). The work is a tangible expression of the aspiration, original with Franciscanism, to emulate the life of Christ. Whether a Joachimist impulse may have thus been operative within the Brethren, however, I am unable to say.

A distorted form of Joachimism was evident, to a small degree, in the movement known as the Brethren of the Free Spirit. The movement began with the teachings of Amalric of Bena in Paris (d. 1207) who had combined a pantheistic interpretation of Erigena's writings with Joachim's prophecies concerning the dawning of an Age of the Holy Spirit. The

Amalricans, or Brethren of the Free Spirit, were a heretical group which claimed that they had received, through grace, a kind of divine consciousness so that all desires were not personal but traceable to the Holy Spirit. As such, members supposedly were incapable of personal responsibility for their licentious actions and claimed to be above sin. The sect was condemned by the Church and this led to the public burning of Erigena's De divisione naturae in 1225. Apparently as a result of this condemnation the sect spread widely in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries within Northern European countries and corrupted many originally orthodox communities of Beghards (i.e. male Beguines).²² Joachimist ideas were not prominent in their true form amongst the Brethren of the Free Spirit primarily because Joachim's system was too intellectually complex for the minds of most of the Brethren.²³ Yet, as was pointed out above, a documented case of the influence of the Joachimist writings of Peter John Olivi among a Beguine sect in Toulouse between the years of 1307-23 does exist. The Joachimist influence amongst the Beguines thus seems to have ranged between a highly diluted and corrupted form within the Free Spirit, a movement which incidentally peaked in the Netherlands in 1368 and continued to the end of the century,²⁴ to its less adulterated form in the writings of Joachimists themselves. The main conclusion to which such evidence leads at this point is that Joachimism was fairly widespread in the North in a variety of forms, and further, that where it is present in an adulterated form, it is possible that it may also have been available in a purer form as well.

This "purer form" of Joachimist influence is indeed evident in interpretations given to the Great Schism of the years 1378-1417 when there existed popes in both Rome and France (the 'Avignon Papacy'). The

Schism was taken by many people of this time as one of the "tribulations" prophesied to precede the Third Age of the Spirit when concord would finally prevail. The Frenchman, Jean de Roquetaillarde (Rupescissa), was a Franciscan of the mid-fourteenth century who became a Joachimist after encountering the writings of Olivi during his studies at Toulouse. Roquetaillarde's commentaries on pseudo-Joachimist works were widely disseminated and were read by eminent churchmen of the period. Roquetaillarde contrasts Frederick II (who was identified as the Anti-christ by numerous Joachimists) to an expected Holy Pope who would take refuge with the King of France when the tribulations were on the increase; an amazing prediction confirmed by the later rise of the French Papacy.²⁵ Roquetaillarde's Joachimist prophecies, written between 1340 and 1360, greatly influenced a Calabrian monk called Telesphorus of Cosenza. A pro-France Joachimist like Roquetaillarde, Telesphorus prophesied in 1386 that the Great Schism may be identified as the crisis preceeding the Third Age which will itself see the joining of the Greek and Latin Churches, the conversion of the Jews, along with similar signs of the New Age.²⁶ No doubt, then, the end of the Great Schism was hailed as a sign of the dawning Age of the Spirit. Pierre d'Ailly (1350-1425), a conservative reformer being dean of St. Donation in Brugges for a time after 1397, and who was a teacher of John Gerson,²⁷ had himself wondered in 1414 if the Schism was one of the tribulations to precede the advent of the Antichrist of which Joachim had written. Two years later the Council of Constance brought an end to the Schism (1417), and in this resolution d'Ailly, then Bishop of Cambai, was one of the prime movers.²⁸ Interestingly, Roquetaillarde had predicted 1415 as the beginning of the Millenium,²⁹ and it is difficult not to assume that the ecumenism which

surrounded the ending of the Schism was not seen as a sign of the Spiritual Age. One must also wonder how much the longstanding interests for unification which culminated in the Council of Florence in 1438-9 (which sought to unify the Eastern and Western Churches) were interpreted as signs of a dawning fulfillment of Joachimist expectation (if not themselves stimulated by Joachimist interests). Certainly, the emergence of brotherhoods such as the Brethren of the Common Life could have very well been also interpreted as a sign of the upsurge of the contemplative life of the Third Age prophesied by Joachim.

As we have therefore seen, a climate of Joachimism was certainly present in the North during the years in which Campin painted the Merode Altarpiece. The most direct link between Joachimism and the altarpiece reveals itself when the influence of the cult of Joseph is considered. Although Schapiro, in his 1945 article about the role of Joseph and his mousetraps in the altarpiece, failed to stress the fact, organized Josephology was primarily a Franciscan phenomenon. The Franciscans, Peter John Olivi and Ubertino de Casale, both Joachimists, were early representatives of the movement to afford special devotional status to St. Joseph.³⁰ Further, the Feast of Joseph (March 19) was adopted by the Franciscan Order in 1399 and a little later by the Dominicans,³¹ both of which, it will be recalled, identified themselves with Joachim's two orders of Spiritual Men. Therefore, the presence of Joseph in the Merode Altarpiece, especially when the Bonaventurian symbolism proposed earlier is considered, seems to suggest a strong Franciscan influence. But, may one also conclude that Joseph's influence carries Joachimist attributes as well? Certainly, the possibility seems to present itself when it is remembered that the two principal proponents of Josephology in Flanders

were Pierre d'Ailly and his one-time student, John Gerson. Both had called for the institution of the Feast of the Marriage of Mary and Joseph at the Council of Constance in 1416,³² the same Council which ended the Schism which d'Ailly himself had seen as a possible fulfillment of Joachimist expectation. Reflection upon d'Ailly's double role in the Council, and upon the interpretation Campin gives to the marriage of Joseph and Mary in the Merode Altarpiece, gives rise to a series of questions and observations. Joachim's Age of the Spirit, occurring after a great period of tribulation, was to see numerous unions occur: unions between Christian and Jew, Eastern and Western Churches, and between man and God through the agency of direct visions and illuminations via the Holy Spirit. The fact that d'Ailly at the Council of Constance advocated the ending of the Schism (one type of union) as well as the Marriage Feast of Joseph and Mary seems significant. This is seen as especially true when the conception of the Marriage of Mary and Joseph in the Merode Altarpiece is understood as the reception of the Holy Spirit in the soul (symbolized by Mary), which results in the soul's vision of and union with God (symbolized by Joseph). Assuming this mystical interpretation of the union of Joseph and Mary did not originate with Campin but was more widely known, the possibility exists that the cult of Joseph from which Campin may have drawn his ideas was not only a Franciscan impulse, but a Joachimist impulse as well.³³ In the following, the presence of such Joachimist ideas within the symbolic program of the Merode Altarpiece will be examined.

D. Joachimist Themes Within the Symbolic Program of the Merode Altarpiece

In our earlier discussion of the threefold process depicted in the altarpiece (chapter five), the theme of expectation was cited. The sense of anticipation, of Christ's coming, was seen to especially inhabit the donors panel as well as the left half of the center panel in which the descent of the Holy Spirit is represented. This was in turn related to the advent symbolism identified in Charles Minott's study which had speculated that, "All of the symbolism of the Merode Altarpiece can probably be related, eventually, to the basic theme of Advent."³⁴ In the following, I will endeavor to show how Minott's intuition was correct, yet in a fashion which Minott himself would have never suspected. The advent which the altarpiece represents is the advent of the Age of the Spirit and of the Second Coming of Christ, a Joachimist doctrine which Minott does not take into account. Unlike the threefold process discussed in chapters five and six the present chapter will deal with the altarpiece and its central theme in terms of a much more subtle but more inclusive process. That is, the altarpiece as an expression of the historical process of the advent of the Holy Spirit in the dawning of the Third Age.

The theme of Christ's coming is of overpowering significance in the Apocalypse or Revelation of St. John, a book from which Joachim exegetically drew the majority of his conclusions about the coming Millenium or Age of the Spirit. A selective review of certain verses in Revelation will serve as a starting point from which we may begin to recognize the presence of Joachimist ideas in the altarpiece. The passages run:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John . . . (Rev. 1:1) Blessed is he that

readeth [John's record of this vision], and they that hear the words of this prophecy . . . for the time is at hand. (3:20)

And somewhat later,

I [Christ] have set before thee an open door . . . (3:8)
Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. (3:20)

And later yet,

And I [John] saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals . . . (6:1) . . . a white horse; and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth . . . to conquer. (6:2)

And still later,

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman. . . (12:1) And she brought forth a manchild who was to rule all nations . . . [who] was caught up unto God, and to His throne. (12:5)

And again,

Let us be glad and rejoice . . . for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. (19:7)
. . . Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. (19:9)

And finally,

Then I saw heaven opened [again], and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him . . . (19:11) . . . is called the Word of God. (19:13) Behold, I [Christ] come quickly . . . (22:7) And the Spirit and the Bride say, come. And let him that heareth say, come. And let him that is athirst come . . . (22:17) He [Christ] which testifieth these things saith, surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. (22:20)

The above passages indicate that the Apocalypse and its rider on the white horse (i.e. Christ, the Word of God; 19:13) is about to appear. The Incarnation and Ascension of Christ is described (12:5), as is the Second Coming of Christ (19:11-13) as well as the mystical coming of the bridegroom and his marriage supper (19:9), which was earlier referred to as the open door of the soul through which Christ enters to sup with the

one who opens that door (3:20). These elements are all present within the program of the Merode Altarpiece. In fact, the vision of the white horse which the viewer sees through the door the gateman/messenger has opened in the donors panel, is really the same vision which the donors behold through the door which the angelic messenger Gabriel seems to have opened. This is because the rider on the white horse is the Joachimist symbol of the coming of Christ, the coming Millenium, and the visionary experience which attends it. The donors, who were previously identified as the 'servants of the preparatory stage of mystical interiorization', thus behold the exact same coming:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ . . . to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass sent and signified it by his angel . . . (1:1)

That is, the donors also observe the approach of Christ into history and into the virginally prepared soul. From the vantage point of Mary (i.e. the soul), the revelation of the coming of Christ "signified . . by his angel" (Rev. 1:1), is actually what occurs in the center panel. If the event portrayed in this chamber can thus be taken not as Gabriel's original Annunciation, but as both the angelic transmission of the prophecy of the Third Age and of Christ's Second Coming, the following conclusions may be considered. The gateman and Gabriel, whom Nickel had likened to one another because they are both messengers, now can be seen to make more sense in these roles. Both serve as messengers whereby the outward man is alerted to the historical advent of Christ and the Millenium, as well as serving to alert the inward soul of man of the Spirit's coming on a personal level. The reading Virgin as a symbol of the soul adorned for its bridegroom thus lends a special meaning to the third verse of Revelation:

Blessed is he that readeth [John's record of this vision],
and they that hear the words of this prophecy for the time
is at hand. (1:3)

But a more startling interpretation becomes available when we take the center panel event as a depiction of the Second Coming itself now occurring within history. That is, the white rider in the donors panel signals the Millenium, a key attribute of which is the Second Incarnation of Christ. Is it possible that the contemporary garments and setting of the Merode Annunciation represent an expected Second Incarnation of Christ in fifteenth century Flanders and do not refer to the first Incarnation of Christ? As will be shown, Joachimist symbols in the Merode Altarpiece may be taken to represent several levels of meaning: the advent of the Holy Spirit in the sphere of outer history as well as in the inner being of man, and the Second Coming of Christ within outer history as well as His mystical coming in the contemplative's soul. These ideas will be treated at appropriate points in the discussion below. The identification of specific Joachimist iconography, however, will provide the basis upon which such concepts may first be considered.

As I began to suggest above, the white horse and open doors of the left and center panels may symbolize the advent of Christ and the Age of the Spirit. But beyond the fact that the white rider is a specific Joachimist symbol of the Millenium, why must it necessarily signify anything more than simply the 'Coming of Christ' in the Incarnation or in the viewer's soul, meanings which both seem to exist in the panel without further allusions to Joachimist prophecy? The first symbolic details to which one can point in attempting to demonstrate that a second rather than a first coming is intended, are the two keys shown at the lock of the donor panel's door. One key is shown inserted into the lock of the

Annunciation chamber door, its partner, however dangles on a keyring (string?). As will be recalled, Gottlieb noticed that the dangling key featured the IHC monogram of Christ, and suggested that it belonged to the outer gate through which the white rider is seen. Gottlieb felt that, in fitting the outer door, the key signified that the dwelling belonged to Christ and that therefore it could be understood as His shrine. I believe, however, contrary to Gottlieb's interpretation, that the dangling IHC-key represents Christ's First Coming, and that the second, inserted key, represents both His Second Coming and the advent of the Age of the Spirit which supersedes the Age of Son. If one were to accept this, then the events shown as occurring within the chamber to which this second key gives access would, therefore, not represent the original but rather the Second Incarnation of Christ.

Whereas twofold symbols like the keys may support the notion of Christ's Second Coming, threefold symbols are perhaps the most effective pieces of evidence with which to demonstrate the presence of Third Age themes in the altarpiece. For example, the three lilies in the pitcher shown standing on the center panel table have been interpreted by Gottlieb as signifying Mary's virginity "ante partem, in partu, and post partem".³⁵ This interpretation is attractive by virtue of its combination of past, present, and future, which is consonant with my former observation that the entire Annunciation process seems to be represented (i.e. as a potential as well as an accomplished fact). But Gottlieb's interpretation does not account for certain important details such as the fact that two lilies are in blossom while the third is in bud. As discussed earlier, Joachim was very interested in patterns of two's or concords obtaining between the Old and New Testament eras. The Father and Son imagery

previously identified within the altarpiece is certainly consistent with this: i.e., the closed and open windows of the center and Joseph panels, or the wall versus the open door imagery. Likewise, I believe that the two lilies in blossom may be seen to represent the accomplished Ages of the Father and Son, while the lily in bud would signify the dawning Age of the Holy Spirit. In my previous Bonaventurian interpretation of the pitcher of lilies, the flowering of the Trinity within the illuminated soul was understood. In the interpretation being advanced here, the Trinitarian association of the lily in bud as the dawning Millenium is not only supported by the donors panel symbol of the white horse, but also by the fact that the lily was itself a Joachimist symbol of the Third Status (Age).³⁶

Other threefold symbols which present this 'dawning third element' include the gatehouse and crenelated walk in the donors panel. As was earlier discussed, the movement of the Spirit out of the gatehouse proceeded along the walk, and through the oculus window into the center panel chamber. In moving past each of the three crenelations, the progressive unfolding of the Age of the Father, Son, and Spirit could be signified. Thus, logically, after passing the third crenelation of the "Age of the Spirit", the Spirit inaugurates this very Age by bringing about its major events: the Second Incarnation of Christ and/or the descent into man's soul (as also symbolized by Mary). The similar entry into the center panel chamber by means of the three steps before the door may also signify, through the use of progressive movement, the same thing.

Instances of light and shadow in the center panel carry this 'dawning third element' signification as well. Two types of shadow are found in the center panel: double shadows and triple shadows. The instances of

double shadows, cast by the laver and piscina (basin), are the result of the light, which enters the chamber through the two oculus windows. On the other hand, I believe that the instances of triple shadows - cast by the towel, window shutter (on the right) and bench - are the result of light coming from three sources: the open door in addition to the two oculus windows. This shift from double shadows and light sources to triple ones may signify the transition, again, from the Second to Third Age. I believe this is true because the 'added' third light source is the door. And, as I attempted to demonstrate above, the opening of this door symbolized Christ's Second Coming and the advent of the Third Age. Therefore, like so much of the altarpiece's symbolic imagery, the element of dramatic action must be imagined for the meaning to become clear. In this particular instance, we are obliged to first imagine the door to the center panel chamber as closed. Double shadows pervade the room. Then, as the Third Age dawns, the door opens, the Spirit penetrates the oculus window and descends (even the third lily bud begins to open), and triple shadows begin to appear around the room.

There are also other threefold symbols in the altarpiece which feature this 'imminent third element' as a possible allusion to the coming of the Spirit. To discover these, it is first necessary to reexamine several sets of mirror images (or 'foci') in the wing panels which were first discussed in chapter four. These consisted, for example, of the 'V' shapes shown in the foreground of each panel, or the 'middle-distance' objects such as the gateman/door in the donors panel and the mousetrap on the shopwindow shelf in the Joseph panel (Figure 9), which serve to complement one another and tighten or bracket the entire three-panel composition by allowing the wings to function in the manner of matching bookends.


Also, the open door of the donors panel, sited above the 'ermine line' of the donatrix's flowing cuff, was seen to mirror the opening window shutter above and behind Joseph's head. Like the gatedoor, this shutter falls in perfect vertical line with Joseph's drill and its downward motion which similarly arcs toward the outer edge of the panel (Figure 11). Other parallels were also noticed to exist between the two wing panels. Of central importance was the discovery that Joseph's chamber functions as the throneroom of God. The room was also seen to double as the mystical marriage chamber in which the 'adorned' soul encounters God 'Face to Face'. The proposed movement of Mary (as a symbol of this soul) into the throneroom (as indicated in Figure 23) served as a visual demonstration of the space's possible marital significance as well. To this it is appropriate to add (although it is not itself a threefold symbol) that a white stone is shown on Joseph's work table. This is the white stone which is mentioned in Revelation and which symbolizes the achievement of spiritual perfection and union with the Deity. Christ says:

To him that overcometh [i.e. perfects himself] will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. (Rev. 2:17)

The white stone is a symbol of the deified ego or higher Christ-self of the 'new man', for the name "which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it" (Rev. 2:17) is the name which the ego gives to itself, or "I". More precisely, the name meant is that of the macrocosmic ego, the 'I am' by which God refers to Himself throughout the Old Testament, and by which Christ refers to Himself in the New Testament (God says to Moses, "I AM THAT I AM . . . I AM hath sent me unto you" Exodus 3:14; that is, God is saying 'I am the I AM'). The new name of the white stone is then identified as Christ's in a later passage of Revelation:

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he
 that sat upon him was called Faithful and True . . . (19:11)
 . . . and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he
 himself. (19:12)

This attaining of the white stone, of 'putting on' the consciousness of God, (referred to as the 'spiritual marriage', see note 53, chapter 6), is exactly what the soul's contemplative entry into the throneroom is meant to accomplish. Therefore, upon entry, the white stone is obtained and the unitive marriage of the soul to God occurs.

The gatehouse in the donors panel has also been seen by me to correspond with the same two identifications; that is, as throneroom and marriage chamber (on the basis of my comparison of it to the Arnolfini Wedding chamber). In effect, the gatehouse and the Joseph panel were seen to be the same chamber. Thus, in the same way that Joseph dispenses Christ through His drill, so the drill stream (of the center panel) was seen to originate in the gatehouse-throneroom (Figure 18). Presently, another comparison between the two panels may also be made. As was earlier discussed, the gatehouse and the three openings of its crenelated walkway may represent, in a fourfold image, the Godhead and the three Persons of the Trinity (see again note 50 and corresponding text in chapter five). The same image may now also be seen to exist in the Joseph panel as well. To see it, it is necessary for one to understand that the three windows symbolize the Trinity, with Joseph now acting, not as God the Father, but as the all-inclusive Godhead. The resulting image may thus be schematically represented as  (compare note 50, chapter five). That the windows may legitimately be taken to represent the Trinity has already been demonstrated in part. The half-shuttered window to the left was previously understood to represent the hidden Father God. The open window next to it, outside of which a mousetrap (itself a symbol of the

Christ) is visible, was seen to represent the revealed Son of God. Now it remains for me to demonstrate that the partially opened third shutter to the right of these two symbolizes the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. In so doing, we are finally brought to discover a symbol which, like the pot of lilies, is a threefold image in which an 'imminent' or 'emerging third element' signifies the coming Third Age. In focusing upon the third window, let us also observe its parallel or counterpart image in the donors panel (see Figure 11). In the donors panel, a gently arcing vertical stream (or 'path') begins at the sashwork Latin cross in the gatehouse window, descends to the elongated rectangle of the open gate through which the white rider is visible, and continues downward to the ermine 'stream' of the donatrix's cuff. In essence the stream begins in the throneroom (i.e. with God), proceeds to the image of the coming Christ as the white rider (suggesting Christ's second incarnational emanation from God), and further down to the donatrix's cuff. The parallel image in the Joseph panel begins at the top of the elongated rectangle of the third window. This window is almost exactly the same width as the gatehouse door, and is similar to it in that the Joseph window shutter is hinged, like a door, on its vertical edge. The line of the elongated rectangle of this open third window similarly leads the viewer's eye down to the drill which Joseph holds, and which falls in perfect vertical alignment with the window itself. Like its counterpart in the donors panel, the drill marks that point at which the vertical line begins to gently arc toward the outer edge of the panel. Also, like its counterpart in the donors panel, the Joseph panel stream represents a divine outpouring. Again, it is the same outpouring in both, that is, from the throneroom in the donors panel, or from the heart of God within His throneroom

in the Joseph panel. There are other parallels as well. In that the opening of the gatedoor and its scene of the white rider has been shown to correspond to both the opening of the center panel door (causing triple shadows) and to Joseph's third window, which is itself just beginning to open, this third 'door-like' window may be therefore taken to represent the same thing: the advent of the Third Age and with it the Second Coming of Christ. In that the third window also carries an association with the Third Person of the Trinity, it represents the two meanings just cited particularly well. So understood, I believe that the stream which begins with the window and descends to Joseph's drill indicates that Joseph, as God, does not dispense Christ in His first incarnation through that drill. Likewise, the center panel event (with its own counterpart of Joseph-God's drill) is also not the first incarnation of Christ. Instead, as a symbol of the dawning of the Holy Spirit within history, the third window signifies that Joseph's drill represents the many-sided advent of the Third Age. Specifically, the drill represents the dispensation (1) of the Dove into men's hearts whereby spiritual visions occur,³⁷ (2) of the Spirit into history, and (3) of Christ in His Second Coming within history. Again, all three meanings also apply to the descent of the Spirit in the center panel. Finally, the fact that Joseph is shown drilling the fourth hole in his board may also represent the 'emerging third element' theme seen elsewhere in the program. Like the fourfold gatehouse symbol in which the gatehouse represents the Godhead, and the sequence of three crenelations represents the successive Ages of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so the fourth hole may signify the dawning Third Age. Because the drill has already been seen to symbolize Joseph-God's dispensation of the Third Age Spirit/Christ in His Second Incarnation, the

above interpretation of the fourth drill hole is especially consistent.

The interpretation of Joseph-God as dispensing Christ in His Second Incarnation on earth deserves further examination. As was just pointed out, if it can be agreed that this is what Joseph and his drill represent, the same meaning applies to the center panel as well. Several details support such an interpretation. First, it must be realized that if Christ's Second Coming in the flesh was expected by Joachimists at this time, there must also have been the expectation that a new 'Mary' would be chosen by God in which Christ could be conceived. Indeed, incredible as it must first sound, Joachimist couples must have wondered if they would be chosen by God for this purpose. In this case, the Ingelbrechts would be a Joachimist couple and Campin has represented the donatrix as the new 'Mary' of the Third Age just as Mary herself was seen as the 'New Eve'. Whether Campin did this in a symbolic way in which the donor couple merely represented the 'idea' of the coming incarnation, or whether he was specifically honoring the donors by intimating that they would be the new Mary and Joseph (less likely) is very hard to determine. However, there is no doubt that the donatrix is shown as the recipient of Christ's second incarnation as the following should further demonstrate. Figure 25 reveals that Joseph's drill-stream impregnates the letter 'E'. The letter is formed by the lines of Joseph's bench in concert with a cleverly placed ax-handle and a tile-line on the floor. To the left of this 'E', the letter 'A' is formed by the lines of Joseph's table top and legs, and is consistent in scale with the letter 'E'. In the same way that the arc of the drill stream in the Joseph panel is the mirror-image of the complementary stream in the donors panel (see again Figure 11), I believe that the letter 'E' corresponds to the donatrix, and the letter 'A'

corresponds to the donor. As such, the couple is being likened to the new Adam and Eve of the Third Age who will bring forth Christ again.

I believe that the same meaning is also expressed through supporting iconographical evidence in the donors panel. The three streams which emanate from God in His gatehouse throneroom all symbolize the same thing (Figure 26). First, the drill-stream by which Joseph-God sends forth Christ in the left-wing is echoed in the corresponding donor panel stream with which the gatehouse God impregnates the donatrix. Secondly, the gatehouse stream which follows the walkway, penetrates the oculus window from outside, and descends via the "indigenous drill" to impregnate Mary, represents the donatrix's impregnation as well. As was just discussed, this is because the center panel logically represents what Joseph's drill represents, and I have already shown several reasons why his drill may signify Christ's second incarnation. Yet, additionally, the oculus is the point from which two incarnational descents proceed. After the gatehouse stream reaches the window, a perfect mirror-image descent occurs, one to the Virgin, and one down the previously identified nodal-line in the direction of the donatrix (see Figures 14 and 15 in addition to 26). The purpose of this diagonal descent along a series of nodes - the window, key-hole, and dagger - all shown previously to symbolize the theme of impregnation, now becomes clear. Quite simply, this alternate descent stands in mirror-image to the 'indigenous drill' of the center panel because it too represents the Second Coming of Christ, now clearly shown as occurring for the donatrix. Correspondingly, the meaning of the altar-piece's two messengers, the gateman and Gabriel, which Nickel draws attention to in his own study, becomes clearer. Both messengers are in a sense the same messenger; the gateman announces the Second Coming of

Christ to the donors just as Gabriel does to the 'New Mary' which the Virgin represents. Also clear to me is the fact that the donors observe through the door what they themselves experience, much in the same way that the viewer experiences internally the mystical marriage he or she observes in the altarpiece itself.

It is appropriate to pause briefly at this point to consider some of the implications attending the concept of the donatrix as the 'New Eve' of Joachimist expectation. First, if this attribution of meaning is accepted, it adds greatly to an understanding of Joachimism in the North and of its interpretation by its followers. Further, it may provide insight into the convention of - at least in Joachimist paintings - featuring donors within the painted program. Yet in relation to the former research, some revisionist implications exist as well. A fundamental conclusion is that, despite the aforementioned claims made on the basis of x-ray evidence to the effect that the donatrix is a programmatic addition, one can clearly see that this is not the case. Numerous pieces of visual evidence have shown that the donatrix is central to the composition.³⁸ The underlying problem is thus twofold, and concerns the misunderstanding and misuse of x-ray evidence by the former researchers. The fact that the donatrix was 'added' to the composition does not mean that she is not in keeping with the original composition. If one is compelled to believe that she was added due to unusual circumstances, perhaps a change in fiancées during the painting occurred so that the figure of the woman was left for a later inclusion (even though the 'customary blank space' was not reserved). Or, either the marriage of the donor, or a change from a single donor to a married couple (also Joachimist of course),³⁹ necessitated the incorporation of a wife. Even if this were the case it

would not require that the donatrix be a superficial add-on, and to assume such is to misunderstand the creative artistic process. Anyone familiar with this process knows that it is not a linear process in time in which the plan is known fully at the outset, but rather one in which synthetic ideas crucial to the composition sometimes appear quite late in the process. Such ideas can cause elements to 'gel' in such an organic way that even such late compositional decisions can be mistakenly assumed to have been made very early. Therefore, in the case of the Merode Altarpiece, this same assumption that x-ray data reveals early and thus fundamental or central compositional decisions was also made by Heckscher when he insisted, on the basis of x-rays which showed the Virgin's eyes as originally raised and looking in Gabriel's direction, that the altarpiece was not to be respected in its present form. As the presence of pattern-relations in the altarpiece shows, such a misinterpretation of x-ray data not only accepts what came before as more basic, but believes that the 'underlying structure' holds the secret to the outer configuration. This is a deep-seated assumption which is at the very core of materialistic scientific analysis. But, as the pattern relations of the Merode Altarpiece show, it is not the understructure which holds the meaning but the transcendent and organic 'super-structure', if you will, of indigenous iconographic pattern relations in which orchestrated meaning must be both developed by the artist and sought by the viewer.

To return once again to the theme of Christ's Second Coming, it will be remembered that Gottlieb had herself admitted that the bridal chamber of the Song of Solomon symbolized, in Christian exegetical tradition, both the First and the Second Comings of Christ.⁴⁰ However, in Gottlieb's interpretation of the center panel on the basis of the Canticle's symbolism,

only the First Coming was seen to apply. Yet, on the basis of the foregoing visual evidence, we see that the representation of Christ's Second Coming is also supported by this exegetical tradition. As such, both Gottlieb's and Minott's interpretation of the center panel as representing both advent and incarnation is supported in an unusual fashion. That is, Christ's Second Coming is about to occur while His First Incarnation has already happened. But further yet, the fact that it is the Second Incarnation which we witness puts to rest Heckscher's and Freeman's previous objections and concerns that the Annunciation chamber is shown at daytime and with an open door rather than in a closed chamber at night in keeping with the apocryphal account of the Annunciation. The fact that the Merode Annunciation chamber violates these criteria may be, in part, because it is not the First Annunciation which is represented.⁴¹ Also, the 'homunculus' Christ-child Who descends on the sunbeam in the center panel has been seen as potentially heretical in that it represents Christ as incarnate prior to the Incarnation. Again, if the center panel is understood to represent the return of Christ, the babe with a cross not only sheds any possible heretical associations, but in fact more accurately reflects the identity of the being approaching earthly incarnation as the Christ Who was previously crucified on the cross.

Another set of symbols may finally be introduced at this point in support of the Second Advent theme. In his 1945 article on Joseph's mousetraps, Meyer Schapiro was unable to explain why two traps were represented; one on the workshop table, and one sitting outside on the shop window shelf. Subsequent articles treating the traps were also unable to explain what two traps could signify that one mousetrap alone could not. As already suggested, Joseph's shop may represent the inner

throne room of the Hidden God which exists outside of time and from which God sends His Son into the world. As Schapiro demonstrated, the mousetrap is an Augustinian symbol of Christ, His Passion and Crucifixion, and the manner in which these occurrences deceived the devil and saved man's soul. The duplication of such a symbol only confuses its meaning, I believe, unless the two traps are taken to represent the First and Second Comings of Christ. So understood, the mousetrap outside Joseph's shop - that is, outside the eternal zone of the Godhead - represents Christ's first appearance in the outer, temporal world (i.e. in history itself). The second mousetrap pictured on Joseph's workbench, however, has not yet left the eternal precinct of God's 'workshop'. Just as Joseph-God is shown in the process of sending His Word forth, so the workbench mousetrap has not yet left the Godhead on its route into material existence.⁴² The two mousetraps therefore supersede their strictly Augustinian associations and acquire a specifically Joachimist connotation. On the basis, therefore, of both the specific Joachimist meanings that may be attached to Joseph's mousetraps and drill-stream, and the previous identification of the Joachimist leanings of the main promoters of Josephology in Flanders, we may suggest that the activities of Joseph are based on Joachimist doctrine.

It is with the Joachimist interpretation of the altarpiece, that the 'inclusive meaning' of the altarpiece becomes available. Although the full extent of Joachimist symbolism has not yet been identified and discussed, the foregoing does permit us to understand how the various sub-themes of the altarpiece fall under the main theme of the advent of the Third Age. The Annunciation and the process of the mystical marriage come to organically participate in the overriding Joachimist theme of the

descent of the Holy Spirit into history and into man's soul, just as Christ Himself descends into His Second Incarnation.

E. The Appearance of the Early Netherlandish Altarpiece as a Symptom of the Third Age

1. vision and light

Although our study of the Merode Altarpiece is not yet finished, the present section will turn increasingly toward an examination of the larger implications the altarpiece holds for an understanding of the Northern Renaissance in early fifteenth century Flanders and the role of panel painting within that development. The approach employed in this section will be to draw conclusions about the revolutionary vision of reality evident in the altarpiece and extend such insights, in an admittedly general fashion, to an assessment of the nature of personal and historical consciousness at this time and place.

Such an examination can profitably begin by returning to the altarpiece and pursuing the Joachimist theme of personal visionary experience as a symptom of the entry of the Holy Spirit into the sphere of temporal fifteenth-century life. As pointed out above, a shift from a meditative mode of spiritual experience to a contemplative and ultimately unitive experience of God was expected to characterize the Third Status. Therefore, the mystical transition from the meditative-illuminative state of the center panel to the contemplative-unitive stage of the Joseph panel, which was discussed at length in chapter six, may now be understood within a Joachimist context. Although the Victorine and Bonaventurian (perhaps Ruysbroeckian) streams constitute the sources for the theme of the

altarpiece as the mystical tabernacle, the artist's interest in the individual viewer and in his or her inward spiritual development which this tabernacle-altarpiece represents, take the process of personal self-transformation which these earlier mystics discussed and adds to it the historical, trans-personal Millennialist idea of imminent world pentecost. Therefore, the contemplative union the viewer's soul is shown to achieve as it enters the altarpiece's Holy of Holies (Joseph-God's chamber), is predicated on the viewer's own spiritual efforts and the advent of the Holy Spirit upon the earth in the Third Age. If Campin did indeed create the altarpiece as an expression of and vehicle for Joachimist ideas, what does this further suggest about the artist's perception of his own role in, for lack of a better term, the Joachimist Renaissance of the Spirit?

In chapter six, the innovative visual devices used by Campin and Van Eyck in the Merode Altarpiece and the Arnolfini Wedding Portrait to guide the viewer in the mystical schooling of his soul were discussed. The possible use of the convex mirror or the closing tabernacle to derive a special conception of spiritual space and experience was treated. The idea of the painted panel as a 'visual Eucharist' which 'absorbed' the viewer was also pursued. In light of the Joachimist content of the altarpiece, one must wonder about the Joachimist significance of these innovations. Was, perhaps, the mystical marriage which the altarpiece symbolizes seen to represent the Third Age, just as the Christian marriage and the old marriage under the law were linked to the first and second eras? Inasmuch as the Eucharistic Spirit plays a significant role in the altarpiece's mystical program of viewer interiorization and absorption, this concept of a mystical Eucharistic 'marriage' may very well

represent Joachimist sentiments. Although the same concept is found in earlier, non-Joachimist circles, it seems quite likely that Joachimists could have appropriated the idea of the Mystical Marriage while stressing the agent of the Holy Spirit within the marriage process in keeping with their Millennialist expectations.

As discussed in chapter six, both the 'book metaphor' of the reading Virgin and the Arnolfini mirror as a representation of God's consciousness stress visual perception, and thus light, as an agent of the Spirit. The spiritual significance of light in the medieval period has been studied by numerous scholars,⁴³ and both Meiss and Panofsky have commented upon its special treatment by early Netherlandish painters. Specifically, Panofsky has seen Jan van Eyck's representation of two light sources in single paintings, one from the south and one from the north, as signifying spiritual versus natural light.⁴⁴ Meiss, in an article of 1945, saw the representation of light penetrating a window in Annunciation pictures as a symbol of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵ Rightly, Meiss saw the biggest advance in painting in the fifteenth century North as the new way in which light is represented. In a footnote to the same article, Meiss referred to the observation of the historian of Flemish art Charles de Tolnay:

Tolnay's interpretation of the growth and meaning of naturalism in early fifteenth-century painting is different from that . . . [which regards] the interest in nature or reality as primary (and connected with secular trends of the period) [and] he believes it originated in, and was sustained by, late medieval religious conceptions. Of light he says . . . "..... the vision of interior (spiritual) light led the mystics to the contemplation of natural light, of which they - for example Suso - sometimes give enchanting descriptions, and in this way they are the direct precursors of the painters called realists".⁴⁶

Although I do agree that 'realist painters' like Campin and Van Eyck are heir to traditions of the mystical (and Platonic) interpretation of light,

I believe they also draw from (or perhaps themselves represent) a more contemporary Joachimist impulse in which supernatural light is seen as ever present and accessible to the soul by virtue of the historical advent of the Age of the Spirit. As such, I would very much support Tolnay's contention that non-religious secular trends were not responsible for the interest in naturalism - at least in the works of Campin and Van Eyck - but that attention to the outer world was of a spiritual rather than a secular nature. This is because Joachimism saw the impress of the Spirit in the outer world, such as in historical and political events. No longer were the outer physical and inner spiritual as mutually exclusive as they had once been. Lay brotherhoods and communities were widespread in which a total monastic retreat from the outer world was no longer required. Franciscanism itself, the original initiator of such forms of lay spirituality, was very much a nature-oriented approach to God without, however, being pantheistic. It will also be remembered that Richard of St. Victor had held that the first two of the six steps to God were "(1) contemplation of visible and tangible; (2) study of the productions of Nature and of art".⁴⁷ In this, Richard drew from Augustine's belief that 'vestiges' of the divine were apparent in the natural world, and it was this same source from which Franciscanism also drew. Yet with Richard's inclusion of art along with the objects of nature, the role which a 'naturalistic art' could play as a vehicle for the apprehension of the divine would seem most acceptable. For these reasons, the naturalism and especially the emphasis upon light (as Spirit) present within the paintings of Campin and Van Eyck, I believe, are both reflections of a Joachimist conception of the world as a merging of matter and spirit. The excessive light within the center panel chamber of the Merode Altarpiece

- an abundance of light with no adequate source other than the Spirit in descent - is itself a good example of the conception of light as an attribute of the Holy Spirit.

2. pattern

But light and its depiction is not the only expression of the advent of the Holy Spirit in these paintings. The powerful role played by 'pattern' in the Merode Altarpiece is also symptomatic of Joachimism and of the Holy Ghost. As a biblical exegetical theologian, Joachim was very concerned with patterns of textual concordance. As in his revelation of the Apocalypse, the patterns perceived in this book of scripture were seen as indigenous to the divinely inspired structure of the text. That is, the exegetical pattern divinely embedded within the text was itself understood as a form of revelation which could anagogically lead the mind to a spiritual level of comprehension. More precisely, the illuminated structure of consciousness through which the patterns in the book became accessible to Joachim's mind was the essence of the revelation itself. Thus, spiritual illumination is the restructuring (spiritualization) of consciousness itself. The function of pattern or "indigenous iconography" in the altarpiece is therefore to restructure the consciousness of the viewer. Ultimately, I believe that the use of grids and nodes and foci, and of the movement through the zones of the mystical tabernacle, was in part the artist's attempt to prepare the viewer's soul (consciousness) for mystical experience. But, in part, the structuring or pattern element was not seen to derive from the artist. Rather, it is likely that the artist saw the Holy Spirit Itself as the real 'patterning force' operative in viewer experience. In one sense,

the artist's structuring of viewer experience readied the viewer's soul for the inrush of the Holy Spirit. But in a deeper sense, the artist no doubt saw even his own compositional efforts as inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit Itself. As such, in assuming that Campin was a Joachimist, it is probable that he saw himself as a mouthpiece of the Spirit. The implications attending this statement are quite far-reaching, but before pursuing them, the subject of compositional pattern may still be profitably examined.

First, by way of background information, the Holy Spirit had been seen as 'structuring agent' by other thinkers than Joachim. Not only could the Holy Spirit restructure consciousness, but It could exercise this effect upon the material world as well. In his book, The Gothic Cathedral, Otto von Simpson refers to the thought of the twelfth century which "often reminds one of the 'universal theism' of the fifteenth century".⁴⁸ Von Simpson refers to Thierry of Chartres, the most influential Chartrian exponent of the notion that the divine artist of creation could be apprehended in material creation with the help of geometry and arithmetic.⁴⁹ Thierry, along with other Masters of Chartres,

. . . identify the Platonic world soul with the Holy Ghost in its creative and ordering effect upon matter; and they conceive this effect as musical consonance. The harmony it establishes throughout the cosmos is represented, however, not as a musical composition but also as . . . a work of architecture.⁵⁰

Likewise, the principle of pattern in the Merode Altarpiece represents the action of the Holy Spirit right down into the sphere of visual form itself. In a sense, the Chartrian idea of architecture as 'frozen music' is similar to the essentially Platonic principle in the Merode Altarpiece of pattern as a kind of frozen residuum of the Creative Ideas and Thoughts transmitted by God through the Third Person of the Trinity. Once the viewer

submits these patterns and forms to consciousness, their source in divine consciousness is regained, and they revert to their origin, taking the consciousness of the viewer with them (as Hugh of St. Victor has said of his diagram of the mystical ark: "This your eye shall see outwardly so that your soul may be fashioned to its likeness inwardly"⁵¹). Interestingly, the compositional language of grids, paths, nodes, foci, and ensembles reveals to us that we are not merely observing International Style space. Rather, in the same way as the influx of the Spirit into history is seen as a transforming agent which brings concord (as between Jews and Christians), so the older International Style composition has become renewed and 're-structured' so as to carry a new spiritual meaning.

Other aspects of the pattern language used by Campin may also be mentioned. The grid structure and the nodes sited upon this system of interlacing lines carry, I believe, other meanings in addition to their associations of the patterning influence of the Holy Spirit. The grids in the altarpiece (Figure 2 through 7) organize the picture plane on the basis of intersecting vertical and horizontal lines. An examination of Van Eyck's paintings reveals the same vertical partitioning of space and, at least in the case of the Ghent Altarpiece, horizontal gridline-paths are also employed. I believe that the vertical and horizontal beams of the cross itself are the basis of this organizing mode. In the Merode Altarpiece, in fact, the cross is the only point in the composition where the underlying 'grid' becomes visible. It is almost as if the symbol of the cross is where the underlying Christian structure of reality, so to speak, becomes manifest, both literally and figuratively.⁵²

The use of iconographic "nodes" also holds - in its very form - a special meaning. That is, apart from the specific meanings of the nodal

iconographs themselves, the compositional impulse to site concentrations of meaning (symbols) at certain points is itself meaningful, and carries implications concerning the spiritual perception of space itself. The construction of a mathematically consistent perspective space which was occurring simultaneously in fifteenth century Florence utilized Euclidean geometric principles and a perspective grid in which all points or coordinates were of equal value; that is, they all related equally (i.e. were 'equally subordinated') to the one vantage point from which the space was constructed. On the other hand, Northern Renaissance space in painting is often seen as 'empirically' rather than mathematically conceived. As such, space is not homogeneously 'levelled' to one viewpoint, but possesses many viewpoints. In the Northern spatial field, certain objects and points in space tend to advance toward the viewer and state themselves more strongly than other objects; in perspective space, on the other hand, all objects are part of a mathematically consistent spatial field and do not 'break' that field so as to advance into an intimate relationship with the viewer. Instead, these objects maintain a mathematically predetermined and thus impersonal 'distance' from the viewer. The same two varieties of spatial perception have also been noticed in the shift evident in the use and experience of environmental space in the sixteenth century City of Lyons, France.⁵³ When the city was under Catholic rule, a hieratic conception of space prevailed. That is, certain points in space were seen as more qualitatively important and more spiritually 'charged' than other points. This was expressed in the numerous sacred landmarks (statues, grottoes, streetside shrines) which dotted the cityscape. But with the rise of the city's Protestant Calvinist community and their widespread iconoclasm, these 'hot spots' were eradicated and

space became homogeneous and 'symmetrical', like the Calvinist business and social organizational structures themselves. In a sense, the perception that the spiritual world can intervene at certain points within the temporal world makes for a hieratic conception of space in which 'thresholds' between the worlds may exist or appear. This viewpoint allows a dynamic interplay between man and space and necessarily 'charges' space with a potentiality not present in the secular perception of space as a continuous, homogeneous, 'neutralized' expanse (no doubt the origin of the modern concept of space as that which is 'empty'). This secular conception of space as a forsaken homogeneous void (i.e. empty of spirit), may be likened to the space of Renaissance perspective, for in both, viewer consciousness is dominated by a physical environmental field in which the viewer does not participate or interact. That is, all objects point to and emphasize the viewer at his vantage point, anchoring him there in physical space and inhibiting movement. But 'nodal space', if I may so call it, is full of potentiality and surprise. The field does not subordinate the viewer, and neither are points in space subordinated to one viewer's vantage point. Rather, according to their spiritual potential as thresholds, these points allow the viewer the opportunity to interact with, participate, and even pass from physical to spiritual space (i.e. consciousness). In this sense, the pattern language of grid-lines and their nodes in the Merode Altarpiece, is consistent with the pictorial space in the panels themselves. That is, the center panel, as we have seen, is a spiritual zone of qualitatively different space than the physical space which the viewer standing before the altarpiece inhabits. In a kind of 'Alice-through-the-looking-glass' experience, a qualitative change of viewer consciousness both allows and results from the contemplative

entry of the viewer into the space of the panel. This qualitative shift in consciousness indicates that a threshold exists between the physical space he inhabits and the spiritual space he seeks to enter. By contrast, the Florentine Renaissance perspective painting represents external, physical space only. It presents a 'window' on a mathematically coordinated and homogeneous space which seeks to be a mere 'extension' of the physical space the viewer occupies. No 'threshold' is involved here, and thus no access is provided to a qualitatively different (i.e. spiritual) level of space or reality. For these reasons I believe that in the experience of perspective space, despite the attempt to sometimes use this space as a stage for spiritual events, the viewer is totally imprisoned in a consciousness dominated by the experience of its immersion in the physical world. (Alberti, one of the leading Florentine promoters of the painter's use of perspective space construction had himself written on the technique, and had likened the viewer's experience to that of looking through a window. He also said that, in using this technique, the artist's purpose was to represent physical and not metaphysical space. The fact that artists represented spiritual beings, such as angels, and spiritual events within this space does not allow one to claim that spiritual space, however, is being shown.) The elimination of the winged polyptych was necessary for a fully consistent perspective space without competing vantage points. However, as the Merode Altarpiece demonstrates, the closing triptych supported the organic conception of physical and spiritual space as complementary and interpenetrating. With the single panel perspective painting of fifteenth century Florence, the spiritual side of the equation was compromised and the concept of interior mental/spiritual space was seriously jeopardized.

The principle on which the "node" is based - that is, point or threshold where the spiritual (or a spiritual meaning) may inundate the ostensibly physical scheme of reality - is also evident in the hidden or 'indigenous' symbols which populate the program. Joseph-God is a spiritual force dwelling behind the fireplace-threshold of the center panel chamber and, with His drill, He spiritually penetrates the physical space of the chamber. This interpretation was made possible through the use of indigenous symbolism by which the spiritual meaning of the altarpiece came to be revealed. In a sense, then, just as Joseph-God crosses the threshold into the physical chamber (via His drill), so may we use the indigenous symbolism to cross the threshold to the spiritual reality which permeates the altarpiece. As should be apparent by this point in our study, indigenous symbolism is not merely a case of one object signifying one concept. The meaning of the indigenous symbol does not stand apart from the symbol as an abstract, isolated concept, but is intrinsic within it and within the organic web of meaningful relations which permeate the entire artwork. To understand an indigenous symbol is therefore not to 'extract' its meaning, but to enter into and become part of the reality of which it is part. The indigenous symbol, therefore, involves the viewer intimately with the program itself. The 'hiddenness' of this kind of symbolism is, in part, an expression of that which is spiritual, and so must by its very nature remain hidden within the 'apparent' (physical) subject matter. By coming to understand this iconography, we therefore come to enter the hidden, spiritual realm of which it is an extension.

But indigenous symbolism is 'hidden' for other reasons as well. When it is used Joachimistically, its hiddenness expresses the imminence of the

Spirit within historical reality. That is, these hidden symbols are instances of the spiritual becoming more accessible as the Holy Spirit Itself becomes increasingly present within the world. Gottlieb's objection that the piscina, laver, and towel of the center panel chamber were in truth liturgical rather than household objects⁵⁴ fails to take into account that an interpenetration of the spiritual and the temporal-domestic spheres is perhaps the meaning intended. The theme of interpenetration is, if I may introduce the term, an expression of 'Joachimist mysticism', which is consonant with the Eucharistic Mystery of the Church inasmuch as both are predicated on the central Christian concept that the spiritual seeks man if man will but seek the spiritual. The Joachimist version of this which I have proposed the altarpiece represents merely elaborates the process of interpenetration on more conscious and less affective grounds. The hidden form of symbolism called 'disguised symbolism', of which Panofsky wrote, is really nothing more than a lexical manner of suggesting this interpenetration. According to Panofsky, disguised symbolism is an attempt to preserve naturalistic continuity while secretly infusing this naturalistic scheme with spiritual significance. A disguised symbol would therefore be a physical object which, for example, convincingly inhabits a domestic setting while being able to operate in a spiritual context of meaning simultaneously. Yet Panofsky treats the two meanings (physical, spiritual) as if they were mutually exclusive, even when they were seen to abide in one object. However, when utilized in a Joachimist program, the two meanings of such a symbol are not separate because the 'spiritualization of the world' is itself a theme both must share in equally. The blend of secular and spiritual is, I believe, an aspect of Netherlandish Joachimism which is thus intentional and is

the ruling principle in instances where 'disguised symbolism' is used. Perhaps this helps to explain a phenomenon which Panofsky noticed. Unlike in Italian Trecento Art, where, according to Panofsky, the disguised symbol was used only occasionally, it is seemingly applied in the fifteenth century North as a general principle to each and every object.⁵⁵ Although I would not agree that all hidden symbolism is disguised (in fact, the majority of it is indigenous), Panofsky's intuition that painted programs in the North abound with spiritual meanings which are not instantly apparent is, at least in the case of the Merode Altarpiece, because the Third Age Spirit was seen as a general principle effecting each and every part of reality. Likewise, as the Merode Altarpiece depicts contemporary fifteenth century reality, the objects represented in the painting are themselves permeated by the Spirit and thus carry spiritual meaning. It is on this basis that I believe that 'disguised symbolism' was employed to represent the advent of the Spirit into material reality rather than, as Panofsky claimed, being a device by which a new interest in naturalism was harmonized with religious content. Ultimately, the symbolic object employed as a threshold to the spiritual rather than as a compromise to naturalism, is how the disguised symbol should be understood.

But the special hidden, indigenous symbolism of which Campin was the innovator for the painted program of the Merode Altarpiece may have served other purposes as well. At these we may just guess at the present, and I will merely list some of the possibilities. As discussed above, Joachim worked within the structure of the Church and saw more of a transformation than a complete displacement of the institution. People and groups, however, influenced by Joachimism (especially the heretical ones)

interpreted the role of the Church differently, and it is thus very difficult for me to determine how Joachimists like, as I have proposed, Campin or his patrons understood the relationship of Second and Third Age Churches. If, for example, the altarpiece was destined for a private chapel within a church, there would have probably been a need for ecclesiastical approval of the iconographic program. Perhaps, then, the hidden Joachimist symbolism - possibly intended for not only the patrons but for a larger Joachimist cult of which they were part - was designed to elude discovery by ecclesiastical authorities. Or, perhaps Joachimist prophecy was accepted in certain churches and was seen as being an important interpretation - as was Joachim's understanding - of Christian doctrine. Such questions are complex and a simple yes or no on this point is impossible without further research. With the rise of brotherhoods, lay spirituality, and various forms of mysticism, it is impossible to know whether or not certain churches absorbed or totally rejected such influences.

3. the artist as secular priest

In the preceeding sub-section on pattern, I discussed the idea of the Holy Spirit as a patterning agent spiritually active in (or through) the program; first as an inspirer of the artist's pattern language, then as a 're-structurer' of viewer consciousness as the viewer's soul became prepared to receive the Spirit directly (illumination). As such, the artist, I surmised, most likely saw himself as a mouthpiece of the Spirit and perhaps a prophet of the Millenium. Indeed, in assembling at this point the foregoing data and interpretations, we may build up a picture of the artist as a quite conscientious servant of the Spirit.

The artist's conscious role as a prophet of the Spiritual Age was no doubt fed by signs of the Spirit's influence within the outward events of the political, religious, and social spheres of everyday life. The early fifteenth century was a dynamic and even a tumultuous time in both the North and the South. Undoubtedly, the Joachimist saw the 'incarnation', if you will, of the New Age in such things as the Great Schism and its resolution, in the efforts to unify the Eastern and Western Churches, in the New Devotion (*Devotio Moderna*), and in the New Art (*Ars Nova*) which appeared in music as well as painting.⁵⁶ The 'new vision' of the world, so apparent in its formulation by the panel painters of the second, third, and fourth decades of the fifteenth century North, was most certainly born out of the perception that the world was on the doorstep of a new and different age. This perception of something new, a new awareness by man of himself, represents a shift in consciousness not merely explainable by outward forces alone. Borrowing from Thomas Kuhn's, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,⁵⁷ we might say a 'paradigm shift' was occurring throughout Europe at this time. That is, not merely a shift in ideas, but a shift in the very structure of consciousness and world view upon which ideas are predicated. The fact that the shift occurred under different circumstances in Northern and Southern Europe, very much suggests to me that a new perception of the world was gradually working its way into the substratum (or perhaps, more accurately, the superstratum) of human consciousness at this time. This impulse or awakening, though similar in both cases, appeared in wide-awake consciousness differently in the North and in the South. Thus, in Italy, for instance, a supportive climate of readiness existed whereby a rediscovery of the Classical (Roman) past could be met with the interest this new wide-awake consciousness took in

both itself and its world-context. In that case, the conscious perception of this new attitude was probably clothed in ideas concerning the re-awakening of national identity. Whereas in the North, the somewhat similar base consciousness came to expression consciously within the mind, I believe, as the perception of an historical newness. For Joachimist's, this basic turn of attitude, I suspect, was understood as a sign of the New Age of the Spirit working its way into the sphere of history and into men's hearts. In both cases it would seem that the new perception had the effect of causing man to recognize their common experience, but in the South this was a less personal and more nationalistic perception of unity, whereas in the North it was a more personal and inward experience. My point is that something truly new was entering history at this time, and that it was an inner perception of this and not merely the projection of Joachimist beliefs onto personalities and events in the outer world that sustained a Northern Renaissance Joachimist expectation of a New Age.

As an expression of this sense of the newness of the time, Northern and Southern artists innovated remarkable new ways of representing their new perception of reality. In the sphere of Northern painting, the Merode Altarpiece represents such an innovation. As has been shown, the triptych, perhaps based upon the closing tabernacle, was developed as a contemplative device for the purpose of spiritualizing the soul of the viewer of the altarpiece. The possible use of the closing tabernacle as a prototype makes us aware of the essentially architectural nature of the viewer's spatial experience. The operation of the altarpiece's wing panels as 'doors' underscores this fact, especially when the door symbolism within the painted program itself is remembered. Indeed, the fact that

painting superseded the arts of architecture and sculpture in the North at this time and 'absorbed' these three-dimensional artforms into two-dimensional painted programs (where architectural environments and sculpture were represented), seems especially significant. In a sense, in that the Merode Altarpiece sought to build within the viewer an internal 'soul architecture' without physical extension or dimension, painting was not merely being used to simply supersede the three-dimensional artforms. Rather, it appears as if painting was attempting to 'spiritualize' the three-dimensional by stripping it of physical extension and raising it to an interiorized, mental-spiritual construct within the soul; a transition point, a threshold. In that Joachimists saw, as Reeves points out, the "visible Church of the second age . . . [being] absorbed by the Spiritual Church of the third",⁵⁷ the Merode Altarpiece may itself constitute an attempt to create a spiritual architecture; an inner rather than an outer church; a church within man himself where he may find God.

As part of this 'spiritual architecture' or tabernacle to be built up spiritually within the soul, the 'book metaphor' previously mentioned seems to have played a part. As discussed, the reading Virgin was used to represent the soul entering into itself, the book covers corresponding to the wings themselves. The image, then, of the altarpiece as a book of images which the viewer opens so as to experience the inrush of the Holy Spirit as the covers are parted was pursued. Light itself, by which these images or visions were transported to the open eye and soul of the viewer, was itself seen as representative of the Holy Spirit which - in the center panel - descends to the book page to then be taken up by the eye of the reading Virgin. On a more general note, it will be recalled that the representation of the relationship of the Old and New Testaments

and Eras was a constant motif in the art of Campin and Van Eyck. Indeed, it was the spiritual understanding, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, of the concordance of the two Testaments which the Parisian Franciscan Gerard of Borgo San Donnino (active c. 1250) understood to be the everlasting or eternal gospel which was mentioned in the Book of Revelation.⁵⁸ As the first two ages had had their testaments, so the Age of the Spirit was to have its testament also. But this testament of the 'everlasting gospel' was not to be a written book of words, but an imagistic, visionary transmission from the Holy Spirit directly to men in the Third Age. Is it possible that the altarpiece as 'book' was created as this 'New Age Testament' which used the universal language of images inspired by the Spirit?⁵⁹ The fact that, as we have seen, the center panel of the altarpiece functions as a "visual Eucharist", seems to support such a contention. As was also discussed, this visual Eucharist must have served to extend the conscious participation of the person in the Mystery of the Mass enacted upon the altar which this altarpiece adorned. Remembering that the New Age Church was seen as the transformation of the Second Age Church into a more personalized, spiritual edifice, the innovation of a visual Eucharist appears to constitute the like transformation of the Second Age Mass into a re-formed Third Age Mass of the New Age Church. If this is true, the implications of how Joachimism operated in the North became somewhat illuminated. Regardless of whether or not Joachimism was a clandestine movement outside of the Church or one arising within it, the presence of such an altarpiece within the private chapel of a church suggests that the Joachimist Third Age Church was to grow out of the Second Age institution. That is, Joachimism was like a spiritual seed planted within the Church which was to transform it quietly from within

outward.

From these considerations we may now turn to examine more closely the implications which such notions hold for an assessment of the artist himself. Based on the above, I believe it should be evident that the altarpiece itself is an Annunciation of the Third Age. This is the real main theme of the artwork, and it makes clear to us how the theme of the Annunciation is to be understood, for it is the Third Age Annunciation of the Millenium, not the Annunciation of the Second Age as has been usually assumed. As such, the artist himself becomes an 'annunciator' of sorts, similar to the two 'messengers' already identified in the altarpiece, Gabriel and the gateman. The concept of the artist as a messenger of the Spirit includes within it the related ideas of the artist as the giver and transmitter of spiritual visions who stands at the threshold between the physical and spiritual worlds. This notion is certainly expressed in the figure, identified as Van Eyck (see note 112, chapter 6) who stands upon a bridge in the Morrison Triptych (Toledo Museum of Art), symbolizing the artist's position at the threshold between the earthly and the spiritual. If, as has been proposed by Gottlieb and other art historians before her, the gateman in the donors panel may be identified as Robert Campin, the same meaning would apply in this case as well. That is, the artist would be shown as the gateman at the threshold who opens the door and 'lifts back the veil between the worlds' to provide us a visionary glimpse of the Spirit and Its coming.

In the service of the Spirit, therefore, the artist sees himself inspiritively guided by the Holy Ghost to create a new artform whereby men may be led across the threshold. It may therefore be rightly wondered whether Joachimist painters saw themselves as belonging to one of the

orders of 'Spiritual Men' which Joachim had prophesied. As will be recalled, one order was to consist of hermits who would be inward and apart from the world at large. The other order, however, was to be a mediating order within the world which would lead men on to a new spiritual plane. From what has been presented above, the concept of the artist as mediator, guide, and as spiritual leader standing in the outer world, seems to coincide remarkably well with the tasks one of the factions of Spiritual Men were expected to fulfill. In fact, my opinion is that these artists saw themselves more in the role of 'secular priests' than as 'artists' in the sense in which the term is understood today.

The notion of the artist as a 'revealer' is embodied in the image of Joseph in his carpenter shop. As was pointed out, his table corresponds to Mary's table which Gottlieb saw to represent an altar. Likewise, Joseph's products (such as the mousetraps) are similarly spiritual tools in the same way that Campin's altarpiece is itself a 'spiritual tool' which rests upon the altar. In his role as God, Joseph simultaneously represents both the earthly and the divine craftsman-artisan. As the divine artisan, Joseph-God dispenses - among other things - visions through His drill.⁶⁰ In this image, the artist as a giver of visions elevates the status of the artist to a very exalted position indeed. Not only is the artist merely the manipulator and transformer of matter into artistic works. Now he is seen as a transformer of consciousness itself, and his artwork is actually no longer a physical statue or a painting. Rather, his artwork is man himself: man transformed, man renewed, man redeemed. In this sense, the artist no doubt felt somewhat justified in comparing himself to the divine artist who fashioned man in the beginning. But I believe that such a comparison was by no means sacreligious or egotistic.

The meticulous devotion of Campin or Van Eyck to detail and to the inner, essential being of the objects and people they painted is very self-transcendent. The artists exhibit the ability to allow these beings to visually speak to the viewer, purely and without the interference of the personal stylistic 'signature' of the overweening ego of, for example, a Rubens or an Ingres. Although I believe that the image of Joseph derives in part from a Joachimistic-Joseph cult, the possible influence of the painter's guild must not be ignored. One would assume that the Guild of St. Luke, a craft guild in Tournai which was dissolved in 1423 and reformed to include just painters, stained-glass workers, and illuminators, supported the special status of the painter. Campin was himself the elected head of the Guild, and the tradition of St. Luke as the portraitist of the Virgin who he saw in a vision (as represented in Rogier Van der Weyden's St. Luke Drawing the Portrait of the Virgin, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), well supports the notion of the painter (who works from sketches) as a transcriber of spiritual visions (indeed, the fact that St. Luke's likeness is thought to be that of Rogier himself may further support this).⁶¹ Did perhaps the Guild itself place its members in the role of the new spiritual men of whom Joachim had spoken? Quite possibly, the process of becoming a painter was more involved than has previously been suspected, and included spiritual as well as technical training. To be a giver of visions, the artist's soul would itself have had to be prepared, so that his inner as well as his outer perception and representation of imagery was cultivated. Thus, a moral-spiritual training was a likely prerequisite for the artist seeking to be a worthy 'servant of the Spirit'.

As indicated above, Jan van Eyck seems to have been represented - in his own paintings and in those of his followers - as just such a

"servant of the Spirit" and spiritual initiate (see again, note 112, chapter 6). Throughout the thesis, elements in Van Eyck's paintings have been compared to those in the work of Campin. Certainly, there exists linkages between the work of these two men which, though not completely understood, should not be too surprising as they are the founding pioneers (perhaps along with Jan's brother, Hubert Van Eyck) of this revolutionary school of painting. That both artists collaborated in the development of a similar language of indigenous iconography is evident, and the reexamination of the paintings of Jan Van Eyck along the principles elaborated in this study will, I am confident, bear this out. The primary implication that such a claim holds for this present thesis section is that Van Eyck was also a Joachimist. In the following, I will provide, in a very brief manner, evidence to support this claim. The value of such evidence will be that it may help justify the contention of this section to the effect that the Joachimist perception of the New Age was indeed the major impulse out of which the Early Netherlandish School of panel painting grew.

Our brief demonstration concerns selected examples of the most obvious elements of Joachimist symbollism in Van Eyck's paintings. It was previously shown (chapter six, page 182ff.) that the empty seats in Van Eyck's Washington Annunciation and Arnolfini Portrait refer to Christ's Second Coming. Is it possible to interpret the Washington Annunciation, therefore, as the Second rather than as the First Coming of Christ as was done in the case of the Merode Altarpiece? Van Eyck's use of the same empty seat symbol in the Arnolfini Portrait would suggest yes. For as was shown, the empty seat at the rear of the bridal chamber represents not the promise of Christ's coming, but (in concert with the

mirror and candle) Christ's actual presence in the chamber. The arrival of Christ in combination with the spiritual illumination of the viewer who has been 'married to God' (described in chapter six, pp. 182ff.) are both concepts which are easily linked to Joachimist expectation. The same theme of the Enthroned Christ of the Second Coming is again represented in Van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece (c. 1424-1432). The Book of Revelation is the source of much of the polyptych's subject matter. This includes images - besides that of Christ Enthroned - of the woman of the Apocalypse, the Lamb of God surrounded by the elect, St. Michael and the dragon (Antichrist), the fountain of life, and so forth. As will be remembered, Revelation was the cornerstone of Joachim's prophetic vision of history. Indeed, the dominant figure in the Adoration of the Lamb panel where the Revelation imagery is at its most condensed, is, in some senses, the Holy Spirit in the form of the Dove on high Who sends down its gifts to those below. The theme of the advent of the Spirit is thus a possible one. Further, Joachim had said that the theology of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12; Luke 6:20-23) would rule the Third Age,⁶² and the blessed who are assembled around the altar of the Lamb, beneath the Dove, divide into groups which correspond to each of the eight Beatitudes. Also beneath the Dove, on either side of the fountain of life, are assembled representatives of the Old Testament and the New. The peaceful accord between these two groups, seemingly the result of the Spirit overhead, recalls the Joachimist notion of the "eternal, everlasting gospel" which is manifested as the new spiritual understanding of the concordance between the Old and New Testaments. Finally, two panels which flank the right side of the Adoration scene show two orders of men; the Holy Hermits who are led by St. Paul and who are wearing black mantles, and the Holy

Pilgrims who are led by St. Christopher towards the Lamb panel. These two groups, who have been seen as illogical intrusions into the expected iconography of such a painting,⁶³ are, however, quite logical within a Joachimist context, for these are the two orders of spiritual men of whom Joachim had prophesied. The Holy Hermits are none other than those of whom the Joachimist, Henry of Weimar, had said (1334), "these hermits whose father was Paul [who was] the first to lead the eremetical life",⁶⁴ and of whom Joachim had said would be an "order which appears new but is not, garbed in black habits and girdled".⁶⁵ These are therefore the more inward and contemplative of the two orders of whom Joachim had also said that they were to be a secluded order who would agonize for the world on a mountain top.⁶⁶ Indeed, just behind this group of hermits the top of a hill, represented in the form of the peak or high cliff, is shown. The other order, as pilgrims, corresponds very well to Joachim's second outward mediating order of spiritual guides, of whom St. Christopher as their leader is the ultimate embodiment. This concludes the short survey of the more easily recognizable Joachimist iconography in Van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece. To this I may add that Van Eyck may have also executed a painting of St. Francis receiving the Stigmata (Philadelphia Museum of Art). As Francis was seen by the Spirituals as the herald of the Third Age, this image especially could serve as another indication of Van Eyck's Joachimist orientation if, indeed, the painting is by him.

In sum, I believe that I have been able to show the presence of Joachimist symbolism in the Merode Altarpiece. I also believe that the nature of this symbolism brings the themes established earlier in this study together in an inclusive fashion. In so doing, the Joachimist theme of the Millennialist advent of the Holy Spirit was revealed as the central

underlying theme of the artwork. In particular, the theme of Christ's Second Coming was seen to indicate that the Annunciation depicted was not, as had been supposed by earlier scholars, that of the first Incarnation. Also, the theme of the mystical tabernacle and of the reception of spiritual illumination which it allowed was seen as being consistent with the contemplative and visionary experience which was to characterize the Third Age. It was concluded that the altarpiece was an innovative spiritual tool utilizing tabernacle, book, and Eucharistic metaphors in a revolutionary program in which visual perception itself was seen as vehicle by which the soul and consciousness of the viewer were redeemed. The painter's use of light and pattern was ultimately seen to express Joachimist values, and these conclusions were also extended to some of the paintings of Van Eyck as well. On this basis, the 'new style' of painting which Campin and Van Eyck had pioneered was interpreted as an expression of Joachimist prophecy, and the relation of such a Millennialist point of view in the North to the concept of the Northern Renaissance was briefly touched upon. The sources of Joachimist influence in the Netherlands was also discussed and the likely sources from which Campin drew seemed to be, like Joachimism itself, Franciscan in nature. Not only did the Bonaventurian symbolism in the altarpiece serve to support this conclusion, but the fact that Josephology was itself seen to have connections with both Franciscan and Joachimist thinkers of the period helped to further confirm that a Joachimist-Joseph cult or sect was a probable source from which Campin drew. The fact that Van Eyck's works also exhibit Joachimist themes, and that a collaborative relationship between the two artists most likely explains this fact, may further suggest that this "cult" was geographically widespread (Campin lived in Tournai whereas Van Eyck lived in Brugges).

VII. NOTES

¹Robert Adamson, "Bonaventura, Saint," Enc. Brit., eleventh ed.

²Edward C. Butler, "Franciscans," Enc. Brit., eleventh ed.

³Reeves, Marjorie, "Joachim of Fiore," Macropedia, 1974 ed.

⁴Augustine had made a vaguely similar breakdown of the spiritual progress of history into the era before the law, the era under law, and the third era under grace (Karl Löwith, Meaning in History, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1949; rpt. 1959, p. 171), yet Joachim's system begins with the era or age under the law and essentially splits Augustine's era under grace in two: i.e. into the Age of the Son, and the Age of the Spirit.

⁵Reeves, "Joachim of Fiore," in both Macropedia, 1974 ed., and Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1967 ed.

⁶Reeves, "Joachim," Enc. Phil., 1967 ed.

⁷"... it is due to the elimination of messianic, apocalyptic, and chiliastic end-expectations within the time of history that Augustine was able to construct a universal history for the first time as one purposeful procursus from beginning to end, without an intermediate millennium." (Löwith, Meaning in History, p. 167).

⁸Robert H. Charles, "Revelation, Book of," Enc. Brit., eleventh ed.

⁹Marjorie Reeves, Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future, London: S.P.C.K., 1976; rpt. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977, p. 10; Löwith, Meaning in History, p. 154.

¹⁰That is, the Age of the Spirit proceeds from both the Ages of Father and Son and not merely from the Age of the Son alone. In this, we see that Joachim respects the concept of a "double procession" in keeping with the Filioque doctrine.

¹¹Reeves, "Joachim," Macropedia, 1974 ed.; M. F. Laughlin, "Joachim of Fiore," NCE, 1967 ed.; Gordon Leff, Heresey in the Later Middle Ages: The Relation of Heterodoxy to Dissent c. 1250 - c. 1450, vol. 1, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), pp. 73, 77; Löwith, Meaning in History, pp. 151, 146.

¹²Indeed, Joachim's tripartite vision of history influenced the derivative systems of history, though highly original in their exact

articulations, of Lessing, Fichte, Schelling, and especially Hegel. It was also embodied in Hitler's Third Reich, though its leader fulfilled not the role of savior but more of the Antichrist (Löwith, *Meaning in History*, p. 159).

¹³Paul D. Alphandery, "Joachim of Floris," *Enc. Brit.*, eleventh ed.; Löwith, *Meaning in History*, p. 149; Reeves, *Prophetic Future*, chapter 4 ["Joachimist Expectation in the Renaissance Period"].

¹⁴Reeves, *Prophetic Future*, p. 30ff.

¹⁵Reeves, *Prophetic Future*, p. 52.

¹⁶Reeves, *Prophetic Future*, p. 52.

¹⁷The isolated instances may suggest a more widespread identification of Friars with the hermits Joachim prophesies; e.g. in the second half of the fifteenth century, the English Augustinian Friar, John Erghome of York and a well-known Augustinian Canon, John of Bridlington, both demonstrated an interest in Joachimist prophecy. In the early sixteenth century a friar of San Christophoro della Pace in Venice, Silvestro Meuccio, was the center of a group interested in Joachimism, and in his own introduction to Joachim's *Exposito*, identifies the Augustinian Hermits as Joachim's new spiritual men (Reeves, *Prophetic Future*, pp. 53-55).

¹⁸Reeves, *Prophetic Future*, p. 43 and n. 43.

¹⁹Edward A. Ryan, "Beguines," *Enc. Brit.*, 1963 ed., Leff, *Heresey*, p. 195.

²⁰Edward C. Butler, "Tertiaries," *Enc. Brit.*, eleventh ed.

²¹Butler, "Tertiaries,"

²²A. S. Pringle-Pattison, "Mysticism," *Enc. Brit.*, eleventh ed.

²³Jeffrey B. Russell, ed., *Religious Dissent in the Middle Ages*, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1971), p. 89.

²⁴Leff, *Heresey*, p. 325.

²⁵Reeves, *Prophetic Future*, p. 67-69.

²⁶Reeves, *Prophetic Future*, p. 68f; and Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 517f.

²⁷Schapiro, "Muscipula", p. 184.

²⁸Reeves, *Prophetic Future*, p. 81.

²⁹Reeves, *Influence*, p. 322.

³⁰F. L. Filias, "Joseph, St., Devotion to," *NCE*, 1967 ed.

³¹Schapiro, "Muscipula", p. 184

³²Schapiro, "Muscipula", p. 184.

³³St. Bernadine of Siena (d. 1444) was an Italian Franciscan who, along with Gerson and d'Ailly, was the other greatest publicizer of Josephology in the first half of the fifteenth century. Like d'Ailly, she subscribes in some measure to Joachimist ideas for she accepts (as did Bonaventure himself) Joachim's identification of St. Francis as the Sixth Angel of the Apocalypse, i.e. in the role of the herald of the New Age of the Spirit (Reeves, Prophetic Future, p. 47).

³⁴Minott, p. 271.

³⁵Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 83.

³⁶Reeves, Influence, p. 383.

³⁷According to Joachim, the Third Age would be characterized by the Holy Spirit descending into men's hearts such that men would receive immediate revelation unmediated by either Law or Church (Roger Cook, The Tree of Life: Symbol of the Center, London: Thames and Hudson, 1974, p. 29).

³⁸To briefly summarize: her white head-dress and ermine cuff were seen as part of a chromatic red/white pattern in which all three panels participated; the gently arcing vertical line which is picked up in her cuff is the mirror-image of the same stream in the Joseph panel (Figure 11); and her head is part of a three-circle ensemble which is echoed in three other places in the triptych's program (Figure 8 and 23).

³⁹A change in donors might explain why the outer wing panels are missing. Assuming that these panels represented the patron saints of the husband and wife, a switch in donors may have resulted in the replacement of - or in this case - a deletion of, the extant saints. Although I would assume that such dedicatory panels were standard, perhaps special circumstances such as that described above justified their deletion.

⁴⁰Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 76.

⁴¹Even if the panel were understood to represent the First Annunciation - a meaning which I believe it still carries at one level (in keeping with the polysemous nature of Campin symbols) - the representation of night is not necessary. Many angelic and spiritual transmissions in the Bible, which are received in the form of visionary experience, occur at night. This convention may signify that the experience is a spiritual perception rather than being a reference to an actual time of day.

⁴²In this sense, the earlier equation of the 'outer mousetrap' to the white rider (see Figure 11 and corresponding text) deserves some qualification. Previously, it was held that both were symbols of Christ. In a general sense this remains true. But in a more exact sense, the white-rider and the 'inner workbench mousetrap' are both symbols of Christ's

Second Coming, while the 'outer mousetrap' must be seen as a symbol of Christ's First Coming.

⁴³See chap. 2 ["Measure and Light"] in Otto von Simpson, The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2nd revised ed. 1962; first publ. Bollingen Foundation, 1956).

⁴⁴Panofsky, ENP, p. 147f.

⁴⁵Millard Meiss, "Light as Form and Symbol in Some Fifteenth-Century Paintings", Art Bulletin 27 (1945), pp. 175-181.

⁴⁶Meiss, "Light as Form", p. 176, n. 2.

⁴⁷"Richard of St. Victor", Enc. Brit., 1963 ed.

⁴⁸Simpson, p. 26.

⁴⁹Simpson, p. 27.

⁵⁰Simpson, p. 29.

⁵¹Zinn, "Mandala Symbolism", p. 334.

⁵²The grid, and especially the cross, is also perhaps a more far-reaching redemption symbol (as used here) than might at first be suspected. I believe, in fact, that it simultaneously supports the themes of the crossing of the threshold (as already discussed in chapter six) and of the redemptive marriage. As previously discussed in notes 54 and 112 of chapter six, the redemption of Fallen Man, as expressed in the split of the sexes, is an idea found in Christian Platonic tradition which may be operative within the thematic program of the altarpiece. Although it is difficult to demonstrate the following contention briefly, I believe that verticality and horizontality were felt to express the opposition between the spiritual and the physical, and that in certain contexts, were also taken to represent male and female respectively. As a result, in the same way as Christ was perceived as the 'healer' of the sexual split, so the cross was understood to represent the final redemptive union of the male and female aspects of Man in his return to wholeness. I believe this interpretation is supported by an iconological interpretation of the marital custom whereby the groom carries his bride over the threshold which may be ultimately understood as a symbol of the 'redemptive marriage'. The upright groom (vertical) lifts his bride in his arms (horizontal), thus forming the cross, and we have the image of the man returned to 'wholeness' (i.e. double sexedness). This 'whole' or redeemed man is thus ready to cross the threshold into the spiritual world, having regained the spiritual state he possessed before the fall into single sexedness. Hence, this movement of the 'married' (completed) soul across the threshold is also what is represented in the aforementioned movement of the Virgin across the threshold into the Joseph panel (Figure 23 and corresponding text). Ultimately, I believe that the grid structure in Early Netherlandish panel painting possesses this redemptive marital significance.

⁵³Natalie Zemon Davis, "Catholic and Protestant Concepts of Space in 16th-Century Lyon," Perspectives on Space: Psychology, History, and Art, Symposium of Division 10(Psychology and the Arts) at the American Psychological Association Meeting, New York City, 1-5 Sept. 1979.

⁵⁴Gottlieb, "Respiciens", p. 65.

⁵⁵Panofsky, ENP, p. 142.

⁵⁶See Panofsky, ENP, pp. 150ff., for a discussion of the 'Ars Nova' in music and painting.

⁵⁷"Joachim of Fiore", NCE.

⁵⁸Russell, Religious Dissent, p. 85.

⁵⁹When it is recalled that the 'open book' of the Altarpiece (which the viewer stands before and 'reads') was likened to the 'open book' which Mary (as symbol of the viewer's soul) reads, the following tends to support the idea that both "books" are representations of Joachim's "eternal gospel". Heckscher identified Mary's book as a concordance (Heckscher, p. 52). Certainly, if the Annunciation depicted is that of the Third Age Second Coming, the book could quite logically be a reference to the gospel of that Age which itself was understood as the 'spiritual understanding' of the concordances between the Old and New Testaments and Eras. Therefore, if the book Mary reads is a representation of the "eternal gospel", it follows that the altarpiece the viewer 'reads' is also.

⁶⁰This image may also carry esoteric symbolism as well. In both eastern and western esoteric spiritual traditions, the body's ductless glands are seen to be the seats of spiritual organs called, in eastern tradition, alternately 'chakras' or 'chakrams' (meaning 'wheels') or 'lotus flowers' (see the "YogaKundali Upanishad of KrshnaYajurveda" in Thirty Minor Upanishads, trans. Narayanasvami Aiyar, Madras; n.p., 1914). These spiritual centers are themselves thresholds whereby spiritual perceptions become available to the sufficiently prepared seeker. Although usually dormant in most persons, through spiritual exercise and training, these organs become 'awakened' and through certain chakras and at specific stages of development, controlled visionary perception is experienced. The onset of supersensible experience through a properly developed chakra is characterized by this flower or wheel coming into rotation. My suspicion is that the 'drill metaphor', as a symbol of the divine transmission of spiritual visions, contains within it the notion of the mystic's chakras being brought into rotation by the divine drill (for a further introductory investigation of the chakras in western spiritual tradition a study of Hesychasm and its Jesus Prayer of the Heart, Sufism, early Rosicrucianism, and the works of Jacob Boehme would be fruitful starting points. The most authoritative modern description, upon which any accurate historical investigation of the chakras would have to be based, is available through a thorough cover-to-cover reading of Rudolph Steiner, Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and Its Attainment, orig. German ed. 1914; authorized English trans. George Metaxa, revised H. B. and L. D. Monges, 1947; rpt. New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1961.

⁶¹Flanders in the Fifteenth Century: Art and Civilization, catalogue of the exhibition "Masterpieces of Flemish Art: Van Eyck to Bosch" (Detroit Institute of Arts, 1960), p. 78.

⁶²"Joachim of Fiore", NCE.

⁶³Panofsky, ENP, p. 216f.

⁶⁴Reeves, Prophetic Future, p. 52.

⁶⁵Reeves, Prophetic Future, p. 52.

⁶⁶Reeves, "Joachim of Fiore", Macropedia, 1974 ed.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In the following I will present a brief review of this study's findings. This will include some of the major implications which I believe these findings hold for an understanding of the Merode Altarpiece, for the Early Netherlandish School of panel painting and its artists, as well as for the Renaissance of the early fifteenth century. Finally, a few recommendations concerning interpretive methodology and the identification of areas requiring further research will be suggested. In presenting this material, selectivity rather than comprehensiveness will serve as the ruling principle.

The thesis began with the central premise that the main theme of the altarpiece had not yet been identified by art historical research. This failure was attributed to the habit of researchers (1) to treat individual symbols/panels rather than overall programmatic meaning, and (2) to rely almost exclusively upon textual sources external to the artwork. As a result of this fragmentary approach, numerous themes, often seen as conflicting, had been proposed by these researchers. The review of former research on the altarpiece in chapter two therefore revealed the identification of numerous subjects and themes such as the Annunciation, advent, marriage and the transition from the Old Testament Era to the New, and Joseph as a saint expressing domestic, familial virtues. On the basis of my own method of visual content analysis, the discovery of pattern language of indigenous iconographic relations was made and the sub-themes of impregnation, marriage and union were further identified. The tendency of former scholars to see the triptych's three panels separately, or to see the center panel as more important than the wings I opposed with an interpretation of the altarpiece as a three-zoned mystical

tabernacle in which each panel was of integral symbolic importance by virtue of an overall thematic interdependence. Indeed, the theme of progressive revelation which the tabernacle expresses, it could be argued, makes the Joseph panel - as God's most sacred Holy of Holies and Throne-room - perhaps even more important than the central panel. I also proposed the existence of themes such as 'opening and closing', 'hidden and revealed', and Mary as the soul of the viewer illuminated by the Holy Spirit and undergoing the "spiritual marriage" with its attendant experience of the vision of God. Mary was also seen to symbolize, like the donatrix, the 'New Eve' of the Second Coming, and Trinitarian themes and symbols in the altarpiece were linked to Millennialist expectations.

Themes and ideas such as these were also connected with specific sources of influence. These sources grouped themselves, for the most part, within the broad stream of Augustinian spirituality, and included the Victorines, Rhenish and Flemish mystics, Bonaventure and Franciscanism. Within Franciscanism, the Joachimistic 'Spiritual Franciscans' were identified as an especially important source of influence, and the impact of Joachimism on the Augustinian Hermits, the Brethren of the Free Spirit, the Beguines and Josephology was examined. Apart from these separate expressions of Augustinianism, the influence of the medieval theatre in both its liturgical and popular forms was proposed as was the closing tabernacle and even the 'book' as a metaphor for the opening altarpiece. These sources of influence were therefore added to those which had already been identified by other scholars, such as the exegetical interpretations of the Song of Songs or the cult of Joseph.

The resulting array of ideas and influences was finally seen to have one unified, inclusive meaning or main theme. I believe this central theme

is the Annunciation of the Millenium, and is to be understood as a three-fold annunciation of the coming of the Third Spiritual Age within History, of the Second Coming of Christ, and of the mystical advent of the Spirit within the souls of men. On the basis of this inclusive theme, it becomes possible to determine the relative status of the other themes as supporting or sub-themes and to discover the logic behind their programmatic inclusion. For example, the themes of Joseph as God, spouse, and artisan could be seen to possess a much stronger interconnectedness and play a more curcial role in the program than was originally understood when Schapiro first focused on the subject of Joseph in his article of 1945.

Yet, despite the fact that I believe that this newly discovered main theme represents a definite advance in our understanding of the meaning of the Merode Altarpiece, an even greater advance may also be apparent. This greater advance in meaning does not simply consist in knowing 'what' the altarpiece means but rather in 'how' it means. The separate ideas and themes of the work come together, not merely under the abstract idea of the Millenium, but through an inclusive process of viewer comprehension which progressively deepens - like Hugh of St. Victor's ark meditation - until all the separate ideas 'melt down' into one complete and centralized realization of unified meaning. At that point, the outer meaning of the altarpiece as the threefold Annunciation process (chapter five), and the inner meaning of the altarpiece as the Mystical Marriage to God (chapter six), become merged in the corporate recognition of both of these outer and inner events in the advent of the Millenium. (chapter seven). Both outer historical and inner visionary advents are thus provided for under the major theme of the advent of the Millenium.

Yet it is in the 'crucible' of viewer consciousness that the synthesis of outer and inner is accomplished. It is therefore not merely a unity of idea, but a uniting of the viewer with the realities standing behind these ideas which occurs through a revolutionary form of idea presentation. By guiding the viewer into a quite specific way of receiving and 'entering into' such ideas, the viewer is not left 'outside' the concept - as would be the case with an abstract idea - but is 'inserted into' the very reality of which the idea is merely the outer boundary or threshold..

The special manner of meaning referred to above is accomplished by a very controlled process which guides the viewer, and which I have called the 'indigenous iconography' of the altarpiece. This iconography includes major symbolic devices which organize and direct both the viewer's perceptual and conceptual comprehension of the altarpiece, acting as blueprints for the viewer's mental-spiritual experience. These devices include the three-zoned tabernacle, the altarpiece as a 'book' to be 'read' by opening its covers (wings), as well as the operation of the central panel as a 'Visual Eucharist' utilizing light (and perhaps the convex mirror) to transport the viewer onto a spiritual level of conscious existence. On a more basic level, however, the rudiments of this "guiding process" may be found in the pattern language which Campin employs as a structuring force within the formal program. Consisting of grids, nodes, foci, ensembles and paths, this pattern language was seen to connect all the panels of the altarpiece, even to the point of bridging the frames between the panels. Iconographs which previously were seen as having no relationship - such as the drill of Joseph, the star-of-light on Mary's mantle, and the donor's purse and dagger - were by virtue of this

pattern element seen to participate in a higher level of corporate meaning. As a result, supra-lexical significations were discovered for many of the program's objects, and 'compound' or polysemous meaning was seen to be a general symbolic principle operating throughout the entire artwork.

But, most importantly, this pattern language serves to 'set the program in motion'. It is this element of motion in time, of the progressive revelation of meaning whereby the viewer undergoes a succession of 'quantum leaps' from lower to higher and more synthetic modes of comprehension which is the generative force behind the 'how' of this special kind of meaning. In essence, this principle of motion is added by the viewer himself. It is the insertion of viewer consciousness into the otherwise spatially static program which puts the program in motion. Itself a 'time-organism', viewer consciousness is thus not so much an ingredient among other ingredients in the programmatic recipe, but rather is more like the spoon which stirs the whole concoction together; that alchemical fire which brings the mixture to life. The principle of movement is therefore the true guiding principle whereby the viewer mounts from the discovery of the individual sub-themes, to a recognition of their relationships and contexts, to a final experience of central thematic meaning. Inasmuch as the viewer is guided to an increasingly spiritual level of meaning, the indigenous iconography of this altarpiece may be called a form of anagogical symbolism. Its hiddenness is therefore very much different from the 'disguised symbolism' of which Panofsky spoke and which was, instead, a form of allegorical symbolism.

The 'unfolding movement' of the altarpiece may now be described. This is especially appropriate in that the bulk of this study has been

involved in breaking down, through analysis, the separate parts of the altarpiece. Yet the organic nature of the work is thereby lost sight of, and may be properly reinstated by means of a complementary synthetic treatment. Very briefly, the 'process of meaning' begins when the wings of the altarpiece are opened, like a great book, and we begin to 'read' its message. As the wings are opened, we may also imagine that the 'doors' represented in the program open as well: the gateman opens the garden door, the door to the Annunciation chamber opens, and the third shutter behind Joseph also opens. In the openings of the gatehouse and Annunciation chamber doors the white rider and central chamber are revealed, and these 'visions' of the Millennial advents of the Spirit and Christ penetrate the souls of the donors and the viewer alike. At the same moment as these openings occur, Joseph-God sends forth both Spirit and Christ through his carpenter shop drill and its counterpart in the 'indigenous drill' which spans the left and central panels. Hence, the Spirit and Christ simultaneously emerge from the gatehouse (Throneroom of God), proceed along the walkway, penetrate the oculus window, and descend - simultaneously - toward Mary and the donatrix. Upon reaching and entering Mary, the star of light faintly appears on her mantle and gradually intensifies in brilliance. An alternate descent from the second oculus window through the six stages (nodes) or mystical interiorization and progress toward God is also represented. As was suggested earlier, the viewer passes from the window to the 'baptismal' laver, 'puts on' the light-filled soul symbolized by the white linen towel, experiences the budding of the Trinity in his soul upon descending to the vase of lilies, and 'dies into Christ' upon reaching the extinguished candle and, above it, the cross. A diminishment of the ego thus occurs

whereby, passing on to the Virgin (illuminated soul) and the book which she reads, the greater 'overshadowing' presence of the Spirit/Christ within the soul is effected. From this point, the soul proceeds to the fire-screen where the soul's final transmutation and union with God occurs; either by an ascent up the chimney, or by a penetration into the Throne-room of Joseph-God through the wall of the fireplace. The same mystical movement and progressive spiritualization of the viewer's soul occurs as he 'visually passes' from the outer court (preparation-cognition) to the sanctuary (illumination-mediation) to the Holy of Holies (unitive perfection-contemplation), as represented by the triptych's three separate panels. The collective result of these incremental movements is the final crossing of the viewer's soul into the spiritual space of the painted program itself.

In thus discussing 'how' the altarpiece means, as opposed to 'what' it means, a more general main idea may be seen to inform the entire artwork as well as its relationship to both the viewer and its own historical context. This "main idea" is that of 'transformation'. This idea permeates every aspect of the artwork and the Joachimist climate of which I believe it was part. For example, a possible expression of the Joachimist notion that the Second Age Church was to be transformed into the Spiritual Church of the Third Age, the mystical-Eucharistic drama which the altarpiece 'sets in motion' is nothing less than a revelation and personalization of the Mystery of the Mass which was celebrated at the same altar the altarpiece itself occupied. In that this 'vision' of what occurs in the Mass is thus being made directly accessible to the mind of the viewer, it tends to supersede the priest as a mediator between the individual and the divine, and perhaps may thus carry special

pre-Reformation and anti-sacerdotal implications. On the one hand, the artwork amplifies and complements the Mass. On the other, it utilizes elements drawn from liturgical and street theatre in the creation of an alternate transformational drama to that of the established ritualistic drama of the Mass itself, substituting the individual viewer for the priest as the main human participant.

The idea of transformation is present in the method of pictorial representation as well. The depiction of space and the placement of objects within that space was neither simply decorative nor inherited from the tradition of the International Style. As I attempted to show, pattern plays a central role in the determination of the placement of objects, object-relationships, and the use of shapes and colors throughout the program. Furthermore, formal pattern in the altarpiece has been interpreted as an extension of the advent of the Holy Spirit as a divine patterning agent, and therefore represents the commitment on behalf of the artist to the historical present and future in which the Spirit is to become increasingly manifest. A reassessment of Campin as a thoroughly progressive artist may therefore be in order. It would supersede Panofsky's estimate of Campin to the effect that,

For all his innovatory spirit, he represents an early, even preliminary phase in the *ars nova*. While looking forward to the future he remained, like many revolutionaries, deeply committed to the past.¹

In truth, Campin's use of a spatial system similar only in appearance to International Style pictorial space construction, was not an expression of his commitment to the past in the sense characterized by Panofsky. Rather, like so much of the 'traditional' Christian subject matter and iconography which he employed and which I believe he gave new Joachimist meanings to, Campin transformed International Style space to serve totally

new ends. In addition, the 'new' adaptation of disguised symbolism which Panofsky credits Campin with is perhaps not so new in spirit as Panofsky has supposed. This symbolism, rather than expressing a concession to Nominalistic naturalism (which separates, irrevocably, the physical from the spiritual world) in its blending of a spiritual with a natural meaning, is actually not a concession to naturalism at all. In truth, as the viewer progresses from the physical to the spiritual reality behind the objects, we may speak instead of an 'anagogical naturalism', which is the very antithesis of Nominalism.

The final example of the idea of transformation which I wish to discuss concerns the artist's relationship to the viewer. Earlier, the concept of the artist functioning as a secular, Joachimist priest was forwarded. The artist was thus characterized as a spiritual guide who does not separate the individual from God, like the traditional priest who acts simultaneously as the 'representative' of God and/or the congregation, but as one who inobtrusively 'marries' the individual to God. In a sense, the altarpiece as 'book' may represent the Joachimistic 'eternal gospel' which the artist-priest preaches, and which takes the form of a visionary spiritual illumination for the viewer in keeping with the nature of universal revelatory experience in the Third Age. The artist therefore is no longer merely a transformer of the physical materials of panel and pigment into art; he is a transformer of Man himself. That is, as 'Joachimist priest', the artist's real artwork is man, and the painted panel is merely one step in the total artistic process whereby man - the original 'artwork' of the divine artisan, God - is redeemed. Just as the artisan Joseph, as God, has His redemptive tools (mousetrap, white stone) on His workbench-altar, so the human artist

Campin displays his 'redemptive apparatus' (triptych) on an altar as well. The human artist thus serves, on earth, the world-redemptive designs of the Divine Artist of Creation.

Beyond the artwork itself, the ideas it embraces may also hold possible implications for a reassessment of Early Netherlandish painting, of Northern spirituality, and the nature of the Renaissance in the North. As previously indicated, the concept of 'the Renaissance' here intended is not merely of a phenomenon which occurred in outer history, but rather represents the fundamental 'paradigm shift' in human consciousness which underlies the outer historical symptoms. I believe that the perception of something 'new' within the world, evident within the new forms of lay spirituality (the 'New Devotion'), of music and art (the 'Ars Nova'), and the perception of a 'New Age' by some, may have all had roots in the fundamental awareness of this shift in personal consciousness. The fact that this shift occurred, manifesting itself very differently to the North and to the South of the Alps, respectively, is here taken as evidence of the commonality and thus existence of the change. Thus, because the same impulse arose in both places despite different environmental circumstances, it is not reducible to them and neither can these outer circumstances be taken as the primary causative agents. The fact that this 'new consciousness' is expressed at about the same time in two revolutionary systems of spatial representation which seem to be the exact opposite of one another further buttresses the historical reality of the proposed paradigmatic shift. Not by chance, also exactly opposite were the relative positions of the arts in North and South (Florence) as has been pointed out by Panofsky in his book, Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art:²

	<u>Netherlands</u>	<u>Italy</u>
Maximal change:	Music	Architecture and "Decorative Arts"
	Painting	Sculpture
	Sculpture	Painting
Minimal change:	Architecture and "Decorative Arts"	Music

I believe that there is a clue to the nature of the fundamental difference between the Renaissances of North and South present within these antithetical patterns of artistic predominance. Very briefly, architecture is the most three-dimensional and spatial of the arts listed, for it not only occupies three-dimensional space (like sculpture), but encloses it as well and defines the spatial experience of the occupant. Painting is two-dimensional, having shed the dimension of non-planar extension. Music, on the other hand, is non-dimensional because it exists not in space but in time. Thus, in architecture and music, the opposite poles of space and time are represented. As these patterns show, whereas the pole of time is foremost in the North where the spatial pole is weakest, the principle of space is predominant in the South where, consequently, the temporal art of music receives the least new development of all the arts.

It should therefore come as little surprise that the element of time, of process, and dramatic occurrence is dominant within the painted program of the Merode Altarpiece. As I tried to indicate previously, the art of painting as represented in the altarpiece seems to have 'absorbed' the other artforms within itself. Complex architectural environments which never existed were invented by Campin and Van Eyck for their painted programs. The plastic forms of Sluteresque sculpture were also represented in their paintings; in some cases so illusionistically that the

three-dimensional weight, tactility, and presence of sculpture was combined in a sort of synesthetic-concentrate to be beamed through a single sense modality: the eye. But it was the representation of process, of motion, and thus of time, that was the ruling drive of the Northern artist Campin. This is why I claimed that theatrical staging and dramatic action was also 'absorbed' by the art of painting, because in creating a drama of which the viewer became part, the element of time was brought into the otherwise wholly spatial art of painting. In the North, painting was thus closer to the ruling artform, music - a performance art based on time - rather than to the three-dimensional arts. In the South, however, Renaissance perspective painting took its lead from architecture. It sought to be a spatial art par excellence, and indeed, the earliest recorded Euclidean perspective representations were the architectural drawings of Brunelleschi in the early fifteenth-century.

What are the implications of this difference? The Northern artist Campin, as was earlier proposed, sought to create a spiritual architecture - a Third Age Spiritual Church - within the soul of the viewer. Indeed, in absorbing the other arts under the reigning principle of time, Campin was 'spiritualizing' the three-dimensional arts by converting them, first into two dimensions, but then into the non-dimensional 'substance' of viewer consciousness and experience itself. That is, the two-dimensional image became interiorized by its conversion into internal mental imagery within the soul. In a sense, this conversion of the three-dimensional to the two-dimensional and then into interior mental imagery is no less than the attempt to redeem material existence through its transformation - within the crucible of consciousness - into the spiritual substance of conscious being itself. Both the artist and the

viewer thus became participating agents in the act of world redemption, thus helping to fulfill the creation of the new spiritual earth of which St. John spoke in the Book of Revelation. Hence, the world, which existed as Idea within the mind of God, is gradually converted back into the spiritual substance of thought as part of the process of the world's return to the Deity. In this concept, the Platonizing aspects of Campin's millennialism are most evident. Unlike earlier forms of spirituality which attempted to deny the life of the senses and the outer world, this conception does not shun the world in search of the spirit but rather establishes the necessary relationship of the two worlds for the redemption of the material world to occur. Indeed, the very notion of the artist as a 'secular priest' standing within the world embodies this essential concept. The elements of time and process operate as the central features of this art because time is the 'medium', so to speak, in which the ego or individuality of the viewer exists. Whereas the home of the physical body is the spatial-material world, the 'I' of man - which seems to emerge with particular force during the beginning of the fifteenth century - is strictly a time-organism. It is a "time-organism" because the central feature of the ego as we know it - its 'identity' - is predicated upon the continuity of self-consciousness within time through the agent of memory. Campin's artistic attempt, as represented by the program of the Merode Altarpiece, to redeem the ego-element in man, thus appropriately chose to adopt the temporal idiom of process and movement.

The contrast between Northern and Southern approaches to spatial representation - and more basically, between the world-conceptions underlying these approaches - may now be touched upon. In the North, the element of time, the participation of the viewer in a program 'set in motion', and

the transformation of the viewer upon crossing the threshold separating his space from the picture space were of paramount importance. But the exact opposite was the case with the perspective artwork of the South and its experience by the viewer. Whereas the Merode Altarpiece seeks to elevate viewer consciousness to a spiritual source of compositional pattern (the Holy Spirit), the perspective artwork subordinates viewer consciousness to a totally physical representation of outer reality ruled by the laws of material structure (the rise of the natural sciences and the search for the underlying physical organizing principles and structure of reality as expressed, for example, in Da Vinci's dissection of cadavers, is but one instance of this interest in physical organizing principles and structural laws). Thus, the representation of physical space, of 'composition', was the goal of the perspective artist (as Alberti had made clear in his own writings during the 1430's). The frame of the painting was therefore like a window, with physical space actually present on one side and representationally present on the other. The Merode Altarpiece, however, represents a spiritual space, and to enter it, an attenuation of consciousness is necessary because a qualitative threshold must be crossed. Movement, time, and viewer participation are thus essential. The Southern perspective artwork is on the other hand, static, almost frozen, and the viewer has the estranging experience of being denied access to his own 'inner space'. The dominance of the physical field in Florentine (and later) perspective painting only address the physical being of man (although the religious subject matter aspires to more than this). There is really no room for the more mobile, spiritual part of the viewer in these frozen, Euclidean compositions.³ In a sense, the Southern artist sought to record the visible, physical world, whereas, as

Northern artist, Campin sought to participate in the divine transformation of the physical world. Indeed, it should be realized that two very different historical impulses are here present. One in embryo, and the other, the Southern, the basis of the natural scientific revolution to which western civilization and the twentieth century in particular, are the obvious heirs. In the former impulse, man is the ruling principle and is an active participant in the perception and the formation of organic, living ideas about the world. In the latter, the environmental field is dominant, and man is the passive onlooker poking at the world with the stick of analysis, never feeling himself as an essential part of the greater context of world reality.

Concerning other recommendations which could be made for further research, a few more may be appropriately added. Further investigation of the sources and impact of Joachimism in the North would not only help to test the interpretation offered here pertaining to the Merode Altarpiece, but could perhaps lead to interesting results in, for instance, political history. If, for example, Van Eyck was a Joachimist, was the Burgundian Court and Philip the Good also influenced by Joachimist thinking which itself stressed the activity of the Spirit in the sphere of outer history? The examination of other works of Campin and Van Eyck for Joachimist ideas, or any of the numerous sub-themes herein proposed, might also bear fruit. In these endeavors, methodological recommendations can also be given. The improvement of visual observation, inventory, and interpretive analysis cannot be overstressed. The search for indigenous iconography - perhaps a pattern language similar to that operative in the Merode Altarpiece - should balance the application of lexical methodology. The patience to delay naming the main theme until the test of 'universal

presence' separates the central from the subordinate themes is also necessary. But perhaps most important, is the ability to allow the artwork to speak accurately about itself. In this hardest of endeavors, I hope I have been to some extent successful.

VIII. NOTES

¹Panofsky, ENP, p. 164.

²Erwin Panofsky, "Rinascimento dell'Antichita: The Fifteenth Century", chap. 4 in Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art (New York: Harper & Row, 1960; rpt. 1972, p. 168).

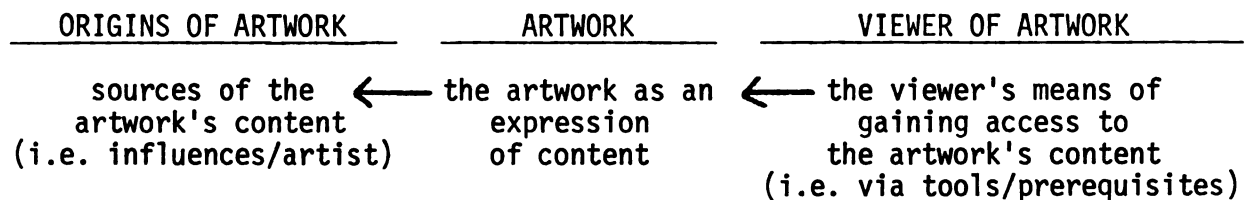
³From the early to mid-fifteenth century precise and pristine perspective compositions of the Florentine painter Fra Filippo Lippi, up through the pinnacle of externality in the perspective plaza scenes of the eighteenth-century Venetian painter Canaletto, a tradition exists whereby the ruling impulse is to simulate man's visual experience of exterior spaciousness.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX: TYPES OF ART HISTORICAL CONTENT AND THEIR TREATMENT:

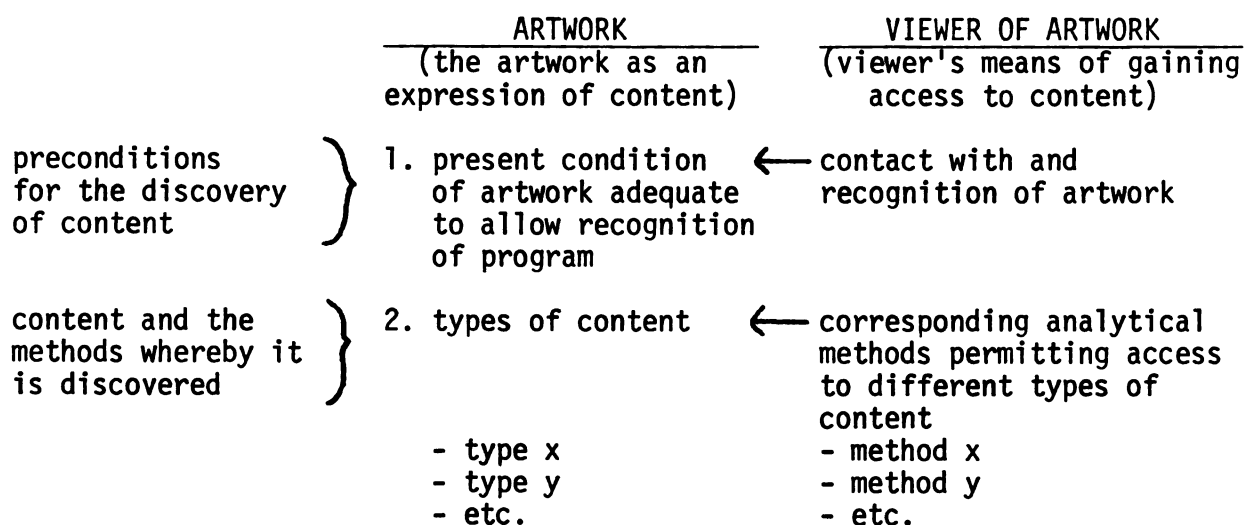
A METHODOLOGICAL MODEL

Below I will set forth the research model upon which this particular investigation has been based, although I believe the same model could be used to study other artworks as well. The model outlines the relationship of the artwork to both its creative origins and to the viewer who is attempting to gain access to its meaning or content. The diagram below uses three columns to depict this process schematically as a viewer who looks at the artwork and tries to discern its content: i.e. the ideas which stand behind/are embodied within the visible program (the arrows signify the viewer's analytical and interpretive penetration of the artwork which uncover its underlying meaning). Simply stated, the better equipped the viewer is to recognize content (i.e. through familiarity with the historical period in which the work was produced, interpretive ability, etc.), the more likely the artwork will, as it were, become 'transparent' to the viewer so that its different types of content will become known.



The specific types of content, however, are expressed as a process of progressive discovery by the viewer of the layers of an artwork's meaning (occurring on the vertical axis of the following diagram). That is, in the viewer's initial contact with the artwork, certain basic preconditions must be fulfilled (artwork is intact, viewer's sense modalities allow perception of the artwork, etc.) for the discovery of content to occur.

After this, the viewer employs certain analytical and interpretive tools to gain access to the meaning (types of content) embodied within the visual and symbolic attributes of the artistic program.



This basic model will now be discussed in greater depth. For clarity, this discussion is referenced to two detailed diagrams placed at the end of this Appendix; Tables 1 and 2.

1. preconditions for the discovery of content

In discovering the content of an artwork there are five fundamental variables (see Table 1, vertical columns). The first two of these are 'creative' in nature. They are: (1) the sources of content, which can be personal, technological, geographical, or institutional in nature, and (2) the articulators or direct shapers of content, who include the artist or artists, along with, in some cases, a patron and/or an advisor. The middle variable is (3) the creation or artwork itself, including its condition at the time of viewer inspection. Should there be any variance from the original - whether as a result of deterioration, alteration of

site and environmental factors such as prime lighting conditions, or even the psychological and cultural variance of a viewer removed in space and time from the culture in which the artwork was produced - the quality of viewer contact is impaired, and actual or mental reconstruction of the artwork must be accomplished before the representation of content can be assumed to be accurate. The last two of the five variables are 'recreative' in nature, and consist of the viewer's means of gaining access, not only to the sources of content, but to the content itself. They are: (4) the viewer prerequisites for receiving and understanding the content, such as his or her perceptual and conceptual capabilities, as well as the pertinent background knowledge necessary for content recognition to occur, and (5) contact with the artwork itself.

2. types of content and their method of discovery

The actual discovery of content also depends upon the same five categorical variables described above, although the artwork, the viewer prerequisites, and the viewer activities now take on a new order of constituents (see Table 2, vertical columns). To begin, there are two basic types of content: intentional content and non-intentional content.¹ In simple terms, intentional content is that which the artist intends to convey to his audience. Intention is broadly defined here to include, for example, certain forms of stylistic phenomena not usually understood as possessing thematic meaning or as representing the conscious intent of the artist. The innocent, child-like faces with which a particular artist invests all the figures of his canvases could be taken as an intentional content if this manner of representation was intentional when it became part of the artist's figural stylistic vocabulary. In essence, these would be

expressional vehicles which have become standardized without necessarily sacrificing expressional content.

Non-intentional content, on the other hand, consists of information drawn from the artwork concerning the artist or the artist's historical environment which is present without the artist's knowledge or conscious intent. For example, if the art of Cezanne can be seen to anticipate, in certain respects, the dominant stylistic vocabularies of twentieth-century art and architecture (rectilinear form, emphasis on the planar surface), these features in the art of Cezanne may be taken as the symptomatic expression of cultural-historical impulses which transcend his conscious reason for depicting such planes and geometricized solids. But only our retrospective historical vantage point has allowed us, in this instance, to recognize a larger historical pattern of which Cezanne is part, but which was not fully present or apparent until well into the twentieth century. Thus, on the basis of such a retrospective judgment we may say that beside Cezanne's intentional content (and conscious reasons for representing planes and rectilinear forms), his artwork also has an "acquired" or non-intentional content (assuming the art historian is correct and is not merely superimposing an interpretation not consonant with the historical reality of the situation). Non-intentional content of this sort is different from intentional content because it is present by virtue of historical developments subsequent to the artwork itself. In essence, non-intentional content is the kind of information with which comparative historians deal.

a. intentional content

Intentional content may dwell within 'interactive' and/or 'presentational agents'. Interactive agents include (1) the artistic medium (e.g. a painting or sculpture), (2) the media format (e.g. a painted triptych or sculptural fountain), and (3) the use and/or siting of the artwork (e.g. a devotional altarpiece or a garden fountain).

These "agents" may have thematic content or significance inasmuch as they interact with and qualify other elements of the artwork's iconographic program. For example, in Van der Weyden's painting of St. Luke Drawing a Portrait of the Virgin, the medium itself may lend meaning to the artwork. St. Luke is shown observing the Virgin in a vision as he draws her. The fact that the artwork depicting this is itself a rendering (based on sketches) which gives the viewer an image of something removed in place and time might suggest that the very observation of this painting is itself likened to a visionary experience. If supporting evidence could corroborate this signification as intentional on behalf of the artist, the paint medium (as a two-dimensional representational artform) would itself qualify as a carrier of intentional thematic content. The media format, such as a sculptural fountain, could also carry thematic content. For example, a fountain could symbolize the "Fountain of Life" described in the Revelation of St. John, and thus take on Biblical significations. Or, the use and siting of an artwork could also be seen to contribute to its overall thematic content. A painted altarpiece designed for use during the Church Mass might relate to certain phases of the celebration of the Mass and achieve full meaning only within the context of different ritual stages.

Presentational agents include (1) the ostensible subject matter (e.g.

the depiction of a woman), (2) the simple iconographic permutations of the subject matter (e.g. this woman as the Virgin Mary),² (3) the iconographic typological permutations of the subject matter (e.g. this Virgin as the Humble Madonna type), (4) the indigenous iconographic permutations of any or all of the above (e.g. this Humble Madonna type used in a special way so as to modify her meaning), and (5) the formal-aesthetic handling of any or all of the above (e.g. the stylized representation of the space surrounding the Humble Madonna or the intensification of color to perhaps signify that she is undergoing a visionary experience). Of course, there are also instances where the formal-aesthetic properties of an artwork operate as ends in themselves. However, in those instances where formal-aesthetic devices participate in the total context of thematic meaning, such devices are really a form of indigenous iconography. I have provided a separate category for such formal-aesthetic devices because widely held concepts of 'style' habitually assume that formal-aesthetic attributes are ends in themselves and thus devoid of thematic content. Special categorical emphasis is thus seen as an appropriate counter-measure.

Category number four, that of indigenous iconography, has already been discussed, and is an extremely important adjunct to the other more established categories of iconographic meaning and analysis. It is important to mention in this regard that the methods employed in the interpretation of several of these iconographic agents, parallel those advocated by Erwin Panofsky in a methodological article published in 1932, republished in revised form in 1939,³ and republished again with further revisions in 1955.⁴ These methods were "pre-iconographical description", which is simply the recognition of the ostensible subject matter, and "iconographical analysis", which is the lexical method used to gain access to my first two

iconographical categories (simple and typological iconographical permutations). However, the third level of iconographic meaning, that of indigenous iconography, cannot be detected by lexical means alone. As discussed in the previous section, the lexical method isolates the part from the whole, unlike visual content analysis (indigenous iconography being its primary focus) which encounters the whole within the part. That is, indigenous iconography always reveals the meaningful connection between the individual part (symbol) and the thematic whole (main theme). Panofsky's third method of "iconographical interpretation" (changed to "iconological interpretation" in his revision of 1955), overshoots this underlying, indigenous ground of unified meaning, and seeks to address the sphere of non-intentional content (to be discussed later). Only visual content analysis used in addition to "iconographical analysis" (i.e. the lexical identification of iconographs) is able to gain access to those significant iconographic relations in which indigenous iconographic meaning exists.

b. non-intentional content

The first type of non-intentional content is that of relative or contemporaneous historical significance. This type of content exists as some aspect of the artwork which symptomatically expresses some characteristic of the artist and/or the artist's cultural-historical environment. There are two forms in which the historian encounters relative historical significance. The first form is the contextual symptoms which can be identified by the historian on the basis of a sufficient grasp of historical climates and events contemporaneous with the area or object under study. This permits the recognition of the influence of such phenomena (as manifest symptoms) appearing within the artwork. As indicated above,

Panofsky's method of "iconological interpretation" seeks to gain access to this body of content, focusing more on the artist and his "essential tendencies of mind"⁵ than on what the artwork reveals about the cultural-historical environment. But even allowing this limitation of the scope of information which the "contextual symptoms" may provide, Panofsky's concept of essential mental tendencies, as discussed below, causes me to doubt the usefulness of this remaining concept as well. For such reasons, the method of iconological interpretation is ultimately seen as serving no useful purpose for the discovery of meaning in any of the categories of content presented in my research model.

The second form of relative historical significance is the historical impulses which may be detected behind the cultural-historical symptoms or events. This conception of historical significance holds that history is not merely the observed events which occur, but that history also exists as a time organism which influences, but is not reducible to, outer events. These historical impulses are accessible to the historian only through a very deep understanding of history, not in its effects, but in its wellsprings. It may be pointed out that Panofsky's deepest level of interpretation (iconological interpretation) is unable to penetrate to these wellsprings of historical phenomena because of its underlying scientific-humanist assumption. Derived from German philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945), the assumption as articulated by Panofsky holds that:

. . . under varying historical conditions, the general and essential tendencies of the human mind were expressed [in artworks] by specific themes and concepts.⁶

For Panofsky, these wellsprings are the "essential tendencies of the human mind", that is, relatively fixed attributes, the products of which alter because of a changing environmental field (i.e. history). In truth,

Panofsky's model of art historical interpretive analysis does not really treat inner historical causes at all because, the mental causative tendencies being constant, the real focus must be upon the effects themselves. Panofsky's predisposition to the continuity of tradition at the expense of innovation which his lexical method of iconographical analysis reflects, is also again apparent in the status of constancy which he bestows upon the human mind. I would oppose this view with what I believe to be a much more historically accurate, perceptive, and fruitful concept espoused by the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), and articulated after him by, among others, the twentieth-century philologist, Owen Barfield.

Steiner's conception of history held that consciousness itself evolves, and that the history of ideas and cultural change were results of this evolution of consciousness. For our purposes, the knowledge of the historical symptoms and signposts of this evolution of consciousness (especially as evidenced within the art historical record), coupled with the investigator's conscious recognition of the traits of his own stage of evolved consciousness (used as a corrective when studying other stages to avoid distorting data by superimposing values and assumptions appropriate to his own stage on to them), would provide access to an understanding of the underlying historical impulses. This knowledge of the specific historical symptoms and signposts of the evolution of consciousness I here call the "historiology of consciousness".⁷

The final form of non-intentional content is acquired or retrospective historical significance. As described previously, this form of content consists of those meanings which an artwork of the past may hold for us now and which arise by virtue of the artwork's displacement in time. Although these "acquired meanings" may represent merely a special type

of comparative historical significance, they may also go much deeper than this. At their most profound level, they would ultimately involve the appreciation of the relative stages of consciousness underlying the historical periods compared as provided by a knowledge of the history of consciousness.

APPENDIX: NOTES

¹In introducing content categories dealing with intention, it is important at the outset to anticipate objections levelled by those familiar with the "intentional fallacy". Put forth by W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and M. C. Beardsley (see The Verbal Icon, 1954, by Wimsatt) in relation to works of literary art, the theory holds that the meaning of a work is not necessarily the same as the author's statement of intention regarding that meaning. Although it is true that artistic intent and artistic result are not always equatable, by far the bulk of artistic production suffers from lack of well articulated and orchestrated intentions, resulting in synthetically weak and characteristically amateurish compositions. By the same token, recognized masterworks usually provide overt testimony to the successful realization of a conscientiously pursued intention or ruling idea. Although the importance of artistic intention as expressed by the artist is not paramount, intention itself - as it operates within the artwork - is. This is because the confirmation of intentional content is the art historian's first order of business due to the fact that all other forms of content resonate off of and are effected by the intentional content. Discovery and cognizance of intentional content is thus a prerequisite for gauging inconsistencies as well as successes in artworks. All successes, including 'happy accidents', are not intentional, although they are consistent with the intentional content (otherwise they become disruptions or inconsistencies at odds with the entire program). However, all failures and inconsistencies do represent either the lack of intent or difficulties in embodying that intent fully.

²It is within this category that Panofsky's "disguised symbolism" falls.

³Erwin Panofsky, Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance (New York: Harper & Row, 1939, reprint 1972), pp. 3-31.

⁴Erwin Panofsky, Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers In and On Art History (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955), pp. 26-54.

⁵Panofsky, MVA, p. 41.

⁶Panofsky, MVA, p. 41 (Bracketed words, my addition).

⁷The flexibility of the term 'historiology', especially in light of its recent use regarding the rhythm and structure of cultural-historical evolution (see the history of 'historiology's' varied connotations in John P. Sedgewick, Jr.'s Rhythms of Western Art, Metuchen, N. J.: Scarecrow

Press, 1972, pp. 313-321), permits its specialized but appropriate use in regards to the notion of the evolution of consciousness. The advantage of "historiology of consciousness" over the former expression is that the latter is specifically intended to emphasize the relation of consciousness to the web of subordinate as well as primary causative historical impulses and events. Although this thrust has perhaps not been intentionally avoided by contemporary proponents of the evolution of consciousness, there has generally been a lopsided emphasis upon the historical changes in human consciousness in and of itself. For example, rather than an analysis and explanation of specific historical events and phenomena, history has been usually treated as a supportive backdrop for the demonstration of the progressive development of consciousness. Characterized by an over-reliance upon the "Great Man Theory" of history (and its modifications) to the exclusion of other approaches, simple one-to-one correlations between a particular stage of consciousness and one facet of an event have been adduced without a sufficient appreciation and examination of the reciprocal action between consciousness and other causative agents. Yet, of far greater importance than these difficulties of application, is the failure of the various historical disciplines to come to terms with the evolution of consciousness view of historical process and meaning. A basic examination of the premises of this school of historical thought would begin with the works of its founder, Rudolf Steiner, especially Rätsel der Philosophie, 1914 (available in English translation as, The Riddles of Philosophy, Spring Valley, New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1973), and to be followed by a study of Owen Barfield, Saving the Appearances (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, undated), Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973, first ed. 1928), Romanticism Comes of Age (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1966; first ed. 1944); American historian Stewart Easton's insightful survey entitled "History and the Evolution of Consciousness" which comprises the lengthy second chapter in Stewart C. Easton, Man and World in the Light of Anthroposophy (Spring Valley, New York: 1975), pp. 20-121; and the interesting topical applications of the evolution of consciousness in, Owen Barfield, "The Evolution Complex," Towards 2 (Spring 1982), pp. 6-16; and William C. Johnson, Jr., "Literature, Film, and the Evolution of Consciousness," The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 38 (Fall 1979), pp. 29-38. See also the brilliant demonstration of the evolution of consciousness, derived independently of Steiner's influence, in the Introduction and first chapter on the history of laughter in Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1968; first publ. Russian, 1965), pp. 1-144. I want to thank Dr. Frederick Amrine for bringing this last book to my attention. Several other historical approaches and interpretations, also apparently independent of Steiner's influence, see historical development as the record of changes in human consciousness. Of special relevance to the art historian are Wayne V. Andersen, "A Neglected Theory of Art History," Journal of Aesthetics and Art History 20 (Spring 1962), pp. 389-404, which examines the developmental art historical model developed by Gustav Britsch; and Alan Gowans, "Child Art as an Instrument for Studying History. The Case for an 'Ontogeny Repeats Phylogeny' Paradigm in Universal History," Art History 2 (Sept. 1979), pp. 247-274. Most of the works cited in the note took, more or less, to perceptual changes as indicators of shifts in human consciousness. Concerning such a proposed shift from medieval to early fifteenth-century renaissance consciousness

it may prove useful to consult Carolly Erickson, chap. 2 ["The Visionary Imagination"] in The Medieval Vision: Essays in History and Perception (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 29-47. (See also, works listed in "Spatial perception and representation as possible indicators of historical/individual spiritual development" section of thesis Bibliography.)

O R I G I N S (of artwork)		A R T W O R K		V I E W E R (of artwork)	
SOURCES/INFLUENCERS OF CONTENT	ARTICULATORS OF CONTENT (Assignmt) (Artist)	EXPRESSION OF CONTENT	ACCESS TO CONTENT (Viewer Activities) (Viewer Prerequisites)		
P R E C O N D I T I O N S F O R T H E D I S C O V E R Y O F C O N T E N T					
		PRESENT CONDITION OF ARTWORK	CONTACT WITH ARTWORK	UNIMPAIRED RECOGNITION OF ARTWORK (sensible, emotional, & cognitive capacity)	
	DONOR OR PATRON	<p>A. VARIANCE FROM ORIGINAL</p> <p>1. Physical Variance of Artwork</p> <p>a. deterioration (phys. damage, poor restor. etc.)</p> <p>b. Loss of parts/elements</p> <p>c. reworking by other hands (additions/deletions)</p> <p>d. display mode altered</p> <p>1. alteration of original site</p> <p>2. art not in situ (e.g. museum)</p> <p>3. staging altered</p> <p>-distance from viewer altered (lateral & vertical - e.g. change in eye-level)</p> <p>-lighting altered (e.g. artificial vs. natural) -etc.</p> <p>e. encountered in reproduced form (bookphoto, slide, etc.) (variance in scale, color, detail, extension, context, etc.)</p> <p>f. encountered in derivative copy form (e.g. Roman copy of Greek sculpture or copy of lost original by follower) (all manner of variance)</p> <p>2. Psychological Variance of Viewer (distance between present viewer and original viewer/audience)</p>	<p>A. RECONSTRUCTION OF ORIGINAL</p> <p>1. Lab analysis and restoration and/or analytical/inter- pretive mental reconstruction</p>	<p>1. Knowledge of artistic/ technical norms to determine and correct physical deviations or to mentally reconstruct original</p> <p>d. knowledge of original site/siting norms</p>	
	ARTIST AND/OR ADVISOR			<p>2. Knowl. of Orig. Audience</p> <p>a. type of historical consciousness</p> <p>b. world-view (beliefs & environmental influences)</p> <p>c. mode of encounter with artwork (e.g. ritual encounter, with salvation expectations)</p>	

Table 1.

O R I G I N S (of artwork)		A R T W O R K	V I E W E R (of artwork)	
SOURCES/INFLUENCERS OF CONTENT	ARTICULATORS OF CONTENT (Assignmt) (Artist)	EXPRESSION OF CONTENT	ACCESS TO CONTENT (Viewer Activities) (Viewer Prerequisites)	
	DONOR OR PATRON	T Y P E O F C O N T E N T	D I S C O V E R Y O F C O N T E N T	C O N T E N T
TECHNOLOGICAL: materials innovations - technical innovations - indirect technological impacts PERSONAL: experiential references of the "articulators of content" GEOGRAPHICAL: national/regional styles or schools INSTITUTIONAL: environmental imagery (e.g. recognizable landmarks or geographical features) religious concepts/traditions (e.g. the Church/confraternities) intellectual concepts/traditions (e.g. university) political socio-economic (e.g. trade guilds)	Patron Determines Patron Determines Patron Determines	I. <u>INTENTIONAL CONTENT</u> A. Interactive Agents	A. may have relevance as participants in indigenous iconographic relations & thus be subject to visual content analysis	1. Familiarity w/ artistic media 2. Familiarity w/ media modes & norms 3. Familiarity w/ respective conventions
		1. Artistic Media (e.g. Ptg, Sculpt.) 2. Media Format (e.g. triptch, fountain) 3. Use and Siting B. Presentational Agents (formal artistic devices which can carry all manner of ideas, themes & their corresponding devel.) 1. Ostensible Subject Matter (e.g. woman)	1. Pre-Iconographic Description (Panofsky, MVA, p.41) 2. Iconographic Analysis (Panofsky, MVA, p.41) 3. " " " "	1. Practical experiences: faml. with objects & events (Panofsky MVA p41) 2. Knowl. literary sources: faml. w/ specific themes and concepts (Panofsky, MVA, p. 41)
		2. Simple Iconographic Permutations of Subj. Matter (e.g. Virgin Mary) 3. Iconog. Typological Permutations of Subject Matter (e.g. Virgin Mary as Humble Madonna) 4. Indigenous Iconog. Permutations of Subj. Matter (e.g. the Humble Madonna modified by iconogr. relations which alter the conventional meaning) 5. Formal-Aesthetic Handling of Above (may contrib. to iconogr. meaning, e.g. stylized treatment of space around Humble Madonna to signify she is having visionary exper.) II. <u>NON-INTENTIONAL CONTENT</u> (may be detected in Interactive & Presentational Agents) A. Relative (contemporaneous) Historical Significance (cultural-historical phenomenal context of art work symptomatically present in it) 1. Contextual symptoms 2. Historical Impulses B. Acquired (retrospective) Historical Significance	4. Visual Content Analysis 5. " " " "	4. Ability to discover intentional patterns of non-conventional meaning expressed formally 5. Taste, aesth. sensibility, preference: subjective (personal) & objective (knowl. of taste preferences contemporary with artwork)
			A1. historical identification A2. Historiology of Consciousness B. " " " "	A1. Knowl. of cultural-histor. context/period in which artwork was prod. & viewed. A2. Knowl. of histor. causation & symptomatology regulated by evol. of consciousness. B. " " " "

Table 2.

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ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1.

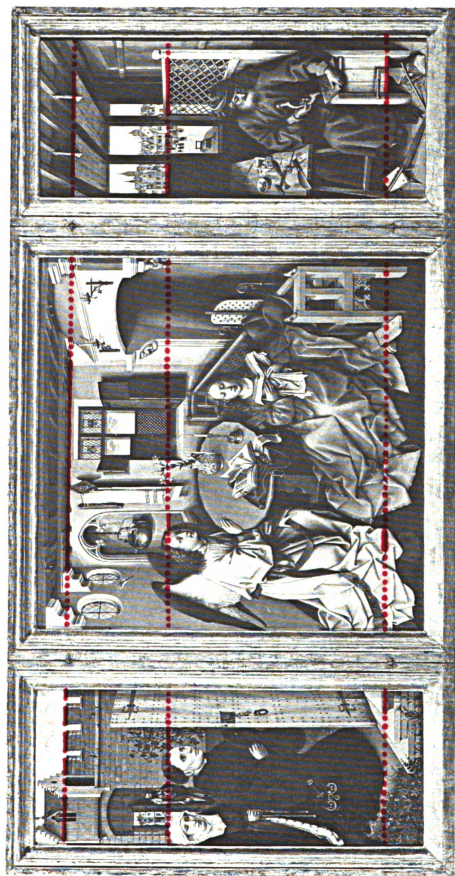


Figure 2.

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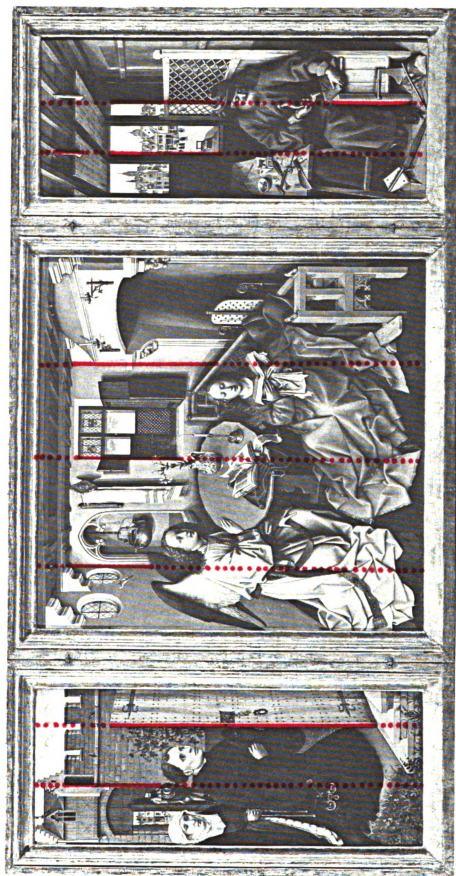


Figure 3.

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Figure 4.

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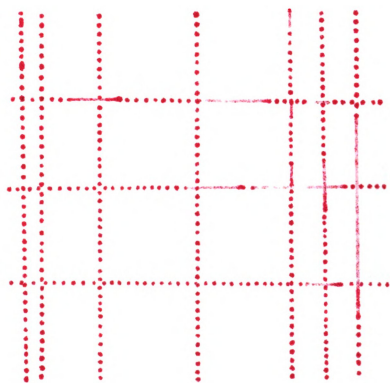
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Figure 5.



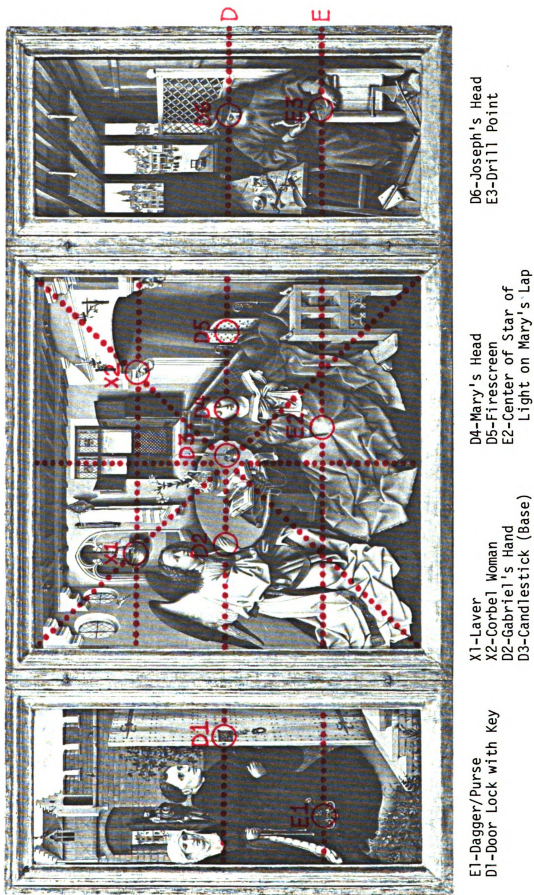
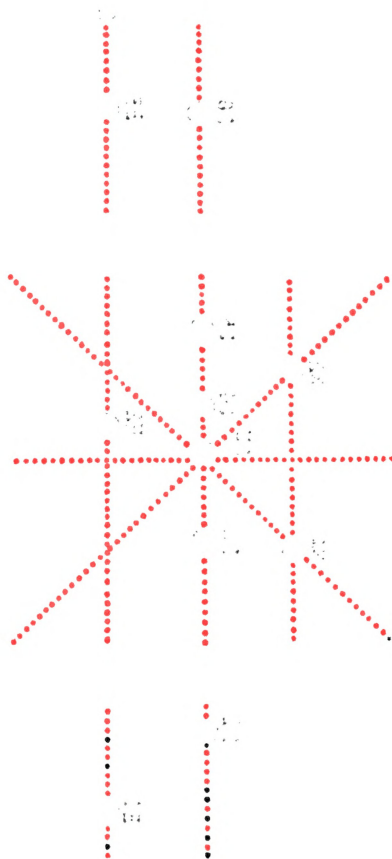


Figure 6.



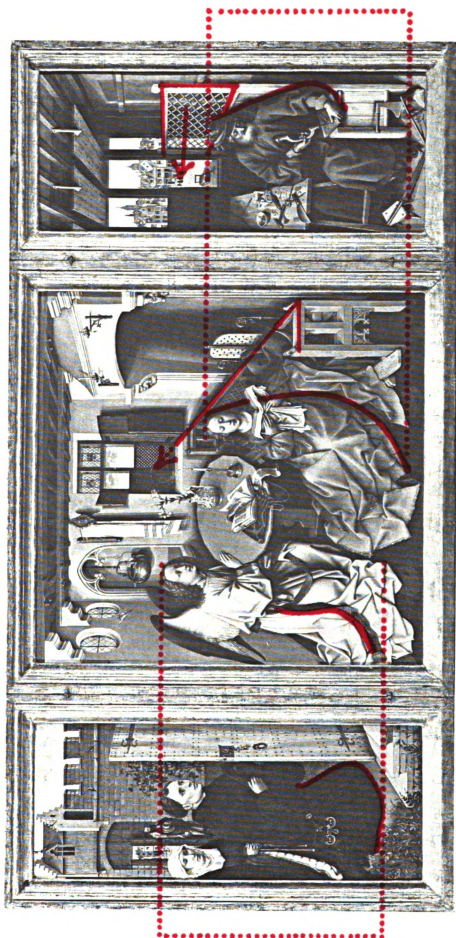


Figure 7.

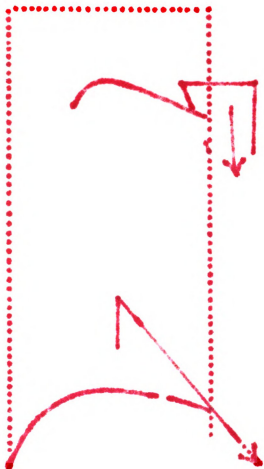




Figure 8.

%

O₂O

O₂



Figure 9.



Figure 10.

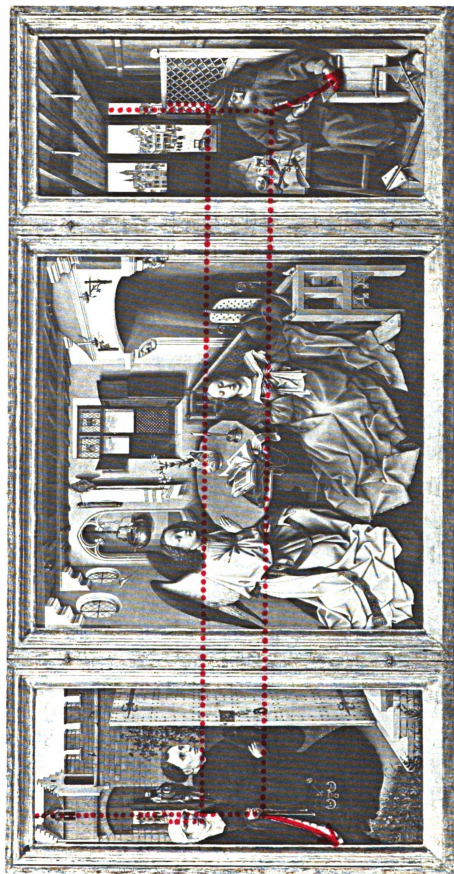


Figure 11.



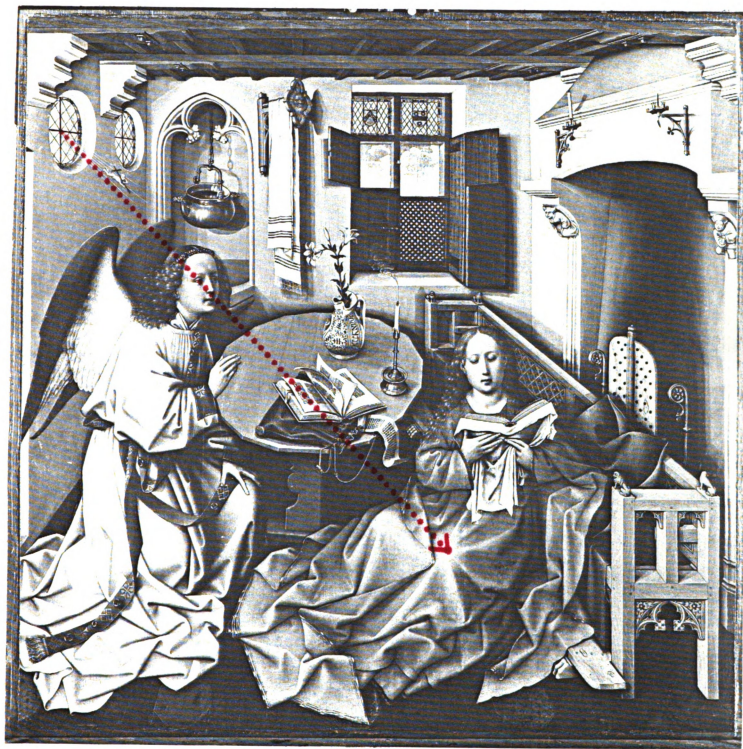


Figure 12.

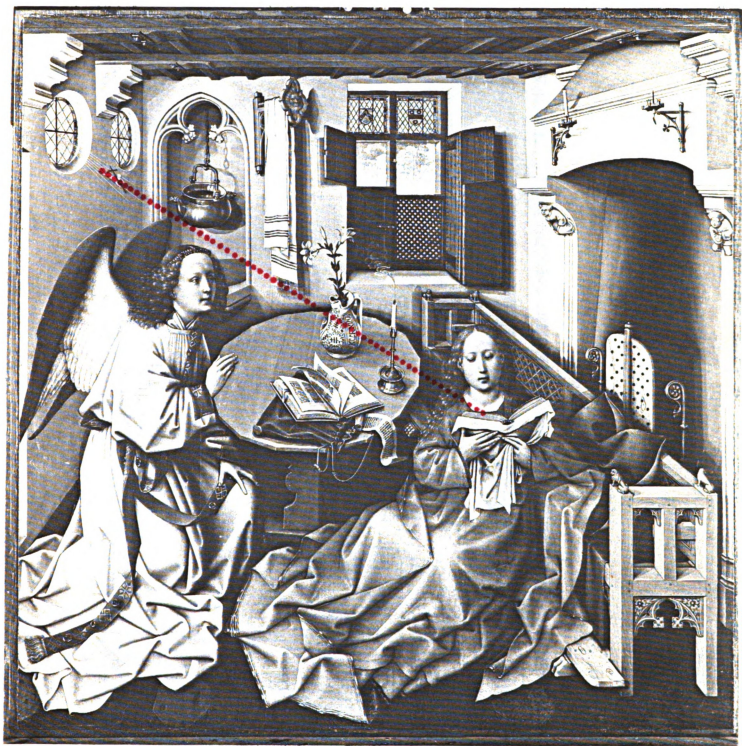
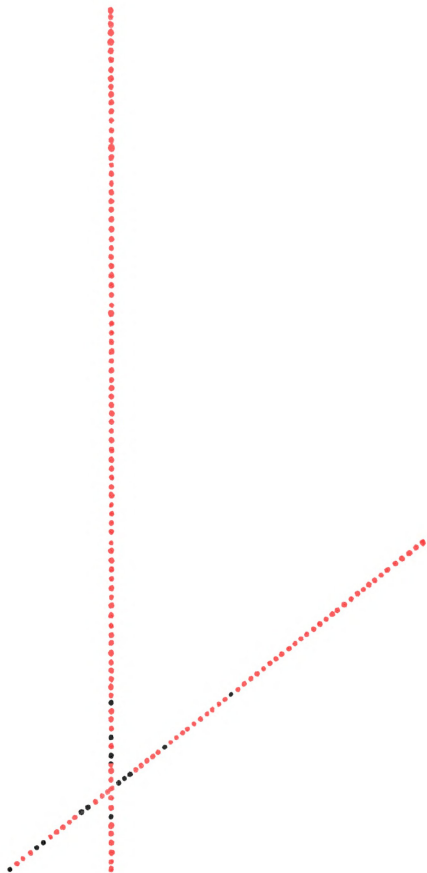


Figure 13.



Figure 14.



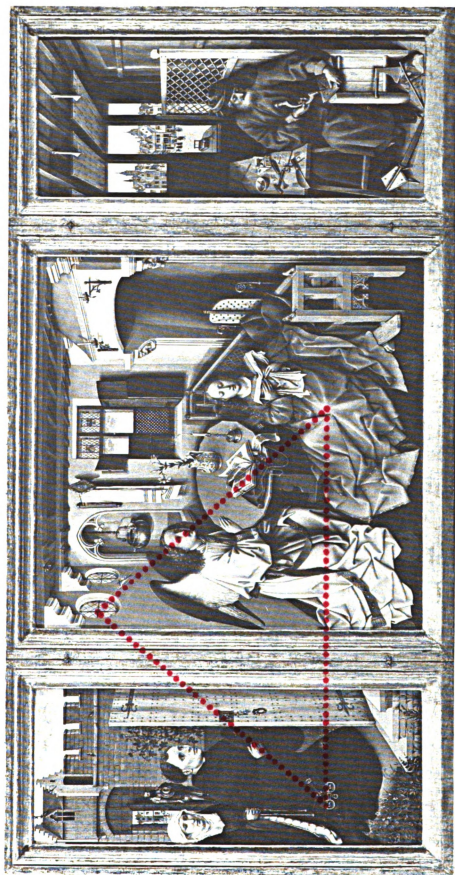
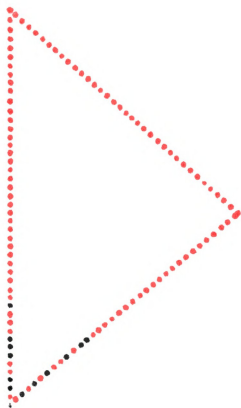


Figure 15.



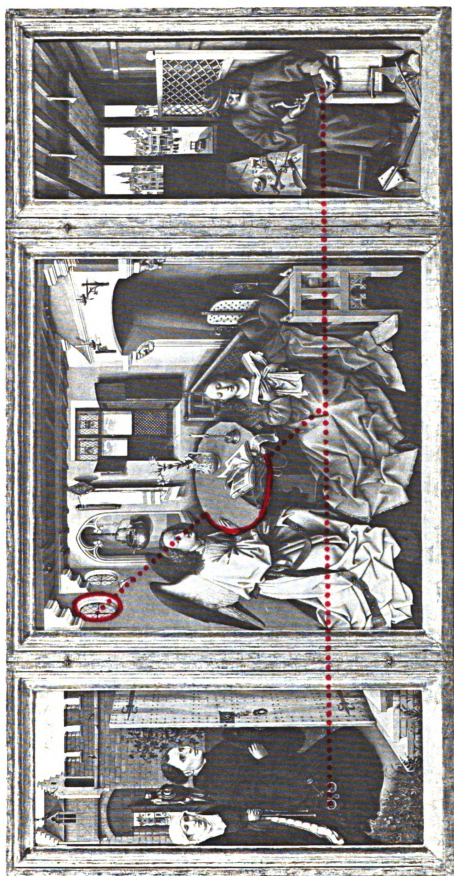


Figure 16.

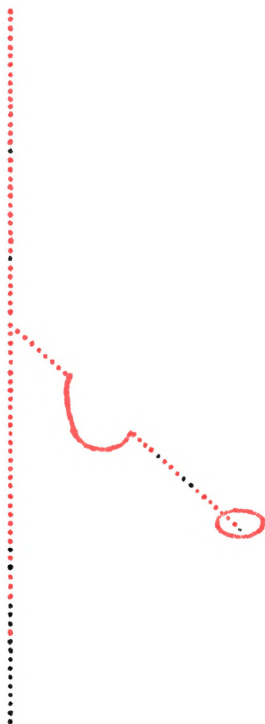




Figure 17.

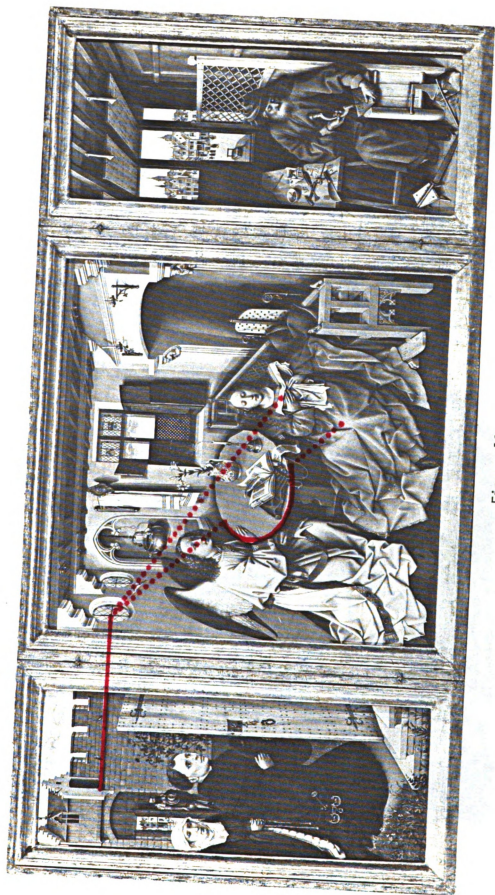
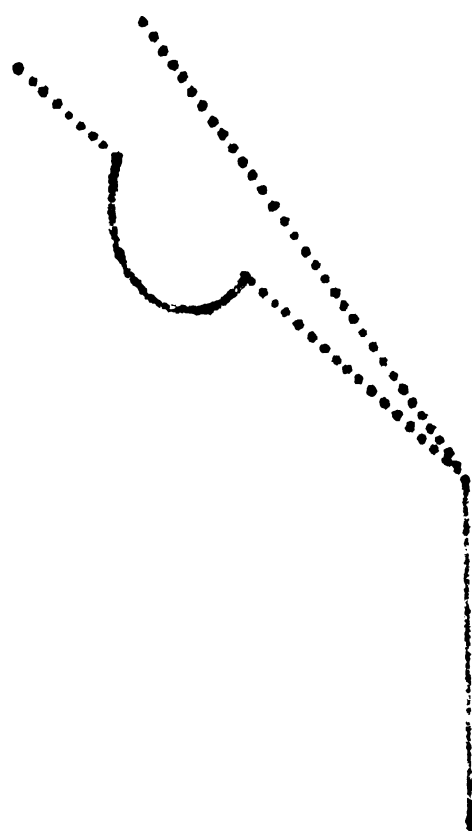


Figure 18.



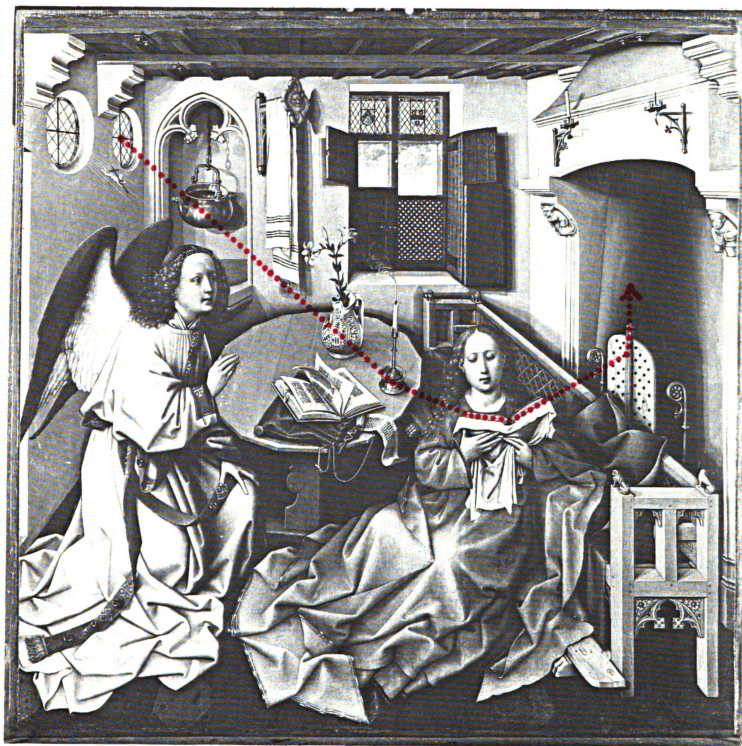


Figure 19.

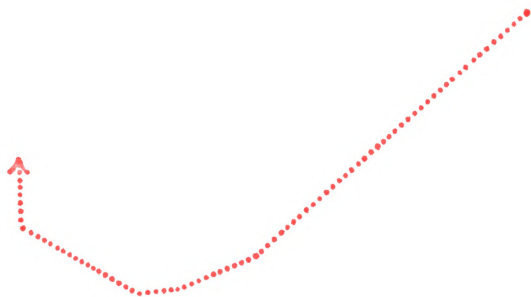




Figure 20.

Figure 21 (Giovanni Arnolfini and His Wife)
has not been reproduced for this University
Microfilms thesis copy but may be referenced
in the thesis copy at Michigan State University
or in the widely used art historical textbook,
Frederick Harrt, Art: A History of Painting,
Sculpture, Architecture (Englewood Cliffs, New
Jersey: Prentice-Hall, New York: Harry Abrams,
1976), volume 2, page 101, figure 101.



Figure 21.

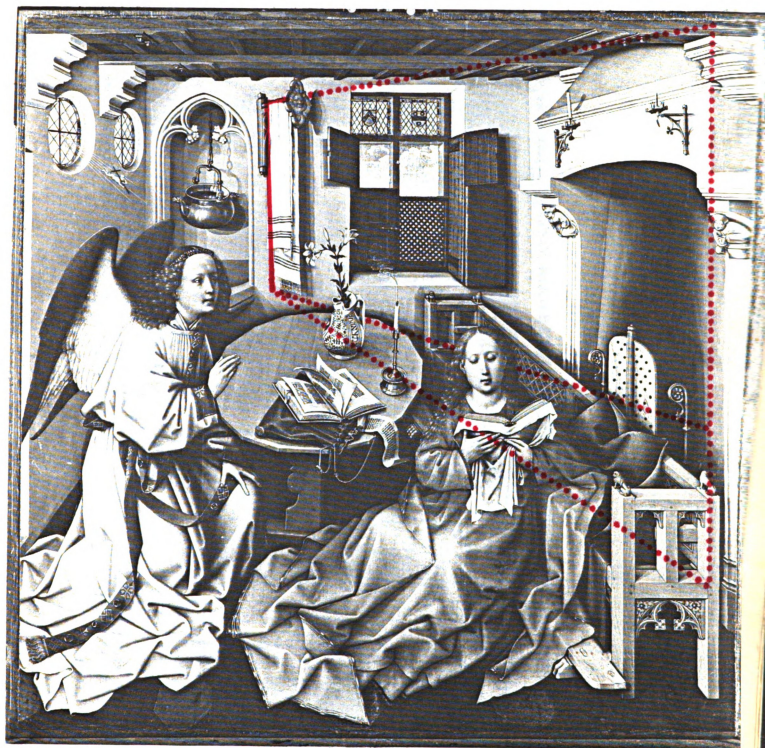


Figure 22.

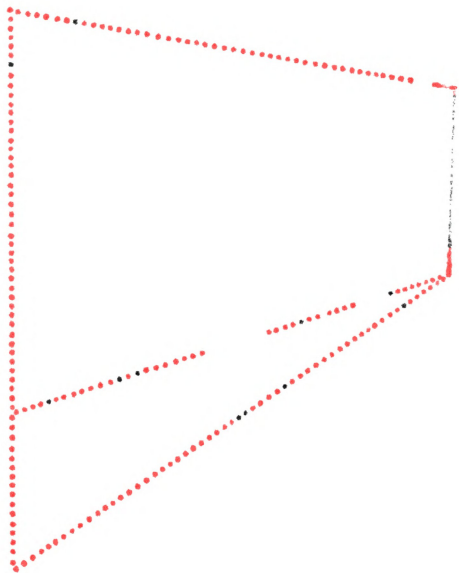
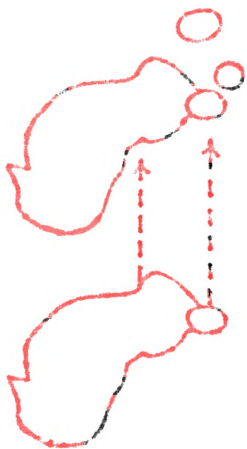




Figure 23.



O₂O

Figure 24 (Detail of the mirror in Giovanni Arnolfini and His Wife) has not been reproduced for this University Microfilms thesis copy but may be referenced in the thesis copy at Michigan State University or in the widely used art historical textbook, Frederick Harrt, Art: A History of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, New York: Harry Abrams, 1976), volume 2, page 102, figure 102.

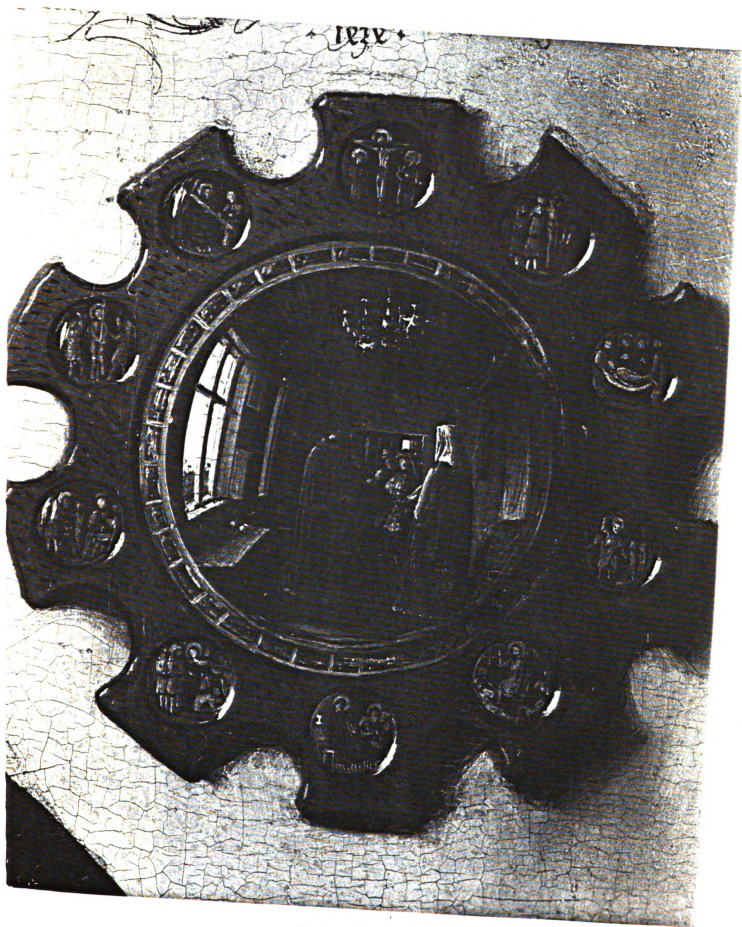


Figure 24.



Figure 25.

3A

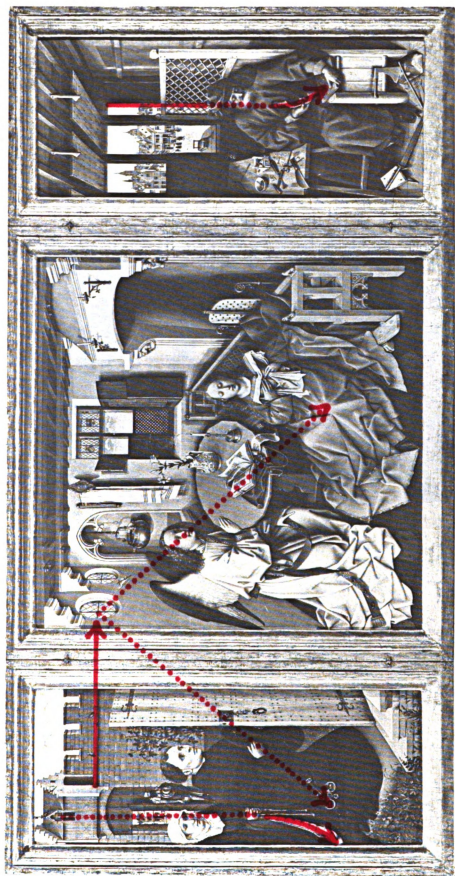


Figure 26.

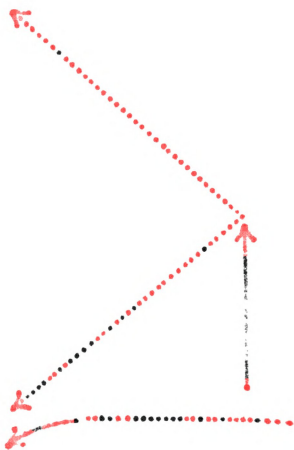




Figure 27.