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Free Beauty and Functional Perspective in Medieval Aesthetics

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Abstract: The concept of functional beauty is characterized by including an aesthetic appreciation of objects that evaluates their efficiency in terms of satisfaction of attributions. As opposed to the concept of free beauty, which includes an appreciation of perceptual qualities for their own sake, the knowledge of functions is a necessary condition for the aesthetic experience itself. The aim of this paper is to reintegrate the medieval tension between these two conceptions, which has been surprisingly neglected in contemporary aesthetic reflection. We start from the hypothesis that the modern opposition between functional beauty and free beauty is rooted in the medieval controversies concerning the role assigned to sensitive beauty. If this is true, it would open a path of interlocution for contemporary aesthetic and theological thought that, based on Patristics, runs through the whole of the Middle Ages. We focus on three tensions which constitute three turning points: (1) the categorical distinction between beauty and appropriateness through St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) and St. Isidore of Seville (*c.* 560–636), who raise the question in the tradition of Latin Patristics; (2) the opposition between aesthetic judgment based on function satisfaction or one based on the free and mere appearance of the object, as can be seen in the foundational thought of St. Basil the Great (330–379), whose influence is not only extraordinary in Greek Patristics, but also in the Latin world; finally, the controversy about practical value of aesthetic attitude, through texts by Hugh of St. Victor (1096–1141), St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) and Suger of St. Denis (1081–1151). The conclusions reveal the irreducible aesthetic value of functional beauty in medieval period and the extraordinary difficulties in accommodating a free and autonomous notion of beauty, as well as the practical benefits of its everyday treatment. In fact, the consideration of a free beauty as a good in itself persists in medieval thought, which is important not only for History of Philosophy, but also for the contemporary concern shared by Philosophy of Religion and Aesthetics about the role of sensitive beauty in the life of human being.

Keywords: functional beauty; free beauty; disinterestednesss; medieval aesthetics; aesthetic attitude

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Citation: Pradier, Adrián. 2022. Free Beauty and Functional Perspective in Medieval Aesthetics. *Religions* 13: 125. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020125

Academic Editors: Manuel Lázaro Pulido and Ricardo Piñero Moral

Received: 17 January 2022
Accepted: 24 January 2022
Published: 27 January 2022

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1. Introduction

The role of sensitive beauty in religious life constitutes a determining place for reflection on divine matters. In the specific case of Christianity, beauty is not only considered today as a gift from God for the rejoicing of mankind, in line with the Genesis story. Its contemplation is also considered as an opportunity for personal and collective salvation (Martini 2002; Ratzinger 2002), as well as an occasion for the intellectual recognition of His existence. Contemporary theologians such as Frederick Robert Tennant (1930), Mark Wynn (1999) or Richard Swinburne [1979] (Swinburne [1979] 2004) have positioned themselves in this last line. For the latter, in fact, the aesthetic argument is a particularly powerful kind of teleological argument. If there is beauty in the world from an objective point of view, but the existence of God is denied, then there is no reason to suppose that the universe should be beautiful: and yet there is beauty; on the other hand, if beauty is a projection of human beings onto nature or artificial things, then, in Swinburne's own words, "the argument could be rephrased as an argument from human beings having aesthetic sensibilities that allow them to see the universe as beautiful" (Swinburne [1979] 2004, p. 190). Thus, there would be no special reasons, under the parameters of an "uncaused" universe, for the special aesthetic sensibilities of human beings. And, certainly, these skills are more complex and sophisticated than those of other creatures. In other words, “why should nature be so constituted that it is receptive to an aesthetic interpretation?” (Wynn 1999, p. 16).

But, what is the nature of this beauty? What is its meaning? What is its scope and object? Moreover, how is it to be appreciated and under what criteria is this appreciation to be made? In reality, the insistence of contemporary theology on this surplus of beauty rests on the traditional philosophical topic of the order of the universe. But there are natural things that do not require the recognition of their specific causal or mechanical order to be considered beautiful. What is the theological meaning of this non-intellectual appreciation and, therefore, not subject to concepts, limited to a certain rejoicing in sight, sound or touch? Is it the fruit of ignorance—a kind of simulacrum of the authentic appreciation of the world, based on reasons and/or recognition of functions—or is there, in fact, a non-functional beauty and, therefore, free and disinterested?

The contemporary concept of functional beauty is defined by an aesthetic appreciation in terms of efficient fulfillment of attributions. The knowledge of these functions authenticates in a way the value of one’s own experience and intensifies it or, at least, makes it more complex by recognizing several strata. The tension between functional beauty and free beauty is a particularly important issue in aesthetic reflection, and the discussion has recently been revived in contemporary debate, especially after the publication of *Functional Beauty* (2008). Their authors, Glenn Parsons and Allen Carlson, bring to the table the contemporary tensions between the two perspectives after a brief outline of the most influential historical positions. In this sense, a glance at medieval aesthetics is enough to reveal an enormous number of valid interlocutors who, however, have been surprisingly forgotten or inexplicably overlooked (Parsons and Carlson 2008, pp. 1–30). In fact, one of the most influential principles of medieval aesthetic thought expresses that the adequacy of design to its intended purpose makes the object correlatively beautiful. Such a proposition admits at least two perspectives: a weak version, whereby there are no functions whose satisfaction in terms of efficiency is not at the same time beautiful; and a strong version, whereby there is no beauty that does not satisfy a series of functions for the sake of a specific end, to the point that something is beauty only and only if it is useful or convenient for something else. In contrast to this consideration, there are objects that seem to resist this criterion, and yet their beauty is maintained. The following examples serve as illustrations and, simultaneously, as a leitmotif.

In 1144, the renovation work on the mighty abbey church of St. Denis was completed, which included a new architectural disposition and a considerable increase of its sumptuary goods. Abbot Suger, who had commanded the reform, ordered to engrave on the upper panel of the doors some verses that synthesized the bases of his new iconographic program. The following fragment is particularly interesting: “All you who seek to extol the fame of these doors,/Admire neither the gold nor the expense, but their craftsmanship” (Suger of St. Denis 2018, p. 97; 1867, p. 188)[1]. The text has something of an unnecessary excuse, which could reveal a pang of conscience. And it is no wonder. St. Bernard, the influential abbot of Clairvaux, had finished his *Apologia ad Guillelmum abbatem* a few years before (ca. 1122). The Cistercian reform implied a rejection of all sensitive pleasures, especially for those who embraced the contemplative life. In the very words of St. Bernard himself, “whatever attracts by its beauty, whatever pleases by its sound, whatever intoxicates by its perfume, whatever flatters by its taste, whatever delights by its touch” is considered “as garbage” (St. Bernard of Clairvaux 1854a, col. 915a)[2]. So, what interest could there be in the pursuit of sensitive beauty through certain textures and material objects, such as gold, silver, precious stones, stained glass, paintings or sculptures?

Although the *Apologia* was not expressly addressed to Suger (Reilly 2011, pp. 295–96), and taking no care of the controversies surrounding the overspending on abbatial pomp and luxury, there are some signs of an aesthetic tension between them: while Suger calls for a judgment according to the aesthetic legality displayed by the object, the latter wonders about the usefulness of so much expenditure and effort that could be harnessed for other, nobler ends[3]. There are two completely different attitudes that openly oppose each other: one, aesthetic, focused on the qualities of the object in its mere appearance before us; the other, practical, concerned with an evaluation of the intended purposes and, according to them, the function that the object fulfills. In summary, “when a man keeps practical advantages in mind, his experience ceases to be aesthetic” (Tatarkiewicz 1980, p. 332). And the final question is: what redemptive function fulfills a free beauty whose enjoyment constitutes an end in itself?

The purpose of this article is to analyze, in medieval aesthetic thought, the main strata of reflection on beauty and its functional perspective. I also intend to highlight the importance of Patristic and medieval sensibility in the pre-modern conceptualization of free beauty, in order to enable a path of interlocution with authors of the past that will be beneficial not only for contemporary Aesthetics, but also for Philosophy of Religion and Theology.

The text is divided in three tensions that constitute turning points. They are not the only ones, but because of their degree of influence, they allow a methodological approach in that they serve as genealogical landmarks.

In the first section, we focus on the categorical distinction between “beauty” (*pulchritudo*) and “appropriateness” (*aptitudo*). Augustine’s position on this matter have a foundational character, insofar as he establishes its two basic aspects: first, an object can be evaluated aesthetically according to the fulfillment of its assigned functions—i.e., from a heteronomous perspective, as well as, second, under a purely aesthetic criterion that focuses attention on its mere appearance—i.e., from an autonomous perspective. On the basis of such a distinction, Augustine introduces an appreciation of the beautiful that places it above the strictly functional dimension. In other words, its pleasure is more excellent, inasmuch as it is relative to nothing but itself.

The second tension is unleashed in the homiletic genre on the six days of Creation. The problem lies in the practical risk involved in enabling a perceptual enjoyment of beauty without considering other criteria. On the contrary, the functional assessment, especially if purposes are noble and adequate, does not arouse any suspicion. Under this perspective, St. Basil the Great establishes that the principle that governs Creation does not consist in perceptual enjoyment, but resides in the very creative art—by the way, an Aristotelian idea: “the principle of works that come from art is art itself” (St. Basil the Great 1968, p. 6c; 1857a, col. 16a)[4]. Perceptual beauty is an effect, derived from a successful application of design: its admiration would be tantamount to a surface evaluation. In this line of thought there is not a distinction in terms of opposition or separation, but rather of conditionality: there can only be beauty where there is an adequate satisfaction of functions for the sake of a greater end.

However, even if the appreciation of external beauty were the spectator’s response to his or her inability to know the intricacies of design, the question about function of sensitive beauty and its place in Creation would be pertinent: first because, regardless of the mystery in determining the proper role of each created thing, God does not play dice with the universe: in this way, there are no “accidental functions”, that is, functions that do not belong to beauty itself (Parsons and Carlson 2008, p. 66; Wright 1973, p. 141); secondly, because there are aesthetic objects that do not satisfy any function and yet they summon our gaze. They constitute pleasurable beauties that do not refer to anything, whose perceptual purpose seems to lie in its mere happening. There is a contracture in St. Basil’s thinking. While illustrating the purposes of each thing according to the dictates of the biblical account, he does not manage to contain his own aesthetic enthusiasm in the face of those events that escape clearly from functionalization. If they are pleasurable, but do not fulfill any purpose in their strictly perceptual dimension; and if we know, at the same time, that everything has to perform a task in the divine plan, what is their proper function for the sake of the ultimate goal of human redemption?

The third and final tension revolves around the aesthetic attitude. One of the authors who has invested most effort in clearing up this question has been Francis J. Kovach, for whom the medieval reflection on beauty, in keeping with its modern conceptualization, presents three elementary properties: first, its desirable character for its own sake; then its delightful reception *per se*; and, almost as a corollary, its qualification as disinterested (Kovach 1974, p. 62). Beauty cannot be judged, therefore, nor can its pleasure be experienced according to a heteronomous criterion. Sensitive beauty is an irreducible fact in human experience and its proper function seems to lie in its capacity to summon and delight the gaze: "it calls (καλοῦν) all to itself, whence it is called beauty" (κάλλος) (Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite 1999, p. 138; 1857, col. 701c–d)[5]. This leads to a finalistic conceptualization of beauty as an end in itself which is opposed to a whole tradition that insists on the opposite view.

However, just as some authors consider the liberation of beautiful forms as a privileged way for contemplative ascent, others, on the contrary, show a resistance to this purely perceptive experimentation of beauty. St. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote in this regard that "those of us who have come out of the people" are who properly think about delightful beauty "as garbage" (*ut stercora*) (St. Bernard of Clairvaux 1854a, col. 915a). But this consideration is not because that really is, but because it is the result of a hard and conscious decision: they are who "have decided" (*arbitrati sumus*) on it. In line with this, the exhaustive list of pleasures that Bernard renounces reveals a lively appreciation of them and "even a note of regret, all the more vigorous because of the energy of his asceticism" (Eco [1959] 1986, p. 7). But if there is a sensitive beauty, and it can be appreciated irrespective of private, insatiable, selfish interests, it may be possible to turn its enjoyment into an occasion to strive for one's own Redemption. This does not mean that cleaning the path of beauty can be done in any way. Medieval attempts to solve this problem achieved such levels of aesthetic, terminological and conceptual sophistication that, to a large extent, they anticipate modern positions. This is the case of Hugh of St. Victor, whose reflections will allow us to see how he was able to accommodate this perceptual, free and disinterested beauty on four fronts: theological, anthropological, methodological and contemplative.

2. First Tension: "Appropriateness" (*aptitudo*) and "Beauty" (*pulchritudo*)

There is a certain consensus in admitting that St. Augustine was the first Christian author who clearly opposed both aesthetic spheres (Tatarkiewicz 1970, p. 51): what is "appropriate", "fit" or "suit" (*aptum*) for something as opposed to what is simply "beautiful" (*pulchrum*). He himself indicates in his *Confessions* that he wrote a work in his youth entitled *De pulchro et apto*—lost today—devoted to the categorical distinction between (1) that which pleases according to its proportional accommodation to the whole —for example, a part in relation to the body (*pars corporis ad universum suum*)—or by its functional suitability in relation to its design—such as the foot to the shoe (*calceamentum ad pedem*); and (2) that which can only be loved for its own sake, independently of any other interests that the object itself might satisfy, even those relating to utility or purpose (St. Augustine of Hippo 1953a, pp. 90–91; 1841a, col. 701)[6]. This difference does not imply the lack of a basis for aesthetic satisfaction of fitness: it only means that the pleasure aroused by sensitive beauty is absolute and therefore not relative to anything else but itself (Tatarkiewicz 1970, p. 51; Plazaola [1973] 2007, p. 52).

The question, however, is more complex than *prima facie* (Beardsley 1966, pp. 92–93). The difference drawn by Augustine introduces a new problematic when considering (a) the proportional fitness and (b) the functional fitness as equivalent variants of the same category. In fact, the aesthetic criterion expressed by the "appropriateness" of an object can refer to completely different contents depending on what (a) and (b) refer to simultaneously: if this is so, it becomes clear that the proportional accommodation of something does not have to coincide with its functional suitability. In other words, the proportional fit of the footwear to the foot does not necessarily have to attend to its usefulness, and this for purely aesthetic reasons. For example, it is obvious that Yves Saint-Laurent's gold-heeled patent leather Opyum sandals have to fit the wearer's foot, which requires an appropriate proportion; but, at the same time, it is a shoe in which the function of walking is less relevant than that of posing, to the point that there is no functional convenience other than aesthetics. They are, of course, very beautiful shoes, but useless for moving around. In this sense, if criterion (a) indicates the idea of proportion as a necessary condition of appropriateness, and (b) reflects the necessary condition of an appropriate design, (a) can sacrifice (b) and, therefore, be beautiful independently of its usefulness, but (b) cannot sacrifice (a): for something to be useful, it has to keep a minimum proportion.

Far from considering his youthful ideas a thing of the past, a careful reading of texts reveals that St. Augustine showed fidelity to some of his earlier doctrines. We know that approximately twelve years after the publication of the *Confessions* he wrote an epistle to his friend Flavius Marcellinus (†413), who had presided over the Conference of Carthage (411) held shortly before. In response to the pastoral help requested by Marcellinus himself and in the midst of the Donatist controversy (Lamirande 1972; Buenacasa Pérez 2015), St. Augustine addresses the thorny question of doctrinal continuity between the Old and New Testaments. Thus, against the thesis that what was previously well done can only be unduly corrected, St. Augustine opposes the idea that changes can be made according to reason and occasion. Using several examples, such as the farmer who performs some tasks in summer and other different ones in winter, when not directly opposed, he also adds, among the list of examples, the question beauty and appropriateness:

> [...], beauty is looked upon and praised for its own sake, and its contrary is ugliness and unsightliness. But fitness, whose opposite is unfitness, depends on something else, and is, in a sense, fastened to it; it is not prized for its own value, but for that to which it is joined. Doubtless, the words ‘suitable’ and ‘unsuitable’ are synonyms, or are so considered. Let us now apply what we said before to this point under discussion. The sacrifice which God had commanded was fitting in those early times, but now it is not so. Therefore, He prescribed another one, fitting for this age, since He knew much better than man what is suitably adapted to each age, and, being the unchangeable Creator as well as Ruler of the world of change, He knows as well what and when to give, to add to, to take away, to withdraw, to increase, or to diminish, until the beauty of the entire world, of which the individual parts are suitable each for its own time, swells, as it were, into a mighty song of some unutterable musician, and from thence the true adorers of God rise to the eternal contemplation of His face, even in the time of faith. (St. Augustine of Hippo 1953b, vol. 3, pp. 38–39; 1841b, col. 527)[7]

The text reveal a certain bio-bibliographical continuity in his aesthetic thought. First of all, St. Augustine supports the idea that beauty implies an aesthetic appreciation free of private, functional or utilitarian commitments, as opposed to appropriateness, which, although aesthetically significant, responds to a norm that is not its own but imposed; secondly, and in line with this, there is a pre-modern understanding of the autonomy of beauty—attributed, in his example, to the beauty of world ages (*universo saeculi pulchritudo*)—and a heteronomous vision, which makes beauty relative to the fulfillment of a specific role in the whole—each of the temporal chapters where the old rules seem to contradict the present ones, but whose timeliness in the light of the time as a whole is appropriate (*cuius particulae sunt quae suis quibusque temporibus apta sunt*). This approach does not exclude the idea that functional aesthetic criterion may not be pleasing precisely because of its fitness within the whole. It is only indicated that the theorization of beauty itself is rooted in its own legality deployment: beauty seems to be autonomous and to operate according to its own normative; the appropriate, the useful, the congruent, the convenient, etc., are located in the territory of heteronomy: “I defined the beautiful as that which is attractive in itself, and the fitting as that which is attractive because suited to something” (St. Augustine of Hippo 1953a, p. 94; 1841a, col. 701; Rey Altuna 1945, p. 31; Svoboda 1933, p. 144)[8].

This understanding of beauty is also seen in his aesthetic consideration of the human body, where "beauty was a more important consideration than utility [...]" (Hunter 2012, p. 362). The exactness in the congruence of all parts and the equality with which everything fits together lead him to think that there is nothing in the human body that satisfies the criterion of utility and at the same time not that of external beauty. Moreover, it is not possible to decide whether, at the very moment of Creation, there was more concern for the aforementioned utility than for external beauty. In fact, there are indications that would sanction this second possibility. Functionality, when it exists, is rather a supervening property of the beautiful[9]. There is, in this regard, a well-known argument about the strictly ornamental character of the beard: if it had a function, it would also be present on female faces, which, due to their greater fragility, would enjoy greater protection[10]. In this sense, there is a functional appreciation that is certainly pleasing. But there is also a disinterested one, much more intense, which is able to free contemplation from the constriction of the design-function-end triad:

> If, therefore, of all those members which are exposed to our view, there is certainly not one in which beauty is sacrificed to utility, while there are some which serve no purpose but only beauty, I think it can readily be concluded that in the creation of the human body comeliness was more regarded than necessity. In truth, necessity is a transitory thing; and the time is coming when we shall enjoy one another's beauty without any lust, a condition which will specially redound to the praise of the Creator, who, as it is said in the psalm, has "put on praise and comeliness". (St. Augustine of Hippo 1954, p. 487; 1841c, col. 791)[11]

In the diffusion of this idea one of the most authoritative voices was that of St. Isidore of Seville, especially after the circulation of his influential *Sententiae*. He introduced a major change in the original Augustinian approach: "fitness" and "beauty" now became the elements in which "appropriateness" (*decor*) consists (St. Isidore of Seville 1850a, col. 551d)[12]. According to the very definition given in his *Differentiae*, *decor* refers to the "external aspect of the body" (*decor ad corporis speciem*); *decus*, which literally could be translated as "decorum," "refers to the soul" (*ad animum refertur*) (St. Isidore of Seville 1850b, col. 27b), that is, what is appropriate from a practical point of view. Therefore, "appropriability", since it refers first and foremost to the "visible aspect" (*species*) of something, is then articulated in two well differentiated dimensions: one of them is autonomous and is deployed according to its own rules; the other, however appreciated it may be, is always oriented towards something that suits it and, in short, whose deployment is carried out according to an improper rule. This categorical division at the very heart of aesthetic valuation does not close off the aesthetic appreciation of utensils such as clothing (*vestimentum*) or goods such as food (*victus*). It only indicates that the judgment will be for heteronomous reasons, that is, to the extent that objects are accommodated for something else (*ad aliud* [...] *accomodata*) (St. Isidore of Seville 1850a, col. 551d).

3. Second Tension: God's Judgment According to Ends and Man's Judgment According to Beauty

In parallel to St. Augustine, St. Basil the Great has a completely different conception of sensitive beauty, where the functional criterion clearly prevails over perceptual values. Regarding the beauty of nature, St. Basil considered that God does not create things simply beautiful, but always with a utility that frees us from the pressure of perceptual pleasures for the sake of a higher goal: thus, for example, God, who originally created roses without thorns and therefore simply beautiful, added them "to make us feel that pain is very close to pleasure and to remind us of our sin, which condemned the earth to produce thorns and thistles" (St. Basil the Great 1968, p. 45a; 1857a, col. 105b–c)[13]. The beauty of things is only appreciable when it is associated with the useful, or when it derives from it, which neutralizes any autonomy by imposing a specific function for each object—in this case, to arouse prudence or generate pain—for the sake of a higher end—to remember the sinful condition of man. But, at the same time, Basil himself wrote in the *Asketikon* that, in the times before the Fall of Adam, God “provided [man] for his delight the ineffable beauties of Paradise” (St. Basil the Great 2005, p. 165; 1857b, col. 913b).

We find St. Basil’s reflection on beauty primarily in the *Homiliae in Hexaëmeron*, where he interprets the story about the six days of Creation, and establishes the radical difference between both human and divine aesthetic judgment. While man stops at the delight of appearances, God’s estimation is made attending to perfection (ἐκτελεσθὲν) and usefulness or profiting (εὐχρεστία), both as regards the parts of any creature, and their respective role in the whole. God’s creative action is carried out with the same thoroughness of artisans: beforehand, He made “a manifest design of the creatures” after which, and only then, “approved” (ἀπεδέξατο) each of them according to its function (St. Basil the Great 1968, pp. 32a–b; 1857a, col. 76c–d)[14]. St. Basil thus conceives God as a skilled craftsman (τεχνίτης), for before proceeding to the final assemblage “he knows and appreciates the beauty of each, since his thought is directed toward their end” (St. Basil the Great 1968, p. 32b–c; 1857a, col. 77a)[15]. Man gets only a vague glimpse of the creative process, and often only when it is already completed; the expert, on the other hand, is able to anticipate every decision and foresee whether or not there will be suitability, adequacy and harmony, “consonance and splendor” (εὐαρμοστία καὶ ἀγλαίη) (Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite 1999, p. 138; 1857, col. 701c): “If, indeed, a single hand, an eye, any fragment of the remains of a statue were to lie separately, it would not appear beautiful to anyone.” On the contrary, when each part is put in its place the effect of “proportion” (ἀναλογία) is so powerful that the outcome becomes “familiar” (γνώριμον) even to laymen (St. Basil the Great 1968, p. 32b; 1857a)[16].

The most famous example of this doctrine is found in the fourth homily of the *Hexaëmeron*, dedicated entirely to the gathering of waters under the firmament. The beauty of the sea is not judged on the basis of its outward charm, but “from the reason that has directed the creative work” (St. Basil the Great 1968, p. 38e; 1857a, col. 92c)[17]. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the satisfaction of the ultimate goal—to guarantee life on earth—through the fulfillment of its functions: (1) to cause the subterranean currents that moisten the earth and provide it with the water needed by creatures; (2) to host all the rivers, since they all flow into it without its capacity being overflowed; (3) to be the source of rain; and, lastly, (4) to allow the export of surpluses between the most distant parts of the earth and thus supply those who are most in need (St. Basil the Great 1968, pp. 38e–39d; 1857a, cols. 92c–93b). Only after the effective fulfillment of each attribution, “then the sea is beautiful”, also, “for God” (St. Basil the Great 1968, p. 39b; 1857a, col. 92d)[18]. World, in conclusion, is a “work of art” (ὁ κόσμος τεχνικόν ἐστι) (St. Basil the Great 1968, p. 7d; 1857a, col. 17b). And it is this consideration that makes possible its aesthetic contemplation. The “Sovereign Craftman” (Μόνον [...] τεχνίτην) “arranges and fits together all the parts, forms a regular whole in perfect agreement with itself, which in turn generates a harmonious global symphony” (St. Basil the Great 1968, p. 8a; 1857a)[19].

The functional perspective is definitely more valuable in St. Basil’s thought, where knowledge of the function—or, moreover, final purposes—modifies the perceptual qualities and resituates them within the aesthetic experience, which becomes it simultaneously more authentic and complete. Glenn Parsons and Allen Carlson not only agree with St. Basil on this idea, but in fact they also agree that “our knowledge of these functions [...] need not be gained from simply looking at the object”. Their example is based on a complex machine whose operation would be within the reach of a few individuals. It is evident that such artifacts can be “functionally beautiful by those who understand how they fulfil [their] function” (Parsons and Carlson 2008, p. 160)[20], while the rest of us would have to limit ourselves to a superficial assessment of design. Something similar happens with Creation, hence in St. Basil’s opinion only a few, the experts, judge sensitive beauty as an admirable excrescence, while others see it as something appreciable in itself. From this perspective, the valuation of merely external beauty would only scratch the surface of things.

And yet, the appreciation of the world under this point of view does not alter the persistence of a primary and genuine aesthetic enjoyment. This is aroused by strictly sensorial stimuli, and does not collaborate at all in a chain of function satisfaction. Such events seem to have no other purpose than their own occurrence, from which they attract our gaze, our hearing, our smell and our touch. Even more: if experiencing these free beauties is, from God's point of view, the last necessary effect of created things, it constitutes for mankind one of its first significant experiences of the world itself.. This confirms the presence of two perspectives in the aesthetic assessment of—same—things: the first subordinates the appreciation of created things to the performance of their tasks, which surpasses all human capacity and understanding: "The Creator does not look with His eyes at the beauty of creatures", but "contemplates them with inexpressible wisdom" (St. Basil the Great 1968, p. 38d; 1857a, col. 92b)[21]. The other approach delays in sensitive beauty to lie in it. And so, in parallel to the exhaustive account of the sea's functions, not even St. Basil himself manages to escape that meaningless, endless, objectless charm, which obstinately refuses to be inserted into a chain of functions[22]:

> Sweet indeed is the sight of the reverberating sea when calm prevails; sweet it is also when, the surface stirred by gentle breezes, it offers to the eye a purple and cyan color; when instead of violently striking the neighboring coasts, it seems to honor them with peaceful embraces. (St. Basil the Great 1968, p. 38d; 1857a, col. 92b)[23]

The rich descriptive nuances allow the assumption of a previous and careful contemplation before the ocean; a long and fruitful meditation that Basil has been able to condense in a few lines, in order to present the threads in which this liberated beauty is woven: such is the sea in a purely aesthetic perspective, an object of diffuse limits, always in continuous and lively movement, varied and irregular, but constant in its forms, an ideal example of endless finality. Faced with this, in Kantian terms, "the imagination can play in an unstudied and purposive way" and, perhaps for this reason, "we are never tired of looking at it" (Kant 2000, p. 126). And just as a functional perspective of the sea is aesthetically adequate, the perceptual experience of such a mysteriously harmonious ensemble of reverberations, colors and undulating shapes also becomes irreducible: it is just an event, a happening, a fact that captivates the most reluctant spectator in the gentle prison of a "sweet vision" (ἡδὺ [...] θέαμα), where it is not possible to impose any prescription on what it should be (Kant 2000, p. 114): it would not make sense. It seems that knowledge of functions is not capable of neutralizing "certain very common appreciative responses to nature—responses of a less intellective, more visceral sort, which we might refer to as 'being moved by nature'" (Carroll 1993, p. 245).

The tension between the fulfillment of functions and the —*avant la lettre*— purposeless purposiveness of sensitive beauty is resolved as soon as reveals itself as an occasion of ascent from visible to invisible (St. Basil the Great 1968, p. 7d; 1857a, col. 17b)[24]. St. Basil thinks that sensitive beauty can arouse in soul a kind of "thinking through analogies" (ἀναλογίζομαι), to facilitate the recognition that there is God and that God is. This doctrine allows us to understand at the same time "numerous pages of Greek Fathers and, in particular, the commentaries on Genesis and the works on the Hexameron" (de Bruyne 1955, p. 132). And it is also part of the same theoretical atmosphere that draws attention to external qualities of created things—order, equilibrium and regularity—in order to induce belief in a supreme and operative intellection behind the fabric of the world. This can be seen in the works of other influential Greek Fathers, especially Origen and St. Athanasius[25]. Nevertheless, the doctrinal legitimacy for this form of reasoning was already endorsed in the deuterocanonical book of *Wisdom*. Through contemplation of the sensitive order—in particular, its greatness (τό μέγεθος) and beauty (τό κάλλος)—it can be inferred, "by means of analogies" (ἀναλόγως), the existence of God[26]. This clarifies an aesthetic path that ends up being mystical:

> Let us glorify the excellent workman for all that is wisely and skillfully created; and from the beauty of visible things let us form an idea of that which surpasses all beauty; and from the greatness of these sensitive and limited bodies let us

> analogically conceive of that which has no limits and is above greatness and whose power surpasses all thought.
>
> For, although we are ignorant of the nature of the created, that which, in general, falls under our senses is so marvelous that even the keenest spirit reveals itself incapable, before the smallest of the things of the world, either of studying it as it should, or of rendering due praise to the Creator. (St. Basil the Great 1968, pp. 11d–11e; 1857a, p. 28a–b)[27]

In the end, sensitive beauty constitutes a privileged door, but indeed it does not guarantee access to His ontological intimacies: regardless of virtues of the analogical path, "the created material beyond its circumscribed materiality will lead the believer towards knowledge that God is. However, it can never lead to knowledge of what God is" (Karahan 2012, p. 195). There are, in this respect, two insurmountable limits for this analogical type of reasoning: on the one hand, man's own impotence to sustain with his intellect, much less with his eyes, the unfathomable power and immensity of God, a commonplace in many biblical[28] and patristic passages[29]. The idea is concretized in the maxim that "to see Him and live are incompatible things" (von Balthasar [1952] 2000, p. 57), however distressing it may be for the seeker of the source of all creation. But there is, on the other hand, the stubborn limitation of created things, which reveals their incapacity to contain the immeasurable vastness of the divine. Basil himself indicates that greatness, with which analogical thinking begins, is limited by the very corporeality of things (St. Basil the Great 1968, p. 11d; 1857a, col. 28a)[30]. For this very reason the visible world is a "school" (παιδευτήριον), rather than an end in itself, to exercise in contemplation, even that which freely and disinterestedly attends to colors, shades and meaningless perceptual forms (St. Basil the Great 1968, p. 6d–e; 1857a, col. 16c)[31]; but it is also a border and a customs office, where it is necessary to declare what is being carried and leave it to continue the journey.

4. Third Tension: Sensible Curiosity According to Private Interests and Aesthetic Meditation According to Disinterestedness

Reflection on aesthetic attitude constitutes the third and last scenario where we can verify the conflict, genuinely medieval, between both functional and heteronomous perspective of beauty, and its conceptualization as free and autonomous. As in other topics proper to Aesthetics, this is also a modern concept. Nevertheless, recognized specialists argue its presence in medieval thought, to the point of being a common place of reflection (Maritain 1920, pp. 36–37 and 131–37; de Bruyne [1946] 1998, pp. 512–21; Schapiro 1947; Tatarkiewicz 1980, pp. 315–16; Kovach 1974). The notion refers to the possibility of isolating (Langfeld 1920, pp. 48–52) or intensifying (Osborne 1959, p. 159) the aesthetic experience in itself, taking no care of other cognitive, personal and/or practical interests (Hospers 1969, p. 3). In Jerome Stolnitz's very terms, aesthetic attitude is a "disinterested and sympathetic attention to and contemplation of any object of awareness whatever, for its own sake alone" (Stolnitz 1960, p. 35)[32]. It should be clarified that positioning oneself in an aesthetic attitude does not imply the emergence of the experience itself; and, vice versa, its experience does not necessarily presuppose its prior adoption either. The attitude just allows a possibility of acquiring and developing an aesthetic habit in our daily way of life, but it does not ensure its occurrence (Pradier 2020, pp. 434–35).

One of the most celebrated sites of medieval aesthetics is found in the *Periphyseon* by John Scotus Eriugena (815–877). We find there the first explicit reflection on the possibility of appreciating sensitive objects under an interest-free perspective (Pradier 2020, pp. 443–50; Haldane 2013, p. 30; Tatarkiewicz 1980, p. 316). In short, Eriugena thought that an "image" (*phantasia*) by itself could not be object of moral sanction: in other words, images *per se* are neither good nor bad. Regardless of whether they are images of good or evil, the evil does not lie in the object, but in the way of approaching it, which can be a "perverse and irrational motion of the free and rational will". According to this idea, Eriugena elaborates an argument based on two profiles, the one greedy, the other wise, in front of a beautiful vessel made of pure gold and set with precious stones: while the second ponders the "image" within himself, and "refers its beauty [...] to the glory of the Creator of natures", the former is consumed in his own greed, for "instead of referring the beauty of that nature and of its phantasies to the glory of Him Who said 'Gold is mine and silver is mine', he plunges and is swallowed up in the most stinking swamp of cupidity" (John Scotus Eriugena 1987, p. 485; 1853, col. 828b–c)[33].

This is the question: if it is possible a disinterested contemplation of beauty, according to its own legality, what function could perform this habitus in human redemption task? Positions on this issue diverged openly. The antagonism reached its peak in the twelfth century regarding three ambits: (1) the function of sacred architecture, monastic in particular; (2) the role of plastic arts in monasteries and churches; and, finally, (3) the purpose of sumptuary arts. The controversy revolved, therefore, not on strictly artistic matters, but on practical ones: charms of sensitive world are strongly seductive and involve the risk of feeding "curiosity" (*curiositas*)[34]. On this issue, Cistercian authors opposed two irreconcilable ways of understanding beauty: one, focused on the perfect beauty of the soul and the spiritual rewards of its contemplation; the other, based on the soul's outward movement, a gesture that makes it "curious about [the affairs of] others". Eyes and ears are, in this respect, "symbols of sin", because "just as death entered the world through sin, so it penetrates through these windows of the soul" (St. Bernard of Clairvaux 1854b, col. 957c)[35] any incursion in the "outside" (foras) entails the danger of losing oneself on the outward journey. Hence the safest refuge is to be found in the soul's interiority: "Stay within yourself, do not fall if you walk among greatness and wonders that are above you" (*Sta in te, ne cadas a te, si ambulas in magnis et in mirabilibus super te*) (St. Bernard of Clairvaux 1854b, col. 959b; Bruce 2019, p. 83). It is therefore necessary to close the windows to the outside, even in their most everyday dimension[36]. In sum, if it is still possible a contemplation of the beautiful, it must begin in the soul, which is in its own right the most beautiful, precious and perfect created things among those at man's disposal:

> No carnal beauty is comparable to it, nor a glowing and rosy complexion; nor a healthy face soon worn by the years; nor a valuable dress exposed to the passage of time; nor the beauty of gold or the splendor of precious stones or similar things, which have a common destiny: corruption. (St. Bernard of Clairvaux 1854c, col. 901d)[37]

The consequences of this doctrine, shared by other renowned authors such as Hugh of Fouilloy (c. 1096/1111–c. 1172) or Isaac de Stella (c. 1100/1111–c. 1170), affected the conception of architecture, based on an extraordinary austerity; sumptuary arts, reduced to their minimum expression; plastic arts and medieval calligraphy and illumination, restricted to its minimum—functional—expression. In parallel, Hugh of St. Victor proposed a valuation of aesthetic experience as something "natural and coherently integrated in the human being's faculties as a whole" (Piñero 2001, p. 153): living it already fulfills an irreducible function, pure and free of content. In this line of thought we find his well-known and influential *Expositio in Hierarchiam Coelestem Sancti Dionysii*, a work in which he not only comments on and expounds the texts of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, but also assumes the version and commentaries of John Scotus Erigena. He shares with him the idea of the support of the sensitive world in the progressive revelation of the divine[38]. External beauty, in its own sake, has a fundamental role in the ascension from visible to invisible things, in spite of their mutual differences, because even if the latter is "simple and uniform" and the former "multiple and of varying proportion", there is a certain "similarity" that allows, as in a mirror game[39], to form from "different proportions a single image": "according to this then the human mind, suitably excited, ascends from the visible beauty to the invisible beauty", in order to reach "the knowledge of invisible things" (Hugh of St. Victor 1854a, col. 949c)[40].

The adaptation of his theory of beauty to the demands of spiritual doctrine is developed by Hugh in his spiritual texts on Noah's Ark, to which he devotes several books.

On the basis of the biblical story of the Flood, the gigantic vessel, which symbolizes the "mystery of our heart" when it is set apart from the world, has a window and a door. The former opens for "contemplation" (*contemplatio*) and the latter for "action" (*operatio*): while "the door is downward, the window is upward, because actions belong to the body, [and] thoughts to the soul". Noah released two birds with the intention of finding out if waters were receding[41]: "the birds flew out of the window, the beasts and men out of the door," for, indeed, "the soul is signified by the bird, and the body by the man". The movement is one such as there and back again, unlike the body, which does not need to leave the ark, except "by occasional necessary accident"[42]. Due to the link already analyzed, every outing in search of external beauty is simultaneously an opportunity for an intellective approach to the contemplative sphere of the divine: thus, "this world is seen by the eyes of the flesh, that inner world is contemplated by the eyes of the heart" (Hugh of St. Victor 1854b, p. 680d)[43]. The window of the ark thus allows the beginning of reflection on created things within oneself, in the hope that the *tour* will not become a tawdry form of *tourisme*, but a fruitful *retour*: it must be done with right intention, just like the "holy men", who "the more outwardly they examine the divine works, the more they are inflamed inwardly in love for the Founder" (Hugh of St. Victor 1854b, p. 639a)[44]. Hugh clears a middle way (García-Lomas Gago 2020, p. 34) between sensualism and Cistercian rigorism by means of a complete reconceptualization of sensitive order, which consequently also affects both the role of contemplation of external beauty and the object of meditation.

The exit of the soul towards sensitive world allows three types of "sights" (*visiones*): "cogitation" (*cogitatio*), "meditation" (*meditatio*) and "contemplation" (*contemplatio*). In "cogitation", soul "is transitorily touched by the notion of things" at the moment when they suddenly present themselves, by means of images, either by sensory stimuli or by arising in the memory (Hugh of St. Victor 1854c, col. 116d)[45] However, this type of activity fails to transcend the realm of the imagination and runs the risk of limiting itself to aimless wandering. The approach to sensitive forms and their meaning has to be the object of a finer thought, "frequent with a purpose". It is here that meditation[46] comes into play, which "delights in wandering through an open space" and, properly speaking, "prudently investigates the cause and origin, the manner and usefulness of anything", with the aim of penetrating deeply without leaving anything in shadows:

> If one learns to love it with familiarity and wants to devote oneself to it frequently, one's life becomes very joyful and provides the greatest consolation in times of tribulation. It is, in fact, that which separates the soul from the din of earthly deeds in the highest degree and even makes it in this life to taste the sweetness of eternal rest. And just as it has learned to seek and to understand by the things that were made the One Who made them, so it instructs the soul with knowledge and frees it with joy, from which it follows that the greatest pleasure is in meditation. (Hugh of St. Victor 1854d, col. 772b–c)[47]

Once the justification of the exit to the sensitive world has been doctrinally and methodologically accommodated, then the role of external beauty and its free and disinterested enjoyment can be addressed. Hugh's aesthetic theory radically distinguishes between "beauty" (*pulchritudo*) and "utility" (*utilitas*), in such a way that, basically, it maintains the original Augustinian division. Utility is articulated in four modes: the "necessary" (*necesarium*), the "comfortable" (*commodum*), the "congruous" (*congruum*) and the "pleasing" (*gratum*). The latter is defined as that which, without being fit for use, "is delightful for its expectation": for example, "certain kinds of herbs and beasts, also birds and fish, and the like" (Hugh of St. Victor 2002, pp. 476–79; 1854d, col. 822a–b)[48]. It is not necessary, therefore, to categorize certain natural forms according to functional criteria in order to enjoy them; nor is it required, in the style of character of Conseil in Jules Verne's novel *20,000 Leagues under the Sea*, "[to] conceptualize nature according to its natural kinds in order to appreciate it aesthetically" (Zangwill 2001, p. 214).

It is striking, in this regard, how Hugh anticipates Kant in the use of some instances that the Prussian philosopher will not hesitate to call free beauties: some flowers, for example, which present for him a certain sensation of "purposiveness" (*Zweckmäßigkeit*), but they are not related to any end (*Zweck*) at all (Kant 2000, p. 120); some forms of marine life, "which are not attached to a determinate object in accordance with concepts regarding its end, but are free and please for themselves" (Kant 2000, p. 114 [*Ak. V 229*]). These are objects that are pleasing insofar as they do not presuppose any concept of what they should be, nor do they seem to be deployed under an absolute unreason: there is a sense of "purposiveness" linked with their forms, but no specific function for them that can be associated to a specific "end" or "goal". In summary, Hugh points an appreciation "based solely on enjoyment of their interesting and appealing shape, color, and pattern" (Parsons and Carlson 2008, p. 115). This position is that of a certain aesthetic formalism in the realm of natural forms[49], but, as we shall see below, also in the context of the sumptuary arts, an aspect that he undoubtedly shares with Suger of St. Denis[50].

In the end, Hugh articulates beauty in four categories according to "position" (*situs*), "movement" (*motus*), "external form" (*species*) or "quality" (*qualitas*). All four affect the "proper external aspect" (*decor*) (Hugh of St. Victor 2002, pp. 80–81; 1854d, col. 814a)[51]. The possibility of contemplating things from a free and disinterested perspective, and of exercising oneself in the adoption of an appropriate attitude—i.e., a habit—is postulated in the third dimension of sensible beauty, relative to the "external form", which is properly the "visible form" (*forma visibilis*) and agglutinates, in turn, two elements: "figures and colors" (*figuras et colores*) (Hugh of St. Victor 2002, pp. 329–30; 1854d, col. 819a). In this regard, sensitive world has not been created for human pleasure, "but instituted by divine will in order to manifest the wisdom of God": pleasure is a (re)call. Its approach must be honest and pious, that is disinterested; motivated by a love that sets objects free in an eloquent and silent admiration; in the course of a honest meditation (*meditatio*). Again, anticipating Kant, for whom an appropriate satisfaction rests simply "on the view of the shape" (Kant 2000, p. 125), Hugh writes one of the most beautiful medieval panegyric of simple and meaningless formal beauty. A lucid moment where he does not manage to say everything possible, but expresses what is essential:

> What is more beautiful and delightful to behold than the sky when it is serene? It shines like a sapphire and, with the most graceful restraint, lets its clarity glimpse and softens its aspect. The sun shimmers like gold; the moon almost pales like electrum; some of the stars shine like flames, some flicker with rosy light, some glow altering their radiance, sometimes pink, sometimes green, sometimes candid.
>
> What shall I say of the gems and precious stones, of which not only the efficacy is useful, but the appearance also admirable? Behold the earth crowned with flowers, what a joyful spectacle it offers, how it delights the eye, how it provokes affection! We see the vermilion roses, the candid lilies, the purple violets, in which not only the beauty, but also their origin is marvelous! How the wisdom of God produces such a form from the dust of the earth! (Hugh of St. Victor 2002, pp. 411–25; 1854d, cols. 820d–821a)[52].

The mere presence is sufficient to appreciate the aesthetic charm of the object, isolated from other aspects and taking no care of interests related to its function, utility or ends. And, accordingly, there are some things that reveal an essential aesthetic dimension in which they operate by virtue of an autonomous legality: hence it is not only its effectiveness is useful (*efficacia utilis*), but "also" (*quoque*) its "appearance is admirable" (*aspectus* [...] *mirabilis est*). Functional satisfaction and free beauty are thus perfectly integrated, compatible and recognizable practices of man's aesthetic life. They are not only segregable in expectation, but in everyday praxis itself, which reinforces the autonomy of pleasure in the sensitive beautiful and its own freedom: thus, for example, in the case of clothing, "those who love beauty too much, often lose utility; and those who wish to retain utility, cannot have beauty" (Hugh of St. Victor 2002, pp. 521–23; 1854b, col. 823a–b). Recall, in this regard, Yves Saint-Laurent's sandals.

5. Epilogue: An Abbot Meditates before the Altar

Let's go back to Suger of St. Denis. We had left him somewhat concerned about the future of his legacy. This is one of the reasons why he was so meticulous both in explaining his motivations and in relating the architectural alterations, the modifications made to the ornaments of the church and the increase in the abbey's treasure. With exquisite care he dwells on the embellishment of the gold frontal of the choir altar, on which was placed the famous Great Golden Cross, in the words of Erwin Panofsky, "one of the most sumptuous objects ever contrived by man" (Panofsky [1946] 1979, p. 15). Today we can only imagine its approximate shape and size, as there are hardly any testimonies about it—except for Suger's own and an inventory dated 1634 and based, in turn, on an earlier text of 1534[53]. We know, however, that the number of precious stones indicated by the abbot is dizzying: eighty marks of fine gold, pearls, mother-of-pearl, hyacinths, sapphires, rubies, emeralds and topazes.

The piece had an elaborate pedestal of four dragons, on which were placed the figures of the Evangelists and at their feet the respective animals: eagle, lion, angel and ox; at the bottom, in turn, there were seventeen gilded copper enamels; between them, six square plates and two half-plates, of the same material; the gemstone decoration consisted of twenty-seven chalcedony stones, eleven carnelians, six agates—two in cameo form showing a human head, five onyxes, seven amethysts, four garnets, six jaspers and a rock crystal colored emerald; mother of pearl, crystals, glass and a Spanish turquoise; the capital was covered with gilded copper, with four figures of prophets and an inscription containing the words pronounced by the centurion at the foot of the cross: "Truly, this was the Son of God!" (*vere filius Dei erat iste*)[54]; there were also twelve enamels of gilded copper on the upper part of the capital; six enamels below the prophets on the lower part; the crucifix was of hollow gold; the crown also of gold; etc. Lastly, the same document describes how in the lower part of the crucifix there was "an image of the abbot on his knees" (*ung image d'Abbé a genoulx*).

Suger arranged the *ornamenta ecclesiae* on the altar under the great cross, including two vessels, one "made of fine prase sculpted in the shape of a ship", and the other "a ewer of beryl or crystal about the size of a pint"; an amphora made of rock crystal and filigree gold; and, finally, a porphyry vessel whose flag was modifies by order of Suger, "using gold and silver, in the shape of an eagle". For the rest, Suger speaks in his Liber of two chalices: one of gold, with gem-set hyacinths and topazes, which replaced an earlier one sold by his predecessor, Adam of St. Denis; another, made of a single piece of sardonyx, in which "the red sard of the stone stands out, in contrast to the blackness of onyx, in striated bands of color in such a way that one seems determined to overcome the distinctive quality of the other" (Suger of St. Denis 2018, pp. 114–15; 1867, pp. 200, 206–7 and 207–8)[55]. He indicates that it was to have no other purpose than the service of the holy office, "with all internal purity and all outward majesty in external ornaments of sacred vessels" (Suger of St. Denis 2018, pp. 107–8; 1867, p. 200)[56]: in particular, he insists that the acquisition is "to show our gratitude to the blessed Denis" (Suger of St. Denis 2018, p. 114; 1867, p. 200)[57].

The gesture of placing these objects on the altar, in parallel to his architectural choices, reveals the pious character of his decision, but, at the same time, his explicit desire for the eye to bear witness to the perceptual qualities of the Eucharistic objects. The aim is to facilitate an absorbing, total, disinterested aesthetic experience, which, in turn, will elicit an "honest meditation" (*honesta meditatio*) in order to open a path that, initiated in the aesthetic, will reach the depths of an almost mystical contemplation (*contemplatio*):

> The admiration we felt for our mother church often led us to reflect upon the different ornaments, the new as well as the old. We would stand transfixed, gazing at that marvelous Cross of Saint Eligius, along with the smaller crosses, and at that incomparable ornament, commonly called "the Crest," which were

> placed upon the golden altar. Then we would utter a deep heartfelt sigh and say, "Every precious stone is your covering, the sardonyx, topaz, jasper, chrysolite, onyx, beryl, sapphire, carbuncle, and the emerald." [...]. Delight for the beautiful house of God and the splendor of the many-colored gems sometimes made me forget about my worldly cares; and devout meditation moved me to reflect on the differences among the holy virtues by directing my attention away from material to immaterial things. I seemed to see myself as if I were dwelling in some strange region of the earth, partly in the filth of the earth, and partly in the purity of heaven, and that I was capable of being transferred, by the gift of God, from this lower realm to a higher one by the anagogical method. (Suger of St. Denis 2018, p. 106; 1867, p. 198)[58]

The experience does not always occur, which brings us back to the beginning of this section when we indicated that, yet the aesthetic attitude has been exercised and deliberately adopted, it does not determine the experience itself: it can only favor it . . . and that, in fact, "sometimes" (*aliquando*). However, when it happens, when the "delight for the beautiful house of God and the splendor of the many colored gems" causes him a kind of mystical rapture, in the course of a "devout meditation" (*honesta meditatio*), transferring him "from the material to the immaterial", then, the aesthetic experience becomes something else and satisfies, in its purposiveness, a noble function: a sort of full liberation motivated by an external, simple and pure beauty that, in celebration of itself, in its own condition of end, contributes to the celebration of God, Christ and His redemptive work. A task that also follows the path of beauty in freedom.

6. Conclusions

We have shown how medieval theorizing on functional beauty can be divided in three positions: first, its denial, to the point that beauty appreciation is not possible in its own sake, unless it is done out of ignorance of its functions; secondly, its rejection, which does not deny its effective presence in the world, but rather denounces its capacity to distract from right contemplation; thirdly, its enablement through a third way, where virtues of sensitive beauty for the human redemption task prevail over the risks involved in its openness. These three perspectives are only possible under the categorical distinction between the beautiful and the appropriate, which unleashes this tension that runs through all medieval aesthetic thought.

There also seems to be a certain consensus that knowledge of the function and, ultimately, the final purpose of the object design modifies the assessment of its perceptual qualities and, therefore, the aesthetic experience itself. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that creative process is usually conceived under the primacy of strict rationality. The problem of the indeterminacy of the proper function of the object is due either to temporal ignorance or, in the case of the divine work, to human cognitive impotence itself. This does not eliminate the improvisation factor of the human creative paradigm in assigning new functions to objects, it only indicates that such functions had already been foreseen by God even before the creation of man—such is the case of the usefulness of the sea for the traffic of goods. In this sense, the model of creativity that most fully expresses the aspirations of human praxis coincides with the divine way of proceeding, in which everything is realized according to the application of a principle of sufficient reason, prior to creation itself, which justifies and gives meaning to all aspects and decisions concerning the object.

We have also shown that there are strictly perceptual events, linked to the way in which concrete objects appear, which seem to resist being encapsulated in functional chains and, nevertheless, are capable of generating an enormously pleasurable aesthetic response, regardless of both private and practical interests. In terms close to Kant, the absence of a concept that, under normal conditions, would be able to determine the specific purposes of these aesthetic events allows a free contemplation, in which one attends to the object in its own perceptual occurrence. And that seems to anticipate, *avant la lettre*, the idea of a purposeless purposiveness.

Likewise, for some particularly attractive things it is so extremely difficult, if not absurd, to determine their proper function—and, therefore, their goals or final purposes—that they end up revealing themselves as free beauties: it is striking, in this sense, the coincidence in the examples used by both Hugh of St. Victor and Kant himself. This match in their selection of objects is not isolated and, in fact, it is relatively common in the field of mystical experience: Evelyn Underhill pointed out in 1912 the case of St. Douceline, for whom the beauty of the song of a bird was capable of leading her directly to God; or St. Francis of Assisi, who ordered the cultivation of a garden of flowers so that all those who saw them would remember the "eternal sweetness" (Underhill 1912, p. 260). Perhaps the main difference between modern conceptualization of free beauty and its medieval expression lies precisely in this background of transcendent meaning. Thanks to this, the aesthetic experience itself is sublimated in a process of liberation from the chains of sensibility towards the awakening of a mystical consciousness. On the contrary, modern consideration has proceeded to its emptying of the religious and the displacement of sensitive beauty towards a subjective space, which begins and ends in itself, whose usefulness for daily praxis remains today a matter of aesthetic controversy.

Lastly, the liberation of a sensitive beauty, autonomous and free, turns things of everyday life and works of nature itself into objects of purely aesthetic contemplation. It is interesting to appreciate in this respect the bases of an aesthetics of nature in authors such as St. Basil or Hugh of St. Victor, whose positions reflect the sentiment of their own time towards natural forms. But it is also interesting that this liberation allows a contemplation of sacred art in a key of analogical reduction or anagogical revelation, which theologically justifies its presence in monastic or ecclesiastical contexts, and even gives an essentially theological value to the sumptuary arts. This does not prevent the existence of an evident tension between an interested or greedy use of them, as opposed to their disinterested enjoyment. We have seen, in this sense, the need to accommodate doctrinally both the idea of a free and autonomous sensitive beauty—whose effective presence in the world does not seem to be questioned in the twelfth century—as well as the legitimacy of its habitual approach in daily life—regarding the aesthetic attitude—. This decision to reintegrate the aesthetic life into the set of properly human experiences expresses the intimate conviction of a good number of medieval authors that a disinterested treatment with sensitive beauty, based on simple and quiet wonder, devoid of private interests, also plays a relevant role in the Christian life.

Funding: The APC for this article was funded by the GIR «Estética y Arte Contemporáneo» of the University of Navarra, within the activities of the research project «Art and Social Transformation» (A&TS), grant number PIUNA 2020/2021.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

[1] *Adm.* XXVII: *Portarum quisquis attollere quaeris honorem, aurum nec sumptus, operis mirare laborem.*

[2] *Apol. ad Guil.* XII, 28: *Nos vero qui iam de populo exivimus, qui mundi quaeque pretiosa ac speciosa pro Christo reliquimus, qui omnia pulchre lucentia, canon mulcentia, suave olentia, dulce sapientia, tactu placentia, cuncta denique oblectamente corpórea arbitrari sumus ut stercora*, [...].

[3] Honorius of Autun had already pronounced on this last matter in his influential *Gemma Animae* I, 171 (Honorius of Autun 1854, col. 597a): "[...], it is good to build churches, provided with furniture, tapestries, decorate them with other ornaments, but it is much better to spend that same money for the benefit of the indigent and send their fortune to the heavenly treasures through the hands of the poor, to prepare, there in heaven, a gift rather eternal than manufactured" ([...] *bonum est ecclesias aedificare, constructas vasis, vestibus, aliis ornamentis decorare, sed multo melius est eosdem sumptus in usus indigentium expendere, et censum suum per manus pauperum in coelestes thesauros praemittere, ibique domum non manufactam, sed aeternam in coelis praeparare, in qua possit cum angelis*).

[4] *Hom. in Hex.* I, 5: ἀρχὴ δὲ καὶ τῶν τεχνικῶν ἔργων ἡ τέχνη.

[5] *De Div. Nom.* IV, 7: [...] καὶ ὣς πάντα πρὸς ἑαυτὸ καλοῦν (ὅθεν καὶ κάλλος λέγεται) [...].

[6] *Conf.* IV, 13, 20: *Haec tunc non noveram, et amabam pulchra inferiora, et ibam in profundum, et dicebam amicis meis: Num amamus aliquid, nisi pulchrum? Quid est ergo pulchrum? et quid est pulchritudo? Quid est quod nos allicit et conciliat rebus quas amamus? Nisi enim esset in eis decus et species, nullo modo nos ad se moverent. Et animadvertebam et videbam in ipsis corporibus aliud esse quasi totum, et ideo pulchrum; aliud autem quod ideo deceret, quoniam apte accommodaretur alicui, sicut pars corporis ad universum suum, aut calceamentum ad pedem, et similia. Et ista consideratio scaturivit in animo meo ex intimo corde meo; et scripsi libros de Pulchro et Apto; puto, duos aut tres. Tu scis, Deus: nam excidit mihi. Non enim habemus eos, sed aberraverunt a nobis, nescio quomodo.*

[7] *Ep.* CXXXVIII, 1, 5: *Haec quaestio quam late pateat, profecto videt quisquis pulchri aptique distantiam sparsam quodammodo in universitate rerum valet, neque negligit intueri. Pulchrum enim per seipsum consideratur atque laudatur, cui turpe ac deforme contrarium est. Aptum vero, cui ex adverso est ineptum, quasi religatum pendet aliunde, nec ex semetipso, sed ex eo cui connectitur, iudicatur: nimirum etiam decens atque indecens, vel hoc idem est, vel perinde habetur. Age nunc, ea quae diximus, refer ad illud unde agitur. Aptum fuit primis temporibus sacrificium quod praeceperat Deus, nunc vero non ita est. Aliud enim praecepit quod huic tempori aptum esset, qui multo magis quam homo novit quid cuique tempori accommodate adhibeatur; quid quando impertiat, addat, auferat, detrahat, augeat, minuatve, immutabilis mutabilium, sicut creator, ita moderator, donec universi saeculi pulchritudo, cuius particulae sunt quae suis quibusque temporibus apta sunt, velut magnum carmen cuiusdam ineffabilis modulatoris excurrat, atque inde transeant in aeternam contemplationem speciei qui Deum rite colunt, etiam cum tempus est fidei.*

[8] *Conf.* V, 15, 24: [...] *et pulchrum, quod per seipsum; aptum autem, quod ad aliquid accommodatum deceret, definiebam* [...].

[9] *Civ. Dei* XXII, 24, 4: *Quanquam et detractis necessitatibus operandi, ita omnium partium congruentia numerosa sit, et pulchra sibi parilitate respondeat, ut nescias utrum in eo condendo maior sit utilitatis habita ratio, quam decoris. Certe enim nihil creatum videmus in corpore utilitatis causa, quod non habeat etiam decoris locum.*

[10] *Civ. Dei* XXII, 24, 4: *Sunt vero quaedam ita posita in corpore, ut tantummodo decorem habeant, non et usum: sicut habet pectus virile mamillas, sicut facies barbam, quam non esse munimento, sed virili ornamento, indicant purae facies feminarum, quas utique infirmiores muniri tutius conveniret. facies feminarum, quas utique infirmiores muniri tutius conveniret.*

[11] *Civ. Dei* XXII, 24, 4: *Si ergo nullum membrum est, in his quidem conspicuis (unde ambigit nemo), quod ita sit alicui operi accommodatum, ut non etiam sit decorum; sunt autem nonnulla, quorum solum decus, et nullus est usus: puto facile intelligi in conditione corporis dignitatem necessitati fuisse praelatam. Transitura est quippe necessitas, tempusque venturum quando sola invicem pulchritudine sine ulla libidine perfruamur: quod maxime ad laudem referendum est Conditoris, cui dicitur in Psalmo, Confessionem et decorem induisti*

[12] *Sent.* I, 8, 18: *Decor elementorum omnium in pulchro et apto consistit; sed pulchrum ei quod se ipsum est pulchrum*, [...]. *Aptum ver est ut vestimentum et victus. Ideoque hominem dici pulchrum ad se, quia non vestimento et victui est homo necessarius, sed ista homini; ideo autem illa apta, quia non sibi, sicut homo, pulchra, aut ad se, sed ad aliud, id est, ad hominem accommodata, non sibimet necessaria.*

[13] *Hom. in Hex.* V, 6, [...] ὕστερον δὲ τῷ κάλλει τοῦ ἄνθους ἡ ἄκανθα παρεζεύχθη, ἵνα τῷ τερπνῷ τῆς ἀπολαύσεως ἐγγύθεν ἔχωμεν παρακειμένην τὴν λύπην, μεμνημένοι τῆς ἁμαρτίας, δι᾽ ἣν ἀκάνθας καὶ τριβόλους ἡμῖν ἀνατέλλειν κατεδικάσθη ἡ γῆ.

[14] *Hom. in Hex.* III, 10, ὁ τοίνυν ἐναργῆ τὸν σκοπὸν τῶν γινομένων προθέμενος, τὰ κατὰ μέρος γινόμενα ὡς συμπληρωτικὰ τοῦ τέλους, τοῖς τεχνικοῖς ἑαυτοῦ λόγοις ἐπελθὼν ἀπεδέξατο.

[15] *Hom. in Hex.* III, 10, ὁ μέντοι τεχνίτης καὶ πρὸ τῆς συνθέσεως οἶδε τὸ ἑκάστου καλὸν, καὶ ἐπαινεῖ τὰ καθ´ ἕκαστον, πρὸς τὸ τέλος αὐτῶν ἐπαναφέρων τὴν ἔννοιαν.

[16] *Hom. in Hex.* III, 10: ἐπεὶ καὶ χεὶρ καθ´ ἑαυτὴν, καὶ ὀφθαλμὸς ἰδίᾳ, καὶ ἕκαστον τῶν τοῦ ἀνδριάντος μελῶν διῃρημένως κείμενα, οὐκ ἂν φανείη καλὰ τῷ τυχόντι· πρὸς δὲ τὴν οἰκείαν τάξιν ἀποτεθέντα, τὸ ἐκ τῆς ἀναλογίας, ἐμφανὲς μόλις ποτὲ, καὶ τῷ ἰδιώτῃ παρέχεται γνώριμον.

[17] *Hom. in Hex*. IV, 6: ἀλλὰ τὸ καλὸν ἐκεῖ τῷ λόγῳ τῆς δημιουργίας κρίνεται.

[18] *Hom. in Hex*. IV, 7: Καλὴ τοίνυν ἡ θάλασσα τῷ Θεῷ, [...].

[19] *Hom. in Hex*. I, 7: [...] καὶ τὰ καθ´ ἕκαστον μέρη πρὸς ἄλληλα συναρμόζοντα, καὶ τὸ πᾶν ὁμόλογον ἑαυτῷ καὶ σύμφωνον καὶ ἐναρμονίως ἔχονἀποτελοῦντα.

[20] Some arguments against this idea can be found for example in (Zangwill 2001, p. 218; Carroll 1993, p. 245).

[21] *Hom. in Hex*. IV, 6: Οὐ γὰρ ὀφθαλμοῖς βλέπει τὰ κάλλη τῆς κτίσεως ὁ ποιητὴς, ἀλλὰ τῇ ἀρρήτῳ σοφίᾳ θεωρεῖ τὰ γινόμενα. The unfathomable character of divine Wisdom in Creation is a commonplace of the Old Testament, which serves the purpose of expressing its incommensurability. e.g., Ps 40:6; 139:17–18; Job 38:4-8; Prov. 8:22–31; Isa. 40:28; etc. An idea that St. Basile, St. Ambrose of Milan, friend of St. Basile, will pick up for its own Hexameron, when declares after exposing his own point of view on the goodness of the sea, its attributions and functions, *Hex. III*, 5, 23: "How is it posible for me to comprehend all the beauty of the sea—a beauty beheld by the Creator?" (*Unde mihi ut omnem pelagi pulchritudinem comprehendam quam vidit operator?*) (St. Ambrose of Milan 1961, p. 84; 1845, col. 165c).

[22] The tension is such that even in the exegesis of Creation there is no unanimity in treating aesthetic judgment, according to functions or disinterestedness: somehow, the understanding of the latter as a precious good for human life resists its consideration as a functionalist excrescence. In fact, the most influential authors tend to assume both perspectives in a line close to Augustinian sensibility. Such is the case of Hugh of St. Victor (Pradier 2021, p. 588), for whom God's creative activity foresees both dimensions, which does not prevent neither their distinction nor their separation according to different ends: "[...] in the works of God

[...] beauty does not eliminate utility" (*Sed in opere Dei* [...] *neque pulcritudo utilitatem tollit*, [...]) (Hugh of St. Victor 2002, pp. 536 and 526; 1854d, col. 823b).Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln and Chancellor of the Oxford Universiry, spoke along the same lines. He was a profuse reader of St. Basil's work as well as the author of a version of the Hexaëmeron. Regarding the "illustrations" (*exempla*) of the Trinity, he proposes an example where the clear separation between beauty (*pulchritudo*) and utility (*utilitas*) can be appreciated, in terms that suggest, once again, a certain complementarity between the autonomy of the former and the heteronomy of the latter. *Hex.* VIII, 4, 4, l. 15–19: "The second illustration is found in anything: the thing's size, shape, and ordering. Size leads the understanding to the power of the Father; shape leads it to the Son who is the splendour of the Father and the figure of his substance; order leads it to the kindness of the Holy Spirit, that orders each thing to be beautiful and to be of benefit for some other thing" (*Exemplum alterum est in unaquaque re ipsius rei magnitude, species et ordo. Magnitudo enim ducit apprehensionem in Patris potentiam; species in Filium qui est splendour Patris et figura substancie eius; ordo ducit in Spiritus Sancti benignitatem, que unamquamque rem in cuiuslibet alterius ordinat pulchritudinem et utilitatem*) (Grosseteste 1999, p. 226; 1982, p. 222).

[23] *Hom. in Hex.* IV, 6, ἡδὺ μὲν γὰρ θέαμα, λευκαινομένη θάλασσα, γαλήνης αὐτὴν σταθερᾶς κατεχούσης· ἡδὺ δὲ καὶ ὅταν πραείαις αὔραις τραχυνομένη τὰ νῶτα, πορφύρουσαν χρόαν ἢ κυανῆν τοῖς ὁρῶσι προσβάλλῃ· ὅτε οὐδὲ τύπτει βιαίως τὴν γείτονα χέρσον, ἀλλ´ οἷον εἰρηνικαῖς τισιν αὐτὴν περιπλοκαῖς κατασπάζεται.

[24] *Hom. in Hex.* I, 7, Ινα οὖν δειχθῇ ὅτι ὁ κόσμος τεχνικόν ἐστι κατασκεύασμα, προκείμενον πᾶσιν εἰς θεωρίαν, ὥστε δι´ αὐτοῦ τὴν τοῦ ποιήσαντος αὐτὸν σοφίαν ἐπιγινώσκεσθαι, [...].

[25] *De principiis*, I, I, 6: "in like manner, the Works of Divine providence and the plan of this whole world are a sort of rays, as it were, of the nature of God, in comparison with His real substance and being. As, therefore, our understanding is unable of to behold God himself as He is, it knows the Father of the world from the beauty of His Works and the comeliness of His creatures" (*Ita ergo quasi radii quidam sunt Dei naturae, opera divinae providentiae et ars universitatis hujus, ad comparationem ipsius substantiae ac naturae. Quia ergo mens nostra ipsum per seipsam Deum sicut est non potest intuieri, ex pulchritudine operum et decore creaturarum parentem universitatis intelligit*) (Origen 1869, p. 12; 1857, cols. 124d–125a).The author who has most insisted on this idea is probably Athanasius. The following text is particularly significant for its philosophical resonances, in *Contra gentes*, 35: "[...], from the order of the cosmos we must also think of its maker and demiurge God, even if he cannot be seen with the eyes of the body. For God did not misuse his invisible nature —let no one pretend that—and leave himself completely unknowable to men. But, as I said above, he so ordered creation that although he cannot be seen by nature, yet he can be known from his works" ([...] οὕτω δεῖ νοεῖν ἐκ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου τάξεως τὸν τούτου ποιητὴν καὶ δημιουργὸν Θεόν, κἂν τοῖς τοῦ σώματος ὀφθαλμοῖς μὴ θεωρῆται. οὐ γὰρ κατεχρήσατο τῇ ἀοράτῳ φύσει αὐτοῦ ὁ Θεός· μή τις τοῦτο προφασιζέσθω· καὶ παντελῶς ἑαυτὸν ἄγνωστον τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἀφῆκεν· ἀλλ᾽ ὡς προεῖπον, οὕτω διεκόσμησε τὴν κτίσιν, ὥστε καὶ μὴ ὁρώμενον αὐτὸν τῇ φύσει, ὅμως ἐκ τῶν ἔργων γινώσκεσθαι) (St. Athanasius 1971, p. 97; 1857, col. 69b–c).

[26] Wisd. of Sol. 13:5, ἐκ γὰρ μεγέθους καλλονῆς κτισμάτων ἀναλόγως ὁ γενεσιουργὸς αὐτῶν θεωρεῖται.

[27] *Hom. In Hex.* I, 11: Τὸν ἀριστοτέχνην τῶν σοφῶς καὶ ἐντέχνως γενομένων δοξάσωμεν, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ κάλλους τῶν ὁρωμένων τὸν ὑπέρκαλον ἐννοώμεθα, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ μεγέθους τῶν αἰσθητῶν τούτων καὶ περιγραπτῶν σωμάτων ἀναλογιζώμεθα τὸν ἄπειρον καὶ ὑπερμεγέθη καὶ πᾶσαν διάνοιαν ἐν τῷ πλήθει τῆς ἑαυτοῦ δυνάμεως ὑπερβαίνοντα. Καὶ γὰρ εἰ καὶ τὴν φύσιν ἀγνοοῦμεν τῶν γενομένων, ἀλλὰ τό γε ὁλοσχερῶς ὑποπῖπτον ἡμῶν τῇ αἰσθήσει τοσοῦτον ἔχει τὸ θαῦμα, ὥστε καὶ τὸν ἐντρεχέστατον νοῦν ἐλάττονα ἀναφανῆναι τοῦ ἐλαχίστου τῶν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, πρὸς τὸ ἢ δυνηθῆναι αὐτὸ κατ᾽ ἀξίαν ἐπεξελθεῖν, ἢ τὸν ὀφειλόμενον ἔπαινον ἀποπληρῶσαι τῷ κτίσαντι·

[28] Isaiah's testimony of his encounter with Yahweh reveals the prophet's state after the vision: "Then I said, 'Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!'" (Is. 6:5); for his part, Daniel also suffers the physical consequences of Yahweh's vision: "I, Daniel, was weak and ill for some days" (Dn. 8:27). And, after witnessing the time of anger, he writes: "[...] No strength remained in me; I turned the color of death and was powerless. When I heard the sound of his voice, I fell face forward in a faint" (Dn. 10:8–9).

[29] In this regard, it is remarkable the reasoning of St. Irenaeus against Valentinus' followers, in *Adv. Haer.* IV, 20, 5, 103–106 (St. Irenaeus of Lyons 1965, p. 639), when he comments that "the Father is inaccessible" (ἀχώρητος γὰρ ὁ Πὰτερ). It is only through the effect of His "affection", His "love for man" and His "omnipotence" (κατὰ τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν φιλαντωρπίαν καὶ τὸ δύνασθαι αὐτὸν πάντα) that He grants the gift of vision "to those who love him" (τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν): "but man cannot, on his own, see God" (καὶ γὰρ ὁ μὲν ἄνθρωπος ἀφ᾽ἑαυτοῦ οὐκ ὄψεται θεόν).

[30] *Hom. in Hex.* I, 11: [...] ἐκ τοῦ μεγέθους τῶν αἰσθητῶν τούτων καὶ περιγραπτῶν σωμάτων ἀναλογιζώμεθα [...].

[31] *Hom. in Hex.* I, 6: [...] προηγουμένως μὲν διδασκαλεῖον καὶ παιδευτήριον τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ψυχῶν·

[32] On this subject, *vid.* (Stolnitz 1961, 1978; Dickie 1964; Dickie 1965; Fenner 1996; Kemp 1999).

[33] *Periphys.* IV, 16: *His duobus uno loco constitutis afferatur vas aliquod obrizo auro factum, pretiosissimis gemmis decoratum, forma pulcherrima compositum, regali usu dignum.* [...]. *Et sapiens quidem simpliciter ad laudem Creatoris naturarum pulchritudinem illius vasis, cuius phantasiam intra semetipsum considerat, omnino refert.* [...]. *Avarus vero* [...] *namque mox, ut phantasiam vasis imbiberit, cupiditatis flamma ardescit, consumitur, contaminatur, moritur, pulchritudinem naturae ipsiusque phantasiarum non ad laudem ipsius, qui dixit: Meum est aurum, meum est argentum, referens, sed seipsum in foetidissimam cupiditatis paludem immergens et ingurgitans.*

[34] On the concept of *curiositas* in medieval thought, *vid.* (Labhardt 1960; Newhauser 1987; Krüger 2002).

[35] *De grad. hum.* X, 28: [...], *quam, dum a sui circumspectione torpescit incuria sui, curiosam in alios facit.* [...]: *quoniam sicut mors per peccatum in orbem, sic per has fenestras intrat ad mentem.*

[36] There is a famous fragment of St. Bernard's *Vita prima*, signed by his friend William, the Abbot of Saint-Thierry, which reads as follows: "He was totally absorbed in the spirit; his thoughts were often completely directed toward God, as were his spiritual meditations, and his mind was totally occupied with God, so that what he saw he did not see, what he heard he did not hear, nor did he taste what he ate; he felt hardly anything with his bodily senses. For instance, he spent a whole year in the novitiate, yet when he left it he still did not know whether it was a carved roof, which we usually call vaulted, or not. However frequently he went in and out of the church, he thought there was only one window in the east end, whereas there were three. He had dampened down all sense of curiosity about such things, so that if perhaps he did happen to see them he did not advert to them because his mind was elsewhere, as they say. Indeed, without memory mere sense perceptions count for nothing" ([...] *totusque absorptus in spiritum, spe tota in Deum directa, intentione seu meditatione spirituali tota occupata memoria, videns non videbat, audiens non audiebat; nihil sapiebat gustanti, vix aliquid sensu aliquo corporis sentiebat. Iam quippe annum integrum exegerat in cella Novitiorum, cum exiens inde ignoraret adhuc an haberet domus ipsa testudinem, quam solemus dicere caelaturam. Multo tempore frequentaverat intrans et exiens domum ecclesiae, cum in eius capite, ubi tres erant, unam tantum fenestram esse arbitraretur. Curiositatis enim sensu mortificato, nil huiusmodi sentiebat; vel si forte aliquando eum contingebat videre, memoria, ut dictum est, alibi occupata non advertebat. Sine memoria quippe sensus sentientis nullus est*) (William of Saint-Thierry 2015, pp. 23–24; 1855, cols. 238d–239a). On the role of memory as a repository of sensory images, *vid*. Bruun (2007, pp. 111–28).

[37] *In Cant.* XXV, 6: *Non comparabitur ei quantalibet pulchritudo carnis, non cutis utique nitida et arsura, non facies colorata vicina putredini, non vestis pretiosa obnoxia vetustati, non auri species, splendorve gemmarum, seu quaeque talia, quae omnia sunt ad corruptionem.*

[38] It is noteworthy that the abbot of Saint-Victor follows a more orthodox line than Eriugena. Particularly striking is his restraint in dealing with the Greek notion of "theophany" (*theophania*): for Hugh, this concept of the Areopagite concerning the sensorial dimension of the ecclesiastical hierarchy—applicable to its members, but also extending to rites, places and instruments of worship—is fundamentally limited to the realm of "figures" (*figurae*) and refers, consequently, to a kind of imperfect knowledge. In this sense, I agree with Németh that Hugh "gives a Latin corrective of the doctrine, based on the contrast of figura and veritas" (Németh 2010, p. 341). Thus, "we do not expect beatitude in the contemplation of figures, in which truth is promised" (*sed nos beatitudinem non exspectamus in contemplatione figurarum, quibus veritas ipsa promissa est*) (Hugh of St. Victor 1854a, col. 1084c).

[39] 1 Cor 13:12.

[40] *Exp. in Hier. Coel.*, Exp.: *Idcirco alia est pulchritudo visibilis, et alia invisibilis naturae, quoniam illa simplex, et uniformis est; ista autem multiplex et varia proportione conducta. Est tamen aliqua similitudo visibilis pulchritudinis ad invisibilem pulchritudinem, secundum aemulationem, quam invisibilis artifex ad utramque constituit, in qua quasi speculamina quaedam diverversorum proportionum unam imaginem effingunt. Secundum hoc ergo a pulchritudine visibili ad invisibilem pulchritudinem mens humana convenienter excitata ascendit; quasi de simili ad similia conducta facile in semetipsa invisibiliter intelligens quae sit eorum, quae foris visibiliter comprehendit, ad invisibilia cognatio.*

[41] Gn. 8:6–14.

[42] *De arca Noe morali* II, 2: *Arca diluvii, sicut iam dictum est, cordis nostri secretum est, in quo latere debemus a strepitu huius mundi. Sed quia ipsa nostrae conditionis infirmitas diu nos in silentio intimae contemplationis pausare non patitur, exitum habemus per ostium et fenestram. Ostium significat exitum per operationem, fenestra exitum qui fit per cogitationem. Ostium deorsum est, fenestra sursum, quia actiones ad corpus pertinent, cogitationes ad animam. Hinc est quod per fenestram aves exierunt, per ostium bestiae et homines. Quod autem per avem anima significetur, et per hominem corpus, [...]. Quod vero ostium in latere positum dicitur, hoc significant quod nunquam a secreto cordis nostril per operationem exire debemus ex proposito intentionis, sed ex accidenti occasione necessitatis.*

[43] *De arca Noe morali* IV, 9: *Istum mundum vident oculi carnis, illum mundum intrinsecus contemplantur oculi cordis. In isto mundo habent oblectamenta sua homines, in illo mundo ineffabiles sunt delectationes.*

[44] *De arca Noe morali* II, 5: [...], *quia saepe sancti viri quanto magis foris opera divina aspiciunt, tanto magis intus in amore Conditoris inardescunt.*

[45] *Hom. in Ecc.* XIX, 1: *Cogitatio est cum mens notione rerum transitorie tangitur, cum ipsa res sua imagine animo subito praesentatur, vel per sensum ingrediens, vel a memoria exurgens.*

[46] On *meditatio* in Hugh of St. Victor, *vid.* (de Bruyne [1946] 1998, pp. 600–1; Vergara Ciordia 2007).

[47] *Did.* III, 11: *Meditatio est cogitatio frequens cum consilio, quae causam et originem, modum et utilitatem uniuscujusque rei prudenter investigat. Meditatio principium sumit a lectione; nullis tamen stringitur regulis aut praeceptis lectionis. Delectatur enim quodam apto decurrere spatio, ubi liberam contemplandae veritati aciem affigat; et nunc has, nunc illas rerum causas perstringere; nunc autem profunda quaeque penetrare, nihil anceps, nihil obscurum relinquere. Principium ergo doctrinae est in lectione, consummatio in meditatione. Quam si quis familiarius amare didicerit, eique saepius vacare voluerit, jucundam valde reddit vitam, et maximam in tribulatione praestat consolationem. Ea enim maxima est, quae animam a terrenorum actuum strepitu segregat, et in hac vita etiam aeternae quietis dulcedine, quodammodo praegustare facit. Cumque jam per ea quae facta sunt, eum qui fecit omnia quaerere didicerit et intelligere: tunc animam pariter et scientia erudit et laetitia profundit, unde fit ut maximum sit in meditatione sit oblectamentum.*

[48] I follow the edition of Hugh of St. Victor's *De tribus diebus* prepared in 2002 by Dominique Poirel (Hugh of St. Victor 2002), for which we indicate the corresponding lines of the critical apparatus. The location of the text in the *Patrologia Latina*, where the *De*

tribus diebus is part of the *Didascalicon*, is shown after the semicolon in all cases.*Did*. VII, 14. *Utilitas rerum quatuor complectitur: necessaria, commoda, congrua et grata. [...]. Gratum est eiusmodi, quod ad usum quidem habile non est; et tamen ad spectandum delectabile, qualia sunt fortasse quaedam herbarum genera et bestiarum, volucrum quoque et piscium, et quaevis similia.*

[49] On formalism in aesthetics of nature, *vid.* (Parsons and Carlson 2004; Zangwill 2005, 2001).

[50] On the possible influence of Hugh of St. Victor's philosophy on Suger of St. Denis's artistic and iconographic choices, *vid.* especially (Poirel 2001).

[51] *Did*. VII, 12: *Quamvis multis ac variis modis creaturarum pulchritudo perfecta sit, quatuor tamen praecipue sunt, in quibus earumdem decor consistit. Hoc est in situ, in motu, in specie, in qualitate.*

[52] *Did*. VII, 12: *Quid iucundius ad videndum coelo cum serenum est, quod splendet quasi sapphirus; et gratissimo quodam suae claritatis temperamento visum excipit et demulcet aspectum? Sol sicut aurum rutilat, luna pallet quasi electrum, stellarum quaedam flammeo aspectu radiant; quaedam luce rosea micant, quaedam vero alternatim nunc roseum, nunc viridem, nunc candidum fulgorem demonstrant.Quid de gemmis et lapidibus pretiosis narrem? quorum non solum efficacia utilis, sed aspectus quoque mirabilis est. Ecce tellus redimita floribus, quam iucundum spectaculum praebet, quomodo visum delectat, quomodo affectum provocat? Videmus rubentes rosas, candida lilia, purpureas violas, in quibus omnibus non solum pulchritudo sed origo quoque mirabilis est. Quomodo scilicet Dei sapientia de terrae pulvere talem producit speciem.*

[53] We know that the Cross was stripped of the Christ around 1590 by the members of the Catholic League (*ligheurs*) and that Cross itself had already disappeared before the 18th century (Verdier 1970, p. 29; Gaborit-Chopin 2001, p. 88).

[54] Mt. 27:54.

[55] *Adm*. XXXIV: *Vasa etiam, tam de auro quam preciosis laapidibus, ad Dominicae mensae servicium,* [...], *beato Dionysio debita devotione adquisivimus: magnum videlicet calicem aureum septies viginti unciarum auri, gemmis preciosis, scilicet jacinthis et topaziis ornatum, pro alio qui tempore antecessoris nostri vadimonio perieat, restituí elaboravimus.Aliud etiam vas preciosissimum de lapide prasio, ad formam navis exsculptum,* [...].*Vas quoque aliud quod instar justae berilli aut cristalli videtur,* [...].*Comparavimus etiam praefati altaris officiis calicem preciosum, de uno et continuo sardónice (quod est de "sardio" et "onice"), quo uno usque adeo sardii rubor a nigredine onichini proprietatem variando discriminat, ut altera in alteram proprietatem usurpare inniti aestimetur.Nec minus porphyriticum vas sculptoris et politoris manu ammirabile factum, [...], de amphora in aquilae formam transferendo, auri argentique materia, altaris servicio adaptavimus,* [...].

[56] *Adm*. XXXIIIa: [...] *nulli omnino aeque ut sancti sacrificio servitio, in omni puritate interiori, in omni nobilitate exterior, debere famulari profitemur*. We read in *Inst. Cap. Gen*. XX, 3: "All the ornaments of the monastery, the sacred vessels and other things that are used, shall not contain gold, silver or jewels; but the chalice and the canula, and only these two things, may be of silver or gilt, but in no way of gold" (*Omnia monasterii ornamenta, vasa utensilia, sine auro et argento, praeter calicem et fistulam: quae quidem duo sola argentea et deaurata, sed aurea nequaquam habere permittimus*) (Rainardus Abbas 1854, col. 1727c).

[57] *Adm*. XXXIVa, [...] *beato Dionysio debita devotione adquisivimus.*

[58] *Adm*. XXXIII: *Haec igitur tam nova quam antiqua ornamentorum discrimina ex ipsa matris ecclesiae crebro considerantes, dum illam ammirabilem sacnti Eligii cum minoribus crucem, dum incomparabile ornamentum, quod vulgo crista vocatur, aureae arae superponi contueremur, corde tenus suspirando: Omnis, inquam, lapis preciosus operimentum tuum, sardius, topzius, jaspis, crisolitus, onix et berillus, saphirus, carcunculus et smaragdus.* [...]. *Unde, cum ex dilectione decoris domus Dei aliquando multicolor, gemmarum speciositas ab exintrinsecis me curis devocaret, sanctarum etiam diversitatem virtutum, de materialibus ad immaterialia transferendo, honesta meditatio insistere persuaderet, videor videre me quasi sub aliqua extranea orbis terrarum plaga, quae nec tota sit in terrarum faece nec tota in coeli puritate, demorari, ab hac etiam inferiori ad illam superiorem anagogico more Deo donante posse transferri.*

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