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Abbot Suger's Silent Soliloquy of Public Aesthetics in the Medieval Saint Denis Abbey

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ABBOT SUGER'S SILENT SOLILOQUY OF PUBLIC AESTHETICS
IN THE MEDIEVAL SAINT DENIS ABBEY

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Sandra Jean Ceas

August 2012

Advisor: Carl Raschke

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Abstract

Abbot Suger transformed the twelfth-century medieval Saint Denis abbey from a didactic Romanesque prayer hall to a spiritually illuminating pre-Gothic worship center. The extant culture, although primarily illiterate, was poised on the threshold of Scholasticism, the rational pursuit of “reason,” which challenged the Christian doctrine of “faith.” Abbot Suger, fully aware of the secular threat, was suitably positioned to be a significant instrument for saving souls from the diversion of their trust in God toward a reliance on logical thinking. Suger undertook a major art restoration campaign for the Saint Denis abbey to create an environment of public aesthetics that engendered a new, heightened experience of worship and devotion that illuminated God’s Sovereignty. Suger synthesized centuries of philosophy and theology to manifest a silent soliloquy of what was ineffable at the time.

Michel Foucault’s method of intellectual archeological inquiry is used to gather relevant information, which contributed to Suger’s vision and his artistic practice. Suger’s art restoration in the Saint Denis abbey manifested the aesthetics of anagogical agency to lift the heads of worshipers toward a theophany of Divine Wisdom.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge Alba Newmann Holmes, PhD, for her dedicated assistance in helping me structure this thesis. Her constructive criticism and considerate advice helped me to stay focused and on task. The clarifying questions Alba asked gave me confidence to explicate what was in my thoughts and not yet in words. She helped me find my voice and to understand that I could effectively push the boundaries of scholarship toward a new genre of writing. This thesis would have been fallow without her gentle rein. I am very grateful for Alba's sincere support and encouragement.

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FOREWORD

This thesis on the public aesthetics of the medieval Saint Denis abbey must be read as a comparative study of *empirical knowledge* (knowledge based on experience rather than logic, a form of *sense knowledge*) aligned with the theological and philosophical spirit of a century. It is not my intention to reconstitute the factual history of an epoch but rather to present an artistic thought-system that reveals a mixture of archaism and bold conjecture to support my claim that the intellectual intuition of Abbot Suger displayed in his orchestrated, public aesthetics of the Saint Denis abbey reflects *non-formal* knowledge that infused the Christian heritage of medieval culture with a living message for the future.

My process for obtaining *non-formal* knowledge through artistic intellectual investigation is modeled after Michel Foucault's introduction to *The Order of Things* on his *episteme* thesis.¹ Foucault diverged from a single disciplinary study in favor of shifting emphasis toward general incongruent ideas around the language of action, need, and exchange as a credible epistemological field of investigation. His intention was to

¹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. of *Les Mots et les choses*, ed. R. D. Laing. (New York: Pantheon Books, Random House, 1970), xxii.

allow the appearance of “peculiarities of the age being researched to reveal a *positive unconscious* knowledge of implicit concepts that are subjacent to consciousness.”²

Like Foucault, I am not seeking the fecundity of a single discovery at the threshold of a century. However, I aspire to uncover an aesthetic epistemological system that can add credible discourse when analyzing paradigmatic cultural shifts. In addition to relating to Foucault’s methodological approach, I especially appreciate his interest in the “subject’s” (i.e. the scientist himself) “overwhelming motivation to achieve value and practical application in the existence of relative discursive practice while being subject to the rules that come into play.”³ In the Middle Ages rationalizing change was termed *contemporaneity*, a custom of justification through reasonable validation, a practice that Suger utilized in his abbey renovation campaign.

Above all of Foucault’s tangents, I resonate with his exposé on *aphasiacs*⁴ and their “fanatical superimposing of different criteria outside of conventional order, which evolves into a precise region of utopia where silent moments of expression await recognition.”⁵ It is in this newly perceived order that fundamental codes of a culture can be liberated for a “pure order more true than the theories that attempt to give explanations

² Foucault, *The Order of Things*, x, xi.

³ *Ibid.*, xiii.

⁴ Aphasia is an impairment of the ability to create coherent patterns through language.

⁵ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, ixi.

to explicit form and philosophical foundation.⁶ The pure and true order of empirical public aesthetics demonstrated in Suger's reconstruction of the St. Denis abbey, I claim, granted the building its power to sustain the Christian culture as it embarked on a journey from "faith to reason" more effectively than any linguistics could achieve.

Although Foucault was concerned with the epoch from the end of the Renaissance to the beginning of Modernity, and I am observing the transition from the twelfth century to the thirteenth century Middle Ages, I use Foucault's *archaeological* inquiry method of addressing the general space of knowledge, to uncover relationships that define systems of mutations necessary and sufficient to demarcate the threshold of a new positivity, that I seek. As pointed out by Laing in the preface to *The Order of Things*, "it is the history of *otherness* relative to epistemology in a given culture that Foucault desires to elevate as not only credible, but also essential to the transitions between centuries."⁷ The otherness I desire to elevate is the interpretation of empirical aesthetics for epistemology between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

My methodology is not a pragmatic analysis of Gothic architecture, symbolism, Christianity or Scholasticism. Instead it is a distinct study of how Abbot Suger developed the public aesthetics of the Saint Denis abbey. His creative processes demonstrate a synthesis of twelfth-century ethos with an intention to manifest silently a more true and a purer order than the existing cultural norms at the turn of a century challenged by the critical transformation from "faith to reason." The new order he envisioned, I argue, is a

⁶ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xxi.

⁷ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

heightened empirical worship experience created to revive the spirit of man's soul to reunite with God, and to obtain the divine wisdom necessary to encounter the imminent cultural changes. To demonstrate this, I parallel twelfth-century living conditions, including Suger's life, and the philosophical and theological precepts of the epoch, with artistic practice demonstrated in Suger's aesthetic restoration of the abbey. The thought process in which I develop my thesis may not follow traditional academic structure but manifests more along the lines of a Deleuzian rhizome of epistemological ruptures linking aspects of research in speculative yet relative juxtapositions to support my analysis of the artistic practice that produces poignant public aesthetics.

I examine aesthetic elements based on Tatarkiewicz's history of aesthetics along with Wittgenstein's analysis and Hagberg's post-Wittgenstein theory to include Arthur Danto's and Joseph Margolis "mind/matter dualism." These theoretical circumstances I juxtapose with the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle and the theology of Augustine, Anselm, Abelard, Bernard and Aquinas, along with interjections of John Dewey's social aesthetic theory pertaining to cognition and perception, with the intention to add a more contemporary interface. Harmonic proportions, established by Pythagoras as expounded upon by Boethius, are incorporated along with facets from Plato's *Timaeus*.

In addition to a philosophical examination of the abbey's significance, I acknowledge the divinely inspired art practice of Abbot Suger as a gradual spiritual process of edification. Artistic practice is presented as an Aristotelian perpetual process of looking at the world in new ways along with Erwin Panofsky's process of creating a living message versus a crystallized work of art. Methodologically, I highlight the revival of Aristotle along with Saint Aquinas' Scholasticism to frame the relevant import of

philosophy and theology that lies in-between, with augmentations from H. R. Rookmaaker's position on Scholasticism and the timeless agency of Christian art. Additionally, I make reference to John Scotus Eriugena's rationalization of Sacred Scripture with "faith and reason" which links philosophy with the theological convictions of Augustine and Aquinas, and is spiritualized by Hugh of Saint Victor's commentaries.

Abbot Suger himself is fully explored through contrasting interpretations of his personality and intentions as offered by Erwin Panofsky, Otto von Simson, Conrad Rudolph, Summer McKnight Crosby, Umberto Eco and Paul Frankl, along with my own reading on Suger's objectives as "reason confronted revelation." Ultimately, as Huizinga's asserts, "works of art characterize a civilization in an epoch;"⁸ Abbot Suger's Saint Denis abbey was not only a synthesis of the tension between "faith" and "reason," it was also an instrument to engage the culture of the twelfth century for imminent change. My project then follows Thomas Crow's suggestion that art-historical practices are latent guides to a way into the future if a map of thought patterns can be discovered.⁹

⁸ J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought an Art in France and the Netherlands in the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954), 225.

⁹ Thomas Crow, *The Intelligence of Art*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 5.

INTRODUCTION

I have spent my adult life studying politics of aesthetics, particularly aesthetics that are shared with the public within a specific culture. My intent here is to examine how these aesthetics historically have brought about a change in thought and in the long term a change in action for a culture at large. This involves the paradoxical efficacy of avant-garde aesthetics affecting the privileged and later being assimilated and adopted by the masses.

Jacques Rancière, a postmodern thinker who has philosophical enterprise on aesthetics and politics, points out that art and politics call into question the status quo of a social order and in their shared “resplendent brilliance” have agency to restore the social bond by “reframing” the plot of the present cultural condition.¹⁰ Although Rancière does not claim that art and politics harbor within them the integrally realizable principle of a new social order, he does assert that both are instruments to mold a new social ethos by

¹⁰ Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus on Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran. (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 3,4.

implementing emancipation through the efforts of “enlightened experts” who initiate a new form of societal management.¹¹

In this thesis, I have chosen to take a look at a specific era in medieval times when a paradigmatic cultural shift was imminent and an enlightened expert, who was in a position of political and artistic liberty, orchestrated an aesthetic experience that would emancipate a new form of societal orderliness within the culture of Christianity. In this epoch I recognize a latent, avant-garde “artistic practice” that is an effective pedagogy for creative “reframing” of a cultural movement with an intention to create social awareness and manifest a cohesive restoration of an innate holy spirit. My approach is what might be called “postmodern.” I do not perform a structured, linear analysis of the topic, but present different threads and strands of historical development and streams of ideas relevant to this period that show Suger’s impact.

Without reservation, I see something brilliant going on and it is with that force of consciousness that I claim Abbot Suger had the heart of a divinely inspired artist who successfully synthesized the tenets of relevant philosophy and theology of the Middle Ages in his art program at the Saint Denis abbey to publicly present what was ineffable at the time. My study emphasizes the artistic practice of synthesizing the invisible ethos of an epoch with the visual aesthetics that had agency to divine *sense knowledge* more effectively than any linguistic discourse. I argue that the new aesthetics evoked a more intimate way of worshipping God that was a transformation from the dark, dogmatic prayer halls of the previous Romanesque style to a heightened sacred experience that in

¹¹ Rancière, *Dissensus on Politics and Aesthetics*3.

time evolved into the awakening of the Gothic spirit in the centuries that followed. I am fully convinced that God calls certain individuals to serve Him through artistic obedience, and to aesthetically present His sovereignty, publically, at a time when “words” will not suffice.

Abbot Suger’s anagogical¹² public aesthetics in the medieval Saint Denis abbey offered an empirical¹³ spiritual experience to enrich man’s connection to God at the threshold of the twelfth-century tension between “faith” and “reason.” Having been vowed to the Saint Denis monastery at the age of ten, where he was educated and fostered throughout his life, Suger developed a special relationship with the livelihood of his home. In 1120 A.D. Suger was appointed Abbot of the Saint Denis and was positioned to renovate the abbey. It is at that moment Abbot Suger revealed a unique disposition he claimed was Divine inspiration, which my research fully acknowledges. A century later his spiritually aesthetic concepts were validated and codified by Saint Thomas Aquinas, and emulated in the spirit of anagogical Gothic art of thirteenth-century cathedrals throughout Christendom.

The anagogical ascent upwards for attaining knowledge was both an ancient philosophical and theological precept Abbot Suger fully understood and adopted for his art program at the Saint Denis abbey. The uplifting anagogical process begins in harmonic order that presents a hierarchy to ascend, aided by illumination, which lifts the head upwards beyond the visual material objects of affection toward the invisible

¹² Anagogical is a Greek word suggesting an *ascent* upwards and is a method of mystical Scriptural interpretation.

¹³ Empirical experience based on observation rather than theory or pure logic.

immaterial *nous* of a higher order of *being*. This system of transcendence is translated in the public aesthetics of the Saint Denis abbey through the engineering of a more open gathering place for prayer, a space proportionately structured to raise visitors' heads up toward the multi-arched vaults to the choir's matrix of stained-glass windows. From the arcade an array of light pours back down upon the worshiper to encourage a glorious theophany: a union with the Divine Wisdom of God. In a system of anagogical aesthetics demonstrating the hierarchal superiority of God over man, Suger gave the public a "reason" for "faith," and an offer of salvation.

My argument is not to describe the individual material symbolic features of the Saint Denis abbey, but rather to elucidate the invisible artistic interpretations and intentions that lie beyond the material that foster a revived spirit of "faith." Abbot Suger, although not an erudite philosopher, was a uniquely gifted artist who was highly educated theologically in the same monastery he felt destined to renovate both physically and spiritually. It is my assertion that Abbot Suger chose to enrich souls, not by preaching or teaching, but rather through a "silent soliloquy" of public aesthetics intended to preserve "faith" before "reason," and to engender the cultural embrace of a "new order," one purer than any linguistic discourse could achieve.

This thesis proposes answers to the three questions: How is a soul saved? How are philosophical and theological precepts ascribed to aesthetics? How does Christian public aesthetics move a culture? I argue that a soul is saved by one's "faith" in God's Revelation of salvation by understanding man's relationship to Him; that creative insight can assimilate principles of philosophy and theology and translate them into *experiential*

aesthetics; to conclude that *art* organizes an invisible *force* that moves the soul of a culture.

In spite of differing definitions of both “art” and “aesthetics,” in the framework of this thesis, I occasionally use them interchangeably, while also including the terms “work of art,” “artwork,” and “art forms.” Until the seventeenth century, art was primarily associated with skill or mastery. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, who coined the term *aesthetic* in 1750, reappraised the concepts of art and aesthetics and described the latter as the science of sense knowledge.¹⁴

Aesthetics, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of beauty, art, and taste, and with the creation and appreciation of beauty. In the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, aesthetics is defined as the study of sensory or sensori-emotional values. The term *art* most often is defined as a product, (painting, sculpture) or human activity such as poetry or dance. Paul Frankl describes *art* as the particular inter-relationship of form and meaning in which form becomes the symbol of meaning.¹⁵ Relative to the analysis of my project, art and aesthetics will not be regarded as craft or skill, but rather as terms used to describe the outward appearance culminated in a work of art including the empirical encounter. In this specific case, the Saint Denis abbey is a “work of art” that generates aesthetic impact.

¹⁴ Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Hugh Bredin. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), 2.

¹⁵ Paul Frankl, *Gothic Architecture*, rev. Paul Crossley 2000. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 277.

Additionally, I rarely refer to the Saint Denis abbey as architecture, for I will be illuminating the *essence* of the “work of art” versus describing its structure. However, some artworks within the composition of the abbey that substantiate the spiritual and analogical claim are interpreted as evidence of the intentions behind their development and their public effect. Umberto Eco contextualized the Greek tradition of a work of art as having two main elements: one was cognitive (*ratio, cogitatio*); the other was productive (*faciendi, factibilium*).¹⁶ In other words, art was knowledge of craftsmanship and essence that produced a useful product imitating the effect of nature. In the Middle Ages this would be typically interpreted as design and object. In a broader sense, I see Abbot Suger extending this notion to include his architectural vision of the Saint Denis abbey as an entity imitating nature in the sense of the cosmology of man and God.

Similarly, the term *artist* is defined as the creator of art, or works of art, and I appropriate the title for Abbot Suger who directed the development of the Saint Denis abbey’s aesthetics, just as a composer would create a piece of music for his orchestra of musicians. In the Christian medieval culture in which Suger lived, the skills of the artisan were a direct gift from God by the light of divine wisdom, used for the purpose of disclosing Him to mankind. It is my contention and the thesis of this study, that the transformation of the Saint Denis abbey exactly pursued this endeavor.

Beauty has been the main element of the aesthetics that has survived since antiquity. Umberto Eco proposes there was a coherent body of thinking about the arts

¹⁶ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 164.

within intellectual medieval thought based on the concrete classical world of beauty.¹⁷ However, for the sake of this research, beauty is not argued, but rather assumed as a transcendental universal of medieval metaphysics, just as Otto von Simson construed beauty as the *splendor veritatis*, the radiance of truth, revelation and a transcendental human existence.¹⁸ Augustinian aesthetics of wisdom, consisting of *modus*, *species*, and *ordo* (measure or dimension, species or nature, and order), also proposed a theory of beauty for the medieval culture.¹⁹ In his analysis of rhythm and the association of the physical with the psychological, Augustine attributed aesthetic value to visual sensations that he theorized as *maxime cognoscitivi*: the human senses fully involved with knowledge.²⁰ Later, in the thirteenth century, the aesthetics of Saint Thomas Aquinas presupposed three formal criteria of beauty: proportion, integrity and clarity, which he organized in his *hylomorphic* aesthetic theory—the philosophical doctrine that identifies matter with the first cause of the universe.

These principles of perfection supplied by both Augustine and Aquinas, Suger innately embedded in the restoration of the Saint Denis abbey; for the concept of proportion was ubiquitous throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages as a psychological relationship between the object and the senses. Ontologically an artistic form has the quality of beauty because the aim of the artist is to make something as perfect, *symmetria*

¹⁷ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, xi, 2.

¹⁸ Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture & the Medieval Concept of Order*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1956), xx.

¹⁹ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 66.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

(harmony and just proportion). In the ancient world proportion signified moral virtues.²¹ It was not difficult for the medieval mind to conceive beauty as a reflection of an abstract invisible “purer order” of exceptional dignity. To the medieval thinker beauty was the radiant truth of their ontological perfection reflected in their origin in God.²²

Researchers like myself, who label themselves *aestheticians*, have distinguished their discipline as neither beauty nor art, but specifically the *aesthetic experience*, the aesthetic response to things. This interest along with the sociology of art in group-participation is respectfully regarded by Tatarkiewicz in the *History of Aesthetics* as “a proper concern of aesthetics,” and that empirical investigation is extremely valuable when assessing art forms.²³ Aesthetics to Tatarkiewicz is both empirical as well as aprioristic, and “a complete aesthetic theory must embrace both: sensuous and intellectual beauty, direct and symbolical art.”²⁴ In its broadest sense the history of aesthetics also embraces the “artistic practice” which reveals aesthetic theory, as art in and of itself.

Studying art in an indigenous culture helps to reveal the metaphysical conceptions of art and beauty in an intellectual milieu that seeks to expand the perceptions of the supernatural, and to reconstruct new insight concerning meaning and value in art. More precisely this would be examining art objects (matter) in a specific culture to describe

²¹ Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, vol. 1, *Ancient Aesthetics*, ed. J. Harrell. (Paris: Polish Scientific Publishers, 1970), 5.

²² von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 51.

²³ Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

them intellectually (mind) in an effort to give a fuller interpretation of the potential innate meanings, intentions, and efficacy. Wittgenstein studied the multifarious relations between sight and thought as an attempt to capture “the hidden unity of art through focusing on the *non-exhibited* characteristics of conferred status—a kind of *seeing* to understand art.”²⁵ Wittgenstein’s concept mirrors Plato’s perception of metaphysical objects harboring a pre-reflective status of dignity. In addition to Wittgenstein’s “mind/matter” theory, he held a certain view that “works of art are culturally emergent entities,” which exhibit properties that are invisible to the physical object and transcend above it. He asserted this characteristic was necessary to be logically consistent, and he did not hesitate to identify the experience as empirical.²⁶ Both Plato and Wittgenstein give art an inherent value to communicate the supernatural, especially when interpreted within a specific cultural setting.

Sociological arguments in aesthetics give credence to the idea that art and social theory form “equal partners in a joint-venture of cognition of the world,” by identifying a source of existential social knowledge in art.²⁷ In other words, art can tell us things in experiential ways that other sciences cannot articulate. Derived from the Greek word *aisthesis* (perception), aesthetics refers to the study of “pleasure in perception,” where works of art are to be contemplated for a transcendental understanding, to include that of

²⁵ G. L. Hagberg, *Art as Language: Wittgenstein, Meaning, and Aesthetic Theory*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), 151.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 175, 176.

²⁷ Austin Harrington, *Art and Social Theory: sociological Arguments in Aesthetics*, (Cambridge, London: Polity Press, 2004), 3.

a society.²⁸ Otto von Simson noted the definition of “symbolic vision” by seventh-century Maximus the Confessor, a Christian monk, theologian and scholar of Neo-Platonism: “the ability to apprehend within the objects of sense perception the invisible reality of the intelligible that lays beyond them.”²⁹ Wittgenstein prompted an interest in the suspense between aesthetics of the “phenomenologically private and the physically public” to be viewed as a process of “inner entity” confronting “external realization.”³⁰ This frontier of encounter is the essential breeding ground for all creativity, and any creator/artist aims to not only merge the two, but to elevate the synthesis of the two, to a level purer and higher than where either was conceived.

The combination of matter and artistic conception in conjunction with the ethos of a culture, the incorporeal connotations of material, and the final, public projection of the art within its cultural context, allowing for an experiential encounter, constitute what I discuss as *public aesthetics*. The hidden unity of art together with its invisible *non-exhibited* characteristics is what gives potency to transcendental meaning from what is visible in the art. It is this mystical ontology that I expose in the Saint Denis abbey.

There are three chapters in my thesis with several subheadings. The first chapter introduces the artist of the Saint Denis abbey, Abbot Suger, in an attempt to understand how his soul was divinely attached to the monastery, and how his role developed in transforming the abbey’s aesthetic worship. Suger’s history, along with the influence of

²⁸ Harrington, *Art and Social Theory*, 12, 14.

²⁹ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, xx.

³⁰ Hagberg, *Art as Language: Wittgenstein*, 99.

colleagues and contemporary discourse, also explains how he fit into the broader intellectual and historical context of the Saint Denis abbey. The second chapter highlights the tenets of the philosophy and theology that Abbot Suger synthesized to materialize the public aesthetics of the Saint Denis abbey, which moved the soul of the culture toward a deeper spiritual commitment to their “faith.” Some pertinent examples are also presented to portray Suger’s unique interpretations from the material to the immaterial. The last chapter, three, summarizes the divinely inspired art practice of Abbot Suger, the effect of the public aesthetics in the Saint Denis abbey along with a brief picture of the century that followed to conclude with an artistic vision of how Christian art can have agency to move a culture toward a closer relationship with God.

CHAPTER ONE: Abbot Suger the Artist and His Relationship to the Saint Denis Abbey

Studying Suger in a Foucauldian episteme method of seeking peculiarities that reveal a positive unconscious knowledge, I recognize idiosyncrasies in Suger that suggest to me he was a culturally conscious artist. In all my research, I did not find another scholar who specifically addressed the perception of Suger as an artist. Panofsky called Abbot Suger many things: statesman, soldier, proto-humanist, theologian, poet, and arranger of liturgical spectacles.³¹ Von Simson considered Suger a diplomat and politician.³² Sarah Spence viewed him as a showman and curator,³³ and Crosby labeled Suger a patron of art and the first medieval historian.³⁴ In my analysis, caught in the middle of a statesman and an abbot was a “want-to-be” artist with a Divine vision for the

³¹ Gerda Panofsky-Soergel, *Abbot Suger: On the Abbey Church of St.-Denis and its Art Treasures*, ed. and trans., Erwin Panofsky, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 4,6,17,20.

³² von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 66.

³³ Robert M. Stein and Sandra Pierson Prior eds., *Reading Medieval Culture: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Hanning*, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 70.

³⁴ Sumner McKnight Crosby, *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis: in the Time of Abbot Suger (1122-1151)*, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1981), 15.

future. In the twelfth century, artists were merely considered “craftsmen,” not visionaries. For Suger to share his perception of reality, wisdom and prophecy in search of the *truth* of God’s Revelation he had to find resources to turn to for “reasons” to manifest his ineffable public aesthetics in the Saint Denis abbey. These resources will unfold throughout this thesis. For now, I declare that it is relevant to understand Suger’s history and relationship to the Saint Denis abbey to get a portrait of the man who changed the approach to worship at the turn of a century.

History

The Middle Ages were a time when man was seeking to understand his place in the God-created universe. One’s origin was relevant to perceiving why one thought and felt a certain way, as an individual lived out his or her life. It was understood that interior forces could determine moral behavior, and exterior influences were responsible for positioning in life. The medieval man considered both the private and the public realms of their life to be meaningful in his *becoming* and his very *being*. This is true of Abbot Suger.

Suger was born to a humble family who chose to pledge him to a monastery at the age of ten. This was customary in the Middle Ages for families who were either burdened with many children, or seeking to provide a son with an education and a career.³⁵ He grew up in the Saint Denis abbey, roaming all the grounds and buildings like a rat habituating its maze. Having been educated at the monastery, Suger developed an

³⁵ Sumner McKnight Crosby, *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis: from Its Beginnings*, 112.

understanding of his home and the history of the Saint Denis abbey. He knew every nook and cranny and eventually every crack and fissure, hidden treasure, and inadequacy.

Suger's soul was nurtured at the Saint Denis abbey.

By the time Suger became a young man, the world around him was expanding rapidly. He and his childhood friend from the abbey, Louis, who had become King Louis VI of France, joined forces to stabilize the shifting culture. Along with being elected as Abbot of the Saint Denis abbey, Suger became principal counselor to the king, and the king became a substantial donor to the abbey. Their alliance was extremely strong and most beneficial to the population of the empire. Saint Bernard of Clairvauz's comment, "behold the two swords," is a suitable metaphor describing their relationship.³⁶ During the twelfth century, an abbot was expected to take an oath of fealty and to perform the usual feudal obligations of justice and safety for the surrounding community.

With a decline in feudalism, and a new autonomy for the monasteries attained from the monastic reforms, Suger's abbey became very actively engaged with the predominantly illiterate and credulous culture. The society was struggling for security and understanding of the new intellectual advances that were unsettling the relationship of "faith and reason." Suger, although he never had written a theological treatise, was an erudite theologian. King Louis VI respected his knowledge and appointed him ambassador to the Pope. Suger was well aware of the doctrines of "faith" that were being challenged by "reason," and it was the church in the twelfth century that took the

³⁶ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 76.

responsibility to help the medieval culture discern between things worldly and those that were Godly.

The people and the prince called Suger the “Father of the Fatherland.”³⁷ Having proven himself as a competent caretaker of his people, both physically and spiritually, Suger was considered a just and humane man by nature, because he was sensitive to the “plight of the powerless,”³⁸ and “intelligent enough to discern hardship without chicanery.”³⁹ When observing his life and activities, scholars consider Suger hard working, a man of action, irrepressibly vivacious, companionable, full of good nature,⁴⁰ personally fascinating, a man of indefatigable energy and a powerful imagination.⁴¹ An anonymous French scholar labeled him, “Causeur infatigable.”⁴² Examples of his kindness abound in stories about sleepless nights while reconstructing the Saint Denis abbey, when he ventured into the dense woods in search of specific timber based on “faith,” and his consideration for his monks as he converted cold marble floors into warm wooden ones.⁴³ Suger’s personality was so exuberant that Panofsky innocuously

³⁷ Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 4,6,17,20.

³⁸ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 66.

³⁹ Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 8.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴¹ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 66, 72.

⁴² Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 13. Translated as indefatigable conversationalist

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 13, 35.

described the abbot's sporadic actions and incessant babble as vain in an "unselfish selfishness."⁴⁴ As a last word, Suger, in his own writings, called himself a "leader."⁴⁵

The abbot of a monastery was expected to care for souls and to maintain the structure in which they worshiped. Before becoming abbot of the Saint Denis, Suger had a reputation for being a strong caretaker and provider, keeping watch over France when King Louis VI was off on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The king returned to a culture fiscally restored and peaceful in unity, which had not been experienced before.⁴⁶ Well qualified and with authority, Suger was prepared to begin construction on the renovation of the Saint Denis abbey. He was a theologian and not a formally trained architect, but according to custom, the cleric of the church or abbey was the builder, or maker of the program.

The Greek word for "foreman" (*architekton*) gave the art of architecture its name.⁴⁷ Plato considered the architect a "quasi-mystical figure" who could create a pictorial way of explaining what is non-temporal, to show "the essential dependence of the ever-changing physical world on an eternal and intelligent cause of *becoming*."⁴⁸ Aristotle added to the strength of this assertion by stating, "No work can come into *being*

⁴⁴ Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 33.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁷ Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 271.

⁴⁸ Julius R. Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964), 113.

without faith and purity of aims.”⁴⁹ In other words, anybody practicing art had honest innate abilities, knowledge and purpose, to manifest the material as an illustration of the immaterial, leading to an eternal source of origin.

Thomas Crow discusses the role of the “maker” in *The Intelligence of Art*, where he identifies the predicament of balance between the name of the maker and the “work of art.” He considers the relationship delicate, yet possessing an “intuitive likeness or parallelism” that involves the art on one side and the “life story” of the maker on the other side.⁵⁰ In my study, the examination of this encounter between the architectural public aesthetics of the Saint Denis abbey and the life of Abbot Suger is highly relevant to discover what Crow calls “intriguing surprises and the unexpected,”⁵¹ or what Foucault would call, “peculiarities of the age.”

What I found curiously affecting about Suger, the quasi-mystical, maker/architect, was how he reacted to the combined experiences of his temporal life, the concern he had for the souls of his flock and his belief in supernatural inspiration along with the influences of his predecessors and contemporaries to create the theological architecture of the Saint Denis abbey. The synthesis of intellectual thinking with theology was considered Scholasticism and was eventually associated with the architecture of Gothic cathedrals; nevertheless, I am asserting that Abbot Suger went a step further, and also incorporated *non-formal* knowledge specifically designed for empirical *sense knowledge*,

⁴⁹ Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 271.

⁵⁰ Crow, *The Intelligence of Art*, 1.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

which would lead worshipers to a deeper spiritual relationship with God. This extramural countenance, I assert, is in response to the characters, and I do mean people with distinctive peculiarities, that Abbot Suger encountered at the start of his art campaign at the Saint Denis abbey. In the next subheading, I will highlight some of their noteworthy viewpoints that influenced Suger's anagogical *sense knowledge* aesthetics in the Saint Denis abbey, only to save the best surprises until Chapter Two. However, the relational interventions of Suger's colleagues are instrumental for two reasons. On the one hand, they stimulated his creative energy, and on the other hand, they restricted his spiritual autonomy.

Influences

The Saint Denis abbey had a controversial Apostolic origin. A number of individuals were involved in establishing its credibility and all of them had an affect on Abbot Suger. History suggests that the Carolingian church of Saint Denis was built by seventh-century King Dagobert, the original founder,⁵² and had been the “royal” abbey for many centuries. Kings, including Charles the Bald, and their princes received their early education within the monastery, and often in the end they were also buried there.⁵³ The Saint Denis was no ordinary Benedictine house of autonomy; it was the spiritual center of France, holding power and prestige.⁵⁴ According to legend, Christ had

⁵² Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 27.

⁵³ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 83.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

consecrated the abbey in person, and Charles the Bald presented relics of Christ's Passion to be honored at great religious feasts celebrated at the monastery. By the twelfth century, Louis VI declared the consecration by Christ as true.⁵⁵

The medieval Christian culture venerated saints and prized their relics. Although a relic was a material matter, any church or abbey housing these precious keepsakes were esteemed for their faith in the powers of the acclaimed saint.⁵⁶ The relics of the martyred Saint Denis, who had converted France to Christianity in the third century, along with his association with Saint Paul, gave the Saint Denis abbey its character as a sanctuary for "the salvation of the soul." The connection of Saint Paul to Saint Denis gave the French the concept that the spirit of Athens was transplanted to France, with "treasures of wisdom."⁵⁷ Consequently, it was extremely important for the Saint Denis abbey that the aforementioned spiritual accolades were true. The resource that surfaced to accommodate this prerequisite was the sixth-century writings of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite.

The mysterious writings of Dionysius discovered during the late fifth century were originally attributed to Saint Paul, Dionysius the Areopagite, but later were determined to have had an author writing under a pseudonym. Centuries later, in search of the anonymous writer, who was speculated to be Saint Denis, Louis The Pious requested Hilduin, the Abbot of Saint Denis (815-840 A.D.), to translate the original *Areopagitica*. Hilduin was extremely interested in this project because he wanted to

⁵⁵ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 78, 79.

⁵⁶ Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 167, 168.

⁵⁷ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 105.

prove that Saint Denis was the Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite connected to Saint Paul, so that his abbey could have the dignity associated with the patron saint.⁵⁸ The story that unfolded is as follows:

First there was Dionysius the Areopagite, identified by Saint Luke in the Vulgate Bible as one of Paul's early Athenian converts. He was known as the Areopagite because he was a member of the highest court in Athens, which sat on the Areopagus, or Hill of Athena Areia to the west of the Acropolis. According to Eusebius, who wrote his *Ecclesiastical History*, this same person became the first bishop of Athens, and a Christian theologian and philosopher. Second was Dionysius mentioned in Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum* (249-251 A.D.). Seven men, including "the blessed Dionysius, Bishop of Paris," were sent into Gaul to preach, but after the emperor Domitian ordered the persecution of all Christians, Dionysius and his companions were arrested, placed in prison, and finally decapitated. Legend has it that as soon as Dionysius' head touched the ground, he reached down and picked it up and continued walking, as his lips chanted psalms. He walked two miles to his chosen place of burial.⁵⁹

Hilduin recognized that the Graeco-Roman name *Dionysius*, deriving from the name of the Thracian god Dionysus, was exceedingly common amongst the ancient cultures, yet it

⁵⁸ A. Hamilton Thompson, reviewing Sumner McKnight Crosby, *The Abbey of Saint-Denis, 475-112*. Vol. I, in *the English Historical Review* 58 No. 231 (July 1943:357-359).

⁵⁹ Crosby, *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis*, 4.

was updated to the common name of Denis in later centuries.⁶⁰ This was evidence enough, along with the biblical stories of Saint Denis' walking, talking, head for Hilduin to defend his case, in his *Historia Sancti Dionysii*, and prove that the trench discovered in the crypt under the high altar of the Saint Denis abbey church is the burial place of Dionysius the Areopagite.

The author in the Dionysius writings claimed that he was the Denis who, according to the Act of the Apostles, was a distinguished Athenian who “clave unto Saint Paul and believed,” and had known Saint John the Evangelist. He also says that he had been a witness at key biblical events including the eclipse of the sun that accompanied Christ's death, and the dormition of the Virgin.⁶¹ Officially identified with the Saint Denis abbey, Hilduin attributed all of the Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite treatises to Saint Denis, including the aesthetically endowed *Celestial Hierarchy*, which described the heavenly hosts, the divine light and sensual gratification. Each new individual's theories with their depictions of aesthetic agency to describe precepts, along with illustrating *motion*, are relevant to this thesis. The presented information builds upon itself to form the substance that lies behind the material presentation of the Saint Denis abbey.

Hilduin was the first to translate the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius and to claim the patronage of Saint Denis; and he memorialized the saint in both a building and a

⁶⁰ Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre: A History of Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 148.

⁶¹ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 103.

text.⁶² A century later, Eriugena translated a more significant and accurate version. Eriugena lived in France and was known as an Irish theologian, a Neo-Platonist philosopher, a notable scholar of Greek, and a poet. His diverse talents permitted him to experiment with many aspects in the search of *truth*, but following the request of Charles the Bald to translate Dionysian writings from Greek to Latin, he dedicated his attention to revealing the mysteries there within, along with personal commentaries and a metaphysical system of his own.⁶³ As I discuss in chapter two, the mysteries uncovered by Eriugena would play a significant role in Suger's thinking about the renovation of the abbey. At this point, it is important to acknowledge his interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius contributed to Hilduin's assertion that the Pseudo-Dionysius was Saint Denis, and with this authority, a legacy of antiquity granted Paris the historical riches of Athens.

The Pseudo-Dionysius writings were not laid to rest after Eriugena. Hugh of Saint Victor, in the same era as Suger, elaborated even further on *the Celestial Hierarchy* with more of an Augustinian Christology than Eriugena had imposed. Due to this, some, and especially Rudolph, prefer to use Hugh of Saint Victor's translations when justifying the ecclesiastic aesthetics of the Saint Denis abbey. However, I will reference Eriugena's work more frequently for information and Hugh's for its imagination. A key word, *renovare*, which Hugh identified in the Dionysius writings, Suger interpreted as "renew, refresh, and renovate;" he adopted the term as motivation for his reformation of the Saint Denis abbey. In addition, Suger also embraced Hugh's inference that "the ultimate visible

⁶² Stein, *Reading Medieval Culture*, 74.

⁶³ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 105.

works of restoration act to illuminate contemplative vision, and so to lead one to the ultimate invisible *truth*.”⁶⁴ With this declaration, Abbot Suger could argue that works of restoration were divine events that lead to salvation, the primary spiritual purpose of the Saint Denis abbey. Hugh of Saint Victor’s commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius states:

“Two likenesses (*simulacra*) have been exposed to man in which it was possible to see the invisible: one of the nature and one of the grace (it should be remembered that the works of nature are the works of creation, and that the works of grace are the works of restoration) divine theology chose works of restoration to demonstrate the invisible through the visible.”⁶⁵

Pseudo- Dionysius’ linking God’s grace with restoration became a significant tenet to Suger. In his own *Booklet*, before starting his restoration campaign, Suger wrote:

“The great enterprise that is about to be undertaken requires an inner disposition, a state of grace, on the part of the builder. The mystical vision of harmony can become a model for the artist only if it has first taken possession of his soul and become the ordering principle of all its faculties an aspiration.”⁶⁶

As for the Grace of God, throughout his writings, Suger thanked God for the privilege to use his “lifetime and labors” to rebuild the abbey.⁶⁷ By the time Suger was appointed as abbot of the Saint Denis, he had a legacy of contemporary translations of the abbey’s origin to reference for justification of restoration. As stated earlier, the relics of the martyred Saint Denis, who had converted France to Christianity in the third century, gave

⁶⁴ Conrad Rudolph, *Artistic Change at St-Denis: Abbot Suger’s Program and the Early Twelfth-Century Controversy over Art*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 46.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶⁶ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 12.

⁶⁷ Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 29.

the Saint Denis abbey its character, along with his association with Saint Paul, as a sanctuary for “the salvation of the soul.”

By now my reader may be thinking: Suger’s colleagues who translated the Pseudo- Dionysius writings to validate the prominence of Saint Denis were not difficult, peculiar characters. This is true, but the effects of the translations did provoke two contemporaries who opposed two different, but relevant aspects of the Dionysius translations that did encumber the commencement of Suger’s art campaign at the abbey. Peter Abelard a popular lecturer who applied *logic* to the authoritative texts of the Christian Fathers, upon investigating the Dionysius documents of Pseudo-Areopagite, argued that Saint Denis was “not” the same author of these works. The second opposition came from a Cistercian monk, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, who initiated the second conservative monastery reform movement that denounced elaborate sanctuary aesthetics to promote reserved artistic asceticism. Neither of these two ways of understanding was congenial to Abbot Suger. Providentially after a short retirement at the Saint Denis abbey, just as Suger was taking on his new role as Abbot, Abelard died. Nevertheless, Bernard continued to harass Suger’s aesthetic vision, with what von Simson calls a sober puritan⁶⁸ taste, and Bernard condemned the embellishments of the Saint Denis abbey. Bernard was known for a resounding theme of temperance when it came to aesthetics in a church or abbey. He felt that art would distract the monks from their devotions. However, Abbot Suger, not only had a different taste, he had a fresh comprehension of what would direct, not divert, faithfulness of his monks, and he had a new hospitable attitude to

⁶⁸ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 39.

welcome any curious, lost soul who would wander into the prayer halls of the Saint Denis abbey.

What is intriguing to me is how Suger integrated his life aspiration and his soul inspiration in spite of the naysayers he encountered in his relationships. He forged ahead with his supernatural inspiration to manifest his celestial vision at the Saint Denis abbey. As stated earlier, the medieval man considered both the private and the public realms of his life to be meaningful in his *becoming*, and Suger's life story and associations paralleled his aesthetic aspirations. On a final note about unusual occurrences, Eriugena's radical commentaries on Pseudo-Dionysius were quickly condemned by the Catholic Church, banned and burned. After the death of Charles the Bald, Eriugena is never heard of again.⁶⁹ Another peculiarity is that although Bernard had put Suger on the defensive about his art campaign, Bernard and Suger eventually became cordial companions as they both served as advisors to popes and kings. Bernard praised Suger for his success in converting his whole religious community without upheaval in a very short time. It will become clear in this thesis that unusual circumstances was not unusual to Abbot Suger's endeavor to renovate and restore the spirit of the Saint Denis abbey and the surrounding culture.

Motivated by Hugh of Saint Victor's "restoration" treatise as a faithful spiritual endeavor, along with the paradoxical aesthetic oppositions Bernard posed, Suger was battling his own "faith" and "reason" conflicts as he began the renovation process on the Saint Denis abbey. By now there was no question that Suger felt he was justified by

⁶⁹ Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 49.

faith,⁷⁰ and inspired by Dionysius' *Celestial Hierarchy* to direct the eyes of the faithful from the visible to the invisible.⁷¹ Suger also knew that he had to defend his efforts with "reason" to convince his colleagues of his sincere devotion expressed through the *public aesthetics* of the Saint Denis abbey. He turned to the popular translations of the Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite writings to justify his cause, and consequently this provoked controversy for centuries to follow. Suger's decision to reference the Pseudo-Dionysius writings instead of solely turning to Augustinian scriptural interpretation and his spiritual inclinations are indicative of the spirit of the twelfth century's clash of "faith and reason." More of the contrast between traditional religious practice and mystical spiritual experience will be presented in Chapter Two.

Saint Augustine has claimed the architecture of a church (or abbey) evokes reverence and awe of the Divine presence.⁷² This declaration has remained true throughout the centuries with shifting aesthetics reflecting the faith of the times. In twelfth-century France, the Divine Presence of God was reflected through the veneration of the patron saint, Saint Paul, who was relevant to the Saint Denis abbey for two very important reasons. One, the legend of Saint Denis being the Pseudo-Areopagite, converted by Saint Paul, held great authority as translations of his writings influenced the new mystical interpretations of the Divine presence. Two, Saint Paul's doctrine of salvation promoted inner-life purification as signified by the spirit of the New Testament,

⁷⁰ Rudolph, *Artistic Change at St-Denis*, 28.

⁷¹ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 129.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 25.

and opposed the outer-life laws and cleansing rituals of the Old Testament.⁷³ A shift in worship and devotion toward a more empirical experience than a habitual practice resonated with King Louis VI and Abbot Suger, who were both instrumental in the reconstruction of the Saint Denis abbey. New spiritual standards moving beyond the ritualism of the old monasticism were considered part of contemporary monastic reform and labeled *contemporaneity*. This practice for a monastic institution was not taken lightly and required sensitive assessment of morals and disciplines of the people and age in which the transformation was to occur. Consideration of the medieval twelfth century will be explored under the next subheading.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *contemporaneity* as relational with a distinctive sense of “presentness,” and it was pointed out by Rudolph, to engage with this custom demanded at least a degree of nontraditional justification,⁷⁴ reminiscent of Foucault’s, “being subject to the rules that come into play.” In other words, transforming the ‘faith’ traditions of an age and culture involved intuition along with a “reason.” The activity around the Saint Denis abbey in the twelfth century involved a culture shifting in its activities and practices around their Christian faith, and the abbot was responsible for calculating the needs to maintain the religious convictions. For Abbot Suger, *contemporaneity* included the aesthetic restoration of the Saint Denis abbey to evoke reverence and awe of the Divine presence, “in the present.”

⁷³ Rudolph, *Artistic Change at St-Denis*, 27.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

Medieval Context

By the twelfth century, medieval culture had suffered from numerous invasions and crusades. Commerce had diminished, governments had decentralized, and life became more localized with responsibility of the people's welfare resting on the Church. In due time trade, agriculture and population growth forged a new middle class that adopted a sense of freedom in thought and creativity.⁷⁵ Twelfth-century lay society had changed. The days of turbulence and chronic insecurity were declining, and a spacious period of positive achievement was opening.⁷⁶ Andy Crouch in his book, *Culture Making*, underscores:

“Culture requires a public, a group of people who have been sufficiently affected by a cultural good, that opens their horizons of possibility and impossibility, which have in fact been altered, and their own cultural creativity has been spurred, by that good's existence.”⁷⁷

Louis VI, Suger's childhood friend, had successfully established a new sense of order and personal security that augmented the new confidence the culture was experiencing. Because of their shared vitality, courage, and passion Suger and King Louis VI developed a life-long friendship. After the death of Louis VI, Suger continued the same respectable and amiable relationship with Louis' son King Louis VII, which

⁷⁵ James Bruce Ross and Mary Martin McLaughlin, eds., *The Portable Medieval Reader: The Astonishing World of the Middle Ages*, (New York: The Viking Press, 1949), 9.

⁷⁶ Marshall W. Baldwin, *The Mediaeval Church*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1953), 45.

⁷⁷ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2008), 38.

included connections with Saint Bernard.⁷⁸ With a new stability and camaraderie between the King and the Church, dormant intellectual matters were revived, and education was revitalized in both isolated universities and in the monasteries. Clerical morale itself had been measurably raised as education became available from emerging schools and the accessibility of texts.⁷⁹ Suger was not only in a key position to affect the culture of France, he was also enlightened by new intellectual energy.

With more unity and integration between the Church and the empire, the Church received freedom to govern and socially organized every sphere of medieval life to create a strong civilization.⁸⁰ Canons and church laws were instituted, and as Huizinga circumspectly observed:

“All [medieval] life was saturated with religion to such an extent that the people were in constant danger of losing sight of the distinction between things spiritual and things temporal. In the Middle Ages the demarcation of the sphere of religious thought and that of worldly concerns was nearly obliterated.”⁸¹

What did remain *true* was that the medieval society accepted the principle that man was destined for another life and that all his actions were potentially significant in shaping his eternal destiny; the supernatural was very real.⁸² Richard Niebuhr richly enhances this precept in *Christ and Culture*, by describing how the reality of social heritage is *sui*

⁷⁸ Crosby, *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis*, 106, 107.

⁷⁹ Baldwin, *The Mediaeval Church*, 45.

⁸⁰ Ross, *The Portable Medieval Reader*, 26.

⁸¹ Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 156.

⁸² Baldwin, *The Mediaeval Church*, 113.

generis for Christians, and that culture is a “secondary environment which man superimposes on the natural, that which is artificial, and comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, and values.”⁸³ Another way of describing the religious spirit of the twelfth-century culture is that the people were spiritually alive with a basic belief in God’s eternal salvation yet quite unaware of what was on the worldly horizon to challenge their customs and values. As caretaker of their souls, Abbot Suger had an opportunity to foster the people’s *sui generis* Christian faith to a heightened security in God, and to ready their souls for the challenge of intellectual reasoning.

It was the Church in the twelfth century that took the responsibility to help the medieval culture discern between things worldly and those that were Godly. Rookmaaker explains that the Church recognized this distraction and tried to incorporate the secular world into their system to prevent “autonomous *nature* from becoming non-Christian and emancipated from Christianity.”⁸⁴ Von Simson made an astute claim, “the twelfth century was marked by the struggle between *imperium* and *sacerdotium*, centering mainly in the issue of investiture.”⁸⁵ In other words, the people struggled with their interests and loyalties between the City of God and the City of the World. Fortunately for Abbot Suger, the whole cultural atmosphere of the medieval twelfth century was fully

⁸³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951), 31.

⁸⁴ H. R. Rookmaaker, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1994), 350.

⁸⁵ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 33.

embedded in a united front where moral theory, political doctrine, the institutions of society such as the family and work, the arts and literature, and much of science, all bore the imprint of Augustine's "God and soul only" theology. Basic tenets were preached about eternal life after death and rituals were instilled to encourage the community to prepare for this heavenly life, by nourishing a supernatural life that acknowledged God along with His sanctification offering. The Church was more interested in saving souls than causing social reform, but it did believe that a society would improve by the changing of individuals within it.⁸⁶

The vitality of the vulnerable culture of the twelfth century released a fervent eruption of creativity intellectually and artistically. New inventions including, clocks, spectacles, buttons and forks, illustrated the pragmatic side of life's aspirations. The twelfth-century medieval culture was essentially "architectonic" in its ideals and achievements and was supported by workers and artisans from indigenous parts of the social structure.⁸⁷ Ecclesiastically churches, abbeys and cathedrals aesthetically expressed the vibrant spirit of the times, and encyclopedic systems of thought were emerging in the monasteries as the educational system *par excellence*, a school of the Lord's service for moral training in preparation for the "good life," and eternal salvation.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Baldwin, *The Mediaeval Church*, 3.

⁸⁷ Ross, *The Portable Medieval Reader*, 21.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

As a cleric, Suger had a responsibility to engender the worshipers of his Saint Denis abbey with a “divine” revelation that could withstand the pressures of the approaching scholasticism. The new way of thinking announced a new dimension to what Aristotle described as *potentiality* and *actuality*, that would eventually rupture Augustine’s *Absolute*. Abbot Suger was sensitive to the potential shift in culture from “faith to reason,” and as his biographer, William of Saint Denis registers,

“ . . . in him [Suger] flourishes the highest art of understanding what had to be done and taking heed to such a degree that he held in readiness whatever exceptional thing he either had heard said or had said to himself at one time or another for the place and time [that they would be needed].⁸⁹

It was “such a time as this,” that Abbot Suger unfolded his destiny in life to restore the glory of God in the Saint Denis abbey as a public esthetic illuminating the *truth*.

The motivation behind Suger’s renovation at the abbey came from his very own soul, that was nurtured at the Saint Denis, stimulated by his contemporaries, paradoxically troubled and encouraged by the dualistic struggle of mankind engaging with “faith and reason,” and ultimately inspired by the Divine Grace of God. Understanding Suger’s history, his personality, his associations and the ethos of the culture in which he lived, is essential to understanding the *force* behind his efforts as artistic composer of the Saint Denis abbey. Documented in his own writings, Suger declared that his intentions were purely for the glory of God united with the souls of His flock, in a spiritual epiphany of salvation.

⁸⁹ Rudolph, *Artistic Change at St-Denis*, 33.

CHAPTER TWO: Anagogical Public Aesthetics

Although saving souls was the number one role of an Abbot, in the twelfth century, the responsibility for this charge intensified as faith was confronted with reason. Harry Emerson Fosdick in *The Meaning of Faith* rightly notes, “Many minds are undone at the first symptoms of religious uncertainty, because they suppose that their doubt is philosophical, and they feel a paralyzing inability to deal with philosophy at all.”⁹⁰ The canons and *truth* of universals that had survived for centuries under the auspices of theology were now being questioned and intruded upon by philosophy. Foucault’s relevant observation about culture is that “within a space of a few years a culture sometimes ceases to think as it had been thinking up till then and begins to think other things in a new way.” Foucault further speculates that the impetus for “change probably begins with erosion from outside, from that space which is, for thought, on the other side, but in which it has never ceased to think from the very beginning.”⁹¹ No longer were theology and philosophy considered one and the same. Although many cultural leaders

⁹⁰ Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Meaning of Faith*, (New York: Association Press, 1922), 38.

⁹¹ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 50.

were seeking to validate theology and philosophy as simultaneously beneficial, there was a dispute as to what was to be first, the “faith” of theology or the “reason” of philosophy.

The attempt to synthesize theology with philosophy was also delineating the relationship of the soul and the mind. On the one hand, theology clearly declared God as the Ultimate *truth*, Mover, and origin of man, who systematically arranged the universe to reconcile an intimate relationship between man and God that was called salvation. In the development of this process, universal knowledge would be shared through the soul of man if he believed based on faith. On the other hand, philosophy dubiously contended that man’s mind, or the psyche soul, was capable of attaining universal knowledge through the logic of reasoning in various independent exercises of dialectical thinking that could direct the soul. For the twelfth-century Christian culture this contemporary discourse was bewildering, and it was the church that was held responsible for helping the people to discern and understand the differences as they applied the theories to their religious lives. Never in history of Christendom had there been a more important era to ensure faith “first,” and for an Abbot that meant saving souls.

This chapter will answer the previously posed questions: How is a soul saved? How are philosophical and theological precepts ascribed to aesthetics? How does Christian public aesthetics move a culture? To form the foundation for an anagogical aesthetic theory this chapter will demonstrate a Foucauldian archaeological inquiry into the general space of philosophical and theological knowledge about the purification of the soul, and the relationships between centuries of word-pictures describing the soul’s conversion. In his education, Abbot Suger would have been exposed to the scholarship that will be explored. It is now time to slip into the creative psyche of Abbot Suger to

absorb the incredible treasures uncovered in this epistemological field of investigation that ultimately were translated into the luminous public aesthetics of the Saint Denis abbey.

Philosophy affecting Aesthetics

Philosophy in twelfth-century France was founded on theories of the great thinkers of Athens Greece, including Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. For these men, philosophy was a *way of life*, a way for man to fit into the scheme of the universe.⁹² For Greek society, philosophy was necessary to determine righteousness.⁹³ Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-143 B.C.), a Roman philosopher, added to the societal needs of justice and declared, “It is for philosophy to investigate the causes of all human and *divine* things.”⁹⁴ Following Cicero, Lucius Annaeus Seneca (1 B.C. – 65 A.D.) further explained, “Philosophy forms and molds the soul, orders life, rules the emotions, shows what things are to be done and what omitted.”⁹⁵ In other words, philosophy was a way of thinking about man’s moral behavior in a cosmic design in order to understand man’s origin and responsibilities in the nature of the world.

Between the declarations of these two great men, Cicero and Seneca, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born into this world. He bestowed a radically new perspective on origin, the order of the universe, human knowledge, existence, reality, goodness, destiny

⁹² Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre: A History of Philosophy*, 46.

⁹³ Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 8.

⁹⁴ Ross, *The Portable Medieval Reader*, 534.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 534.534.

and truth. Classical intellectual activity was interrupted by new concepts that challenged philosophy. With effervescence, theology assimilated the ancient realm of thought for centuries to follow and it managed to remain dominant until the rise of Scholasticism, the school of reason, which then demanded the return of its legacy. At the threshold of this occurrence, we enter the philosophy of the twelfth century preoccupied with particular problems pertaining to proving God's existence and His *divine* indoctrination of his Son in contrast to the increasing awareness of individual man and his *human* nature.

One of the main reasons why Christianity prevailed over classical philosophy was the oratory of biblical narrative was ubiquitously dominant over the lost implicit Greek texts and rhetoric of philosophy. This prominent status of theology changed when the Greek philosophy of Aristotle was translated into Latin during the twelfth century. Until then the philosophy of Plato and Neo-Platonism had sufficed as it was integrated into Christianity on the premise of Plato's *tripartite* theory in *The Republic*, in which he argues that the soul's three parts, appetite, rational, and spirit are solely directed by the force of the spirit to control the mind and the body. In contrast, as Aristotle examined the soul and its life-giving force in man, his view of immortality of the soul was notoriously obscure, and often interpreted as an outright denial of the existence of the soul. Furthermore, Aristotle's teachings in the twelfth century introduced the science of *logic*, which impaired the sovereignty of "faith," and introduced "reason" to the epistemological discourse on the ontology of man.

To begin the philosophical excavation of man and his origin, three "dig-bags" are needed: one for the soul, one for the metaphor, and one for the paradox of faith and reason. The findings reveal treasures of references for Suger as he imagines the aesthetics

translations of the precepts. The first site for exploration is in the prosperous Greek city of Croton in the southern part of Italy where the extraordinary wise man Pythagoras began his active philosophical life in 525-500 B.C.⁹⁶ Pythagoras speculated that there was a hierarchy in the life of man which he described through the metaphor of the Olympian games: the lowest class were the men who operated in the economics of the affair, while in the middle were the competitors, and at the highest level were the spectators, who analyzed and reflected on the event. To “look on” for Pythagoras was a posture of liberated thinking, and observation was esteemed. (One of the meanings of the Greek word *theory* is to “look on.”)⁹⁷ Each individual synopsis in Chapter Two is an opportunity to “look on” an epistemological field of study that eventually contributed to the aesthetic decisions involved in the renovation of the Saint Denis abbey. The repetitive themes build upon one another to reveal implicit and relevant concepts.

Pythagoras’ philosophy added to the hierarchy of man and assigned a soul to man, which he perceived as needing a means of purification. Theologically Pythagoras did not hold an opinion about the nature of the gods, but he was culturally embedded in the religion of *Dionysus*, where a cleansing practice of exhausting passionate worship occurred as a passage into the *spirit* of Dionysus for immortality.⁹⁸ Not content with this ritual, Pythagoras directed his attention to the study of mathematics as the definitive purifier of the soul that assured its immortality. *Numbers* became the principles of all

⁹⁶ Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 9.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 10.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

things in search of a “mode of being” of a “pure order.”⁹⁹ Pythagoras’ doctrine of a mathematically ordered world began with counting pebbles that developed into relationships of lines, triangles and squares. As the method magnified to create specific kinds of entities Pythagoras moved on from arithmetic to geometry, and then to a structure of reality that revealed an order in the universe.¹⁰⁰ This system grew into the concept of “form” and became the most important philosophical contribution Pythagoras made. The notion of “form” gave “limit” to the previous concept of unlimited substance in “matter.” Pythagoras best illustrated the concept of “limit” in music and medicine as exemplified in *harmony* and *health*.¹⁰¹ Pythagorean mathematics of form, and the hierarchy of man’s soul, had significant influence upon later philosophers, especially Plato’s Forms,¹⁰² and it eventually crossed over into the theology of the Pseudo-Dionysius writings that were instrumental in Suger’s mystical references on aesthetics of form. Raw material has now been placed in all three dig-bags.

Fifty years later the second site to visit is the sacred Athens’ precinct of Apollo Lyceus where Socrates (470 – 399 B.C.) was known to think. Socrates held an interest in the nature of man and the moral qualities of human actions. He was ardently committed to the pursuit of wisdom and truth that leads to a life worth living. Socrates conceived of man’s soul as a psyche capable of intelligence that could shape a man’s conscious

⁹⁹ Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 9.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 10, 11.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 12.

character and direct his daily conduct. Considering himself a “visionary,” since he experienced “messages” and “warnings” from a “mysterious voice” he called *daimon*, Socrates was very sensitive to the interior of man.¹⁰³ He believed man must take care of his soul to live a moral life. “To know the good is to do the good,” was a proverbial expression he issued to establish his foundation for a good life by linking *knowing* with *doing*.¹⁰⁴ Socrates declared that the activity of the soul is to *know*, and knowledge is virtue. This was a new approach to intellectual inquiry and centered reliable knowledge within the soul of man where the psyche had the power to process thought in an orderly manner to initiate right behavior. Socrates labeled this concept *dialectic*.

The process of the dialectic begins with a disciplined conversation of the most obvious aspect of any problem until a clear outcome is coaxed out that is the fullest possible knowledge about it, including an inconclusive result.¹⁰⁵ To arrive at clear and fixed concepts, Socrates added an action he called *definition*, where the mind could distinguish the particular and the universal through *inspection* and *interpretation*. Through his *dialectic* discourse Socrates claimed that underneath the world of facts, the mind could discover an intelligible order in things lying behind what is visible in the world.¹⁰⁶ Suger’s artistic endeavor in the public aesthetics of the Saint Denis abbey illustrated the creative process of inspection and interpretation to identify particular

¹⁰³ Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 35, 36.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 39, 40.

symbolic transformers that lead to what lies behind the visible world. Socrates' philosophy also resonates with Foucault's exchange of ideas around the language of *action* which allows the appearance of "peculiarities" that reveal a *positive unconscious* knowledge that is subjacent to consciousness. While Foucault was not a student of Socrates, Plato was, and Plato preserved Socrates' unwritten theory of inductive argument and universal definitions in his renowned writing in *Dialogues*.¹⁰⁷

Inspired by a noble teacher, Plato (428-348 B. C.) brought together all the previous major concerns of human thought into a coherent organization of knowledge that he insisted was never explicit because he wanted to preserve the freedom of his mind for new intellectual insights bred from the impression of an "idea."¹⁰⁸ Plato argued that the world of ideas, and not the visible world of actual things, was the most real and most formed "true" knowledge.¹⁰⁹ Continuing Socrates' theme of an intelligible order underlying the visible world, "a world behind the world of things," Plato fabricated his legendary cave allegory of two worlds, the dark and the light to illustrate the "conversion of the soul" from the world of appearances to the world of reality. Liberated from the cave and enlightened through the sense experience, the mind could attain true knowledge. Plato discussed four stages of this process in a hierarchy from the lowest and darkest reality to the highest, light, and intelligible world, moving from the imagination where the sense experience of appearances is taken as true reality, through a level of believing

¹⁰⁷ Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 46.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 44, 49.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

with an opinion, on to thinking in the abstract, to finally reasoning from hypotheses which depends upon some higher truth related to a larger context. Although Plato concedes that the mind is never satisfied, he did claim a “perfect intelligence” where the mind is completely released from sensible objects and is dealing directly with the *Forms*. Plato asserted that this theory is facilitated by the power of Socrates’ *dialectic*. The “perfect intelligence” in the unity of knowledge Plato identified as the *synoptic* view of reality.¹¹⁰

The concept that Ideas and Forms are those “changeless, eternal, and nonmaterial essences or patterns of which the actual visible objects we see are only poor copies,” became central to all of Plato’s philosophy explaining the nature of a timeless existence of Ideas such as Good and Beautiful, which have more *being* than things. The real world Plato argues is not the visible world but rather is the intelligible world, because it consists of the eternal Forms. For example, the concept of Beauty is more beautiful than the beautiful physical object itself.¹¹¹ It is important to understand that Forms to Plato exist prior to their embodiment in things, and also after they perish. Forms have an independent existence.¹¹² For Plato, the soul resides in Form and is the principle of life, but it can only achieve order and peace if “reason” is in control of the man’s sensual *appetite*, and the power of the *spirit* within. Plato asserts that if the soul leaves the realm of the Forms and enters the body it will drift “in the bewildering sea of multiplicity of

¹¹⁰ Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 51, 55.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 56, 57.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 58.

things” and “reason” will fail to recall the truth it once knew; that the ultimate reality is nonmaterial. If the soul does control the appetite and the spirit of the body through its knowledge of the truth, there will be a recovery of man’s lost inner harmony through *recollection* in a process such as from darkness to light, ignorance to knowledge. To Plato, when there is inner harmony, man will have a good life of well-being and happiness. Plato concludes that when reason controls the soul of life, man achieves the virtue of *wisdom*, and the balance of inner harmony.¹¹³

Although Plato avoids theology, in his *Timaeus* he does lay out a view of the cosmos in a coherent way illustrating how the world exhibits order and purpose according to an arrangement of geometrical intervals and harmonic scales that are the work of *intelligence* that he accredits to a divine Craftsman or Demiurge. This Creator does not bring new things into being but rather orders what already exists in chaotic form from a matrix receptacle that has no structure, and in which things eternally appear and perish. Plato maintains that all this activity is achieved by the World Soul through divine “reason.”¹¹⁴ Finally, Plato asserts that to make sense of these things the mind must discover reasons for the way these physical things behave and he resorts to the science of physics and mathematical principles. Mathematics led Plato into the field of metaphysics, ethics, religion, as well as a theory of art.¹¹⁵ Plato’s “world behind the world of things”

¹¹³ Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 60, 67.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 74, 76.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

and his “dark to light soul conversion” resonate in the public aesthetics of the renovated Saint Denis abbey.

Dig bags are full and now is a good time to shift through them to get a glimpse of the ancient world before Aristotle makes his mark. The twelfth century was just beginning to translate Aristotle for study and interpretation. Upon examination, all three ancient philosophers agree that man has a soul that must be taken care of and eventually converted to purification. All three identify a process of cleansing through an orderly system of harmony leading to a purer order. Pythagoras identified a hierarchy in man’s life to climb to liberation and Plato’s climb was out of the cave from dark to light, with both acknowledging the participation of the senses in the process to experience and perceive. Shapes and Forms, along with imagination and Ideas, reveal the dualism of mind/matter that both Socrates and Plato suggest activates the ability to see the invisible intelligible order of things behind what is visible and where “true” knowledge resides that is Good, Beautiful and eternal. None of the great thinkers found a god there in the ultimate immaterial reality, only knowledge, truth, wisdom, and in Plato’s case, a Craftsman. Finally in the faith and reason bag there was no reason to look for faith, for what lies at the bottom is Socrates’ dialectic and Plato’s divine reason. The essential “take away” from the excavation is that man has a soul that progresses through an ordered hierarchy to be cleansed by sense perception from dark to light leading beyond the visible to an invisible purer order of true knowledge that is good, beautiful and eternal. In essence this journey is anagogical.

Would Aristotle add anything new to the find? Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)_was a pupil of Plato at Plato’s Academy and fluctuated between affirming and criticizing

Plato's philosophy until he developed his own version. The main difference was that Aristotle was more interested in empirical data of *nous* than Plato's mathematical approach. The dynamic realm of *becoming* as opposed to Plato's *being* was more important to Aristotle.¹¹⁶ Therefore, yes, adding the motion of *becoming* empirically is very relevant to the findings in this research, particularly in regards to how Aristotle described the process of change as advancing from *potentiality* to *actuality*. However, Aristotle's doctrine of *syllogism*, a reasoning process to get at the *truth* of reality that is described in "words,"¹¹⁷ for this study, could be left out of the bag for at least another century. Providentially, Aristotle affirms that the mind ascends from the visible material world to the invisible immaterial to find the first principle of *being* through the *senses* to the highest level of abstraction.¹¹⁸ Finally, Aristotle does not recognize God, and this does become a problem for the twelfth-century thinker as Aristotle's works become important in the framework of Scholasticism. Nonetheless, he does continue to acknowledge man's soul and its potential to be virtuous through perpetual habit.¹¹⁹ Many of Aristotle's theories on sense stimulation; empirical knowledge, abstraction, potentiality and habitual behaviors were just being studied in the monastery schools. Suger learned from his classical predecessors and soon adopted many of their concepts as principles for his own aesthetics.

¹¹⁶ Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 79.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 81-83.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 86-89, 95, 96.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 96-100.

Before leaving Antiquity, this research would be remiss if it did not visit Plotinus (204-279 A. D.), a philosopher of the third century who studied both Plato and Aristotle to institute a position of philosophy that was later labeled Neo-Platonism. In the Middle Ages Neo-Platonism assisted in the synthesis of philosophy and theology because of its speculative description of the system of reality with a religious doctrine of salvation. Plotinus described the world, its source, where man fit in it and how he should behave morally. He argued that the true nature of man was to return to Absolute Unity in God. This concept transformed Plato's elusive Demiurge to an Absolute reality in God, and created a new Platonism with a mystical transcendental ecstasy.¹²⁰ Plotinus described the union of man with God in a metaphor of hierarchical *emanation*, where things flowed excessively from God by way of light emanating from the inexhaustible sun.¹²¹ Plato's sunlight outside of the cave. For Suger, the Neo-Platonist identity with God and the desire for Absolute Unity was significant to his design of harmonious anagogical aesthetics demonstrated in the overall structure of the Saint Denis abbey.

Finally another great Athens thinker must be considered. Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (480-524 A.D.). Boethius, a philosopher, lived a short life in Athens that lead to execution, and left behind a very influential treatise, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. His work presented a new vision of philosophy residing in imaginative forces that were higher than human nature. Boethius envisioned a divine Providence, of

¹²⁰ Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 120, 121.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

God, that offered an allegorical description of philosophy.¹²² Shifting the rational of philosophy toward the imagination was a beneficial perspective when processing the relationship between “faith and reason,” and Boethius’ treatise contributed to the vigorous debates in philosophy and theology for decades to follow.

Plato’s and Aristotle’s enterprise of philosophy dominated the intellectual scene for centuries, and the philosophy of the Middle Ages eventually became known as natural philosophy because it assumed that the universe has a natural order of things that the human mind could rationalize. With the help of Plotinus and Boethius medieval natural philosophy maintained a belief in the existence of God and revealed a matrix of diverse and competing *potentialities*¹²³ that synthesized philosophy with religion. The philosopher at the time was arguing within the limits of human understanding and arguing from the principles of physics. The theologian based his views on the belief in a God who was not limited by the principles of nature. Those who applied reason to the solution of problems in theology knew that, in the final analysis, reason was subordinate to faith. The Christian faith was based on the revelation of fundamental *truths* that were assumed to be beyond the knowledge of reason. Reason was important in the Middle Ages because the domain of thought was divided between truths presented by revelation and truths made available by reason. But if revelation was *truth* beyond compare, the rock on which Christian society was built, reason became the means to understand the

¹²² Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 146-148.

¹²³ Stein, *Reading Medieval Culture*, 96, 100.

revelation and its associated spiritual matters. The archaeological inquiry will turn to the Christian “rock” in the next subheading of this chapter.

The final take away from medieval philosophy for the benefit of aesthetics is substantial and extremely significant to Abbot Suger’s artistic affinities. Pythagoras initiated the canon of mathematical divine proportions of harmony. Socrates revealed the invisible behind the visible. Plato elevated the gift of imagination and delivered the ultimate source of “light” for revelation that Plotinus illuminated toward salvation, and Aristotle highlighted the *empirical* experience of sense knowledge for *becoming*; all spoke in terms of ascension to attain a higher order of “true” *being*. As a culmination of their wisdom, it is effortless to conclude that there is an innate harmonic structure in the world, universe and man, that is invisible but can be imagined by the agency of light and reasoned by the soul through a hierarchical empirical experience that leads to action of moral behavior. A perfect combination of philosophical theories for Abbot Suger to synthesize with the theology of the twelfth century as he aesthetically composed and constructed his Saint Denis abbey to serve the surrounding culture’s “faith” being challenged by “reason.”

Theology affecting Aesthetics

The philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, relative to the universe, its creator, man, man’s behavior, and the salvation of man’s soul was so enticing that it could not be ignored when confronted with theology. The twelfth-century culture was encountering new knowledge through reasoning and deduction, and this process threatened the basis of faith when it came to the universe, its creator, man, man’s behavior, and the salvation of

man's soul. The intimidation of a philosophy challenging theology had to be reconciled. At first, beginning with Augustine, declarations were made that there was no difference between philosophy and theology because "faith" and "reason" lead to the same end. This was an easy assumption since the Church controlled the culture of the twelfth century, and their doctrines were clear and dogmatic that God was the Absolute Truth, the Original Creator, and Immanuel. But theologians inundated by new translations of philosophy found themselves in a precarious position of having to explain and defend these precepts.

The theological traditions of Christianity looked to ancient Greek philosophy for the language and argument with which to articulate their religious visions. Theologians believed that the discoveries of philosophers had already been anticipated by Scripture in Roman 1:20; "Ever since the creation of the world, His eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things He has made." Medieval theologians described four methods of interpreting the Scriptures: literal/historical, allegorical, topological (moral), and anagogical.¹²⁴ All of the approaches were used depending on the circumstances, but faith was always the most important element in the process of interpretation, and regarded as essential before any reasoning. The responsibility of shepherding an illiterate culture expanding into a scholastic atmosphere was inevitable, and finding palatable language was pertinent.

The rise of intellectual activity around the merged boundaries of theology and philosophy motivated a diversity of thought and action in medieval Christendom. There

¹²⁴ Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 40, 50.

was trepidation within the civilization concerning sufficiency of the individual powers of reasoning to understand the most important aspect of religious life, salvation. The culture was no longer free to act purely on faith alone. The translations of Aristotle's philosophy filtering through the thoughts on life and universals permeated the authority of theology, and the delineation was confusing. The new "reasoning process" of Aristotle was stifling: requiring induction, deduction, and demonstrative reasoning, developed into "words" describing thoughts in a valid system to reach a truth. How was Suger going to freely release all the creative energy he acquired from visiting numerous pilgrimage centers throughout Italy, the Rhineland and France that had displayed a stagnant faith? What references could he make when he envisioned a new aesthetic *beyond* the dogma of Romanesque art? Why did he not feel free to express the divine presence in his soul that had been fostered since he was a child at the Saint Denis abbey? Typically an artist striving to create a work of art that seeks to touch the soul of a culture and *move* its members to a higher order must ensure that the art has absorbed the understood *way of life* first, before enhancing the work with new visions that evoke a new way of thinking.

The "other" side of life from philosophy that must be excavated to complete the study seeking relics of wisdom is the terrain of theology, and the same three dig-bags are needed: soul, metaphor and faith and reason. Within the millennium between the two greatest theologians of the Middle Ages, Augustine and Aquinas, the works of two others are prominent, theologian Anselm of Canterbury of the Benedictine Order and his posthumous contender on the problems of the universal, Peter Abelard, a scholar of philosophy and theology. To complete the theological assessment of the influences on the twelfth-century Abbot Suger and his Saint Denis abbey, it is imperative to also study the

writings of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite through the translations of John Scottus Eriugena, and Hugh of Saint Victor. First stop Rome, and it will be a long visit with the most influential theologian of the Middle Ages.

Augustine did not think of himself as a philosopher, but his lifetime quest for true wisdom and spiritual peace designated him as such along with being a theologian. In the late fourth century A.D. he was born in Africa of a pagan father and a Christian mother who did not provide him with a secure childhood, as a result, he suffered deep moral turmoil while growing up.¹²⁵ Disillusioned with Christianity and perplexed by evil, Augustine set out to discover a truth that did not need “faith before reason.” He moved to Rome to be a student of rhetoric and he explored the “dualism” of Manichaeism for a short spell, only to find disappointment there as it contrasted his inbred faith in God. Next he experimented with Skepticism, but his affinity for “reason” moved him on, and he found Neo-Platonism. Augustine enjoyed the Neo-Platonist concept of a world totally separate from the material world, and that man possesses a spiritual sense that enables him to know God in the immaterial world. Augustine could now see the unity of the world to include the body and the soul and he overcame his skepticism, materialism and dualism concerns.¹²⁶ His studies in Neo-Platonism helped him to make sense of Christianity, but as he got deeper into Plotinus’ doctrine of *emanation* Augustine became too unsettled, for he had a “seed” in his soul that claimed that all things owe their existence to God and not a world of God overflowing.

¹²⁵ Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 129.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

Abandoning rhetoric, Augustine devoted his life to the pursuit of philosophy, which for him meant theology, the knowledge of God who had all authority. True philosophy for Augustine was inconceivable without a convergence of “faith and reason,” and for him, there was no distinction between theology and philosophy.¹²⁷ The main source of Augustine’s theology and philosophy was his interpretations of Scripture in search of wisdom of life, but in his travels, Plato and congenial remnants from Neo-Platonism also influenced him. In due time, while sharing his studies with Saint Ambrose, he became a Catholic and was ordained a priest in 391 A.D. This led to his becoming the Bishop of Hippo in 395. Until his death, Augustine stayed steadfast to his claim that the only things he wished to know were God and the soul.¹²⁸ Augustine avowed that God created the world and all form has His “seed,” including man, which illumines the human intellect with divine wisdom that is unfolding from the very beginning of creation.¹²⁹ Interpreting the Platonic concept of the physical world as a reflection of the Ideal, Augustine claimed that everything in the world is a symbol of the Creator, and as a foundational doctrine: God created all things *ex nihilo*, out of nothing.¹³⁰

Skepticism surrounded Augustine in his time, and in many of his works he addressed various heresies and philosophies. Augustine did not feel threatened by

¹²⁷ Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 131.

¹²⁸ Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 31.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹³⁰ Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 138.

philosophy. He interpreted philosophy as a quest for a happy life that had undertones of ethics and religious purpose.¹³¹ With this attitude, Augustine gave many classical answers to philosophical problems, specifically addressing the concern of the two Absolutes that coincide in the nature of *truth* and God: the religious, *Deus*, and the philosophical, *esse*. He firmly asserted that religion presupposes every philosophical thought or question, and God is the presupposition of the question of God: “Where I have found the truth, there I have found my God, the truth itself.”¹³² According to Augustine, *veritas* is presupposed in every philosophical argument, and *veritas* is God, the ontological solution to the problem of the philosophy of religion. Augustine’s position became the rational and conclusive description of the relationship between the mind and *Being* for the medieval mindset.

Augustine esteemed “faith” over the facts of science because it held the *revealed truth*, and for him it was only from this perspective that “reason” could be approached: “Believe in order that you may understand” (*On the Gospel of John*, Tract 29, 6 and Sermon CXVIII, I) rather than “understand in order that you may believe” expressed his fundamental attitude that faith precedes, and understanding follows.¹³³ Augustine understood that “reason” had value and that it could aid “faith” by elucidating what is initially believed or even establishing the need for belief. Augustine trusted that the “seed” within, of Divine Wisdom, would provide the freedom to submit to the Truth

¹³¹ Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 31.

¹³² Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball, (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 12, 16.

¹³³ Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 32.

discovered within, because the *revealed truth* came from a single eternal Source of eternal Truth, and to him that was God.¹³⁴

For the human mind to comprehend this divine *truth*, Augustine devised a concept that “intellectual perception results from an act of illumination” in which the divine intellect enlightens the human soul.”¹³⁵ This presumption rests on Plato’s *sunlight*, and for Augustine, God is the source of this light. A divine “light” could lead the human intellect beyond sense objects to a higher level of eternal truth, which Augustine described as abstraction bathed in incorporeal light.¹³⁶ With Augustine’s endorsement along with a long historical reference to the agency of “light,” the medieval culture conceived of a transcendental reality that engenders the universe, and illuminates the intellect for the perception of *truth*. The ability to lead the mind from the visible world of appearance to the contemplation of the divine *truth* became known as “anagoge,” ascending to the *truth* via the sense experience of “light.” Sense knowledge was acceptable to Augustine, but he did place limits on it because of the uncertainty in human interpretation, and insisted that the experience must elevate to the highest perception, God.

Another aesthetic constituent that Augustine adopted was the Pythagorean and Neo-Platonist numerical mysticism. He used it to interpret the Christian universe based on Solomon’s wisdom recorded in Scripture, “thou hast ordered all things in measure and

¹³⁴ Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 36, 37.

¹³⁵ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 52.

¹³⁶ Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 135, 136.

number and weight.”¹³⁷ In Augustine’s eyes, the cosmos would return to chaos without the principle of *number*. The authority of Augustine’s *divine wisdom of number* also endowed Christian art with an extraordinary dignity where the ideal of beauty remained a visual one,¹³⁸ until it reached “intelligible beauty,” then it became virtue.¹³⁹ The aesthetics of “beauty” became a visible illustration of the *divine order* that was within. Augustine best exemplified this concept in his most influential work *The City of God* (413 A.D.). In it he describes two worlds, one that loves God, the City of God, and one that loves the self, the City of the World. Man in the world of self, lives in vain in his own imagination and “lifts up its head in its own glory.” Man in the world of God, says to its God, “Thou art my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.”¹⁴⁰

The archeological dig of Augustine’s theology is “pay dirt.” He not only shuffled through the previous dig-bags of ancient Greece, Augustine also polished up the finds to clarify that God was the Ultimate authority and reality, the Creator of all things *ex nihilo*, everything in the world is a symbol of Him, and all form has God’s “seed” in which through an act of illumination the human intellect senses divine wisdom that enlightens the soul. Augustine affirmed the immaterial world behind the material and acknowledged that man possesses a spiritual sense that enables him to know God through sense knowledge. He adopted Pythagorean and Neo-Platonist mystic numbers and blessed them

¹³⁷ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 22.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹³⁹ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 43.

¹⁴⁰ (*The City of God*: Book XIV Chapter 28).

with Solomon's wisdom to confirm a divine order in the universe. Most importantly for Suger's aesthetics, Augustine assigned God as the source of all "light" that could lead the human intellect beyond sense objects by lifting the head toward the abstraction of incorporeal light to a higher order of eternal truth. Augustine's doctrine established the early medieval mindset that faith was first to find *revealed truth*, before any reasoning, and his description of the *City of God* became the archetype for medieval living. The significant nugget Augustine added to the treasures of the past was his concept of the soul as having a "seed" of inbred faith in God. This "seed" I observe as a part of Abbot Suger's artistic heart, and it is what I believe he must have anticipated to find in the soul of every member of his flock.

Out of the garden and back to the dig sites, two contemporaries of Suger also have something to offer. Following Augustine's viewpoint, Anselm the Archbishop of Canterbury, too, saw no clear distinction between philosophy and theology, and he also was primarily concerned with providing rational support for the doctrines of Christianity, which he already had accepted as a matter of faith. He was convinced that "faith and reason" lead to the same conclusions, and believed that human reason can create a natural theology or metaphysics that is rationally coherent. Anselm claimed that the acceptance of *revealed truth* is the point of departure for human reason.¹⁴¹ Influenced by Plato and Augustine in believing that there is a supreme and perfect reality that is reached from a finite moving up through a hierarchy to the *Being*, Anselm formulated his famous ontological argument for the existence of God in his book *Proslogian*. Anselm's method

¹⁴¹ Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 161.

was a scholastic system of “faith seeking understanding;” but he differed from Augustine in that his thoughts proceeded from within his mind, unlike Augustine’s claim that the mind only moves by some empirical evidence directed toward God.¹⁴² Although Anselm and Augustine seem to have two different starting points, Anselm is very clear in his introduction to his argument that he believes in the existence of God and he invites all his readers to clear their minds save God’s presence.¹⁴³

Anselm’s writings were not always fully understood because of their position between the extreme dialecticians and the anti-dialecticians, and his uncertain declaration of God as the actual *Being* was troublesome throughout the Middle Ages until Aquinas clarified the need for Christians to have no doubt that the *veritas* in Anselm’s argument can *only* be God. Before Aquinas, the theologian Peter Abelard confronted Anselm’s claims, but Anselm did add to the reoccurring metaphors of the past. His contemporary refinement of clearing the mind, save God’s presence, and accepting the truth of Revelation was significant when aligned with the movement up through the hierarchy toward understanding. I claim that Abbot Suger’s public aesthetics intended to clear the medieval mind for God’s Revelation not only through Augustine’s Divine Light, but also through an entire spiritual empirical environment.

Following Anselm, Abelard championed “reason,” but not a reason directed against faith, but rather a philosophy to defend faith against heretics and unbelievers. He encouraged devotion over dogma, but he did use dialectic to elucidate dogma as a

¹⁴² Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 160.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 160.

defense against detractors.¹⁴⁴ Abelard's most significant writing is the *Introduction to Theology* in which he debated that the existence and unity of God can be established by reason. He emphasized a distinction between understanding (*intelligere*) and comprehending (*comprehendere*) to identify understanding as *cognizing*, and faith as *manifesting*. In his introduction he stated, "Faith is called an estimation of things not apparent, whereas cognition is an experience of those things by their very presence."¹⁴⁵ Abelard's position led to his *nominalistic* solution to the problem of universals, in which he denies that universals are things and affirms that they are significant "words" or concepts, language, not things. Universals as "words" held significance to Abelard as he used them to make sense. Whereas, Suger held "things" to be more meaningful in the process of making sense and he arranged the objects of his public aesthetics to arouse a *sense knowledge* that he considered to be more appropriate to the culture of the twelfth century.

Abelard's discussion of universals and abstraction made him one of the founders of the Scholastic method that developed later in thirteenth-century medieval thought.¹⁴⁶ Although Abelard left the doctrine of abstraction incomplete, he did include ideas on his inclinations toward man learning things through the senses with a psychological theory that the intellect could construct through imagination, as it desired, whether particular or universal; therefore, the interpretation can be very different than the external physical

¹⁴⁴ Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 74, 78.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

things.¹⁴⁷ This gives the intellect the ability to perceive beyond the objects of sense perception, and sounds much like the forces in Boethius' allegorical imagination. Abelard's abstract language, at times, created uncertain as to his belief in God, but he did continue to theorize and stir up debate during his time. His nature was described as overbearing, vain, and scornful¹⁴⁸ often enough that his opinions were disregarded and even condemned by Saint Bernard who accused Abelard of making Plato a Christian.¹⁴⁹ Abelard was one of Suger's peculiar colleagues, but his emphasis on devotion over dogma and his affirmation of sense perception beyond the visible were assets to Suger's art program; yet, the significance Abelard placed on "words" was as haunting to Suger as Bernard's aesthetic restrictions.

The numinous "words" of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, the most contemporary find during Abbot Suger's reign at the Saint Denis abbey, were so enchanting in their mystical interpretations of the universe that these writings superseded most of what proceeded them and became a justification tool for Suger in his artistic expressions. According to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, the universe is created in unity by a perpetual self-realization of "the One," the Bible's "Lord," and what he identifies as the "Superessential Light," or elsewhere in his writing, "the invisible Sun."¹⁵⁰ He designates God the Father as "the Father of the lights," and Christ as the

¹⁴⁷ Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 85.

¹⁴⁸ Crosby, *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis*, 109.

¹⁴⁹ Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 73.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

“first radiance,” who reveals the Father to the world.¹⁵¹ The author goes on to clarify that these names are from Scripture and are considered *affirmative theology*.¹⁵² He continues on to explain that because the Divine nature is incomprehensible in its ineffable distance from things in the world we are obliged to assume a *negative theology* that denies all the predicates ascribed to God by affirmative theology. In other words, it is impossible to find an all encompassing, suitable description of who or what God is. He concludes that, “the only approach is through *learned ignorance*, beyond knowable.”¹⁵³

To link God to man in the world, the Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite developed a theory that the universe proceeds from God as a celestial hierarchy (as in Neo-Platonism), without dichotomy, linking the “highest, purely intelligible sphere of existence” to the “lowest, almost purely material one” in a relationship that shares the essence of God: “truth, goodness and beauty.”¹⁵⁴ To avoid association with pantheism, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite declared the universe as an inexhaustible source of God’s overflowing beauty, as God’s Providence.¹⁵⁵ The process of connecting man to God is described as a flow that can go from either direction; the *emanation* of pure Light Divine can flow down to matter and permeate it thoroughly, or the route can be reversed

¹⁵¹ Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 19.

¹⁵² Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 46.

¹⁵³ Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 150.

¹⁵⁴ Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 19.

¹⁵⁵ (*On Divine Names*, IV, 10) Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 46, 47.

in which there is an ascent from the “pollution and multiplicity, to purity and oneness.”¹⁵⁶ Ultimately this event gives permission to man to use his sensory perception and sense-controlled imagination when observing the material world so he can transcend it by absorbing it. This aesthetic experience is known as a *theophany*, in which the cognition and yearning of the soul, by way of faith and prayer, elevated to unite and *share* space with the inaccessible Godhead.¹⁵⁷ The Pseudo-Areopagite asserts that the mind can rise from the material to the immaterial through manual guidance (*materiali manu ductione*), because all visible things are “lights” that reflect the Godhead Itself.¹⁵⁸ He further alluded that everything, including stones and trees, the visible and the invisible, are “light” brought into being by the Father of lights.

The Pseudo-Areopagite continues to elaborate on how, under the guidance of “reason,” all things lead him to the cause of all things, which endows them “with place and order, with number, species and kind, with goodness and beauty and essence, and with all other grants and gifts.”¹⁵⁹ This vision explicitly paralleled the “ecclesiastical hierarchy” that governs the City of God on earth.¹⁶⁰ The fundamental thesis of Pseudo-Dionysius is that God is the cause of all things, God is the *origin* of essence, God is

¹⁵⁶ Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 19.

¹⁵⁷ Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 48.

¹⁵⁸ Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 20.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁶⁰ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 139.

Superessence, because he is the “gift of Divine light,”¹⁶¹ and in the end, absolutely incomprehensible.¹⁶²

The newly translated words of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, which were speculated to be written by Saint Denis, a follower of Saint Paul, and a witness to Jesus Christ, paralleled the visions of Saint Augustine with a new magical sense that was irresistible to Suger and his colleagues Eriugena, Hugh of Saint Victor and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. Although Pseudo-Dionysius’ *negative theology*, nor was Eriugena’s attempt to reconcile it with a *superlative theology*,¹⁶³ the overflowing vision of the *Celestial Hierarchy* was alluring. Guided by Divine reason, man’s yearning soul could transcend the material world through sensory perception, leading to an ascent up an ordered celestial hierarchy to unite in a theophany with the Father of lights in an immaterial, ineffable, pure essence. Pseudo-Dionysius’ descriptive “words,” such as, “overflowing beauty,” “the invisible Sun,” and his description of Christ as the “first radiance” who reveals the Father to the world, were jewels of delight to Suger’s imagination. Eriugena’s commentary on his own translation of the Pseudo-Dionysius writings equally illuminated Suger’s senses with a description of the universe as “a symphony of symbols descended from the Eternal” (*Division of Nature* V, 3).¹⁶⁴ Another explanation that Eriugena offered pleased Suger: he claimed that God’s Holy Spirit

¹⁶¹ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 115.

¹⁶² Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 46, 47.

¹⁶³ (*Division of Nature*, I, 462), Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 24.

¹⁶⁴ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 139.

provides the means to determine cause and effects in the world that are necessary to acquire human knowledge of what is already known. This belief positions “faith” before “reason,” but Eriugena maintains that they both come to the same end because they both flow from the same Divine Source of Wisdom.¹⁶⁵

Hugh of Saint Victor’s translation was more Augustinian. Hugh was deeply acquainted with the works of Augustine and displayed a similar manner of thinking to such a degree that he was referred to as *alta Augustine*, a second Augustine.¹⁶⁶ Hugh described a “love in the heart” that one must follow¹⁶⁷ in intuitive contemplation for the human intellect to experience a mystical interpretation of the world and its forms.¹⁶⁸ In his treatise, *Practice Geometriae*, Hugh referenced God as an artist and spoke about art in terms of geometry and symbolism in an allegorical style that stimulated Suger’s creativity.¹⁶⁹ Suger found Hugh’s expressive way of presenting divine knowledge very appealing to his own inclinations, and they both shared an interest in art as a spiritual aid in reading Scripture. Both were skilled at manuscript illumination, but Hugh excelled in the art of miniature, displaying an unusually intricate aesthetic style that scholars believe influenced Suger’s art of the Saint Denis abbey; this was especially evident in the high

¹⁶⁵ Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 55.

¹⁶⁶ Rudolph, *Artistic Change at St-Denis*, 39.

¹⁶⁷ Stein, *Reading Medieval Culture*, 79.

¹⁶⁸ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 11.

¹⁶⁹ Rudolph, *Artistic Change at St-Denis*, 34, 36.

altar relief, the windows, and the Great Cross.¹⁷⁰ But records are elusive as to whether Hugh actually participated in the artworks at Saint Denis. Nonetheless, Hugh's "spirit" was an inspiration to Suger to transform the abbey into a mystical aesthetic experience. The theory of creation (*opus conditionis*) and restoration (*opus restaurationis*) that Hugh conceived correlated to the Creator and the Savior, and was instrumental terminology for Suger to proceed with his art campaign, because both creation and restoration were necessary concepts of "faith."¹⁷¹

Lastly, Bernard, Suger's friend and foe, in his famous treatise denounced elaborate monastery art (*Apologia ad Guillelmum*),¹⁷² yet justified art as having the ability to "guide" the mind to the perception of ultimate *truth*. Although Bernard also portrayed the mystical reunion of the soul with God as the "immersion in the infinite ocean of eternal light and luminous eternity,"¹⁷³ he lacked the imagination to interpret his thoughts aesthetically. On the one hand, Umberto Eco describes Bernard as a "mystic voyeur, denouncing any objects that provoked his aesthetic gratification."¹⁷⁴ On the other hand, Huizinga described Bernard as a gentle mystic who added tenderness to the religious sensibilities of the medieval soul.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ Rudolph, *Artistic Change at St-Denis*, 34.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁷³ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 123.

¹⁷⁴ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 9.

Abbot Suger inherited a rich combination of aesthetic implications described in the innate and emerging theology of his day. The effects of sensation—for *sense knowledge* experienced *empirically* to move the human intellect to a higher level of *truth* through *illumination* of Divine Wisdom based on an innate knowledge of the Ultimate One with which man’s soul yearned to reunite—were tantalizing to any God-loving artist. Endow these concepts with an *incorporeal divine* “light” inexhaustibly *overflowing* on a perfectly ordered *ecclesiastical hierarchy* full of symbols revealing the ostensibly invisible like magic toward *revelation*, and you will have an explosive aesthetic *theophany* in the making that not only reflects Solomon’s glorious Temple, but also the yet-to-be written *City of God*. This *force* could not be ignored, and I will argue later that Abbot Suger responded with *divine inspiration* and obedience of faith, as he struggled to rationalize his endeavor.

Although Abbot Suger was primarily a theologian, I am convinced that his academic education at the Saint Denis monastery, along with his influential acquaintances, prepared him to be very cognizant of the historical theologies and philosophies leading up to the twelfth-century intellectual discourse. I agree with Umberto Eco’s assessment that aesthetic intuition is the same as intellectual intuition.¹⁷⁶ Abbot Suger, in my opinion, was a very intuitive man who knew, as William had noted, “the place and the time,” along with knowing “the people,” who would nurture what Foucault called, the “subject’s” motivation. It is my assertion that Suger was motivated to

¹⁷⁵ Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 190.

¹⁷⁶ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 61.

sustain the Christian heritage of medieval culture with a living message for the future that moved the soul to faith first. In the twelfth-century culture, the church believed that a society would improve by the changing the individuals within it. Suger's own obedience to faith underscored his launch of a divinely inspired art program to demonstrate what Aristotle's new translations were just beginning to disclose: the soul's faith and purity of aims are the ordering principle of all its faculties and aspirations.

The archeological inquiry into the general space of philosophical and theological knowledge about the purification of the soul, and the relationships between centuries of word-pictures describing an event to form the foundation for an anagogical aesthetic theory is complete. The metaphorical dig-bag has been placed aside for the next subheading, Aesthetics Synthesized. In that space, the artist's creative psyche will be at work to answer the question: How are philosophical and theological precepts ascribed to aesthetics? Before departing this section, the two dig-bags—soul, and faith and reason—will be examined to answer the question: How is a soul saved? Since this was a foremost responsibility of an Abbot, it is extremely important to understand the premise theoretically before ascribing aesthetics to the principle. A synopsis of the presented tenets based on the soul relative to faith and reason serves that purpose.

The first formal explorations of philosophy assigned man a soul that required purification and peace through harmony. According to Seneca, ancient philosophy postulated that philosophy controlled the soul. Cicero claimed the soul reasoned divine things. Philosophy offered many liberated Olympian ways to "look on" life in search of a true pure reality based on the principles of nature's order. However, the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, changed thinking by claiming the soul of man for God's purpose

alone. Jesus introduced the soul's dependence on faith in the Father's design as the true order of the universe and man's relationship to it and to God. The nativity of Christendom changed the way man thought and felt about the nature of the world, replacing the old laws of religion with a new empirical spirit of faith in God's Revelation and His salvation plan. Twelfth-century Christianity used Augustine's doctrines to retain its spiritual heritage. Augustine struggled with his own challenges with faith and reason, but he finally resolved his discord by revealing to the medieval culture the concept of faith residing in a "seed" in man's soul planted by God. This "seed" was the knowledge source of all divine things. Subsequently, Pseudo-Dionysius elaborated on the yearning of the soul's kernel to flourish with wisdom in a theophany with God, which Eriugena then embellished with the agency of God's Holy Spirit.

Paradoxically, philosophy had a contender and the debate between "faith" and "reason" evolved. For the twelfth-century illiterate Christian culture the dispute was fervent because traditional oratorical biblical preaching and worship were affected by the intellectual activity of philosophy. The universal knowledge that God is the Ultimate *truth* and origin of man that requires faith to comprehend was being challenged. Philosophy offered alternative ways of attaining universal knowledge through the logic of reasoning instead of faith. Attempts to synthesize theology and philosophy, consequently, presented a discrepancy in the relationship between the soul and the mind, and it unsettled the individuals of medieval society. As Fosdick poignantly states, "Faith is our [Christians] only way of dealing with reality; by it alone we can know *the possibilities of*

individuals and of society.”¹⁷⁷ An astute abbot like Suger was fully aware of this scholastic threat that could permeate the future of his flock. He had to fulfill his primary role and save the souls of man for God by insuring faith “first” before reason, regardless of whether the two philosophies did or did not lead to the same end.

The motion to *becoming* empirically was introduced by Aristotle as a *potentiality* to *actuality*. Abbot Suger was going to insure that the medieval illiterate society *became* spiritually engaged with God so the Ultimate *truth* of His Revelation was accepted through faith alone. Suger was not going to do this through Aristotle’s *syllogism* of “words,” nor through Anselm’s *nominalistic* “word” system, but rather by a silent soliloquy of mystical aesthetics for empirical *non-formal knowledge* of Divine *truth*, in preparation for the return of “words” in Aquinas’ scholasticism. With the notion of Hugh’s “love in the heart,” Suger followed his intuition to save the souls of his flock by encouraging faith in the Revelation of God’s salvation plan through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which reconciles the “out of order” relationship of man with God, for that is how a soul is saved: His *Way of life*.

Anagogical Aesthetics Synthesized in the Saint Denis Abbey

Last stop of the archeological inquiry is at the Saint Denis Abbey, north central France, in the twelfth century. The metaphor dig-bag has overflowed onto what will follow in this section as it is filtered through the creative practice of Abbot Suger

¹⁷⁷ Fosdick, *The Meaning of Faith*, 45.

engaged in a gradual spiritual process of edification. The findings will answer the question: How are philosophical and theological precepts ascribed to aesthetics?

The primary function of a monastery was orderly corporate prayer and worshipping God with regulated asceticism.¹⁷⁸ Added responsibilities included nourishing the surrounding community and offering hospitality to traveling pilgrims and military transitions. The monastery was not only a political and economic presence, it was also a retreat extending security, and encouraging reflection as a way to salvation.¹⁷⁹ Sacraments such as baptism, confession, and the offering of the Holy Eucharist were standard ceremonies, including prominent burials, as well. Although the monastery offered many services to the surrounding culture, the care of souls was foremost, particularly as man was becoming more educated and inquisitive. The spiritual life of monks intensified as they realized the need to set an example for their parish, which was dealing with the conflicts of “faith” and “reason.” It is time to fully acknowledge the connection between Abbot Suger’s two main responsibilities, saving souls and maintaining the abbey buildings. He took his job to blend the two seriously as a lifetime destiny.

Suger petitioned to repair the old dilapidated structure of the abbey. Monastery *contemporaneity* required a reason for implementation of any reform, and Suger could point to a number of factors in need of repair. There were gapping fissures in the walls, crumbling columns “threatening ruin,” valuable ivories hidden away moldering, and altar

¹⁷⁸ Baldwin, *The Mediaeval Church*, 25.

¹⁷⁹ Crosby, *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis*, 110.

vessels like “lost pawns” not fulfilling their obligations.¹⁸⁰ Secondly, Suger proclaimed the abbey was inadequate for crowds desiring to participate in worship. He explained that the entrance was too narrow for the increasing number of pilgrims, and the main altar, where the relics were retained, did not accommodate ample viewing for the public, especially on feast days.¹⁸¹ Suger recorded an amusing story in his *De Administratione* that was often repeated and which painted an image of the overcrowding:

“ . . . the inadequacy which we often saw and felt (for the narrowness of the place forced the women to run toward the altar upon the heads of the men as upon a pavement with much anguish and noisy confusion . . . (25: 42-43).”

The doctrine of “suitable size”¹⁸² was acceptable to the medieval mind, and with the King’s blessing, Suger was permitted to renovate and decorate the Saint Denis abbey to service the growing worshipers in his care, and to invite the curious secular community into the House of God.¹⁸³ Fully absorbing Hugh’s “restoration” as “revelation.” I claim Abbot Suger proceeded in his art campaign to have “faith” stand strong against “reason,” in a manner that Fosdick identified as contagious faith in community initiated by the abbey’s spiritual seer.¹⁸⁴

Abbot Suger had a desire to revitalize the medieval culture that Umberto Eco described as “deficient in a sense of historical development and dialectical contradiction,

¹⁸⁰ Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 6.

¹⁸¹ Frankl, *Gothic Architecture*, 67.

¹⁸² Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, an Aristotelian tenet, 151.

¹⁸³ Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 13.

¹⁸⁴ Fosdick, *The Meaning of Faith*, 110.

and its picture of reality was rather like its social structure, hierarchical and fixed in immutable relations.”¹⁸⁵ With an artistic heart desiring to honor God, the Abbot was motivated to deliver to the world the *City of God* where the ineffable can only be experienced as a theophany of Divine *non-formal knowledge*, capable of sustaining a culture on the threshold of a *new positivity* in a new “order of being.” Rookmaaker’s message that “art is given the task to reveal the *eternal truth* beyond what the eye can see”¹⁸⁶ exemplifies what Abbot Suger understood. At the Saint Denis abbey, God was going to reveal Himself in the ineffable public aesthetics of the abbey that would carry His spirit into the next century as demonstrated in the grandeur of Gothic art. Intuitively aware of the culture’s ethos, divinely inspired, and gifted, Abbot Suger “restored” the abbey with a new aesthetic to share with the public as agency to worship in a new way which would revive the spirit of faith in the surrounding souls. Fosdick claimed, “The vital assurance of faith always comes, not so much from observing the outer world, as from appreciating the meaning of man’s inner life.”¹⁸⁷

In the twelfth century, arousing the soul of man’s inner life from the material to the immaterial, from the visible to the invisible, was promoted through various philosophical and theological theories which Suger adopted to promote his art program at the Saint Denis abbey. I will demonstrate how the dig-bag of order (hierarchy),

¹⁸⁵ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, xi.

¹⁸⁶ Rookmaaker, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*, 111.

¹⁸⁷ Fosdick, *The Meaning of Faith*, 110.

illumination (light), ascension (anagogical), and empirical reflection were considered the agents to uncover Divine knowledge of God's salvation.

The medieval mind considered visible objects to be symbolically supernatural in significance.¹⁸⁸ As noted earlier, the following people also contributed to the value of material as signifier. Plato's philosophy established a pictorial way of explaining the physical world's dependence on eternal matter. Augustine imbued all matter with God, as both transcendental and immanent in the universe. Eriugena declared the universe to be a "symphony of symbols" descended from the Eternal with Divine authority and Pseudo-Dionysius claimed that man had to absorb the material to transcend it to divine realities. Rudolph described this process as "a spiritual ascent from material to the immaterial, from the visible to the invisible through the natural dynamism of symbols." Therefore, it is suitable to assume Christian material matter was regarded as sacred and had agency to move man toward the Divine.

Like Baumgartner, I have found examining art objects in a specified setting offers sense knowledge of innate meaning and efficacy, likewise, Wittgenstein's notion that there are *non-exhibited* characteristics hidden within the unity of the art that have relevant meaning is exhibited in my project.¹⁸⁹ Suger saw great potential in creating a material world of sacred art that represents God's Divine nature. His only obstacle was Bernard, who criticized monastic use of art that could be a distraction to devotion. Clearly, Suger envisioned the very opposite and perceived art to be effective at enhancing worship and

¹⁸⁸ Ross, *The Portable Medieval Reader*, 12.

¹⁸⁹ Hagberg, *Art as Language: Wittgenstein*, 3.

spiritual commitment because faith was involved. Rudolph explained that for the medieval thinker, faith was essential in understanding signs.¹⁹⁰ I argue that Suger had an acute sense of what was needed to transform the previous style of Romanesque prayer halls into a more passionate experience of unity with the Divine. A century later Aquinas would affirm Suger's concept in his *hylomorphic* aesthetic theory which I described earlier as spiritual matter being associated with the First Cause of the universe.

Since Aristotle was not yet fully comprehended, much of the twelfth-century philosophy of aesthetics settled around Neo-Platonism which expanded Plato's theory that love of the physically beautiful leads to the love and knowledge of the Form of the Beautiful, to teach that love for the Source of existence leads everything back to its Ultimate origin.¹⁹¹ As a true Augustinian hiding behind Pseudo-Dionysius, Suger's main objective in the material use for his public aesthetics at the Saint Denis abbey was to unite man's soul with God, his motivation throughout the art campaign. A few examples of material illustrating his interpretations are the Trinitarian symbolism on the western facade, the bronze doors, the Cross of Saint Eloy on the main altar, and the anagogical windows of the choir.

First, I present Suger's unique interpretation of the Trinity woven together with a narrative of judgment and salvation, which Crosby insists was the first of its kind to elaborate on the connections of the threefold God and the apocalyptic vision of the

¹⁹⁰ Rudolph, *Artistic Change at St-Denis*, 50.

¹⁹¹ Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 22.

Second Coming of Christ.¹⁹² A half a century later, Suger's version began to surface in early Gothic renditions including Notre Dame and Chartres. Paula Gerson, cited by Rudolph, makes a fine observation regarding Suger's non-traditional illustration which explains that it is a blending of Augustinian and Pseudo-Dionysius thought by its obscurity of meaning, yet it was meant to put forth very specifically the salvation of man.¹⁹³ Gerson further notes that this level of theological sophistication in reference to Christology and eschatology had not yet been presented.¹⁹⁴ When Hugh of Saint Victor witnessed the work of art he declared it to be "sweet beyond the rest."¹⁹⁵ For this thesis argument, the notion of "beyond" is part of Suger's artistic endeavor in general. I claim that he not only had urbane foresight in spiritual matters, but he was divinely inspired to enhance the biblical canon of salvation in his effort to fulfill his role as Abbot, which was to save souls.

A second example of material illustrating Suger's interpretations is the bronze doors at the abbey's entrance. Suger considered them a proper entrance to his new abbey because they represented the Passion, Resurrection and Ascension of the Savior, enriched with metal, gold and enamel.¹⁹⁶ Suger's inscription on the doors reads, "The noble work is bright, but a work that is nobly bright should brighten minds, so that they may pass

¹⁹² Crosby, *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis*, 182.

¹⁹³ Rudolph, *Artistic Change at St-Denis*, 37, 38.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁹⁵ *De Sacramentis* 2:17:8 9R-96 fn 39

¹⁹⁶ Crosby, *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis*, 188.

through the true lights, to the True Light, where Christ is the true door.”¹⁹⁷ I admit, Suger is a rather poor poet, but I do insist that based on his history at the Saint Denis abbey he was rightly justified to make the new doorway into the abbey a significant display of the tenets of his faith relative to the *truth* of God’s salvation through Jesus Christ. The exterior facades served to draw the eye to the complexity of the abbey’s magnitude, but the entrance extended a welcome to all souls to enter a sanctuary dedicated to the one true God who leads man to this eternal destiny as referenced in John 10:9: “I am the door; by me if any man enter, he shall be saved . . .”¹⁹⁸ Von Simson considered the entire façade including the bronze doors the “gate of heaven leading the mind on to ineffable truths.”¹⁹⁹ The search for truth, as I have indicated earlier, was foremost on the minds of the medieval culture on the threshold of “reason” as opposed to “faith.” The truth to Abbot Suger was the revelation of God’s mercy in salvation.

The Cross of Saint Eloy that hung behind the Holy Eucharist altar was sadly decaying when Suger started his renovation at the Saint Denis abbey and he took special interest in replacing the many missing jewels. To justify his desire to replace the precious stones he did reference Pseudo-Dionysius’ inference that even the stones of the earth were fragments of the Divine light; but more important was the Divine intervention of royal kings removing their rings to donate to the cause.²⁰⁰ Suger acknowledged both

¹⁹⁷ *De Administratione XXVII*, Crosby, *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis*, 189.

¹⁹⁸ Frankl, *Gothic Architecture*, 271

¹⁹⁹ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 109, 113.

²⁰⁰ Crosby, *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis: from Its Beginnings*, 114.

connections in his *De Administratione*, by praising Almighty God and the Holy Martyrs for abundantly bestowing what was needed to renew the cross and also by describing the “anagogical” manner in which the “lovely many-colored stones” called him away from the material to the immaterial to a “strange region in the purity of Heaven.”²⁰¹ Bringing life back to material symbols of Christendom was described by Von Simson as “a gradual edification that illuminated the soul” with a divine harmony that is then reflected in the material work of art.²⁰² Suger continued to explain in *De Administratione* that he was “willed to be offered as a child” who was to serve God in this worthy manner.²⁰³ It is my claim that Suger was to use his artistic gift in any way that manifested during his art campaign as pure obedience to his calling.

Lastly, the anagogical windows of the choir crown the glory of the Saint Denis abbey. Sixteen stained-glass windows illuminated the mosaic enamel floors to present a symphony of colored light that evoked an abstract, metaphysical response in sensory saturation overload. Suger inspired a newly engineered choir of cross-ribbed vaults that enhanced the ability for larger windows for more flow of light.²⁰⁴ In Suger’s vision this emanation was a “miraculous, sacred divine light.”²⁰⁵ Rudolph registers that the expanse

²⁰¹ Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 21.

²⁰² von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 129.

²⁰³ Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 57.

²⁰⁴ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 117.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

of glass was more than any chapel in history had ever displayed.²⁰⁶ From one artist assessing another, there is no doubt in my mind that this achievement was extremely conducive to Suger's intention to create a powerful experience that encouraged more attention on the "spirit" of life versus the pragmatic "thought" of life.

Concluding his material extravaganza, Suger declared, in the likeness of Ezekiel's vision of Solomon's Temple:

"Behold in my trouble I have prepared with all my might for the house of God the gold for things to be made of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and the brass for things of brass, the iron for things of iron, and wood for things of wood, onyx stones to be set, glistening stones of diverse colors to be displayed, and all manner of precious stones and marble stones in abundance."²⁰⁷

The Church in the Middle Ages, Huizinga notes, was tolerant of many religious extravagances as long as they did not revolutionize traditional doctrine.²⁰⁸ I frame Suger's intentions behind his artistic expressions not as revolutionary, but rather as insightful, considering the maturing conversations about "faith" and "reason" that questioned the universal truths of Christianity. He was inspired to put forth a powerful display of public aesthetics that would illuminate the culture's perception of Divine Wisdom. Huizinga identified this type of symbolism, which embraced all nature and all history, as a distinct "conception of the world" offering a more unified presentation than which other sciences could offer.²⁰⁹ Thomas Crow, in a discussion of the work of

²⁰⁶ Rudolph, *Artistic Change at St-Denis*, 64.

²⁰⁷ *De Administratione*

²⁰⁸ Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 194.

anthropologists, including Schapiro and Levi-Strauss, claims material objects “bear within the deepest, irresolvable contradictions of a society” and house “intellectual and sensory revelation.”²¹⁰ The material objects of the Saint Denis abbey did not fall short of this condition, instead the public aesthetics of the Saint Denis abbey were fully embedded with the controversies of the twelfth century, and Suger was seeking to ordain them with the power to release sensory revelation in support of the diminishing Christian faith.

A universe ordered in perfect proportion had been considered a sensible phenomenon for millennia. Huizinga describes it as “a vast hierarchic system of ideas” which link with “ideas of a higher and more general order” in a harmonic proportion, which he calls, *symmetria*.²¹¹ Huizinga further explains that in the ancient world the subordinated hierarchy signified the radiant truth that man’s ontological perfection was reflected in the return to his origin via an architectonic structure.²¹² Returning to the philosophical treatises presented earlier, there is a consistent path from Pythagoras’ *psychagogia*—harmonious acoustic order of guiding souls toward purification—to Socrates *eurhythmical* – sound proportions of rhythm with an ability to touch the soul with intelligence beyond the visible world—to Plato’s Ideal Patterns arranged in an eternal hierarchy to expose the Soul of the World²¹³—ending in Augustine’s theology

²⁰⁹ Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 205.

²¹⁰ Crow, *The Intelligence of Art*, 102

²¹¹ Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 216.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 205.

²¹³ Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 12.

which attached the Pythagorean mystic number system to the interpretation of the entire Christian universe. Suger astutely synthesized these visions of man's soul purifying to receive a *truth* from a higher harmonious order beyond the visible world in his public aesthetics of the Saint Denis abbey. With Augustine's authority in the twelfth century the sense of a divine harmony expressed in *The City of God* reflecting Solomon's Wisdom along with the contemporary *Celestial Hierarchy* of Pseudo-Dionysius, there was a definite relationship between the aesthetics of geometric hierarchy and redemption of the soul.

Although Rudolph states there was no evidence of an overall geometric system in the Saint Denis abbey,²¹⁴ von Simson asserts it was a "privilege of clerics" to develop plans in accordance with geometrical laws,²¹⁵ and Eco insists that the activity of art to arrange things in accordance to rules of proportion was necessary to create unity.²¹⁶ In his *Booklet*, Suger demonstrated his understanding of these premises by claiming:

"The mystical vision of harmony can become a model for the artist only if it has first taken possession of his soul and become the ordering principle of all its faculties an aspiration."²¹⁷

Creating an Absolute Unity with God through a mystical transcendental hierarchy was inherent in Suger's plan, especially as he harmonized the nave of the abbey by equalizing

²¹⁴ Rudolph, *Artistic Change at St-Denis*, 93, footnote 13.

²¹⁵ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 31.

²¹⁶ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 172.

²¹⁷ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 33.

the aesthetics of the east and west portals in an expression of linking the old with the new, and the past with the future.²¹⁸

Von Simson conducted an extensive study on Suger's choir and determined the harmonic ratios incorporated were a "musical cosmology"²¹⁹ that Suger described in *De Consecratione* as "circuitus oratoriorum."²²⁰ The harmony of proportions along with the illumination of sunlight in both the choir and the nave also conformed to the many references to the mystical *force* of "light" that could touch the soul and lead mankind up through a hierarchical order toward the *first* Form, God. Augustine professed that any art accredited to God had an embedded "intelligible beauty" that could spiritually illuminate the soul to the Absolute Truth. These premises were considered "anagogical" interpretations and led to a complete thesis for Suger's symbolic language of revelation as a *life force* of God's revelation in the twelfth-century Saint Denis Abbey.

Pseudo-Dionysius' anagogical concept enhanced Augustine's anagogical hierarchical experience of number to an illuminated universe of symbols of "light" as a manifestation of God. The popular Dionysius writings promoted a pure sensual experience stimulated by radiance that could lead the mind from the visible world of appearance to the contemplation of the Divine truth of Revelation. Literally translated, anagogical means "the upward-leading method" or a "guiding upward" toward

²¹⁸ *De Administratione XXIX*

²¹⁹ Frankl, *Gothic Architecture*, 28.

²²⁰ Crosby, *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis: from Its Beginnings*, 287.

Heaven.²²¹ The transcendental aesthetic experience from the material to the immaterial was considered illumination of pure knowledge in union with God.²²² In light of the transition from worshipping in the dark halls of the earlier Romanesque abbeys to a glowing clerestory of heavenly light drenching the Saint Denis abbey, the traditional medieval Christian culture easily submitted to the immediate anagogical experience that eliminated the burden of the “mind/matter dualism.”

Light had become not only a core principle of order, but also a significant agent for illuminating the soul with Divine knowledge. In the Pseudo-Dionysius universe, all matter in nature or man-made objects become a “light” *force* for anagogical encounter. According to Huizinga, the three modes of thought together—realism, symbolism and personification—illuminated the medieval mind with a flood of light.²²³ The new renovations of the Saint Denis abbey, which opened up the prayer halls and illuminated the interior with arrays of multi-colored sunlight passing through the enormous stained glass windows, produced a truly sensuous experience. Suger claimed the occasion “link[ed] the earth with heaven” as the soul transferred from the inferior to the higher world.²²⁴ At the center of the abbey man could raise up his head in an act of awe and worship, which Suger believed would cleanse the soul and spiritually unite man with God. In *The City of God*, Augustine praises, “Thou art my glory, and the lifter up of mine

²²¹ Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 20.

²²² Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 50.

²²³ Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 205.

²²⁴ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 14.

head.” Calling attention to this physical response, Huizinga casts the impression that if the medieval mind needed to know the nature of the “reason” of a thing, “it neither look[ed] into it, to analyze its structure, nor behind it, to inquire into its origin, but instead, look[ed] up to heaven, where it shines as an idea.”²²⁵ Von Simson amplified the anagogical purpose of art to include its ability to raise the mind to the perception of Ultimate Truth because there is an innate *force* of God in all of creation.²²⁶

Both theories of Augustine’s “sense knowledge” of *incorporeal light* and Pseudo-Dionysius’ divine “light” suited Suger’s attempts to create a celestial hierarchy at the Saint Denis abbey that would lift heads upwards and direct the mind toward the Divine Revelation. It wasn’t until much later that this empirical experience of the soul’s ascent from sensory cognition to higher mystical knowledge was articulated in “words” as an aesthetic theory. First Aquinas confirmed sense intuition, and then Saint Bonaventure described the anagogical process allegorically in *Journey of the Soul to God*. The narrative begins with contemplation of the visible world and the material universe as a ladder by which man ascends to God in degrees powered by the soul. The steps entail sense, imagination, reason, intellect, intelligence, and finally at the apex of the mind, the spark of conscience.²²⁷ Admittedly, Suger may not have been articulate when it came to “words” but I do assert that he was, as his biographer elucidated, very intuitive, extremely creative, highly sensitive to empirical knowledge and divinely inspired by

²²⁵ Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 214.

²²⁶ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 115.

²²⁷ Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 165.

God. It was Huizinga who astutely showed that the medieval culture was no longer satisfied with the aesthetics of “stark and motionless figures.”²²⁸ It is my claim that Abbot Suger discerned the static spiritual condition of twelfth-century culture and sensed that he was positioned at the Saint Denis abbey as an instrument of God to create a new worship experience, which was far more dynamic than had been experienced before. For an illiterate culture, Suger orchestrated what Wittgenstein would describe as a “silent soliloquy.”²²⁹

Sensory saturation as an encounter with God is considered an empirical spiritual experience. Augustine’s theology encouraged medieval man to expose his senses to divine objects of “light” so the human intellect could be illuminated to a higher level of *truth*, which would release divine wisdom from within the human soul. This wisdom was the knowledge of God, *maxime cognoscitivi*. The authority of Neo-Platonism in twelfth-century Christendom also promoted the reunion of the individual soul with its Prima source to be achieved in ecstasy or mystical experience.²³⁰ Furthermore, Aristotle’s newly translated works and his theory of *entelechy*, contributed to the belief that aesthetic experiences could lead man to go beyond the visible world to an intelligible world of superior *nous*. The Christian medieval man was primed for a new and deeper level of contemplation and emotion that could spiritually move his soul closer to his God. Suger’s

²²⁸ Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 263.

²²⁹ Hagberg, *Art as Language: Wittgenstein*, 3.

²³⁰ Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 22.

“crown of light” at the Saint Denis abbey, in Suger’s words, was considered a “chamber of divine atonement.”²³¹

Emotional reaction to a harmonious celestial hierarchy of bright, shining objects and luminous colored lights evoked a metaphysical response that was abstract and beyond or above what was visible to the eye. With devoted spiritual contemplation, Huizinga exalts the mind’s capacity to transcend the deficiencies of logical expression and soar toward the ineffable.²³² Remembering the judicious thoughts of Tatarkiewicz that aesthetic theory must embrace both the “sensuous and intellectual beauty and the direct and symbolical art,” it is comprehensible to imagine standing in the Saint Denis’ divine chamber to experience a public aesthetic that not only included an elaborate system of symbols and beauty in an intellectual matrix, but also stimulated an empirical spiritual encounter with God. Umberto Eco who concluded, “his church [Suger’s abbey] was simultaneously aesthetic and didactic, what cannot be read can be experienced.”²³³ Eco’s assessment epitomizes Abbot Suger’s public aesthetics at the Saint Denis abbey.

The aesthetic extravaganza of the Saint Denis abbey encompassed a complicated synthesis of philosophy and theology. The creative insight of Abbot Suger assembled all the contemporary precepts of theology and philosophy in an artistic practice very similar to the way this thesis is composed: gathering, aligning, cross-referencing, editing,

²³¹ *De Administratione* XXVIII

²³² Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 207.

²³³ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 15.

weighing, praying, speculating, and envisioning the transformation of “words” into the ineffable experiential essence that lies behind the visible world. In that creative space, a Christian artist calls on his Creator to join *forces* with him in a collaborative effort to assemble the visible world of materials in a perfect, pure, divine order in which the gestalt takes on a life of its own, far beyond what the eye can see or the mind can conceive, to an incomprehensible *truth* of Revelation that requires a submission of faith from both the artist and the viewer. In this form of *symmetria*, philosophical and theological precepts are ascribed to aesthetics. For Abbot Suger, the result of his divinely inspired public aesthetics at the Saint Denis abbey was a spiritual offering to raise the senses of his flock, both physically and intellectually, to a level higher than the controversies of the epoch, and therefore to reunite man with the Ultimate Source of his *being*.

The direct translation of theology into architecture, Frankl explains, is a composition of forms and symbols that convey the essence of a culture.²³⁴ The soul of the medieval culture was communicated through a Christian universe of symbols reflecting God. The artistry of the twelfth century was a complex matrix of shapes, colors and lights arranged to create a celestial hierarchy for an empirical spiritual encounter that was beyond what words could express. It was Wittgenstein’s latter philosophy that asserted the notion that complexity of art promotes the clarity of concept.²³⁵ Hugh of Saint Victor described the visual hierarchy as an image of the angelic hierarchy, which could teach

²³⁴ Frankl, *Gothic Architecture*, 27.

²³⁵ Hagberg, *Art as Language: Wittgenstein*, 7.

both what was unseen in the angelic order along with how humans are to be ordered in society.²³⁶ Placing artistry in culture and social life, Stein and Pierce claim that a complex methodology “elucidates the place by seeing it in multiple frames.”²³⁷ This was noted previously by Umberto Eco as a “metanarrative attached to its Christian heritage of *universal* and *transcendental* assumptions.”²³⁸ In the twelfth century Christian beliefs were unsettled by new ideas, and Abbot Suger was in a position to reinforce the faith of the abbey’s worshippers by engaging them in the setting of public aesthetics at the Saint Denis abbey which would lift their spirits to a higher order of *being*.

Huizinga clarifies that medieval art was not for its own sake, but rather to decorate the spiritual and cultural life with splendor, which was to be enjoyed as an element of life itself.²³⁹ He goes on to explain that medieval art was also subservient to life.²⁴⁰ Plato declared that art was to serve the moral order. The corporate activity of a church or abbey was to gather the society in a harmonious whole, and provide spiritual nurturing that would spread throughout the culture. Earlier it was stated that an Abbot believed that culture would change and improve by the soul of one person touching the soul of another. It was Aristotle who presented the concept that learned habits are responsible for morals and that ethics give the soul the control to behave virtuously.

²³⁶ *Commentaria in Hierarchiam caelestem II PL*, CLXXV, 946, von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 139.

²³⁷ Stein, *Reading Medieval Culture*, 17.

²³⁸ Crosby, *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis: from Its Beginnings*, 3.

²³⁹ Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 244.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 258.

Aristotle was also a strong proponent for art as a persuasive tool for moving a culture along.²⁴¹ The authors of *The Medieval Reader* effectively encapsulated the impression of cathedral art as a monument of the arts coordinated in the service of religion as a school of pictures and ornament, which teach the Scripture of medieval faith through symbols and the drama of worship.²⁴² Suger manifested the worship center of his abbey as building theology, in what von Simson called a “spiritual process of conceiving the universe in symphonic composition.”²⁴³

Highlights of the last few paragraphs answer the third question posed: How does Christian public aesthetics move a culture? Art can present a persuasive order of beauty that reflects an invisible *force* from the Creator of all things, the Unmoved Mover who can do all things, including spiritually uniting with man to lift up his head toward Him and learn His *Way of Life*. Through the drama of empirical spiritual worship, the “seed” in man’s soul is nurtured to live the *Way* of Jesus Christ, the Christian Lord and Savior, who set the example of moving mankind toward his Father, one by one. Stated earlier, an Abbot believed that souls of their flock would change by their connections to one another and also whom they touched as they circulated in civilization. Fosdick called it

²⁴¹ Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 142.

²⁴² Ross, *The Portable Medieval Reader*, 18.

²⁴³ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 133.

“contagious faith in community.”²⁴⁴ As far back as Socrates, a culture has known, “to know the good is to do the good.”²⁴⁵

Frankl argued that, “the development of a civilization must precede its expression in art through form.”²⁴⁶ I do not completely agree. I prefer to see art not only as a reflection of a culture, but also a living dialogue about that culture which has agency to move a society from its present state to a future destination, what Aquinas later posits in his *motion* theory of *potentiality* into *actuality* (which originally came from Aristotle’s *entelechy* theory). In the instance of both Suger and Aquinas the movement was toward the Original Mover, God, who draws the soul in a sense experience which initiates thought upward until the ultimate cause is reached. Abbot Suger’s newly renovated abbey reflected the vision of cosmic harmony and as von Simson declared, “it was so to be understood.”²⁴⁷ It is my claim that the public aesthetics of the Saint Denis abbey were created with this intention in mind.

The Saint Denis abbey, as Crosby notes, was one of the last important monastic churches because the medieval culture would soon shift to the growing urban centers and secular cathedrals.²⁴⁸ Insightfully, Abbot Suger’s public aesthetics at the Saint Denis abbey was to leave a spiritually endowed mark upon the medieval culture for an

²⁴⁴ Fosdick, *The Meaning of Faith*, 110.

²⁴⁵ Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 35.

²⁴⁶ Frankl, *Gothic Architecture*, 295.

²⁴⁷ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 126.

²⁴⁸ Crosby, *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis*, 289.

empirical experience that was meant to claim the soul for life, and implant the Christian heritage of “faith” in the unseen *sui generis* Divine Wisdom. The incomprehensible Godhead, the ineffable Essence, becomes comprehensible only by its manifestation in nature and by its symbolic language of Revelation.²⁴⁹

Public aesthetics is art manifested from the combination of a culture’s ethos with matter that holds incorporeal symbolic significance to that culture, and is then projected publically, and specifically, for cultural interface. My argument is that the public aesthetics of the Saint Denis abbey was specifically orchestrated by a divinely inspired man with a vision to save souls by offering an abstract spiritual encounter in the abbey that would fill man’s soul with an awe of divine beauty and awaken God’s Wisdom from the “seed” within. I claim that Abbot Suger sought to stimulate man’s soul by a *sense knowledge* aesthetic experience that portrayed a mystical transcendental hierarchy to a unity with God. In divine harmony with the Ultimate Maker, Suger believed man would submit to the absolute *truth* of salvation and fully invest his “faith” in God’s revelation before engaging in “reasoning.”

You don’t have to be a genius to synthesize the obvious, but you must be a creator to choose to manifest the synthesis in a new form, and that is exactly what Abbot Suger did in the public aesthetics of the Saint Denis Abbey; his was an artistic practice as an Aristotelian perpetual process of looking at the world in new ways.

²⁴⁹ Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 50.

CHAPTER THREE: Saving Souls

The search for pure wisdom, knowledge and absolute truth was part of both philosophy and theology from the beginning of classical thought, and continued throughout the centuries fluctuating between “faith” and “reason.” Suger’s era did not escape this reality, in fact, it was more important than ever before, because there was a potential for the upheaval of the established position of “faith.” Both philosophically and theologically the soul of man had been established as an instrument of resolution and universal understanding by reuniting with its Ultimate Source: the Unmoved Maker philosophically, and God theologically. The reunion involved a conversion through some type of hierarchical order moving from the visible material to the invisible ineffable unknowable. From Pythagoras through Augustine and supported by the twelfth-century contemporaries, the process involved sensory perception associated with “light” to rise above reality to a super reality of Divine presence, until the exterior and the interior were one. This empirical spiritual journey is what Abbot Suger had witnessed throughout his education at the abbey and his worldly travels. Suger, fully prepared and divinely inspired, incorporated every single mystical principle he could into the public aesthetics of the Saint Denis abbey, not only to physically “renovate” the debilitated “prayer halls”

of his abbey, but also to spiritually “refresh” the souls of the surrounding twelfth-century culture.

Paul Tillich in *Theology of Culture*, claims that risking the loss of faith is existential, and the “meaning and fulfillment of our lives is at stake.”²⁵⁰ “Individual and social life,” claims Huizinga, “in all their manifestations, are imbued with the conceptions of faith.”²⁵¹ I am reminded by Fosdick that unsettling the foundation of faith will overwhelm man’s mind. Clearly Suger was not willing to risk the souls of his flock, and with assistance from the *Divine Will*, he made his mark in history.

Summary

In summary my thesis makes two distinct claims. One, that Abbot Suger was a uniquely gifted artist, who under the influence of *contemporaneity* and divine inspiration engineered a new system of public aesthetics in his Saint Denis abbey specifically for a heightened spiritual experience in worship to secure man’s relationship to God and save his soul. Two, that the silent expression of the public aesthetics in the Saint Denis abbey incorporated the ethos of the twelfth-century culture and inspired a renewed investment in “faith” toward a higher, purer order of Divine knowledge to protect man from losing his soul in the discourse of “reason.” Both claims speak about saving the soul and the *potentiality* of art participating in the effort.

²⁵⁰ Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 28.

²⁵¹ Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 151.

From the very beginning, I explained that the method of my investigation to support these claims would be through an explorative artistic thought system reflecting Foucault's *episteme* thesis and Deleuze's rhizome. My intention was to uncover a *positive unconscious* knowledge of implicit concepts that are subjacent to consciousness, which reveal a more true and purer order than what is obvious in the theories that attempt to give explanations for explicit form and philosophical foundation. It is my assumption, rightly so, or not, that my research at this point provokes three different responses: the philosopher seeks to grasp a particular concrete concept in my work, such as "light," as the foundation of my claims; the theologian is called to the "Father of Lights" as the emphasis; and the Christian artist is awakened to the illumination of Divine inspiration. In any case, I accept all references, but prefer the latter two as the essence of my work to support my overall thesis that the skills of the artisan were a direct gift from God by the light of divine wisdom, for the purpose of disclosing Him to mankind. To unearth the final inherent treasures of *positive unconscious* knowledge implicit in my concepts about Abbot Suger and the public aesthetics of the Saint Denis abbey, it is necessary to address Divine inspiration and how it manifested in both Suger's life and the agency of the art in the abbey.

The infusion of ideas [illumination] into the mind by the Holy Spirit is described in Latin as *inspiro*.²⁵² The greatest evidence of Divine inspiration is when man finds in his own soul "the abiding revelation by which he is freed from all doubts and

²⁵² Rev. Dr. Ralph Denny Koehler, #1 *Christian Bible History: Revealing the Wonderful Evidence For the Divine Inspiration, Faithful Preservation, And Competent Translation of the Christian Bible*, (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2004), 28.

uncertainties as to his present and future state, and of the duty which God requires of him.”²⁵³ This definition by Rev. Dr. Ralph Denny Koehler is true for understanding both Suger’s motivation and his aesthetic intentions in the Saint Denis abbey. For his soul, and the soul of his congregation, to abide in the revelation of God’s absolute certainty is a perfect, pure state of *being* for all *becoming* on the threshold of a new *possibility*.

Abbot Suger believed that when man dedicates his soul to the Divine, the Absolute Unmoved Mover, God, in faith, then his *motion* in life is directed by that source of *nous*. Through that commitment, Divine Grace delivers any *potentiality* that becomes *actuality*, and in return, there is an obligation to fulfill the revealed destiny. In *De Consecratione* II, Suger naively describes that first submission:

“When I was instructed by the brethren as a schoolboy I used to hear [of the anxiety of the crowds]; . . . in my mature years I zealously strove to have it corrected. *But when it pleased Him who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by His grace*, to place insignificant me, although my merits were against it, at the head of the so important administration of this sacred church; then, impelled to a correction of the aforesaid inconvenience only by the ineffable mercy of Almighty God and by the aid of the Holy Martyrs our Patron Saints, we resolved to hasten, with all our soul and all the affection of our mind, to the enlargement of the aforesaid place – we who would never have presumed to set our hand to it, nor ever to think of it, had not so great, so necessary, so useful and honorable an occasion demanded it.”²⁵⁴

Compelled to serve his calling, Suger allowed a mystical vision to take possession of his soul. Von Simson described the commission as “an urge provoked by an influential

²⁵³ F. W. Evans, *New Lebanon*, (published by the United Society Called Shakers, 1853) <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433082159884> 5/9/12 access

²⁵⁴ Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 89.

catalyst that must be conveyed.”²⁵⁵ Imagination striving to express the ineffable, Huizinga asserts, manifests in shape and form that can only signify what lies deeply beyond.²⁵⁶

In the opening chapter of *De Consecratione* Suger’s writing on the construction of the Saint Denis abbey, he openly recognized that what mattered above all was a purified mind, and that the purpose of art was to honor God with “first fruits” and “preciousness,” that ultimately are made available by God alone.²⁵⁷ Various miracles were recorded in *De Administratione* supporting Suger’s claim that all the provisions and supplies that were necessary to “restore” the abbey to a glorious vision of *The City of God* were made available through the hand of God. From finding extinct timber, quarries with rare stone, generous donations of precious jewels, safety in storms, and unusual talents of strength and artistry, Suger was entirely convinced that the art program at the Saint Denis abbey was Divine intervention, and it was under the inspiration of the Divine Will that the program came about. Boldly stated, Suger expressed, “unlike King David, I had not been refused the privilege of building a house for the Lord to dwell in.”²⁵⁸ The idea of a “house,” Augustine explained was a metaphor for an “innate deposit of knowledge given to us by God.”²⁵⁹ Later Aquinas in his *Summa Theologia II*, identified this latent

²⁵⁵ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 61.

²⁵⁶ Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 220.

²⁵⁷ Rudolph, *Artistic Change at St-Denis*, 28.

²⁵⁸ (*De Administratione* 44,7f), Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 149.

intelligence as “beauty of spirit” waiting to flourish.²⁶⁰ Umberto Eco beautifully describes how the process of divine creation is unknowable, but “the Maker (God) knows his own work in its formation.”²⁶¹

Although the Cluny movement intensified the aesthetics of the monastic liturgical arts, it was still in the Romanesque idiom of iconic and dogmatic narrative seeking to educate the lay public with biblical account. Abbot Suger had a vision removed from the pragmatic linear chronicle that was status quo, and visualized a more reflective mystical, transcendental hierarchy that could aesthetically be manifested to elevate the human didactic and spiritual mind to an abstract imagination that would allow the “spirit” of God to permeate man’s soul, with His *divine beauty* and absolute *truth*. No ordinary man moves with this kind of conviction at a time of aesthetic controversy without a “seed” of Divine inspiration within.

To rebuild the Saint Denis abbey, the work of Stein and Prior in *Reading Medieval Culture*, suggests that Suger used Hilduin’s well-known rhetorical terminology of *amplificatio* (general strategies with some specific procedures) to describe his own plans to rebuild the abbey, and by so doing, Suger put himself into a direct relation to Hilduin’s translated texts of the Pseudo Dionysius.²⁶² The fundamental thesis of Pseudo Dionysius is the soul’s yearning to return to the source of incorporeal divine “light” that

²⁵⁹ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 169.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 204.

²⁶² Stein, *Reading Medieval Culture*, 6.

is God, the cause of all things, the origin of essence, and the giver of life. The authority of Augustine's theology also preached God as the life source of "light" that was assessed through a sensory ascent directed by an innate knowledge of Him in man's soul. In essence the theories of both Augustine and the Pseudo-Dionysius were similar in describing a Divine union of man's soul with God through a process of illumination. Suger's vision of the "renewed" Saint Denis abbey was to imitate this perfect cosmology of man and God in an abstract invisible "pure order" to display man's ontological perfection reflected in Him. According to Von Simson, Suger desired to build an emulation of the Hagia Sophia at Constantinople and the Solomonic Temple because Suger claimed that both were built with the same purpose in mind and with the same author of Divine Wisdom.²⁶³

Creatively, Suger superimposed different criteria outside of conventional order in a new *symmetria* to convey analogous knowledge and offer agency for empirical wisdom of the true cosmology of man and God: the Celestial Hierarchy of Christ as "first radiance." His nontraditional aesthetic interpretations of the Trinity, his predictive transitions between the old and the new nave to contrast the two Testaments, Old law and New spirit, and his glorious anagogical stained glass windows emitting the life source of "light" to lift the heads toward the Divine, are evidence that Abbot Suger was promoting a new way of worship to revive and old way of thinking. Suger was motivated to deliver to the world the *City of God* where the ineffable can only be experienced as a theophany

²⁶³ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 95,37.

of Divine *non-formal knowledge*. The silent soliloquy of *splendor vertatis*²⁶⁴ evoked a more intimate way of worshipping God and fostered a revived spirit of faith.

Wittgenstein speaks about how “a picture not easily left behind” captivates the viewer and repeats inexorably in the intellect of interior language.²⁶⁵ In other words, an impression is made that is retained in thought for a very long time. I conclude that similarly the illuminating aesthetics of the Saint Denis abbey left an imprint on the public visitors’ soul with a spirit that inevitably sustained him throughout the twelfth century and into the thirteenth with a living message for the future more effectively than any linguistics could achieve. Interestingly a century and a half later, Saint Thomas Aquinas put “words’ and *clarity* to the aesthetic principles that Suger implicitly exercised. Aquinas explained this phenomenon as a preexisting, organic reality that rises with potency through the humility of the artist/creator.²⁶⁶ Works of art made under circumstances of exceptional volatility, Thomas Crow identifies as the ones likely to yield insight to the understanding of change in any historical period.²⁶⁷

Rudolph argues that Suger was not an innovator, but rather a “compiler of thoughts and innovations of others.”²⁶⁸ I claim that a true innovator intentionally

²⁶⁴ von Simson’s description of the radiance of truth, revelation and transcendental human existence. von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, xx.

²⁶⁵ Hagberg, *Art as Language: Wittgenstein*, 150.

²⁶⁶ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 179.

²⁶⁷ Crow, *The Intelligence of Art*, 102.

²⁶⁸ Rudolph, *Artistic Change at St-Denis*, 73.

assembles the thoughts and innovations of others to find the threshold of *potentiality* becoming *actuality* of a new *positivity* to a “purer order” of *being*, especially under the influence of their Maker. Rookmaaker explains,

“one of the first times the Holy Spirit is mentioned [in Scripture] is in relation to a man who was filled with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs” (Exodus 31: 3,4).

Rookmaaker continues to characterize the condition as a state in which God imbued man in such a way, that he had the freedom to realize and fulfill new possibilities.²⁶⁹ Panofsky renders Suger as of “tiny stature” and “low origin with great ambition”²⁷⁰ I not only agree that Suger ascended above his standing, I also acknowledge Suger’s claim of Divine inspiration that motivated his restorative art program at the Saint Denis abbey to purify the minds of his congregated souls on the threshold of a new order of *being*. Abbot Suger had a vision removed from the pragmatic linear chronicle that was status quo, and visualized a more reflective mystical, transcendental hierarchy that could manifest aesthetically to elevate the human didactic, spiritual mind to an abstract imagination, allowing the “spirit” of God to permeate man’s soul with His *divine beauty* and absolute *truth*.

²⁶⁹ Rookmaaker, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*, 235.

²⁷⁰ Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, intro.

Conclusion

I consider my thesis a “psyche soul” archaeological exploration of a very specific “work of art” orchestrated by a particular individual who was highly sensitive to his role in the culture at the turn of a century dealing with a paradigmatic shift from “faith” to “reason.” The method of research has been an artistic thought-system aligning influential philosophies, theologies, and traditional habits of the twelfth-century Christian culture with the public aesthetics of the Saint Denis abbey to not only acknowledge the systematic synthesis of its erudite essence, but to also speculate on the aim and agency of the art to affect the spirit of the epoch. I agree with Crow in *The Intelligence of Art*: “Art historians have become adept at interpreting meaning in works of art after the fact, but much less so in finding any map to follow how the thoughts formed.”²⁷¹ By exploring and juxtaposing the adjacent authorities of the culture in which Abbot Suger created his public aesthetics, I have specifically mapped the thoughts that contributed to the work of art, the Saint Denis abbey, to expose a new way of comprehending artistic efficacy. I identified silent expressions of anagogical aesthetics that liberated a culture to a purer order than any linguistic discourse could have achieved at the time. Wittgenstein postulated, “The relationship between linguistic and aesthetic philosophy is vaguely sensed and too rarely articulated.”²⁷² I took that as a challenge to not only *sense* the power of aesthetics, but to also attempt to speak intelligibly about the rapport between

²⁷¹ Crow, *The Intelligence of Art*, 102.

²⁷² Hagberg, *Art as Language: Wittgenstein*, 5.

visual *sense knowledge* and “words,” with a desire to elevate the interpretation of empirical aesthetics for epistemology.

I purposely chose the Saint Denis abbey to analyze because it offered a unique situation in history where the ethos of mankind was on the periphery of a frontier of new potentialities becoming actualities. Specifically the advancement of intellectual activity was disquieting the inherited absolutes of Christianity, and philosophers and theologians were seeking theories of reconciliation between the two. This particular form of intercourse generated a vitality of thought and ideas that was not easily articulated. The space between the proclamations is where I claim artistic ingenuity surfaces to encapsulate and communicate what is not completely lucid at the time. Considering that the general public of the twelfth century was bucolic and did not yet have exposure to scholastic training in the emerging universities, the transmission of relevant affairs and knowledge could not be suitably dispersed through oratory or text. When the circumstance involved religion, there was certainly opportunity for preaching to occur in the collective worship centers throughout the land, but more advantageous was the availability to empirically affect the individual’s soul through visual aesthetics. The medieval mind was accustomed to symbolic representation of their faith, and venerated the liturgical materials to encourage contemplation and stimulate their state of mind. Huizinga pointed out that “the naïve religious conscience had no need of intellectual proofs in the matters of ‘faith.’ The mere presence of a visible image of things holy sufficed to establish their truth.”²⁷³ The hidden unity of art together with invisible non-

exhibited characteristics that are imbued with meaning, gives potency to transcendental agency.

Suger's public aesthetics of the Saint Denis abbey was the prototype for not only the architectural design of future cathedrals, but also the precursor for a new environment of empirical experience in relation to an encounter with God that the twelfth-century culture chose to espouse. Von Simson argues that "Suger translated the theology of light and music into the Gothic style," and Frankl echoes the assertion that "light" was the driving force of Gothic art.²⁷⁴ Rudolph claims that the combination of monumental sculptures, the stained glass windows, and the use of typology in the art of Suger's abbey was the birth of Gothic architecture.²⁷⁵ Drawing on the wisdom of von Simson further, he notes that "the Gothic style of architecture was created in response to a demand to experience the Heavenly Jerusalem," and was engineered with the geometry of divine proportion from the ground up "as a professional secret based on the square" representing the Godhead. In addition, he claims, "reversing the movement of gravity into an active energy shifted the Christian thought from the mystical to the rational approach to *truth*," and became "the dawn of Christian metaphysics."²⁷⁶ The silent public aesthetics of the Saint Denis abbey in its sophisticated system of empirical theology, was, I conclude, a presentation of an ideological relationship between man and God demonstrated through

²⁷³ Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 165.

²⁷⁴ Frankl, *Gothic Architecture*, 28.

²⁷⁵ Rudolph, *Artistic Change at St-Denis*, 12.

²⁷⁶ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 4, 7, 10, 13, 14.

an anagogical “light” system of empirical connections that inspired an ineffable intellectual consciousness of the revelation that man’s salvation is obtained purely by a soul commitment to God alone.

The new aesthetics of Suger’s abbey encouraged a higher level of spiritual engagement, which was eloquently describe by Huizinga as a transformation from living in the simple pure shadow of Antiquity and Romanesque prayer halls to encountering scholastic theology that seized a spirit to “live in the *sunshine*.”²⁷⁷ In spite of the new spiritual vitality, there was still a tension concerning the dualistic conception of life and the world. However, the sense of conflict in the twelfth century that arose from the newly translated Aristotelian theories confusing solid Christian doctrine carried over into the thirteenth century until Saint Thomas Aquinas took on the task to reconcile Aristotle’s dialectic concepts with Augustine’s doctrines of seminal reason.²⁷⁸ Abbot Suger may not have had the intellectual gifts of his successor, Aquinas, but I maintain that he served his calling with the gift that God had bestowed upon him, and he chose to aesthetically stimulate the intellectual senses of mankind to a higher order of theology that would be discussed for centuries to follow.

In the medieval civilization it was the Church that was primarily responsible for spiritual guidance and the nurturing of moral behavior. Whether understood philosophically or theologically, the civil behavior of mankind and man’s relationship to an absolute *truth* was approached from either the interior soul or exterior cultural

²⁷⁷ Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 335.

²⁷⁸ Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, 44.

convention. Also, within each of the theories, there existed a hierarchical progression in a supernatural, universal ordering system that was illuminated in order to *sense* knowledge, which would provide perfect wisdom, spiritual cleansing or salvation, and a union with a Superior *Being*. This synopsis of beliefs portrayed the *way of life*, as it was taught and understood in the twelfth century when Suger was positioned to fulfill his two roles as Abbot of the Saint Denis abbey: to maintain the physical structure of the monastery and to save souls. With the support of the King, autonomy from the monastic reformations, and the new mystical *Celestial Hierarchy* of Pseudo-Dionysius along with Augustine's *City of God*, Abbot Suger was encouraged to renovate his abbey to emulate the Divine *way of life*. I conclude that Abbot Suger was a very intuitive thinker who sensed the direction of the future, and responded to the inevitable cultural shift with public aesthetics that addressed what was ineffable at the time. It wasn't until a century later that Saint Thomas Aquinas put "words" to the aesthetics of spiritual knowledge.

A Century Later

Aestheticians who believe that art not only absorbs the culture's ethos, but also projects the unseen, unknowable, and ineffable future before its time, recognize that it often takes decades or centuries for affirmation of the artist's intuition and intention. The public is not only unaware of art's efficacy, they can also be very resistant to the avant-garde direction. In due time, art prevails to serve its aim, and continues to encourage going beyond the visible to the invisible higher order of intelligence, whether divine or simply aprioristic. In the case of the public aesthetics of the Saint Denis abbey, there was ardent success to the art of light, hierarchy, symmetry, and anagogical empirical

experience of theophany, which I conclude pioneered a newly revived Christian spirit of worship in the twelfth century. Prelate friends of Suger, Bishop Henry of Sens and Bishop Geoffrey of Chartres shared the same convictions as Suger and soon built cathedrals with comparable aesthetics and spiritual impact;²⁷⁹ von Simson describes these as “an expression of new religious experience,”²⁸⁰ which became known as the “uplifting” spirit of Gothic art. Abbot Suger had started a transformation in religious experience that elevated man’s linkage to God.

The new aesthetics of Abbot Suger’s abbey was not identified as Gothic until the fifteenth century when the new humanists, men of the Renaissance, referenced it to the barbarians and called it Gothic. But in its time, the style of the early cathedrals of Ile-de-France were called *opus modernum* (creative modern), so French that they came to be known as *opere francigena*.²⁸¹ The transformation of the old Romanesque church aesthetic to the new illuminating celestial hierarchy, as von Simson pointed out, communicated “an ideological message that was of passionate concern to every educated Frenchman,” because the expression of ideas was contiguous with those of the crown.²⁸² The aesthetics of the new cathedral church or abbey had changed the Romanesque worship of the unapproachable God to a new relationship with the Divine where the boundary between man and God had disappeared, what Frankl identifies as “man being

²⁷⁹ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 64.

²⁸⁰ Rudolph, *Artistic Change at St-Denis*, 74.

²⁸¹ Crosby, *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis*, 19.

²⁸² von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 135.

part of the whole.”²⁸³ This concept resonated with the Capetian monarchy,²⁸⁴ and the spirit of the aesthetics was endorsed to proliferate for centuries to follow.

It has become clear through the studies of Rudolph, Panofsky, Frankl, Crosby, and von Simson that Suger was not gifted with language; his writings were pragmatic and not poetic or inspirational. However, Suger was brilliantly artistic and left an indelible mark on theological aesthetics for centuries. Suger’s “silent soliloquy” clarifying man’s quest to the *truth* in God’s revelation by raising his head, heart, soul and consciousness to the heavenly realm was inevitably affirmed in Gothic cathedral art. Conversely, Panofsky asks the question that Suger would have delighted to avow: “Did Suger know his rose window, great innovation and light metaphysics would lead to the Scholastic intellectual movements?”²⁸⁵ Imagine, as Boethius and the Pseudo-Dionysius would encourage one to do, how the artist Suger would have felt to see that his aesthetic gift to the twelfth century would lead to the intellectual language of “words” one hundred years afterwards.

The theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas, codified a century after Abbot Suger’s display of empirical knowledge, is an affirmation of the Pseudo-Dionysius interpretation of transcendental divine hierarchy and anagogical relations between man and God illuminated by the powerful beauty of “light.” The shared intuition between Suger and Aquinas of the tension between “faith” and “reason,” was expressed with the same concerns but Aquinas chose “words” and Suger chose “art.” Both men sought to affect

²⁸³ Frankl, *Gothic Architecture*, 277.

²⁸⁴ von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 64.

²⁸⁵ Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 36.

the culture's understanding that the world is becoming more complex and that finding a *truth* to stand on more relevant, whether arrived at by reason or faith. In either direction there is a hierarchy of *sense knowledge* leading to the Unmoved Mover, and Abbot Suger led his flock to the Divine empirically before the scholastics did so through text.

Saint Thomas Aquinas had the benefit of witnessing a century of change in the spirit of the medieval culture as advances in Scholasticism added logical thinking about religious matters pertaining to the universals of the world and man's behavior in it. The universe for Aquinas, Eco describes as a "hyperbole of form, a gigantic metaphor for life,"²⁸⁶ and "a combination of Plato's *Timaeus*, Pseudo Dionysius imagery, and Boethius mathematical and musical vision into metaphysics of form; an ontological property involving participation in life and being."²⁸⁷ Aquinas was determined to develop a synthesis of Christian and Aristotelian philosophy along with contemporary influences in a coherent systematized manner that was culminated in his *Summa Theologica*, which displayed an architectural quality akin to Suger's architectural theology in the aesthetics of the Saint Denis abbey. Not only were their structures similar in concepts of *sense knowledge*, harmony in the divine order of beauty, and *motion* toward *truth*, they were also aligned with their dependence on the First Mover, God.²⁸⁸ I consider Aquinas' theories relevant to my claim of divine inspiration because sense knowledge bestowed by God on an individual's soul, to move the individual toward serving God and revealing

²⁸⁶ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 90.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁸⁸ Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 179.

His *truth*, is evidence that Abbot Suger was not only a very intuitive thinker who sensed the direction of the future, but also divinely inspired to respond by presenting to the twelfth-century culture what was beyond words.

The attempt to merge the truths of natural “reason” with the truths of “faith” reached a zenith in Scholasticism, but these were soon denied compatibility by two Franciscan thinker of the fourteenth century, Duns Scotus and William of Ockham who explained that “certain religious doctrines are beyond discovery by the use of reason,” and that the incomprehensible *truth* of Divine Revelation should not be intruded upon by the human intellect.²⁸⁹ Scholasticism declined and empirical experience of man’s relationship with God returned. Had Augustine’s “seed” been nurtured well enough by Suger in the twelfth century for it to harvest again a century or two later? Laing in the preface to Foucault’s *The Order of Things*, points to a significant aspect of Foucault’s thinking: “It is the history of “otherness” relative to epistemology in a given culture that Foucault desires to elevate as not only credible, but also essential to the transitions between centuries.”²⁹⁰ Another way of looking at that phenomenon is how the pendulum swings between new and old tenets of universals throughout the generations to continually refine the contrasts for a higher understanding on which to build; this is what Foucault calls the *tabula* of knowledge man must consider as nature’s repetition reveals new forms of wisdom.²⁹¹ In the event of Christendom, the pendulum seems to always

²⁸⁹ “The Intellectual Synthesis of the High Middle Ages,” <http://history-world.org/midintellectual.htm> (accessed 4/4/12)

²⁹⁰ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xxiv.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, xxiv.

subside at the core of “faith” and in each generation an instrument in God’s hands is called to expose this dogmatic reality of divine *truth*. As highlighted earlier by Suger’s biographer, Suger innately knew his time and place, his part in the “whole” relative to saving the World Soul of faith. Many of Suger’s writings, notes Panofsky, make references to “future generations.”²⁹²

Future Potentiality

In the twenty-first century, what is the current debate between “faith” and “reason,” and how do aesthetic respond? It would take a whole new study to answer those questions in the wake of Nietzsche declaring, “God is Dead!”²⁹³ in 1882, and in 2005 the revealing book of Sam Harris’, *The End of Faith: religion, terror, and the future of reason*. It was Aquinas in the thirteenth century who established a demarcation between “faith” and “reason,” and Rookmaaker, who in the twentieth century made the astute remark that when faith became set apart from real problems of culture, God was made unnecessary.²⁹⁴ Is God unnecessary? A Christian standing on the rock of Salvation would surely exclaim, no! A Christian artist, recognizing that God has gifted him or her with unique talents for His purpose would *sense* a calling to participate in reclaiming His Authority. Augustine asserted, “If divine governance were to lapse, all creation would

²⁹² Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, xi.

²⁹³ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Thomas Common (Barnes & Nobel, Inc.: 2008), p. 103.

²⁹⁴ Rookmaaker, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*, 43.

cease to exist” (*De Gen.* 4.12.22).²⁹⁵ Rather than expounding on this topic, I will finish my thesis with a reflection on the efficacy of intuitive artistic practice leading to public aesthetics that can affect a culture empirically toward a revived spiritual encounter with God’s Sovereignty.

My psyche archeological dig in a very specific time frame relative to a very specific individual, and his work of art, was an empirical experience that codified the artistic practice of a Divinely-inspired Christian artist, and revealed a few treasures for a twenty-first century Christian artist to consider. I agree with Crow that art-historical practices are latent guides to a way into the future.²⁹⁶ The study of Abbot Suger’s artistic practice and his manifested aesthetic vision in the Saint Denis abbey exhibits an accomplished pedagogy for any epoch. The most relevant aspects of Suger’s art practice were *contemporaneity*, divine inspiration, and faith.

Contemporaneity is being present to the conditions in which one lives. For an artist this would involve an awareness of the ethos of the culture as it has evolved, and insight into where it appears to be heading. As revealed in this research, since antiquity, the *way of life* for man is man’s understanding of how he fits into the scheme of the universe. Without a superior Maker, Demiurge, or God, the yearning soul of man has no system in which to connect with its original source. It is my contention, as displayed by Suger, that it is a Christian’s responsibility to protect the *truth* of God’s universals and to show others a way to obtain it. Earlier I claimed that the Christian artist must ensure that

²⁹⁵ Stein, *Reading Medieval Culture*, 93.

²⁹⁶ Crow, *The Intelligence of Art*, 5.

their art has absorbed the understood *way of life* first, before enhancing the work with new visions that evoke a new way of thinking. Rookmaaker stresses that Christian art is “given the task to reveal the *eternal truth* beyond what the eye can see”²⁹⁷ From my own experience and observation of Abbot Suger, under Rookmaaker’s assignment the Christian artist calls on his Creator to join *forces* in a collaborative effort to assemble the visible world of materials in a perfect pure divine order to unveil His *truth* and evoke a reunion that was explained in this study as a theophany.

Recalling the many material and symbolic elements that fostered the heightened spiritual essence of the Saint Denis abbey, an artist of any era can gloss the implications for their own interpretation. The metaphorical dig-bag was rich with artistic treasure, but without inspiration to move Aristotle’s *potentiality* to *actuality* there is no creation, and as Rudolph interpreted Hugh of Saint Victor’s assertions, “creation and restoration are necessary concepts of faith.”²⁹⁸ The pendulum subsides once again on faith, and each new generation raises up a believing instrument in God’s hands called to expose His *Way*. In the medieval Christian mind and in the minds of Christian artists today, the skills of the artisan were a direct gift from God by the light of divine wisdom, for the purpose of disclosing Him to mankind. As Evans articulates, when man is freed from all doubts and uncertainties as to his present and future state, he is free to perform the duty that God requires of him. Abbot Suger in his creative restoration of the Saint Denis abbey did just that, and set an extraordinary example for future generations of artists.

²⁹⁷ Rookmaaker, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*, 111.

²⁹⁸ Rudolph, *Artistic Change at St-Denis*, 42.

John Dewey's argument about social aesthetics identifies that the tragedy of the "lost individual" in the present century,

"is due to the fact that while individuals are now caught up into a vast complex of associations, there is no harmonious and coherent reflection of the import of these connections into the imaginative and emotional outlook on life."²⁹⁹

In other words, there is a lack of harmony, or what he calls, "harmonious interactions," there is no source of origin, and no internal reflection on life. He goes on to emphasize that the root of this confusion does not lie within the individual, but instead is "due in turn to the absence of harmony within the state of society." He also claims that spatial fragmentation eventually affects the individual at the most basic level of their character.³⁰⁰

Since antiquity, the basic level of character of man has been called the soul. My interpretation of Dewey's theory is that the soul of man is disconnected from his origin because there is no order or hierarchy in which to transcend the world to a higher order for unity, such as the medieval culture had. Adding Foucault's thoughts to this condition, Foucault speaks about returning to an "origin of light which has been shining since the beginning of time."³⁰¹ Could that be Augustine's "seed," the Divine light within? Rookmaaker makes another relevant observation,

²⁹⁹ Jason Kosnoski, *John Dewey's Social Aesthetics*, (Palgrave Macmillan Journals, 2005), Vol. 37, No. 2 (April) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3877118> Accessed: 04/04/12

³⁰⁰ Dewey, *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 332.

“Man today is in revolt against the world of alienation and the loneliness of the mass man. He is searching for a new world but finds no principles in order. Man is still human and deep inside he still knows that there is more, and is searching for a reality that is more than the brain can encompass and the eye can see; he hopes to find a mystic unity with God.”³⁰²

Rookmaaker goes on to suggest that there needs to be a new orientation of old Christianity that is not knowledge or word, but experience.³⁰³ Processing the thoughts of Dewey, Foucault and Rookmaaker, it sounds like a mystical analogical aesthetic experience in the public sphere would benefit the disjointed twenty-first culture.

“In a post-humanist, post-Christian and neo-pagan world,” declares Rookmaaker, “the Christian artist must stand for humanity and speak prophetically against the attacks of the spirit of ‘our’ age.”³⁰⁴ He continues to describe the artist as having a responsibility to reveal the *truth* of reality beyond the material world of appearance. Rookmaaker also acknowledges that to fulfill this calling, the artist must interpret the times in which he or she lives in order to understand the present structure before presenting something new.³⁰⁵ This claim supports my earlier statement that the artist of *contemporaneity* must first have insight to the “presentness” by being sensitive to what has lead up to the present state, secondly an understanding of the symbolic communication surrounding the present, and an thirdly an intuition about how to transform the present to the future through appropriation of the symbols along with evolutionary alterations to heighten the

³⁰² Rookmaaker, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*, 198.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 202.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 246, 249.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 243.

experience toward new understanding. This responsibility, Rookmaaker called a privilege, as did Abbot Suger.

Understanding the symbolic communication of the twenty-first century is the challenge for a contemporary Christian artist today. However, culture consists of patterns and symbols that are both explicit and implicit, and I believe these can be excavated, assimilated and transformed into works of art that can be shared with society in an effort to heighten awareness and devotion to a higher, purer order of *being*. Andy Crouch in *Culture Making*, provides an appropriate perception: “Only the artifacts that leave the solitude of their inventor’s imagination can move the horizons of *possibility* and become the raw material for more culture making.”³⁰⁶ In closing, I return to my original claim in my introduction: Public aesthetics is a powerful intervention to move a culture, and if its creator/artist is cognitively aligned with the theology and emerging philosophy of the present and Divinely inspired, then he or she is capable of presenting the ineffable before its time. In my future scholarship, I aspire to argue that there is a perpetual, reciprocal relationship between aesthetics and textuality that cannot be divorced and instead should be wed eternally for the highest level of understanding man’s relationship to the universe and his Maker.

³⁰⁶ Crouch, *Culture Making*, 40.

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