Architecture and the shaping of thought

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An examination of two buildings, the Katholikon in the monastery of Hosios Loukas in Greece and the church at the Abbey of Saint Denis in France, reveals how architecture has shaped thought. The practice of transmitting well-formed symbolic messages—the mode of communication—is juxtaposed here to the less epistemologically accessible mode of representation. Just as visual forms in the design process reveal conceptual possibilities reaching beyond conscious intentions of a designer, buildings have frequently manifested culturally nascent thoughts. Architecture has not only represented but also negotiated cultural differences before people could fully understand them. Conversely, the mode of communication in architecture has been symptomatic of how political forces silenced experiential ambiguities and turned buildings into tools for disciplining thought.

Keywords: architecture, design, epistemology, representation, byzantium, gothic

L’étude de deux bâtiments, le Katholikon du monastère d’Hosios Loukas en Grèce et l’église de l’abbaye de Saint Denis en France, révèle à quel point l’architecture a façonné la pensée. La pratique de la transmission de messages symboliques bien définis — le mode de communication — est ici juxtaposée au mode de représentation le moins accessible épistémologiquement. Tout comme les formes visuelles du processus de design révèlent des possibilités conceptuelles allant au-delà des intentions conscientes du designer, le bâtiment a souvent manifesté certaines pensées culturellement naissantes. L’architecture non seulement représentait, mais également négociait les différences culturelles avant que les populations ne puissent pleinement les comprendre. Inversement, en architecture, le mode de communication était symptomatique de la manière dont les puissances politiques réduisaient au silence les ambiguïtés expériентielles et transformaient le bâtiment en outil permettant de discipliner la pensée.

Mots-clés: architecture, design, épistémologie, représentation, byzance, gothique

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Architecture, the most public and permanent of material practices, produces objects and environments that have been instrumental in cultural exchanges and negotiations. Yet according to currently dominant models of knowledge, buildings—like industrial products—supposedly result from practical problem-solving procedures and express artistic intentions, a perspective that silences the fact that across time and all over the world, built environments have also given form to culturally nascent thoughts. That is, material structures, those already built and exposed to public perception as well as those in the process of being conceptualized by architects, patrons, or master builders, have not only solved problems but also helped to clarify thoughts, confront beliefs, and expose tacit assumptions. As a result, practices involved in envisioning, understanding, and using architecture have also supported exchanges of new ideas and refinement of emerging attitudes. Even when master builders worked without the involvement of what we today call designers, they repeated the construction efforts. In a cyclical manner, buildings have been conceptualized as types, built, understood as lived-in environments, and reconceptualized again in new locations.

Contemporary design processes, when considered beyond procedures driven exclusively by profit or economy of means, involve representational experimentation. Architects produce multiple drawings and models of a project not merely to communicate their intentions but to trigger exchanges in which the object of design is identified as an issue and a set of conceptual priorities. Sometimes ambiguous or evocative, diagrammatic or analytical, these representational forms are produced in multiple versions to distill how all those involved in these conceptual negotiations think about the purpose and complexity of the design commission. Both the physical building and the criteria by which the experiential and cultural phenomena of the project are judged are products of these negotiations. Unlike simple problem-solving procedures, the design process also produces a multifaceted understanding of what is being designed and why. The conceptually inclusive character of these design practices depends on non-verbal experimentation, especially on visual forms such as diagrammatic sketches that have the ability to engage the full spectrum of thoughts without reducing them to conclusive statements or literal interpretations.

Because of these epistemological complexities, the ways in which architecture acquires meanings has been a contested issue in architectural theory. Semiotic approaches such as those outlined by Geoffrey Broadbent (1978) or Diana Agrest and Mario Gandelsonas (1973) generally address the production and reception of meanings in architecture only when they assume a clear distinction between the signifier and the signified. Such a distinction implies that the meanings of a building are discernable as well-formed semantic figures intentionally applied to the material structure, which itself is inherently meaningless outside of the universal
principles of physics and the economy of means. As if subverting this dichotomy, Henri Lefebvre (1991) discusses space—seemingly the very universal sine qua non of architecture—as the product of social forces. Yet even his view is limited by an underlying belief that people produce spaces according to deterministic rules of social and political evolution. Thus none of these approaches adequately addresses the dynamic complexity of conceptual processes I describe above. The understanding of inhabited reality as resulting from nuanced and not always conscious or intentional exchanges of thoughts that I argue for here is actually closer to what Michel Foucault (1972) discusses as the emergence of discursive formations and epistemological statements. The fact that material practices—not only verbal discourses—may be instrumental in refining new structures of sense making has been implied most directly by Raymond Williams’ analysis of the cultural or social function of the arts, specifically his notion of structures of feelings, “affective elements of consciousness” that can either explicitly manifest existing social structures or be a part of “a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating.” Williams recognizes that “the idea of a structure of feelings can be specifically related to the evidence of forms and conventions—semantic figures—which, in art and literature, are often among the first indications that such a new structure is forming” (Williams, 1977, pp. 132-133). Penetrating as it is, even this observation, I would argue, is inadequate to address the dynamic complexity of the architectural processes of sense making.

This argument is based on the assertion that constructed environments involve two complementary modalities of shaping thought: (1) the mode of communication, a well-controlled transmission of unequivocal messages, and (2) a much less systematic mode of representation, a set of practices that connect thought and perception by erasing some but validating other thoughts. The first mode is more commonly recognized and easier to analyze because it is inherently aligned with semantic theories and other well-established logo-centric epistemological assumptions. It is most discernable in discussions that address the meanings of architecture in terms of truth, correctness of interpretations, or political uses. The mode of representation, on the other hand, poses an epistemological challenge similar to that which Theodor Adorno (1966) and Michel Foucault (1970) identify as the possibility and impossibility of thinking certain thoughts. According to Kenneth Surin, thinkability is a key component of cultural specificity because “every culture generates for itself its own ‘thinkability’ (and concomitantly its own ‘unthinkability’)” (1995, p. 1183). Architecture’s mode of representation, I argue, engages the open-ended process of sense making when a person is confronted with an experience that cannot be easily contained by pre-existing and dominant narratives. It silences the conventional procedures of decoding messages and creates a mental environment in which thought becomes intrigued but doubt-
ful, introspective but also anxious to find a new structure of understanding.3 Because buildings may repeat these processes for generations of users, gradually users’ memories of such experiences have contributed to the cultural specificity of thought.

These two modes of shaping thought are not diametrically opposed or exclusive; buildings have embodied both of them but in different proportions. Built environments that resulted primarily from emerging ideas, unselfconscious attitudes, and conflicted assumptions tend to emphasize the mode of representation. Others, designed according to highly controlled political or symbolic programs, emphasize the precision of artistic communication. The so-called traditional cannon of architectural history—the list of buildings that seemingly exemplify the highest achievements of the human civilization—comprises monuments that are known as symbolically coded artifacts. Generally speaking, the mode of communication has become instrumental in the ways political powers have controlled the production of meanings and knowledge, and the mode of representation has been essential in the evolution of the culturally grounded imagination and this kind of receptiveness, which has historically determined what people were able to register.

These assertions have broad and far-reaching consequences for the epistemology of design, which I will substantiate within the limited scope of this article by discussing two buildings separated by time and space but linked by the little-studied process of cultural exchange.4 The first of these is the Katholikon in the monastery of Hosios Loukas in Greece, a structure frequently considered one of the best examples of the Middle Byzantine Period in architecture. Built around the third quarter of the tenth or the first quarter of the eleventh century, the building indeed provides evidence of the church design typology and systems of decoration characteristic of that period. Here, however, I would like to focus on the building as a highly refined response to Iconoclasm, which had preceded the period in which it was built.

One could say that the history of the theocratic state of Byzantium revolved around the issue of the representation of the divine. As early as the sixth century, Pseudo-Dionysius, or Dionysius the Areopagite, announced that God is “known in all things and as distinct from all things. He is known through knowledge and through unknowing”—the key assumptions of what become known as his

2 Theodor Adorno (1966) discussed the problem of unthinkability in the context of death and despair. Addressing epistemological issues, Michel Foucault also asked and discussed the question, «What does it mean, no longer being able to think a certain thought?» (Foucault, 1970, p. 50).
3 In contrast to the prevailing understanding of the word representation, in this article any practice that uses visual resemblance to establish a direct connection between a figurative depiction and a name and/or meaning would be included in the category of communication.
4 I discuss the full spectrum of these issues in my forthcoming Architecture of Thought.
negative theology (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987, p. 108). Following the earlier neoplatonic thought of Plotinus, Tertullian, and Origen, Pseudo-Dionysius profoundly questioned the possibility of representational naming, of giving a corporeal representational shape to the divine, because “just as the senses can neither grasp nor perceive the things of the mind, just as representation and shape cannot lay hold of the intangible and incorporeal, by the same standard of truth beings are surpassed by the infinity beyond being, intelligences by that oneness which is beyond intelligence” (p. 49). At the same time, however, he also holds that “God is not absolutely incommunicable to everything. By itself it generously reveals a firm, transcendent beam, granting enlightenments proportionate to each being, and thereby draws sacred minds upward to its permitted contemplation, to participation and to the state of becoming like it” (p. 50). Thus, in the theocratic Byzantine Empire, understanding the divine being was viewed both as beyond the abilities of the human mind and as the supreme law governing the empire, a potentially explosive mixture of conflicting assumptions and interests. Consequently, the controversy concerning truth in representation of the divine led to its political outcome, Iconoclasm. Between 726 and 843, the emperor prohibited the figurative depiction of the divine as a violation of the spirituality of worship, not only banning all imagery in churches but also causing the rampant destruction of art and widespread human suffering. Following what I have described as the mode of communication, only unequivocal symbolic signs were accepted in churches, and the controversy concerning truth in representation was reduced to questions of who had the authority to decide whether or not to represent or how to correctly interpret material manifestations of the divine. Questions concerning the meaning of representation became, in Edward James Martin’s words, “a political weapon rather than a debatable problem” (1978, p. 78).

Although historians of architecture have not discovered a specific text indicating that designers of the Middle Byzantine churches followed an explicit program that challenged the Iconoclastic closure of representational considerations, approximately a century after Iconoclasm ended, probably as a result of repeated conceptual experiments, somebody designed the Katholikon in the monastery of Hosios Loukas as a place where perceptual ambiguity and paradoxical interpretations test the limits of religious thought.

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5 These attempts became so numerous that Edward James Martin (1978) devotes an entire chapter of his A History of the Iconoclastic Controversy to recording the various authorities and reasons given.
Figure 1. Interior of the Katholikon in the monastery of Hosios Loukas.

The Katholikon was an important commission. The lower part of the space's interior was richly covered with slabs of valuable stones and the upper part decorated with refined mosaics. As is typical of Middle Byzantine structures, the interior includes multiple figurative depictions. The program and spatial arrangement of these sacred figures may well illustrate what Otto Demus (1976) proposes as a system of deciphering meanings in Byzantine ecclesiastical art. Indeed, the church interior could be seen as an intricately coded ideal iconostasis in which mosaics of saints are organized in the lower level, closer to the people, and the divine beings occupy the upper part, symbolizing heaven. Yet in the case of Byzantine churches, especially those built during the Middle Period, such literal interpretations must be examined in the context of other experiential phenomena.

While the popular systems of interpretation of these structures revolve around figurative representation, the Katholikon is also a place where people interacted with what I have termed nonfigurative representation (Piotrowski, 2000, p. 107). Its opposite, figurative representation, assures that a depicted form is recognizable as an appearance of something known from physical reality or as a figural form commonly associated with a particular concept or interpretation. The concept of nonfigurative representation, on the other hand, refers to the mode of representation that establishes the relationships between given material forms or visual phenomena and symbolic reality without resorting to semantic figures and familiar appearances. Figure 1 provides examples of both these types of representation. As it shows, the placement of sacred figures is directly related to the geometry of the interior; almost always they are located on concave surfaces, on vaults, domes,

6 As such, figurative representation can be seen as grounded in the Aristotelian concept of the imitation of nature and Plato’s process of doubling.
and half-domes. Each figure is depicted in a hieratic manner, that is, in the static frontal position or as the least arbitrarily composed appearance or gesture. In the main dome, angels and prophets surround the space as if gathering around its empty center, and Christ presides over them at the top. In the right squinch, where a semi-cupola provides a transition from two walls intersecting in the corner and the large dome above, is a scene of Nativity in which angels bow in the most actual sense to the Child because they are depicted on concave surfaces. While Demus sees such compositions as an attempt to create a realistic illusion (1976, p. 23), others have discussed this kind of spatial practice as a unique form of signification. Robert Nelson, for example, calls it a “sacralized space,” that is, space “consecrated by images through the sense of vision” (2000, pp. 157-158). I would like to posit that this experiential phenomenon is an example of nonfigurative representation because, while remaining empty and amorphous, the physical void space of the squinch or any concave space surrounded by hieratic figures acquires a degree of concreteness, materiality, and tactility. And this very process of solidifying the physical void space allows the space to represent a holy site in a nonfigurative manner. The fact that the attention of a believer is focused on the empty volume where figurative depictions are absent is essential for moving thought beyond the pre-existing systems of interpretations and semantic figures.

Yet the even more elusive and most evocative case of nonfigurative representation in the Katholikon was created by daylight. In the past, the interior shown in Figure 1 was darker than at present because windows made of small apertures, other than those at the top, were glazed with dark colored glass. Before the major earthquake of 1593, while the dome was still covered with gilded tesserae, the whole building operated as a sophisticated daylight-controlling device. Figure 2 shows a simulated section designed to measure how daylight was distributed in the original interior, revealing phenomena that scholars were unable to analyze before the advent of the digital technology. It records the light along the church’s
vertical plane of symmetry and in the horizontal layer of space that would have been occupied by people. As it shows, light in the Katholikon was concentrated in the space of the dome and the upper part of the naos, while other areas, especially those occupied by believers, were much darker. Because light itself is invisible, what the image shows would have been only an implied phenomenon. Light’s energy must be absorbed by solid matter to become visible; light cannot be seen when it passes through empty space or when it hits a perfectly reflective surface. A mirror does not absorb light, and thus its surface dissolves optically like an empty space. The surfaces of the empty interior of the main dome at Hosios Loukas were covered with gilded mosaics that functioned like a crude concave mirror. Consequently, all the light coming from the ring of windows at the top of the naos was kept bouncing within the space of the dome. That multiplicity of rays crossing space is what is recorded in Figure 2. Because the light energy was absorbed by the much less reflective and dark stone surfaces below, only a small percentage of the daylight energy would have reached to the floor. Maybe the most important aspect of this experience for viewers would have been its paradoxical duality. People could sense the concentration of light in the dome during the Divine Liturgy because smoke would light up above them and imperfections in the tesserae would create a measured degree of the glittering effect in the dome. At the same time, believers would directly experience that the light surrounding them was more muted than that above. The difference was palpable, but the threshold between these two realms would have been the most elusive of all distinctions.

The nonfigurative character of these phenomena or the impressions they triggered in viewers’ minds are reminiscent of the paradoxical statements made by Pseudo-Dionysius. The building implies that the vertical space of the naos is a meeting place between what can be touched and understood—the stone-covered realm of the mortals—and that something which cannot be reached, fully understood, or explained—the realm of the divine. In an anagogical manner—by the ascension of the contemplative mind—when human attention is captivated by difficult-to-explain phenomena, the imagination is transported closer to the superior realm. In this way the Katholikon operated as a sophisticated post-iconoclastic device designed not to stabilize the correct way of representing divinity but rather to test the limits of human perception and processes of sense-making. By focusing perception on empty space and the least discernable of distinctions, the building materialized the paradox and thus revealed the theological value in doubt and ambiguity.

At the moment when Byzantine architecture had reached these nuanced levels of development, the theological and political differences between Latin and Byzantine Christianity became irreconcilable and led to the Great Schism of 1054. But the mutual excommunication of the pope and the ecumenical patriarch did not
end political and cultural exchange between the two branches of the Church. To the contrary, it seems that the Schism increased interest in the other. Moreover, in 1095, after the Turks had overrun the Empire, the Byzantine emperor appealed for help from the West and the First Crusade was launched. Constantinople, the gathering place for Western soldiers answering that call, exposed the crusading elites to the artistic sophistication of eastern culture. All this was taking place while the Latin world itself was undergoing political changes and needed new means to organize and express its new structures and relationships. Thus it was not a coincidence that the Gothic style, which Simson calls “the conservative ‘language’ of Christian architecture throughout the Western world” (1964, p. xx), was created in the period between 1137 and 1144 when Abbot Suger redesigned and reconstructed the west and east ends of the church at the Abbey of Saint Denis, the burial place of the patron saint of France and of French kings.

![Figure 3. Ambulatory in the Basilica of Saint Denis.](image)

Figure 3, a photograph of the ambulatory in the Basilica of Saint Denis, shows the unaltered part of that twelfth-century remodeling. The space has been widely acknowledged as prototypical of all Gothic churches. Indeed it represents a radical departure from earlier Romanesque interiors, not only in the way the structure controls forces of gravity but also because the church form is presented as an ingenious structural solution. Moreover, the interior marks a departure from earlier patterns in the way it is flooded with light. The frame-like structure of columns, ribs, and external buttresses transformed the exterior wall into a line of large openings that were filled with stained-glass windows. This space and all its later developments in Gothic cathedrals have been accepted as one of the highest achievements of Western civilization, the representational seed of the Western identity.

Abbot Suger, hailed by historians as a great statesman, designer, and enlightened patron of the arts, conceived of this ecclesiastical space as the symbolic expression of the newly centralized political power, extending the celestial hierarchy to the order governing Capetian France (Simson, 1964, p. 139). Across the whole of
Christendom at that time, the celestial hierarchy was understood according to the previously discussed writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, for whom it was the expression of a gradual transition from the domain of divine beings to that of mortals (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987, p. 197). While the program for remodeling the church was driven by political reasons, Suger “wished to be understood... as an architect who built theology” (Simson, 1964, p. 133).

Erwin Panofsky’s influential 1946 Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St. Denis and Its Art Treasures asserted that the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius directly inspired many aspects of that church’s design. Indeed, the Greek text and John Scotus Eriugena’s Latin translations of the Dionysian volume were deposited in the library at Saint Denis, treated as one of its most valuable possessions because Pseudo-Dionysius was mistaken at that time for Saint Denis, the patron of Christianity in France. Unfortunately, Panofsky and even his critics (e.g., Peter Kidson, 1987) reduce these exchanges to the mode of communication and focus on the direct links, or lack of them, between the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius and Suger. By viewing the conceptualization of architectural ideas as a merely intentional and fully conscious process of goal setting and then materially executing those goals, they overlook the equally important role that the mode of representation might have played in this case. In an environment in which people either still remembered the wonders of the Byzantine architecture or were under the spell of descriptions attempting to encapsulate experiential phenomena similar to those I have revealed in the Katholikon, I believe that the Dionysian texts must have strongly resonated with their shared recollections of eastern architecture. By his own admission, Suger talked with people who had known Constantinople and refers to these “almost incredible reports” in his writings (Panofsky, 1979, p. 64-5). Similar fascinations were strong and common enough in France to prompt construction of churches precisely following the Byzantine layout, such as the cathedral of Saint-Front in Périgueux, which was built at the same time that the St. Denis was remodeled. Former crusaders or their relatives must have also been able to directly influence Abbot Suger’s design decisions, as suggested by the fact that the stained-glass compositions in the ambulatory included the Crusading Window, consisting of ten images depicting scenes from the First Crusade. The inclusion of pictures showing non-saintly historical persons in episodes not related to relics or miraculous events was highly unusual at that time.8

Although Abbot Suger never traveled to Byzantium, he was clearly fascinated by the Dionysian theological discourses.9 His writing shows that he was especially captivated by the symbolic function of light, visual effects, and the notion that the human mind is capable of the anagogical ascension. He frequently follows Pseudo-Dionysius’ words, repeats his phrases, but at the same time changes the meanings or assumptions behind them. Such shifts are not random, but revolve

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8 The most explicit in this respect were nineteenth-century discourses concerning the issue of national style in countries like England and France.
around issues of control. Suger’s writing is more aligned with the Dionysian text when he justifies the need for hierarchy than when he discusses matters involving the relationship between perception and religious knowledge. While for Pseudo-Dionysius the impossibility of understanding God was directly related to the limits of human perception, for Suger the problem is reducible to that of identifying or producing signifiers and establishing the correct understanding of their content. Primarily, this is a shift in emphasis from non-verbal phenomena to verbal constructs, thus similar to a shift from the mode of representation to the mode of communication.

How this transformation of Byzantine imports informed the design of the Saint Denis church can be seen in Abbot Suger’s treatment of the issue of anagogical ascension. When he describes the state of mind triggered by looking at visual effects created by precious stones decorating the altar, he sounds like a worshipper experiencing the phenomena of the Middle Byzantine churches: “dwelling, as it were, in some strange region of the universe which neither exists entirely in the slime of the earth nor entirely in the purity of Heaven; and that, by grace of God, [...] transported from this inferior to that higher world in an anagogical manner” (Panofsky, 1979, p. 64-5). In his case, however, this paradoxical sensation was triggered not by the nonfigurative representation of the divine but by precious objects, things that could be treated as superior signs only as much as they are exceptional in appearance or monetary value.

Figure 4. The Anagogical Window in the Basilica of Saint Denis.
(Courtesy of Professor Alison Stones.)

8 The window has been destroyed, but was still present in the church of Saint Denis in 1729, when Bernard de Montfaucon published drawings of its images.
9 During his many travels, Abbot Suger visited Italy, where Byzantine influences were strong. He might have also seen older Byzantine imports in Southern France or the mosaic in the chapel in Germigny-des-Prés in central France.
The most explicit example in the Saint Denis church of how Suger transformed the notion of religious ascension of the mind is the composition of a window shown in Figure 4, the Anagogical Window. Instead of negotiating the paradox of human inability to perceive the divine, this collection of stained-glass images operates as a didactic device that trains believers how to discern true Christian knowledge. The difficulty of comprehending the extrasensory phenomena is reduced to examples from the history of Christianity that demonstrate how to distinguish between true and false religious messages. Although the sequence of images is not completely certain, it seems that the higher in the composition of the Anagogical Window, the closer these references are to messages received directly from God. The roundel at the bottom of the widow, for example, depicts Christ standing between two females labeled as “Sinagoga” and “Eclesia,” in which he lifts the veil off the old Jewish tradition and thus makes the Church the true authority on Christian symbolism. Directly above, another roundel shows Christ unveiling Moses, Suger’s inscription explaining that Christ reveals what Moses, as the symbol of pre-Christian tradition, veiled. In the middle rondel, the image implies that true understanding must be extracted from material signs, as Paul separates the bran of the Old Testament from the flour of the New Testament.\(^\text{10}\) The penultimate roundel shows the Book being opened by the Lion and the Lamb, possibly a reference to the word of God as recorded in Holy Scripture. Finally, at the very top, is shown the Ark of the Covenant, the container of the stone tablets materially inscribed by God. A crucifix is also placed inside the Ark, which God the Father holds up as if the cross and the body of Christ belonged to the same category of unequivocal material means of communication as the Ten Commandments. Thus the overall sequence is about learning how to discern correct Christian knowledge. References to the Jewish tradition seemed to have been necessary to exemplify its incomplete or impure version. By implication, the ascension of the mind is presented here as the elimination of incorrect religious understanding. Far from negotiating any theological paradoxes or testing the limits of human perception, the window is a material manifestation of Suger’s establishment of authority over the religious processes of sense making.\(^\text{11}\)

Despite the differences between them, I believe that Suger was in fact inspired by Pseudo-Dionysius, possibly believing that his design decisions merely made passages of the negative theology easier to comprehend. Perhaps he thought that judging his new conceptual ideas by the standard of awe-inspiring memories that others had brought from Byzantium was symbolically benign. Whatever his assumptions, the fact remains that he unself-consciously but consistently subverted or eliminated a possibility of what I have identified as nonfigurative representation in the Katholikon. And thus he responded to the challenge of the dematerialized shell of Byzantine interiors, those mosaic-covered surfaces
that created religiously charged phenomena, by designing a rational and explicit structural frame. What in the Katholikon existed as a spectrum of figurative and nonfigurative representations of holy and divine beings was reduced in France to a system of easily recognizable figurative illustrations composed in the bright colors of stained-glass windows or carved on the western façade, all explained by captions written by the Abbot himself. Complex experiential phenomena, such as those created by the movement of the Sun, still occurred in the Gothic building, but efforts were made to redirect any interest they created to the didactic mechanism and the correct system of theology that Suger built.

While the Byzantine architecture intimately explored an uncharted capacity of thought in order to challenge the limits of perception and link the imagination with religious ideas, both Iconoclasm and the Gothic style reduced these possibilities to unequivocal and predictable communication. The conceptual constitution of the church of Saint Denis became politically useful at the moment it revealed that a well-constructed system of narratives and semantic figures could limit the freedom of sense-making practices. Control over what people registered and how they concluded their thoughts was equally important as preventing perceptual curiosity and doubt. This discipline was developed in opposition to the mode of representation of the Byzantine architecture. The mode of communication operated in a similar way in the East and West, and its understanding might have been easily transmitted across cultural divisions as verbally explicit political or artistic programs. The modes of representation, however, were not only radically different but the dialogue between them, even if involving culturally subconscious denial or envy, could not have happened without the existence of buildings such as the Katholikon and the need to conceptualize a new ecclesiastical space like that of the ambulatory in the church of Saint Denis.

10 This roundel might have been originally located at the bottom of the sequence.
11 It is telling that the process continued and the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 imposed official regulatory measures on theological thought in the West.
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