



### **Vue diagonale de la nef**

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# creative manipulation of photography as a religious means for sacred gothic buildings

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*Architecture is an eternal expression of the divine project; any believer can perceive the harmony of a world operated by God. In order to venerate the existence of God and to guide the believer's eyes towards His spiritual words, the metaphysics of light in Gothic architecture contributed to a religious belief in its divinity and the importance of its display in holy settings. It was due to the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius (6C), who proclaimed that all light, streamed through windows or reflected from metals, were divine. Anyone could approach to a closer understanding of the light of God through the light of material objects in the physical world. God is light, and light gives beauty. Beauty must be identified with brightness, which reflects the image of God. To enhance faith, Abbot Suger encouraged Gothic architects to make building interiors as bright as possible with huge windows. As a medium of record, communication and an aesthetic force, photography has given powerful effect on architecture. Being a creative expression, photography is an applied art, in which the mind and imagination are concerned. The quality of photography is the power to capture the spontaneous movement and the vibrant moment of never-recurring exposure. It is also the power, which allows for the imaginative formalization of the outer world into a range of grey or colours, separating details from surroundings for a controlled message. To enhance these qualities, photo manipulation is an excellent tool, as it can transform and change photographs, according to traditional yet current situations in contemporary societies. Depending on its result, photo manipulation is considered an art form because of creating unique images, performed by artistically talented photographers. Questions arise on positive and negative effects of photo manipulation in Gothic cathedrals, as this changes believers' perception on spatial light to surroundings.*

**keywords** Gothic cathedral of St, Denis, The divine light, Photo manipulation

## medieval thought of the divine light

The middle of the twelfth century was a period of evolution and growth for the Church, and Christian philosophy flourished. On religious architecture, three developments became significant: (1) Scholasticism, (2) the image of Jesus Christ, and (3) theology. To start with, scholastic theology advanced in the areas adjacent Paris, in order to unite faith and reason for illuminating articles of faith. Logic was introduced as a tool for elucidating an argument and a mediator of reason to clarify faith. Moreover, an increased consciousness of the dichotomy and contradiction arose between the human and the divine innate in Jesus Christ' figure. In terms of architecture, the last but most importance was the applied theology of Abbot Suger. His academic ideas were grounded on the writings of a mystic St. Denis, whose theology focuses on Platonic concepts about life and the substance of light in the Gospel of John (8:12): "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life". According to St. Denis's philosophy, light is an ordering force which emerges in every level of existence. Everyone stems from, obtains, and spreads the divine light that originates from God. "God is light, and light gives beauty to things; essential beauty must be identified with brightness which, together with harmony and rhythm, reflects the image of God"<sup>1</sup>.

In fact, the Neo-Platonist thought integrated the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle is central to medieval philosophy, due to his use of logic and syllogism in laying out philosophic opinions; the use of metaphysics to depict what lies outside the sensible world, and the philosophy of the soul. As the philosophy was similar to ideas about art, beauty, and images, beauty acquired a philosophical meaning, allowing philosophers to portray beauty as being in line with three principles –composition, harmony and order. When humans experience beauty, they contemplate these virtues, reflecting on these principles in their own soul and in God. Physical beauty is a reflection and manifestation of metaphysical beauty. Liturgy, music and art contributed Christians to transcend the physical world of sensual reality and the restrictions of the human mind to contemplate God and to perceive the divine world. In medieval thought, the image is not an illusion but a revelation.

## spatial light at gothic st. denis church

Gothic architecture is characterised as a unified, definite shape. The colossal height of the cathedral shows up by vertical lines and pointed arches in the architectonic structures. Upon entering, the overall impression of the building is sensed by astounding verticality underlined by the upward movement of the columns and arches. The worshippers feel their presence minute in the existence of God, and understand their position related to the building as well as that to God. Gradually, their space moves in two directions, parallel to the ground toward the altar and perpendicular to the ground toward heaven, and highlights the Christian view of life to an ultimate goal; it is eternal rest in heaven. It is no wonder why Gothic architecture accentuates the worshipper's awareness to that goal, Jesus Christ. Moreover, in Neo-Platonic thought the rays of the sun were regarded as the rays of creative spirit which inspires form with a meaning. Light was the noblest material, the closest approximation to pure form.

*"The second main cause of the impression of transcendence is the light itself. Gothic buildings were intended to dematerialise in the sense that the larger windows, for which allowances were made by the buttresses and by the general engineering of the structure, filled the upper parts of the lofty naves with light... Gothic ones were from the start intended to use light itself as an essential ingredient of their spiritual message... The use of light is not an accident of Gothic engineering skills".*

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Becoming the first Gothic style, the abbey church of St. Denis played a complex role for the French monarchy in national policy. The church architecture was an expression of the two ideological strategies pursued for the restoration of the monarchy in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The first strategy was to restate traditions for the French monarchs, to establish themselves as direct descendants of the legitimate royal house. They claimed their inheritance of the imperial authority of Charlemagne who was crowned Frankish king in St. Denis in 754. His grandson, Emperor Charles the Bald, was buried here. The preservation of this Carolingian tradition inspired Abbot Suger to renovate St. Denis, following Dionysius the Areopagite, the writer of Pseudo-Dionysius and a disciple of the apostle Paul. In these influential writings, the theory of celestial hierarchies was expounded, and a king was to be regarded as God's representative on earth. In order to advocate this theory, the restoration of royal power was an integral part of God's divine plan of salvation. The second strategy involved introducing new ideas to supersede the events of the immediate past. Therefore, politically and architecturally, the innovation of St. Denis was meant to acknowledge and restore the past. Gothic architecture, started at St. Denis, provided a tangible expression of this concept.



**f2 and f3\_Different spatial light of St. Denis during the day**

(left) Bordered, Wikimedia (right) Wikimedia

What transformed St. Denis from a functional building to works of art was the use of light and space which had beauty and symbolic meaning. Gothic architects used the formal aspects of their buildings to represent God. The colour and quality of light, and the movement and understanding of space are references to God's presence, omnipotence, and perpetuity. Churches underlines heaven as the ultimate goal, while it remains focused on the means of achieving that goal here on earth.

*"This theory [Neo-Platonic] argued that man could come to a closer understanding of the light of God through the light of material objects in the physical world. Standing as he did at the very point of the formation of Gothic style, Suger was able to impress the importance of light on succeeding generations of architects and to create a monument that was in this and other respects well in advance of its time"<sup>9</sup>.*



**f4 and f5\_Gloucester cloister by photo manipulation and its natural light**

(left) Angelo Hornak, <https://www.behance.net/gallery/9648827/Morning-Prayer-Photo-Manipulation> (right) Diliff, Wikimedia

## photo manipulation

Before the emergence of computer software in the 1980s, photographs were manipulated by using paint, double exposure and mounting negatives. A famous contemporary photographer Ansel Adams (1902-84) went further to use darkroom exposure techniques such as burning or dodging a photograph. The resulting image may have little or no resemblance to the original picture. However, in the era of digitalization, photo manipulation is a widespread phenomenon, despite a misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the subject caused by changing images for deceptive purposes. In fact, the core of photo manipulation is a creative action of a digital photograph for retouching and modifying image elements and composition, in order to show a message which is incapable with a photograph.

Two types of photo manipulation exist. The first is modification of images through sound ethics, thus creative manipulation demands excellent skills to make images inventive and extraordinary. This type of manipulation is applied as an art form of photography, because it provides more interesting and a playful effect to the viewer. The second is modification of technical aspects in photography, such as adjusting colours, contrast,



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balance, sharpness, removal and addition, etc. Particularly, it is important and even necessary to architectural photography as a result of a difficulty or impossibility on location to acquire the desired results which could be easily achieved by manipulating the images. Being a valuable service, nowadays it plays an ordinary role for persuasion, education, information and entertainment on almost every picture in our day life.

Questions arise on the relationship of architecture and photographers, as the manipulation of images changes believers' perception on space, even their senses to surroundings. (1) Do architectural photographers have full understanding of the intention behind Gothic buildings, in terms of the light-shadow? (2) If do, can they enhance symbolic and aesthetic meanings in sacred space through photo manipulation? (3) Does creative manipulation have more powerful impact than authentic photography on worshippers' faith towards God, leading their eyes to heaven? (4) What are photographers' ethics and limitation of creativity in doing manipulation?

As discussed partially, these answers can be varied, depending on people who involved in Gothic architecture: their knowledge of spatial light, mutual understanding between photographers and worshippers, etc. Nevertheless, photo manipulation needs to be ethical, and manipulated photographs should deliver the real facts instead of the false. Why so? Of course, a surprise can bring to the worshippers, invoking the curiosity in their minds to modified images. On the other hand, a misconception can mislead them, when images are manipulated unethically and in a wrong way with wrong intentions. They produce an unfavourable effect on the worshippers' fallacy between fact and fiction. Whether manipulation should be done or not, any argument should be based on the necessity and positive intentions in ethical way.

### **ethical issues**

Ethical editing dilemmas on computers with high speed photo transmission increased in the early 1990s, starting a new era of decision making. The routine of producing images starts with the thought process and proceeds through assigning, photographing, selecting, and presenting. The photographer's decision on how to photograph an objective involves what type of visual information is required to tell the story. Moreover, the limits of the camera's lens can decide what can be captured and excluded in the frame. The inclusion-exclusion of visual information executed by photographer's conscious decision and the limits of the camera is the first step to manipulate the story. Once done, the viewers can interpret it provided by the limited visual information on the image.

*"Photographs give us visual evidence about things that no man has ever seen or ever will see directly. A photograph is today accepted as proof of the existence of things and shapes that never would have been believed on the evidence of a hand-made picture".*

In short, photographers need to create a precise representation of a subject with a camera or a computer to render an image. By selecting deceptive angles or focal points the photographer changes the perception of an incident. Deceptive elimination-inclusion of elements in a photograph for a composition's sake produces a sense of manipulation.

### **conclusion**

Being both art and science, architecture and photography share their common characteristic, particularly in Gothic buildings where the light-shadow is interdependent and plays an important role. And inspiring architectural photography is the creative, aesthetic response of a capable photographer to the harmonious construction of the architecture.

Photographs are a medium to convey a message, although the limits of photography for architectural recoding are visible. Photography expresses not only the external aspect of buildings, but also the internal, spatial aspects by photo manipulation. Photographer enhances the viewers' vision of the world through changing visual reference. It is a contribution to cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible.

"What is ethical in the digital manipulation and enhancement of an architectural photograph?" Repeatedly, manipulating an image with its reason, purpose and intention should be questioned in advance. An ethical problem appears when the photographer is not frank to his motivations, methods, and conclusions. In this regard, considerations should take place with a positive purpose. If it is for artistic outcome, aesthetic considerations come into play. For documents, journalism or religious purposes, other ethical considerations play between the photographer and the viewers.

Photo manipulation achieves desired results: the creation of unique images and expressions. In order to capture a building aesthetically and accurately, photographers demand absolute patience and skill. How about Gothic St. Denis, the birthplace of the divine light from heaven, when worshippers see its modified images in print or on internet virtually? Creative yet ethical photo manipulation has one more step forward in magic and responsibility.

## endnotes

1. Marcel Aubert, *Gothic Cathedral of France and Their Treasure* (Paris: Kaye, 1959), 32.
2. Edward R. Norman, *The House of God* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 152-153.
3. Robert Branner, *Burgundian Gothic Architecture* (London: A. Zwemmer, 1961), 21.
4. Stacey O'Neal Irwin, *Digital Media, Human-Technology Connection* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016). Cited in Stephen Edwin Coleman "Digital Photo Manipulation: A Descriptive Analysis of Codes of Ethics and Ethical Decisions of Photo Editors" (PhD diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 2007), 3.

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## CV

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**Exposición Torre Bois le Prêtre**  
Andreas Ruby, DAM, Frankfurt, 2012