John Summerson, "Heavenly Mansions: An Interpretation of Gothic," in John Summerson, *Heavenly Mansions and other Essays on Architecture* (New York, 1963):1-28. Originally presented as a lecture to the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1946, the text is reproduced here without the footnotes in the original, and with cerain substitute (but superior) illustrations.

"Heavenly Mansions: An Interpretation of Gothic"

There is a kind of play common to nearly every child; it is to get under a piece of furniture or some extemporized shelter of his own and to exclaim that he is in a 'house'. Psychoanalysis interprets this kind of play in various ways. I am not, however, concerned with such interpretations except in so far as they show that this particular form of phantasy cannot be dismissed merely as mimicry of the widespread adult practice of living in houses. It is symbolism--of a fundamental kind, expressed in terms of play. This kind of play has much to do with the aesthetics of architecture.

At a later stage, the child's conduct of the game is transferred to a new plane of realism; he constructs or uses dolls' houses and insists on a strict analogy between his own practices and those of adult life--the doll's house must be an epitome of an adult's home. But whether the child is playing under the table or handling a doll's house, his imagination is working in the same way. He is placing either himself or the doll (a projection of himself) in a sheltered setting. The pleasure he derives from it is a pleasure in the relationship between himself (or the doll) and the setting.

None of us ever entirely outgrows the love of the doll's house or, usually in a vicarious form, the love of squatting under the table. Camping and sailing are two adult forms of play analogous to the 'my house' pretences of a child. In both, there is the fascination of the miniature shelter which excludes the elements by only a narrow margin and intensifies the sense of security in a hostile world. Less direct but even more common is the liking for models and houses in miniature. Many of us remember the enormous popularity of the Queen's Doll's House, shown for charitable purposes between the wars. The tiny cottage presented by the people of Wales to Princess Elizabeth exercised a similar appeal. The concept of the diminutive in building exercises a most powerful fascination. The 'little house' is a phrase which goes straight to the heart, whereas 'the big house' is reserved for the prison and the public assistance institution. Pleasure-houses of any kind often take their names from diminutives. 'Casino', 'bagatelle', 'brothel', are all diminutive words. The 'love-nest', love in a cottage', the 'little grey home in the west', the 'bijou residence'--all such hackneyed phrases serve to remind us how deep is the appeal of 'the little house'.

But we must be careful to keep separate two different manifestations of this appeal. There is the 'cosiness' of the little house; but also its ceremony. It is the 'cosiness' which psychologists underline in their interpretation of its symbolism. But for us the ceremonial idea is more important--the idea of neatness and serenity within, contrasting with wildness and confusion without. The ceremony of the chlld's house, like its cosiness, is found again in adult play--that grave form of play which is intertwined with religious and social customs. The baldachino, the canopy over the throne, the catafalque over a tomb, the ceremonial shelter carried over a pope or bishop in a procession--these are not empirical devices to exclude dust or rain but vestiges of infantile regression such as we have just observed.

It is precisely this feeling for the ceremony of the little house which links all that I have been saying with the development of architecture. The Latin word for a building is *aedes*; the word for a little building is

aedicula and this word was applied in classical times more particularly to little buildings whose function was symbolic--ceremonial. It was applied to a shrine placed at the far end, from the entrance, of a temple to receive the statue of a deity--a sort of architectural canopy in the form of a rudimentary temple, complete with gable--or, to use the classical word, pediment. It was also used for the shrines--again miniature temples--in which the *lares* or titular deities of a house or street were preserved.

I am not going to trace back the history of the aedicule, but I suspect it is practically as old as architecture itself, and as widespread. The incidence of the aedicule in some Indian architecture, for instance, is very striking. This miniature temple used for a ceremonial, symbolic purpose may even enshrine one of man's first purely architectural discoveries, a discovery re-enacted by every child who establishes his momentary dominion under the table.

Now, the aedicule, from a remote period, has been used as a subjunctive means of architectural expression. That is to say, it has been used to harmonize architecture of strictly human scale with architecture of a diminutive scale, so that a building may at the same time serve the purposes of men and of a race of imaginary beings smaller than men. It has also been used to preserve the human scale in a building deliberately enlarged to express the superhuman character of a god. Perhaps this should be put another way: the aedicule has been enlarged to human scale and then beyond, to an heroic scale, losing its attribute of smallness and 'cosiness' but retaining and affirming its attribute of ceremoniousness. This concept will become clearer as we proceed.

The aedicule becomes of considerable importance in Hellenistic and Roman architecture. Its use as a shrine, recorded on coins and other objects, like the shop-sign shown in Fig. 1, was not its only use.

Figure 1: An aedicule, from a 1st-century shop sign in Pompeii.

The shrine idea was woven into the development of architecture--both temple architecture and domestic architecture. A striking instance of this is the interior of the Temple of Bacchus at Baalbek (Fig. 2) where we see not only the shrine or *adyton*--in this case a quite substantial 'temple within a temple'--but a liberal use of aedicules to provide settings for statues both in the shrine itself and in the main structure of the temple.

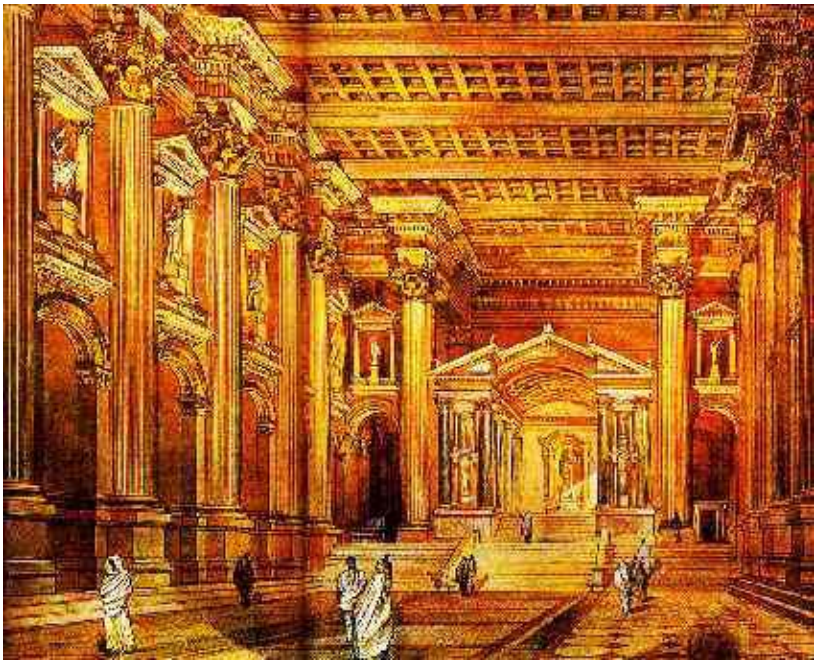

Figure 2: Interior of the Temple of Bacchus at Baalbek.

This example, dating from the 2nd century AD, is obviously over-ripe and complex, reflecting a late stage in a long tradition. But it does show, better than any other surviving temple interior, how the aedicule became interwoven with temple architecture, so that the full-scale order is laced or counterpointed with diminutive architecture of purely ceremonial significance.

So long as the aedicule is used as a setting for statues its use approximates to its original function as a shrine--a function which it preserved, as we shall see, right through the Middle Ages. But at some period--I cannot say when--its use was extended to give ceremonial importance to an opening--a door or a window. It then became virtually two-dimensional, a frame or portal, suggesting that the opening which it embraced was one of special significance. This special significance, however, was in due course afforded to so many doors and windows that the aedicule became nothing more than a trite, everyday decorative feature. As such it reemerges early in the Italian renaissance and as such it has been employed hundreds and thousands of times in this and every other country since the end of the 16th century. The Georgian door-case is an instance familiar to everybody, so familiar that it never occurs to us to consider such a thing as being anything so pompous as an aedicule or to connect it with that remote period of architectural history when the miniature temple really possessed some emotional significance, still less to that remoter period when its use was reserved for the shrine of a deity.

But the history of the aedicule in classical architecture is not a subject I want to pursue any further at present. So let us return to the more general consideration of aedicular architecture--the 'little house' with which we began. For obvious reasons, the construction of miniature architecture is rather uncommon; in fact,

it is practically limited to the nursery, except in so far as it has become a part of the ornamental systems of various styles of architecture. However, the representation of miniature architecture is quite another thing; and one of the most interesting recurrent themes in the history of art is this practice of representing, in paintings and illuminations, an architecture of the fancy--an architecture, very often, which could not be built.

Roman mural painting often consists largely of this sort of confectionery. That it is older than Rome is obvious, but the remains of Roman cities yield the richest evidence. The wall paintings of Pompeii, in particular, have rendered this kind of art famous and given it the name by which it is popularly known--Pompeian. Pompeii is rich in well-preserved mural paintings, ranging in date from the 1st century BC up to the destruction of the city in AD 79. They have been classified in four styles, and in each successive style, aedicular architecture takes a more prominent place till in the fourth (latest) style it absorbs the whole interest of the composition. The main characteristics of this fanciful architecture are that it is completely open and incredibly thin--a mere scaffold--architecture, so reduced in mass that it appears to hang in the air. It consists of irrational and purposeless buildings--colonnades, pergolas and paper thin walls which enclose nothing. Where there are figures, they are sometimes grouped in a theatric tableau borrowed from classical drama, but more often they are single figures--each posed in an aedicule and reminding one a little of the innocent ceremony of the child under the table--that symbol of architecture to which I referred at the beginning of this essay.

Now, at this point I am going to introduce, quite abruptly, the thesis I wish to submit--simply by asking you to compare two architectural compositions. One is a 1st-century wall-painting at Pompeii (Fig. 3).

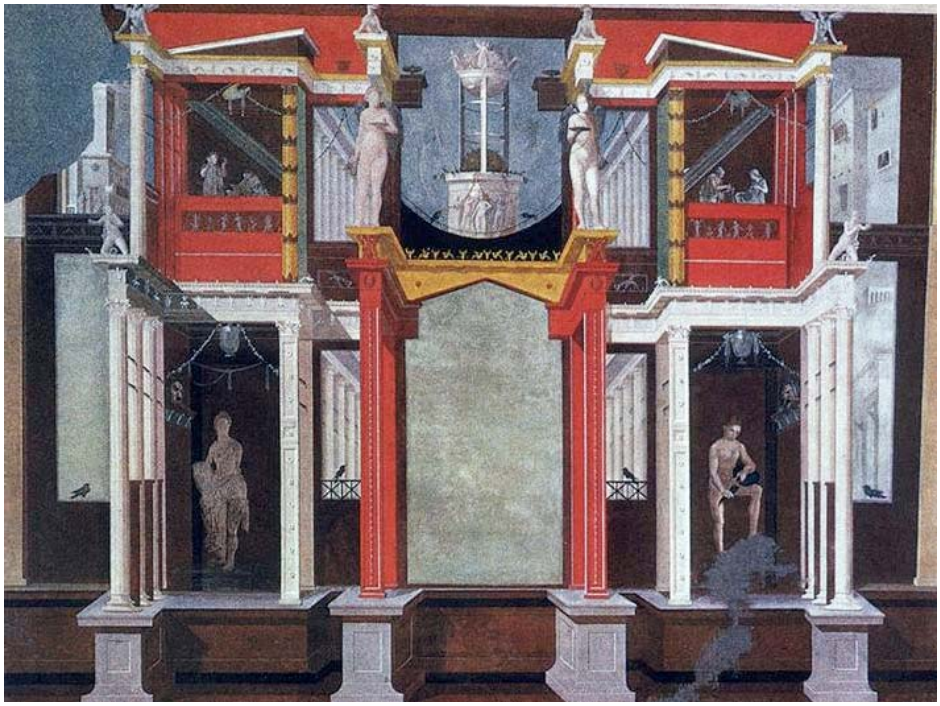

Figure 3: Wall painting at Pompeii.

The other is the south porch of Chartres Cathedral (Fig. 4), built about AD 1250.

Figure 4: South porch at Chartres Cathedral (13th century).

You will notice that these two compositions, separated in time by more than a thousand years, have a very great deal in common. Both are divided into three bays. In both cases the divisions between the bays are open and extend upwards into aedicules, containing figures. In both, the main openings are crested with gables or pediments. In both, the supporting members are fantastically thin. In short, the porch at Chartres is, in principle, a loyal realization of the Pompeian project!

I admit that to fortify my case I have chosen these examples carefully. The north and south porches at Chartres are, of all the architectural works of their age, the most classical in proportion, distribution and detail--appropriately so, since Chartres was, in the 12th-13th centuries, pre-eminently the seat of classical studies. I admit, too, that the Pompeian example is chosen because, in its main lines, it is a rather felicitous counterpart of the Chartres porch. But, even so, the comparison is sufficiently striking to set one searching for threads with which to link these two works of art together. Can there possibly be any historical threads? Or must we refer the resemblances to a basic psychology shared alike by the artists of classical Pompeii, those of medieval Chartres and the child under the table? I believe that there are historical threads, but I do not think that they could have spun their way through a thousand years of history but for the primitive and universal love of that kind of fantasy represented by the aedicule--the 'little house.'

When the Chartres porches were built, Pompeii lay forgotten in its tomb of ashes--even the name of the place had disappeared from human conscience. Obviously, no influences from Pompeii itself can ever have found their way into the medieval world. But the art of Pompeii was an art widespread in the Roman Empire and it is only a freak of history which has made the buried city its most conspicuous exemplar. The character and themes of Roman decoration were adopted by Christian artists in many parts of Europe. In the Byzantine Empire, aedicular structures are found in many mosaics--those of Salonika for instance, and of Damascus. In the Carolingian renaissance of the 8th-9th centuries the aedicule appears in many objects, such as, for instance, the Gospel of S. Médard de Soissons in the Bibliothèque Nationale, in doors, shrines and plaques,

and also in what little architecture of that age is left to us. It must also have appeared in the stucco work used on the walls of churches but which has almost entirely disappeared.

Carolingian art provides, no doubt, the most important link between the classical world and the Romanesque revival of the arts in the 11th century. But Romanesque art is, as Deschamps says, the most composite of all arts; there were innumerable contributors to its creation, nor must we forget the main stock--the First Romanesque--on which these contributions were grafted. The First Romanesque of Lombardy had already adventured into arcaded west fronts (like Pavia and Lucca) which are, in effect, aedicular fantasies, and the First Romanesque of France and Spain has its arcaded apses, pilaster-strips, bands and corbel-tables consisting of suspended arches. In the Romanesque churches of Languedoc and Burgundy the aedicular idea is ever-present; in Provence it links up directly with the Roman use of the aedicule; in Poitou and the west generally it begins to be articulate in a specially picturesque way on west fronts; in Normandy and England it is all ready for the next move--the creation of Gothic.

It has been satisfactorily shown, by Mâle, Lasteyrie and others, that the re-entry of figure-sculpture into architecture in the Romanesque churches of the 11th century was conditioned by the sculptors' familiarity with metal-work, manuscripts and other objects of art: the technique of architectural sculpture, up to the Gothic revolution in the middle of the 12th century, shows clear evidence of such a derivation. But so far as I know, nobody has developed the corollary of this--namely, that the aedicular architecture of Romanesque churches may have been reinforced or given renewed vitality from the same source.

Romanesque architecture is, as I have said, composite; it is an aggregate rather than a synthesis. It preserves much that is Roman--the round arch, the barrel vault and, in some parts of France, the principle of the pilaster and Corinthianesque carving. But to this is added something--something which distinguishes the architecture as Romanesque. This is not simply a matter of ornament--of characteristic sculptures and mouldings. Nor is it a matter of structure, the empirical quest of a satisfactory vaulting system--the quest is, in fact, curiously independent of stylistic development. It is more radical than all this; it is something resulting from a profound desire to escape from the remorseless discipline of gravity, a desire to dissolve the heavy prose of building into religious poetry; a desire to transform the heavy man-made temple into a multiple, imponderable pile of heavenly mansions.

What is behind this compelling ambition I do not know; to answer that question one would have to approach the subject from a different angle, exploring the psychological atmosphere of Romanesque church--building as it arose from changing social conditions. But two things are sufficiently obvious. First, that the ambition to dissolve architecture from the substantial to the insubstantial did exist; and, second, that this ambition was aided and inspired by a feeling for that frail, picturesque aedicular architecture which, through the various channels I have mentioned, had been handed down from the theatre, house and tomb decorators of Rome.

I have said that Romanesque represents an incomplete synthesis. By this I mean that the aedicular architecture is never wholly identified with the structural carcase. It was introduced in various ways, easily enumerated. First, there is the ornamental shaft, tall and thin like a literal enlargement of the fancywork of Pompeii. Sometimes it is applied to the wall, sometimes it is sculptured in the wall itself. Sometimes it pretends to support one end of an arch, sometimes a vaulting rib; sometimes to support a corbel-table, sometimes a wooden roof; sometimes it does not pretend, and supports nothing. Second, there is the arcade, a decorative, repetitive combination of shaft and arch--a motif so often allied with the representation of figures that Foçillon has adopted *l'homme-arcade* as an expression; and, most important, there is the vaulting, of which I shall have more to say in a moment. All these features are found in the Romanesque

architecture of France and England, but they do not really lift the architecture off the ground. They have the gaucherie of some would-be aviator who, by fixing wings to his shoulders and looking up to heaven, hopes he may find himself flying. In Romanesque, it is always the grave, somber rhythm which appeals to us; the aedicular scaffolding grafted on to it is rarely moving and often tiresome and bizarre.

Romanesque is puzzling, ambiguous, incomplete. The point of all its business eludes one. Then, suddenly, the creation of Gothic explains everything. Some extraordinary men--some among Abbot Suger's masons at Saint Denis, some elsewhere--saw precisely how to arrive at a true synthesis of the warring elements in Romanesque. They were followed by others and within a hundred years the whole of the first and decisive chapter of Gothic had been written.

The nature of Gothic architecture has been expressed in many formulas, but almost all, since Viollet-le-Duc, are based on technical rather than aesthetic premises. These premises may be perfectly correct, but to give them primacy in an exposition of Gothic architecture is to perpetuate the 19th-century fallacy that architecture is a matter of structure plus adornment. Viollet-le-Duc, by analyzing French Gothic in terms of equilibrium, made it seem that this was so; but you have only to examine Viollet's own personal background to see why it was necessary for him, in his time, to see Gothic in this way. His method was to break down the Gothic problem from outside, to expose it in the terms which his age and his temperament dictated. His method has dominated the exposition of Gothic ever since; but I venture to suggest that for us, in our time, the rationalistic, non-psychological method is inadequate. And (in view of the fact that Gothic is taught in the schools) positively harmful and misleading because it prompts modem analogies of the most absurd kind. And, further, I suggest that the point where the Gothic reality is most easily grasped is precisely in this concept of aedicular architecture, this recaptured inheritance of what let us boldly call 'Pompeian' art.

The creation of something new in the arts invariably means the turning upside-down of some uneasy equilibrium, the making of an adjunct into an essential, a parasitic growth into a main stem. So it was in the passage from Romanesque to Gothic. In Romanesque, the aedicular episodes are ornamental: *merely* ornamental--parasitic. But the creators of Gothic seized upon this incidental 'Pompeian' idea and made it capital. In doing so they created, and at the same time solved, certain structural problems as well as other undefined problems of space and proportion. If we study Gothic in this light--as the evolution of an idea--we shall find that both the technical and the aesthetic aspects fall into place and become readily understandable from our 20th-century standpoint.

As everyone knows, one of the most striking innovations in Gothic is the universal adoption of the pointed arch in place of the round arch. The reasons for its adoption have often been summarized in terms of statical expediency, but there is plenty of evidence to show that it was a matter of deliberate choice--a matter of taste. The pointed arch, with the cusp and one or two other things were stolen from Arab art across the Pyrenees. It was used here and there, in a casual way, in Romanesque work, for the novelty of the thing, and then seized upon as an essential by the creators of Gothic. It was seized upon as essential, not because it was materially essential, but because the pointed arch struck that note of fantasy which was what the mind of the age desired (Fig. 5).

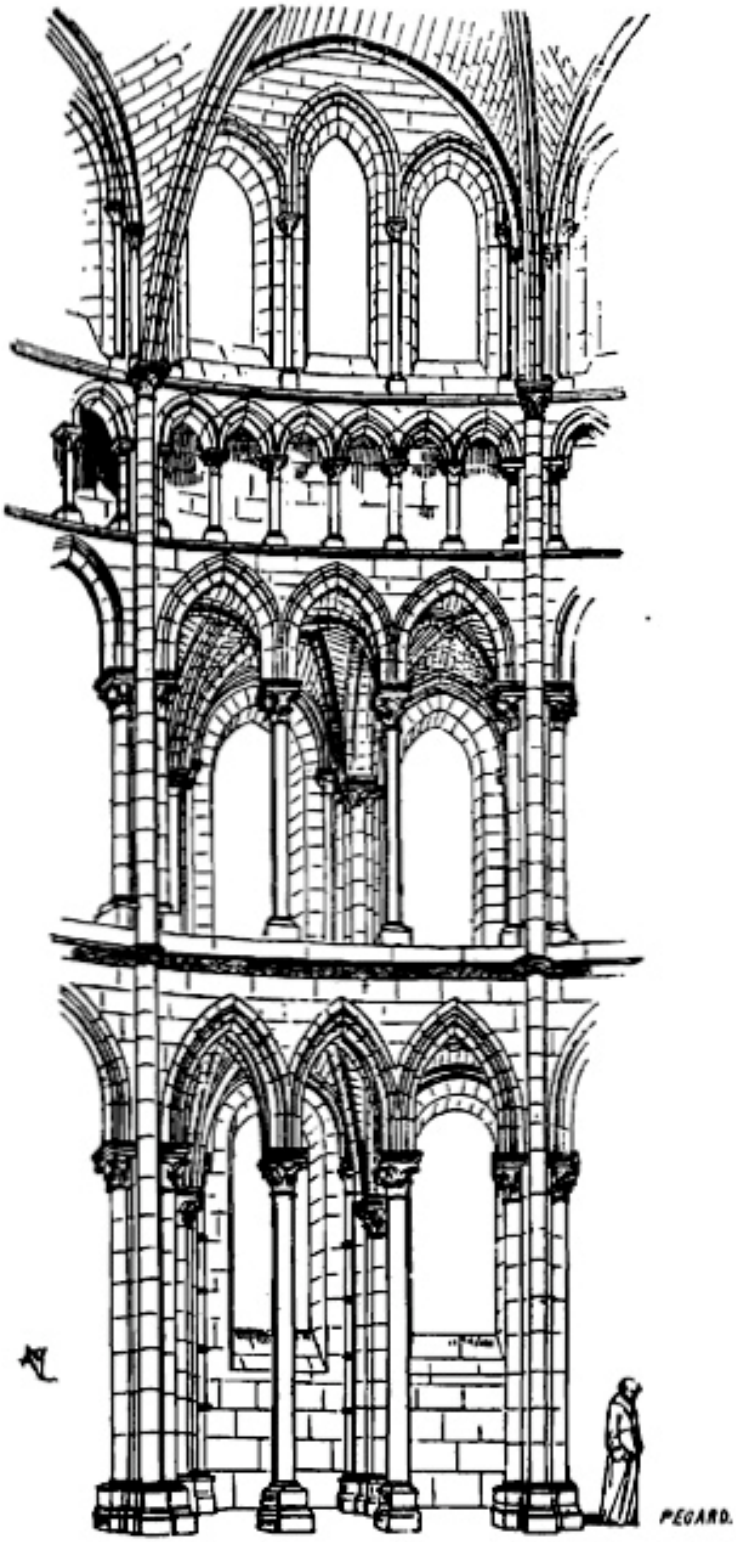

Figure 5: Soissons Cathedral (late 12th century), interior of south transept.

It wilfully destroyed the discipline of the round arch, which had become an incubus and a bore and stood in the way of the realization of the free 'Pompeian' church of the future.

The pointed arch was, of course, structurally convenient; but this matter of convenience has been over-stressed. I repeat that Gothic *created and simultaneously solved* its problems. The notion of the Gothic system solving the Romanesque problem is, from the point of view of structure, unreal. We are told that the pointed arch rendered possible the high, brittle structures of the 13th century. But this is not strictly true; structures just as high and just as brittle could have been constructed on a round arched system. Certainly, the pointed vault exerts a smaller outward thrust against the walls; but in such a very slight degree that one cannot conscientiously see any compulsion in this circumstance. It is convenient, as the builders of Durham early discovered, to use pointed transverse arches in a vault, thereby facilitating the use of semicircular diagonals while retaining a level ridge. But here again it is no more than convenience; and it cannot be seriously maintained that in these great ceremonial buildings the ancient, superb discipline of the round arch was disrupted merely for the sake of a limited degree of technical convenience.

No. The pointed-arch system was, I believe, adopted for this reason: it had an air of fantasy--perhaps, dare one guess, of Oriental fantasy--which went along with the realization of the 'Pompeian' idea. It is impossible, of course, to reconstruct the associations which focus round a given form at a given time; but for some reason the pointed arch became attractive in itself at the same time that the aedicular idea had been fully deployed as the subjunctive architecture of the Romanesque. So the whole architectural situation was turned upside down. Instead of the aedicule serving to adorn the structure, the structure was made the slave of the aedicule. And as a supreme gesture of enslavement, the round arch was broken.

An examination of the great cathedrals of the 12th-13th centuries shows how the aedicule took charge of the new situation. This theme of pure fantasy, once released from bondage, was free to range through all gradations of stature from the heroic to the minuscule. In the naves of the great cathedrals, for instance, we find it performing with easy success the function which the Romanesque had already visualized and painfully attempted in the churches of Caen. At Lâon and Notre Dame in Paris (Fig. 6), an aedicular cathedral, composed of shafts and ribs, springs from the capitals of the sturdy nave columns, which form, as it were, a link with the past, the old prose basis from which the Gothic fantasy takes wing.

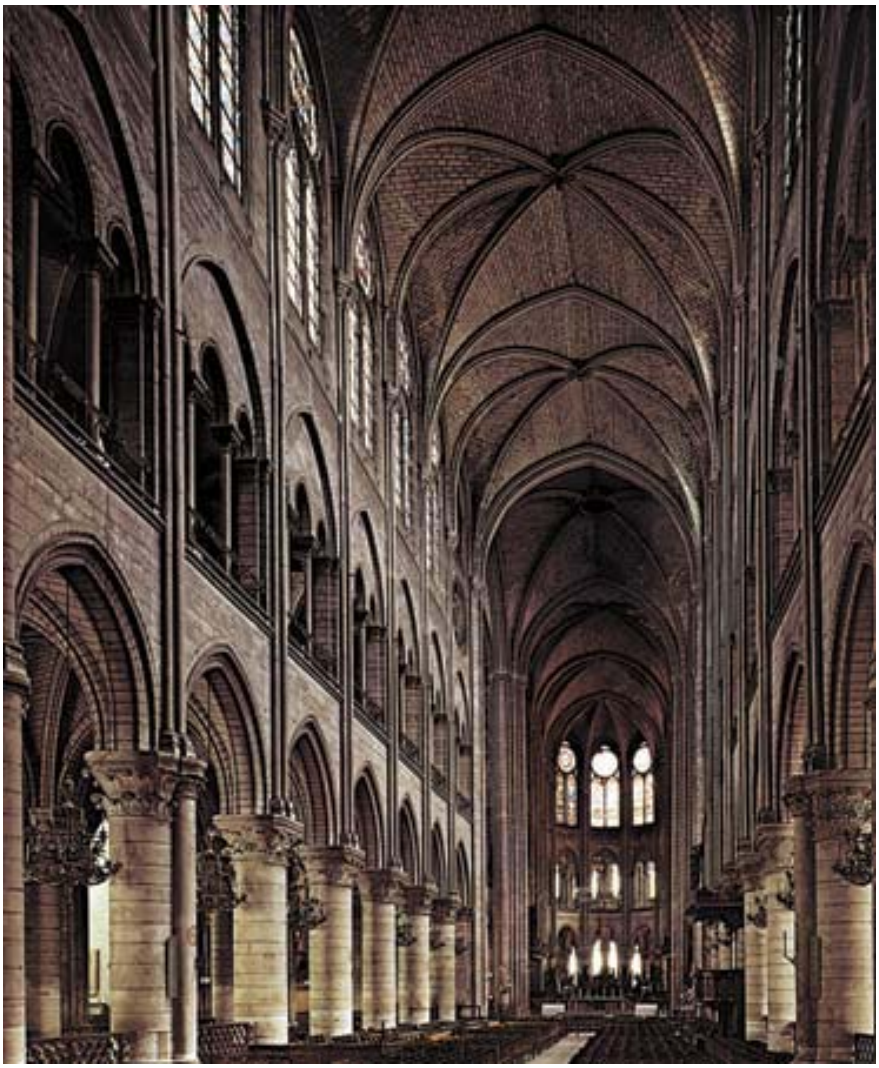

Figure 6: Nave of Notre-Dame Cathedral, Paris (12th-13th centuries).

When we come to Amiens we find that the shafts spring from the floor; the sense of a Romanesque basis has vanished and the whole conception, from floor to vault, is aedicular. Aedicular in this sense: that the miniature sky-architecture of the Pompeian paintings has been realized--re-enlarged, as it were, to the scale from which the painters may be supposed to have reduced it.

In this aedicular architecture of the grand order, it is to be observed that the ribbed vault plays a most conspicuous and dramatic part. It is the rib, rather than the vault as a whole, that captures the eye, the rib which flies away from the shaft above its diminutive capital and joins its fellows in a boss at the very summit of the building. Now, this rib is often supposed to be an essential part of the structural scheme of Gothic architecture. It is supposed, in some mysterious way, to canalize the forces latent in the vault and carry them safely down into the buttressed pier. But this is a post facto rationalization. The commonsense truth is that the safety of the vault does not depend on the rib, but on the coherence of the vault as a whole, just as it does in any groined vault of the 17th century. The researches of Victor Sabouret and Pol Abraham have

established this beyond dispute. If a vaulting rib is smashed by a projectile, the adjacent part of the vault does not necessarily collapse; and if the abutments of a vault are weak it is not necessarily the ribs which start to crack. The rib is simply an ornamental reinforcement of the angles of the vault; the fact that it projects from the vault is of no structural importance whatever. It could just as well be bonded into the severies, retaining a flush face right up to the arris. No; the vaulting rib, like almost everything else in Gothic architecture, originates in an aesthetic intention. The ribbed vault, in fact, may be compared with the airy pergolas which make their frequent appearance in the fantasy architecture of Pompeii.

From the master-order constituted by the nave shafts and vaulting-ribs, the aedicular scheme descends in a gradation of inferior orders. Thus, a secondary order is provided by the shafts of the nave arcade, which control the stature of the entire chevet and its chapels, each one of which becomes a paraphrase of the apse itself. The triforium has its own order, so has the clerestory; the towers rise in stages, order above order. Each portal has its own complex of orders, ranging from the grand aedicules which provide the gables for the arches, to the lesser terraced aedicules which canopy the prophets and martyrs ranged along the jambs. The whole cathedral resolves itself into these aedicular orders, sometimes pertaining to and articulating the structure itself, sometimes confusing and even contradicting the structure. And from first to last, all effort strains at one objective--the destruction of mass, the creation not so much of upward flight, as of suspension in space, the creation of an architecture wholly independent of the exigencies of gravity.

Having proposed the aedicule as the psychological key to Gothic, it remains to test the proposition in relation to some of those characteristics which are no less essential to a complete view of the Gothic phenomenon. Of structure, I have already said something, but perhaps I should recapitulate. I believe that it was the 'Pompeian' idea which sanctioned the Gothic system. It sanctioned the rupture of the round arch and arrogated the resulting flexibility of plan to its own purposes. Nowhere is the 'Pompeian' character of Gothic more expressive and lovely than in those instances of apparently improvised vaulting necessitated by the junction of old work with new or by adaptation to an awkward site. Here the scissor-like flexibility of the pointed arch performs all sorts of antics--antics which would be perfectly ridiculous if we did not take them in the spirit in which they are meant--the spirit of a 'Pompeian' perspective.

Precisely the same aesthetic sanction converted the flying buttress from a pathetic makeshift, an admission of defeat, to a romantic and beautiful component of the system, a fairy viaduct having a ridiculous affinity with the conceits in some of the stucco panels in the Naples Museum.

Again, Gothic mouldings develop under the sanction of the aedicule. They represent a device by which the onset of gravity, of inert mass, is dissipated at those places--chiefly openings where it would normally be most felt. The wall surrounding an opening is disintegrated into a cluster of thin members whose articulation is stressed by the deep undercutting between them; each of these members represents or betokens an aedicular unit which, in early work, is fully expressed in terms of base, shaft, capital and archivolt. The mouldings of capitals are profiled so as to defeat the impression that they are carrying weight; the upper moulding, salient and deeply undercut, gives a shadow suggesting suspension rather than support. Unrelated to the aedicular idea, Gothic mouldings can become meaningless; they do so where the idea is obscured by an excess of vanity on the part of the mason--as, for example, in the Angel Choir at Lincoln--where the mouldings nearly defeat their own end.

The evolution of tracery is, I suspect, closely related to the use of aedicular designs in early stained glass. For instance, in the Belle Verrière of Chartres (Fig. 7), dating from the middle of the 12th century, the aedicule within which the Virgin is seated and the lateral aedicules, containing censing angels, unite to form

a structure wonderfully prophetic of the tracery of the next century. And so one could go on. The aedicule unlocks door after door.

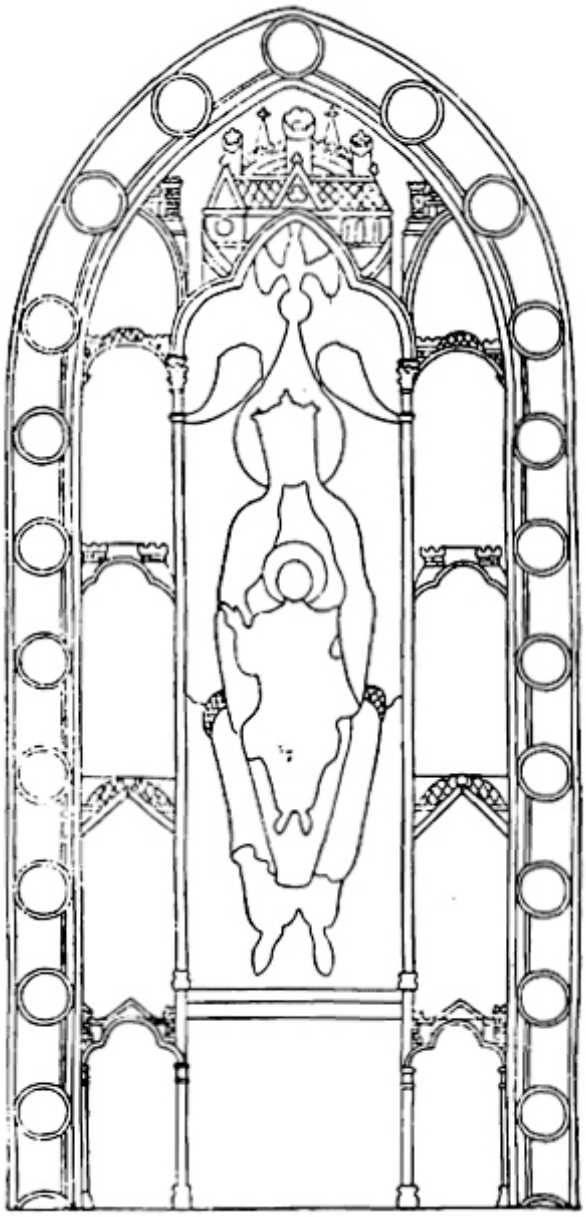

Figure 7: Belle-Verriere window, Chartres Cathedral (12th century).

The aedicular system stands complete, perfectly realized, in the first quarter of the 13th century. From the middle of the century onwards it is underlined, stressed and even exaggerated, notably by the liberal use of ornamental gables, sometimes in a rather mechanical, inharmonious way, as who should say, 'don't forget that this arch is not just an arch but also a shrine'. This kind of mannerism reaches its peak in a church like Saint Urbain at Troyes (Fig. 8)--perhaps one of the most technically perfect of all French churches--where all the windows are gabled, the apex of each gable thrusting through the pierced parapet of the church.

Figure 8: Exterior, St.-Urbain at Troyes (13th century).

It is during the first half of the 13th century that one of the major implications of the aedicular system is gradually unfolded. The aedicule is, in essence, a shrine. The Gothic cathedral is, therefore, a multiplication of shrines. As we have seen, these shrines--aedicules--are disposed in a series of orders, descending from the master-order which controls the bay-unit and the vault. The stature of the orders is diminished in the aisles, again in the clerestory and triforium and once again on the purely ornamental plane. It is here that it joins hands with the sculptor; these last aedicules are inhabited not by the human users of the cathedral but by supernatural beings carved in stone. Here, in fact, the aedicule returns to its proper stature and proper function--here it is once more the 'little house' (Figs. 9, 10, 11).

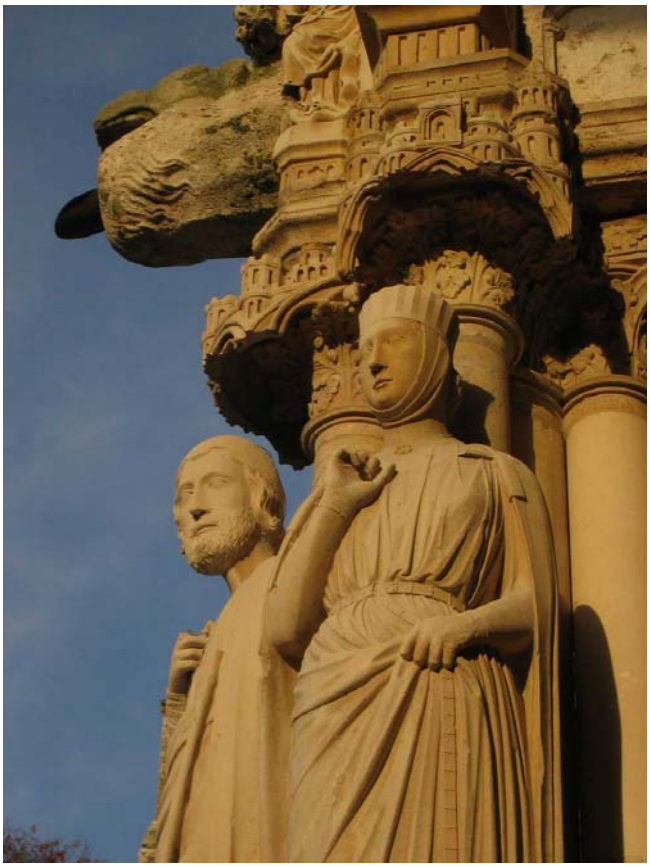

Figure 9: Sculptures under their aediculae: facade of Chartres Cathedral (13th c.).

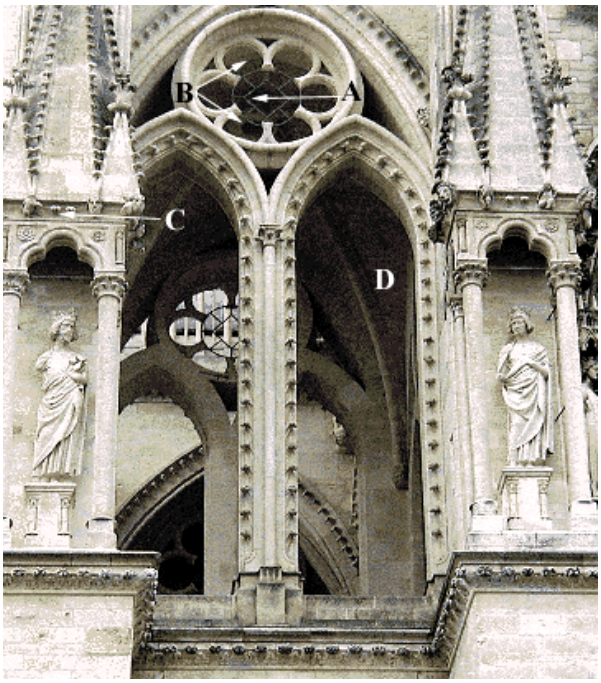

Figure 10: Sculptures under aediculae, Reims Cathedral (13th c.).

Figure 11: Seville Cathedral, Spain: Nativity (terra-cotta, 1460s), with each major figure under its own aedicula.

Indeed, it is perhaps more logical to regard the whole cathedral as an ascent from this, the normal aedicular scale--than to regard the ornamental aedicule as a reduction from its grand relations who have grown big and been married to the structural carcase of the building.

Anyway, it is on the ornamental plane that the aedicule is employed for the identical purpose for which it is used in manuscripts, ivories, enamels and reliefs, namely to provide a framework, a *mise en scéne*, for iconographical exposition. Already in Romanesque buildings, this idea had been exploited, especially in west fronts (e.g. Angoulème) and portals. But in Romanesque work the sculpture is stylized and the aedicule is a dead form--or rather a chrysalis--form whose potentialities are hidden. The Gothic artists brought to life not only the sculpture but likewise the aedicule itself. Hence, the porches of Chartres, one of which we have already examined; hence also the great portals of Amiens, Bourges, Rheims and Lâon (Figs. 12, 13).

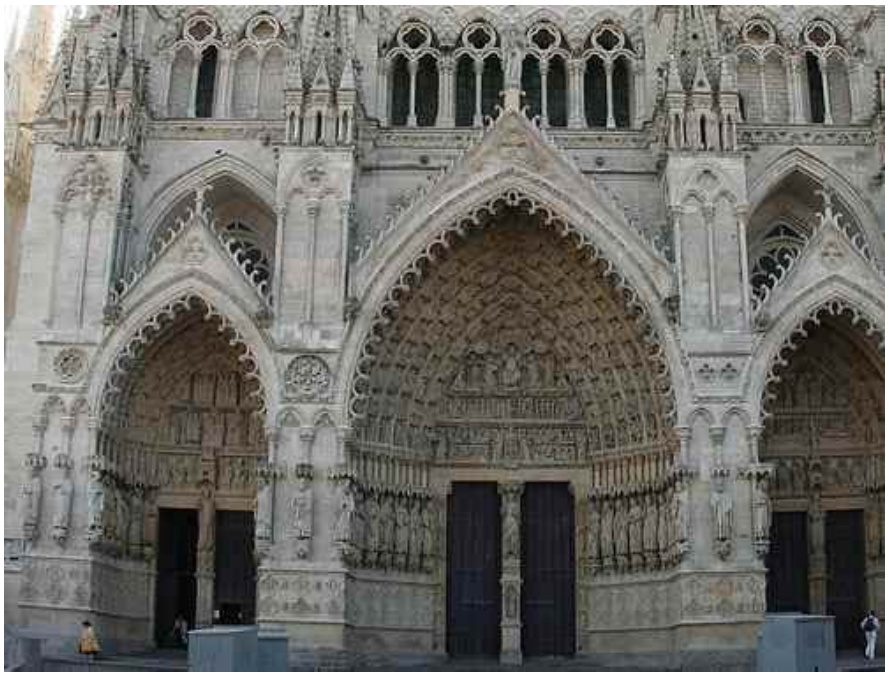

Figure 12: Amiens Cathedral facade portals (13th c.).

Figure 13: Rheims Cathedral facade portal sculptures, with aediculae above and below (13th c.)

The porches of Chartres are wholly exceptional in their perfect fusion of classical and Gothic form. The great portals of the other cathedrals are differently conceived. As they are not self-standing but grow from the main structure of the cathedral, they have to struggle for their aedicular independence. Thus, at Amiens the conflict between the descent of the massive western buttresses and the upthrust of the aedicular architecture of the porches is grotesquely painful unless one acquiesces in the artists' pressing invitation to forget all about gravity and mass and accept the aedicular scheme and that alone--a scheme without gravity, suspended in the air. To help you to this illusion they have done everything in their power. They have made the aedicular frontispiece fantastically top-heavy with huge pinnacle-formations at the summit and no basemould whatever except a trivial offset near the ground, as if to declare with maximum emphasis that such architecture as this does not rest on the ground: does not need foundations (the Rheims artist, who carved hanging tapestries round the base of the portal pressed this point even further!). To defeat the potential onset of gravity in the buttresses they have sunk roses and quatrefoils in them, as though casually to suggest that the masonry surface is a mere veil. And to emphasize once again the suspended character of the composition they have contrived deliberate discords where the gable eaves meet the buttresses, suggesting that the gables, which might seem too substantial if they seemed to rest on the frail structure beneath, are themselves suspended from the clouds and have just been drawn into place by the flying monsters straining from their lower angles. Has any Baroque or Rococo architecture ever set out to contradict the structural elements of a facade with such determined insolence?

It is in these great porches and portals, as I have said, that the aedicular scheme is harnessed to the purpose of the iconographers and sculptors. Just as the architecture of the Pompeian murals provides the setting for scenes and personages drawn from classical myth and drama, so these portals provide the setting for those iconographic arrangements which, as Emile Mâle showed, in his great books, are no arbitrary or sentimental groups but schematic expositions drawn from the theological and encyclopaedic literature of the Middle Ages.

Let it be understood that in this interpretation I claim no discovery concerning Gothic. The identification of the aedicule as the leading theme is suggested here only for its convenience in the understanding and exposition of Gothic architecture. Its convenience is considerable, for it seems to dominate not only the Gothic fabric itself but Gothic architecture in relation to other architectures and, likewise, Gothic architecture in relation to other aspects of medieval life and thought. It now remains to elucidate some of these relationships.

First, let us re-examine the relationships of Gothic to classic architecture. At the beginning of this essay we glanced at the part played by the aedicule in antiquity--its function first as a shrine, then as a portal, and its development in the 'aedicular' architecture of Pompeian wall-paintings. We then rediscovered the aedicular principle in 12th-century France, finding a strikingly close parallel between certain later Pompeian murals and the porches of Chartres. Admitting this parallel to be wholly fortuitous, there is still an identity of spirit between the two manifestations which is sufficiently remarkable. One is prompted to ask if there was not some kind of 'renaissance' in the 12th century which made it possible for the vestigial memories of Roman decoration to coalesce once again into a nearly classical form of expression. The answer to such a question is unambiguous. There was such a renaissance, and in other spheres of 12th century life its reality is easily recognized and has long been admitted by historians. C. H. Haskins, in *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (1927), made the renaissance of the 12th century the subject of an important book: covering literature, jurisprudence and science, but not extending to the visual arts. He succeeded, however, in showing

that the general advance in intellectual achievement characteristic of the 12th century was pretty clearly in the nature of a renaissance--a second and stronger wave of classical resurgence than the first wave which belongs to the age of Charlemagne.

In literature the term 'renaissance' is easily justified by an enormously vigorous cultivation of the classics in the Cathedral Schools and the outpouring of new classical poetry, both religious and secular, often adhering closely to classical models. Hildebert of Le Mans, for instance, perhaps the greatest of medieval Latinists, who worked at the end of the 11th and beginning of the 12th century, was the author of a famous elegy on Rome, which reminds us that, as Haskins says, Rome was to the men of the Middle Ages 'the great fact in their immediate past'. The Middle Ages were, indeed, haunted by Rome and the classical world; in a sense, the quattrocento, with its real, objective renaissance, laid the ghost by finding it flesh and blood after all. The Middle Ages possessed a traditional recollection of Rome but did not know Rome; the only threads which they held firmly in their hands were literary threads--textual threads. The architecture and sculpture of Rome were, except in Italy itself, hidden from them. But, even so, the tradition of Roman splendour in the visual arts was an element in the medieval mind which cannot be ignored.

So it is reasonable to see the architecture of the 12th century as to some extent a kind of renaissance;--or, more accurately, perhaps, as a filling-in of the architectural category to balance other categories in which the connection with the ancient world was more definite and actual--the categories of language, poetry, jurisprudence and the sciences. It is, after all, not the presence of monuments or texts which creates a renaissance; it is the psychological atmosphere of an age, and its 'will to form', which makes it possible for these things to play their part. The mental orientation of the 12th century tended towards the classical; hence the renewed study of the classics and the writing of classical poetry, and hence, too, the creation of an architecture in which affinities with antiquity are recognizable.

It would be difficult, I believe, to find in the Latin literature of the 12th century any specific expressions of admiration for the architecture or sculpture of ancient Rome. On the other hand, there are evidences, here and there, of a general admiration--a secular, non-aesthetic admiration--for its nobility and wealth of materials. Suger, the rebuilder of St Denis, considered obtaining columns for his Abbey church from the Baths of Diocletian and was only deterred by the dangers and difficulties of transport. And Suger was always ready to acquire Roman antiquities for his treasury--witness the antique porphyry vase, now in the Louvre, which he 'converted' into an eagle by the addition of bronze head, wings and talons. Suger's aesthetic appreciation of such things was, perhaps, limited; on the other hand the classical world meant much to him--he could recite long passages from Horace by heart. To him, as to so many of his contemporaries, Rome constituted an enormous factor in the historic past--a factor from which it was impossible (unless one was a St Bernard) to withhold a certain reverent admiration.

To think of the 12th century as having witnessed a ' renaissance' is greatly to modify the customary view of Gothic and classic art as 'opposites'; and in fact this habitual antithesis is in many ways highly unsatisfactory. It is a too obvious conclusion drawn from *prima facie* impressions. The silhouettes of art history which automatically take shape in the individual mind can never be veritable 'traces' of the disposition of events; they are merely local and subjective simplifications. And it is probably nearer the truth to think of the whole flow of European art as a classic stream, distorted for a period from its course, than to think of an opponent 'will to form', breaking in during a Gothic interval and disappearing again with the exhumation of antiquity during the quattrocento. The Gothic interlude is, indeed, apparently separate and self-contained; but it is really the same European classic stream flowing under changed conditions, undergoing an extravagant metamorphosis whose effects lasted for some four hundred years.

A thesis precisely the opposite of this is the one so brilliantly expounded by Wilhelm Worringer's *Form in Gothic* (1927), which sought to define Gothic as the great flowering of that northern 'will to form' which is already latent in the primitive interlaced ornament of the barbarian races, and which is in its very nature opposed to classicism. Instead of seeing the Gothic cathedral as a prodigious but temporary distortion from the norm of classicism, he sees certain forms of later classicism (especially the Baroque) as 'Gothic in disguise'--an assumption of classical forms by peoples in whom the inorganic, abstract 'will to form' was deeply ingrained. This point of view is so precisely antithetical to the one I have been adducing that there is no difficulty whatever in harmonizing the two, for we have here, quite simply, exterior and interior impressions of the same phenomenon. If the 12th century witnessed a 'renaissance', the movement was shaped by the immensely powerful psychology into which it penetrated, a psychology which you may call, if you will, the psychology of northern man as opposed to that of his Mediterranean counterpart.

To marry these two points of view is, I think, to balance up the Gothic phenomenon very fairly. Worringer is impressed by the 'chaos' of Gothic--'a deliberate chaos of energy developed in stone'; and he observe that 'this super-logical, transcendental effect' arises from a 'logical work of multiplication', and it is 'this nervous passion for multiplication which stamps the Gothic cathedral with that same fervid, restless character which he finds in early Germanic bronzes and the interminable interlacings of many 8th-century manuscripts. This multiplication in Gothic architecture is, as I have tried to show, essentially the multiplication of the aedicule motif. Now Worringer, very naturally, arrives at the aedicule right at the end of his exposition; having started with a broad hypothesis concerning the northern will to form, the detailed character of the Gothic system only comes under observation in the final analysis of architectural method:

> Gothic man seeks to lose himself not only in the infinity of the great, but also in the infinity of the small. The infinity of movement which is macrocosmically expressed in the architectural structure as a whole expresses itself macrocosmically in every smallest detail of the building. Every individual detail is, in itself, a world of bewildering activity and infinity, a world which repeats in miniature, but with the same means, the expression of the whole.. . . The crown of a pinnacle is a cathedral in miniature, and anyone who has sunk himself in the ingenious chaos of a tracery can here experience on a small scale the same thrill in logical formalism as he experiences in the buiding system as a whole.'

Thus Worringer, approaching our subject from a very different starting point, states his appreciation of the aedicular system as an effect, whereas we have been studying it as a cause. Our approach has been that of the architect; Worringer's is that of the art-historian. Our approach has, I think, illuminated one side of the problem which Worringer does not touch; for in the notion of the aedicule as something belonging intimately to the classical world, but which was revivified in the creation of Gothic, we find an expression in terms of architecture of that paradoxical renaissance of the 12th century which in other aspects of medieval life can be fully substantiated. Thus, Gothic architecture however striking may be its individuality and however great may be the temptation to oppose it to classicism as the embodiment of a different principle, is truly a continuation and development of the classical line, a metamorphosis of classicism, temporary and unstable, seeking its way back to permanence and stability as soon as the great creative crisis of the 12th-13th centuries had spent itself.

Our theme could be pursued into several other spheres, notably into scholasticism and into the political philosophies of the Middle Ages. Moreover, the declension of Gothic through the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries could be interpreted exactly in the terms which we have employed. From the great west facade of Strasbourg to the simplest East Anglican screen, with thin buttresses to each mullion, the aedicule persists as the basic unit of design. Already by the middle of the 13th century, however, the vivid articulation becomes blurred. The shafts fall into decorative groups, attach themselves to columns and end at last as merely the

salient members in rhythmic sequences of mouldings. Tracery dissolves into the flowing harmony of the curvilinear. Silhouettes of towers no longer strain upward with defiant, inelegant force; the stages are nicely modulated in anticipation of the height to be attained. Gradually, Gothic is emptied of the sense of effort and daring--and chaos; it becomes relaxed, sensuous and conventional. This is not a decline in any pejorative sense, but a declension: a slow wending back, stage by stage, to the classic norm. During this process the aedicule becomes the oft-repeated unit in a purely decorative system, its last and humblest role being that of the cusped which covers so many thousands of square yards of 'Perpendicular' walling.

But to develop all this is beyond the scope of this essay. I have been concerned to demonstrate two things only. First, that the idea of the aedicule or 'little house' is an idea of fundamental importance in the aesthetics of architecture. Second, that this idea, applied to the study of Gothic architecture, tells us much about that architecture and something about its relationship to the other architectures of the world.