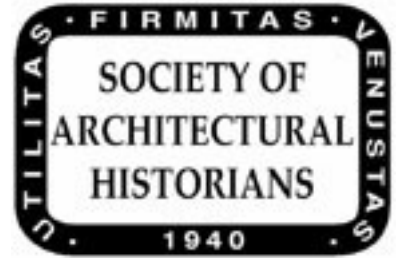




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Monumentality and the Rue Mallet-Stevens

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This essay investigates the esthetics of Robert Mallet-Stevens, using the Rue Mallet-Stevens as a means to consider his ideology. Sigfried Giedion first underscored the major theme of Mallet-Stevens' architectural theory—monumentality—an idea which the critic exploited to denounce both the architect and his street. Giedion also initiated a negative current of opinion against Mallet-Stevens, accounting for the architect's descent into professional obscurity.

Monumentality as a concept is a telling theme by which to assess the Rue Mallet-Stevens and its architect. Using Mallet-Stevens' broader understanding of monumentality rather than Giedion's, three different levels of interpretation can be established in the street—architectural, urbanistic, and visionary. Architectural and urbanistic evaluations are found in Mallet-Stevens' early formal preoccupations, especially with the Wagnerschule and de Stijl; they reflect as well pragmatic responses to city planning legislation. An artistic source apart from architecture promotes the visionary interpretation, the cinema. Film provided the meaning for Mallet-Stevens' innovative forms, especially by establishing an architectural iconography related to jazz-age Paris of the 1920s.

Lastly, Mallet-Stevens' idea of monumentality and Giedion's functionalistic ideology will be juxtaposed. In the Rue Mallet-Stevens, both the urbanistic and historical context is addressed rather than ignored. Mallet-Stevens' theory, in contrast to the functionalist view that promoted an architectural rupture with the past, induced forms that recognize and build upon history in a positive way.

PARIS HAS a tradition of naming streets after illustrious national figures. Paris' street names—Rue Bonaparte, Rue Richelieu, Rue Auguste Comte—reveal her favorite sons, noteworthy men of letters, science, art, and politics. These streets, in many cases undistinguished in terms of their architectural form, acquire significance through association with the names of the great and powerful. Meaning comes not from the physical, but from the non-physical realm of the historical memory. This is not the case with the Rue Mallet-Stevens (Figs. 1 and 2). Whereas other streets allude to an historical significance external to their own existence, the Rue Mallet-Stevens fused the artistic consciousness and personal history of its namesake with its form. Here, form and content are correlated: the name of this modern-

ist street reveals the very source of its substance. It is a tragic irony that for most people, the name of the Rue Mallet-Stevens represents nothing more than its forms, leaving anonymous the personality of the namesake which it symbolizes (Fig. 3).

Questions naturally arise as to the cause of the architect's descent into oblivion. Two probable reasons can be found, one biographical and the other publicistic. First, the Second World War marked a hiatus in the exceptionally productive architectural and journalistic career of the architect. Neither building nor writing during his wartime sojourn at Villeneuve-sur-Lot, the architect fell into an obscurity that increased as his self-imposed exile from Paris continued. Moreover, his untimely death in 1945 deprived him of the opportunity his colleagues had to develop their artistic ideologies during reconstruction, thereby gaining public recognition. In addition, unfavorable criticism from the architectural press kept Mallet-Stevens from the public eye. Sigfried Giedion was Mallet-Stevens' most noteworthy critic. In *Bauen in Frankreich* (1928), he attacked the Rue Mallet-Stevens asserting, "No building conceived with an emphasis on luxury and limitlessness can today maintain any meaning whatsoever in the history of architecture."¹

Giedion's assessment might be illuminated by comparing it to another tract he wrote in 1928, the CIAM La Sarraz Manifesto. Here, Giedion articulates many of the precepts of the early modern movement's ethical stand, focusing upon such themes as *existenz minimum*, proletarian art forms, and architecture as a social catalyst.² Most importantly, Giedion seeks to eliminate esthetic issues from the range of architecture's pragmatic and social involvements. Estheticism is associated with formalism, and together they are tied to the most evil of all artistic preoccupations.

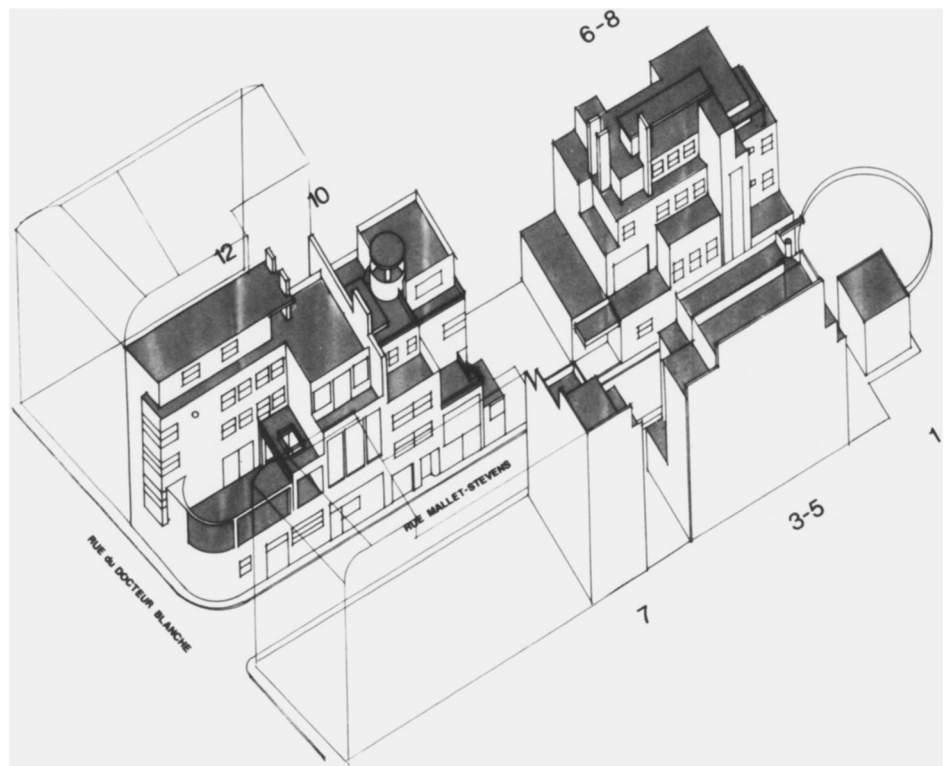
1. As a correspondent for the periodical *Der Cicerone* in 1927, Giedion produced a series of articles on recent French construction. His purview naturally included the Rue Mallet-Stevens, discussed in an essay entitled "Der Situation der Französischen Architektur," *Der Cicerone*, xix, 1927, 310–317. These articles were assembled a year later in Giedion's first major monograph on modern architecture, *Bauen in Frankreich: Bauen in Eisen, Bauen in Beton*, Berlin, Leipzig, 1928. His discussion of the Rue Mallet-Stevens in this book is an edited version of the earlier article.

2. In this regard, see especially Section II "Town Planning," and Section III "Architecture and Public Opinion" of the La Sarraz Manifesto, translated by Ulrich Conrads, and included in his *Programs and Manifestoes of Twentieth Century Architecture*, Cambridge, MA, 1970, esp. 110–112.

Fig. 1. Robert Mallet-Stevens, Rue Mallet-Stevens, Paris, 1925–1928, view of ensemble (Raynal, ed., *Dix Années des Réalisations*, Paris, 1930).



Fig. 2. Rue Mallet-Stevens, axonometric drawing (author).



pations, fashion. Fashion smacks of transiency. That which Giedion seeks is a-temporal, architectural constancy, induced from the constituent social and technical facts of the age.³ For Giedion, the hallmarks of fashionable architecture include luxury and purely cerebral, esthetic interests, all of which remove architecture from the realm of the realistic. In the La Sarraz

3. *Programs and Manifestors*, 112.

Manifesto, Giedion typifies this kind of architecture as academic. His critique of the Rue Mallet-Stevens decries its *Monumentalität*, and alludes to the architect's trivial and intellectual preoccupations. Dismissed as mere fashion, the street is regarded as wholly inconsequential. In short, Giedion's understanding of the Rue Mallet-Stevens is shaded by an aversion to explicit formalism and fashion, described as academic or monumental. Thus rejected by this influential apologist for modern architecture, the

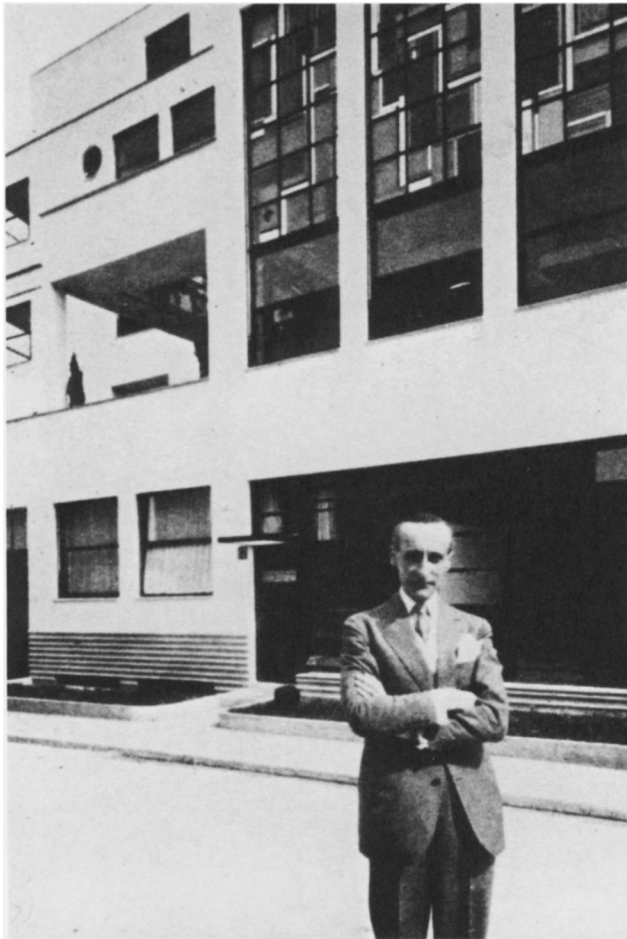


Fig. 3. Portrait of Robert Mallet-Stevens taken in front of his house on the Rue Mallet-Stevens, 1928 (*Architectural Forum*, XLVIII, April 1928).

Rue Mallet-Stevens and its architect fell increasingly from reigning public and professional opinion.

Giedion's insight into the importance of monumentality for Mallet-Stevens is correct, but not the interpretation of monumentality that he imposes upon the Rue Mallet-Stevens. In contrast to Giedion's narrow association of monumentality with fashion, Mallet-Stevens' view involved a more comprehensive and generalized understanding. From an early stage in his architectural career, Mallet-Stevens emphasized the need for monumentality in both architecture and urbanism. In an essay entitled "The Influence of Architecture on the Population of Cities," he stressed the need for such design:

Streets bordered by houses, public buildings, and especially monuments . . . must become the educators of the population, and their role . . . for those who stop to contemplate their proportions or the harmony of their forms, is to invoke joy and the ideal.⁴

Already here, Mallet-Stevens' conception of monumentality in-

4. Robert Mallet-Stevens, "L'Influence de l'Architecture sur la Population des Villes," *Tekné*, 21 September 1911, 307.

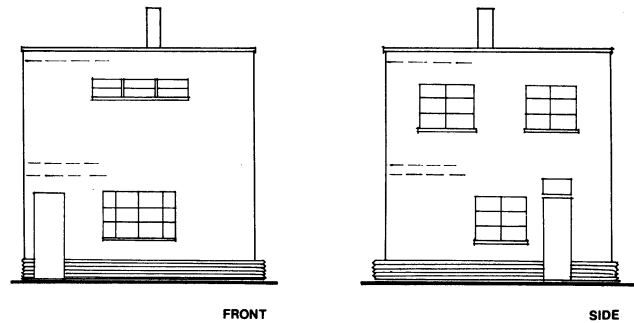


Fig. 4. Rue Mallet-Stevens, concierge dwelling, 1928, elevations (author).

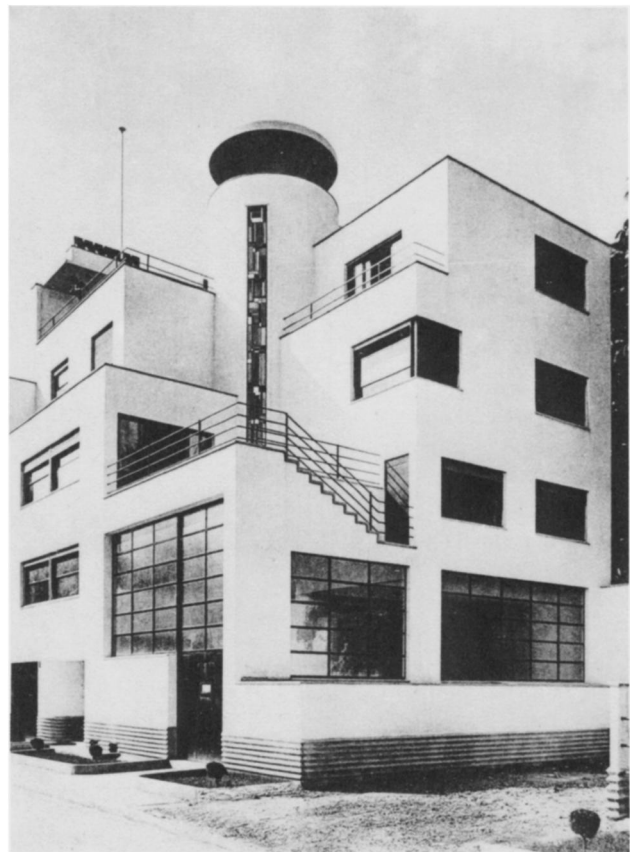


Fig. 5. Rue Mallet-Stevens, Maison Martel, view (Raynal).

cluded three basic issues: the first, a formal component in architecture with implicit interests in rules of composition; the second, an urbanistic consideration in which housing and large-scale public works interact to create a comprehensive urban and social order; the third, an architecture that is an educational mechanism, invoking some kind of "higher consciousness." A symbiotic relationship unites these concerns. The third consideration grows naturally out of the first two, particularly when architecture serves as an expressive instrument. Alternatively, the final consideration acts as *modus operandi* in search of forms which convincingly portray the supposed "Nature of the Age."



Fig. 6. Robert Mallet-Stevens, project for workers' housing, Saint Cloud, perspective view (Deshoulières, ed., *Rob. Mallet-Stevens*, Brussels, 1980).

Fin-de-Siècle Vienna provided Mallet-Stevens' initial contact with these ideas. After graduating from Paris' Ecole Spéciale d'Architecture in 1910, Mallet-Stevens worked for a year in the office of Josef Hoffmann. His early projects betray a debt to Hoffmann which lingered until the publication of his first book, *Une Cité Moderne* in 1922. Furthermore, they reflect a more generalized source, the work produced by the students in Otto Wagner's special school of architecture at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste.

The written work that most influenced Mallet-Stevens' early ideas was Otto Wagner's *Die Grossstadt*, published the year of the Frenchman's stay in Vienna. The sources for Mallet-Stevens' attitudes about the monument and the city can be found in Wagner's discussion of monumentality. Wagner's views were based on two premises. The first was an expressed interest in creating an esthetic which represents the implicit ideals of the modern age. The second was an effective communication of these ideals to the population by means of architecture. This architectural consideration turned the building into a kind of billboard for the Zeitgeist, and provided an initial stimulus for the idea of architecture as propaganda.⁵

To consider monumentality on the formal level in the Rue Mallet-Stevens, the examples of two houses are instructive (Figs. 4 and 5): the caretaker's lodge (conciergerie) at the street's end, and

5. These ideas were first introduced in Wagner's *Moderne Architektur* published in Vienna in 1895 and later reinvoked in his *Die Grossstadt* of 1911.

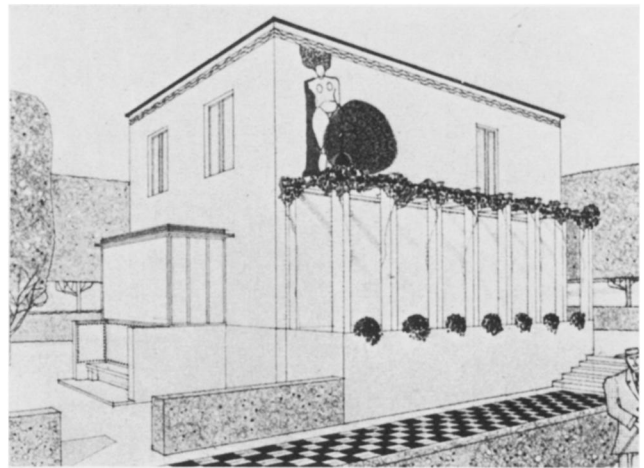


Fig. 7. Wagnerschule project for workers' housing, 1908, perspective view (*Das Ehrenjahr Otto Wagners an der K. K. Akademie der Bildenden Künste*, Vienna, 1908).

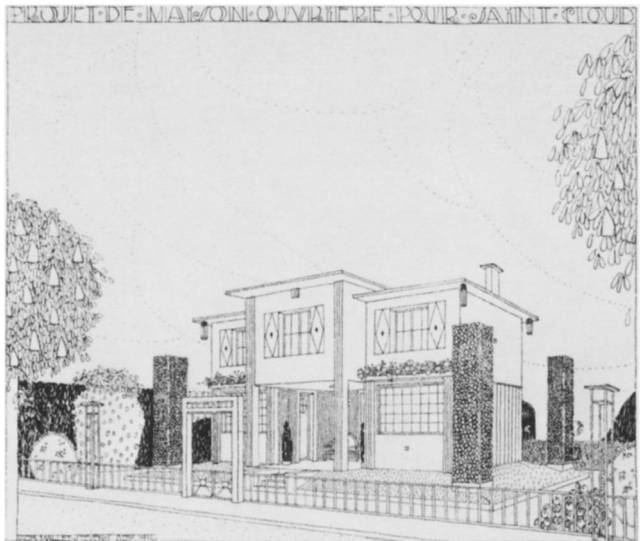


Fig. 8. Robert Mallet-Stevens, project for workers' housing, Saint Cloud, perspective view (Deshoulières).

the Maison Martel, attached to the architect's own house. The two buildings are quite different—the lodge, simple, cubelike, and schematic; the Martel house, large, elaborate, and highly articulated. On one level, the two buildings represent different formal conceptions. Yet on another, one represents a seed, the other a fruition.

Consider the concierge in relation to Mallet-Stevens' two projects for workers' houses at Saint-Cloud, prepared in 1914. These schemes reveal his formal involvements with both Wagner and Hoffmann. The first (Fig. 6) can be compared with a Wagnerschule project of 1908 in the Vienna Academy's annual publication (Fig. 7). Both are cubes with symmetrically disposed façades and porches. Yet differences are apparent as well, especially in Mallet-Stevens' articulation, which is derived more from

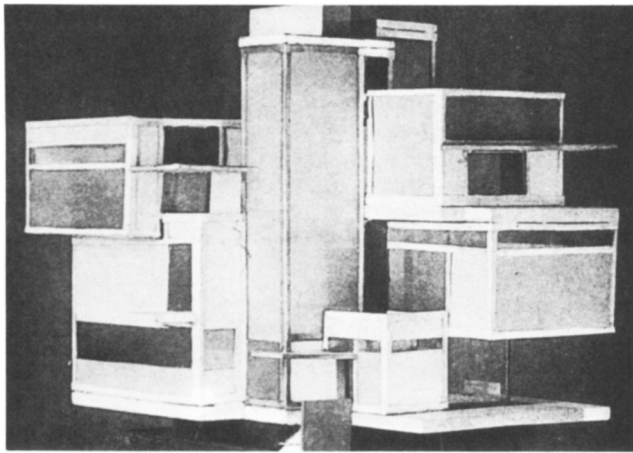


Fig. 9. Theo van Doesburg, project for an artist's studio, 1923, view of model (*L'Architecture Vivante*, III, 1925).

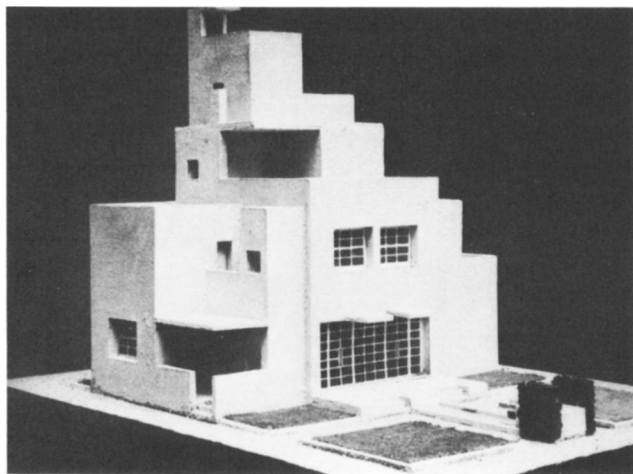


Fig. 10. Robert Mallet-Stevens, project for a concrete villa, 1924, view of model (*L'Architecture Vivante*, II, 1924).

Viennese Werkstätten, than from Jugendstil details. Mallet-Stevens' project is carefully defined; the edges are emphasized and the confines of the box clearly conceived. The earlier project attempts a dialogue with the landscape, the latter seeks to remove itself from the vegetation. In short, Mallet-Stevens' scheme becomes a kind of rarified box in a landscape setting. This formal conception was not built until 15 years later in the concierge dwelling at the end of the Rue Mallet-Stevens.

The second project for workers' housing is an expansion of the first (Fig. 8). The one accommodates the program in a single unified cube, the other employs a combination and symmetrical juxtaposition of spatial envelopes. Composition as the interpretation of the program in discrete volumes is important here, and it is to become the major orientation of Mallet-Stevens' formal stance.

These formal considerations became overlaid with de Stijl notions in 1923. Theo van Doesburg and his interests in a new artistic monumentality seduced the Frenchman, lending greater

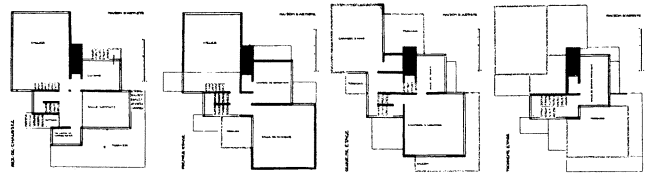


Fig. 11. Theo van Doesburg, project for an artist's studio, 1923, plans (*L'Architecture Vivante*, III, 1925).

immediacy to Mallet-Stevens' formal experiments, especially concerning an esthetic derived from a progressive social and artistic conscience. The two architects became collaborators at the villa for the Vicomte de Noailles in Hyères, and were theoretical comrades in two exhibitions, the Rosenberg show of 1923, and the Ecole Spéciale Exposition of 1924. Important similarities between Van Doesburg's project for an artist's atelier of late 1923 and Mallet-Stevens' *béton-villa* of early 1924 are apparent (Figs. 9 and 10). Most important is Mallet-Stevens' shift from comprehensive symmetry, and an intensified relationship between the free plan and its volumetric expression. In a diagrammatic way, the plan is conceived as a series of independent spatial volumes, balanced, juxtaposed, and interpenetrated, taking into account hierarchy in program and spatial use (Figs. 11 and 12). Mallet-Stevens further experiments with asymmetrical composition, though local symmetries may remain.

The imprint of Van Doesburg and the preference for a non-frontal, free composition is best seen on the Rue Mallet-Stevens in the Maison Martel. Here, program and plan underlie the displacement of forms in an irregular manner. Functionally, the house is both atelier and duplex for a pair of sculptor-brothers, Jan and Joe Martel. The predominant feature, a four-story circular stair, skewers the levels of the building, unifying the various functions, themselves placed into separate spatial trays within the building envelope (Fig. 13). The major programmatic considerations are expressed on the exterior of the residence through breaks in surface plane, caesurae in the façade caused by fenestration, and shadows produced by soffits and cantilevers. We can read this building as a formal culmination of Mallet-Stevens' monumental preoccupations in a formal sense, whether Viennese or de Stijl in origin. Despite its elaboration, the Martel house makes important references to its architectural history, as embodied in the concierge dwelling only a short distance away.

The Rue Mallet-Stevens also has its roots in Wagner's urbanistic conceptions of monumentality. For Wagner, two major ideas were important: architecture symbolizing responsible government, and the communication of the state's public concerns. Consider his scheme for District XXII (Figs. 14 and 15), which illustrates the urban ideas outlined in *Die Grossstadt*.⁶ In this

6. For amplification of these points, see the section entitled "Regulation of the City Plan" of *Die Grossstadt*, translated by Clifford Ricker as "The Development of a Great City" in *The Architectural Record*, v, May 1912, especially 492–494.

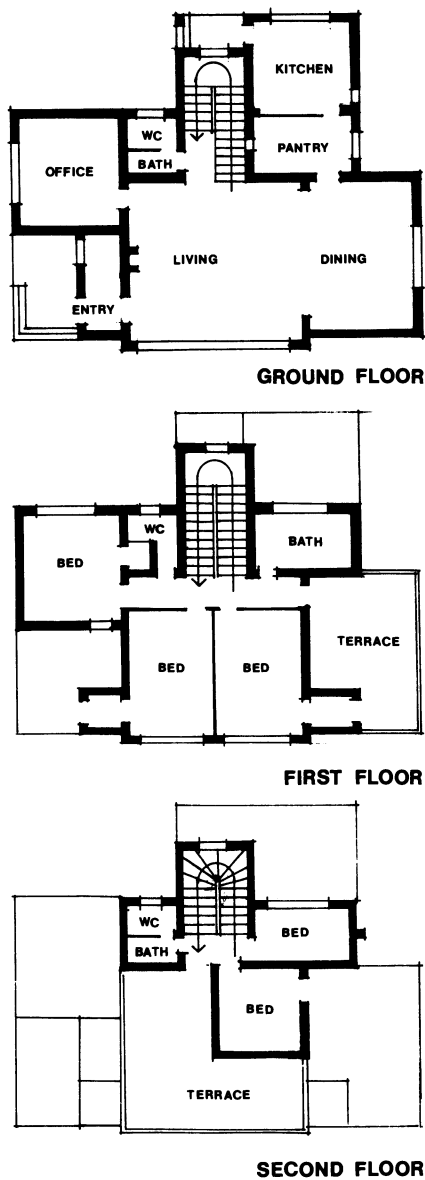


Fig. 12. Robert Mallet-Stevens, project for a concrete villa, 1924, plans (author).

scheme, he presents a city precinct, extensively developed with the anonymous apartment blocks comprising most of Vienna's nineteenth-century fabric: rectangular *Randbebauung* around an interior court. In contrast to this aggregate, however, the scheme is inflected by large public spaces, with plantings, fountains, and promenades, and dotted with the monuments of the imperial liberal democracy of Franz Josef. These buildings were to include a university library, a palace of Viennese culture, and an imperial war museum, important, not so much for what they were, but for what they represented. The monuments were intended to portray society's progressive spirit and to symbolize enlightened government. Both considerations led Wagner to propose controlled speculation, where new development pro-

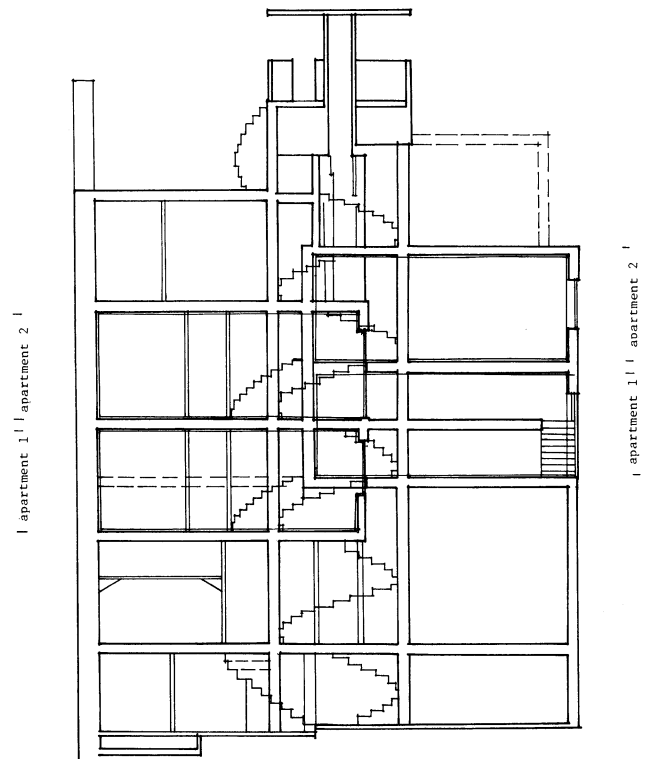


Fig. 13. Rue Mallet-Stevens, Maison Martel, 1925-26, section (author).

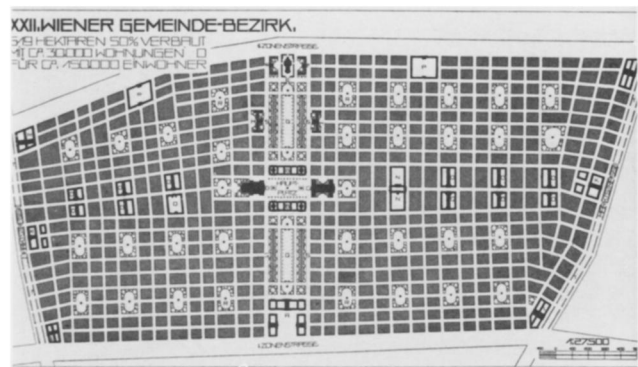


Fig. 14. Otto Wagner, District XXII, 1910-1911, general plan published in *Die Grossstadt* (Geretsegger and Peintner, Otto Wagner, London, 1970).

ceeded only in conformity with the overall urban plan. In District XXII, Wagner visually exploited public legislation.

Furthermore, he envisioned a necessary tension between speculatively built housing and the monuments of his district—buildings essential to put citizens in touch with the age's immanent spirit. These monumental set pieces, largely based in academic predispositions such as building types or symmetry in plan and elevation, required the context of housing to make their meaning known. If the apartment represented day-to-day con-



Fig. 15. Otto Wagner, District XXII, aerial view (Geretsegger and Peintner).

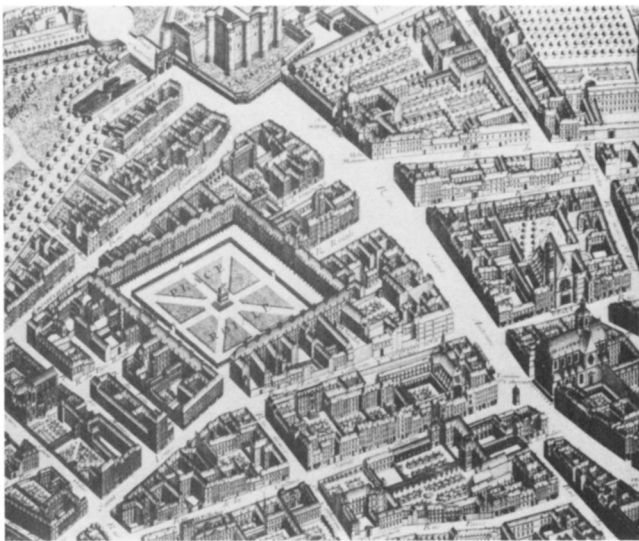


Fig. 16. Place Royale, Paris, 1605, aerial view (Plan Turgot, 1739).

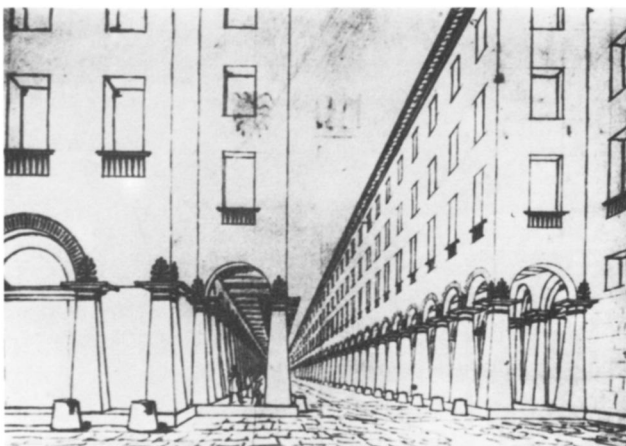


Fig. 17. Friederich Gilly, Rue des Colonnes, 1791, view (Rowe, *Collage City*, Cambridge, MA, 1979).

tingency, then the monument represented eternal principle. This dialectic was necessary to form a coherent urban whole.

At this point, one shift from Wagner is important for Mallet-Stevens. Wagner understood the ideals of the age to be particularly embodied in certain special buildings, but Mallet-Stevens developed a more generalized interpretation during this period before the First World War. For him, monumentality was important in every building, even housing, as the reflection of the ubiquitous *Zeitgeist*. Later, the problem of monumental housing became associated as well with the idea of a coherent urban unit. This attitude was inherent in Wagner's urban concerns, for District XXII is conceived as a unified housing scheme. Yet, equally important was the Parisian practice of monumental housing, such as the Place Royale and Rue des Colonnes (Figs. 16 and 17): both employed the cohesive prospect combined with piecemeal development. The Rue Mallet-Stevens also exploited the Parisian street, playing off a unified group of façades against anonymous fabric.

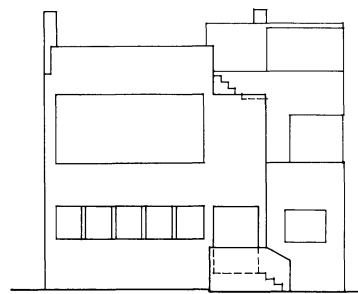
In no less a way, the Rue Mallet-Stevens was affected by progressive urban legislation, most notably the setback laws of 1902–1903 and the subdivision acts of 1919 and 1925. The subdivision acts had both hygienic and esthetic purposes.⁷ They stressed the importance of comprehensive planning in terms of public services and utilities, especially power and water. They also recognized the significance of existing context on new structures, especially in that any new construction must not interfere with the old in terms of light and air. Esthetically, they stressed continuity of street patterns, maintenance of street façades, and unity of formal vocabulary. Similarly, the setback ordinances specified maximum street heights and spatial envelopes whose perimeters could not be interrupted by construction. With regard to the Rue Mallet-Stevens, they maintained a 12 meter street height, and introduced systematic setbacks. These constraints did pose problems, and conflicts did arise between the architect and the Prefect of the Seine. But for Mallet-Stevens, the development of a flexible, loose-fit approach to design allowed for a considerable degree of freedom when dealing with legislative demands from above and programmatic changes from below.⁸

This situation is well illustrated on the Rue Mallet-Stevens by the Maison Dreyfus, designed for Daniel Dreyfus, the developer of the site (Fig. 18). Preliminary designs were submitted to the

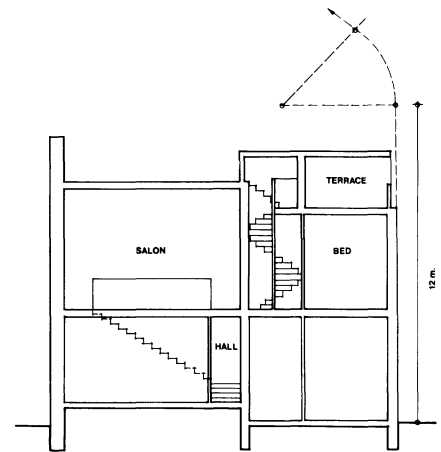
7. For a more extensive discussion of Paris city planning legislation, particularly setback requirements, see Norma Evenson, *Paris: A Century of Change, 1878–1978*, New Haven, 1979, particularly 147–159.

8. The building regulations concerning the site are in the possession of the Archives de la Ville de Paris, Quai Malaquais. The information is catalogued under "Rue Nouvelle (Située Rue du Docteur Blanche, no. 9)" involving separate files for the Maisons Reifenberg, Martel, Allatini, Mallet-Stevens, and Dreyfus (scheme II). Material is also to be found under the "Rue Mallet-Stevens," including files for the Maison Dreyfus and the Caretaker's House.

Fig. 18. Rue Mallet-Stevens, Maison Dreyfus, Scheme I, 1925, elevation and section (author).

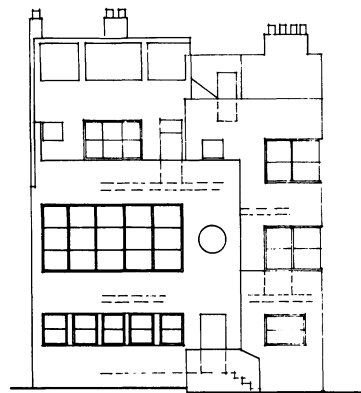


Elevation

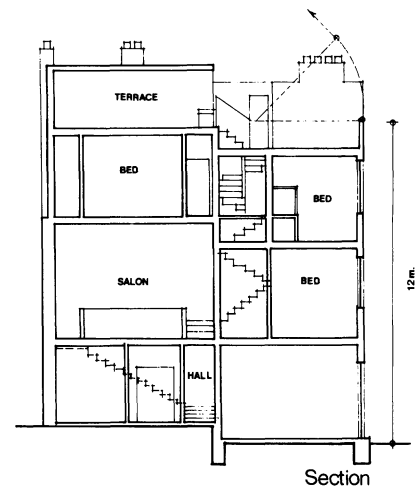


Section

Fig. 19. Rue Mallet-Stevens, Maison Dreyfus, Scheme II, 1926, elevation and section (author).



Elevation



Section

Prefecture of the Seine in January 1926. They were not approved, since they violated certain clauses in the subdivision act that required a permanent light court for the neighboring house. Property agreements were reached to ensure the free space. In the interim, however, Dreyfus changed his demands for the project, enlarging the scheme from one to three bedrooms (Fig. 19). The addition of a third floor to the original project would have forced the house beyond permissible height limits. Hence, floor to ceiling height on the second floor was reduced, a stepped section introduced, and a spiral stair employed to unify the various levels. Externally, a setback on chimneys drew the building into the construction envelope.

To a certain extent, these changes can be regarded as basic architectural common sense. However, the importance of Mallet-Stevens' flexible approach to architectural form, which permitted him to deal effectively with certain kinds of design problems, should not be underestimated. In this, Mallet-Stevens' point of view can be contrasted with Le Corbusier's, exemplified by the latter's apartment house at the Porte Molitor, a project bearing programmatic likeness to Mallet-Stevens' buildings (Fig. 20). Le Corbusier's building was beset with ordinance problems from

the outset, leading to the architect's criticism of urban legislation as confining and deleterious to artistic experimentation.⁹ For Mallet-Stevens on his street, rather than permit such imposition to compromise his scheme, he used them to his advantage. Not only was he able to circumvent the bureaucratic stalemate, but he was further able to expand and extend his formal strategies as truly expressive of new urbanistic concerns.

This attitude was not unusual to progressive urbanists of the early 20th century. We have observed a similar position in a state architect such as Otto Wagner. Likewise, urban legislation was important to Parisian planners Eugene Hénard and Henri Sauvage. The first proposed hygiene legislation that produced the *à redents* housing system (Fig. 21), idealized by Le Corbusier in his City of Three Million and Plan Voisin (Fig. 22). The second conceptualized new models for setback housing (Fig. 23), which occurred on the Rue Vavin in 1911, and was exploited by Sant-Elia in his futurist manifesto *La Città Nuova* (Fig. 24).

9. Willy Boesiger, ed., *Oeuvre Complete*, II, 1929–1934, Zurich, 1964, 144.



Fig. 20. Le Corbusier, apartment house, Porte Molitor, Paris, 1933, perspective view (Boesiger, ed., *Oeuvre Complete*, II, Zurich, 1964).

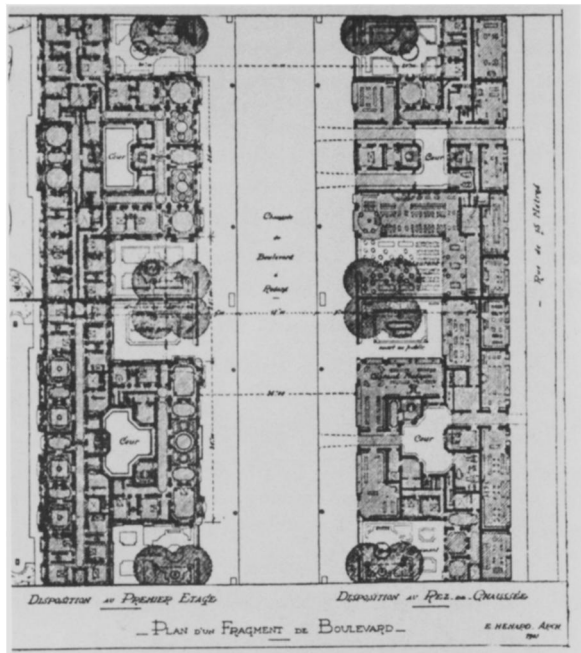


Fig. 21. Eugene Hénard, Boulevard à Redents, 1903, plan (Evenson, *Paris: A Century of Change*, New Haven, 1979).

Having addressed Mallet-Stevens' architectural and urbanistic interests in the Rue Mallet-Stevens, the third of his monumental concerns, the visionary, can be considered. On a formal level, the

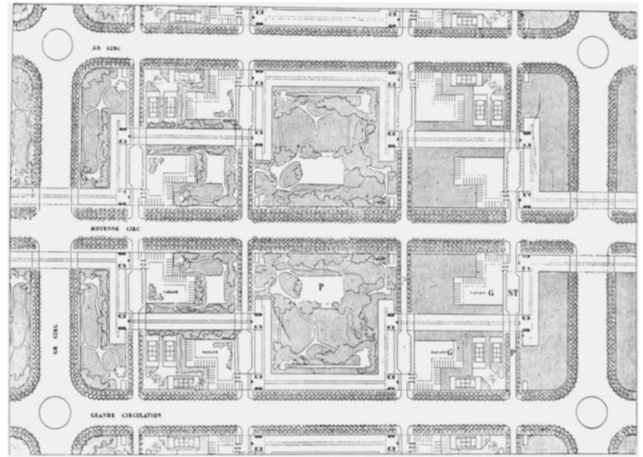


Fig. 22. Le Corbusier, Immeubles-Villas, 1925, plan (Boesiger, *Oeuvre Complete*, I, Zurich, 1964).



Fig. 23. Henri Sauvage, apartment house, 26 Rue Vavin, Paris, 1911-1912, detail of façade (author).

Rue Mallet-Stevens posed a built alternative to traditional Parisian urbanism (Fig. 25). The tension caused by this contrast was recognized by early critics. For example, P. Morton Shand wrote in *The Architect's Journal*:

It would be hard to find a row of buildings anywhere more nicely calculated to shock the conventional lover of architecture than that depicted in one illustration of the Rue Mallet-Stevens. At first, this eminently un-French-looking street, with its entire absence of wrought iron and sculptural excrescences might be mistaken for part of some lath and plaster Moorish exhibition designed to reproduce a characteristic, flatroofed, mud-walled Saharan city.¹⁰

Shand, like many others, regarded the street as different, strange, foreign.

10. P. Morton Shand, "M. Robert Mallet-Stevens," *The Architect's Journal*, LXIV, 5 October 1927, 449.

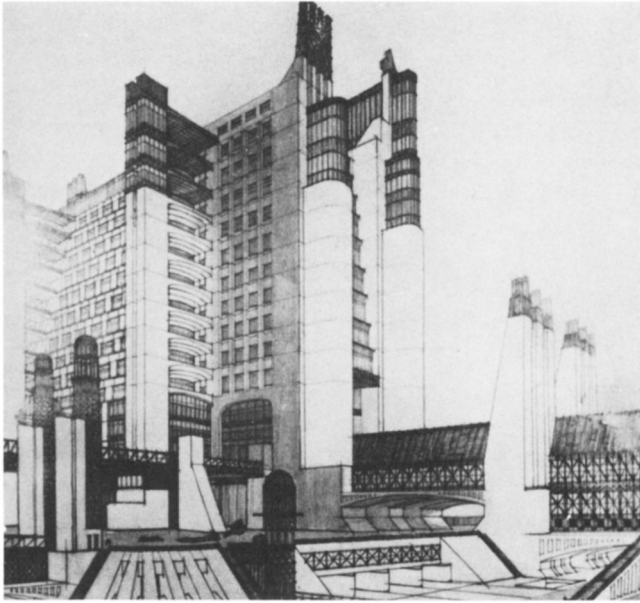


Fig. 24. Antonio Sant'Elia, project for an apartment house, 1914, perspective view (Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, New York, 1970).

Furthermore, the strangeness of the prospect was intensified by comparison with the other buildings of Auteuil, which provided a backdrop of more conventional fabric against which this showcase could be spotlight. Architectural precedents did exist for this treatment, especially in Otto Wagner's "speaking monuments" of District XXII, played off against the anonymous texture of Vienna. Likewise, Mallet-Stevens' street needed old Paris to make its statement clear.

Although Wagner provided the source for this interpretation of monumentality, many of its formal means and intellectual meanings derive from a medium apart from architecture, that of the cinema. In his book *L'Art Cinématographique* (1929), Mallet-Stevens argued that the cinema was the only true artistic medium of the modern age, hence the single contemporary art form. He emphasized the importance of film to modern culture, for unlike theater, it was immensely popular. This was due largely to film's ability to convincingly portray the unreal and to transcend the conventional dramatic unities, particularly time, utilizing a range of visual effects that superseded traditional *mise en scene*.¹¹

Film also took on an implicit meaning as a technological artistic medium. The optimism inherent in Mallet-Stevens' and others' understandings of this high-tech art form was explicitly reinforced by film's choice of subject matter and story line. In many cases, film became a crystal ball wherein tomorrow could

11. Robert Mallet-Stevens, "Le Decor" *L'Art Cinématographique*, Paris, 1929, 21–22.

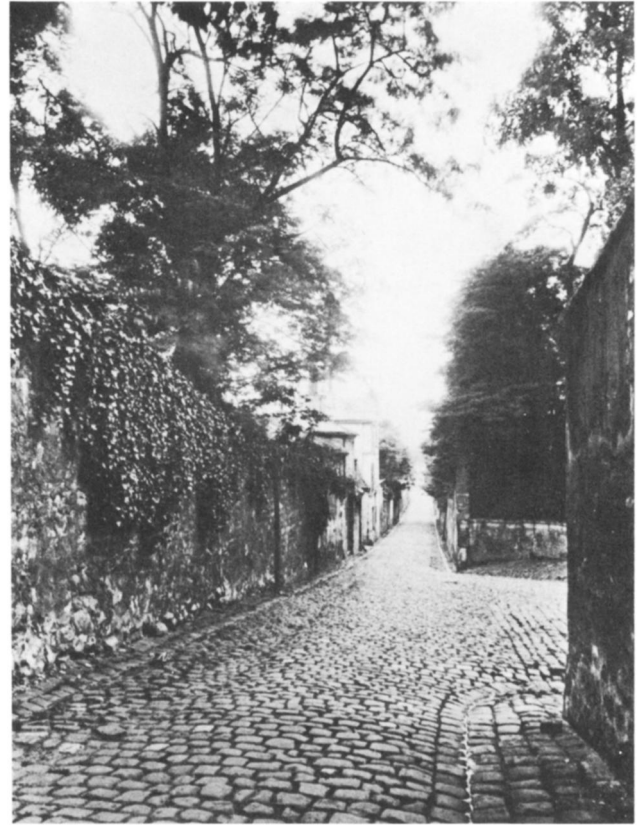


Fig. 25. Eugène Atget, photograph of the Rue Raynouard, Sixteenth Arrondissement, Paris, photograph taken ca. 1917 (Balbo, *Atget*, Paris, 1975).

be viewed today, confirming the naive belief in a utopian future, sponsored by the progress of science.

Marcel L'Herbier's film *L'Inhumaine* (or *The Inhuman Lady*) with its sets designed by Mallet-Stevens, was particularly noteworthy in this regard. The scenario of the movie was a machine age romance between an actress and an engineer. The woman was coveted by many men, one of whom, upon discovering the actress was secretly in love with the engineer, killed her. The engineer, however, foiled this act of vengeance. Through the miracles of love and science, he restored the actress to life, after which the couple lived happily ever after in his laboratory. Despite the maudlin sentimentality of story line, the film does introduce a very important issue. Science was to interact with man on an existential level—it could even reverse death.

This positivistic vision of science was made especially palpable by the architecture of the settings (Fig. 26). Everything in *L'Inhumaine* was ultra-modern—pendulum-wagging machinery, crackling electrical currents, high speed automobiles. Medium, decor, and story line converge, projecting an optimistic view of the world as it could be, a society capable of anything, even immortality, provided science were allowed to run its course unimpeded.

Formally, the viewer's reactions were controlled by contrasts

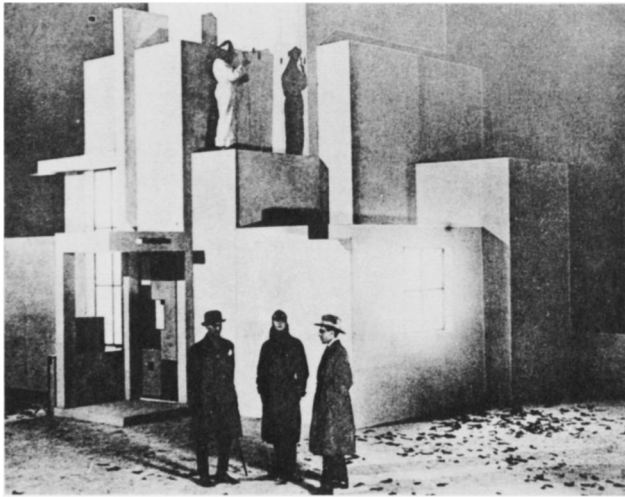


Fig. 26. Robert Mallet-Stevens, set decor for film *L'Inhumaine*, 1923, still taken from film (Raynal).

of light and shadow, black and white. Mallet-Stevens' architectural forms were nourished by such contrasts, yielding abstract compositions rich in chiaroscuro. On an urbanistic level, however, he employed contrast in a very different manner, focusing on the opposition of old and new. This concern was most apparent in his Pavilion of Tourism at the Paris *Exposition Internationale des Arts-Décoratifs* of 1925 (Fig. 27).

The building was an outgrowth of the forms of the engineer's laboratory in *L'Inhumaine*, a living stage set advertising the film's presence and impact at the futuristic exposition. Furthermore, in much the same way as the film presented certain internal contrasts, so did the pavilion with its context. Mallet-Stevens turned the building into a frontispiece for the fair, taking as an image the setting from his film, a piece of stage scenery. The classic photo of the pavilion viewed it against the backdrop of the Grand Palais, an eclectic composition prepared for the 1900 fair. A dialogue was established between the two buildings; the old was seen as retardataire and heavy, the new as light and progressive. Mallet-Stevens made his interest clear by this eloquent contrast.

This attitude was further developed in shop designs of 1925 and 1926 (Fig. 28). The fronts of his Bally shoes or Alfa Romeo garage ignored or contradicted the eclecticism of Third Republic Paris. New patterns, materials, lettering used in surprising ways, giving a vignette of what might be, were made convincing in contrast to the tedium of what had been.

The Rue Mallet-Stevens was the receptor of cinematic and architectural ideas arising out of the Exposition des Arts-Décoratifs. At the same time, it stood as built criticism of the intentions of the fair. Theo van Doesburg recounted Mallet-Stevens' objections during organizational meetings of 1923–1924. Rather than a temporary trade exhibition, he argued in favor of a permanent housing display, where advances in construction and

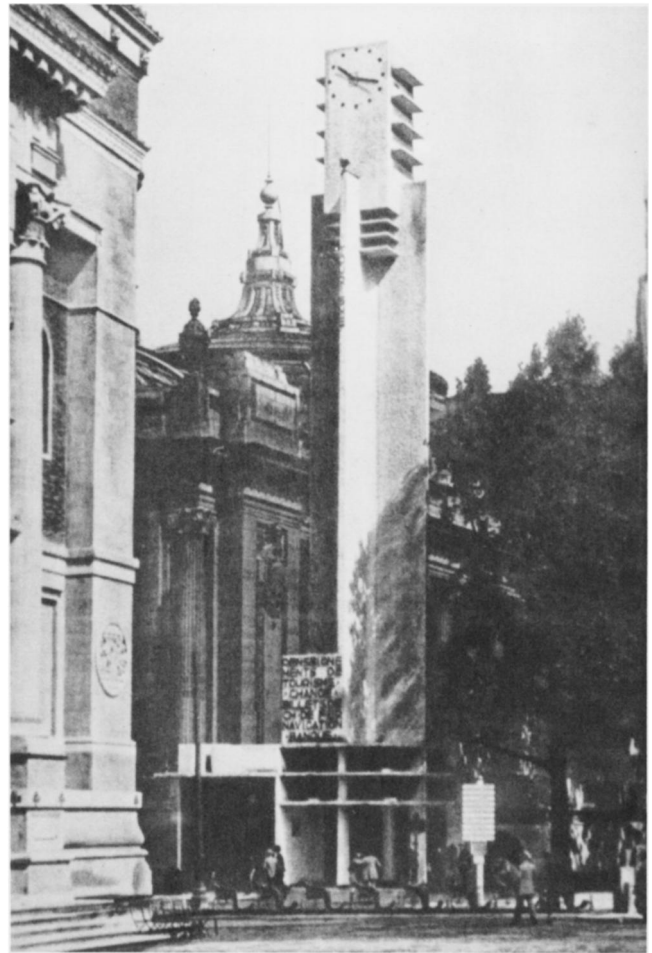


Fig. 27. Robert Mallet-Stevens, Pavilion of Tourism at the exposition des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 1925, view (*Encyclopédie des Arts Décoratifs*, II, 1925, reprint, New York, 1977).

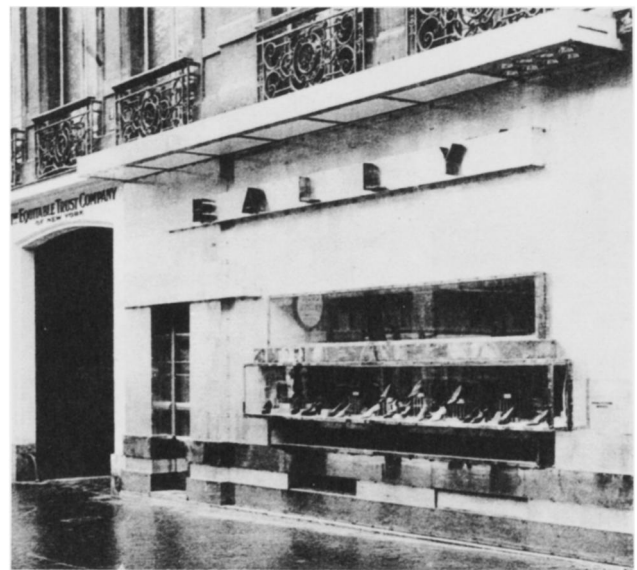


Fig. 28. Robert Mallet-Stevens, Bally Shoe Shop front, Boulevard de la Madeleine, façade, Paris, 1927 (Raynal).

design would be illustrated on a revolving basis.¹² Needless to say, the organizers of the fair, particularly Henri Sauvage and Charles Plumet, disregarded his suggestions, and Mallet-Stevens' visions were forced to be fragmentarily represented by the tourist pavilion-stage set.

Still, the idea of a housing exhibition in which he would build in microcosm the city of the future lingered with him. The opportunity to realize at least a portion of his vision came in 1925, when the banker Daniel Dreyfus commissioned Mallet-Stevens to design a street which would ultimately bear the architect's name.

To summarize, the Rue Mallet-Stevens capsulizes a number of ideas—architectural, urbanistic, visionary—derived from several distinct theoretical realms. Like the formal and intellectual underpinning of the street, Mallet-Stevens' conception of monumentality must be seen as an equally hybrid mixture. Otto Wagner's theory of monumentality established an important point of departure. Viennese articulation, expanded by *de Stijl* and cinematic allusions, established the requisites for progressive form. Monumentality was equally important urbanistically, where new housing exploited innovative legislation to create its impact. Lastly, monumentality as significant, provocative imagery receives intellectual and formal support from the film. By connecting architecture with the cinema, by making architecture into a stage set and contrasting it with reality, Mallet-Stevens generated for his public a convincing view of the accessible future.

To return to the criticisms of Sigfried Giedion: on the one hand, it is clear that he was correct to assess Mallet-Stevens as a designer interested in monumentality; on the other, it appears that Giedion had too limited an understanding of the nature of

monumentality, reducing it to a simplistic, academic point of view. Monumentality, as understood by Otto Wagner, Theo van Doesburg, and Robert Mallet-Stevens meant something much more than symmetrical façades and axes. It meant, first, that art forms must be both involved with, and representative of the situation of modern society. This architecture was effective to the extent that it represented the perceived attributes of modern life, both existentially and politically. Secondly, the monument as portrayed by the Rue Mallet-Stevens was to be an instrument of social uplift. By involvement with the monumental complex, the observer was to come into contact with the forms of the future. By contrasting dazzling white forms with other more anonymous fabric, the relative merits of the new over the old could be judged.

In conclusion, one can discern two implicit interpretations of monumentality existing in the early modern movement. The first was doctrinaire, as articulated by the first major pronouncement of modernism, the CIAM La Sarraz Manifesto. This statement deprecated the monument as fundamentally academic and backward-looking. This same manifesto, however, did cite the need for innovative building that would reflect the new age and interact with the public for purposes of education. It criticized speculative development as inherently evil. And it never acknowledged that the monument could and did give order to existing urban fabric, in addition to providing a mechanism for ordering new development.

The Rue Mallet-Stevens, taking into account the need for expressive, progressive, and responsible architecture, accomplished its ends not by isolating itself from, but embedding itself in the city. Rather than shrugging off urban legislation and controls, it exploited them, in part by developing a formal strategy that provided for a degree of free play within esthetic structure. Most importantly, by means of dramatic contrast, Mallet-Stevens was able to institute formal and urbanistic strategies in which vision and history existed side by side.

12. Theo van Doesburg, "Eenige Notities Betreffende de Voorbereiding der 'Exposition des Arts Decoratifs' in 1925 te Parijs," *Het Bouwbedrijf*, 11, March 1925, 109, 110.