The Spectacle of the City of Paris from 25bis rue Franklin
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Martin Bressani
The Spectacle of the City of Paris from 25bis rue Franklin

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1. View of Paris from the roof terrace of 25bis rue Franklin in 1904

Above, calm and tranquility, below, life and movement.
Edmond Uhry, on 25bis rue Franklin, 1904[1]

The apartment block at 25bis rue Franklin designed by Auguste Perret in 1903 stands on the crest of the hill of the suburb of Passy, facing the city of Paris. Emile Zola chose this exact vantage point to model his famous description of the city in his novel of 1878, *Une page d'amour.*[2] Beyond the simple amusement such coincidence may arouse, Perret's conception of the city and its relation to architecture can, in fact, be better understood when analyzed through Zola's constructed view. In this paper, I will examine the special links between the building on rue Franklin and the spectacle of Paris spreading out in the distance beyond its windows. In a fashion typical of the nineteenth century, these connections were established at multiple levels, from the urban plan to the building elements. Perret's synthetic vision proposed a complex web of associations derived from the writings of César Daly and Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc on the modern house. As in Zola's novels, however, the city is the ever-present backdrop, the great conscience against which Perret set his architectural "renaissance,"[3] and it allowed him to expand the individual work to near epic dimensions. Both the building on rue Franklin and later, from 1933, that on rue Raynouard in Passy — the two most architecturally ambitious projects carried out by Perret — make clear the force of this relationship for the architect: each offered a vast panorama of Paris and in each the top floor served as Perret's private residence, from which a series of terraces

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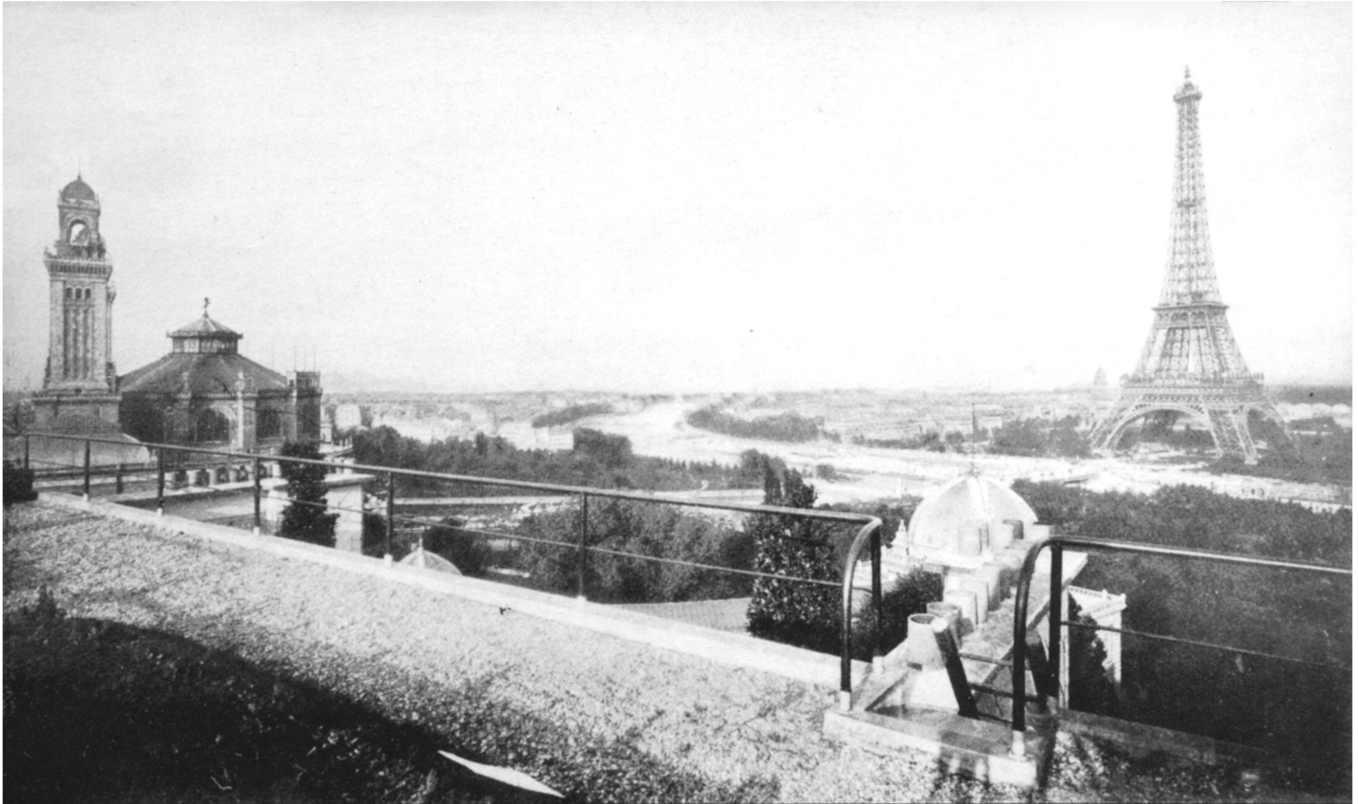

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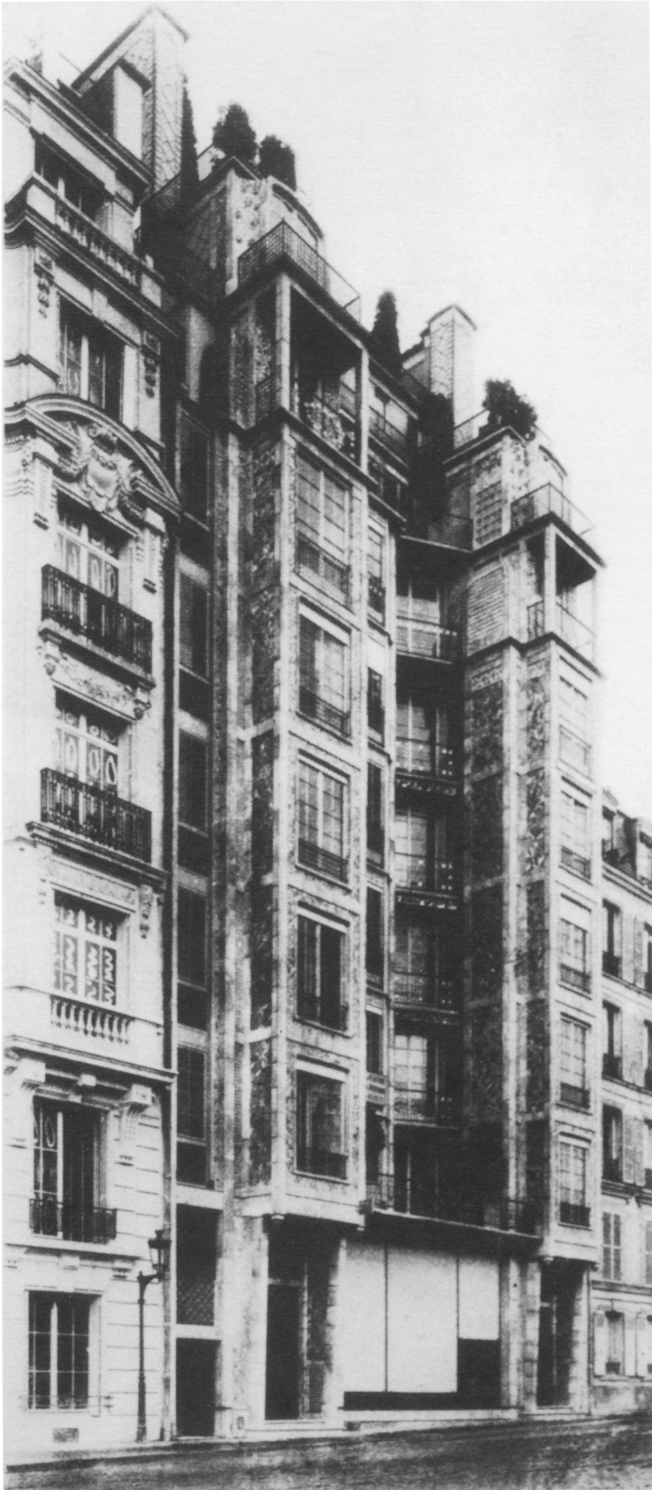

2. Auguste Perret, 25bis rue Franklin, 1904

3. Master plot plan of rue Franklin, present state

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formed a belvedere over the city. In addition, from 1905 onward, Perret proposed projects for a series of point-block towers to surround Paris, emphasizing the specific role of the suburb within his concept of urbanism as well as the crucial importance of the tower form — implicit in the rue Franklin project — as an urban type.[4]

Zola's Paris

The city of Paris holds a special place in the work of Zola. It forms the alluring, almost dangerous setting for most of his novels, particularly those of the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle. In this respect, *Une page d'amour*, the eighth novel of the cycle, is uncharacteristic, for its story unfolds at the *edge* of Paris.[5] As the city remains a distant spectacle, it acquires an independent and synthetic existence, becoming a character in its own right. For the middle-aged widow Hélène, the novel's protagonist, nestled in her apartment on rue Vineuse, Paris is "infinite and unknown. It was as if she were stationed at the edge of a world whose eternal spectacle was given to her without the possibility of penetrating it."[6] In *Une page d'amour*, for the first time, Zola took a distanced look at the city, savoring its fleeting energies. Hélène only descends into the depths of Paris when she finally succumbs to her passionate love for the doctor Henri and joins him at the foot of the hill of Passy. This passion that takes hold of Hélène's soul develops progressively over five distinct sections of the novel, each of which is coupled with a very lengthy description of the city as Hélène gazes at it through her window. Through such contemplation her well-ordered existence will be transformed and her growing passion for Henri will find its catharsis in the spectacle of a Paris transformed, under Zola's pen, into a giant organism, in turn, "a swelling ocean," "a colossal forge," "a ferocious monster."[7]

Such metaphors were not untypical at the end of the nineteenth century: Paris, it was thought, had developed a will of its own, "a furious river bearing an uprooted population."[8] Usually, this meant that the city had acquired an unfortunate, irredeemable autonomy. For Zola, by contrast, Paris was a contemplative mirror turned to the protagonist: in *Une page d'amour* it clarifies and distills Hélène's inner turmoil. If the formidable city remains indifferent to her fervent questioning, its spectacle is a constant meditative resource. In the final pages of the novel, following the fatal consumption of her passion, Hélène casts a last look over the city before she retires to the countryside.

> Hélène, for the last time, let her eyes range over the impassive city, which she would never know. She saw it lying there, tranquil and seemingly immortal in the snow, just as she had left it, just as she had seen it every day for three years. Paris was, for her, full of her past. It had been beside her when she had loved, and when Jeanne had died. But this companion of all her days still showed the same serenity on its giant face, untouched by pity, the silent witness of all the tears and laughter that seemed to flow past in the waters of the Seine. She had, at various times, thought of it as a ferocious monster or a kindly colossus. Today, she realized that she would never know it; it was too indifferent and too vast. It stretched out before her, it was life itself.[9]

Paris alone has borne witness to Hélène's burning love grown in solitude. But it could play its cathartic role only if kept at a far distance. Seen from the suburb as a unified entity, the city assumes a new intelligibility. It is "life itself," no longer blurred by the human bigotry or meanness that pervades the *Rougon-Macquart* chronicle; it is life in its greatest flux, a natural landscape set in motion by human energies. In the end, for Zola, it is precisely this ever-changing nature, these forces of self-renewal that confer stability and even immortality on the landscape of Paris: progress becomes the authoritative fact, the vital fluid running through the city as it runs through Hélène in the space of *Une page d'amour*.

In Zola's later novels, such as *Paris* (1898) or *Travail* (1901), these forces achieve their ultimate fulfillment.[10] Following naturally from the optimistic view of the city portrayed in *Une page d'amour*, Paris is now the locus of a utopian — socialist — transformation of society. Zola depicts the city as an immense repository of human activity that actualizes progress. In *Travail*, in particular, Paris becomes a new, second nature whose energies the prophet-like figure of Luc channels toward unprecedented harmony.

The portrait of modern life as the constantly changing spectacle of the city was not unique to Zola. By the turn

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of the century, Baudelaire's "man of the crowd" was perceived by many as embodying an inescapable modern predicament. The *boulevardier*, the *flâneur*, the urban wanderer, uprooted and alone in the crowd, was frequently evoked in writings on the city. Baudelaire conceived of the modern city as a series of fleeting images detached from every aspect of life, images that could never be unified. For Zola, as we have seen, the spectacle of the city helped to secure the individual's historical position: it encapsulated living human history and thus formed the ideal reality of modern life. When Baudelaire distanced himself from the city, it was a type of condemnation: the heroic realization of having irrevocably lost contact with our origins. In this sense, the Baudelairean city is unintelligible; it cannot become Zola's "organism." For Zola, the city had to be seen from afar precisely to interpret it and understand its language. Just as Hélène's soul is individual becoming, the city is universal becoming. Following Ernest Renan's faith in the liberating virtue of science, Zola the positivist established progress as a permanent "law" that paradigmatically manifested itself in the city. Work was the "father and the regulator of the world."[11] Before the nineteenth century, Zola believed, the energies at work in the city remained unconscious; science, however, might get to the "system of things": "A conscious humanity will appropriate the universe through science, action, dream."[12]

What gave Zola's wish-fantasy its specific resonance is that he never subsumed individuality under a Fourierist system of collective behavior; he never transformed the city into a phalanstery where the individual lost his own becoming. (In *Travail* it is an individual, Luc, that realizes the energies contained in the great city.) Zola believed that work must be combined with human passions, the one developed along with the other. A new world of production required a new world of passion. And where, in *Une page d'amour*, Hélène's passion intensifies along with the city's twirling energies, in *Travail*, the love affair becomes fused with the city's utopian destiny.

We may find a certain naïveté in Zola's dreamworld. In retrospect, the Baudelairean *flâneur* in his artificial paradise seems a more accurate depiction of modern life. But for many architects to accept Baudelaire's world meant to lose confidence in one's ability to shape significantly the built environment. Baudelaire considered architecture, of all the arts, to be most affected by the modern condition. Zola believed the opposite: architecture, the most social art, would bloom in the new *cité idéale*.[13] In more general terms, his positive approach to progress, his idealization of work and individual action, more effectively captured an architectural audience — particularly at the approach of a new century when, with the mounting tide of the socialist alliance in France, optimism was high.

Fifteen years before the publication of *Une page d'amour*, César Daly had proposed a systematic evolution of architectural styles, "a philosophical interpretation of the past,"[14] in which, prefiguring Zola's project, he envisioned "architectural laws" of progress. Around the same time, from 1854 to 1868, Viollet-le-Duc laid down his great framework of the evolution of architectural history, the *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle*, in which he called for an architecture deduced from an in-depth understanding of the origin of French society in the Middle Ages. His *Entretiens sur l'architecture* of 1863–72 went further: from the dawn of antiquity, he traced the evolutionary process of the Western tradition up to nineteenth-century France, which he bequeathed the great *mission civilisatrice*. But Viollet-le-Duc only peripherally addressed the problem of the city. For Daly, it became a central issue. In his early career, Daly had worked with Victor Considérant, developing new urban projects based on the progressivist approach proposed by Charles Fourier. Though he later abandoned his utopian pursuit, Daly sustained a confidence in progress throughout his life; however, for him, progress was not simply "mechanical," it required the impetus of individuals:

> Without denying the action of unconscious progress, it is nonetheless conscious progress that is the principal instrument of human progress, the creative force of civilization and historical styles of architecture.[15]

Daly held that by interpreting Paris's historical fabric one could define these acts of will that would shape and unify the modern city. Paris, according to this model, was a sort of encyclopedia to be read and deciphered. As urban contemplation, enabled by the promenades, produced a series

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4. César Daly, *parallèle* of suburban villas of the second order. From *L'Architecture privée au XIXme siècle sous Napoléon III*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1872).

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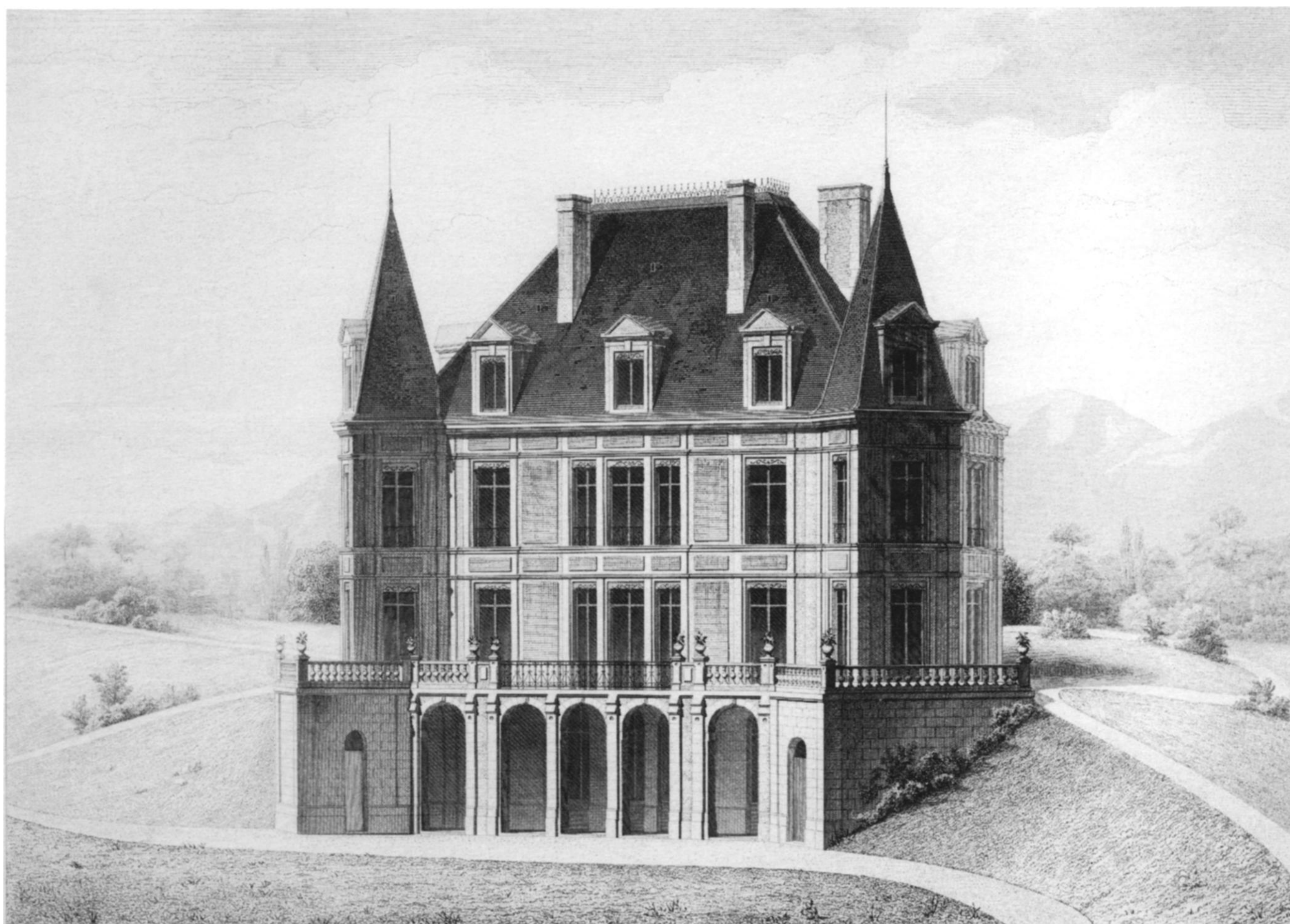

5. Daly, perspective view of a suburban villa by E. Petit. From *L'Architecture privée*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1864).

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of images of human history, the city became a reification of historical progress, a landscape that held the key to the riddle of humanity. At the same time, as in *Une page d'amour*, the "suburb" became the place of reflection. The suburban villa, Daly wrote in *L'Architecture privée* of 1864, served "to mark the genius and the character of modern civilization, like the temple of Egypt or that of Greece."[16] Planted in the suburb, the villa most clearly embodied the modern principle of "comfort in liberty, the city in the country."[17] Within the villa, the individual could fully blossom, "satisfied by the salutary and hygienic action of vegetation upon the health of the body and the 'elasticity' of the mind."[18] Daly's villa became a sort of sanctum in which the family ritual was enacted and in which the private garden acquired therapeutic, even moralizing, virtues. The suburb itself was formed by the aggregation of these closed worlds. Daly even advocated abandoning the belvedere, a usual characteristic of the classical villa:[19] entirely inward-looking, focused on its own carefully crafted environment, the villa took on the attributes of a theater, creating an illusionary construct that a wider prospect might dispel. Daly perceived "the forest of chimneys that our great cities, viewed from a distance, offer as spectacle"[20] as a violence done to the subtle space of individuality preserved within the villa's walls. Yet the tableau presented in the garden of the villa was, in fact, a complement to the urban tableaux along the promenades. For Daly, the villa was ultimately a fragment of the city, but leveled of its contradictions and idealized to suit the particular wish of its owner.

The Villa in the Sky

Hélène gazed, first, at the wide spaces that lay beneath her windows, at the slopes of the Trocadéro and the long curve of the embankment. She had to lean forward to catch a glimpse of the bare square of the Champ-de-Mars, shut in at the far end by the dark block of the Ecole Militaire. Down below, on the vast square and on the pavements on both sides of the Seine, she could make out pedestrians as a moving crowd of black specks, swarming like ants; the yellow body of an omnibus glittered; lorries and cabs crossed the bridge, no bigger than a child's toys, with delicate little clockwork horses; and along the grassy banks, amidst the strollers, some servant-girl's white apron was a white spot against the green. . . . Hélène looked still farther; yonder, the broad stream divided amidst a jumble of houses, the bridges on either side of the Cité became threads stretched from one bank to the other; and the towers of Notre-Dame, all golden, rose up like boundary stones on the skyline, beyond which the river, the buildings, the clumps of trees were a mere hazy shimmer of sunlight. Then she turned her dazzled eyes from that triumphal hearth of Paris, where the whole glory of the city seemed ablaze. On the right bank, amongst the trees of the Champs-Elysées, the great glass windows of the Palais de l'industrie shone white as snow; farther off, behind the flattened roof of the Madeleine, like a tombstone, rose the huge mass of the Opéra; and then there were other buildings, cupolas and towers, the Colonne Vendome, Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, the Tour Saint-Jacques, and nearer than these the heavy square blocks of the new Louvre and the Tuileries, half-buried in a forest of chestnut trees. On the left bank the gilt dome of the Invalides glittered; beyond it the two uneven towers of Saint-Sulpice were pallid in the sunlight; and still farther back, to the right of the new, slender spires of Sainte-Clotilde, the blue-grey Panthéon, squarely perched on an eminence, overlooked the town, its delicate colonnade rising sheer into the sky, its dome gleaming motionless in the air with the sheen of a captive balloon.[21]

Perret sited his building on rue Franklin at the inner edge of the suburb of Passy at the point from which Hélène had gazed at "the great sea" of Paris. From the apartments of 25bis, the view of the Trocadéro gardens and the city beyond is sweeping and uninterrupted. Paris is presented as a "magical panorama,"[22] "a vast expanse, restful to the eyes."[23] All major rooms provide access to this vista since Perret grouped them around the street side, eliminating the usual internal courtyard. Their particular U-shaped configuration further dramatizes the view outward: from the entrance *galerie*, the five rooms can be apprehended all at once, establishing a "panorama" of the apartment as well as of the city. As Henri Bresler has noted, this configuration confers a "theatricality" on the apartment, a "staging" of space that opens onto the infinite perspective of the distant city.[24] Stepping into the apartment, one enters a "magic box" where the city of constraining boundaries, the city of the sidewalk, has vanished and a new landscape is held captive before one's eyes.[25]

Perret's inversion of the traditional inner courtyard to the front secures the individual identity of the dwelling. This is clear in the spatial experience of the interior: front and

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6. Three views of the interior of the sixth-floor apartment, 25bis rue Franklin

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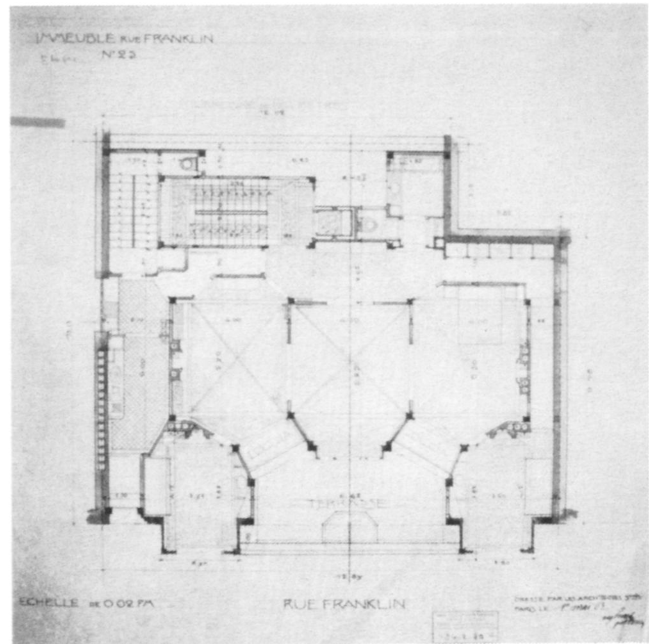
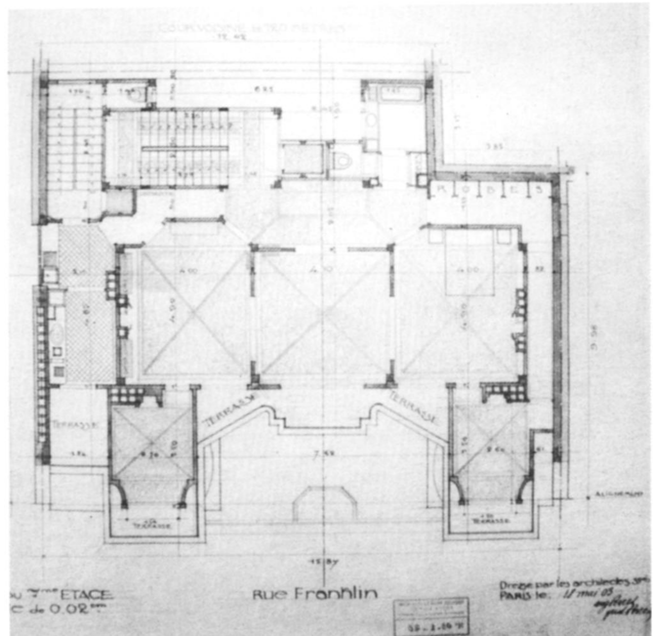
back rooms are no longer separated; the apartment, disdaining its immediate neighbors, forms a unified sequence of spaces converging on the spectacle of Paris. This bracketing-off gives to the apartments of 25bis a kind of liberty previously thought possible only in the suburban villa. Perret has integrated the model habitat of the villa into the modern type of the apartment block. The apartments of 25bis are, in essence, a series of villas stacked one on top of the other. The fusion of the two typologies extends to the very morphology of the building. The structure as a whole appears independent of the city alignment: the front recess, the contrasting projection of the side bays, and the continuous glazing of the kitchen windows strongly demarcate 25bis from the adjoining buildings. Its resemblance to a small, freestanding tower further emphasizes its autonomy.

Perret's apartment plan itself takes the configuration of a villa. James Ackerman has identified two contrasting types of the villa established in Roman times: "the condensed cubic and the open-extended."[26] The former, when facing a view, "tended to acquire a loggia along its façade, . . . typically framed between two projecting blocks or towers."[27] Many Renaissance villas followed this model — the Belvedere of Innocent VIII at the Vatican, the Farnesina in Rome, or some of Palladio's villas, for example. The villas illustrated in Daly's *L'Architecture privée* were likewise typically U-shaped, the recess created by the side wings used as an open-air porch. The building on rue Franklin reveals an analogous plan: the central recess delimited by the two side towers frees space for a generous terrace. Though Perret could provide this terrace only for the apartments on the first, seventh, and ninth floors, he, significantly, labeled the balconies on all floors as "loggias."[28] But the typical plan of 25bis borrows as well from the "open-extended" model of the villa. If Perret's building is "condensed" between its two party walls, with its side wings framing a series of loggias, it also strains to liberate itself from such confinement. Given more space, one senses that the rooms of the apartment would have extended openly in all directions. Perret's obvious appropriation of Viollet-le-Duc's plan for an urban residence published in the *Entretiens* suggests that the more "organic," open-extended villa type was even more suited to his thinking.



7. Plan of typical apartment, 25bis rue Franklin, 1 May 1903



8. Plan of seventh-floor apartment, 18 May 1903

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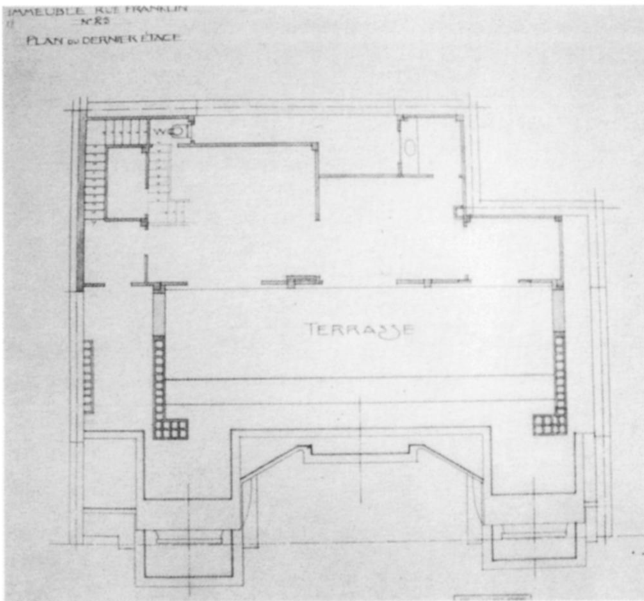
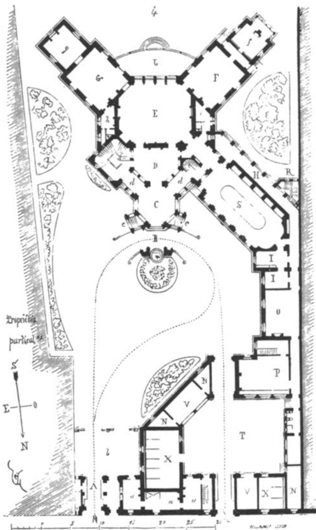


9. Plan of ninth-floor penthouse, 25 September 1903



10. Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, plan of ground floor of an urban residence. From *Entretiens sur l'architecture* (Paris, 1872).

The slight asymmetry of the apartment plan at rue Franklin confirms its organicity. And the large expanse of glass that furnishes the panoramic view of Paris sustains the "open villa" metaphor. Each sun-drenched apartment becomes, as a critic noted in 1905, "the house of a serene and superior simplicity," "so restful to the eyes as to calm our inner fever or our fatigue."[29] Like Daly's villa, 25bis exemplifies the "rejuvenating powers of modern art"; it, too, provides "sun, health, and happiness."[30] Perret reemphasized the salutary character of his new housing type in a proposal of 1905 to "surround Paris with a belt of twenty-story towers" intended to attract the "motorist": the first tower to be built, Perret reported, would be a "sportsman's hotel." Later, in 1922, Perret asserted that life "in the third dimension" transforms itself in the "most positive fashion." His project for fifty-story apartment towers was a sort of "phalanstery, but entirely conceived to safeguard individual freedom . . . by the 'Taylorization' and 'mechanization' of all the mundane necessities of housing."[31] "The house in the *azure*"[32] "is free from dust, perfectly ventilated and absolutely silent."[33] The modern villa, for Perret, could only exist high above ground, in an ideal plane of pure air, silence, and spectacle.

At rue Franklin, this privileging of height is revealed as the upper apartments gradually gain an independence not entirely explained by the legal setback requirements. Ascending through the building, one discovers a progressive widening of windows at the side bays from the first to the fifth floor, loggia openings on the sixth, an expansive terrace on the seventh, decorated with a tile in imitation of grapevine-covered trellises, and a penthouse on the ninth, its tri-level terraces covered with natural greenery and flowers. The higher the apartment, the more it resembles a villa. Perret's ninth-floor penthouse, freed on all sides, is the dream realized.

25bis rue Franklin proposed a metamorphosis of the traditional "barrackslike apartment dwelling"[34] into an ensemble where the latitude necessary for individual fulfillment unites with the requirements of communal living. Perret, at 25bis, fused the two key types of modern housing: the *maison à loyer*, or apartment block, product of a capitalist economy, and the villa, product of an individualistic soci-

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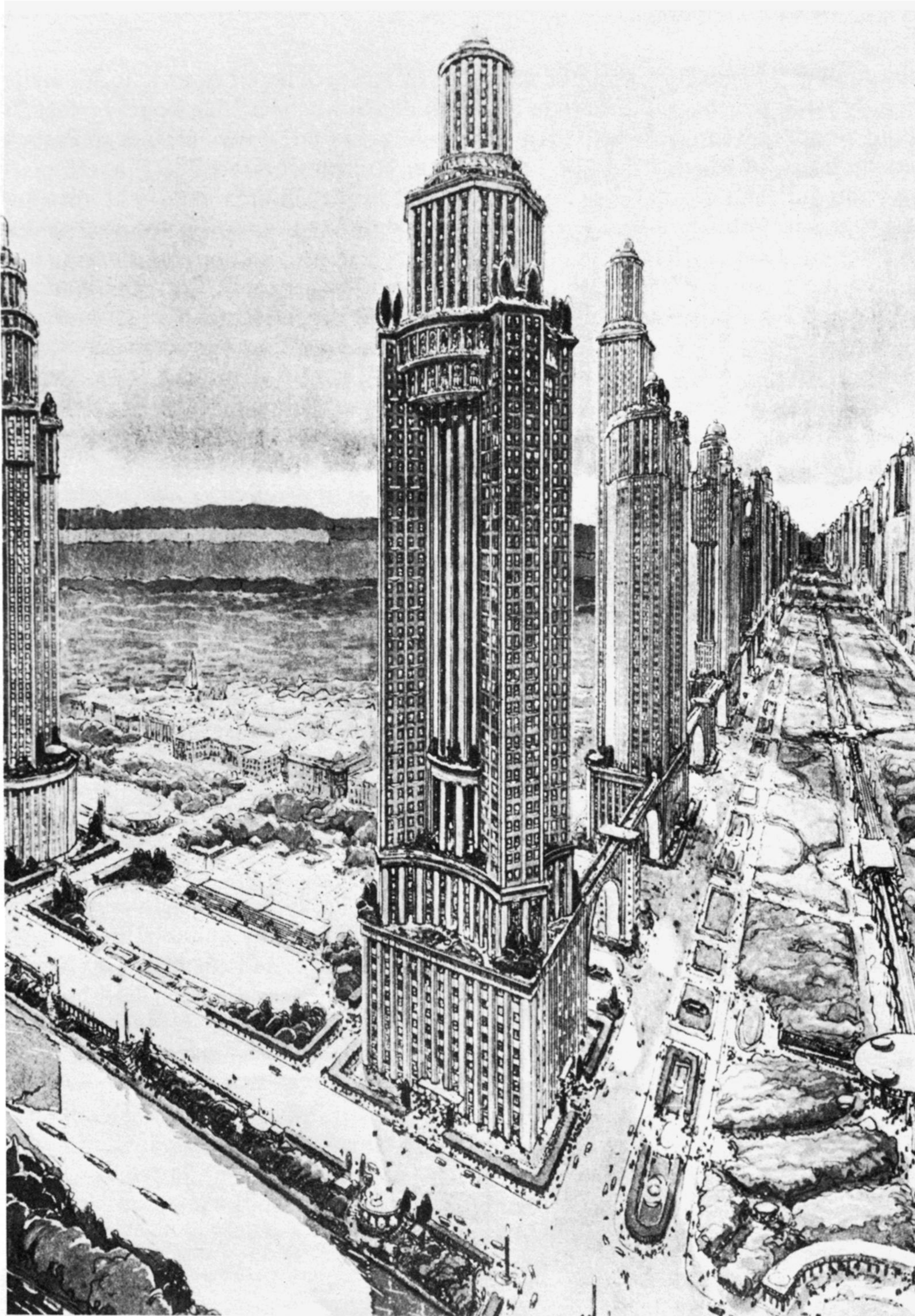

11. Jacques Lambert, *L'Avenue des maisons-tours*, drawn from sketches by Auguste Perret, 1922

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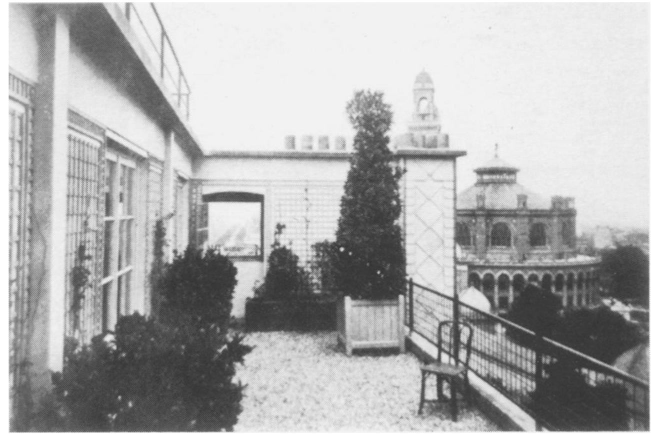
ety. He thereby captured within his new urban type the essence of Zola's *cité idéale* as described in *Travail*: individuality rallied to collective work and combined for the common good. Perret's suburb is not Daly's closed environment that maintains the illusion of a possible separation between work and home. Daly's suburb, an aggregation of fragile, picturesque preserves, turned its back on the world of labor and formed a barrier to the normal growth of the metropolis. Perret glorified work. The mechanization of services in his new tower-dwelling, by economizing time and energies, was but one facet of this idealization. Like Zola, Perret established the primacy of work by making the city the new landscape. In his elevated villas, the spectacle of the city was to serve, as it did for Hélène, as a catalyst for meditation on collective becoming. That Perret confined his urban projects to the suburb is significant: His suburb existed in an open, vital relationship to the city that it surrounded; the city formed an organic entity whose original core could be disregarded only at the risk of a loss of meaning and intelligibility. If his proposals propounded a definite break with the morphology of the existing city, they nonetheless connected with it through the major axes of growth, such as that defined by the Avenue de Neuilly and the Avenue des Champs-Elysées.[35] A ring of green spaces would further mediate between the old and the new. The "evolutionary" radiating ring of growth would ultimately secure coherence. Haussmann had replaced the old fortification lines of Paris with his wide boulevards; Perret's proposal modernized the suburb to suit the new conditions.



12. View of ninth-floor terrace, 25bis rue Franklin, 1904

Cathedrals of Modern Life

Auguste Perret aimed higher than the creation of just another stage in the course of urban evolution. It is telling that an article from 1922 on his urban project of that year was titled "Les Cathédrales de la cité moderne." The metaphor of the cathedral was then commonly used in reference to skyscrapers; for instance, the Woolworth Building illustrated in the same article was often called the "Cathedral of Commerce." For Perret, however, the analogy between the cathedral and the reinforced-concrete tower went beyond a morphological comparison or convenient

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13. View from seventh-floor terrace

metaphor. Perret stated directly that "the house thus conceived is, no more no less, the *risorgimento* of all architecture."[36] Daly had previously proposed that, programmatically, the house was the modern monument par excellence; for, more than any other building type, it embodied society's modern ideals of freedom and individuality. But Perret's tower on rue Franklin aimed at a connection with the monuments of the past, at once more literal and more general.

Perret considered the view of the city offered by 25bis rue Franklin as nothing less than the whole of architectural history summarized in a series of towering monuments. The Eiffel Tower, absent from Zola's magnificent description in *Une page d'amour*, dominated the foreground of Perret's panorama, emphatically marking the Champ-de-Mars and the site of the international exhibitions of 1878 and 1889 — which Perret held to be the major events of nineteenth-century architecture.[37] The Champ-de-Mars, among all the sites in the capital, unequivocally represented the modern world. And the building on rue Franklin stood on the westward axis of the modern city's growth from the Champ-de-Mars, confronting the principal monuments of French medieval and classical architectural history. As the gleaming spectacle of Paris encapsulated human and architectural history, so Perret had to invest his building with the powers displayed before it. Paris was, in Zola's words, "life itself"; for Perret, a "living" architecture had to embody the complex flow of energies and memories at work there. The "modern cathedral" was to recover the ancestral tradition through the rejuvenating powers of modern industry.

Perret thought that the true building tradition of France had been lost:

> At the origin, there is no architecture but that of the wooden frame. To avoid fire, buildings are then built of stone. But the prestige of wood construction is such that the new structures reproduce all of the characteristics and details of the wood frame. From this moment on, the so-called classical architecture is no longer anything more than a decor.[38]

He believed that the architecture of medieval France alone had escaped this predicament. During the Renaissance of the fifteenth century, architecture had relapsed into the former tainted style. Even the greatest monuments of French classicism, such as Perrault's east façade of the Louvre or Gabriel's Hôtel de la Marine on the Place de la Concorde, illogically imitated wood construction. Perret may have secretly admired these buildings; his mature work bears flagrant kinship to seventeenth-century French classicism. In 1903, however, he carefully avoided references of too obvious a classicist nature. His "modern" renaissance was to be developed first from an act attuned to the new modes of industrial construction exploited in the Eiffel Tower.

Perret was always keen to state that the roof terrace of 25bis was "slightly higher than the first platform on the Eiffel Tower."[39] And the balcony railings at every window and terrace were fashioned from standard industrial parts identical to the railings used around the viewing platforms of the tower. But 25bis emulated the Eiffel Tower in other ways. The reinforced-concrete frame of Perret's building was a "monumentalized" version of Eiffel's steel frame: steel encased in "new-born stone."[40] The frame, though still an industrial product, could be very subtly crafted by a careful choice of component parts. The filiation of 25bis with the Eiffel Tower was, then, essentially that of industry; but by itself, industry failed to enter into a true dialogue with architectural history. Perret thus sought to discover within industry an expressive and symbolic dimension that tradition alone could provide, to produce in the new work traces of its antecedents.

The building on rue Franklin bears a quite specific and wholly unconcealed relation to the medieval urban half-timber house. The parallel is obvious in the undisguised skeleton frame, the ground-floor platform bracketed to receive the more delicate structural framework of the upper floors, and the cantilever over the entrance doorways. The bosses at the entrance clearly attest to Perret's use of a Gothic source. Viollet-le-Duc had earlier proposed the revival of this medieval type in his urban house project published in the volume of plates attached to the *Entretiens*. Perret was less literal than Viollet in his application of the type. For example, at 25bis he did not retain the diagonal framing that was a key feature of the original medieval house; only at the two entrances did he subtly

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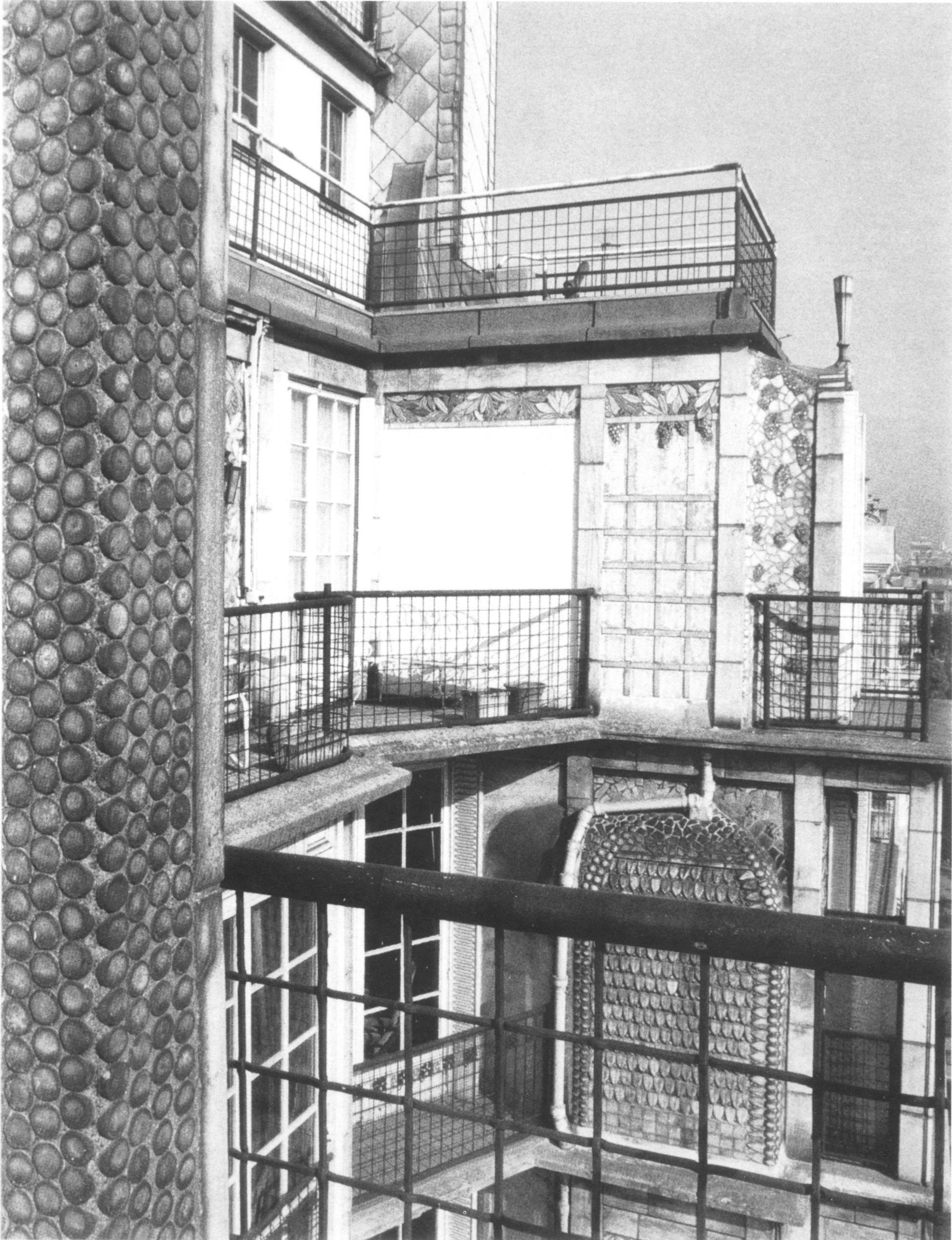

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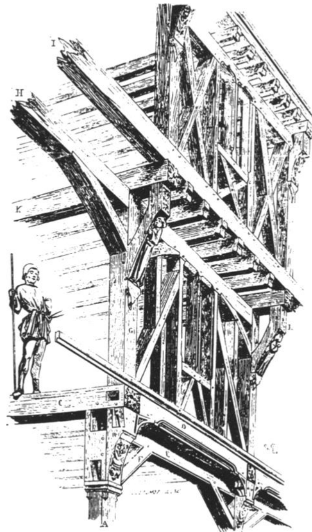
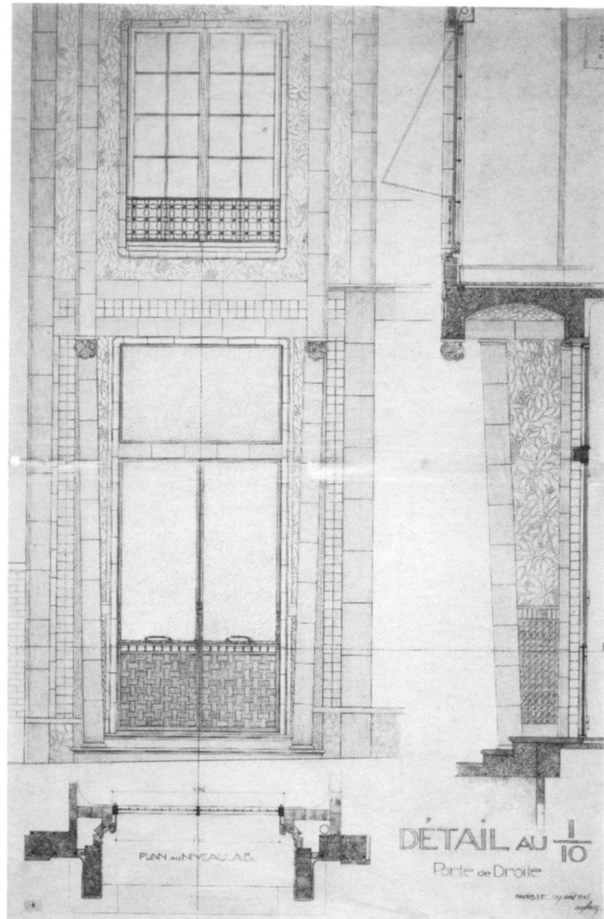
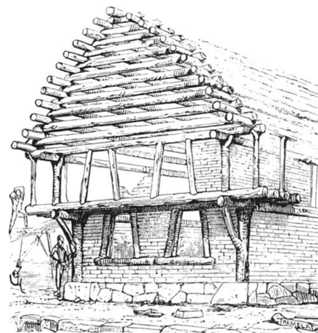


14. Medieval half-timber house illustrated in Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française de XIe au XVIe siècle* (Paris, 1868).



16. Detail elevation and section of the left entrance, 25bis rue Franklin. Note that Perret labels the drawing as the "right" entrance.

15. Viollet-le-Duc, project for an urban residence. From *Entretiens sur l'architecture*.



17. Aryan dwelling illustrated in Viollet-le-Duc, *Histoire de l'habitation humaine depuis les temps préhistoriques jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris, 1875).

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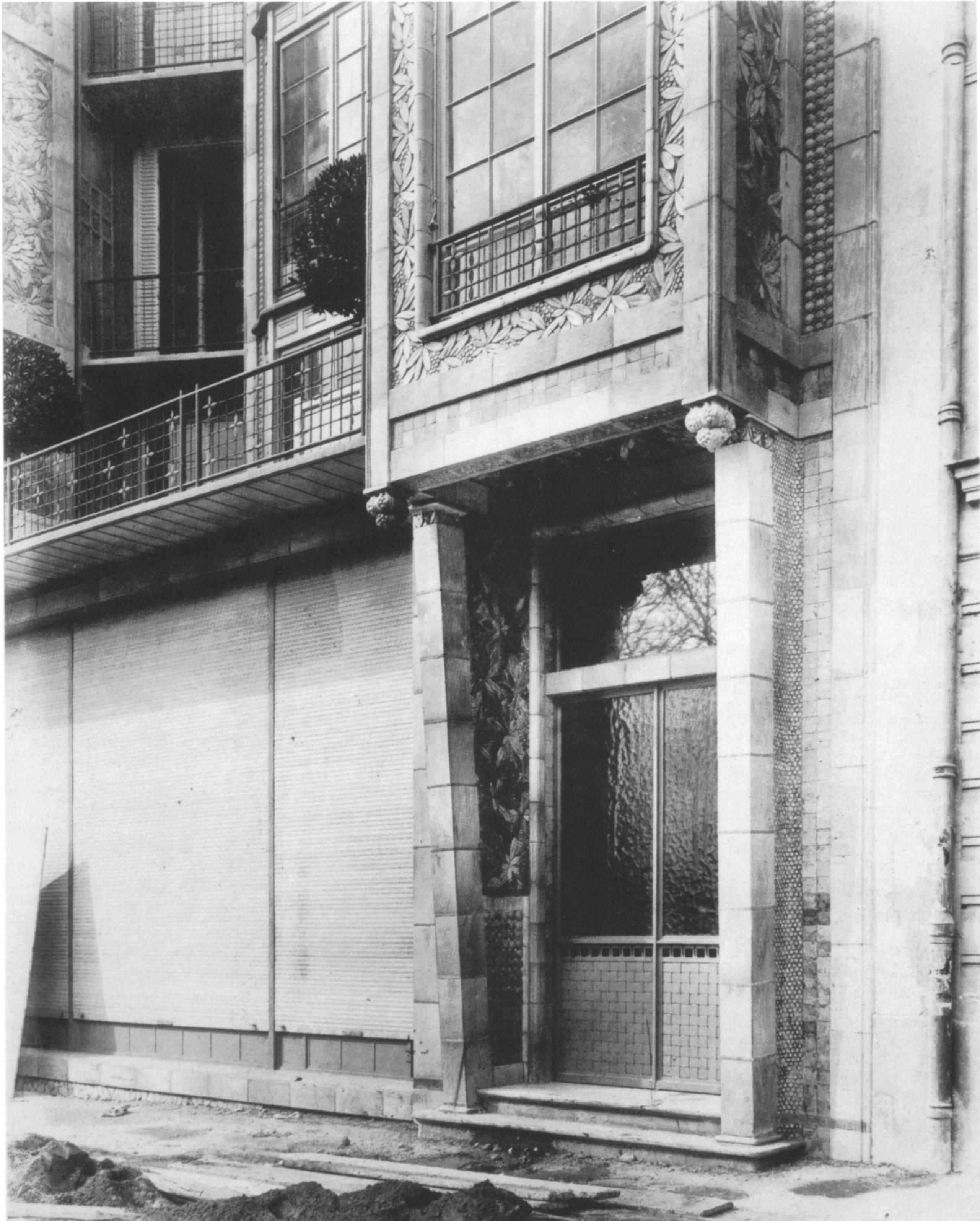

18. View of the left entrance, ca. 1904

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19. Detail of ceramic tile cladding, façade of 25bis rue Franklin

recall the diagonal through the inclination of the side walls. Viollet-le-Duc, in his *Histoire de l'habitation humaine* of 1875, had suggested, moreover, that the type of structural organization used for the medieval half-timber house had originated in the most primitive housing form of the Aryan race, well before the introduction to the Western world of the classical or the Gothic.[41] Similarly, the medieval source of 25bis rue Franklin was layered with a series of associations with classicism and primitivism that blurred its univocal character. Perret "classicized" the medieval house through ordered discipline. The exterior articulation of 25bis follows a specific proportional system: all structural bays at the front (those parallel to the street) are in a four to three proportion that is carried along the entire central block from the first floor to the top of the sixth.[42] The disengaged structural frame at the sixth-floor side bays assumes a simplicity akin to Grecian tectonics while recalling, as already stated, the loggia form characteristic of the classical villa. The strong regularity of the main building block suggests an autonomy more closely related to the classical Parisian *hôtel* than to the medieval urban house. Thus Perret has created a new synthesis that dissolves the notion of style. The radical character of his building in the context of *fin-de-siècle* Paris confirms Perret's desire to displace the known stylistic categories. His effort recalls the eighteenth-century Graeco-Gothic ideal of a synthetic, "international" architecture.[43] Perret, however, reversed the process: no longer the classical temple infused with Gothic lightness and delicacy, but a vernacular medieval building type classically ordered.

Perret understood that it was the reinforced-concrete frame — born out of the forces of modern industry — that assured the true coalescence of classicism and the Gothic, that manifested simultaneously the principles at the core of each of these great Western traditions. The lithic and "fibrous" characteristics of reinforced concrete together made it an ideal "classical" material.[44] Like wood, it could span proportionally large distances and, like stone, it had an inherent monumentality. In uniting the structural properties of wood and the sculptural qualities of stone, it resolved classicism's enduring problem — that of a stone structure imitating a wooden constructive system. At the same time, the combination of monolithic and fibrous characteristics gave reinforced concrete the elasticity required by Gothic construction. Its resistance to diagonal loading thus made it an ideal "Gothic" material.

Industry and Nature

And so, at 25bis rue Franklin, the whole production of the past (expressed in the duality of Gothic and classical) could be traced in the form of the building and its means of construction. Memories, below the threshold of conscious awareness, invested the present with the aura and significance of the past, but were never allowed to displace the perception of the new work.[45] Such diaphanous containment of history gave to industry a greater attention. Indeed, the clearest characterization of Perret's building in the context of its original production was its undisguised industrial aesthetic. The severe orthogonality of its articulation and the sheer ruggedness of its detailing (particularly the cornices and railings) are in radical contrast with the historicist or art nouveau buildings erected at the turn of the century. The window railings — traditionally an element of great ornamental virtuosity — are formed by a simple wire-mesh grid set within a frame of standard industrial pipe. The structural frame of reinforced concrete is monolithic: specific proportions cannot be read for individual vertical or horizontal members as they are caught in the continuous web of the structural "cage." Like a tree, 25bis grows without interruption. The "raw" industrial features confer on the architecture a modernity that evokes a poetry of the primeval. The original model of the medieval half-timber house is subsumed under the natural metaphor: Perret attempted both to represent a certain vision of the authentic French tradition and to surpass that tradition toward a totalizing of the enterprise of architecture.[46] The forces of industry display primordial human energies untainted by convention.

Perret's straightforward industrialism was courageous in light of the glamours of the Belle Epoque. His architecture, however, possessed a lyricism of its own. Like Zola, he elevated the celebration of work to the level of an ode to nature. As already noted, Zola often transmuted the spectacle of Paris into a hymn to the vital forces of nature: in the novel *Paris*, the city becomes "one vast field without

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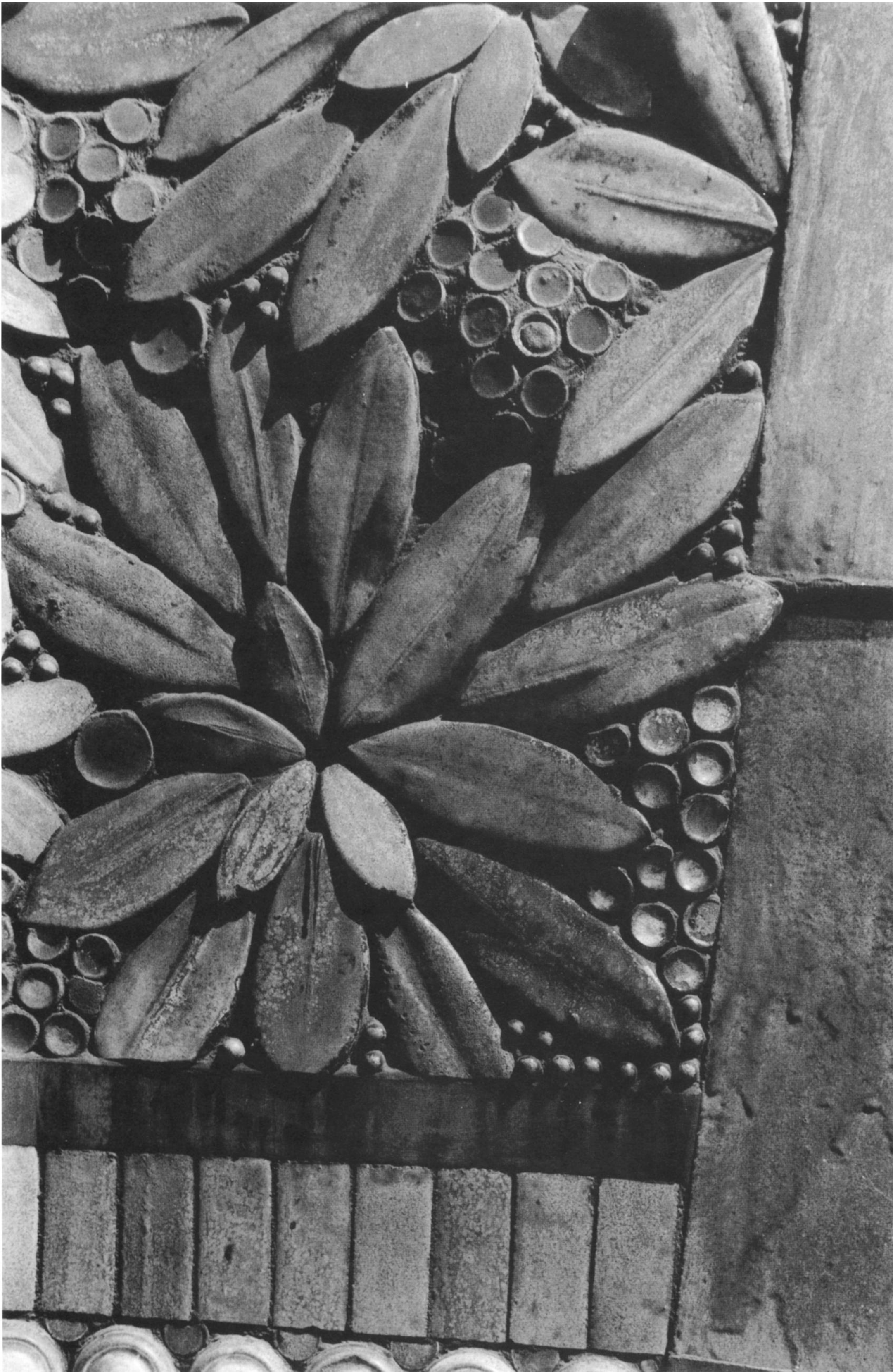

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boundary, all equally fertile. Wheat, wheat everywhere, wheat to infinity [*du blé, du blé partout, un infini de blé*]."[47] The same association of the forces of industry with those of nature prevails at rue Franklin: as one draws nearer to the building, the severe orthogonality of its articulation is progressively softened by the organicity of its tile cladding. The cladding on the exterior face of the infill comprises three or four types of tiles produced by the ceramist Bigot. These were laid on fresh cement by *limousinants*, masons of the least skilled category, who followed very minimal guidelines by the architect.[48] The leaf-shaped motif of the infill and the barklike texture of the tiles that clad the structural members function as a supplement to Perret's industrialism; they offer a natural model by which to understand his tectonics: the skeleton is the trunk and the infill the leaves of Perret's "industrial" tree. The structural organization of the building as a whole — a ground structure of widely spaced piers above which ramifies a more slender framework cantilevered off the ground-floor platform — also resembles that of the tree (a comparison that Viollet-le-Duc had already made in his *Histoire de l'habitation humaine*).[49] At rue Franklin, the analogy provided a basic justification for uniting history and industry under the rubric of the "organic." In fact, the organic pervaded other aspects of 25bis. As seen previously, Perret's apartment plan enriched the symmetrical villa type with a new organicity inspired by Viollet-le-Duc's plan for an urban residence published in the *Entretiens*. The prismatic, cellular rooms seem to grow out of the core. They radiate, in an almost Wrightian manner, from the "principal organ"[50] — the *salon* — disregarding the surrounding party walls where all service spaces are relegated. The autonomy of Perret's tower form thus finds theoretical affirmation in an organicism which demands that a building be developed outward.

Perret resolves the potential contradiction between the containment of tradition and the "modern" forces of industry by conflating the two in a global, "organic" reading of progress. History and industry derive from the same source: human becoming represented in the spectacle of the city. It is no accident, then, that the side bays of 25bis rue Franklin, in their strongly accentuated verticality, correspond to the twin towers of the Gothic cathedrals: as they confront Paris, they establish a secret link with Notre-Dame, the "triumphal hearth of the city."[51] Perret saw a certain congruence between the tower of Eiffel and the towers of the cathedral of Notre-Dame. Taken individually, the two monuments lack a viable presence: Notre-Dame because of its remoteness, Eiffel's tower because of its lost contact with architecture's origin. United in the larger field of the city, however, they acquire sudden meaning. Put in "place," they take on the inevitability of natural phenomena.

For Perret, both history and industry share a metaphoric connection with nature: history is the "growth" process that brought about a flowering in the form of industry. It is not surprising to see the presence of history recede at 25bis, making more visible the dialogue between nature and industry. History is a path left behind, giving way to an unmediated accord between the world of nature and the world of work. The primitivism of Perret's industrial aesthetic suggests an unspoken tie between technology and nature, between machines and living organisms. Like Zola's throbbing city — an entity alternately machinelike and organic — Perret's industrial "tree" possesses the autonomy of a living being. The tower form used in Perret's various urban proposals symbolizes this vitality: its unprecedented height, pushing ever skyward, glorifies the energies of modern industry. In this respect, too, the site of 25bis, already noted, was significant: at the boundary between city and country, on the axis of symmetry between the forces of nature and those of man. In contrast to the unresolved tension between industry and nature still visible in art nouveau's mimicking of natural form, Perret's architecture proposed that modern man's new autonomous world was intrinsically natural.

Perret believed, moreover, that man and nature, following a parallel and mirrored course, could overcome the dialectic of alienation. The staging of love in *Une page d'amour* and *Travail* gave the metaphor for this reconciliation: Hélène's love for the urbane and courteous Henri ends in the death of her child Jeanne and leads to her retreat to the countryside. In *Travail*, however, Luc's love is victorious and all the city's children become "*ses chers enfants*."[52] Each day in Zola's enlightened city brings a new blessing:

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"The dream of lighting . . . a new sun . . . will soon be realized. . . . Henceforth there is no winter, as there will be no longer any nights."[53] Through love — the leveling of difference — man becomes the *"roi du travail."*[54]

At these moments of demiurgic exclamation, the contradictions of an organic utopia of work come to the fore. Both Zola and Perret evoked as a model a nature that never existed, a pastoral ideal created in reaction to the turpitude of the nineteenth-century metropolis. Their figure of industry and nature is an image of control and order whose implementation would have meant rupture and discontinuity rather than growth and expansion. More fundamentally, their "naturalism" elicits a vision of the eternal and the stable to legitimate a practice (technology) that makes the world a "standing reserve" to be shaped at will, a world precisely without an immutable nature.

Perret, again like Zola, tried to invest the organic city with a kind of divinity. But this juxtaposition of the "real" world (the city) with an idyllic vision (nature) can be effected solely at the level of spectacle. In *Travail*, as in *Une page d'amour*, the protagonists must climb to the heights of the city to contemplate "the great human family."[55] At 25bis rue Franklin, city and country truly meet only at the ninth-floor penthouse, only there does one find the distance required for the totalizing vision. Indeed, the reconciliation of the world and the self dreamed up by Perret and Zola will take place in the realm of the *image*. Imagine Auguste and Gustave Perret on the flowered-covered roof terrace of their "villa in the sky," observing, toward the countryside, the green clumps of trees shimmering in sunlight, or, toward the city, the serene movements of the discharging cranes along the embankments of the Seine. These tableaux are united in one panorama equally at hand. They are available, however, only through a privatization of experience. The long-distance view is detached from its object. As in the description of Paris in *Une page d'amour* or the ideal factory in *Travail*,[56] all noise and dust have disappeared: the processes of industry offer up the picture of an elegant and effortless dance. And the image of the world, distilled through spectacle, is at the viewer's free disposal.

A final thought: In pushing to the point of contradiction the organic metaphor intrinsic to nineteenth-century historicism, Perret's building can, perhaps, generate an ambiguity that is fruitful. At rue Franklin, the dialogue between industry and nature, spectacle and collectivity is so acutely polarized that it creates a breach, opening the way for a more radical avant-garde. The fascination of 25bis stems from its delicate but nervous presence within the rue Franklin alignment; it simultaneously engages the existing city fabric and disengages from it. A similar ambiguity exists at the level of the building typology: the subjective space of the villa is, in some sense, opposed to its collectivization in the tower form. Here it prefigures Le Corbusier's *immeuble-villa* of the 1920s. The typology of 25bis uncovers and, consequently, takes on the modern space of intersubjectivity. But Perret's urban plan, unlike Le Corbusier's, optimistically proposes an evolutionary growth of the city that leaves the original core intact. Perret's radicalism, embedded between the world of tradition (conveyed by the spectacle of the city) and the world of nature, wants to seal the legitimacy of the modern age. Perret, in the serene space of the apartments at 25bis rue Franklin, seeks to overcome *angst* not by abandoning commitments to modernity but by clarifying the nature of these commitments. The ambiguity that the building generates ultimately calls into question the assumptions behind nineteenth-century positivism.

Notes

This article stems from work originally carried out as a master's thesis at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1984. I wish to thank Stanford Anderson for his generous comments and editorial assistance as well as Joe Siry for first pointing out the theme of the villa that underlies the conception of 25bis rue Franklin.

1. Edmond Uhry, "Une maison à Paris," *L'Art décoratif* 6, no. 2 (1904): 56.

2. Zola himself wrote that the house in *Une page d'amour* "could only have been sited on *rue Vineuse* or *rue Franklin*"; quoted by Henri Mitterand in "Une page d'amour: Notice," in Emile Zola, *Une page d'amour*, vol. 2 of *Les Rougon-Macquart* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 1613. On rue Franklin only the buildings at street numbers 23, 25, or 27 could offer an uninterrupted view of the city.

3. Perret's aiming toward a "renewal" of architecture is often explicit in his writings. In his article "Les Cathédrales de la cité moderne," *L'Illustration* 4145 (August 1922): 135, Jean Labadié quotes Perret as saying that his new rein-

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forced-concrete apartment tower (a project illustrated in the same article) forms the "*risorgimento* (renaissance) of architecture as a whole."

4. See P. de L., "Une maison de dix étages," *La Patrie* (21 June 1905), no pagination; Labadié, "Les Cathédrales de la cité moderne"; and idem, "À la recherche du home scientifique," *La Science et la vie* 102 (December 1925): 546–56.

5. Zola wrote that *Une page d'amour* is "an opposition, a pause of tenderness and sweetness" in the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle, particularly as it stands between two of the more scandalous novels, *L'Assommoir* and *Nana* (quoted by Mitterand, "Une page d'amour," 1607). Traditionally, *Une page d'amour* has been considered a somewhat insipid interlude within the cycle; however, some scholars have read the novel more favorably. Alfred Proulx, in *Aspects épiques des Rougon-Macquart de Zola* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), notes that *Une page d'amour* is a psychological analysis that substitutes itself for Zola's usual sociological inquiries. For Proulx, the strong presence of Paris "diminishes the strength of emotional attachment"; Paris effects a generalization of Hélène's story, providing "a distancing between the reader and his emotions" (pp. 76–77). Roger Ripoll, in *Réalité et mythe chez Zola* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1981), emphasizes the tragic character of the novel, which, "in the background of the main action, sets sites and objects that make manifest the great fatal and beneficial powers at play" (p. 608). As Zola wrote, "Paris, with its ocean of roofs, is like the antique chorus in Greek tragedies" (p. 606). Ripoll notes the classic form of the novel, with its five distinct sections, themselves divided into five chapters, each concluded by a description of the city of Paris. For him, the novel acquires a mythological dimension: "The psychology on which Zola claims to draw tends to transform itself into a mythology, and it is on this account that the transfiguration of the Parisian landscape, ascribing to the great city the type of presence and dynamism of the natural elements, makes it the revealer of the secret life and the destiny of the protagonists" (p. 619). The uniqueness of *Une page d'amour* within the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle lies in its being a *general* portrait of love that achieves epic proportions. Zola scrutinizes reality with minute attention and, simultaneously, draws out general laws from his observations. "That the creation of a novel and theoretical thought can be fused," writes Ripoll, "is proven by the title, *Une page d'amour*. The word *page* is part of Zola's critical vocabulary. . . . To use the language of the critic to name a work is to establish the novelist as a theoretician who needs not owe anything to the mechanical sequence of fiction" (p. 606).

6. Zola, *Une page d'amour*, 854. (Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.)

7. Ibid., 822, 909, 1092.

8. Vicomte G. d'Avenel, "Le Mécanisme de la vie moderne: La Maison parisienne," *La Revue des deux-mondes* 140 (1897): 279.

9. Zola, *Une page d'amour*, 1092.

10. Here I refer to two cycles of novels: *Les Trois Villes — Lourdes* (1894), *Rome* (1896), and *Paris* (1898) — and *Les Évangiles*, of which only three were written — *Fécondité* (1899), *Travail* (1901), and *Vérité* (1903) — the fourth, *Justice*, remaining at the project stage.

11. Emile Zola, MS no. 10333, Bibliothèque Nationale, 249; quoted by Henri Desroche in *La Société festive: Du Fouriérisme écrit au Fouriérismes pratiqués* (Paris: Edition du Seuil, 1975), 340.

12. Ibid.

13. As Desroche has well documented, Zola was keenly interested in Fourierist experiments such as the famous Familistère of Guise. The physical realization of the *cité future* was also of interest to him. Desroche quotes Zola, "Start from primitive times and plunge into utopia by the use of iron" (*La Société festive*, 340).

14. César Daly, "Ma nouvelle publication," *Revue générale de l'architecture et des travaux publics* 21 (1863): col. 164.

15. César Daly, "Conférence sur les hautes-études d'architecture," *La Semaine des constructeurs* 14 (1889): 26; quoted in Richard Becherer, *Science Plus Sentiment: César Daly's Formula For Modern Architecture* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1984), 238.

16. César Daly, *L'Architecture privée au XIXme siècle sous Napoléon III* (Paris: Morel et Cie, 1864), 1:20.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., 21

20. Ibid.

21. Emile Zola, *Une page d'amour*, translated from the 1878 edition by Jean Stewart as *A Love Affair* (London: Elek Books, 1957), 51–52.

22. P. de L., "Une maison de dix étages."

23. Yvanhoé Rambosson, "L'Evolution logique de l'architecture," *L'Art pour tous* 3 (July 1905): 214.

24. Henri Bresler, "Finestre su corte," *Rassegna* 28 (1986): 58.

25. Ibid.

26. James Ackerman, "The Villa as Paradigm," *Perspecta* 22 (1986): 18.

27. Ibid., 20.

28. To my knowledge, the term *balcon* was commonly used in France to label small balconies. Normally, these would project out from the building façade; at rue Franklin the small terrace off the dining room or bedroom is recessed and is more akin to the classical loggia.

29. Rambosson, "L'Evolution logique de l'architecture," 216, 213.

30. Ibid., 211, 217.

31. Auguste Perret as reported by Labadié in "Les Cathédrales de la cité moderne," 135.

32. Auguste Perret as reported by Bernard Champigneulle in *Perret* (Paris: Arts et Métiers Graphiques, 1959), 103.

33. Labadié, "La Recherche du home scientifique," 555.

34. Daly, *L'Architecture privée* 1:18.

35. Auguste Perret as quoted by Labadié in "Les Cathédrales de la cité moderne," 132.

36. Ibid., 135.

37. Auguste Perret, letter to Le Corbusier, 17 January 1916, Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris.

38. Auguste Perret, *Contribution à une théorie de l'architecture* (Paris: André Wahl, 1952), no pagination.

39. Gustave Perret as reported by P. de L., "Une maison de dix étages."

40. Auguste Perret as reported by Louis Charvet, "Visites d'ateliers: Les Constructeurs, A. & G. Per-

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ret," *La Revue des jeunes* 17, no. 1 (1927): 58.

41. Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Histoire de l'habitation humaine depuis les temps préhistoriques jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Bibliothèque d'Education et de Récréation, 1875; reprint, Brussels: Mardaga, 1986), 56–57.

42. This is a proportional ratio that outlines the "Pythagorean" triangle (base of four, height of three, hypothenuse of five), which Viollet-le-Duc thought formed the geometric source of classical architecture. See Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Entretiens sur l'architecture* (Paris: Morel et Cie, 1863–72), 2:394–413.

43. See Robin Middleton's classic study, "The Abbé de Cordemoy and the Graeco-Gothic Ideal: A Prelude to Romantic Classicism," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 25 (1962): 278–320, and 26 (1963): 90–123.

44. See Peter Collins, *Concrete: The Vision Of a New Architecture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), 164–72.

45. I am paraphrasing Michael Fried on Baudelaire and Manet in "Painting Memories: On the Containment of the Past in Baudelaire and Manet," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (March 1984): 521.

46. Michael Fried has made a similar claim for Manet; see ibid., 530.

47. Emile Zola, *Paris* (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1898), 607.

48. See Rambosson, "L'Evolution logique de l'architecture," 215.

49. Viollet-le-Duc, *Histoire de l'habitation humaine*, 57.

50. The term is Viollet-le-Duc's, in reference to his project for an urban residence. See his *Entretiens sur l'architecture* 2:283.

51. Zola, *Une page d'amour*, 852.

52. Emile Zola, *Travail* (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1901), 525.

53. Ibid., 634.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid., 621.

56. See the lyrical description in *Travail* of the factory where the wedding of Nise and Nanet takes place (pp. 479–80). See also Zola's notes on the ideal factory world described by Kropotkin; quoted in Frederick Ivor Case, *La Cité idéale dans "Travail" d'Emile Zola* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 101–2.

Figure Credits

1, 12. *L'Art décoratif* 6, no. 2 (July–December 1904).

2, 18. Photo Chevojon.

3. *Rassegna* 28, no. 4 (December 1986).

4, 5. César Daly, *L'Architecture privée au XIXme siècle sous Napoléon III* (Paris, 1864–72).

6, 13. Photographs by Gilbert Fastenaekens.

7–9, 16. Perret Archives, Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, Paris.

10, 15. Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Entretiens sur l'architecture* (Paris, 1872), vol. 2 and vol. of plates.

11. *L'Illustration* 4145 (August 1922).

14. Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française de XIe au XVIe siècle* (Paris, 1868).

17. Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Histoire de l'habitation humaine depuis les temps préhistoriques jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris, 1875).

19. Photograph by Martin Bressani.

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