



LAUREN M. O'CONNELL



## LAUREN M. O'CONNELL

Lauren M. O'Connell es historiadora de la arquitectura y profesora de Historia del Arte en el Ithaca College, con una especialidad de investigación de la Francia de los siglos XVIII y XIX. Sus escritos sobre Viollet-le-Duc, el impacto arquitectónico de la Revolución francesa, la historia de las actitudes hacia el pasado arquitectónico y las relaciones artísticas entre Francia y Rusia han aparecido en volúmenes editados y en el *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, *The Art Bulletin*, *History of Photography* y *Nineteenth Century Art Worldwide*. Su bibliografía comentada acerca de la École des Beaux Arts aparece en la edición 2020 de *Oxford bibliographies in architecture, preservation and planning*. Tradujo *L'Allégorie du patrimoine* (*The invention of the historic monument*, 2001), de Françoise Choay, de 1996, y se doctoró en Historia de la Arquitectura y el Urbanismo en la Universidad de Cornell durante el mandato de la profesora Choay como catedrática Andrew D. White. Su investigación ha sido apoyada por becas del Programa de becas Fulbright, el Centro Getty para la Historia del Arte y las Humanidades, el Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA) de la National Gallery y el Canadian Center for Architecture. Su trabajo actual se centra en la codificación arquitectónica de las jerarquías basadas en raza y género; forma parte de la junta consultiva del grupo afiliado a la Sociedad de Historiadores de la Arquitectura sobre Raza y Arquitectura Moderna.

Portada interior:  
TORRE DE SAINT-JACQUES LA BOUCHERIE. París, ca. 1867.  
Imagen: Dominio público.



# Theorizing *patrimoine*: reflections on Françoise Choay's *textes instaurateurs*

LAUREN M. O'CONNELL

## Abstract

A former student and translator of Françoise Choay's *L'Allégorie du patrimoine* reflects on enduring aspects of her thought and its relevance to contemporary debates. Particular attention is paid to Choay's consistent originality and willingness to challenge received ideas—arguing for Haussmann as a savior, not a destroyer, of Paris, for example; centering the anticipatory character of Viollet-le-Duc's approach to conservation; and defining a new lexicon, of rules, models, and “instaurational texts” for the analysis of architectural discourse, over time and today. Choay's attention to language and to rigorous textual analysis are foregrounded, as in her prescient application of Riegl's monument/historic monument taxonomy to revolutionize our valuation of architectural fabric inherited from the past. The instigational potential of Choay's patrimonial theorizing is demonstrated with reference to the author's own research on the conservational history of an emblematic structure in Paris, and on Viollet-le-Duc as a historian of Russian architecture and a precocious theorist of photography. The author emphasizes Choay's prospective stance, her commitment to *patrimoine* in its generative capacity to undergird our capacity for building in the present, which she regards as critical for our very cultural survival.

**Keywords:** monument, historic monument, patrimoine, instaurational text.

The title of Françoise Choay's 2013 book on Haussmann and Paris captures the complex and productively contrarian nature of her theoretical writings on the meaning and significance of architectural “*patrimoine*.” This title, *Haussmann: conservateur de Paris*, announces the volume's revisionist intent—to counter more than a century and a half of Haussmann vilification with a new, textually supported assertion that we have this “*mal aimé des français*” (Choay, 2013: 13) to thank both for the persistence of Paris as “the most visited city in the world today”<sup>1</sup> (Choay, 2013: 7), and for the overlooked “conservational dimension”<sup>2</sup> of his work (Choay, 2013: 15). Deftly maneuvering between the poles of “radical demolition” and “ossifying museal conservation”,<sup>3</sup> (Choay, 2013: 14) Choay argues that the prefect in effect preserved Paris for future generations, judiciously managing “the dialectic between conservation, demolition and innovation”<sup>4</sup> upon which depends, in her view, the inscription of living cultures in space and time (Choay, 2013: 14) (Figure 1). One sees why Choay would find Haussmann fascinating and exemplary; reading against the grain of conventional interpretation and in the context of his *Memoirs*, exhaustively collated, edited and annotated by Choay herself and her team, (Choay, 2000) Haussmann emerges as an embodiment of

---

<sup>1</sup> Original quotation: “la ville la plus visitée du monde”.

<sup>2</sup> Original quotation: “dimension conservatoire”.

<sup>3</sup> Original quotation: “la démolition radicale [...] la conservation muséale, mortifère”.

<sup>4</sup> Original quotation: “la dialectique entre conservation, démolition et innovation”.



qualities she embraces throughout her oeuvre. No predictable “passéist,”<sup>5</sup> (Choay, 2011: 92), Françoise Choay is a preservationist who surprises (and she would closely question the English language term, which imperfectly maps onto the field of conservational theory) –not a blanket advocate for every threatened structure in “George Washington slept here” spirit (to borrow from an outmoded critique of American practice) but an analyst and an interrogator. Choay’s commitment, apparent from the first pages of the two texts at hand, is not to *les vieilles pierres* per se, but to the thoughtful, case by case scrutiny of the values that attach us to them, and to the ways in which these might govern our treatment of the architectural legacy of our forebearers. Further, and again *à la différence* with certain received ideas about the logical boundaries of the patrimonial field, she casts her optic forward on our building practice in the present, arguing that the very survival of rooted human cultures depends on the prolongation of our “compétence d’édifier” –our ability to innovate, to imagine new forms and architectural frames for our lives in community.



FIGURE 1. PARIS IN 1860. Philippe Benoist’s bird’s eye view of Paris, midway into the prefect’s tenure, captures the coexistence of conservational and transformational impulses in Haussmann’s program. Image: “Paris in 1860, view of the Saint-Gervais Quarter,” Philippe Benoist, *Paris dans sa splendeur* (Paris, 1861), Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library.

With lexical and intellectual precision, over decades of production, Choay thus builds a consistent argument, ever renewed with new precisions and modulations, for a theoretically informed approach to decisions about our treatment of the architectural inheritance of the past. Certain terms, and their precise meanings, are fundamental to this project –prime among them of course is *patrimoine*, understood as the built environment constructed by human societies, in both its historical and contemporary dimensions. The ambiguity of the term renders it notoriously difficult to translate—in English: “heritage” is close but

<sup>5</sup> Original quotation: “passéiste”.

past-delimited, and “patrimony” does not have the same currency, for example. Her works explore the fluid ways in which it is deployed over time, sometimes inflected with rural and/or urban and infrastructural modifiers but always maintaining, in her usage, a *leit motif* of spatiality. *Patrimoine*, in Choay’s lexicon, is geographically and culturally circumscribed – even if very broadly, without being tethered to the vagaries and historical instabilities of politically defined units. It follows then, that the notion of a “*patrimoine mondial*” deserving of protection is a contradiction in terms in her view, and that her interest lies in the anchoring of *patrimoine* in the local and territorial scales (Choay, 2011: 94-96). A corollary pair of terms, equally foundational for Choay, describes an intertwining binary first adumbrated in the patrimonial context by Alois Riegl – *monument* and *historic monument*. Her attention to language – etymological, historical and semantic – and even the device of the analytical dyad, undergirds the non patrimonially-focused writings as well; the influential *The rule and the model* (*La règle et le modèle*) structures a close analysis of the architectural treatise tradition by means of an either/or classification of generative (rule) and imitative (model) types.

### Monument and historic monument, Riegl and Choay

Riegl’s 1903 taxonomy of the values we associate with the artistic and built legacy of the past, *Der moderne Denkmalkultus*, and his proposition that these values should inform our approach to that legacy in the present, is widely known and cited today in multiple contexts. A recent study comparing the semantics and experience of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama and the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. invokes Riegl in pondering the implications of displacing from South Carolina and re-erecting in Washington the cabin of enslaved workers from the Edisto Island Point of Pines plantation (Majeed, 2020; Rogers, 2018). Françoise Choay was early to recognize Riegl’s relevance to contemporary debates on what to conserve, what to restore, and what to cede to the depredations of time, climate and human culture. She elaborated upon his framework in a landmark essay accompanying the French translation of Riegl’s text in 1984, which distinguished between intentional, commemorative *monuments* and those *historic monuments* that we come to treasure as such after the fact for their aesthetic or historical value (Choay, 1984). There Choay highlighted the soundness and continued vitality of Riegl’s approach, drawing out its implications for the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in the context of modernism and its seeming incompatibility with heritage conservation. The central kernel of this essay, distinguishing etymologically and historically between the *monument* and the *historic monument*, and classifying systematically the values we attach to each, is summarized in *La terre qui meurt* and, in slightly more detail, in *Le patrimoine en questions*. The *monument*, commemorative in purpose and intentional in nature, is erected to recall to mind, for present and future generations, heroic actions, signal events and living beliefs that contribute to the maintenance of a group’s identity.<sup>6</sup> As such it warrants “vigilant” protection as long as those beliefs endure; conversely, it is also logically prone to destruction when those are rejected, either internally or by external opponents.

Controversies in the United States over Confederate statues erected in the South after the Civil War and well into the Jim Crow era are a contemporary case in point of the vulnerability of the Rieglian *monument* when the values it embodies are both alive and hotly contested. The symbolic charge of these representations of Confederate figures, clear *monuments* in their intentionally commemorative intent, lay effectively dormant in the dominant, white

---

<sup>6</sup> “On appellera alors ‘monument’ tout artefact [...] ou ensemble d’artefacts délibérément conçu et réalisé par une communauté humaine, [...] afin de rappeler à la mémoire vivante, organique et affective de ses membres des personnes, des événements, des croyances, des rites ou des règles sociales constitutifs de son identité” (Choay, 2011: 67).

imagination for decades, and they thus stood unmolested. Recent challenges to their continued survival, culminating in a summer 2020 of Black Lives Matter protest but begun well before, have laid bare the still vital and profoundly fractious relationship of these relics to active memory and community identity. Thus when the American Society of Architectural Historians wrote an unprecedented position piece arguing for the dismantling of these toxic relics they were, appropriately one might say, matching the recommended treatment with the specific nature of the artifact in question (SAH, 2020).<sup>7</sup> As Choay pointedly puts it, the *monument* calls for vigilant upkeep as long as the beliefs it incarnates are alive, and conversely, it is “exposed” to willful destruction when it has either lost its connection to living memory, or when the values it embodies are under internal or external attack (Choay, 2011: 67-68). One might even argue that the SAH need not even have highlighted the unprecedented nature of their recommendation to remove the statues: “The Society of Architectural Historians [SAH] supports and encourages the removal of Confederate monuments from public spaces. In its 80-year history, SAH has never before advocated for the direct removal of any historic resource, let alone listed monuments,” (SAH, 2020) because these, in Choay’s sense, following Riegl, were not the *historic monuments* that an architectural history society would be logically bound to defend, but living *monuments* whose survival is necessarily tethered to the ongoing support and belief of the sponsoring community. The authors indicate as much in a following sentence; citing the distress these statues cause to African-American citizens and, further on, their express original intent to “reinforce racist ideals;” as they put it, “Our inaction gives these monuments power” (SAH, 2020). That power is the potency of the living monument, in the fullness of its incantatory and affective appeal to collective memory and belief. Needless to say, the profound absence of community consensus about their value and meaning is a complicating factor here, as is the fact that these same *monuments* (legitimate candidates for removal when their values no longer hold) have, over their life course, accrued “age” and “art” value, sliding them over into simultaneous *historic monument* territory. Indeed, the SAH Heritage Conservation Committee is attentive to the dual *monument/historic monument* status of the statues it proposes removing, arguing for their removal to secure locations and “ongoing care and conservation,” while also emphasizing that the statues’ symbolic *monument* function (e.g., “they declare and demarcate ‘white’ spaces”) eclipses whatever *historic monument* defense might be mounted in their favor: “Their existence can no longer be justified based on aesthetics, as works of art or public sculpture” (SAH, 2020).

Which brings us to the consideration of the *historic monument* side of the dyad. As defined by Riegl and richly elaborated by Choay the *historic monument* is not an intentional one at all. While *monument* implies a persistent and active association with memory and belief, *historic monument* refers to a neutral and no longer “living” “document” that we have come to value over time for a panoply of reasons –as record of a disappeared past, as aesthetic exemplar, as witness to the romantic action of time, etc. The historic monument’s “knowledge value” is abstract and our response to is often bound up with its aesthetic qualities, which Choay notes, following Riegl, complicates the process of isolating its value and tying conservational decisions thereto.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For a nuanced discussion of controversies over the fate of beleaguered Confederate monuments in the American south, encouraging us to ask, “Why were they made? Why then? Why there? Why should we retain them (or not)?” see Upton (2020). See also Upton (2015), on the circumstances surrounding the creation of African American monuments in the same South in relationship to the persistent “dual heritage” interpretation of the Civil war.

<sup>8</sup> “Le ‘monument historique’ n’est pas un artefact intentionnel, création *ex nihilo* d’une communauté humaine à des fins mémoriaux. Il ne s’adresse pas à la mémoire vivante. Il a été choisi dans un corpus d’édifices préexistants en raison de sa valeur pour l’histoire (qu’il s’agisse d’histoire événementielle, sociale, économique ou politique, d’histoire des techniques ou d’histoire de l’art) et/ou de sa valeur esthétique” (Choay, 2011: 70).

The summaries provided in the *La terre qui meurt* and *Le patrimoine en questions* texts included here themselves abridge a detailed adumbration of the *monument/historic monument* distinction (which fully emerges only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) in Choay's 1996 monograph *L'Allégorie du patrimoine*, where it is preceded and contextualized by a detailed discussion of attitudes toward past heritage in the ancient, medieval and early modern periods. It is worth noting that the English title for this work, *The invention of the historic monument* (2001), foregrounds the centrality to her thought of the *monument/historic monument* distinction, while also betraying a bit of an accident of publishing history that elides the centrality of *patrimoine*. As translator of the book, but not of the title, I recall that the list on offer from Cambridge University Press at that time included Erich Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's very well received *The invention of tradition*, originally published in 1983, which explored cultural phenomena associated with 19<sup>th</sup>-century nation-state formation (specifically, the marshalling of cultural forms—song, ritual, iconography—to forge national community in support of newly confected European “nations”). A key chapter of Choay's book (Chapter 4) “The consecration phase: institutionalization of the historic monument,”<sup>9</sup> describes the culmination (in France) of inchoate earlier interests in and efforts at patrimonial conservation in the form of the state-sponsored institutionalization of a preservation apparatus armed with protective legislation—ergo the “invention” of the *historic monument*, emblem and target of that process. The symmetrical titling with Hobsbawm and Ranger's study was designed to point up a parallel between the two studies, even while it somewhat eclipsed the over-arching objective of Choay's effort to excavate our notions of *patrimoine* and their consequences, in archeological fashion, over the *longue durée*.

#### Case in point: plotting a perceptual history of the Tour Saint-Jacques

The import of the Riegl-inspired framework for Choay's audience is, of course, that it provides a road map of sorts for those with decision-making power vis à vis our built heritage, whether in framing protective legislation or in aligning individual conservational decisions with the specific logics of a community's attachment to a given structure or site. Her conceptualization offers a powerful tool for the historian as well, in my own case inspiring a micro-history of shifting attitudes toward an emblematic structure in Paris, the Tour Saint-Jacques, and of the consequences of each shift for its treatment and very survival (O'Connell, 2001). Perceptions of this still dominant vertical accent at the heart of the Châtelet quarter ranged widely over the course of several centuries, beginning with the revolutionarily-inspired destruction of its host medieval church of Saint-Jacques de la Boucherie in the late 1790s, an attack linked to its status as a living symbol, or *monument* to the suddenly and officially discredited Christian religion (here I expanded upon Choay's lexicon to describe the church as *monument*-like in its symbolization of still active communally-held beliefs and practices) (Figure 1). The amputation of the church was followed by the deliberate sparing of the now orphaned tower by revolutionary authorities; I argue that they were advocating for it as what would come to be called a *historic monument*—worthy of saving on hastily argued art-historical grounds. Advocates within the post-revolutionary buildings administration of the late 1790s, the Conseil des Bâtiments Civils, not otherwise known for its devotion to Gothic architecture, flagged the 16<sup>th</sup> century tower for retention as a fine example of the late Gothic “Flamboyant” style. The short-lived reprieve decreed by the Conseil des Bâtiments Civils would be followed by renewed vulnerability in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as modernization plans, first under Rambuteau and then, most notoriously, under Haussmann, identified the Tour Saint-Jacques as an ungainly impediment seemingly devoid of saving graces, and slated it for the wrecking ball. It would only be when the tower's potential as an urbanistic marker of Haussmann's *grande croisée*—the broad north/south intersection and centerpiece of his plan—was recognized

---

<sup>9</sup> Original title: “La Consécration du monument historique”.



that its survival, and even its restoration and rehabilitation as a grandiose park ornament in Alphand's system, was assured (Figure 2). By this time of course (mid-1850s), the nascent patrimonial sensibilities awakened by revolutionary destruction had taken institutional form with the establishment in 1830 of the Inspection générale des monuments historiques and the naming of Ludovic Vitet, and then Prosper Mérimée as its first Inspectors. Despite this ostensibly more hospitable climate, it was the practical, urbanistic case made for the tower's contribution to the great crossing that rendered it finally invulnerable, not any general perception of its intrinsic value.

As this "perceptual history" sought to demonstrate, by the time the tower had survived all of these vicissitudes, it had well and truly transitioned into fully neutralized *historic monument* territory. Indeed, by 1933 it was available for surrealist mockery in the form of responses to a lampooning questionnaire about the fate of Parisian landmarks, published in *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* under the heading "Should we conserve, move, modify, transform or demolish?" "Conserve it as it is," wrote André Breton, "but demolish the entire surrounding neighborhood and forbid anyone from coming within a kilometer for 100 years, under pain of death" (O'Connell, 2001: 468). Tristan Tzara further dramatized, *ad absurdum*, the perceived evacuation of the tower's capacity to signify: "Demolish it and rebuilt it in rubber," (O'Connell, 2001: 468) and, to remind us of its former, meaningful, life as the sacred point of departure for pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela –rest an empty shell on this rubber roof. In like spirit, Brassai published a lugubrious photograph of the tower and paired it with a macabre passage about dead pigeons, and Breton would use that photograph to illustrate, in the 1937 *L'amour fou*, his nocturnal wanderings in forsaken quarters of the capital: "In Paris the Tour Saint-Jacques swaying/Like a sunflower/Sometimes bumps its forehead against the Seine and its/Shadow glides imperceptibly among the tugboats"<sup>10</sup> (O'Connell, 2001: 469).

These representations confirmed the tower's definitive drainage of meaning, of any meaningful connection to the religious values that inspired its original construction. It was worth emphasizing though, that the semantic evolution undergone by the Tour Saint-Jacques can itself be seen as both neutral and, ultimately, protective. The symbolic impotence of the *historic monument*, which on the surface would seem to assign it an inferior status to that of the living and breathing *monument*, constitutes a no less efficacious armor –armed as we now are with legislation that values either and both, on their separate terms. The story of the Tour Saint-Jacques in fact offers evidence of the availability of symbolic redefinition as a viable and even necessary option for historic architectures confronting economic and technological pressures in our inherited city centers. Roland Barthes, writing about the Eiffel Tower, noted its ability to attract meaning "like a lightning rod attracts thunderbolts" (Barthes, 1997); it was this same capacity that saved the Tour Saint-Jacques at multiple turns, to the point that it would now appear inviolate, embraced as a trace of an unrecoverable past, a "contact zone" (Pratt, 1992) (borrowing from the literary scholar Mary Louise Pratt) between contemporary Parisians and their forebearers.

My study of the perceptual history of the Tour Saint-Jacques surfaced an unexpected episode in the tower's semiotic evolution that finds a parallel with Choay's provocative promotion of Haussmann's conservational *bona fides*. In the episode in question, none other than Le Corbusier himself, purportedly indifferent to the historic fabric erased by his projects, is seen promoting the sparing of key historic structures in Paris in his 1925 Plan Voisin, among them the Tour Saint-Jacques and the Portes Saint-Denis and Saint-Martin. As read by Thordis Arrhenius,

---

<sup>10</sup> Original quotation: "À Paris la tour Saint-Jacques chancelante/ Pareille à un tournesol/ Du front vient quelquefois heurter la Seine et son ombre glisse/ imperceptiblement parmi les remorqueurs" (Breton, 1937: 94).



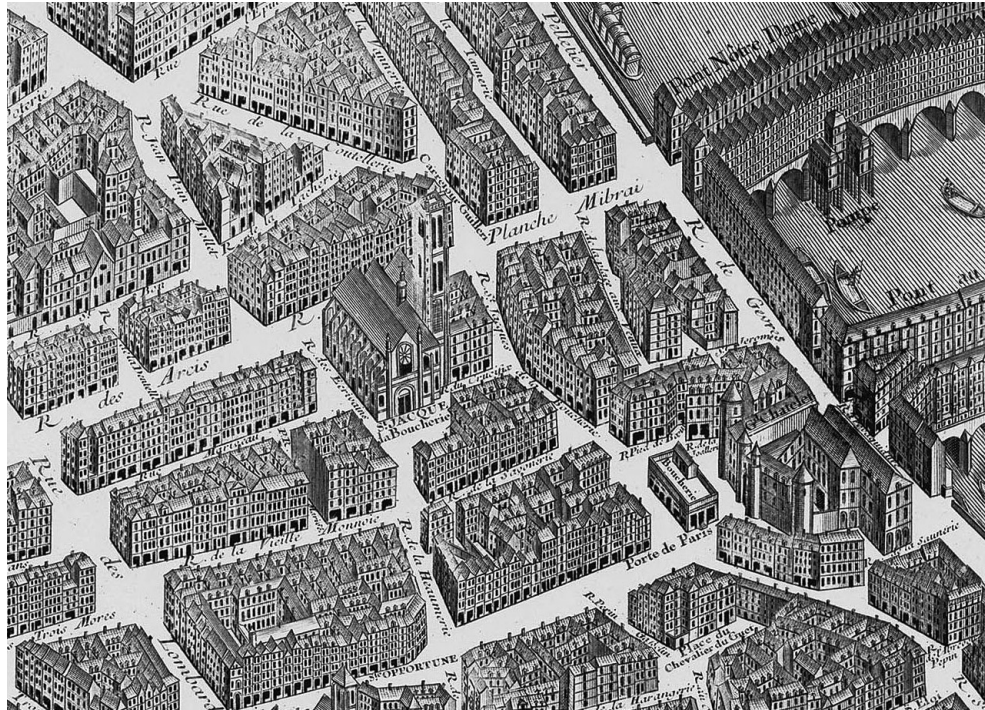


FIGURE 2. THE INTACT MEDIEVAL CHURCH OF SAINT-JACQUES DE LA BOUCHERIE. Church with its 16<sup>th</sup> century tower, at the bustling center of the Châtelet quarter in Turgot's 1739 plan of Paris. Image: Turgot Map of Paris, segment 10, detail, Kyoto University Library [[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/39/Turgot\\_map\\_of\\_Paris%2C\\_Kyoto\\_University\\_Library.jpjgl](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/39/Turgot_map_of_Paris%2C_Kyoto_University_Library.jpjgl)] (accessed 31 May 2021).

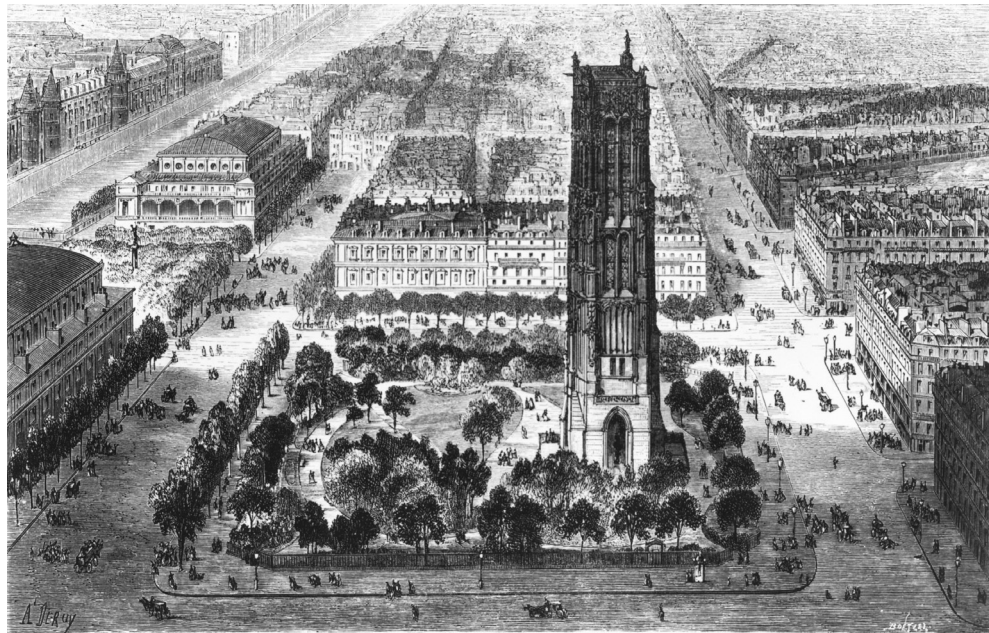


Fig. 321. Square de la Tour Saint-Jacques. Vue à vol d'oiseau.

FIGURE 3. THE TOUR SAINT-JACQUES. Its host church demolished, redefined in the 1850s as ornamental centerpiece of the Square Saint-Jacques and lynchpin of the great crossing at the center of Haussmann's transformed capital. See the larger context in Figure 1, with the Square in the lower right quadrant, at the Southeast corner of the intersection of the Rue de Rivoli and the Boulevard de Sébastopol ("la grande croisée"). Image: Adolphe Alphand, *Les promenades de Paris, Paris, 1867-1873*. Cornell University, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections.

Le Corbusier's proposal assigned privileged status to selected cherished remainders so as to integrate, in vertical, sectional layers, the city of the future with valuable vestiges of its past (Arrhenius, 2000, quoted in O'Connell, 2001: 467). It is still jarring to consider Le Corbusier in this light, although excellent recent scholarship recasts his reputation as designer of solitary decontextualized modernist objects by showing, through the evidence of his own drawings, writings, and lectures, his profound engagement with landscape and place (Cohen, 2013).

### Hausmann, preserver of Paris?

Choay's publication of Hausmann's largely unexamined *Memoirs* in 2001 and the subsequent publication in 2013 of key excerpts therefrom in *Hausmann: conservateur de Paris as a livre à thèse* that challenges misconceptions about the prefect as uber *démolisseur*, attest to the durability of her interest in his influence; her earliest publication on the topic, *Modern city planning*, dates to 1965. In the 2013 work, grounding her claims entirely in the words of Baron Hausmann himself (a method she returns to consistently in her *oeuvre*, as in *Le patrimoine en questions*, an anthology of primary sources), Choay builds a multi-tiered argument for re-framing Hausmann as an extraordinary student and champion of the city's historic fabric, notwithstanding the sweeping transformations he directed. The collection is organized into ten thematic groupings, each comprised of texts authored by the prefect, drawn either from his *Memoirs* or from other published and administrative documents; a short final section includes primary source commentaries by contemporaries. Hausmann's texts are annotated, economically, with clarifying and elucidating observations. Each thematic grouping is introduced and situated briefly by Choay to highlight the unexpected or under-studied dimensions of Hausmann's thought; the cumulative effect of the totality is to re-cast his achievement, and his place in the history of built heritage, or *patrimoine*, in terms of an interweaving of conservational and modernizing impulses. Among the themes foregrounded are the prefect's erudition—in terms of his deep and wide education in history, science, and the arts; his deep familiarity with the architectural history of the capital and his close attention to the values associated therewith; his commitment to hand drawing as an integrator of aesthetic and spatial ways of thinking; his prescient understanding of the limitations of the prevailing structure of buildings administration, which prioritized Ecole des Beaux Arts-trained architects and constrained the critical expertise of engineers and urban infrastructure specialists; his deft integration of the perimeter suburbs without loss to their identities and integrity; and even his progressive social sensibility, evident in the creation of equitable access for all to critical social and health services.

Choay's introduction to excerpts from the rarely cited biographical portions of Hausmann's *Memoirs* will convey the flavor of her commentary:

*The majority of readers skip this text located at the beginning of the Memoirs, assuming it to be unreliable given its autobiographical character. And yet this genealogy of a Protestant family of German origin, which became French before the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes and was established in Paris since the time of the Revolution, reveals everything at once: Georges-Eugène Hausmann's familiarity with Paris, and the exceptional scientific, economic and aesthetic education with which he set about to provide himself and then put to the service of an unwavering devotion to his native city<sup>11</sup> (Choay, 2013: 19).*

---

<sup>11</sup> Original quotation: "Ce texte, placé en ouverture des *Mémoires*, est sauté par la majorité des lecteurs en raison de son caractère autobiographique, d'emblée jugé suspect. Et pourtant, cette généalogie d'une famille protestante d'origine allemande, devenue française avant la révocation de l'édit de Nantes et établie à Paris depuis la Révolution, révèle tout à la fois: la connaissance de Paris que possédait Georges-Eugène Hausmann; la formation scientifique, économique et esthétique exceptionnelle dont il sut se doter et qu'il mit au service d'un amour sans faille voué à sa ville natale".



Her prologue to the texts focused on Haussmann's street piercings, quintessence of his interventions in the public mind, directs the reader to the widely unsuspected attention given by the prefect to the retention and repurposing of selected historic structures, which she also illustrates with a photographic series showing conserved pre-Haussmannian vestiges along the Blvd. Saint Germain, her own home *quartier*. "The following five texts argue for the conservation of urban fabric through the maintenance and reuse of existing buildings. This approach illustrates the adaptive capacity of the professional teams formed by Haussmann"<sup>12</sup> (Choay, 2013: 83). The texts presented document his rescue of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois, which had been under threat of demolition after the clearing of the encumbrances around the Louvre, but which Haussmann directed be saved, "I expressed the utmost loathing about laying a hand on a monument whose antiquity alone, as well as historical memories, should protect it"<sup>13</sup> (Choay, 2013: 89). The same text spotlights his saving efforts at the Hôtel Carnavalet and the Halles Centrales, and his argument for the sparing, via adaptive re-use *avant la lettre*, of the Hospice des Incurables, with its vast and airy courtyards "planted with beautiful trees," to be drafted into service as a neighborhood school for the Faubourg Saint-Germain as part of his re-organization and rationalization of the neighborhood Lycée system (Choay, 2013: 91).

### Choay on Viollet-le-Duc's "nostalgia for the future"

Choay's affinity for Haussmann, and for the questioning of received ideas and assumptions in general, shows up as well in her consistent attention to the oft-criticized historian, theorist and preservation architect Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc. As with Haussmann, Choay confronts popular and academic assumptions about the nineteenth century polymath through the nuanced close reading of texts. Viollet-le-Duc was famously drummed out of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts for his iconoclastic (where classicism was the icon) championing of medieval form and his pointed critique of the school's pedagogy and curriculum and its isolation from the competitive tide of modern industry,<sup>14</sup> but is broadly admired today as a theorist and progenitor of 20<sup>th</sup> century modernism. He is taken seriously for the erudition of his work as historian as well,<sup>15</sup> although, as I explored in my 1993 analysis of his 1877 *L'Art russe* (O'Connell, 1993), his argument for the "rationality" of each nation developing a contemporary architecture rooted in its own "genius" relied on now discredited racialized typologizing. Indeed the most current strand of scholarly work on Viollet-le-Duc the historian focuses on its marring by late 19<sup>th</sup> century racial theory.<sup>16</sup> But despite excellent corrective scholarship,<sup>17</sup> Viollet-le-Duc is still dismissed, or at the least most consistently taken to task, for his supposedly over-zealous approach to restoration ("*c'est du Viollet-le-Duc*" can still disparagingly be invoked to denote an historically inauthentic restoration). His "philosophy" of restoration is most famously –and infamously– enshrined in the much quoted and, according to Choay, "misread"<sup>18</sup> (Choay, 2009: XXI) pronouncement on the practice in the prodigious 1854-1868 *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française*: "To restore a building is to reestablish it in a completed state that may never have existed at any given moment"<sup>19</sup> (Viollet-le-Duc, 1868).

<sup>12</sup> Original quotation: "Les cinq textes suivants militent pour la conservation du tissu urbain grâce à l'entretien et la réutilisation des bâtiments existants. Cette démarche illustre la capacité d'adaptation des équipes professionnelles formées par Haussmann".

<sup>13</sup> Original quotation: "Je lui montrai la plus grande répugnance à porter la main sur un monument que me semblaient devoir protéger son antiquité même et, aussi, des souvenirs historiques".

<sup>14</sup> For a thorough account of Viollet-le-Duc's role in the 1863 "coup" at the École in the context of Second Empire politics see Bressani (2014: 305-332); see also Bonnet (2006: 169-199).

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Bressani (2014).

<sup>16</sup> See Cheng (2020) and Davis (2010).

<sup>17</sup> E.g., Murphy (2000).

<sup>18</sup> Original quotation: "mal lu".

<sup>19</sup> Original quotation: "Restaurer un édifice, c'est le rétablir dans un état complet qui peut n'avoir jamais existé à un moment donné".

And yet it is precisely his thinking on restoration that Choay finds deserving of our attention. She makes two related points about the misreading of Viollet-le-Duc's position: first, that Viollet-le-Duc never claimed the least "authenticity" for restorations thusly inspired (Choay, 2009: 146)<sup>20</sup> and second, that the kind of creative re-imagining he proposed was a logical and reasonable response to the French circumstance in particular, which was characterized by the virtual non-existence of a culture of "entretien" –of maintenance and upkeep of historic fabric (Choay, 2009: XXIV). Given the lamentable state of dilapidation of the country's built legacy resulting from this neglect, the notion of restrained Ruskinian conservation or stabilization of historic structures was simply not applicable. In the anthology that follows the *Le Patrimoine en questions* excerpt in the present volume, Choay includes several Viollet-le-Duc texts that bear this out. Especially interesting today is one that demonstrates Viollet-le-Duc's deep familiarity with and respect for the construction history of Notre-Dame Cathedral, whose rehabilitation was of course delegated to him in 1844, an initiative not unrelated to a surge in affection inspired by Victor Hugo's 1831 novel. By the 1840s, given the cumulative effects of neglect and revolutionary violence, it was neither ignorance of nor disrespect for the building's "original" state that inspired the architect to creatively re-imagine such parts as the by then long-gone spire (dismantled in the 1780s). Compare the present situation; in the wake of the tragic fire that took Viollet-le-Duc's spire in April 2019, Prime Minister Edouard Philippe announced that he would launch an international competition to replace it with a modern version, and President Macron signaled his receptivity to "a contemporary architectural gesture;" the spirit of this plan was entirely consonant with the approach taken by Viollet-le-Duc in confecting a new spire in the 1840s. Ironically though, not a month later the French Senate resolved to restore the structure "as it was," even though "what it was" was a classic Viollet-le-Dolcian re-imagination of what the 13<sup>th</sup> century *might* have built had they had the opportunity to fully realize their own principles with the technology available in his day (Cascone, 2020). As Tom Ravenscroft wrote in *Dezeen*

*Faced with the current restoration, what would Viollet-le-Duc do? We can be certain that if he had had to replace the entire 13<sup>th</sup>-century timber roof in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, he would not have faithfully recreated the historic structure. As he did with his timber needle, he would have utilised modern techniques to create a roof that he believed best embodied gothic ideals, rather than a replica of what was lost (Ravenscroft, 2019).*

Indeed, Choay especially lauds the "anticipatory" nature of Viollet-le-Duc's thought (Choay, 2009: 147),<sup>21</sup> as well as his related advocacy of re-use, and his rejection of its opposite, museification (and, in her view, of its abhorrent companion, touristic consumption). Choay quotes Viollet-le-Duc in *Le patrimoine en questions* introduction: "the best way to save a building is to find a use for it"<sup>22</sup> (Choay, 2009: XXI); it is the same willingness to intervene in historic fabric in order to grant it continued life that she values in Haussmann. Choay's ultimate concern is with nurturing that critical human capacity that she regards as under threat –our "compétence d'édifier"– or capacity to build. In defending Viollet-le-Duc's embrace of assertive restoration as a rational and palliative response to the lack of a culture of upkeep, and his openness to the transformation of historic fabric to accommodate new functions, Choay is underscoring his interest in the potential of past fabric to inspire future creation –new architectures that anchor human groups in the particularities of local *territoire*, and in the

<sup>20</sup> From the anthology portion of this publication, not included in the present volume.

<sup>21</sup> From the anthology portion.

<sup>22</sup> Original quotation: "Le meilleur moyen de conserver un édifice, c'est de lui trouver un emploi".



*longue durée*. Like that of Choay herself, Viollet-le-Duc's "nostalgia," as she puts it, "is for the future not for the past" (Choay, 2001: 105). What he asks of the past is the understanding of "a constructional system capable of inspiring a contemporary architecture"<sup>23</sup> (Choay, 2009: XXIV).

Ever inspired by Choay's willingness to revisit seemingly settled interpretations of historic figures, I undertook my own investigation a few decades ago of another aspect of Viollet-le-Duc's thinking—his attitude toward the nascent medium of photography. Over the course of my research on his *L'art russe* I had come across a cache of photographs of Russian buildings at the French Bibliothèque du patrimoine. I recognized them as matching the viewpoints of several of Viollet-le-Duc drawings in *L'art russe*, and noted that their captions were written in the hand of Viollet-le-Duc's Russian connection, Viktor Butovsky—I had fortuitously been studying those letters at the home of Viollet-le-Duc's great granddaughter Geneviève Viollet-le-Duc on the same research trip (O'Connell, 1998: 139). The discovery shed useful light on the making of *L'art russe*—explaining, for example, both his knowing representations of buildings he had never seen, and the prodigious drawing output that the copiously illustrated book seemed to involve. More significant, to my mind, was the prescient nature of Viollet-le-Duc's thinking about the new representational medium, and its relationship to traditional hand drawing, which emerged from further exploration of his writings on and uses of the technology. I was able to conclude that while Viollet-le-Duc quickly embraced the utility of photography to the work of restoration (he commissioned photographs of Notre-Dame, for instance) and for supplying data on remote sites he was exploring in his work as historian (e.g., *L'art russe* and an essay he wrote to accompany Désiré Charnay's 1862 *Cités et ruines américaines*), he took the unorthodox, at that time, view, that the "truth" revealed by photography was less reliable than that disclosable by analytical drawing. His own visual, historical, and geological excavations, through drawing, of the Swiss Mont Blanc range captured their "reality" far more powerfully, in his view, than the fleeting and superficial (literally) moment in time frozen in a photograph. Viollet-le-Duc's view on the unreliability of photography, and its ability to distort "reality"—through framing, composition, lighting and angle, for instance—was elegantly conveyed in a note chiding Victor Champier for writing an overly flattering article on him: "You have portrayed me as Nadar did—in a head and shoulders portrait, relegating my defects to the shadows or to the space outside the frame" (O'Connell, 1998: 144). The "anticipatory" character of Viollet-le-Duc's thought (to borrow Choay's characterization), is fully in evidence here, linking him forward to post-modern understandings of the photographic medium's inherently instable relationship to its ostensible subjects.

### Rules, models, and the instaurational text

By way of conclusion, one might point to Choay's long-standing interest in the "*texte instaurateur*" or instaurational text, the one that has the "generative" capacity to stimulate new solutions to new problems. Choay developed this framework for her doctoral dissertation on discourses in architecture and urbanism, published as *La règle et le modèle* in 1980 and translated into English and revised as *The rule and the model* in 1997. The intellectual apparatus she developed in this important early work would percolate through and be further developed in the patrimonial writings under analysis here, as a few indications will suggest.

As elsewhere, Choay attends scrupulously to language in this study, working with semantic filiations and fine distinctions to define characteristics of the architectural treatise as a genre. She describes the texts of the Italian Renaissance treatise tradition, on which the book centers, as *inaugural*—as having "established an inaugural relationship to built space."

---

<sup>23</sup> Original quotation: "un système constructif susceptible d'inspirer une architecture contemporaine".

In her analysis the genre “takes as its singular aim the conception –by means of a set of rules and principles– of the built domain in its totality” (Choay, 1997: 3-4). *Inaugural*, then, references both the centrality of reason in the texts so designated –the primacy of rules and principles– and, in the word’s association with “beginning,” their prospective, rather than retrospective, character. Choay coins an additional and evocatively homologous term for the specific texts she will analyze in the book, prime among them Alberti’s *De re aedificatoria*: the *instauration* text is one that aims explicitly to develop “an autonomous conceptual apparatus in order to conceive and build new and unknown forms of space” (Choay, 1997: 6). *Instauration*, then, further highlights the catalyzing intent of a text so described; such a text aims, in forward-looking fashion, “to provide a theoretical support and foundation for spaces, whether already built or projected” (Choay, 1997: 6). Her deep admiration for the *instauration* text par excellence, Alberti’s *De re aedificatoria*, rests both on the rigorous *esprit de système* that undergirds his brilliant parallel structuring of the organization and the content of the work, and, more importantly here, on its open-endedness as an inspirational guide. Instead of proffering totalizing spatial models of the sort offered in More’s *Utopia* (which also wins her close analysis in the book), Alberti “provides a rigorous foundation for building, while leaving it open to the unforeseeable contingencies of human imagination and desire” (Choay, 1997: 274).

It should not come as a surprise that in the revised, English edition of that 1980 work Choay signals that as “the only nineteenth-century architect who can be said to belong to the Albertian tradition” Viollet-le-Duc should perhaps have been included in her analysis (Choay, 1997: xiii). It is perhaps easy to see why the “anticipatory” nature of Viollet-le-Duc’s thinking, and Haussmann’s success in safeguarding the survival and identity of Paris through a judicious mix of conservation and demolition are entirely consistent with the modern and magisterial vision of Alberti as analyzed by Françoise Choay. All three are consistent with positions she has taken throughout her career as a distinguished *instauration* theorist herself, of both patrimonial conservation and modern urbanism.

\*

#### References

- Arrhenius, Thordis (2000) *Restoration in the machine age: themes of conservation in Le Corbusier’s Plan Voisin*, AA Files 38: 10-22.
- Barthes, Roland (1997) *The Eiffel Tower and other mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard, University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 5.
- Bonnet, Alain (2006) *L’Enseignement des arts au XIXe siècle: la réforme de l’École des beaux-arts de 1863 et la fin du modèle académique*, Presses universitaires, Rennes.
- Bressani, Martin (2014) *Architecture and the historical imagination: Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, 1814-1879*, Ashgate, Farnham.
- Breton, André (1937) “Vigilance”, *Œuvres complètes*, Gallimard, Paris, p. 94.
- Breton, André (1993) *Earthlight*, trans. Bill Zavatsky and Zack Rogow, Sun and Moon Press, Los Angeles.
- Cascone, Sarah (2020) *France will rebuild Notre Dame’s spire as it was, scrapping plans to top the fire-ravaged cathedral with a contemporary design*, Artnet News, July 13 [https://news.artnet.com/art-world/notre-dame-spire-reconstruction-1894147] (accessed on 2 February 2021).
- Cheng, Irene (2020) *Structural racialism in architectural theory*, in: Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II and Mabel Wilson, *Race and modern architecture*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, pp. 134-152.

- Choay, Françoise (1969) *Modern city planning*, Braziller, New York.
- Choay, Françoise (1980) *La Règle et le modèle*, Seuil, Paris.
- Choay, Françoise (1984) "À propos de culte et de monuments", in: *Le Culte moderne des monuments. Son essence et sa genèse*, trad. Daniel Wiczorek, Seuil, Paris, pp. 7-20.
- Choay, Françoise (1996) *L'Allégorie du patrimoine*, Seuil, Paris, 1996.
- Choay, Françoise (1997) *The rule and the model*, MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Choay, Françoise (2001) *The invention of the historic monument*, trans. Lauren M. O'Connell, Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Choay, Françoise (2009) *Le Patrimoine en questions. Anthologie pour un combat*, Seuil, Paris.
- Choay, Françoise (2011) *La Terre qui meurt*, Fayard, Paris.
- Choay, Françoise and Vincent Sainte Marie Gauthier (2013) *Hausmann: conservateur de Paris*, Actes Sud, Paris.
- Cohen, Jean-Louis, Sheldon H. Solow and Barry Bergdoll (2013) *Le Corbusier: an atlas of modern landscapes*, MOMA, New York.
- Davis, Charles L. II (2010) "Violet-le-Duc and the body: the metaphorical integrations of race and style in structural rationalism", *Architectural Research Quarterly* 14 (4): 341-348.
- Hausmann, Georges Eugène, baron (2000) *Mémoires*, edited by Françoise Choay, Bernard Landau, and Vincent Sainte Marie Gauthier, Seuil, Paris.
- Majeed, Risham with Blake Bradford (2020) "Just being", *Art Journal Open, Conversations*, May 22 [<http://artjournal.collegeart.org/?p=13526>] (accessed on 15 January 2021).
- Murphy, Kevin (2000) *Memory and modernity: Viollet-le-Duc at Vézelay*, Penn State University Press, State College.
- O'Connell, Lauren M. (1993) "A rational, national architecture: Viollet-le-Duc's modest proposal for Russia", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 52 (4): 436-452.
- O'Connell, Lauren M. (1998) "Viollet-le-Duc on drawing, photography, and the 'space outside the frame'", *History of Photography* 22 (2): 139-146.
- O'Connell, Lauren M. (2001) "Afterlives of the Tour Saint-Jacques: plotting the perceptual history of an urban fragment", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 60 (4): 450-473.
- Pratt, Mary Louise (1992) *Imperial eyes: travel writing and transculturation*, Routledge, London.
- Ravenscroft, Tom (2019) *Viollet-le-Duc would not hesitate to build a new roof and spire*, Dezeen, 30 April [<https://www.dezeen.com/2019/04/30/notre-dame-new-spire-roof-viollet-le-duc/>] (accessed on 15 January 2021).
- Riegl, Alois (1984) *Le Culte moderne des monuments: son essence et sa genèse*, trad. Daniel Wiczorek, Seuil, Paris.
- Rogers, Kathryn Merlino (2018) *Building reuse: sustainability, preservation, and the value of design*, University of Washington Press, Seattle.
- Society of Architectural Historians Heritage Conservation Committee (2020) *Statement on the removal of monuments to the Confederacy from public spaces*, adopted 19 June. [[https://www.sah.org/docs/default-source/preservation-advocacy/sah\\_statement\\_monuments-to-the-confederacy\\_19-june-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=39f3249b\\_2](https://www.sah.org/docs/default-source/preservation-advocacy/sah_statement_monuments-to-the-confederacy_19-june-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=39f3249b_2)] (accessed on 16 December 2020).
- Upton, Dell (2015) *What can and can't be said: race, uplift, and monument building in the contemporary South*, Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Upton, Dell (2020) "Monuments and crimes", *Journal 18* (June) [<https://www.journal18.org/5022>] (accessed on 16 December 2020).
- Viollet-le-Duc, Eugène-Emmanuel (1868) *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française*, Librairies Imprimeries réunies, Paris.
- Viollet-le-Duc, Eugène-Emmanuel (1877) *L'Art russe: ses origines, ses éléments constitutifs, son apogée, son avenir*, Morel, Paris.