

APPENDIX A

The Ecole des Beaux-Arts General Evolution

The Ecole des Beaux-Arts' (1819-1968) conceptual base evolved from the Academie Royal d'Architecture which began in 1671. The "academic doctrine was, in twentieth-century terminology, rationalist; it was characterized by a complete trust in, to use a more eighteenth-century word, reason; and at least at first the Academy's trust was so complete as to make reason a seventeenth-century absolute. The Academy sought to evolve universal principles of architecture. . . . The touchstones of these principles were what had long been regraded as the best examples: for proportion, the five Orders; in general, the greatest buildings and texts of Roman antiquity and the Italian Renaissance." (1) By 1717, its basic lectures had become a two year course of study delivered by an appointed Professor of theory. The lectures covered the issues dealt with by Vitruvius, Alberti, Palladio and others, namely architectural theory, composition, arithmetic, geometry, mechanics, military architecture, fortifications, construction and perspective. In addition to the lecture series, the education included work on competition projects in ateliers outside the school and study in Rome.

Two primary lecturers on theory influenced the form of the program greatly. The first was the program director and first Professor of theory, Francois Blondel (1617-86). He believed in immutable rules of composition and taught them following the Roman and Renaissance texts and examples. A distant relative of his, Jacques-Francois Blondel, (1705-75) was later appointed Professor of theory and his lectures were recorded in L'Architecture francaise and Cours d' Architecture. J-F "Blondel acknowledged that beauty is changing, not absolute, but he also believed beauty to be derived from long-appreciated predecessors, while maintaining a belief in the validity of the classical examples. This educational system lasted a little over a century and was dismantled immediately after the French revolution and the fall of the Bastille (1789) and reinstated in a slightly modified form as the Section d'Architecture of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1819 after the monarchy of Louis the XVIII was restored. "The king gave to the administration and curriculum of the school a shape that remained substantially unchanged, except for a few years after the reform of November 1863, for more than one and a half centuries." (3)

The structure of the curriculum was similar to its predecessor, the Academie Royal d'Architecture. It comprised lectures on architectural theory, mathematics, geometry, construction, history of architecture, perspective. In addition a series of competitions and levels of achievement culminated in the Grand

Prix de Rome. The competitions were worked on outside the formal school in ateliers of architects and theorists. They criticized students' work and gave varying emphases to the basic rules of composition and design. The general Ecole des Beaux-Arts program in architecture required a potential student to first be accepted into an atelier by the master. After this, the student could enroll in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and prepare for the entrance exam which tested mathematics, geometry, history, drawing and architectural design. To prepare, a student could hire a tutor, work in their atelier, and listen to the lectures at the school. "From the early 1820's on, there were lectures in theory of architecture, history of architecture, construction, perspective, and mathematics; by 1900 there were more than twice as many courses, including physics and chemistry, descriptive geometry, building law, general history, and French architecture." (4) After passing the entrance exam a student was admitted to the second class and allowed to submit to competitions and continue to listen to lectures. The competition programs and instructions were written by the Professor of theory and judged by the faculty of the academy. The only exams were at the end of lectures on scientific subjects and a student could take the exam without listening to the lectures.

There were two types of competitions; esquisses (sketches) and projects. The competitions tested composition, construction and drawing. For a student to be promoted into the first class he had to receive credit for a specific number of sketches, projects and exams on all subjects. Projects and exams would be given points for good work and a student also needed a minimum amount of points to advance to the first level. A particularly interesting aspect of developing a project was the use of time limits on the development of an initial idea. Students were given twelve hours to develop a sketch for a project. After this point they could take tracings of it back to their atelier and develop it. At the final judging of the project it was first compared to the original drawing; if it did not reflect the same idea, it was rejected. This method of evaluation would certainly have an effect on design; it would tend to require conservative approaches relying on known prototypes and rigid compositional rules. And this was in fact the case.

The first class was similar to the second but with greater emphasis placed on the competitions which had greater program complexity. The Grand Prix de Rome was the culmination of the program and it was open to anyone, though it was usually won by someone in the first class. Winners, one a year, were sent to the French Academy in Rome for four to five years at government expense. Many people competed more than once for this honor and many never won. Students in the first class had no discrete termination to their education if they did not win the rome prize, so they left whenever they felt ready to go. A diploma

was instituted in 1867, but was of little importance for quite awhile. The ateliers were not architects' offices, they were places for teaching. Each atelier had one master who set the tone of the work and emphasized particular approaches to design within the generally accepted Beaux-Arts traditions.

Footnotes

1 Richard Chafee, "The Teaching of Architecture at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts," in *The Architecture of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts*, ed. Arthur Drexler (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1977), p. 62.

2 Ibid., p. 63.

3 Ibid., p. 79.

4 Ibid., p. 82.