Introduction: The Significance of the Grand Prix de Rome d'Architecture

Since the seventeenth century architecture has been approached from four fundamentally different points of view—that of the academic architect, the craftsman-builder, the civil engineer and other technological experts, and, in more recent years, the social scientist. The architectural designs made annually at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris for two and a half centuries before 1968 by competitors for the Grand Prix de Rome are of particular importance for the history of architecture because they constitute so complete—and extreme—an expression of one of these basic approaches, namely, that of the academic architect.

From the academic point of view (and the word “academic” as used herein is intended to be primarily descriptive and by no means necessarily derogatory), architecture is regarded essentially as a fine art in which principles of formal composition stemming from the classical tradition are considered of first importance. Both the craftsman-builder and the engineer, on the contrary, have tended to give emphasis less to such formal design than to utilitarian and structural ends, with the craftsman-builder coming from a background of handicraft and of folk traditions in art, and the engineer from a training in technology and applied mathematics. Since sociology was founded in the early nineteenth century by Henri de Saint-Simon and his disciple, Auguste Comte (who gave sociology its name in the 1830's), the social implications of architecture have been increasingly emphasized, considerably affecting conceptions of mass housing and urban design.

Corresponding to these four points of view toward architecture four basically different kinds of training for the young architect have developed. These may similarly be characterized as the academic, the craft, the technological, and the sociological. Academic training places emphasis on the study of compositional theory and traditional principles of
formal design, as the most important aspect of the architect's training. As the word "academic" itself implies, these principles are considered to be most satisfactorily learned in schools or academies. There, the professors are supposedly acquainted with the "best" design principles as exemplified in great buildings or architectural books of the past, especially those of the classical tradition. It is this system of architectural education, to be investigated in the pages that follow, that characterized official architecture in France from the seventeenth century to our own time and was most completely and clearly reflected in the designs made for the Prix de Rome.¹

In contrast to this, craft training in architecture has, of course, stressed the achievement of proficiency in one or more of the building trades, a profiency that the beginner can learn either on the job under a master craftsman, or, in modern times, to some degree in a vocational school taught by master craftsmen. The aim of this type of architectural education has been to train craftsmen-builders who can themselves erect buildings, instead of merely making designs to be carried out by others as has customarily been done by both the academic architect and the modern civil engineer (a term first used in 1763 by the English engineer John Smeaton to distinguish civil from military engineering). But where the design taught in academies has been based primarily on formal composition, with "beauty" as a major end, in technical schools the emphasis has been on the pragmatic application of scientific principles to specific problems, with economy and utility as the ends in view. Under the influence of the new disciplines of sociology and social science it was to be expected that architectural schools would eventually emphasize pragmatic principles. They thus stressed social function in buildings and the proper relation of them to the social as well as to the physical environment, and therefore to planning for all classes in cities and other regions. But such "urbanism," "regional planning," or "environmental design" became highly influential only after the twentieth century was well under way. It strongly affected the École des Beaux-Arts, the center of academic training in architecture, only with the student revolt of 1968.

Except for brief intervals during the French Revolution and two World Wars, the French academic tradition in architecture was consistently given official recognition by the government from 1671 to 1968. In 1671 the Académie Royale d'Architecture was established by Louis XIV's great minister, Colbert, under the auspices of the king himself. In connection with lectures given before the Académie, a school evolved for training architects. Even though the Académie was closed during the Revolution because of its association with the now discredited monar-
academic point of view had increasingly been forced to compromise with the "modern" position toward architecture that has become more and more influential since the eighteenth century. At that time, new tendencies—those loosely known as the romantic movement and the Industrial Revolution—began to modify academicism, and indeed complicated the whole architectural situation not only in France but elsewhere in the Western World. These newer tendencies differed greatly from French academicism as well as from each other in fundamental ways, such as their respective presuppositions about history and the nature and value of change, about the natural world, and about both the individual and society—presuppositions which have necessarily affected architectural design. On the architect's attitude toward history, for example, must necessarily depend his opinions concerning forms, methods, and styles of the past in relation to new developments. The treatment of the site or the importance given to the natural qualities of materials must inevitably be affected by the architect's point of view toward nature; and the degree to which he subordinates his personality or that of his client to other expressive ends in architecture has reference to the relation of the individual to society, and so to principles and institutions which transcend the individual.

Thus it was with the rise of the romantic movement and the Industrial Revolution alongside the academic tradition that there began to flourish simultaneously the four fundamentally different approaches, each with its own set of presuppositions—a situation without previous parallel in the history of architecture. An inevitable consequence was that academicism began to be faced with strong competition, partly from the increasing number of new technical schools, partly from a revived apprentice system with new vocational schools, and—eventually—in part also from schools of urban and environmental planning. The Industrial Revolution, in giving rise to techniques and values based on the practical utility of "mechanistic" natural science, gave rise also to engineering and other technical schools propounding these new techniques. Romanticism stimulated individualism, which rejected the subordination of architect and client to traditional design principles. Paradoxically, too, romanticism also fostered values based on "social science" and on a conception of society as an organism, which eventually lead to the establishment of schools emphasizing planning—urban, regional, and environmental. Meanwhile romanticism fostered the revival of non-academic historical styles, including an anti-classical Gothic Revival. Out of this came a revival of the medieval apprentice system and its conception of craftsmanship not unrelated to the formation of workingmen's organizations and to the development of vocational schools in which crafts could be taught by methods discovered since the Middle Ages.

Not only did the conflict between these major trends—academic, technological, and romantic—result in the divergence in concepts of architectural education, but it also helped to produce the eclecticism which still persists in architecture and which has been marked by the existence of an almost infinite number of architectural "styles," some historical, some anti-historical. As is obvious, an entire building may still follow a single style or combination of styles, while contemporary neighboring buildings are totally different: some recall other historical styles, but many others reflect a desire for "modern" expression independent of historical reminiscence. Yet no one style has overcome or assimilated the others completely enough to resolve the immense disorder of present-day architecture into a single completely accepted style for all types of building. For—to cite only four types of buildings: the academic tradition, however modified, still affects the design of many public buildings, which still seek to be classically "monumental" in feeling; the utilitarian point of view of the engineer tends to dominate most industrial architecture, and the romantic spirit is still reflected in the individualistic character of much domestic architecture; while its partial offshoot, sociology, has a profound effect on the development and nature of public housing.

As the conflict among these approaches gained in strength, the French academic tradition, in order to survive at all, was forced to compromise to a considerable degree. Study of the Grand Prix designs shows that while the highly abstract and formal standards established by Louis XIV's Académie Royale d'Architecture were in large part continued by the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, they were increasingly affected by the less traditional attitudes toward nature, toward the individual, and toward history that became important after the mid-eighteenth century. In short, the Grand Prix offer an excellent medium for analyzing the influences which have succeeded in modifying and ultimately destroying the French system. Since an understanding of these points of view is necessary for comprehending how the architectural contributions and limitations of our own time came into being, developments reflected in the Grand Prix designs remain of considerable significance for the architect, the historian, and the critic of architecture today.

NOTES

1. For the effects of that revolt on architectural education see my article, "The Rise of a New Architectural Education in France," American Institute of Architects Journal, LVI (October, 1971), 44-47.
THE EVOLUTION OF THE BEAUX-ARTS TRADITION IN FRENCH ARCHITECTURE
From the Founding of the Académie Royale d’Architecture to the Revolution

The concours, or competitions, for the Prix de Rome can be understood only in the light of the academic tradition in architecture as manifested in French architectural education. After a brief description of those competitions, therefore, the background, origins, and history of the Académie Royale d’Architecture and its successor, the architectural section of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, and the school of the Académie Royale and its own successor, the architectural section of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, will be investigated in this and the next two chapters.

Although the first student competition for a prize held by the Académie Royale d’Architecture took place in 1701-1702, this was an isolated instance. The second did not take place until 1720, when the competition for what became regularly known after the French Revolution as the Grand Prix de Rome began as an annual event. Thereafter, except for a few war years, the competition was the high point of the year in French architectural study throughout the nearly two and a half centuries of its life.

The competition was traditionally entered by advanced students of French citizenship who were asked to prepare designs for large architectural projects—customarily for some kind of monumental building with royal, state, or civic connotations—in accordance with a program of more or less detailed specifications given to the competitors at the beginning of the competition, at first by dictation, then, early in the nineteenth century, in printed form. The projects were intended to be exercises in imagination, since they were not intended to be built. In a few of the earliest competitions the participants were required to design only part of a building, but within a few years the programs regularly called for an entire structure. Each competitor was expected to present
his design solely by means of drawings—no models were asked for. The drawings were plans, elevations, and sections (or “profiles” in some competitions before 1750). Perspective drawings, specifically forbidden for the competitions of 1786 and 1787, were submitted, we shall see, in only three competitions in the entire history of the Grand Prix, and even then as supplements to the usual plan, elevation, and section. The characteristic absence of a visually “realistic” approach to architectural design is therefore to be noted because the academic point of view had its philosophical basis in classical “idealism,” especially Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic idealism, rather than in “realism,” “naturalism,” or “materialism.” Plans, elevations, and sections are “idealized” abstractions of the “real” world of nature and the senses, inasmuch as they do not depict architecture “realistically” as it appears to the eye of the beholder.

The program was customarily prepared, not by the teaching staff of the architectural school, but by members of the Académie Royale d’Architecture or later by the architect-members of the Académie des Beaux-Arts. Each contestant, after receiving the program, was first required to prepare within a short but specified period of time, a highly generalized, small-scale sketch, or esquisse, showing a rough plan, elevation, and section of his solution to the problem. The competitor had to adhere to his final drawings to the general solution in his esquisse—otherwise he would be ruled hors concours (i.e., disqualified). At first the esquisses were prepared in the presence of the Members of the Académie, then in the presence of the professor in charge. From 1744 on, however, the esquisses and the drawings on the final sheets were traditionally executed en loge—that is, each contestant prepared his esquisse and made the final drawings in a little cell, or loge, for the purpose of making certain that his conception and final work were his own.

The method of beginning with an esquisse was typical of the academic approach, which has always emphasized starting with the general, the most “ideal,” aspects of design before turning to its particularities. Thus, characteristically, Jacques-François Blondel (1705-1774), professor in the school of the Académie Royale d’Architecture from 1762 to his death in 1774, wrote: “After having conceived the general project of a building, the architect must study its principal parts... finally he must think of the details...” This approach is very different from a “romantic” or utilitarian “functional” point of view, in which the designer would likely start out with some highly particular feature—the “romantic” designer perhaps with a detail that struck his fancy; the “practical” man with the answer to a problem of utility, structure, or economy.

Because the concept underlying the esquisse was so typically academic, it is not surprising that even in the earliest competitions it was required.2 As time went on, the programs became ever more complex; nonetheless, the esquisse was customarily required to be executed within a single day to demonstrate the competitor’s ability to grasp promptly the essentials of a large and complicated problem.

Even in the eighteenth century so rapidly did the number of competitors increase that a preliminary competition was instated. As early as 1739 the Académie hit upon the idea of judging the esquisses alone and eliminating all but eight competitors on that basis.3 After the French Revolution a special one-day preliminary competition was inaugurated; in 1855, as the number of competitors increased, two preliminary competitions were established, the first being a twelve-hour sketch problem to design a specified architectural motif, the second a twenty-four-hour sketch problem involving a great architectural ensemble. Eventually a third preliminary competition proved necessary, a twelve-hour plan sketch introduced between the twelve-hour sketch of a motif and the twenty-four-hour sketch of an ensemble. By such means the number of finalists was held to eight until 1864, after which there were ten.

As competition increased, the programs steadily became more elaborate, as did the drawings expected of the contestants; the small size and simplicity of the early Grand Prix designs reflect the relative informality of the early competitions. In the first competition of 1701-1702 only three students submitted drawings. None of these designs or those of the next competitions of 1720, 1721, and 1722 have survived, the earliest drawings that still exist being from the designs that won first and second prize in 1723 in the competition for a “Hôtel” (City House) for a “grand seigneur.” Of the design that placed first, by one Jean Pinard, only the elevation has survived (Fig. 1)—the plan and the “profile” are missing. The size of the drawings over the years will be discussed at greater length below (see chapter 4); suffice it to say here that Pinard’s drawing was quite small—a little over two feet long. However, the drawings rapidly became larger, and by 1753 they had become so big that the individual loges in which the competitors worked, though first used only in 1744, had to be enlarged to give adequate space.4

The competitions also became increasingly important and elaborate, and so did the role of the patrons. Until the Academies were suppressed, each member of the Académie Royale d’Architecture could sponsor a student in the school. The patrons’ names were increasingly often cited in the minutes of the Académie along with those of their students who were competing for the Grand Prix. Patrons’ names were first recorded in the minutes for 1745 in connection with students submitting esquis-
ses, and this became a frequent practice in the late 1740's and 1750's. In 1758 patrons' names were first cited in connection with the names of award winners. This occurred with greater frequency during the 1760's and early 1770's, and from the mid-1770's it became a regular feature of the Grand Prix. Now, the reputation of a patron was increasingly dependent on the success of his protégés in the Académie school, who were usually working in his atelier and whom he had therefore instructed in architecture. Sometimes a patron with several young men in his atelier would select the one to be sponsored in the Académie's school by holding a competition among them, with a program he dictated himself. Since much of what many early students knew about architecture came from their training in the ateliers of their patrons, the better their work in the school, the more glory was reflected on the patron. As a consequence, the competition for the Grand Prix tended to become not only a competition among the students but among their respective patrons as well, and since the patrons constituted the juries for the Grand Prix competition, not unnaturally each tended to support his own protégé. Inevitably, therefore, the judgments were accompanied by much jockeying and politicking. This became one of the most criticized aspects of the Grand Prix competitions.

One event that especially contributed to making the competitions more formal and elaborate was the appointment in 1762 of Jacques-François Blonde as chief professor of the school, with Julien-David Leroy (1724-1803), Grand Prix of 1750, as his adjunct professor. Later two other professors were named in addition. Blondel required the students to devote much more time to schoolwork, as part of which he introduced a monthly competition, the so-called Prix d'Émulation. As a result the Grand Prix became more elaborate to distinguish it from the lesser competition. Thus, the Académie had to allow the Grand Prix competitors of 1772 to draw their plans at a smaller scale because they again lacked sufficient space in their loges, already enlarged in 1753, to make drawings of the size originally specified. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the size of the drawings was limited only by the exhibition space available in the Salle Melpomène, the large hall of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, where, after its construction in 1858-1862, the Grand Prix drawings were exhibited and judged. Each competitor was allotted a fixed number of running feet of wall space within which his drawings had to fit, with the plan and elevation on separate sheets side by side and the section on a third sheet above. Thus although the scale at which the required buildings were to be depicted in the drawings was specified in the program, the actual sizes of the sheets were for

many years customarily determined by the exhibition space rather than by the program.

The length and intensity of the competition varied considerably. In the relatively relaxed years shortly before the Revolution when the drawings, though increasing in size, had by no means reached their maximum dimensions, the competition customarily lasted a leisurely nine months. After the Revolution—though the drawings were still increasing in size to reach a maximum of about twenty feet in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—the duration of the final competition steadily shortened. The first one after the Revolution, in 1797, lasted 144 days; that of 1827, 118 days. By the 1920's a little over three months had become the standard time, and this was made official by a regulation of 1928 fixing the term at ninety-six days. In 1959, however, increasing dissatisfaction with the "Beaux-Arts" conception, which since the 1920's had been attacked as "paper architecture" by protagonists of the "modern" movement, resulted in the supervision of education being placed in the arts in the hands of a new Ministry of Cultural Affairs. Its first Minister, André Malraux—an art historian, critic, and novelist—was thoroughly unsympathetic to the academic tradition and to Grand Prix competitions. Hence in that year the period of the final competition was reduced from ninety-six to only thirty-six days. Such a sharp de-emphasis of the length and importance of the competition meant that from then on the number of sheets and the size of the drawings had to be much reduced, and presentation of the designs greatly simplified. Now all of the drawings were customarily placed together on a single smaller sheet of carefully specified size, as in the case, for instance, of the winning design of 1965 (Fig. 29), which also shows characteristic simplification of presentation. The programs specified that all drawings must be on a single sheet; that of 1965, for example, measured 11 x 9 feet, and so was considerably smaller than the sheets on which the plans alone had ordinarily been presented before 1959.

The task of making the very large drawings was as much a test of the contestant's physical stamina as of his abilities, even though he had to submit his esquisse he was allowed and indeed expected to have a considerable amount of drafting assistance from fellow students known as nègres. Officially, such assistance was allowed in the competitor's atelier only on preliminary studies at reduced scale and not on the final large-scale drawings. These the competitor was supposed to prepare in his loge at the Ecole entirely by himself. But this regulation was increasingly honored in the breach, and the contestants had their nègres prepare in
the atelier a series of drawings on sheets of tracing paper made at full scale with a special transfer ink. When assembled, the sheets formed the entire drawing in reverse. They were then smuggled into the loge at the École, placed face down on the final sheet of paper and rubbed off onto it so that the competitor would then only have to render the drawing into the final picture. The winner of one Grand Prix in the early 1920's was known to fellow students to have smuggled such drawings into his loge rolled up in an umbrella; by the mid-1920's so completely was this procedure accepted that contestants openly brought the full-sized tracings into the loges. Increasingly, the amount of assistance some contestants received developed into an open scandal, and competitors who sought to make their own drawings were at a disadvantage. In an effort to equalize matters, for a time after World War II the loges in the École were abandoned, the contestants being allowed to prepare their designs entirely in their ateliers. But then so likely were all the drawings to be mostly the work of talented helpers, rather than of the contestants themselves, that it was officially decided to move the competitors to loges in the Château at Fontainebleau, nearly forty miles from Paris, in an effort to isolate them and ensure that their designs were their own work.

In spite of such difficulties and limitations, the traditional approach to the Grand Prix competitions was at least largely successful in compelling entrants to demonstrate their ability to arrive quickly at the essentials of a large architectural problem and to develop it without becoming bogged down in ornamental or structural details, as is so likely with beginners. But this necessarily involved the grave limitation of neglecting such details, since large-scale drawings of them were never required in the Grand Prix competitions (though they were part of other student exercises at the École). The requirement in several early competitions of a "profile" drawing indicates that beautiful and appropriate general forms, rather than specific structure or ornament, were regarded as the major end to be achieved. In the section drawings, soon required in place of profiles, detailed structure of roofs, floors, and walls was given increasingly less attention. Thus, although in relatively early Grand Prix sections, such as that of 1759 (Fig. 3), the roof structure was indicated, this was soon to be entirely omitted, an area of white paper being left instead (e.g., Fig. 18). Although ornament was to be indicated on elevations and sections, it could be indicated only at very small scale, so that it did not have to be carefully studied and could be left to the last possible minute. The consequence was that the "Beaux-Arts" system was regarded by its detractors, with considerable justice, as displaying a deplorable lack of interest in and knowledge of modern developments in structure and a deplorable crudity of inadequately studied, outmoded, ornamental details.

Nonetheless, that system, as reflected in the Grand Prix competitions, offered major advantages and compelled competitors to attack large problems in a general way. The very size of the problems that brought about the development of the system of nègres thereby contributed much to architectural education, for the nègres learned a great deal by working under talented advanced students. However, the system, with its voluntary service, was completely dependent upon high atelier morale. By 1930 the waning of the "Beaux-Arts" system was reflected in the fact that morale had so far declined that one competitor had to pay his nègres to be assured of adequate assistance. As long as the system worked, however, it was a device that no one helped to educate the younger student, but also gave each contestant valuable practice in developing the ability to supervise the work of others. Furthermore, the large size of the required drawings meant that competitors received valuable experience in producing designs under pressure, as architects often have to do. So great, however, were the pressures upon students at the École as a consequence of meeting deadlines on design problems, that they were almost forced to acquire the habit of working intensely up to the last possible moment on their drawings. Indeed, it seemed as though they often put on the final touches on the cart, or charette, which for competitions other than the Grand Prix, carried drawings from the atelier to the Salle Melpomène. From this practice arose the expression "to be en charette," the state of being under great last-minute pressure to complete a work. Too often, students at the École, including competitors for the Grand Prix, acquired the habit of being able to work only under pressure rather than in a more evenly disciplined way.

Although the sources of the academic tradition go back ultimately to classical Antiquity, especially to Roman architecture and classical "idealism" in philosophy, the more immediate sources lay in Italian art and art theory of the High Renaissance and the Baroque. When the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture was founded in 1648, the dramatist Corneille therefore felicitated it on having roused from Italy the secret of beauty. Not only this Academy but several others preceded the establishment of the Académie Royale d'Architecture so that the organization and theories of the architectural academy were naturally based on the earlier French models. The first of these to be founded was the literary Académie Française, officially established by Richelieu
Theory of Design

Like the French academies themselves, the theories of design manifested in the drawings for the Grand Prix derived mainly from literary and artistic sources of the Italian Renaissance, which in turn were largely based on classical Antiquity. From the beginning, the Académie Royale d'Architecture's dominant conception of good architecture was that it exemplified a beauty of form based on fixed principles of taste. These principles were universally accepted by the foremost among those best qualified to judge their merit, and these principles were also teachable. Consequently, as we have seen, at the first meeting of the Académie, on December 31, 1671, François Blondel as director, speaking on behalf of Colbert, stated that the first duty of the Académie would be to formulate principles of architecture and the second would be to teach doctrine based on them. The second and third sessions of the Académie, on January 7 and 14, 1672, were, at the instance of Blondel, devoted to discussing the problem of bon gout (good taste), and it was agreed that "the veritable rule for recognizing things of good taste among those that are pleasing is to consider what has always been more pleasing to intelligent persons, whose merit has been demonstrated by their works or by their writings." The principles of beauty in design were therefore to be based on good taste, which was regarded as good everywhere and for all time, and thus more important than any particularities, whether utilitarian requirements, materials, time and place, or the idiosyncratic genius of an architect. This dominant theory in the Académie Royale d'Architecture derived primarily from classical "idealistic" philosophy, especially the idealism of Aristotle and the Neo-Platonists rather than of Plato. Although Plato, Aristotle, and the Neo-Platonists regarded the idea of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful as the highest ideal and unity, Plato regarded only ideas as real, with particular facts and events of nature and the senses—including therefore works of art and architecture—as being mere shadows of universal ideas, and so essen-
tially unreal and necessarily lacking in significance. But while, like Plato, Aristotle held that Platonic ideas, or “universals,” are more important than particularities, he also maintained that universal principles are nonetheless based on particular facts and events and can only be formulated with these in mind. Hence in the arts, including architecture, such Aristotelian abstractions as symmetry, order, harmony, and proportion, believed to differentiate the fine arts from mere craft, can be formulated only by the study of individual works, including buildings and parts of buildings, executed at a specific time and place by particular designers. Nonetheless, for Aristotle and his followers the principles arrived at on the basis of outstanding examples are more real and significant than any particularities. Thus inasmuch as Aristotelian principles must be formulated on the basis of particular examples, according to academic theoreticians those examples that best exemplify Aristotelian universals and thus come closest to absolute Beauty, Truth and Goodness, must be carefully studied and followed as models.

Like Aristotelian, and more than Platonic philosophy, Neo-Platonism, founded on the works of Plotinus (ca. 204-270 A.D.), has also valued works of art highly, though only insofar as those works partake of Platonic ideals and so achieve an abstract beauty and unity transcending, and independent of, particularities of the world of the senses. For instead of maintaining with Plato that such particulars are mere shadows of Platonic ideas, or with Aristotle that they are the basis for the Aristotelian universals though inferior to them, the Neo-Platonists have held that particularities are inferior because they are nearer the bottom of a great “Chain of Being” emanating from the universal and absolute idea—the Good, the True, and the Beautiful (which can also be equated with God). Hence, in passing down through stages of the “Chain of Being,” one passes from the superior to the inferior in works of art as well as in ideas.

The generally dominant and more conservative school of thought—at the beginning represented in architecture by François Blondel—held to the classical theory of “universal consent” as the test of quality. Its upholders tended to apply to architecture and other arts a combination of Aristotelianism and Neo-Platonism. On the one hand, they believed that good design is founded on Aristotelian principles of order, symmetry, harmony, and proportion rationally formulated on the basis of particular examples apprehended through the senses. On the other hand, they also held that there is a Neo-Platonic hierarchy of architectural and other artistic programs arranged in descending order in a “Chain of Being.” Of these, the programs at the top are those for monumental buildings possessing the most universality and permanent value because they involve architecture for king, state, and church; whereas those at the bottom are the least universal and monumental, either because they are directly devoted to particular utilitarian and economic needs or because they are works for the lowest social classes of people.

The conservative academicians were often called the “Ancients,” a term going back to the early days of the Académie Française (founded in 1635) which antedated the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture and also the Académie Royale d’Architecture. In all of these academies there were conflicts between the “Ancients” and the “Moderns,” who themselves were divided into two groups, both of which subscribed to views also coming ultimately from Antiquity by way of the Renaissance, but possessing very different connotations. Both of the minority groups who regarded themselves as “Moderns” rejected the view that principles of beauty are universal and so had been set for all time and place, with the consequence that the most significant work of recent centuries had been by architects, such as Palladio and Vignola, who sought to follow classical principles. The “Moderns” believed that architecture had developed since classical times and even since the Renaissance, and that its principles were not universally valid but at least partly relative.

In opposing the “Ancients,” one group held to the idea that a good work of art is a creation in accordance with an idea in the artist’s mind. Basically Neo-Platonic, this nonetheless emphasized in an un-Platonic way the creative individual possessing the idea and therefore the uniqueness, rather than the universality of the idea. This view was characteristic of Italian Mannerism which reacted against the strict classicism of the High Renaissance, encouraging instead a free classicism at least partly expressive of the individual fancy of the artist. This point of view was reinforced by the Christian emphasis on the worth of the individual person in the sight of God, and strongly affected the religious art and architecture of the Baroque, which grew out of Mannerism. It was easy, moreover, for this view to become secularized later into a romantic individualism, through which, therefore, Baroque religious romanticism was replaced in works of art by romantic extolment of the individual’s sensations and emotions as being most natural and therefore primary.

The other, and more extreme, group of “Moderns,” however, held that good architecture is in direct accord with particularities of nature—the materials and techniques of structure, the purpose natural to the building and to its time and place—a point of view reflecting philosophical materialism, including eventually functionalism as a kind of materialism. This point of view, long almost without influence within the French academic tradition, derived from the materialism of Epicurus, the
applied science of Archimedes, and Hippocratic medicine, as revived and carried further in the Renaissance. But although derived from classical sources, its proponents among the "Moderns" held, in contrast to the "Ancients," that classical principles, far from being eternal laws, are merely a consequence of the prestige of the ancients and of what people are accustomed to, so that innovation and progress beyond the achievements of Antiquity are both possible and desirable. It is significant that the leader of the "Moderns" in the late seventeenth-century French architecture, Claude Perrault (who, we noted, may or may not have been a member of the Académie Royale d'Architecture)—was a medical doctor also interested in engineering; and his brother, Charles, Colbert's secretary and an amateur architect, was the leader of the "Moderns" in the Académie Française. It should be added that later this group of "Moderns" were to take over from Newton the idea of directly observing nature to formulate a law. Some of them, inspired by Perrault, were to find merit in that most unclassical style of architecture, the Gothic, because its rational use of materials had resulted in structural economy.

In addition to classical sources, the doctrines of Descartes also contributed to the background of academic theory. Descartes distinguished two kinds of knowledge, one of which was derived from the world of material facts as apprehended through the senses. This had much in common with the views of the second group of "Moderns," as did his doctrine of doubt, except upon immediate evidence, for by this all reliance upon authority, including therefore the authority of the Greeks and Romans, was rejected. More important for Descartes, however, was knowledge that comes from general ideas innate in the human mind, implanted by God in the mind of every individual at birth. These innate ideas being common to every human being of whatever time and place, are therefore both universal and eternal; moreover, they are geometrical. In such major respects as these, and also in the belief that reason is the sovereign judge of truth, Descartes' philosophy reinforced the mixture of Aristotelianism and Neo-Platonism held by the "Ancients" in the French Academies. It contributed to their belief in universal, rational principles giving rise to an essentially geometric beauty of form, with beauty itself, as the highest unity, constituting the goal in the arts. It contributed also to their belief in an innate taste, exemplified, together with the principles of formal beauty, by the works of past masters.

It should be added that, much as Descartes' philosophy combined doctrines held by the "Ancients" with others held by the "Moderns," the Académie also tended to synthesize the two points of view, although that of the "Ancients" usually dominated. The character of the synthesis, however, was to vary considerably over the years, so that although the conservatives tended to prevail, and in theory even more than in practice, the "Moderns" at times showed considerable strength. Where François Blondel represented the views of the "Ancients," and Claude Perrault, the "Moderns," the leading architect of Louis XIV's late years, the academician Jules-Hardouin Mansart (1646-1708), reflected a kind of synthesis of both. A similar synthesis was to be seen even more clearly in the ideas and works of Jacques-François Blondel, the chief figure in the school of the Académie Royale d'Architecture from 1762 until his death in 1774, and the one who set the school firmly on the path that it was essentially to follow thereafter.

One Aristotelian doctrine more than any other was fundamental to the prevailing academic theory in all the arts. This was the doctrine of the imitation of nature in art expounded in Aristotle's Poetics—not nature as it is but as it ought to be, a universalized nature "raised above all that is local and accidental, purged of all that is abnormal and eccentric, to be in the highest degree representative,"—what was called in seventeenth-century France "la belle nature." Such imitation involved the adoption of general attributes of nature such as symmetry, order, harmony, proportion. This conception was reflected strongly in Vitruvius's De Architectura, the only architectural treatise to survive from Antiquity. In its sixth meeting, the Académie referred to Vitruvius "as the first and most knowledgeable of all architects." As time went on, however, Vitruvius was to be less venerated, especially after increasing archaeological knowledge made it possible to investigate the sources of his principles in Etruscan and Greek architecture in an effort to arrive at more truly fundamental principles and a purer style.

It was, however, in accordance with the Aristotelian doctrine of imitation that the arts of classical Antiquity, of the Italian Renaissance, and of French academicism all emphasized Aristotelian universals in the form of canons, or norms, of design, especially those relating to the classic orders. Academic architects in the age of Louis XIV, even more than their predecessors in Antiquity and the Renaissance, maintained that beauty resides in canonical, and thus ideal, proportions. François Blondel unequivocally stated that "proportions are the cause of beauty in Architecture." On this account the book containing the course of lectures he had given to students in the school of the Académie deals primarily with the ideal proportions that the orders and other architectural elements should have. On this account, also, Blondel endorsed Vitruvius's statement that the greatest care of the architect ought to be proportion. Indeed, to Blondel—who like Descartes was a mathematician—good
proportions were not simply the result of custom but were based on eternal natural laws, and the best illustrations of those laws were to be found in certain examples of the architecture of the past.

Aristotle himself had not advised the imitation of earlier models for achieving ideal form in this way. But the Roman poet Horace, whose influence on the Renaissance was great (and about whom François Blondel wrote), urged in his Ars poetica that the poet should be chary of inventions and should instead follow a model in the great poetry of the past, which for Horace meant Greek poetry. In accordance with this idea, which was later applied to all the arts, the French academic tradition always tended to follow the precedents established by earlier works of art, particularly those regarded as "classic." In architecture this meant following examples of the general classical tradition, whether those of Antiquity or the Renaissance and post-Renaissance, including earlier examples from French academicism itself. In the classical tradition, at least since the beginning of the Renaissance, Roman and Italian Renaissance precedents ordinarily played a much more important part than those of Greek architecture which, until the second half of the eighteenth century, was almost entirely unknown to western Europe. In view of this reliance on principles stemming mainly from Roman and Italian Renaissance architecture, it is not surprising to find Félibien, the first secretary of the Académie Royale d'Architecture, remarking in his Principes de l'architecture that "Vitruvius cannot be too much esteemed nor too much followed," and that Palladio, perhaps the most classically Roman of all the Italian architects, "holds first place among the Moderns." Such veneration for "classic" precedent, whether from Antiquity or the Renaissance, naturally precluded individual genius and originality, which had been given some value by Italian Mannerism and was to be exalted by romanticism later. Blondel typically remarked, "For the one or two extraordinary geniuses which an entire century, can bring forth, and who by the force of their nature and spirit have been able to develop for themselves a taste regulated without the aid of [traditional] theories, one sees thousands who by their ignorance and presumption corrupt all." Such statements make it obvious that a conflict between the academic regard for precedent and the romantic glorification of individual genius was later to become inevitable; indeed, it was to play the major part in bringing about the decline of French academicism.

Even though the Académie Royale d'Architecture customarily adhered to the general classic tradition, it tended to waver between two chief points of view. Usually—and this was especially the case under Louis XIV—it tended to emphasize the general classic canons of design men-

honed above, canons arrived at, not by imitating single examples from the past, but by studying many classic examples and authorities in order to combine the "best" features of those selected as in the most "correct" taste. However, at times there was the tendency to copy specific buildings or architectural elements from the past; but this tendency became strong only when the academic point of view was affected by outside influences. Such immediate emphasis upon the specific and particular, rather than on Aristotelian and Platonic norms, is actually not classical in spirit, but has more in common with the romantic point of view, so that quite literal copying of specific classical examples is often called "Romantic Classicism."

Even though the general canons ordinarily followed in French academic architecture have thus been based on classical norms, the notion of what constitutes the "best" has tended to vary considerably with changes in taste. Nor have the French academic architects always hesitated to differ with some of the theories of even the best-known authorities of Antiquity or the Renaissance. The Académie Royale d'Architecture often criticized, particularly in minor matters, the very authorities for which it had the most respect. It frequently disagreed with both Vitruvius and Palladio, even though it long ranked them respectively first and second in its list of great architects, followed by the sixteenth-century Italian and French Renaissance architects Scamozzi and Vignola, De L'Orme and Bullant. This freedom to criticize classical authorities to some degree can be seen even in the writings of François Blondel himself. On the one hand he stated, "We must have all possible esteem and even veneration for Antiquity, because it is from this source that we have drawn everything excellent that has been produced in modern times." But then he went on to say, "There are things in the buildings of the Ancients that I should never advise using..." He concluded, "One can alter some of the ideas of the Romans as the Romans have done with the ideas of the Greeks, provided that one remains, as did they, within the limits of general rules." Indeed, Blondel felt that by altering the ideas of the Greeks and of Vitruvius later architects had sometimes improved upon them as long as the general classic "rules" were not violated. Said he, "But as we know that the doctrine of Vitruvius is purely that of the Greeks who preceded him; and that those who followed him, even the Romans themselves, have much surpassed..."
the beauty of their edifices and which have the most universal approbation, namely, Vignola, Palladio, and Scamozzzi..."19 (Significantly, the three architects Blondel exalted as Moderns were in fact the most classical architects of the Renaissance.)

Hence, while the French academic designers closely followed what they considered to be principles found in Roman precedents, they did not necessarily accept all Roman precedents, but only those that best suited their own point of view at a given period, and even these were usually modified in an effort to improve them. Consequently, even the most conservative French academic architects were likely to accept, at least tacitly, some idea of possible progress in architecture. Furthermore, many of the principles that the academic architects considered to be Roman were in fact derived from the classicizing authorities of the Renaissance, such as Palladio, Vignola, and Scamozzi. Although many of the classic forms and principles adopted by the Renaissance, and consequently by French academicism, were present in many important Roman works, they were by no means typical of all Roman art or of any one period.

It must be kept in mind that the usual intent of High Renaissance architects was not to copy specific Roman buildings but to arrive at their own general canons based on a composite of Roman examples,10 canons which were generally more rigid than those of Vitruvius himself, and much more rigid than those illustrated by actual Roman buildings. Since French academic architects tended to adhere to the principles laid down in the writings of these Renaissance authorities even more closely than did most Italian architects themselves, the French academic canons of "classic" design in turn tended to become even more rigidly fixed than those of Renaissance Italy.

The influence of classicizing architects of the High Renaissance such as Palladio and Vignola was not, however, the only Italian influence on French academicism. For the latter also was subject—though in lesser degree—to the influence of freer tendencies which, under the leadership of Michelangelo, had grown away from the strict "classicism" of many other Renaissance architects. It was out of this freer and more Michelangelesque current that Mannerism and the Baroque finally arose.

By the time the Académie Royale d'Architecture was founded, this Manneristic and Baroque current, which had originated in post-Renaissance Italy rather than in classical Antiquity, had long been affecting French architectural theory through the half-Italianized court. But the nationalistic reaction against the plan for redesigning the Louvre, made by Bernini, who came to France in 1665, had rendered the Mannerist-Baroque current unpopular among French architects by the time the Académie was founded six years later. The members of the Académie in the age of Louis XIV frowned upon the Italian Baroque and its architects. For example, François Blondel spoke disparagingly of the "bizarre features," such as elaborate cartouches, broken pediments, and columns niched back into the wall, which Bernini's rival, the Italian Baroque architect Borromini, introduced into his works. According to Blondel, such features "bore relation neither to the precepts nor to the examples of true architecture," and "corrupted the beauty of the invention."21

In spite of such statements, the French academic tradition was to some degree influenced by the relatively free classicism of Michelangelo and architects of the Italian Baroque. Thus even Blondel himself praised Michelangelo's rear façade of St. Peter's as "on the whole one of the most beautiful things that the Moderns have ever produced in architecture." Despite this favor, however, to remark that license had been taken with particular members and moldings.22 Furthermore, Blondel did not hesitate to cite various seventeenth-century Baroque buildings in Rome as being important examples of architecture.23

It was typical of the centralization of artistic as well as political ideas under Richelieu, Mazarin, and Louis XIV himself that the stricter "classic" tendencies of the High Renaissance, which had never entirely died out, and the freer tendencies of Michelangelo and even of the Baroque were brought together with certain native inventions—such as the Mansard roof—to form a characteristic style at the time when the Académie Royale d'Architecture was founded. Because the two imported Italian currents, despite considerable denigration of the Baroque, played such an important part in forming Louis XIV style, the style has been called, by one historian of French architecture, "the Barocco-Palladian Compromise,"24 the term "Palladian" here standing for the general Vitruvian conception of Roman architecture held by the classicizing architects of the High Renaissance. It should be emphasized, however, that this represents a great over-simplification for Louis XIV style was no mere "compromise." It involved, rather, a thoroughly French synthesis of Italian and native French elements to produce a new and original style. This characteristically French style in many respects persisted in official architecture, and so in the Grand Prix designs, largely because the emphasis placed on governmental control of all aspects of life during Louis XIV's reign established a precedent for supervision of the arts, and consequent conservatism, which dominated French architectural education throughout its history. Within the tradition, however, there was always tension between the ultra-conservatives and their somewhat
more liberal confrères—between the more rigidly classicizing or "Palladian" current, and the freer, more individual, "Baroque" and "romantic" tendencies. It was this tension, we know, that had originally brought about the conflict between the "Ancients" and the "Moderns," and the same struggle continued to affect French academic art in some degree until 1968 and the revolt which signified the triumph of "Moderns."

Even though the more conservative wing was predominant in the Académie itself, the Grand Prix designs show that the freer and more expressive current at times emerged. Nevertheless, the designs also show that despite all such changes the basic tendencies in fundamentals remained relatively constant. It was because so many of these factors persisted that the Grand Prix reflected a remarkably consistent architectural tradition, and as is so often the case, the longer the tradition existed, the more dogmatic it tended to become.

This doctrinarianism in large part resulted from the belief of the conservatives that the principles of beauty are fixed and natural "laws" of design. Blondel proposed that there are "natural beauties which please and which compel liking at the moment they are known"; and that the "pleasure which they give lasts always without being subject to change." It is true that dating from Félibien's time there were usually some members of the Académie with a more liberal view, but even at its first meeting the Académie stated that it would meet once a week "to confer on the art and rules [my italics] of architecture."

The belief in eternal and unchanging principles naturally tended to prevent acceptance of the doctrines of progress and evolutionary change which were prevalent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The idea of progress had played a largely subordinate role in the period of classical Antiquity, which believed instead in cycles of advancement and regression. The idea was essentially lacking, too, in the Christian Middle Ages, as well as during the Renaissance, which in most fields harked back to classical Antiquity. It was only after progress in science, by means of the methods first suggested by Francis Bacon, had obviously surpassed the achievements of the Ancients, that the idea invaded other fields, and that evolution and change became ends in themselves. Since Blondel was a mathematician, and there had been demonstrable progress in mathematics, even he could be expected to be sympathetic to the idea applied to architecture. Still, only since the eighteenth century have these notions consciously influenced the history of architecture to any degree. Eventually their influence became so great that they even affected participants in the French academic tradition, leading them, we have seen, to attempts at reform. For the most part, however, the Grand Prix continued to reflect the reluctance to depart from its principles of design. Because changes in those principles developed only with difficulty, many of the theories on which the Louis XIV style was based continued to influence the drawings made for the Grand Prix throughout its history.

It must be reiterated that these drawings normally reflected only the more conservative design aspects because the competitors were naturally loath to risk offending the conservative members of the Académie with advanced ideas. The more conservative jurors always tended to be governed by their theories rather than by their own practice, for their theories, we noted, were usually rather more conservative than their actual architecture. Blondel, for example, often used the classical forms with considerable Baroque freedom in his own buildings. Nevertheless, even the least conservative examples of academic design customarily were prone to stress rational principles of composition rather than originality or utility. While this emphasis on abstractly rational principles had been fairly characteristic of the architectural theory of classical Antiquity, as represented by Vitruvius, it became more marked with the theories of architects of the Italian Renaissance, such as Alberti, who wrote that "the true seat of beauty is in the mind and in reason." When the Académie Royale d'Architecture was founded in the seventeenth century, this tendency became still more important for art and architecture in harmony with the philosophy of Descartes. The writings of such early authorities as Blondel and Félibien clearly betray a Cartesian regard for reason. Thus Félibien, before he became the first secretary of the Académie, had bestowed special praise upon the artist Poussin for his rationality, and in typical fashion had stated that in the art of painting the lights of reason are above that which the hand of the painter can execute. Similarly, the minutes of the third meeting of the Académie stated that architecture had developed from mere building only when architects had "by the lights of reason, sought to make each part of a building exactly suitable, and had given it more beauty and exact proportion." Another characteristic of the academic point of view, particularly noticeable in the early days but always persisting in some degree, was the aristocratic approach to art, which it in part inherited from Vitruvius, from Neo-Platonism, and from the Renaissance, and which was exaggerated by the intensely aristocratic spirit of the age of Louis XIV. At that time the Académie did its best to spread the idea that only an aristocracy of intellect could possibly comprehend architecture—as Blondel put it, "There are few people capable of knowing the beauties of architecture." Blondel further remarked that Louis XIV had rescued
the art of architecture "from the mortar and the trowel," a statement indicating that the architects of the Académie, as royal architects, now considered themselves to be of considerable social position, able to meet noble and royal clients on terms of near equality, rather than craftsmen of low social class as had been the case under the maîtres or guilds. Thus the architect J.-H. Mansart rose from a family of guild members to eventual ennoblement and ministerial responsibilities.

This aristocratic heritage was also reflected in the importance assigned to "nobility" of subject matter, so that the value of a work of art was felt to depend directly on the dignity of its subject. Félibien, for example, early praised the work of the seventeenth-century French painter Vouet, because in Vouet's time French painting began to be more noble in feeling. Following the precedent set by Vitruvius and Italian Renaissance architects, the French tended to rank types of buildings, with monumental public architecture considered to be the most noble, a tendency reinforced, we saw, by the Neo-Platonic conception of a hierarchical "Chain of Being." This emphasis on nobility of subject became particularly exaggerated in France not only because the Académie was founded during the hierarchical age of Louis XIV, but also because it originated as an advisory body to the king as the head of the state, so that the members were concerned primarily with the royal and public buildings. Even during the period when France became a republic, the members of the architectural section of the Académie des Beaux-Arts customarily obtained the great commissions for monumental public architecture; hence the tendency to regard this as the most worthy genre persisted in the Grands Prix. Nevertheless, the conception of what should be included under public architecture broadened considerably, as building types became more specialized, to include more "utilitarian" buildings, such as exchanges, markets, libraries, mint, etc. This became particularly true after Jacques-François Blondel was appointed professor at the school of the Académie Royale d'Architecture, for in the second volume (1771) of his Cours d'architecture he devoted much space to such types of buildings.

Somewhat related to the importance placed on nobility and dignity of subject matter is the importance that artists placed on improving nature, in accord with Aristotle's doctrine of imitation. Even in the representational arts of painting and sculpture, academic artists did not seek to imitate nature literally; hence they paid relatively little attention to subjects such as landscape and still-life which deal most directly with the world of nature, and which they placed at the bottom of their hierarchy. The academic artist has always had a primarily humanistic rather than naturalistic approach to art, and in dealing with nature has customarily emphasized only la belle nature—that idealized nature formally composed by man, on which, the Académie believed, even proportion is based. It is therefore not surprising that Félibien so emphatically maintained that the artist must concentrate his attention upon composition (meaning formal composition) in order to secure ideal beauty. It was this same ideal and ordered beauty that François Blondel had in mind when he transferred la belle nature to architecture by declaring, "It is necessary to subject oneself to certain rules and to eschew caprice if one desires to establish la belle architecture.

Thus the joint doctrines of la belle nature and la belle architecture constantly tended to produce abstractly formal compositions in French official design, based on traditional and a priori principles, so that normally no importance was given to the "naturalistic" and "picturesque." As a result, academic architects paid relatively little attention to the natural site that in different ways are so important for "romantic" and "functionalistic" design. According to the academic point of view, then, nature must be clearly recomposed by the artist in the light of general principles of formal composition which are universally valid—with the consequence that in the Grand Prix competitions the competitors were customarily allowed to imagine their sites in accordance with those principles.

It was primarily because of this also that French academicism tended to adhere to the classical tradition, which by its nature can best be codified into canons of design. However, when the Académie Royale d'Architecture was founded, the architects took over only those aspects of Roman, Renaissance, or Baroque classical architecture that could answer the theories, as well as the conditions and requirements, of the age of Louis XIV. Only those features of "classic" composition were selected and developed that were best suited to the prevalent Cartesian regard for abstract logic, unity, and clarity, and that could best express that glorification of the French state and the aristocratic principles exemplified by the absolute monarchy of Le Roi Soleil himself. In fact, architecture was consciously regarded as one of the most effective ways of expressing such things. As Colbert wrote to Louis XIV a few years before the founding of the Académie: "Your Majesty knows that, except for outstanding military engagements, nothing marks the grandeur and spirit of princes more than buildings, and all posterity measures these qualities by the merit of the splendid houses that they have raised during their lives." In conveying the principles of the monarchy by means of classically inspired designs, the Académie therefore went beyond earlier examples of that tradition in stressing, to an even greater degree than ever before, unity, centralized order, and symmetry. Correspondingly, François
Blondel showed his fundamental classicism in the remark: "We ought to have every possible esteem and veneration for the Antique." But in stating that unity engenders beauty, and that symmetry is agreeable to human beings "because it has an affinity with our natural constitutions," he gave emphasis to qualities which, while growing out of Vitruvian doctrine, went well beyond Vitruvius. That this same view toward classicism and symmetry continued, though in somewhat liberalized form, into the twentieth century is indicated by Julien Guadet, who wrote: "In architecture the first studies ought to be essentially classic", and "Symmetry with, however, variety ought generally to be sought."

At the time the Académie Royale d'Architecture was founded, symmetry and proportion were regarded as closely related—indeed, according to one contemporary definition, symmetry was actually synonymous with proportion. Nevertheless, according to another definition—the usual one today and the one implied in Guadet's statement—symmetry has meant the identity or close similarity of two parts of a design on opposite sides of an axis.

The earlier definition that had equated symmetry with proportion was derived from the Greek, and had been followed also by Vitruvius. To the Greeks, and to Vitruvius, symmetry had meant any harmonious relation of parts to the whole and to one another, and not necessarily bilateral identity of parts only. In the seventeenth century, therefore, the use of the term in this context was upheld by learned men who knew their Greek and Latin, even though symmetry as bilateral identity had already become the more popular meaning. This is all made very clear in Perrault's translation of Vitruvius, published in 1673. Whenever Vitruvius used *symmetria*, Perrault translated it by the word "proportion," thus giving the word its Greek and Latin meaning. In a footnote he pointed out that in everyday parlance the word signified "the relationship which parts on the left side have with those on the right, those high up have with those low down, those in back with those in front." In other words, symmetry then commonly meant bilateral identity, as it does today. Perrault went on to say, "It is quite strange that Vitruvius did not speak of this kind of symmetry which constitutes a great part of the beauty of edifices." In French architecture such symmetry had become more important than it had ever been to Vitruvius, and was to make for a more rigid unity in formal planning that affected the Grand Prix.

When two years later François Blondel began publication of his *Cours d'architecture*, he used only the Vitruvian meaning for symmetry. It is thus not surprising to find that while bilateral symmetry was fairly usual in the architecture of Louis XIV, it was by no means an absolute in architecture of that time—for example in the arrangement of rooms in the Château of Versailles or in buildings of the age of Louis XV, and so in the earliest Grand Prix designs—as it became in the Grand Prix of the second half of the eighteenth century and later.

Bilateral symmetry, then, was itself a kind of proportion and one that came to be regarded as giving the highest possible degree of compositional unity. The two principles remained very important throughout the history of French academicism, even though the degree of symmetry varied considerably at different periods. Nevertheless, from the beginning of the Grand Prix competition and continuing for a period of about one hundred and seventy-five years, all of the winning designs without exception were not only highly unified in plan, but were basically symmetrical in being identical on opposite sides of axes. The first clearly asymmetrical composition in the history of the Grand Prix was the "Votive Church in a Celebrated Place of Pilgrimage," which won the prize as late as 1897 (Figs. 22-23). Even after that, moreover, asymmetrical compositions were exceptional, and no totally irregular and picturesque composition ever appeared in the Grand Prix designs.

In other words, the kinds of compositions permissible to the academic architects of France were restricted because of their regard for order and formality, and this in turn tended to exaggerate the "classical" spirit of French academic design. It is certainly not surprising that the unity and symmetry characteristic of Grand Prix plans and elevations frequently remind one of Roman buildings, such as the Imperial Baths or the Pantheon. But it was only these more highly ordered Roman compositions that appealed to the age of Louis XIV and to the regard for logical organization. Like the Imperial Baths, the Grand Prix plans were usually organized around one or more focal spaces of simple geometric shape, generally an important room or courtyard, as in a typical plan such as that of 1786—a "Building to House the Academies" (Fig. 7). Usually, too, the focal spaces were at the intersection of two main axes crossing at right angles, as in the plans for 1823 and 1900 (Figs. 9 and 24), and likewise in the Baths of Caracalla, the Basilica of Constantine, and various other public buildings. The term "axis" implies not only a line in plan running along the center of a void, but also a median plane directly above that line, which cuts the whole composition in two, so that in elevation as well as in plan the arrangement of voids and solids on one side of each axis is essentially the same as that on the other side. The axial kind of composition—though later at times in the Grand Prix designs based on a single axis—remained characteristic; only in a very few Grand Prix toward the end of the competition were distinct axes lacking
(e.g., Fig. 29), thus foreshadowing the collapse of the tradition. That the use of axes remained of great importance in the late nineteenth and well into the twentieth century is indicated by Julien Guadet's statement in his lectures on architectural theory, "The axis is the key of a design and will be the key of the composition. . . . In an architectural design it is necessary to proceed before all by means of axes." It is not surprising, then, to find that throughout almost the entire history of the Grand Prix competition, axial compositions—usually cross-axial—of a kind inherited from selected examples of Roman architecture were employed. As a consequence, even the largest and most complex schemes gave an effect of simple geometrical clarity of organization that was at once academic and peculiarly French.

The same desire for clarity can be seen also in the approach to representing architecture on paper. Because the academic architects always looked upon themselves not as craftsmen-builders but as artists who design architecture in the drafting-room, the ability to make careful and clear drawings became a prime requisite for professional success. Not only in architecture but also in the other fine arts, the ability to draw became emphasized as soon as academicism was established in France; hence Félibien wrote in the 1660's, "Drawing is the foundation and base of this whole great mechanism of Painting [machine de la Peinture]." As might be expected, the kind of drawing particularly favored was characterized by regular and fairly continuous outlines which clearly delimit the forms and were consequently well suited to represent the comparatively simple, geometrically ordered forms of academic design.

This emphasis upon abstract ideas and clarity of presentation extended to the graphic process to which the architect and the Grand Prix competitor adhered in conceiving their designs. They started from a basic Vitruvian belief clearly reformulated by Vasari in the sixteenth-century: "Drawing [disegno] is the father of our three arts, Architecture, Sculpture and Painting." In an almost exact translation of another statement by Vasari, Félibien had defined drawing as "an apparent expression, or a visible image of the thoughts of the mind (esprit) and of what one has formed first in the imagination." Like Vasari, also, the French academic artists and architects have always considered that three steps are necessary in preparing a finished design, steps by which the artist never more closely approximates, in visible form, the idea in his mind while seeking to reduce to a minimum that which is irrational. In doing so he becomes a creator who, philosophically speaking, moves progressively closer to the ultimate Neo-Platonic idea of Beauty, Goodness, and Truth which exists in the mind of God alone.

The first of the three steps in making a design consists in putting down on paper a rapid sketch which presents, in preliminary form, the essence of the idea in the mind of the designer. This preliminary sketch the Italian academic artists and critics actually called a pensiero, or thought; while the French, since Félibien's time, have called it an esquisse, or sketch.

Thus, in the competition for the Grand Prix, the preparation of a freehand esquisse to record the essence of the designer's idea was always the first step. After the esquisse was deposited with the secretary of the school, the competitor—like any academic designer—was next expected to make at a larger scale much more carefully detailed studies of the various parts of his design. The third and last step consisted in bringing these studies into a final synthesis, a final design, that was a visual culmination of the idea in his mind. It was solely on this final design drawn with a ruling pen—which must not, however, diverge in any essential way from the freehand conception in the esquisse—that the work of a competitor was judged.

Thus the aim of this threefold process was simply to represent on paper the designer's mental conception of the form of his building, and to do so with progressive clarity so that in the end the design could be readily apprehended by others, especially by the judges. The process was essentially a rational one, and in order that the final designs might be the more easily understood, the competitors were required to adhere to certain graphic conventions. In doing so, they were necessarily compelled to restrict self-expression as well as to avoid specifically realistic kinds of representation. Indeed, as noted earlier, the very types of drawings—plans, elevations, and sections—to which a competitor was restricted were themselves mathematical conventions, abstractions, inasmuch as an actual building is not seen as a plan, elevation, or section, but instead is perceived in a changing perspective.

In order that elevations, plans, and section drawings might be mathematically exact as well as perfectly clear, they have customarily been drawn "mechanically," that is, not drawn freehand, but with instruments to produce a mechanically exact and clear outline. And, at least in elevation, the Grand Prix designs were always "rendered" with washes, etc., for the purpose of further bringing out the form of the proposed building by distinguishing solids from voids and by making clear to the beholder which parts of the building would project and which recede.

In general it can be said, however, that during the periods when French academicism was most pure, and thus least affected by other approaches, the renderings submitted in the Grand Prix competitions were most conventionalized and most removed from pictorial realism and from individual style in drawing. Conversely, during periods when the
academic view was most strongly modified under the impact of anti-academic romantic or realistic tendencies, the elevation, plan, and section drawings were most likely to be drawn less mechanically and rendered in a range of colors rather than with monochrome washes. For color can be used either to achieve a more realistic effect or to arouse feelings and emotions in the beholder, feelings and emotions regarded as primary by the romantic approach to architecture. In either case, the abstract reasoning glorified by the academic point of view would be sharply modified.

Even the types of construction were customarily selected and restricted to harmonize with this desire for clarity. Just as the academic designers long tended to employ only the centralized cross-axial plan found in certain buildings of the classical tradition, so also they tended to restrict themselves to construction methods characteristic, not of all classical architecture, but of those Roman or Renaissance buildings regarded by the age of Louis XIV as in the best taste. Hence the materials and methods selected from the "classical" past were those that could best produce the effect of clear yet monumental order considered so necessary for architecture under the Grand Monarque. It was a firmly established tradition that architecture can only be truly monumental and have the highest degree of character if constructed of solid masonry with at least a facing of cut stone, preferably marble, and if the building has simple geometric forms axially composed, with the major rooms and halls covered, if possible, with vaults or domes of simple geometrically "classical" shape. In using such construction, the French architects were merely continuing and giving greater emphasis to a point of view that had become particularly characteristic of the "classical" tradition in the Renaissance. As early as the middle of the fifteenth century, Alberti, the first great Renaissance writer on architecture, had stated that the roofs of "temples" (i.e., churches) ought to be tunnel vaulted because "it gives them greater dignity and makes them more durable"—makes them, in short, more monumental.

But although the French academic designers thus so long restricted themselves to forms based primarily on masonry construction, their regard for abstract composition and "correct" proportion meant that they gave little or no conscious expression to the specific nature of the masonry used. In short, even more than to Vitruvius and his Renaissance followers, the expression of the quality of the material was less important to the academic designer than "correct" design. Buildings, whether of solid stone, brick, or rubble with a facing of stone, brick, or stucco, etc., were designed with the same surface treatment, the same "classical" elements. As a consequence, the attitude toward materials and methods of construction was ordinarily in sharp contrast to that of "functionalistic" architects of modern times who maintained that the form of the building must express the qualities of the materials and methods of construction used in it. Hence only late in the nineteenth century, well after the views of the civil engineer had begun to affect some exceptional academic architects, such as the "rationalists" Labrouste and Duban, was non-masonry material, iron, depicted in a few Grands Prix in forms that partially (but only partially) expressed the inherent nature of the material.

In sum, the principles that characterized academic composition when it was first formulated under Louis XIV affected the Grand Prix designs to the end. At times these principles were followed with great strictness; at other times they were treated with somewhat more freedom. There occurred within the framework of French academic tradition considerable variation in compositional treatment, variations that reflect changes in the prevailing ideas as to what is worthy of expression in architecture. This brings us to another important point, namely, the character desired in French academic architecture, and the reasons for certain modifications in it expressed at different times.

NOTES


3. Charles Perrault designed an addition to the family house. He was appointed by Colbert Commiss de la Surintendance des Bâtiments, and held that office from 1663 to 1678.


10. Blondel's Comparaison de Pindar et d'Hercace was published in 1673.
THEORY OF DESIGN

118. Horace, Ars Poetica, II. 128-131, seems to urge the imitation of the Iliad rather than the search for originality.

12. André Félibien, Des Principes de l'architecture, de la sculpture, de la peinture, et des autres arts qui en dépendent, 3rd ed. (Paris, 1697), preface, n.p. Blondel, Cours, did not place quite so much reliance on Vitruvius because he felt that later architects had surpassed Vitruvius not only in "modern" times but even in the Roman period itself. See preface, pt. 1; elsewhere, however, he placed Vitruvius first—see n. 16, below.


15. For instance in 1753 the Académie reserved passing favorable judgment on Vitruvius' propositions because they were not like those in works of Antiquity (Procès-verbaux de l'Acad. roy., VI, 192); and in 1698 it criticized some of Palladio's stair arrangements (Procès-verbaux, III, 44).


17. F. Blondel, Cours, pt. 2, bk. VIII, chap. x, pp. 167-168. As a result of his regard for Antiquity, Blondel particularly revered the classic columns. Said he, "The most noble part of a building is the column, and it is on this that the rest of the ornaments depend" (pt. 1, bk. I, chap. III, p. 5).


19. Ibid., preface.

20. It is true that in arriving at such standards of design he more consciously "classic" architects of the Renaissance, such as Bramante or Palladio, sometimes came close to literal imitation of specific Roman buildings, but this was not ordinarily their chief aim. Although Bramante's Tempietto at S. Pietro in Montorio, for example, closely resembles Roman circular temples such as Tivoli or those cited by Vitruvius, it is by no means a literal copy; and Palladio's attempt to reconstruct from literary evidence the bridge built by Caesar across the Rhine was exceptional even for him.

21. Ibid., pt. 3, bk. II, chap. II, p. 250; and p. 768. Blondel also criticized the church of the Theatine Fathers in Paris, designed by the Italian Baroque architect Guarini. Similarly Blondel's younger contemporary Charles-Augustin D'Aviller attacked Italian Baroque design in the preface to his own Cours d'architecture, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1694; originally published in 1691). He stated that the effort must be made "to prevent in France, today so enlightened, what has happened in Italy where at present license in the arts is without bounds, as the buildings of Rome during this century have relation neither to the precepts nor to the examples of true architecture; there are only cartouches, broken gables, niched columns [colonnes tichées], and other extravagances which the Cavaliere Bernini, Pietro da Cortona, Rainalci, and several others have put into use..." D'Aviller, who had been a student under François Blondel in the school of the Académie Royale d'Architecture, was the first from that school to be sent to Rome (1674); and although he never became a member of the Académie, he was allowed to attend its meetings.


23. Ibid., pt. 3, bk. III, chap. VI, pp. 263-265; including Santa Maria in Via Lata (Cortona), the Collegio della Propaganda Fide (Borrutini) and the Palazzo Ludovisi (Bernini), among many others. The Académie as a whole also said a good word for the Baroque. Thus in 1734 it praised Michelangelo and Bernini for their decorative ability (Procès-verbaux de l'Acad. roy., V, 138). It is probably significant, however, that this praise was given to Michelangelo and Bernini during the reign of Louis XV when the Rococo prevailed in architecture and strict "classicism" had therefore somewhat relaxed its grip in France.


28. Procès-verbaux de l'Acad. roy., I, 3. The rules were also stressed by F. Blondel (Cours, e.g., pt. 5, bk. I, chap. I, p. 3, and pt. 3, bk. I, chap. XI, p. 235), and by D'Aviller, who stated in the preface to his Cours d'architecture, "We have always seen that those who depart from the rules... have lost the reputation that they would have acquired if they had submitted to them." In 1686 the Académie again emphasized the importance of rules (as it was to do frequently), though this time it exceptionally admitted that perfection in architecture also "depends on the greatness of the genius of the architect" (Procès-verbaux de l'Acad. roy., II, 119). In 1744, one Cartaud maintained before the Académie that the "proportions of Antiquity have been followed and approved by so many able men that... one ought not put to the account of the Académie a work which will not conform to the old rules" (Procès-verbaux de l'Acad. roy., VI, 9). More liberal opinions were, however, occasionally expressed. In 1766, for example, Académie members agreed that principles in regard to the classic orders are not invariable and that rules are "for the most part the children of the taste which has preceded them" (Procès-verbaux de l'Acad. roy., VII, 242). Yet in 1775 even the architect Soufflot, in many respects an unusually liberal academician, read a discourse before the Académie "on the identity of taste and rules in the art of architecture" (Procès-verbaux de l'Acad. roy., VIII, 241).

29. See Bury, Idea of Progress. Bury, however, failed to do justice to the existence of some idea of progress in Antiquity.

30. For example, his stables at the château de Chaumont-Lagois, are cited by Hautecoeur, II, 872, as particularly Baroque.


32. Félibien, Entretiens, 6th entretien, p. 282.

33. Procès-verbaux de l'Acad. roy., I, 5.

34. F. Blondel, Cours, pt. 2, bk. VIII, chap. x, p. 170.

35. Ibid., dedication.


37. Vitruvius, De Architectura, bk. I, chap. III, discussing the different departments of architecture, mentioned public architecture before private and followed that order in the layout of the treatise. Alberti gave still greater importance to public architecture in his De Re Aedificatoria: "Who that has built any public edifice does not think himself honoured by it when it is reputed to a Man only to have built a handsome Habitation for himself?" (Leoni translation, 1726, p. x). In bk. IV, chap. I, Alberti cited the relative importance of three chief types of buildings: public buildings, buildings for principal citizens, and buildings for common people. Similarly, Palladio spoke of public buildings as being more excellent (see preface, bk. III, i quarto libri dell'architettura, Ware translation, 1738, p. 57). That the French academic architects also adhered to this view is indicated by a statement which a Gabriel (probably Jacques and not his son Jacques-Ange) read to the Académie in
1734, and which was part of the preface to a proposed treatise on the discussions of the Académie. In it Gabriel spoke of architecture as ornamenting cities with—in the following order of importance—palaces for kings, princes, and principal lords; then temples, public squares, and other public buildings; followed by houses, bridges, roads, dikes, canals, etc. (see Procès-verbaux de l'Acad. roy., V, 136-137).


39. Camus, secretary of the Académie Royale d'Architecture, stated in 1734 that la belle nature was an essential element of good proportion; and that good proportion together with proper distribution of parts and convenience, formed the three elements of harmony in architecture which produce good taste (Procès-verbaux de l'Acad. roy., V, 142-143).

42. September 3, 1668; Hautecoeur, II, 264.
44. Ibid., p. 170.
45. Vitruvius did, however, give considerable importance to ordered unity and symmetry in his De Architectura, notably in Bk. I, chap. II, and bk. III, chap. 1. In par. 1 of the latter, for example, he wrote, "The planning of temples depends upon symmetry," using the term "symmetry" to mean appropriate harmony.

46. Julien Guadet, Eléments et théorie de l'architecture, 5th ed. (Paris, n.d.; originally published 1901-1904) I, 82. It is true, however, that Guadet used the word "classique" somewhat more broadly than did Blondel.
47. Ibid., I, 128.
48. Pascal (d. 1662) also used symmetry synonymously with proportion. See Fiske Kimball, The Creation of the Rococo (Philadelphia, 1943), p. 153. The Neo-classicist Quatremère de Quincy reverted to this meaning, on the basis of Greek and Latin, as late as 1825 under "Symétric" in the third volume of his Dictionnaire d'architecture, 3 vols. (1788-1825), published as part of the Encyclopédie méthodique (1782-1832).
50. F. Blondel, Cours, pp. 727, 768.
52. Félibien, Entretiens, 4th entertain, p. 366.
57. A paraphrase of De Tolnay, Old Master Drawings, pp. 19-22 and 6, where, however, he is discussing drawing in general, not Grand Prix designs as such.
58. Quatremère de Quincy—under "Caractère," in his Architecture stated: "In general, the use of stone is what gives architecture the greatest character, that is to say the most force, simplicity, and severity, above all if these stones are of marble of which the glistening splendor (éclat) and the solidity add to the difficulty of working them" ([1788], 493).
7. Charles Percier, Edifice à rassembler les Académies (Building to House the Academies), plan. Premiers Prix, 1786.

*Opposite page:*