INTRODUCTION

Around the year 1830 there emerged in Paris a group of architects who studied the history of architecture with a new, precise method of spatial and structural analysis. This permitted them to grasp the subject in terms of its organic principles and thus to be at home with history and not be controlled by its forms. Their method permitted them to project new buildings freely, in terms of their functions and meanings, and to create relieved ornamented surfaces of exquisite freedom and effect. Their emergence brought about a revolution in French architecture. Great opportunities were offered them by the development of Paris, first, tentatively, during the Monarchy of July of Louis Philippe between 1830 and 1848, then pell-mell and splendidly during the Second Empire of Napoleon III, proclaimed in 1852 and overthrown in 1870. They rose to this occasion. They, their students, and their successors largely produced the Paris of the mid-nineteenth century as well as the so-called Beaux-Arts system of training and design that eventually emerged from it. After 1870 the architects of the world flocked to Paris to imbibe this system and went home to create little Paris's all over the earth.

The leaders of this group were four friends: Félix Duban (1796–1871),[1] Henri Labrouste (1801–75),[2] Louis Duc (1802–79),[3] and Léon Vaudoyer (1803–72).[4] They were always seen as a group. They had won the Grand Prix de Rome in four successive years (1823–26) and had consequently studied together as *pensionnaires* at the French Academy in Rome, where they joined their sympathetic predecessors Abel Blouet and Emile Gilbert. The four returned to Paris around 1830 to lead the Romantic movement in architecture during the Monarchy of July. These Romantic *pensionnaires* went on to become the old masters of Second Empire architecture, producing three of its most impressive monuments: Vaudoyer's Marseilles Cathedral, Duc's Palais de Justice on the Ile de la Cité, and Labrouste's Bibliothèque Nationale. Three younger men also emerged during the Second Empire—Hector Lefuel, with his New Louvre; Charles Garnier, with his Opera; and Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, with his campaign of medieval restoration—but they were individualists responding to the coordinated impetus of the Romantic *pensionnaires*. Both Garnier and Viollet-le-Duc claimed to be carrying on their enterprise, with Garnier claiming Duban and Duc as his precursors and Viollet-le-Duc citing Labrouste.

It is the work of the first four—its principles, its innovations, the professional reorganization that accompanied its emergence, and the complexity and subtlety of its architectural products—that is the subject of this book.

The participants in and descendants of the Beaux-Arts tradition always dated the definitive formulation of their system to the *pensionnaires'* return to Paris. In 1863, in the essays on architecture that were to constitute part of his *Grammaire des arts du dessin*, the editor, artist, and critic Charles Blanc noted enthusiastically:

How can one now despair of our architecture when one remembers that knowledge of the exemplary models is very recent and that the real Renaissance dates from only thirty years ago? Guided by penetrating study and criticism, possessing all the necessary tools, our school today has before it the most promising future.[5]

Again, and more specifically, in 1889 the architect Lucien Magne wrote in his *L'Architecture française du siècle:*

Reason and truth finally penetrated into the domain reserved for the arts; one realized that the work did not depend on an empty formula, but rather on the rational expression of an idea: an artistic reform was rising, and in the first rank among the innovators figured the students who between 1821 and 1826 represented the school at Rome, Blouet, Gilbert, Duban, Labrouste, Duc, Vaudoyer.[6]

Julien Guadet, an occasional student of Labrouste named to the prestigious post of Professor of Theory at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, cited this reformation in a famous passage in the introduction to his course of 1894:

At the beginning of the century, the only aesthetic was to conceive a Roman building a priori. . . . *A little later, a violent reaction substituted for the Roman* a priori *the medieval* a priori, *architecture of a culture even more different from our own. . . . Happily, several proud artists—our masters—perceived and made others perceive that independence does not consist in changing one's livery, and our art slowly freed itself from this paleontology. Everything has not been equally successful, but all the efforts toward this end have been fertile, and today we know and we proclaim that art has the right to liberty, that only liberty can assure it life and fecundity, we might even say, salvation!*[7]

Finally, in 1922—the year of Le Corbusier's "Ville contemporaine pour 3 millions d'habitants"—the last great spokesman for the tradition, Georges Gromort, wrote:

A whole group of artists evolved whose works were to dominate the middle of the [nineteenth] century and prepare for the advent of an architecture totally new in its character, variety, and vitality, seemingly despite its traditional sources. The generation born with the century, that in fact of an age with the great romantics . . .

was fated to illuminate with the compositions of its maturity the eighteen years of the reign of Louis-Philippe and to sustain, for twenty years more, the architectural art of the second empire with examples of the authority of its old age. Four artists of the first rank successively won the grand prix: they were Gilbert in 1822, Duban in 1823, Labrouste in 1824, and Duc in 1825.[8]

For all the precision with which they date and attribute this architectural revolution, each of these authors modifies what it introduced. Blanc, a younger contemporary of the Romantic *pensionnaires*, sees it as a new clarity in the study of history. Magne, the son of an architect of this generation, depicts it as rationalism per se, in structure as well as in style. Guadet sees it as freedom from stylistic restrictions through eclectic selection of sources. Gromort perceives it even more abstractly, as broad compositional elasticity. All are partially right, as we shall see. This was a multiple phenomenon unfolding over time: the works of the Romantic *pensionnaires* were, in turn, historicist, rationalist, eclectic, and compositional. But these were not entirely individual contributions of four men incidentally contemporary: each of these qualities was present in each man's work, making it always experimental and complex.

Their enterprise was to find principles so basic that they could embrace the entire history of architecture and remain valid for the nineteenth century as well. They wished to understand the whole of the world's architectural speech and discourse in a universal language. They tried to do so by simultaneously studying structure, space, and decoration. It was an impossibly comprehensive program—one that could only have been seriously undertaken in the positivist 1830s. It produced various results in the individual works of these men, even more divergent results in that of their successors, and finally academicism when, with Guadet and Gromort at the turn of the century, its comprehensiveness was mistaken for a system that was all-inclusive and eternal, but that in fact proved to be out of date.

By the end of World War II this tradition and its century were history. Until recently the historical study of nineteenth-century France has largely avoided the Romantic generation of 1830. They had been appropriated by the Beaux-Arts tradition and thus were deeply suspect to the emerging modernists of the 1920s. Sigfried Giedion, first in his *Bauen im Frankreich, Eisen, Esenbeton* of 1928 and then in his *Space, Time and Architecture* of 1941, turned attention to engineering rather than design and initiated a long series of explorations of nineteenth-century French technology—often in its utopian aspect—of which Paul Dufournet, Françoise Bourdon, and François Loyer's *Hector Horeau* (1980) and Bernard Marrey's *Les Grands Magasins* (1979) and *Vie et l'oeuvre extraordinaire de M. Gustave Eiffel* (1984) are the most recent examples. Similarly, the anti–Beaux-Arts

Gothic rationalist tradition in France, that personified by Viollet-le-Duc and carried on by Anatole de Baudot and Louis Bonnier, has maintained its reputation as a protomodern movement and has been the subject of continuing research: Françoise Bercé's *Les premiers Travaux de la commission des monuments historiques* (1979), J.-M. Leniaud's *Jean-Baptiste Lassus* (1980), and the 1980 exhibition and catalogue *Viollet-le-Duc*. A third area of research has also emerged from the continued philosophical definition of the nature of modernism and the exploration of the events in economics, politics, and thought accompanying the French Revolution of 1789. Starting from the work of conceptualists like Michel Foucault, this has produced Tony Vidler's studies of Ledoux, Richard Etlin's *The Architecture of Death* (1984), Joseph Rykwert's *The First Moderns* (1980), Alberto Pérez-Gómez's *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* (1983), and, more narrowly, Werner Szambien's *J.-N.-L. Durand* (1984).

All of this has stepped around the central tradition, that which came to be called Beaux-Arts. Even Labrouste, for all his technological innovation and the respect he enjoyed from the Gothicists, seemed tangential to Giedion and his successors.[9] The only exceptions were the most distanced and conservative historians, such as Louis Hautecoeur in the sixth and seventh volumes of his magisterial *Histoire de l'architecture classique en France* (1955 and 1957) and Donald Drew Egbert in his posthumously published *Beaux-Arts Tradition in French Architecture* (1980). Recently this has changed, however. Commencing with Arthur Drexler's exhibition and book *The Architecture of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts* of 1975–77 and continuing with the series of exhibitions and catalogues of nineteenth-century student work produced by the Ecole des Beaux-Arts itself, a broad documentation of the subject has begun to appear. The projected exhibitions of the new Musée d'Orsay in Paris will carry this further.[10] But this interest stems less from historical regard for the subject than from a contemporary, postmodern hope that the Beaux-Arts encapsulated a smooth, consistent system—like the turn-of-the-century American classicism of McKim and Burnham—that might be appropriated to balance the exclusiveness and utopianism of modern design.

The realization that at least at its origins, in the work of Duban, Labrouste, Duc, and Vaudoyer, the Beaux-Arts tradition was something infinitely more complex, personal, and difficult was the doing of Neil Levine in his doctoral dissertation "Architectural Reasoning in the Age of Positivism: The Néo-Grec Idea of Henri Labrouste's Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève" (1975) as well as in his contribution to the Drexler volume. Levine's work has given historical value to the central Beaux-Arts tradition by delving into the subtleties of its foundation. Robin Middleton in England and Bruno Foucart in France have been working along similar lines, as are a number of younger scholars in the United States—Chris-

topher Mead, Katherine Fisher Taylor, Barry Bergdoll, Alice Friedman—and researchers in France who are pursuing the careers of Labrouste, Alfred Normand, Gabriel Davioud, Paul Abadie, Victor Laloux, Jacques-Ignace Hittorff, and Charles Garnier.[11]

This volume is a contribution to that project. It seeks to analyze the intentions of Duban, Labrouste, Duc, and Vaudoyer in the immediate context of architectural evolution during the Romantic years of the second quarter of the nineteenth century. But, more specifically, it seeks to approach their work as a manifestation of the centralized government bureaucracy within which it was produced, which gave it an abstract, classical inflection before 1850, and which made it profoundly expressive of the Second Empire during the two decades after. The designs that resulted were Romantic in attempting to be of their time and place by respecting the materials, climate, and social character of nineteenth-century France. But these designs were also classical in imposing a particular traditional Parisian abstract logic upon each problem as well as in adopting one or another version of the classical architectural vocabulary. They were never bohemian, Gothicist, or futurist. Such qualities were ultimately unappreciated by Duban, Labrouste, Duc, and Vaudoyer, whose enterprise was the inflected expression of an institution and a tradition. As a result, what they created was an elastic, diagrammatic art that could be systematized, taught, and exported all over the world as the basis of the Beaux-Arts movement in late-nineteenth-century architecture. The origins of this art were complex, however, and in that complexity lay the elasticity that made it such a powerful and pervasive idea.

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Designing Paris

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