# Classical Economics: On the Currency of the Beaux-Arts System

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"The originality of our École can be defined by one word: it is the most liberal of any in the world."[1] So proclaims Julien Guadet, professor of architectural theory at the Paris École des Beaux-Arts, in the first of his four-volume compilation of lectures, *Éléments et théorie de l'architecture* (1901–1904). Guadet's sweeping appraisal of his institution was, despite its hubris, supported by the school's international stature. Published at a time when enrolment in the École's architecture section swelled to meet the growing demand of foreign students, Guadet's books sought to codify the essential elements of design and disseminate them to students within and beyond the school's ateliers in Left Bank Paris. And indeed, they did. Copies of *Éléments* circulated widely across the Continent and throughout the Americas – from Boston to Buenos Aires – where they entered the architecture libraries of universities and professional offices alike. Translations and typescripts of Guadet's lectures soon followed, further expanding the reception of Beaux-Arts pedagogy and generating discursive shockwaves through a profusion of complementary design textbooks well into the 1950s.[2]

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1   An abridged German translation of this essay was published in an issue of the journal *ARCH+* on standardised architecture (*Normarchitektur*): "Die Ökonomie des Klassizismus," in *ARCH+: Zeitschrift für Architektur und Urbanismus* 233, 2018, pp. 38–43. I thank Alek Bierig for providing helpful feedback on an early draft of this essay. "L'originalité de notre École peut se définir d'un mot: elle est la plus libérale qu'il y ait au monde." Julien Guadet, *Éléments et théorie de l'architecture*, 4 vol., vol. 1, Paris, 1901, p. 80; David Van Zanten's translation in David Van Zanten, "Just What Was Beaux-Arts Architectural Composition?" in Jeffrey W. Cody et al. (eds.), *Chinese Architecture and the Beaux-Arts*, Honolulu, 2011, pp. 23–37, here p. 26. Guadet goes on to underscore the school's international appeal in a seldom-discussed passage that is worth quoting at length: "... dernièrement j'entendais un Américain, bon juge en matière de libertés, venu en Europe exprès pour étudier les écoles d'art, afin d'en créer dans son pays, en choisissant parmi tout ce qu'il aura vu dans toute l'Europe de plus appropriable et de plus désirable pour sa patrie; eh bien, cet Américain me disait: 'Ce qui distingue votre École de celles que j'ai vues en Italie, en Allemagne, en Angleterre, en Autriche, – il venait de parcourir l'Europe, – est son libéralisme absolu, c'est la façon dont chez vous l'élève est traité en home, en homme qui a le droit de choisir son maître, de choisir sa voie artistique!'," in Guadet, 1901, pp. 80–81.

2   A sampling of these sundry books might include: Nathaniel Cortland Curtis, *Architectural Composition*, Cleveland, 1923; Howard Robertson, *The Principles of Architectural Composition*, London, 1924; Georges Gromort, *Essai sur la théorie de l'architecture*, Paris, 1942; and Albert Ferran, *Philosophie de la composition architecturale*, Paris, 1955. For an account of John Galen Howard's use of Guadet at the University of California Berkeley, see Joan Draper, "The Ecole des Beaux-Arts and the Architectural Profession in the United States: The Case of John Galen Howard," in Spiro Kostoff (ed.), *The Architect: Chapters in the History*
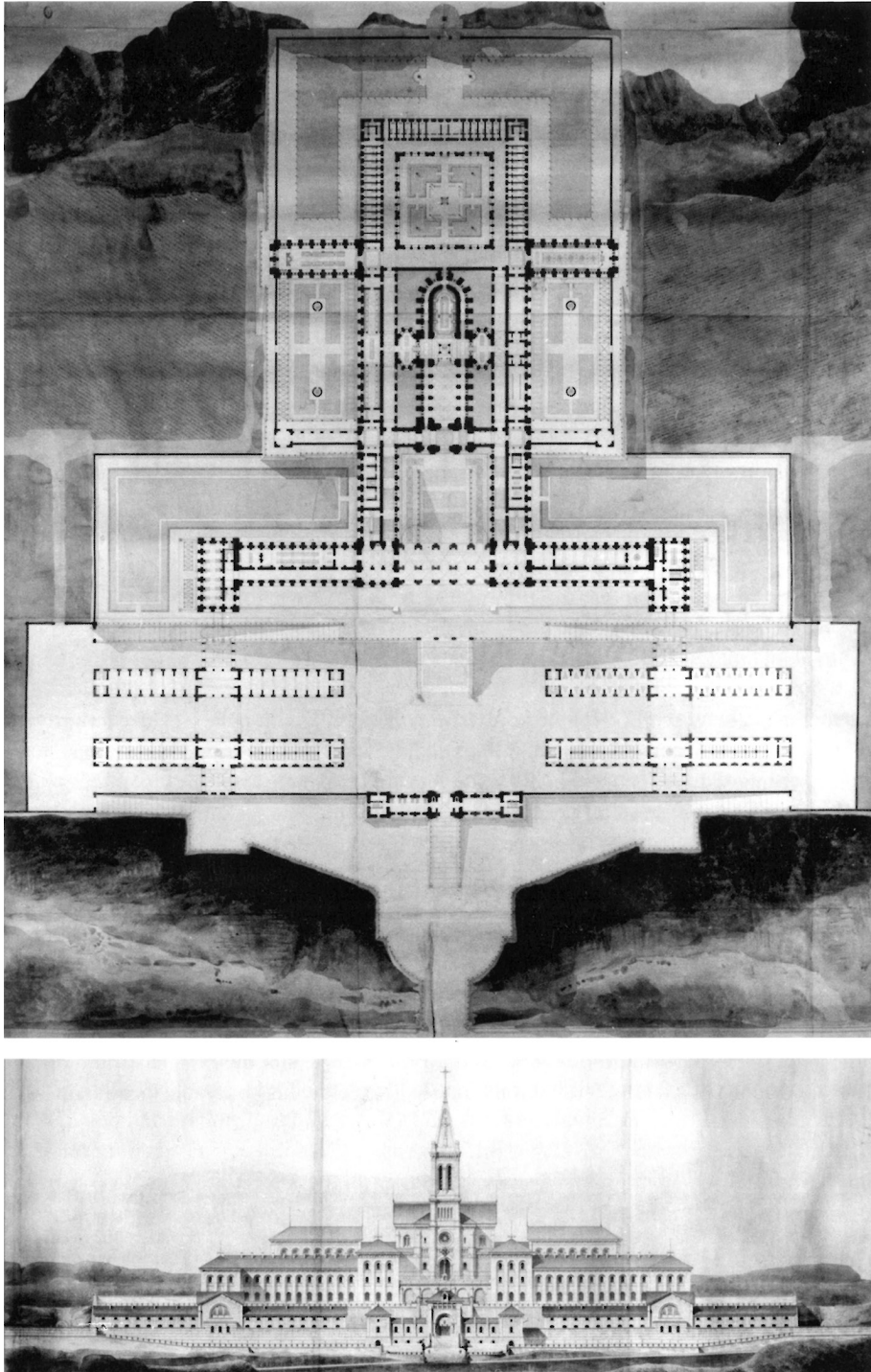
1 Julien Guadet, *Hospice dans les Alpes*, Prix de Rome drawing (1er Prix), Plan (above) and front elevation (below), India ink and watercolor on paper, 1864, Inventory numbers PRA 233-1 (plan) and PRA 233-6 (elevation), Collection of the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts

If we take Guadet at his word, then the appeal of the École – and the catalyst behind its internationalisation – lay in its inherent liberalism. Yet what, exactly, might this mean? Guadet goes on to ascribe this trait to the 'classical' tradition behind the disciplinary apparatus known as the Beaux-Arts system.[3] For Guadet, academic classicism provided its followers with both a concept and a method of design that could respond to any site or program: architectural composition. The latter comprised a set of procedures for identifying the elements of a building type – ranging in scale from windows, to staircases, to rooms, to entire edifices – and for rationally planning them into a well-ordered spatial form following rules of symmetry, axiality, and regularity, qualities that were most clearly articulated in the building's idealised floor plan (fig. 1). Therefore, for many of Guadet's readers, the liberalism of the Beaux-Arts system entailed the individual's freedom to make logical design decisions within the medium of architectural drawing and the matrix of classical principles that governed composition.

Less considered are the ways in which the École's liberalism exceeded the thought process of the individual designer. True to the contested nature of the term 'liberal' itself – imbricated with a broad spectrum of political ideologies, from left to right[4] – the Beaux-Arts system prescribed a set of social relations that could serve a wide variety of agendas. These relations centred on a particular model of architectural labour: the atelier-based production of monumental drawings for submission to jury competitions. A spate of recent scholarship has demonstrated how this model of training became the cross-cultural standard for architectural pedagogy at newly created professional degree programs across the Atlantic and even the Pacific.[5] This research prompts new questions. Was the transnational systemisation of the Beaux-Arts system a homogenising process? Why did the system travel to certain countries and how did its model of architectural labour adapt to their respective social structures and value

of the Profession, Oxford, 1977, pp. 209–237. For an analysis of Guadet's pedagogy, see Guy Lambert, "De l'amphithéâtre à Éléments et théorie de l'architecture: le cours de théorie de Julien Guadet, un 'lieu de production du savoir'," in Guy Lambert and Estelle Thibault (eds.), *L'atelier et l'amphithéâtre. Les écoles de l'architecture, entre théorie et pratique*, Wavre, 2011, pp. 99–127.

3   Guadet, 1901 (note 1), p. 83. For an overview of the Beaux-Arts system, see David Van Zanten, "Le système des Beaux-Arts," in *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* 182, 1975, pp. 97–106 and Jacques Lucan, *Composition, Non-Composition: Architecture and Theory in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* [2009], Theo Hakola (trans.), Abingdon, 2012.

4   Keller Easterling has explored these dynamics in her essay, "Coda: Liberal," in Peggy Deamer (ed.), *Architecture and Capitalism: 1845 to the Present*, Abingdon, 2014, pp. 202–216. David Van Zanten has pointed out that the entry on "liberal" in Émile Littré's 1866 *Dictionnaire* begins: "Qui est digne d'un homme libre." Van Zanten, 2011 (note 10), p. 35.

5   See Jeffrey Cody et al. (eds.), *Chinese Architecture and the Beaux-Arts*, Honolulu, 2011; Joan Ockman (ed.), *Architecture School: Three Centuries of Educating Architects in North America*, Cambridge, Mass., 2012; Jean Paul Carlhian, *Americans in Paris: Foundations of America's Architectural Gilded Age*, New York, 2014; Robert A.M. Stern and Jimmy Stamp, *Pedagogy and Place: 100 Years of Architecture Education at Yale*, New Haven, 2016.

systems? What intersections did the growing patronage of Beaux-Arts architecture share with larger patterns of social and economic liberalism – and to what end?

What follows is a broad sketch of various standards of the Beaux-Arts system that throw Guadet's superlative claim into relief. Shifting our perspective away from the relationship between principles of composition and individual student drawings, I instead focus on how the École's standards configured the discipline of architecture to operate as a kind of currency; in other words, as a paper-based system for consolidating architectural labour, assigning it value, and circulating it within the expanding international markets of cosmopolitan bourgeois society. As will be shown, the École's promise of individual freedom was predicated upon the ever-deepening entrenchment of these practices across cultural and geopolitical boundaries. As a scalable standard, then, the Beaux-Arts system liberalised not only the design of individual buildings, but also the profession of architecture itself.

Standards of Atelier Production

The hallmark of the École's liberalism was its atelier system. Although the school functioned under the aegis of the French state, the latter had little control over the decentralised network of atelier studios where Beaux-Arts pedagogy was practiced. Prospective architecture students seeking admission to the school first approached the atelier of their choosing and asked its prominent master architect (*patron*) for tutelage to prepare for the École's semi-annual entrance competition (*concours d'admission*) and the subsequent design exercises that guided one's architectural training.[6] An ethos of free choice thus coloured a student's education from the beginning. This sentiment pervaded all aspects of instruction, as students could participate in school-wide competitions and attend weekly academic lectures at their discretion. Indeed, compared to the other prevalent models of design instruction prior to World War I – namely, office apprenticeship and polytechnical studies – the Beaux-Arts system seemingly gave its students the freedom to choose their own educational path and to earn individual renown in an arena of valorous competition that French architect and *patron* Charles Garnier likened to war.[7] Even the introduction of 'official' state-run ateliers to the school by a highly controversial 1863 decree did not

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6   There are many in-depth accounts of the history of the atelier system and its institutional logistics. See Richard Chafee, "The Teaching of Architecture at the École des Beaux-Arts," in Arthur Drexler (ed.), *The Architecture of the École des Beaux-Arts*, exh. cat., The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1977, pp. 62–109; Jean Paul Carlhian, "The Ecole des Beaux-Arts: Modes and Manners," in *Journal of Architectural Education* 3/2, 1979, pp. 7–17; Donald Egbert, *The Beaux-Arts Tradition in French Architecture*, David Van Zanten (ed.), Princeton, 1980; and Lucan, 2012 (note 3), pp. 101–115.

7   Charles Garnier, "L'enseignement artistique," in *À travers les arts*, Paris, 1869, pp. 201–229.

shake the school's identification with independent, 'free' ateliers (*ateliers libres*). If anything, these reforms galvanised student support for the off-site *ateliers libres* that existed as autonomous social units within the macro-level order of the École.[8]

Freedom within the atelier system, however, was circumscribed within strict hierarchies, rules, and the observance of historical precedent. Such regulations ensured the well-oiled production of an atelier's most valuable asset: competition-entry drawings submitted for jury evaluation. The painstaking drafting techniques and scale of these drawings, some measuring as much as twenty-six feet (7.9 metres) in width, often required the collective labour of many students within the atelier, even if authorship was attributed to a single individual. Students thus maintained an organised division of labour, also dutifully collecting membership payments from each atelier member to pay for their rented workspace and to guarantee the weekly criticism of their *patron*. Furthermore, within each atelier, labour was divided along the lines of seniority between newly admitted members (*nouveaux*) and older students (*anciens*). Consider the process of competing for the venerable Grand Prix de Rome: the capstone of a French student's Beaux-Arts education. After completing a twelve-hour sketch (*esquisse*) that delineated their course of action (*parti*) for the competition program, Grand Prix entrants returned to their respective atelier, where they spent up to four months developing a suite of large renderings of the finished project (*projet rendu*) with the help of younger students, referred to as *nègres* ('negroes'). That their menial labour was racially coded – period English translations refer to this system as "niggering," to the discomfort of a contemporary reader[9] – illuminates how the space of the atelier functioned as a microcosm of French colonial society, with all its violent hegemonies intact. Much the same is clear in period accounts describing the masculine hazing rituals and Orientalist parties that animated a given atelier's esprit de corps (fig. 2).[10]

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8   Paul Cret offered the following reflection on the crisis of 1863: "[S]tudents protested against what they thought was an attempt to enforce an official creed and fought for the School's liberal traditions, for liberalism had become the main character of the École. The student had complete freedom to select his teacher and to pursue his studies with the same independence inside as outside the School." Cret, "The Ecole des Beaux-Arts and Architectural Education," in *Journal of the American Society of Architectural Historians* 1/2, 1941, pp. 3–15, here p. 10.

9   Charles Henry Cheney, "The American Academy in Rome," in *Architectural Record* 31/3, 1912, pp. 243–255, here p. 250. Scholars have yet to explore the larger social significance of this term. Few contemporary authors have even addressed it. Denise Scott Brown commented in the 1970s – referring to architect James Stirling's memories of "niggering" during his architectural training in Liverpool – that the term evinces a larger culture of caste and authoritarian personality specific to the Beaux-Arts system. Denise Scott Brown, "Learning the Wrong Lessons from the Beaux-Arts," in *Architectural Design* 48/11–12, "Profiles 17: The Beaux-Arts," Robin Middleton (guest ed.), 1979, pp. 30–32, here p. 32.

10   Primary and secondary accounts of the school's atelier culture can respectively be found in: Alexis Lemaistre, *L'École des beaux-arts dessinée et racontée par un élève*, Paris, 1889; Annie Jacques and Emmanuel Schwartz (eds.), *Les Beaux Arts, de l'Académie aux Quat'z'arts: anthologie historique et littéraire*, Paris, 2001.

2 E. Le Deley, *L'atelier libre de Jean-Louis Pascal (1837-1920), 20, rue Mazarine*, photograph, c. 1903,
Collection of the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts

At the heart of Beaux-Arts liberalism was thus a competitive market of image production whose structure approximated that of larger society. This was not lost on the École's contemporaries. French-born architect and influential University of Pennsylvania professor Paul Philippe Cret noted that, on account of its ateliers, the school was "much more a self-governing body of students, men in their twenties, than an autocracy controlled either by a group or the government."[11] Cret even asserted that the school's pedagogy constituted a legal apparatus, of sorts, that would direct the self-governance of its students: "It put into practice the 'cases system' a hundred years before it became common in our law schools. For what is the architectural school competition but a case to be conducted as the student sees fit, the jury having the final say?"[12]

11 Cret, 1941 (note 8), p. 14.
12 Ibid., p. 11.

By positing the Beaux-Arts system as analogous to the study of law, Cret implies that the school's design methods could be no less constitutive of a well-ordered society. Yet was the school's pedagogy bound to a particular politics? In France, the school's credo of 'universal' design principles along with its spirit of *liberté* and *fraternité* shared ideological valences with republicanism, as though the École were the French republic modelled in miniature. The introduction of Beaux-Arts pedagogy to the United States, however, reveals the adaptability of its standards to alternative models of liberalism – even auguring those still yet to come.

Building a Beaux-Arts Society

Upon returning to the United States in the mid-19th century, the first American architects to train at the Paris École des Beaux-Arts entered a rapidly growing building industry without the centralised control of national academies like those of France. Indeed, the very definition of who constituted an architect fluctuated with the vagaries of the market. Those who completed university coursework or a professional apprenticeship sought exclusive claim to the title of 'architect,' and levelled their animosity toward craftsmen and 'journeymen artisans' who amassed the capital and contracts to hang a shingle, so to speak.[13] Conditions of professionalism shifted, however, in the 1860s. The abolition of slavery and the political aftermath of the American Civil War provided both the fiscal resources and the cultural desire for professional schools that could shape a new American society defined by quasi-universal citizenship. It was within these competing liberalisms – i.e. freedom of the private market versus the extension of a centralised democratic state – that the codified standards of the Beaux-Arts system arguably acquired their most potent currency.

True to form, Beaux-Arts pedagogy arrived in the United States via the space of the atelier. Richard Morris Hunt, the first American citizen to study at the École, from 1846–1854, returned to the United States and established his own professional atelier in New York City in 1858. Although short lived, Hunt's atelier exerted a profound influence on the stateside professionalisation of architecture – an initiative that dovetailed with his co-founding of the American Institute of Architects in 1857 to "elevate the standards of the profession."[14] Period photographs of Hunt's atelier reveal a space that was more Paris fine arts studio than Manhattan bureaucratic office (fig. 3). Prix de Rome drawings and plaster casts

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13   Dell Upton, "Defining the Profession," in Ockman (ed.), 2012 (note 5), pp. 37–65, here p. 39.

14   On the subject of Hunt, the AIA, and the broader emergence of professional architectural culture in the United States, see Dana Cuff, *Architecture: The Story of Practice*, Cambridge, Mass., 1991, especially pp. 28–35; and Mary Woods, *From Craft to Profession: The Practice of Architecture in Nineteenth-Century America*, Berkeley, 2008.
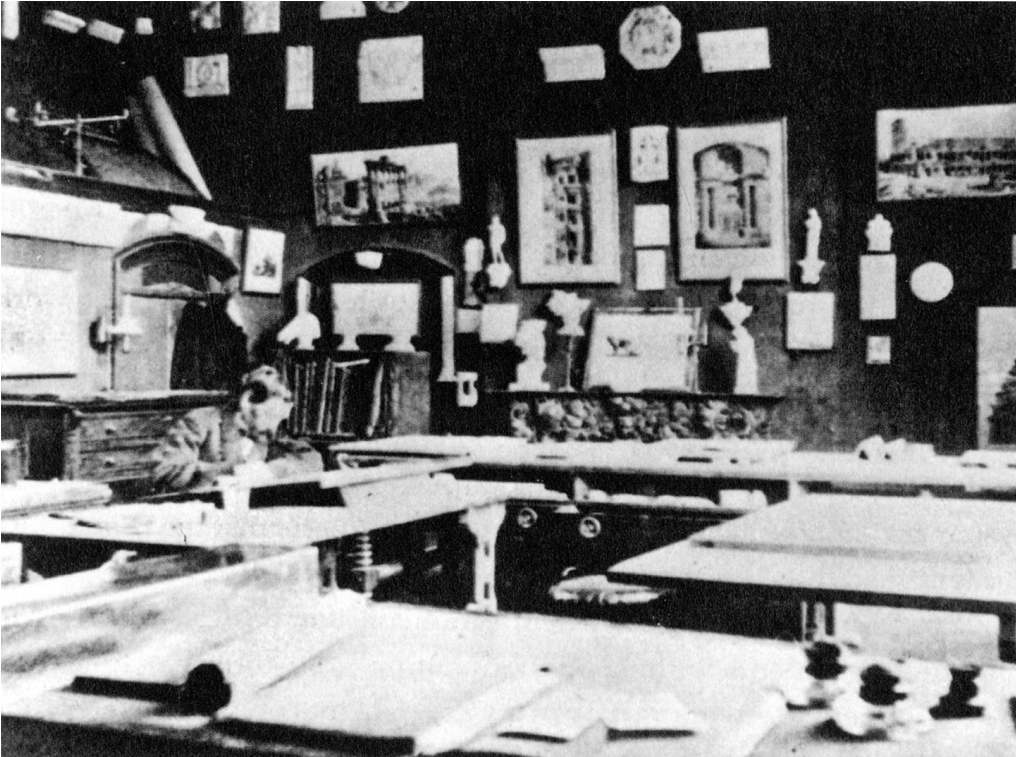
3 Interior of Richard Morris Hunt's atelier in his Studio Building on West Tenth Street, New York City, photograph, 1856, Richard Morris Hunt Papers, Library of Congress AIA/AAF Collection

hang on the walls, exerting their disciplinary authority over student-draftsmen working at adjacent tables. Part of the same workspace, moreover, was one of the most robust architecture libraries in the United States, further illustrating the importance of historical research and precedent study in atelier production. Such was the environment that trained the young American architect William Robert Ware, who subsequently organised some of the nation's first university architecture programs following his tenure in Hunt's Beaux-Arts-derived atelier.

It was in the discursive space of the atelier that Ware found the most effective model for distinguishing architectural education from that of competing disciplines and trades. Historians credit Ware with founding the nation's first formal architecture program at M.I.T. in 1865 and catalysing, either directly or indirectly, the creation of nine more American schools between 1870–1895 as heirs to the Beaux-Arts system. Yet Ware's efforts in formalising design education did not emerge from a tabula rasa. By the 1860s, the academic discipline of architecture was firmly ensconced in the domain of engineering, due in part to

a mid-century influx of German professors who imported to American universities the pedagogy of construction-oriented polytechnical schools like the Berlin Bauakademie and the Karlsruhe Polytechnische Hochschule.[15]

What, then, about the Beaux-Arts system gave it an edge over the then-pervasive German polytechnical model? Again one finds an answer in the word 'liberal.' Writing in 1867, amid establishing the architecture program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.), Ware commented: "We [recognise] the architect's need of a liberal culture in his art and extensive learning ... [W]e propose to employ with great freedom, not only as an exercise in modern architectural composition, but as an auxiliary to the study of the history of art."[16]

Although Ware's emphasis on architecture as a liberal art might seem opposed to the economising logics of engineering, the American reception of Beaux-Arts pedagogy nonetheless viewed classical design expertise as a commodity for transnational circulation. University-based ateliers like Ware's at M.I.T. actively recruited French-born architecture instructors like Eugène Létang, Constant-Désiré Despradelle, and Paul Cret, among many others, as human capital to fill their ranks.[17] Catalysing the exchange of Beaux-Arts pedagogy as an 'export product,' moreover, was a visual economy of *concours* drawings from Paris that furnished instructors with heuristic tools with which to teach precedents for emulation. The mantle of cultural distinction accorded to these drawings cemented the perceived value of the Beaux-Arts system in relation to other forms of architectural media. A brief glimpse into the profession's burgeoning public sphere around 1900 makes this clear. Appearing in leather-bound portfolios and in the pages of new professional journals, Beaux-Arts drawings wielded an Olympian air of superiority over product advertisements

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15   Michael J. Lewis, "The Battle between Polytechnic and Beaux-Arts in the American University," in Ockman (ed.), 2012 (note 5), pp. 67–89, here pp. 68–69.

16   William Robert Ware, "On the Conditions of Architecture and of Architectural Education in the United States," in *Royal Institute of British Architects Papers*, 1866–67, pp. 86–87, quoted in Richard Pluntz, "Reflections on Ware, Hamlin, McKim, and the Politics of History on the Cusp of Historicism," in Gwendolyn Wright and Janet Parks (eds.), *The History of History in American Schools of Architecture 1865–1875*, New York, 1990, pp. 53–72, here p. 54.

17   For a perspective on the impact of Beaux-Arts pedagogy in Argentina through the arrival of French-born architecture instructors, see Noemí Adagio, "Artistic Ideals and Professional Ideals. Architects, Scholars and Students. Buenos Aires, 1900–1922," in Fabio Grementieri et al. (eds.), *Architectural Culture around 1900: Critical Reappraisal and Heritage Preservation*, Buenos Aires, 1999, pp. 223–229. For a more recent analysis, see Virginia Bonicatto and Magalí Franchino, "Regular y educar. Debates en torno al carácter de la arquitectura en la ciudad de Buenos Aires (1901–1928)," in *Congreso Internacional Beaux-Arts. Arquitectura en América Latina (1870–1930). Transferencias, intercambios y perspectivas transnacionales,* 2019, URL: http://ocs.congresos.unlp.edu.ar/index.php/CBA/1CBA/paper/viewFile/4340/1121 [accessed: 10.03.2020]. For the broader historiographic context, see Claudia Shmidt, "Del desprecio a la nostalgia. El *beaux-arts* en la historiographía sobre la arquitectura en América Latina," in ibid., URL: http://ocs.congresos.unlp.edu.ar/index.php/CBA/1CBA/paper/viewFile/4341/1120 [accessed: 10.03.2020].

and readymade plans that situated architecture as a middlebrow product for consumption.[18]

This is not to suggest, however, that the Beaux-Arts system was incompatible with entrepreneurialism. On the contrary: in the United States, the École's atelier-based pedagogy was an enzymatic force in generating privatised professional networks and thickening the market competition among them. Two events of 1893–1894 underscore this phenomenon. First, the passing of the 1893 Tarsney Act: a congressional bill that liberalised federal building contracts by making them available to private sector architecture firms through open competition. Previously designed by in-house architects overseen by the Treasury Department in Washington, D.C., government buildings followed routine conventions rather than the aesthetic will of an individual designer. With the Tarsney Act, though, a new climate of merit-based competition favoured architects who practiced the École's principles (that is, until the act was repealed in 1912). David Van Zanten has noted that the perceived logical clarity of the Beaux-Arts language – cultivated over a century of inter-atelier competition – gave it an upper hand in juried competitions, making it "the speech of success and professional domination [in the United States], more than what it was in France, the assumed language of the elite."[19] By this measure, the Beaux-Arts system provided the rubric for how architecture's emerging professional meritocracy might function.

Feeding this meritocracy was an expanding network of École-derived ateliers whose purpose was to standardise professional training. In this vein, 1894 witnessed the founding of the New York-based Society of Beaux-Arts Architects. Formed by seventy-two of the École's former students, the Society's principle aim was "preserving among ourselves the principles of taste required at the [school and] endeavoring to propagate these principles among the rising generation of architects and the public in general."[20] Pursuant to this vision, the Society ran a series of public design competitions modelled on those of the École in order to cultivate disciplinary standards across disparate communities. The most prestigious of these competitions was the annual Paris Prize, created in 1904, which awarded its winner a two-year stay in Paris and automatic entry into the *première classe* of the École des Beaux-Arts. Entries for this and other prizes came from students in university ateliers as well as novice draftsmen belonging to private drawing clubs – some created solely to groom competitors

18   The intricacies of this phenomenon are too nuanced to rehearse here. For an excellent take on the subject, see Hyungmin Pai, *The Portfolio and the Diagram: Architecture, Discourse, and Modernity in America*, Cambridge, Mass., 2002, especially pp. 12–39.

19   Van Zanten, 2011 (note 5), p. 29.

20   "Report of the Committee on Permanent Organization" quoted in "An Association of Ecole des Beaux-Arts Students," in *Architecture and Building* 18/14, 1893, pp. 166.

for the Society's prizes. Such phenomena arguably reveal the École's liberalism at its apogee. It was this inherent quality that enabled a third-party entity like the Society to build a shared social infrastructure for the profession, albeit one united by an ethos of market competition and individual success.

Coda: Different Standards?

The dissemination of the Beaux-Arts system indelibly shaped the identity politics of architecture as a bourgeois profession. Its liberal freedoms, to be sure, were largely restricted to those who could access them: upwardly mobile white men. Women were granted admission to the École beginning in 1897, but few

4 Frances Benjamin Johnston, Photograph of Tuskegee students in front of the Architectural Drawing Exhibit organized by Walter T. Bailey, 1906, Tuskegee University Archives

went on to enjoy prominent careers.[21] Scholars like Meredith Clausen are beginning to fill the gender gap in Beaux-Arts historiography, yet few have explored how the school's putative universal pedagogy accommodated other forms of difference – especially race. To what extent did the expansion of the Beaux-Arts system confront existing social boundaries and enable its practitioners to trespass them?

Examples of the latter shed light on lesser-known pathways of Beaux-Arts liberalism. Influential African-American architects such as Augustus Hazel and Robert R. Taylor were among the most fervent adopters of the Beaux-Arts system, which they used to build professional programs at historically Black universities like Tuskegee and Howard (fig. 4).[22] Moreover, Black architects who studied at programs modelled on the École were among the most prolific of the pre-Civil Rights era.

Take, for example, the Philadelphia-based architect Julian Abele. As the first Black student to graduate from the University of Pennsylvania's architecture program, which he did in 1902, Abele joined the prominent all-white Philadelphia firm of Horace Trumbauer, who funded Abele's three-year sojourn to Paris and his rumoured training at the École des Beaux-Arts.[23] Abele's long-overlooked work in Trumbauer's atelier included many of the firm's well-known Beaux-Arts mansions and institutional buildings, such as Harvard's Widener Library and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Most striking, perhaps, was Abele's pivotal role in designing the master plan for the campus of Duke University at the height of Jim Crow segregation in North Carolina (fig. 5).

That the Beaux-Arts system could give a Black architect the currency to design a space he himself could not enter deserves further consideration. To be sure, while many of Abele's contemporaries would have lauded his work on such a high-profile commission, others might have seen it as acquiescent to an aesthetic regime of white supremacy. Writing in 1926, in the same year as Abele's work for Duke, Harlem Renaissance poet-luminary Langston Hughes advised: "this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America – this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible."[24] For Hughes and others of his ilk, the adoption of a bourgeois cultural practice like the Beaux-Arts system was tantamount to the suppression of individual liberty, rather than its midwife.

21 Meredith Clausen, "The Ecole des Beaux-Arts: Toward a Gendered History," in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 69/2, 2010, pp. 153–161.

22 Lewis, 2012 (note 15), p. 86. See also Ellen Weiss, *Robert R. Taylor and Tuskegee: An African American Architect Designs for Booker T. Washington*, Montgomery, 2012.

23 I thank Harvard professor Sarah Lewis for introducing me to Abele's work. For a study of Abele's career, see Dreck Spurlock Wilson, *Julian Abele: Architect and the Beaux Arts*, New York, 2019.

24 Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" [1926], in *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader*, David Levering Lewis (ed.), New York, 1995, pp. 91–95, here p. 91.
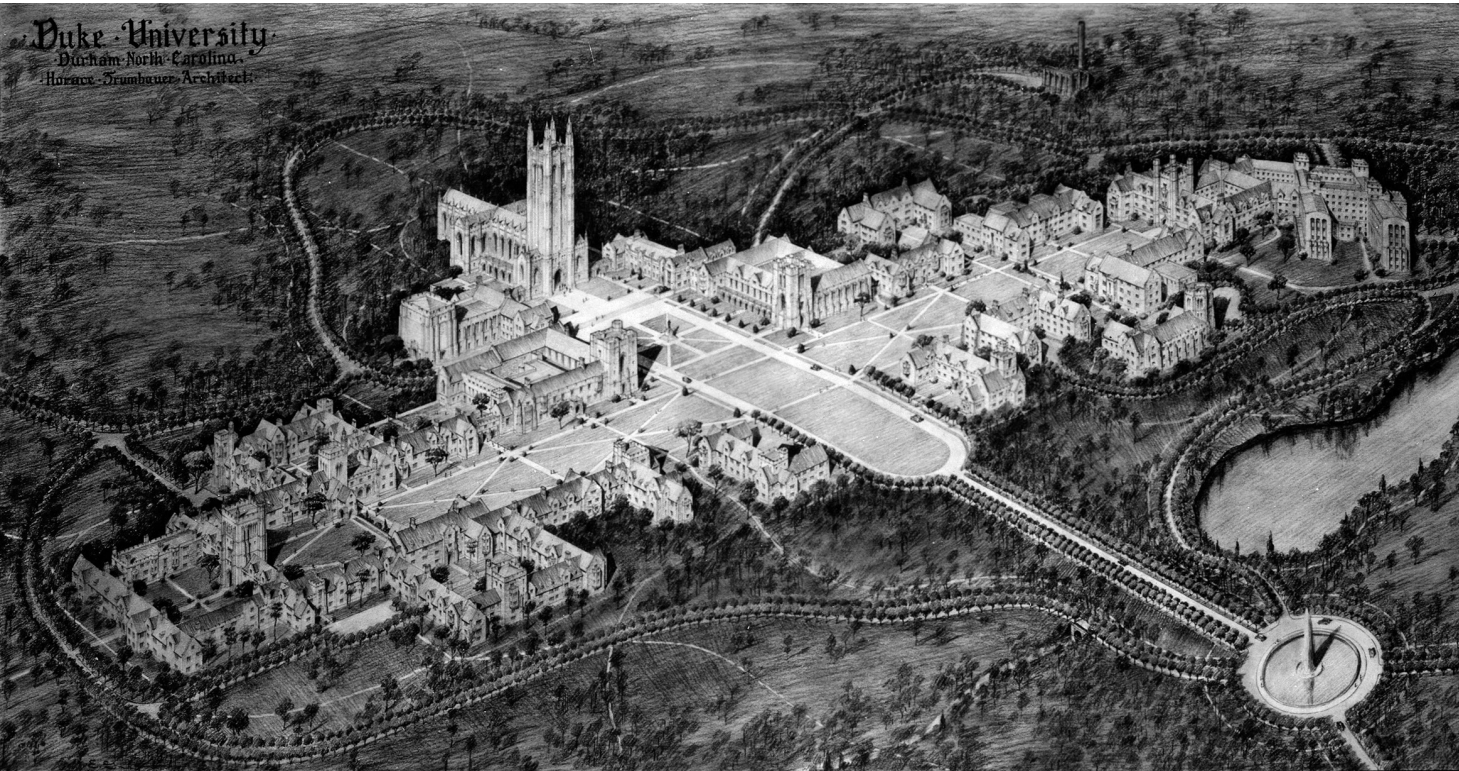
5 Julian Abele/Horace Trumbauer, rendering of Duke University's West Campus, c. 1925,
University Archives Photograph Collection, box 81, Duke University Archives

Other perspectives, however, gesture toward an understanding of the agency at play in the Duke master plan. Poet-activist Audre Lorde famously warned that the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.[25] Indeed, the Beaux-Arts system was the foremost tool of architecture's emergent liberal order, giving its practitioners access to said 'house' and to the most powerful state and non-state clients of their day. The growing adoption of the Beaux-Arts system across social and racial divides did not disassemble this edifice of power. Rather, it rendered its borders less discernible, and it made its tenets of meritocracy more tenable. If this 'liberal' design method could materialise the racist laws of the American South, its elegant use in Abele's hands dialectically hastened their demise.

This returns us to Cret's point about the belated overlaps between architectural and legal standards: each an ideal vision of society and the apparent means

25   Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" [1984], in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Berkeley, 2007, pp. 110–114.

with which to realise it. By their very nature, the individual freedoms promised by either system require the extension of their hegemony. Yet, as the case of Abele suggests, this process does not always follow its intended script. For here we see how a design standard can be a currency for both coercive power and its veiled resistance – at once enforcing a social order while laying the foundation for its transformation.