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Basile Baudez and Nicholas Olsberg, *A Civic Utopia: Architecture and the City in France, 1765-1837*. London: Drawing Matter Studies, 2016. 28 pp. Twenty-four fold-out pages, 10 b/w and 36 color illustrations. £20.00 U.K. (pb). ISBN 978-0-9956309-0-1.

Review by Richard Wittman, University of California at Santa Barbara.

The slim and luxurious book under review derives from the exhibition of the same name curated by the two authors that ran from late 2016 through early 2017 at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London. The exhibit was a collaboration between the Courtauld and Drawing Matter, the organization that published the book and that describes itself on its website as “a public forum for examining the architectural drawing, not only as an object or means to an end but as an active way of thinking about, expressing and making architecture.”[1] Drawing Matter’s central asset is its large collection of historic architectural drawings, built up over several decades by the writer and collector Niall Hobhouse and from which all but three of the drawings studied in this volume derive.

The book comprises twenty-eight large format pages devoted mainly to text, interleaved with fourteen differently proportioned color pages, a few of which fold out, and which are mostly devoted to the thirty-six color plates of the drawings that are analyzed in the text. The authors are both well-known and respected scholars. Olsberg is the author of several studies of twentieth-century Canadian and American architecture and was the founding Head of the Art History Archive at the Getty Center in Santa Monica and later the Director of the Canadian Center for Architecture in Montréal. Baudez recently assumed the post of Assistant Professor in the Department of Art and Archaeology at Princeton University following several years as *maître de conférences* at the Université Paris-Sorbonne, and among several publications is the author of a distinguished comparative study of eighteenth-century European architecture academies.[2]

The book is divided into two sections. The first introduces the organization and general conceptual framework of the book and is by Olsberg. The second presents a series of in-depth analyses of specific drawings or groups of drawings and is by Baudez.

Olsberg’s section is entitled “Law, Order and the Beautiful.” It evokes the Enlightened ideals that reshaped thinking about the city in France during the period under consideration, and introduces the seven category headings into which the drawings to be considered in the book are divided. These are in Latin, in homage to the classical inspiration that fueled so many of those ideals. They are *porta*, or gateway; *ratio*, which refers to the power of science and reason; *lex*, or the rule of law; *sanitas*, which concerns hygiene and social organization; *spectaculum*, which refers

to urban embellishments and civic enjoyment; *lexicon*, which concerns the language of a civic architecture; and finally *exemplum*, by which the authors mean the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century interest in establishing adaptable ideal models for different architectural situations. Olsberg then fleshes out what each category is understood to mean with respect to the French city by discussing a series of drawings, each of which relates to one of the categories.

The *porta* category, for instance, is evoked through a brief analysis of a beautiful 1811 pen and watercolor view by Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine which, from a vantage point in between Gabriel's two pavilions on the Place de la Concorde in Paris, looks south across the Place and the Pont de la Concorde towards the Assemblée Nationale. Its relation to the concept of *porta*, we learn, lies in the significance of the Place de la Concorde (originally the Place Louis XV) in reorienting the French capital towards the west. *Ratio* is then illustrated via a plan for one of Antoine-Laurent-Thomas Vaudoyer's projects for transforming Louis Le Vau's seventeenth-century chapel of the former Collège des Quatre-Nations into the new headquarters of the Institut (1805). *Lex* is evoked through two beautiful watercolor and ink studies for Jean-Charles Delafosse's engraved series of highly expressive prison facades (ca. 1770). *Sanitas* is illustrated with one of Bernard Poyet's ink and watercolor studies for a reformed and modernized Hôtel-Dieu or central hospital for Paris (ca. 1788), a structure that would look perfectly at home on the Munich Ludwigstrasse of the 1830s. *Spectaculum*, *lexicon*, and *exemplum* are similarly evoked with drawings for projects that were never built or from publications that were never published. Olsberg exhibits a light touch in his discussions of these various images, describing not just the formal properties and historical biographies of the buildings they depict, but also how the draughtsman's point of view, artistic technique, and his arrangements of figures in the foreground all combine to add up to a particular vision. In his closing lines, Olsberg reminds us that this was not only an age of stern and famously moralizing reformers—of Beccarias and Robespierres—but also of satirists and ironists, and he suggests that our response to the moralizing aspect of such drawings stands to gain if we can remain alert also to the more informal human realities evoked by the figures that lark, stroll, fight, or otherwise live their lives in the foreground.

The case studies then presented by Basile Baudez repeat the pattern of running through the seven Latin categories, each connected with a drawing or set of drawings, only this time the analysis of the drawings is much more systematic, historically contextualized, and footnoted with references to primary and secondary source materials. (The first and second halves of the book take up the same number of pages, but there is significantly more text—less blank space—in the second half.) Baudez first discusses a beautiful pen and watercolor drawing reproduced in a fold-out plate depicting an urban scheme for the Place du Château-Trompette in Bordeaux by the architect Louis Combes (ca. 1797). With precision and concision, Baudez situates the drawing amid the many twists and turns of the forty-plus-year history of this important urban site. The discussion offers no larger reflection on the significance of the drawing or the project, and confines itself to a detailed explication of what the drawing and the project actually present, and how the project fit into its historical context.

This same approach guides all the case studies that follow. For the category *ratio*, Baudez uses an immense pen and wash plan by Jacques-Denis Antoine (ca. 1765, incorrectly labeled 1865 in the caption [p.16]) for the creation of a new mint behind the façade of one of Gabriel's twin pavilions on what was then still the Place Louis XV. The text begins with a very well-informed account of the fascinating and unconventional career of Antoine himself, before then situating

the project depicted by the drawing amid the complex development of this particular commission, which was to end a few years later with Antoine building the existing (and conceptually related) Hotel des Monnaies on a different site on the opposite bank of the Seine. Baudez also offers a close reading of the plan itself, and specifically of the organization of the various sectors of the building (public, administrative, industrial) which Antoine memorably represents using different red and grey washes. The analysis is very detailed, indeed—to the point of wondering how the horses in their stables at the back of the complex could possibly have endured the industrial racket emanating from the coin mills that Antoine had situated next door.

Two of the case studies are concerned with utilitarian architecture, which emerged in the eighteenth century as an important new area of concern and experimentation for architects. The concepts of *sanitas* and *exemplum* are thus explored with reference to projects for urban markets and slaughterhouses: for *sanitas*, a pair of studies by Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine for city markets (1820), and for *exemplum*, several studies of slaughterhouses, markets, as well as town halls for the town of Mâcon by the Burgundian architect Paul Piot (1828-1840). Baudez analyzes all of these both from up close (Piot's slaughterhouse isolated pigs from the sheep and cows because of their propensity for "noisiness during their last moments" [p. 22]) and from afar, placing them in the larger contexts of changing thought about urban infrastructure, hygiene, and public benefit. We turn next to *lexicon*, which is considered with reference to different examples drawn from the same set of engravings used by Olsberg to discuss the concept: the sole known copies of a never-published compendium of architectural types compiled by the architect André Sainte-Marie Châtillon around 1830. With *spectaculum* we return to public prestige architecture, with a remarkable series of beautiful pen and wash drawings of an unexecuted project for a new Théâtre Italien in Paris by the architect François-Joseph Bélanger (ca. 1779—incorrectly labeled 1799 in the caption [p.24]). Baudez offers a brief account of the circumstances behind the decision to rebuild the theater of the Comédie-Italienne troupe, as well as a probing biographical sketch of Bélanger, who is remembered for the brilliant success he enjoyed in winning important domestic commissions from the highest reaches of the French nobility, but who we learn here was never much esteemed by his peers, and never once received a public commission. This project, then, is presented as part of Bélanger's vain efforts to translate his success as an architect of aristocratic dwellings into the even more prestigious domain of monumental public architecture. Echoing Olsberg in the first half of the book, Baudez draws attention to Bélanger's decision to emphasize the spectators in his theater drawings rather than the stage, and offers up this choice as "an ode to a new urbanity" (p. 24). The final case study, then, relates to *lex*, and refers to five ink and wash drawings by Louis-Pierre Baltard depicting a project for the Palais de Justice and prisons in Lyon (1829-1830). The text provides an overview of changing thought about prisons and their design (Beccaria, John Howard, Jeremy Bentham, and on to Claude-Nicolas Ledoux; the obligatory mention of Foucault is omitted), and recounts the local circumstances in Lyon behind the decision to rebuild these two municipal structures. It also presents a potted history of Baltard's career, and finally analyzes these drawings in relation to the structure he actually built just a few years later and which survives today.

The framing arguments about the Enlightenment city contained in this book are certainly not new, and the authors do not claim otherwise. The virtue of the book lies instead in the concisely detailed, nuanced, and perfectly well-informed case studies, which have the great virtue of focusing on lesser-known, unsuccessful, unexecuted, or provincial projects, rather than on better-known monuments by leading figures. In this, the book escapes the trap of simply reinforcing the existing canon of works and narratives, and will broaden the horizons of even a reader who is

already knowledgeable in the field. The only slightly disappointing aspect of the book, surprisingly, is the images themselves. Despite the ample size of the pages, the fine paper, and the evident care that went into the overall design, the images (or the parts of them that are most of interest) are simply too small. Partly this is the result of a design decision to surround them as much as possible with luxurious expanses of blank paper (rather than run them vulgarly up to the edge of the sheet), and partly it is a consequence of an editorial decision to publish all drawings integrally, without cropping. In a few cases (plates 15 and 16) this latter decision meant reproducing the very large blank colored borders around the drawings, which as a consequence get packed into a space on the page only 4 inches in width and become almost useless as a referent for the text. Fortunately several (though not all) of the drawings are available at much greater scale on the sections of the Drawing Matter website devoted to the book, and can easily be consulted there while reading the printed book.[3]

NOTES

[1] <https://www.drawingmatter.org/about/>

[2] Basile Baudez, *Architecture et tradition académique* (Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2013).

[3] <https://www.drawingmatter.org/sets/portfolios/views-civic-utopia/>

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