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Basile Baudez, *Inessential Colors. Architecture on Paper in Early Modern Europe*.

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021. x + 255 pp., 172 figures, Appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. \$68.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9-78-0691213569; \$47.60 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9-78-0691233154.

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Few historical documents have been essentialized by architects as persistently as Giambattista Nolli's *Nuova Pianta di Roma*, first published in Rome in 1748. The plan is rightly famous because it employs the *poché*—the representation of sectioned solids such as walls as black surfaces—to insert miniature plans of churches and *palazzi* into the mass of urban fabric. This montage conjures an image of the late baroque city as an intricate concatenation of public spaces, accessible parts of semi-public buildings, and the contours of private residences.^[1] The *Pianta* continues to inspire both architects and historians to this day, as it raises questions that transcend the historical context of its production, such as how public and private buildings configure the relationship between public and private space, how various building types shape the urban fabric, or how ancient Rome remains present in the modern city. The fascination Nolli's plan exerts on architects is probably best illustrated by the *Roma Interrotta* exhibition of 1978, in which twelve leading architects were asked to each rework one of the print sheets that compose the *Pianta*. This brief produced a collection of projects that still bears testimony of the preoccupations of postmodern architecture.^[2]

It is easy to understand why Nolli's plan has been treated so eagerly as the representation of absolute architectural values, urban qualities, or supra-historical critical concepts. Its graphic language manages to suggest spatial and formal complexity thanks to the precise application of a controlled visual code: the use of black, a limited range of hatchings, and 'white', that is, paper left in reserve. These graphics allow the map to act as a metonymy for the urban space it represents, and to evoke its qualities. As such, the map is almost a monument to values associated with black and white representation: precision, transparency, and permanence. In short, because it is monochromatic, the *Pianta* appears to show what is essential.

It is this set of associations that Basile Baudez challenges in his *Inessential Colors. Architecture on Paper in Early Modern Europe*. The title of the book articulates its program. The opposition between design (*disegno*) and color has been a key theme in the theory and criticism of European art from the mid sixteenth century onwards. If, at face value, design and color simply refer to two basic components of any drawing or indeed image, they also cover a wide range of opposing associations. *Disegno*, which can mean the act of drawing or planning and designate these

processes as well as their result, is easily identified with reason and the ability to grasp structures and fundamentals that lay beyond the realm of appearances. It is no coincidence that in the second half of the seventeenth century Giorgio Vasari's concept of *disegno* gave way to Gian Pietro Bellori's *idea*, which designates a perfection that can only be seized by reason, not sense perception, but to which any work of art should aspire. By contrast, the realm of color is surface. It is unstable and mutable, subject to transformation or decay, like human flesh. Color is governed by whim or fashion, the opposite of reason and good taste. As such, it is unreliable, prone to exaggeration, illusionism, and lies. The opposition design-color is easily projected onto gender and class distinctions, most often to the detriment of women and non-elite practitioners or audiences.

If the *disegno-colore* debate has played out explicitly mainly with regard to painting and the merits of its different regional Italian and European schools, Baudez examines the use and meaning of colors in a particular medium: the architectural drawing. It is a central tenet of his book that the use of color instigated a dialogue between the art of the architect and the painter. To this duo Baudez adds a third interlocutor, the military engineer, and the related discipline of surveying. As Baudez shows, it is in drawings of fortifications and military maneuvers that the use of color first became codified, and where attempts at codification were pushed the furthest. When military advantage was at stake, color quickly shed any hint of frivolity, to be used with as much precision as the line. It was engineers who carried over this codification into the design of architecture; it is to them that we owe the persistent use of red to represent brickwork in section.

Baudez's book is very much an account of such moments of transfer: from one discipline to another, as when architects trained as painters in the Dutch Republic begin to enliven their drawings with naturalistic colors, but also from one medium to the next, as when colored French academy drawings were translated to the printed page to be hand-colored again, with all ensuing confusion.[3] The author traces these transfers by examining a vast corpus of architectural drawings. Its chronological range stretches the limits of the "early modern" of the title from the fifteenth to the early nineteenth century. The magnitude and quality of this corpus alone make this book an invaluable addition to the growing body of studies treating early modern architectural prints and drawings as objects of study in their own right, such as Cammy Brothers' *Giuliano da Sangallo and the Ruins of Rome*, Dario Donetti and Cara Rachele's edited volume *Building with Paper: The Materiality of Renaissance Architectural Drawings*, and Caroline Yerkes's and Heather Hyde Minor's *Piranesi Unbound*, to name a few.[4]

These studies have in common that they examine architectural drawings less for their role in the design and construction process than as artifacts shaped by various practices of image-making that pertain as much to drawing, painting, printing, and bookmaking as they do to architecture. They also share an empirical approach, developing a historical narrative from close examination of the objects in hand, unfolding historical context at a scope and pace dictated by the visual material itself. Baudez, too, largely bypasses the well-worn theoretical frameworks of the *ut pictura poesis* (like poetry, so painting) or the rhetorical association of color with the use of particular stylistic means, in favor of close reading of the drawings and their manufacture. This is in part a matter of necessity. In contrast to the conceptual aspects of *disegno*, the practice of drawing has hardly been theorized. Angelo Comolli's unfinished *Bibliografia storica critica dell'architettura civile ed arti subalterne* (1788-92) dedicated only a few entries to the art of drawing per se, pointing out that the subject is both too vast and too specific to offer an elaborate bibliography.[5] This critical deficit is exacerbated when it comes to the use of color. As Baudez

reminds us, when the coloring of architectural drawings was addressed at all, it was often in the form of censure. In the late eighteenth century, for instance, the painterly treatment of large-scale architectural drawings which privileged atmosphere and effect over accuracy, was criticized as a symptom of architecture devolving into fine art.

Baudez' book turns this theoretical deficit into a strength, by taking seriously the few manuals that did offer prescriptions for the use of color, and by paying close attention to techniques of drawing and reproduction. This attention extends into the Appendix, a small publication in its own right that lays out the tools and instruments of the early modern architectural drawing. At the same time, Baudez embraces the sensory rather than theoretical nature of his object of study as a matter of principle. From the outset he distinguishes three ways in which color is applied in architectural drawings: in imitation, as when materials are rendered naturalistically; conventionally, when information is conveyed according to established codes; and for affect, when color aimed at pleasing an audience. This distinction works less as a rigid framework of classification than as a means to guide the reader through the abundant material. Perhaps more importantly, it reflects the agenda of the book. As Baudez writes, "[it] is the convergence of chromophobia and the criticism of architectural drawings that largely inspired this study" (p. 213). The eighteenth century is at the center of Baudez's preoccupation, when architects explored the affective use of color to the extent that it led to censure in theory and practice; Étienne Boullée would famously advocate a sublime monochromy in architectural representation in order to bestow his fictional buildings with the desired sublimeness. Against this position Baudez offers a reading of architectural drawings with pleasure at its center, one where the inessential is of the essence.

The sheer scope of this book, which intertwines the study of specific cases with a general exploration of how color is used, why it is there, and what it should achieve, requires an attentive reader capable of handling the relative openness of Baudez's categorizations. The summary offered by the conclusion is helpful to nail down the historical trajectory of the book, which leads from painted cityscapes in the Netherlands and Italy over the application of painterly hues by architects in the seventeenth-century Netherlands and Germany and experiments with conventional color by military engineers, to the "return to mimesis" (p. 210) by French architects of the second half of the eighteenth century. As Baudez himself indicates, this deceptively linear storyline hints at other important narratives. These narratives surface occasionally but are equally pertinent. The transfer of specific codes and conventions in the use of color hints at geopolitically motivated processes of knowledge transfer, as when French practices are adopted in Sweden. Expertise and skill in the use of color became a signifier of professionalism and informed architectural education. Color more than line points at the impact of various techniques of reproduction on the dissemination of images of architecture, because of the technical challenges intrinsic to the process. On a more general level, the hypothesis that pleasure was an important driver in the use of color raises questions about the expectations of various audiences towards both architectural drawings but also architecture itself; approaching architecture through color opens the door to reconsider those aspects of buildings that still fall foul of current critical discourse, such as beauty.

As much as a historical study, Baudez's book can therefore be read as a contribution to a larger ongoing conversation about architecture, its mediation and its materiality, which runs as much through the publications mentioned above as well as books like Fabio Barry's *Painting in Stone. Architecture and the Poetics of Marble from Antiquity to the Enlightenment*.^[6] This conversation is

shaped by current concerns in architecture. The increasing complexity of building in combination with the urgent need to tackle the climate crisis challenges the traditional role of the architect as designer and asks us to reconsider what matters most in the built environment. At the same time, architecture today too exists in the maelstrom of digital images produced by humans and non-humans alike, sometimes at a considerable distance from actual buildings. Studies like Baudez's book enrich this conversation by complicating our understanding of such omnipresent artifacts as colored representations of buildings, but also by reminding us that architecture and its image have always played multiple and sometimes contradictory roles.

NOTES

[1] On the pianta, see for instance Mario Bevilacqua, *Roma nel secolo dei Lumi. Architettura, erudizione, scienza nella pianta di G. B. Nolli "celebre geometra"* (Naples: Electa, 1998).

[2] Léa-Catherine Szacka, "Roma Interrotta: Postmodern Rome as the Source of Fragmented Narratives," in Dom Holdaway and Filippo Trentin, eds, *Rome, Postmodern Narratives of a Cityscape* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013), pp. 155-69.

[3] Baudez offers a fascinating analysis of four different hand-colored prints made on the basis of the same academy drawing, each providing a different and often wild interpretation of the original (pp. 194–200). Here, figures 153 and 154 have been swapped.

[4] Cammy Brothers, *Giuliano da Sangallo and the Ruins of Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022); Dario Donetti and Cara Rachele, eds., *Building with Paper: The Materiality of Renaissance Architectural Drawings* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021); Caroline Yerkes and Heather Hyde Minor, *Piranesi Unbound* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

[5] Angelo Comolli, *Bibliografia storica critica dell'architettura civile ed arti subalterne* (Rome: Stamperia Vaticana, 1788-92), vol. 3, pp. 56-70.

[6] Fabio Barry, *Painting in Stone. Architecture and the Poetics of Marble from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (Yale University Press, 2020).

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