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Sheila Crane, *Mediterranean Crossroads: Marseille and Modern Architecture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. xi + 352 pp. Maps, figures, plates, notes, bibliography, and index. \$82.50 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-8166-5361-4; \$27.50 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-8166-5362-1.

Review by Mark Crinson, University of Manchester, UK.

Marseille appears at a few select moments in surveys of modern architecture. In the nineteenth century, there is the building of Léon Vaudoyer's extraordinary polychromatic cathedral, isolated on the dockside like a piece of huge driftwood fusing Mediterranean cultures. In the early twentieth century, the city's transporter bridge, spanning the entrance to the Old Port, fascinated many visitors for its spindly engineering and exciting sense of new forms of movement. Then there is an architectural event, the setting sail from Marseille on 29 July 1933 of the SS Patris II, a cruise ship full of modernist architects and planners intent on the discussions that would lead to the famous Athens Charter. Finally, in the 1950s, Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation appeared, an experimental housing block with seemingly georgic views from its roof garden. For all of these monuments or events the city is almost absent, at best a sounding board for mythologies about France's relation to the Mediterranean, at worst playing a bit part in the story of modernist architecture's rise and fall.

In her new book, *Mediterranean Crossroads: Marseille and Modern Architecture*, Sheila Crane has produced a new interpretation that makes us re-think this canonic foursome, forcing the city centre stage in its conflicting and sometimes violent particularity. Her parameters are the middle decades of the twentieth century, framed by the dates of the Patris II and the Unité. She finds in this period six "encounters" with Marseille, centred on the Old Port and especially the *quartier réservé* on its north side, that provide the material for her chapters. This is less a study of architecture as actually built, then, than of "urban imaginaries," of how ideologies intersect in discourses around architecture and urbanism. Hence the concern is largely with representations of buildings and the city, and so film, postcards, architectural drawings, models, novels, maps, guidebooks, and especially photography are always to the forefront of the analysis.

Marseille was often regarded as a city without monuments, so the book aptly starts with the curious ways in which Marseille's transporter bridge became an iconic engineering structure. The bridge had provided a pragmatic answer to the need for an aerial promenade or aerial ferry carrying passengers across the seaward sides of the Old Port, and its two pylons gave physical form to the city's claim to be a gateway to the Orient. While the view from the bridge was its main attraction to the Lumière brothers, it was—as with the Eiffel Tower—its steel pylons, truss and cables that appealed to modernist tastes. László Moholy-Nagy, Walter Benjamin, Germaine Krull and Sigfried Giedion seized on the bridge in their films, texts and photographs, giving it intellectual currency for the way it seemed to embody new perceptual experiences of fragmentation and discontinuity, as well as the possibilities of interpenetrable space in modern architecture.

This rather quirky piece of engineering was designed by Ferdinand-Joseph Arnodin and built in 1905, and it was already technologically outdated by the 1920s. Thus the *architecte-urbaniste* Jacques Gréber, with very different ideas of urban evolution, centred his 1933 plan for Marseille on the Old Port as the

city's core, and argued that the transporter bridge was an eyesore and should be demolished as part of his plans to improve communications and living conditions in the city centre. For Gréber the sheer size of the bridge, let alone its engineering aesthetic, denied the hilltop-located Notre-Dame de la Garde its rightful prominence. (He was probably also shocked by the affront to the much-nearer cathedral, but Crane—despite its appearance in many of her images—is curiously blind to the cathedral's continuing presence in the city.) Whether the bridge was celebrated or condemned, what comes through this first chapter is the sense of the city's centre as a desired site of mobility, social as much as architectural. This mobility in turn was key to the idea—shared by Moholy-Nagy and Gréber, despite their other differences—of the city as having a characteristic physiognomy revelatory of its inner nature, one only made possible by the view from above.

Efforts to renovate the image of Marseille as France's southern hinge, as gateway to the Orient, even as capital of the Mediterranean, are the subject of chapter two. Local architect Gaston Castel's proposals and the wartime plans of the *architecte-urbaniste* Eugène Beaudoin are the main examples, one as part of a colonial worldview the other as a Vichy idea of Marseille replacing Paris as France's global city. Again mobility was an important theme, whether as a city channeling goods through it, as a doorway onto the south, or as a tourist gateway and destination. Re-evoking nineteenth-century Saint-Simonian dreams, exploiting Henri Prost's 1920s proposals for new transnational tourist parkways along the south coast, and responding to new ambitions for Marseille's central position vis-à-vis airline travel, Castel's proposals treated infrastructure as critical to the city's strategic regional position as capital of *le Sud*, a re-centralization of the metropole-colony relation.

This was a city imagined as having radiating influence rather than serving as either a point along a north-south meridian envisaged by Le Corbusier or as bulwark of the reactionary regionalism of Charles Maurras and fellow upholders of *Latinité*. Rival German and Italian visions, each harnessing new technologies to renewed Mediterranean ambitions, gave point and focus to Castel's thinking. But of course the war and occupation changed much of this. Under Vichy, Beaudoin, already one of France's most influential architects, was commissioned to modernize the city's circulation and he did this by proposing the de-congestion of historic quarters, outdoing Prost with his high speed roads centrifugally connecting city to region. As Crane points out, this projected a "limitless mobility" (p. 103) sharply at odds with realities of refugee life in wartime Marseille. For Beaudoin, the city was to echo Pétain's call for an imperial metropolis, a gateway to "EurAfrica." As the climax of these movements, the Old Port would be re-styled as a grandiose municipal centre combining seventeenth-century allusions and more than a nod to contemporary Italian fascist urbanism.

If these were unrealized schemes, chapter three, provocatively titled "Urban Gynecology," deals with an act of massively realized destruction. The narrow, labyrinthine streets on the northern side of the Old Port, regarded with contempt by the city's elites, had for some time been a destination for both adventurous tourists and moralizing reformers. This was an almost legendary area of prostitutes, petty criminals, political radicals and immigrants, the subject of racialising, sexualizing and criminalizing discourses. Crane might have made more use here of earlier campaigns to change the city's working class centre, both the Haussmann-style "improvements" of the late nineteenth century and the almost complete destruction of the medieval area of La Blanquerie in the twenty-five years after 1912. Beaudoin, whose plans were informed by both precedents, wanted to aerate, sanitize and prettify the *quartier réservé*, retaining some frontages along the port as window dressing. But it was the Nazis—taking control of the city in November 1942 and with cooperation from the Vichy regime—who acted where the architect could only propose. Instead of Beaudoin's *curretage*, cleaning out its decaying parts, General Oberg's engineers cauterized the area, deporting 20,000 inhabitants and dynamiting a huge swathe in an intimidating act of "slum clearance as urban warfare" (p. 115).

The "gynecology" of Crane's title now makes sense: it refers to the house as the realm of otherness in the city, private space deemed open to preventive intervention by the masculinized protocols and

professions of public order (*curretage* was a medical technique often used in abortion procedures). The hysterical descriptions and lurid metaphors often used by 1930s writers provided the backdrop for Beaudoin's proposals and the justification for the Nazis' act of urban cleansing, an urbanistic version of the ideology of *Lebensraum* with precedents in Warsaw and even in Hamburg. Crane is highly judicious here, refusing to indulge in the games of blame that have tied Beaudoin's plans directly to the demolitions. Nevertheless, even though the architect was involved in attempts to moderate the Nazis' actions, to save isolated historic monuments and return doughty Marseille fishermen to the quarter, Crane sees Beaudoin's plan as a parallel act of "militarized logic" (p. 142). She even points to the usefulness of the transporter bridge as the Nazis surveyed their prey and then documented its destruction.

Following this jagged tear in the city's fabric, the following three chapters deal with issues that accompanied further clearing and reconstruction in the area. Chapter four addresses the new visions for the quarter, how images of ruined destruction mattered, and how the Nazi precedent of planning-by-violence continued to echo after the war. Beaudoin remained centrally important, revising his plans towards a more spacious and monumental vision of the city inspired by his studies of Isfahan, with even larger administrative buildings, a sequence of public squares and long slabs of luxury apartment buildings. In part this new approach was a way of distancing the architect from any implication in the demolition, but it also evoked the mass spectacles and mystification of vast public spaces popular with fascist regimes. Some of these ideas had continued currency in the city, even as Beaudoin's plans were dropped after liberation and the architect returned to Paris, but at this point ideas of rebirth and the martyred city (inspired in part by German demolition of one end of the transporter bridge) also emerged. Such themes were common, of course, with many other postwar cities but Marseille already had a local trope of recovery from violent destruction and this supported a third theme that accompanied the final demolition of facades along the portside and leveling of ground across the quarter: the forgetting of the immediate past in the desire, as Crane explains using Marc Augé and Paul Ricoeur, "to regain the future" (p. 187), to repeat instead of remembering.

The design of the facades along the Old Port is the subject of chapter five. This is a complex if more familiar story of squabbles and clashes between Paris-based and local architects, and of course it took place at a time when Le Corbusier's far better-known Unité d'Habitation was being designed and built in the suburbs. After Roger-Henri Expert had proposed a transatlantic vision of a portside city of towers—diluted into a couple of U-shaped towers designed with Gaston Castel to straddle the area's new retaining wall—the architect who eventually designed most of the new quarter was the locally-based Fernand Pouillon, a former assistant to Beaudoin. Pouillon re-conceived the upper part of the quarter so that it looked as much out to sea as into the Old Port, dredging up the image of a city of fortresses and using North African allusions in his façade details. And when Pouillon (with André Devin), following an intervention by Auguste Perret, gained the commission to redesign buildings lining the quayside that had already been started by André Leconte, the post-demolition ensemble was more-or-less complete. The result was a dull set of blocks over a covered walkway, in scale with the neighbouring Hôtel de Ville but lacking any of its subtleties of façade design. This is only disappointing if we had been expecting a grand architectural product.

The final chapter describes the emergence of new conflicts over priorities of preservation or construction. In part this is about proposals to create a kind of *ville-musée* out of the few historic structures still standing: the battered old sixteenth-century Hôtel de Cabre, for example, was sawn-off from its foundations and shifted to frame a new street. In part, too, the chapter is about the revived interest in Marseille's archaeology that emerged under Vichy as part of its claims for deep French identity, connecting up with Maurras's *Latinité*. The ancient Graeco-Roman town of Massalia, one of the most significant ports in the western Mediterranean, was located on the same contested spot of the *quartier réservé*, and archaeologists hoped to take advantage of the destruction to find substantial remains. There was a long history of frustration here, of repeated attempts to summon up something

substantial. But after the war some important finds were made, a Greek amphitheatre and Roman docks among them, if nothing visually spectacular. These were integrated into the new buildings and a Musée des Docks Romains was built to attract a new, more high-minded tourist to the reconstructed quarter. New accounts of Marseille's history were also suggested by planners, archaeologists and politicians, using myths of ancient Massalia and cyclical patterns of destruction and reconstruction to suggest Marseille's inevitable destiny as capital of the Mediterranean.

A hollowing out of Marseille's centre had taken place, later to be followed by gentrification and the rapid renovations of the recent Euroméditerranée scheme. The supple rhythms of Crane's exposition, her deep but lightly carried archival work, and above all her sensitivity to the particularity of her visual materials, have carried us far. We have learnt as much about the wider implications of modernist aesthetics and Nazi attitudes to occupation as about the urban conflicts and provincialised modernity of this great Mediterranean city.

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