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Mediterranean Crossroads: Marseille and Modern Architecture. By Sheila Crane. University of Minnesota press, 2011. 352 pp., 104 black & white photos, 13 color plates. \$20.50.

Mediterranean Crossroads is a commendable book, albeit one that should not be read with the expectation of learning about the Mediterranean or “crossroads,” let alone crossings through the sea. What this book is really about is intellectual and architectural encounters not in but *with* the city of Marseille, between the 1920s to the 1950s. As such, this monograph delivers effectively. Architectural historian Sheila Crane posits that Marseille pre- and post-World War II was essentially a canvas on which planners from the new discipline of *Urbanisme* could imagine, draft and construct visions of both the city’s past and future. This thesis poses some methodological questions along the way as I will explain below, but overall, Crane’s conclusions and references are immensely valuable to a breadth of scholars—including those unfamiliar with architectural jargon—looking at port cities and the French Empire from a variety of disciplines and interests.

The crossroads implied in the title are indeed better understood as encounters between the city and architects, photographers, engineers, archaeologists and politicians. Crane’s collection of primary and secondary sources (including local archival work) is nothing short of impressive. Spatial theory appears early on in the book through writers like Walter Benjamin and Henri Lefebvre. However, Crane’s monograph does ignore an essential component of Lefebvrian thought conceptualizing space as a nexus of social relations: despite the many vivid figures in this research (Le Corbusier, Nazi imperialists, Pétain, Beaudouin, Marseille itself), a central set of characters is missing—the Marseillais themselves. In a way, this absence fits the idealistic plans of these visionaries, and Marseille for them as in Crane’s book remains mostly de-humanized and detached from reality. Like the theorists and artists Crane references, her view of the city is mostly aerial. Central to the book’s argument is the tension not between space and society (her more recent projects on the *bidonvilles* seem to be going in that direction) but between myth and the city. In that sense, I do think that what can be perceived as a shortcoming is also a great complement to an entire literature of micro-histories and anthropological

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work around the Mediterranean Sea. Crane's book offers compelling and comprehensive contexts for scholars interested in a more horizontal, people-based approach. I think this contrast in future research would be fruitful. The target audience of students and professors will find that *Mediterranean Crossroads*, as a methodological counterpoint, is a perfect fit in many syllabi.

Another reason why the title is misleading is that Crane intentionally paints Marseille as a (failed) *global* hub rather than a Mediterranean one. Not only does she reject Marseille's "mediterreanness," but following Michael Herzfeld, she urges the reader to question Mediterraneanism as fraught and Eurocentric (8). Most of her empirical engagement falls outside of the metropolitan-colonial, center-periphery and colonial-postcolonial frameworks. She compares Marseille not to Algiers but instead to "cities like Glasgow, Hamburg, Mumbai, Osaka, Chicago and São Paulo, that likewise presented distinctive models or urban modernity defined by local particularities and transnational connections." (10) However, the geographic scope remains for the most part narrowly focused on the *Vieux Port* and its façades. Additionally, while the structure of the book makes sense as a chronological progression, the coherence of some loose thematic threads is sometimes questionable. Since the book is clearly about the grand projects of thinkers rather than Marseille's local communities, dedicating an entire chapter to a figure like Le Corbusier rather than having his plans and drawings interspersed in every section could have been a sound idea.

For readers outside of the fields of Architecture and Art History, the second, third and fourth chapters on idealistic city planning and fascist attempts of "*épuration*" in Marseille's notorious red-light district and other insalubrious areas stand out as particularly engaging and original. Dedicating several pages to Herman Sörgel's utopian Atlantropa project, however, seems counterintuitive since the very actualization of this science-fiction-like multi-dam plan would have effectively drawn the coastline away from Marseille and rendered it irrelevant as a port city. Further, the terminology in chapter 3 sometimes sounds controversial when Crane borrows directly from *urbanistes* of the time for techniques like "*curettage*." In any case, this is certainly a chapter that presents interesting material and evidence to a field like Women and Gender Studies. In that sense, the book makes a case for the validity and value of the

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interdisciplinary approach when looking at an object of study as vibrant and dynamic as Marseille. Her references to films and novels contribute to the balance and tenor of her argument. These different angles collectively paint a city readers can immerse themselves in, and the author's expertise in Art History from her Doctorate degree also shines through. Her descriptions are vivid, and her research showcases the multi-dimensionality and multi-sensory space of Marseille's cityscape. You can almost smell it.

Mediterranean Crossroads is an undeniable contribution to Marseille's historiography, but readers should be aware of its limited mid-century scope. Marseille's *longue durée* history remains largely untold, but Crane nonetheless presents riveting snapshots and anecdotes inviting further questions on urban storytelling. The conclusion, regrettably, reads more like an epilogue than a solid capstone to this edifice, as it merely teases out queries that were likely on the mind of most readers looking at Marseille: What about post-Algerian independence urban development? What are the implications for the various populations of Marseille of the periods of economic expansion and contraction she mentions? What is the trend looking past the 2013 inauguration of the MUCEM into the coming decades? Scholars of post-colonial theory will lament the lack of emphasis on Marseille and the Maghreb as dialogical architecture. Regardless, Crane's Marseille is brilliantly described as a playground for some of the most innovative and dangerous modernist minds of the time who used pencils and dynamite sticks with orientalist, imperialist, racist or capitalist ulterior motives. Revisiting these intellectual debates of the time on urbanism is as relevant as ever in the current global climate.

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