

Comments on La Grande Joliette in Marseille according to Emmanuel Pinard
By Arnaud le Marchand.

Photographing the periphery and interior interstitial spaces contributes to the crucial debate on the evolution of the city. Such photographs can be interpreted as witnesses to the disappearance of the traditional city; they record the symptoms of a much greater crisis. Urban sprawl is associated with spatial traps for unemployment, segregation, loss of community and ecological problems. Faced with the paradoxical attraction of these images, we are quick to condemn a morbid fascination, an aestheticization of bad taste. Such lack of comprehension is recurring; it goes along with the regret at losing the old centres and compact cities. Several objections can be posed:

The inherent force in some of these spaces and constructions. A road intersection is a system which links near and far, actually enabling us to consider and experience the circulation of people, machines, stories, proximity and remoteness, sounds, pollution, and ruins. A road intersection summarizes aspects of contemporary life from the local to the global and vice versa.

Life in these peripheral spaces is not just about poverty, solitude and crime. It's also about the invention of other daily habits and uses of the space, leading to other conflicts than those occurring in city centres.

Finally have there ever been cities without fringes, without internal and external wasteland, ideally compact and consensual? A city with no dirty corners, without shortcomings, without sponginess, is a myth. Can the city be considered without criticizing this nostalgia for sumptuous centres saturated with culture and wealth? Aren't empty spaces just as necessary to urbanity as full ones?

Emmanuel Pinard's work invites this way of thinking. Having explored the uncertain limits, the wasteland and interstices, he is returning to the historic, more central zones. Since reporting current multiple fragmentations, he shifts his gaze to the Talabot's Docks warehouse in Marseille on the La Joliette basin, that is to say to the buildings made into heritage facilities by institutions after a period when they had formed an industrial port zone. He implicitly reconsiders them in relation to the periphery. Before becoming buildings recognized for their qualities, as protected sites of memories and invested with promises of new development, these facilities were themselves caught up in conflicts, organized traffic circulation, barred the way for others, posed new problems, as contemporary urban forms do. They were a frontier, a periphery, and a junction. These views of the La Joliette basin enable us to go from one method of questioning to another. Indeed, a question of scale is immediately posed in photographing the La Joliette area. Emmanuel Pinard responds in two different ways:

First of all in the chosen point of view, that of the Digue du Large breakwater. There is a certain coherence between this distance and the functionalities of the site. The breakwater was built to make a port big enough for the ships it expected to receive. Their current dimensions surpass those of the cathedral and largely exceed those for which the dock was designed. The ferries at the quayside exceed them while like the small container carrier barge to the left, they are far from being the majestic ships of the

age. These “mobile” forms possess a quite other dimension than that of cars, hence the apparent absence of people in the current representations of ports. Industrial photographs, used in commercial negotiations, notably with insurance companies, are now more often taken from the air and reduce human presence to mere detail. The presence of the ships is a reminder of the constructed dimension of the area placing human and non-human actors in relation to one another, at multiple scales, letting us go directly from the district to the Mediterranean and on to global oceanic traffic.

The choice of the polyptych rather than a single, or an overhead viewpoint often used to illustrate an area of this significance, broaches the question of scale through the complexity and undulation of the territory. Impossible to represent in one take, not only because of its size, but also because of its contradictions. The intentional discontinuity of this series underlines the enclaves, parts, and non-linear contours of the quayside. It recalls the difficulties of grasping in a single take, such an assembly despite its apparent continuity. It needs to be actually paced in order to understand it, not viewed from above.

At last the choice of subject examines the question of the city and its empty spaces. The La Joliette basin and the dock warehouse linked by rail emphasised the domination of Paris over Marseille's development like a stone memorial. This basin and the dock of a major company were not local projects; the Marseille people wanted to develop their port towards the South. It is thus the materialization of the projection of global logics, that they fought and ended up besieging later to temporarily regain control of the port of Marseille. This dockside building already represents the city/port separation despite the physical proximity that can conceal political differences.

Furthermore such an assembly represents technical modernization; it was an attempt to organize port labour according to the factory model. Initially victorious, it got rid of the Corporation des Portefaix (porters) and the organization of labour of old trade, it went on to fail, notably due to the irregularities of port activity, discontinuities which were impossible to permanently contain within this space. Finally, this assembly is linked to other invasions and fractures, it would go on to serve colonial trade and decolonization would then wreck it. Decolonization was responsible for the population of Marseille's Northern neighbourhoods with the return of the “pieds noirs [expats]” and emigration. The container discretely present in one of the frames of the polyptych then condemned it to a change of use, to marginalization. Its requalification in the context of the Euromed project, still puts political and economic relations into play, a social construction in fact as much as a structure. Its future use begs the question whether the motorway intersections of the peripheries and the HLM social housing developments themselves won't become heritage sites after a future requalification.

These images overturn the traditional vision of ports and of Marseille as represented in Vernet's painting, seen from the inside. The viewpoint starts at the Digue du Large breakwater facing towards the city and not from the quay towards the maritime horizon. A reflexive return trip towards a space that has become an interior one, but perhaps also towards a space more influenced than influencing, like the return of the colonial movement that had caused it to emerge. This is very much about post-colonial Marseille. There is thus segmentation and remoteness at the centre of the most

prestigious. By means of an unconstrained practice of architectural photography, Emmanuel Pinard is able to renew the vision of the centre and the periphery.

11-2006