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Marcel Roncayolo. *Les grammaires d'une ville: Essai sur la genÖ¨se des structures urbaines Ö Marseille.* Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Haute Etudes, 1996. 507 pp. 380 Fr (cloth), ISBN 978-2-7132-1195-9.

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I do not know if many anglophone readers know Marcel Roncayolo's work. I am pretty sure he is much better known in Italy or Spain than in northern Europe, so a word of introduction might not be superfluous–not regarding the author's career or his many works, but about his importance for all those who, in France, are trying to invest interest and passion in the history of the urban scene. It is my opinion that he and Jean-Claude Perrot were the two major figures of what has been labeled as urban history in the academic landscape of 1970s France. But both of them had a special kind of influence. Jean-Claude Perrot hit the urban scene with only one work, but that a major book (*Caen au XVIIIe siecle, genese d'une ville moderne*, Paris-La Haye, Mouton, 1975), and then moved to the history of economic thought. Bernard Lepetit, one of his pupils, kept on carrying the torch until his death last year. Marcel Roncayolo wrote many pieces in collective works. l'*Enciclopedia Einaudi*, l'*Histoire de la France urbaine* are among the most famous. But he published so few books on his own that this one might be called the first. For someone who began to work in urban history at the end of the 1950s, it is rather a surprise. He has no real followers in the academic sense, but his influence reaches all academic spheres, due to his teaching activity at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes and to his communication with many disciplines. This "all-round player" of the academic court is listened to, read, and used by art historians, geographers, sociologists, economists, political scientists, architects, and anthropologists. In France, when you meet some fellow "urbanite," you can almost be sure that you will both mention him.

Of course, you could find structural reasons for this widely acknowledged influence: the many academic positions in top-level learning institutions, his "bilingualism" between history and geography that led him to be dedicated to interdisciplinary work, etc. I would add another one. Reading Edward Muller's tribute to Roy Lubove in the *Journal of Urban History*, I found this sentence that might help to make clear Roncayolo's place in French urban studies: "Reacting to the ambiguity of seeing urban history as anything that happened in cities, he defined the field 'as the process of city-building over time … [that] implies a focus upon the city as a physical entity … and the use of this framework to explore technological and social change.' Not only did this perspective stress familiar Lubove topics such as housing, architecture, transportation, public health, and social organization, it also embraced the attitudes, culture and decision making that shaped the city-building process" (*JUH*, September 1996, p. 682).

Of course there are differences in the ways in which Lubove and Roncayolo study the city, but you can find this same will to tackle the urban phenomenon, not taking the city as a point in space, nor as a simple theatre scene, nor as a convenient place to study something else. I find this commitment essential to explain, at least, my own intellectual debt and attention to Roncayolo's work, though he was never my teacher.

It is difficult to review a book written by someone whose work has been at the roots of your own work. It is even more difficult when the book itself has played this role. I remember having read Roncayolo's text in 1986 when I was beginning my Ph.D. With a few others, it gave shape to all I've done since. In fact, the book is part of the enormous "These d'Etat sur travaux" that Roncayolo presented in 1981, gathering together, at that moment, his many years' work. This late publication may appear like a tribute, at the time when Roncayolo retires, but perhaps my usual hatred for miscellanea and Festschriften and my "no flowers by request" cast of mind should be held back for a (short) while. Because this is a most useful book, not merely a present of respect to an old man. In *European Urban History* (Richard Rodger, editor, Leicester University Press, 1993), Bernard Lepetit and Jean-Luc Pinol underlined that the nineteenth- and twentieth-century volume of *Histoire de la France urbaine* (1983) was premature in the sense that empirical studies were insufficiently developed at that moment. French modern urban history lacks great books, as they say: this "new old" book be-

longs to this category.

For those reasons, mine will not be a review that turns to pathetic hero worship and cunning praise or to vicious reproach. Can one review, as we understand it, a book written more than fifteen years ago ? Can a reviewer argue about the outdated or trendy aspects of a book written at a moment when he or she was playing with tin soldiers and Barbie dolls? That would be even sillier than usual. In fact, the right tone to review this book would be to examine the legacy and effects of Roncayolo's works on French urban studies. But that would be a paper, not a review. There would certainly be comments to make on methodological points (especially on statistical tools), but I am not qualified to do that. So what am I doing? A call to readers would be the right expression. Here are some elements to make you want to read this book.

The book is about Marseilles, but it is not a book on Marseilles. It is not a monograph either about Marseilles or about one of Marseilles' aspects (workers, cultural activity, planning,...), nor is it a time-focused study of Marseilles. When Roncayolo needs eighteenth-century elements to manipulate about how much this moment shaped representations of the city, he goes and searches for them in the archives; when he needs the 1968 census to get at spatial analysis of social localisations, he finds it. Nor does he discriminate as to the use of series extracted from the census or of qualitative information taken from the sphere of "discourses." His aim is to throw light on the genesis of urban structures that still weigh on today's Marseilles, and especially about the social division of space. And he uses what can be useful to answer his questions. Doing so, he crisscrosses many questions that we would have glorified ourselves to treat in a single-perspective book: demographic growth and its rhythms, industrialisation and local managers, changing functions of a harbour-town, building industry and its cycles, intra-urban social settings and moves, planning.... The most remarkable is this will to hold as many wires as possible, not disdaining any tool or sources, not privileging form over function or the opposite.

When Roncayolo examines what he calls the "liberal model" (the urban structures appearing from the eighteenth century onward), he invokes building cycles, population moves and growth, landmarks in the city, subdivision strategies, and industrial development as well as tourist guides, ideas of the civil engineers about space, and municipal discourse on the poor and disabled. I'd like to try to translate a paragraph opening this chapter to show where Roncayolo stands. I find here some echo of Roger Chartier's attitude that considers the opposition between reality and representation, post-modernism and materialism as tricky, confusing, and useless (see "Le monde comme representation," *Annales ESC* [November-December 1989]. See also the Mayne-Englander duel in *Urban History* two years ago as an illustration of the ill will of the debaters). I would not write that he would say, as I do, that this is an academic game between masters and disciples, old and young, heirs and pretenders, and as such as boring as other games of the field. But he certainly pleads for something else. Listen, without forgetting that this was written during the 1960s-1970s:

"Besides, the city is not the immediate and blind result of interests of actions. At least, it is not only that. The city is the object of more or less coherent representations, representations of what exists and of what is projected, both participating in larger system of ideas or ideologies. Hence they cannot be considered as pure reflections of material or geographical constraints, of the need of exchange or production. The city is just a point, amongst others, where fastens on a 'mental stock of tools' [this is Lucien Febvre's notion of "outillage mental"]. Ideology can precede, pre-form or distort urban realities, transpose them in the worlds of utopias, shape them up to a certain point. Nothing of that implies that representations escape society and its conflicts, that urban history is nothing but a history of ideas about the city, detached from any substratum, a mere and plain catalogue of discourses of authors, artists or schools of thought. But the reflection and intervention on the city can be at the end of the line and not at the beginning, in the return of mentalities and sensibilities toward material forms and not at the source of ideas" (p. 312).

Eclecticism ? Weakness of the problematic ? Call it as you wish, even if this includes some pejorative judgment. I suppose you can believe that when you see that his borrowings from history, geography, economics, and sociology are not temporary loans, but appropriations. But I am still sensitive to this kind of plea, and may be more than ever, in a context where the purring of pretend cultural studies has become an industrial noise-nuisance and where the hectic drivels of "good ole' time history" fans gives me urticaria. To quote Roncayolo, "Epistemologically too, the city might be nothing but a meeting spot." I guess this epistemological humility is the price to pay to answer questions about how a city moves through its spatial forms and its social content, in this material and immaterial sphere where human beings and physical elements meet and give sense and use one to each other. If urban history is about something, and good for something, it is about "generations of buildings as well as generations of people," as said our British colleague

H. J. Dyos years ago. Here is the widely known secret of Marcel Roncayolo's powerful book, which I recommend to readers, along with Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991). Lefebvre called for a history of space? Marcel Roncayolo was already beginning to answer him. But we have still to follow them.

Oh, did I tell you? Marcel Roncayolo is a geographer if we consider his academic degrees. But who would care about labels after reading this book...?

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