

## BOOK REVIEW OF *A CIDADE EM TODAS AS SUAS FORMAS* (THE CITY IN ALL ITS FORMS)

RECENSÃO DO LIVRO *A CIDADE EM TODAS AS SUAS FORMAS*

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La Rocca, F. (2018). *A cidade em todas as suas formas* (A. A. Ramos, Trans.). Editora Sulina. (Original work published 2013)

*A Cidade em Todas as Suas Formas* (The City in All Its forms) written by the sociologist Fábio La Rocca, was published in 2018 by Editora Sulina, in Brazil, and is the Portuguese translation of the original work published in 2013, by CNRS Éditions, under the same title.

Along the pages of this book, divided into four chapters, Fábio La Rocca, who has published multiple works focusing on sociology of imaginary, communication and media, visual sociology, cities and urban spaces, provides readers with a passionate tour of the city universe, thus being able to elicit accurate and up-to-date reflections on the infinite urban possibilities in constant metamorphosis. With constant references to Simmel, Heidegger, Baudrillard, Maffesoli's works, among others, we are immersed by restlessness: after all, it is necessary to learn to think the urban ambiances with our eyes.

In order to elaborate a literary *flânerie* through the chapters, we have registered below some impressions and reflections that the work has elicited.

### WANDERING AROUND URBAN ENVIRONMENTS IN A CURRENT CLIMATOLOGY

In a first chapter, La Rocca presents, in a question form, a summary of the next pages. "How should we look at the city?" (La Rocca, 2013/2018, p. 17). Is there a more correct way of perceiving urban space? Since we recognize this impossibility, we are suggested to think, then, in new ways of perceiving, understanding, feeling and living the city(ies). Thus, it is necessary to wander through its paths and experience its architectural "skin", its forms, styles, identities and fragments. Until the "urb", as Calvino (1972/1990) mentioned, gives us an answer.

In this contemporary climatology, the change in the urban paradigm evoked by La Rocca is perfectly clear. Linear cities, arising from structural rationalism to Le Corbusier, give way, as if in an ecdysis, to the postmodern cities of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown that provide for the explosion of forms, open situations and aesthetics of diversity.

In this urban promenade, the form and modalities of the physical city are interpreted beside the sensitivity of the aesthetic experience of the different subjects responsible for giving meaning to the place. This worthwhile encounter between space and sociality, presented by Heidegger's analysis of the "being-city", is described as "a process of symbolic elaboration of the space that emerges in the practices of daily life" (La Rocca, 2013/2018, p. 20).

The cities are perceived, in this way, as a sensitive poetics that reflect their post-modern spirit, either (a) through the architectural body-city with sinuous shapes, an icon of beauty that spatializes the imaginary and works as a medium while transporting polysemic narratives; (b) through the chaotic cyborg-city, a giant spectacle, used by the author in the Bladerunnerization metaphor; or (c) in the understanding of "super-places" — neologism associated with the idea of non-place in Marc Augé's (1992/2016) work published in 1992 — of psychophysical attraction that spreads through the metropolises, changing and setting themselves up as magnetic spaces for consumption not only of objects, but mainly of desires, impulses and dreams.

### URBAN IMAGERY(IES)

In the second chapter, entitled "Formas do Imaginário Urbano" (forms of the urban imaginary), the city is reaffirmed as a great social research laboratory by becoming a cinematographic character. Cinemas has been the object of numerous analyzes in recent years, and according to Marc Ferro (1977/1992) in the 1970s, it offered a counter-analysis of society. Following this premise, it is observed by La Rocca that the magic of this medium would be to contribute to the production and propagation of social imaginary as well as mental maps. In the line of this idea, by making use of a variety of references, the author deduces that one of the possibilities of urban imagery is intrinsically related to the world of images in cinema. In his words: "cinema appears as the production of an urban culture capable of showing us and making us observe the vastness of the forms of the urban landscape that, consequently, become cinematographic landscapes" (La Rocca, 2013/2018, p. 81). Thus, it is in the visuality of the cinema that we are able to experience and verify the complexity of the urban form(s), in a new mental cartography created individually in each observant.

This analysis is in agreement with a *phenomenology of perception*, proposed by Merleau-Ponty in 1964, as the author rightly states. La Rocca's considerations indicate that cinema invites people to reflect on the individual relationship of subjects with space and redesigns, in this way, an "intimate geography" of the city. However, in this intimacy, would there be space to see ourselves in community?

By combining considerations about the collective city, or rather, the Dionysic city (Maffesoli, 2003) in which we get inebriated and wander (Baudelaire, 1976, as cited in La Rocca, 2013/2018), La Rocca brings another suggestion of urban imagery: the hype city. At this point, it is considered an urban cartography of fun, of "sensationalism of pleasures", of "tribal religions". Several festive episodes in the city become the medium of "nervous

excitement mobilizing all the senses. A total and synesthetic mobilization of the energies that are correlated with the ideology of entertainment” (La Rocca, 2013/2018, p. 109).

From that point, regardless of how and where, it is possible to interpret the city in “a continuous process of transformations and transfigurations of its own spaces” (La Rocca, 2013/2018, p. 125). The author disrupts and restructures the city based on the collective narration of infinite situations that happen in everyday life. Communication and community. In an existential dynamism, fragments of life, places of sociality and (sensitive) spaces of emotions conceive and signify, in a ritualistic process originated by the subjects, following Carey’s line of thought (1992), what we now know as the symbolic reality of/in the city. It is the collective practices that “give sense, values and significance to space” (La Rocca, 2013/2018, p. 135). There is no city without its inhabitants.

### SEEING AND THINKING WITH YOUR EYES

In the third chapter there is a growing visual stimulation arising from the proliferation of images in cities that, in turn, experience a continuum of daily elaboration of experiences and possibilities. Urban forms are then considered to be a polygon of signs. “We find ourselves in a position of relationship with this visual stimulation as never seen before, capable of exercising a power of fascination, of attraction, but also of repulsion” (La Rocca, 2013/2018, p. 158). In *Crise no Castelo da Cultura: Das Estrelas Para os Ecrãs* (Crisis at the Castle of Culture: From the Stars to the Screens), Martins (2011) already states that the “image constitutes the very form of our culture” (p. 77).

In this tour guided by countless visual stimuli through the cities, though, we can adopt the *blasé* attitude (described by Simmel) as a form of protection or practice visual *flânerie* either in the daily walks or in the inter-paths for the uncontrollable becoming. In transport or outdoors, sitting inside a cafe, for example, it is necessary to (re)learn to see the city behind this glass-screen.

In this urban crossing of postmodern climatology, without certainties and promises, “then a communicational constellation appears, which is quite the sign of an aesthetic *spatialization* from which a journey of the urban imaginary is triggered” (La Rocca, 2013/2018, p. 165). There is space, then, to (a) touch (with) the gaze through outdoor advertising, social body, form of communication and cultural expression that contributes to designing an urban space — and inhibiting or even preventing others (Pires, 2007); and (b) to manifest a “being-in-the-world” based on graffiti, interpreted by La Rocca (2013/2018) as visual and linguistic codes, tattoos on urban “skin”, “icons that produce a visual imagery that is embedded in urban interstices, and that make the streets similar to open-air art galleries” (p. 211).

### WANDERING THROUGH HYBRID CITIES

After walking through this urban visual grammar that appears as an “emotional and at the same time symbolic metaphor” (La Rocca, 2013/2018, p. 211), *tecnópolis* is

presented in the fourth chapter. At the beginning of this journey, La Rocca provokes us by quoting Cedric Price “technology is the answer, but what was the question?” (La Rocca, 2013/2018, p. 213).

Considering that the metropolises are increasingly permeated by digital technologies, new ways of living and inhabiting these spaces are inevitably emerging on a daily basis. This urban fusion where “*technè* fuses with *bios*” (La Rocca, 2013/2018, p. 217) is seen from the topics media interconnections, technodigital spatialities and second city.

In contemporary climatology, human life and presence in the city — always on or available — is recorded and shared in a tribal digital imprinting; enhanced and “oriented” — and sometimes made possible — by the technological presence, in which a possible example is digital modulations of digital *déambulation* such as Google Maps, Google Earth, Drive & Listen, among others.

Would this be the farewell of the *flâneur/flâneuse* that walks through the galleries and streets inebriated by the thousand ambiances?

In line with the ideas of Leite (2006), we can understand the metamorphosis of Baudelaire’s characters. After all, in this new conception of space, or better, in this second city, where communication and information storage capacities are enhanced — cyberspace — there is space for *cyber-flânerie*. In the postmodern “bit architecture” there is room for an ontologically reconfigured “being-city”, nurtured and inhabited in a symbiotic, interactive and increasingly hybrid way.

The tour comes to an end when the pages end, but it continues as a valuable epistemic contribution in our knowledge of *the city(ies) in all its forms*.

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