

***La ville dans tous ses états***, by Fabio La Rocca,  
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## **The Surreal Metropolis**

It is about time that the city should become once more a central object of academic research, that the humanities and social sciences should become concerned with the city from an interdisciplinary perspective, beyond received understandings of the city. After all, between the advent of the global village and the proliferation of digital networks, this perspective, that of the modern condition of the metropolitan urban world, now lies in ruins. It is also long overdue that the contemporary city be studied from a fresh point of view, and that we should not simply continue to repeating the brilliant visions of W. Benjamin, G. Simmel or the Chicago school. Neither is it sufficient simply to cite Ch. Baudelaire, E-A Poe et I. Calvino, or to be content to illustrate urban life with reference to the masterpieces of F. Lang,

Murnau, and R. Scott, as if between now and then the cityscape had been left unchanged by the passage of time.

In this essay where the sociology of *l'imaginaire* and visual sociology constitute the axis around which are woven insights from mediology, architecture, contemporary art and literature. These insights, not merely glimpses, are used by Fabio La Rocca to meet the challenge of understanding and interpreting the *la ville dans tous ses états* whilst evoking its genealogy, its archeology, whilst highlighting the unheard characteristics of its contemporary phenomenology. He has based his analysis on the bedrock of classic sociological thought, whilst simultaneously interpreting the languages of the metropolitan medium in all its forms (photography, cinema, street art...), but also with references to the research of his colleagues of the *Centre d'étude sur l'actuel et le quotidien* (A. Rafele, S. Hugon, R. Josset...), within which he has founded a group of study on the image in sociology. His study of the contemporary city is founded upon the in-depth analysis of the place of the image in the matrix and upon the surfaces of urban life. The image would be, then a true terrain for living the city, and at the same time a source of new phantasmagorias, a platform where the sensitive, the emotional, and the corporeal co-exist in space and time.

This essay is not merely content to evoke these theories, but it employs them to the fullness of the lived experience of the contemporary city. A reservoir of contradictions and of a *rizomathique* life, this essay presents all the same consistencies,

which create a privileged space for collective and community-based communication where the expressions, citing M. Maffesoli, are manifested in the fragmentary yet coherent forms of the tribe. Smart mobs, we could argue, using the metaphore of H. Rheingold, but La Rocca shows that, in contemporary life, is not only about intelligence, but also a fecund, even if turbulent, synergy between sense, dreams, and reason. Thus, after having described the connection between the cinematographic *imaginaire* and architecture, which permits him to suggest a “bladerunnerisation” of territory, to know an elaboration of the metropolitan form based upon a cinematographic and fantastic vision, rather than a political or ideological project, the italian sociologist of *l'imaginaire* describes the new epiphanies of the urban scenario, investigating the field of “hype”. The “Hype city” would be the result, the outcome, but also the inversion of a city made fecund by the society of drama. Here, the real contents of the collective thrill becomes submerged in its ver own esthetic, its own production and re-production, the telling of its own story, like an exemplary text of a profane epoch. Of course, the author does not forget the measure in which the merchandise of this spectacle, the model of the cultural industry, orchestrates this frantic dance. In any case, he also shows at what point the dreams and the ideology of the situationists, to which he makes frequent reference, social life could have in and for itself, celebrating itself as the true contents of the postmodern metropolitan ambience.

It is no longer a question of verifying the quantity and the quality of the alienation in the contemporary context, neither to combat it with theoretical weaponry, but to describe how we can live in a master-system where, for some time now, technology has overtaken humanity. From *Metropolis* to *King Kong*, to *Aurore*: the song of two humans to the *Truman Show*, along with *Blade Runner*, we have already seen this: the human is no longer, and perhaps never was the heart of the metropolis. And for all that, like this book reveals with a great power to evoke, and remarkable lucidity, the technosocial body, the successor of the masses, which became public after having been the privilege of the working class, and which is transformed in an extra-ordinary representation of the contemporary world, which manages despite everything, by eroticism, the ruse, and pleasure, to live and dance within. *La Rocca* knew it well, studying with precision, for example, the phenomenon of street art long before it became a fashion, long before it became part of the mainstream cultural codes. Street art appears, then, as the expression of a sensual contact between the margins of urban life and its material structures, a witness of a conjunction of what was once separated: the human and the technological, the subject and the object, the work and the spectator. In the same way, electronic life is linked to the urban context and proposes to us that which we could name a third dimension, the synergy of the physical and the immaterial in a scene which is not and which is no longer simply the cinema, but a surreal life, more real than reality itself.