

Les lieux du sensible. Villes, hommes, images, by Alain Mons, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2013, 254pp.

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*Ce que nous offre la visibilité de la ville
ce sont des milliers d'éclats disparates*
Alain Mons

Les lieux du sensible guides us through an anthro-poetic journey through the contemporary city from the perspective of an urban “affectology” with a deep and intense perception of the different atmospheric variations, giving us an insight into the urban aesthetic. This kind of “travelling” thought proposed by Alain Mons, brings us into contact with the sensitive, the manifold perceptions of the urban and cultural environment and, at the same time, illustrates in all its complexity the particular social aesthetic atmosphere that gives rise to social life; this existential aesthetic (p.11) where we can see a powerful fluctuation and reciprocal penetration of forms, images, bodies. This composition, that constitutes social life wherein evolves the individual, represent an expressive mode where art, spatial experience,

images, and the aesthetic are some of the instruments that permit us to comprehend our urban environment. Or, better again, these urbanities, as the author puts it, are composed of various atmospheres, the fluctuating milieu that affects the visual and sensory input registered by the contemporary nomad.

In this direction, we can find all the importance of the porosity of the sensitive defined by Alain Mons as the characteristic of the contemporary epoch. So, this relation, or better, this connection between the inside and the outside, is a kind of permanent oscillation permitting movement of the point of view in order to capture and feel the sensitive ambiances that determinate our existential life environment. This is clear in the four parties of the book where the author operate a dialogue between the socio-urban environment and the different characteristics of the image, places, body and the sensible experiences. In the first part, Alain Mons shows us this peopling of the images through the ideal illustration of a visual climate (p.23) characterising with vigour our contemporary atmosphere and where we can feel this power of the image that modify our space through “significant itineraries, iconographic poles activating the superpose imaginaries of the habitants” (p.27). In the power of images we can find also the fantasy of the cinema that characterize the urban wandering (chapter 2) by a poetic mode. In a way, the magic of cinema, explored here as a cinematographic symptomatology of *the city* (p.29), conduct us in a crossing of the space, permitting us to discover places and feel some sensations by the perspective of

sequence of the cinematographic eye of the likes of Michelangelo Antonioni, David Lynch, Krysztof Kieslowski, Atom Eogyan. The great importance of the magical universe of the cinema as a contribution to explore our collective imaginary of the metropolis is well known, and it helps us build a vision of the urban landscape and its atmospheres. In this way we can travel on this magic lantern - the cinema - that make possible a deep exploration of the cities and so a form of knowledge. For Deleuze, the philosophical question of cinema is a mechanism of thought operating with the signs of the image-movement charged with dynamic tension. We are, in this case, immersed in a phenomenological dimension that helps us to decrypt the urban dimension; and the cinema, in the perspective of Siegfried Kracauer, can be understand as a form of knowledge. And the analysis of Alain Mons is in interaction with a way to think the cinema as a methodology through with to explore the sensible experience of urban social dimension.

If the cinema influence our perception, at the same time the electrification play a preponderant role in the production of ambiances. And this is the sense that we can find in this geography of lights (p.41) forming an aesthetic process, a “medialization” (p.47) of the urban territories: so a urban scenography where we can feel the emotions, energies, vibrations of ours nomadisms, wanderings and crossings. The movement, this characteristic that influence our existence and that of the places, is explored in the second part of the essay through the remarks on the polytrophicbecame (pp.

72-85) or well the interesting perspective of the fissure and the echo chamber of ours apartments constituting a “cosmogony” (pp. 97-99) to continue with the auratic’s experience of the city by the weaving of an urban thread where, at the same time, we can be affected by a genetic mutation of places and environments (p.114).

Naturally we can feel this mutation, this “moving of the milieu” (p.115) also by the body and its multiply modes of apparition and communication like illustrated in the chapter 9 of the essay. This bodily centrality, the sensations of brushing in the depths of the city, the epidermic effect that the author shows us also by the cinematographic aesthetic or the magnetism of the dance, testify all the richness of the urban milieu and its atmospherically variations in the production of ambiances, of sensible perceptions that influence and determinate ours experiences. Some atmospheric experiences (p.197) characterized also by contemporary art that here is a tool to talk about the city, to dialogue the bodies and reveal, again, the multitude of the ambiances and the experience of the perceptions.

In this sort of special thinking about existence, there is a process of symbolic elaboration of space that emerges through everyday life where urban space creates various opportunities to produce “situations” giving sense simultaneously to spatial references and to the people immersed in these atmospheres. Through this process we can recognize that, in all the contemporary mutations of the urban environment, scientific rationality cannot grasp the

contemporary city. Thus, we must renew how we seek to understand the transformations of urban spaces through the optic of the sensitive. The interest in sensitive forms, influenced by Pierre Sansot's theory, is a way to built an "existential aesthetic" where individuals are influenced by the social and aesthetical atmosphere characterizing the urban environment. We can notice, in addition, how the author operates a study of the urban place from the perception and imaginary where the affects, emotions, and memories can affected the way we look at space; or how perception – we can feel all the importance of the theory of Merleau-Ponty – changes the way to read the pages of the city also form the perspective of the imperceptible. This is the fruit of the fact that urban daily life is always in movement with the multitude of exchanges, interactions, flux, and topographic contexts and the individual is immersed in a "external sollicitation" constituted by various images (advertising for example) that, implanted on the urban spaces, capture the regard of the individual. The images surround us and we can considerer them as "atmospherics" and we can feel this through all the effect of technology, or art, choreography with the essence of a way to be here and everywhere, inside and outside, to be present and absent at the same time.

This is the force of the imaginary, the presence of images and the entire artistic panorama that help us to build the perspective of the sensitive as a theoretical approach in order to understand the phenomenological aspects of the city and the symbolic

representation of its spaces. And this essay tries to explore in a brilliant way the *va-et-vient* between the outside and inside, the affectionate experiences and imagination have the effect of atmospheres, ambiances that structure the fluctuation of the perception.

Alain Mons put in perspective an “atmospheric anthropology” where all the environmental configurations are affected by the ambiances, the perceptions. The strategy is a reflexion on the “social climatology” (Fabio La Rocca, Michel Maffesoli) where the atmosphere must be considered as a basic fact, a data for the social sciences as a way to put the attention on all the impregnation characterizing the urban spheres. This is the sense of the different sensitive ambiances that Alain Mons explores in the contemporary urban condition. The sensitive ambiances emerged in the places that we live or across, by the moving, the affective relation with the contexts. It’s an aesthetic that influences the way to feel the city and also the way we have to look, in a phenomenological and epistemological way, to the centrality of urban spaces and its contours. The “atmospheric anthropology” can be understood as a new paradigm to explore the city. A paradigm (through the perspective of Thomas Khun) that follows the evolution of the thought and must be changed in function of the epoch where we are situated to make possible to build a vision of the social world, a normative model. Well, a paradigm as an indicator of the contemporary *zeitgeist*.

With the support of multiply theoretical references that put

in dialogue Walter Benjamin, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gilles Deleuze, Peter Sloterdijk, Georg Simmel, Pierre Sansot, François Laplantine, Sigfried Kracauer or some cinematographic works, the universe of the contemporary art, dance, photography that confirm a deep erudition, Alain Mons gives focus to the fragments, details, the harnessing of urban space, its outlines and oscillations. All those things determines the places of sensitive and also invite us, through a fluctuation of senses, to a deep exploration of the imaginary.

