

Our daily heaven

The first question is a classic one. So classic that it is one of the questions we hear most frequently in the movies: Where am I? What is this place?

Or, to be more precise, since what matters here is not where the body is, but where the eyes are: Where am I looking from? What am I looking at? What do I see?

The second question is philosophical. Why is there this instead of nothing? Why am I here and not there? Who is there? Who might be there? Who might be looking at me? What does the gaze of the one who is looking at me tell me? What is the relationship between me and what I see?

The third question is scientific. What are those lights? Why do they have different colors? Do they move or are they fixed? What patterns do I see in those dots? How far are they? How can I get closer?

None of these questions is new. For centuries, we have felt them and asked them as we looked at the starry night sky. That sky schoolbooks tell us about but which is not there anymore over the cities. For centuries, that sky has inspired poems, geometries, terrors, devotions, oaths, dreams and sleepless nights.

But soon, we feel that this sky is strange, that these galaxies are somewhat organized, intelligent, geometrical. This sky was made with ruler and compass. What sky is this? Where did our everyday sky go?

The absence of chaos in these galaxies is spooky. Is some extraterrestrial civilization looking at us? What are those strange constellations that cover this sky as if they were zodiacal signs? There is something mythological, rather than mythical, in their design. Who made these galaxies?

The subtitles help us understand. That world is, in fact, our own. That's where we are. We are there, here, looking up, looking at a mirror that puts us in the sky. We are those constellations. We are down here looking up there and up there looking down and we think we see the same thing. «As above, so below; as below, so above.» Impossible not to think of the hermetic principles.

There's nothing as far away and as alien as a galaxy, and nothing as close and familiar as a city. Here, those two worlds collide and coincide, meet one another, and familiarity becomes distance, distance becomes familiar. The cold and sidereal barrenness fuses with the frantic and hot urban

space. And when we again manage to imagine the microscopic chaos that inhabits these galaxies, the people, the cars, the neon lights, the crimes, the failed encounters, we are able to breathe again. There is, after all, no intelligence behind the organization of the Universe. These images that we project onto the sky were made by us. They are human after all. The straight lines are still only human. No god can draw like us.

When we finally see the cities, when we recognize the alignment of avenues, the first thing that comes to mind are the maps of the urbanist Richard Florida. But these lights we see are not city lights, they are not the economy, not the arts. They are not even the city. They are city signs. They are dots created by lines crossing each other. Reflexions in a mirror. Markings made with a pencil on a sheet of paper. They are a cartography of the city. A cartography that puts them up in the sky.

There is a cold sadness in these cities. The barren distance that separates us from these cities, where we live, is filled with an icy ether which may prove impossible to cross. We can sense an archaeological approach in these images. These mirror images show us our cities travelling through space, they show us our cities as they could be seen, when they no longer existed, if there were someone to look at them. They are Celestial Cities, as Beijing's Forbidden City or Damascus dreamed to be, as we are told were the cities of the Golden Age, that time that never was, when all of us were happy. There is an alternative story in the maps of these cities, but we'll never know how it would be.

These images are a possible future for cities. One day, an astronomer from the future, in a distant civilization, will be able to see, projected in the mirror of his telescope, the old image of our cities, long dead, light-less, and he will see an inverted image that will look like these. When he sees this image, the cities will have long disappeared.

These paintings are an obvious proof of the illegal practice of astronomy, just as the observations and drawings of the German lithographer Wilhelm Tempel (1821-1889), self-made comet discoverer that all through his life had to justify before a corporatist and classist scientific community his lack of academic training. Max Ersnt made a book about him, "Maximiliana or the Illegal Practice of Astronomy", considered to be one of the most beautiful books of the 20th century and a work of reference for asemic writing, where he himself graphically commits the same crime, which invades in fact all of his work, filled with stars and suns.

It is also asemic writing we're dealing with here, in these Celestial Maps. Someone is saying something here. We do not know what, or to whom, but something is being said. These cities talk, in their

regular and cold calligraphy, like an airport talks to an airplane, a page to a pen, a spectrum to an astrophysicist. Something is written and something is inscribed in this background black matter.

Oddly, these maps give us back a sky that the city lights robbed us of, and oddly they lack light. The dots here are mere crossings, they're not lamps. The stars in these maps are squares, encounters, not dazzling lights. That is why they lack concentrations, why they don't have centers, why they are so distributed. That's why space is treated democratically. There are no strange attractors absorbing everything around. They may be imposing, mysterious and seductive, but none of these celestial cities is imperial. And they are put alongside their cemeteries, the quintessential metaphor for the silence of sidereal space, as if to whisper in their ears that they are mortal.

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