



Viste da fuori: le nuove identità urbane di Londra e Milano

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The overall idea underlying this analysis resulted reading *London Orbital* by Iain Sinclair and *Tangenziali* by Gianni Biondillo and Michele Monina.

The basic and main goal of the two books was first of all to experience, in the psychogeographical sense of the term, London and Milan starting from their suburbs; as a result, both are conceived as tales of real journeys along these cities' today's tangible boundaries i.e. the motorways surrounding them.

Not incidentally, these metropolises are currently objects of an unprecedented urban and cultural interest because of the important changes they are facing in order to host two global events, the Olympic games 2012 for London and the Expo 2015 for Milan, which are going to highlight to a worldwide audience those cities' merits, as well as their flaws.



Despite their common theoretical basis and their shared formal characteristics, the two works analysed resulted in extraordinarily different books, as the commonly accepted definition of psychogeography by Guy Debord should suggest: "The study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals".

Specific and different environments such as London and Milan, even when experienced starting from their globalized, anonymous suburbs and their non-places, can affect emotions and behaviours of urban stalkers and common inhabitants in utterly different ways.

Of course, cultural backgrounds and personal characteristics of individuals physically experiencing those places mould the final result as well.

Therefore, the analysis and comparison of *London Orbital* and *Tangenziali* could not transcend the analysis and comparison of the metropolises' history and evolution and of the social and cultural phenomena which have influenced and still influence them.

Every single city, indeed, should be considered as an independent, living organism, the main and only character of a never-ending process of change and evolution, astonishingly similar to life. Cities have a specific birth, then they grow in their peculiar ways, they change thorough the centuries and they can even die. And every city has its specific patchwork of identities.

Therefore, on the one hand, the wide, inextricable web of identities, signs and images which forms London (whatever it is), on the other, the chaotic and blurred mix of identities and representations called Milan: the fact that so different cities have very few to share is commonplace, but where actually lay the very reasons of their differences is still to be investigated.

London, born as the extreme periphery of the Roman Empire, grew to become the great capital of a wider empire and of a nation to which the city has always paradoxically imposed its independence, its difference, its otherness, on political, social and cultural grounds. Enclosed in its walls, the City fought the power of sovereigns, became the most important market in Europe and finally started an unprecedented chaotic process of urban sprawl *ante litteram*, soon after the Middle Ages, which made it the first metropolis ever, literally enclosing in its boundaries entire villages, small towns and regions.

Milan has always been a capital strongly tied to its surrounding territory, which has been victim of many sieges thorough its history because of its political, symbolic and strategic role in Europe. It expanded in a strictly radial progress, with the Duomo (its famous main cathedral) as its centre and useless boundaries of stones, bricks and water vainly trying to stop it. Milan will remain the protagonist of Italian history for many years to come until today.



Common to both these urban profiles is the key role played by suburbs: consciously or not, the official representation of every city in the world is very keen to hide and ignore this area, but the fact is that suburbs played their role of frontiers and factories of identities ever since the very notion of city came to life. Boundaries sign what is part of the city and what is not, who is in and who is or should be out of it; but suburbs are places where differences and identities melt, where important and symbolic urban changes take place because of the absence of space downtown, where other communities from around the world arrive and new, alternative, unofficial cultures blossom. Where, finally, lives or at least was born the very *genius loci* of a city, the result of many little, different identities which together form a whole.

Here lays an extraordinary idea underlying *London Orbital* and *Tangenziali*: these two psychogeographical experiences are in sharp opposition to official images of those cities, but are amazingly coherent and respectful to London's and Milan's history and evolutions.

This latest question inevitably brings back to the changes experienced today by these two cities. Again, the events they are due to host in the next few years, the Olympic games 2012 in London and the Expo 2015 in Milan, will take place mainly in their suburbs and the urban changes so pompously advertised by the official representation and by the media are going to affect first of all their suburbs, where sites for the construction of modern buildings and infrastructures have already been located.

Local communities despise those changes as destroyers of their home territories, local authorities are still uncertain about the actual benefits their areas will have back from the events when they will be over, some (and Iain Sinclair among them, as for London) point out that both projects are going to turn into the usual wild speculation wave, while previous rural areas, reportedly the Lower Lea Valley in London, are going to be spoiled and lost forever.

If suburbs and boundaries have always been the main source of the liveliest identities of a city and if an age has to be judged by what it leaves to the generations to come, projects like the Olympics and Expo ones do not seem to be the best way to save London's and Milan's lively, blurred, different, ever-changing identities.

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