

# LA CULTURA Y LA CIUDAD

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(eds.)

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LA CULTURA  
Y  
LA CIUDAD

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INTRODUCCIÓN.....	XVII
JUAN CALATRAVA	

## LECCIÓN INAUGURAL

RITRATTI DI CITTÀ DAL RINASCIMENTO AL XVIII SECOLO .....	I
CESARE DE SETA	

### SECCIÓN I LA IMAGEN CODIFICADA. REPRESENTACIONES DE LO URBANO

EL MITO DEL LEJANO OESTE EN LAS CIUDADES DEL SUNBELT NORTEAMERICANO.....	15
CARLOS GARCÍA VÁZQUEZ	
LOGOTYPES AND CITIES REPRESENTATIONS.....	23
JEAN-LUC ARNAUD	
RECONSTITUCIÓN URBANA: TRAZA, ESTRUCTURA Y MEMORIA .....	33
JAVIER ORTEGA VIDAL	
NUEVOS TIEMPOS, NUEVAS HERRAMIENTAS: UN CASO DE HGIS .....	45
ANTONIO J. GÓMEZ-BLANCO PONTES	
EL PASEO DE LOS TRISTES DE GRANADA COMO REFERENTE DE UNA ESCENOGRAFÍA ORIENTAL A PROPÓSITO DE UN DIBUJO DE WILLIAM GELL .....	55
MARÍA DEL MAR VILLAFRANCA JIMÉNEZ	
LA CIUDAD EN LA NOVELA GRÁFICA AMERICANA. VISIONES DE LA METRÓPOLIS CONTEMPORÁNEA A TRAVÉS DE CINCO AUTORES JUDÍOS: WILL EISNER, HARVEY PEKAR, ART SPIEGELMAN, BEN KATCHOR Y PETER KUPER.....	63
RICARDO ANGUITA CANTERO	
EL PARÍS MODERNO DE CHARLES BAUDELAIRE Y WALTER BENJAMIN.....	73
ANTONIO PIZZA	
IMÁGENES FUGACES: REPRESENTACIONES LITERARIAS DEL SUBURBIO.....	85
MARTA LLORENTE DÍAZ	

HABITANDO LA CASA DEL AZAR. LA CULTURA DE SORTEOS DE CASAS COMO UN SUBLIMADOR EN LAS REPRESENTACIONES DE UNA NUEVA TIPOLOGÍA DOMÉSTICA DE LA <i>CLASE MEDIA</i> DE MONTERREY. LA CASA DE ACERO (1960) .....	97
ALBERTO CANAVATI ESPINOSA	
IMAGINARIO URBANO, ESPACIOS PÚBLICOS HISTÓRICOS, GLOBALIZACIÓN, NEOLIBERALISMO Y CONFLICTO SOCIAL. EJE ESTRUCTURADOR: PASEO DE LA REFORMA, AV. JUÁREZ, AV. MADERO Y ZÓCALO .....	105
RAÚL SALAS ESPÍNDOLA, GUILLERMINA ROSAS LÓPEZ, MARCOS RODOLFO BONILLA	
REPRESENTACIONES DE LO URBANO EN EL SANTIAGO DE CHILE DE 1932. LA CIUDAD, EL URBANISTA, SU PLAN Y SU PLANO: CINCO MIRADAS POSIBLES DESDE EL OJO DEL URBANISTA KARL BRUNNER. ....	111
PEDRO BANNEN LANATA, CARLOS SILVA PEDRAZA	
REPRESENTACIONES CARTOGRÁFICAS Y RESTITUCIÓN GRÁFICA DE LA CIUDAD HISTÓRICA DE LIMA. SXVII-XIX.....	119
MARITZA CORTÉS	
CASABLANCA A TRAVÉS DE MICHEL ÉCOCHARD (1946-1953). CARTOGRAFÍA, FOTOGRAFÍA Y CULTURA. ....	125
RICARD GRATACÒS-BATLLÉ	
FAENZA E LE SUE RAPPRESENTAZIONI URBANE: DALLA CONTRORIFORMA AL PUNTO DI VISTA ROMANTICO DI ROMOLO LIVERANI .....	135
DANIELE PASCALE GUIDOTTI MAGNANI	
MONTERREY A TRAVÉS DE SUS MAPAS: EN BUSCA DE UN CENTRO HISTÓRICO MÁS ALLÁ DE «BARRIO ANTIGUO» .....	143
JOSÉ MANUEL PRIETO GONZÁLEZ, CYNTHIA LUZ CISNEROS FRANCO	
MEDIOS DE REPRESENTACIÓN URBANA Y ARQUITECTÓNICA EN EL MUNDO MESOAMERICANO. UN TALLER DE ARQUITECTOS MESOAMERICANOS EN PLAZUELAS, GTO. ....	151
JOSÉ MIGUEL ROMÁN CÁRDENAS	
EL PLANO OFICIAL DE URBANIZACIÓN DE SANTIAGO Y LA ORDENANZA LOCAL DE 1939: ORGANIZACIÓN ESPACIAL Y SISTEMAS DE REPRESENTACIÓN EN LA MODERNIZACIÓN DEL CENTRO HISTÓRICO .....	161
JOSÉ ROSAS VERA, MAGDALENA VICUÑA DEL RÍO	
CUANDO LA SOMBRA DE UN ARSENAL ES ALARGADA. PRIMEROS «RETRATOS» DE LA CIUDAD DEPARTAMENTAL DE FERROL EN LOS SIGLOS XVIII Y XIX (1782-1850) .....	169
ALFREDO VIGO TRASANCOS	
LAS LÍNEAS QUE DISEÑARON MANHATTAN DE LOS EXPLORADORES A LOS COMISIONADOS .....	177
ANA DEL CID MENDOZA	
SATELLITE MONUMENTS AND PERIPATETIC TOPOGRAPHIES .....	187
FIRAT ERDIM	
PLANO Y PLAN: LA TRAMA DE SANTIAGO COMO «CIUDAD MODERNA», EL PLANO OFICIAL DE LA URBANIZACIÓN DE LA COMUNA DE SANTIAGO, DE 1939, IDEADO POR KARL BRUNNER. ....	195
GERMÁN HIDALGO, WREN STRABUCCHI	
GRANADA: LECTURA DE LA CIUDAD MODERNA POR MEDIO DE SUS PANORÁMICAS Y VISTAS GENERALES .....	201
CARLOS JEREZ MIR	

## Índice

«TURKU ON FIRE». IL «GRID PLAN» ALLE RADICI DELLA CITTÀ CONTEMPORANEA .....	209
ANNALISA DAMERI, ANNA PICHETTO FRATIN	
CARTOGRAFÍAS TOPOLÓGICAS DE LA DENSIDAD URBANA. UNA PROPUESTA PARA EL DESCUBRIMIENTO RELACIONAL .....	217
FRANCISCO JAVIER ABARCA-ÁLVAREZ, FRANCISCO SERGIO CAMPOS-SÁNCHEZ	
DICOTOMÍA DE LA VISIÓN. INCIDENCIAS EN EL ARTE DE LA CARTOGRAFÍA .....	225
BLANCA ESPIGARES ROONEY	
CARTOGRAFÍAS DEL PAISAJE METEOROLÓGICO: DIBUJANDO EL AIRE DE LA CIUDAD .....	233
TOMÁS GARCÍA PÍRIZ	
INVESTIGACIÓN CARTOGRÁFICA Y CONSTRUCCIÓN DEL TERRITORIO .....	241
NANCY ROZO MONTAÑA	
LA REPRESENTACIÓN URBANA EN LA ERA DE LAS SMART CITIES .....	247
PAOLO SUSTERSIC, MÓNICA FERRER	
MÁQUINAS PARA LA PRODUCCIÓN DEL ESPACIO. LOS DIAGRAMAS COMO HERRAMIENTAS DEL PLANEAMIENTO URBANO .....	253
PABLO ARRÁEZ MONLLOR	
INVENTIT ¡HALLADO, ENCONTRADO! .....	261
IOAR CABODEVILLA ANTOÑANA, UXUA DOMBLÁS IBÁÑEZ	
ENTRE LO REAL Y LO VIRTUAL. LAS HERRAMIENTAS DIGITALES Y SU ACCIÓN EN LA TRANSFORMACIÓN DEL PAISAJE URBANO EN LA PRIMERA DÉCADA DEL SIGLO XXI. A PROPÓSITO DEL URBANISMO «UNITARIO» .....	267
SERGIO COLOMBO RUIZ	
LEARNING CITY. SOCIALIZACIÓN, APRENDIZAJE Y PERCEPCIÓN DEL PAISAJE URBANO .....	275
UXUA DOMBLÁS IBÁÑEZ	
BARCELONA CINECITTÀ. THE CITY INVENTED THROUGH SCENOGRAPHY .....	285
DICLE TASKIN	
LA REPRESENTACIÓN DE LAS CIUDADES IDEALES ITALIANAS DE LOS SIGLOS XV Y XVI .....	293
DAVID HIDALGO GARCÍA, JULIÁN ARCO DÍAZ	
EL MAR DESDE LA CIUDAD. PARET, LEJOS DE LA CORTE, Y LA IMAGEN DE LAS VISTAS DEL CANTÁBRICO ..	301
MARÍA CASTILLA ALBISU	
DE LA VIDA ENTRE JARDINES A LOS SOLARES YERMOS. EN TORNO A UNA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE LA IMAGEN DE TOLEDO .....	309
VICTORIA SOTO CABO, ANTONIO PERLA DE LAS PARRAS	
CIUDADES IMAGINADAS / PAISAJES DE PAPEL. PROYECTO Y REPRESENTACIÓN DE LA CIUDAD DE LISBOA .....	317
CARMEN MORENO ÁLVAREZ	
CITTÀ POSTUME. COSTRUZIONE RETORICA E STRATEGIA ANALITICA NELLE IMMAGINI URBANE DI GABRIELE BASILICO .....	323
MARCO LECIS	

RACCONTORE LA CITTÀ TRA IMMAGINI E PAROLE. RITRATTI URBANI NEI LIBRI FOTOGRAFICI .....	331
ANNARITA TEODOSIO	
FOTOGRAFÍA Y TURISMO. EL REGISTRO DE LO URBANO A TRAVÉS DE FOTÓGRAFOS DE PROYECCIÓN INTERNACIONAL POR LAS ISLAS BALEARES .....	339
MARÍA JOSÉ MULET GUTIÉRREZ	
PARÍS N'EXISTE PAS.....	345
MARISA GARCÍA VERGARA	
VISIÓN PANORÁMICA Y VISIÓN PANÓPTICA: MODOS DE VER LA CIUDAD EN EL SIGLO XIX .....	353
BEGOÑA IBÁÑEZ MORENO	
LA MÍSTICA DEL MIRADOR: CIUDADES A VISTA DE PÁJARO.....	361
CARMEN RODRÍGUEZ PEDRET	
DESENCUENTROS. DOS DIBUJOS PARA UNA PLAZA, DE PUIG I CADAFALCH .....	369
GUILLERMO CARABÍ BESCÓS	
BARCELONA AND DONOSTIA-SAN SEBASTIÁN TO THE EYES OF A BAUHAUSLER: URBAN LIFE IN THE PHOTO COLLAGES OF JOSEF ALBERS .....	377
LAURA MARTÍNEZ DE GUEREÑU	
I MEZZI DI TRASPORTO E LA CITTÀ, TRA PERCEZIONE E RAPPRESENTAZIONE .....	385
SIMONA TALENTI	
VISIÓN DE LA CIUDAD DE VENECIA EN LOS ESTUDIOS DE EGLE RENATA TRINCANATO (1910-1998) .....	393
ALESSANDRA VIGNOTTO	
VISIONES LITERARIAS Y PERCEPCIÓN DEL PAISAJE URBANO. EL RECONOCIMIENTO DE VALORES PATRIMONIALES EN LAS VIEJAS CIUDADES ESPAÑOLAS EN LOS AÑOS DEL CAMBIO DE SIGLO.....	399
JESÚS ÁNGEL SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA	
PALINODIA ÍNTIMA DE UNA CIUDAD INDECIBLE .....	405
AARÓN J. CABALLERO QUIROZ	
CIUDADES VISIBLES .....	411
IÑIGO DE VIAR	
ESPACIOS DE LA RESISTENCIA: PARÍS EN RAINER MARIA RILKE .....	419
CAROLINA B. GARCÍA ESTÉVEZ	
CIUDAD DE LETRAS, EDIFICIOS DE PAPEL. UNA IMAGEN LITERARIA SOBRE LA CIUDAD DE ONTINYENT .....	427
DANIEL IBÁÑEZ CAMPOS	
«FEBBRE MODERNA». STRATEGIE DI VISIONE DELLA CITTÀ IMPRESSIONISTA .....	433
FRANCESCA CASTELLANI	
ROMA, RECONOCER LA PERIFERIA A TRAVÉS DEL CINE .....	439
MONTSERRAT SOLANO ROJO	
EL PAISAJE EN LA CIUDAD. EL PARQUE DEL ILM EN WEIMAR VISTO POR GOETHE .....	449
JUAN CALDUCH CERVERA, ALBERTO RUBIO GARRIDO	
LAS CIUDADES INVISIBLES COMO HERRAMIENTA DE ANÁLISIS URBANO .....	457
HELIA DE SAN NICOLÁS JUÁREZ	

## Índice

REPRESENTACIÓN HISTÓRICA, LITERARIA Y CARTOGRÁFICA EN EL PAISAJE URBANO DE TETUÁN ENTRE 1860 Y 1956 .....	465
JAIME VERGARA-MUÑOZ, MIGUEL MARTÍNEZ-MONEDERO	
CONSTRUCCIÓN Y CONSERVACIÓN DE LA IMAGEN DE LA CIUDAD INDUSTRIAL: IVREA Y TORVIScosa (ITALIA) .....	473
ÁNGELES LAYUNO ROSAS	
LA CONTRIBUCIÓN ESPAÑOLA AL URBANISMO DE LA CIUDAD DE MILÁN .....	481
MARÍA TERESA GARCÍA GALLARDO	
CULTURAL LANDSCAPES AND URBAN PROJECT. ISTANBUL'S ANCIENT WALLS CASE .....	489
PASQUALE MIANO	
RENOVATIO URbis STOCKHOLM. CONFERRING A PROPER CHARACTER ON A CITY ON THE ARCHIPELAGO ..	497
CHIARA MONTERUMISI	
SECCIÓN II	
LA IMAGEN INTEGRADORA.	
PATRIMONIO Y PAISAJE CULTURAL URBANO	
LOS REALES SITIOS: PATRIMONIO Y PAISAJE URBANO .....	507
PILAR CHÍAS NAVARRO	
THE MAUROR LEDGE OF GRANADA. A VISUAL ANALYSIS .....	519
JOAQUÍN CASADO DE AMEZÚA VÁZQUEZ	
EL ORDEN RESTABLECIDO, LA DESCRIPCIÓN DE LOS PUEBLOS RECONSTRUIDOS TRAS EL TERREMOTO DE ANDALUCÍA DE 1884 .....	523
ANTONIO BURGOS NÚÑEZ	
LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE LA MEMORIA DEL PAISAJE .....	531
BERNARDINO LÍNDEZ VÍLCHEZ	
ARQUITECTURA ETNOGRÁFICA EN EL ENTORNO DE RÍO BLANCO DE COGOLLOS VEGA, GRANADA .....	539
SALVADOR UBAGO PALMA	
AGRICULTURA FRENTE A LA BANALIZACIÓN DEL PAISAJE HISTÓRICO URBANO. ESTUDIO DE CASOS EN MADRID, BARCELONA Y SEVILLA .....	547
DAVID ARREDONDO GARRIDO	
LOS ESPACIOS DE LA MEMORIA (Y DEL OLVIDO) EN LA CIUDAD Y SUS DISCURSOS NARRATIVOS: CREACIÓN, TRANSFORMACIÓN, REVITALIZACIÓN, TEMATIZACIÓN .....	561
IGNACIO GONZÁLEZ-VARAS IBÁÑEZ	
APUNTES SOBRE CIUDADES POSTBURBUJA: LOS COMUNES URBANOS EN BARCELONA .....	569
CARLOS CÁMARA MENOYO	
CIUDADES DE LA MEMORIA. CINCO DEPÓSITOS DE BARCELONA .....	579
ANA ISABEL SANTOLARIA CASTELLANOS	
A TRAVÉS DEL CALEIDOSCOPIO. EL PAISAJE URBANO EN LA CIUDAD CONTEMPORÁNEA .....	587
FRANCISCO FERNANDO BELTRÁN VALCÁRCEL	

LA CONSERVACIÓN DE LA IMAGEN DE LA CIUDAD HISTÓRICA. EL ESTUDIO DEL COLOR EN LA CARRERA DEL DARRO .....	595
CARMEN MARÍA ARMENTA GARCÍA	
 PAISAJES VELADOS: EL DARRO BAJO LA GRANADA ACTUAL .....	603
FRANCISCA ASENSIO TERUEL, FRANCISCO JOSÉ IBÁÑEZ MORENO, ANTONIO GARCÍA BUENO	
 UNA IMAGEN ANÓNIMA, UNA ESCENA URBANA, UN TROZO DE HISTORIA. ESTRATEGIAS FLUVIALES EN LA CIUDAD CONTEMPORÁNEA .....	611
JOSEMARÍA MANZANO JURADO, SANTIAGO PORRAS ÁLVAREZ	
 GRANADA: CIUDAD SIMBÓLICA ENTRE LOS SIGLOS XVII Y XVIII .....	619
NURIA MARTÍNEZ JIMÉNEZ	
 LA INFLUENCIA DE LA PIEDRA DE SIERRA ELVIRA EN LA CONFIGURACIÓN URBANA DEL CASCO HISTÓRICO DE GRANADA .....	625
IGNACIO VALVERDE ESPINOSA, IGNACIO VALVERDE-PALACIOS, RAQUEL FUENTES GARCÍA	
 EL SACROMONTE: PATRIMONIO E IMAGEN DE UNA CULTURA .....	633
ANTONIO GARCÍA BUENO, KARINA MEDINA GRANADOS	
 LA IMAGEN DE LA ALCAZABA DE LA ALHAMBRA .....	641
ADELAIDA MARTÍN MARTÍN	
 LA GRAN VÍA DE COLÓN DE GRANADA: UN PAISAJE DISTORSIONADO .....	651
ROSER MARTÍNEZ-RAMOS E IREULA	
 EL CONFINAMIENTO DEL PAISAJE DE LA ALHAMBRA EN SU PERÍMETRO AMURALLADO .....	659
ALEJANDRO MUÑOZ MIRANDA	
 TRAS LA IMAGEN DEL CARMEN BLANCO .....	667
ESTEBAN JOSÉ RIVAS LÓPEZ	
 LA ALCAICERÍA DE GRANADA. REALIDAD Y FICCIÓN .....	673
JUAN ANTONIO SÁNCHEZ MUÑOZ	
 LA UNIVERSIDAD DE GRANADA EN EL PRIMER TERCIO DEL SIGLO XX: CULTURA, PATRIMONIO E IMAGEN DE CIUDAD .....	681
MARÍA DEL CARMEN VÍLCHEZ LARA	
 EL AGUA OCULTA. CORRIENTES SUBTERRÁNEAS Y SACRALIZACIÓN TERRITORIAL EN LA GRANADA DEL SIGLO XVII .....	689
FRANCISCO ANTONIO GARCÍA PÉREZ	
 INVENTARIO DE UNA CIUDAD IMAGINARIA .....	701
JUAN DOMINGO SANTOS	
 NUEVA YORK-REIKIAVIK. ORIGEN Y EVOLUCIÓN DE DOS MODELOS URBANOS .....	709
JOSÉ MIGUEL GÓMEZ ACOSTA	
 CONTRAPOSICIONES EN LA FOTOGRAFÍA DEL PAISAJE URBANO: EL VALOR ESTÉTICO FRENTE AL VALOR DOCUMENTO .....	717
JUAN FRANCISCO MARTÍNEZ BENAVIDES	
 JULIO CANO LASSO: LA CIUDAD HISTÓRICA COMO OBRA DE ARTE TOTAL .....	723
JOSÉ RAMÓN GONZÁLEZ GONZÁLEZ, MIGUEL CENTELLAS SOLER	

## Índice

EL ESPACIO INTERMEDIO COMO CONSTRUCTOR DE LA IMAGEN DE LA CIUDAD.....	731
RAQUEL MARTÍNEZ GUTIÉRREZ, JOSÉ MARÍA ECHARTE RAMOS	
CITY OVERLAYS. ON THE <i>MERCAT DE SANTA CATERINA</i> BY EMBT .....	739
SEBASTIAN HARRIS	
LA BARCELLONA DEL GRUPO 2C. L'IMMAGINE DI UN LAVORO COLLETTIVO.....	747
FABIO LICITRA	
LOS JARDINES DE J.C.N. FORESTIER EN BARCELONA: UNA APROXIMACIÓN CRÍTICA SOBRE EL IMPACTO DE SUS REALIZACIONES EN LA IMAGEN DE LA CIUDAD.....	755
MONTSERRAT LLUPART BIOSCA	
BARRIO CHINO. LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE LA IMAGEN DE LOS BAJOS FONDOS DE BARCELONA .....	761
CELIA MARÍN VEGA	
NUEVA YORK 1960: EL PAISAJE SOCIAL. CHICAGO 1950: ARQUITECTURA MODERNA PARA UNA SOCIEDAD AVANZADA.....	767
RAFAEL DE LACOUR	
PAISAJE URBANO Y CONFLICTO: ESTUDIOS DE IMPACTO VISUAL EN ÁREAS HISTÓRICAS PROTEGIDAS ALEMANAS (COLONIA, DRESDE) Y EUROPEAS (ESTAMBUL, VIENA) .....	775
DANIEL DOMENECH MUÑOZ	
PAISAJE HISTÓRICO URBANO Y ARQUITECTURA CONTEMPORÁNEA: EXPERIENCIAS EUROPEAS Y COMPARATISMO.....	781
ADELE FIADINO	
CONTRIBUCIÓN DE LA VEGA COMO PAISAJE CULTURAL AL PATRIMONIO DE GRANADA LA PROBLEMÁTICA ACTUAL DE SUS RELACIONES .....	787
EDUARDO ZURITA POVEDANO	
ANÁLISIS DE UNIDADES DE PAISAJE CULTURAL URBANO RESULTADO DE LA LEY DEL GRAN BERLÍN DE 1920 .....	795
FRANCISCO JOSÉ FERNÁNDEZ TORRES, MARÍA LUISA MÁRQUEZ GARCÍA	
PASADO, PRESENTE Y FUTURO DEL LITORAL MARROQUÍ. DAR RIFFIEN .....	805
ALBA GARCÍA CARRIÓN	
LAS HUELLAS Y PAVIMENTOS DE LA ACRÓPOLIS.....	813
JOSÉ FRANCISCO GARCÍA-SÁNCHEZ	
PAESAGGI INUMANI: I SILOS GRANARI COME MONUMENTI.....	821
ANTONIO ALBERTO CLEMENTE	
ESPACIOS DE REACCIÓN. LA RUINA INDUSTRIAL EN EL PAISAJE URBANO.....	827
YESICA PINO ESPINOSA	
LANDSCAPE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE: TECHNIQUES AND STRATEGIES FOR THE AREA DEVELOPMENT . . .	835
MARIA ANTONIA GIANNINO, FERDINANDO ORABONA	
MANINI Y SINTRA: APORTACIONES AL ÁMBITO DEL PAISAJE .....	841
IVÁN MOURE PAZOS	

### SECCIÓN III

#### LA CULTURA Y LA CIUDAD / LA CULTURA EN LA CIUDAD

CIUDAD HISTÓRICA Y EVENTOS CULTURALES EN LA ERA DE LA GLOBALIZACIÓN .....	851
JUAN CALATRAVA	
CIUDAD Y TRIBU: ESPACIOS DIFERENCIADOS E INTEGRADOS DE LA CULTURA POLÍTICA. REFLEXIONES ANTROPO-URBANÍSTICAS SOBRE FONDO MAGREBÍ .....	863
JOSÉ ANTONIO GONZÁLEZ ALCANTUD	
MUSEO E/O MUSEALIZZAZIONE DELLA CITTÀ .....	875
DONATELLA CALABI	
VENEZIA E IL RAPPORTO CITTÀ-FESTIVAL .....	881
GUIDO ZUCCONI	
EL OCASO DE LA PLAZA DE BIBARRAMBLA COMO TEATRO .....	887
JUAN MANUEL BARRIOS ROZÚA	
ALGUNAS LECCIONES DE LUGARES CON ACONTECIMIENTOS ASOCIADOS .....	897
JOAQUÍN SABATÉ BEL	
LA RICONVERSIÓN DELLE CASERME ABBANDONATE IN NUOVI SPAZI PER LA CITTÀ .....	909
PAOLO MELLANO	
LA FACHADA MONUMENTAL, TELÓN DE FONDO Y OBJETO ESCENOGRÁFICO .....	917
MILAGROS PALMA CRESPO	
AGUA Y ESCENOGRAFÍA URBANA. REALIDAD E ILUSIÓN EN LAS EXPOSICIONES UNIVERSALES .....	929
FRANCISCO DEL CORRAL DEL CAMPO, CARMEN BARRÓS VELÁZQUEZ	
EL ESPACIO PÚBLICO COMO CONTENEDOR DE EMOCIONES .....	941
JUAN CARLOS REINA FERNÁNDEZ	
UNA INTERPRETACIÓN DE LA CIUDAD DESDE LA PERSPECTIVA DE LA CULTURA INMATERIAL DE LAS FIESTAS POPULARES .....	949
LUIS IGNACIO FERNÁNDEZ-ARAGÓN SÁNCHEZ	
CULTURAL EVENTS, URBAN MODIFICATIONS. VENICE (ITALY) AND THE MODERNITY .....	957
FABRIZIO PAONE	
LA CITTÀ DEL TEATRO DE GIORGIO STREHLER .....	965
JUAN IGNACIO PRIETO LÓPEZ, ANTONI RAMÓN GRAELLS	
INNOVANDO LA TRADICIÓN: LOS JARDINES Y TEATRO AL AIRE LIBRE DEL GENERALIFE. UN DISEÑO DE FRANCISCO PRIETO-MORENO PARA EL FESTIVAL DE MÚSICA Y DANZA DE GRANADA .....	973
AROA ROMERO GALLARDO	
UNA FIESTA MÓVIL. LA IMAGEN DE SEVILLA EN LA OBRA DE ALDO ROSSI .....	981
VICTORIANO SAINZ GUTIÉRREZ	
EL GRAN ACONTECIMIENTO CULTURAL DEL VACÍO Y LA MEMORIA EN EL ESPACIO COLECTIVO DE LA CIUDAD .....	989
MARA SÁNCHEZ LLORENS, MIGUEL GUITART VILCHES	

## Índice

HACER CIUDAD. ALDO ROSSI Y SU PROPUESTA PARA EL TEATRO DEL MUNDO .....	997
LAURA SORDO IBÁÑEZ	
SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA, HISTORIA Y PROGRESO. EL XACOBEO COMO INSTRUMENTO DE TRANSFORMACIÓN URBANA .....	1005
RICARDO HERNÁNDEZ SORIANO	
GIRONA TEMPS DE FLORS: CULTURA E TURISMO .....	1013
NADIA FAVA	
ARQUITECTURA E IDENTIDAD CULTURAL. EXPERIMENTACIONES CONTEMPORÁNEAS EN LA CIUDAD DE GRAZ .....	1021
EMILIO CACHORRO FERNÁNDEZ	
EXPERIENCIAS DE UNA CAPITALIDAD CULTURAL QUE NO FUE EL CASO MÁLAGA 2016 .....	1033
IGNACIO JÁUREGUI REAL – DANIEL RINCÓN DE LA VEGA	
ROMA, CA. 1650. EL CIRCO BARROCO DE LA PIAZZA NAVONA .....	1039
JULIO GARNICA	
PATRIMONIO Y PAISAJE TEATRAL URBANO. LA PLAZA DE LAS PASIEGAS EN GRANADA .....	1047
CARMEN BARRÓS VELÁZQUEZ, FRANCISCO DEL CORRAL DEL CAMPO	
LA VILLE RADIEUSE: UNA CIUDAD, UN PROYECTO, UN LIBRO DE LE CORBUSIER. UN JUEGO .....	1055
JORGE TORRES CUECO, CLARA E. MEJÍA VALLEJO	
LA BERLINO DI OSWALD MATHIAS UNGERS .....	1063
ANNALISA TRENTIN	
PANORAMI DIFFERENTI PER LE CITTÀ MONDIALI .....	1071
UGO ROSSI	
METODO PARA VISIBILIZAR LA CULTURA DE LA CIUDAD: MONUMENTALIZAR INFRAESTRUCTURAS .....	1077
MARÍA JESÚS SACRISTÁN DE MIGUEL	
ANTIGUOS ESPACIOS CONVENTUALES, NUEVOS ESCENARIOS CULTURALES. APROXIMACIÓN A SU RECUPERACIÓN PATRIMONIAL .....	1085
THAÏS RODÉS SARRABLO	
EFICIENCIA ENERGÉTICA Y CULTURA URBANA: LA CIUDAD COMO SISTEMA COMPLEJO .....	1091
RAFAEL GARCÍA QUESADA	
STORIA DI UNA RIQUALIFICAZIONE URBANISTICA AD ALGHERO. LO QUARTER: DE PERIFERIA A CENTRO CULTURALE .....	1097
ANGELA SIMULA	

# CULTURAL LANDSCAPES AND URBAN PROJECT ISTANBUL'S ANCIENT WALLS CASE

PASQUALE MIANO

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## 1. ANCIENT CITY WALLS AS AN IMAGE

«Fortified city, which has been the most common model in West countries for centuries, stood for contemporaries and today stands for historians as a structure which is at the same time material, urban, social, political and, from the representation point of view, it looks like an image»<sup>1</sup>.

Fortification walls, as «essential element of urban ideogram»<sup>2</sup>, materialized the idea of limit, as shown in «city portraits»<sup>3</sup>, European cities perspective maps made between XV and XVIII centuries, in which the meaning goes beyond pure defensive role, to include a sacral dimension, to mark a difference, to underline an identity.

The reinterpretation of defensive walls' system and its band has already started during XVIII century: ancient fortifications were replaced by tree-lined boulevards, that often became consolidated city limit and at the same time suture element with outside villages; otherwise, walls' circuit was transformed in gardens in which there was both recreational and military function. But then, during the XIX century, walls were firstly drastically reduced in their physical barrier role through the creation of passages and doors and, afterwards, often totally demolished.

During all these big urban transformation processes, here very synthetically summarized, walls have become inevitably a fragment, a «ruin», assuming new roles but still representing urban identity factor, even if in a different and problematic way.

This new condition is somehow well-declared by Henri Focillon, when he affirms «the artist staring the existence is like Leonardo da Vinci in front of a ruined wall, devastated by time and winters, riddled by blows, stained by waters from earth and sky, pierced by fissures. We don't see anything but ordinary circumstances traces. The artist sees distinct or confused men figures, battles, landscapes, collapsing cities – shapes. These things stand to his sight, which operates to discern and build them again»<sup>4</sup>.

1. Jacques Le Goff, «Costruzione e distruzione della città murata. Un programma di riflessione e ricerca», in Cesare De Seta and Jacques Le Goff (eds.), *La città e le mura*, Roma, Laterza, 1989, pp. 1-10 (translated from Italian).

2. Ibid., p. 1 (translated from Italian).

3. Cfr. Lucia Nuti, *Ritratti di città. Visione e memoria tra Medioevo e Settecento*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1996.

4. Henri Focillon, *Vita delle forme seguito da Elogio della mano*, Torino, Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2002, p. 80 (translated from Italian edition).

## 2. CITY WALLS AND CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH

Even as a fragment, often forgotten, walls subject keeps on pushing for researches and in-depth analysis in different fields. From historic survey point of view, «this problem imposes a *regressive method* which starts from traces to restore urban past and whose interest, both problematic and descriptive, appears undeniable, because it avoids the idea of a urban evolution dominated both by determinism and randomness. (...) This problem guides to *multiple data* collection and analysis. It involves, in fact, the necessity to relate, beyond written documents, to archaeology, cartography, images, etc. (...) It introduces a *dynamic, global, comparative* point of view in urban history»<sup>5</sup>.

From urban project point of view, walls' condition in contemporary city opens to an interpretative work which has to keep a lot of aspects together in order to let them interact in many situations, even if they appear very different from each others: multiscalarity, fragments treatment and the way how they create a net. Single places identity becomes in this way fundamental<sup>6</sup>.

Walls, ultimately, represent an essential city cultural landscape element: few other elements in historic city are able to underline at the same time historic-archaeological, identity-representative and urban-compositional aspects in a city structure.

They represent an extraordinary research and design theme: they are architecture and urban element at the same time; properly a construction but full of strong city connotations, difficult to find elsewhere. Therefore, a kind of subject to approach absolutely in a interdisciplinary and interscalarity way, by collecting different materials and elaborating them through various analysis levels that may always interface<sup>7</sup>. At the same time, wall's issue imposes a research methodology which has to deal with a dynamic and comparative condition among different urban realities with similar features, or at least, conditions.

## 3. ISTANBUL'S WALLS: BETWEEN IMAGE AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Istanbul is one of the city in which walls appear as a relevant aspect: it presents an extraordinary cultural urban landscape whose components suggest design survey methodologies and tools. Even now, Constantinople ancient fortification system appears fundamental: a military architecture, conceived as a protective and «containment» line for historic city and its monuments, may be reconsidered in contemporary city, especially in relation to other urban matters that, in case of the Turkish megalopolis, appear particularly complex and interesting.

«In Doge's Palace in Venice, Domenico Tintoretto celebrates Constantinople's conquest (1204). The city is at the backdrop, with its walls and squared towers (...) walls that look exactly like those which in August 1911 the young Jeanneret will draw in his third Carnet of «Voyage d'Orient». Sailing along Marmara sea, he will capture Istanbul's skyline from Hagia Sophia to Seraglio, with the clear walls' barrier and its parallelepiped towers at the

5. Jacques Le Goff, op. cit., p. 1-2 (translated from Italian).

6. Cfr. Pasquale Miano, «The city walls. An old theme for new urban spaces», *Revista lusofona de arquitectura e educacao*, 11, 2014, pp. 579-597.

7. Cfr. Pasquale Miano, *Armature tematiche e progetti*, Napoli, Clean, 2012.

close-up, and he will note on the top: "Souvenir sketch; to show the walls' belt at the sea border, where the city starts and soars..."»<sup>8</sup>.

How to think today Istanbul's walls? How do they represent an identity and specificity factor for cultural landscape?

From Le Corbusier's voyage the city has been changing a lot; the Historic Peninsula, surrounded by the fortification system, was once «Stamboul», different from Genoese colony of Galata, beyond the Golden Horn, and from «Scutari» (today Üsküdar) on the Bosphorus eastern side. Nowadays, the Historic Peninsula is just a district inside Istanbul's complicated urban machine, but keeping significant historic-archaeological elements and showing incredible urban and architecture potentialities. Those elements have to face with urban and social developments of last decades and with big transforming actions which have revealed themselves invasive for Historic Peninsula, tourist and cultural centre.

#### 4. WALLS' ROLE IN CONTEMPORARY ISTANBUL

The Historic Peninsula is morphologically included inside its walls: even if some parts of them disappeared and others still exist openly, the shape has survived all the centuries as they passed. Today the old city looks almost like a «complete» city inside a megalopolis and it seems like all of the new quarters which developed outside the walls followed this kind of attitude of historic city to be enclosed in itself. For the particular geographic condition and for its big extension, a lot of «circles» were shaped: it is a kind of process through which original walled city repetitions were formed, not according to contents and prestige but about the formal setting and the urban shape.

Also for this reason, walls appear fundamental in order to recognize defining elements for the Historic Peninsula. The layout is composed of three parts: one overlooking the Golden Horn to Seraglio Point, one parallel to the Marmara Sea coast and the only part on earth called Land walls. The fortification interaction and idea of system is well-declared by Jacques Le Goff: «the image that walls produce is so full of symbolism that it does not deal with a simple wall, neither a line or a band, but with the integration of places that diversify and expand the symbol feature»<sup>9</sup>.

On the other hand, this important urban identification does not correspond to a real cultural and urban design recognition: we register a loss of role which reflects negatively on the acknowledgement of the entire city historic heritage. Although Unesco's protection<sup>10</sup>, a general urban point of view considering walls' system and its relation with contemporary city's tissues is still missing. It may assume, in fact, a central role in urban transformations panorama, for which important relations and existing connections among different scales and urban materials should be adequately considered. Exactly in relation to the walls, in fact, two different characterizing dimensions can face: a big dimension, represented by big routes and large open spaces, but also by remarkable historic architectures, by archaeologies and by

8. Cesare De Seta, «Le mura simbolo della città», in Cesare De Seta e Jacques Le Goff (eds.), op. cit., p. 19 (translated from Italian).

9. Jacques Le Goff, op. cit., p. 7.

10. Cfr. İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi, *İstanbul Historic Peninsula. Site Management Plan*, İstanbul, 2011.

walls' circuit itself, and a small dimension, mostly inside original urban centres, places that the history and the population conformed in order to recognize themselves, places where walls play a role more as an idea than as the reality.

##### 5. BUILDING A STRATEGY STARTING FROM THE WALLS

Reversing point of view appears necessary: starting again from walls' circle idea as the keystone for a new Istanbul urban cultural landscape vision. In this sense, lots of issues and problems are to be discussed: in addition to mediation/meeting role among different megalopolis scales, the entire walls' band becomes a unique system which relates both to the outside and the inside through a considerable and varied thickness which defines the structure and contemporary articulation of the Historic Peninsula perimeter.

That being so, it results important to consider last century urban transformations: in particular the Historic Peninsula coastal area on Marmara Sea, case-study developed from morphological and design point of view, looks like a peculiar part of old city because, starting from 1946, different filling up operations of the coast determined a series of urban structures and tissues layers parallel to the sea. The ancient oriental railway track, walls' system line, Henri Prost's plan coastal road and shore line determined contemporary urban tissues. Henri Prost understood the importance of «(...) the coastal road that started from Sarayburnu and extended along the Marmara shore. In his report, the urbanist wrote that with its panoramic view overlooking the Marmara Sea and the Bosphorus from Sarayburnu, the «Coastal Boulevard» would be an «unrivalled promenade» in Istanbul (Prost, 1937). The Yenikapı-Yedikule coastal road, which was proposed as a scenic cornice road in continuation of this coastal boulevard would provide access to the city's suburbs and the airport (...)»<sup>11</sup>. Above all that, the city structure led to a particular living and perceiving way as well, so that main touristic route, inhabitants one and naturalistic-archaeological paths can barely meet with each others.

For these reasons, coastal area on Marmara Sea shore is a significant place from where observing how city has combined itself with the wall's system during centuries. Situations such as surroundings, border, inclusion manner, cannot be read and analysed so easily in the other urban parts where walls' system meets urban areas: few fragments of Golden Horn walls still exist and Land walls are such a strong landscape infrastructure to be considered as a whole. Along Marmara Sea shore, instead, walls' fragments are in direct contact with buildings, open spaces, streets: that is the place where the co-existence can be reconsidered, where a comparison with many other situations can be made, where the walls may be clearly intended as urban design material. That is the place where the walls play a fundamental role as an element of relation, according to an interpretation which belongs to archaeological field, as underlined by Andreina Ricci: «any element itself does not appear determinant in order to understand places history. Relation among objects are, instead, significant (either artistic or normal objects), among objects and monuments, among different kind of monumental presences, among buildings, earth and raised stratifications. Just through multiple relations it is possible to rebuild environments, interactions between nature and men, and to re-imagine

11. Cânâ Bilsel, «'Les trasformations d'Istanbul': Henri Prost's planning of Istanbul (1936-1951)», *ITU A|Z*, vol. 8, 1, 2011, pp. 100-116.

urban and rural areas complex layouts, by recognizing, beyond the signs, man's intervention, thought, presence. It is possible to obtain complex and articulate synchronic re-compositions, diachronic sequences as well, which let, focusing on partial synchronies, to catch the link between permanence and transformation; or, moreover, a bit paradoxically, the sense of newness in many permanence and continuity in apparent transformations: place «meaning» preservation although its modifications and meaning changes while being reused»<sup>12</sup>.

## 6. FROM SERAGLIO POINT TO YEDIKULE

A general urban strategy can be built to supply a different vision, to propose an alternative to current ways of planning, based on the Historic Peninsula proper features and to promote more articulate design considerations inside Unesco World Heritage Sites as well. In this way, it may be possible to create a system among different ideas and projects, such as archaeological terraces creation, entire system connection to future Archaeo-park in Yenikapı, for which interesting projects have been elaborated as competition results, the reuse of ancient oriental railway today out of order, valorisation of different kind of paths away from touristic ones: not big monuments city for once, but the real Istanbul, where walls' role as element of relation appears fundamental. It is about cultural landscape, this time conceived through a new image, not the one of old representation but something much more articulate, cognitive activity result, able to explain what nowadays appears confuse and blurred.

Therefore, the strategy moves from Seraglio Point until Yedikule, where design consideration become more specific. Lord Byron, during XIX century, commented these places by affirming: «I have visited the ruins of Athens; I have travelled a great part of Turkey, I have seen a number of parts of Europe and roamed a little in Asia. But I have never seen nature or a work of art as impressive as the view from Yedikule to the end of the Golden Horn»<sup>13</sup>.

It is a very particular area, contact point between Land and Sea walls. The name of the quarter, Yedikule, one of the small ancient centre along the coast, comes from the big Fortress itself which characterizes the area, Yedikule Hisarı, Seven Towers Fortress.

The Fortress includes the ancient roman Golden Gate, triumphal entrance of roman emperors, that, with its two towers —the only ones to be squared, comparing to other five— is part of Land walls. These ones are characterized by a triple defensive scheme: inner wall is the most important and it measures around 12 meters of height, with 18-20 meters towers; outer wall, separated from the first one by a peribolos, reaches 8,5 meters and it has towers as well; the complex ended with a moat, deep around 6 meters, which today is not completely visible anymore, in part occupied by vegetable gardens. Land walls extend from Golden Horn at north side, to Marmara Sea in the south, where Marble Tower used to be junction point between Land and Sea walls, in direct contact with the water<sup>14</sup>. Today the Tower is separated from the whole system because of the coastal street and much more isolated after industrial area nearby closed, whose position appears strategic. Inside of the

12. Andreina Ricci, «Archeologia: fra passato e futuro dei luoghi», in Alberto Clementi (eds.), *Il senso delle memorie in architettura e urbanistica*, Bari, Laterza, 1990, pp. 143-153 (translated from Italian).

13. Ayşe Yetişkin Kubilay, *Maps of Istanbul: İstanbul Haritaları (1422-1922)*, İstanbul, Denizler Kitabevi, 2009.

14. Cfr. Wolfgang Müller-Wiener, *İstanbul'un Tarihsel Topografyası*, İstanbul, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2002.

area three industrial archaeology buildings are located: a gasholder, old city-gas deposit, and two rectangular buildings which hosted coal and other combustible materials furnaces.

## 7. BUILDING A NEW CONNECTION IN YEDIKULE BETWEEN ARCHAEOLOGY AND INDUSTRIAL PAST

A late-1800's postcard reveals the old relation between industrial area and Sea walls, with the Fortress behind. In current situation industry prevails, now out of order and used as a bus deposit; although, the relation with the surrounding both naturalist and historic landscape still appears very important and strong. This relation is kind of historic because old photographs show how the area and its buildings were surrounded by vegetable gardens and green spaces. Rectangular buildings appear today without roof and flooded in the inside by spontaneous nature. As shown, it is an area where different elements coexist, by time and space: the walls, the industries and the coastal landscape.

In this situation, walls' role clearly appears in order to prefigure design actions, through which, once more, big and small urban dimensions combine continuously. It deals with continuity with Land walls and integration of the Fortress'inner space; connection path strengthening from project area to small centre; direct connection to green spaces along the coast to let the industrial area assume the important role of hinge-park among different systems; creation of panoramic areas to historic and naturalistic landscape; individuation of continuous paths with the existing project for Turkish state railways area.

Ultimately, it deals with the construction of a project based on layers relation, able to connect different element through underground spaces, directly connected to some archaeological excavation next to the Land walls. The idea is to realise an articulate dug system which keeps together both the relation to archaeology and the connection to the coastal park. This one may be related directly to new urban connection spaces and, on the other side, it may be reconfigured according to existing park paths. On this way, new spaces in relation with the gasholder and the other elements of industrial archaeology may derivate from a digging operation as well.

Comparison, visibility, mediation and continuity are for sure design parameters that may be used for the construction of a possible new image in a part of the historic city which contains figurative significant pieces in the general urban frame.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

At the end, the walls, conceived in a system of new urban relations, become transition place themselves, able to mediate in delicate relation between urban artifice and natural-cultural landscape.

Through the project, layers which compose the place may be underlined and, at the same time, may identify more versions of Yedikule, all present and recognisable, in the current overlapping situation.

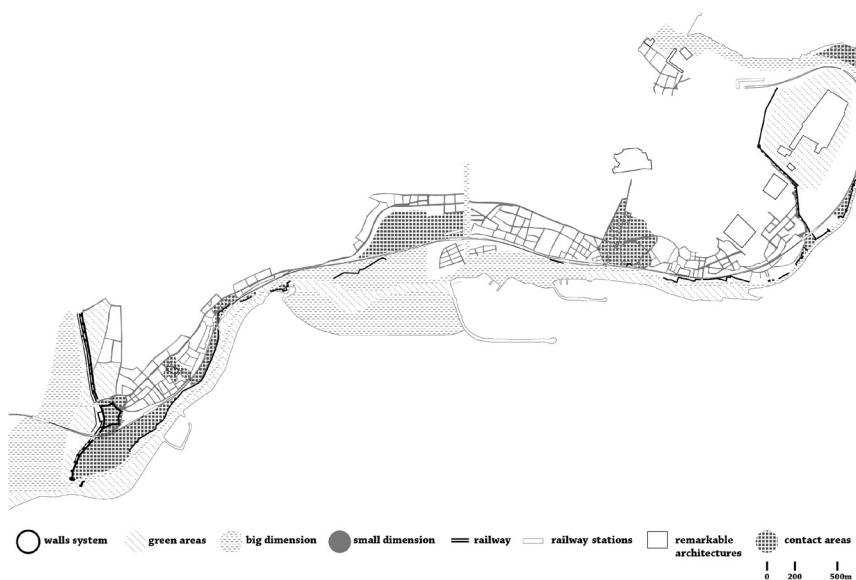
Lost connections may be resumed, others just presumed may be reactivated and included in a dynamic union.

Archaeology and landscape are in Yedikule a real physical presence, fundamental element of project construction, but also expression of other potentialities still to be enhanced, that design work may underline more and more with its mechanisms.

croquis de l'ensemble, par montre les deux murs de  
l'ancien fort de la ville à la maison de la ville  
qui s'étend. Il y a de nombreux palais byzantins  
dans le quartier où se trouvent les plus de  
hautes



Le Corbusier, *Istanbul: the Walls of Byzantium, Hagia Sophia, the Blue Mosque and the Seraglio seen from Marmara Sea*, 1911. (Source: Giuliano Gresleri (a cura di), *Le Corbusier. Viaggio in Oriente*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1984)



*Urban strategy: small and big centres.* (Source: Authors' drawing)



*Through a new image.* (Source: Authors' drawing)