

A photograph of a hillside with a small town and a large stone tower on the right. The hillside is covered in terraced fields and some trees. The town consists of several buildings, including a prominent white building with a dome. The stone tower on the right is tall and has several arched windows. The overall color palette is muted, with a mix of earthy tones and a slightly desaturated greenish-blue hue.

ARQUITECTURA Y PAISAJE

transferencias históricas
retos contemporáneos

VOLUMEN II

A B A D A E D I T O R E S

**ARQUITECTURA
Y PAISAJE**
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retos contemporáneos

VOLUMEN II

LECTURAS

Serie **H.^a del Arte y de la Arquitectura**

DIRECTORES Juan Miguel HERNÁNDEZ LEÓN y Juan CALATRAVA

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Para la edición de este libro se ha contado con la colaboración económica del Grupo de Investigación HUM813 Arquitectura y Cultura Contemporánea.



UNIVERSIDAD
DE GRANADA

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Calle del Gobernador, 18
28014 Madrid
WWW.ABADAEDITORES.COM

IMAGEN DE CUBIERTA: *Granada. Vista del Generalife y Río Dauro*, autor desconocido, ca. 1900. Archivo Municipal de Granada, signatura 00.018.17, número de registro 300667.

maquetación ANA DEL CID MENDOZA
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diseño de cubierta FRANCISCO A. GARCÍA PÉREZ
AGUSTÍN GOR GÓMEZ

ISBN 978-84-19008-07-7

IBIC AMA

depósito legal M-484-2022

impresión COFÁS, ARTES GRÁFICAS

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PRESENTACIÓN	XIX
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VOLUMEN I

1. PAISAJE URBANO Y CULTURA ARQUITECTÓNICA

ARCHITECTURE AND THE URBAN LANDSCAPE, PUBLIC SPACE AS A TRANSFORMATION OF CONTEMPORARY CITIES (1945-1970)	25
Adele Fiadino	
“LES RUINES D’UNE RAISON...” . DESONTOLOGIZACIÓN DEL PENSAMIENTO Y DESTRUCCIÓN DE LA ARQUITECTURA Y EL PAISAJE	37
Federico L. Silvestre	
MENDELSON Y AMERIKA: DOS VISIONES DE LA CIUDAD ILUMINADA	55
José Manuel Pozo Municio	
PAISAJE O ARTIFICIO: LA IMPLANTACIÓN DE JARDINES EN LAS PLAZAS DE GRANADA EN EL SIGLO XIX	69
Fernando Acale Sánchez	
EL TERCER ESPACIO DE LA CIUDAD: LA IDENTIDAD URBANA DE LOS PAISAJES INTERMEDIOS . .	81
Luisa Alarcón González, Francisco Montero-Fernández	
EL BLOQUE: INSTRUCCIONES DE USO	91
Mónica Aubán Borrell	

ARCHITECTURE, CITY, AND LANDSCAPE IN THE SABAUDIA PROJECT IN THE AGRO PONTINO . .	103
Gemma Belli	
THE LANDSCAPE IN THE ITALIAN PUBLIC SOCIAL HOUSING DURING THE '50S: ROBERTO PANE AS AN ARCHITECT FOR THE INA-CASA PLAN	117
Ermanno Bizzarri	
PERCEPTION OF URBAN SPACE AND ARCHITECTURE IN THE NORTHEAST OF ITALY BETWEEN THE 15TH AND 16TH CENTURIES: THE ROLE OF COLOR AND LIGHT	129
Federico Bulfone Gransinigh	
A CITY OF MARBLE. URBAN READINGS THROUGH THE LENS OF A MATERIAL.	141
Charlotte Bundgaard	
APERTURISMO ESPACIAL FRENTE AL LUGAR. EL CONCEPTO REDEFINIDO DE VENTANA COMO MECANISMO EVASOR	153
Emilio Cachorro Fernández	
DAMAGED IDENTITIES. EARTHQUAKES, HISTORICAL CENTRES AND RECONSTRUCTIONS BETWEEN ABANDONMENT AND URBAN REGENERATION	171
Stefano Cecamore	
MEMORIAS FRANCISCANAS: UNA VISIÓN SOBRE LOS PAISAJES DE LAS CIUDADES DE LIMA (PERÚ) Y SALVADOR (BRASIL) A PARTIR DE LOS CONVENTOS SERÁFICOS	179
Maria Angélica da Silva, Katherine Edith Quevedo Arestegui	
MAKING THE CITY.	191
Martina D'Alessandro	
LAS CASAS DE ALQUILER DE LUJO ENTRE MEDIANERAS EN EL PRIMER TRAMO DE LA GRAN VÍA DE MADRID. 1910-1920: PEDRO MATHET Y SEGUROS LA ESTRELLA	205
Juan de Andrés Martínez	
CONTEMPORARY URBAN LANDSCAPES: THE CONSTRUCTION OF PUBLIC HOUSING IN THE 1950S IN SOUTHERN ITALY	217
Carolina De Falco	
UNIDAD EN LA VARIEDAD: ARQUITECTURA DE PAISAJE EN BERLÍN HANSAVIERTEL.	229
Manuel Rodrigo de la O Cabrera	
PAISAJES FORTIFICADOS EN CLAVE CONTEMPORÁNEA: UNA PUESTA EN VALOR PATRIMONIAL DE LA SIERRA SUR DE JAÉN A TRAVÉS DEL PROYECTO DE ARQUITECTURA.	241
Rafael de Lacour, Manuel Sánchez García	
PRECURSORES DE LA MOVILIDAD URBANA	253
Miguel Ángel Díaz González, Daniel Gómez Magide	
RENZO PIANO ENTRE EL MAR Y LA CIUDAD. ANÁLISIS DEL CENTRO BOTÍN Y LA TRANSFORMACIÓN DEL FRENTE MARÍTIMO DE SANTANDER	267
Daniel Díez Martínez	

LA CIUDAD Y EL OASIS: DOS CAMPUS DE DAN KILEY EN NUEVA YORK Y CALIFORNIA	281
Marta García Carbonero, Laura Sánchez Carrasco	
UNA MIRADA DE VUELTA. A PROPÓSITO DE ANTONIO JIMÉNEZ TORRECILLAS	291
Alba Jiménez Navas, Mario Martínez Santoyo	
PAISAJE CULTURAL URBANO E IDENTIDAD TERRITORIAL. CEMENTERIO, MEDINA Y ENSANCHE DE TETUÁN	303
Bernardino Líndez Vílchez	
LA TRANSFORMACIÓN URBANA DE LA CIUDAD DE LUGO A PARTIR DE LA IMAGEN FOTOGRÁFICA	317
Francisco Xabier Louzao Martínez	
(RE)CONSTRUIR LA CIUDAD SEGÚN SU CARTOGRAFÍA Y ARQUITECTURA: DEL MEDIO NATURAL AL TEJIDO URBANO INDUSTRIAL	329
Miriam Martín Díaz, Enrique Castaño Perea	
LA METAMORFOSIS DE CUSCO ENTRE CAMBIOS DEL PAISAJE URBANO Y CONSERVACIÓN DE IDENTIDAD CULTURAL	339
Claudio Mazzanti, Vianey Bellota Cavanaugh, Crayla Alfaro Auca	
LAS CASAS DE MIES VAN DER ROHE: DEL ESPACIO CONTINUO AL PAISAJE ENMARCADO	351
Ricardo Merí de la Maza, Clara E. Mejía Vallejo	
UNA CIUDAD DENTRO DE UN JARDÍN: EL LAGO DEL OESTE DE HANGZHOU	363
Antonio José Mezcua López	
UNA ARQUITECTURA DEL OLVIDO: EL PAISAJE PATRIMONIAL DEL CASTILLO Y FORTALEZA DE LA VILLAVIEJA EN BEAS DE SEGURA (JAÉN)	371
Pablo Manuel Millán-Millán, José Miguel Fernández Cuadros	
RHINOCEROS ESPERIMENTI: LA REPROGRAMACIÓN URBANA DESDE EL CONTEXTO HISTÓRICO	383
Fernando Moral Andrés, Elena Merino Gómez.	
“DES RACINES POUR LA VILLE”: REFLEXIONES DE RENÉE GAILHOUSTET EN TORNO AL PAISAJE URBANO.	397
María Pura Moreno Moreno	
ESO PARECE UNA IGLESIA. SOBRE EL LENGUAJE MODERNO Y LA IDENTIDAD DE LA ARQUITECTURA DEL TEMPLO	409
Juan M. Otxotorena	
THE PORTICOES OF BOLOGNA BETWEEN URBAN SPACE AND ARCHITECTURAL CULTURE. FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE UNESCO NOMINATION	421
Daniele Pascale-Guidotti-Magnani, Elena Ramazza	
ABANDONO Y REGRESO. REHABITAR PEQUEÑOS PUEBLOS HISTÓRICOS ITALIANOS	435
Claudia Pirina	

TRES CARTOGRAFÍAS AMBIENTALES EN USA 1963-1975	449
Fenando Quesada López	
GEOGRAPHICAL FORMS AS ETYMOLOGY OF THE URBAN LANDSCAPE: A CONTRIBUTION TO THE (RE)DESIGN OF ARRABIDA (PORTO, PORTUGAL)	461
Sílvia Ramos	
EL TRÁNSITO ENTRE ALCÁZAR Y MEZQUITA EN LA CIUDAD DE MADINAT AL-ZAHRA: EL SABBAT	473
Manuela Rodríguez Bravo	
LOS PROYECTOS PARA LA FINCA EL SERRALLO EN GRANADA: CRÓNICA DE UN PAISAJE	487
Marta Rodríguez Iturriaga	
LLEGANDO A MADRID. MEMORIA DE UNA SILUETA	503
Eva J. Rodríguez Romero, Rocío Santo-Tomás Muro, Carlota Sáenz de Tejada Granados	
EL PAISAJE COTIDIANO: NARRACIONES Y CARTOGRAFÍAS DEL SUR DE MADRID	515
Carlota Sáenz de Tejada Granados, Eva J. Rodríguez Romero, Rocío Santo-Tomás Muro	
CONTRA LA DESMEMORIA. LA TRANSFORMACIÓN DEL PAISAJE PORTUARIO DE SEVILLA	527
Victoriano Sáinz Gutiérrez	
DE LA GRIETA DE ASFALTO A LA COSTURA VERDE: TRES EJEMPLOS DE RECONVERSIÓN URBANA	539
Laura Sánchez Carrasco, Marta García Carbonero	
CONSERVACIÓN EN LOS ESPACIOS PÚBLICOS HISTÓRICOS: ACTUACIONES EN LOS ESPACIOS GENÉRICOS DE LA CIUDAD HISTÓRICA	551
Silvia Segarra Lagunes	
ESCALERA Y PAISAJE. LUGARES INTERMEDIOS ENTRE LO URBANO Y LO DOMÉSTICO.	561
Juan Antonio Serrano García	
THE RURAL ITALIAN VILLAGES OF THE 1950S: PLACES TO KNOW AND RELIVE	573
Simona Talenti, Annarita Teodosio	
PAISAJE COLLAGE. LA INTEGRACIÓN DE LAS QUINTAS DE RECREO DEL CAMINO DE ARAGÓN EN LA CIUDAD DEL SIGLO XXI.	587
Carmen Toribio Marín, Rosana Rubio Hernando, Rafael García García	
EL PAISAJE DE LAS MEDINAS MARROQUÍES TRAS EL PROTECTORADO ESPAÑOL DE MARRUECOS (1912-56): EL LEGADO DE ALFONSO DE SIERRA OCHOA.	601
Jaime Vergara-Muñoz, Miguel Martínez-Monedero	
EL PAISAJE HISTÓRICO URBANO COMO RECURSO PARA EL PROYECTO DE ARQUITECTURA. ESTRATEGIA DE REGENERACIÓN URBANA PARA EL CONJUNTO SANTA CLARA-DON FADRIQUE EN SEVILLA	613
Cristina Vicente Gilabert, Marina López Sánchez, Mercedes Linares Gómez del Pulgar	
ARCHITECTURE IS <i>OUTIL</i>	625
Luca Zecchin	

REMIRAR PAISAJES HABITABLES: ESPACIOS DE CENTRALIDAD Y DE PROXIMIDAD URBANA. CONJUNTO PEDREGULHO Y EQUIPAMIENTOS DE BARRIO SESC EN BRASIL	639
Carla Zollinger, María Pía Fontana, Miguel Mayorga	

2. EL PATRIMONIO PAISAJÍSTICO ANTE LOS DESAFÍOS DE LA CONTEMPORANEIDAD

REPERCUSIONES DE LA ENAJENACIÓN DEL PATRIMONIO REAL EN EL PAISAJE DE LOS REALES SITIOS. EL CASO DE ARANJUEZ (MADRID, ESPAÑA)	651
Pilar Chías, Tomás Abad	
LA DEFINICIÓN DEL PAISAJE Y SU PROTECCIÓN: EL DEBATE ITALIANO ENTRE 1904-1939	663
Fabio Mangone	
PAISAJES DE RUINAS. UNA MIRADA SOBRE EL VALOR MEMORIAL DEPOSITADO EN LOS ASENTAMIENTOS URBANOS ABANDONADOS EN EL TERRITORIO EUROPEO CONTEMPORÁNEO	671
Carlos Bitrián Varea	
TRES FALLIDAS INTERVENCIONES EN EL PAISAJE: LO INAUTÉNTICO, EL ESPECTÁCULO TECNOLÓGICO Y LA PRESERVACIÓN ENCARECIDAMENTE PERVERSA.	679
Joan Casals Pañella	
WRIGHT'S INFLUENCE IN NAPLES.	687
Vincenzo Esposito	
CONSIDERACIONES DESARROLLISTAS GEOGRÁFICO-ESTRATÉGICAS DE LA ALPUJARRA. PROGRESIÓN TRADICIONAL ALPUJARREÑA Y EFECTOS ADVERSOS MEDIANTE UN EJEMPLO REPRESENTATIVO	697
Juan Luis Fernández-Quero	
<i>HABITAT ÉVOLUTIF</i> : LA CIUDAD VERTICAL DE ATBAT-AFRIQUE.	707
Cristina Quiteria García Dorce	
PARQUES PERIURBANOS EN ÁREAS METROPOLITANAS: DE PAISAJES PERIFÉRICOS A ESPACIOS DE SOCIALIZACIÓN	717
Francisco José García Fernández, Blanca del Espino Hidalgo	
PAISAJE EMPAQUETADO	731
Iñigo García Odiaga, Iñaki Begiristain Mitxelena, Ibon Salaberria San Vicente	
LA ARQUITECTURA DEL TURISMO DE MONTAÑA Y LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE SU PAISAJE: DEL REFUGIO RURAL A LA ESTACIÓN DE ESQUÍ. EL CASO DE SIERRA NEVADA (GRANADA)	743
José V. Guzmán Fernández	
EMERGING LINKS BETWEEN ALPINE LANDSCAPE HERITAGE AND MEGA-EVENTS IN THE MILAN-CORTINA 2026 WINTER OLYMPICS	755
Zachary Mark Jones, Francesca Vigotti	

EL PATRIMONIO CULTURAL DEL VALLE DE RICOTE (MURCIA) Y LA CARTOGRAFÍA DEL <i>GENIUS LOCI</i> . BASES TEÓRICAS Y METODOLÓGICAS PARA LA ELABORACIÓN DE UN MAPA CULTURAL A PARTIR DE ACCIONES DE PARTICIPACIÓN SOCIAL	765
Joaquín Martínez Pino, Marta Ruiz Jiménez	
THE BUILT LANDSCAPE OF THE CINQUE TERRE	775
Mauro Marzo, Viola Bertini	
CHALLENGING THE ARCHITECTURAL LANGUAGE: THE BAMBOO CASE.	787
Giulia Pezzullo	
PATRIMONIO PAISAJÍSTICO Y ASENTAMIENTOS RURALES. REGENERACIÓN Y RECUPERACIÓN SOSTENIBLE DE LOS POBLADOS AGRÍCOLAS MODERNOS EN ITALIA Y ESPAÑA.	797
Raffaele Pontrandolfi, Jorge Moya Muñoz, Manuel Castellano Román	
PAISAJES PRODUCTIVOS Y ESPACIO PÚBLICO. CUANDO LA CIUDAD QUIERE SER MÁS CAMPO. . . .	809
Juan Carlos Reina Fernández	
PAISAJE Y ANTIGUAS INFRAESTRUCTURAS. UN LAZO IDEAL ENTRE AFINIDADES Y DIVERSIDADES CULTURALES	819
Emanuele Romeo	
EL PROYECTO PAISAJÍSTICO COMO INSTRUMENTO PARA SOLVENTAR LA PRECARIEDAD EN EL BARRIO HISTÓRICO DE BAJO DE GUÍA DE SANLÚCAR DE BARRAMEDA	829
José Antonio Romero-Odero	
THE CASTLES OF <i>PAYS CATHARE</i> . A MULTI-LAYERED HERITAGE?	841
Riccardo Rudiero	

VOLUMEN II

3. OTROS PAISAJES, OTRAS ESCALAS: EL PROYECTO ARQUITECTÓNICO EN EL TERRITORIO DISPERSO

LA TRANSFORMACIÓN MUDA DEL PAISAJE URBANO	857
Antonella Falzetti, Veronica Strippoli	
CAMBIAR EL PAISAJE: LA OBRA DEL INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE INDUSTRIA (1941-1975).	869
Ángeles Layuno	
DISEÑO Y CONSTRUCCIÓN DE UN PAISAJE AGRÍCOLA MODERNO. EL AGRO PONTINO EN LA “BATTAGLIA DEL GRANO”.	887
David Arredondo Garrido	

THE HUMAN ECODYNAMICS OF THE ARCHITECTURAL ICELANDIC LANDSCAPE: THE HISTORICAL EXAMPLE OF TURF HOUSES AND EARTHWORKS	903
Pablo Barruezo-Vaquero	
THE SOTTOBORGO AND THE CAPILLA-ESCUELA: THE SERVICES OF THE PLANNED DISPERSED SETTLEMENT OF THE 20TH CENTURY IN ITALY, PORTUGAL AND SPAIN.	913
Tiziana Basiricò, Rui Braz Afonso, Luis Santos y Ganges	
EL PAISAJE Y LOS PRIMEROS PUENTES DE HORMIGÓN ARMADO DE ANDALUCÍA ORIENTAL, 1920-1945	925
Antonio Burgos Núñez, Juan Carlos Olmo García	
ARQUITECTURA DEL OLIVAR EN LA VEGA DE SEVILLA. FRAGMENTOS DE UN PAISAJE EXTINTO	939
Manuel Chaparro-Campos, José-Manuel Aladro-Prieto	
REGENERACIÓN, PAISAJES Y ARQUITECTURAS: ESTRATEGIAS DE INTERVENCIÓN EN EMPLAZAMIENTOS MINEROS ABANDONADOS EN CERDEÑA	953
Pier Francesco Cherchi, Marco Lecis	
EL VÍNCULO AFECTIVO ENTRE ARQUITECTURA Y TERRITORIO.	963
María Fandiño Iglesias	
EL UNIVERSO ATRAPADO EN UN FRAGMENTO DE CIELO: LA INTERPRETACIÓN DEL PAISAJE LLEVADA A CABO POR JAMES TURRELL A TRAVÉS DE LOS SKYSPACES.	975
Tomás García Píriz	
JUAN BORCHERS, UNA MIRADA SOBRE EL ESCORIAL	987
Ignacio Hornillos Cárdenas	
THE TREND OF SPANISH-STYLE ARCHITECTURE IN JAPANESE HOUSES, HOTELS, SHOPPING CENTRES, OUTLETS, AND THEME PARKS IN THE 20TH CENTURY	1001
Ewa Kawamura	
THE PERTINENCE OF PERCEIVING THE VISIBLE: THE OPTICAL TELEGRAPH TOWERS OF THE CASTILLA LINE IN THE LANDSCAPE	1015
Laura Lalana-Encinas	
ARQUITECTURAS DE LA LLANURA, POÉTICAS DE LA INMENSIDAD	1027
Alejandro Lapunzina	
EL ESTABLO-GRANERO DEL DOTTI, UN MODELO DE AUTOR	1039
Fabio Licitra	
DE HABITAR UN TERRITORIO A CONSTRUIR UN PAISAJE: SAN JULIÁN DE SAMOS	1053
Estefanía López Salas	
ARQUITECTURA Y PAISAJES DEL PROGRAMA INDUSTRIAL DEL FRANQUISMO PARA EL BIERZO Y LACIANA (LEÓN, ESPAÑA)	1063
Jorge Magaz Molina	

ESCAPE FROM AVANT-GARDE: ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE IN HANNES MEYER'S KINDERHEIM IN MÜMLISWIL (1938-39)	1075
Andrea Maglio	
LAS “TIERRAS ALTAS” Y LA LECCIÓN DEL PAISAJE	1087
Paolo Mellano	
COLONIZACIÓN DEL TERRITORIO Y CONSTRUCCIÓN DEL PAISAJE	1099
Plácida Molina Ballesteros, Rui Manuel Braz Afonso, Rui Alves	
DEL COUNTRYSIDE AL TESLA WALD: EL COMPROMISO DEL PROYECTO ARQUITECTÓNICO EN UN BOSQUE DEGRADADO	1111
María Ocón Fernández	
NUEVOS MODELOS DE ASENTAMIENTO EN LA TRANSFORMACIÓN DEL PAISAJE RURAL ENTRE LA TRADICIÓN Y LA MODERNIDAD. LOS PUEBLOS DE LA REFORMA AGRARIA EN ESPAÑA E ITALIA A MEDIADOS DEL SIGLO XX	1123
Raffaele Pontrandolfi, José María Guerrero Vega, Francisco Pinto Puerto	
LA TORRE ALQUERÍA DE MÁGINA. CARTOGRAFÍAS Y ARQUITECTURA DE LA ALQUERÍA DE DÚRCAL	1137
David Raya Moreno	
EL PAISAJE DEL RÍO MAGDALENA, DISPOSITIVO INTEGRADOR DE CIUDAD	1149
Luz Mery Rodelo Torres	
HÁBITAT RURAL DISEMINADO Y NUEVAS FORMAS DE EXPLOTACIÓN DEL TERRITORIO EN LA SIERRA DE LA CONTRAVIESA (GRANADA - ALMERÍA)	1157
Luis Miguel Sánchez Escolano, Noelia Ruiz Moya	
GEOMETRÍA. LO QUE EL HORIZONTE MIDE	1169
Rafael Sánchez Sánchez	
LA PARTICIPACIÓN COMO PRÁCTICA DE MEDIACIÓN ENTRE EL PROYECTO ARQUITECTÓNICO Y EL PAISAJE RURAL: EL CASO DEL MÁSTER UNIVERSITARIO EN ARQUITECTURA ETSAV-UPC	1179
Marta Serra-Permanyer, Roger Sauquet Llonch, Isabel Castiñeira Palou	
THE MYTH OF THE CAUCASIAN SOUTH: HOLIDAY DESTINATION OF THE WRITERS DURING THE SOVIET REGIME	1191
Chiara Simoncini	
LOS PROGRAMAS DE REHABILITACIÓN ARQUITECTÓNICA E INTEGRACIÓN SOCIAL DEL TERRITORIO RURAL ANDALUZ. ALAMEDILLA COMO CASO DE ESTUDIO.	1203
María del Carmen Vílchez Lara	
TERRITORIOS INVISIBLES, PAISAJES IMAGINADOS: ANÁLISIS Y ALTERNATIVAS SOBRE LA PROBLEMÁTICA DEL NO-LUGAR EN EL LEVANTE ALMERIENSE, SIGLOS XIX-XXI.	1215
María Zurita Elizalde	
PAISAJES AGRARIOS EXCAVADOS: EL CASO DE LA COMARCA DE HUÉSCAR	1237
Eduardo Zurita Povedano, Ángel Aguilera Delgado	

LOS CULTIVOS DEL AZÚCAR DE CAÑA, PAISAJES PRODUCTIVOS DE IDA Y VUELTA: EL CASO DEL LITORAL GRANADINO Y LAS FUNDACIONES CARIBEÑAS.	1251
Eduardo Zurita Povedano, Carmen Zurita Sánchez, Elías Mhend Cabrera	

4. DESCRIBIR EL TERRITORIO, COMUNICAR EL PAISAJE

PAISAJE Y POLÍTICA EN LA OBRA DE JOSÉ MARÍA DE PEREDA.	1265
Juan Calatrava	
EL CIELO NOCTURNO COMO PAISAJE	1279
Marta Llorente Díaz	
LA VENTANA INDISCRETA. LE CORBUSIER Y LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DEL PAISAJE.	1295
Jorge Torres Cueco	
51° 30' 46.20" N, 7° 1' 08.85" E	1311
Francisco Arques Soler	
PAISAJE Y MEMORIA. LA VEGA DE GRANADA EN LA OBRA DE FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA.	1323
Paloma Baquero Masats	
ESTÉTICA PINTORESCA VERSUS DESARROLLISMO. LA DESTRUCCIÓN DEL PAISAJE Y EL AMBIENTE HISTÓRICO-ARTÍSTICO EN ESPAÑA	1335
Juan Manuel Barrios Rozúa	
LA DISTANCIA DEL PAISAJE EN EL SENTIDO TERRITORIAL DEL CUERPO.	1349
Aarón José Caballero Quiroz	
FROM SCANDINAVIAN SATELLITE TOWNS TO NEW TOWNS IN THE DESERT: ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE'S OVERSEAS REPORTAGES, 1965-1969. A TRAVELING ARCHITECTURE CRITIC'S PERSPECTIVE FOR CULTURAL MEDIATION	1359
Valeria Casali	
PAISAJES INVENTADOS: DEL HOTEL COMO PROMESA DEL HOGAR EFÍMERO, AL <i>BLING</i> DE LOS OBJETOS COTIDIANOS. CONVERGENCIAS ENTRE LA ALTERIDAD DE LO DOMÉSTICO EN EL CINE DE SOFIA COPPOLA Y LA INVASIÓN A LOS OTROS, EN LA OBRA DE SOPHIE CALLE.	1371
María de los Ángeles Castillo Soriano, J. Alberto Canavati Espinosa	
RECUPERAR LA LECTURA PARA COMUNICAR EL PAISAJE	1383
Antonio Alberto Clemente	
ONE YEAR FROM VENICE TO INDIA LEARNING FROM THE LANDSCAPE: THE "SLOW JOURNEY" OF DOLF SCHNEBLI	1393
Alessandra Como, Isotta Forni, Luisa Smeragliuolo Perrotta	
PAISAJES DE EXPORTACIÓN. EL RELATO BIDIMENSIONAL DE LA ARQUITECTURA CHILENA CONTEMPORÁNEA.	1405
Felipe Corvalán Tapia	

CONTROL SOCIAL DESDE LA CIUDAD BASURAL EN <i>ISLA DE PERROS</i> DE WES ANDERSON.	1417
Bernardita Cubillos	
LA CONSTELACIÓN DE TUSCIA: EL MANIFIESTO PAISAJÍSTICO DE PIER PAOLO PASOLINI.	1429
Ana del Cid Mendoza	
DRAWING THE WATER TO SEE ROME. CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AND FLUIDITY.	1443
Francisco J. del Corral del Campo, Carmen M. Barrós Velázquez	
VER EL PAISAJE SIN LOS OJOS. SENTIR EL TERRITORIO A CIEGAS	1453
Francisco J. del Corral del Campo, Laura Muñoz González	
DE VALPARAÍSO A SACROMONTE. IMÁGENES DE UN PAISAJE ENCRIPTADO EN LA GRANADA DE FINALES DEL SIGLO XVI.	1467
Francisco A. García Pérez	
LA POESÍA VISUAL COMO METODOLOGÍA DE APRENDIZAJE Y ENSEÑANZA DE LA CIUDAD	1479
Rafaele Genet Verney, Antonio Fernández Morillas, Xabier Molinet Medina	
OTEANDO LA PALABRA. APROXIMACIONES A LA IDEA DE PAISAJE EN LA POESÍA HISPÁNICA DEL SIGLO XX	1489
José Miguel Gómez Acosta	
ESCALAS DEL PAISAJE EN LA NARRATIVA CINEMATOGRAFICA DE PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON . . .	1499
Agustín Gor Gómez	
THE ANCIENT CITY OF PAESTUM. THE EVOLUTION OF AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPE REFLECTING THE VARIOUS SHAPES OF CIVILIZATIONS	1515
Ludovica Grompone	
(RE)PRESENTAR UN PAISAJE PRESENTE: SOBRE LA CONDICIÓN ENVOLVENTE DE LA ARQUITECTURA	1527
María Elia Gutiérrez Mozo, Ángel Cordero Ampuero	
LOS SUBURBIOS DE BARCELONA EN LOS AÑOS SESENTA A TRAVÉS DE LA LENTE DE ORIOL MASPONS Y JULIO UBIÑA	1539
Arianna Iampieri	
GRANADA: LOS ALREDEDORES DE LA CIUDAD CRISTIANA A LA LUZ DE SU REPRESENTACIÓN GRÁFICA.	1551
Carlos Jerez Mir	
NUEVAS LECTURAS PATRIMONIALES DE LA CIUDAD DE CÓRDOBA. EL PAISAJE URBANO A TRAVÉS DE SU DIFUSIÓN HISTÓRICA	1563
Ángela Laguna Bolívar, Lourdes Royo Naranjo	
ENTRE VIENA Y SICILIA: ESPACIOS Y PRÁCTICAS DEL SABER CARTOGRAFICO EN EL SIGLO XVIII	1575
Valeria Manfrè	
EL COLOFÓN DEL VIAJE: NARRACIÓN Y PAISAJE DE ESTADOS UNIDOS EN EL SIGLO XIX	1587
Nicolás Mariné	

CARTOGRAFÍAS DE LEYENDAS: UNA APROXIMACIÓN GRÁFICA AL CAMPO TRANSILVANO A TRAVÉS DE SU PAISAJE LITERARIO	1597
Mario Martínez Santoyo, Alba Jiménez Navas, Tomás García Píriz	
TERRITORIOS REHABILITADOS: EL IMAGINARIO PAISAJÍSTICO A TRAVÉS DE INSTALACIONES ARTÍSTICAS CONTEMPORÁNEAS	1611
José Luis Panea	
VALE DO AVE. PERCEPCIONES CONTEMPORÁNEAS DEL PAISAJE	1623
Júlia Cristina Pereira de Faria	
LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DEL ESPACIO FÍLMICO A TRAVÉS DEL CAMINAR EN ERIC ROHMER.	1635
Yolanda Pérez Sánchez	
EXCAVAR EL TERRITORIO A TRAVÉS DEL MAPA.	1647
Ana Isabel Rodríguez Aguilera, Elena Rocchi	
“EL MARIDAJE DE LO BELLO CON LO ÚTIL”: EL PAISAJE EN LA CUENCA DEL NOGUERA RIBAGORZANA, 1946-1962	1661
Isabel Rodríguez de la Rosa	
PAISAJES INESCRUTABLES: LOS AUTOCROMOS DE LA GRAN GUERRA DE JULES GERVAIS-COURTELLEMONT.	1673
Carmen Rodríguez Pedret	
MIRANDO MADRID. VISIONES DESDE EL CONTORNO DE LA CIUDAD	1687
Rocío Santo-Tomás Muro, Eva J. Rodríguez Romero, Carlota Sáenz de Tejada Granados	
THE RADICAL TRAVERSE OF SPACE-TIME IN THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY PICTURESQUE GARDEN	1697
Rebecca J. Squires	

Las Ecodinámicas Humanas del paisaje arquitectónico islandés: el ejemplo histórico de las casas-tepe y las obras de tierra
The Human Ecodynamics of the Architectural Icelandic Landscape: The Historical Example of Turf Houses and Earthworks

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Abstract

En este capítulo utilizamos el concepto de Ecodinámicas Humanas como categoría de análisis para examinar el paisaje arquitectónico islandés. Para ello, nos centramos en dos elementos históricos, a saber: las casas-tepe y las obras de tierra. Ambos representan elementos arquitectónicos rurales que han sobrevivido durante más de mil años; aquel como el hogar islandés, este como elemento territorial divisorio para el manejo de recursos. En la última centuria, no obstante, ambos se han abandonado arquitectónicamente y ontológicamente; es decir, como proyectos vernáculos *descen-antropizados*. Estos elementos fueron construidos gracias a una interrelación constante entre entidades bióticas y abióticas —un constante intercambio de energía a lo largo del espacio-tiempo—. Consideramos que reconocer estos entrelazamientos arquitectónicos, así como las distintas escalas espaciales —micro y extensiva—, es fundamental para interpretar los paisajes rurales.

This paper explores the architectural landscape of Iceland by using the concept of Human Ecodynamics as a category of analysis. I apply this vision by focusing on two historical features: turf houses and earthworks. They both represent rural architectural elements that have stood for more than a millennium; the former as the home of Icelanders, the latter as the element that divided territories for managing resources. In the last century, however, they have been abandoned architecturally and ontologically -i.e., as human-decentered, vernacular, projects. These elements were built thanks to the constant interrelationship of biotic and abiotic entities — a constant flux of matter through time-space. I argue that recognising these architectural entanglements, as well as their different landscape-scales — small and extensive —, is fundamental for interpreting rural landscapes.

Keywords

Ecodinámicas humanas, arqueología del paisaje, Islandia, casas-tepe, obras de tierra
Human ecodynamics, landscape archaeology, Iceland, turf houses, earthworks

“Architecture [...] emerges as a movement between human and non-human bodies”.

Mikkel Bille and Tim Flohr Sørensen, *Into the Fog of Architecture*, 2016

I aim to explore in this chapter how architecture — in this case, that of rural areas — can only be fully comprehended if envisioned as a dynamic process between humans and non-humans. This notion will bring up another one of importance for our present; namely, the usefulness of a vernacular architecture which explicitly addresses the entanglement between humans and non-humans. As I conceive this discourse from the point of view of archaeology and history, this text is arguably also of importance for understanding landscapes as historical and archaeological. As I will explicit in the next section of the text, the concept of Human Ecodynamics¹ plays a key role in this chapter, used here as a category of analysis.

There have been recent proposals on similar lines for a so-called multispecies archaeology². Such archaeology intends to unite the divide between humans and non-humans, consequently de-centring the narratives from anthropocentric lenses³. Its epistemological — and ontological — ground is set on the idea that humans are not just humans but that other species are an integral part of what it means to be human⁴. Similarly, there has been a series of exploration within archaeology aiming at understanding architecture not as a static form of inert matter but rather as (more-than-human) living assemblages of matter in a continual movement⁵.

I see no reason to negate many of the basis of these proposals. In fact, HE can bring many benefits to an archaeology of multispecies preoccupied with a thorough approach to building spaces: they all incorporate visions from complex system and symbiotic analysis. Yet, and against many pundits of these approaches who envision ontology from a flat perspective, I acknowledge that these notions of the past are mediated by our present notions about the past⁶. I moreover follow an explicit heterarchical understanding of humans’ and non-humans’ interrelationships — which might contradict some of the principles of the aforesaid approaches.

To unfold my idea, the text first explains what we should understand by Human Ecodynamics and what it has to do with the study of landscapes and architecture. I then offer a historical and descriptive account of Icelandic turf houses and earthworks from the Viking period — the features concerning this chapter. The text comes to an end with some remarks — applicable to both architecture and archaeology — which arise when approaching these architectural features from the point of view of Human Ecodynamics.

¹ Henceforward also as HE.

² Suzanne Pilaar Birch, ed., *Multispecies Archaeology* (London-New York: Routledge, 2018).

³ Pilaar Birch, *Multispecies...*, 1-9.

⁴ Pilaar Birch, *Multispecies...*, 1-9.

⁵ Mikkel Bille and Tim Flohr Sørensen, eds., *Elements of Architecture. Assembling Archaeology, Atmosphere and the Performance of Building Space* (London-New York: Routledge, 2016).

⁶ Following thus an intersubjective approach: Russel Sbriglia and Slavoj Žižek, “Introduction: Subject Matters”, in *Subject Lessons: Hegel, Lacan, and the Future of Materialism*, ed. by Russek Sbriglia and Slavoj Žižek (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2020).

On Human Ecodynamics and landscapes

The concept of Human Ecodynamics has been in use in the archaeological domain since 1995⁷. Sometimes conceived as a paradigm, it reinforces and is reinforced by Historical Ecology⁸. The study of Human Ecodynamics aims to trace in a long-term fashion the historical interrelationships between humans and the environment through both space and time, assessing the agency that both these entities have on each other. In other words, it aims to study the dynamical human-natural system(s)⁹.

An important feature of HE is that it gives agency to both humans and non-humans¹⁰ and, therefore, portrays humans as not superior to their environments. Indeed, both are equally important for the system to be¹¹. Other ideas of importance brought by HE are those of non-linear dynamics, understanding humans and non-humans interrelationships as a complex adaptive system, and, as a consequence, comprehend these dynamics as the result of different spatial-temporal outcomes¹². Said differently, it presents a holistic conceptual framework for better understanding co-evolutionary dynamics¹³.

Overall, HE accounts for understanding history as the coevolution between humans and non-humans¹⁴. This is to say that sociohistorical systems can only be understood if harnessing the concept of coevolution — i.e., influencing and influenced by the physical-natural system¹⁵. This sets the space for an integrated history of humans and environments as coupled systems¹⁶.

⁷ James McGlade, “Archaeology and the Ecodynamics of Human-Modified Landscapes”, *Antiquity*, n.º 69 (1995).

⁸ Carole Crumley, “Historical Ecology: A Multidimensional Ecological Orientation”, in *Historical Ecology. Cultural Knowledge and Changing Landscapes*, ed. by Carole Crumley (Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA: School of American Research Advanced Press, 1994), 1-16.

⁹ Ramona Harrison and Ruth Maher, “Humans: A Force of Nature”, in *Human Ecodynamics in the North Atlantic: A Collaborative Model of Humans and Nature through Space and Time*, ed. by Ramona Harrison and Ruth Maher (Maryland: Lexington Books), 1-9; James McGlade, “Arqueología, dinámica no lineal y discurso histórico”, *Trabajos de Prehistoria* 56, no. 2 (1999): 5-18.

¹⁰ Sensu Latour’s Actor-Network-Theory: Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹¹ McGlade, “Archaeology...”, 124.

¹² McGlade, “Archaeology...”; McGlade, “Arqueología...”; James McGlade and Elizabeth Garnsey, “The nature of complexity”, in *Complexity and Co-Evolution Continuity and Change in Socio-Economic Systems*, ed. by Elizabeth Garnsey and James McGlade (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2006); Harrison and Maher, “Humans...”

¹³ McGlade and Garnsey, “The nature of...”

¹⁴ Harrison and Maher, “Humans...”; McGlade, “Arqueología...”

¹⁵ William Marquardt, “Dialectic in Historical Ecology” in *Historical Ecologies, heterarchies and transtemporal landscapes*, ed. by Celeste Ray and Manuel Fernández-Götz (London-New York: Routledge, 2019).

¹⁶ Ben Fitzhugh et al., “Human Ecodynamics: A Perspective for the Study of Long-Term Change in Socioecological Systems”, *Journal of Archaeological Science Reports*, no. 23 (2018): 1077-1094; Robert Costanza et al., “Developing an Integrated History and Future of People on Earth (IHOPE)”, *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, no. 4, (2012): 106-114.

On the other hand, Historical Ecology has developed concepts of enormous importance such as heterarchy or dialectical analysis¹⁷. The concept of heterarchy postulates a fluid classification of analysis depending on the moment, place, and agents. This nails perfectly with the idea of co-evolutionary, complex-adaptive systems, which are “constantly evolving, [their] couplings are continuously renewed [in processes] of self-organization”¹⁸. As for dialectical analysis, it acknowledges an interrelationship between humans and non-humans and proposes a method with different spatial-temporal scales of analysis for understanding such interrelationships.

Landscapes, considered the main arena of these dialectical interrelationships, thus become the ideal laboratory for researching an integrative history¹⁹. This, in turn, has important consequences for how to archaeologically approach the study of landscapes²⁰: following a method capable of merging different scales, both in terms of actors and space-time — i.e., the dialectical method. This framework, therefore, is capable of rendering mutual interrelationships between humans and non-humans whilst articulating different temporal and structural scales.

Applying this to the study of landscapes requires focusing on different actors interacting between them at different rates, in different places and at non-equal tempos. And yet, one could argue the existence of a gap between micro and macro approaches to landscapes. Such a gap could be filled if following HE, which postulates a correlation between micro scales and extensive levels of analysis²¹. As a consequence, the study of human ecodynamics enhances the archaeological study of landscapes²².

In this paper, the aim is to show how to integrate different scales and agents of analysis in order to coherently understanding the built landscape of Viking Age Iceland. This is done so by focusing on two distinctive features.

Two Icelandic Features: architecture in the landscape

The society of Viking (871±2-1262/4)²³ and Medieval Iceland was rural in essence. Farming, hunting-gathering, fishing, and trading set the course of the daily life of

¹⁷ Marquardt, “Dialectic...”, 11-31; Carole Crumley, “Afterword: integrating time and space in dynamic systems”, in *Historical Ecologies, heterarchies...*, 287-297.

¹⁸ McGlade and Garnsey, “The nature of...”.

¹⁹ Crumley, “Historical...”.

²⁰ Carole Crumley, “Historical Ecology and the Study of Landscape”, *Landscape Research*, no. 42 (2017): 65-73.

²¹ Similar approaches have already been proposed for understanding Viking Age farms on a multi-level scale of analysis: Ingvild Øye, “Farming and farming systems in Norse societies of the North Atlantic”, in *Viking and Norse in the North Atlantic Select Papers from the Proceedings of the Fourteenth Viking Congress, Torshavn, 19-30 July 2001*, ed. by Andras Mortensen and Simun V. Arge. (Torshavn: Annales Societatis Scientiarum Faeroensis Supplementum XLIV, 2005).

²² Pablo Barruedo-Vaquero and David Laguna Palma, “On the Integration of Landscape Archaeology Within the Framework of Human Ecodynamics - Some Theoretical Considerations”, *forthcoming*.

²³ 1262/4 corresponds to the end of the period known as the Free-State or Commonwealth (*þjóðveldi*): Helgi Þorláksson, “The Icelandic Commonwealth Period: building a new society”, in *Vikings. The North Atlantic Saga*, ed. by William Fitzhugh and Elisabeth I. Ward (Washington:

Icelanders. The Icelandic landscape of this period was, therefore, rural, mostly characterised by spatially dispersed farms organised in different communities (*hreppar*)²⁴. A myriad of features can be spotted within this spatial organisation: farmsteads, walls, shielings, barns, peat-cuts, horse-marks, charcoal pits, churches, graves, assembly sites, etc²⁵. Of these, I will focus on one category within farmsteads — turf-houses — and walls — earthworks.

Turf houses

Turf houses are the traditional architectural Icelandic feature par excellence (fig. 1). This type of architecture has been in use since the island was colonised in 871±2. Although they evolved through time, adapting to different environmental and social circumstances, their main features and techniques remained the same for over a millennium²⁶. Turf-housing was a traditional building technique in Scandinavia since Prehistory and the first generation of Icelanders found turf was the most suitable material in Iceland for building houses²⁷.

Turf houses were normally oblong and narrow in shape, with curved walls making wider space in the middle of the structure and narrower at the ends²⁸. In the interior, at least one fire — the hearth — was to be found on the floor, normally at the middle(-ish) of the house with slate above the earth. Wooden benches were attached to the interior of the walls. Postholes held timber posts that enable the whole frame, but especially the roof, to stand²⁹. These wooden pillars carrying the weight were placed on flat stones, which in turn prevented the wood from moisture and rot. In the exterior, roofs were made of one or more turf layers, which were underlaid by reeds and branches³⁰. The turfed roof had apertures for the smoke to leave out the house. Meanwhile, walls were made of turf blocks and earth fill (fig. 2).

Smithsonian Books, 2000); Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 351-353. Within this period, Iceland experienced different socioeconomic and ecological changes: Douglas Bolender, “The creation of a propertied landscape: land tenure and agricultural investment in Medieval Iceland” (PhD Thesis, Northwestern University, 2006), 31-35; Orri Vésteinsson, “The archaeology of *Landnám*: early settlement in Iceland”, in *Vikings...*

²⁴ Orri Vésteinsson, “Communities of Dispersed Settlements: Social Organization at the Ground Level in Tenth- to Thirteenth-Century Iceland”, in *People and Space in the Middle Ages, 300-1300*, ed. by Wendy Davies, Guy Halsall, and Andrew Reynolds (Brussels: Brepols, 2006).

²⁵ Árni Einarsson and Oscar Aldred, “The Archaeological Landscape of Northeast Iceland: A Ghost of a Viking Age Society”, in *Remote Sensing for Archaeological Heritage Management*, ed. by David W. Cowley (Brussels: Europae Archaeologia Consilium (EAC), 2011).

²⁶ UNESCO World Heritage Centre. *Tentative List*. s.v. “The turf house tradition”, consulted the 9 of March 2021, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5589>; Byock, *Viking...*, 34-41; 360-368.

²⁷ Byock, *Viking...*, 34.

²⁸ This design followed the same patterns as Scandinavian longhouses: UNESCO World Heritage Centre. *Tentative List*. s.v. “The turf...”.

²⁹ I will not explain here the engineering nor the architecture pertaining the internal frame of turf houses — this have been explained elsewhere (e.g., Byock, *Viking...*, 360-362)- and it is not of real importance for the aims of this text.

³⁰ Byock, *Viking...*, 34-41.



Figure 1: Þjóðveldisbærinn Stöng: a turf house from the Viking Age located in Þjórsárdalur, Southwest Iceland. Source: Adobe Stock.



Figure 2: Herringbone-turf wall from Glaumbær Farm. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

These houses were the main habitat of Icelanders for over a millennium, mirroring the rural society that built them. As I will discuss in the final section, these vernacular houses have important consequences for understanding architecture beyond humans.

Earthworks

Earthworks are one of the most prominent features of the early Icelandic landscape. They were in use between the beginning of the 9th Century and the mid of the 13th Century³¹. Earthworks conjoint one to another forming boundaries systems which divided up the landscape in infields and outfields patterns, and enclosed different farmsteads³². Among other things, these systems were used for managing the livestock, demarcating the pastureland, and as farm-markers. In short, their main function was to managed land, specifically by “controlling the movement of sheep in and out of grazing areas”³³. Earthworks were made of piles of turf stacks, which, at least in some cases, were placed over stones that served as the foundation of these boundaries³⁴. Needless to say, different microorganism and plants populated them.

For their scale in the landscape, earthworks represent a massive human effort. Most notably, though, they were possibly built upon processes of negotiation, agreement and mutual aid³⁵. Therefore, they seemingly represent a collective human effort of resource management based on mutual aid, communalism, and mutualism. These stories of collective work are enmeshed with their function as land markers for managing the landscape. The other side of the coin is that these features were also used and transformed by non-humans, be it cattle, plants, snow or volcanos.

The stories purported by turf houses and earthworks goes hand in hand with processes of building, abandonment, reparation, reorganisation, and living together and “therein”. In this, a multiplicity of agents, both humans and non-humans, had different roles depending on the moment and of the scale of analysis which we use. Here is where Human Ecodynamics appears again as a conceptual tool for making sense out of these apparent multispecies, “messy”, architectural wraps.

The Human Ecodynamics of the Architectural Icelandic Landscape

Turf houses and earthworks might be conceived as though they were human architecture. Yet, I intend to present another perspective. Without diminishing humans’ role, this

³¹ Árni Einarsson, Oddgeir Hansson and Orri Vésteinsson, “An Extensive System of Medieval Earthworks in Northeast Iceland”, *Archaeologia Islandica*, no. 2 (2002): 61-73; Oscar Aldred, “Legs, Feet and Hooves: The Seasonal Roundup in Iceland”, in *Multispecies...*, 277.

³² Einarsson, Hansson and Vésteinsson, “An extensive...”; Oscar Aldred et al., *Forn garðlög í Suður-Dingeyjarsýslu / A System of Earthworks in North-East Iceland* (Reykjavík: Fornleifastofnun Íslands, 2005); Oscar Aldred et al., *Forn garðlög í Suður-Dingeyjarsýslu: framvinduskýrsla / A system of earthworks in NE Iceland* (Reykjavík: Fornleifastofnun Íslands, 2007); Einarsson and Aldred, “The archaeological...”; Árni Einarsson, “Viking Age Fences and Early Settlement Dynamics in Iceland”, *Journal of the North Atlantic*, no. 27 (2015): 1-21.

³³ Aldred, “Legs...”.

³⁴ Aldred et al., *Forn...*(2007), 9-15.

³⁵ At least according to Einarsson, “Viking Age...”.

vernacular architecture is only truly understood by acknowledging the fundamental role of non-humans. They all were entangled.

Interrelationships

No doubt, Icelanders ideated turf houses and earthworks; they decided the form they would have and the matter they would contain. Icelanders moreover invested effort and time in building these features. And yet, turf houses are made of³⁶ timber, driftwood, volcanic rocks and stones, turf³⁷ with matted roots, soil, reeds, branches, synanthropes, fungi, mycelium, plants, lichens, roots, and microorganism³⁸. The same applies to earthworks - aside from timber, synanthropes, reeds, and branches. This already glimpses that architecture is nothing but the entanglement of humans and non-humans. For example, timber and driftwood were employed for creating frames which were thickly covered by sod and/or turf — helping to retain the heat. In another example, roofs were underlaid by reeds and branches which prevented from rot — precisely because they were full of “life”; e.g., non-human organisms populated roofs and doing so maintained houses habitable³⁹.

But I do not intend to render a reality in which non-humans are important only as far as their relations (especially to humans) afford⁴⁰. The reality of these human ecodynamics is that they were dependent also on the inner characteristic of non-humans. For example, turf houses were partly due to growing grass, and this grass attracted sheep and cows who climbed on the roofs of turf houses⁴¹. The grass of turf houses equally grew over walls, connecting the soil with the entire house⁴²; as Gavin Lucas said, it is alive⁴³. As for the internal structure of houses, this was made possible only thanks to a constant exchange of matter between humans and non-humans at different rates. For its part, earthworks are elements wherein stones and turf stacks were piled (by humans) but their internal qualities allowed for maintaining their form and robustness, as well as for other life to develop and be. The roaming of sheep within these boundaries also made them possible.

These images of different scales are part of the Icelandic architecture; without them, this architecture loses meaning. Timber, sod, grass, stones, people, microorganism, animals, the burning wood in the fire lighting up the atmosphere in a snowy night, etc. were all in this

³⁶ In other words, the event of building and its process “hinges upon” external relations. For example, the drift of driftwood arriving the shore, the availability of timber, etc.

³⁷ Normally marshy.

³⁸ Byock, *Viking...*, 35-39; Tinna Grétarsdóttir and Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson, “Pulses for future architecture”, *Tera*, no. 1 (2020): 90

³⁹ In this sense, turf houses are nothing but houses containing smaller houses; habitants within habitats. Said differently, a symbiotic organism (*cf.* “supeorganism” in Grétarsdóttir and Hafsteinsson, “Pulses...”).

⁴⁰ In this I adhere to Harman’s critique to some philosophical tendencies: see Graham Harman, “On behalf of form: the view from archaeology and architecture” in *Elements of...*

⁴¹ Grétarsdóttir and Hafsteinsson, “Pulses...”, 90; Byock, *Viking...*, 34-41.

⁴² Byock, *Viking...*, 35-39.

⁴³ Gavin Lucas, “Symbiotic architectures”, in *Multispecies...*, 106.

way intertwined — as if they compounded a sole unit⁴⁴. This is to say that even if humans designed and built these features, these were at the same time built by non-humans in the sense that their own properties and actions are fundamental for turf houses and earthworks to come to be. Humans and non-humans co-produced and co-habited⁴⁵ the architectural landscape. This leap breaks the divide between humans and non-humans and gives non-humans' agency⁴⁶ and inner properties back. Coming to terms with this notion is fundamental if we are to understand the deepest ontological meaning of these features. This would allow us to envision archaeology and architecture as a “building ecology”⁴⁷.

Scales of architectural analysis

Hence, how are we to understand the architecture of the Icelandic landscape? Through different scales of analysis. There is no change all the time, nor all changes are equally important⁴⁸. The key is to see different chains of ever-shifting actors with mutual, but unequal, interrelationships. This might contradict some scholars who envision this from the perspective of a flat ontology, as mine follows an explicit heterarchical approach. For instance, in processes or events of decay the importance of certain non-humans, whether animals or microbes, might be more important than humans; and perhaps the contrary applies to certain processes of occupation and “animacy” of turf houses — mainly a human-mediated habitat⁴⁹.

This heterarchical scale of analysis is seemingly more truthful because it does not impose a concrete order (of equality or inequality) for understanding architecture and landscapes. It rather allows for ever-new reconfigurations in a moving network. It might be said, in this sense, that heterarchical scales, as brought by HE, assert that not every change or event is equally important, not every individual of a species has the same say (capacity of change), not all species are equal all the time; but they all have agency and internal capacities. Such a notion has been exemplified through this analysis of the architecture of Iceland, made of fluid assemblages on disparate scales — from microorganism to humans, and the processes happening before, during and after the architectural form emerges⁵⁰.

Scales of (built) landscape analysis

This analysis recalls another aspect for understanding the landscape as a built environment. From a historical and archaeological point of view, not least than from architecture, landscapes should unite different scales of analysis. Human Ecodynamics compels us not

⁴⁴ Hence including Ingold's notion of atmosphere: Tim Ingold, “Lightning up the atmosphere”, in *Elements of...*

⁴⁵ Grétarsdóttir and Hafsteinsson, “Pulses...”, 90.

⁴⁶ As pursued by Lucas, “Symbiotic...”, 105.

⁴⁷ Lucas, “Symbiotic...”, 110-113, who gives another example of interrelationships within turf houses.

⁴⁸ As claimed by Harman, “On Behalf...”.

⁴⁹ With this heterarchical approach, I argue, we are in a good place for understanding architecture not just as animate, blurring hence the distinction between organic and inorganic as asked by Lucas “Symbiotic...”, 115.

⁵⁰ Bille and Flohr Sørensen, “Into...”; Lesley McFadyen, “Immanent architecture”, in *Elements of...*

to disconnect incoherently our gaze for understanding the built environment. There is an ontological connection between turf houses and earthworks which is also important for understanding the politics of building this architecture. Many of the historical processes which happened in Iceland during the Viking and Medieval periods cannot fully be understood without uniting both scales of analysis: what occurred within the limits of the turf house had a resemblance in the infields and outfields and vice versa. If we assume that turf houses and earthworks were interrelated parts of farms (small vs extensive scale), we will thus realise that both should be integrated into a coherent analysis of (built) Icelandic landscapes. I, therefore, hope this chapter expresses that understanding the Icelandic landscape can only be done by integrating both architectural scales.

A lesson for the present (and future)

In this chapter, I have tried to change our approach towards architecture. In so doing, I have used a vision based on Human Ecodynamics which places our attention to different tempos -almost as movement⁵¹- and acknowledges the interplay between humans and non-humans in the configuration and reconfiguration of architecture. These two fundamental notions are, nonetheless, rare to find in our present. This is not fortuitous and, arguably, goes in hand with the abandonment of this vernacular architecture. The Icelandic architecture, especially turf houses, has long been criticised within colonial narratives⁵² and recently considered an obstacle against neo-liberal modernity⁵³. As a consequence, in the last century turf houses have been abandoned as architectural projects and earthworks bulldozed. Once eradicated from contemporary memory, their ontological meaning — elements made of humans and non-humans upon processes of agreement, interdependency, etc. — is also fading away.

For this, I align with other authors⁵⁴ arguing that returning to these elements is vital in our present for resolving some critical issues. A human-decentred, vernacular, architectural approach can bring many benefits to our present and future precisely for its ontological meaning. No doubt, this demonstrates how architecture is political and worth fighting for.

⁵¹ Gavin Lucas, “Building lives”, in *Elements of...*, 117.

⁵² Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson, “‘Icelandic Putridity’: Colonial Thought and Icelandic Architectural Heritage”, *Scandinavian Studies* 92, no. 1-2 (2019): 53-63.

⁵³ Grétarsdóttir and Hafsteinsson, “Pulses...”, 97.

⁵⁴ Grétarsdóttir and Hafsteinsson, “Pulses...”.

El paisaje es hoy un tema crucial en el debate arquitectónico, urbanístico, artístico, territorial, político, ecológico y antropológico. En la pregunta sobre qué es un paisaje se entrecruzan muchas de las grandes cuestiones que tienen que ver con la construcción y con la percepción de nuestro entorno, en un momento determinado por una crisis global que convierte a la mirada sobre nuestro hábitat en un asunto marcado por la urgencia. La centralidad del paisaje en la cultura contemporánea es un fenómeno tan reconocido que ha dado lugar a elaboraciones teóricas específicas tendentes a dar cuenta del mismo. Está claro que hoy las cuestiones relacionadas con el paisaje, en su sentido más amplio, constituyen uno de los núcleos conceptuales en los que en mayor medida se entrecruzan naturaleza, cultura, historia y contemporaneidad.

La complejidad y variedad de temas que el paisaje convoca solo puede abordarse desde una mirada transversal y desde la complementariedad de diferentes saberes y disciplinas. Tal fue el objetivo que se propuso el Congreso Internacional *Arquitectura y paisaje: transferencias históricas, retos contemporáneos*, celebrado en Granada del 26 al 28 de enero de 2022, cuyas aportaciones se recogen en el presente volumen.



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