

Ouvrage issu du programme de recherche
« La représentation de l'architecture et du paysage urbain en tant que
méthode de lecture et de transcription conceptuelle des perceptions
visuelles urbaines liées au mouvement, à des fins de requalification »,
Versailles 2020-2023

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**Pier Paolo Pasolini and Reyner Banham:
gazes on the city with the movie camera**

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Pour citer cet article

BISTAGNINO Enrica, « Pier Paolo Pasolini and Reyner Banham: gazes on the city with the movie camera ». In : BISTAGNINO Enrica, FALCIDIENO Maria Linda, PIERLUISI Gabriele et VIATI NAVONE Annalisa (dir.), *Regard, mouvement, perception. Paysages urbains en mutation*. ENSA Versailles, 2024. Ouvrage issu du programme de recherche « La représentation de l'architecture et du paysage urbain en tant que méthode de lecture et de transcription conceptuelle des perceptions visuelles urbaines liées au mouvement, à des fins de requalification », (organisé entre 2020 et 2023), LéaV/ENSA Versailles, mis en ligne le 1^{er} juillet 2024, p. 132-140.

Pier Paolo Pasolini and Reyner Banham: gazes on the city with the movie camera*

Enrica Bistagnino

*This essay continues the critical reflection presented in the paper “Movimenti di immagini del paesaggio urbano in tre atti : oggetto, scena, simbolo” published in *Sguardi*, the special issue of the GUD-Genoa University Design magazine that’s the proceedings of the International Conference “Movimento e percezione. La rappresentazione del paesaggio urbano come motore del progetto” organized by LéaV (ENSA Versailles) – scientific responsible Gabriele Pierluisi – , in collaboration with Dipartimento Architettura e Design DAD (Scuola Politecnica, Università di Genova) scientific responsible Maria Linda Falcidieno – held on the Microsoft Teams Platform on 18 and 19 June 2021.

The theme of the urban landscape implies the idea of movement in such a variety of declinations as to be particularly elusive to definitions and taxonomy. In spite of this complexity, it seems in some way possible, or at least desirable, to try to hypothesize what might be some of the main variables that, individually, but above all in combination, trigger that astonishing system of image mutations that can be traced, from time to time, in an equally complex variety of reference scenarios.

Simplifying a lot, I am thinking of the ‘phenomenological’ sphere of the urban landscape where change takes place in the concrete transformations triggered by architecture; I am thinking of images mobility intrinsic to the dimension of perception, by its own nature susceptible to continuous changes in receiving and processing acquired informations; I am thinking, finally, of the inexhaustible figurations repertoire generated by representation, which, in a way, suggests a double order of change/movement: a movement inherent to the representational act in itself – which restores to the real something true and something ‘false’, that is, that extraneousness of the authorial gaze regarding the reality to which it refers, which, in fact, introduces a change

in its image –, a movement determined by the representation understood as a projectual vision capable of intentionally modifying space in order to determine it.

In light of this complexity, the main objective of this classificatory work is to outline, albeit without any claim to completeness, a framework of thematic references on some of the main meanings and reasons for the image movement of the urban landscape.

Finally, it should be pointed out that in this essay, as in the one preceding it, the expressions movement and change are used as synonyms. However, in relation to the specificity of the context, they can take nuances of meaning, specifying, in their turn, the content to which they refer.

Given this premise, and recalling the three main dominions of the movement/change of the urban landscape image – those relating to the movement of the object, of the point of view, of the medium of representation¹ – I would like, here, to consider the movement relating to the point of view. A movement in which the subject, integrating its own knowledge – in particular that relating to theories on the image – with the fundamental repertoire of experiences determined by the direct fruition of places, is the motor of different visions. The interest of the essay focuses, therefore, on the observer considered in an active dimension, as author of visual practices, creator of images of the urban landscape defining its identity. Indeed, ‘every landscape exists only for the gaze that discovers it. [...] Landscape is the result of a conscious perception, a judgement and finally a description. Landscape is the space described by a man to other men’ (Augé, 2002/2004, p. 72).

In particular, to exemplify this reflection, I examine two authorial visions, developed in the second half of the last century, in which, of course, traces of the respective cultural scenarios are visible.

The authors are Pier Paolo Pasolini and Reyner Banham; the products analysed are the audiovisuals “Pasolini e... la forma della città” and “Reyner Banham loves Los Angeles”. The aim is to read and compare images of the two authors as the result of the mediation between different sensitivities and traditions on the idea of city representation and of course, with respect to the physiognomy of the concrete city. In the cases under examination: the historical Italian city and the contemporary American megalopolis.

Due to the communicative value of the two audiovisuals, which we could define as documentary, and due to the technical-expressive characteristics intrinsic to the dynamic forms of representation, the analysis will also refer, interpreting them visually, to some central themes of the communication models elaborated in linguistics and to the analysis methodologies of the dynamic image.

Let us start, therefore, with a clarification: the two movies, distant in many respects, seem to have, however, some interesting points of contact.

They are representations, aimed at the observation and restitution of reality, made within television series. “Pasolini e... la forma della città”, is an episode of “io e...”, a programme by Anna Zanoli for RAI, shown weekly from 1972 to 1974, aimed at exploring themes related to beauty; “R.B. loves Los Angeles” belongs to the series “One Pair Of Eyes”, by BBC TWO then directed by David Attenborough. A programme aired monthly from 1967 to 1984, aimed at exploring a broad spectrum of issues with aesthetic, ethical, political values.

Despite the fact that the two audiovisuals belong to television programming, a fact which generally entails implications in terms of communication due to the co-presence, albeit with different weights, of several forms of authorship – the television editor, the series creator, the episode author and the director – the visions of Pasolini and Banham seem to be central.

Communication tools, techniques and codes are dealt with in order to develop functional languages for the transmission of messages that well express the intellectual profile of those who handle them.

Thus, Pier Paolo Pasolini, with the static framing of the camera positioned frontally with respect to the town of Orte, echoes the fixity perspective formulated in the treatises of the Italian Renaissance, evoking, in this way, that harmonic and controlled vision of space that is the vector of absolute beauty (*fig. 1*).

These are shots in which Pasolini seems to be ‘listening’ to the place, to its formal connotations. And indeed, the city (Orte) contributes in imprinting its form to the form of the product that represents it. In other words, an active intertextuality takes place between the object and its image, between the context and the way of looking (Focillon, 1943/1987). Thus, the very fixity of the framing, which somehow sacrifices the mobility potential intrinsic to

the medium of representation, seems to be the starting point of an effective demonstrative process aimed at conducting a passionate critique of the building development enacted in post-war Italy. This reflection is implemented when Pasolini includes elements of disruption of the city’s composure in the image. The author himself speaks about describing the ‘view’ of Orte: “[...] I made a shot that first showed the town of Orte in its stylistic perfection as an absolute perfect form; all I have to do is move this thing here in the camera and the form of the town, the profile of the town, the architectural mass of the town is cracked, it is ruined, it is disfigured by something extraneous, there is that house that you can see there on the left, can you see it? [...] We are now facing Orte from another point of view. There is the usual blue-brown mist of the great northern Renaissance painting. If I frame it, I see an even more perfect total than before. That is to say, the shape of the city is at its most perfect. But if I pan from left to right, what I was telling you before becomes even more severe. In fact the city, from our point of view on the far right, ends with a beautiful aqueduct on that brown ground. And immediately attached to the aqueduct are other modern houses, not to say horrible-looking, but extremely mediocre,



1. Screenshot from the work *Pasolini e... la forma della città*, 1974. Screenplay: Pier Paolo Pasolini. Director: Paolo Brunatto (1974). Television series episode “io e...”, curator Anna Zanoli, RAI production.

poor, unimaginative; houses which are absolutely necessary, I'm not saying no, but there they are another disturbing element in the perfection of the form of the city of Orte, like the house we saw earlier" (Pasolini, 1974).

An indictment of contemporaneity, sustained through the representation of the state of places, taking shape and intensity through the essentiality of the shots.

An accusation also expressed using images of further examples of landscape and architecture degradation – such as Yazd in Persia, Al Mukalla in the state of Aden, Sana'a in North Yemen, Bhatgaon in Nepal –, proposed in a kind of ideological montage. "[...] do you remember (of Sana'a) that beautiful city in northern Yemen, perched on the desert like a kind of rustic Venice that they are already destroying. They have already practically finished destroying all the walls that surrounded it [...] the monuments remain, but it is not the monuments that are at stake, those are easy to save, it is the whole city that is difficult to save. So this is a problem that arises in every country all over the world, but of course what upsets and hurts me most is that it happens in Italy" (Pasolini, 1974).

On the whole, Pasolini, without rhetoric, through a succession of shots fundamentally devoid of dynamic tension, declares his interest in the past, an anonymous, nameless, humble past "that no one defends, that is the work of the people [...]" (Pasolini, 1974), a past that belongs to him. "I am a force of the past / only in Tradition is my love / I come from ruins, from churches, / from altarpieces, from villages / abandoned on the Apennines or the Pre-Alps, / where brothers have lived / [...]" (Pasolini, 1964).

In this 'neorealist' vision, the very choice of Orte is in some way symbolic: a place, one among many in our country, that alludes to a variety of peripheral and 'dialectal' contexts expressive of the unitary and multiple beauty of Italian architecture.

And it is precisely this collective and widespread beauty that Pasolini wants to protect "with the same ardour, with the same goodwill, with the same rigour with which one defends a work of art by a great author. [...] to defend something that is not sanctioned, that is not codified [...], that is the work [...] of an infinity of nameless men who nonetheless worked within an epoch that then produced the most extreme, most absolute fruits in works of authorial art" (Pasolini, 1974).

The 'discourse' directed at the spectator, which is also implemented through the filmic medium of Ninetto Davoli, takes shape thanks to several interacting linguistic planes. First of all in the spoken language: in some passages Pasolini, resorting to the fatigue and conative function of language, maintains contact with the viewer and urges him to follow the author's point of view: "There is that house you can see there on the left, do you see it? [...] that's also almost nothing, see?" (Pasolini, 1974). Fundamental, then, are the numerous gaze links between the different shots, which accompany the viewer's eyes to follow the author's point of view. Finally, equally significant is the sharing of the 'actor's' movement enacted through subjective shots that favour identification with Pasolini's gaze. This set of linguistic elements gives depth to Pasolini's discourse and develops a climax culminating in the dystopian vision with which the documentary closes. After showing the structure, the form, the profile of another city, Sabaudia – a city with a metaphysical and at the same time realistic character, escaped the homologation of fascism, but not that of the 'power of consumer activities' (Pasolini, 1974) –, on the dunes of the coastline, immersed in an intense landscape, grey and windy, Pasolini dramatically notes that "this thing happened so quickly that we did not realise it. It has all happened in the last five, six, seven, ten years. It has been a kind of nightmare in which we have seen Italy around us destroy itself and disappear. Now, perhaps waking up from this nightmare and looking around, we realise that there is nothing left to do" (Pasolini, 1974). On the whole, it can be noted how the film's strongly critical valence, expressed through a dry visual and verbal language, echoes Pasolini's writer's gaze, further attesting to the transversal influence between the author's theoretical-cultural vision and the different expressive media. The audiovisual representation on Orte can in fact be considered "[...] the filmic counterpart of one of the Scritti corsari, a short cinematic pamphlet [...]" (Chiesi, 1998).

English architectural historian and design-sensitive, student of Nikolaus Pevsner, Reyner Banham about his approach to reading Los Angeles writes: "Like previous generations of English intellectuals who learnt Italian to read Dante in the original, I learnt to drive to read Los Angeles in the original" (Banham, 1971/2001).

In Reyner Banham's vision, in fact, the language of the Californian metropolis, of its architecture and urban planning is the language of movement; Los Angeles is the place where mobility far exceeds monumentality, the iconic symbolism of its architectural works and identity signs to the point that it cannot be understood except through fluid movement through its diffuse urban texture (Banham, 1971/2001).

In fact, the residences of Frank Lloyd Wright, Richard Neutra and Pierre Francis Koenig, the Watts Towers, the Hollywood sign, and the visual apparatus of Disneyland do not seem to constitute powerful urban landmarks as much as the complex dynamism of the image of Los Angeles, which Mike Davis, years later, would represent with the effective metaphor "city of quartz" (Davis, 1991/2008).

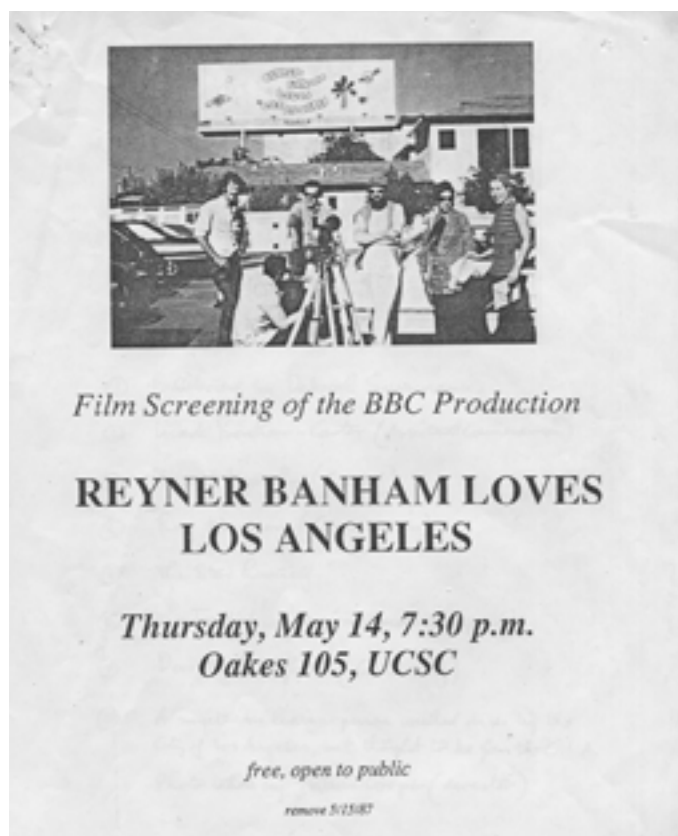
It is in this general perspective that Banham designs his reading of Los Angeles; a reading marked by a crossing of situationist memory and practised through multiple orders of mobility: the mobility of the gaze, the mobility of the means of transport, the mobility of the city's recording device.

Eye, car and camera are the three mediums that enhance the dynamic perception functional to understanding urban dynamics. Thanks to this

extreme mobility, the focus moves between the multiple connotative themes of Los Angeles: the architecture, the widespread pop culture – the hot-dog stands, the tourist attractions –, the highway infrastructure, etc.

Conceived together with Julian Cooper, as early as 1968, while working on a radio programme for the BBC, the film on Los Angeles was proposed to the same broadcaster a few years later with the suggestion that it be included in the series "One pair of eyes". The success of the proposal was determined, as Banham himself recalls, by the publication of his book "Los Angeles: the Architecture of Four Ecologies" the year before. "That changed everything, because a) there was a book about LA so it had to be a serious subject, and b) I was now the author of a book about a serious subject, and must therefore be a serious author" (Banham, 1987) (fig. 2).

Banham's exploration is fuelled by an enthusiastic approach that characterises the film in both its visual and sound components, and which, moreover, is already explicitly stated in the title "Reyner Banham loves Los Angeles". A title devised "quick as a flash" (Banham, 1987) when Deborah Sussmann², responsible for the locally produced graphics for the programme, asked him what he should paint on the billboard along Little Santa Monica Boulevard.



- ① Billboard by Deborah Sussmann
- ② Mark Banham-Carter (Assistant Cameraman)
- ③ "Spot" Murphy (Sound)
- ④ Roy Hansen (Cameraman)
- ⑤ The Star himself
- ⑥ The Ford (Country Ford Motor Company)
- ⑦ Dorothy Stamford (Continuity)
- ⑧ A mysterious liaison person, wished on us by the City of Los Angeles, but thought to be from the C.I.A.
Photo taken by Julian Cooper (director)

2. Notes on: Reyner Banham loves Los Angeles, Cover and internal page of the screening announcement of the work by Reyner Banham *Reyner Banham loves Los Angeles*, 1987, UCSC.

Unlike Pasolini, an 'internal narrator' who, by placing himself in a different dimension to the receiver of his communication (the viewers of the programme "Io e..."), enacts a sort of 'top-down' educational process, Banham assumes the gaze that could be that of a 'tourist', putting himself on a par with his diegetic interlocutors and, therefore, with the viewers.

Landed in Los Angeles, he rents a car equipped with a "Baede-Kar" registered guide device, an original gimmick reminiscent of Karl Baedeker's³ (*fig. 3*) city guides, to embark on his discovery of the city. In the filmic simulation, Banham seems to interact on an equal level with the programme's viewers, whose attention he often solicits by looking in video camera. The fluid speech, alternating with the different sound expressions of the interviewed characters, the voice recording of the audio-guide, musical sections and ambient sounds creates a rhythm that well accompanies, and further fuels, the mobility of the vision.

With Cooper's directorial contribution, Banham seeks to maximise the movement intrinsic to the medium of recording reality, accelerating and multiplying its mobility through the speed and dynamism of the car on which the filming equipment is mounted.

Images caught through the windscreen or reflected on the rearview mirror, in general delimited by the interface of the vehicle that makes movement possible, seem paradigmatic of the mobility project implemented to embrace and understand, through representation, the continuous becoming of the complex urban articulation.

In this cognitive process, the car is, therefore, an integral part of the recording device. It is a kind of fundamental 'helper' to 'compress time' and 'extend the gaze' in order to facilitate the systematisation of the multiplicity of themes, even opposing ones, that characterise Los Angeles: past and present, fixity and movement, 'high culture' and 'low culture' and much more (*fig. 4*).

Thus, the shots follow one another rapidly, creating a rhythm that enhances movement and highlights the contrasts of the urban scenery. Fast driving passages on motorways and urban streets, also recorded with aerial shots that capture the succession of shapes and the vastness of the territory (*fig. 5*), alternate with phases of walking and stops at iconic architectures such as the Gamble House, the Eames House, but also the Griffith Observatory and much more.

The editing junctions are frequently based on speech that directs attention towards specific elements of interest; at other times there are gaze junctions that serve to lead the viewer to assume the same point of view as Banham; Then there are directional links, such as those that allow us to follow the car as it drives along motorways, and axis links, such as, for example, in the transition from the shot of the city through the subjective view through the observatory's telescope and the subsequent close-up image of a skyscraper, a link that allows a space-time jump by switching between two narrative sequences.

In the variety of shots, Banham is present in different ways. Behind the camera, with a directorial function, or in front, often looking into the camera to reinforce moments of direct interlocution with the viewer, or with an active role in relating to other characters in the scene, such as, for example, the artist Vasa, the guard at Rolling Hill, the young people engaged in physical activity 'on the road', or those at the Drive in.

Generally, the author's body is an active body, inside the representation of the city, a moving body, sometimes with the camera, which, in certain sequences, seems to actualise Dziga Vertov's cinematographer in "The Man with the Camera" (1929).

The dynamic value of the city is then further emphasised by the frequent representations of the means of transport filmed in motion, using aerial views, tracking shots to follow/precede the movement of the vehicle, and in some cases, with images of the interiors of the passenger compartments.

If the city spaces are in continuous transformation, defining fluid, open configurations, antagonistic to the idea of delimitation and formal stability, then not only will their perception be dynamic, but also the way of inhabiting them, as the musician recalls in a shot showing him inside the passenger compartment of his van while playing the piano (*fig. 6*).

Banham thus visualises what he theorised in *Autopia* (Banham, 1971/2001): the motorway is no longer just an infrastructural organisation and the car is not just a means of transport, they are the main icons of the city, places for experiencing urban space.

The idea of urban space as a place of relationships, events, actions is reaffirmed. Los Angeles appears as a city where architecture dialogues with the world of design, products, merchandise, and advertising images.



3. Screenshot from the work *Reyner Banham loves Los Angeles*, 1972. Opening sequence screenplay: Reyner Banham. Director: Julian Cooper. Television series episode “*One pair of eyes*” production BBC TWO.



4. Screenshot from the work *Reyner Banham loves Los Angeles*, 1972. Sequence that highlights a multiplicity of themes and perspectives. Screenplay: Reyner Banham. Director: Julian Cooper. Television series episode “*One pair of eyes*” production BBC TWO.



5. Screenshot from the work *Reyner Banham loves Los Angeles*, 1972. Central sequence centrale related to representing the movement topic. Screenplay: Reyner Banham. Director: Julian Cooper. Television series episode “*One pair of eyes*” production BBC TWO.



6. Screenshot from the work *Reyner Banham loves Los Angeles*, 1972. Sequence representing the contact with the city: view of the city from the Griffith Observatory, bus tour, visit to Gamble House and Eames House, meetings in the street, visit to the artist Vasa, surfing, the van as a means of transport and place to live. Screenplay: Reyner Banham. Director: Julian Cooper. Television series episode “*One pair of eyes*” production BBC TWO.

All of these, thanks in part to the re-signification brought about by pop art, become 'respectable' interpreters of a profound cultural renewal. In this sense, the markets, the hot dog stands, the commercial signs, the surfboards are elements that, like the architecture and road infrastructure, contribute to constitute a dynamic, limitless and formless city.

Los Angeles is thus the model of a new city without a centre that seems to annul the very idea of the city as it was understood until the beginning of the last century. A restless agglomeration, where the real monuments are the streets, the neon lights, the residual areas and what will continue to emerge in its stubborn flow.

Conclusions

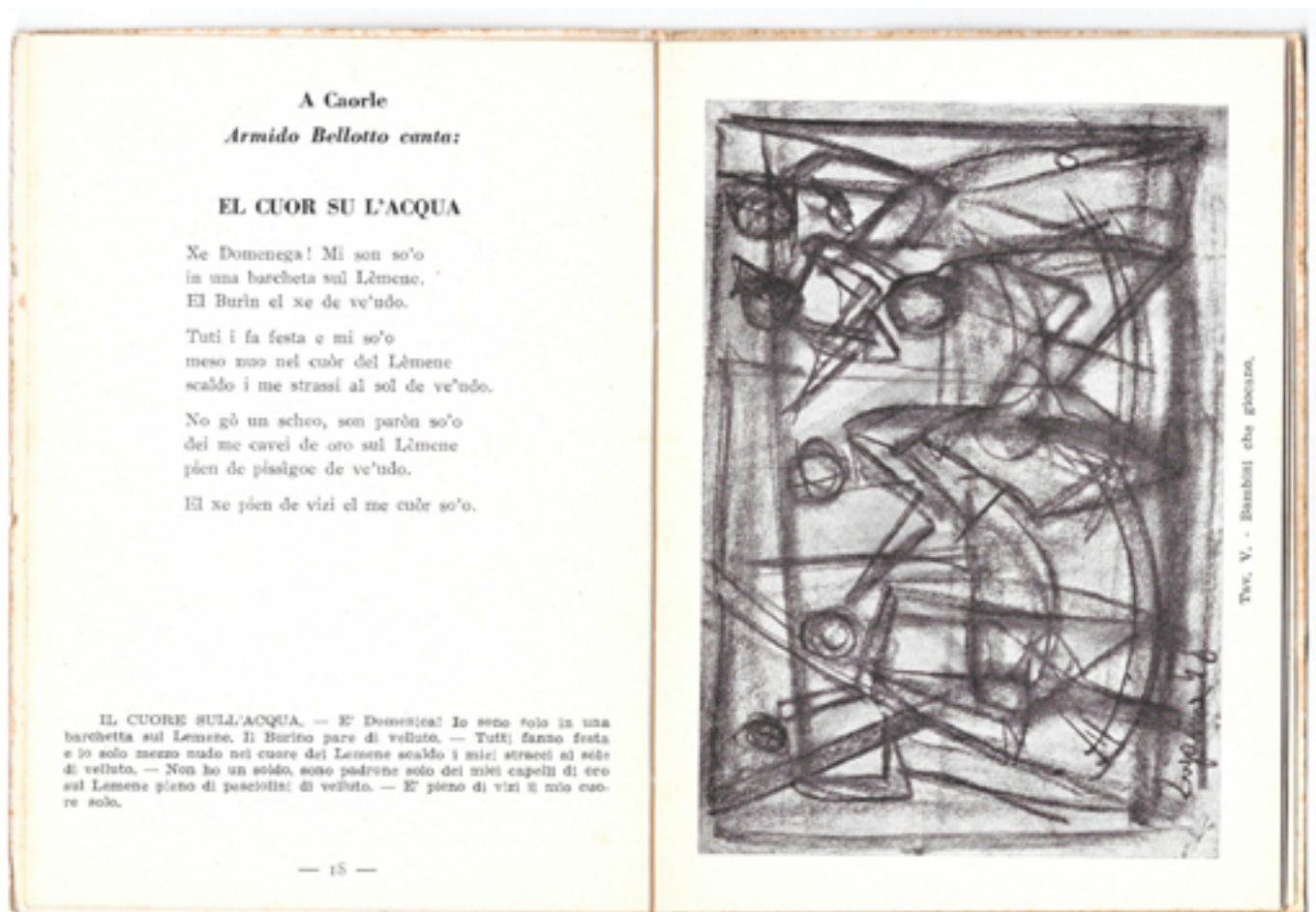
Fixity / mobility; form / agglomeration; past / future; vernacular / pop; architecture / design; sedentariness / nomadism; *italianità* / 'otherness' are just some of the oppositional pairs that can be found in the audiovisuals proposed by Pasolini and Banham. These themes reflect the cultural diversity of

the authors in thinking and representing the city at a crucial time, in a phase in which the city is taking on new meanings and physiognomies.

The knowledge and respect of a territory dense with widespread, vernacular and 'popular' beauty, that of the many mediaeval historical centres, is at the centre of Pasolini's audiovisual work. Between civic passion, a nostalgic glance towards the past and pessimism towards the future, Pasolini affirms the need to protect and enhance those minor territorial realities, towards which he also developed a family relationship during his long youthful stay in Casarza della Delizia (1942-1950).

This view is interpreted in static images that, time after time, fix attention on the beauty of the historic city, on its absolute form in harmony with the natural context, but also they show the desecration of the urban landscape enacted by irresponsibly managed building growth.

Pasolini's images are slow and captivating: the observer has to watch. They present evidence of both beauty and its violation allowing the audience to witness it.



7. Pages from the plaquette *Dov'è la mia patria* by Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1949. Pasolini's poems with drawings by painter Giuseppe Zigaina, published by Academiuta di Lenga Furlana, Arti Grafiche Fratelli Cosarini, Pordenone.

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Exaltation of speed, brevity, and constant change are just some of the themes that can be found in Banham's audiovisual. The exploded city, based on the idea of the road and the automobile, where architecture and motorway infrastructure border each other with 'naturalness', where everything seems to be constantly changing, where everything frays, can only be interpreted through a mobile gaze. There is no centre in the city, just as there is no centre in the audiovisual. Everything is movement further enhanced by the mobility of the car. Thus, the avid gaze of visions composes a dense stratigraphy of images that seems to evoke the beautiful rhythm of representations realised a few decades earlier in the filming from the train in "Berlin. Symphony of a Great City"⁴ (fig. 7)⁵.

Key-words

Urban landscape, Dynamic image, Point of view, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Reyner Banham.

Notes

1. The reference to these connotations of the landscape's images movement was introduced by the writer in the paper presented for the international conference "Movimento e percezione. La rappresentazione del paesaggio urbano come motore del progetto", ENSA Versailles, 2021. In particular, in that context, an initial reflection on the declinations of change in relation to the object was proposed. See E. Bistagnino, "Movimenti di immagini del paesaggio urbano in tre atti: oggetto, scena, simbolo", in *Sguardi*, Special issue of the GUD magazine, April 2021.

2. Deborah Sussman is the graphic designer who, thirteen years later (1984), created the visual identity of the Los Angeles Olympics.

3. The name of the audio guide service available in the car rented from Banham recalls the name of Karl Baedeker, author, around the mid-nineteenth century, of tourist guides characterized by exceptional cartographic care, good handling and clarity of information.

4. "Berlin. Symphony of a Great City" is Walter Ruttmann's film (1927) where a convoy headed to Berlin offers, through its speed, rapid landscape shots that deprive the image of its referential relationships with the real data.

5. Au sujet de la figure 7 : Two fundamental themes emerge: Pasolini's interest in the cooperation between word and image, extensively experimented in many subsequent projects, including the audiovisual *Pasolini e... la forma della città* the attention developed towards local during his staying in Casarsa. Cfr. Bistagnino, Enrica, 2022. Pier Paolo Pasolini e Giuseppe Zigaina, testi e immagini per la plaquette "Dov'è la mia Patria". In Battini, C., Bistagnino, E. (cur.). *Dialoghi. Visioni e visualità*. Milan : FrancoAngeli, p. 1295-1310.

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