

Italian Intellectuals in Persia

The Utopia of the Historical Landscape and the Critical Conscience of a Generation

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Abstract: Starting from a documentary by Pier Paolo Pasolini proposing a comparison between Orte and Yazd regarding the barbarism of building speculation and the destruction of the historical landscape, the essay recomposes a cultural story, within and outside the Italian borders, and links authors who belong to the same cultural generation, born within the first two decades of the 20th century, looking at the historic city as a complex landscape to inspire and learn from for the construction of the future city.

Keywords: Pasolini-Quaroni, Orte-Orvieto-Yazd, landscape urbanism, historical centers.

Pasolini-Orte-Yazd

References to historical Persian cities are not uncommon in the works of Pier Paolo Pasolini. In the collection *Scritti Corsari*, the author describes Isfahan as one of the most beautiful cities in the world, around which a “new, modern, and ugly” city was born². In his short 1973 film called “*La forma della città*”, after having analyzed the town Orte, documenting the ravaged landscape, and denouncing the urban speculation and absence of controls that have thwarted the preservation of the historical landscape harmoniously erected on the hills, Pasolini touches on the risk of destruction of the city of Yazd.

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2. PASOLINI 1973: «It was 1972. I was, that September, in the town of Isfahan, in the heart of Persia. An underdeveloped country, as it is horribly referred to, fully launched. On the Isfahan of ten years ago – one of the most beautiful cities of the world, or perhaps, who knows, the most beautiful – a new Isfahan was born, modern and horrible. But along its streets, at work, or strolling, towards evening, one sees the young boys that one would have seen in Italy a decade ago: humble and dignified sons, with their beautiful heads, their beautiful pure faces under the innocent locks».

«The topic I chose was a city, the city of Orte, ... I practically chose as my them, “The form of a city... the profile of a city” [...] my first shot showed the city of Orte in its stylistic perfection, as an absolute perfect form, I just have to move this thing [zoom out] on the camera and there the contour of the city is defaced by something extraneous... There is that house that one sees, there on the left, this is a problem... often I filmed in Morocco, in Persia, in Eritrea and I had the problem of how to shoot a scene in which one can see the city as a whole, in its completeness. How often have you seen me upset because this purity of a city was ruined by something modern, by some foreign body that had nothing to do with the skyline of a city that I had chosen [...] a crack in its form and style... this I feel deeply... this at this point is no longer an Italian defect, but of the whole world... especially in the Third World... for example in Persia, with a completely different form of rule from ours, there is a kind of emperor, the Shah, the same things happen, maybe even worse. For example, I think of a magnificent city called Yazd on the Persian Gulf, near the desert, a marvelous city because... all the cities... had an ancient system of ventilation... of two or three thousand years ago that had remained intact... columns that gathered the wind and directed it into the city. Thus the panorama was dominated by this sort of fan that resembled small Greek or Archaic or Egyptian temples, that is, in short, something stupendous. When I arrived, the city had been destroyed, as if it had been bombed. The Shah had it destroyed to show his subjects, his people that Persia was a modern country, that was moving forward, etc. But this is something that also happens in countries whose regime is the opposite of the one in Persia...».³

In his monologue, Pasolini analyzes Orte's features, examining the town's formal qualities as if they were a script or storyline, using words such as “purity”, “foreign body”, “style”, “form”, “cracks” [“fissures”], and “reasoning”. The tone of the monologue is that of a practical workshop: the camera substituting the textbook. The writer comments while framing the shots with a camera while another cameraman films him. In the scenes of the documentary are made explicit what Bernardo Bertolucci wrote about Pasolini: «Day by day, as he shot his first film [Accattone], Pasolini found himself inventing cinema, with the restless energy and naturalness of someone who finds he has a new means of expression in his hands and just has to take complete control of it, erasing its history and giving it new origins».⁴

About four minutes into the film, the Friulian poet-director then begins a comparative reasoning: the problem observed in Orte is not

3. PASOLINI 1973 doc.

4. BERTOLUCCI 2001.

only an Italian shortcoming, but concerns all those sites in which the problem is posed of giving *physical form* to modern urban settlements, their transformation, the new city outside of the historical center, or the transformations within the historical center. Yazd and Orte have amazing features, to paraphrase Pasolini, defaced by the urban expansion, the realization of structural artifacts built in recent periods and juxtaposed or superimposed on the outline of the historical sites, elements alien to the *composition* of an anthropized landscape conceived and realized as a unit or consequentially. The problem of the growth of a settlement in the modern era is manifestly a problem of urban architecture, above all because the more recent building construction techniques differ from the traditional ones. (Fig. 1). But it is a problem that sees significant precedents, especially, regarding demographic and economic issues, in an important tradition of dating back various centuries, as exemplified by the 1558 study of Giovanni Botero on the causes of the size of cities⁵ who tackles the question in a way we could consider ‘scientific’.

In many Italian cities, the construction of modern neighborhoods [districts] (once considered suburbia) took place by connecting the historical city to the new settlements to *bordering urban spaces* built *beyond the walls or city limits*. Examples are the suburban quarters realized outside of Rome the first two decades of the 20th century – of these the neighborhoods built by the Istituto Case Popolari stand out in particular for their formal and typological quality – not unlike the modern city of Yazd with less enthusiastic results: “new, modern, and horrible”, to paraphrase Pasolini’s description. The connecting sites of the various Roman urban patterns, beginning with the access gates along the Aurelian walls, were conceived on the one hand by imposing urban scenography [designs] conforming to those of a Baroque 18th century city (consider the interventions by Aschieri, Bruner, De Renzi, Limongelli, Marconi, Palmerini, Sabbatini, Wittinch, etc.) and on the other defining morphological scheme and typological configurations differing from those in use the previous centuries, especially regarding the various housing styles starting, however, from the continuity of urban spatial and perceptual conditions (materials, colors, decor). The

5. BOTERO 2017 (1588).

1909 Roman Piano Regolatore Generale (general urban development plan) clearly expresses how the modern city is to be grafted on the preexisting one, which is substantially the town as represented in the map, Mappa del Nolli (Fig. 2). We are speaking about the quarters starting from Porta Pinciana, Porta del Popolo, Porta Maggiore, Flaminio I-II, Appio II, Porta and San Pancrazio – Monteverde is where Pasolini lived after having resided near Rebibbia and Ponte Mammolo and in the Jewish Ghetto – and since his arrival in Rome got to know as a *citizen* of the Capital. Even though the objects of the artist-anthropologist's major interest, as is evident from *Ragazzi di Vita* were the borgate (working-class suburbs), far from the Aurelian walls, but reached by the Tiber or the Aniene – that is by a territorial system of variable landscapes within a continuous spatial and ecological riverbed. Even other contemporary authors cited by Pasolini, such as Sandro Penna, portray the city, in particular its first modern suburbs, attributing positive values representative of new standards of quality to it: «The cities ended with large roads, surrounded by houses, townhouses or large public tenements with their “dear horrible colors” in the dense countryside: just beyond the end of the line of trams or buses began the expanses of grain, the canals with the rows of poplars or elderberries, or the useless wonderful shrubs of acacia and blackberries. The towns still maintained their forms intact, whether on green plateaus, or on the summit of ancient hills, or this side or that of creeks».⁶

Getting back to Orte, it should be noted that, in his 1973 documentary, Pasolini shows no images of Yazd, but only describes it and rather shows some images of Yemen (*another Quaronian site*). The Persia that Pasolini visited was that of before the 1978-79 events but is certainly not the Persia documented in *Passenger to Tehran*⁷, a report of the 1926-27 trip, which contains also photos and postcards (Fig. 3) illustrating landscapes and monuments that rose above the traditionally built sandy settlements, still untouched by modernity, that squarely faced the surrounding or far distant mountains in the background. The problems that Pasolini identified in the city of Yazd

6. PENNA 1973.

7. SACKVILLE-WEST 1926.

– comparing it to the case of Orte – had to do with the alterations of the material city, a direct consequence of the dysfunctionality of the social and political city. In a brief essay, Giulio Sapelli treats the theme of *modernization without development*⁸ in a Pasolinian key, describing the poet as a “utopic socialist thinker” rather than a “Marxist” because «of the Marxists, he does not possess the crucial element: faith in social progress. He is an entirely original thinker, that through his work bears witness to the decadence of society».

There is furthermore the question of citizenship, looking at the city and archaic civilizations, as Max Weber explains in analyzing the identifying and administrative aspects of the settlements: «[in the East] however a civic right of the city did not exist in the sense used in antiquity and the Middle Ages and of the city the true and proper corporative character [...] Nevertheless, right here, on the shores of the Mediterranean and the banks of the Euphrates, we find for the first time true analogies with the ancient ‘polis’ comparably the phase of development which Rome was at during the time the Gens Claudia were admitted. It is always a patrician citizen who dominates [rules] [...]».⁹ The decadence of a society is directly reflected in the environment in which it resides, whether in the city or the countryside. We could cite many examples that successfully illustrate sites that reflect characteristics of *utopia* and *reality* in the ‘anthropized countryside’; consider the fresco “Allegory of Good Government” by Lorenzetti (1338-39) in Siena’s the Palazzo Pubblico or the architectures, even now occupied, of the Royal Crescent by John Wood in Bath. The most relevant expression of urban culture in Italy was created by the Signorie in the Renaissance and before that in the Italian Medieval communes, while in Iran, we may agree that it was the urban architecture realized by the Safavid dynasty.

These observations bring us back to some conceptual passages expressed by Ludovico Quaroni in his *Il progetto per la città. Dieci Lezioni*¹⁰, in particular the page in which the Roman maestro uses the

8. SAPELLI 2005.

9. WEBER 2014, (p. 23 e p. 27 in “Carattere associativo della ‘comunità’ civica e statuto del ‘cittadino’. Mancanza di ambedue i concetti in Oriente”. Die Stadt (1911-14).

10. Quaroni 1996, p. 91

following brief titles for some paragraphs which, read sequentially, reenforce the comprehension of those themes which we are here trying to investigate: “In the relationship emergence-fabric the compositional energy of the medieval city and early Renaissance”, “Simplicity [naturalness] in the planimetric and altimetric disposition of building [construction] volumes.”, “Construction following a natural system does not need a Plan”. The historical landscape, therefore, represents the utopistic aspiration to preserve a certain tradition, in which one *artistic role of urban planning*, that is the Germanic tradition according to Camillo Sitte and Bruno Taut’s *Stadtkorne* is more evident than that of Ludwig Hilberseimer’s *Rational city* according to the most common historiographic interpretations not without simplifications¹¹. That is, the tradition that looks upon the classical world as if it were paradise lost or the Golden Age; «utopian scenarios are invoked in specific, historical situations. The associations which they assemble, as well as the functions which they might fulfill, are not conditioned by an appeal to a universalized Golden Age. Landscapes are bearers of morally loaded meaning, of political messages; utopian landscapes slip easily into ambiguity and parody: they negotiate a yearning for and suspicion of the ideal. But most of all, in literary, geographical, artistic, and horticultural media, they demonstrate a desire to organize and circumscribe the natural world, to delineate a potentially perfect future, and to provide a space for analyzing the uncertainties entailed by paradise».¹²

Alfonso Berardinelli, thus, recalling the idea of the historical landscape as a «particular ‘eternity’, sacred and mythical, of the landscape, the Italian social world which he had elaborated in his work, [and which Sandro Penna in *Un po’ di febbre* describes as follows] brings to mind the thoughts of some of Pasolini’s contemporary authors: «what a marvelous world was Italy during the time of Fascism and immediately following! Life was as we had known it as children, and for thirty years it had not changed [...] in this spare geometric intellectualism that destructively expresses his angst for the loss of his object of love and for the modern desacralization of all of reality».¹³

11. BARBERA 2016.

12. EVANS 2003.

13. PASOLINI 1973, p. 12 e p. 150.

In Italian culture, even the Renaissance represents the golden age or in a Hegelian manner *the spirit of the world*, and many Italian intellectuals are unable to participate [partake] of its reflections in the subsequent eras, as, for example, for the Novecento movement invented by Margherita Sarfatti and animated by a group of artists that in Milan renew the magnificence of the 15th century: «On the one hand Pasolini is unmistakably Italian, immersed in the heart of our highest literary and figurative tradition, bound inextricably to our landscape and our language, I would say an “Italian [vision] of reality, manifesting itself above all with the Renaissance, composed of sensuality and spirituality, of mysticism and adherence to the present, of oblivious happiness and a resistance to change [...] On the other hand, his obstinate and “Lutheran” search for truth, his disdain for the mask, his existential extremism cannot but appear to us as an anti-Italian».¹⁴

Quaroni-Orvieto-Esfahan

But there is a partial analogy that this brief study intends to highlight. In the tome *L'architettura delle città* (1939), Ludovico Quaroni introduce the work with a geographical description of the territory encircling Orvieto (1939), comparable to that elaborated by Pasolini for Orte (1973)¹⁵: both begin with a description of the city set in the encompassing territory, within a wider geographic scale.

«To whoever descends for the first time through the Faliscan uplands towards the Paglia valley there appears, inundated by the sky and the sun, the image of Orvieto, compact, on a rock that emerged from the earth, a gemmation of the rock itself. The houses of gilded tuff, from the gilded tuff are born inasmuch as one recognizes the base; the roofs, for wondrous providence of the weather, have assumed the same color, and jostle, wavelike immobile throng, around the cause and the purpose of the city; the Duomo, the cathedral. Joy is the joy of discovery.

14. LA PORTA 2012, p. 70.

15. Quaroni was born in 1911 e Pasolini in 1922: a decade apart they are two Italains, emigrants and sons of emigrants for whom Rome is the city of birth or choice.

The spectator, even if for many long years had accompanied the monument in the history books and in images, will have the feeling of finding themselves before something completely new to them, far removed from the idea they had of it: the spectator 'has discovered' the city.

Orvieto was built for the Duomo and the Duomo for Orvieto.

The immense momentum of the spires [steeple] and the gables, light and soaring in the golden and forced decorativeness of the colored tiles is calculated for the course, stifling staidness of the houses unvarying blocks of tuff. The rock that rises, everted by the opaline green of the Umbrian plains resembles a platter for the offering of the golden jewel the earth presents to the sky. now imagine, you who know the city, Orvieto deprived of its Duomo, or perhaps, the Duomo transported to the deserted countryside or an Alpine valley, in a forest or the seashore: even were the structures kept intact, the finishings, the color of the moment, the Duomo will no longer be itself. An architectural work exists only as a function of its environment. The work of art, for itself, only has life while in the study, abstractedly, as material produced only by the work of man». ¹⁶

The experimentation of the language, the experience of the *physical* and of the *social* city are the ciphers that intellectuals of Pasolini's (born of 1922) and Quaroni's (born of 1911) generation share, in continuity with the generations of Giovanni Pascoli (born 1855) and Mario De Renzi (born 1895) – the parallels are not random and they have been on more occasions highlighted by Lucio Barbera. Nevertheless, it is clear to many that the critical conscience cultivated by this generation, though enticing and fascinating for their disciples and followers, did not always have the shared cultural objectives especially by the generations that fully participated in the period of 1968.

«Pasolini, one of many: Carlo Levi, Ignazio Silone, Nicola Chiaromonte, Elsa Morante, Romano Bilenchi, Anna Maria Ortese, Emiliano Brancati» asserts Goffredo Fofi in 2015 in his intervention entitled *A quarant'anni dalla morte di Pier Paolo Pasolini* «everything changes in the seventies, there is no neo-realism, no populism, no

16. The book that gave the name to the journal "L'architettura delle città – The Journal of the Scientific Society Ludovico Quaroni".

economic miracle any longer, no more Center-Left (that has become, as it is now, the dessert for the right), no Communist Party, nothing any longer: it is the end of Italy. In Pasolini's literary life... one [clearly] sees... the last books and films by Pasolini describe this desperation, there is the conscience of this ending. Pasolini was killed by Italy, and soon after [Aldo] Moro dies. We are a "land inhabited by deceased" as Alphonse de Lamartine said in the 1800s [describing Italys' ruinous decadence]. Even the later Fellini is desperate, and the same may be said of Morante...».¹⁷

Seeking testimonies today among the generation that saw Italy during and after fascism with their own eyes is confirmation of the fact that the country exuded poverty and misery. The beauty described by Pasolini and some of his contemporaries appears an aestheticization of an anthropological fascination for the sites and above all the humanity that in them lived. That described by Fofi is a cultural koiné that emerges between the two world wars in Italy and constitutes the expression of the culture around a gradient of values, which were the *leitmotif* in cinema, literature, and the architecture of neorealism.

Even Alberto Moravia made more than one visit to Persia: in 1958 with Elsa Morante¹⁸ and another in 1977 for an interview with the Shah of Persia Reza Pahlevi¹⁹ following the interview with Oriana Fallaci in 1973. And the director Michelangelo Antonioni visited Tehran in 1974 for the presentation of the film *Deserto Rosso*²⁰ (Red Desert, 1964)²¹ (Fig. 4).

It was a generation that, among other things and in some sectors of the national technical culture, in various ways dealt with, since the 1920s and 1930s, the problem of «the forced urbanization of

17. Goffredo Fofi in his intervention entitled *40 anni di Pasolini: a forum* organized by CSC-Cineteca Nazionale; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5HSOh8hbDg>

18. DI PAOLO 2015.

19. MORAVIA 1977.

20. Antonioni, *Zanni Red Desert at AMA Gallery in Tehran*: <http://www.michelangeloantonioni.info/wordpress/2018/12/16/antonioni-zanni-red-desert-at-ama-gallery-in-teheran/>

21. Mehdi Kowsar remembered how in 1974, while Antonioni was at dinner at his home in Tehran, he expressed the wish to see the spectators' expressions as they left the cinema after the showing of his film, so they went together and sat for fifteen minutes in the car in front the cinema.

the country. An adventure that narrates the ambitions and the distress of a rebellious youth, in their search for the foundations of an Italian identity counter to the European and Germanic myth». The principles of *Strapaese*²² « o sterile on a literary level becomes a cornerstone of the entire story of the founding,» it elaborated the utopic values of the *ideal city* and the *urban form* that had characterized the urban culture of the Italic civilizations, captivating other architectural and literary cultures. These cultural experiences, during the Second World War, had the opportunity to compare themselves to other forms of cultural elaboration with the same sensitivity in seeking the primordial myth of their own culture, as happened with the American descendants of the followers of Henry David Thoreau, his *Walden* and the *Transcendentalist* philosophical and poetic movements established in the new continent the previous century, coming into contact, in Italy, with the «rural and rustic character of Italians, that is to say, the most genuine and frank expression of the race, the environment, the climate, and the mentality where are safeguarded by instinct and by love, our purest traditions» and «in the new city [...] the triumph of the tireless provincial genius, protagonist of that revolution whose capital is Strapaese, and Strapaese is not found in Europe but in Italy, in the ancient youthful Italy of traditions and of transformations.»²³ Upon these ideas are reflected and set, in fact, even the studies of generations of American scholars who had roots, associations, and ties with European culture: Lewis Mumford (born of 1885 - *The culture of cities*, 1938), Spiro Kostof (born of 1936 - *The city shaped*, 1991), and it is noteworthy that American architects like John Ackerman, Ian McHarg, John Brinckerhoff Jackson had been soldiers in the Second World War and trod some stretches of the Belpaese on foot in uniform. This biographical note is anything but insignificant, considering the meaning the war had both for Italians and Americans. Consider the role in the U.S. of the popularizer of the Italian social conditions, Frederic Friedmann, German sociologist, professor at Arkansas University and personal friend of Adriano Olivetti who arrived in Matera in 1949 and discovers «... the strident contrast

22. MALAPARTE 1927.

23. MALAPARTE 1927, *op. cit.*

between the objective conditions of life of the peasant and the nobleness of his reactions. This contrast teaches the visitor... that extreme poverty represents far more than a state of material conditions... it is a way of life, a philosophy...»²⁴

But getting back to the not evident parallel between Persian and Italian cultures in their respective *golden ages*. A confirmation of the profound analogies between the perception of values that a historical settlement emanates, by comparing the two cultures, is provided in Nader Ardalan's thesis, a scholar and architect of Iranian origin, born in the U.S.A. and professor at Harvard, co-author of *The Sense of Unity. The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture*.²⁵ He attributes "spiritual" (cosmological) values to the conceptual and constructive process of the traditional Persian urban architectures and sites – and that may be associated – albeit considering due differences – with "the altogether mystical, romantic, primitive, and decadent origins" that Ludovico Quaroni recalls in his introductory essay of the publication *La corona delle città*²⁶ [*Stadtkrone*] by Bruno Taut, in which he amply deals with the expressionist culture, which had great importance in the Roman school at the beginning of the 20th century together with Futurism: «the basis for understanding the traditional Islamic architecture, which extends the principles of sacred architecture from the mosque to practically every other architectural unit and finally to town-and city-planning itself, is the relation existing between the cosmos, man in the traditional sense of *anthropos*, and architecture. [...] Cartesian philosophy was instrumental in quantifying space for Western man to such an extent as to obliterate, practically all memory of the qualitative space upon which all religious

24. La città dell'Uomo.it, *Storia e testimonianza della vicenda umana a Matera*, https://www.lacittadelluomo.it/pagina_sez04_02b.htm

25. ARDALAN-BAKHTIAR 1973, p. XI.

26. QUARONI 1973 (1919): "To someone who today is entirely immersed in the research on objectivity in urban planning, [...] it may seem strange that it has been decided to publish, in Italian, the text of *City Crown*, the *Stadtkrone* by Bruno Taut, [...] I believe the publication is warranted precisely in this period of a complete rethinking of architecture [...] and on the other had the publication of *Die Stadtkrone* may diffuse the too excited enthusiasms on the emerging revivalistic fashion of Rationalism. It seems to us in fact that it was one of the first famous masters of social architecture of the *Siedlungen* [settlements] to clarify the altogether mystical, romantic, primitive, and decadent as well as illogical and irrational of pure atmosphere of the Modernist Movement."

rites and orientation are based. In Islamic architecture space is never divorced from form: it is not the materialization of abstract Euclidean space which then provides a frame into which forms are “placed”. Space is qualified by the forms that exist in it». Ardalan, furthermore, in the first note of the introduction, specifies what his cultural references are, stating that the meaning of tradition as used in his essay «has been expounded majestically during the past few decades in the West by such authors as F. Schoun, R. Guénon, A.K. Coomaraswamy, M. Pallis, T. Burckhardt, and few others associated with traditional studies». Though it must be clarified that in the literature proposed by Ardalan it is the medieval and not the western Renaissance city that is the materialization of the *sense of unity*, more akin to the sense of unity of the Persian city, interrupted by the idea of modernity introduced by the Renaissance.

From Utopia to Ecological Brand

In a forthcoming essay, Adriano Prospero observes “warning signs on the loss of collective memory and ignorance of our history.”²⁷ This aspect of contemporary culture, discernible independently of sites and generations, goes parallel with the growing affirmation of the concepts of *preservation* and *heritage*, towards which they tend, extends common sense notion beyond that of safeguarding and protection of the historical material heritage, but rather potentially includes almost every tradition, cultivating it as a critical category, at a time when the concepts of *resiliency* and *recovery* are at the center of an international debate. But already some time back, Eric J. Hobsbawm had explained how a tradition is invented. Therefore, the attention and interest in “historical centers” and the commitment for their safeguard, whether for “identity-related” or “economic” motives, is to be considered an almost ordinary cultural-political action for any contemporary urban culture. This kind of interest has recently developed ever more insistent in all geographical areas of the world that do not partake of the historical culture of the Mediterranean, where tradition is not built up from philological research aimed at the conservation of ruins or “physical” vestiges: «Intangible heritage is a novel, not properly-defined yet concept introduced by

27. PROSPERI 2021 (in press).

Rem Koolhaas along with tangible (physical) heritage. The essence of intangible heritage mediates somewhere between conservation of physical environment where significant events took place and putting tradition, culture into action».²⁸ It, however, has to do with a different approach with respect to the studies and the projects elaborated by the team coordinated by Mehdi Kowsar and Ludovico Quaroni documented in this issue [collection] and undertaken in 1978 that had as an aim to build a modern city in continuity with the historical city, transliterating into modern settlement typology and morphology the character of Yazd urban tradition.

In the last fifty years, within the framework of the urban development of the global cities and the role of historical centers, the outcomes have been rather diverse, synthetically described by Vittorio Franchetti Pardo in a chapter of a monograph, *La città in età postindustriale. L'identità delle città storiche nel mondo globalizzato e le sue varianti interpretative (The City in the Post-Industrial Age, The Identity of the Historical Cities in Globalization and the Interpretative Variants)* in which the Roman historian analyzes comprehensive case histories of interventions in the urban centers in which the urban fabric is perceived «as a physical and sociological reality, like an intrinsic interrelating between urbs and civitas [...] the city center is an organic whole [...] a place and factor of symbolic valorization.»²⁹ But some of the questions that subtend these complex social phenomena, and cultural politics, have already been revealed by Salvatore Settis in his 2004 brief but substantial essay *Futuro del 'classico'*, pointing out that «the more we will know how to look at the “classical” not as a deceased inheritance that belongs to us without merit of ours but as something surprising to be won back daily, like a powerful stimulus to understand the “different”, the more we will know how to model new generations for the future.»³⁰ Settis above all analyzes the impact of classicism on civilization outside of the Mediterranean geographic area. Since 1972, in fact, UNESCO's World Heritage Lists have introduced safeguard procedures that also include

28. KOOLHAAS-ALBOKRINOVA 2011.

29. FRANCHETTI PARDO 2018, p. 364, p. 369.

30. SETTIS 2004.

historical centers on top local urban regulations, shifting the question of urban form to a political-administrative level besides the historical-artistic and technical-conceptual as one can glean from Quaroni's words in the following text: «The masterworks of man, in terms of the city, have a completely different history; the first building of a “whole”, now famous, was often so modest, in its dimensions and form, to be swept away, demolished to make way for a new version larger and more beautiful, and that the whole expressed its proper ideas, of the architect and the artist, even contrasting – provided they were sustainable with the patron's own ideas. After him perhaps someone else will have then realized the plan, often modifying it – voluntarily or involuntarily – while a third architect will have received the task of coming up with a third building, and so forth, all the way to the present complex of Piazza San Marco and so certainly it was for the royal square of Esfahan and for the Hagia Sofia-Topkapi complex, on to the “system” of the old town of Prague».³¹

What is evident in the eyes of the scholars of cities, confirmed by relatively recent praiseworthy studies such as *Recombinant Urbanism*³² by David Grahame Shane, published in 2005, is that in the last couple of decades no projectual studies or proposals have been formulated regarding the idea of the city capable of significantly surpassing or updating the European and American studies produced until the 1960s and 70s. Postmodern culture, from the 80s until 2000, has resulted in experiments especially on the architecture of buildings – objects within a Cartesian grid as Ardalan observed – but the settlement models and transformation of existing cities have had as their reference a design concept that has not gone beyond what had been elaborated in the West between the two world wars.

As confirmation of the latent need to overcome, recognize, or reactivate some traditions on urban studies we note that in the 2017 essay by Laurent Matthey and Nicola Contoreggi was published in a journal called “*The Form of a City*”: *Pasolini and the Poetic Ecology of the Sign*³³, to briefly mention, that considers Pasolini «as a primitive

31. QUARONI 1996, p. 90-92.

32. GRAHAME SHANE 2005.

33. MATTHEY-CONTOREGGI 2017, pp. 399-414.

theoretician who supported that which would become known as landscape urbanism».

A noteworthy point of view, especially if we bear in mind that Landscape Urbanism represents an alternative thesis counterposed to New Urbanism, that established itself as the only possible proposal of thinking on the postmodern city in the United States, although rooted in some specific western traditions, in line with the approach to contexts experimented by one of the previously mentioned American scholars, Ian McHarg (born 1920), the proponent of an ecologism *ante litteram* that ties together the issues concerning cities, landscapes, and infrastructures, based on territorial survey studies and techniques which became the basis of the conception of GIS software. In 1969, in fact, Ian McHarg wrote *Design with Nature*, still a fundamental text and, of its category, perhaps never surpassed, in which landscape architects “must become the steward[s] of the biosphere”. In truth, it is an important book not only for landscape architects but for all architects who work on the transformation of a territory maintaining together multiscalarity and complexity of the natural and the anthropic environment.

The question of environmentalism and ecological conscience, thus, arose in the 1960s and 70s, as a consequence of the hazardous effects of industrial development and contributed to the founding of an ecologically oriented culture within the framework of the “at (global) risk society” in which Ulrich Beck emerged attempting, with his concept of “second modernity”, to overcome the definition of “post-modern”.

Evidently the cultural sediment of a collective ecological awareness – although Pasolini never used this type of terminology and went no further than interpreting the concept of “urban form” describing formally completed organisms – is more solidly bound to the “modern desacralization of reality” than usually occurs in reasonings proposed by the more frequently covered studies in some academic environments, especially in Italy. A practice that, in Pasolini’s case, turned into the condemnation of the failure to protect the historical landscape of Orte as emblematic.

Analogously one could reason on a personality such as Ludovico Quaroni, though an architect rather than the poet, in those years, who had more specific instruments to develop theoretical-technical elaborations

to intervene in a physical reality – consider the genesis of the rural village La Martella (1952) or the summer settlement of Il Gualdo (1963) or the project for the Concorso per la Pineta di Donoratico (1956) and other project and study experiences.

This set of issues, seen from today's vantage point, seem to have always been there, in the books we have read, but missing were the circumstances to establish links and reflections that would bring to light the possible direct relationships useful in reconnecting the past threads to some more recent experiences [events], allowing them to emerge from the historiographic oblivion or from readings limited to idealistic-linguistic interpretations.

For which years and the obvious consequences of some harmful interventions on the territory were necessary to come to an understanding like James Corner that: «earlier urban design and regionally scaled enterprises [failed] was [in] the oversimplification, the reduction, of the phenomenal richness of physical life»³⁴.

Reality has shown that «the political times are too far different from the necessary technical times for the transformation and the control of urban growth»,³⁵ especially in the case of contemporary Iranian cities and many other cities worldwide whose growth has exceeded all predictions in terms of numbers and time frame: to this set of urban organisms the contemporary city of Yazd also belongs (Fig. 5).

We must ask ourselves what the rereading of these experiences of the recent past teaches us with respect to the present demands of the market and respect to the control of the growth of the city. Botero had already distinguished the profound difference between Italian cities (in which *civitas* and *urbs* were clearly distinguished), Chinese cities (whose demographics that so expanded that the entire country acquired an urban nature), and the African (in Ethiopia, Negus, has no residence and represents with its court only a vast city)³⁶, as was obvious from the original use of the word “magnificence” meaning something that consists “in multitude and power”. It is also clear that Quaroni's words, when they describe an urban environment as «the living tradition,

34. CORNER 2006, p. 32.

35. QUARONI 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

36. DESCENDRE 2017 (1558).

followed instinctively by all, absorbed naturally frequenting that constructed *environment*, known as daily walking, touching or leaning against a wall, those pillars who are living, polished, almost modeled by human presence describe one »³⁷ of the sites, a sense kindred to the reading by Nader Ardalan of the city as part of a building landscape unitary «the centripetal node within a regional space of vast dimensions [... where] Man moves continuously in an undulating and expanding space that is forever united. In the conception of “place” or *makān*, a central space is created by enveloping it in walls. These boundary conditions may in time become “usable” or “living” walls containing secondary spaces that are dependent upon the primary space for their light, air, view, and, in the esoteric sense, for their communion with the Logos. The circumstances of the encounter of space with the “boundary shapes” determine the particular architectural expression».³⁸

It is not simple to be able to affirm and concretely realize the cultural value of the project of the modern city conceived as the result of the evolutionary interpretation of the characteristics of the historical city of a complex urban fabric, other than a system of an orthogonal “grid”, that is, the method which seems to subtends to confirm experience such as those Mehdi Kowsar, Ludovico Quaroni, and other Italian and Iranian architects attempted to realize in 1978 with the Yazd Urban Development Plan documented in this issue. Models of the city in which the sense of unity is expressed by the co-design of architectonic and urban scale. The “Cartesian” model described by Ardalan – that also includes the grid model of the Greek city, the Roman city, and that Manhattan, retroactive object of interest of Rem Koolhaas in *Delirious New York* (1978), realized as efficiently as ruinously in many cities worldwide – has prevailed almost always, even if only for practical reasons.

37. QUARONI 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

38. ARDALAN-BAKHHTIAR 1973, p. 17.

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