

THE IMPOSSIBLE STROLL THROUGH THE UNREACHABLE CITY, REYNER BANHAM'S URBAN ECOLOGIES REVISITED ¹

EL PASEO IMPOSIBLE POR LA CIUDAD INABARCABLE, UNA RELECTURA
DE LAS ECOLOGÍAS URBANAS DE REYNER BANHAM

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La ciudad de Los Ángeles es, seguramente, la primera ciudad surgida auténticamente como resultado de la amplia popularización del uso del automóvil y, por tanto, no debería extrañar que la comprensión analítica y sintética de su naturaleza profunda esté asociada a este medio y a las infraestructuras que lo posibilitan. Así lo entendió el crítico e historiador Peter Reyner Banham cuando asumió que sólo al volante de un vehículo podría descubrir la auténtica idiosincrasia de esta insólita ciudad que la crítica europea más ortodoxa despreciaba incapaz de extraer una síntesis que la explicara. Lo que sucedía es que la ciudad se presentaba como pionera de una nueva forma urbana que, apoyándose en el uso masivo del automóvil y la vivienda unifamiliar característica de la ciudad jardín suburbana, proponía una descentralización absoluta como alternativa a la ciudad compacta industrial. En 1971, Banham publicó un texto hoy canónico, *Los Angeles, The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, que pretendía desvelar una imagen clara y sintética de la ciudad. Este artículo destaca lo principal de la propuesta de Reyner Banham y busca ampliar su planteamiento teórico-que maneja las escalas estructural y morfológica- a una tercera escala -la de la percepción sensorial de la experiencia física del espacio- a partir de algunas obras académicas de referencia, pero también a partir de referencias literarias de escritores vinculados a la ciudad, en un intento por trasladar la visión poética y sensible al campo de los estudios urbanos. Esta visión permite mostrar un cambio de paradigma respecto de la relación que establece el habitante de una ciudad contemporánea como Los Ángeles -y, por extensión, tantas otras- con el escenario de la vida colectiva que representa el espacio público

Palabras clave: Ciudad, morfología urbana, paisaje urbano, percepción

The city of Los Angeles, CA, is, for sure, the first city to authentically emerge as a result of the widespread popularisation of automobile use, and it should, therefore, come as no surprise that the analytical and synthetic understanding of its profound nature is associated with this means of transportation and the infrastructures that make it possible. This is how the critic and historian Peter Reyner Banham understood it, when he proposed that only from behind the wheel of a vehicle could it be possible to reveal the true idiosyncrasies of this unusual city that the most orthodox European critics rejected, who were unable to extract a synthesis that could explain it. What was happening was that the city appeared as the pioneer of a new urban form which, relying on the widespread use of the car and the single-family dwelling, which is typical of the suburban garden city, proposed an absolute decentralisation as an alternative to the compact industrial city. In 1971, Banham published a now canonical text -*Los Angeles, The Architecture of Four Ecologies*- which aimed at revealing a clear and synthetic image of the city. This article highlights the main points of Reyner Banham's proposal, looking to expand its theoretical approach -which handles the structural and morphological scales- to a third scale: that of the sensory perception of the physical experience of space, based on some academic works of reference, but also on literary references by writers linked to the city in an attempt to transfer the poetic and sensitive vision to the field of urban studies. This vision makes it possible to show a change of paradigm regarding the relationship that the inhabitant of a contemporary city like Los Angeles -and, by extension, so many others- establishes with the scenario of collective life, represented by public space.

Keywords: City, urban morphology, urban landscape, perception

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1971, the historian, Peter Reyner Banham published his famous book on the city of Los Angeles, titled *Los Angeles. The Architecture of Four Ecologies*. A book on a city that, in the eyes of the critique, appeared as incomprehensible. Mumford (2021, p. 850), for example, repudiates the city under the label of “undifferentiated mass”. But Banham showed that it was possible to understand it, and set out a theoretical framework that studied the form of the contemporary city using two fundamental scales – structural and morphological -, implicit in his analysis. As a result of the recent translation of Reyner Banham’s text into Spanish (2016), this article critically reviews his vision, and proposes enriching it by adding a third scale to his outline, the perceptive – the outcome of the view of the person who goes around the city experiencing its form-, in an attempt to complete the perspective of the studies on the form of the city presented in the aforementioned book. For this, the article is based on academic reference documents that introduce this third scale, but also on the works of literary authors where the singularities of the city of Los Angeles appear well defined, providing an expressive and poetic value that urban studies should not avoid.

The approach from the shape is precisely one of the most valuable aspects of the British author’s book, which perhaps has not been fully understood: the review of Plagens (1972) and Davis (2003, p. 55-57), for example, are, above all, of a social nature, but neither appears to assume that the approach of Reyner Banham is structural and morphological. Its reading gives back a synthetic image of the shape of the city of Los Angeles, that allows understanding it as a whole. The broader scale – the structural – shows the geographic context the city lies within – coast, hills, plains-, the infrastructure network that organizes its spatial connectivity – the large highways-, and the infinite mosaic of basically single-family residential pieces. The morphological scale, in his approach, makes it is possible to distinguish the characteristics of the residential mosaic, and facilitates the differentiation between the cookie-cutter single-family home, repeated *ad nauseam* through the plains in the valley, and the singular single-family homes of the elite, settled in the hills. This scale also shows the implacable process of spatial segregation that is engrained in the city from the way itself, that its infrastructures impose.

This article, as a theoretical contribution that complements the vision of Banham (2016), proposes a perceptive scale that introduces the analysis of the urban atmosphere -just as the Situationist International outlined (Careri, 2015, p. 74)- in an attempt to synthesize it in a series of eloquent literary and poetic images that contributes towards understanding the immediacy of the experience of the person that inhabits the city.

This three-scale approach contributes towards understanding the physical space of the city of Los Angeles, against the *cliché*

that paints it as an incomprehensible city. However, its break down into pieces will really give us back an immeasurable city, albeit not in intellectual terms, but rather in physical ones. A city that is so extensive and syncopated that, on its closest scale, will only accept being experienced by car, a complement of the self-absorption that the single-family dwelling fosters. Both circumstances reduce the exposure of the person to their fellow citizens, and therefore, their living experience, thus transforming their social nature in a major way.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This article falls within both the morphologist tradition that Manuel de Sola-Morales vehemently defined in Spain, always arguing for an urbanism that had to clearly reflect its belonging to the architectural area, as study and intervention on “the pure physical shape” (Sola-Morales, 2008, p. 15), and on the perceptive view, which since the end of the 1960’s, Kevin Lynch (2001), Gordon Cullen (1964), or even Jane Jacobs (2011) and Jan Gehl (2006) introduced; all of them very critical of the urban proposals of the Modern Movement to which they ascribe a lack of projectual depth as a consequence of overlooking a scale that fosters civic sociability and that provides complexity and variety to the urban whole. Facing the criticism that Banham’s perspective received (Plagens, 1972; Davis, 2003, p. 55-57), this paper defends the relevance of a contribution focused on the analytical and synthetic understanding of the physical body of the city, and complements it by highlighting its consequences on human experience.

Reyner Banham started his exploration and discovery of Los Angeles as a response to an academic position which, as Fishman (1987, p. 156) states, rejected the city with the excuse of its novelty and immensity. Los Angeles challenged the modern concept of metropolis as such, and how it had been considered since the Industrial Revolution: how could one speak of a city in a place that had no clearly distinguishable urban center?

III. HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

The city of Los Angeles represents an authentic change of paradigm in the history of the suburban garden city. Both the 18th century suburbs on the outskirts of London, and those raised along the railroad networks in Philadelphia and other industrial cities in the United States in the 19th century, were subordinate to a central city (Fishman, 1987). They were shelters for a wealthy and privileged minority, whose project aspired to represent an alternative to the compact city model. In Los Angeles, the single-family

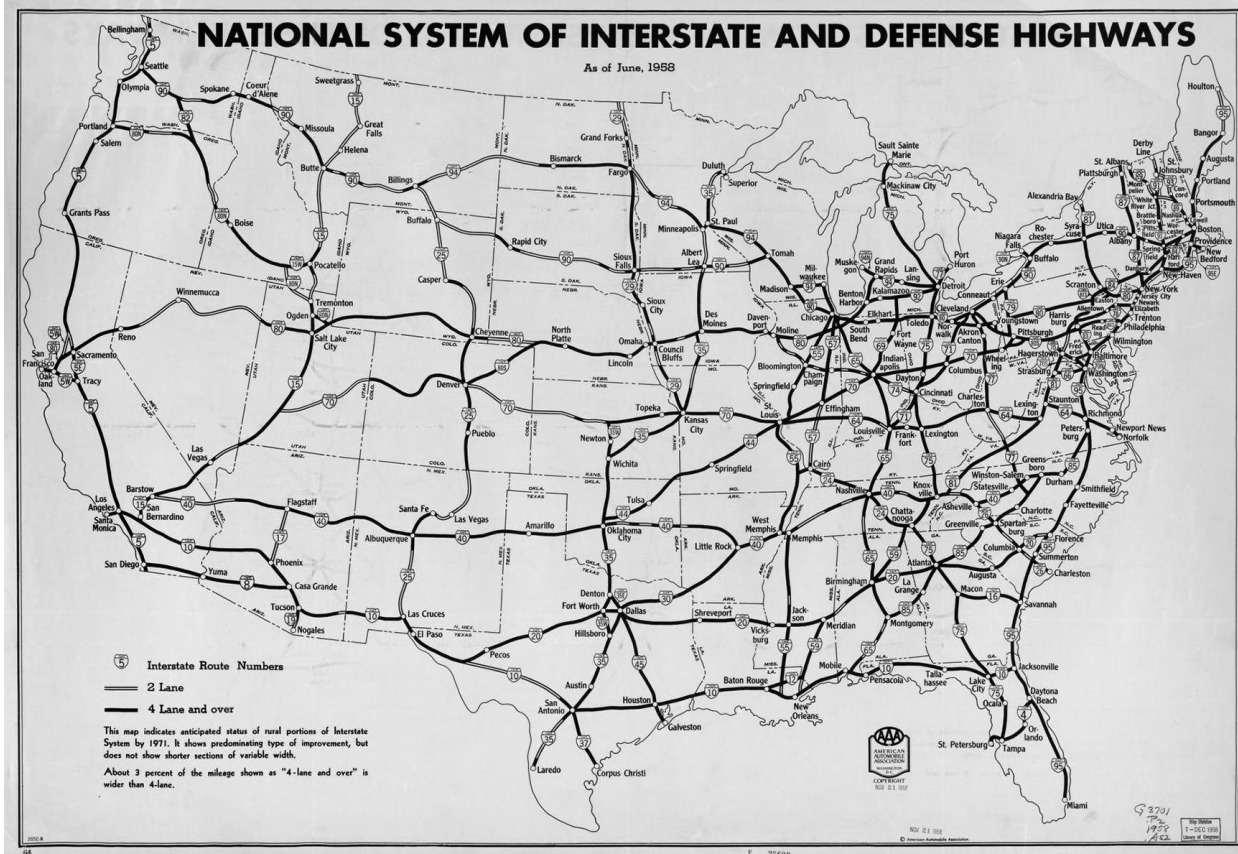
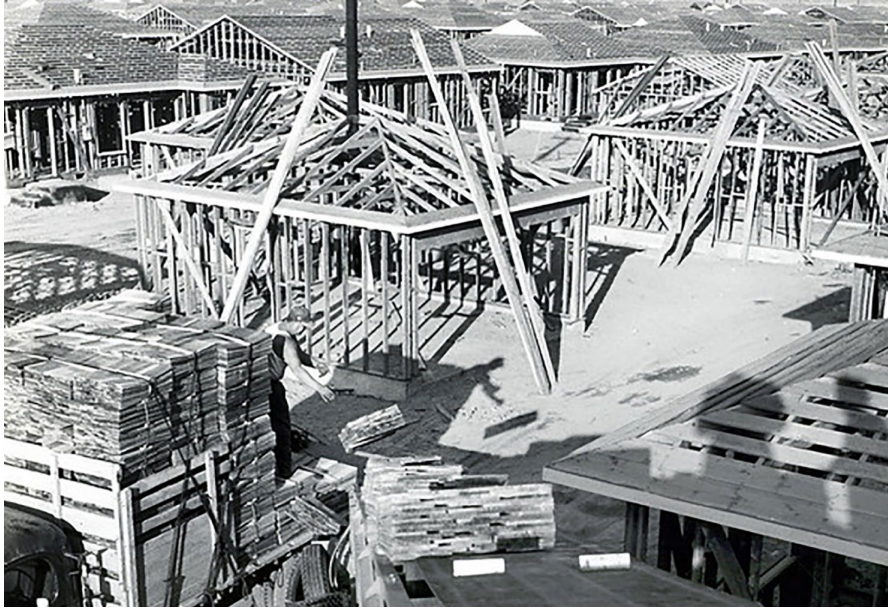


Figure 1. The Balloon Frame system in an advertisement in Lakewood, California. Source: Nicolaides & Wiese (2006, p. 266)

Figure 2. 1930's advertisement of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). Source: Federal Housing Administration (circa 1930).

Figure 3. Cartography of the first interstate highway network Source: American Automobile Association (1958).

dwelling abandons its peripheral condition to become the star element of the entire city (Fishman, 1987, p. 155). But under the framework of the suburban ideal, there are three key elements prior to its consolidation that would promote its transformation into the suburban metropolis that it became from the second half of the 20th century: first, the extraordinary simplification and standardization of the construction processes linked to the single-family dwelling, thanks to the appearance and dissemination of a very simple construction system known as balloon frame (Figure 1), which allowed raising a very quick construction (Jackson, 1985, p. 126); second, the ease of acquiring property ownership, backed by the Government through the Federal Housing Administration, whose role is to grant guarantors for long-term loans provided by private entities -as can be seen in an advertisement of the 1930s (Figure 2)- to buy, build, or remodel a dwelling (Jackson, 1985, p. 204); and third, the development and financing of an extremely broad network of highways (Figure 3), created through the sponsorship of the Interstate Highway Act of 1956 (Jackson, 1985, p. 249). Thus, the history of Los Angeles is that of the emancipation of the suburb from the urban center. In the Californian city, the single-family dwelling became one of the key elements of the urban structure. The version of suburb materialized in Los Angeles was built as a decentralized city without either functional or emotional ties with the city center, and with a transportation network designed to almost exclusively serve the private vehicle.

IV. BROCHURE OF LOS ANGELES: GEOGRAPHY, FABRICS, AND NETWORKS

From a structural point of view, Reyner Banham (2016) synthesizes the shape of the city of Los Angeles into three sets of elements: the residential ones, those set in the hills and the plain – which he calls “The hills” and “the Id plains”, respectively; the infrastructural ones -the highways or, in his terminology, “Autopia”-, and the geographical ones, which are fundamentally present in the shape of a nature concentrated in the vision of the widespread Pacific Ocean, which Banham called “Surfurbia”.

Geography

The Pacific – the territory of Surfurbia – substitutes in the Angeleno imaginary, the scenario of the countryside or nature which, in the day dreams of the first idealists that foresaw suburbia, surrounded the residential space (Rasmussen, 2010, p. 117), and it turned into the landscape that provided broad clear horizons that had characterized the actions of the first English landscapers (Hoskins, 1981, p. 172-173). In Banham’s vision, the Pacific provides the

horizons and the sensation of freedom that the urban sprawl impedes: “From Malibu to Balboa, an almost continuous white sandy beach runs some one hundred and ten kilometers, almost all of them public access” (Banham, 2016, p. 31). The coastline is the place of Los Angeles that adopts the condition of universality of the public space (Banham, 2016, p. 33). In fact, a good part of the shoreline, from Playa del Rey, passing through El Segundo and Manhattan Beach, up to Hermosa Beach, enjoys something unusual in Los Angeles: it is closed to vehicles.

Residential fabric

However, in reality and mostly, Los Angeles is incomprehensible from the pedestrian point of view, because it is impossible to walk around it. Its size and homogeneity are discouraging and make it completely alien to the realm of pedestrians. An attempt to walk through Los Angeles is the opposite of the stroll of the artists of Romanticism, those that, in fact, invented this nonchalant means of transit (Jarvis, 1997). The landscape offered the poet or the painter, a continuous and organized, but also changing, sequence of elements that remained constantly stippled of singularities of a varied nature. The romantic walker could also look back, changing what they had already seen, to see it from a different perspective, or turning to the sides of the road to contemplate a new perspective. The supposed fictional Angeleno walker has before them a vast sea of infinite single-family cookie cut homes, a tedious spectacle that goes on and on. These are the Id plains. It is a paradoxical DNA, as it means that the character of the city is determined by a lack of character: “in what refers to the most basic and charmless, but vital, impulses of the urban psychology of Los Angeles, the plains are in fact the central core of the Id of the city” (Banham, 2016, p. 165). Los Angeles could even be considered as the first large scale test of what Koolhaas (2007) has called The Generic City (Figure 4). The plain is “everywhere and nowhere” (Banham, 2016, p. 176). Furthermore, in Los Angeles the paradox appears that even standout architecture – that abounds on the hillsides, the coastline, and in buildings associated to the highway – ends up being equally tedious due to their repetition and does not constitute any singularity to which one can be visually or emotionally linked to improve the legibility of the complex (Lynch, 2001, p. 34). The hills offer the most edifying spectacle of the views over the Pacific, and of some sophisticated dwellings, often built by the most renowned architects of the time – like the Case Studyhouse 22 (Figure 5) -, but the truth is that a pedestrian who dared to follow the windy path of a road climbing the slopes would find a landscape of fences and hedges (Banham, 2016, p. 99) that hide the famous homes and the views towards a Pacific Ocean, which becomes a reserved and exclusive spectacle for the elite who live in the area.



Figure 4. The plains of Id, Los Angeles, California. Source: Photograph of Alex S. Maclean (2003, p. 49).

Figure 5. Case Study house 22 of Pierre Koenig. Source: Photograph of Julius Shulman (Banham, 2016, p. 229)

The infrastructure networks

From the view of the pedestrian, the city is in fact incomprehensible. The vision of the whole is only possible by taking a step back far enough to be able to understand the dwellings as a large mosaic. And this view is only possible from the air, or from the incredible height that these immediate highway junctions (Figure 6), so praised by Banham (2016, p. 83-85), provide. For David Brodsky (1981, p.2), the network of highways of the Los Angeles metropolitan area is comparable to mountain chains and river systems, that is to say, the highway network has a practically geographical scale, and represents the most important trait of the landscape built by human being, “however, beneath this large scale, structure and identity seem really hard to

identify” (Lynch, 2001, p. 41). As Banham says himself “those who are incapable of easily moving through their diffuse urban fabric (...) will never completely understand the city” (2016, p. 14). By moving with ease, he means, of course, by car. The many details that build the landscape turn any trip into an intense and enriching experience, even though the details we can perceive by walking along monotonously similar single-family homes is a tedious experience. The accelerated rhythm of the car makes one lose focus of those irrelevant details, and offers a landscape close the vision of abstract expressionist, that of a Jackson Pollock painting for example, where the effect of the whole prevails, while the detail is completely banal and lacks interest. The best way Los Angeles is perceived, is behind the wheel.

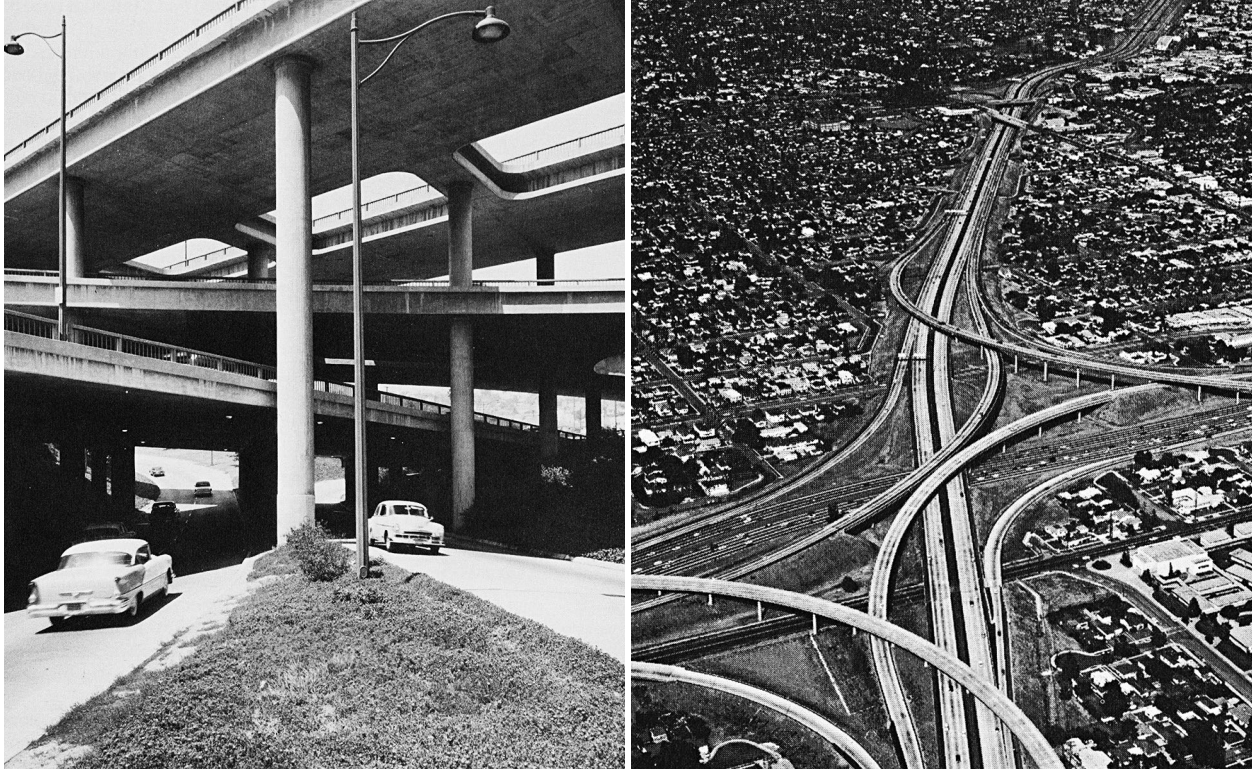


Figure 6. The junction between the Santa Ana and Harbor freeways (left) and the crossing of the Santa Monica Freeway with the San Diego freeway (right). Source: Left: Photograph by Dick Whittington (Brodsly, 1981, p. 118). Right: Photograph from the California Division of Highways (Banham, 2016, p. 89).

V. STRUCTURE AND PERCEPTION

While the difference between the two characteristic fabrics of the city, that of the plains and the hills, operates at a morphological scale, the most important role that the highway plays in Los Angeles occurs at a metropolitan scale. As Brodsly (1981, p. 51) rightly states, the highway network “is a great urban synecdoche, one of the few parts capable of representing the whole” **3**. In the Angeleno metropolis, the residential enclaves live completely away from one another. The element that ties them with the whole is the highway. Without it, each suburb is an island completely disconnected from the rest. Following Brodsly, “in a suburban sprawl and of hundreds of randomly connected settlements, the highway brings up the sensation of clarity and precision useful to define and integrate the urban space. It has generated a new awareness of place” **4** (1981, p. 23).

At a structural scale, the highway network works are an authentic binding that allows tying infinite pieces spread over a very wide territory. Before the popularization of GPS, any indication in Los Angeles had to be linked to a reference of an access to the closest highway. This means of orientation is key for any driver who does not want to get lost, because “getting lost in Los Angeles means not being able to get on the highway or not knowing where to turn to leave one” **5** (Brodsly, 1981, p. 24). Reyner Banham (2016, p. 11-12) begins his text on Los Angeles by praising “A Guide to Architecture in Southern California”, by David Gebhard and Robert Winter, and in particular, its maps, which are certainly very simple layouts that reflect the quality described by Brodsly. In the layouts of the guide, the architecture they propose visiting is located in different residential areas of Los Angeles, and to get there, the nearest highway is always referenced (Figure 7).

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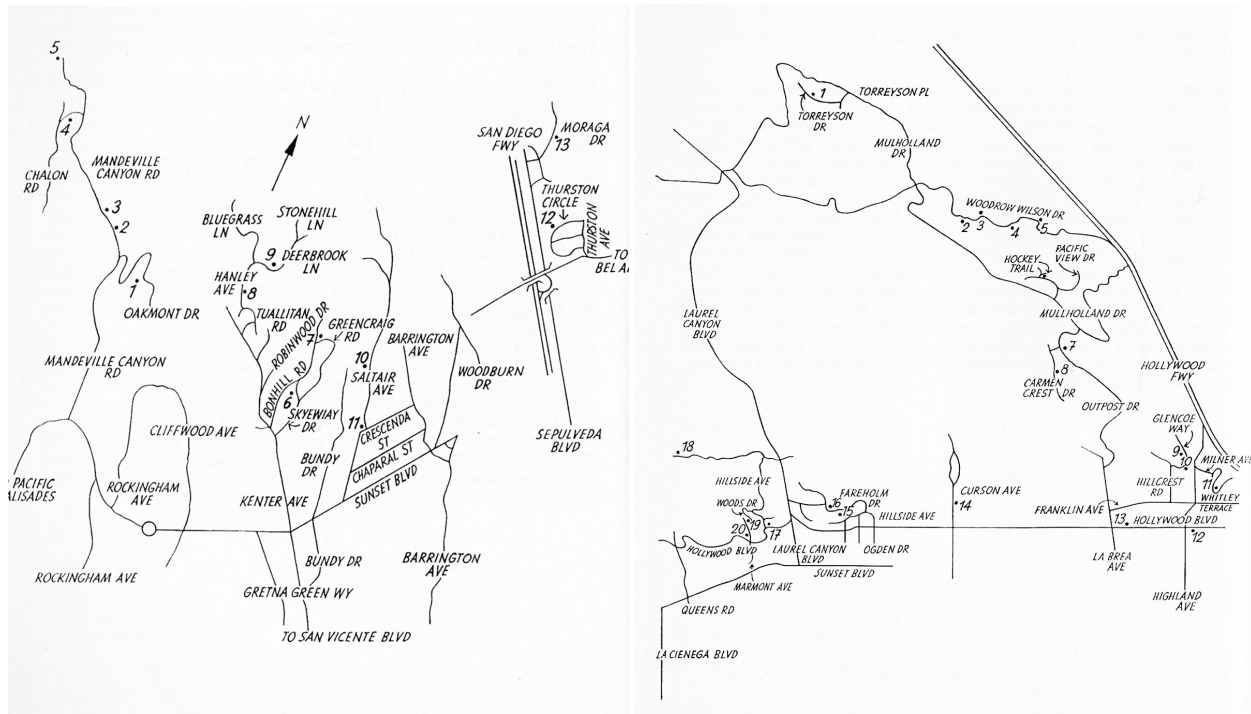


Figure 7. Two layouts of Gebhard and Winter's guide. Source: Left: Gebhard & Winter (1965, p. 30). Right: Gebhard & Winter (1965, p. 46).

These diagrams are an expression of the abstract condition of the territory of Los Angeles, a territory where highways are elements that provide the minimum essential structure that allows acquiring the notion of place (Gebhard & Winter, 1985, p. 9).

However, the authentic nature of the highway is determined by a mechanistic willingness that has reduced the traditional notion of street – a place for walking, buying, meeting, circulation – exclusively to its vehicle role. The highway is a street that has been stripped from all the roles that it had traditionally been entrusted with, except the movement of a vehicle:

(...) the highway represents the absolute subversion of this traditional sanctuary of the public domain that is the street. Through a tenth of their daily life, the average inhabitant of Los Angeles sits in a private universe encapsulated in steel. More than any other ecology of Los Angeles, more than any other specific place that is identifiable as such, the highway is a private space **6** (Brodsly, 1981, p. 46)

As a place -or as an ecology according to the term used by Reyner Banham (2016, p. 215-227)-, the highway only exists turned upon itself, rejecting any experience that is not related to driving. For Brodsly, it is like a tunnel, a space that is indifferent to the environment it crosses, only occasionally connecting with the urban space (1981, p. 38). This paradoxical condition leads the highway, on one hand, to interconnect the city more profoundly, but, on the other, to generate an enveloping space that complicates links between different parts of the city, and also between itself and a good part of its immediate surroundings. As a single-function road, it reinforces that idea that the different parts of the city are seen as mere passthroughs, while one reaches a concrete destination (Brodsly, 1981, p. 38). Driving along a metropolitan highway is not a trip, it is not enjoying the unforeseen details of the road, or experiencing contact with others. Meanwhile, it is worth remembering that it was from these unforeseen events, and above all, from the outside contact that the first bourgeois fled, to abandon the compact city to create the suburb (Fishman, 1987, p. 38). And it is in this sense that both the highway and the single-family home have triumphed as habitats that repel the daily and continuous contact between human beings, and above



Figure 8. Junction over East Los Angeles. Source: Photograph of CALTRANS (Brodsly, 1981, p. 30).

all, among people of different social and economic levels. According to Brodsly “one can cross the poorest parts of the city without having to ever directly face poverty”⁷ (1981, p. 38). The junction of East Los Angeles is located at the edge of the largest Latin American neighborhood of the city, but most drivers that cross it never leave the highway to head into what they surely consider a hostile territory (Figure 8). For the urban middle classes, the highway constitutes a bridge over the accidents of social geography (Brodsly, 1981, p. 40).

The romantic poets especially enjoyed the findings along the road, be it a leafy grove, a waterfall, or the spire of a distant

church jutting out on the horizon. On the highway, one only has to focus on the signs that indicate directions or exits. The English romantic poet, William Wordsworth, transformed the people he met during his long walks into human archetypes – the hermit, the girl, the mother, the old man – from which he showed traits of the human condition in which his readers could see themselves as part of a fraternal whole (Sánchez, 2018, p. 28). The poetry of the highway and the suburb is that of loneliness and self-absorption, a condition that, though also potentially universal, leaves the human being with nothing more than narcissistically enjoying themselves, without fostering any other relationships.

⁷ Free translation.

The heroine of a Joan Didion novel – *Play it as it Lays* (2017) – drives along the highways of Los Angeles to escape the existential crisis caused by the flight of her husband. For this character, the highway is a specific and important place of her life, a place where she feels as the owner of her destiny; she is the queen of an impenetrable fortress, safe from the enemies and challenges of collective life. It represents a metaphoric return to the castle from which, according to Rebecca Solnit, the English had left at the end of the Middle Ages to discover and transform the landscape in a long process that peaked during Romanticism (2015, p. 132-133). Although the highway is a collective infrastructure, the experience of its use is completely private and practically individual. While the walks of the romantic poets let them connect with the geographical and cultural landscape once again, driving has taken us back to self-absorption. One that is also fruitless in intellectual or sensitive terms, but rather is revealed to be quite a banal experience. In Pynchon's novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, the highway -reinforcing this idea of analgesic self-absorption – becomes a bloodstream injected with a narcotic that limits vital anxiety:

Oedipa resolved to pull in at the next motel she saw, however ugly, stillness and four walls having at some point become preferable to this illusion of speed, freedom, wind in your hair, unreeling landscape it wasn't. What the road really was, she fancied, was this hypodermic needle, inserted somewhere ahead into the vein of a freeway, a vein nourishing the mainliner L.A., keeping it happy, coherent, protected from pain, or whatever passes, with a city, for pain (1994, p. 26).

The incredible apparatus this infrastructure called a highway, works almost as an enclosed underground tunnel, and the encapsulation that this suspension of reality generates has at least two levels of depth, although, of course, both completely elude the surroundings. On one hand, the driver must always stay alert to follow the traffic signs; on the other, the driver on their normal commute – from home to work – is capable of abstracting and thinking of something else. However, this kind of meditation space delves into the breaking of links between the person and their surroundings, exactly the opposite of what the Romantic poets intended – as Jarvis indicates (1997, ix)– with their approach to this setting through their walks. In these, there would also be moments that made it possible to transcend what they had in front of them, because upon entering the landscape, they sought to move away to find a space of individual reflection – away from the noise and collective anger they found amid the compact city-, but only after having profoundly experienced the complexity and intensity of the surrounding reality. Joan Didion aptly states this in a documentary (Dunne, 2017), when she

speaks about the life of the character in her novel *Play it as it Lays*: “What happens to Maria in this book, is that she assumes that the experience makes no sense. It is that which everybody in Los Angeles has to end up basically accepting, because nothing seems to make any sense”.

The encapsulation that the car and the highway offer, represents one more step in the individual self-absorption process described by Sennett (2002) in *The Fall of Public Man*. For him, the crowded environment of the industrial city, full of strangers –as expressly described by Edgar Allan Poe (2011) in his short story *The Man of the Crowd*– offered an alibi for the isolation of an ever more meager family unit. In the suburban setting of the single-family home, the family turns more to itself, emerging as a personal space of expression protected from the outside world (Sennett, 2002, p. 331). In Los Angeles, the car becomes one more step on this individual self-absorption: that of the individual estranged from their own family, who they have distanced themselves from, and isolated in their car, driving along the highway, is capable of comfortably showing who they are, although now not before anyone else, recognizing themselves only in the rear view mirror. Sennett (2002, p. 246-247) says that the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau was the first one to realize about the disappearance of the public space –as a space of community representation where the citizen would be an actor who codifies human behavior and presents it to the rest– and its substitution for a life that is more inward to oneself; a life, for Rousseau (2009, p. 74-75) that is more genuine, but for Sennett (2002, p. 247), one that is clearly emptier and more sterile.

The paradox of the highway is the following: it is space where many people can come together, a space, however, that exacerbates up to unsuspected limits, that anonymous condition that surprised the artistic avant-garde when they experienced it for the first time in the industrial city (Azúa, 1999, p. 38-40). The masses of passersby that walked together without knowing one another or exchanging anything along the urban avenues, drive now equally crammed together, but even more isolated from one another by the metropolitan highways. Thus, the car is presented as a kind of sanctuary for individuality, totally disconnected from the rest of the congeners and from any surrounding, a landscape that fosters the alienation of the human being. In a car on the highway, the driver is really a king of his castle. In this way, the aforementioned metaphoric return to the castle occurs where, according to Solnit (2015, p.132-133), Medieval inhabitants still lived isolated from a surrounding that terrified them and against which they felt helpless. After colonizing and domesticating the landscape, the bourgeoisie sought to isolate themselves from a setting which, once again, they felt as hostile “Protected by a single-family home and

their own car, the Los Angeles inhabitant can live their daily life almost completely outside any intrusion”⁸ (Brodsly, 1981, p. 45).

Paradoxically, while the person progressively isolates themselves from their immediate surroundings, at the same time they facilitate the intrusion of an exaggerated and distorted reality into their home, through the T.V. and the digital media and, in their car, through the radio. At the same time, they annul their connection with the closest reality, they perceive the more distant world with intensity. However, they do so through the media, entertainment and advertisement, which make them an ever more passive, albeit aggressive, spectator of *The Society of the Spectacle* (Debord, 2012), which has eliminated direct contact from their life, which, at the same time, allowed them to develop a more profoundly sensitive and critical awareness (Gehl, 2006, p. 29).

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This article has revised the book of Reyner Banham, framing it in the morphological perspective in which the author himself inserted it when he summarized its shape into four pieces – the coast, the highway network, and its two main fabrics-; and although today it may seem evident, the analytical effort that the English critic made is among his greatest contributions, because it provides a theoretical framework to the study of the shape of a city which then, and as has already been seen, was a sort of enigma. Second, the paper has added to the discussion the jump in scale that Banham did not do –on remaining all the time behind the wheel of his car– to propose a view that allows adding new perspectives that contribute to understanding Los Angeles, and from which it is possible to build a critique that transcends excessive optimism –which sometimes emanates from the text of Banham- towards a metropolis which, in fact, delves into the loneliness of a person, isolated from the type of collective experience that was traditionally given in the public space the compact city offered. In New York, in the 1960's, for example, Jane Jacobs still managed to put the almost exclusively structural vision of Robert Moses up against the ropes, stating and detailing the qualities that she had seen in her walks through Manhattan, where she lived (Flint, 2011, p. xv-xvi). Surely a book like that of Jacobs (2011) is necessary, not on Los Angeles in particular anymore, but about suburbia in general; a view that, from the optic that emphasizes the sensitive experience of the city, is capable of attracting the complexity and diversity that this seems to lack.

⁸ Free translation.

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