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Influence of Video in Shaping the Perception of the Albanian

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Abstract
This study investigates the influence of video on shaping the perception of public space, with a particular emphasis on how video and film during Albania's transitional period (1991–2017) contributed to altering the understanding of these spaces. The everyday interaction with visual media—whether through videos, films, advertisements, or public displays—demonstrates that video has evolved into both a reflective and a manipulative instrument in the conceptualization of public space. Following the fall of the communist regime, Albania underwent rapid sociocultural and technological transformations that significantly reshaped its urban landscape and the way it was perceived by its inhabitants. Public spaces, such as Skanderbeg Square, emerged as critical arenas where these changes were both reflected and contested. Within this context, film and video art served as mediums to explore the tensions and intersections between space, identity, and collective memory. The study highlights that video functions not merely as a tool for documenting reality but as an active agent in crafting new spatial experiences. Through artistic techniques akin to the cinematic approaches of Andrei Tarkovsky, Wes Anderson, and Ridley Scott, as well as experimental practices in video art by local authors, video renders public spaces perceptible in novel ways. The study employs a phenomenological methodology, integrating archival research with comparative analysis. Film sequences are deconstructed and translated into graphic analyses, creating spatial representation schemes that reveal how visual perception and collective memory are shaped through video. Skanderbeg Square serves as the primary case study, illustrating the visible transformations in both its form and symbolic content. This square exemplifies how video fosters a dialogue between individuals and public spaces, enhancing the understanding of their interconnectedness. By adopting an interdisciplinary lens, this study addresses a significant gap in the literature at the intersection of video, architecture, and collective memory. It offers valuable insights for architects, urban planners, anthropologists, and scholars of visual arts, underlining the role of video as a powerful medium for interpreting and reimagining public space.

Keywords: *Architecture, Design, Sustainability, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Generative Design, Building Information Modelling (BIM), Life Cycle Assessment (LCA).*

Introduction

In our contemporaneity, the presence of the image as a constant in daily life is indisputable. Images that appear on streets, clothing, or magazines—and, above all, those conveyed through video, projections, and screens—exert a profound influence on our perception of reality. Our interaction with physical space and its representation through video imagery generates diverse perceptions that do not always align with the actual spaces being depicted.

Following the fall of the communist dictatorship, Albania underwent significant social, cultural, and economic transformations, opening itself to Western influences. Within this context, technology and visual arts experienced rapid development. The introduction of color television and foreign broadcasts into every household marked a significant cultural shift. At the same time, urban transformations, often carried out informally by residents—such as converting apartments into shops or constructing incongruous architectural additions—altered the visual identity of cities profoundly.

In the early 1990s, contemporary Western art forms, including performance, installation, and video art, began to penetrate the Albanian artistic landscape. Unlike painting, video offered unique advantages such as the manipulation of time, the integration of audio, and the dynamic mobility of imagery, creating a more impactful experience for viewers. The dystopian realities of the transitional period inspired Albanian artists, who used video to document urban transformations, the erosion of public space, and crises of identity.

Public spaces, such as Skanderbeg Square, emerged as critical arenas for these transformations and central themes for artists like Stefano Romano, Ergin Zaloshnja, Anri Sala, Alban Hajdinaj, Gentian Shkurti, and Irgin Sena. Their video works reflect on architectural interventions and the processes of public space erosion, transforming video into a public platform for experimenting with perceptions and artistic approaches. Film footage, video chronicles, and video art not only contextualize public spaces but, through editing and montage techniques, also enhance spatial perception, offering a more profound understanding of the dynamics of public space.

Research on Public Space through Moving Images

This study examines videos and films as tools that, through cinematic techniques, reshape our perception of public space. The primary objective is to juxtapose the architectural and monumental descriptions of public space with the dynamic interactions of the people inhabiting it. The research addresses two key questions: How do videos and films, from the onset of Albania's transitional period to the present day, manipulate reality in their representation of public space? And what cinematic and perceptual techniques are employed to depict public space in the era of neoliberalism?

Through a perceptual and spatial analysis of chronicles, films, and videos from the period 1991–2017, with a particular focus on Skanderbeg Square, the study highlights how moving images serve as instruments for preserving collective memory and emphasizing the significance of public space in the face of its erosion.

Objectives and Methodology of the Research

This research aims to explore the impact of moving images on the perception of public space and their role in its representation during Albania's transitional period. The primary objective is to analyze the cinematic and perceptual techniques employed to construct a narrative about public space, portraying it as a dynamic arena for social and political life.

The methodology involves analyzing film sequences depicting Skanderbeg Square, comparing them to the physical space, and reviewing relevant literature on these locations. Through drawings and visual analyses, the study seeks to identify recurring patterns in the representation and perception of public space, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of urban and artistic transformations during the transition period.

The perception of Space

The perception and documentation of space are central themes in this writing. It is, therefore, essential to establish definitions of visual perception, particularly in relation to moving images and public space.

The concept of perception has deep historical roots and has been extensively theorized in philosophy. Perception refers to the awareness or recognition of something external to oneself or the realization of the existence of entities beyond the self. At its core, perception serves as an intermediary between reality and its representation, functioning as a process that enables new forms of understanding derived from sensory or empirical data. Perception can be categorized in various ways, two of which include cognitive perception and Gestalt perception.

Since antiquity, visual perception has been regarded as an inherent faculty enabling engagement with the external world, providing a means of transitioning between external experiences and internal reflections, and vice versa. Early thinkers approached perception primarily as a physiological phenomenon tied to the eye and the sense of sight. Scholars such as Alhazen, Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, and others investigated the workings of the visual apparatus (the eye) and the nature of light, which, upon entering the eye, facilitates the perception of the external world. In parallel, philosophers like Baumgarten, Kant, and Schopenhauer examined visual perception from a philosophical standpoint, emphasizing the role of "choice" in aesthetic judgment and identifying perception as a variable shaped by subjective discernment.

The frescoes of Villa Boscoreale exemplify this perspective, extending interior spaces into exterior realms through the use of perspective, thereby expanding the viewer's perception beyond the confines of physical walls. In this context, as in other instances where artistic media are employed, visual perception is mediated through artifice, such as Brunelleschi's linear perspective and Leonardo da Vinci's atmospheric perspective. The latter complements linear perspective by adding a greater

sense of naturalism to images, enhancing the perceived authenticity of visual stimuli. Diverse viewpoints reveal different possibilities, creating suspense, surprise, and a sense of discovery, while also providing spatial reference points.

Visual perception is not merely the act of seeing; it also involves memory and acquired visual understanding. It encompasses a range of factors, including subjective awareness, attention, interpretation, and the integration of visual stimuli. It involves not only processing received information but also the subjective experience and the construction of meaning. Thus, visual perception can be described as a dynamic and complex process that reflects the interplay between sensory inputs, cognitive processes, and subjective experience.

The Essential Role of Visual Perception in Documentation

Central to visual perception is the documentation of impressions derived from specific moments, which reach us through sensory data extracted from a particular place or event, affirming our presence within it. This documentation of visual perception has historically led to the creation of images as representations of the visible world, positioning the observer as a recipient of visual impressions shaped by another. This parallels the role that painting assumed in translating visual perceptions from reality until the advent of the first photographic image by Niépce. The invention of photography liberated painting from its mimetic function, enabling it to engage more freely with the interpretation of visual perception.

Photography quickly replaced painting as the primary medium for capturing reality, offering previously unimaginable perspectives, such as aerial photographs by Nadar. These images provided an objective and immediate view of the world from above, where everything appeared static, allowing humanity to see itself from an entirely new vantage point at a specific moment in time, free from the awareness of being observed. Similarly, photographs from remote expeditions or wartime—such as those by Alexander Gardner—brought the visual perception of grim events occurring in a specific moment to a wide audience. These viewers, rather than perceiving the events as distant or abstract, assimilated the photographer's visual perception as if it were proximate, both in space and time.

However, as Merleau-Ponty notes, Rodin argued that photography deceives because it attempts to halt time, an endeavor that is inherently futile since time never ceases. (Merleau-Ponty, 1993) Indeed, time is in perpetual motion, and everything is continuously evolving. This concept was explored in the sequential studies of movement by photographer Eadweard Muybridge, who depicted a galloping horse through a series of photographs. These successive images conveyed the essence of motion. With the advent of moving images, visual perception ceased to be confined to a static representation frozen in time, becoming instead an interpretation drawn from the physical world and presented dynamically to the viewer.

Even the simple act of observing something and etching it into memory constitutes a form of documenting visual perception. Moreover, when we fix our visual perception onto a physical surface, it transforms into a reinterpretation of perception, layered with what Baumgarten refers to as the "judgment of beauty." This overlay enriches the act of documentation, blending subjective interpretation with objective representation.

Visual Representation Differences: Video and Painting

Following the logic of the preceding section, it can be argued that video adheres to the same foundational principles as painting. However, as demonstrated by scholars such as Merleau-Ponty and Benjamin, significant differences emerge in how these two mediums reflect the visual perception of public space. Both possess the capacity to alter their reference by producing an image that, while resembling its source, aligns with the synthesized visual perception derived from it.

Painting documents the visual perception of reality through the internal filter of the artist, incorporating their moral and aesthetic judgments. Consequently, a painting's depiction of the public space mirrors the artist's subjective visual interpretations.

Video, on the other hand, as Benjamin argues, is inherently



Figure 1. Ideal City, Florentine (Italian), after design by Giulio da San Gallo (Artist) ca. 1480-1484 (Renaissance), oil and tempera on panel

shaped by the artist's choices, such as camera angles and the editing of sequences, which actively guide the viewer's gaze (Benjamin, 1968) Despite this artistic mediation, video retains the detachment of a technological medium and the authenticity of its image as a reflection of reality. In this sense, the artist's role in video is not merely to create an image based on their own visual perception but to manipulate and reconfigure sequences extracted from reality.

As suggested by Ladaga and Manteiga, video has the potential to re-evaluate public space by serving as a surface for reflection and reinterpretation (Alexandro Ladaga, 2006) Nonetheless, the focus in this analysis lies in the representation of public space through video and the visual perception it generates for its audience. Through this lens, video is examined not just as a documentary medium but as a transformative tool for engaging with the perception of public spaces.

Visual Perception and Its Role in Artistic Representation

Visual perception employs various techniques and methods to function as a visual language, whether in drawing, photography, or film. These methods also serve to alter our visual perception, a subject that has been addressed by numerous authors. In his book Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye, (Arnheim, 2004), Rudolf Arnheim argues that language cannot freely express what we see in an image, as it serves only to name what we have seen, heard, or thought. He introduces several categories for the exploration of images in the visual arts, such as balance, harmony, weight, contrast, space, dynamics, form, and light, which artists use to construct images.

Similarly, Bernard Tschumi, an American architect, acknowledges the importance of movement and dynamism in public spaces. He employs graphic tracing to describe frames in sequence and to maintain dynamism, creating dynamic patterns extended in time with rhythm, which he then transforms into objects, sculptures, or structures (Abdel-Ghani, 2020). His methodology aligns with the Gestalt principles employed by Arnheim to describe composition and its rules.

Graphical transcription tools are also utilized in this work, such as drawing and markings, to analyze how Skanderbeg Square is depicted in Albanian films and videos. Tschumi's approach is inspired by Eisenstein's montage theory, and his methodology is comparable to that of Arnheim

The technical tools analyzed thus far serve the purpose of capturing, processing, and producing images. Through these tools, the artist can also alter the visual perception of the reference in the creation of a new image. For instance, by changing the angle from which a public space is filmed or drawn, the artist can present a different perspective. Therefore, one of the most important aspects to be explored in this research is manipulation as a creative act; it plays a fundamental role in our visual perception of public space. However, how do we refer to manipulation beyond its application through technical tools in image creation?

In general, manipulation refers to the act of influencing or controlling someone or something. It can be applied in various contexts. Art, for example, is one of the clearest examples of manipulation, as it manipulates the image to achieve the desired effect. It manipulates using "techne," meaning technique. The technique may be manual or involve mechanical or digital technical tools, but it always involves an image that is manipulated, or to use another more technical term, "edited." However, manipulation is not always a process involving technical image tools; it can also be a conceptual manipulation, where the image and the word do not correspond to what is visible or known.

Returning to the core of our theme, manipulation/editing has played a decisive role in cinematographic works that have significantly influenced our perception of public space, employing techniques that manipulate our understanding of this space. Wes Anderson uses symmetry and color to enhance the perception of public space with symmetrical designs and scene framing. He also uses chromatic schemes, creating a cohesive visual impression with saturated contrasts.

Andrei Tarkovsky employs prolonged shots to capture scenes for extended periods, disrupting our temporary connection. His cinematography often plays with transitions between spaces, both internal and external, and uses color to convey changes in space. Metropolis by Fritz Lang uses architecture to define the distinction between two social classes, with the working class confined to the lower city and the ruling class situated in the upper city.

In Blade Runner, color schemes and the confrontation between the upper and lower classes are employed to capture public spaces through symmetrical angles and massive volumes. The fluorescent geometries and perspective views reveal a distant horizon of the city with towering vertical structures.

In A Matter of Life and Death, extreme chromatic divergence is used, shifting between the black-and-white depiction of heaven and the vibrant colors of earthly life, creating turbulence between color and monochrome, symmetry and asymmetry, thus casting doubt on the authenticity of the presented space.



Figure 2. Frame sequence by Andrei Tarkovsky's Zone, in Stalker, 1979

Defining Public Space in the Context of this Study

For the purpose of the study, it is necessary to define in what connotation we use the word public space, as far as this study is concerned. Public space is a term that includes an area between architectural elements where people can move and engage with each other. It is an environment where personal visual memories converge to form collective expressions. Scholars such as Rosalyn Deutsche, Henri Lefebvre, and Claude Lefort have contributed to the understanding of public space. Deutsche emphasizes its political nature and power dynamics (Deutsche, 1998). while Lefebvre defines it as a place of meeting, passage, socialization, and cultural interaction. (Lefebvre, 1968) Lefort claims that public space serves as a symbolic arena for contesting and affirming political legitimacy, (Lefort, 1986).

Colomina's work on the relationship between media and architecture emphasizes the mediated nature of public space and the way in which different visual cultures construct and represent it (Colomina, 1994). Lefebvre's definition of public space is that it can only be defined as such when it serves as a place for encounters, passage, socialization, and cultural interaction. Deutsche argues that true public spaces are dynamic and contested, providing a platform for the expression of democratic ideals and the negotiation of social meanings.

Skanderbeg Square as a Cultural and Spatial Symbol

Skanderbeg Square, the central part of the monumental complex in Tirana, occupies a central place in the collective memory of Albania. The square has its origins in 1917 with the construction of the first parliament of Albania but was only named as such in 1968, when the Skanderbeg monument was placed there. It has undergone numerous transformations over the decades, which have been reflected in videos, films, photographs, and paintings. These media document its evolving identity, preserving its significance as a shared space. The memories of generations, expressed through elements like the square's fountains, demonstrate how perceptions change over time, shaped by personal experiences and architectural alterations. For example, previous generations' memories may evoke nostalgia, but they may not resonate with newer ones.

The square serves not only as a physical space but also as an environment layered with emotional and sensory experiences. Kevin Lynch's theories on urban images highlight the interaction between the observer and the environment in the formation of place-based memories (Lynch, 2020). Similarly, Ardian Vehbiu's analysis of the Clock Tower emphasizes its role as a stable, unchanging symbol amidst the flow of the square, compared to a cinematographic lens that witnesses and records the passage of time (Vehbiu, 2018).

The analysis is further enriched by elements of space representation. Photography and video are the primary mediums for documenting Skanderbeg Square, each offering different ways to preserve and reinterpret its public space. While photography captures single moments, video presents movement and temporal continuity, adding layers of narrative and emotional depth. Nevertheless, both media shape perceptions of architecture and public space through compositional techniques, framing, and manipulation of light and color.

The depiction of Skanderbeg Square in Albanian films, particularly during the dictatorship era, and in photographs by citizens, shows how technical elements like framing and perspective influence the public understanding of its architectural and spatial identity. A comparative analysis of video sequences further emphasizes how compositional



Figure 3. Skanderbeg Square, before War World II. The picture shows the area before the drastically changes in the landscape of the communist era

styles—such as symmetry or atmospheric effects inspired by filmmakers like Wes Anderson and Tarkovsky—can alter our perception of the square, creating a dynamic interaction between reality and the mediated image. Ultimately, these visual representations serve as historical evidence and as tools for reimagining the public space.

Video Sequence Analyses from: Chronicle of February 2 1991.

In the original study, 7 film materials with different sequential views were treated, but in this summary, we will only treat one film material, that of the chronicle of February 2, 1991. In the video footage of this chronicle, the entire event of the protest during the fall of communist regime that occurred on February 2, 1991, stands out. The video chronicle is a recording of Albanian Radio Television, the only existing television at the time. This video chronicle comprehensively encapsulates all the facts that happened on that day, focusing on the key events that occurred with a significant portion of the sequences referring to the strike in Skanderbeg Square. The events, from the gathering of people to the toppling of the bust of former dictator Enver Hoxha, are depicted. The video sequences portray various viewpoints, and in all cases, the architecture of the square functions as a theater of the events of the time. These video images have symbolically become emblems of the change in the communist system in Albania. Therefore, the video enacts the idea of the public space not as static but as dynamic, something that only the video with its inner characteristics can achieve with the image in movement. The chronicle enhances a representation of what a public space is, a site of contestation that becomes only visible when people reclaim it and not merely an architectural or monumental space (in the traditional sense of these words). Indeed, the fact that the viewpoint is not unique but is plural together with the use of peripherical portions of the square to depict the entirety contributes to this idea of the public space described above. Therefore, the public space is made, used, reclaimed by people and not, again, by the simple representation of its architectural or monumental components.

In Figure (4), the viewpoint offered is from the colonnade of the Palace of Culture, with the camera moving from left to right, focusing on the square and the crowd of people gathered around the space where the dictator's statue once stood. This viewpoint provides a transition between spaces; although both spaces may be considered external, the viewpoint in this case is within the columns, so it can be said to be within the structure of the building. The columns, in a way, offer a kind of transition or division of the two spaces. In the sequence, this is evident through the separation of graphic elements and as traces, and by the geometric elements, the geometric columns that traverse the image vertically (but in motion), providing a strong structural representation of the image and space, as they, as elements, help to bear the weight and break the horizontal traces created by the square's landscape and the crowds of people. The image is in motion, and the columns also form a rhythm that gives strength to the image. From this sequence, due to the columns in the foreground and the space of the square in the background, the scale of perspective is also determined; in relation to this, the dimensions of the square and the architectural elements offered in this sequence help in the monumental perception of this space. This contrast between the architectural/monumental and the space of people again makes evident the notion of the public space as dynamic and in motion. It is the human crowd that we see through the columns what makes us perceive the public space in a 'non-traditional' and architectural way highlighting its human nature.

In this first scene of the chronicle we can experience a different perception of the public space as a social claim space thanks to some cinematic technique used such as for instance the distance that the viewpoint enhances between the representation of the public space and the spectator; the position of the same spectator who sees from a 'safe place' the event of the contestation (through the spaces in-between the columns); the use of the symmetry that facilitates the perception of distances and movements, without which such public space wouldn't exist; the view from the top.

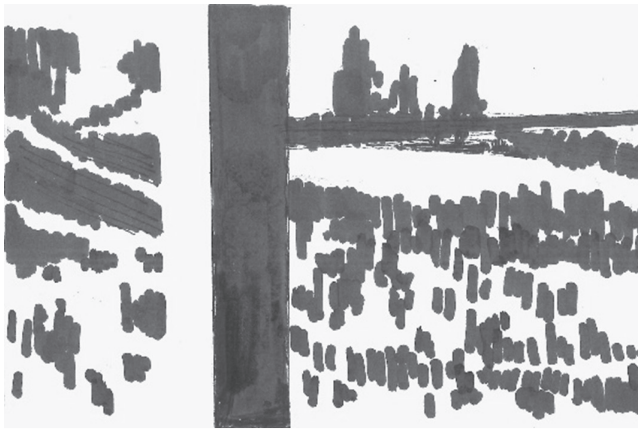
All these, a viewpoint that put the spectator in a position of distance, rather than a subject immerses into the crowd, contribute to see the crowd and not merely the architectural elements as the protagonist. Once again, the space becomes public when is inhabited by people and in this case, when is reclaimed as such.

Both drawings present graphically the image of figure 4. It is important to keep in mind that these represent a video sequence, so the elements are moving (from left to right). In the first illustration, a graphical translation of the image is observed with solid verticals and irregular horizontals. The verticals offer a solution that gives order to the graphical representation of this image, giving it greater stability.

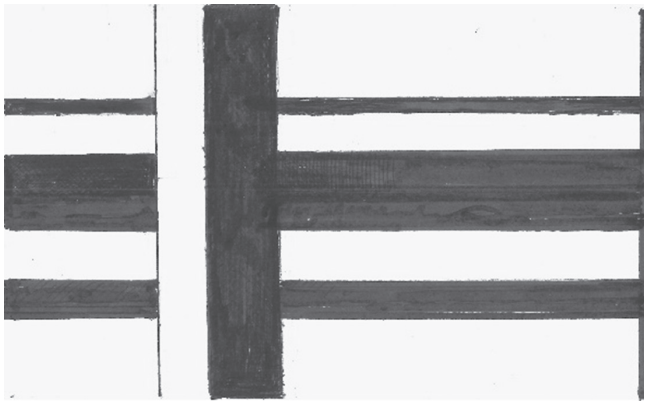
In the second illustration, the visual centrality is translated into a graphical model, where the verticals, moving with the



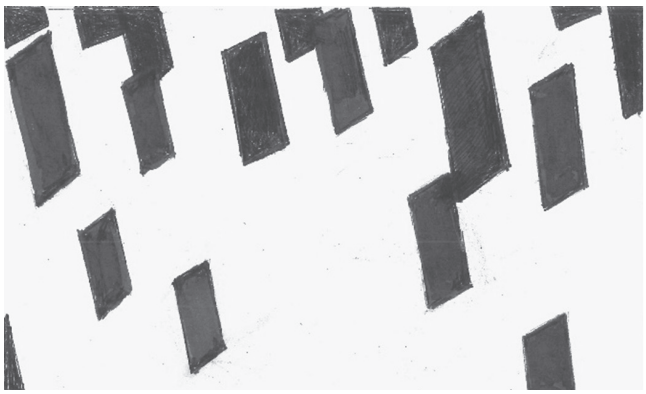
Figure 4. Retrieved from: The video clip from the 'Opinion' broadcast documenting the strike that occurred on February 20, 1991. (sequence from Culture Palace).



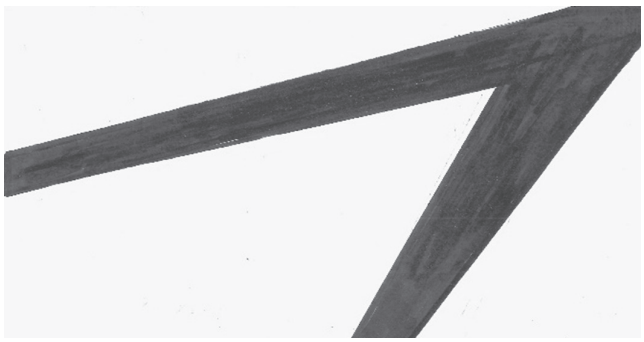
Drawing 1. Graphic drawing of figure 4, detecting graphic contrasts, in black and white, ink on paper, curtesy, of the author.



Drawing 2. Graphic representation of figure 4, illustrating a graphic flow in black and white, rendered in ink on paper, courtesy of the author.



Drawing 3. Graphic drawing of figure 5 (The Square), detecting graphic contrasts, in black and white, ink on paper, curtesy, of the author



Drawing 4. Graphic representation of figure 72, illustrating a graphic flow in black and white, rendered in ink on paper, courtesy of the author.



Figure 5. Retrieved from: The video clip from the 'Opinion' broadcast documenting the strike that occurred on February 20, 1991. (sequence showing the Square).

camera, act as sequence balancers, connecting not only the two sides of the image but also the internal and external space to it. The graphical elements of the visual field are translated into static horizontal lines. This second illustration synthesizes, through graphical elements, the sequence photogram that appears in figure 4.

It remains to be seen through other examples if the graphic elements that make up this sequence are repeated and if this pattern follows any visual scheme.

In the video sequence frame on figure (5), what is observed is a portion of the scene when the German shepherd dogs are attacking from the side of the police towards the protesters on February 2, 1990. The scene is constructed with dynamic sequences, where the subject is the public space of the square and the people that are moving with dynamism. From this viewpoint, the contours of the space (the square) are not discernible as a grid; if it were not for the people moving on it, the space would be alienated and indistinguishable because reference points would be lacking; the human subject in this case allows for the differentiation of the perspective of this square space. However, the video sequence we are watching is quite old, and as a result, the square is achromatic and devoid of color, and the entire image is like a kind of graphic play due to the technical means. At that time, the square was composed of small tiles and asphalt; however, the pattern and color of those did not allow for easy differentiation from the perspective of the eye. Unlike today, where the square consists of a grid or a well-arranged network of tiles, they are symmetrical and make the perception of space more comprehensible.

In the drawing number 4, a pattern has been created referring to figure 5, which represents with geometric shapes the graphic traces of people and animals present in that figure. The positioning of the rectangle is not in a clean vertical position because the graphic traces in the figure tend to be dynamic rather than static, so the non-verticality of the rectangles came as a reference from the image. As mentioned earlier, the drawing does not present distinguishable contours of the

square; in this case, the camera has used the graphic traces created by individuals in the square to create compositional balance. This is also evident in the subsequent drawing number 5 (below), where the trace of the visual weight carried by that sequence is apparent, and it serves best to describe the space, in a sense of visual weight and visual composition. The horizontal V shape carried out in this drawing serves also as an instrument for visual representation of the movement in the space of the square.

Conclusions

The graphic schemes extracted must be constantly considered as the results of sequences coming from a medium like video, which essentially captures movement and temporal progression. These sequences create patterns of spatial perception, where vertical shapes and indicators provide rhythmic repetition in the temporal perception of the event, thus evoking geometric elements, especially vertical ones, with stability that defines spatial coordinates, as illustrated in the drawings. The symbolism of the presence of the observation of vertical elements often redirects the focal point of the camera to have the verticals as a reference precisely because they provide stability. Another distinctive element is the element of proportional scaling, which does not always correspond to the vertical elements, however the following analysis reveals that in the realization of video materials, proportional scaling is widely used to best convey the impression of spatial depth.

In most of these videos, geometric shapes are used as reference points for the eye. It is precisely the use of these abstract forms that makes these artworks effective in changing our perception of public space. In fact, these forms, once again used as reference points, become aesthetic tools not only to describe architectural compositions, but more importantly to delineate the two subjects of these videos, the viewer and the spectator. These works invite us to see Skanderbeg Square from a perspective, from the most peripheral perspectives to see the entirety of the square, including the people who inhabit it, that is, to perceive the public space.

The video chronicle illustrates how Skanderbeg Square transcends its architectural elements to become a social and dynamic public space, shaped by human activity and historical events. The interplay of cinematic techniques, graphic representation, and human presence reveals the transformation of the square into a symbol of collective action and the reclaiming of public space.

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