



Revival of City Squares in Balkan Cities

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The Pythagoras' (un)costant

Curated by Stefano Romano

There is only the way you can count on | the road is the only salvation | there is only the desire, the need to go out | to be exposed in the street, in the square. | Because the Universal Judgment | does not pass for homes | from home you cannot hear trumpets | from home you walk away from life | the struggle, pain, bombs.
(Giorgio Gaber, "There is only the road," from the album "Even today we cannot fly")

My mobile house will still have two legs and my dreams will not have borders.
(Ernesto Rafael Guevara de la Serna, from "Works", v. 3, pt. 2)

The win will be of those who have been able to cause the disorder without loving him.
(Guy Debord, from "The Situationist International")

This exhibition emerged as an inspiration from the project Revival of City Squares in Balkan Cities, a project which aims to reflect on new creative ideas about city squares, by asking people who use those spaces about their values and problems, as well as to re-use them in order to create new vibrant, creative and livable spaces as city squares. The project is still developing in some cities of the Western Balkans, namely Tirana and Durrës (Albania), Kotor (Montenegro) and Skopje (Macedonia).

Cities play a key role since antiquity as they represent power and politics (characteristics often exercised by the people and then a prerogative of citizenship), as well as a place of economic activity. The space within them that represents all these issues is the square. In fact, we can see this in ancient Greece, where the square, called "Agora", was not just the 'center' of religion and commerce, but was also a symbol of democracy (e.g. the assembly of the polis gathered there to talk about politics).

Even in ancient Rome, urbanism and the building of the cities was very important for both reasons mentioned above, as well as for the role of the monument of Roman civilization. Thus, the concept of the "Ideal City" (Vitruvius) was born, which was supposed to respect the "*imago urbis*" of Rome, meaning that the buildings must have contained all the typical structures of the Roman world: thermae, amphitheater, theater, basilica, temple and forum. In this model of Roman culture, which takes much from the Greek, the central square, the Forum, was representative as in the "*Agorà*" of the heart of community life. It was a symbol of the entire city and had to be majestic, as well as connected to the temple portico and thus assuming the role of true geometric center of the historic city.

The square is therefore always a primary element in the genesis and in the image of a city and has always been the catalyst of the expression of the citizens' will. People gathered at the square to buy and sell goods, and to express their political feelings. With the industrial revolution at the end of the XVIII century social life and the appearance of the city itself changed radically. With the insertion in social and economic fabric of a completely different way of working and living, where the life rhythm was starting to get the factory work rhythm, the needs of people in their city life also changed profoundly. The transformation was continuous and included every sphere of public and private life. Since the Fifties started in Europe the development of the type of society or civilization in which we still live today. This was the beginning of the "industrial society at the stage of advanced capitalism" or the "mass civilization" or the "consumer society" that has led to the homogenization of the collective taste and to the commoditization of any kind of values. This type of social transformations converged in a series of reflections which found their climax in 1968.

1968 was in many ways an important year, in which a large mass of socially heterogeneous movements (workers, students and minority ethnic groups) formed by aggregation often spontaneous, crossed almost all countries of the world with their dissenting charge and seemed to shake governments and political systems in the name of a radical transformation of society. The square was the obvious place of the complaints, requests, clashes. The course of events in a relatively concentrated and intense time, helped to identify the name of the movement, precisely with the year

1968. The movement originated in the mid 1960s in the United States and reached its climax in 1968 in Western Europe. In the West (Europe and the United States) a vast coalition of students and workers took a stand against the ideology of the then new consumer society, which proposed the value of money and the market in the capitalist world as a central point of social life, against the Vietnam War, by binding to the battle for civil rights and philosophies that express a radical rejection of the principles of capitalist society (counterculture). At the same time, some populations of the Eastern bloc rose up to denounce the lack of freedom and the intrusiveness of the party bureaucracy.

Despite being spread throughout the world, the youth protests died down in the early 1970s, anywhere without having apparently reported significant results. Merit of the youth movement of those years was, especially in the West, to put as focus of interest values which had been the interest of a few. Topics such as pacifism, anti-racism, rejection of power as a form of domination of the privileged few, women's rights and an interest in the environment, became a permanent part of the political debate and the socio-cultural world as a whole.

After many years, in which the world was shaken by protests - all taking place at the square (remember the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989), we are now faced with a new global crisis, a crisis that many are calling the biggest so far, as it has affected the whole world in a chain reaction. Slowly, one after the other, many Western countries have found themselves on the brink of failure, which has triggered (once again) the squares to revolt and spontaneously gave birth to a new "occupation movement" in which one can find links with the 1968 movement, the social heterogeneity, and the fight against a) inequality (now even more pronounced), b) the economic market, and c) the use of war as an instrument of dialogue. Perhaps a movement born away from the square, or rather born into a new typology of square, the virtual one. The Internet, the virtual space, is a place where people can share information and organize themselves, has revolutionized the idea of public space and it has appropriated terms that originally made sense only in the idea of physically meeting people, such as "forum" (from "Forum" square in Latin). The Internet has thus assumed the shape of the contemporary square, summarizing in itself some characteristics such as that of meeting people from heterogeneous layers of society with the opportunity to express their own opinions, to form groups of thoughts and to give people the opportunity to organize protests or to make their voices heard. But as much as the virtual space has acquired a tremendous force as a "place" of complaint, dialogue and expression of ideas, it is still difficult to get to "see" through the network; to read that a forum was attended by 300,000 people, it is still different than to see them all gathered together in a physical, real space. What space then if not yet the square? This place that the "Strong Powers" wanted to plunder of all its most important functions because they have understood its power; this space more and more conceived in the new "Imago Urbis" of contemporary cities as accessory, decorative space and whose new shapes were drawn and conceived to prevent people from meet there forming a "thinking mass"; because capitalist society and its market need masses, but only as a shapeless mass of people in front of their TV choosing new goods to buy, not as a mass of people spontaneously gathered to demonstrate their dissent or their will.

From these considerations we can understand how the square is an element whose physical peculiarities are easy to describe, but the use of which is difficult to characterize. Perhaps it is still stronger to use a megaphone for people's voices. It is with these interpretations that the exhibition titled **The Pythagoras' (un) constant** can be understood.

In the English language the word "square" is the same term for a square (the architectonic element). In geometry the diagonals of a square are $\sqrt{2}$ (about 1.414) times the length of a side of the square; this value, known as Pythagoras' constant, was the first number proven to be irrational. The value of the diagonal of a square (even of a city square) is defined by a constant number, irrational, but constant, namely immutable; all the other values changes but not this one. Speaking in real terms, when you work in public space, how could you define a constant, immutable, independent value? When artists have begun to deal with public space, they have somehow violated an unsafe space, where the role of chance, the reaction of ordinary people, institutions, time, and a thousand of other variables were and are totally unpredictable. Violating this space and accepting the risk of leaving a part of the production of their artwork open to the chance, has made art in some way a complex tissue, in which the final result not only is not guaranteed but is also absolutely incalculable, inconstant, because it is subject and object to all the variables that operate in that space. Hence the need to bring the Pythagoras "constant" again to unknown, into a changeable number, an (un) constant value, because there are too many variables involved in order to calculate a priori the result with mathematical (or political) precision.

[] **The protest in the square**

Oliver Ressler, Take the square

The video installation by the Austrian artist can be read as an analysis of the movements of the squares that begun in 2011 as a reaction to the social and economic inequality that the new global political and economical system is provoking in an always more accentuated way.

The video is based on discussions conducted with activists from “15M” in Madrid, the “Syntagma Square Movement” in Athens and “Occupy Wall Street” in New York. Three cities, three different Countries where people arrive to the same operating mode in a kind of “Spirit of the Time” of Kant memories, covering issues of organization, horizontal decision-making processes, the importance and function of occupying public spaces and how social change can occur.

[] The time in the square

Zimmerfrei, Panorama_Bologna

The artwork realized by the group Zimmerfrei is a living portrait of a city. It's a portrait made by compressed time, realized with a fixed camera turning in circle as a clock. Piazza Maggiore, the very earth of the town, is populated by every kind of people but between tourists and cleaning workers, we can especially recognize old men, students and immigrants' families, the only ones who still use the central place as a social meeting point. Among unaware passer-bys there are some who take their time and build up a bigger place for their own figure and attitude, making self-portraits or group portraits as sculptures of time.

[] The change in the square

Verica Kovacevska, The Last Pioneers

photo - performance, 2012

This work was supposed to contain one hundred people in their late twenties and early thirties, wearing jeans, white shirts and a red pioneer scarf. The artist wanted to tell the story of the last generation of pioneers of Albania, who equipped with the dresses to perform, but left without the system for which to perform, found themselves in turbulent times of change.

The Skenderbeg Square was chosen as an important historical reference - a place that was formerly used by the pioneers during various ceremonies. By placing them “back at the square”, the artist wanted to look back to their pioneer experience and the radical social and political changes since then, putting them at the front as the forthcoming generation that will take an active role in creating the new Albanian society.

Unfortunately, the artist's permit to complete the work at Skenderbeg Square was revoked upon her arrival in Tirana, as any references to the country's socialist past were no longer welcome.

However, this did not stop two pioneers, who nonetheless came to the square at short notice and re-claimed their history and the public space.

[] The dialogue in the square

Network Nomadic Architecture, Breaking the borders

The Greek artistic - architectonic collective perform an action in one of the three key points of the Boulevard of Tirana, “Mother Teresa” square. The action consists of a long table laden with Greek and Albanian food to which passersby are invited to sit and eat a meal prepared especially for them, to help the spontaneous discussion and dialogue on issues such as borders, public space and their use, ethnicity, poverty etc ... The discussion will be aided by a video made earlier in the historical center of Athens that tells of people, their stories, their experience and all the issues that can be addressed in the discussion in Tirana.

[] The politics in the square

Armando Lulaj, FECAL JUSTICE

Albanians still do not ask for the bill for their problems, people educated by this policy today continues to remain motionless and under pressure. For this we must look as an example the story of E.D. the child who was only 7 years old when he died of burns on 80 percent of the body following the explosion of the arms factory of Gerdec. Him that he was there accidentally, as each child pushed by curiosity, friendship, the desire to go out, stay out and experience new thrills, sees life through his eyes curious as a child. He was founded still alive after the explosion and whispered to his father, “Sorry dad that I go out without permission”. This phrase, recorded with the artist's voice will be heard in Scanderbeg Square.

[] The economy in the square

Studio203, Sum to zero – (Tirana's Unveiled Archive#1)

Tirana's Unveiled Archive is an archive of images, on public spaces in Tirana, spaces, which use and identity no longer coincide. For this become the object of reflection of studio203, to create an overall view of spaces revealed again in their own identity. Specifically "sum to zero" reflects on "Avni Rustemi" square called "Pazar i ri" (the new market). This place exists only as a venue for this local market, people no longer even remember the name of the square, and without it the square itself completely lose its identity. The work starts from this identity acquired from the square, according to an economic law called the "Law of Walras", in a market excess demand is zero. The photograph shows an attempt to keep in balance on a counter of a stand of the market at "Pazar i ri", in the cold light of the night and the warm lights of the stands left on by the merchants, in contrast to the hustle and bustle of the day.

[] The vision in the square

aMAZElab, Open City Balkani

The project of aMAZElab developed throughout 2011 intended to reflect the city as an open space, a space of exchanges and encounters, freedom and social equity, a crossroads of cultures in which every individual can become a "citizen". For this purpose "Open City Balkani" has developed in all Western Balkans different activities and the realization of a series of posters exhibited in many of the cities where the project was hosted. Each artist has created an image that was an expression of the search for a new identity of the Balkans that was expression of hopes, resources, and visions.

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