Architectural Interpretation of Kiarostami's Poetic Cinema

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

The Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami is famous for mobilizing natural landscapes and Iranian vernacular architecture as the primary set for his films. These spaces function not only as visual motifs, but also as elements that shape the cinematic spaces of his films, recount the narratives, and foreshadow the plot's conclusions.

This thesis examines five of his films to understand how natural and built spaces have been used in visual storytelling and to derive an architectural interpretation from his cinematic spaces.

Positing that a film can be read through spatial experiences, this thesis aims to discuss and deconstruct the spatial composition of Kiarostami's cinematic images, and then re-envision them through an architectural narrative. I discuss the way these spaces have been chosen, illustrated, and juxtaposed in sequential frames. Then, through a process that combines architectural design with cinematic framing and editing, I reconstruct and present spaces inspired by Kiarostami's vision of place and space in a series of architectural vignettes.

Through the act of investigating Kiarostami's spatial language, this thesis introduces architectural methodologies as a tool for the analysis of cinematic narratives and concepts. The visualization of these narratives through my own interpretation transcribes Kiarostami's approach to spatial storytelling into architectural place making and design.

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Kiarostami's Cinema

Introduction

Throughout the past century, cinema has been one of the most influential phenomena in redefining our understanding of our surroundings. By evolving the ancient traditions of storytelling, offering new visual aesthetics, and providing new possibilities for observation, cinema has had a deep influence on other forms of art. Equally, it has been influenced by other art forms, such as theatre, music, literature, and architecture. As Sergei Eisenstein wrote, "It seems that all the arts, throughout the centuries, tended toward cinema. Conversely, cinema helps us to understand their methods."[1]

The relation between architecture and cinema and their influence on one another can also be discussed in different ways. As Juhani Pallasma points out, "the interaction of cinema and architecture – the inherent architecture of cinematic expression, and the cinematic essence of architectural experience – is equally many-sided."[2] Filmmakers have used the potential of architecture to shape the atmosphere and cinematic space of their movies: bedrooms often project privacy, fireplaces suggest intimacy, and staircases imply passage.[3] Conversely, architects have adopted features of cinema, such as editing, successive images, and cinematography in their projects.

Another aspect of this relationship appears when one of these two becomes the subject of the other. The layered architecture of the city of Metropolis, in the sci-fi movie *Metropolis* (1927)*,* illustrates and symbolizes the relation between social classes in a future city; the contradiction between old and modern buildings and landscapes in *Mon Oncle* (1958) illustrates common lifestyles in American cities. The life of social classes in *Metropolis,* and the issues of modern life in *Mon Oncle*, are the main themes of the movies, which have been represented, directly and metaphorically, through architecture.

Cinema has also become the subject of architectural projects in different ways. As the places in which films are screened, movie theatres shape the cinematic experience of the audience and play a key part in the perception of movies. In projects such as the Museum of the Moving Image, by Thomas Leeser, or the Linked Hybrid Cinémathèque, by Steven Holl, cinema has become the subject of architecture both functionally and conceptually.[4] Also, Le Corbusier's concept of *promenade architecturale,* which he has used in a number of his

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[1] Sergei Eisenstein, from the draft of a preface for *Cinematisme*, quoted by François Albera in his introduction, 7; quoted in Yve-Alain Bois, introduction to "Montage and Architecture," by Sergei M. Eisenstein, trans. Michael Glenny, *Assemblage*, no. 10 (December 1989): 112, https://doi.org/10.2307/3171145.

[2] Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema* (Helsinki: Rakennustieto Oy, 2001), 14.

[3] Ibid., 20.

[4] James Macgillivray, "The Death of Film in Architecture: Two Recent Cinemas," in *100th ACSA Annual Meeting Proceedings, Digital Aptitudes*, eds. Mark Goulthorpe and Amy Murphy (Boston: ACSA, 2012), 147, http://apps.acsa-arch.org/resources/proceedings/uploads/streamfile.aspx?path=ACSA.AM.100&name=ACSA.AM.100.20.pdf

projects, including Villa Savoye, or Jean Nouvel's idea of architecture as analogous to cinema, are based on the idea of experiencing architecture as a series of successive images.[5]

The correspondence between architecture and cinema also appears when the cinema of filmmakers, especially those of auteurs, become the subject of architectural research. Each filmmaker uses architectural elements and spaces in a certain way that leads to their unique cinematic style and recognizable atmosphere in their films. Architectural elements in the movies of filmmakers such as Charlie Chaplin, Alfred Hitchcock, and Andrei Tarkovsky have been frequently discussed by art researchers such as Juhani Pallasmaa, Graham Cairns, and Donald Albrecht to recognize and analyze the influence of architecture on their movies.

This thesis aims to explore the work of one of the auteurs of cinema, not merely through his use of architecture, but through its cinematic form. In this thesis, cinema and architecture are assumed to share one fundamental task, which is to build place. As Juhani Pallasmaa asserts, framing an image indicates the establishment of place, which is the fundamental task of architects. Hence, he believes that almost every cinematic image includes architecture, regardless of whether architecture has been shown in it or not.[6]

By positing that each shot of a film is architecture, it is possible to discuss the concept that architecture creates within a film, much like the meaning of a shot in that film. We can discuss the creation of shots in cinema, like the creation of space in architecture. This approach allows us to see the film and interpret the spaces and atmospheres to reach a new understanding of the film; to discuss the movie through its architectural language. We can see images, their framing, and their sequentiality, and discuss places, experience of space, and the planning of spaces.

fig. 2 - Archidirectors

Federico Babina's graphic design project focuses on the authors of cinema, and illustrates a house based on the architecture used in their movies.

To explore the idea of interpreting movies as pieces of architecture, the cinema of Abbas Kiarostami has been chosen as a source of inspiration. This thesis suggests an architectural interpretation of his cinema by analyzing the cinematic spaces and forms of his movies and translating them into architecture. This idea is developed through research on the relation between cinematic form and

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[5] Eisenstein, "Montage and Architecture," 130; Jean Nouvel, "Incorporating: Interview with Alejandro Zaera," *El Croquis, 1987-1998, Jean Nouvel*, El Croquis Editorial (1998): 39, quoted in Graham Cairns, *The Architecture of the Screen: Essays in Cinematographic Space* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2013), 39.

[6] Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image*, 20.

architecture. Every movie consists of four formal elements: mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound.[7]

Three of these four elements have deep roots within architecture, which have been explored by art researchers such as Juhani Pallasmaa, Sergei Eisenstein, and Graham Cairns. Juhani Pallasmaa's article, "Lived Space in Architecture and Cinema" discusses cinematic space and cinematography, and their relation to architecture; Sergei Eisenstein in his article, called "Montage and Architecture," focuses on editing and cinematography in architecture. And Graham Cairns covers various aspects of this relationship in his book called *The architecture of the Screen.*

Abbas Kiarostami made movies for forty-seven years, and employed various forms, techniques, and narratives styles. His work ranges from educational movies for children, to movies about the issues of middle-class people, to complex movies that question the relationship between life and death.

This thesis focuses on five of Kiarostami's most celebrated movies: *Where Is the Friend's Home? Life and Nothing More*, *Through the Olive Trees*, *Taste of Cherry*, and *The Wind Will Carry Us*. These movies, made between 1987 and 1999, possess similar cinematic, visual, and formal characteristics. They were made about similar subjects, shot in similar spaces, and narrated in a similar style. They are often considered poetic movies, primarily because of their unique cinematic and narrative styles that are closer to poetry than the novelistic tradition in filmmaking.[8]

The first chapter of this thesis, "Kiarostami's Cinema," is an introduction to the cinema of Kiarostami. By analyzing the five films of Kiarostami, this chapter briefly investigates Kiarostami's worldview and his notions of cinema, including his approach to realistic and minimal filmmaking, which shapes the language of his movies and influences the audience's perception of them.

The subsequent section, "Architecture and Kiarostami's Cinema," discusses the three formal elements of cinema: *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, editing, and their relation to architecture. This chapter also explores the architectural aspects of Kiarostami's films: the way architecture has shaped the *mise-en-scène* of his films and how it affects his cinematography and editing. Positing that a film can be read through architecture, this chapter suggests interpretations derived from natural and architectural spaces of his films.

In the third chapter, "Architecture Derived from Kiarostami's Cinema," I will use the analyses of the first two chapters and explore a method to connect the cinema of Kiarostami to architecture. I will design a series of architectural vignettes derived from *mise-en-scène* and

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[7] David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson*, Film Art: An Introduction*, 8th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 111.

[8] Abbas Kiarostami, "Films Without Borders: Abbas Kiarostami Talks About 'ABC Africa' and Poetic Cinema," interview by Scott Foundas, *IndieWire*, accessed January 6, 2020, https://www.indiewire.com/2002/05/interview-films-without-borders-abbas-kiarostami-talks-about-abc-africa-and-poetic-cinema-80407/

cinematography of Kiarostami's films, and then I will juxtapose them based on the editing of his films and the way he put spaces together. Through translating the cinematic form of Kiarostami's movies into their architectural analogues, this thesis aims to present an architectural interpretation of the movies of one of the most acclaimed contemporary filmmakers.

fig. 3 – Abbas Kiarostami

Kiarostami

Abbas Kiarostami was an Iranian artist born in 1940. He studied painting and worked as a graphic designer and then as a director of promotional videos. He was first drawn toward cinema by making credit titles for Iranian movies in the late 1960s. In early 1970s, he started his filmmaking career at Kanun (the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults) in Tehran, assisting this foundation in creating educational material for children. In twenty-one years at Kanun, he made sixteen shorts and four feature films, including *The Travele*r (1974), *Where Is the Friend's Home?* (1987), *Close-Up* (1990), and *Life and Nothing More* (1992).

He started gaining international acclaim with *Where Is the Friend's Home?* and *Close-Up*. In 1987, *Where Is the Friend's Home?* won the Bronze Leopard at the Locarno Film Festival; in 1992, *Life, and Nothing More* was screened in the Un Certain Regard section at the 1992 Cannes Film Festival and awarded the Roberto Rossellini Prize; and in 1994, *Through the Olive*

Trees was nominated for the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival.[9] These three movies, known as the "Koker Trilogy," demonstrate the progress of Kiarostami's filmmaking skills and development of his unique cinematic style, which led to *Taste of Cherry,* the winner of 1997 Palme d'Or, and *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999)*.*

In the 2000s, Kiarostami became involved in various activities: he published collections of his poems, participated in photography exhibitions in different parts of the world, published books about Iranian poets, and directed operas. He continued making experimental films; his use of digital cameras and computers in cinema resulted in movies such as *ABC Africa* (2001), *Ten* (2002), *Five* (2003)*,* and *24 Frames* (2017). He also made two features outside of Iran: *Certified Copy* (2010) and *Like Someone in Love* (2012). Kiarostami passed away on July 4, 2016 and is buried in Lavasan, Iran.

fig. 5 - The Bread and Alley   *fig. 4 - Take Me Home*
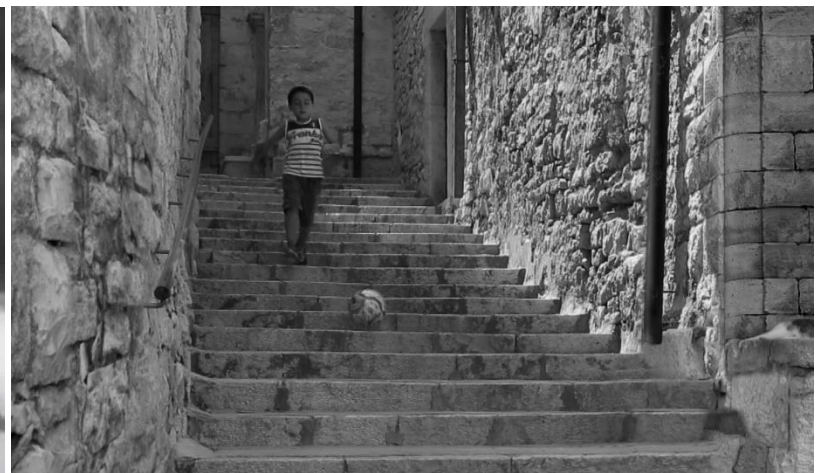
Kiarostami's first film, *The Bread and Alley* (1970), compared to *Take Me Home* (2016), the last film he made before he passed away*,* illustrates the strong resemblance among his films in over four decades of filmmaking.

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[9] "Khaneh-je doost kojast? (Where is the Friend's Home?)," Locarno Film Festival, accessed January 6, 2020, https://www.locarnofestival.ch/pardo/program/film.html?fid=898028&eid=69; "Zendegi Edame Darad," Festival de Cannes, accessed January 6, 2020, https://www.festival-cannes.com/en/films/zendegi-edame-darad; "Zire Darakhtan Zeyton," Festival de Cannes, accessed January 6, 2020, https://www.festival-cannes.com/en/films/zire-darakhtan-zeyton

A Poetic Cinema

Kiarostami's cinema is often considered as minimalistic cinema primarily because of his approach in avoiding complex techniques of acting, directing and scene-setting, and recounting about ordinary people. Kiarostami often employed non-professional actors and chose real locations as the set of his films to reach a simple and more realistic language in cinema.

He gradually developed a style in which the role of cinematic elements was reduced to a minimum. Elements such as *mise-en-scène*, narrative, editing, production design, artificial lighting, and sound were simplified or removed from his movies, and all the elements were used purposefully to serve his certain cinematic style. As a result of this approach, his films emphasize on images and invite audience to observe all the details carefully. As Jean-Luc Nancy argues, "Kiarostami mobilizes the look: he calls it and animates it, he make it vigilant."[10]

Kiarostami used to base his movies on reality. In his cinema, the narratives are often based on real occurrences and actual locations and characters. As he stated that location is the most important part of a film, he tried to capture the atmosphere and spaces of an existing location, and develop his initial ideas based on them.[11] He found his characters in these locations and chose them to play their own role in front of the camera. Often the development of the narrative and screenplay was based on lives and personalities of these ordinary people.[12]

His films often recount stories about the routine life of ordinary people. These narratives are presented in real and non-manipulative images—the sensitivity to the beauty of life as lived and the basic graces of everyday life delicately included in the moments of his movies. Kiarostami himself states that there are details in everyday life, which despite seeming inconsiderate, deserve to receive our noble observation when framed by the camera.[13] These ordinary moments of everyday life, along with his approach in depicting non-manipulative images, rebuild our perception of reality. As Khatereh Sheibani argues, in cinema of Kiarostami, "camera functions as revealing fresh eyes clear and cleansed enough to grasp the reality that the audiences' eyes failed to see before."[14]

Mehrnaz Saeedi Vaffa states that "certain images or inspiring moments that may look insignificant or irrelevant are in fact illuminating. Moments that occur at seeming random in the middle of a scene wind up informing both the character and the viewer."[15] These simple images do not eliminate the complexity of a subject; rather, they try to achieve a simpler, more

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[10] Jean-Luc Nancy et al., *Lévidence Du Film - The Evidence of Film: Abbas Kiarostami* (Paris: Y. Gevaert éd., 2001), 16.

[11] Godfrey Cheshire, Abbas Kiarostami, and Ahmad Kiarostami, *Conversations with Kiarostami* (New York: Woodville Press, 2019), 29.

[12] *10 on Ten*, directed by Abbas Kiarostami (city, country: MK2 Productions, Zeitgeist Films, 2002): 49:25–50:15, DVD.

[13] "La leçon de cinéma de Abbas Kiarostami." directed by Mojdeh Famili: 13:20-13:42, Disk 2, Le Vent nous emportera, Édition Collector. Directed by Abbas Kiarostami: (MK2, 2002.) DVD.

[14] Khatereh Sheibani, "Kiarostami and the Aesthetics of Modern Persian Poetry," *Iranian Studies* 39, no. 4 (December 2006), 512.

[15] Jonathan Rosenbaum and Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa, *Abbas Kiarostami* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 58.

intimate language to emphasize the complexities of the issue. These ordinary details turn into notable moments that enrich viewer's understanding of the subject and allows personal perception of Kiarostami's films. These images allow viewers to go further than just watching reality and to reach greater truths and the more complex concepts hidden behind the images.

The inherent complexities and contradictions of the themes are delicately and indirectly presented in certain moments to offer the audience the opportunity of thinking. As Godfrey Cheshire suggests in his article "A Cinema of Questions," Kiarostami's movies offer the audience questions, instead of answers: from simple questions about the narrative to questions and contradictions about human life.[16] His films do not offer a fixed answer; instead, they show a path and ask the audience to reach their own destination. They offer various readings of reality and do not intend to suggest an absolute and unchangeable whole.[17] Kiarostami relates this characteristic to the qualities of poetry and believes that a poetic cinema "has the capabilities of a prism. It has a complexity to it. It has a lasting quality. It's like an unfinished puzzle that invites us to decipher the message."[18]

To find the answer to the questions and decipher the message, the audience have to reveal their personalities, their past, and beliefs. Kiarostami suggests that divergent reactions of different people about one film reveal more about the life of the individuals who have interpreted it than his films ever could about one specific character in a film.[19] In his cinema, some spaces are left ambiguous and uncertain for the audience to fill in and complete the film. He believed that when people are engaged in the creative process of a piece of art, they can derive notions that are more graceful than his own, and he was not inclined to interrupt this process and limit their imaginations.*[20]

Kiarostami used the language and the structure of poetry in his films to convey a sense of multiple realities.[21] Khatereh Sheibani compares "Kiarostami's realism" to the realism used in certain modern Persian poems and argues that "[T]his multiplicity of possibilities liberates his film from having a fixed meaning by providing space to its spectators to draw their conclusions."[22] These multiple meanings are often created by leaving empty spaces in the film. The viewers start to find the answers and fill in the blanks to complete the film in their minds and create their own truths based on the reality that has been depicted in the film. In this way, there will be hundreds of films derived from one.[23]

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[16] Godfrey Cheshire, "Abbas Kiarostami: A Cinema of Questions," *Film Comment* 32, no. 4 (1996): 34-43, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41689284

[17] Sheibani, "Kiarostami and Persian Poetry," 512.

[18] Abbas Kiarostami, *Lessons with Kiarostami*, ed. Paul Cronin (New York: Sticking Place Books, 2015), 20.

[19] Ibid, 22.

[20] Houshang Golmakani, and Majid Eslami. "An interview with Kiarostami: The viewer is right!" *Film Magazine*, June 9, 1998, 28-37. *Translation mine.

[21] Rosenbaum and Saeed-Vafa, Abbas Kiarostami, 59.

[22] Sheibani, "Kiarostami and Persian Poetry," 513.

[23] Kiarostami, *Lessons with Kiarostami*, 21.

Cinema critics often make — and complete — Kiarostami's films through the metaphors that they believe are hidden in the images, and interpret them in various and sometimes paradoxical ways. Art researchers read them through poetry and painting, and philosophers relate them to certain mystical schools of thought. And yet, it seems that there is no singular way of reading his cinema; rather a way of personal understanding and interpretation, and the fact that what he presents on the screen is only the starting point of a creative process.

fig. 6 - Where Is the Friend's Home?

Where Is the Friend's Home? (1987, 85 mins., Kanoon)

It is the first part of Kiarostami's trilogy, called the Koker Trilogy or the Earthquake Trilogy. The movie narrates the story of a young student who takes his friend's notebook by mistake, and tries to find him to give it back to him. He searches for his friend in the narrow meandering paths of his village, walks all the way to another village back and forth tirelessly, but cannot find his friend's house.

fig. 7 - Life and Nothing More...

Life and Nothing More... (1992, 95 mins., Kanoon)

The second movie of the Earthquake Trilogy is about a man and his son who are heading to a village two days after an earthquake struck that area, and killed thousands of people. They are looking for the two characters of the *Where Is the Friend's Home?* movie who live in that village, and hoping to find them alive. On their way to the village they see the catastrophes of the earthquake and its impact on their lives.

fig. 8 - Through the Olive Trees

Through the Olive Trees (1994, 103 mins., Abbas Kiarostami Productions)

The film crew of *Life and Nothing More…* have chosen a man and a woman to play the role of a couple in the movie. During the shooting of a scene and during the interruptions between numerous takes, the man, who is madly in love with the woman, tries to convince her to marry her. Although the woman does not talk to him or even react, the man explains his reasons, and repeats "I love you," over and over again.

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fig. 9 - Taste of Cherry

Taste of Cherry   (1997, 95 mins., Abbas Kiarostami Productions)

A middle-aged man drives through the paths of a hill, and tries to find someone to bury him. He has planned to take all of his pills at night, comes to a hole that he has dug on the hill, and sleeps in the hole. He is looking for someone to come in the morning, and throw dust on his body and bury him. He picks up a soldier, a seminarian, and an old man, and tries to convince them to bury him first thing in the morning.

fig. 10 - The Wind Will

Carry Us

The Wind Will Carry Us   (1999, 118 mins., MK2 Productions)

A film crew is heading to a faraway village in the western part of Iran to shoot a local mourning ritual. They have been told that one of the residents of the village is seriously sick, and is going to die soon. They spend days in the village while they can hardly communicate with the outside world, and have nothing to do other than waiting for her death. Early one morning, the sound of crying comes from the old woman's house. The residents begin to gather together to perform the ritual.
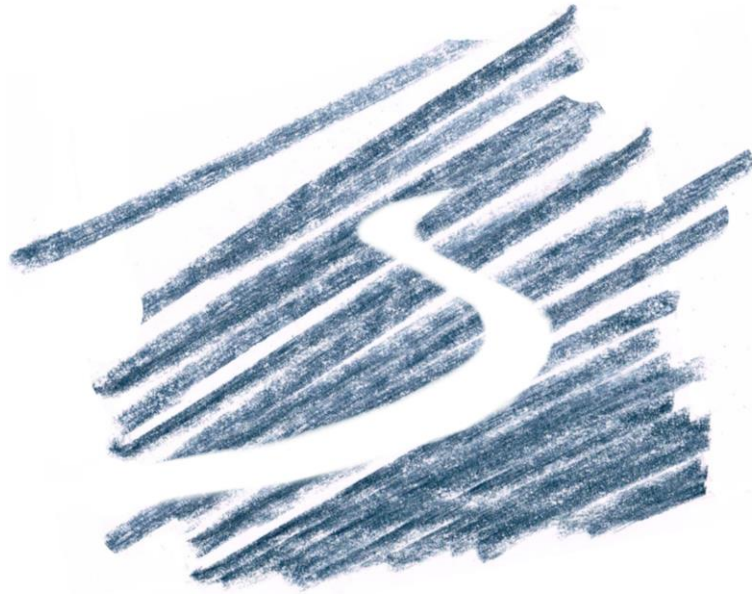
Architecture and Kiarostami's Cinema

Each form of art includes specific formal elements that allow us to perceive that piece of art through those elements. To be able to decipher a painting, we need to know about the features of this medium, like colour and composition, while the analysis of a novel requires knowledge of language.[24]

According to David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson in *Film Art*, every film consists of four key cinematic elements: *mise-en-scène,* cinematography, editing, and sound. *Mise-en-scène* and cinematography are the two elements related to the shot; the former shapes the contents of the frame, and the latter influences the frame. Editing modifies the relation between the shots, and sound the relation between sound and picture.[25] Although these elements might seem to be confined to the realm of cinema, they have been frequently interpreted in other forms of art. Sergei Eisenstein, who researched the influence of cinema and its techniques on other forms of art such as painting, literature, and architecture, believed that all the arts have borrowed from cinema and conversely, that cinema has learned from the other arts.[26]

Eisenstein argued that long before cinema, architects mobilized cinematic techniques such as editing and sequentiality in their works to recount a narrative. Referring to the spaces of the Acropolis of Athens, the movement of the users on the site, the organization of buildings and elements, and their influence on viewers through framing, Eisenstein calls the Acropolis one of the most ancient movies that have been ever made.[27] Likewise, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, by analyzing the temples in certain cultures, argues that, the architecture of these spaces has mobilized the effect of sequentiality to shape a sense of anticipation and climax.[28]

As with editing, the two other visual cinematic elements – cinematography and *mise-en-scène* – have strong architectural links or equivalents. As in Eisenstein's article "Montage and Architecture," the user's movement and what the eyes frame in an architectural space have been taken as equivalent to the camera's movement and the framing of the shots. Furthermore, the close relationship between *mise-en-scène* and architectural spaces, with regards to the common task of cinema and architecture to define "the dimensions and essence of existential space," have been frequently discussed by scholars.[29]

Considering the aforementioned three formal elements of cinema, it is inevitable that architecture can influence every film at least in three different aspects: architecture is considered as a part of setting in cinema, and in this way shapes the *mise-en-scène* of films; the choice of architectural spaces inherently confines the framing and movement of camera; and in

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[24] Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, 111.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Eisenstein, "Montage and Architecture," 112.

[27] Ibid, 117.

[28] Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Entretiens sur l'architecture*. vol. 1 (1863): 253-57, quoted in Richard A. Etlin, "Auguste Choisy's Anatomy of Architecture," in *Auguste Choisy (1841-1909): L'Architecture et l'art de bâtir. Actas del simposio internacional celebrado en Madrid*, ed. Javier Girón and Santiago Huerta (Madrid, 2009), 172.

[29] Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image*, 13.

editing, architectural imagery and the articulation of space create the basic dramatic and choreographic rhythm of any film.[30]

        This chapter has been divided into three sections; each designated to one of these three elements: *mise-en-scène,* cinematography*,* and editing. Every section begins with a general description of each cinematic element and its relation to architecture. Then, I will specifically discuss the cinema of Kiarostami, the way architecture affects each of these elements, and creation of meanings through architecture and spaces in his cinema.

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[30] Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image,* 32.

Mise-en-scène

Mise-en-scène is a term originating in theatre, and literally means staging a scene through the artful arrangement of actors, scenery, lighting, and props.[31] In cinema, *mise-en-scène* refers to the contents of the frame and their organizations, relative to each other.[32] Setting, costume, staging, and other elements of *mise-en-scène* each influences the viewer's perception of image and space. By organizing these elements inside a frame, filmmakers create a distinct space that shapes the visual aesthetic of the movie, embodies the narrative of the film, and reveals different aspects of the characters' lives.

In reality, creating and organizing spaces are often assigned to architects. Architects organize interior and exterior elements of a structure and are responsible for organizing natural elements and their interaction with the buildings. The creation of *mise-en-scène* in cinema is similar to the creation of space in architecture. As Pallasmaa states, "the structuring of place, space, situation, scale, illumination, etc., characteristic to architecture - the framing of human existence - seeps unavoidably into every cinematic expression."[33] *Mise-en-scène* considerably impacts the audience's understanding of the space, and filmmakers often shape the cinematic spaces of their films by controlling environment or creating an entire set.

However, Kiarostami was one of those filmmakers who employed the existing spaces and locations as the set of his films. Kiarostami believed that *mise-en-scène* should go almost unnoticed and fade away in the interest of the entirety of the film.[34] Choosing real locations, instead of creating contrived sets, allowed Kiarostami to avoid prominent *mise-en*-scènes, and present realistic images of ordinary people's life. Although his approach in employing chosen locations as the set of his films considerably limited Kiarostami's views and cinematic style, they were the most important elements in his filmmaking, which allowed his initial ideas to grow. Not only did these realistic built and natural spaces influence cinematography, but they were also the source of inspiration for development of narratives, characters, and dialogues.[35]

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[31] Maria Pramaggiore and Tom Wallis, Film: A Critical Introduction, 2nd ed. (Boston: Pearson Allyn and Bacon, 2008), 88.

[32] John Gibbs, *Mise-En-Scene: Film Style and Interpretation* (London: Wallflower, 2002), 5.

[33] Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image*, 20.

[34] *10 on Ten*, directed by Abbas Kiarostami: 44:10-44:30.

[35] *10 on Ten*, directed by Abbas Kiarostami: 49:25-50:15.

I. Natural Landscapes

Most of Kiarostami's films are shot in exterior environments: nature, streets, villages, cars, and paths, all of which contribute to shaping the overall visual aesthetic of his movies. Similar to the approach of documentary filmmakers, Kiarostami often does not strictly control the *mise-en-scène.* He tries not to make major changes to these environments in order to "remain faithful to nature and human nature."[36] As a result of this approach, the images that Kiarostami offers look remarkably real; as they illustrate considerable amount of details that demonstrate the real life of people spontaneously and naturally.

Beginning with *Where Is the Friend's Home*, natural landscapes have always gained prominence in Kiarostami's cinema. In this film, the choice of these green landscapes of northern Iran bears a strong resemblance to the theme of the film. As Kiarostami explained: "since I was making a poetic, heroic work, I thought it would be better to have rich, green spaces. The city lacked this aspect." [37] *Where Is the Friend's Home* recounts the story of a second-grade boy who accidentally took home his friend's notebook and is worried about his friend being expelled from school for this mistake. He runs from his home village all the way to a neighboring village by himself to find his friend's house and give back the book.

The path between the two villages passes through various natural landscapes: a hill with a single tree on it, meadows, woodlands, and a cemetery. As the boy passes through these spaces, and goes further from his house to reach an unrecognized location, his persistence, sense of responsibility, and the heroic aspect of his journey is revealed. He runs through long stairs, dark and sometimes dreadful passages, and encounters strange people and unknown locations because of his quest to find the home of his friend.

Among these landscapes, the image of a meandering path on a hill and a solitary tree at the end of it, which has also appeared in *Life and Nothing More* and *Through the Olive Trees,* has become the motif of these three films, also known as Koker Trilogy. In *Where Is the Friend's Home*, the winding path signifies the hardships of a journey and the tree means friendship.[38] The tireless efforts of the boy to find his friend within these beautiful green landscapes turns into a spiritual and symbolic journey of self-discovery; a journey that leads to the triumph of friendship. [39]

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[36] *10 on Ten*, directed by Abbas Kiarostami: 5:55-6:30.

[37] Cheshire, *Conversations with Kiarostami*, 114.

[38] Cheshire, *Conversations with Kiarostami*, 117.

[39] Alberto Elena, *The Cinema of Abbas Kiarostami*, trans. Belinda Coombes (London: Saqi, 2005) 75, 77.

fig. 12 - Natural Landscapes I

Natural landscapes highlight the poetic heroic theme of *Where Is the Friend's Home*.

The flow of spring breeze in the olive trees, trembling branches and leaves, along with the greenness of meadows in spring are in harmony with the theme of love and life in *Through the Olive Trees*. In the movie, which has been filmed among the ruins of a village, the protagonist is trying to convince his beloved to marry him, but the young girl does not respond to him. In the last sequence, he follows her through the olive trees and they leave the village, moving toward the green woodlands. The man continues to talk about the reasons for his request and the woman simply listens. By the end, they go further away and the audience sees them as two white dots in a vast green landscape. They start a short conversation that cannot be heard, and then each one goes to a different direction.

Similar to most of Kiarostami's films, *Through the Olive Trees* has an open ending that allows a personal perception of the film; Kiarostami does not offer the audience answers and instead asks them to watch thoroughly to find the clues. On the one hand, in the ending of *Through the Olive Trees*, the fact that after the conversation they head to different directions, paired with the woman's lonesome image in a long shot, implies that she has rejected his request. On the other hand, natural landscapes and cinematic spaces suggest a much more optimistic ending. Their long walk together begins from the ruins of a village — which is a

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metaphor for depression —[40] through the olive trees, and to the vast green meadows, which signifies a strong sense of life.

Perception and interpretation of the film, like other Kiarostami's films, rely on the subtle clues he provides in his films, especially in the epilogues. Landscape is one of these clues mobilized to let the audience interpret the open ending of the film and to create their own truth based on their observations. In the last sequence, the choice of space and the way they are portrayed, create meanings to this film. The atmosphere, movement of characters, along with the joyful music in this scene, allow an optimistic interpretation for the conclusion.

fig. 13 - Natural Landscapes II

In *Through the Olive Trees*, the green and vivid landscapes signify a strong sense of life.

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[40] The resemblance between ruins of buildings and depression in the cinema of Kiarostami will be discussed in the next section, *Built Spaces*.

In *Taste of Cherry*, the role of natural environment is more prominent. The main location of this film is the arid and deserted landscapes of northern Tehran, in Iran. These landscapes are devoid of life and due to the future development plans of the city, the construction workers are the only occupants. During the film, we see images of construction sites and the process of earthworks and excavations along with the people who are working under adversities in the middle of a vast lifeless environment.

This choice of location and the timing of filming it, in autumn, has caused the images of the film to appear pale and lifeless. In the countless longshots in the film, the audience is primarily watching images of soil. Soil which is the source of life and the bed of death. Also, the few trees and shrubs that have grown in this area are yellow or seem devitalized due to the change of seasons.

The location of the film is in a perfect harmony with its subject. *Taste of Cherry* is about a middle-aged man who has decided to commit suicide. He has dug a hole in this area and is driving around this grave looking for someone to bury him the next morning. The protagonist does not talk about the reasons for his decision, but the arid landscapes and constant images of sceneries covered with soil and dust, suggest his perception of life.

Watching the arid and lifeless sceneries in long shot, and the depressed image of protagonist's face in medium shot, affects viewers' emotions and allows them to feel sympathy for him, not through dialogues delivered, but rather through the atmosphere of space. As the film goes on, it becomes harder to spot life and its grace through the images, and the audience loses hope of finding them at all. Similarly, the protagonist has no hope of finding elegance in his life and has decided to find a way to free himself from it.

At night, the man takes all of his pills and sleeps in the grave he has dug for himself. A black scene is shown for about a minute and then, the same location is shown but this time in spring. Now many things are happening spontaneously; a man with a camera, the sound technician, and plenty of other individuals are working in that location. The protagonist walks towards Kiarostami and gives him a cigarette. Plants and trees are alive again, the hills are covered in green, and the fresh blooms are blossoming.

In this sequence, the protagonist has been portrayed only once, and the main focus is on life and nature. Nature becomes the main subject, and its cycle of life and death gains priority over the life of the middle-aged man. Life flows in the space, and everything has been rejuvenated. The season has passed and now it is time for life, whether the main character is there to witness it or not. "The trees were still full of flowers and nature was alive. He was the only one who had been forgotten," Kiarostami says.[41]

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[41] Cheshire, *Conversations with Kiarostami*, 164.

This interpretation of the film's ending has strong resemblance with one of the poems of Omar Khayyam that was suggested by Kiarostami for the brochure of *Taste of Cherry*, and has also been quoted in Gérard Lefort's review of the film: [42]

> When you and I behind the veil are past,
> Oh but the long long while the world shall last,
>   Which of our coming and departure heeds
> As much as ocean of a pebble-cast.[43]

[42] Gérard Lefort, "'Le Goût De La Cerise', à Tombeau Ouvert," Libération.fr (Libération, November 26, 1997), https://next.liberation.fr/cinema/1997/11/26/le-gout-de-la-cerise-a-tombeau-ouvert_220704
[43] Harold Bloom, ed., Edward FitzGeralds The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004), 38.

fig. 14 - Natural Landscapes III

In *Taste of Cherry*, the arid landscapes and constant images of sceneries covered with soil and dust, suggest the protagonist's perception of life.

II. Built Spaces

In each of these films, Kiarostami has mobilized the vernacular architecture of Iranian villages to highlight the concept and theme of his film. The architecture of these villages does not only shape the cinematic space, but also affect the narrative and concept of each film.

The noteworthy role of architecture in Kiarostami's films comes from the fact that he wrote the script of his films based on the locations and their inhabitants. He stated that in his paradigm, location comes first, and if a concept in his head does not match the location he would change that concept.[44] So, in his cinema, the locations and spaces are in harmony with the concept of the film and allow him express his ideas through the spaces.

The Wind Will Carry Us is about a middle-aged man and his film crew who travel to a faraway hamlet to film an old woman's impending death and her funeral. To convey the power of life, Kiarostami selected the vivid architecture of western Iran. In this architecture, roofs are inhabitants' place of daily chores; the shade created by the walls are appropriate spaces for taking a break and having an intimate discussion; half-opened doors frame the life of the people inside, and behind the windows women are peeking into others' lives. These vivid images of architecture, which portray the daily life of people and their desire for life, contradicts the direction of the theme that the film crew wishes to be—which is death.

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[44] Cheshire, *Conversations with Kiarostami*, 29.

fig. 15 - Built Spaces I

In *The Wind Will Carry Us,* the vivid images of an exotic vernacular architecture in western Iran convey the power of life.

In his other film, *Where Is the Friend's Home,* Kiarostami chose the simplicity and purity of the villages of northern Iran to denote the poetic theme of this narrative. These villages with white houses and rich green surroundings provide a safe and secure environment for him to make his journey harmlessly. To depict the diligence, persistence and endurance of this conscientious child, Kiarostami selected labyrinth-like spaces, long stairs, dead-end alleys, and narrow paths of the stepped architecture that is native to the highland areas. The lonesome child gets lost several times as he explores the village in search of his friend's house. He faces hardships and obstacles but remains determined and hopeful.

fig. 16 - Built Spaces II

In *Where Is the Friend's Home*, the pure architecture of the protagonist's home village is in contrast with labyrinth-like spaces of the neighboring village.

Where Is the Friend's Home, along with the two films Kiarostami produced later, *Life and Nothing More* and *Through the Olive Trees,* are made in a small village called Koker. Three years after making *Where Is the Friend's Home*, the village of the film was partially demolished by an earthquake of catastrophic proportions, and this time Kiarostami went back to the same location to make two other films about the people who had survived. People were distressed and unsettled by the earthquake, but were nevertheless trying to make a new life; and surprisingly, in the film, Kiarostami chose to give prominence to the life of survived people and the future they planned, rather than dwelling on the sorrow and depression caused by this catastrophe.

The images of built spaces in *Life and Nothing More* and *Through the Olive Trees* primarily contains poorly built houses, partially destroyed structures, abandoned places and ruins left by the earthquake. These images draw the audience's attention to architectural elements rather than architectural spaces. We rarely see the whole mass, but architectural elements are prominent. A sole wall, a broken window, an abandoned door, stairs that lead to nowhere, wooden fences, and empty door frames are all common images in Kiarostami's work.

In Iranian literature, wreckages, abandoned houses and half-demolished structures are metaphors of depression, as Saeed-Vafa indicates.[45] Considering the theme of these two films, which is life and death, and Kiarostami's will to highlight the desire for living, instead of showing losses and depression, Kiarostami has chosen frames of these ruins with the green landscape in the background. He has referred to these images in most of his elaborations of *Life and Nothing More*, as it is a central concept of the film: "Fifty-thousand people had died, but thousands of trees were still standing. The river and mountains were as they had been before, and death was just a small dot, like a mole on the face of a living person."[46] In these images, the demolitions convey sorrow and the rejuvenating nature implies the effort of making a new life and the fact that life goes on. These images illustrate a contrast between losses and hopes, and highlight the thin life between life and death.

Although these three films share one location, the cinematic images are considerably different and matches the concept of each film. In *Where Is the Friend's Home,* architecture accompanies the child through his journey and signifies the hardship he is going through. In *Life and Nothing More,* architectural images have replaced the images of funeral and mourning, and delicately imply the sorrow and depression caused by the earthquake. And in *Through the Olive Trees,* while its occurrences seem to happen after the actual earthquake, abandoned houses provoke the audience's imagination to regard the fate of the residents of these houses.

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[45] Rosenbaum and Saeed-Vafa, Abbas Kiarostami, 59.
[46] Cheshire, *Conversations with Kiarostami*, 141.

fig. 17 – Built Spaces III

In *Life and Nothing More*, and *Through the Olive Trees* the demolitions convey sorrow and the rejuvenating nature implies the effort of making a new life and the fact that life goes on.

The setting of Kiarostami's movies often share common architectural qualities, whether they are located in the northern part of Iran or the west of Iran (which has a different climate), or another country, like Italy. One of the essential qualities of these environments is the type of materials that are used in these locations. All the spaces portrayed in Kiarostami's films are made with indigenous materials and the traditional construction methods of that area. Depending on the location, the *mise-en-scène* might include surfaces made of stone, mud, adobe, gypsum, wood, or brick. These architectural surfaces are crucial elements that shape the atmosphere of his movies. Kiarostami emphasizes these surfaces by using them as the sole background for his subjects. In many shots, the long shot of the subject is framed while the background is occupied with a stone surface, or demolished gypsum wall.

Kiarostami's movies engage not only vision, but other senses as well, like touch. As Pallasmaa believes that "a film is viewed with the muscles and skin as much as by the eyes,"[47] Kiarostami's movies involve the viewers' tactile sense by highlighting the details of walls such as patterns, moisture, shadows, cracks, and breaks. They allow the audience to feel the roughness, coldness, age, and history of the surfaces. Engaging the tactile sense is also very prominent in his photo series, such as *The Wall*, *Doors* and *Snow White*. As Yusef Eshaqpour writes in the introduction to *The Wall*:

> The texture of walls both include tangible and visual feelings. Rough materials – lime, stratum, stone, brick, cement. Stucco and coarse finishes – are different from image to image… They reflect the signs of the passage of time – parched, cracked, fractured, blistered, or scalded.[48]

These imperfect surfaces that are often covered partially by plants emphasize the reality of the images. They convey a feeling that these surfaces are the walls of a living house. They are alive like the people who live in these houses: they change, adapt, crack, and get old with those people. These walls are living creatures that recount the story of themselves and the people who live behind them. They engage the audiences' imagination to interpret these stories and derive their own narratives.

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[47] Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image*, 18.

[48] Abbas Kiarostami and Youssef Ishaghpour, *The Wall* (Tehran: Nazar Art, 2011), Introduction, eBook version.
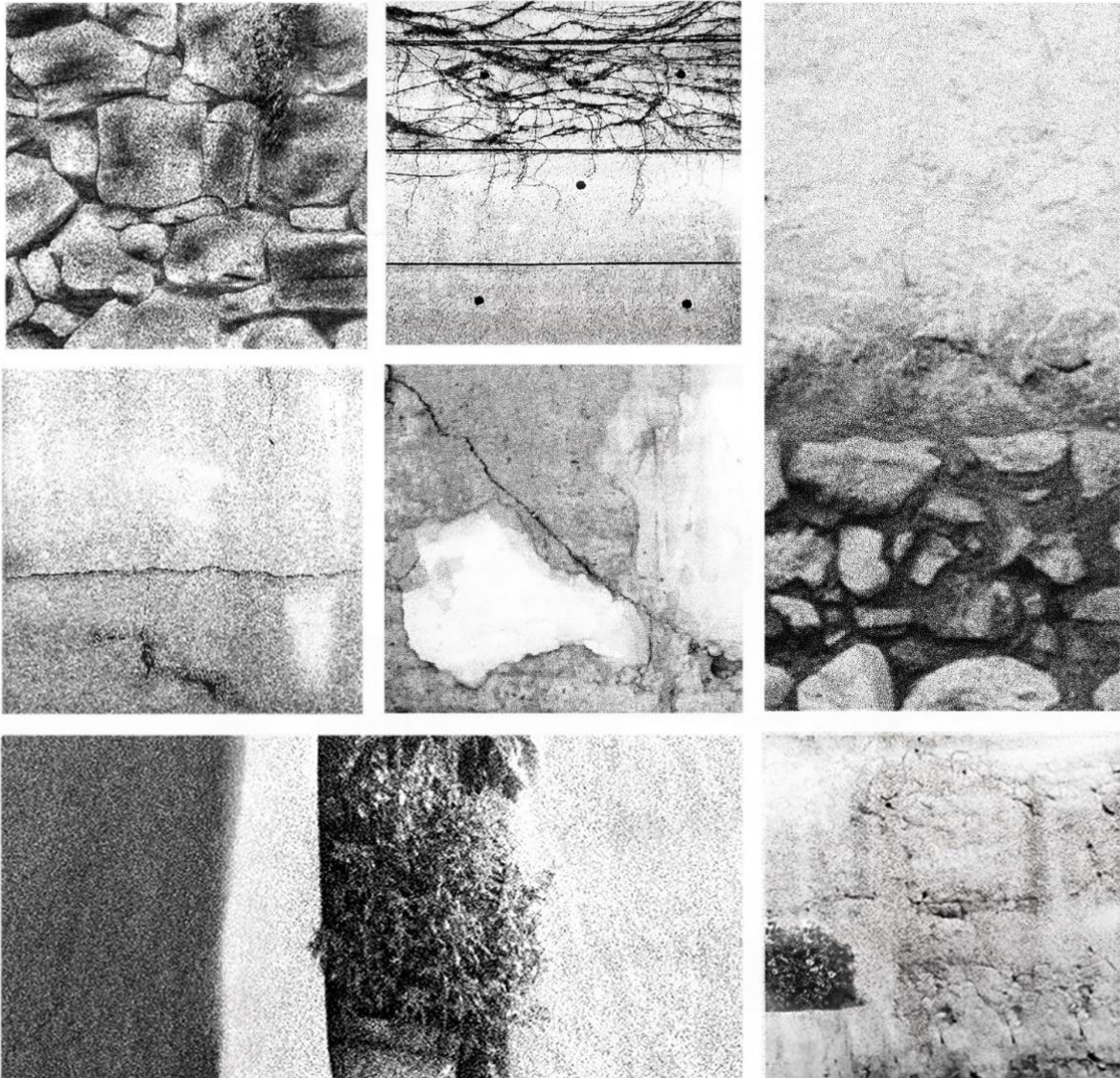
fig. 18 – Built Spaces IV

Rough surfaces of the materials in these five films provoke touch and vision.

Cinematography

Cinematography is the tool that filmmakers use to speak to the audience, "using images as expressively as writers use words."[49] Cinematography portrays events and shapes viewers' perception of space. By dividing a setting or location according to what is inside and outside the frame, cinematography limits infinite space and shapes a comprehensible space for the audience.

Pramaggiore and Wallis write, "A camera's placement and movement determine the way viewers perceive characters, events, and objects in the world on screen."[50] In a four-dimensional place with various possibilities and elements, the camera captures one frame and ignores the others. It shapes viewers' understanding of space by drawing an invisible wall around the subject. By creating this cinematic space, filmmakers are able to recount the narrative and illustrate the subject.
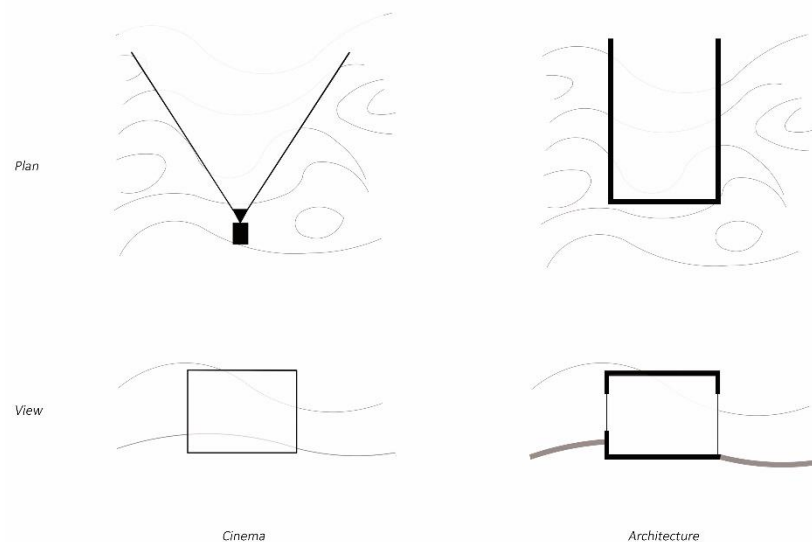
fig. 19 – Cinematography and Architecture

Cinema and Architecture domesticate limitless space and make it perceptible for humankind. In cinema, the invisible walls of the camera shape spaces; in living spaces primarily the architectural elements create spaces.

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[49] Pramaggiore and Wallis, *Film: A Critical Introduction*, 130.
[50] Ibid, 157.

In cinema, the invisible walls of the camera shape spaces; however, in living spaces, it is primarily the architectural elements that create the spaces in which the narrative of the subjects are being portrayed. As Pallasmaa says, architecture "domesticates limitless space and endless time to be tolerated, inhabited and understood by humankind."[51] By limiting space, architecture and cinema are able to shape our understanding of our environment. Relating the act of framing an image in cinema to the fundamental task of architecture, which is to establish a distinct place, Pallasmaa argues that "[t]here are hardly any films which do not include images of architecture."[52]

Sergei Eisenstein, in his article "Montage and Architecture," discusses his idea of perceiving the Acropolis as a series of sequential images. His idea of seeing architecture as series of motion images is based on the experience of the user, and his or her movement in space, in the same way that cinematography allows the framing of events through movement in space.

Eisenstein discusses the user's first impression of entering each space of the Acropolis, and argues that the architectural imagery that this citadel depicts for the user with qualities such as symmetry, balance, angled volumes, and bold corners, all convey a specific feeling for the people who enter each space. This use of visualization to influence the viewer's first impression of images, is similar to shot design in cinema. In the end, he argues that a profound perception of the Acropolis happens only through experiencing succession of spaces, similar to the perception of a film that is only possible through experiencing the sequentiality of images. This idea posits that camera in cinema and user in architecture bear a strong resemblance, which is to travel in time and space.

This resemblance between cinema and architecture has also been noted by Kiarostami, in his workshops. Kiarostami used to encourage students to think about the cinematography and the framing of images as they are developing a narrative. He asked them to try to experience spaces and events in their minds in advance: "Turn your mind into a camera, one able to float about in time and space," he explains.[53]

Through creating cinematic images, filmmakers not only provoke the audience's vision but also are able to engage their other senses. Walter Benjamin believed that regardless of their apparent visuality, cinema and architecture share tactile arts.[54] In reference to this claim, Juhani Pallasmaa adds that the "illusory cinematic space" creates this tactile feeling by giving the audience kinesthetic experiences.[55] Cinema creates this experience by using the various potentials it possesses for engaging the audiences with the films' subjects. Narrative, sound,

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[51] Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 19.

[52] Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image*, 20.

[53] Kiarostami, *Lessons with Kiarostami*, 54.

[54] Gilles Deleuze, *Logique de la Sensation*, Editions de la Difference, 1981, p. 79. Quoted in David B. Clarke, "Introduction: Previewing the Cinematic City", in David B. Clarke (ed.), *The Cinematic City*, Routledge, London and New York, 1997, p. 9.

[55] Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image*, 18.

music, picture, colour, and actors – who allow the viewers to imagine themselves as the characters – all draw the audience into this illusory space and help them feel closer to the subject of the film.

"We are immersed and involved in the space and time of the events of the film, but without a single body with whom to align ourselves unequivocally – be it a character in the scene or a neutral camera – we are moved, both emotionally and physically,"[56] Jennifer M. Barker argues in her book, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience.* We position ourselves as the subject, feel present in the space, and feel sympathy with the characters. We cry, we laugh, and we get scared with the characters. We match our senses with theirs. In this way, as Pallasmaa describes it, "a film is viewed with the muscles and skin as much as by the eyes."[57] Simply put by J. W. von Goethe, "the hands want to see, the eyes want to caress."[58]

[56] Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 6.
[57] Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image*, 18.
[58] As quoted in Brooke Hodge(ed), Not Architecture But Evidence That It Exists: Lauretta Vinciarelli– Watercolors, Harvard University Graduate School of Design (Harvard), 1998, p 130.

I. Architectural Imagery

Kiarostami often employed stationary cameras and long shots, and captured pictures at eye-level. His camera often avoided arousing audience's emotions and judging the characters and situations. By making these arrangements, Kiarostami presented unbiased images to audience, and allowed them think and perceive the movies personally.

The role of symmetry and balance is prominent in the composition of Kiarostami's images. Although the views of his films are considerably limited by the characteristics of the chosen locations, Kiarostami, like a painter, arranged all the elements of the frame so that they shape a natural pictorial balance. He creates images that are framed symmetrically and, at the same time, do not seem artificial or constructed. One of the reasons for this spontaneity is that the architecture of his locations is often shaped naturally and is unplanned.

The vernacular architecture portrayed in Kiarostami's movies is not inherently symmetrical or even balanced in shape and geometry. This is – first – due to these locations' gradual development and growth without any master planners or designers. Over the years and with the growth of their populations, these spaces have been shaped to fulfill their inhabitants' living needs. Limited access to facilities and new technologies have caused the expansion of these remote villages to be dictated by primary limiting factors such as climate, site, and locally available construction methods and materials, as opposed to through engineered plans and designed geometries.

Secondly, these spaces have faced significant aesthetic and programmatic changes over time. A huge portion of these alterations (which can be seen depicted in *Life and Nothing More* and *Through the Olive Trees*) have occurred as a result of natural disasters like earthquakes, and have affected the architectural and living qualities of these spaces.

The two factors of unplanned development and spatial adaptation have caused the architecture of Kiarostami's villages to seem organic and spontaneous, with architectural forms that are inherently unexpected and irregular. However, Kiarostami used various framing methods to orient the pictorial composition toward his desired qualities: symmetry and equilibrium. He does this so precisely that sometimes it is hard to notice the irregularity of architectural forms. For instance, in one of the shots from *The Wind Will Carry Us*, the two characters are walking through the narrow pathways of a village while the camera is following them through a long panning. In the background, we can see the walls of the surrounding buildings jutting in and out, suggesting that the exterior walls of these buildings do not form a flat wall in plan. But at the end of this shot, when the camera stops to face an open doorway perpendicularly, the fixed frame of the door and the wall appear completely flat, captured in perfect vertical and horizontal symmetry.

Frozen in this view, it may be hard to notice that we are looking at the image of two buildings with off-set exterior walls. The flat frontal frame hides that one building is much

closer to the camera, and two steps lower than the other one. Kiarostami has resolved this irregularity by choosing a specific location for the camera, relative to the architecture and the actors' movements.
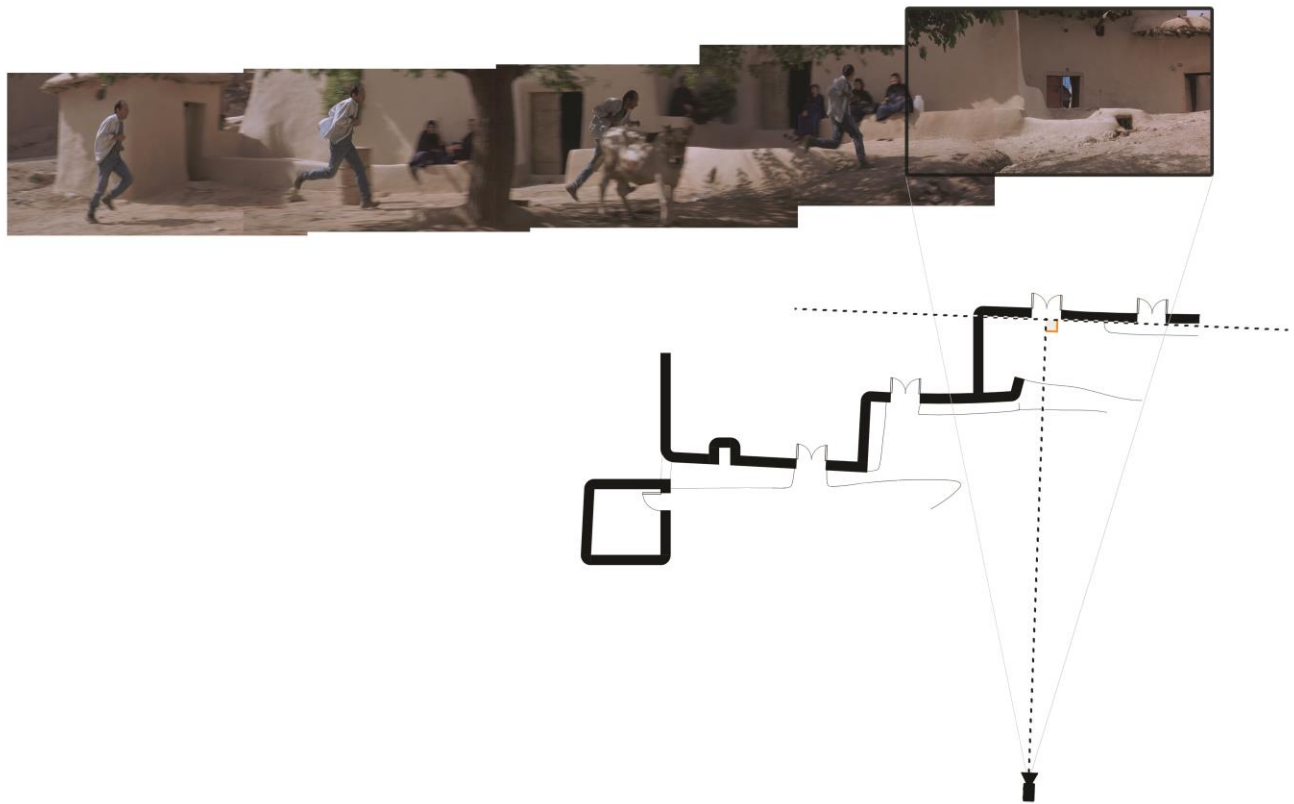
fig. 20 – Architectural Imagery I

Presenting symmetrical images of the irregular geometry of vernacular architecture in *The Wind Will Carry Us*.

In one of the few shots of a built space in *Taste of Cherry*, we see Kiarostami's other technique in creating symmetrical images. There is a small asymmetrical building in which the two characters of the film are portrayed. This building is asymmetrical, but the whole image of the building is organized in a way that for each element on one side, there is an equivalent element on the other side. For instance, the skyline in the background has divided the picture into two equal horizontal elements. Or a wall on the left has a visual equivalent on the other side, which is a water tank in the background. Although Kiarostami consistently seeks balanced and symmetrical images, his obligation to reality and his insistence on creating images that look real result in his unwillingness to portray perfectly symmetrical images. Instead, he uses architecture and its natural characteristics to create this feeling of spontaneity inside precisely orchestrated frames.

The other characteristic of the images is that the prominent elements of *mise-en-scène* appear at the same distance from the camera. Kiarostami often diminishes the effect of perspective to simplify the cinematic spaces. Although the frames are often similar to flat images, the perspective has not been completely eliminated from them. Similar to Persian miniatures, objects at various distances from the frame have been presented in successive layers, as a way of creating the effect of perspective and depth of view. The flat images that shape the cinematic spaces of Kiarostami's movies are often created by placing the camera perpendicular to architectural elements.
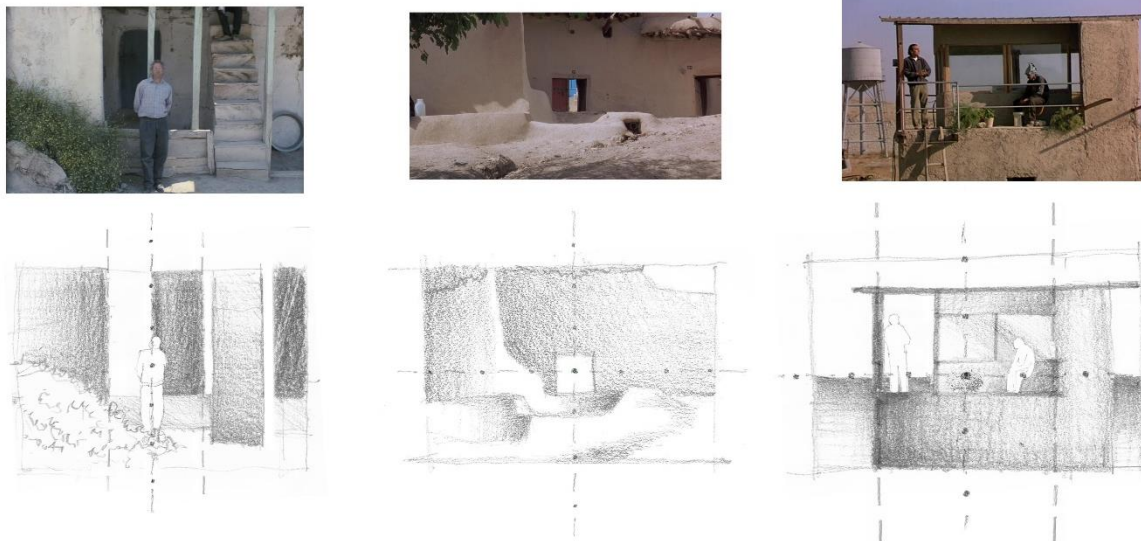

fig. 21 – Architectural Imagery II

These diagrams illustrate the symmetrical architectural imageries in Kiarostami's films along with his approach to diminish the effect of perspective.

In the panning shots, architecture and camera stand in constantly varying angles relative to each other. In Kiarostami's films this type of shots are often used to follow the characters from one space to another, and the camera often stops only when the two-point perspective disappears. By capturing architecture in this way and showing the space like a flattened image, Kiarostami allows that moment to stand out delicately from the other frames of that shot. In these moments, with the edges of the walls and the image's frame parallel to each other, he also accentuates that particular instant of the shot or narrative.

Kiarostami does not often use music, non-diegetic sounds, exaggerated perspectives, fast cuts, or saturated colours to emphasize moments. Instead, he employs specific cinematic spaces and architectural imagery to achieve similar results. The turning points of the characters' journeys and peak narrative moments often occur when the camera frames architecture in a one-point perspective. In this way, the position of the actors, the staging of the scene, and the narrative are sometimes affected by the architecture and its relation to cinematography. For instance, in *Where Is the Friend's Home?* the protagonist, who searches for his friend's house, finds a house which he assumes is his destination, only to find out that it is not. This incident happens four times in the movie. Each time, when we think he has found his friend's house, the prominent nature of the moment in the overall narrative is showcased in how the relationship between the architecture and the camera is captured by Kiarostami.

In most of Kiarostami's shots, the camera is located at eye level and captures images like an observer. Even when the protagonist is a young child, camera adapts itself to him and captures views in the size of the boy. This feature allows his images to seem more realistic and less exaggerated. It also directs viewers' eyes to earthbound elements such as humans, buildings, and trees, and ignores the sky.

The other visual composition that has frequently appeared in Kiarostami's images is a frame depicted within the frame of camera. By shooting an image through a frame, Kiarostami emphasizes elements that are not noticed easily, and therefore delicately highlights his vision. Positioning an element within a frame, he emphasizes the concepts and reveals his point of view about the subject and about the characters. This composition has often become possible by using architectural elements as visual tools that frame the more prominent image. A composition of walls, a window, an opening through a wall, the gap of a door left ajar, and two poles are some examples.

This idea becomes more complex when Kiarostami deploys it in a point-of-view shot. Matthew Abbott mentions that, in such shots, audience are watching the cinema screen through the eyes of the characters who are watching a landscape through a frame. Basically, they are watching "views of views of views of views". He believes that these shots are inviting

audience to observe events; "It is a call to presentation; it demands you wake up and pay attention," he claims. [59]

fig. 22 – Architectural Imagery III

Kiarostami emphasized the prominent moments of *Where Is the Friend's Home* by setting up the camera perpendicular to architectural elements.

[59] Mathew Abbott. "The Wind Will Carry Us: Cinematic Scepticism." Chapter. In *Abbas Kiarostami and Film-Philosophy*, 32–46. Edinburgh University Press, 2017.

II. Long Shots and Free Spaces

Kiarostami gives freedom to the audience to understand his images subjectively. He illustrates events broadly and neutrally to allow a personal perception of the subjects and events. To gain this freedom, Kiarostami uses a large number of long shots, which allows space and subject to be perceived subjectively. Rosenbaum calls these long shots "philosophical long shots": long shots that illustrate the subject clearly and, at the same time create questions and ambiguity.[60] By looking for answers to these questions, the audience are able to interpret the movie freely.

Juhani Pallasmaa contends that one of the reasons that natural environments possess emotional engagement is the existence of the field of peripheral vision.[61] Kiarostami used this capacity to engage the audience with nature in a direct and less manipulated way. In his movies, exterior spaces and the natural environment are shown clearly in wide shots. This type of shot is called a "cosmic long shot"[62] by Jonathan Rosenbaum, because of the way they broadly illustrate the world.

These long shots are one of the reasons that the locations in Kiarostami's films turn into familiar places for viewers. Another factor in the creation of this familiarity is the continuity of sites in editing, which I will discuss further in the section "Editing: Continuity of Spaces." Through a succession of long shots, viewers are able to navigate through places and paths thoroughly and gain a general knowledge of the whole location. Successive long shots often appear when the characters are seeking a location in the natural landscape. It is easy to get lost or lose track of navigation in these moments; so, Kiarostami chose the camera's location to be far from the subject, so as to maintain a strong sense of navigation for the viewers.

In villages, where the spatial nature of the locations can be communicated through images of narrow winding paths, tall walls, and tight spaces, long shots illustrate the architecture while the protagonist runs through the spaces. Architecture encompasses a large portion of the image and it gives the impression that the protagonist is caught among these walls and paths. In these moments, architecture functions both as an aesthetic element, and as a reliable attendant who accompanies the protagonist all the way through his journey. These long shots of the subject and their appearances in relation to the narrative of the films are highly influenced by the architecture of the locations, and portray a clear image of humans, nature, and their relation to place and space.

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[60] Rosenbaum and Saeed-Vafa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, 11.
[61] Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 15.
[62] Rosenbaum and Saeed-Vafa, *Abbas Kiarostami,* 25.

fig. 23 – Long Shots and Free Spaces

III. Inaccessible Doors

Compared to his wide shots of exterior spaces, Kiarostami is reluctant to show interiors to the audience. Kiarostami often leaves the viewers outside houses and does not let them look inside. In some cases, the characters of the film find their way inside, but the viewers are kept outside, behind doors. This set up often results in a limited understanding of the events taking place inside, only captured through emitted sounds or obstructed images. Sometimes, the viewers are given a limited view of interior spaces through a gap in a door, or a curtain that obscures the view. Often, they can only hear the conversations taking place.

Keeping the audience outside the door and showing the happenings from behind a curtain or from a doorway is a way of eliminating information and creating ambiguity. Kiarostami calls this "the experience of the unknown," and says that "all we can do is guess, and imagine what's behind the door."[63] In *Taste of Cherry,* our only hope to learn anything personal about the main character (his personal life, his marital status, and social class) is limited to a shot of his room. Throughout the entire movie, he does not say anything about himself, and in one of the last scenes of the film, the viewers might expect to understand this information through architecture. This crucial shot is taken from outside his room while we see him as a shadow behind curtains. Soon, we get disappointed when he turns off the lights, and we do not receive what we expected.

Kiarostami explains that the idea of obscuring interior spaces has not been a conscious decision. "Now, thinking about it retroactively after all these years, I have never entered anyone's house with complete ease. First, I have to take off my shoes, and then I have to respect the house and people who live there, and always remember that I am a stranger in their house."[64] It seems that the location of the camera and the framing of images is chosen to stand in place of a stranger's point of view. The camera and the viewers are the strangers who do not find their way inside. They cannot enter someone else's territory and interrupt their privacy. This relationship between interior spaces and the camera has been repeated in all these five movies. In *Where Is the Friend's Home?* the camera illustrates vague images of the house through clothes hanging from a clothing line, until we can begin to see it clearly.

In *Life and Nothing More*, we see the houses that have been demolished in the earthquake, and there are no physical barriers that separate the inside from the outside. With no walls or ceilings, Kiarostami still manages to imply privacy by not allowing strangers to go inside. In a scene, the protagonist enters an old woman's house to help her. The camera stays outside. Even though there are no doors, we see him enter a dimly lit room, but can hardly see

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[63] Abbas Kiarostami, "Behind Closed Doors with Director Abbas Kiarostami," interview with Tina Hassannia, *The Globe and Mail*, accessed January 6, 2020, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/film/behind-closed-doors-with-director-abbas-kiarostami/article27372496/

[64] Shadmehr Rastin and Abbas Kiarostami, "Goft-e-goo Ba Abbas Kiarostami [An Interview with Abbas Kiarostami]," *Tajrobeh Magazine*, April 2011, 188.

anything of the interior space. In another scene, the main character is leaning against the pole of a house with a balcony on the second floor. The man whose wife is on the balcony comes down and starts a conversation with the protagonist. But Kiarostami does not show us the balcony, the space of the house, or the off-camera woman who is watering the plants and sometimes joins in the conversation.

fig. 24 – Inaccessible Doors I

Leaving audience behind doors or windows and depicting interior spaces vaguely allow audience to
visualize interior spaces in their mind.

The same building has been depicted in *Through the Olive Trees*, but this time Kiarostami captures the balcony and parts of an interior space. The difference here is that this is a movie about the making of *Life and Nothing More,* and we are told that the man and the woman are just two inhabitants of the village. Also, we understand that this building is not an actual house. It might be a reconstructed wreckage, a part of an abandoned house, or a set designed for *Life and Nothing More*. Accordingly, the building is not a private house, no inhabitants live there, and the two actors are not a couple; and there is no disturbance of territory and privacy by the strangers, the viewers.

fig. 25 – Inaccessible Doors II

Kiarostami's approach in depicting a building relies on different characteristics of that building. In this case, the location of the camera relative to the building differs depending on whether the building is a designed set or a private house.

One of the brilliant scenes of *The Wind Will Carry Us* has been portrayed in an interior space. In this scene, the main character, who is looking for fresh milk, steps inside a dark space and as he goes further he walks into complete darkness. In the meanwhile, a girl appears out of this darkness with a small kerosene lamp and starts milking a cow. In this absolute dim space, the only source of light is this small lamp that has illuminated parts of the girl's body, and there is hardly anything depicted of the interior space of this dark underground.

There is an interior shot in *Taste of Cherry* when one of the characters is inside a small building, similar to a small guardhouse, and the protagonist is waiting outside. In this shot, the camera depicts the protagonist while he is walking behind the window; and what is depicted of the interior space is primarily the window's frame and parts of the interior walls. The protagonist talks to the person inside but the audience never sees the interior space.

There is another interior shot in this film that is portrayed in the same way. This time the building is a museum and the main character is standing behind the windows. The camera is located inside the building, and frames the protagonist who is waiting outside and staring at the interior spaces carefully, while there is a vast arid landscape in his background. Again, nothing is visible of the interior spaces.

In these two shots of *Taste of Cherry*, Kiarostami has depicted a closer image of the protagonist and has avoided portraying the interior spaces of the buildings. If the camera was located outside the window, it could naturally include a part of the interior spaces in the image, but when it is inside and is framing a window the focus of the image will be the protagonist's face. Meanwhile, using depth of field, he also emphasizes the background landscape instead of the building. These shots are also similar to the shots of the characters inside the cars. In these shots, the camera frames the medium shot of the characters and their conversation together, while in the background the large windows of the car are constantly framing exterior spaces and primarily natural landscapes.

fig. 26 – Inaccessible Doors III

In *The Wind Will Carry Us* and *Taste of Cherry*, the views of the interior spaces are limited and obscured.

Editing

Taking shots from different spaces and joining them together shapes the narrative and the language of the film. Editing allows filmmakers to juxtapose images and spaces and imply the connection between them.[65] Although each image has its own meaning, we perceive the movie by seeing the sequence of images, not at each image individually. By putting together shots from various spaces and times in a sequence, filmmakers create the choreographic rhythm of the movie. Pallasmaa believes that this rhythm is created using "architectural imagery and the articulation of space."[66]

In "Montage and Architecture," Eisenstein explains the experience of being and walking in architectural spaces as a montage sequence, similar to experiencing a movie.[67] He describes his first impression of entering each space of Acropolis, and relates it to the first impression of seeing a new image after each cut in cinema. Eisenstein sees being in an architectural space as a cinematic take, and the connection and succession of these spaces as editing, which connects the shots in cinema. As Eisenstein suggests, in the same way that the perception of a movie depends on a succession of images, the perception of architecture relies on a succession of spaces, not merely one of them.

Jean Nouvel argues that architecture becomes analogous to cinema when "a series of shots … take the viewer across a number of locations as the narrative of the moving building user develops across space and time."[68] The planning of spaces in the architecture of Nouvel has a strong resemblance with the notion of sequencing through editing in cinema, Graham Cairns contends. Cairns continues that the way Nouvel "explains projects as a series of spaces that open out, one into the other, in a sequence of specific moments; the points at which we pass from one of these spaces to another becoming the architectural equivalent of a cut that jumps from one location, space or room, to the next."[69]

In the architecture of Jean Nouvel, each space functions similar to sub-stories of a film. Juxtaposing these spaces in a way that one opens out into the other, Nouvelle is recounting the entire narrative seamlessly. Similar to editing and montage in cinema, the sequentiality of images and spaces allows each one of them to find a new meaning within the narrative. The way Nouvel compiles spaces together is like the way editors in cinema put the materials together. Each of Nouvel's spaces have their own meaning, but it is the experience of the sequentiality in space and time that allows his projects to recount an entire narrative.

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[65] Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, 227.

[66] Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image*, 32.

[67] Eisenstein, "Montage and Architecture," 117.

[68] Jean Nouvel, "Incorporating: Interview with Alejandro Zaera," El Croquis, 1987-1998, Jean Nouvel, El Croquis Editorial (1998): 39, quoted in Graham Cairns, The Architecture of the Screen: Essays in Cinematographic Space (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2013), 39.

[69] Graham Cairns, The Architecture of the Screen: Essays in Cinematographic Space (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2013), 39.

In one of his lectures, Kiarostami describes anticipation and climax created by employing editing in architecture. He recounts his experience of entering a multistorey building adjacent to a sea. The building had been designed with narrow and dark hallways and there was no opening to see outside, Kiarostami said. He stated that he climbed the stairs to the next level in the hope of seeing any outside views. After climbing three floors of windowless and dark spaces, "I stepped in front of a vast window that looked out over the sea and a wide, brilliant blue sky. It was a view that moved me tremendously. The impact of this window was even more acute because of the three floors of enclosed spaces," writes Kiarostami.[70]

Kiarostami's approach in relating cinematic editing to architecture is analogous to Eisenstein's notion. They both see each architectural space as a cinematic image, and the architectural elements that connect these spaces similar to cuts in editing. Eisenstein finds this analogy in the way walls alter spaces and Kiarostami finds it in the way steps change space.

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[70] Kiarostami, *Lessons with Kiarostami*, 111.

Kiarostami believed that breaking the scene might harm the reality of a film and he often avoided doing so.[71] He often used long takes to ensure the continuity of spaces and avoided drawbacks in those aspects so that the audience can experience space and time with the characters of the film. This approach in compiling spatial images allows the audience to maintain the continuity of locations and understand the sequentiality of spaces relative to one another.

One point worth mentioning here is that in reality, the spaces might not be organized and located in the same order that are depicted in the film, and each space might be located far from the others. But the fact that by controlling the time of shooting and the movement of the characters, and corresponding the visual similarity between two adjacent spaces, Kiarostami insists in implying the continuity of locations is important.

Where Is the Friend's Home consists of five consistent sections, each of which takes more than five minutes. In each of these sections, through employing long takes and consistent editing, Kiarostami portrays the journey of the protagonist without breaking the consistency of time or location. The longest consistent section appears when the young child runs all the way from one village to another. Kiarostami has juxtaposed the spaces between two villages so that not only each space seems real but also their planning and succession relative to each other does. The whole location becomes so realistic that the audience can experience the whole journey with the protagonist. By employing continuity within a shot through long takes, and among adjacent shots through editing, Kiarostami made the perception of cinematic spaces more like the physical spaces and created another layer of reality for his films.

The continuity in editing and employing long takes has shaped the aesthetic realism of Kiarostami's cinema. By keeping continuity of spaces, Kiarostami is able to show the long journey of his characters through the locations and imply the metaphoric aspect of this journey toward self-discovery. The first scene of *The Wind Will Carry Us* is one of the brilliant examples of this approach. This scene includes long shots of a car zigzagging through the hills and the voices of a film crew that is heading to a faraway village. The presence of a car with its urban occupants in a vast natural landscape conveys the strangeness of these people to their surroundings. While the film crew is waiting for one the villager's death, and sometimes they even wish for it, people who actually live in these environments are living a much simpler life. They are the people who are living in the present and do not sense death; and they are the people who impose their way of living on the film crew.

This paradox between the issues of film crew and the life of inhabitants is also represented in another scene when the main character has to run to the topmost location in

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[71] Shahin Parhami, "A Talk with the Artist: Abbas Kiarostami in Conversation :" Synoptique, , accessed January 6, 2020, http://www.synoptique.ca/core/en/articles/kiarostami_interview

the village to find signal for his cellphone. In this scene, the protagonist, who is standing on the roof of a house, is peeking into the inhabitants' lives. Meanwhile, his phone starts to ring and to find the signal he has to run on the roofs of various houses, travel a labyrinth-like path through the backyards and stairs, and finally climb a cliff to reach the peak of the village.
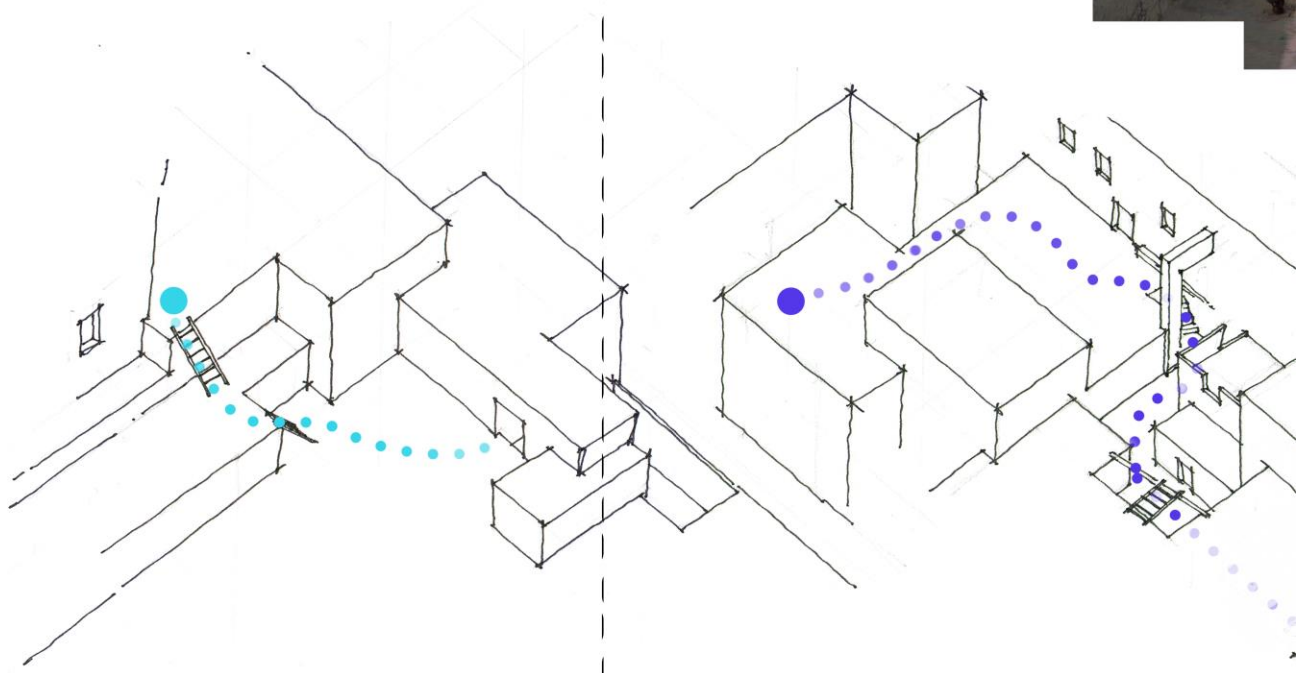
This entire scene is illustrated in only three shots, and all the spaces are depicted consecutively. In this scene, the anxiety and the rush of the protagonist is in clear contrast with the life of the villagers who are doing their daily chores calmly and are indifferent to that the strange struggles of the film crew.

1

2

3

fig. 27 – Continuity of Places II

This diagram illustrates the passage of the protagonist through the long labyrinth-like paths in *The Wind Will Carry Us*, and the strong sense of location that is conveyed by depicting the entire passage in three shots.

fig. 28 – Continuity of Places I

Kiarostami's sketch of the locations of *The Wind Will Carry Us,* and the planning of spaces relative to each other.
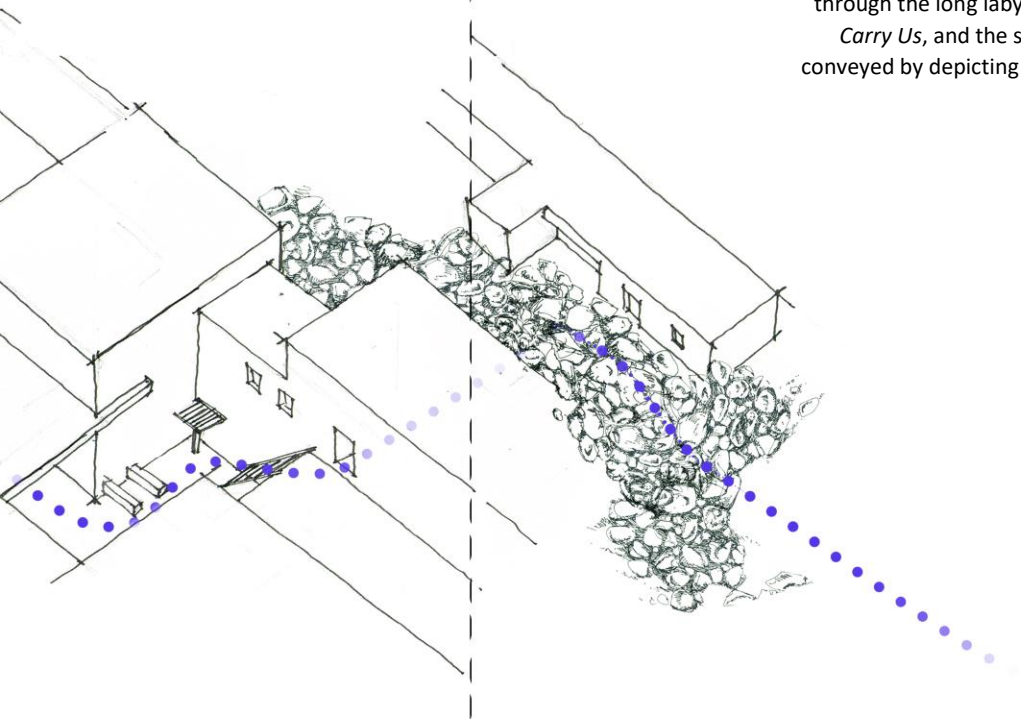
II. Repetition of Spaces

Using editing, Kiarostami has created formal patterns, such as repetition, in his movies: the repetition of locations and events in *Where Is the Friend's Home, Taste of Cherry, and The Wind Will Carry Us*, the repetition of close-ups in *Life and Nothing More*, and the repetition of dialogues and takes in *Through the Olive Trees*.

In an analysis of the pattern of repetition in *Where Is the Friend's Home?* Majid Eslami argues that these repetitions cause the questions of the movie to become more prominent than the answers.[72] He argues that the repetition of the numerous questions throughout the film depletes the value for answers, and highlights the intermediate moments of the film over the conclusion. In other words, the path of reaching the answer becomes so prominent that the destination itself becomes inconsequential, and is often omitted from the film. In these movies, path and destination lose their common values: path is made prominent, and destination is diminished and precluded.

The location of Kiarostami's films often include a specific site that most of the narrative takes place in and the natural landscapes that exist adjacent to this location. These landscapes are often pretext to show the journey that the protagonists experience and their efforts to overcome hardship. They are vast spaces that are in paradox with the confined spaces of the villages and convey the freedom of characters from their limitations. Showing large number of natural landscapes in a film might make it complex for the audience to get familiar with each space, understand their spatial qualities, and consequently perceive the metaphorical meaning of each of them. To avoid this ambiguity, Kiarostami uses the camera and the repetition pattern.

In the multiple takes of each one of these spaces, Kiarotstami depicts them identically. He uses one specific angle, position, and movment of camera along with identical depth of field to portray each space. As a result, the image that the audience sees of each space is limited to one specific frame. In other words, the image of each space represents the whole space in the film. Simplifying numerous spaces of a film to simple images allows the audience to get familiar with spaces and grasp the meaning of each space.

In *Where Is the Friend's Home*, a hill with a solitary tree on top becomes a space that conveys peace and safety. It is primarily because the audience has seen the young child climbing this hill up and down three times; they have realized that this hill, unlike other natural landscapes that he runs through, is close to his village and his house, and it is where his grandfather can watch him.

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[72] Majid Eslami, "The Freshness of Repetition: Where Is the Friends Home? Thirteen Years Later*," Film International,* no. 26-27 (1999), 112.

In contrast, one of the landscapes of this film, a cemetery, becomes quiet frightening due to this repetition. The first time, when the audience sees the cemetery, first, they notice that this landmark is pretty far from the village where the young boy lives; and then they can see a dog there, which then he says that he is afraid of. So, the next two times that the child passes this cemetery, the audience are unconsciously looking for the dog and any danger that might put the child at risk of harm. In this way, this location becomes a space that conveys apprehension. Although the cemetery itself is not frightening, and looks exactly like any cemetery in that area, the repetition allows it to become a subjective space for the people who see it.

For the fourth time, the young boy has to pass this space in total darkness of night to reach his home. Kiarostami strengthens the tension and fear of this scene by not following him on this path. Instead of leading him all the way to his home, Kiarostami shows us the image of one of the characters, an old man, who has helped this child before. By omitting the image of the child in this scene, Kiarostami engages our memory to the film. The viewers cannot see the path the child is travelling but they have already seen the whole passage three times and while they are watching the old man do his chores, they are envisioning the child and the path he is travelling in their minds, and the possible dangers he might encounter.

In *Taste of Cherry*, numerous hills with similar visual characteristics are employed as location of the film. The audience travels a vast landscape with the protagonist, through these hills and what they primarily see are hills covered with soil. They are all similar and with no specific sign or landmark that distinguishes them from one another. The only space which is recognizable is the location of the grave that the protagonist has dug for himself with a small shrub on its side. Kiarostami uses the only recognizable location of his film as a central space that all the other places are located in relative to that; and consequently, all the places find their meaning relative to this central space.

The character comes to this location from different directions, and the image of this space is depicted analogously every time. These similar shots not only turn the central location into a subjective space, but also the paths and locations adjacent to it. This familiar space conveys an unpleasant feeling simply because the audience knows it is going to be the protagonist's grave. Every time he gets closer to this space, the audience knows that he is getting closer to his grave, and whenever he goes further they feel a relief that maybe he will never return.

The multiplicity of repetitive shots along with the unpleasant feeling it conveys allow the location to embody a metaphorical meaning. This arid remote landscape with a grave on it becomes the symbol of death. The tension that the audience feels by seeing the man getting closer to this location is due to the fact that they are imagining him getting closer to his death; and whenever he leaves this location it feels as if he is moving away from death. He takes different people to this location in the hope of finding someone to bury him the next day. The first two times the protagonist takes people to this location, and they refuse to help him, he

opts to drive away. But the third time, Kiarostami does not show the protagonist getting closer to his grave; he shows the audience that he is leaving this space with someone who has agreed to help him. During their ride, the recruit talks about the beauties of nature, and the elegance of life and all he talks about is the value of living in this world. This conversation, along with the reverse direction from the grave suggests the protagonist's doubts about the act he has planned and possibly his regrets about it.

When for the fourth and the last time the protagonist goes back to this location, he has taken all of his pills and has decided to kill himself. This time in the darkness of night, which signifies death, [73] he travels these meandering paths and gets closer to this space, which is also a symbol of death. He sleeps inside the grave, watching the full moon and after few moments he vanishes in the total darkness of night and in the silence of this vast landscape. He never leaves this space and his life is over.

Kiarostami once said that "the shape of *Taste of Cherry* is drawn from a Persian poem about a butterfly that flies around a candle, moving closer and closer to the flame until it burns."[74] This resemblance can be perceived clearly by looking at the path that the protagonist travels during this film. The man's diligence in approaching death and his constant roaming around the central space, which is soon to be his graveyard, bears a strong analogy to the movement of a butterfly around an illuminated candle.

The repetition of locations and places engages the audience's memory with these elements, and therefore, turns them into subjective spaces. A large part of the feelings that these landscapes can convey derives from the audience's memory of seeing each space for the first time. They become spaces that the audience have already seen and experienced with the characters; they become subjective spaces that find meaning after being depicted repeatedly; they become part of a memory, and like any other memories, they contain emotions and sentiments.

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[73] Cheshire, *Conversations with Kiarostami*, 166.
[74] Kiarostami, *Lessons with Kiarostami*, 106.
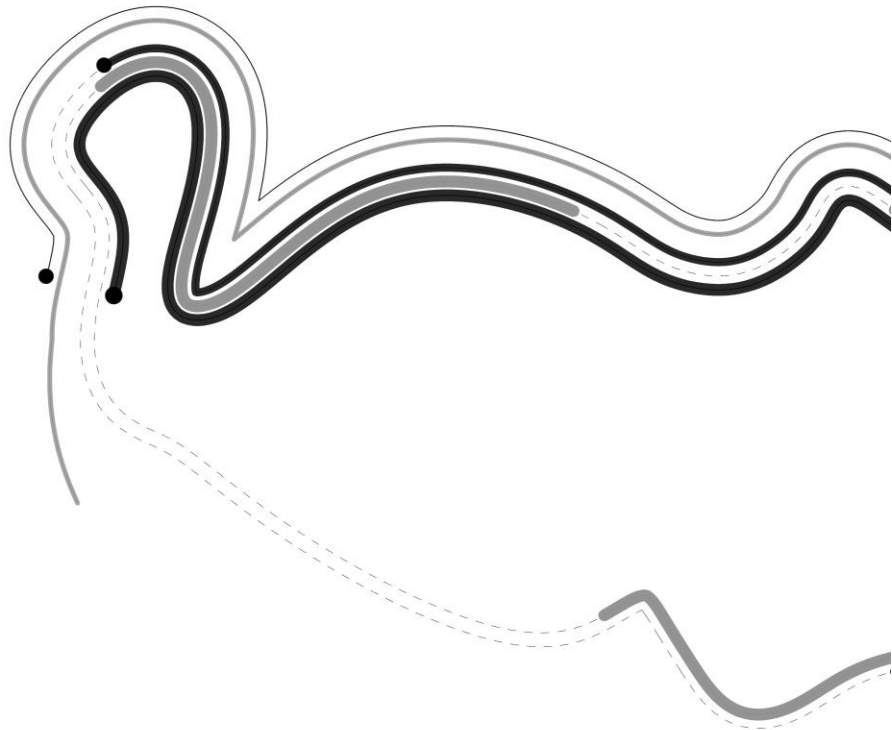
Central space

Beginning of each passage

1st drive toward the central space
1st time leaving the central space

2nd drive toward the central space
2nd time leaving the central space

3rd time leaving the central space

4th drive toward the central space

Unseen parts of the passage

fig. 29 – Repetition of Spaces I

The protagonist of *Taste of Cherry* drives around a central space looking for someone to bury him. This diagram illustrates the entire path that he travels around this space and his four journeys toward this space.
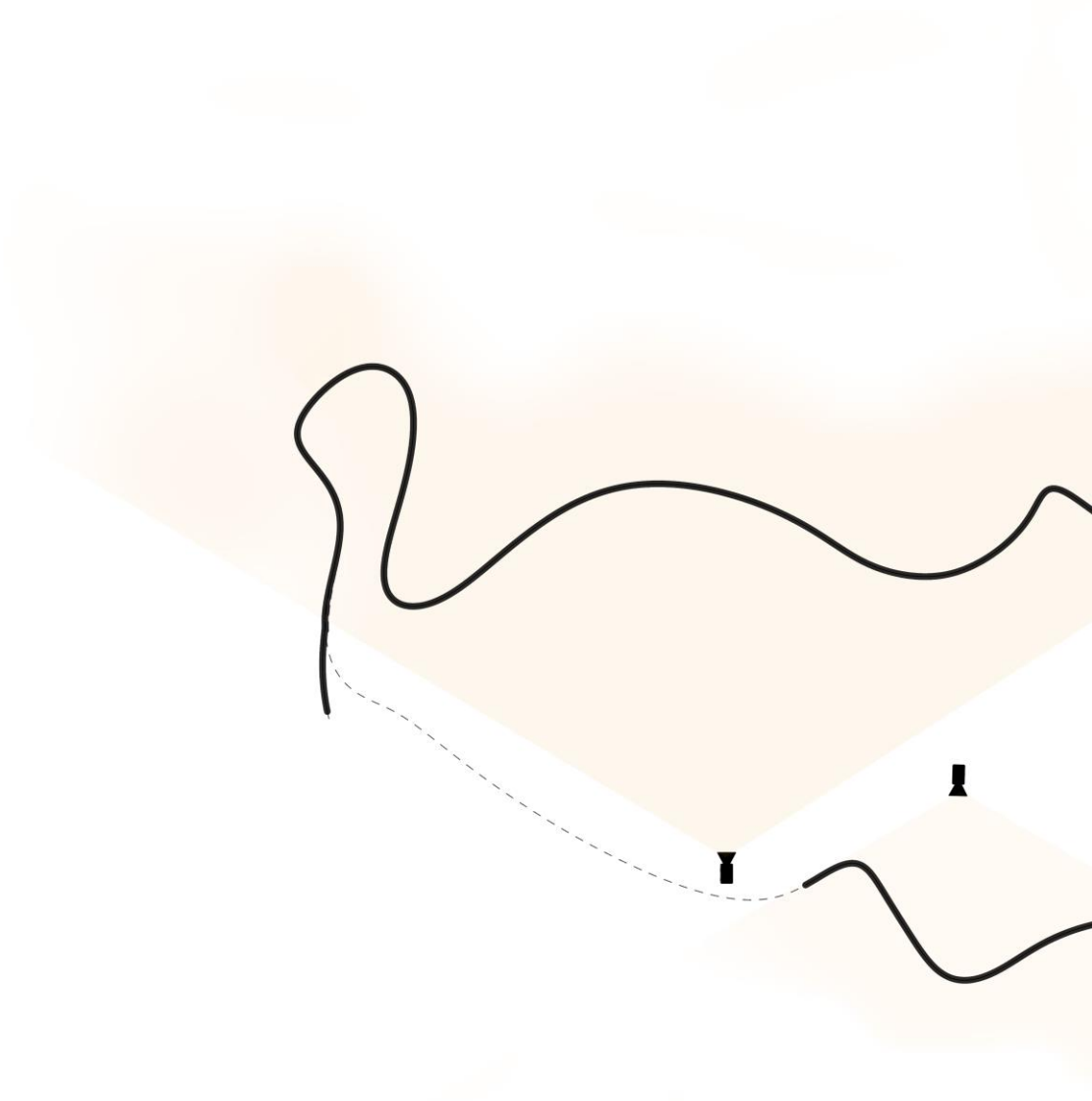
Central space

Passage captured in long shots

Unseen parts of the passage

fig. 30 – Repetition of Spaces II

The position of camera does not change during the multiple passages of *Taste of Cherry*'s protagonist to the same locations and presents similar view of each space.

fig. 31

Architecture Derived from Kiarostami's Cinema

As discussed in the last chapter, cinema and its formal elements have a significant analogy with architecture: mise-en-scene with architectural space, cinematography with architectural imagery, and editing with the planning of spaces. This analogy was discussed within the cinema of Kiarostami: the role of natural and architectural spaces in mise-en-scene of Kiarostami's films, the way he depicts architecture through cinematography, and the way he juxtaposes spaces together through editing.

Based on these two analyses, along with a brief study about the atmospheres and cinematic images that convey solitude in this chapter, I am aiming to re-envision the atmosphere of Kiarostami's films and develop a sense of place in architecture. I am examining a method to use the formal elements of Kiarostami's cinema in creation of a series of architectural vignettes, which are architectural interpretations of Kiarostami's cinema.

As the first step of the examination, I have chosen the narrative that I aim to recount through these vignettes. These architectural vignettes recount the story of solitude and isolation inspired by two of Kiarostami's poems. Subsequently, I refer to Kiarostami's cinema, and will analyze the way solitude has been conveyed through images and atmospheres. I will then design architectural vignettes inspired by Kiarostami's mise-en-scenes, cinematography, and the theme of solitude in his cinema.

At the end, these single vignettes are juxtaposed together based on the way Kiarostami compiles space through editing. By juxtaposing these spaces, I aim to envision the entire narrative through architectural experiences. This juxtaposition aims to represent a sense of place, which the user of space can experience not only through his eyes but, like any other piece of architecture, through body and time.

Narrative

Kiarostami's poems are similar in language and narrative style to the narratives of his films, and they have been his inspiration for many of his concepts in his creations. In an interview with Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa and Jonathan Rosenbaum, Kiarostami points out the fact that his poems gave him inspiration for dialogues of *The Wind Will Carry Us*, and sometimes, conversely, the dialogues of his films shaped the verses of his poems.[75]

Kiarostami's poems have also influenced certain moments and scenes of his films. Kiarostami explains one of these scenes that illustrate the analogy between his cinema and poetry. During a discussion between two characters, in *The Wind Will Carry Us*, as an apple drops down, the discussion stops, the camera starts to follow the apple while it is rolling from one corner of the terrace to the other. The apple passes the edge of the railing, through the gutter falls down to the ground, where a child is standing. Kiarostami explains that the initial idea behind this exquisite moment comes from a real experience he had years ago, and the related poetry in his later book, *Walking with the Wind*: [76]

> A red apple
>
> makes a thousand turns
>
> in the air
>
> and falls
>
> into the hands of a playful child.[77]

Also, after Kiarostami's death, his younger son, Bahman Kiarostami, in collaboration with Nazar Publication, published a booklet called *Death, and Nothing More* which includes Kiarostami's notes during the making of his 1997 film, *Taste of Cherry.* A large portion of these handwritten notes includes poems, pieces of writing, quotes, and concepts about the theme of death in *Taste of Cherry*. Some of these notes are written by Kiarostami and some of them are transcribed from the books and poems he read about death and aging. Kiarostami had not published any poetry books at the time, but most of the writings in the booklet and the way they are organized have strong resemblance to the poems he published years later. Some of the poems in this booklet have clearly affected the narrative of *Taste of Cherry.*

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[75] Rosenbaum and Saeed-Vafa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, 113.

[76] Ibid, 112.

[77] Abbas Kiarostami, Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, and Michael Beard, *Walking with the Wind* (United Kingdom: A Harvard Film Archive Publication, 2001), 40.

A brief description of one of the characters of the book *Old Age,* written by Simone de Beauvoir, closely resembles the protagonist in *Taste of Cherry*: "Devoid of love, devoid of hatred, devoid of desire."[78] The film does not suggest much information about its protagonist, but this sentence clearly represents what Kiarostami portrays of his character in the films.

Another piece of writing in the booklet has strong analogy with one of the concepts of *Taste of Cherry*. As one of the characters of the film describes the elegance and the joy of life hidden in basic graces such as change of the seasons, watching sunrise, full moon and tasting a cherry, he elaborates that life with all of its graces is the promised heaven that even the people on the other side would like to come and experience. Positing that all the joy and beauty that ever is exists right on earth, and believing that the promised heaven is this world itself, is one of the key concepts of the film that is reflected in this phrase from the booklet: "Everything in this world is void, if we forget about happiness. So, let's be joyous until this paradise stands."[79]

Kiarostami argues that poetry not only influences dialogues and characters of his films, but it also streams into his imagination and is revealed to him as individual images.[80] These images are sometimes presented in the films, and sometimes are expressed through poetry; and it's the reason of the strong analogy between his poems and the images in his cinema. "These vignettes [poems] recall the camera shots in his cinema, and resemble with the cinematic moments of his films," Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak and Michael Beard state.[81]

Accordingly, Kiarostami's films were developed through the artful arrangement and composition of these images and pictorial poems, similar to a collage. Kiarostami has hundreds of small sources of inspiration in his mind and putting them together allows him to develop the narrative and images of his films. Thus, Kiarostami's poems have considerably impacted the narrative of his films and are one of the primary sources of inspirations for him. Based on Gaston Bachelard's words, "the great function of poetry is to give us back the situations of our dreams."[82] It is sensible to argue that Kiarostami's poems are pieces of his imaginations; his untold stories and undepicted moments of his films. These are the poems that present his minimalist narrative style, rhythmic poetic imageries along with his desire to reveal the elegance of an ordinary moment.

To develop this project, I referred to Kiarostami's poems, positing that they are the stories that bear the strongest resemblance with his cinematic narratives. They are the stories that have influenced his cinema, directly and indirectly, and have contributed to the creative process of his work.

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[78] Simone de Beauvoir, *Old Age* (London: Penguin, 1990), 239.

[79] Abbas Kiarostami, *Marg Va Digar Hich - Death, and Nothing More* (Publication, Iran: Nazar , 2017), 6.

[80] Rosenbaum and Saeed-Vafa, *Abbas Kiarostami,* 115.

[81] Kiarostami, *Walking with the Wind*, 5.

[82] Gaston Bachelard and Maria Jolas, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 15.

He has three books of poetry: *With the Wind* (2001), *A Wolf Lying in Wait* (2005), and *Wind and Leaf* (2011). After reading all of his poems, I noticed that a large number of these poems are either about nature or about solitary people. The poems that are more pictorial are often about nature and the poems that are more descriptive are about the experiences that a lonely man might undergo. The theme of solitude is dominant in all of Kiarostami's works. In his cinema, the protagonists are often lonely individuals who are strangers to space and to the people around. The young boy in *Where Is the Friend's Home* is unable to communicate with others, especially adults, to express his wishes. The main character of *Life and Nothing More* along with his son are the only two characters in the film who have not been influenced by the earthquake, and cannot feel sympathy with the people around them. The protagonist of *Through the Olive Trees* is a person who has lost his closest family members. He is a lonely man seeking someone to talk with, and the only one who understands him is the girl he likes. He talks to the girl through whole film and does not hear a word from her. In *Taste of Cherry*, the middle-aged man spends most of the film inside the confined space of his car, which conveys a feeling of isolation, looking for someone to share his thoughts with. Likewise, the film crew in *The Wind Will Carry Us* have come from a city to a faraway location, and are clearly strangers to the people and space there.

I have used two of Kiarostami's poems with the theme of isolation and solitude as the source of inspiration to develop the narrative of this project. The first poem, published in *Walking with the Wind* (2001), expresses solitude through visualizing a natural space with certain qualities, while the other poem, published in *A Wolf Lying in Wait* (2005), expresses the different emotions that a solitary person experiences. These two poems convey a range of feelings that have resulted from solitude, and each line refers to one of these feelings. The succession of these feelings and their composition as a piece of poetry shapes the narrative of my work.

I

In the wasteland of my solitude

single trees thrust up

by the thousand. [83]

II

I arrive   alone,

I drink   alone,

I laugh   alone,

I cry   alone,

I'm leaving   alone. [84]

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[83] Kiarostami, *Walking with the Wind*, 226.

[84] Abbas Kiarostami, A Wolf Lying in Wait: Selected Poems, trans. Imāmī Karīm and Michael Beard (Tehran: Sokhan, 2005), 34.

These are two of Kiarostami's poems that describe different emotions which a lonely person might experience. Solitude might be very disturbing and disappointing, like a wasteland, or it can be as joyful as a drinking a glass of wine or observing nature in absolute peace.

To create a sense of place derived from these poems, I referred to Kiarostami's films in order to understand how he denotes solitude, loneliness, and isolation through space and atmosphere.

I. Darkness and Silence

Using the ambience of darkness, Kiarostami separates his characters from their surroundings in order to emphasize their solitude. Sometimes they move from light to shadow and sometimes they walk into absolute darkness and disappear. The darkness shots are very calm and vague and often convey tension; they sometimes become a symbol of death, and sometimes imply fear or sadness of the lonely characters.[85] This darkness also diminishes the influence of the image on the audience and allows them to focus on the sounds of nature and feel the silence and peace that flows in natural environments. Godfrey Cheshire writes about a minute of darkness in *Taste of Cherry*, which separates the epilogue of the film from the rest: "In its penultimate scene, when the figure we've identified all along is lying completely still, apparently heading into a darkness both literal and figurative, we're left utterly alone with ourselves, with our own deepest feelings ..."[86]

fig. 32 – Darkness and Silence

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[85] Michel Ciment, Stéphane Goudet, and Abbas Kiarostami, "Entretiens Avec Abbas Kiarostami," accessed January 6, 2020, https://www.zintv.org/Entretiens-avec-Abbas-Kiarostami
[86] Godfrey Cheshire, "Taste of Cherry," The Criterion Collection, accessed January 6, 2020, https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/55-taste-of-cherry

II. Isolated Spaces

Habitats and buildings surrounded by vast landscapes and secluded from the cities are the primary locations used for these five films. These spaces imply the isolation of villages and their oddity in relation to the surrounding landscape. As a result of this isolation, the characters are often adrift in nature and need to search for the location of these faraway villages. One of these isolated spaces is the interior space of cars. In these shots, the protagonists are depicted in the confined space of their private cars. Khatereh Sheibani suggests that these spaces give characters the privacy and isolation they lack in their lives.[87]

fig. 33 – Isolated Spaces

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[87] Sheibani, "Kiarostami and Persian Poetry," 534.

III. Abandoned Houses

Two of these films are located in an area that has been partially demolished by an intense earthquake. In these films, the image of people living among the ruins of deserted spaces and the remains of collapsed buildings illustrate the desolation and loneliness of the outlived people.

While the sole image of these spaces conveys a feeling of loneliness and depression — that was discussed in Section Three of this thesis — depicting green landscapes as the background of these spaces reduces these feelings. These spaces lose their metaphorical meaning of depression and function as the frame for these beautiful landscapes to convey the desire for living.

fig. 34 – Abandoned Houses

IV. Lost in Space

Another approach to convey solitude is to show the characters in long shots and among spatial and natural elements. While the characters move through these spaces at times they vanish and moments later reappear. These images convey a feeling of being strayed and of abandonment. This isolation is sometimes quite pleasant. In *Through the Olive Trees*, while the two main characters walk through a woodland, trees block the view of the characters momentarily and then they reappear as time progresses. The trees in these images function similar to the walls of a house; they isolate people from the surroundings and provide the privacy that the two characters lacked in the village, and an opportunity for the protagonist to express his love.

In contrary, in *Where Is the Friend's Home,* the image of woodlands become quite frightening. In these vast areas it is easy for a child to get lost or get hurt by animals. The camera implies these dangers by depicting him as running through the trees, as his image gets obscured, and therefore the tension within the scene is increased.

fig. 35 – Lost in Space

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V. Symbolic Motifs

Kiarostami mentions having experienced loneliness is a crucial factor in understanding his images of the roads. He argues that the roads in his photographs, and his films, do not necessarily have any special significance, rather they allow him the expression of loneliness.[88] In his films, the images of the characters who are travelling these paths on their own highlight their solitude and isolation; and shooting these moments in a long take and long shot depicts the strength of this feeling.

Solitary trees are another visual motif that has repeatedly appeared in all of these five films. Lone trees appearing in sharp contrast with a vast arid landscape conveys a strong sense of solitude and matches the loneliness of the films' protagonists.

fig. 36 – Promo poster of Taste of Cherry

Kiarostami mentions his strong desire to depict the images of trees to convey a feeling of isolation and loneliness. He chronicles the story of a specific tree that he had photographed several times but he was not satisfied with the result; he succeeded in capturing the feeling of loneliness with his last photograph taken and then he stated that the reason for his satisfaction was because "the feeling of loneliness was there." He took the photograph, and used the image for the promo poster of *Taste of Cherry*.[89]
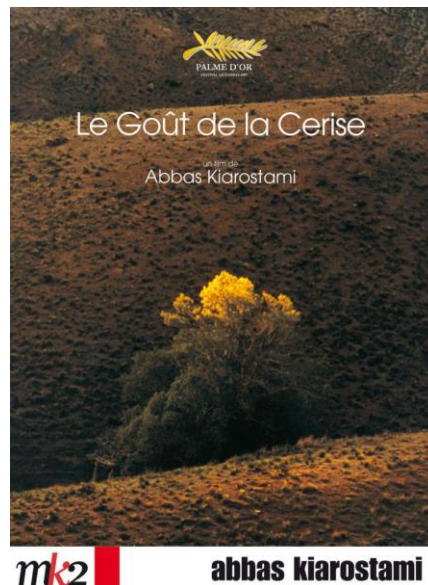
fig. 37 – Symbolic Motifs

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[88] Arsalan Mohammad and Abbas Kiarostami, "A Conversation with Kiarostami," PBS (Public Broadcasting Service), accessed January 6, 2020, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/01/a-conversation-with-kiarostami.html
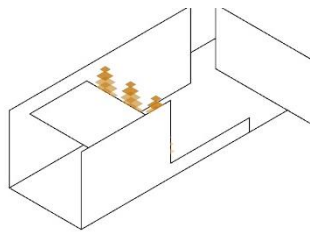[89] Ibid.

Architectural Vignettes

By considering Kiarostami's approaches in conveying loneliness through atmospheric images, I have visualized the selected narratives to conceive the atmosphere of these two poems.

Single trees thrust up by the thousand

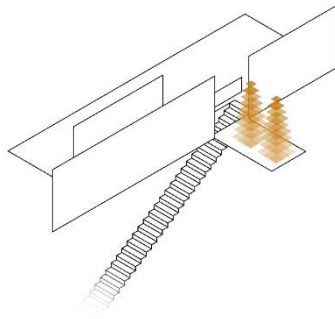*fig. 38 – "Single Trees" axo.*

fig. 39 – "Single Trees"

In the wasteland of my solitude

▲ *fig. 40 - "Wasteland of Solitude" axo.*
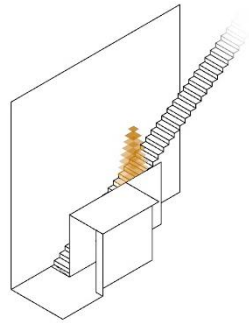
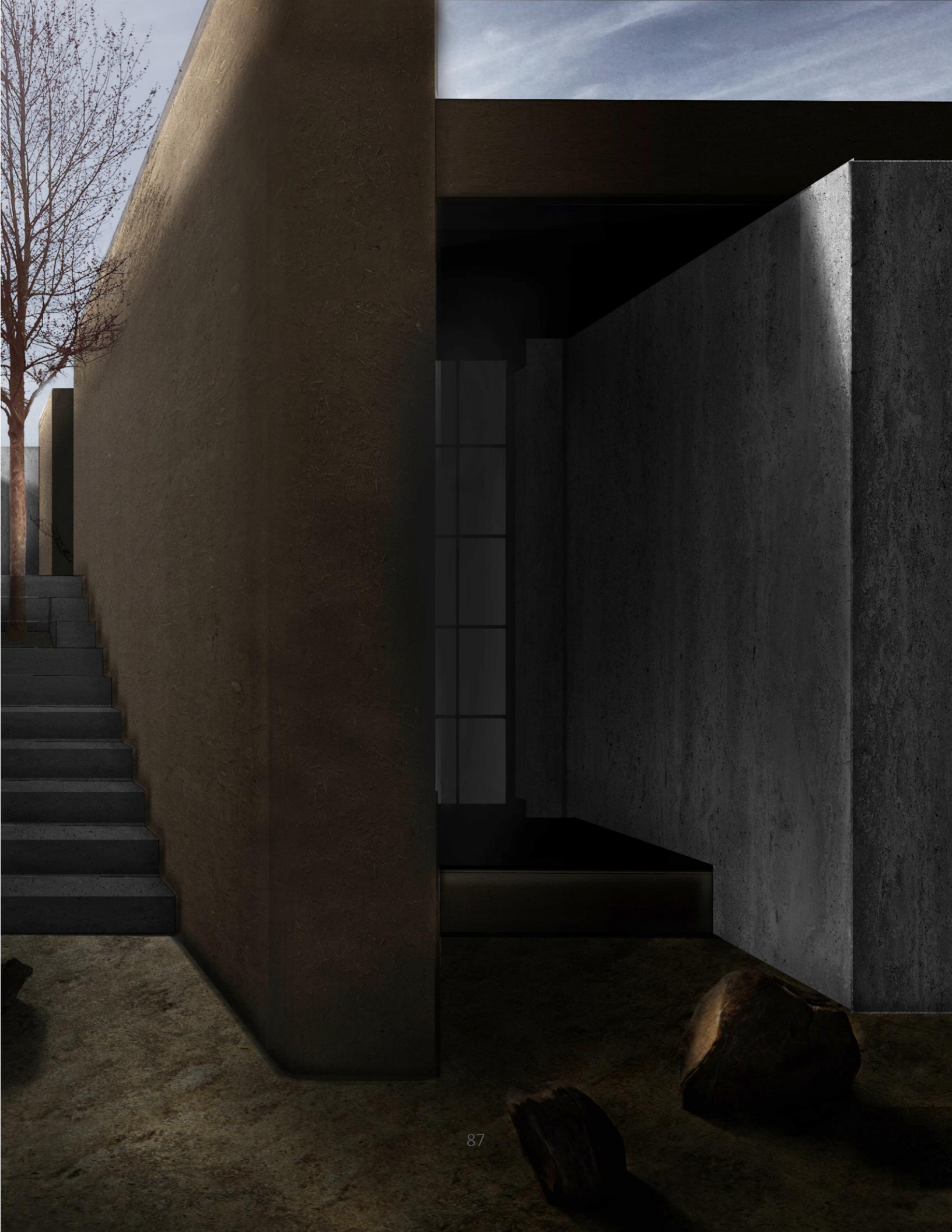▶ *fig. 41 - "Wasteland of Solitude"*

I arrive   alone,

▲   *fig. 42 – "I arrive alone" axo.*

▶   *fig. 43 - "I arrive alone"*

I cry   alone,
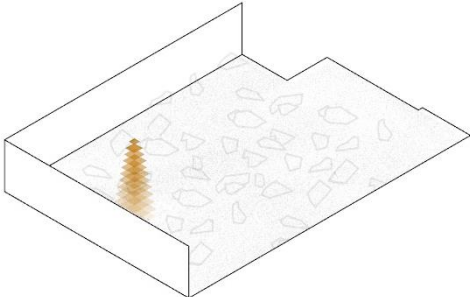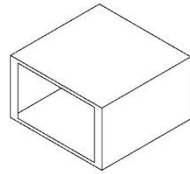
I drink   alone,
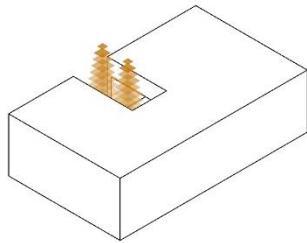
I laugh   alone,
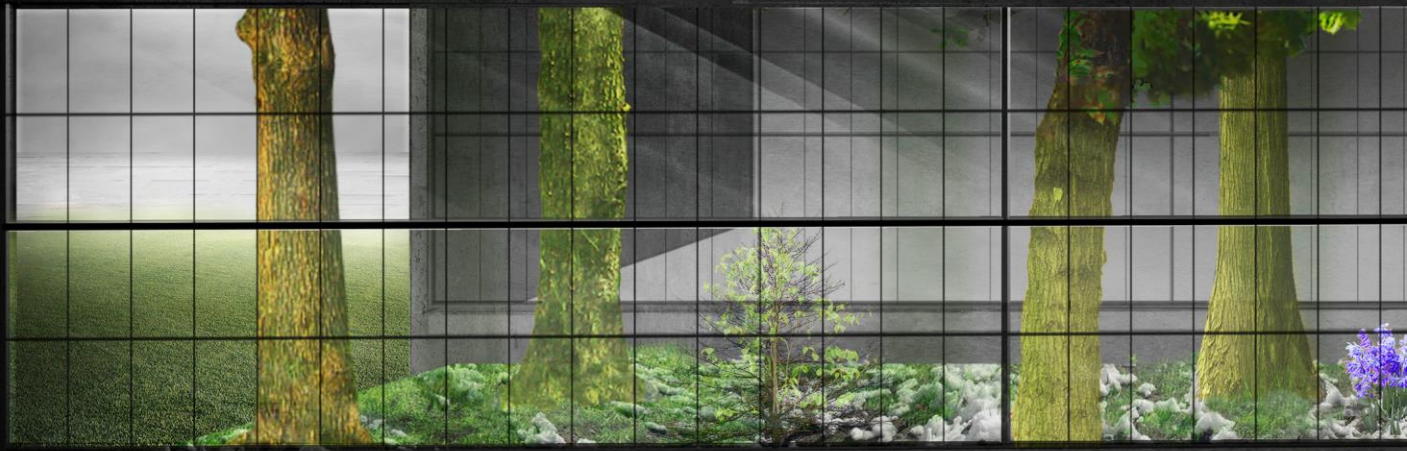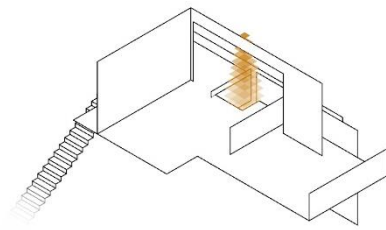
I'm leaving   alone.
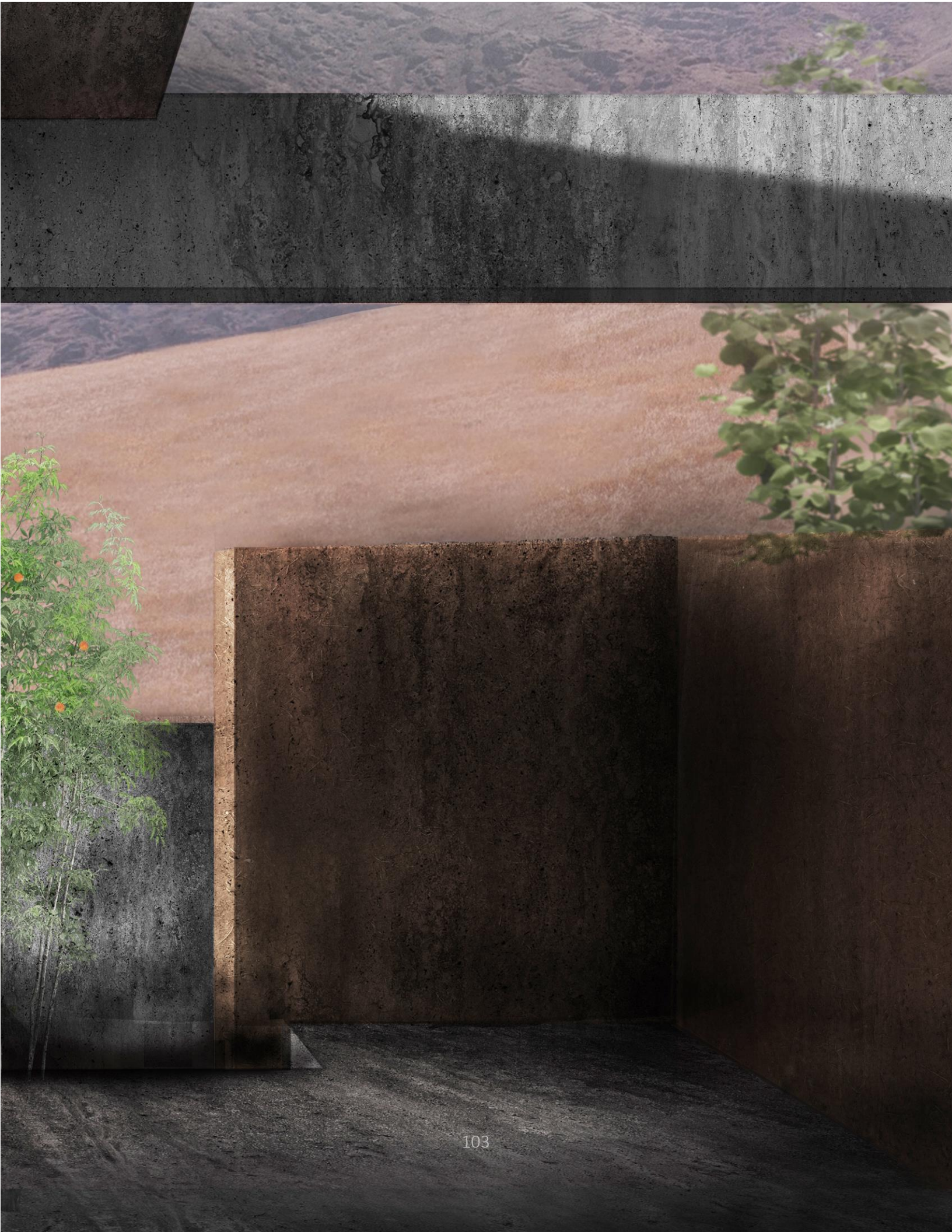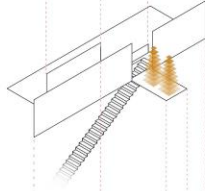
Juxtaposition of Spaces

These are all individual vignettes and spaces, each recounting one scene of the narrative. To create an architecture derived from Kiarostami's cinema, these single vignettes should come together to enable visualization of the entire narrative. Juxtaposition of these spaces has been also inspired by the way Kiarostami compiles space in his films.

According to the analysis of juxtaposition of spaces through editing in the cinema of Kiarostami in Section Five, Kiarostami shows spaces without neglecting time or location. He wishes for the audience to experience time and space with the characters of his films. Inspired by that notion, I compiled these spaces in a way that the succession of spaces could be maintained, and the travelling from one scene to the other could be envisioned by the viewer; as if the viewers are seeing these images in a long take, without interruption. In the end, this juxtaposition of spaces completes the architectural interpretation of Kiarostami's cinema. This is an architecture inspired by various aspects of Kiarostami's cinema: the narrative style, the way spaces contribute to the narrative in revealing concepts, architectural imagery, juxtaposition of spaces, and succession of images.

Single trees thrust up
by the thousand,
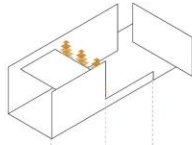
In the wasteland of my solitude.

I arrive   alone,

I cry   alone,

I drink   alone,

I laugh   alone,

I leave   alone.

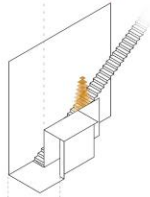*fig. 52 – Juxtaposition of Spaces I*
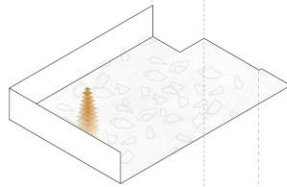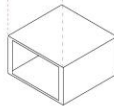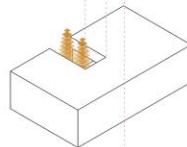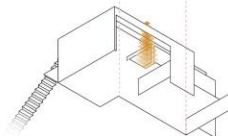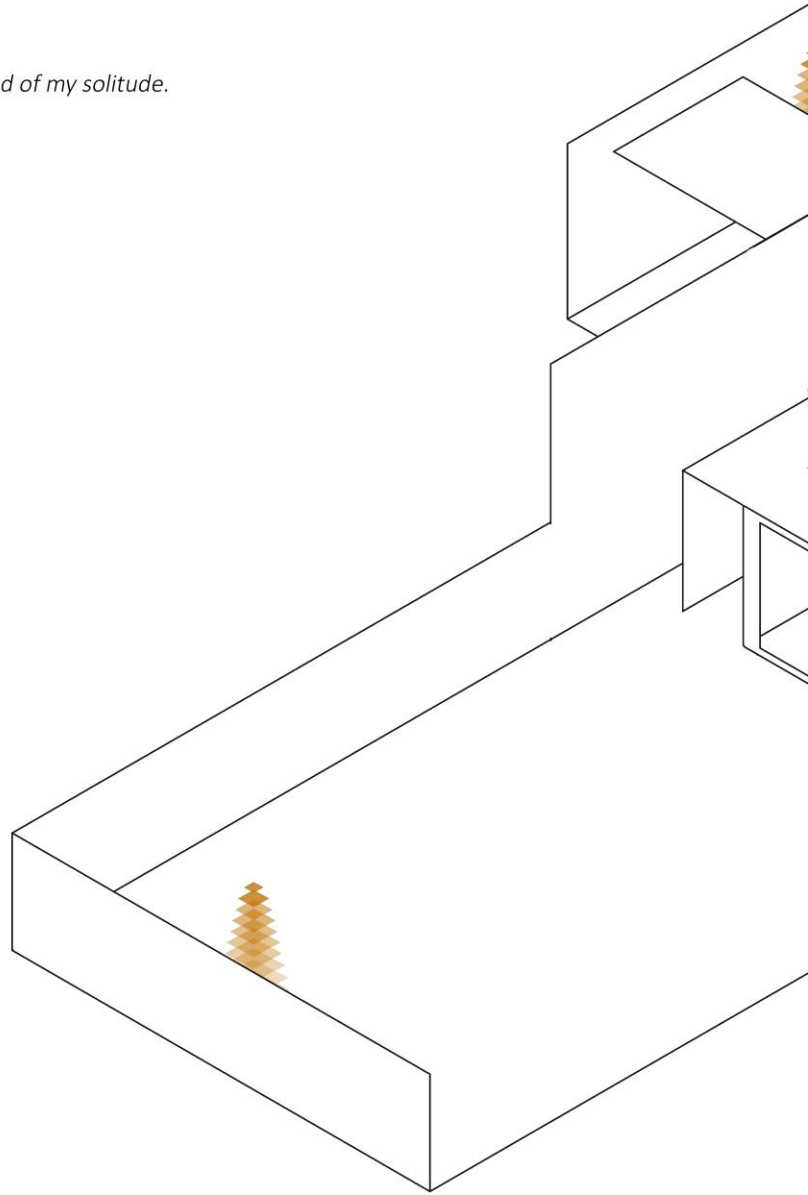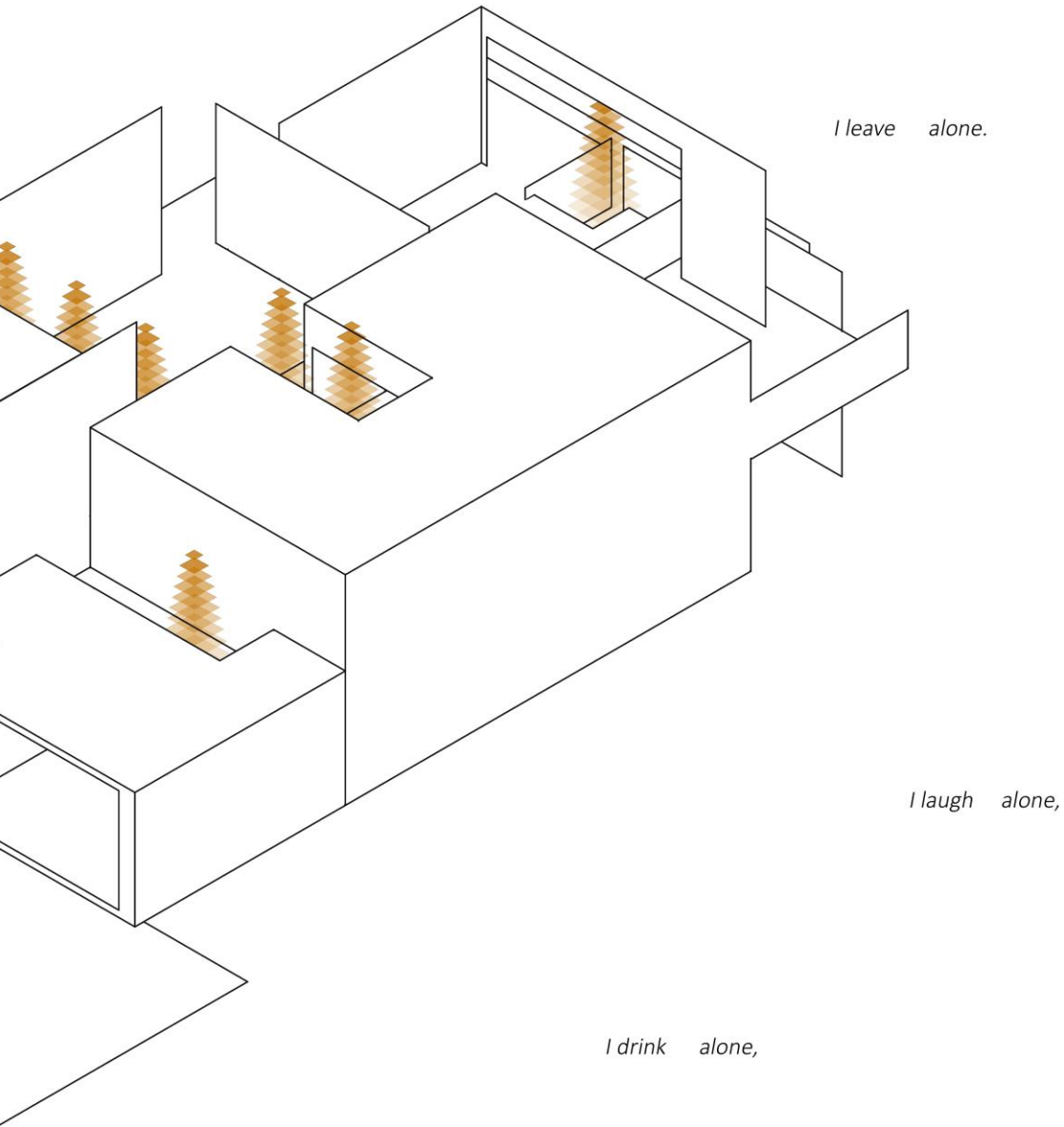
Single trees thrust up
by the thousand,

In the wasteland of my solitude.

I arrive   alone,

I cry   alone,

I leave   alone.

I laugh   alone,

I drink   alone,

fig. 53 – Juxtaposition of Spaces II

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Conclusion

Architecture and cinema, although historically born vastly apart, possess undeniable resemblances. One of the aspects of this resemblance stems from the fact that they both employ time and space to establish a distinct place that allows these two mediums to offer similar experiences of space to their audience. The movement and experience of being in a house can be remembered as a series of images, like a film. Conversely, a film can be experienced like a piece of architecture, and each image can be a subjective experience of the space.

In Kiarostami's cinema this resemblance is being strengthened by creating realistic spatial imageries. He often used camera like an observer who was witnessing events, and created realistic images without the least exaggeration and manipulation. Likewise, the juxtaposition of images allows the audience to follow characters in their journies and allows them to place themselves as the characters of the films. With these approaches Kiarostami has made cinematic images closer to physical spaces, and created this illusion that whatever is being seen on the screen is real.

In Kiarostami's cinema, space and location play an important role—to the extent that he argues that location comes foremost in his paradigm.[90] The locations that Kiarostami chose as the set of his films were one of the sources of inspiration that allowed him to develop his initial ideas. This thesis focuses on this aspect of Kiarostami's films, and analyzes different aspects of the relation between cinema and architecture in his films.

Without being biased and by having the aforementioned quote of Kiarostami in my mind, I started this project by reading about the films' criticisms, analyses, Kiarostami's interviews and writings. The information I learnt gave me the opportunity to get familiar with various aspects of Kiarostami's films. Simultaneously, studying the role of physical and cinematic spaces in Kiarostami's cinema revealed the resemblance between his ideas and his choice of location. Although Kiarostami rarely talks about the concepts of his films, the details he mentioned in his interviews and writings revealed the fact that many of his notions and concepts are represented in his choice of spaces and the way they are organized in the film.

During my research on the cinema of Kiarostami, I also studied the films of other great filmmakers such as Andrei Tarkovsky, Yasujirō Ozu, Federico Fellini, and Jean-Luc Godard. What I noticed is the very different approaches in using architecture in cinema; and what might be unique in Kiarostami's films is his obligation to reality. The images and spaces of his films look so real and ordinary, that many details in architectural imagery might not stand out and might appear to be insignificant, even though Kiarostami has chosen and controlled these spatial

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[90] Cheshire, *Conversations with Kiarostami*, 29.

elements purposefully and has organized them to find a metaphoric meaning and reveal the notions of the narrative.

Kiarostami's sensitive perception of directions, navigation, natural light, and the visual aesthetics of the real spaces have contributed to him being recognized as a poet of space. A poet who perceived the essence of existing spaces, sensed their meanings, and presented them realistically on the screen to allow the audience to observe and find the hidden poetics of these spaces. Long takes, slow rhythm, and insignificant narratives are eye openers that invite audience to be vigilant and observe spaces with curiosity.

By designing the vignettes, I explored one approach to translate some of Kiarostami's notions about space in architecture. In particular, the way he used space both as a pretext to recount a narrative and as an element that can strengthen the viewer's understanding of the images. This design is also an effort to relate cinema and architecture in practice. The architectural vignettes are created through employing storytelling, architectural imagery and the effect of successive images in the cinema of Kiarostami.

These vignettes are an architectural homage to Kiarostami and his works of art. They employ architectural and natural elements and organize them in a way that they convey the poetic sense of place that has emerged in his films, photographs, and poems.

Letter of Copyright Permission

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fig. 2:

From: Bahman Shafiee
Sent: Thursday, September 12, 2019 2:10 PM
To: Federico Babina
Subject: Kiarostami

Dear Federico Babina,
I am working on my master thesis about spaces derived from Kiarostami's movies.
I have recently seen your fascinating project ARCHIDIRECTOR, and I would like to ask for your permission to mention your work on relationships between
cinema and architecture, and include your graphic illustration, "Kiarostami."

From: Federico Babina
Sent: Thursday, September 19, 2019 5:34 AM
To: Bahman Shafiee
Subject: RE: Kiarostami

Dear Bahman,
I'm not use to leave my work for Project that I do not follow directly.
In this case, I can give you my permission but just if you specify that the use it is not
commercial that you will respect the copyright and that you'll properly
credit it.
Best
Federico Babina

---

fig. 3:

From: Bahman Shafiee
Sent: Monday, September 9, 2019 6:40 PM
To: Matthew Murphy
Subject: Photo Copyright

 Dear Matt Murphy,

I am a graduate student at the University of Waterloo in Canada.
I am working on my thesis about Abbas Kiarostami, and I was wondering how I can get permission to use one of the photos that Abbas Attar has taken from him:
https://pro.magnumphotos.com/Asset/-2S5RYDCDSUL.html

Best Regards,
Bahman Shafiee.

From: Matthew Murphy
Sent: Tuesday, September 10, 2019 4:59 PM
To: Bahman Shafiee
Subject: Re: Photo Copyright

Dear Bahman,
In this case, we can grant permission to use the image without Magnum incurring a licensing fee if you agree to the following terms:
1) The image will be used once, and only as part this specific thesis project. Any other use must first be approved by Magnum Photos.
2) The photographer will be credited as "© A. Abbas/Magnum Photos".
3) The presentation in which this image will be used will only be accessible through UWSpace.
Best,Matt

fig. 36:

From: Bahman Shafiee
Sent: Friday, January 10, 2020 1:32 PM
To: Anne-Laure Barbarit
Subject: Copyright of Taste of Cherry's Poster

Dear Anne-Laure Barbarit,

I am a graduate student at the University of Waterloo, in Canada. I am working on the cinema of Kiarostami and need to use the poster of *Taste of Cherry,* which is published on your website, in my thesis.

I am contacting you to ask for permission to use that image in my thesis.

Link to image:
https://mk2films.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2016/07/333-1171381479-1302.jpg

From: Anne-Laure Barbarit <anne-laure.barbarit@mk2.com>
Sent: Friday, January 17, 2020 7:25 AM
To: Bahman Shafiee
Subject: RE: Copyright of Taste of Cherry's Poster

Dear Bahman,

I hope this email finds you well.
I confirm we agree with the use of the image from THE TASTE OF CHERRY in your thesis.
Please include the colloqing copyright notice in your credits:
Still image from the film THE TASTE OF CHERRY directed by Abbas Kiarostami © 1997 Abbas Kiarostami/ mk2 D.R.
All the best,
Anne-Laure

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