Urban Square as a Theater:  
Issues of Continuity and Discontinuity in Urban Design

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ABSTRACT

This thesis tries to establish some criteria for designing a good urban square, with concern for the static and dynamic approaches. The former refers to aesthetic issues, and the latter refers to social and contextual ones. I start by examining the phenomena of modernity from two aspects: the impact that modernity has on contemporary cities, and its influence on today’s people. Basically, it has made today’s urban spaces inhuman, and made people lose their senses of self, the most basic and instinct concept linking body and environment. The issues discussed here are the time-space notion, self-identity, 20th century urban utopias, and the public-private relationship. Then the discussion goes to the dialect between “continuity” and “discontinuity.” The argument is that discontinuity is necessary for creating abundant images of a city. It links all the elements on the urban level, and interestingly makes the whole urban environment continuous.

The concept of “theater” is employed as a tentative framework to connect the theory and the practice parts, namely the criteria development. An analog based on some features shared by the urban square and the theater is taken to specify the characteristics of the urban square. Finally, three criteria for designing the urban square, boundary, theme, and collective activities are developed through studying some cases.

Thesis Supervisor: Michael Dennis
Title: Professor, Department of Architecture
The ritual in Chiufen
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The idea of this thesis was conceived four years ago, when I was dealing with a settlement preservation project in Chiufen, a declined small hill town in northeastern Taiwan. It was in the fourth moon of the Chinese lunar calendar, and a ritual was held with a parade cruising around the whole village. In the wake of their marching path the most important places in the village were revealed. The event came to a climax when the long line of the parade began to climb a long and steep stony stairway, the main image of Chiufen. It struck me when I saw the residents were vigorously attempted to carry an idol's sedan chair to climb the stairway. It reminded me the story of Sisyphus, an endless labor in vain. It was just like Chiufen's past prosperity that will never return. I began to think about the interactions between space, event, and participators. I believe that there exist some dynamic relationship among them. Now it is good to see some relating things written.

I appreciate the environment that MIT offers, the abundant resources and the flexibility of the S.M. Arch. S. program. I must thank my advisor, Michael Dennis, who can usually (though not always) tolerate my strange ideas and give me necessary helps. Lots of my urban design ideas are from him. Also I would like to thank my thesis readers, Stanford Anderson and Lawrence Vale, where my concerns about “people” are mainly from.

Thanks are due to John Sih, a friend who generously lent his brand new and expensive powerbook computer to me; and Hua-ping Chang, a suitemate who is willing to listen to any kind of rubbish at 3:00 A.M. To Michelle and Antoni, that kind of old friends understanding and supporting you to the last minute. And to Judy, a unique girl who kept my skull sober (maybe a little “somber”) during this period.

Of course, the appreciation owing to my parents has far exceeded the word “thanks” can say. I will never forget the scene when they were waving to me in the airport while I was coming to the States. By the way, hopefully they will not divide the amount of the tuition with the page number of my thesis.
Giovanbattista Piranesi
_Carceri_, plates II, etching
TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction

II. The Problematic of "Modernity," and Its Influence on the Urban Space
   2.1 Modernity
   2.2 Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century
   2.3 Public vs. Private

III. The Notions of "Continuity" and "Discontinuity," and the Studies of Urban Squares
   3.1 Continuity and Discontinuity
   3.2 The Studies of the Urban Square: A Way of Categorizing

IV. Urban Square as a Theater
   4.1 Discontinuities of the Theater
   4.2 Urban Square as a Theater

V. Case Studies

VI. Conclusion

VII. Footnotes

VIII. Bibliography
Illustrations

14 Fig. 1 The dynamism of modernity
16 Fig. 2 Existential Questions
17 Fig. 3 The Boulevard Art of Paris
18 Fig. 4 Diagram of Haussmen’s plan for the Second Empire Paris
19 Fig. 5 The Garden City
20 Fig. 6 Plan voisin for Paris, Le Corbusier
20 Fig. 7 Perspective of Corbu’s Utopia
24 Fig. 8 Decomposition of the City Sign Model by Hjelmslev
25 Fig. 9 The Whole Process of Determining the Urban Symbolic
31 Fig. 10 Comparison of continuity and discontinuity in pre-modern and modern periods
37 Fig. 11 Typologies of the medieval square
41 Fig. 12 Rob Krier, Some Classifications of the Square
41 Fig. 13 Kostof; Zucker’s Five kinds of square
48 Fig. 14 Sergei Eisenstein, Schematic sketch of the Carcere oscura
48 Fig. 15 Path for experiencing the Arcropolis of Athens
49 Fig. 16 Analog between the square and the theater in terms of the purpose of self-identity
51 Fig. 17 A general review of the acting elements
54 Fig. 18 Vigevano, Piazza Ducale (photo: Vigevano, Verga)
55 Fig. 19 The Theme and Discontinuity of the Piazza Ducale
57 Fig. 20 The Theme and Discontinuity of the Piazzas in Vicenza
60 Fig. 21 Boston City Hall Plaza
61 Fig. 22 Different Pressures of the Boston City Hall Plaza
63 Fig. 23 Piazza San Marco, Venice, Scene from the Sea
63 Fig. 24 Nazis’ Berlin, by Speer
64 Fig. 25 Piazza San Marco, Venice
64 Fig. 26 Gentile Bellini, Procession of the Holy Cross in the Piazza San Marco, 1496
65 Fig. 27 Piazza San Marco, Venice
68 Fig. 28 Piazza del Campo, Siena
68 Fig. 29 Palio of Siona
69 Fig. 30 Piazza Navona, Rome
70 Fig. 31 Panini, Carriage-rides of Piazza Navona, 1756
72 Fig. 32 The comparison between the ritual and the theater;
I. Introduction

The trend of modernity began to change the structure of the city in the eighteenth century. After the Industrial Revolution this process sped up dramatically; the material progress within the past two hundred years has far exceeded that of human civilization over the past several millennia. Some people consider it a totally new era, which has created a huge disconnection between itself and the human historic line before it, and has made contemporary history discontinuous.

During this reconstructing process, the criteria of judging the urban spaces changed drastically. Many places which had been considered pleasant for hundreds or even thousands of years suddenly became unsuitable for "modern" life. For instance, an industrialized society's demand for the vast amount of transportation always makes the narrow and winding road system of the old towns completely inadequate. As a result, a lot of urban squares have become parking lots, and expensive land prices make it much harder than before to create the amenities that were commonly seen in the old towns. In this situation, we doubt that any values for judging the urban space can endure such drastic changes in the urban environment.

The purpose of this thesis is, first of all, to look for an architectural "hidden value," with which an urban square is considered an amenity. This will be done by checking several examples in history, especially the ones between the Renaissance and the pre-industry periods. Secondly, I will investigate the possibility of applying this "value" to designing an urban square in today's city.
Some clues linking the modern era and pre-modern times exist. In other words, some values used in judging whether an urban space is "good" (let's simply use this subjective word temporarily) have never changed, no matter how the whole context varies. With these common values, we can study some spatial rules that were considered amenities in the medieval, the Renaissance, and in the later urban squares, and apply them to today's urban spaces. However, I do not imply that there are any "universal" qualities which can be called upon when considering social or geographical differences. Here I will focus particularly on the urban square, since it is a dramatic node within the urban spaces, in which some spatial characteristics can be easily revealed because of the strengthened mode of human activities.

"Continuity" and "discontinuity" in the city are terms I will apply to my studies of the urban square. Through studies of the process of modernity mentioned above, the characteristics and contrasts between "continuity" and "discontinuity" will be revealed and become distinct. Here the terms "continuity" and "discontinuity" need to have clearer definitions, since they are so commonly used in many fields where they might have different meanings that are totally irrelevant or even opposite to each other. In this thesis I would simply use a three-aspect viewpoint to define them: morphological, historical, and social. The examples we discuss here are mainly Italian squares. Additionally an American urban squares will also be mentioned as a contrast. The reason for this selection is not because of the so-called "Euro-central" tendency, but because of their well established documentation and the good condition of historical preservation, which offer us a fairly complete set of research reference sources. On the other hand, most of the urban squares developed in regions other than Europe do not have much variation and vitality, in terms of the "civil society" (see page 35, Town and Square in Antiquity).
In the second part of this thesis, I attempt to apply the "rules" discussed in the first part to the design of today's urban open space. To link the eternal gap between "theory" and "practice," I offer "theater" as an analogy and a bridge in between. Basically a successful urban open space, or more specifically, an urban square, must have some unique characteristics that firmly attract people's feelings, and, on a certain level, create an "isolated" environment in which people act as actors and audience at the same time. The "continuity" and the "discontinuity" issues in fact can be found compressed in a heterotopia like the theater. Two hypotheses are raised:

1. The discontinuity between the urban elements mentioned above, is necessary for forming a city's abundant image, which interestingly links all elements together and makes the whole urban fabric continuous.

2. From the viewpoint of the collective activities happening within the square, this discontinuity and the dialectic between "inside" and "outside" can in fact be compared to the characteristics of the theater, which offer a method for analyzing the interaction between the urban square and the collective activities, as well as a rule for designing a successful urban open space.
A carrousel proclaiming the forthcoming marriage of Louis XIII and Anne of Austria, Place de Vosges, Paris, 1612
II. The Problematic of "Modernity," and Its Influence on the Urban Spaces

2.1 Modernity

As a foundation of this thesis, an analysis of modernity will be emphasized, especially in terms of its influence on the urban space. However, there has never been a clear agreement about either the definition or time period of "modernity." For the convenience of our discussion, I will simply use Anthony Giddens' opinion about its emergence: "...‘modernity’ refers to modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence."

The impact that modernity has had on our living environment is tremendous. Many old cities confronting this trend must either change their urban structure in order to adapt to the new needs, or fall into a stagnant situation. Through the reconstructing process the ways of producing new urban spaces changed fundamentally. Unlike modern cities, such as Los Angeles or Houston, which were built totally after the Industrial Revolution, the old city must adjust itself to fit the new needs. Given this situation, we have to reconsider the possibility of connecting the dislinkage between modern and pre-modern times.

Anthony Giddens thinks that modern institutions are in three kinds of key respects discontinuous with the gamut of pre-modern cultures and ways of life. He made a chart to show the "dynamism of modernity" as below:
**Separation of time and space:** the condition for the articulation of social relations across wide spans of time-space, up to and including global systems.

**Disembedding mechanism:** consists of symbolic tokens and expert systems (those together = abstract systems). Disembedding mechanisms separate interaction from the particularities of locales.

**Institutional reflexivity:** the regularized use of knowledge about circumstances of social life as constitutive element in its organization and transformation.

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Figure 1 The dynamism of modernity by Anthony Giddens; *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 20

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*The Abstraction of the Notions of Time and Space*

*To be conscious is not to be in time*
*But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,*
*The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,*
*Be remembered; involved with past and future.*
*Only through time time is conquered.*

T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

For people in the pre-modern era, the notion of "time" was directly linked to that of "space." In the pre-industrial time, the structure and size of the city had a geographical relationship with people's daily lives. The distribution of differentiated places and the distance between them construct a "structure of feeling," to which people refer as the reference of time. This firm interaction started to separate after the emergence of modernity. For example, the invention of the mechanical clock unified people's time notion, and the process of making it objective also made it become abstract and
independent from the feeling structure of space. Berman claims that "... modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity; it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, 'all that is solid melts into air.'" (Berman; 1982: 15)

This time-space issue helps us to examine urban spaces by rethinking their roles in today's context. Living in the modern, or as some people suggest, the Post-Modern era, we have to consider the urban questions from this time-space viewpoint. In this thesis I tend to compress and put this issue into the realm of the square, because I believe that the urban square is the last place in the city to be alienized by modernity. However, some criteria have to be employed in the design of the urban square. The sad thing is that we have to make it isolated from the real world, through the analog of "theater," to recreate people's lost time-space notion and the structure of feeling.

"Globalization and Self-identity"

As the trend of globalization emerges in the modern era, the need to relocate and reidentify one's position in the new world is becoming much more imminent than before. In addition to the separation of time-space integration mentioned above, disembedding mechanisms are also an important source of alienation. People usually identify themselves and sense their bodies and minds through communication with the environment around them. This conceivability, however, is rapidly replaced by large amount of sign systems, and by trusting experts. Globalization expands the objective realm in people's minds, but also minimizes the subjective linkage between a person and his/her everyday environment. Giddens says that
"The existential question of self-identity is bound up with the fragile nature of the biography which the individual ‘suppliers’ about herself. A person’s identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor - important though this is - in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual’s biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world and sort them into the ongoing ‘story’ about the self." (Giddens, 1991: 54)

From this viewpoint we can tell that the way we identify ourselves has a firm relationship with the conceivable environment around us. It is a relatively subjective process operated in our minds, and might be limited by disembodiment mechanisms. Hence we now have to put this concern in our research of the urban space.

Existential questions concern basic parameters of human life, and are ‘answered’ by everyone who ‘goes on’ in the contexts of social activity. They presume the following ontological and epistemological elements:

| Existence and being: the nature of existence, the identity of object and events. |
| Finitude and human life: the existential contradiction by means of which human beings are of nature yet set apart from it as sentient and reflexive creatures. |
| The experience of others: how individuals interpret the traits and actions of other individuals. |
| The continuity of self-identity: the persistence of feelings of personhood in a continuous self and body. |

Figure 2. Existential Questions by Anthony Giddens; Modernity and self-Identity, p. p. 55
* Creative Destruction

For the modernists, the most efficient way to solve urban problems is to create a totally new city by eliminating the old structure. David Harvey called this “creative destruction” (Harvey, 1989: 16). The earliest practice of this notion on urban design is Haussmann’s plan for Second Empire Paris. In the beginning of the twentieth century this notion was linked to the romantic effort of revolution. In comparison with Haussmann’s ambitious plan, which was to execute the will of the emperor, the twentieth century plans still have an idealistic social perspective. However, this kind of destruction also eliminates all the accumulation of civilization while it is eliminating the problems. We will have a further discussion on urban utopias in the next section.

Fig. 3 The Boulevard Art of Paris
by J. F. Batellier
2.2 Urban Utopias in the 20th Century

The notion of urban utopias in the twentieth century is in fact the result of modernist thought. Modernists try to get rid of all the urban problems in the traditional city, to escape from all kinds of short-term proposals, and to reach an over-all solution just like revolution.

Though not in the 20th century, the re-shaping of the Second Empire Paris in 1860s is the first example of large-scale urban design after the emergence of modernity (Fig. 4). This ambitious career conducted by Haussmann turned Paris from an old medieval city into a grand Baroque one. This project built lots of grand Boulevards lined with blocks of bourgeois apartments, which already had the economic sense of mass-production. Rasmussen points the tendency of rationality in this project:

Fig. 4 Diagram of Haussmen's plan for the Second Empire Paris
Source: Leonondo Benevolo, History of Modern Architecture
“From a rational point of view Napoleon’s whole scheme was of very amateurish character when not directly based on older plans. It is exactly what might be expected when town planning is done by laying a ruler on a city map and, with no regard for the cost, cutting great swaths straight through blocks of houses.” (Rasmussen, 1949: 165)

This kind of attitude ignores the variety of urban spaces. Hence there did not appear any significant urban square during that period. The ironic thing is that this plan is not an urban utopia like those in the 20th century, but rather, the execution of the emperor’s will.

The Garden City (Fig. 5) proposed by Ebenezer Howard in 1898 was a relatively successful urban utopia, not only because it was essentially a concrete proposal rather than an ideological concept, and also it “combines the liveliness and opportunity of the old city, the spaciousness of the countryside and the efficiency of a logical layout.” (Risebero, 1979: 213) However, the blend of “tradition” and modernity was more economical such as self-sufficient and balance between industry and agriculture. Basically, the space in the Garden City was rather suburb and stagnant. Besides, Le Corbusier’s the Plan voisin proposal for Paris proposed in 1924 reveals a desire for huge-scale open spaces, and a notion of instrumentalizing the city (Fig. 6, 7).
Basically, all these modernist notions about urban design tend to eliminate all the existing artifacts, or start from a total beginning. They all try to get the work done within a short period of time instead of treating it as a lasting and long-term process.

Fig. 6 Plan voisin for Paris, Le Corbusier

Fig. 7 Perspective of Corbu's Utopia
2.3 Public vs. Private

As we suggested above, self-identity needs conceivable references from the exterior environment. The inward operation within people's minds, according to Hannah Arendt, "compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the thoughts of the minds, the delights of the senses — lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance." (Arendt, 1958: 50) We can say that the tendency to join the public is the main struggle in which people attempt to discern reality from imagination, and to prove their existence.

We can discuss this issue from a comparison between Oriental and Western societies. Generally speaking, Oriental societies do not have a clear border between the public and private realms, while Western societies draw a very clear line between them. The best example of this fact is the urban square. In Europe there are lots of urban squares that are built for the citizens, while we almost can find almost no similar element in the Oriental cultures. In China, the only square that can be found on the community level is the square in front of the temple, the religious center in the community. This kind of place is mainly used for religions. Several reasons might be employed to explain this phenomenon. First is the difference in the political systems. The tradition of the "civil society" in the Western world allows the existence of collective activities, which must be held in a public place. These kinds of activities are usually prohibited in an Oriental totalitarian regime. Second is the difference in religions. Westerners always identify themselves through a belief in the existence of God, which becomes the reference of the intimate operation. This reference confirms to a certain degree their needs for self-identity without having to ask from the public realm, so the "private" activities can still be derived from the whole. Third is the difference in the
building construction. In comparison with the framework system in the Oriental society, the bearing wall system in the Western tradition makes the private space more possible. From this comparison we can tell the social reasons for the emergence of the differentiation between the public and private realms.

*Modernization: the Privatization of the Public Realm*

The dialectic between the public and private realms forms the central issue in the discussion of urban modernization. If, as many people suggest, modernization is the critical point at which the public realm begins to be privatized, the urban square should be the last place to endure this change. Spiro Kostof thinks that the public space has two justifying aspects. The first "...has to do with familiar and chance encounters," such as meeting friends in public places. The second aspect is a ritual one. "Public places host structures or communal activities — festivals, riots, celebrations, — and because of that, such places will bear the designed evidence of our shared record of accomplishment and our ritual behavior." (Kostof, 1991: 124)

In traditional cities the urban center is always the most distinct public realm. These centers have both political and geographic centralities. Under this circumstance the urban square usually plays the role of a center for either the whole city or a community. Hence the urban artifacts surrounding the square are mostly important monumental and public buildings. From this viewpoint, the urban square is a miniature of public centers. However, with the emergence of the modern era the physical urban center is rapidly being replaced by a de-centered system, which is constructed by electronic network. Hence nowadays the urban square is probably the only symbol that preserves the vestige of the traditional urban center.
III. The Notions of "Continuity" and "Discontinuity," and the Studies of Urban Squares

3.1 Continuity and Discontinuity

The terms "continuity" and "discontinuity" are commonly used in many fields, with some different meanings that are totally irrelevant or even opposite to each other. For example, Karl Marx claims that human history is not a smooth process but has several segments and is marked by certain "discontinuities," which address class conflict and historic conjuncture. Although this has some relationship to our topic, it is not a main issue in our discussion. Here we are discussing this issue in terms of the city's formal structure, namely urban morphology; as well as the linkage and the dislinkage in a city's history.

3.1.1 City: An Unevenly Juxtaposed Assemblage

The city is a long-lasting object with a large number of artifacts built by different people, with different cultures in different epochs. A city is either a long-term accumulation which has existed for a period of time, such as those old cities in some ancient countries; or a newly starting master plan waiting for future establishment, such as Washington D.C. Hence the city can be conceived of as an unevenly juxtaposed assemblage. During this construction process, various kinds of continuities inevitably appear. It usually happens on the interface between two different objects. For example, the Renaissance way of designing the urban space usually "extrudes" a regular shape out of the medieval urban pattern which is originally irregular, and of
course forms a discontinuity between the two elements, such as the interface of the urban square.

3.1.2 Pseudo-text

Since the city is the accumulation of separately built objects (here I use the word "accumulation" instead of "combination" or "blend," in order to emphasize the chronological order and the overlapping effect), the messages we conceive from those objects are inevitably complicated. Urban semiologist Raymond Ledrut claims that the urban space is not a text but a "pseudo-text," because it is produced by non-semiotic processes as well as semiotic ones and because there is not always only a sender in the historically conditioned built environment. This notion obviously recognizes the essence of "accumulation" in the process of constructing a city. The "sign" here includes not only the perceivable parts of physical artifacts, but also the process of the interaction between different forces. For example, the forms and meanings of collective activities are parts of the urban text. The analysis of urban semiology can help us make a further examination on the large amount of accumulated elements. To use the urban semiotics method we should take a brief look at its theory. Basically it can be explained from a chart revealing the decomposition of the city sign:

![Fig. 8 Decomposition of the City Sign Model by Hjelmslev](Sd=signified, Sr=signifier)
The distinct characteristic of this kind of socio-semiotics approach is that it addresses not only an analysis on the substance and form of the expression, but also on the cultural context behind the objects, namely the "ideology" issues of the "content." Hence, in this thesis although we will focus on the morphological analysis of the urban space, we will still emphasize the "content" part, namely the political, economic, and cultural contexts.

Manuel Castells criticized the structuralist semiotics that ignore the roles of the social process and ideological practices. He thinks that the correspondences between the urban signs and the ideologies behind them is an external and dynamic process, rather than an internal and mythical relationship. (Castells, 1972: 220) It is not a single-pathed process, and can be schematized thus:

![Diagram](image)

Fig. 9 The Whole Process of Determining the Urban Symbolic by Manuel Castells, 1972: 219
3.1.3 Three Levels of Discontinuity

Given the situations above, namely the fact that the city is a juxtaposed accumulation, and the importance of the ideology behind the urban text, we can examine the discontinuities on three different levels when we are analyzing the urban space. The first one is on the interface between the urban spaces, which is from a more morphological point of view. This portion can also be separated into two parts: 1. the interface between the urban artifacts and the urban spaces, namely the facade of the city, and 2. the linkage between the urban spaces; The second one is on the social level, on the interaction between different agents and groups. The third is on the conjunctions of various distinct epochs, which have the implication of the notion of “accumulation” and “juxtaposition.”
Level I: 
The Interface Between the urban spaces

"The Different Pressures on the Inside and Outside of a Building"

Charles Jencks in his paper "Post-Modernism and Discontinuity" argues that discontinuity is a necessary phenomenon in creating an urban environment with abundant spatiality:

"Anything was better than this ennui (here refers to the universalism of the Modernism) and one can see why Venturi's 'complexity and contradiction' was quickly welcomed as a stimulant. Not only was it visually dramatic, it also could handle urban reality in a satisfactory way, accepting the different pressures on the inside and outside of a building, which were invariably suppressed in a Modernist architecture."

Despite that whether if it is controversial, we can clearly see the totally opposite aesthetic opinions about the discontinuity between the Modernist and the Post-Modernist. Here the "different pressures on the inside and outside of a building" indicates a very important issue in urban design. It is the interface between the buildings and the urban spaces, namely the "solid" and the "void" parts in the urban fabric, and also the border between the "public" and the "private" realm mentioned above. This interface is usually the facade of the urban buildings. The essential differences between the two realms, namely the "different pressures," form the first level of discontinuity in the city.

However, within this argument Charles Jencks mainly addresses the form of the urban facade. In fact the so-called "different pressures" are not merely a phenomenon caused by physical forms of the urban artifacts. As mentioned in section 3.1.2, we still have to make further investigation on the "content" level, which will be discussed in the level II and III parts.
Level II: Discontinuities on the Social Level

The city is the production of the interactions between different actors and groups. In the medieval towns, the social divisions are clearly reflected on the locations. For example, the medieval Italian towns usually have a “concentrically ordered town with elites living near the center and the poor pushed to the periphery. Religious and administrative buildings constituted the core of the settlement.” (Sjoberg, 1960) So do Paris and some of the early bishoprics in the north. It is less applicable to Flemish cities and French bastides, which were built around central marketplace (Dickinson 1961). Many English towns grow around one major street with a section widened for a market, and social divisions were reflected more by access to the main street than by residence in the center or the periphery (Hohenberg & Lees, 1985). Although nowadays the city has become much more complicated than ever, the social division is still the internal issue that forms the exterior appearance of the city.

To focus our viewpoint within the realm of the urban space, we can begin from examining the process of the “accumulation” happening in the historical context. The “accumulation” mentioned throughout the whole thesis, in fact is a highly unstable balance of the interactions between different social groups and forces. This balance forms another sources of the “different pressures,” which will have examples in the case study part (chapter 4) of this thesis.
Level III: Discontinuities on the Conjuncture Between Distinct Epochs

On this level our viewpoint addresses on the vertical section, namely discontinuities relating to the "time" aspect. Both the level II and level III parts imply the effects of "accumulation." Usually on the turning point of history, the conjuncture between two distinct epochs, the city endures some major changes. For example, the coming of the Renaissance fundamentally changes people's notion about the urban space, and the revolutionary change of the mode of production, such as the Industrial Revolution, always forces the urban spaces to adjust themselves to fit the new needs. Hence there certainly exists some dislinkage between the periods. Basically, I am examining the perceivable discontinuities revealing through the physical urban spaces and artifacts.
3.1.4 Theory of Permanences

From this viewpoint Aldo Rossi also has his own notion about continuity. He mentions the “theory of permanences” by both Poète and Lavedan in his book *The Architecture of the City*. Basically a city’s meanings are based on the continuity “...revealed through monuments, the physical signs of the past, as well as through the persistence of a city’s basic layout and plans.” (Rossi, 1982: 59) Under this statement Rossi creates a unique explanation of the subject that the urban collective memory is carried with. The most distinct difference between Rossi and other scholars’ notions about the continuity is Rossi’s emphasis on the physical urban artifacts, while most other people address the relatively more social issues. Although these artifacts’ usage and functions keep on changing through the history, the life of the city still carries on, and the changing of these functions do not effect the “permanences” of the city’s physical structure. This attitude offers a strong support for our morphological approach to the problematic of continuity. The importance of this theory is that it figures out that the continuity of the urban spaces can not be comprehended from their functions. This point has important influence on the studies of the urban square in this thesis.
3.1.5 Modern versus Pre-modern

On the other hand, while being discussed within the issue of "modernity," the word "discontinuity" usually gives people the impression of the disconnection between the modern era and the pre-modern time. Besides, some other discontinuities also exist in the phenomena of modernity mentioned in the last chapter. The separation of time and space, and disembedding mechanisms caused by the emergence of the modernity both have the sense of discontinuity. However, these continuities are on the level of people's consciousness, the structure of feeling, which are different from those on the level of spatial structure. Basically the latter ones, namely the spatial discontinuities, which are to be discussed in next chapter, are considered as necessary elements in urban design. Using these discontinuities on the spatial level in fact is an important means to eliminate the dislinkage and fragmentation of the structure of feeling and make them continuous again.

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<td></td>
<td>*structure of feeling</td>
<td>*over-all pre-planned scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discontinuity</td>
<td>*locality</td>
<td>*urban space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*juxtaposed accumulation</td>
<td>*separation of time and space</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Fig. 10 Comparison of continuity and discontinuity in pre-modern and modern periods
3.2 The Studies of the Urban Square: A Way for Categorizing

*In The City Square* by T. E. Hulme

In the city square at night, the meeting of the torches.
The start of the great march,
The cries, the cheers, the parting.
Marching in an order
Through the familiar streets,
Through friends for the last time seen.
Marching with torches.

Over the hill summit,
the moon and the moor,
And we marching alone.
The torches are out.

On the cold hill,
The cheers of the warrior dead
(For the first time re-seen)
Marching in an order
To where?

The urban square is an interesting, or we can say “quaint” artifact in the city. It uniquely combines the characteristics of both “inside” and “outside,” and the senses of “openness” and “enclosure” simultaneously. It seems to be a place without any specific function, but also with lots of public activities happening within. A successful urban square always has some kind of unique aura that attracts people’s curiosity, just as if some special event, usually festive could happen at any time.

For years, lots of treaties and research have discussed the issues of the urban square, from various viewpoints. Most of them put emphasis on either descriptive chronological history, or functional
criticism. They offer a well established base of first-hand documentation. However, a more contextual analysis, with which an internal "rule" for judging, or even creating the urban square can be found, is still left to be worked on.

Although we are always using the phrase "urban square," it can not be treated as a monolithic and even notion when we are making a further analysis of it. The squares formed in different epochs and different area usually have very distinct differences. Additionally, the squares in the same area of the same time also can be categorized according to different functions, such as residential or commercial. In this thesis the categorizing method becomes important since the studies on the "continuity" and "discontinuity" should be based on some common characteristics that can be shared by certain kinds of squares.

In this thesis I categorize the squares according to some principles. Basically, it is for the purpose of studying the subject, instead of constructing a framework for serious historic research.

A three-aspect consideration was taken: chronological, morphological, and social. In the following, these three aspects will be discussed in different segments, but still can be referred to each other.
**Chronological**

When examining the urban squares of different epochs, we can approximately judge some major distinctions among them according to some major time segregations of architectural history. Paul Zucker in his classic studies of this topic, *Town and Square*, used a framework constructed with five periods:

I. Town and Square in Antiquity (500 B.C. ~ 9th C. A.D.)
II. The Medieval Town and Square (9th C. ~ 15th C., from the beginning of the Romanesque ~ the end of Gothic style)
III. The Renaissance Town and Square
IV. Town and Square from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century
V. Early American Public Squares

Basically, I will use this classification as the main framework. However, for the convenience of our discussion, part III, the Renaissance period and part IV, the period between Baroque and the 19th century, will be merged together. This is because the main point to be emphasized is the distinction between the medieval and the Renaissance notions of urban design. Besides, part V, early American public squares, which talks about American urban squares before the 19th century, will not be included since it does not have much relationship with our purpose.

**Town and Square in Antiquity (500 B.C. ~ 9th C. A.D.)**

Zucker starts from some ancient oriental and middle-east countries rather than western ones. However, he thinks that “...the square did not represent an essential element of the town” until 500 B.C. After that did genuine squares began to appear in Greece.
Urban Square as a Theater

(Zucker, 1959: 19) His explanation is: "...only within a civilization where the anonymous human being had become a 'citizen,' where democracy had unfolded to some extent, could the gathering place become important enough to take on a specific shape." (Zucker, 1959: 19) Before examining the earliest square, we still have to take a look at the archaic Greek town before 500 B.C., whose plan has a kind of interesting and original pattern.

The archaic Greek town usually had an irregular layout. However, while building the acropolis, According to Zucker, the Greeks still did not have the notion of developing the "... technique of spatial definition on a scale commensurate with human needs." Hence the acropolis represented but an accumulation of irregularly dispersed shaped volumes, each existing in its own right without being tied together into a spatial unit. Generally the desire for shaping space developed only very slowly after 500 B.C." (Zucker, 1959: 28) Not until then did the notion of regularity begin to appear in the settlement plan. Basically, the arrangement of the buildings during that period has a dynamic and off-center layout without a dominative axis. Robert L. Scranton thinks that "... the composition was in fact the natural result of the organic development of a town in its functional character. The unity was largely in the profusion, and in the simple, matter-of-fact accumulation of one thing with another as need arose." (Scranton, 1985: 17)

The Medieval Town and Square (9th C. - 15th C., from the beginning of the Romanesque - the end of Gothic style)

The main difference between the Medieval and Roman cities is that "the organization of a town as a whole was neither understood nor desired by the builders of the Middle Ages." (Zucker, 1959: 63) Hence we can clearly see the characteristics of the irregular city patterns and the narrow, winding streets. People hardly feel the need
for the open urban space, except the area around the dominating buildings such as a church or a civic hall. Churches were mostly erected as isolated structures, without any planned relation to the surrounding town. Small shacks and little houses were often attached to them, providing the best natural means of contrasting the human scale of daily life with the towering mass of the edifice (Zucker, 1959: 65). Hohenberg describes the structures and functions of Medieval Towns as having three characteristics: First is that "...many towns grew on the sites of Roman settlements." Second is quoted from Mumford (1961) with two images: the container and the magnet. Thirdly, as Lopez says, the "'crossroads within the wall' embodies a paradox: the city closes itself off from the rural environment in order to enlarge the scope and intensity of communication with the wider world (1963: 27)" (Hohenberg, 1985: 22).

Zucker categorizes the European medieval squares according to their morphological distinctions. They are:

1. the market square as a broadening of the main thoroughfare
   a) as developed in the original previous settlements;
   b) planned as such in new foundations;
2. the market square as a lateral expansion of the main thoroughfare;
3. the square at the town gate;
4. the square as the center of the town
   a) as developed in the original previous settlements;
   b) planned as such in new foundations;
5. the parvis;
6. grouped squares

He gave some examples to illustrate these typologies as shown in Fig. 11:
Urban Square as a Theater

Fig. 11

A. square as a broadening of the main thoroughfare
B. square as a lateral expansion of the main thoroughfare
C. square as the center of the town
D., E. grouped squares (Zucker, Town and Square, 1959)
The most distinct difference between the notions of urban design of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance period is that there really began to have the "urban planning" concept in the Renaissance period. The designers began to take the town as a whole. The emergence of humanism and initial rationalism make people believe that theory can help improve people's lives. "Renaissance theorists and Renaissance artists believed firmly that human life could be entirely rationalized by philosophical and logical schemes, and they embodied this belief in their plans for human habitation.” (Zucker, 1959: 100)

According to Zucker, the Italian Renaissance squares can be defined only in very broad terms:

1. The desire for spatial unity, to which all other architectural tendencies are subordinated.
2. The frequent employment of arcades as connecting architectural elements in order to increase the unity of the facades surrounding the square.
3. The use of monuments, fountains, flagpoles, etc., for organizing the space of the square, whether it be closed, dominated, or nuclear.

Hence in fact the initial notion of rationalization had already started in the Renaissance period. The main difference between the rationalities of the Renaissance period and the modernist period is that the former was still based on the human being, rather than being instrumentalized.

This framework is applicable and, to a certain degree, very useful to our proposition, since these periods represent several of the most symbolic epochs in both architecture and urban history.
Urban Square as a Theater

Morphological

In his book *The Architecture of the City* Aldo Rossi analyzes the city from the viewpoint of urban morphology:

"I repeat that the reality I am concerned with here is that of the architecture of the city - that is, its form, which seems to summarize the total character of urban artifacts, including their origins. Moreover, a description of form takes into account all of the empirical facts we have already alluded to and can be quantifies through rigorous observation. This is in part what we mean by urban morphology: a description of the forms of an urban artifact. On the other hand, this description is nothing but one moment, one instrument. It draws us closer to a knowledge of structure, but it is not identical with it." (Rossi, 1982: 32)

Paul Zucker in *Town and Square* thinks that the various functions of the square should be treated separately from the basic spatial concepts, since the usages of a square are always keeping on changing. He claims that:

"The appearance of each individual square represents a blend of intrinsic lasting factors (topographical, climatic, national) and of changing influences (stylistic, period-born), i.e., of static and dynamic forces. Although squares of certain types prevail in certain periods, general space-volume relations are independent of particular historical forms. There exist definite basic types of squares which appear again and again. They show common characteristics in their spatial form, although the artistic expressions cannot be pressed into dogmatic categories." (Zucker, 1959, 8)
Hence he categorizes the square into five kinds of "archetypes" according to a formal classification:

1. the CLOSED SQUARE: space self-contained  
2. the DOMINATED SQUARE: space directed  
3. the NUCLEAR SQUARE: space formed around a center  
4. GROUPED SQUARES: space units combined  
5. the AMORPHOUS SQUARE: space unlimited

Of course one square could represent more than one type at a time. Spiro Kostof in *The City Assembled* depicts the shapes of these five archetypes with one-point perspective drawings as in Fig. 13.

* Krier, Rob: Urban Space (Stadtraum), 1975

Basically, Krier’s analysis on the urban spaces is a purely formal approach. He categorized the urban spaces according to typological and morphological characteristics of urban spaces without considering the historical and social contexts. Kostof thinks that “This is the practicing urban designer as against Zucker’s architectural historian.” (Kostof, 1992: 146) This kind of viewpoint reveals a pessimism about the possibility of considering the historic and social contexts in urban design.

The research that Krier conducted is based on studies on the "fabric plan" of the urban square. Though lack of effort on the third dimension of the square, namely the facades of the buildings around, Krier’s works still offer a well organized documentation on the typologies of the “enclosure.” Further discussion about the enclosure will be carried on in chapter IV. Fig. 12 shows some of the typologies quoted in *The City Assembled* by Kostof.
* Kostof, Spiro: The City Assembled

From the subtitle The Elements of Urban Form Through History we can recognize the effort with which Kostof tries to bring the historic dimension into studies of urban morphology. He found some constituent elements of the city. These are some common elements existing in every city pattern, and the urban square is categorized within the portion of “public places,” which obviously have the implication of social context. Kostof puts much effort into describing the historic and social contexts of some squares, which seem to be representative cases for inducing a set of more normative rules. However, the issue of value judgment seems to be ignored.
Urban Fabric Reading Approach

When looking at the map of a city, we are reading a sign representing the contrast between “solid” and “void.” The “solid” part represents all those artifacts that occupy any volume of space; and the space in between forms the “void” part, namely the urban space. The interesting, and also complicated thing about this kind of sign is its stories behind, a collective process and an ideology of the human being symbolized through these abstract drawings. Of course only a limited number of things can be judged or guessed merely from a map, but this kind of simplified codes, however, also eliminates lots of irrelevant and indiscriminate messages, then offers a systematic way to check and categorize some essential elements in the city.

The urban square, therefore, plays an important role in a city’s layout. In the latter portion of this thesis we will analyze some urban squares from various kinds of view, and reading the urban fabric will become a starting point to examine the morphological discontinuities of the urban square.

Social

To examine the urban square from the social aspect, two viewpoints should be taken: practices of the interaction between different groups, and collective activities. The former one refers to the process of "accumulation," which is considered a critical issue in discontinuities of the city. The latter one refers to the idea of dynamics in the theater. Further details will be discussed in next chapter.
IV. Urban Square as a Theater

Outside and inside form a dialectic of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us as soon as we bring it into play in metaphorical domains.

Gaston Bachelard; the Poetics of Space

This chapter, as mentioned in the introduction, is an “in-between” bridge between the theoretical and the practical parts of this thesis. Basically, I am using the notion of the theater to construct a framework within which some concrete rules of designing “good” urban spaces can be defined. Through this process the urban square is used as an example. In the previous chapters, we started the discussion from modernity. Then, from examining the phenomena of the “discontinuity” it created in terms of urban form, we reach the issue of the dialectic between the “continuity” and the “discontinuity.” I propose this as the central argument of urban design. My hypothesis is that the discontinuity in terms of accumulation is necessary for forming an overall continuous urban environment.

However, like most situations we confront when researching the design method, there still exists a gap between theory and practice. Though a dramatic, and maybe the most characteristic sphere in the urban milieu, the urban square still possesses too many ambiguous characteristics and too much information “wandering” between our daily lives, and some extremely isolated and purified concepts. Usually the former part, all the irrelevant information, tends to be eliminated when we are trying to make a useful analysis. Hence I use the theater, a perfect example of a discontinuous heterotopia, as a tentative framework to examine the rules of discontinuity in environmental design. I would argue that a successful urban square always, interestingly enough, has some essential characteristics of a theater.
The "theater" here is not restrained within one narrow definition. From the Greek amphitheater to today's movie house, we can think of many kinds of "theater" with different functions. Basically, we are referring to some of its characteristics such as isolation, the dialectic between "outside" and "inside," and the interaction between the play and the audience, which form spatial discontinuities. Usually a theater has a stage, or a screen, on which the show or the film are presented; it also has an enclosed space, physically or psychologically, in which the audience can temporarily escape from the outside world and concentrate on the show. These are two basic physical elements of the theater.

While talking about the theater, we also should take a look at the events happening inside. They include the show itself, and the audience. Basically, I am examining the theater from three aspects: the physical environment, the activities of the audience, and the show. Many efforts have been taken on researching the relationship between architecture and the film theory. Manfreto Tafuri in The Sphere and the Labyrinth has a deep analysis on the theory of Eisenstein, a Soviet Avant-Garde film director, especially on Eisenstein's interest on architecture. However, lots of treaties, even some research by Eisenstein himself, tried to approach this topic through making an analog between the circulation in the space and the playing of the film. In a paper Montage and Architecture Eisenstein proposed a circulation line (he called it path) among the buildings of Acropolis. He uses the change of the viewpoints and scenes to refer them to the effect of montage. This is a formalistic approach that ignores the internal logic between space and the essence of the theater.

Issues of discontinuity are still employed in the following analysis, to construct the internal logic.
4.1 Discontinuities of the Theater

"Today, there is no obvious relationship between theater and architecture. Theater is an art of the ephemeral, it is written on sand. The space that it creates lasts no longer than the performance, while architecture establishes permanency."

-Gaëlle Breton, Theaters

The functions of a theater only operate when the play or film is being presented. Hence we can examine the discourse of the theater from two viewpoints: one from the physical environment of the theater and the other, from the process of the event. The former approach, however, does not address the classification of theater morphology, since what we are trying to connect between the theater and the square are only their notions.

Referring to the three levels of discontinuity of the urban space, three aspects relating to discontinuity are critical issues for forming the theater. They are the physical environment (enclosure), the process of the event (narrative), and montage.

4.1.1 The Physical Environment

"The Discontinuity between Inside and Outside"

Obviously a theater needs a boundary between the "inside" and "outside." Since isolating itself from the outside world is a crucial fact for carrying out the show, a discontinuous interface is needed between the inside and outside. This kind of boundary does not need to be a physically "solid" element, but the spaces on the two sides must have different properties and pressures.

This boundary, on the one hand, isolates the show from the outside, which has too much irrelevant information that might bother the audience. The boundary plays the role of eliminating this. It
“purifies” the imagination space of the show. On the other hand, through darkness the boundary creates a sense of enclosure, which temporarily changes people’s mechanized notions of time and space. It offers an unlimited imaginary space that is totally subjective and internal. This seems to be the last position for people to resist the totality of the rationalism, which is the main feature of modernity.

*The Accumulation and Juxtaposition of the Scenery

The scenery of a theater is the representation of fragmental notions. Every single piece of scenery, and every sign and code in it, represent their own stories which have no direct relationship with each other. They float, and send their own messages individually. They are discontinuously accumulated and juxtaposed on the levels of both syntagm and paradigm. Here the syntagm refers to the chronological editing of different sceneries. They replace one another in a linear order, a manner of “jumping cut” throughout the whole show. Paradigm addresses the synchronous and parallel relationship. For example, every element in the scenery of a scene, all the furniture, lighting, and costumes are put together on the stage at the same time. This kind of juxtaposition creates endless new meanings. Since it is irrational and does not exist in our real lives, it gives people more space for imagination and interpretation.

4.1.2 The Process of the Event

Theater: “Sign Recognition” and “Rule Obedience” as Social Commitment

Although people do not know each other when they get into the theater, they can feel a “collective thinking” being carried on, and the scenes of the play, or the screen image of the film, become a kind of sign system recognized by everybody. Sometimes this sign system is very symbolic, such as the scenery and the performing gestures in Chinese Opera, or merely an unwritten regulation, such as darkness
as means of isolation. Hence “sign recognition” and “rule obedience” are the basic requirements for the audience to participate in the theater. Besides, “going to the theater” is an important means of class identification. People can find other people in the same social class, with similar tastes and interests. So the theater is a temporary small community with some certain kinds of social commitment.

"The Interaction between the Event and the Environment"

Without the audience, a play simply becomes a ritual. The show only exists and makes sense when it is being played to the audience. Unlike appreciating other forms of art, the audience members of the play or the film are forced to “stick to” the process. Hence there is a kind of collective thinking happening according to the time axis of the show. This is a public activity. In contrast, though a public place, the museum does not have this kind of collective thinking. Everybody is enclosed within one art piece and him/herself without communicating to each other. From this viewpoint the theater as opposed to the museum, is a real public space. This collective thinking is an important means of breaking the linkage between the audience and the outside world.

4.1.3 Montage: the Art of Discontinuity

"The madness consists only in the piling up, in the juxtapositions that explode the very foundation of the objects' customary 'possibility,' a madness that groups objects into a system of arches that 'go out of themselves' in sequence, ejecting new arches from their bowels; a system of staircases exploding in a flight of new passages of staircases; a system of vaults that continue their leaps from each other into eternity."

-Eisenstein; “Piranesi, or the Fluidity of Forms"

In his book The Sphere and the Labyrinth Manfredo Tafuri mentions the research that Eisenstein8 conducted on Piranesi9, as an example for analyzing the relationship between the Avant-Gardes and
architecture. Eisenstein insists that El Greco and Piranesi are among the precursors of the new film language. He focuses his analysis on El Greco's View and Plan of the City of Toledo (1604-14) and Piranesi's Carcerosocura (Dark Prison), whose motives are easily connected to the theory of montage.

The strict definition of montage is "editing," the action of connecting the fragmental film pieces together. However, its broad sense includes every kind of accumulation and juxtaposition. The syntagm and paradigm mentioned above are the classification in terms of vertical and horizontal montage. What Eisenstein addresses when he is making an analog between the film and architecture is the vertical aspect. Through this process (the proceeding of the event) there are a lot of horizontal juxtapositions.

Fig. 14 Sergei Eisenstein
Schematic sketch of the Carcerosocura con antenapal suplizio demalfatori (Dark Prison with scaffolding for the torture of evildoers)

Fig. 15 Path for experiencing the Arcropolis of Athens (S. Eisenstein)
4.2 Urban Square as a Theater

Given all the elements and situations in previous portions, we can begin to make an analysis on the analog between the urban square and the theater. Fig. 16 below shows a simple path and relationship between these elements.

SQUARE (COLLECTIVE ACTIVITIES)  THEATER (NARRATIVE)  \[\rightarrow\] Time

Sign Recognition Rule Obedience

TIME-SPACE  \[\rightarrow\] Imaginary relationship

RECONSTRUCTION (SELF-IDENTITY)

Our hypothesis here is that a “good” square should create an environment within which people can reconstruct their “structure of feeling,” namely subjective notions about the external world. In the first chapter we have mentioned people's time-space notions, which were more subjective and internal operations in the pre-modern time, and became unified and objective by rationalization and instrumentalization after modern time. Hence seeking the way to escape from the domination of "ration," and looking for the possibility of subjective imagination, is an important reason that people go to the urban square.
The characteristics of "functionless" and "isolation" of the square are the main features that offer the possibility of creating an environment, in which people can temporarily escape from the realistic world. The "functionless" makes people stay in the square without having to have a purpose. The enclosure of the compound and the "gazing" from other people make the whole square a theater-like space, since people know that every move they make is being watched while they are watching the others in the same way. Anything happening within the square, whether it is pre-planned or incidental event, becomes a perceivable portion of this space. This effect dramatizes those activities and makes the square similar to the theater. In the square people can perceive everything by themselves without the help from the instrument such as the media. They can define the events and the scenes they see, in a subjective manner. They can construct their notion about time through all the events, which basically are not constructed on "ration" such as those routine jobs happening in our daily lives. Hence a new time notion, which does not have to fit the real and mechanized time, can be defined individually according to the process of the events.

According to the three levels of discontinuity of the city discussed in section 3.1.3, and the discontinuities of the theater in section 4.1, three crucial issues in forming a theater are applied to the criteria of judging the square. They are boundary, theme, and collective activities. Some examples will be examined in the next chapter in according to these three criteria.
### Urban Square as a Theater

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three levels of discontinuity</th>
<th>Discontinuities of the theater</th>
<th>Criteria of the urban space</th>
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<tr>
<td>Interface</td>
<td>Physical environment</td>
<td>Boundary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social issues</td>
<td>Process of the event</td>
<td>Theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conjunction between different epochs</td>
<td>Montage</td>
<td>Collective activities</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Fig. 17* A general review of the acting elements
V. Case Studies

In this chapter three criteria for designing the urban square are developed, according to the analysis in the previous chapters. This is also the "practical" part of this thesis in contrast with the "theory" part before chapter four.

The three criteria are boundary, theme, and collective activities. They form a three-aspect consideration to be taken in designing the urban square.

5.1 Boundary

A successful urban square always has some characteristics that make it a unique urban element. An enclosed and clearly defined area is always the first requirement for a lively urban square. This boundary, to a certain degree, has to completely "isolate" the area it encloses from the outside world. It does not have to be a concrete facade, but it should be an element that has a totally different character as the space it defines. For example, Piazza San Marco in Venice (see section 4.3.2) is an L-shape compound with one end terminated by the Adriatic Sea. A totally open scene, the sea still becomes a physical and psychological boundary of the square. The textures on the two sides of the interface, one side the square, and the other side the sea, are two kinds of space with different pressures. This drastic disparity between the two spatial properties confirms the subjectivity and stability of the square. In other words, the public activities must be kept isolated within the enclosure, and the enclosing objects must ensure that those activities and the atmosphere not "leak" because of influences from the outside world.
In this conception we recognize the essential similarities between the square and the theater on the boundary issue. For the theater-goers, the need for being isolated, whether physically or psychologically, intentionally brings themselves into the representation of the narrative. This narrative, however, appears in another kind of form in the square, which is the "theme" we discuss below. Hence if a square fails to create the sense of an "other" sphere because of failing to eliminate the message from the outside world, the problem is on its boundary.

**Piazza Ducale: a Renaissance example**

However, the boundary of the square is not merely a wall, an isolating element like that of the theater. It still plays the role of "scenery" because it is the main image of the whole square. To examine this issue, we take a look at two kinds of approaches in terms of the "formation" of the square: the medieval and the Renaissance squares. As mentioned in chapter II, there are a lot of differences between the urban design notions of the Middle Ages.
Urban Square as a Theater

Theme

Discontinuity

Fig. 19 The Theme and Discontinuity of the Piazza Ducale
and the Renaissance period. Basically, the urban artifacts in medieval times were the result of long-term accumulation, while an overall pre-design notion began in the Renaissance period. Hence there exists an essential difference between the boundaries of the medieval and Renaissance squares. The Piazza Ducale in Vigevano, is a Renaissance example. As probably the first Renaissance square in Italy, the Piazza Ducale is a model for building Renaissance squares, which are totally different from that medieval ones. Basically, this late fifteen-century square (1492-1494) first uses the "extrusion" method to create a regular-shape void within the existing irregular urban fabric. Wolfgang Lotz in his book Studies in Italian Renaissance Architecture describes this process. He quotes from the Ferrarese ambassador's report to his court:

"Ludovico is trying very hard to beautify Vigevano and to make it into a city (the town had not yet been granted a charter); in the vicinity of the castle he has torn down a rather wide street of houses to make way for a beautiful and magnificent thing."

Standing in the Piazza Ducale, people perceive a symmetrical and completely regular space, 134 meters long and 48 meters wide, with the baroque facade of the Cathedral of Sant' Ambrogio terminating the long side axis, and a tower on the south side (Fig. 18). In fact, it is not a "whole design" built in the same time, but rather, the result of repeating renovation and expansion. But it still creates a "Renaissance" municipal square very different from these medieval ones in Vicenza or Padua. From the plan we can clearly see the extrusion effect, which creates a regular void out of the originally irregular urban fabric (Fig. 19). The interface, namely the facades within the square, is just like the skin of the cut edge. Obviously, there exists a discontinuity between the facades and the artifacts behind. This is an inevitable process because the action of "extrusion" implies the creation of a totally different realm.
Urban Square as a Theater

Collective Activities

Theme

Discontinuity

Accumulation

Different Pressures

Fig. 20 The Theme and Discontinuity of the Piazzas in Vicenza

57
This kind of urban design notion, of course, has political intention. Ludovico Maria Sforza il Moro built this square in order to proclaim the authority of his family.

The Piazza Group in Vicenza: A Medieval Example

Let us return to the discussion of the medieval square in order to examine the differences. The piazza group in Vicenza (Fig. 20) is a typical model of the municipal square of the medieval period. Since Vicenza declined very quickly after the 15th Century, and did not rise again until the 18th Century, its basic town pattern still has the typical characteristics of a medieval Italian town. The urban design notions of the Renaissance, Baroque, or Classical period, namely the largely pre-planned, axis-oriented, and symmetrical ideas, are not employed into this small town (Hsu, 1992). So although the erection of the Basilica also demolished some existing buildings, basically there was no attempt to create a complete outdoor space, but simply “yield” a bigger place for the civic center. The interesting result is that some fragmental and small spaces sprang up after the Basilica was placed in the middle. Piazza dei Signori, Piazza delle Erbe, and Piazza delle Biava all have their own functions and characteristics. However, during this process, some efforts were still placed on the interface between the squares and the urban fabric. Unlike the Renaissance notion, the facades of these piazzas are constructed separately and designed according to the individual buildings. This is still a successful enclosure because it isolates the piazzas from the outside world, but the discontinuity becomes existing in the junctures of the accumulation (fig. 20). Every building has its own facade, which to a certain degree reflects the “characteristic” (not total function) of the building behind it. Naturally the variety of the different buildings is the reason a continuous facade is impossible, except for the Renaissance method mentioned above, which creates another kind of discontinuity.
Boston City Hall Plaza: A Modernistic Example

Office Building

The office building is a house of work, of organization, of clarity, of economy. Bright, wide workrooms, easy to oversee, undivided except as the organism of the undertaking is divided. The maximum effect with the minimum expenditure of means.

The materials are concrete, iron, glass. Reinforced concrete buildings are by nature skeletal buildings. No noodles nor armoured turrets. A construction of girders that carry the weight, and walls that carry no weight. That is to say, buildings consisting of skin and bones.

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Working theses, 1923

Here the necessity of the discontinuities, no matter whether for the Renaissance or the medieval squares, exists because the property of the urban square is different from that of the urban fabric. If, according to the modernistic notion, the form of the building should follow its function, then obviously only the continuity between the building and its facade is considered, and the urban spaces are ignored. The Boston City Hall Plaza is an example of the modernistic notion of urban design. By demolishing over sixty acres of the old city center, the urban renewal plan designed by Pei, Cobb, Freed, & Partners in 1962 proposed a huge plaza with several public buildings around it (Fig. 22). All these newly built buildings were typical reinforced concrete structures with the plain concrete style that was popular in the 1960s (Fig. 21). Although being within an overall plan, these new buildings were still designed individually without having much relationship with the environment. Basically, these buildings have their own continuities on the level of the building itself. They are designed completely according to their needs, which end on the facade. Hence we can not see either the juxtaposed loggia that tends
to form a centripetal force for the plaza, nor the abundant and fragmental accumulation of heterogeneous objects. In other words, the insistence on continuity within the building inevitably isolates it from the urban context, and sacrifices the continuity of the whole urban space. Fig. 21 shows an analysis of the Boston City Hall plaza in terms of the discontinuity in the boundary issue. We can see that the “different pressure” lines basically do not form a complete enclosure because they only exists individually in the interface of the buildings, and there are not any “defining elements,” which are considered “functionless,” such as the columns bearing the Lion of St. Mark in Vicenza’s Piazza dei Signori.
Urban Square as a Theater

Fig. 22 Different Pressures of the Boston City Hall Plaza

Basically it does not have accumulation within the planned area.
5.2 Theme

Secondly, a lively square should have a "theme," which not only has a formal attitude, but also has political and economic implications. In other words, this "theme" should have a firm relationship with local activities, through which collective memories could be accumulated. The sea side boundary of Piazza San Marco mentioned above plays this role in the whole plaza. It is a historical interface that creates a real stage for the square, and even the whole of Venice, since this opening has become the symbol of Venice, a state that was born from the sea trade (Fig. 23). Hence a theme does not have to be a physical object or construction. In the center of Piazza San Marco there are two other themes that are physical objects: the Campanile erected in 888 A.D. was originally a nautical signpost, and, of course, the famous Cathedral St. Mark. Braunfels describes the uniqueness of these facades and elements:

"... unlike the Piazza della Signoria in Florence, whose monuments were all made by artists active in Florence, mostly Florentines themselves, the Piazza San Marco is filled almost entirely with plunder. The first examples were the two monolithic granite columns, which are supposed to have been erected in 1172. In early times, ships tied up to them and traitors were executed between them." "The facade of St. Mark’s was decorated round about with plundered works of art,... Only the classical bronze feet for the three flagstaffs in front of the facade, which were made in 1505, are products of Venice itself. Yet they bore the flags of three empires that had been wrested from the Byzantine emperors — Cyprus, Moria, and Candia." (Braunfels, 1988: 85)

These signs, which are exhibited on the facades of the piazza, historically construct a strong theme that makes the piazza a place that reveals the political and economic history of Venice, one of the most remarkable Mediterranean systems at that time. The influences that
Urban Square as a Theater

Fig. 23  Piazza San Marco, Venice, Scene from the Sea

Fig. 24  Nazis' Berlin, by Speer
Different pressures

accumulation

Fig. 25 Piazza San Marco, Venice

Fig. 26 Gentile Bellini, Procession of the Holy Cross in the Piazza San Marco, 1496
these themes have on the activities happening in the piazza is obvious. In fact every building around Piazza San Marco has its political function, which is proclaimed through its facade. The continuous actions of renovation through history, those demolishing, extension, or new construction, is the inner logic of accumulation.

According to Zucker, the decisive step toward Renaissance concepts "...was taken by Jacopo Sansovino in 1536-37 by razing previously existing buildings opposite the Porcuratie Vecchie (on the northern side of the square), pushing back the building line, and designing his new library. By this change the Campanile became isolated as the hinge between the Piazza and the smaller Piazzetta." (Zucker; 1959: 114) Fig. 27 shows the comparison between the original and the renovated plans. We can see the change of the "pressure interface," which interestingly links the original square and the new
perpendicular axis pointing toward the sea. Fig. 26 shows the painting *Procession of the Holy Cross in the Piazza San Marco* by Gentile Bellini in 1496, right before the change. This painting clearly shows that the Cathedral became the main "scenery" of the stage. It claims the power of the authority. In addition, almost at the same time, another political procession was held in the square, and it is mentioned in the book *Italian Civic Pageantry in the High Renaissance* by Bonner Mitchell:

1495, APRIL 12 (PALM SUNDAY). PROCESSION IN SAINT MARK'S SQUARE TO CELEBRATE THE FORMATION OF A LEAGUE TO OPPOSE KING CHARLES VIII OF FRANCE.

A curious blending of religious and political themes in the Venetian style. After the government had brought about an alliance with Pope Alexander VI, King Ferdinand of Spain, and Ludovico il Moro of Milan (the builder of the Piazza Ducale in Vigevano mentioned above) to oppose Charles VIII, then returning up the peninsula after the conquest of Naples, it chose the occasion of an annual Palm Sunday procession to announce the new league. The doge and ambassadors of allied powers heard mass and then revised the procession, which passed through Saint Mark's after going around the square. The procession included a number of Venetian *scuole*, some with allegorical chariots or other apparati, and several groups of monks and priests, some of the former carrying religious relics. Among the chariots: one with David and Abigail, one with <Italia> and several provinces, and one representing each of the allied states. The latter bore inscriptions, and as each passed before the procession, the doge came out of the church and the league was formally proclaimed in the square. Some inscriptions and versed are recorded.

The "themes" above have a firm relationship with the transmission of authority. An extreme example of this domination through the theater-like effect is the Nazis' notorious urban design by Speer (Fig. 24). However, I do not imply that the only function of the theater effect, within which the theme and the narrative are carried out, is domination. Sometimes these symbols contrarily become the theme of subversion, such as protests or demonstrations.
5.3 Collective Activities

Basically, the "theme" mentioned above is still physically a part of the square, and it cannot be considered without its context. The theme always "exists," and is conceivable. It is just like the theater's scenery, which forms a concrete space for the story. Thus the narrative could be planted in the audience's imagination without floating in the air (of course there are shows without any background and scenery, but is not within our discussion). The difference between is that the theater does not exist when the show is not being played, but for the square, the themes are always there. They are "waiting" for the activities, and very naturally those activities go by a kind of narrative axis dominated by those themes. Hence a successful square should, as I mentioned in section 3.2, give people a feeling that some special event, usually festive, is going to happen. This is just like when we are sitting in the audience of a theater and waiting for the show. We know that we have come into an isolated sphere, and everything we conceive is for the show.

Here we focus our discussion on the collective activities, the pre-planned events with certain kinds of "script." There are some specific political, religious, or commercial events that happen in the square only once in a while. They are not physically a part of the theme, but they are the real vitality for the square, and usually those specific events form the main part of the residents' collective memories, or the fragmental image in terms of tourism. We can say that the "theme" refers to the static mode, which addresses the physical object of the square-theater analog; and the "collective activities" refer to the dynamic mode, which emphasizes a periodic and peaked issue. In terms of the square-theater analog it should be examined within the interaction between the performance and the audience.
Fig. 28 Piazza del Campo, Siena

Fig. 29 Palio of Siena
Another critical issue relating to the collective activities is time. Different from other forms of art, the play or the film are ephemeral, or, to speak more precisely, they only exist when they are being played and conceived. This time issue, and the conceivability of the activities that will be discussed later, are important for people’s self-identity. As I mentioned in the first chapter, a distinct characteristic of modernity is the abstraction of the notions of time and space. The play and the film, however, redefine the mechanism of time and space. Through the new abscissa the play or the film offering, a new reference system is established. This system, which is relatively much more objective than the mechanized definition of modernity, gives people a larger space of imagination that is based on a conceivable and touchable sphere. This is the idea of the square. People can directly sense themselves and the “whole public world” without the help of the instrument.
For example, Palio of Siena, an annually held pageantry, is a historical event held on the Piazza del Camp (Fig. 28, 29). It includes horse races and some competitions, which date back to the Middle Ages, when Siena was an independent republic and divided into seventeen contrades, or wards, each with its own church, homes and military armies. Obviously the image of the Piazza del Camp we perceive, namely the famous shell-shaped polygon with a high tower standing on the bottom, is the theme of the square. It includes not only the formal characteristics, but also the whole context, the historical and cultural background behind. As for the Palio, it is an institutionalized collective activity held once a year, and of course we should see it from the interaction between the square, the performers and the audience, such as the shell-like square as the stage for the horse race, or the difference between the “Siena’s horse race” and simply a “horse race.”

Fig. 31 Panini, Carriage-rides of Piazza Navona, 1756
Another example is the carriage-rides on Rome’s Piazza Navona in the 18th and 19th century (Fig. 30). The rich blocked the fountain’s drain, usually at weekends in August, to provide themselves a cool setting for carriage-rides (Fig. 31). This kind of fashionable activity began in the 17th century, when the Pamphili pope Innocent X rebuilt his family palace (left) and commissioned Borromini and Rainaldi’s new church of S. Agnese and Bernini’s Four Rivers fountain (center) (Kostof, 1991: 145). Hence a direct relationship and correspondence between the architectural form and the theme are clearly reflected on this activity.

With the emergence of capitalism, lots of the traditional collective activities have changed their original essences, which were mostly ritual (including political in a broad sense), to commercial and entertainment orientations. This evolution also has a firm relationship with the trend of the rationalism of modernity. Although put in the analytic framework of the “theater,” the square in feudal or monarchic epochs was rather more like a “church,” which in many ways tends to create the same effects as the theater. Schech made the following comparison between these two approaches (Fig. 32):
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EFFICACY</th>
<th>ENTERTAINMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Ritual)</td>
<td>(Theater)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>results</td>
<td>only for those here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>link to an absent other</td>
<td>fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abolishes time, symbolic time</td>
<td>emphasizes now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brings other here</td>
<td>audience is the other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>performer possessed, in trance</td>
<td>performer knows what he's doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>audience participates</td>
<td>audience watches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>audience believes</td>
<td>audience appreciates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>criticism is forbidden</td>
<td>criticism is encouraged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collect creativity</td>
<td>individual creativity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 32 The comparison between the ritual and the theater; Schech; *Performative Circumstances*, Seagull Books, 1983
VI. Conclusion

Some hope of creating a “good” urban square still seems to exist. Here the design criteria we developed, namely boundary, theme, and collective activities, are three basic concerns for designing an urban square. Imagination and the concern for people, which we learn from the theater, should never be forgotten in the urban design process.

From today’s viewpoint, the urban square is not an efficient elements in the city at all. It does not have a specific function, which can promote the circulation and accumulation of the wealth. On the contrary, it hinders the transportation of the city. However, through examining those examples in different epochs, we suddenly realize that the notion of modernity, the trend of rationalization, only speeds up the accumulation of the capital, with the price of eliminating the possibility of imagination. Functionless and multi-characteristic, the urban square becomes the last place in the city resisting totalitarian rationalization and mechanization.

The ironic thing is that we have to try to temporarily isolate ourselves from the real world, to get a self-identity without the help of instruments. We are not trying to go back to the “good old days,” the pre-modern period at which people could not tell the myth from the reality, and were afraid of dying from epidemics. This is only nostalgia. Maybe creating a good urban square, in which people can participate in festive events in person, is just like establishing another heterotopia such as Disney World. However, we all need to have our own structure of feeling, the subjective interpretation of the external world. The urban square is at least still an urban space, an element relating to our daily lives. We should guard it carefully.
VII.
Footnotes

1. Giddens, Anthony; *The Consequences of Modernity*, p.p. 1
2. Some sociologists, such as Anthony Giddens and Jürgen Habermas, do not think there exists a “Post-modern” era that is distinct from the modern one. They claim that the so-called “Post-modern” phenomena are just the expansion of modernity.
3. Ledrut, Raymond; *Speech and the Science of the City*, 1973
4. Zucker, Paul; *Town and Square*, Columbia University Press, 1959
5. Here the notion “urban space” is from the book “Urban Space” by krier, Rob.
6. The term “heterotopia” comes from Michel Foucault, referring to some existing closed places, which are negative or in contrast to the daily experiences. It generally includes the places carrying the duties that are totally different from, even conflicting to the social disciplines. It skillfully executes the function of balancing and venting the needs of society, and plays a role that looks anti-discipline, but in fact reproduces the will of the authority.
7. Eisenstein, Sergei; Montage and Architecture, a paper in Towards a Theory of Montage, vol. 2
8. Sergei M. Eisenstein, Soviet film director
10. Here of course the “new film language” refers to the Soviet formalism tradition, which emerges at the same time as the Avant-Garde.
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