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Jarateng: Making social-ends meet by embracing public living

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3.
Public Spaces: human [re]action

Fig. 65

Human [re]action

"Design for public spaces are too constrained, not providing for basic human needs such a comfort, relaxation and discovery" (Carr, 1992:17). "They may allow only for passive engagement with others or be structured only for predetermined actions, making them rigid and unchallenging" (Carr, 1992:17). This leaves little to the imagination of the user of the space according to Carr (1992:17). A public space cannot determine how people should behave or interact socially but instead people`s freedom of social interaction and behaviour should determine the nature of the space.

"Public spaces can be changed by public action" (Carr, 1992:20), therefore a public space may be suggestive and there should be allowance in its design for it to organically develop through human behaviour. As this is a space that appeals to different people, there should be many social opportunities and a variety of activities such as reading a book, listening to music and exercising. Such spaces can benefit from the support of informal performances such as musical and dance performances.



Fig. 66



Fig. 67

(Carr, at al (1992) Public Space: Environment and behaviour)

I decided to do a visual analysis of public spaces in the inner city of Johannesburg by going through an exercise of analysing and observing human behaviour in these specific public spaces.

Human behaviour in public space: a visual analysis

Case study 1: Wits University library lawns



(Author`s own)



(Author`s own)

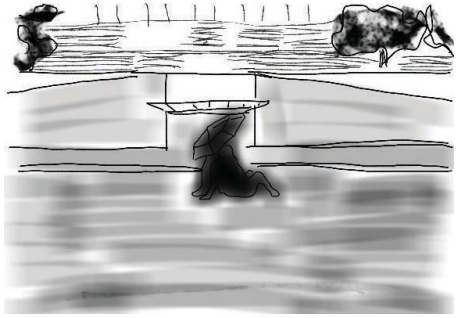


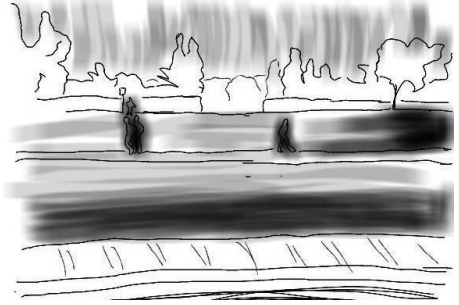
(Author`s own)

Case study 1: Wits University library lawns









At the Wits library lawns the space is used to cross over to other spaces and places like the library. Students use the benches to read books or newspapers, to surf the net on their laptops or listen to music. Students also tend to utilise stairs nearby as seating as apposed to seating on the grass.

Case study 2: Joubert Park, Hillbrow



(Author`s own)



(Author`s own)

Case study 2: Joubert Park, Hillbrow



(Author`s own)

As early as 7am people are already walking through the space. Men congregate to gamble. Some people use the benches as stalls to conduct business. The homeless use the park as a home where they sleep and wake up to.
Others choose to sit somewhere either than on the benches for more comfort.

Case study 3: Ghandi Square, Jo`burg CBD



Fig. 68

Ghandi Square *(http://www.joburg.org.za)*

At Ghandi square the space is also used to cross over to other spaces. Some people use the bus shelters as places to sit and have conversations, some cycle through the space while others use the provided seating to have a quick lunch or just rest.

Case study 3: Gandhi Square, Jo`burg CBD





(Author`s own)



Case study 4: Mary Fitsgerald Square



Fig. 69

(http://www.joburg.org.za)



Fig. 70

The square as a market place *(http://www.joburg.org.za)*

The Public Space

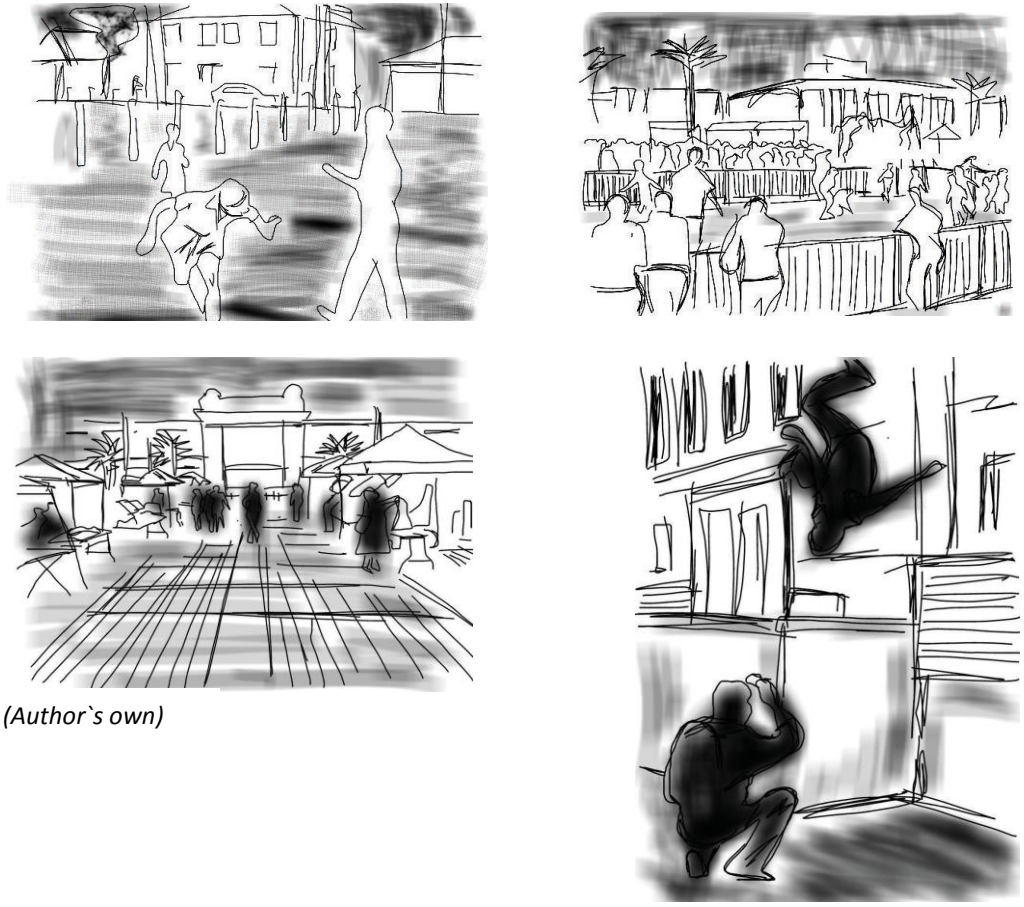
"Public places are a stage for our public lives" (2000:14). Carr describes it as public space being the stage upon which the drama of communal life unfolds (1992:3). "They are the parks where celebrations are held, where marathons end, where children learn the skills of sport, where the seasons are marked and where cultures mix" (2000:14). "They are the places where social exchanges are made" (2000:14). Public spaces foster a sense of community where there is a lack or enhances the richness of it where there is. It is also important for a space to give identity to its particular context.

"Social spaces are fundamental to our sense of existence and belonging" (Shaftoe 2008:11). A sense of being part of others is important to human development. Health and wellbeing is another projection as a result of this environment. Henry Shaftoe (2008:11) states that as a result of our evolutionary heritage, humans seem to need both social contact with others and some access to greenery in order to maintain psychological balance. The developing of a community and solidarity in gaining an identity is an important social projection. Often the main recreational facility which boosts an image of a neighbourhood or urban area is a public open space. At the same time a public space can also be the deteriorating factor in an urban area, because if a public space does not fulfil its social function and does not project any social aspects then it starts dilapidating, and when it does it affects the physical state of an area. So the economic social projection is vital. If a public space fulfils its social obligations then that means people will be encouraged to use that space and in so doing, people take pride in that space. Therefor the physical state of that space is preserved and attracts people from the tourists and other locals.

The Traditional uses of public space

Traditionally public spaces have functioned as meeting places, market spaces and traffic spaces where traffic would dominate over the years. Jan Gehl states that the city has always been a place for people to meet and greet each other, a place to exchange

Case study 4: Mary Fitsgerald Square



(Author`s own)

People use the Maryfitsgerald Square as a play area, a market area, and the space is also transformed to an ice rink for example.

information about the city and society, a place where important events would be staged such as coronations, processions, feasts and festivals and town meetings, to mention a few(2006:10). Gehl continues to state that the city was also a marketplace, a place where goods and services were offered and exchanged, and in addition to that the city was a thoroughfare providing access to and connecting the various uses of the city (2006:13). Public spaces are therefore spaces with an overflow of a variety of activities which sometimes happen simultaneously in an intense chaotic way.

Gehl states that however the conditions of the uses of public space were altered in the 20th century, particularly in the industrialised nations, as new patterns of traffic, trade and communication were so radical that they interrupted centuries of tradition as to how people used the city and its public spaces (2006:13). The three main uses of public space being for meeting, trading and traffic began to be in conflict and the balance between these uses were lost.

Gehl states that the public or city as a marketplace also underwent dramatic changes in the 20th century (2000:13). “Trade from open booths was gradually moved to small shops along streets and squares, then to increasingly larger shops and supermarkets, and finally to giant shopping malls, usually far from the heart of the city. In those cases where shopping centres were established within the city, they closed in on themselves and were no longer part of the public arena” (Gehl at al, 2006:13). The public life of the market space began to loose its essence as its public condition became too controlled. The market activity was moved from the public arena into a closed private environment.

Amidst the physical changes of our urban environments, it is people`s attitudes towards public living and public space which can reshape our public spaces to what they should be - human friendly.

The path to improving public spaces is by creating spaces in which people can embrace public life. It is about appropriating more space for humans than for cars. In European countries there is a high level of public life. Gehl states that many European cities continue to carry on a lively tradition of using public spaces for social and recreational activities (2006:18). Gehl states the during the 1960s and 1970s, more and more pedestrian streets, areas and peaceful squares were established in European cities (2006:18). In many cities the pavement spaces were widened which allowed for furniture to be placed there and also for the space to be livened with trees. Gehl states that in Barcelona starting in about 1980, a broader concept of public space was formulated in a co-ordinated public space policy and the city was fighting back both physically and culturally (2006:18). Gehl continues to state that what happened in Barcelona in terms of the concept of public space was the starting point for a new, intense period in the last 20 years of the 20th century, in which increasingly more urban spaces were created or renewed, in order to ensure good public spaces for new types of public life (2006:18).

Case Studies (Types of spaces)

Combined square and building type

I chose to look at the following case studies because they combine a public square and a building which is similar to my design.

Broadgate Arena,

London, England. 1985-90
Architects: Arup Associates

Location: City Centre
Type: Recreational Square in private office complex

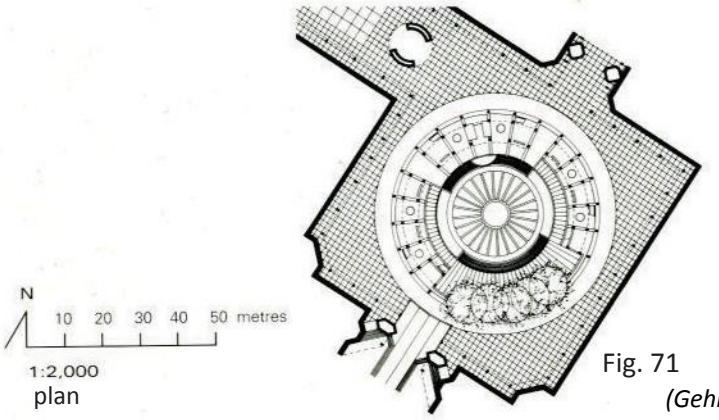


Fig. 71
(Gehl, at al (2006)New city spaces)

Broadgate Arena was created in conjunction with a large private office complex in central London. What makes this city space special is its design with a circular stage as the focal point. The stage is ringed by a cylindrical space edged by balconies and is used for various activities both in summer and winter (2006:112).



(Gehl, at al (2006) New city spaces)
Fig. 72

Broadgate Arena was built as an integral part of a new office complex near Liverpool fine the internal rectangular courtyard space that connects to the surrounding streets and the station through a shopping arcade. Broadgate Arena is the core space in the complex and, particularly in the summer, serves as a large open canteen for the many employees who work in the surrounding offices (2006:114).
The space was intended and designed as a site for performances and happenings, a public theatre, an arena. The design is reminiscent of the circular stage and cylindrical balconies of Shakespear`s Globe Theatre. The summer features changing entertainment with musical and theatre performances as well as cafe` life. In the winter the arena is converted into an ice skating rink (2006:114).

The arena itself is a precision-cut circle surrounded by a planted cylindrical “screen” a round space inside the square formed by the facades of the office buildings. The main activities are collected within the “screen” and the arena, as they unfold with shops on the lower floor and terraced cafes with panoramic views on several levels up against the screen. The spaces between the screen and the office buildings serve as circulation areas for many office people going to and from work, but they are rather empty at other times of the day (2006:114).
Not too many passers-by frequent the place, which livens up during the hours that of-

fice personnel fill the space or in conjunction with special arrangements in the arena. The screen also effectively discourages people on the outside from entering and livening up the space once the 25,000 employees from the office complex have gone home (2006:115).

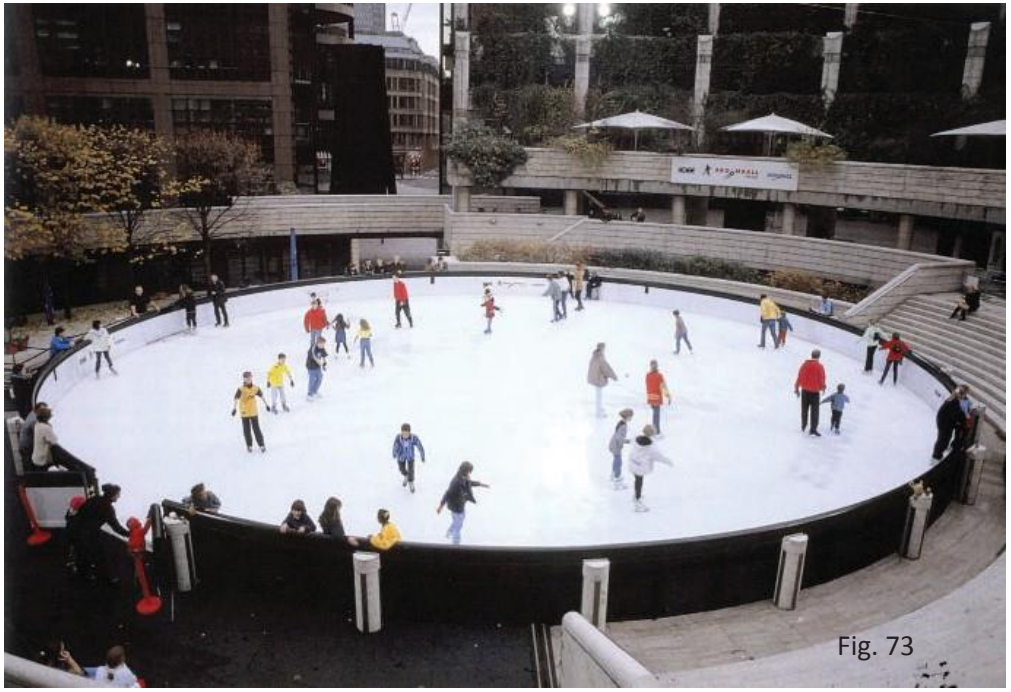


Fig. 73

The central courtyard transforms into an ice skating rink

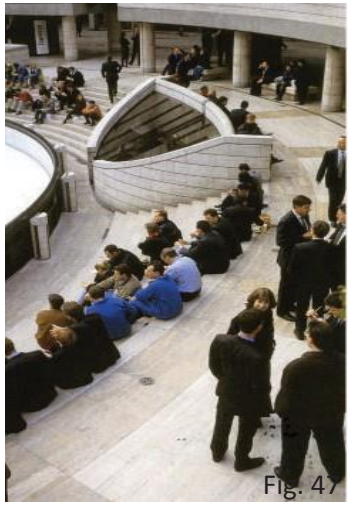
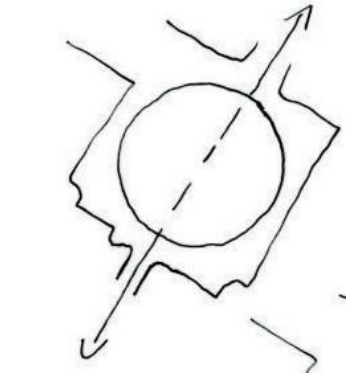


Fig. 47

(Gehl,at al (2006) New city spaces)

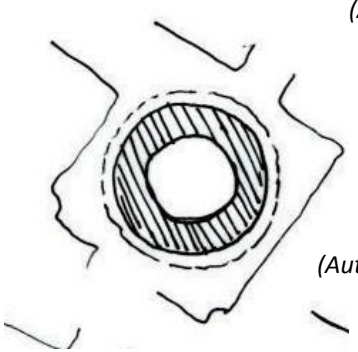


Fig. 74



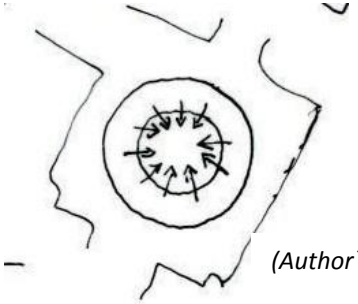
Axis making the space symmetrical

(Author's own)



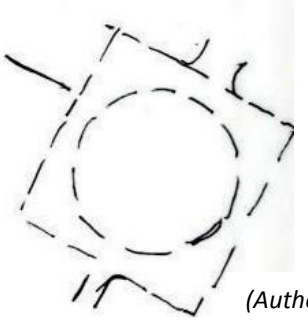
The office building as a hard edge and the centre as soft space

(Author`s own)



The office building looks onto the space

(Author`s own)



Geometry: The centre is inscribed in the square edge

(Author`s own)

Public Spaces in Montpellier

Montpellier, France. 1984
Architect: Ricardo Bofill

Location: New urban quarter close to historic city centre
Type: Monumental square/recreational square

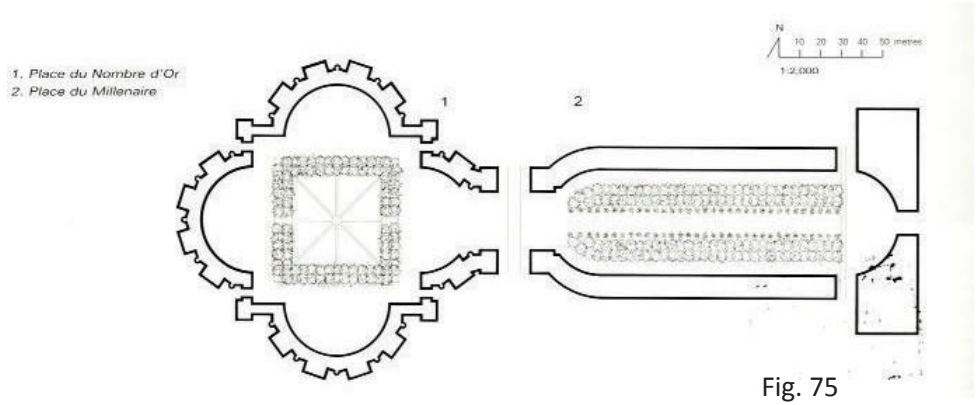


Fig. 75

Plan

(Gehl,at al (2006) New city spaces)

The new quarter, called Antigone, is not only interesting due to its distinctive architectural expression. Because of the unusually large number of ground-floor functions in the buildings collected along the spatial sequence this new part of town becomes a far livelier character than most corresponding new urban projects" (2006:174).

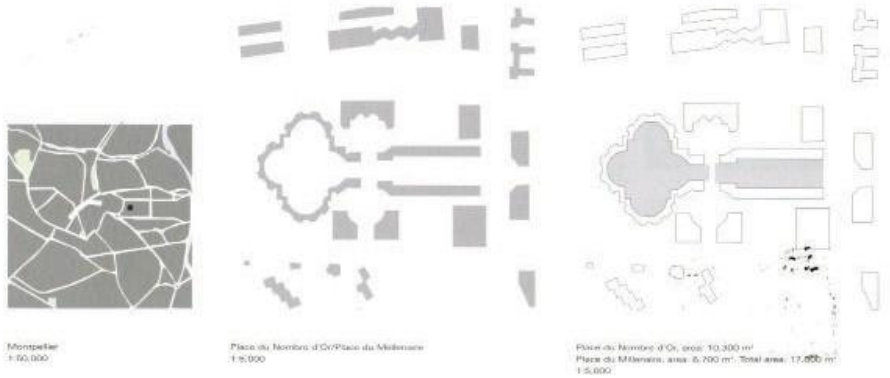


Fig. 76

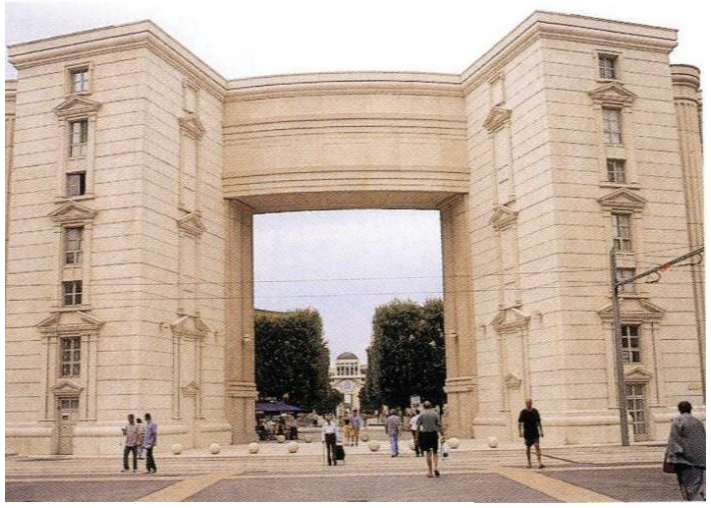
(Gehl,at al (2006) New city spaces)

Place du Nombre d`Or and Place du Millenaire are the beginning of the central course of space in the new city district. Place de Thessalie and Esplanade de l`Europe are among other squares in this large expanse, which forms a fixed neo-Baroque pedestrian axis as an outdoor extension of the inside walkway of the shopping centre. The axis is also seen as an inversion or negation of the indoor centre`s type of space. The space is lined by buildings seven-storeys high, and the axis constitutes the most important public area that unites the new quarter in its entirety. In addition to residences, shops and cafes, the axis also houses a large indoor swimming pool, as well as more regional functions such a Maison des Syndicats which is a trade union building (2006:176).
The gravel surfaces of Place du Millenaire are used for activities such as play and also serve as the platform for outdoor service from a couple of cafes, as well as providing room for relaxation on the benches along the edge of the space (2006:177).



(Gehl, at al (2006) New city spaces)

Fig. 77



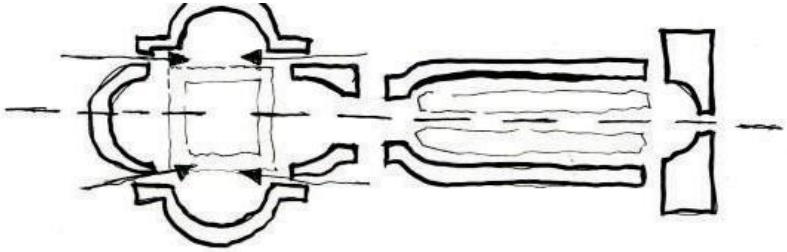
(Gehl, at al (2006) New city spaces)

Fig. 78

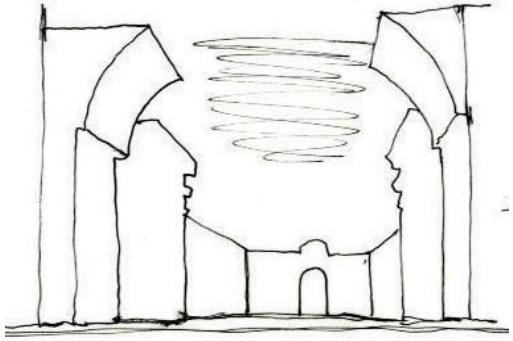


(Gehl, at al (2006) New city spaces)

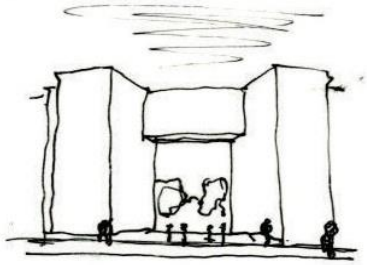
Fig. 79



A very strong axis which connects the two squares and there is a clear symmetry



The building marks an entry point



The building frames the view to the other end of the space

Recreational Square type

Sankt Hans Torv

Copenhagen, Denmark. 1993
Landscape architect: Sven-Ingvar Andersson

Location: District outside the city centre
Type: Recreational Square

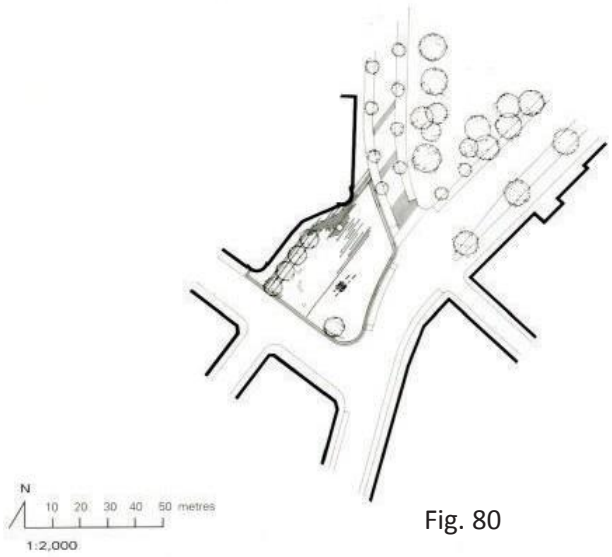


Fig. 80

Plan

(Gehl, (2006) New city spaces)



Fig. 81

Despite the open character of the site and many traffic arteries, it is simple tools which turned Sankt Hans Torv into a lively and well-functioning urban square (2006:96). The slightly convex granite floor gives a soft landscape-like quality to the square (2006:96).

Sank Hans Torv is a square in one of the most dense urban quarters, Norrebro, built outside the old city centre after the city walls were torn down towards the end of the 19th century. Three of the sides of the square are surrounded by four-and five-storey buildings containing local shops, restaurants and cafes on ground floor level. The fourth side of the square opens towards a church, which stands free on a triangle that has the character of a park (2006:98).

In converting Sankt Hans Torv from its old function as a busy intersection to its new function as a square for recreational activity, much of the surface traffic was diverted (2006:98). This created a new city space with its back against the buildings on the northeast side of the square (2006:98). The space still has heavy traffic along its southeast side, but a lively city has grown up around the cafes and fountain on the sunny car-free side of the square. The surface of the space buckles slightly. There is a large granite sculpture which marks the point of gravity for the square (2006:98). The edges of the surface along the streets have also been softened and almost levels with the street. The cafes spread along one side of the square, where a row of linden trees soften the edge of the square from their position in a rectangular field of gravel (2006:98).

The renovation of the Sankt Hans Torv is an interesting example of how a well designed public space can act as a catalyst for the renovation of a whole district. The design of the square marks a change in the status of the neighbourhood and symbolises the rebirth of the quarter through its lively use as a local recreational square and meeting place (2006:99).



(Gehl, at al (2006) New city spaces)

Fig. 82



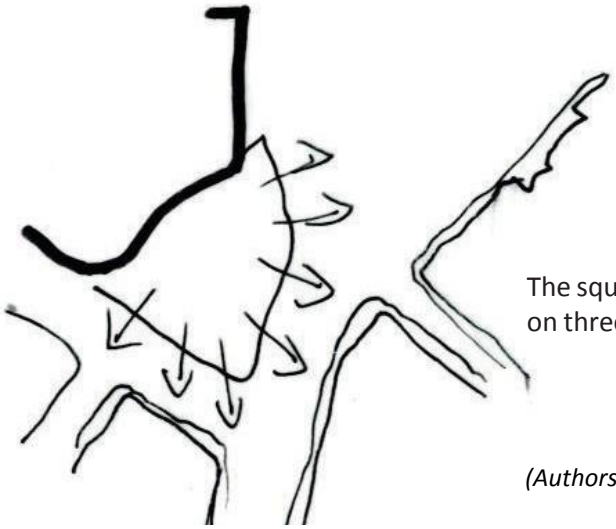


Fig 83



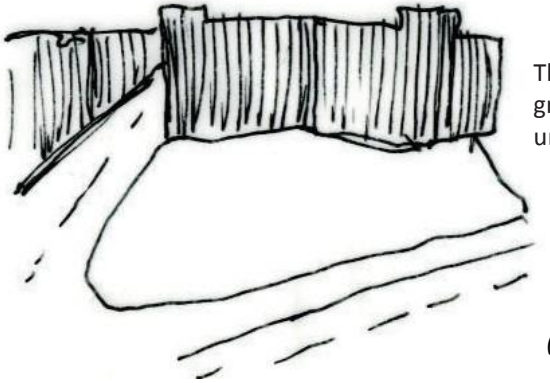
Fig 84

(Gehl, at al (2006) New city spaces)



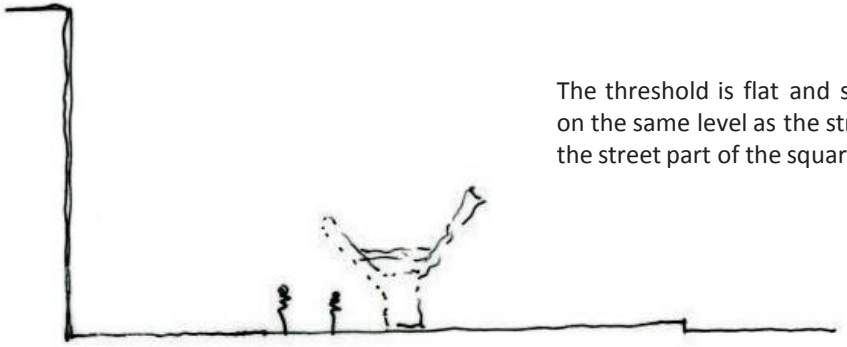
The square opens on to the street on three sides

(Authors own)



The building behind the space grounds the space and adds volume to the space

(Authors own)



The threshold is flat and seems to be on the same level as the street making the street part of the square

(Authors own)

Local Example

Ghandi Square

Johannesburg, South Africa
Architects;

Location: Johannesburg CBD
Type: traffic square, office and retail



Fig. 85

(http://www.joburg.org.za)

Gandhi square was originally known as Van der Bijl Square. This central bus terminus lies adjacent to Johannesburg's Eloff Street, situated close to Carlton Centre (http://wikimapia.org/669642/Ghandi-Square).

This square was renamed in honour of Indian patriarch Mahatma Gandhi, who was a a civil rights activist (http://wikimapia.org/669642/Ghandi-Square).

In the late 1990s property developer Gerald Olitzki was appointed to revamp the terminus as part of Johannesburg's inner-city renewal project, which aimed to restore the CBD into the city's business hub. The refurbishment of the square was completed in 2002. It now has a new look and visitors can enjoy a quick meal at one of the

restaurants and cafes that line the square while waiting for a bus (http://wikimapia.org/669642/Ghandi-Square). The square is also used as a space to cross over to the other side of the city and therefor connects two sides of the city. The space is formed by the surrounding buildings which form two tall vertical walls sitting opposite each other. Two of the four sides are completely free of buildings and mark the entry and exit points into the square. Apart from the restaurants on ground floor, there are also offices which sit above the restaurant and a few residential apartments. There is always activity throughout the day as people hurry to catch buses to and from work.

The square is also used for a variety of public exhibitions and awareness campaigns (http://wikimapia.org/669642/Ghandi-Square). It is a lively space which could be even livelier with the introduction of more evening entertainment.



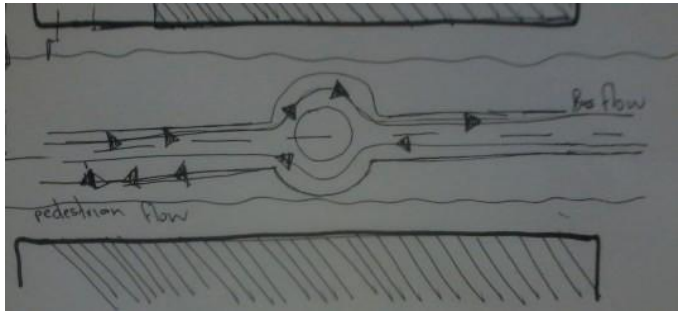
Fig. 86

A view of the square and the pedestrian walk *(http://www.joburg.org.za)*



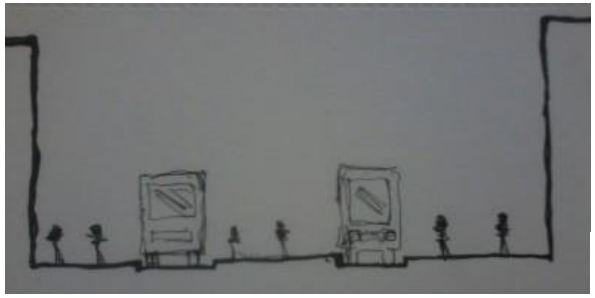
Fig. 87

(http://www.joburg.org.za)



(Author`s own)

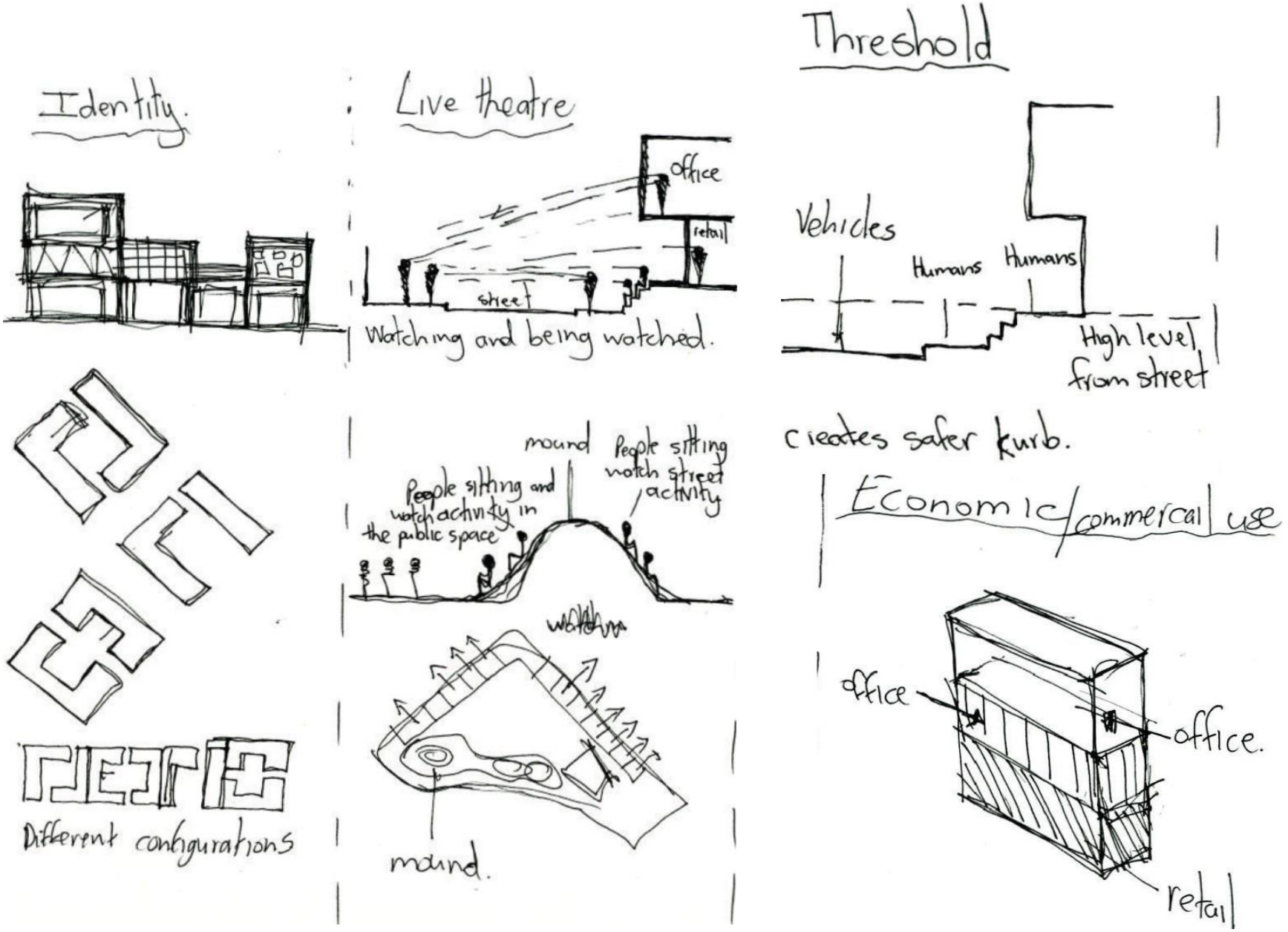
Plan showing pedestrian flow



(Author`s own)

Section showing threshold and relation of square to surrounding buildings

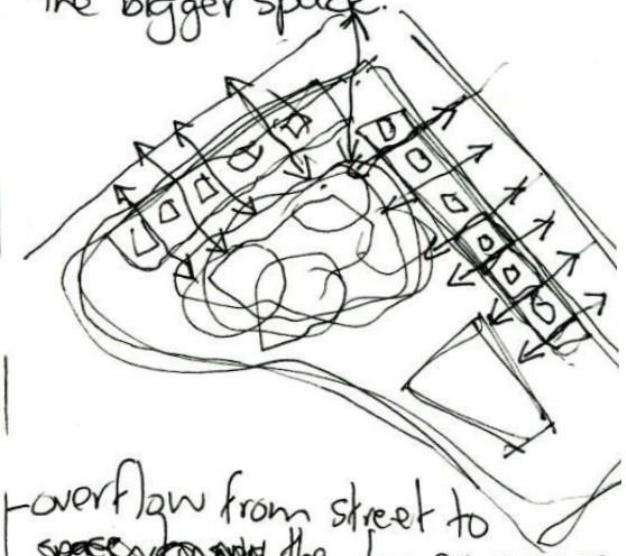
Applying key aspects of my theory to my design



Overflow



From small courtyard flowing the bigger space.



-overflow from street to ~~space~~ the bigger space
from the bigger space to the
-Possible overflow of social in the centre.

Temporality



① market fair



open-air cinema.



Ceremonial activity

Loose space.



Hard edge, soft center.

