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space language: spatial design as a means of communication
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abstract

Over time, man has come to the realization that he can communicate with his neighbors through the design of the space he creates. He has demonstrated his personal opinions and lifestyle through the design of the home, the religious beliefs of his community through the design of the place of worship, and the social structure of his community through the design of the city. The design of space provides a powerful medium of message communication.

As architects, we create spaces that communicate to the people who use them. Therefore, we must carefully consider the message and familiarize ourselves with it through research and personal investigation. We must also have a good understanding of architectonic techniques of message communication.

Through this thesis I have investigated, discovered, and understood how to successfully communicate a message through spatial design. Along this quest, I have researched spaces that have been acclaimed for their success in message communication and studied them to digest the specific techniques they employ. Simultaneously, I experimented on my own part with different messages and how I can communicate them through the process of spatial design.

The design implementation of this research takes the form of a restaurant located in the heartland of the United States, which expresses a message of unification of a disjointed, individualistic society.

thesis topic: issues and positions

Much like written or spoken language, spatial design is a language that powerfully communicates a message when
used correctly and appropriately. This message can evoke an emotion or heal a wound, provoke a deep thought or incite to worship, reinforce traditions or break down stereotypes. For example, visitors to the Acropolis understand a sense of dominance, importance and power; visitors to the gothic cathedral understand its message of mystery and holiness. With such a powerful language, the spatial designer must understand the syntax of the design language and speak it fluently.

When we enter successfully designed space, it encourages us to tune our senses to the message it conveys. That space should be designed so that its message is easily understood and provokes a response, be it agreement, rebuttal, or rejection.

Through this thesis investigation, my goal is to improve my own design work by learning how to clearly communicate my message through the space I design. To clearly communicate my message, I must first understand the mechanics of design. Without this fundamental knowledge, I as designer am no better than a novelist who lacks a general understanding of verb conjugation.

Once we have learned the language of design, including the specific tools it incorporates and the syntax of joining them together, we are able to relate our ideas, convictions and personality to our neighbors. Just as in learning a foreign language, we must begin with a basic architectural vocabulary and grammar and continue reading the works of other designers to broaden our own abilities.
preliminary case studies

In order to gain a clear understanding of how messages can be communicated through spatial design, it is necessary to study the work of other architects. For this reason I have chosen to study four projects that have been widely acclaimed to be successful in their design intent: Säynätsalo Town Hall by Alvar Aalto, Unity Temple by Frank Lloyd Wright, the National Mall by Pierre-Charles L'Enfant and Hagia Sophia by Anthemius and Isidorus.

Säynätsalo Town Hall

In his design for Säynätsalo Town Hall, Alvar Aalto conveyed his personal sociological opinion. Aalto looked back to the time of ancient Greece and Rome and idealized their system of city-states, which were wholly independent, self-governing cities that supported themselves. He felt a sense of distrust for a large central government that dictates the way of life of the common citizen, believing that the best and most effective government operates at the local level and that the citizen is the building block of civilization. Therefore, the message conveyed in this design emphasizes the town council chambers and spaces where the citizens can congregate.

the design tools utilized to communicate the message

- volumetric hierarchy
- simplicity / complexity
- framed view
- exaggerated scale
- the enclosed courtyard
- diversity of activity

11 volumetric hierarchy
12 framed view of the council chambers
13 the enclosed courtyard
14 diversity of activities: view of the commercial spaces on the first floor
15 use of the baroque style
16 axial organization (plan of Washington D.C.)
17 axial views
18 exaggerated scale counteracted by large open spaces
the national mall

Having just defeated the British and gained political freedom and autonomy, the newly formed United States of America sought to prove themselves to the rest of the world. Brand new nations often struggle to gain the recognition necessary to succeed in economics, politics and world affairs and are often marred by political upheavals and rebellion. Through the design of the National Mall in Washington D.C., Pierre-Charles L'Enfant demonstrated that this new confederation was politically stable, could stand on its own feet and was a force with which to be reckoned.

Not only was L'Enfant aiming to demonstrate that the United States was a strong and permanent nation, but also that democracy itself was not merely an experiment, but a stable and just form of civilization. The United States was the first nation to wholly adopt democracy and its implications to govern its people. Surrounded by monarchical nations, Americans assumed the responsibility to convince the rest of the world of the superiority of democratic government.

Currently, the Mall stands as a representation of the American Legacy. It not only demonstrates the authority, dignity and permanence of the United States Government, but it represents several other quintessential American ideals as well. It was perhaps the first spatial interpretation of the unlimited western horizon to which Americans have been drawn in search of wealth, glory and a better life. It communicates an overwhelming sense of national pride. Moreover, for a nation so inclined to maintain a perpetual state of motion, the National Mall represents stability and permanence, perhaps a central point around which the life of the country revolves.

the design tools utilized to communicate the message

- the Baroque style
- axial organization
- axial views
- exaggerated scale counteracted by large, open spaces
- hierarchical situation of objects
- symmetrical composition
Hagia Sophia

Through this vast architectural campaign, Roman emperor Justinian had two basic ideas he wanted everyone in the known world to understand: that the Roman Empire was alive and well (despite the fact that it had been moved to Constantinople), and that Christianity was the state-supported religion.

At a time when the sovereignty of the empire was threatened on all frontiers, Constantine chose to move the capital to preserve Roman tradition. Then, upon his coronation, Justinian was faced with the task of bringing the monumental grandeur of the imperial capital city to its new home in Constantinople. Through the design and construction of the Eastern Empire’s chief cathedral and other important buildings, Justinian sought to rival and surpass the grandeur of any of Rome’s greatest architectural pieces.

In contrast to the pagan, earthly religions of the empire, Christianity endorses mysterious and seemingly paradoxical dogmas such as “the first shall be last,” “blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven” and “love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you.” Striving to convey this sense of the ethereal, Justinian realized that the architecture of pagan Rome would no longer suit Christianity. To this end, the architects of Hagia Sophia were charged with the task of communicating the metaphysical dogmas of worship and mysterious divinity to the people of the empire.

the design tools utilized to communicate the message

- abstracted Roman devices: the classical column, arch and dome
- centralized plan
- vertical axis
- dematerialization
- dome-on-pendentives
- layers of purification
09 | case study: unity temple

Unity Temple

In designing a house of worship for a Unitarian congregation, Frank Lloyd Wright strove to communicate the doctrine that composes the Unitarian faith. One basic belief of this church is "the concept of salvation not as a blissful heavenly afterlife but as the perfection of human character in the earthly lifetime ... a belief that divinity resided not in a celestial heaven, but in souls of human beings."¹ A second belief maintains "God would be present in a space housing the gathering of people..."² By emphasizing the gathering of people and the improvement of character in the here and now, Wright is communicating a humanist message to his audience. In contrast to the Gothic and Byzantine cathedrals of Europe, whose central message is one of ethereal mystery, pointing heavenward to a distant God, the message of Unity Temple is one of man in communion with fellow man and God; dignified yet unpretentious, gracious yet not gorgeous.

the design tools utilized to communicate the message

- central, inward focus
- cube-on-cruiform
- lack of views to the exterior
- continuous spatial flow
- people as the object of focus

¹ Joseph Synd, Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple and Architecture for Liberal Religion in Chicago, 1885-1909 pp. 267-8
² Robert McCarter, Unity Temple: Frank Lloyd Wright.
the thesis issues

The exploration of techniques of message communication is not complete until these techniques are applied to a design situation. When given a specific design programme and site, the designer can then explore methods of communication through the design of space. The following is the particular set of issues and problems set forth for the design portion of this thesis investigation. It should be mentioned that this design project functions as the ultimate case study, thus completing the research.

problem statement

When the first European colonists landed on the shores of what would soon be the United States, they were in some sense escaping a totalitarian and intolerant regime to establish themselves as individuals. Since that time, whether for religious, political or economical freedom, people have come to this nation seeking a place where their individuality would be respected. The sanctity of the individual has been a central theme to the American experience, culminating in legendary and independent figures such as the Marlboro Man who spends his life alone, roaming a solitary landscape; Andrew Jackson, who is the image of the self-made man; and various athlete-heroes who have risen from and defeated poverty and stereotypes in a storm of success.

This emphasis on the individual has formed the cornerstone of the richness of the American experience, however, it has also left a void of community cohesiveness. The American individual has developed to the point where they no longer need assistance from anyone for anything. Throughout the history of the United States, the community bond has continually decreased as Americans have proceeded onward and westward, to the point where today, most American towns and cities are not communities at all: they are nothing more than a mass of people living in close proximity to one another. Even after decades of living in the same neighborhood, people still do not know the first names of their next-door-neighbors.

Americans have grown to be so self-sufficient and individual that we strive to limit our interactions with other people. Anytime we leave the house, we drive to our destination with the windows rolled up and air-conditioning on to
11 thesis issues: problem statement

avoid contact with others. When we arrive, we scurry across the vast parking lot and into the store before anyone notices us. We conduct our business in a hurried fashion, making sure to avoid any eye contact with anyone. Even when we attend supposed social events, we often leave immediately after the event, thus avoiding social contact once again. When we dine in restaurants, we prefer to be seated in booths rather than freestanding tables so that we can once again shut out the other people that surround us.

The blight of individualism on the American people can also be observed by examining the ideal that most Americans hold dear. In the American dream, every adult individual has one spouse, 2.3 children, a dog and a two-story house in the suburbs surrounded by 0.25 acres of lawn and two sedans in the driveway. Any infringement on this dream—neighborhood children playing on the lawn, increased property taxes, etc.—is seen as an act of aggression against the owner’s individuality. This scenario comes dangerously close to the medieval castle complete with turret and moat, as well as a “keep off the grass” sign to ward off the intrusion of strangers. With such a mindset, it is not difficult to see how America has fallen into being a conglomeration of individuals rather than a cohesive community.

In the past few decades, towns and cities, which were once strong communities of people who truly knew each other, have become pockets of individuals. One particular example is Colorado Springs, Colorado. Once a small community of mountaineers and small-time businesspeople, Colorado Springs was the example of a cohesive community that worked together, attended church and other social events together and truly knew each other. Only in the last ten years has Colorado Springs seen major growth, as large scale immigration from the Pacific coast boosted the city to a booming metropolis of chain restaurants and trendy bookstores. No longer do the residents of Colorado Springs do not know the names of their neighbors, nor do they much care to. They have become individuals in every sense of the word.

Colorado Springs is just one example of the thousands of towns and cities across the United States that have lost their cohesiveness as communities. The trend of our society towards the individual has almost destroyed every community across the nation.
the design challenge

As mentioned previously, this thesis deals with the methods and techniques of message communication through the medium of spatial design. The most basic goal, therefore, is to gain an understanding of the process of communicating a message architectonically. This particular knowledge base may then be built upon to communicate a vast array of messages.

As can be seen in numerous instances, architecture has been used to positively impact society in a great range of effectiveness. It can change the way we think about ourselves and about others. It has the power to provoke radical change in society or maintain centuries-old tradition. One may think of such timeless architectural pieces as Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye, which altered our notion of the home and our familial relationships, or perhaps the World's Columbian Exposition of 1892 in Chicago which, despite the arguments of Louis Sullivan and others, made the statement that the Beaux Arts tradition was still alive and relevant, and that the American architects could easily compete with the best of Europe.

Thus, in consideration of the problem at hand as well as the knowledge gained from the thesis investigation, is it possible to use the design of space to communicate the urgency of our individualistic society and make a positive impact on the community? Can the reclusive individualism of the American people be challenged through spatial design? Can architecture cause the American individual to recognize, respect, and depend upon others? And ultimately, is it within the power of the spatial designer to return our pockets of individuals to being cohesive communities?

34 the world's columbian exposition of chicago, 1892: the beaux-arts tradition is not dead and is still relevant, even in the americas
35 villa savoye, challenging our traditional lifestyle through the design of the home
36 individual (acrylic on illustration board 22"x28")
37 fellowship (acrylic on illustration board 22"x28")
38 assimilation (acrylic on illustration board 22"x28")
the latin-american precedent

In order to understand the ability of spatial design to encourage interaction between individuals, one can investigate the cultures of Latin America and their public spaces. While it is important to recognize the dangers of idealizing one culture and degrading another, it is possible to gain a basic understanding of the nature of one culture and apply that understanding to the problems of another.

When investigating Latin American cultures, one aspect that emerges as vital is the relationship between people. Latin Americans have an entirely different notion of interpersonal relationships than do Americans. They do not believe in the sanctity of the individual, but in the cohesion of the group.

The three paintings to the left represent an abstraction of the Latin American view of the individual and the group. The following is a composition of words to demonstrate the themes of the paintings.

forever \ wander \ never \ arrive
aggressive \ achieve \ non-descript

individual

total \ non-dimensional

Intently progressing towards a destination
Mutually defining one another
Dynamically pursuing unity

fellowship

share
confide
rely

is assimilation
Latin Americans have a very real sense of the eternal, as if this life were just a snapshot of a much larger spectrum of time. Their perspective moves far beyond death, in hopes that those they leave behind will remember them. Thus, the main objective of this current snapshot in time is to build lasting relationships with others, making an indelible mark that will live on much longer than their physical bodies.

Generally speaking, Latin Americans make this mark by associating themselves with others, the individual grafting itself into the group. The individual never defines itself with respect to anything it is individually or has personally accomplished, as all accomplishments are accredited to the group of which that individual is part.

The individual describes itself as “father,” “mother,” “eldest son,” or “cherished daughter,” never referring to occupation, degrees earned or physical attributes as descriptive factors. This method of self-identification defines the individual with respect to its relationship to others. The individual donates its occupation, degrees and to some extent physical attributes to the group, to further the causes, authority, strength and cohesiveness of the group. Therefore, by becoming an integral part of a group, the individual is guaranteed to be remembered when absent.

"We must be sure that we are not, as so often happens in ambitious undertakings of the sort, comparing a traditional, classical or ideal version of one society with the modernized version of another. For in these times we can hardly help being aware that the question of the role of the individual in society is hardly one of a timeless symposium between great but static cultures or social philosophies, each representing some sort of eternal Platonic idea."

--Robert S. Eliwood, Jr.

39 the cohesiveness of a latin american family
40 plan of the inca city of huanuco, peru
two latin american spaces
the andean plaza mayor

With the conquest of the New World by western Europeans, two distinct cultures collided creating a hybrid civilization. In particular, the Andean region of South America saw the crossbreeding of the Spanish culture with various indigenous peoples including the Inca. In spite of many vast ideological, religious and social differences, one obvious similarity comes forth: the social structure and significance of the urban environment.

Central to both civilizations is the communion of people, as is evident in the design of Inca cities, such as Huanuco and Machu Picchu, Spanish cities such as Lima, and hybrid cities such as Cusco. In laying out the city, both groups began with the plaza mayor in the center out of which grew religious, municipal, commercial, residential and agricultural spaces. The plaza mayor as an urban institution advanced as it grew to assimilate both Spanish and Inca elements.

As mentioned earlier, the Andean cultures place a high value on interpersonal relationships, be they family, friend or business associate. In the Andean mindset, the individual finds his definition relative to the other members of his group and lacks definition and direction outside the community. Property is seen as somewhat communal, the need for personal space is virtually non-existent and children live with parents until marriage—never alone or with friends.

With such an emphasis on the group or community, it is easy to understand the importance of the plaza mayor. The plaza mayor serves as the grand hub of congregation. Casual meetings of friends take place here, as well as business transactions from street vending to high-powered corporate negotiation. It not only serves as a place for congregation but also as an object of local pride—the plaza mayor (or its centerpiece) is often the symbol of the community. It is essentially the glue that binds the community together.

What is most interesting, however, is that the truly lasting communion between individuals invariably occurs on the fringes of this incredible space. Admittedly, interaction on a base level does occur inside the plaza mayor itself, but only on
a limited and fragmented scale. This interaction usually occurs between no more than two or three individuals. But amazingly, when this limited and fragmented group passes from the open space of the plaza to its fringe spaces, a contagion of interpersonal connection spreads to others and individuals begin interacting with individuals with whom they would never interact under normal circumstances.

Therefore, the challenge presented by the plaza mayor to the mind of the spatial designer is to determine the ingredients that lend the space the exceptional congregational qualities it possesses and understand their potential in bringing people together.

On a simple level, the plaza mayor employs an elaborate system of layers to filter movement from the public, open space of the plaza to the private, intimate spaces along the fringe. In one particularly evident example, the plaza mayor of Cusco filters the movement from public to private through open walkways and colonnades, under the overhangs of balconies, through glazed storefronts and into intimate interior spaces, which, in the case of restaurants, lead the visitor to the individual spaces of the tables where they will share a meal. This system of layers helps explain the level of communion between individuals that occurs in the fringe spaces.

the public living room

On a more metaphysical level, the plaza mayor is also the meeting place of government and religion, commerce and culture. Almost without fail, the seat of government forms one edge, and the chief cathedral of the city sits opposite it in a gesture of equilibrium and partnership. The communities of the Andes utilize the plaza mayor as the communal center—the “public living room.”

Essential to the concept of the public living room is that the plaza mayor is the shared space of the community. While everyone has their own individual homes, they all feel a certain ownership or share of this public space. This peculiar ownership fosters a sense of pride, and the plaza mayor becomes the object of that pride.
The concept of the public living room also connotes a strong and vibrant civic vitality. This space often plays host to such events of import as political rallies and revolutions, communal weddings, funerals of important people, and festivals. In all, the public living room of the Latin American community exudes an intoxicating and contagious energy.

Just as the private living room of the individual home is a comfortable and intimate environment, so also the public living room offers a comfortable environment. Masks and false facades disintegrate as a result of this comfort and people are able to be truly intimate with each other. Therefore, even with its usually grand scale and public atmosphere, the public living room maintains a quality of intimacy.

The location of the public living room within the Latin American community is also of importance. It always lies at the center of the community if not geographically, certainly culturally, politically and economically. In all cases, it is the first planned space of the community, and all other spaces are arranged with respect to it.

41 the plaza mayor of cusco, peru
42 the fringe space between public and private
43 the atrium utilized as a smaller version of the public living room
44-45 conceptual diagrams
La Bajada in Lima, Peru

One of Lima's thriving entertainment districts, Barranco is home to various cultural activities including open-air markets, nightclubs and museums, as well as historic homes and businesses. Like its neighboring district Miraflores, Barranco has become a place to relax and get away from the hectic life of the city. However, unlike Miraflores, Barranco has maintained its historic colonial flavor. Positioned on the bluffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean, Barranco is a quite peaceful place where friends gather to enjoy each other's company.

One of the key spaces in Barranco is La Bajada, a pedestrian street that extends from the plaza and cathedral in the center of Barranco down towards the ocean. Its historic significance lies in the fact that it served as the only passage from the neighborhoods of Barranco to the beaches below. Therefore, it has always been a space of entertainment and relaxation.

In spite of the fact that several other passages to the beaches have been constructed, La Bajada retains its importance in the urban fabric of the district. It has such attractions as restaurants of varying degrees of formality, artisan shops and lookout points with spectacular views of the Pacific.

Even with its great tourist appeal, what makes La Bajada important to this thesis study is how the particular layout of its spaces encourages people to connect with each other. The pedestrian path winds through vegetation, obscuring the view of the ocean until the last moment, thus emphasizing the journey along this path, not necessarily the destination. The structures that form the edges of the path front it with balconies and porches, advertising the activities within and providing varied dining and shopping experiences.

In reality, La Bajada is similar to the typical plaza mayor of a Latin American town in that it carries the same system of public space, fringe, and private space, which enhances its success at engaging people with one another. It seems that the most popular dining
spaces along La Bajada are the balconies and porches, most likely for the simple fact that they allow the diners to simultaneously remove themselves from and observe the people walking along the path. This removal fosters a sense of connection between people.

Another design aspect of La Bajada that encourages a real sense of connection between individuals is the level of enclosure. The path begins as a groove cut into the earth, thus beginning to define the space. It then passes beneath a wooden footbridge that announces arrival into the space. Throughout the length of the path, an overhead canopy of vegetation reduces the size of the space to a quite human scale.
a study in contrasts

One of the greatest lessons learned through the process of this thesis is the importance of the study of opposites. The human mind has the great ability to sense the tension created between polar ideas and thus develop a greater understanding of each. When we study a particular philosophy or ideal, we must look at it and its opposite to grasp it fully.

Likewise, in verbal communication, the study of opposites has merit. Dictionaries often define a word or phrase utilizing its antonym, emphasizing the relationship and contrast of the two. Studying both its synonyms and antonyms renders a word or phrase in its entirety.

To the human ear, the most interesting musical compositions are those that utilize contrast effectively. The classical and baroque sonatas provide excellent studies in auditory contrast. One particular example is Franz Josef Haydn's Piano Sonata #37. Comprised of three movements, the most obvious contrast is the styling of each movement. The first movement is quick and light, the second movement is heavy and almost dirge-like and the third is even quicker than the first and has a dance-like quality. A second contrast essential to this and many other Classical and Baroque sonatas is the tension between the major and minor keys. By beginning the first movement in the key of D major and transitioning to B minor, Haydn adds color and interest to the sound.

52 the purity of black is only truly revealed when compared to white
separation / connection

With respect to this thesis and the study of contrasts, it is important to note that any efforts at encouraging people to connect with one another are futile without also separating them from one another. If the individual is to understand the importance of connection with others, it must also understand the solitude of individuality, if for nothing more than a basis for comparison.

When applied to an architectonic situation, this contrast of separation and connection requires various degrees of connection, from intimate, close proximity to complete isolation from the community. Quite possibly the most powerful degree of connection between people is provided in hints of connection, utilizing shadows, sounds and movement to allude to the presence of other individuals. This type of foggy connection heightens the interest of the individual and makes it keenly aware of and engaged in the community of a space.

The first step in causing an individualistic society to consider the value of community is to increase each individual’s awareness of others and of the group. Once that awareness is achieved, the individual will begin to feel a part of a community and to understand its role in that group. By creating tension between connection and separation, the individual is reminded of the group and likewise, the group is reminded of the individual.
the thesis design

In considering the architectural implementation and experimentation of the theories essential to this thesis, I chose the programme of a restaurant. While not the only public building in which these theories could be tested, the restaurant seems to offer a wide range of opportunities of bringing individuals together.

Probably the most social activity in which humans take part on a regular basis is the act of sharing a meal together. In every culture, the main meal of the day takes precedence over all other events. It is a time when the members of a group share not only their food with each other, but also their lives. Families use the evening meal to recount the day's activities to each other, courting couples use it to become better acquainted with each other, friends use it to build ever stronger bonds between them.

There is something almost primal about the act of sharing a meal together. The very fact that we must actively engage in sharing our food and drink with others causes us to relinquish our individuality and even to trust others. It creates a true sense of intimacy and community that is unparalleled by any other activity in which we take part. For this reason, the restaurant is quite the appropriate choice to act as a catalyst to transform an individualistic society into a true community.

53 panoramic photo of the site, main street, muncie, indiana
54 a typical shopping mall. this is the only place in muncie where people interact. does the mall provide quality interaction?
55 the site looking east down main street
56 the site looking west down main street
design tools employed

Having chosen the architectural programme and building type, it is necessary to consider the specific design tools available and the advantages and disadvantages of message communication inherent in each. It is at this very simple level that the design and intention of the design find their success.

site location and local context

The particular site selected for this design project is located in downtown Muncie, Indiana. Muncie, like most other American towns and cities lacks a sense of community cohesiveness. In decades past, Muncie's downtown was a thriving commercial, cultural and political center. While there was no one particular public space comparable to the Latin American plaza mayor, the entire downtown district functioned as the city's center. Yet, as common to many American towns, the center of Muncie has shifted from its downtown to the outskirts with the introduction of the shopping mall.

Essentially, the shopping mall is the only space in Muncie comparable to the plaza mayor in civic importance and public accessibility. However, the materialistic and selfish nature it promotes only succeeds in further separating and isolating individuals from the group. Thousands of people crowd into the shopping mall to engage in the most selfish and individual act—buying. It is not uncommon, particularly in the few days preceding Christmas to see grown adults fighting over material goods much like children do. It is no wonder, therefore, that the people of such a community try to avoid each other and sequester themselves from any type of community interaction.

The site, located on Main Street, is somewhat urban, flanked on either side by buildings that are part of the urban fabric of Muncie's historic downtown. To the west is a beaux-arts limestone bank and to the east is a three-story brick commercial building. One block to the west is the Delaware County courthouse, which serves as the center of downtown.
separation and connection in the design project

Understanding the aforementioned importance of separation and connection, the first design strategy was to separate the restaurant into two basic blocks and connect them by a common atrium.

The vertical space of the atrium is an interpretation of the public space of the plaza mayor. People are arranged around the central atrium as if they were seated in balconies, overlooking the plaza below. The floor of the eastern balconies is one meter higher than that of the western balconies, thus providing a deeper view into the dining space across the atrium and a clearer view of people on other floors.

The balconies of the atrium echo the spatial qualities of the fringe spaces that exist in the plaza—the people feel that they are removed from the activity of the public space yet they are still able to observe it. The balconies also provide a sense of intimacy and enclosure, making the dining experience even more intimate.

On a more detailed level, the design identifies certain points of separation to contrast the interaction of the atrium. At the entry from Main Street, people pass through a short portal that for a moment secludes them from others. Once through the portal, people emerge into the atrium and immediately notice the interaction that is key to the space. Likewise, the positioning of the elevators provides a contrast to the interaction of the atrium. The elevator lobby is a small-scale, private area that serves as a temporary seclusion. When people emerge from the elevator lobby, they are again reminded of the interaction of the atrium. Screens also provide a contrast—as people pass from the elevator lobby to their table, they move around the perimeter of the atrium at times hidden from the view of people across the atrium by screens, at other times in full view.

This restaurant is similar to the sanctuary of Wright’s Unity Temple. In both cases, the atrium concept is used to provide clear views of people across the space, and both place people at the focal center. The two atria also share a common architectonic
vocabulary: both are vertical spaces formed by layers of balconies on all four sides.

The atrium in the restaurant also refers back to the public enclosed courtyard of Säynätsalo Town Hall. At Säynätsalo, Aalto's main intention of including the enclosed courtyard was to provide a place where the people of the city could congregate. In much the same way, this restaurant uses an open defined space to provide a place where the people of Muncie can come together and connect with each other.

the public living room in the design project

If this restaurant is to successfully bring individuals together into a cohesive community, it should share many of the aspects of the public living room that exist in the plaza mayor. It should provide a shared space for the community, one that causes visitors to take pride in their community and their position in that community.

The National Mall in Washington, D.C. provides a good example of a space that fosters pride in the people. It encourages its visitors to take pride in and connect with their past and the people who made such a nation possible. This connection is accomplished through the use of over scaled monuments constructed of smooth, white stone scaled down by the vast lawns upon which they sit. This sense of pride is also achieved in this restaurant, albeit with different tools. The restaurant fosters a sense of pride by giving the diners their choice of dining environments, from very public to very private, and of adjusting the space to suit their needs.

This restaurant provides this pride by avoiding any sense of hierarchy among individuals. No one guest is seated in a more desirable location than any other. Likewise, all guests have a view into the atrium, allowing all to feel equally connected to others.

As well as offering a sense of pride to its guests, this restaurant carries the vibrant civic vitality that is essential to any successful public space. Upon entering, the guest is presented with four levels on which people are eating, ordering food, serving tables, waiting for tables, listening to concerts, chatting with friends. The energy...
of this space affords a civic vitality that no other space in Muncie can.

Intense energy is not the only qualification for a successful public space, for if it were, public spaces would have the character of a factory. Therefore, it is also important to simultaneously provide the guests with a comfortable, intimate environment. Firstly, the simple option of choosing different dining arrangements—very public or very private—offers guests the option to select the environment that they find most comfortable. Also, based on the investigation of the plaza mayor, it can be said that most people feel comfortable in the intimacy of the fringe space, where they can remove themselves from the intense action of the space but still be able to observe it. By providing these situations, this restaurant allows for intimate dining within the context of an incredibly energetic space.

In thinking about the individual dining environments for this restaurant, the decision was made to avoid the use of booth-style tables in favor of freestanding tables. When people sit in booths, they tend to isolate themselves and ignore everyone around them. The booth becomes their private space, and in the event that someone invades that space, it is understood as an act of aggression. (Children often do not comprehend this oddity and peer into the adjoining booth, only to be promptly scolded by their parents for being rude.) Freestanding tables avoid such blatant seduction and also allow for people to adjust them to personalize the space. Such a personalized space encourages a stronger sense of ownership and pride in the individual dining environment within the much larger social environment—a pride much like the plaza mayor encourages.

the urban edge

When confronted with the realities of an urban site, the issue of the urban edge arises. In most urban projects, it is important to maintain the wall of the street, sometimes for simple programmatic reasons and space requirements but usually for the fabric of the urban environment.

However, in some urban projects, the decision is made to violate the urban edge for various reasons. Such an example would be Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim.
Museum in New York. Wright's intention was to create an icon for the city of New York and reveal that the Guggenheim's collection was of utmost prominence. To convey this message, Wright purposefully interrupted the wall of the street by pulling the building back from the sidewalk and introducing a cylindrical object in an otherwise rectangular setting.

In this design, it was decided to violate the urban edge. If this restaurant is to become the center of the community, it must call attention to itself and it must not blend in with its surroundings. For this reason, the eastern block of the building is pulled back away from the street. The resulting plaza emphasizes the exposed atrium and the interaction that occurs within. It also acts as advertisement for the restaurant, encouraging people on the street to peer deep into the atrium.

diversity of activity

Another reason the plaza mayor functions well as a public space is the diversity of activity that it offers. The plaza offers dining, shopping, groceries, municipal offices and other amenities.

Also exemplifying a diversity of activities, Säynätsalo Town Hall offers a variety of amenities to its visitors. By including space for a library, a bank, a pharmacy, a barbershop and apartments for municipal employees, as well as the municipal offices and the council chambers, Aalto transforms a normally monumental, obscure building type into the very heart of the community. This diversity lends the Town Hall a civic energy similar to that of the plaza mayor of Latin American communities.

Echoing this diversity of activity, this restaurant affords more amenities than the typical restaurant. Included in its programme are a coffee bar, a breakfast and lunch café, a bakery, a bar, a jazz club, banquet rooms, and rooftop dining. Since the bakery, café and coffee bar open early in the morning to serve the business community of downtown Muncie and the bar and jazz club stay open past midnight, the restaurant is essentially a twenty-four hour facility. This extended operating schedule and programme offers the community a place where all can feel comfortable, from families with small children to the elderly, from business executives to high school students.
In order to evaluate the success of the design portion of this thesis project, the design challenge must be re-examined. Does this design truly question the individualistic nature of the American society? Does the design encourage the individual to enter into a sense of community with others? Does the design form a cohesive community out of the mass of individuals that comprise Muncie? These issues were the basis for the design, therefore, they should be clearly addressed in the design.

By causing the individual to become aware of others, this design forces to the surface the problems of an individualistic society. By avoiding such expected restaurant features as the booth and private dining, it forces people to re-examine their predispositions about not only the way they dine but also the mode of thinking about others.

It is important to understand that if the design only challenges tradition, people will not feel comfortable and will most likely not return. To this regard, even as this restaurant causes people to question the sanctity of individuality, it simultaneously provides a comfortable dining environment to avoid total shock. People will leave this restaurant with a feeling that they have certainly been exposed to others and yet felt comfortable.

Also, the contrast of separation and connection heightens awareness of other people. The design successfully utilizes the atrium to encourage people to first notice and then connect with each other. The Main Street entrance portal and the secluded elevator lobby as well as the addition of screens provide an interesting contrast to the connection present in the atrium.

In light of the successes of this design, there remain some areas that could be improved. In order to achieve the civic vitality mentioned earlier, the restaurant could be made more energetic. In its current state, the space relies entirely on the energy of the people to create a sense of civic vitality. The built form could not only support energetic activity as it does, but it could also be an energetic form.
The form of the atrium and the surrounding spaces should provoke more interest by being less didactic and clean-cut. As the design is currently, the entire facility is open to view upon entering the principal door. If the design revealed its different parts gradually, the entire spatial sequence would be more interesting and engaging.

In an effort to emphasize and exploit the atrium as the principle space and to create more interesting environments in the surrounding spaces, the atrium positions itself on an angle to the grid of the street. While this is a strong design move, the tectonics of connecting it to the grid of the street should be more carefully considered. At this point, the rotated grid of the atrium appears to be somewhat arbitrary.
Further study options in the design project

1. The individual dining environment
The most important space in this restaurant design is the environment that encloses each table. To contrast the public nature of the atrium and the level of interaction between people, the individual table setting should be intimate and comfortable. To this point, this space is not designed. This development would be the most important next step.

2. Alternative sites and local contexts
It would be interesting to test the theories of separation/connection and the public living room in other local situations, perhaps rural, metropolitan, and suburban.

3. Alternative building types
These theories could also be tested in other building types to understand them more fully. The restaurant as a type is a commercial space—it might be beneficial to try other programmes such as civic, educational, recreational, residential, religious or transportation facilities. The activities that occur in these alternatives are different than those of a restaurant, which would bring up new challenges for the designer.

4. Alternative design tools
As the tension between separation and connection was the chief design tool to draw individuals into a community, it might be beneficial to study other tools to achieve the same end.

5. A study of opposites
Another way to congeal the knowledge gained through this thesis would be to investigate how communities can be formed in environments that typically intend to separate people such as prisons/correctional centers or factories.
reflection

Through the process of this thesis investigation, I have learned that it is possible to communicate messages through the design of space. For centuries, architects have revealed their personal and institutional beliefs in the pieces they have designed. The particular architectural examples I have studied in this thesis show a wide range of messages communicated through a wide range of building types.

In Säynätsalo Town Hall, Aalto expressed his conviction that the legitimate governmental power was the local municipalities, not the federal government. By placing the council chamber in the prominent position and arranging all other spaces with respect to it, he emphasized its importance.

Wright demonstrated the Unitarian belief that divinity resides in the human spirit through his design for Unity Temple. His strategy of using a centralized cruciform design and locating people at the focus was his chief tool for expressing this idea.

In the design of the city of Washington, D.C. and the National Mall, Pierre L'Enfant successfully communicated a message of prominence, permanence and westward expansion. His use of one principal axis leading westward as well as symmetry, and long, grand views of monuments stated that the newly formed nation was one with which to reckon.

When called upon to design a new cathedral for the Eastern Roman Empire, Anthemius and Isidorus produced an architectural piece that stated the wealth, prosperity and power of the Eastern Empire, even after the downfall of the Western Empire. They also expressed the mystery and awe of the Christian religion to its new followers.

In the design portion of this thesis, I have found that architecture can be used to improve society, strengthening its weaknesses and capitalizing on its strengths. After learning from the cultures of Latin America and their beliefs in the community, I have better understood how it is possible to transform an individualistic society into a cohesive community while maintaining a healthy degree of individuality. I have also seen the role of architecture in the creation of such a cohesive community.
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personal experience

All information regarding Latin American culture was taken from personal experience in Peru and examined under the guidance of Professor German Cruz.

Research on the plaza mayor and la bajada was taken from the thesis author's first hand experience in Lima and Cusco, Peru.
02 sketch courtesy of Brookhaven Wesleyan Church in Marion, Indiana
08 Brett Tippey
09-10 Trachtenberg and Hyman.
11-14 Bearbeitung.
15 Highsmith and Landphair.
16 Ching.
17 Highsmith and Landphair.
19-22 Trachtenberg and Hyman.
23 Tippey.
24-27 McCarter.
31 Tippey.
32 Owens.
36-39 Tippey.
40 Ching.
41-53 Tippey.


55-58 Tippey.

59 McCarter.

60 Highsmith and Landphair.


62 Tippey.

63 Trachtenberg and Hyman.

64-65 Tippey.

66 Bearbeitung.

67-70 Tippey.

71 Trachtenberg and Hyman.