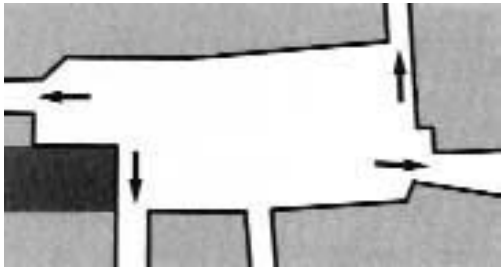
Figure 3.14 The open piazza corner: Piazza Campidoglio, Rome
Figure 3.15 Camillo Sitte's 'turbine' piazza plan

3.14

a second one would branch off further back on this street and out of sight from the plaza' (Collins and Collins, 1986) (Figure 3.15).

(ii) The Arched Piazza Corner

The use of an arch to connect the two adjacent façades of a square is a highly decorative method of closing an otherwise weak corner. The arch may be placed within the wall of one of the square's façades or, as in the Piazza Santissima Annunziata in Florence, it may be placed a short distance along the street and set back from the main space of the square. Both methods of inserting the arch can be equally successful. The arch itself is a highly decorative feature, an ornament of the city. Its potential for framing a spectacular view adds a further dimension to the appreciation of the urban scene and provides the urban designer with an element to enrich the townscape (see Figure 2.31).



3.15

(iii) The Piazza Pavilion

Where two roads leave a square at the same corner the gap in the public space can destroy the enclosed quality of the square. It is the corner condition most frowned upon by Camillo Sitte (1901) and according to him, should be avoided if possible. However, it is not always possible to achieve ideal corner conditions for a public place. Imperatives other than aesthetic conditions, such as traffic considerations, may be of higher priority. In Villa Real, Portugal, a small planned town of the late nineteenth century, this particular corner condition has not only been accepted in the main public square but has been developed as an important decorative feature of the square. At each corner of the square four identical villas have been placed as pavilions. Each villa has an external angle facing onto the square which has been emphasized as the main design feature of the villa and is the subject of many decorative features. The four identical villas complete the space in a most attractive manner (Figure 3.16).

CURVED PIAZZA CORNERS

There are many notable examples where the corners of a public place do not exist as such, the place becomes a form of amphitheatre: indeed there are several examples of urban spaces built on the ruined foundations of theatres, amphitheatres and gymnasia (Figure 3.17). The degree of

curvature for such spaces varies from the arc of the perfect circle to the gentler shape of the more complex curves. This type of corner, if it can be so termed has been used for the simultaneous design of several street corners in order to define an urban space. Whether it is the design of the corners which create the urban space is dependent on the size of the corners relative to the size of the space. In these instances the design of the space itself has often been more important than that of the surrounding buildings. For example, John Nash designed two circus spaces to define the crossings of Regent Street with Piccadilly and with Oxford Street. At the time both spaces were confusingly called Regent's Circus. They are now called Piccadilly Circus, where the circus is no longer evident, and Oxford Circus which was rebuilt between 1913 and 1928. In each case the circus was defined by four identical partially curved buildings on each of the four corners. Unfortunately the rebuilt Oxford Circus is weakly defined and its spatial qualities are now out of proportion with the scale of the streets forming the crossing (Figure 3.19).

(i) Geometric Curve

The paramount example of spatial enclosure taking a circular form is the Circus at Bath by John Wood the Elder (Figure 3.19). The Circus consists of three arcs of a circle: entry into the circus is at three points each on the centre line of an arc. The internal façades of the circus are decorated in three main bands or floors corresponding to three of the orders of architecture. The ground floor is decorated according to the Doric Order, the first according to the Ionic and the upper floor according to the Corinthian Order. The whole composition is finished with a band of solid balustrade which disguises the angle of the pitched roof. Other notable examples include the great colonnaded arms of the Piazza Obliqua, St Peter's, Rome; the Hemi Cycle at Nancy and the Exedras in Piazza del Popolo, Rome (Figures 3.20, 3.21 and 5.18).

3.16

3.17

Figure 3.16 The Pavilion piazza corner, Villa Real de Saint Antonio, Portugal
Figure 3.17 Curved piazza corners: Piazza Navona, Rome