

the site. Where decoration or expensive materials are used it is to express commercial strength; it symbolizes the power and prestige of the enterprise, usually a multi-national organization. Buildings, their materials and components, have been internationalized with a corresponding loss of the rich regional identity associated with the traditional city. Modern architects and planners tried to harness these technological forces for the benefit of the general population. In doing so they formulated a 'machine aesthetic' for the building and the city. When seen in this light, the failure of the modern city, is a failure of a society and its culture, of which the design and planning professions are only a small part.

Amongst the well documented failings of the modern city are, for example, the growing congestion on the roads including the danger of gridlock; the dangerous conditions of city life; isolation in the suburbs, an underclass of poor and disenfranchised people; a dying city centre; and an ageing city infrastructure. The inner city has become an area of social and economic deprivation with a shrinking tax base from which to solve its problems. These local difficulties have to be seen against the more serious world problems of pollution, ozone layer depletion, the greenhouse effect and climate change, resource depletion, levels of energy consumption, population growth, worldwide food shortages and famine (Myers, 1987). Paradoxically, these seemingly insurmountable world problems may stimulate a change in the ethos of society and its values. Such change in attitudes may be necessary to save the city and bring about a return to its prime function as the home of humankind, a place that does not possess the image of a fearsome object from which all sane people flee.

### **A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE**

There is a growing international consensus that all development in the future should be sustainable.

Sustainable development has many definitions. A common definition is: 'to meet the needs of the current generation without preventing future generations meeting their needs' (Brundtland, 1987). The adoption of sustainability as the guiding principle for development policy formulation has a number of implications for the city and its form.

The definition of sustainable development used here implies both inter- and intra-generational equity. Leaving aside for a moment, equity between nations, the definition does require a radical rethink of the distribution of wealth within a given society. Job creation in the service, leisure and quality-of-life industries may be a part of this process of equitable resource distribution. If that proves to be true then the decorative work for the city by artists, craftsman or production on the factory floor may once again be on the urban design agenda.

Sustainability implies the careful husbandry of the natural and man-made environment. It implies a return to the mores of farming traditions, that is, leaving the land in a better condition than it was found. This value of good husbandry applies to the built as well as the natural environment. Conservation of building stock becomes, under this regime, the norm, while demolition and reconstruction is the strategy requiring justification. There seems a broad consensus for the conservation of the rich urban heritage in many European cities. Because of conservation policies much that is currently of architectural and historical value in our cities will probably be retained. Conservation of the built environment, more generally, however, may become more commonplace. Not simply for reasons of history, aesthetics or sentiment, but in order to reduce energy consumption, waste and resource depletion. In that scenario many buildings currently considered unsuitable, unsightly or downright ugly would be found new uses and humanized with a decorative treatment of the façade and the surrounding environment.

For reasons of energy efficiency, additions to the sustainable city of the future may take the form of low-rise, high density developments sited along

corridors of infrastructure and public transport (Owens, 1991). Super-insulated three and four storey mixed use buildings, constructed from regional materials would provide urban designers with a new agenda for design (Blowers, 1993). The rich texture of urban space resulting from such urban policies opens up a wide field for decoration with planting, floorscape and street furniture. The use of 'long-life' traditional facing materials for buildings also offers scope for a decorative architecture.

A greater reliance on public transport as opposed to the universal use of the private motor car is necessary for energy conservation, particularly for the reduction of the use of fossil fuels (Matthew and Rodwell, 1991). A viable public transport system is also necessary if the city is to avoid congestion on a scale requiring massive urban surgery and investment to solve the problems of mass movement. A number of cities in Europe, meanwhile, are investing in public transport, restraining the use of the car and emphasizing movement by foot, bicycle, bus, tram or train. Assuming this trend will continue, then life for the city centre and other important nodes looks bright. The revitalization of the centre offers the urban designer the greatest scope for the use of decorative talents. It is here that the community has traditionally concentrated most of its creative energy. Change to a more sustainable society and the development of urban structures worthy of the values inherent in such a society requires a major paradigm shift in the way we think about cities. While there are signs of this cultural change (necessary, some would say, for human survival) these signs are by no means universal or clearly evident. Catastrophe may be necessary to propel society in the direction of this paradigm shift and its concomitant technological changes.

### **THE POST-MODERN CITY**

Before outlining a strategy for future city decoration it is appropriate to examine some examples of the



**Figure 8.9** The Portland Building, Portland, Oregon

1980s urban spaces which have done so much to re-establish the pleasure of walking along streets and sitting in the calm of a city square. Portland, Oregon, as a city, made a concerted effort to bring people back to its centre. In Portland the flagship of this process was the celebrated town hall which, through the use of various Post-modern idioms, created a decorated landmark. The building contains many fine sculptures, a feature which is repeated in the surrounding streets. The animal sculptures which dominate the main street and the square continue to please the residents long after their novelty has worn off. Another means of bringing vitality back to the downtown area was the creation of a public square by the demolition of a city block. The square cleverly uses the slope of the land to