

The aesthetic experience and visual appeal of decoration depends upon four factors. The first is the quality of the space which is both the setting for the decoration and which in turn is enhanced by it. The second is the physical form and the pattern of the decoration. The third is the circumstances under which the decoration is seen; for instance, weather conditions, particularly the quality of the light. The fourth factor relates to the perceptual framework of the observer, his or her mood, how he or she sees and what has been seen before.

PHYSICAL VARIABLES OF DECORATION

UNITY

While a full discussion of basic design concepts and their relationship to urban design has appeared elsewhere (Moughtin, 1992), it is proposed in this text to relate them directly to ornament and decoration. Probably the most important quality of any work of art is the clear expression of a single idea: any idea in any medium must, *a priori*, be complete, it cannot be composed of scattered elements without relation to each other. Urban design aims therefore to express complete unity in its compositions. Theorists such as Lynch, Alexander and Norberg-Schulz have tried to come to terms with the complexity of the concept of unity when applied to the field of urban design (Lynch, 1960; Alexander *et al.* 1987, Norberg-Schulz, 1980). For such writers, the study of human perception is important for the understanding of unity. The Gestalt school of psychology stresses the simplicity of visible form in the geometrical sense for producing clarity and singularity to distinguish figure from background. (Katz, 1950). Man, in order to orientate in the city, of necessity reduces the environment to an understandable simple pattern of signs and clues. In the words of Norberg-Schulz (1971): 'If we want to interpret these basic results of perception psychology in more general terms, we may say that the elementary organizational schemata consist of

the establishment of *centres* or places (proximity), *directions* or paths (continuity) and *areas* or domains (enclosure)'. Composition in urban design is the art, first of all, of creating visual unity out of a diversity of elements. For this purpose, a common theme for decoration is important to reinforce the normal tendency to see, understand and respond to vivid and coherent images. Secondly, it is to bring together these lesser unities into a city or town structure which itself is a visual and organizational unity. The goal of urban design has been given by Lynch as the development of a strong urban image. The structure of a pattern of decorative treatment with related themes emphasizing Lynch's five components is important for making the city whole in Alexander's (1987) terms and more imageable in Lynch's terminology (1960).

PROPORTION

An important characteristic of unity is the proportion of the parts or elements which make up a composition. Proportion is the method by which visual order is established, giving due weight to the compositional elements. For example, as Wölfflin (1964) points out: 'The Renaissance took delight in a system of greater and lesser parts, in which the small prepared one for the large by prefiguring the form of the whole'. Following the laws of proportion, some central idea, a visual element or group of related elements should dominate the whole composition. In urban design the 'dominant' may be the main town square around which the main civic buildings are arranged. Equally important for unity is the dominance of one decorative theme: the repetition of roof materials, pitch, skyline, ridge, verge and eaves details; the consistent use of floorscape materials and patterning; and the choice of street fittings of compatible form (Figure 1.2). The designer's task is to unify floor, walls and fittings in urban spaces which meet functional and symbolic requirements so that they are pleasing and attractive. The visual understanding of the city improves when the main structural elements are emphasized



Figure 1.2 Chipping
Campden

using ornament and decoration. It is argued here that visual pleasure is related to this understanding of city structure.

SCALE

Scale depends upon the comparison of one set of dimensions with another set. Urban design is concerned with human scale, that is, the relationship of buildings and urban space to the size of a human being. Man is therefore the measure used for the built environment. The visual qualities of urban space and its architectural envelope and the act of healing or making whole the city are both closely related to the correct scaling of the urban landscape. Decoration and ornament play an important part in creating human scale in an area.

Taking man as the measure of scale, then for scale to be determined man must be visible. The mathematics for the measurement of scale has its origins in the work of Maertens (1884). Maertens found that we cannot distinguish any object at a distance more than 3500 times its smallest dimension. The limitations set by optical geometry define the varieties of urban scale. The nasal bone, according to Maertens, is a critical feature for the recognition of the individual. It is possible to distinguish individuals at about 12 m (40 ft) recognizing facial expressions; at about 22.5 m (75 ft) a person can still be recognized but at about 35 m (115 ft) the face becomes featureless while at 135 metres (445 ft) body gestures only can still be discerned. Finally it is possible to see people and recognize them as such from up to about 1200 metres (4000 ft).