

Figure 1.6 Palazzo
Communale, Piazza del
Campo, Siena



Africa are imbued with heightened energy and the whirling-dervish dance transports participants to another plane. Rhythm in architecture has similar properties. It can be explained by reasoned analysis; but its stimulating and poetic effect transcends reflection. In the last resort rhythm in architecture and urban design is experiential.

Rhythm in architecture is the product of the grouping of elements; of emphasis, interval, accent and direction. It is the sense of movement achieved by the articulation of the members making up the composition. As Summerson (1963) explains: 'A

single column is just, well a point on a plan; or rather, a very small circle on a plan - it gives you the module of an order but nothing more. But two columns give you at once an inter-columnation, a rhythm, and there with the module, you have the germ of the whole building.'

CONTRAST

The triumph of unity over chaos, or the victory of order, is the condition of aesthetic success both in architecture and urban design. Good design, however, should avoid monotony and, therefore, it should have interest and accent. Some of the great pleasures in life derive from the contrasts found in nature. In architecture, much of the pleasure derives from similar contrasts. Entering the bright amphitheatre of the Piazza del Campo, Siena, from dark cavernous streets incised in the urban fabric is a stimulating urban experience; the contrast of horizontals and verticals in the Palazzo Communale confronts the visitor with further delight (Figure 1.6). If such contrasts were eliminated our lives would lose much intensity and vitality. Generally contrasts have to be kept within proportion to avoid perceptual overload. The correct balance between complexity and repose in architecture is the key to order. The same principle applies in the field of city decoration, as Smith (1987) points out 'Aesthetic success is conditional upon the victory of order, but there has to be sufficient complexity to make the victory worthwhile'.

Contrast in architecture, urban design and ornamentation is applied over an almost limitless field. There is contrast, of form and antiform, that is, of building and space, of street and square, soft and hard landscape, or colour and texture. In buildings there can be contrast in form, such as the sphere and the cube, the dome and the spire. In decorative details there is contrast of line or the contrast of objects in silhouette, contrast in direction, vertically and horizontally, or in colour and texture. Whatever the forms of contrast used, the main lines of the building or townscape should

produce a unified effect. A difficulty facing the designer lies in seeking the right degree of contrast. Taken to extremes such contrast can only produce discord. This occurs when the proportions of contrasting elements are so individually insistent that they compete rather than act as a foil to each other. The calculation of the right amount of contrast in harmonic composition for decoration and ornament as it is for any other aspect of design is a question of intuition and feeling. The rule of thumb, however, would seem to indicate the need for a clear dominant theme with contrasts of a compatible order. Extreme contrasts may produce disorder and lack of clarity.

CONCLUSION

The concepts discussed above have been used and can be used to analyse the aesthetic qualities of urban form. They are not, nor do they pretend to be, exact measures of quality. Some would argue that such measures are inappropriate. Nevertheless they provide a foundation for discussing the use of decoration and ornament in cities.

CLIMATIC BACKCLOTH FOR ORNAMENT AND DECORATION

The circumstances under which decoration is seen are important for its appreciation: indeed climatic conditions can affect the form of decoration. The clear bright skies of Greece may have stimulated the development of the crisply chiselled outlines of classical Greek architecture: the most subtle of profiles and the most complex mouldings can be seen and appreciated in the fine light (Figure 1.7). The building material, marble, was readily available for the perfect execution of such work. The stained glass windows of the Gothic Cathedral make the most of every shaft of precious sunlight infusing the building with colour and light, a contrast with the grey exteriors. The irregular and highly sculptural roofline of many medieval northern European cities



Figure 1.7 Temple of Athena Nike, Athens

makes a dramatic statement against grey or watery skies. A bold overstatement is necessary in such circumstances. Roofscapes comprising buildings with subtle outlines of classical Greek origin appear bland and have little visual impact when seen in the light of the long northern European winter. Climatic conditions do not on their own offer a sufficient explanation for decorative style and form in architecture. Climate, particularly lighting conditions is, however, one parameter for the study of decoration in the city.

PERCEPTION

Human beings attach meanings, values and objectives to their actions. We each have our own perceptual world developed within the boundaries of the social group to which we belong and with whose members certain aspects of the perceptual frame of reference is shared. The pensioner, the