



3.2

**Figure 3.2** Parthenon, Athens

**Figure 3.3** Internal corner of the Palazzo Medici – Riccardi, Florence



3.3

enclose space and the 'external corner' where two planes meet and present a three dimensional view of the building. The first type is most commonly found in the public place or piazza and the second will mark the junction of streets.

The importance of the corner as a node of pedestrian activity is often reflected in residential areas by the location there of corner shops and public houses. Until after the Second World War, the angled plot at street corners was considered choice terrain much sought after for private mansions, large luxury stores, panoramic apartment blocks, and prestige banks. These corner activities and the buildings which enclose them are often a counterpoint to less prestigious neighbouring buildings. This was frequently reflected in more elaborate ornamental work to mark the corner.

The art of turning the corner is an aspect of town design which frequently exercised the minds of builders in the generations prior to the so called 'Heroic Age' of the Modernists. This problem of turning the corner, in its most fundamental form, is expressed in the method used to resolve the junctions

between gable and flanking walls of the megaron type structure common in countries with a northern European climate. The solution to many problems of building design often have their origin in the Hellenic period. The Greeks of classical times resolved this particular problem by taking the entablature round all façades of the building and by returning, at an angle, part of the flanking cornice to enclose and edge the tympanum of the gable. The columns supporting the gable were returned round the flanking walls enclosing an external ambulatory or covered colonnaded walkway, the peristyle. All four walls of the typical temple were unified by the repetition of the column theme supporting a common entablature and supported on three steps. The corner of the building

is formed by a typical column with symmetrical base, shaft and capital (Figure 3.2). The early Renaissance architects also favoured a simple formula for turning the external corner relying upon a flat pilaster or rustically expressed quoin stones. More exuberant expressions of the corner are exhibited in baroque buildings where transition from plane to plane is prefigured in a ripple of pilaster upon pilaster. In Victorian and Edwardian Britain those architects taking their cue from medieval form gave expression to the corner using the tower or cluster of towers. The internal angle, while not possessing the same scope for expressive design, also presents design problems for the creative artist. The arcaded courtyard where arches meet at an internal corner can appear structurally or visually weak, or clumsy in the extreme (Figure 3.3).

So far corner design has been discussed at the scale of the single building. While for those practising urban design architectural analogy is important, nevertheless, for the purposes of this discussion, the building in its townscape setting is of greater relevance. In addition the townscape setting gives the corner an added dimension and scope for imaginative treatment. The street corner when given emphasis with decorative treatment becomes memorable in the mind of the viewer. It thus takes on added significance, performing the role of landmark. As such it is significant in strengthening the imageability of the city. A further function of the corner is its role in unifying two adjacent façades often acting as a vertical foil or contrasting element to the horizontality of the street scene.

### **THE CORNER TYPOLOGIES**

Post-modern theoretical developments in architecture and urban design have frequently sought inspiration from historical precedent. Often these lines of enquiry have led to the construction of typologies (Krier, 1979; Rossi, 1982). A type can be defined as a characteristic specimen or illustration of a class or

group of objects. The following typology of urban corners is one of physical types, a classification based on physical form rather than usage or function. This interest in the identification of spatial types and the construction of typologies has stemmed from the study of traditional urban forms as a reaction to Modernist approaches to urban form and design. The interest in typologies, however, is not a new concern. Zucker, for example, in his book *Town and Square* (1959) defines spatial archetypes for the analysis of urban squares. Zucker's typology is based on the subjective impression of spatial quality and is entirely independent of the specific function of that space.

The construction of a typology involves identifying common characteristics among the set of objects studied. In other words, for the purpose of this study, corners as they are used and appear in the townscape must be capable of arrangement in sub-groups. For the typology to be of use it should have the capacity both to analyse existing situations and to act as a design tool. The purpose of the present typology is to assist the urban designer with the task of decorating the city. For this purpose the individual categories identified are relatively distinctive and discrete while, it is hoped, they are not so general as to be meaningless. The aim of this typology is to be both comprehensive and complete without the use of a 'catch-all' category into which all odd or maverick corners defying definition are neatly swept. As with any typology it is difficult, if not impossible, to draw precise boundaries between archetypes, and since this study is based largely upon historical precedent, new and evolving forms of corner may not fit within its parameters.

There are two typologies of corners: one for street or 'external corners', the other for piazza or 'internal corners'. Figures 3.4 and 3.5 illustrate each typology in diagrammatic form. The street corner can be categorized as: the negative corner; the angular corner; the curved corner and the towered corner. The last three categories can be further sub-divided. The angular corner can take the form of