“Street Architecture”: Nineteenth-Century Urban Buildings and the British Architectural Profession

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of History of Art
University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

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"Street Architecture", a phrase used by British architectural writers from the 1820s, described stylish small-scale residential and commercial urban buildings that no longer adhered to urban vernacular norms. These buildings determined much of the architectural character of modern metropolises, and therefore street architecture was one of the most conspicuous aspects of nineteenth-century modernity. For a century prior to World War I the term found its way into most British monographs, essays, editorials and addresses on the subject of contemporary architecture.

Street architecture posed problems that elicited a variety of responses, yet patterns do emerge. The unregulated nature of nineteenth-century urban architecture created streetscapes comprised of racy individualistic buildings, many of which affronted architectural propriety. When irregularly composed streets were deemed a relief from the so-called monotony of Georgian streets, or a by-product of the "Battle of the Styles", their variety was Picturesque and therefore respectable. However, much of this complexity was also understood as mercantile
rivalry that made commercial buildings compete with one another in scale and ostentation. Writers who defended the dignity of the architectural profession objected to buildings that appealed to the public in the service of business interests.

The discipline of urban planning was founded early in the twentieth century, in large part because government seemed poised to determine the character of all future urban architecture. Anticipating this opportunity, British architects-turned-planners envisioned remaking London in the image of Paris. Those who adopted Beaux-arts ideals, and even planners committed to Picturesque principles of design in Garden Cities and Suburbs, interpreted Victorian architectural exuberance as exclusively pandering to crass commercialism, and demanded that streets be composed of modest, dignified buildings. Planners argued for new city architecture that did not cater to popular taste.

In the event, urban architecture remained undisciplined and “street architecture” disappeared from planners’ lexicon. But the history of the term exposes the contest between architects and the city that shaped planning theory in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century. It also illuminates the vitality of debate occasioned by the unprecedented growth of nineteenth-century metropolises, which professional interests ultimately obscured.
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Preface

“Ordinary” urban buildings were the subject of much debate among British architects in the nineteenth century, and this is not surprising. Attention was drawn naturally to the typical commercial and domestic buildings that in the aggregate contributed most to the unprecedented size of cities and their speed of growth. Significant changes in the nature of patronage, in the character of urban buildings and in streets of buildings also demanded comment and critique. Problems associated with urban buildings in general were also relevant to other significant issues of the time, including the “Battle of the Styles”, and the proper use of new building materials. Finally, perhaps the most telling indication of the new importance of urban buildings is that the British architectural press deemed it necessary to use a new term in discussions regarding typical modern buildings and streetscapes. “Street architecture” was coined and made current because of the development of average shops, commercial buildings and houses that shaped the extraordinary creature that is the nineteenth-century city. But given that street architecture was central to so many complex processes and circumstances, perhaps it is surprising that until now there has been no investigation of the meaning, role or significance of this term by historians of the period.

The present study attempts to correct this oversight. Douglas Richardson directed my attention to this uncharted region of architectural discourse and to him I owe the genesis of this dissertation.
I would also like to thank him for his forbearance as the work grew into its present shape. He made countless suggestions for its improvement, as did Robert Bowers, Francesca Scalzo and Maureen Wall. They also showed me the greatest kindness of all by developing an enthusiasm for the subject.
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Introduction

"Street architecture" seems to have appeared in print for the first time late in the Georgian period, in 1828. It occurs in the second volume of *The Public Buildings of London*, by John Britton and A.C. Pugin, to describe John Nash’s buildings in Regent’s Park and Regent Street, and the Adam brothers’ Fitzroy Square, Portland Square and The Adelphi. These were not public buildings but they were noteworthy, having been designed by important architects. However, other passages in *Public Buildings* clearly indicate that many new urban houses and shops could also rise in status on their merits alone, and could be conceived as “architecture” rather than mere buildings, because they no longer adhered to the norms of eighteenth-century urban vernacular construction.¹ From this time onward the term street architecture

¹ The first instance of the term “street architecture” that I have found occurs in John Britton and A.C. Pugin, *The Public Buildings of London*, vol. 2 (1828), p. 226. Although this appears to be the only use of the term by Britton and Pugin, the text frequently refers to buildings that would soon be described as street architecture by most architectural writers. The following passage from the introduction of this volume, p. xx, shows the authors arguing for interest in this “lesser” form of architecture: "The example set by the Commissioners of the Crown Lands, and the extensive operations of Mr. Nash in the Regent’s Street
appeared frequently in print, as many urban buildings acquired "architectural character" when designed in conformity with successive paradigms established by monumental building types. Specialized buildings—banks, small office buildings, and warehouses—that grew out of the standard urban building type were also described as street architecture and this contributed to the term's currency, especially as these buildings increased in number and scale. But by the middle of the century "street architecture" a term that originally denoted only buildings possessing architectural dignity and style, came to refer to all urban buildings regardless of their quality or use. This change in meaning corresponded to the increasing expectation that all buildings ought to aspire to the level of "architecture."

and Regent's Park, have given a new impulse to, and created a certain degree of popular taste for, this beautiful art: and what has been thus accomplished has not been without its influence on the efforts of private individuals. There was a time when such ranges of houses as the Adelphi Terrace, Portland Place, &c., were considered as forming a kind of epoch in Architecture; but it is not asserting too much, when we say that far more taste is now displayed in many of those modern improvements which some persons consider as comparatively unimportant. In the old streets, wherever houses have been pulled down, they have been succeeded by others of a more ornamental character; and even where no embellishment has been aimed at, the fronts exhibit at least better proportions and produce better effects. Many shop fronts too, may be pointed out, which although on too small a scale to be prominent features in a general view, and although the ornaments are sometimes too delicate for their situation, display a superior degree of architectural richness and finish." Further, on p. xxiv, they write: "The new club houses in St. James's Street...have contributed very much to adorn their respective situations, and to impart a strictly architectural character to our street buildings."
This change in attitude was in large measure due to the fact that in the Victorian era most architects designed small stylish buildings and some of these buildings were significant milestones in the history of nineteenth-century architecture, such as Charles Barry's Reform Club, Richard Norman Shaw's New Zealand Chambers, and J.J. Stevenson's Red House. Other important architects—including Charles Cockerell, G.G. Scott, Philip Webb, Robert Kerr, A.H. Mackmurdo, C.F.A. Voysey, C.R. Ashbee, C.R. Mackintosh—and many minor talents, also designed buildings that were described as street architecture by their contemporaries. These works were considered admirable because they proved that small-scale buildings, including commercial building types that rapidly developed out of traditional urban architecture, were part of the mainstream of architectural development. These successes fueled the currency of the term, as well as expectations associated with it. In the last two decades of the century, however, as imposing urban building types—such as apartment houses, hotels, and large office blocks—became strongly differentiated, they were usually described individually as examples of specific building types and only rarely as examples of street architecture. The fact that the term “street architecture” seldom appears in historical studies of the period clearly reflects the achievement of architects in subsuming traditional urban vernacular forms of architecture to new requirements while satisfying the ideals of architectural propriety and style.
For almost a century, extending through World War I, the topic of street architecture held considerable importance. The changing nature of urban buildings was of importance in a considerable number of articles and editorials in architectural periodicals—*The Architectural Magazine*, *The Builder*, *The Buildings News*, and *The Architectural Review*—from the 1830s to the end of World War I. It also played an important role in architectural monographs by A. W. N. Pugin, John Ruskin, G. G. Scott, James Fergusson, J. J. Stevenson and H. H. Statham. Even architects who wrote comparatively little discussed the topic extensively at meetings of the Royal Institute of British Architects, the Architectural Association and the Society of Arts. While particular buildings would be mentioned on occasion, street architecture usually referred to *typical* commercial and residential buildings in the aggregate. For the most part these buildings were worthy of consideration simply because they were so abundant. They were the buildings that created the modern city and therefore they were among the most conspicuous aspects of nineteenth-century modernity.

The sheer number of stylish small-scale residential and commercial buildings has been of central significance in all synoptic studies of nineteenth-century architecture. Kenneth Clark, H. S. Goodhart-Rendel, Niklaus Pevsner, and H. -R. Hitchcock have addressed the issue of the great quantity of Victorian building. John Summerson, in particular, has investigated many aspects of the ordinary building
world of the nineteenth century, such as suburban estate development. Among histories of nineteenth-century cities Donald Olsen's *Growth of Victorian London* is especially important because it gives considerable attention to typical urban buildings. In general, historians of nineteenth-century British architecture have given the buildings once described as street architecture their due.

Olsen's work is also important for his attention to the reception of these buildings in the architectural press. These ephemeral comments help to revivify the complexity of architectural discourse during the period because they contradict, as often as they complement, statements by writers such as Pugin and Ruskin that were meant to articulate enduring aesthetic values. Studies of the history of the architectural profession also illuminate the workings of disparate interests within the building world, as too do the standard texts that outline the beginnings of the urban planning profession. The examination of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century attitudes towards street architecture depends on and complements all these histories, as well as those that focus on the work of notable architects and architectural writers. However, the topic of street architecture, since it traverses varied areas of architectural history over the century preceding World War I, creates a lens that shows connections among these interests that were once probably very apparent, but have become less clear over time.
British writers held predictably complicated attitudes toward contemporary street architecture. Some embraced the values and ways of living that new urban buildings exemplified, but most observers expressed reservations concerning both the buildings and the society that produced them. But whether they approved or disapproved of what they saw, when Victorian architects wrote about street architecture the discussion revolved around two broad issues: the difficulties commercial architecture presented, and the ideal nature of urban landscapes. Both these areas of concern illuminate attitudes respecting the purview and interests of the architecture profession. The unregulated nature of urban architecture during the nineteenth century created chaotic streetscapes often comprised of buildings that challenged accepted notions of architectural dignity and style. Architects wanted to establish design principles that would allow order to be perceived in the disorder of streetscapes, and they wanted to make a clear distinction between buildings designed by architects and those designed by builders.

While the topic of street architecture often invoked professional biases and jealousies, on many occasions the dramatic quantitative changes in urban buildings and the cities they created provoked sensitive responses. John Ruskin, G. G. Scott and J. J. Stevenson are among the better-know architectural writers who attempted to define architectural principles appropriate to the scale of both individual buildings and the city as a whole. Many others also participated in the
discussion of street architecture. During the Victorian period this
discussion was more often involved with changing perceptions to fit
realities than with imposing ideal solutions on the unprecedented
changes in urban landscapes. For most of the century the topic shows
architects genuinely attempting to understand modern cities. The street
architecture that was built, the consensuses that were achieved, and the
voices of dissent within the profession, all show architects responding to
both the possibilities and the real limitations that prevailed during the
astonishing growth of British cities, especially London.

This changed in the first two decades of the twentieth century.
The tolerance that usually marked the discussion of the architectural
composition of streets was reduced when a narrow professionalism that
had been routinely directed at popular taste shifted and focused on
streetscapes. At this time the discipline of urban planning was founded,
and at its beginning it was committed to eradicating the architectural
chaos of nineteenth-century streets. This new professional resolve
entirely obscured an earlier more accommodating attitude towards urban
architecture and urban landscapes. It also brings the story of street
architecture to a close for the simple reason that the term does not find
its way into the lexicon of urban planners. The end of the currency of
the term, however, is just as important as its beginning. At the inception
of the profession urban planners felt confident that government would
invest them with control over all aspects of urban design, including the
design of ordinary buildings. Architects-turned-planners justified this demand because they attributed excess, exuberance, or inadequacies of design exclusively to the effects of popular taste and commercial necessity.

Urban planners expected that professional groups would ultimately determine the character of all urban architecture, but in place of serious debate concerning how cities should look, early discussion of urban planning concentrated on the institutional means by which comprehensive ideals could be imposed on cities. Even when the formal qualities of city plans were under discussion, the buildings that would create these cities were of secondary importance.

This reorientation of interests obscures the connection between the emergence of urban planning and nineteenth-century attitudes towards streetscapes. There are many unexpected continuities that extend through Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian criticism, as there are between this criticism and the ideals held by the champions of modernism. Long-standing criticism of both popular taste and Victorian commercial architecture would eventually provide a justification for many of modernism's so-called reforms, especially those that required restraint and discipline, and which diminished the quality of urban buildings in the twentieth century. The modernist urban planning tradition Jane Jacobs set out to attack in 1960 in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* had nineteenth-century roots. Much of the story of
street architecture helps to explain some of the biases that shaped the urban planning discipline in Britain, as well as in the United States, during the first half of the twentieth century.

Professionalism is, in fact, the thread that runs through the entire discussion of street architecture, but the buildings that composed the fabric of the city were of immediate interest. The evolution of explicitly debated issues has therefore determined the structure of this thesis. After the Regency (the period covered in chapter one), until about the beginning of the twentieth century, the problem of commercial architecture and the ideal nature of streetscapes were considered separate issues. These subjects are treated in parallel, and in chronological order, in chapters two to four. Chapter two concerns commercial buildings in the 1830s and 40s, when they were perceived as merely the expression of popular taste. The topic of commercial buildings is interwoven with debate about the ideal nature of urban landscapes in the second half of the nineteenth century. Chapter three traces the evolution of attitudes toward streetscapes in response to changing aesthetic ideals within the architectural profession. The topic of chapter four is response to commercial buildings erected in this period is, during which time urban streets, including residential streets, were perceived increasingly as the products of commercial forces. The relationship of street architecture to street plans is the subject of the fifth and final chapter. By the first decades of the twentieth century this subject brings
together attitudes towards popular taste, commercial architecture and ideal urban landscapes. The four chapters covering the period from the beginning of the Victorian period to World War I (chapters 2 to 5) show writers acknowledging conflicts among interested parties—patrons, architects, governments, and the public—responsible for the character of urban streetscapes. The complex interplay among these forces was already apparent during the Regency, and many of the attitudes voiced then would continue to inform the discussion of street architecture into the twentieth century. As we shall see in chapter one, however, observers during the Regency did not believe that varied interests necessarily created conflict, and they responded to the commercial and residential architecture built in London during their day with a pleasure rarely expressed by later writers.
Chapter 1

Late Georgian Urban Building and the Coining of the Term Street Architecture

The architectural world shared a community of interests during the Regency, and this permitted most early nineteenth-century observers to be more satisfied with the buildings of their own day than Victorian critics would be of their own productions. The urban building activity in London during the Regency was dominated by the development of Crown lands, and while these projects accommodated a wide variety of uses, and contended with awkward sites, the supervision of these works by John Nash gave each project a certain unity. The patronage of the Crown lent prestige even to the most modest of these buildings, which were no longer designed along traditional urban vernacular lines. Beyond the Crown lands, stylish buildings designed by architects of repute were also beginning to be common sights and contemporary observers were impressed by the fact that even shop fronts now contributed to the architectural quality of London. This change in the character of many urban commercial and residential buildings led to the coining of the term
street architecture, especially because the sheer quantity of these new buildings created entirely man-made landscapes.\(^1\) These new streetscapes, far from being "monotonous" as they usually were in eighteenth-century, were Picturesque, meaning they possessed agreeable variety and incident. The conditions that created the community of interests in the Regency, and the general belief that the quality of street architecture was assured, would not survive into the Victorian period. But the Picturesque did provide the Victorians with a method of perception that would permit observers to experience much more fractious architectural scenes in aesthetic terms.

From the Regency onward the Picturesque was increasingly evident in individual buildings, streetscapes and the city as a whole. The imprecision and elasticity of the Picturesque—irregularity, roughness, movement, variety and intricacy\(^2\)—allowed it to accommodate both the limitations and disparate interests that determined the character of nineteenth-century cities. It was indefinite enough to accommodate almost any style of architecture, and it allowed architects to perceive a kind of order in unplanned streets, making it possible for them as individuals responsible for the design of single buildings to contribute to the general character of urban landscapes. And while the Picturesque accommodated the piecemeal growth of cities, it was nevertheless a

\(^1\) See note 1 in the Introduction.

principle that would permit deliberately planned streets to steer clear of the Scylla of Georgian "monotony", while still avoiding the Charybdis of visual chaos. Indeed, the Picturesque was compelling because it could be used both as a very deliberate planning principle when planning was possible, and as a way of accommodating irregular urban development when planning was impossible. Moreover, the architecture of the Regency proved that the Picturesque suited all urban contexts.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century John Nash designed individual urban buildings for Regent's Park with conspicuous Picturesque qualities. Unlike Inigo Jones' "piazzas in Covent Garden"(1631-1635), the Adam brothers' Adelphi Terrace (1768) and Fitzroy Square (1790), or John Kay's Macklenburgh Square (1812)³—all in London—and the Circus and Royal Crescent at Bath by Wood the elder and younger, the buildings of Regent's Park are Picturesque because they possess greater variety of outline, marked intricacy of details and bolder projections and recession in plan than previous large-scale residential buildings that have architectural character. The buildings of Regent's Park are still symmetrical monuments, but as they were designed to complement the irregular landscape of the Park, they produced "scenes" in which the regular and the irregular were balanced.⁴


This type of composition had the sanction of Uvedale Price, Payne Knight and Nash's erstwhile partner Humphrey Repton who had recommended this marriage of regular architecture and irregular nature in the creation of Picturesque views. 5

The combination of the natural and the man-made would later be admired where irregular natural terrain contributed to the Picturesque quality of towns, but sensitivity to the relationship of buildings to their surroundings also allowed cities to be perceived as man-made landscapes. Therefore, a fine balance between regularity and irregularity could also be perceived in great metropolises in which natural features were of little significance. This perception depended on an awareness that the very scale of major nineteenth-century cities required that even extensive tracts of regular building formed only a fragment of the whole, which was by necessity irregular in toto. While architectural writers were

landscape occurs in Uvedale Price, An Essay on the Picturesque (London, 1794) pp. 46-48. In an extended note Price rejects Gilpin's assertion that Palladian, while pleasing, is not Picturesque, and rejects Gilpin's claim that "should we wish to give it Picturesque beauty we must, from a smooth building, turn it into a rough ruin." Claude, Poussin and Veronese introduced "smooth", "regular" and "finished" buildings into their pictures and rendered them Picturesque by the beauty of the scenery that surrounds them. But, Price adds, "a piece of Palladian architecture, however elegant, however well proportioned its parts, however well disposed and selected its ornaments, how perfect soever the symmetry of the whole, yet, in mere elevation, or placed (as it frequently is in reality) in a street with other buildings, or at the top of a lawn, naked and unaccompanied, is a formal object and excites only a cold admiration of the architect's ability."

For Nash's connection to Repton, see: John Summerson, The Life and Work of John Nash, Architect (London: George Allen, 1980), pp. 34-41. Nash and Repton had begun their partnership in 1796 with a commission to enlarge the house and improve the landscape of Corsham Court, Wiltshire. The partnership continued for four or five years with a number of country house commissions.
sensitive to “accidental” Picturesque compositions, the rebuilding of Regent Street under Nash’s supervision provided the first opportunity for them to evaluate the success of deliberately composed Picturesque streetscapes.

Regent Street, being urban rather than suburban, was conceived as a wholly architectural environment and Nash had intended that it conform on a very large scale to the tradition of formal regularity and unified composition. The original design for the street was in fact very directly associated with the severe formality of the Rue de Rivoli and it changed only when it became apparent that the disparate needs of the speculators and leaseholders for their houses, hotels and banks would never be adequately satisfied behind a single facade. The result is an ensemble of distinctly different buildings that appear to be informally or spontaneously related. Nash was aware of the achievement; describing the design of the north end of Regent Street, Nash wrote: “Individuality and variety of design and separation of the buildings by the intervention of trees may make this the most interesting part of the New Street and produce the same effect on the eye as the High Street in Oxford so generally admired.”


7 Summerson, *Nash*, p. 204 (n.18) quotes a letter from Nash of 7 September 1813 to the Crown Estate Commissioners.
This individuality and variety mark the beginning of the Picturesque aesthetic in urban environments and historians have considered this its overriding significance. Regent Street employs "the principles of Picturesque landscaping" to create "urban scenery" using an "architectural vocabulary [that] remained well within the accepted range of Romantic Classicism".\(^8\) This "amazingly successful blend of formality and Picturesque opportunism"\(^9\) is the first instance of a planned "urban Picturesque" similar to Oxford High Street which is created through a "precarious balance between neo-classical archaeology and Picturesque theory".\(^10\) In short, the composition is Picturesque and the individual buildings are classical.

Nash's contemporaries described his achievement in slightly different terms. Britton commends Nash's work in Regent Street because he "has produced a varied succession of architectural scenery, the aggregate effect of which is picturesque and imposing."\(^11\) Elmes, in *Metropolitan Improvements* (1829) peppers his description of Regent Street with the word Picturesque, which he uses to describe the reduction of long buildings into projections and recessions of contrasting


\(^10\) J. Mordaunt Crook, "Metropolitan Improvements: John Nash and the Picturesque", p. 96.
forms which themselves, and in their contribution to the composition of a street, produce noble effects and interesting vistas. Elmes describes the entire street from Pall Mall to Portland Place as "a great and useful undertaking; possessing as a whole a grand and commanding character, with more architectural features and variety than any large work that we have seen." Regent Street's (illustrations 1.1 and 1.2) "masses, great parts and divisions, are grand and effective; and its breaks and general outline are productive of an agreeable variety of light and shade."

In essence Nash's contemporaries saw Regent Street as both varied and imposing. There is no contradiction or disjunction between style and composition. Classical architecture readily permits variety when buildings are no longer perceived as individual monuments but rather as components of a large composition that reveals complex relationships under scrutiny. The blend of formal irregularity and classicism that creates this urban Picturesque was a necessary result of the practical requirements of the work on Regent Street. It is important to stress here that the scale of the project ordained the solution. The Picturesque is imposed by absolute size and this conditioned the perception of Nash,

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13 Ibid., p. 114.

14 Ibid., p. 115.
Elmes and Britton. The buildings create a man-made landscape, and the idea of landscape itself invokes the concept of the Picturesque.

Indeed this new way of perceiving architecture was used by both Britton and Elmes in their description of views of London in which the buildings that comprise the views had not been designed as deliberate compositions. This is most clearly expressed by Elmes in Metropolitan Improvements in his introduction to the description of the Bank of England:

Our best position to see this richly variegated, picturesque and beautiful front will be from Bank Buildings: from which spot the circular corner next Princes Street forms a striking foreground; the Royal Exchange on the right forms a good middle distance; the old church of St. Bartholomew a capital object, from its singular antique tower, for the distance; and the far-famed lucky lottery office of Richardson, Goodluck and Co., from its solid form, and true Italian proportions of its Doric entrance story (design of Sir Robert Taylor's), and which is now in strong shadow, for a powerful relief and contrast in the foreground. Thus have we in one architectural picture, compositions by three great masters in our art, Sir Christopher Wren, Sir Robert Taylor and Mr. Soane.\textsuperscript{15}

It was something of a commonplace to admire views of cities when the elements within the view created compositions that were literally "Picturesque", meaning exhibited properties found in paintings.\textsuperscript{16} As Elmes suggests here, the discovery of these striking and effective compositions was as much a source of pleasure as the compositions themselves. The exercise of perception that made Picturesque

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 128.

\textsuperscript{16} Hussey, The Picturesque, p. 1. quotes Jane Austen's satire of conventional Picturesque taste in Northanger Abbey (1818).
compositions out of varied and complex accidental elements preceded Nash's deliberate Picturesque planning, and this mode of vision affected the design of Regent Street and subsequent attitudes towards views down streets.

In his Thirteenth Discourse given on 11 December, 1786 Reynolds, drew a comparison between architecture and painting in the following much-quoted passage:

It may not be amiss for the Architect to take advantage *sometimes* of that to which I am sure the Painter ought always to have his eyes open — I mean the use of accidents: to follow when they lead, and to improve them, rather than always to trust to a regular plan. It often happens that additions have been made to a house, at various times, for use or pleasure. As such buildings depart from regularity, they now and then acquire something of scenery by this accident, which I should think might not unsuccessfully be adopted by an Architect, in an original plan, if it does not too much interfere with convenience. Variety and intricacy is a beauty and excellence in every other of the arts which address the imagination: why not in Architecture? The forms and turnings of the streets of London, and other old towns, are produced by accident, without any original plan or design; but they are not always the less pleasant to the walker or spectator, on that account. On the contrary, if the city had been built on the regular plan of Sir Christopher Wren, the effect might have been, as we know it is in some new parts of town, rather unpleasing: the uniformity might have produced weariness, and a slight degree of disgust.  

This passage has been described as the first time that the ideals of the urban Picturesque are articulated. While this is true, this observation should be qualified. First, it is important to note that it is nothing more than an extended aside from the main purpose of his discourse, which is

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the composition of paintings. Secondly, Reynolds’s “variety and intricacy” is merely contrasted with wearying regularity, which would be an aesthetic crime in any circumstance. Moreover, Reynolds is not entirely original in his approbation of the variety of cities. One need only look, for example, to the architecture in the background of Veronese’s paintings, and the designs of Serlio, Palladio and Scamozzi for theatre scenery to discover a similar enthusiasm for a profusion of varied architectural forms in cities. What is important is Reynolds’s authority as President of the Royal Academy. It permitted the most classicising of architects to consider variety and intricacy as integral to the design of towns, and gave unimpeachable authority for the appreciation of the pictorial possibilities of accidents and irregularity.

Even earlier than Reynolds, Abbé Laugier insisted that intricacy and variety were essential attributes of cities. He describes the ideal city as a “whole...divided into an infinite number of beautiful, entirely different details so that one hardly ever meets the same objects again, and, wandering from one end to the other, one comes in every quarter across something new, unique, startling, so that there is order and yet a sort of confusion, and everything is in alignment without being monotonous, and a multitude of regular parts brings about a certain impression of irregularity and disorder which suits great cities so well.”

But Laugier's enthusiasm for irregularity is in fact qualified by many of his subsequent statements concerning cities. This is by no means a paradox, but rather evidence of the ease with which regularity and irregularity can exist simultaneously in cities by virtue of their size alone.

As to the facades of houses, they need regularity and much variety. Long streets where all houses seem to be one single building, because one has observed a rigorous symmetrical scheme, are a thoroughly boring sight. Too much uniformity is the worst of all faults...To build a street well, uniformity is only needed for facades which correspond and run parallel. The same design should extend over a whole section which is not crossed by another street and must never be repeated in any similar section. The art of varying the design depends on the various forms given to the buildings, on the amount of ornaments applied and on the different way in which they are combined. With these three means each of which is almost inexhaustible one is able, even in the largest towns, never to repeat the same facade twice.19

Laugier's method of avoiding monotony seems overly deliberate because the amount of irregularity his planning strategy permits is related to the types of landscape he admires. It is not the untame nature of the English Picturesque, but the formal gardens of Le Notre in which “there is at one and the same time order and fantasy.”20

The Adam brothers articulated principles of variation in terms that are far more evocative, and yet assume that a similar regularity determines the general composition. In the following passage they are concerned with Vanbrugh's work in individual buildings, but the breadth

19 Ibid., p.131.
20 Ibid., p. 128.
of this vision and their reference to landscape have important implications for the ways that cities would be perceived.

Movement is meant to express the rise and fall, the advance and recess with other diversity of form, in the different parts of a building, so as to add greatly to the picturesqueness of the composition, for the rising and falling, advancing and receding, with the convexity and concavity and other forms of the great parts, have the same effect in architecture that hill and dale, foreground and distance, swelling and sinking, have in landscape; that is they serve to produce an agreeable and diversified contour that groups and contrasts like a picture, and creates a variety of light and shade which gives great spirit, beauty and effect to the composition.21

During the nineteenth century these comments by Reynolds, the Adams and Laugier would be almost endlessly recycled and occasionally developed in the discussion of views down streets. Britton and Elmes do not depart from these terms of approbation in their enthusiasm for the aesthetic qualities of Regent Street. They merely change the terms of approbation by describing "accidents", "variety", and "contrasts" as "Picturesque".

For Elmes the Picturesque is an easily acceptable concept because he is writing to accompany Shepherd’s views, and therefore especially concerned with the effectiveness of particular architectural scenes. Architects attempting to formulate a theory of urban architecture rather quickly grasped the fact that Picturesque variety entails a degree of

21 Hussey, The Picturesque, pp. 190-191. Adam is describing the qualities of Vanbrugh’s architecture in this passage. Although Adam admires these qualities in Vanbrugh, Adam admits that Vanbrugh unfortunately takes them to extremes and his buildings are finally "so crowded with barbarisms and absurdities, and so borne down by their preposterous weight, that none but the discerning can separate their merits from their defects."
individuality that threatens the notion of an organised urban vista. The Picturesque per se becomes important in architectural theory when it becomes apparent that it must be controlled, and this is evident as early as Soane's lectures to the Royal Academy.

Soane's lectures, given at the Royal Academy between 1809 and 1836, show the difficulties of trying to strike a balance between classical regularity and the Picturesque in cities. Soane contradicts himself frequently and often leaves the reader wondering just how comfortably Picturesque and classical ideals can co-exist. He seems to borrow freely from Reynolds, Laugier and Adam, and when they contradict each other he contradicts himself. Bolton has explained Soane's contradictions in his lectures as due to struggles Soane was having with theoretical material which he came to only late in his life, Soane being 53 years old in 1806 at the time he began his preparations for them. But it is equally true that Soane's diligent effort of researching and writing allowed the ideas of eighteenth-century writers to continue to inform the discussion of urban design through his lectures, just as this effort, as Summerson contends, affected his later architecture and "enriched his vocabulary of form and enhanced his appreciation of architects whose works were not necessarily in vogue". Whatever the causes, Soane's


23 Ibid. p. 6.

lectures present ideals and contradictions shared by his contemporaries and later writers on urban architecture.

In the following passage from Lecture X "Gardens and City Plans" he is clearly borrowing from Laugier and Reynolds:

It has been contended by the admirers of this system of letting large tracts of Land on Building Leases, that, whilst the old parts of London as well as most old "Towns, seem to have been produced more by accident, whim, or caprice than from any regard to individual convenience or grandeur of appearance: by this New System many of our Streets and Squares are formed with all possible attention to strict regularity. This may be true, then it must be remembered that by this very regularity we have exchanged the grand effects of Architecture for disgusting insipidity and tiresome monotony. The old Town of Edinburgh by the variety and breaks in the outlines of its buildings is more beautiful, and possibly not less convenient, than the New Town, with all its regularity and polish. Why should we not unite the variety of figure, the wild effects, the bold combinations of cultivated Art, with all the regularity displayed in the Ancient Architecture.²⁵

In the next lecture, "Decoration and Composition", Soane continues this theme when he addresses the "sameness and monotony" of the street fronts of houses in which "the general feeling is the same, the same insipidity and want of variety is apparent...both in outline and decoration". Soane tells students to avoid this by following the model of Vanburgh, because "boldness of fancy, unlimited variety, and discrimination of character mark all his productions." This is all very much like Adam, and so is his distaste with unlimited variety:

²⁵ John Soane, Lectures in Architecture, pp. 158-159.
Too great a Variety of Parts and Movement in the exteriors of buildings... is to be avoided as much as monotony. Variety may be carried to excess, by too many breaks and divisions... The general effect is weakened and the whole becomes confused instead of producing that Movement and Variety which creates the most pleasing sensations... A Composition, overcharged, altho' it may please the ignorant, will not fail to make the judicious grieve.26

Soane's discomfort with overcharged irregularity shows he believes unity takes precedence over variety. This is apparent in this same lecture when Soane describes the houses in Lincoln Inn Fields and Great Queen Street (illustrations 2.3 and 2.4) in entirely positive terms: "When one entire side of Great Queen Street was formed of Houses, like those shown in the Drawing before you, what a noble effect must have been produced. Italy might have boasted of such a Work."27 The Palladian regularity of the urban ensembles that create these noble effects clearly is antithetical to his approbation of the wild variety he defends when he compares architecture to gardens or when he extols the bold variety of Vanburgh.

But Soane's dislike of overly complex compositions is not entirely determined by a desire to maintain a fine balance between regularity and irregularity. His terms of condemnation and approbation are rather telling: only the "ignorant" can approve of excess, and only the "judicious" can fully appreciate a "noble effect". Perhaps this is true, but as an argument it is not particularly reasonable. The truth of the statements depends in large part on conventional associations among words like "ignorance", "excess", and "confusion" on the one hand, and between "nobility" and "judiciousness" on the other. The word groups merely reinforce one another's meaning and, further, they do not

26 Ibid., pp.174-176.
27 Ibid., p. 179.
describe architectural principles effectively. However, Soane, both as a serious student of architectural history and as an architect whose work frequently exhibited "primitivist" clarity, would naturally place knowledge and restraint above "overcharged" effects and naïveté.²⁸ It would seem difficult to reconcile this value system with an admiration for roughness, sudden variation and natural irregularity on which the Picturesque is based, but not impossible. In general, architectural writers rarely endorsed Picturesque freedoms absolutely. The formal irregularity of the Picturesque required discipline, and so too did the "character" of individual buildings in streetscapes.

Soane—cribbing from eighteenth-century French theory again, in this case Blondel and Boffrand²⁹—gives a general guide to prevailing ideals concerning the way in which "character" in architecture is expressed:

Architecture in the hands of men of Genius may be made to assume whatever Character is required of it. To attain this object, to produce this Variety it is essential that every building should be conformable to the uses it is intended for, and that it should express clearly its Destination and its Character, marked in the most decided and indisputable manner. The Cathedral and the Church; the Palace of the Sovereign, and the dignified Prelate; the Hotel of the Nobleman; the Hall of Justice; the Mansion of the Chief Magistrate; the House of the rich individual; the gay Theatre, and the gloomy Prison; nay even the Warehouse and the Shop, require a different style of Architecture in their external

²⁸ Summerson, Architecture in Britain, pp. 466-467.

appearance, and the same distinctive marks must be continued in the internal arrangements as well as in the decorations.\textsuperscript{30}

This description of character is fully consonant with the idea of association that Reynolds had articulated in his appreciation of the Picturesque qualities of old architecture that can “affect the imagination through an association of ideas.”\textsuperscript{31} This principle is also present in Archibald Alison’s \textit{Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste} (1790), and Uvedale Price’s \textit{Essays on the Picturesque} (1794) in which taste was described as dependent on individual experience and associations.\textsuperscript{32} Like intricacy and variety, these ideas were developed by Knight and Repton who advocated a mixed style for Picturesque effect in country houses.\textsuperscript{33}

This emphasis on “characteristicness” makes style secondary to the expression of the function and status of the building, and of its time and place. It does open the door to the acceptance of unbridled stylistic eclecticism, but not necessarily.\textsuperscript{34}

“Character” can also create a new kind of order. To return to Soane’s list, it should be noted that while he emphasizes variety and

\textsuperscript{30} Soane, \textit{Lectures}, p. 178.

\textsuperscript{31} Reynolds, \textit{Discourses}, p. 226.

\textsuperscript{32} Hussey, \textit{The Picturesque}, p.15 and pp. 217-218.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid. p. 209, simply that style is as important as character; for example, houses, regardless of style must look like houses.

different "styles" of architecture, the list itself is hierarchical. It begins with cathedrals and ends with shops and warehouses. The architectural character of the building should reflect not only its function, but also the social status of its users and use. For the discussion of street architecture it is important that shops and warehouses are included in this list, but it is equally important that they are at the bottom of the hierarchy. It is also typical of the ambivalence of architects toward these "lower" forms of architecture that this is Soane's only direct reference to them. When, for example, Soane encourages his listeners to entertain "moderate expectations", his sights reach down only to the level of "noble mansions" in Lecture VII. And while elsewhere he describes and illustrates Adam's British Coffee House at Charing Cross (illustration 1.5), he commends it as an example of a beautiful small building and not as a species of commercial architecture.35

Architectural writers besides Soane were also concerned with status. Britton shows his sympathy for architecture as an expression of social status when he describes as "pretentious" Nash's practice of representing individual houses as a single palace, which he compares unfavorably to Adam's Fitzroy Square.36 Elmes displays a similar respect for character in his high praise of new, more elaborate urban houses because each is now able to "exhibit the taste and wealth of the master of the mansion."37

37 Elmes, Metropolitan Improvements, p. 115.
This sensitivity to character and hierarchies is also expressed in Elmes’s reaction to the shopping area of Regent’s Street near Langham Place, Elmes writes: “The architecture of the shops is various, and sufficiently whimsical in places to please the demon of fashion; it can be changed as the fashion of the day, or the character of the goods to be displayed within them require: the fronts being supported on slender iron columns within them.”

Elmes is indulgent with this capriciousness because he associates it with fashion, whereas he notes and criticizes transgressions of architectural propriety in other building types. Although this distinction between serious and frivolous architecture does not worry Elmes much—he is intent on praising innovation and the appearance of material prosperity—his approval of fashionable frivolity in shops makes them virtually sub-architectural.

Picturesque associationism was certainly capable of justifying novel solutions to architectural problems, but it was equally capable of reinforcing conventions. To a cultivated mind, some associations are more valuable than others, and those that transgress architectural proprieties are not valuable at all. Nash, “the master pragmatist”, was willing to indulge the fancies of his clients, deliberately affronting architectural conventions. This is evident in his “pretensions” houses,

38 Ibid.


40 Crook, "Metropolitan Improvements", p. 96
his "whimsical" shops, but it is especially significant in the design of Park Village East and Park Village West, constructed between 1824 and 1828. Nash had intended to produce a Picturesque country village of cottages on the outskirts of London, similar to Blaise Hamlet that he designed in 1810. But Park Village East and West became something other than the Picturesque village Nash had intended. Elmes' illustration of Park Village East shows serial eclecticism, as houses in Tudor, Italian, Swiss and classical vernacular are ranged side by side toed up to the building line. Nash's decision to abandon a style suggestive of a country vernacular for sequential stylistic variations was dependent on a desire to attract the higher rents that "a rather higher class of occupier" could afford. It was a very astute decision as its success can be measured by the fact that it is quite possibly the model for following generations of ordinary suburban builders. The "invention" of serial eclecticism as the signifier of "suburbia" was clearly the most successful of Nash's planning innovations, if success is judged by continuity and number of its followers. But it was a popular success not countenanced by serious sorts of architects.

As Pevsner contends, Picturesque theory was responsible for stylistic eclecticism. Pevsner has attributed its beginnings to Repton's acceptance of an admixture of classical regularity and informality in

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42 Ibid., p. 128.

43 Summerson, Nash, p. 129
gardens, in Repton’s words, a “compromise between ancient and modern gardening, between art and nature”. This compromise between classical regularity and Picturesque informality lead directly, according to Pevsner, to “abandoning of the broad unity of the eighteenth century in favour of a technique of adding part to part”. This resulted, according to Pevsner, in “individualism, or, if you will, liberalism and relativism, or...historicism” seen in “the buildings in Oxford Street, or the Strand and Fleet Street, or in Princes Street, Edinburgh...in their unmitigated contrasts of style and proportion”. Although the Picturesque may be


45 Pevsner, "Humphrey Repton". Pevsner is specifically referring to Repton’s recommendations for the improvements of Hasells and Cobham, made in 1790 and published in 1803, which included a suggestion to preserve the formal seventeenth century walled garden beside the house as a transitional zone between the formal architecture of the house and the park.

Pevsner’s articles of the 1940s: "Heritage of Compromise" Architectural Review (February, 1942); "Genesis of the Picturesque" Architectural Review (November 1944); as well as "Humphry Repton," The Architectural Review (February 1948) are examined in Reyner Banham "Revenge of the Picturesque: English Architectural Polemics, 1943-1965" in Concerning Architecture, ed., John Summerson (London: Allen Lane, 1968) in which Banham argues that Pevsner was, with others, attempting to give "historical justification for the revival of the Picturesque" at a time when such an effort "infuriated" young architects in the thrall of European modernism, and hence the classical tradition in architecture. Banham suggests that the history of the next twenty years of writing about architecture could be described as battles waged in a war between the native British Picturesque and the European modernist camps. One of the reasons that Picturesque was anathema to the younger generation, according to Banham, is that it was in largely responsible for "the visual disorders of suburbia". See below, chapters three, four and five, for a somewhat earlier date for the beginning of this infatuation with the classical tradition in views down streets.
best summarized as a “technique of adding part to part”, regardless of
their admiration for Picturesque irregularly and contrast, few
architectural writers accepted complete stylistic diversity in contexts in
which architectural propriety was demanded.

While stylistic eclecticism quickly denoted middle-class suburbia
as merely an intermediate class between the pseudo-palaces of Regent’s
Park and the pseudo-cottages of rural architecture, its willful
individuality cut against the visual coherence of towns demanded by
architects. Indeed it is quite telling that Nash reserved this mode of
design to the least prestigious of the areas of Crown Land built under his
supervision. But the problem of serial eclecticism was more than simply
its rejection of formal principles of design. Because eclecticism was
merely popular, it reduced serious architectural principles to the level of
a commodity, or a fashion with no architectural pedigree. Because
buyers and speculative builders determined its success, it was rejected
by architects and the visual chaos it created was evidence of the
uneducated taste of builders and middle-class householders, but
criticism could also go beyond concern for formal proprieties to suggest
that popular taste was literally unrespectable. The suspicion of popular
taste and fashion may have been the source of the “indestructible”, but
absolutely baseless, rumour that these houses by Nash were inhabited

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by "kept" women. Whatever the source of this rumour—which indeed may have had nothing to do with the style of the buildings—eclecticism, popularity and excess would soon seem to be improprieties that architects themselves rarely attributed to their own actions.

These were issues that did not intrude much on Britton's and Elmes' encomiums or on Soane's theoretical preoccupations. Britton and Elmes were intent on perceiving London as a Picturesque work of art in which all buildings contributed to the scene. Soane shared their enthusiasm for Picturesque irregularity in imposing streetscapes, and all three accepted Picturesque associationism in so far as it was consistent with the status and use of buildings. None of them endorsed the extension of Picturesque principles beyond this. Although Britton, Elmes and Soane were to some degree aware of the fact that changes in patronage had architectural consequences, this did not much concern them. But soon Loudon, Pugin, and Ruskin would contend with the effect of patronage on street architecture, especially the effect of commercial requirements on shops. And while freedom and license were generally appreciated in the discussion of streetscapes, the individual buildings that composed the scene usually affronted cultured sensibilities and required reform.

47 Summerson, *Nash*, p. 204 (n.58)
Chapter 2

Urban buildings and popular taste: Loudon, Pugin and Ruskin in the 1830s and 40s

Architectural writers' interest in specific forms of street architecture was frequently directed at shop fronts, especially in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. From the 1830s onward shop fronts departed from vernacular norms, and although they became more ornamented and stylish, they were for the most part the products of the "lower orders" of the building world: builders, carpenters, and manufacturers of ready-made parts. Hence the general discussion within the architectural profession of prevailing characteristics of shop fronts concerned the state of popular taste. This interest in popular taste is certainly associated with a similar interest on the part of designers with manufactured goods, especially as everyone agreed that popular taste was in need of reform. But whereas the reformers of design in manufactured goods saw the solution to the problem of popular taste in strengthening the ties between art and industry, architectural theorists had few opportunities to affect the design of most shops directly. The discussion of shops therefore illuminates architects' attitudes toward taste in general building practice. Although Loudon, Pugin, and Ruskin approach popular taste as it is expressed in shop fronts in very different
ways, they all share the belief that ordinary buildings ought to follow the
precepts established by precedent and monumental architecture.

To twentieth-century eyes, images of shopping streets from the
1820s show an enviable coherence, a complex pattern of theme and
variation. George Scharf's drawings of the Strand (illustration 2.1) show
remarkable consistency in their design, which repeated certain
vernacular forms. Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century shop fronts
(illustration 2.2) usually have gently bowed windows composed of small
panes of glass, and slender frames around windows and doors. The door
is either on one side or it is in the middle, flanked by the windows.
Scharf's illustrations show that variety is derived essentially from
differences in the height of entablatures, in the shapes of bows, and in
the widths of the shops. Nash's shops on the west side of Regent's Street,
in the Royal Opera Arcade (illustration 2.3), and the shops designed by
Samuel Ware for the Burlington Arcade, are consistent with the ordinary
shops of the time. The arcade shop fronts are especially good examples of
the strength of the norms for shop-window design in the first part of the
century because the bows project very little, as if to conform to the
London Building Act of 1774 which restricted projections beyond the
building line to ten inches.\textsuperscript{1} As these were interior windows they would
not have been subject to this requirement.

Most shops were designed by the carpenter or builder following
familiar patterns that were consistent over a very long period of time.
Prior to 1785 no pattern books concerned solely with shop fronts were
published in Britain, although all-purpose pattern books sometimes

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{1} Alan Powers, \textit{Shop Fronts} (London: Chatto and Windus, 1989), p. 3.}
contained a few examples of the type among designs for various architectural features. 2 William Pain's *The Practical House Carpenter, or the Youth's Instructor* went through at least six editions as well as one American edition, and might be assumed to be a very successful example of the type. 3 The plates are devoted to more or less conventional subjects around the turn of the century: the orders, moldings, chimney pieces, stairs, trusses, doors, country houses, farmhouses, and town houses. The 1790 edition also includes a design for a green house, a hot house, a coach house, a church, a pulpit, six chimney pieces, two gateways to gentlemen's houses, five plates devoted to stairs, and six plates devoted to shop fronts. The first shop front is measured, indicating that the shop is 24 feet high and 13 feet wide, and the dimensions of the moldings are given as well. It is a double-bowed front with the entrance in the middle, carried out with very simple, classically inspired moldings. The simplicity is relieved by dainty leading patterns in the fanlight over the door, and this is in keeping with the general restraint of designs throughout this book. The other shop fronts are very similar: the proportions are consistent, all the shop windows project on a gently curving profile and in each case the entablature above the doorways recedes on a complementary concave profile. Their most conspicuous variations are in

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3 The copy I have examined is the third edition London, 1790.
the pattern of the fanlight or transom over the door, the ornaments of the orders, and the number of doors and windows. It is this last point that explains the reason for so many illustrations of shop fronts: they show the relative proportion of doors and windows in facades where there are one or two windows and one or more doors. The text accompanying the plates is very terse, merely suggesting that the cornices and moldings illustrated in other plates can be used in shop fronts. This clearly suggests what Scharf's drawings confirms: shop fronts were different from interior woodwork only in so far as the proportions of the elements were concerned, and there was very little in the detail to distinguish a shop from other examples of a carpenter's repertoire of forms.

Pattern books devoted exclusively to shops fronts began to appear in the 1790s. The most notable characteristic of these books—I. and J. Taylor, Designs for Shop Fronts (1792) (illustrations 2.4 and 2.5); J. Young, A Series of Designs for Shop Fronts (1828) (illustration 2.6); J. Faulkner, Designs for Shop Fronts (1831) (illustration 2.7); T. King, Shop Fronts and Exterior Doors (n.d. but likely 1830s) (illustration 2.8)—is that the designs are more stylistically varied than those illustrated by Pain.4 Classical styles still dominate the selection but there are also Egyptian, Adamesque, Soanesque, and Gothic examples. These patterns provided the shopkeeper with the opportunity to follow the architectural fashion of

4 Parts of these books and of N. Whittock, On the Construction and Decoration of the Shop Fronts of London (1840), are reproduced in David Dean, English Shop Fronts from Contemporary Source Books 1792-1840 (New York: Transatlantic Arts, 1970). These are the only books devoted to shop fronts published during the period that appear in the catalogue of the RIBA library.
the day, but all follow convention established in earlier books by representing only the shop and not the building above it.

The pattern books also reflect changes in the design and construction of shop fronts over this period. The bow window goes out of fashion and the size of the windowpanes increase up to the 1830s at which time large panes of plate glass are normal. Stall boards also become increasingly lower, and doors are occasionally recessed a few feet to permit glazing of the adjacent plane created by this recess. This new window functions even more effectively than the Georgian bow because it allows the merchandise on display to be seen from an oblique angle on the approach to the shop, as well as on the shop's doorstep. However, views down nineteenth-century streets and examples of extant shop fronts show (illustration 2.9) that elaborate, stylistically varied shop fronts are not entirely common, although occasionally the columnar styles advocated by these books can be found (illustrations 2.10). Columns were expensive and restricted the size of the windows and soon went out of fashion in shop fronts. In the plates devoted to shop fronts that were actually built, in Nathaniel Whittock's *On the Construction and Decoration of the Shop Fronts of London* (1840) (illustration 2.11), and in John Tallis' *London Street Views* (1840) (illustration 2.12), we can see that shop fronts comprised almost entirely of plate glass existed by this time.

The need for books of shop designs was decisively undermined by the appearance in the 1840s of ready-made iron, brass and wood moldings. This led to the manufacturer's catalogue replacing the pattern book as the source of new and fashionable designs. After this it seems that only one book dedicated exclusively to shops was published in
Britain, and it is perhaps one of the most interesting. Victor Delassaux and John Elliot's *Street Architecture: A Series of Shop Fronts and Façades Characteristic of and Adapted to Different Branches of Commerce* (1855) contains twenty-two plates of sometimes extraordinary designs, and true to the book's subtitle they are directly related to the merchandise on sale. The practical requirements of trade are cleverly connected with the advantageous display of various merchandise in designs that accommodate a wide variety of contingencies. Among the adaptations to the various trades are: a ironmonger's shop with an abundance of cast-iron ornaments (illustration 2.13); a "seedsman's shop" with a conservatory on the second floor; a "paperhanger's warehouse" that has an extremely high ground floor in order to provide ample space for storing stock on a mezzanine level; and the establishment for a "poulterer and bird-fancier" has cages built into its front. The proportions of the furniture shop are logically justified by the fact that "the display of furniture requires length rather than height", and the restricted frontage of the "laceman's shop" is explained as appropriate to streets where rents are expensive and lots are narrow.

In the design of more standard shops Delaussaux and Elliott have also taken into consideration the way in which goods are best displayed. The design of the jewellery shop is relatively reticent so that the external ornament will not compete with the goods on display: "dark polished wood slightly relieved by gilding sets jewellery shops off to the best advantage". There is also an effort to associate the goods for sale with an appropriate style. Hence a severe classic style is recommended for the "bookseller and publisher of scientific and high class literary works", over
which a bust Shakespeare presides, while the "poulterer's" establishment is "rustic", and a bull and a sheep adorn the butcher's shop.

These plates and their descriptions show Delassaux and Elliott refining symbolism of a traditional sort, using a combination of whimsy and common sense in effective merchandising ploys. The authors clearly believe this kind of inventiveness justifies the avowed intention of the book, which is an inducement to the "heads of the profession...to use their talent in designing shop fronts and street facades...[because] few classes of subjects afford such scope for inventive genius, and none where its efforts would be more appreciated or exercise so favourable an influence on the taste of the multitude". But despite the many inventive plates, the book taken as a whole indirectly explains why the "heads of the profession" would continue to show little enthusiasm for the building type.

Essentially, most shop fronts conform to a limited number of forms and this makes even Delassaux's and Elliott's inventiveness flag occasionally. This is most noticeable in the designs for the "hosier and outfitter" and the "boot and shoe-maker's", both in the Gothic style. Although the authors offer elaborate justifications for their designs—the design for the "hosier and outfitter" is explained by the fact that "the business for which this shop is intended requires but little external display; stockings, shirts, gloves and hats not beings sufficiently attractive to bear exhibiting in extenso;" and the "boot and shoe-maker's
warehouse...admits of division of frontage as boots, and shoes...are
generally exhibited in groups”—their similarity to one another and to the
general run of shops underlines the fact that many businesses do not
require specialized fronts, nor is their trade amenable to symbolic
expression. And while some trades do not demand much of the designer
others seem to actively inhibit invention. The authors admit this in their
description of the “wine and spirit warehouse”: “The arrangements of
such a place are so well known and so usually carried out in the same
way, that we have only decorated after our own fashion the plans
generally adopted.”

Delassaux’s and Elliott’s descriptions of their design, the designs
themselves, as well as plates in other pattern books, show that the
designer of a shop front usually must be content with varying details in a
relatively limited number of basic designs. This might be deemed
satisfactory, and justification for their claim that shop fronts provide
“scope for inventive genius”, but even these limited opportunities can be
curtailed in practice. The authors admit this in the final sentence of the
book: “we have not submitted details for all these designs, as the
drawings are on a scale large enough to shew clearly the effect intended,
and it seemed to us better to leave minor details to the judgment of those
who might be inclined to carry out our plans, and who could probably, in
order to reduce expence (sic), avail themselves in many cases, of such
casts and patterns of ornaments as they might find ready made to their
hands.” This explains why architects showed little positive interest in the building type, because shops were inextricably connected with merchandising and cheap manufactured goods, both of which “respectable” architects deemed degrading to the art of architecture.

Nathaniel Whittock proves the currency of this idea in his statement that:

If a grocer requires a front that will distinguish his shop from the draper or iron-monger, any person but an architect would direct his attention to producing a design something in the Chinese or Indian style of decoration; but the very mention of the terms would distress a regular architect—to him sugar and tea would lose their flavour if they were not sold beneath a Grecian entablature, copied with great minuteness from a temple at Athens.5

John Buonarotti Papworth proves Whittock wrong: Papworth did in fact provide “something in the Chinese style” for a tea warehouse of 1802 in Ludgate Hill (illustration 2.14). Papworth was several times vice-president of the Institute (later Royal Institute) of British Architects. Among other works in an extensive practice, he designed twenty or so shop fronts as well as the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly (1819) and one of the first “gin palaces” in Holborn Hill (1829-32).6 These facts are important not merely because they make Whittock’s overstatement obvious, but because this kind of assertion was perpetrated in positive terms by the architectural profession itself.

Shop fronts were considered the most blatant form of popular architecture, and it was in the interests of the profession to keep up the

5 David Dean, English Shop Fronts, unpaginated introduction.

appearance of being aloof from popular taste. The manner in which serious architectural writers approached the question of popular taste in their discussion of shop fronts evolved over time, but in the 1830s and 40s, Loudon, Pugin, Ruskin and Weale’s *Quarterly Papers* showed that they believed the design of shop fronts was a symptom of the present cultural condition and therefore their attitudes towards shop fronts perfectly reflects their attitudes towards the culture that produced them.

Although Loudon was to have considerable influence on nineteenth-century architecture, he was a landscape gardener who was much inspired at the beginning of his career by Uvedale Price’s *Essay on the Picturesque*. Educated in Edinburgh, he arrived in London in 1803, and was soon employed as a landscape designer by several members of the nobility and the gentry. In 1804 he began to write and produced numerous publications concerning various aspects of gardening, perhaps the most significant of which are the *Gardener’s Magazine* (which began publication in 1826), and *Arboretum et Fruticetum Brittanicaum, or the Trees and Shrubs of Britain* (1838).

His interest in gardening led to an impressive range of complementary publications, among which are the *Magazine of Natural History* (founded in 1828), and the *Architectural Magazine* (1834-1838). Both these and the *Gardener’s Magazine* have some claim to being the


8 Gloag, *Mr. Loudon’s England*, pp. 179-181, for a full list of Loudon’s publications.
first journals of their kind. His interest in architecture dates from 1806 with the publication of *A Treatise on Forming, improving and managing Country Residences. An Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture and Furniture* (first published in 1833), *The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion* of 1838 and the five volumes of the *Architectural Magazine* became the most consulted sources of design for domestic architecture in the nineteenth century.\(^9\) While his architectural publications may be considered entirely separate from his books and magazines on gardening and his discussion of rural and suburban architecture separate from his references to urban or street architecture, they are all parts of an entirely consistent set of convictions that determines his treatment of these various subjects.\(^10\) In all these areas his Benthamite convictions are apparent, especially because of their educational intent and the assumption, apparent throughout his writings, that all areas of human activity are capable of perfectibility.\(^11\) He wanted everyone to participate in the professions, useful sciences and arts, and this is more generally Benthamite inasmuch as this desire is implicitly concerned with the greatest good for the greatest number. Moreover, he attempted to fulfill this intention in his emphasis on the


\(^10\) See note 7 above. Howard Leathlean, "Loudon's *Architectural Magazine* and the Houses of Parliament Competition" *Victorian Periodicals Review* (Fall 1993): 145-153, the most recent work on Loudon, concerns the *Architectural Magazine* only.

more commonplace aspects of the subjects: he is concerned with small gardens rather than large private parks, and in architecture he shows a predilection for minor private works rather than monumental public architecture.\(^{12}\)

This is not to suggest that Loudon's publications were marginal in any way, or were perceived as the work of a crank. *The Suburban Gardener, The Encyclopaedia* and *The Architectural Magazine* were popular and critical successes among architects and their middle-class patrons. Emphasis on progress, on the lesser forms of architecture, and a wish to develop a broad public knowledge of the aesthetics of architecture were all common at the time. Loudon's books on architecture are generally consistent with the awareness of the expansion of architectural patronage after Waterloo (voiced by Britton and Elmes).\(^{13}\)

The *Architectural Magazine* even received an enthusiastic puff in the preface to the second edition of *The Public Buildings of London* (1838), in a preface written by Leeds (who was a frequent contributor to the magazine).

Many of Loudon's gardening and architectural publications can be described as combinations of primers and pattern books directed at people with relatively limited means and with very little prior familiarity with the subject. The *Encyclopaedia* and the *Suburban Gardener* contain

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\(^{13}\) see chapter 1
texts and illustrations that would allow an assiduous reader to follow many of his plans with limited professional assistance. But these are more than pattern books because they attempt to describe the principles that govern these arts, and Loudon is especially concerned with reconciling aesthetics, science, and new or improved technologies. And even though the *Architectural Magazine* has been recognized as the beginning of the professional architectural press, it was meant to address a very broad audience. It was specifically directed at the inquisitive amateur or beginner, "ladies", architectural students, building tradesmen and shopkeepers. This remarkably and delightfully disparate group reflects the breadth of Loudon's objectives: "ladies" are included probably on the principle of Benthamite feminism. Architectural students will be induced "to read, write and think as well as to see and draw". Carpenters and other tradesmen will become "architects in point of knowledge and taste". Shopkeepers will acquire a taste for architecture, which will encourage them to have their shops designed with "dignity"


16 *Architectural Magazine*, 1 (1834), Preface.

17 Ibid., 2 (1835), Preface.
“originality” and “elegance”, and hence “street architecture... will soon constitute a principal part of [architects’] employment”. ¹⁸

Not only would a much wider knowledge of the art and science of architecture improve the comfort and taste of the general public, it would also improve architecture as an expressive art. Loudon’s most confident expression of the potential for this improvement occurs in the preface to the *Encyclopaedia* in which he compares the advancement of those areas of building science “open and amenable to the judgment of mankind generally...such as relate to comfort and convenience...[to] the department of taste in building [which] is little in advance of what it was two thousand years ago”. Architectural taste is stultified due to the exclusivity and ignorance of architects “adhering rigidly to rules (made perhaps in a former age and consequently adapted to a less advanced state of civilisation), instead of testing those precedents and rules by fundamental principles and adapting the latter to the state of society for the time being...[D]esign and taste, or utility and convenience, like everything else to man are progressive, and change with the changing conditions of society.”

This theme is developed in Loudon’s essay in the *Architectural Magazine*, “On Unity of System in Architecture”, in the conclusion of which he makes the following rather remarkable statement:

“But modern architects and builders can do nothing without precedent; nothing without the five classical orders, or the five or six styles of Gothic architecture. Their minds are so imbued with these, that they can invent nothing that does not belong by precedent either to the one style or the other. It is for the rising

¹⁸ Ibid., 1 (1834), p. 91.
generation of architects to free themselves from such trammels; and to weigh the knowledge left to us by our ancestors in the balance of reason."\textsuperscript{19}

However much Loudon might be personally opposed to hidebound adherence to historical precedent, he does admit that conventional associations help express a building's purpose and character.\textsuperscript{20} The expression of purpose is often patently obvious; for example, houses are immediately distinguishable from barns because entrances to human habitations are accessible by stairs.\textsuperscript{21} But this and even more refined expressions of purpose—for example the use of large windows for large rooms consistent with a large house—are not really immutable; they are rather qualities "we have been accustomed to associate with that use or purpose".\textsuperscript{22} Poetic and associational factors commend the revival of Elizabethan style in architecture because "its extensive use in the mansions of this country at a time when some of the largest were built

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 2 (1835), p. 99.

\textsuperscript{20} George L. Hersey, \textit{High Victorian Gothic: A Study in Associationism} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972) describes Loudon's concern that architecture express "fitness for the end in view" in a number of loose functional associations as part of a general nineteenth-century tendency to conceive of architecture as a "informational appliance".

\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Encyclopaedia}, p.1112

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid. See also Hersey, \textit{High Victorian Gothic}, passim, for the influence of Loudon's associational theory throughout the Victorian period. Hersey is concerned mainly with Loudon's influence on ecclesiastical architecture, and specifically the expression of the function or the mere existence of different spaces within an architectural shell that contributed to the complex masses of High Victorian Gothic church architecture.
has come to be considered as peculiarly appropriate to country residences. But the meaning of architectural forms can also change over time, and under changed circumstances, as when picturesque massing is employed in middle-class domestic architecture: “Turrets and projections of every kind, viewed with reference to use, convey the idea of commodiousness and convenience; it being supposed that their object in modern houses is to supply closets and cabinets and other minor apartments.”

Loudon is well aware that historical styles are deemed necessary, and moreover individual predilections, taste or fashion often control such choices. He therefore provides his readers with examples of all styles that might be reasonably employed. Of course it was this that made these books notorious for their style mongering. But his provision of a variety of styles is really not the result of lack of conviction. It is rather a sanguine acceptance of people as they normally behave. This is exactly like his attempt to persuade people to design their gardens according to the reasonable principles he carefully articulates and his willingness to provide plans for gardens that his readers may want despite his instruction. There is no right or wrong in questions of taste or judgment; there is only better or worse. Loudon’s task is therefore to provide

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24 Loudon, *Encyclopaedia*, p. 1114.
gardeners and householders with practical advice so that they may exercise their taste intelligently and derive satisfaction from their decisions.

Loudon’s acceptance of individualism determined his attitudes towards street architecture in the *Architectural Magazine*, as can be seen clearly in his response to a reader’s letter. The writer “R” begins his letter wondering whether street houses should be treated “singly as in Oxford Street or collectively, in elevations embracing several fronts as in Regent Street”25. Later in the letter “R” answers his own question in favour of the latter in his criticism of Oxford Street: “we see such a variety of tastes displayed in the erection of the houses” “such different heights and widths of buildings; such unequal heights and widths of openings; and such a variety of inconsistent ornaments” with “such masses of inharmonious, heterogeneous combinations that each building forms no part of a whole with adjoining structures”.26 He suggests that individual districts ought to be under the control of a single architect so that a certain degree of harmony may be imposed on the street fronts. The writer here seems to be implying that it would be well to institutionalize Nash’s role in the development of the crown estates. Loudon’s endnote vehemently opposes R’s opinion without referring to


26 Ibid., p. 114.
Nash; rather, Loudon refers to the much easier target of Edinburgh's New Town, which possesses "one of the tamest congregations of buildings in Europe" almost "as dull as Berlin" as the consequence of centralized architectural control.27 Loudon insists that whereas government control can insure the "general effect and beauty in cities" every planned street suffers in comparison to those in which "every individual exercises his own taste; and we should wish, if possible, not to see two elevations alike in any one street."28 This may pass merely as a statement of picturesque principles; but Edinburgh's New Town—with design mandated in areas like Carlton Hill—is an easy target for the charge of "monotony". Regent's Street in London is not. Loudon's deliberate decision to consider only the dullest results of architectural control is meant to imply that picturesque qualities can be assured only when individuals are permitted unrestrained individual expression. In the following years Loudon published articles by others that recommend broad unity of style in the design of streets, but with enough variety to ward off monotony and to create picturesque irregularity.29

Many of the contributors to the *Architectural Magazine* refer to street architecture in order to criticize lapses of architectural propriety in

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27 Ibid., p. 116.

28 Ibid., p. 117.
individual houses, shops and taverns. Thus, “Amicus” describes windows that extend over almost the entire frontage of shops as “monstrous productions” because the glass denies the appearance of structural security that ought to be implied.  

30 “Cynicus” complains of “gin-temple builders... subject only to the purse or whims of their employers who have erected order upon order in most admirable disorder...lavishly bestowing plate glass and gilding”.  

31 More even-tempered criticism of these building types usually concerns more minor faults of architectural propriety: pilasters positioned above openings in walls; flimsy-looking piers; architraves that curve in; entablatures that have no visible means of support, and columns used purely as ornaments.  

32 When Loudon chooses to respond to these criticisms, he seems like a remarkably patient schoolmaster defending the efforts of novices in their Latin and Greek, and calmly reassuring critics that these faults will be corrected over time. In response to one diatribe against incompetence, he


32 “Gin Temples,” 3 (1836), p. 94.

33 “Street Architecture,” 2 (1835), p. 524.


35 George Dymond, “Improved Shop Front” 1 (1834), p. 382.
explains to “ladies” in particular the best ways of learning their lessons in the correct forms of the architectural orders.

Contributors to the Architectural Magazine could occasionally match Loudon’s pleasure in any display of external ornament in ordinary buildings.36 W.H. Leeds is typical in his approval of elaborate internal and external fittings and ornament because they also show “elegance and taste”.37

Loudon’s rebuttal to the abuse heaped on gin palaces by “Cynicus” is concerned with other issues:

We are friendly to the gin temples...because we look upon them as the first dawning of a more enriched and varied taste in street architecture.... As to the incorrectness of the architectural taste of these elevations, we think the injury it is likely to do much less, in the infancy of this kind of improvement, than the good which the buildings themselves will effect by setting the example of increased architectural embellishment. Let other tradesmen begin to decorate the fronts of their houses; and when this fashion becomes general there will be a demand for a more refined taste, which will not fail to be supplied and displayed. We question much whether the ultimate arrival at good taste in this way may not establish it on a surer foundation than if the architects of street had begun at once by correct and elegant designs. It is not by being led blindfold into that which is excellent, that excellence is established; but by passing through error, and undergoing correction; and finally learning from experience what excellence really is and, of course, appreciating it accordingly.38


37 Ibid., p. 295.

Three years later, in 1837, Loudon once again went to the defense of gin palaces, but concerned himself somewhat less in the potential they have for the improvement of public taste, and more for their current design. Although they often "exhibit very inferior specimens of design...they ought not to be despised; and however common it may be for architects to laugh at the splendour of gin temples, yet it cannot be denied...that to them the architects and architecture of the metropolis are considerably indebted".39

Loudon's sanguine acceptance of stylistic eclecticism and even ineptitude is linked to his faith in progress and education. He could compromise aesthetic ideals for the moment because they were part of a social condition that was in the process of inevitable improvement. With his faith in the future he could accept the reality of his time. He could argue for architecture as a popular form of art that could accommodate the desire for individuality and expression of any group willing to make the effort. Although Loudon accepted the fact that inherited architectural norms were deemed "best", his deeply held political convictions required him to acknowledge that patrons often had good reason not to follow them. He could defend eclecticism in the suburbs and in the city, and even debased architectural forms, because he accepted as valid the real function of architecture in the ordinary person's life. Loudon's assessment of the cultural conditions of his day led him to attempt relatively modest reforms that had real chance of success.

Loudon was not interested in streetscapes because, it would seem, he understood that the appreciation of a composed urban vista depends

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on a rather abnormal mode of vision. Few people notice more than what is in front of them, and the ordinary business of urban life often precludes the disinterested aesthetic gaze down streets. He also understood that in the suburbs stylistic diversity satisfied the desire for individuality, of imagining one's own house as a castle and its small garden extending to the horizon. This fiction of independence is nothing less than the simple humanity to which Dickens gave form in Mr. Wemmick's moat and drawbridge in *Great Expectations*. Loudon's tolerance also permitted him to accept as necessary the stylistic diversity of willfully individualistic buildings that increasingly were constructed in city streets.

Loudon's views on architecture and the culture that produced it could have no better foil than Pugin's writings. Pugin's nostalgia for a static and clearly defined social order contributed to his demand that all types of street architecture follow thoroughly consistent formal principles, yet his insistence that buildings unequivocally convey the social status of their use and users caused him to be as concerned with associationism as Loudon. Pugin also shared Loudon's lack of interest in streetscapes, and he too believed that popular taste ought to be taken seriously.

Pugin's *Contrasts* was published during the existence of the *Architectural Magazine* and received an extensive review there. The anonymous reviewer gave a long précis of the book and criticised it only concerning the implications of Pugin's ideas for the design of ordinary buildings. The criticism takes place on two fronts, the aesthetic and the practical. Allowing Pugin's premise that architecture is a reflection of religious spirit and liturgical practice, the reviewer turns Pugin's
argument on itself. In the first place the reviewer agrees with Pugin that contemporary buildings are not as splendid and costly as the palaces and churches erected before the Reformation, but their relative simplicity is a indication of the progress of society, not its degeneration as Pugin deems it. He chooses to read Pugin's frequent references to the "mutilations", "degradations" and destruction of medieval architecture, and the "meagre", "miserable", and "paltry" constructions since the Reformation, as evidence of the benign, if not laudable, architectural quality of simplicity, reflecting the increasing simplicity of religious ritual. The reviewer then states that this is only one aspect of the general enlightenment of society that will eventually result in property "becoming comparatively equalised." In such a society "splendour of court" will be "unnecessary."

Though gorgeous buildings will thus pass away, it will not follow that beautiful architecture will cease to exist; on the contrary, it will not be exhibited merely here and there, as in former, and in great measure the present, times, but it will be universal in every dwelling-house from the cottage upwards, in every street and in all public buildings... Further a higher degree of science and taste may be displayed in a modern dwelling-house, taking the interior, as well as the exterior, into account, and including the furniture, and the architecture, and also the mode of warming, ventilating and lighting, than any cathedral, Gothic or Grecian, that ever existed.

His emphasis on the necessary combination of engineering and taste allows him to complete his review expressing the expectation that architecture will improve, not as a result of religious reform (which is how Pugin concludes Contrasts), but with the reform of education, when the "taste of the whole public will be highly educated."40
Pugin's text in *Contrasts* is concerned almost exclusively with ecclesiastic architecture but the "contrasts" of his plates show inns, fountains, house fronts and towns. One of the most curious aspects of *Contrasts* is the separate content of the text and illustrations, but the reader is left in no confusion that the ordinary architecture of the streets and their furnishings are as important and as damning an indication of the state of society as its public and ecclesiastical architecture. Although the religious premise of Pugin's argument and his evaluation of the architecture of his day are fundamentally opposed to previous writers, Pugin shows he agrees with other critics of the day in his interest in ordinary street architecture. And whereas his plates show meagre utilitarian modern constructions opposed to intricate ornamental Gothic productions, "The Temple of Taste and Architectural Repository" propels his argument in a somewhat different direction. (illustration 2.15) This illustration is by no means meagre, and whereas it indirectly dams a culture that could produce such a monstrosity, the critique is aimed directly at the architectural profession. The acerbic signs advertising the services of the architectural trade repeatedly condemn its commercialism and convictionless expediency. Again and again he accuses modern architects of ignorance and of catering to their clients' absurd eclectic whims: “Designing taught in six lessons: Gothic, severe Greek and the Mixed Styles”, “A Moorish Fish Market” “Gothic verandas, Tudor railings, Norman Gothic Garden Seats”. And all these ridiculous creations are doubly damned because they are cheap: the signs proclaim ready-made chimneys, balustrades, cornices in cast iron or “compo”, at reduced

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40 "Remarks on London Street Houses and Shop Fronts,” 4 (1837), pp. 141-143.
prices or moderate rates. The amusing polemics against easy and cheap architecture places him squarely in opposition to Loudon and his circle, and this position is more fully elaborated in his following books.

In *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* modern buildings are sometimes attacked for being "paltry" (as they were in *Contrasts*), but most of the buildings and objects he criticises in *True Principles* are overly elaborate. Their tastelessness is not so much evidence of the absence of a cultivated sensibility thoroughly familiar with a complex conventional language of forms as it is evidence of dishonesty. Pugin's two essential rules—"that there should be no features about a building which are not necessary for convenience, construction and propriety; and that all ornament should consist of enrichment of the essential construction of the building"—are really injunctions against lying, which is the cardinal sin of modern architecture. 41 The falsehoods include a "linen-draper's shop that apes to be something after the palace of the Caesars; the mock stone columns are fixed over a front of plate glass to exhibit the astonishing bargains, while low ticketed goods are hung out over the trophies of war. But this is not all; every paltry town has a cigar divan, with something stuck out to look Turkish, and not infrequently a back parlour travestied into a vile burlesque of eastern architecture."42 (See illustration 2.16) These sorts of absurdities and falsehoods are everywhere apparent, and the "venerable garb" of England has altered as "every good old gabled inn is turned into


42 Ibid., p. 66.
an ugly hotel with a stuccoed portico, a vulgar coffee-room lined with staring paper, imitation scagliola columns, composition glass frames, an obsequious cheat of a waiter and twenty per cent added to the bill on the score of the modern and elegant arrangements.43

Watkin has thoroughly examined Pugin’s moral argument and Pugin’s belief that an “obsequious cheat of a waiter” complements his surroundings and could not inhabit a more honest building is part of this morality.44 Indeed, all artifices and tricks “are showy and worldly expedients, adapted only for those who live by splendid deception, such as theatricals, mountebanks, quacks and the like.”45 The equation of architecture with morality is clear enough in these passages, and it allows him not only to condemn the appearance of these buildings but the function of the buildings themselves. It seems especially telling that these criticisms occur in True Principles in his explanation of the principle of architectural propriety, which Pugin defines as “the external and internal appearance of an edifice [which] should be illustrative of, and in accordance with, the purposes for which it is destined.”46 By this standard alone showy buildings are absolutely appropriate to the trade in fashionable merchandise, allusions to Turkey would be appropriate to tobacconists, and elaborate fittings to expensive restaurants. Loudon would probably have made these points on the basis of his own definition

43 Ibid., p. 65.


45 Pugin, True Principles, p. 55.

46 Ibid., p. 50
of character, but Loudon was friendly to these building types while Pugin was in principle against them.

Pugin attacks the taste of his time throughout *True Principles* by caricaturing modern shops, furniture, draperies, wallpaper, and fireplace grates as well as the monumental architecture of modern colleges, churches and mansions. Pugin’s polemics often depend on implied comparisons between cast-iron shoe-scrapers and medieval reliquary cases, or linen drapers’ shops and cathedrals. These unfair comparisons and extravagant condemnations are extremely amusing, but they are also a bit bizarre. It seems very strange that the tawdry, petty and absurd objects of everyday life play such an important role in a treatise that purports to be a serious exposition of aesthetic principles. Pugin’s call for the grand unity of design depends on the vilification of objects and building types which, regardless of the way they look, are themselves disgusting to him.

Pugin’s belief that ordinary objects and the significant transformation of the ordinary buildings of the city were symptoms of something more worrying than the rapid increase in material prosperity or the degree of skill of designers (as Loudon would have it) has an interesting parallel in the work of Charles Dickens. Dickens who is much more aware of the customs of people than he is interested in things, nevertheless begins his essay on “Gin Shops”, in *Sketches by Boz, Illustrative of Every-day Life and Every-day People* with the following:

*It is a remarkable circumstance, that different trades appear to partake of the disease to which elephants and dogs are especially liable, and to run stark, staring, raving mad, periodically....Six or eight years ago, the epidemic began to display itself among the linen-drapers and haberdashers. The primary symptoms were an*
inordinate love of plate-glass, and a passion for gas lights and gilding. The disease gradually spread and at last attained a fearful height. Quiet, dusty old shops in different parts of town, were pulled down; spacious premises with stuccoed fronts and gold letters, were erected instead; floors were covered with Turkey carpets, roofs supported by massive pillars; doors were knocked into windows; a dozen squares of glass into one; one shopman into a dozen....The disease abated. It died away. A year or two of comparative tranquility ensued. Suddenly it burst forth amongst the chemists....Then the hosiers were infected, and began to pull down their shop fronts with frantic recklessness. The mania again died down, and the public began to congratulate themselves on its entire disappearance, when it burst forth with tenfold violence among the publicans, and keepers of "wine vaults". From that moment it has spread with unprecedented rapidity, exhibiting a concatenation of all the previous symptoms; onward it has rushed into every part of town, knocking down all the old public-houses, and depositing splendid mansions, stone balustrades, rosewood fittings, immense lamps, and illuminated clocks at the corner of every street.47

This turns out to be nothing more than a delightful comic hook that precedes the serious business of the essay. Dickens is concerned with exposing the tragedy of drunkenness, and the only real connection between this description and the serious intent of the essay is the figure of contagion from an unknown source. For Dickens, of course, there really is a simple cause and cure for what really needs to be remedied—drunkenness—but he plays on the complacent helplessness of his audience to set the stage for his explanation of what these are. And the source is neither the splendour of gin palaces, nor the gullibility or stupidity or moral weakness of drunks, it is rather deep in the social fabric, in poverty. Or as Dickens explains it:

47 Charles Dickens, _Sketches by Boz, Illustrative of Every-day Life and Every-day People_ (London: Mandarin, 1991), “Gin-shops".
Gin-drinking is a great vice in England, but wretchedness and dirt are a greater; and until you improve the homes of the poor, or persuade a half-famished wretch not to seek relief in the temporary oblivion of his own misery, with the pittance which, divided among his family, would furnish a morsel of bread for each, gin-shops will increase in number and splendour. If Temperance Societies would suggest an antidote against hunger, filth and foul air, or could establish dispensaries for the gratuitous distribution of bottles of Lethe-water, gin palaces would be numbered among the things that were.48

Pugin’s description of shops as symptoms of chaos, uncertainty, moral decay or a headlong rush into decadence seems almost to play into Dickens’ critique of a confusion between the causes and the symptoms of the disease. It seems as if Pugin became aware of this problem in the Apology which provides architectural solutions to architectural problems. Its criticism is constructive, even to the extent of including examples of the “correct” application of Gothic forms to street architecture (illustration 2.17). These designs are meant to “have a peculiar expression illustrative of our manners and habits...[T]he smaller detached house which the present state of society has generated should possess a peculiar character: they are only objectionable when made to appear diminutive representations of larger structures.”49

The exact meaning of this text and the specific qualities of the design need some examination. Compared to the “Emporium of Fashion” illustrated in True Principles (illustration 2.16) Pugin’s design for “Edwards Grocer and Tea Dealer” expresses the facts of its construction. The substantial arches on the ground floor framing the shop windows are fully consistent with the pattern of fenestration on the floors above, as

48 Ibid., p. 220.

too are the materials. This contrasts with "The Emporium of Fashion", which has its entire ground floor encased in plate glass panels and its upper floors decked out in pilasters, pedimented windows, balustrades and urns. Indeed, the most significant difference between these two illustrations is in the amount of decoration. The approved design is very chaste and quiet. Of course the trade in groceries and tea is inherently modest, at least in comparison with whatever is sold in an "Emporium of Fashion".

The simplicity and restraint of the grocery shop is quite contrary to his description of the effect of the adoption of Gothic to the design of the new Royal Exchange. For this building he imagines turrets, a bell tower, gilded vanes, and the expression of the history of the City and its commercial institutions in "arms, badges, images and appropriate detail." These sorts of details could also be used in villas and mansions; clearly some of them would also be appropriate for the facades of at least some shops, even if the only criteria for their employment were the age and dignity of the trade. But clearly ornament should express a building's position within a social hierarchy and therefore the advertisement appropriate to a higher social position is not appropriate to a commercial building. Pugin does not elaborate this point directly, but he makes a similar point in his discussion of "sepulchral memorials." The hierarchical arrangement of this section concludes with a description of monuments appropriate to "humbler classes" for whom "a cross, with the instruments of their trades or crafts, with marks and devices, would

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50 Ibid., p. 19.

51 Ibid., p. 38.
be sufficient and appropriate". While it might be argued that here Pugin is quite reasonably concerned with the burden of cost, the same argument does not hold as well in his design of the shop front. Surely here the addition of elaborate moldings and devices would constitute a relatively small part of the cost of the building as a whole.

Pugin's attitudes towards the elaboration of street architecture were rebutted by others besides Loudon. One, at least, of John Weale's *Quarterly Papers on Architecture* was published in response to Pugin. The *Quarterly Papers*, by a number of authors, are for the most part archaeological and concerned with church architecture, but in the essay "On the Present Condition and Prospects of Architecture in England", the anonymous writer responds to Pugin's attacks on ordinary urban architecture in a way that combines Loudon's optimism for its future and his pride in the increasing quality of street architecture. The writer can gently mock the hankering after variety that produced such a variety of styles: "Tobacconists built smoking divans in the Turkish Style—conservatories illustrated the forms of the Alhambra—and the metropolis shortly exhibited such a museum of heterogeneous display in the article of shop fronts, that the trades of every country and every age might now find, in one city, a home for all." He sees this as a necessary transitional phase, merely accompanying the increasing knowledge of architecture through the ages and throughout the globe. The author is confident that although "no catholic principle of national architecture is

52 Ibid., p. 36.

yet established, a very general feeling shall have become universal, the requited all-governing principle will doubtless begin to show itself."54 For the present it really seems to be remarkable and sufficient that:

Our metropolis may be taken as a sample at large of what is being done in other towns in relative degree. Ranges of new street architecture in the city and elsewhere, show as great an improvement on the style of Nash, as did Regent Street on the no-style of the thoroughfares it supplanted. We behold shops, radiant with examples of fanciful variety, attesting the increased demand for the architect, the decorative painter and carver; palatial Club-houses, making the abode of sovereignty contemptible in comparison, Fire and Life Offices looking down with infinite assurance upon the Bank of England; porticoes rivalling those of the Acropolis and that of the Pantheon; monumental columns, abominable as monuments, but still valuable as architectural symptoms; Gothic towers and spires rising to challenge the steeplings of Wren; and, lastly, the new Houses of Parliament to challenge all the world.55

His pleasure here is as much with the evidence of material prosperity that street architecture displays as it is with the architectural quality of the buildings. He is very much like Loudon in this respect, except that perhaps he is much more confident that the improvement in general architectural taste is an established thing. He is of course writing after the construction of Barry's Reform Club and Cockerell's Sun Fire Building (to which he refers specifically elsewhere in his text). These buildings received almost universal approbation among architects both for their aesthetic qualities and for the fact that they gave monumental expression to building types that had only recently grown out of the standard urban vernacular house type.

54 Ibid., p. 10.
55 Ibid., p. 10.
In the decades to come these purpose-built commercial buildings—offices, warehouses, hotels and banks—were frequently illustrated in the architectural press under the rubric of “street architecture”, and for the most part, architects had these sorts of buildings in mind when they described streetscapes and the aesthetic characteristics of cities. As they became increasingly significant components of streetscapes, both in number and size, they were perceived as contributing to the architectural improvement of the city as a group, regardless of the quality of individual buildings. These buildings tended to be faulted only when they possessed ground-floor shops with large expanses of plate glass because it was generally agreed that this deprived the buildings of the appearance of support. Around the turn of the century attitudes towards these buildings changed considerably in some circles, but for several decades architectural writers responded to them with both enthusiasm for the prosperity and architectural improvement of the city they signified, and distaste for the structural dishonesty on the ground floors. For the remainder of the century these attitudes toward purpose-built commercial buildings would appear to be a synthesis of concerns expressed by Loudon and Pugin, and in the Quarterly Papers.

However, shop fronts—especially when they were considered independently of the buildings that housed them—were subject to almost universal disparagement. In some ways, of course, this was merely because shop fronts provided architects with opportunities to indulge in expressions of distaste for shams and overly elaborate decoration. So, too, did other forms of street architecture that in general received gentler criticism. The particular problem shop fronts presented to the architectural profession is presaged in Ruskin’s Seven Lamps:
Many the pretty beading and graceful bracket there is in wood or stucco above our grocers' and cheesemongers' and hosiers' shops: how is it that the tradesmen cannot understand that custom is to be had only by selling good tea and cheese and cloth?...How pleasurable it would be to have the power of going through the streets of London, pulling down those brackets and friezes and large names, restoring to the tradesmen the capital they had spent in architecture, and putting them on honest and equal terms, each with his name in black letters over his door...It is curious, and it says little for our national probity on the one hand, or prudence on the other, to see the whole system of our street decoration based on the idea that people must be baited to a shop as moths are to a candle.\textsuperscript{56}

Ruskin's desire to see all the decoration removed from these buildings means that they ought not to aspire to the status of architecture, because architecture, according to Ruskin himself in \textit{The Seven Lamps}, depends on the addition of "unnecessary" features to buildings. This passage is therefore a rather unusual advocacy of austerity that runs counter to much of Ruskin's attitudes towards buildings, even of the most humble sort. Yet it is an important point that Ruskin further defends with an argument based on leisure. Ruskin believes that decoration is only proper in places where the owner is at leisure to appreciate it, which cannot be done at a place of business. To Ruskin this justifies the decorated shop fronts of the middle ages because their owners lived above them; conversely he condemns any elaboration of shops in his own time because shopkeepers increasingly lived in the suburbs and did business in the city. As novel as this second argument is, it is suspect merely because it is a determination by Ruskin

of other people's places of contentment. Moreover, it essentially serves as an introduction to his denunciation of railroad stations, "temples of discomfort", where "miserable" travelers can find no pleasure in decorations of any kind. Ruskin, of course, simply hated railroads and railroad stations which is the critical bias that propels his peace and comfort argument.  

Pugin's and Ruskin's condemnation of the elaboration of building types whose use dictated that they be either relatively unadorned or simply "left to do [their] work" would show up in the work of later writers who were in general less puritanical and less consistent. Criticism of shops was almost always strenuous, especially as shops that catered to the less than well-to-do became imposing and stylish. Until well into the twentieth century, shops provided architects with frequent opportunities to rail against structural dishonesty, and the use of elaborate decoration as a means of catching the public's attention. Shops were reviled as evidence of the egregious state of popular taste, which was doubly condemned because it was wedded to commercial expediency. Few architects would commit themselves in print to a belief like Loudon's that shops gave evidence of improving popular taste.

This outright condemnation of shops fed the ambitions of the profession, since architects rarely admitted to engaging in their design. This fiction allowed them to defend the principles of architectural

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58 Ruskin, *Seven Lamps*, 176.
propriety and to distance themselves and their works from the corrupting influence of trade. For the most part architects tended to neglect the fact that the imposing commercial buildings they designed could be subject to the same criticisms that were directed at shops. And by the same token, it was rarely admitted that most commercial buildings were some form of advertisement for the businesses housed in them.

The effect of popular taste and commercial expediency could be elided or stressed depending on architects' perception of the good of the profession, both with respect to their discussion of individual building types and in their attitudes towards the aesthetic characteristics of cities. For most of the century the discussion of street architecture in the aggregate was approached as a purely professional issue in which the influence of patronage was generally discounted, because the important issues were the promotion and reconciliation of different styles of architecture. The problems of patronage were central to the discussion of shops in order to distinguish serious architecture from frivolous display. Only at the beginning of the twentieth century did architects draw together the different issues that comprised these discussions. At this point architects started to demand that all buildings express their status and use because the architectural profession believed it was in a position to impose control over all street architecture.
Chapter 3
The “Battle of the Styles” and Victorian Streetscapes

Most new urban buildings in the second half of the nineteenth century conformed to the styles of the day, sometimes with admirable effect. But much street architecture still could be faulted for continuing to defy accepted notions of architectural propriety. While problems posed by individual buildings and certain building types were important to many architectural writers, the principles that should govern the composition of streetscapes were directly concerned with very broad issues debated in architectural circles. Many streets of buildings, especially in speculative housing estates, were composed of identical houses or slight variations on a single design.¹ While regularity persisted in much domestic street architecture, commercial streets—consisting of haphazard collections of individualistic, stylistically diverse buildings—posed an entirely new and quite opposite problem. These twin spectres of dull uniformity and stylistic chaos were of special significance to the antagonists in “The Battle of the Styles”. John Ruskin, G. G. Scott, James Fergusson and J. J. Stevenson were concerned with proving that

the style each thought best was not only flexible enough to used in any building type, it was also capable of creating both harmonious and varied cities. Despite disagreements over stylistic norms, all accepted picturesque formal values in the composition of streetscapes: they believed that ideal urban vistas would depend on a balance between regularity and irregularity, between consistency and variation.

The architectural press, in particular the *Builder*, also addressed these issues. It promoted picturesque irregularity and contrast because these principles seemed capable of reconciling competing points of view in the hotly contested issue of style. The *Builder* frequently attempted to formulate principles of composition amenable to both the most enthusiastic supporters of varied architectural scenes and the adherents to more restrained architectural forms. Though eclecticism was sometimes admired in occasional articles, this was simply grudging acknowledgement of the delight such vistas provoked in comparison to the “dreary and dull” regularity of older urban areas.²

² J. Mordaunt Crook, *The Dilemma of Style* (London: John Murray, 1987), argues that the Picturesque led to stylistic eclecticism but that a pure hankering for stylistic variety really only occurs in the most marginal circumstances, and that A. W. Pugin’s rationalism essentially superceded it in the 1830s. The stylistic eclecticism evident in the later part of the century is in fact hardly pure, and it is countenanced by serious architectural theorists really only because it might conceivably lead to a synthesis that would resolve the “dilemma of style”. Crook quotes a number of Victorian writers (pp. 161-192) who reject blatant eclecticism. While Crook is concerned with style as it is manifested in individual buildings he makes it clear that stylistic eclecticism was rarely welcomed in any circumstances. Crook should be compared to Donald J. Olsen, *The Growth of Victorian London* (London: Batsford, 1976) who examines London buildings in general and comments on London made by Victorian writers. Olsen (pp. 60-68) emphasises the quest for individuality, freedom and variety in the rejection by architects of the formal values of
Although the picturesque was an extremely useful concept during the period of stylistic competition, its eventual abandonment cannot be attributed entirely to a greater degree of consensus among architects at the end of the century. The piecemeal rebuilding of London throughout most of the Victorian period seemed to have made London nothing better than a collection of "large villages". The rejection of the picturesque was due in large part to the desire to remake London as an "Imperial Capital", a city in which classical regularity would symbolically express order and power. Architects forgot that the picturesque had, in fact, produced grand and imposing cityscapes during the Regency. They did so because in the interim picturesque theory had evolved to cope with the irregular development of London. The picturesque suited the particular problems presented by Victorian street architecture, and because the picturesque and street architecture were identified with one another, their respectability in architectural circles was intertwined. When architects

Georgian London; he ties these values to Victorian social values, especially individual enterprise. His argument is based on scattered references to the city in the architectural periodical press that describe the effects of the new buildings. While there was a certain enthusiasm for stylistic variety he seems to over-emphasize the extent to which most architects accepted the visual consequences of uncontrolled individualism throughout the Victorian period. The idea that stylistic eclecticism follows from laissez-faire economics is pursued by Malcom Andrews "The Metropolitan Picturesque", in: The Politics of the Picturesque, eds. Stephan Copley and Peter Garside (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 282-298. Andrews advances Olsen's argument and further claims that since "the Picturesque was founded on the aesthetics of poverty, neglect and decay" (p. 288) it created a rather ambivalent attitude towards urban slums and dilapidated buildings in general. His essay is concerned essentially with the beginnings of the architectural conservation movement rather than Victorian architecture.
no longer had patience with the limitations on their scope of influence, which nineteenth-century street architecture made so evident, they abandoned the picturesque aesthetic.

John Ruskin’s influence on individual buildings has been examined frequently, and for the most part "Ruskinian" buildings (including those that were described as street architecture), follow his primary dictum that “ornament is the principle part of architecture”, meaning they were relatively expensive. There are, however, significant passages in his work that concern the formal characteristics applicable to all forms of buildings and to streetscapes alike, and these ideals seem to follow from his familiarity with the paintings of medieval towns by Samuel Prout (illustration 3.1). Prout’s work helped Ruskin link picturesque ideals that had been articulated by previous writers on architecture to a much more “pictorial” picturesque. Ruskin’s drawings of streetscapes (illustrations 3.2 and 3.3), as much as his studies of individual buildings, show a strong affinity for the perception of the city as a picturesque work of art. Many show that he was concerned much less with architectural forms as previous architects described them, than with the compositional effects that buildings could share with landscapes and paintings. From his earliest essays in Loudon’s Architectural Magazine to the evocation of northern landscapes in The Stones of Venice (1851-53), Ruskin was as capable of the distant view of architecture as he was of minute descriptions of a building’s smallest details, and he was sensitive to the co-ordination of all ornament to both near and remote

views of buildings. His word pictures evoke the city in toto, or all architecture generally, in praise of colour, mass and shadow in which discordant notes would be abjured as they would in any painting. While all such concerns are inherent in previous picturesque descriptions of buildings and cities — which may have contributed to Ruskin's influence among architects — Ruskin's pictorial and poetic precepts expanded the vocabulary of picturesque architectural possibilities that could be adapted to all classes of architecture.

Characteristic of the exclusivity of Ruskin's vision is the breadth of his concept of the picturesque. From The Seven Lamps of Architecture (1849) onward, Ruskin blurs the distinction between the picturesque and the sublime, describing both as having "angular and broken lines, vigorous oppositions of light and shadow, and grave, deep, or boldly contrasted colour". The picturesque differs from the sublime only in as much as it is a "Parasitical Sublimity", a quality that he defines with a certain amount of precision in the third volume of The Stones of Venice (1853) as

sublimity belonging to the external or accidental characters of a thing, not to the thing itself.... For instance, when a highland cottage roof is covered with fragments of shale instead of slates it becomes picturesque, because the irregularity and rude fractures of the rocks, and their grey and gloomy colour, give to it something of the savageness, and much of the general aspect, of the slope of the mountain side.... The mountain itself would have been grand, which is much more than picturesque; but the cottage cannot be grand as such, and the parasitical grandeur which it may possess by accidental qualities is the character for which men have long agreed to use the inaccurate word "Picturesque".5

In other words, the picturesque calls to mind other objects that would be described as sublime. This, of course, is a form of associationism, but it depends on the perception of abstract formal similarities rather than on the recognition of motifs. Indeed, it depends on a way of looking, or an act of the imagination, rather than on deciphering conventional signs.\(^6\)

Of course, what is fascinating (and infuriating), about Ruskin is the power of his imagination, which makes it possible for him to transform any perception. John Unrau has examined Ruskin’s definition of “ornament”, for instance, and he notes that Ruskin allows it to mean different things in different contexts. Unrau argues that according to Ruskin, successful ornament is always successful both at close range where the details are perfectly legible, and at a distance where it produces a general effect by creating a complex play of light and shadows. Ornament can be considered as the sublime on a small scale or, as Ruskin puts it in *Modern Painters*:

> Greatness can only be rightly estimated when minuteness is justly reverenced. Greatness is the aggregation of minuteness; nor can

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\(^5\) Ibid., vol. 11, pp. 159-160.

\(^6\) George L. Hersey, *High Victorian Gothic: A Study in Associationism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1972), pp. 23-26, examines Ruskin’s essays written for Loudon’s *Architectural Magazine*, which shows Ruskin’s familiarity with more conventional forms of associationism. Hersey notes that even at this time Ruskin was expanding the terms of associationism in his reading of motifs.
its sublimity be felt truthfully by any mind unaccustomed to the affectionate watching of what is least.  

There are no simple oppositions here, nor in his definition of the picturesque. The great and the small, the man-made and the natural, are not different in kind since each contains its opposite within itself.

This over-stepping of the normal definitions of words and violation of traditional conceptual categories create complexities that had significance for the evolving discussion of street architecture. By subsuming normally separate concerns within a somewhat hostile concept — as the picturesque and ornament are within the sublime — Ruskin changes the nature of the concept, making it protean, promiscuous and fecund. This happens to the sublime in “The Lamp of Power”, the third of the Seven Lamps, where it becomes associated with symmetry and asymmetry, with scale, monumentality, rock faces, landscapes, ashlar and rusticated masonry, colour, light and shadow, small decorative details, and finally with “the trouble and wrath of life[,]...its sorrow and its mystery”.  

His examples range widely — across the Alps, the choir of Beauvais, the buildings of the Acropolis, the Palazzo Vecchio of Florence, the Doge’s Palace in Venice, Rouen Cathedral — including not only Romanesque and Gothic, but also Egyptian and Greek among other styles of architecture. Contemporary

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British street architecture finds its place in this discussion. In fact Ruskin ends “The Lamp of Power” in a triumphant denunciation of ordinary buildings, thereby lending a degree of significance to buildings that a generation earlier would not have been considered "architecture" at all.

Ruskin's attitude towards architectural composition demands that all forms of building and all building types conform to the same pictorial principles. Individual details and whole cities participate equally in a conception of architecture that is always very close to landscape. Thus the "broad, dark and simple" roofs that protect Continental belfries create "four or five grand masses of shadow", which are great imposing forms that contrast with the vertical slats of English belfries, that Ruskin finds "uninteresting in their precise carpentry". On a much larger scale street architecture exemplifies the invidious qualities of all contemporary English buildings:

How beneath the mark of attack, and the level of contempt, that which is common with us! What a strange sense of formalised deformity, of shrivelled precision, of starved accuracy, of minute misanthropy have we, as we leave even the rude streets of Picardy for the market towns of Kent! Until that street architecture of ours is bettered, until we give it some size and boldness, until we give our windows recess, and our walls, thickness, I know not how we can blame our architects for their feebleness in more important work; their eyes are inured to narrowness and slightness: can we expect them at a word to conceive and deal with breadth and solidity? They ought not to live in our cities; there is in their

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8 Ruskin, Works, vol. 8, pp. 116-117.
miserable walls that which bricks up to death men's imaginations as surely as ever perished forsworn nun.9

From his emphasis here on the picturesque quality of massiveness and boldness,10 Ruskin turns to other formal characteristics of streetscapes in the third volume of The Stones of Venice (1853):

As each city reached a certain point in civilisation, its streets became decorated with the same magnificence, varied only in style according to the materials at hand, and the temper of the people. And I am not aware of any town of wealth and importance in the Middle Ages, in which some proof does not exist that, at its period of greatest energy and prosperity, its streets were inwrought by rich sculpture, and even (though in this, as before noticed, Venice always stood supreme) glowing with colour and with gold. Now, therefore, let the reader — forming for himself as vivid and real a conception as he is able, either of a group of Venetian palaces in the fourteenth century, or, if he likes better, of one of the more fantastic but even richer street scenes of Rouen, Antwerp, Cologne, or Nuremberg, and keeping his gorgeous image before him — go out into any thoroughfare representative, in a general and characteristic way, of the feeling for domestic architecture in modern times: let him for instance, if he is in London, walk once up and down Harley Street, or Baker Street, or Gower Street.... Renaissance architecture is the school which has conducted men's inventive and constructive faculties from the Grand Canal to Gower Street; from the marble shaft, and the lancet arch, and the wreathed leafage, and the glowing and melting harmony of gold and azure, to the square cavity in the brick wall.11

9 Ibid., p. 136.


11 Ruskin, Works, vol. 11, p. 3
Here Ruskin is following the picturesque/monotonous distinction made earlier by several writers on architecture, except that he makes classical architecture the villain, which allows him to ignore all Georgian building schemes that had attempted to break out of the monotony of “Gower Street”. Ruskin’s examples of picturesque richness are still medieval towns, and his examples of monotonous baseness are the same ones that had been criticised for at least a generation. The general structure of his argument does not differ much from Reynolds’, for example, but Ruskin’s imagery here (as in “The Lamp of Power”) suggests certain specific characteristics that practising architects could adopt. Clearly, Ruskin’s emphasis on colour and ornament had immediate impact. Further, the very abundance of his examples, the sheer excess of his language, had effect. While Ruskin was never reconciled to nineteenth-century building practices, the inclusiveness of his imagery

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13 See Brooks, *John Ruskin*, pp. 62-74, for an analysis of Ruskin’s writing style, and Brook’s suggestion the “multitudinous of the carving and the richness of Ruskin’s response to it are both mirrored in the structure of his sentences.” (p. 65)
provided writers with a point of view that permitted them to appreciate and promote streetscapes of extreme visual complexity.

George Gilbert Scott's *Remarks on Secular and Domestic Architecture* (1857) clearly attempts to advance Ruskin's evocative imagery in a workmanlike examination of the ways in which specific motifs can be applied to buildings in order to produce man-made landscapes of variety and complexity. There is, of course, a tremendous degree of self-interest at work in Scott's discussion of urban architecture as his "secularization" of Gothic was meant to defend his first design for the Foreign Office.14 But despite Scott's motivation, and despite the validity of charges of hypocrisy concerning Scott's subsequent behaviour in the Foreign Office competition, *Remarks* shows Scott was sincerely concerned with the ambitious project of encouraging the development of "modern" architecture based on Gothic principles of design.15 And while Scott and his contemporaries were intensely concerned with the burning issue of "style", Scott's defense of Gothic for ordinary architecture is based on its ability to inject picturesque qualities into urban vistas.16

14 For a succinct summary of the Battle waged in print 1857-1860, see Muthesius, *High Victorian*, p. 162.

15 Garrigan, *Ruskin*, p. 118, quotes at length Ruskin's letter concerning Scott's vicissitudes in the design of the Foreign Office (Ruskin, *Works* vol. 36, pp. 316-317), in which Ruskin writes "What a goose poor Scott (who will get his liver fit for pâté de Strasburg with vexation) must be, not to say at once he'll build anything." See also Pevsner, *Some Architectural Writers*, p. 177.

16 See Brooks, *John Ruskin*, pp. 144-147, for a more positive interpretation of Scott's motivations and his compromises in his defense of the Gothic style as a "point de départ" for the development of a modern style of architecture. Brooks refers to articles that appeared in *Builder*15 (28 November1857), p. 688, and *Builder* 16 (2 January 1858), p. 1 in which the writer acknowledges the correctness of Scott's intent in this

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In the three chapters of *Remarks* devoted to buildings in towns, Scott shows that Gothic forms and Gothic principles of design are amenable to all building types, from the most imposing public buildings to the houses of the poor. The advantage of Gothic, as Scott explains it, is that it is capable of relieving monotony while at the same time producing a picturesque harmony. This is most clearly articulated in his argument for a Gothic design for “palatial” street architecture. This argument is certainly meant to answer criticism of his Gothic design for the Foreign Office, which was to be inserted into a classical architectural environment:

I will first suppose that our public building presents a street-front to one of our great thoroughfares, ranging with buildings of perhaps equal importance and permanency with itself in the modern Italian style.... It is the fashion to decry the introduction of any but the classical Italian styles in such situations, as if perfect uniformity of character were essential to beauty. The Renaissance architects of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries felt no such scruples at introducing changes of style, and the Grand Canal at Venice and the streets of other Italian cities shew that no disagreeable effect results from it. Their disciples, however, of the present day, endeavour to keep possession of the monopoly of our street architecture by decrying those changes which their masters were the first to make, and denouncing as contrary to good taste that variety of style in street architecture which the founders of their school originated.... The Renaissance architects of Venice and of Florence also adopted forms sufficiently harmonizing with those of the medieval palaces around them, and I believe that no one has ever complained of painful want of harmony from their juxtaposition.17

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17 George Gilbert Scott, *Remarks on Secular and Domestic Architecture* (London, 1858), pp. 193-194. It should be noted that this is the second edition, but references to it invariably describe it as “nearly identical” to the 1857 edition.
This harmony is not accidental; rather it is the result of the adoption of varied forms inside a simple silhouette:

The Renaissance began [in Italy], not from the decay of pointed architecture, but from the days of its perfection; so that among the Italian palaces we have every gradation, from the best Gothic period of the fourteenth century to the Palladian of the sixteenth; and, what is more remarkable, the block form of these varieties does not very essentially differ.... It would be well for us...to take hints from such palaces as the Riccardi, the Strozzi, and those of the preceding century; and working them up for ourselves, with details of our own, to make them aid us in harmonizing our palatial fronts with their Renaissance neighbours, as these had been in their day designed to accord with their Gothic predecessors.\(^\text{18}\)

Scott's emphasis on harmony is an indirect way of insisting that his design for the Foreign Office is not that strange, and certainly not inappropriate to its context. Indeed, these passages could be illustrated by Scott's competition entry, his design being symmetrical and regular, and with few verticals to challenge the horizontal emphasis of its arcading, stringcourses and heavy cornice (illustration 3.4). The relationship of the Foreign Office to a Renaissance palazzo becomes even more pronounced when it is compared to Scott's terrace houses in Broad Sanctuary, Westminster (1852) and St. Pancras Hotel (1865). The mass and outline of the Foreign Office appear to be quite simple in contrast with the restless surfaces and skylines of the earlier and later buildings (illustrations 3.5 and 3.6). Scott's diverse handling of Gothic forms in these three buildings amply justifies his argument for the flexibility of

\(^{18}\) Ibid., pp. 195-196.
Gothic, especially its ability to accommodate varied functions and architectural contexts.

But, *Remarks* can also be read as more than a defense of Scott's work in particular, or even the Gothic in general, because Scott accepts the fact that buildings express a city's history. Therefore, great cities necessarily display competing architectural forms, and in itself this is not bad. This observation has rather interesting consequences for his argument.

His examples of successful street architecture include Regent Street, the more nearly contemporary architecture of London, as well as the buildings of medieval towns. He invites his readers to consider Regent Street a successful example of "making groups, not alike, but differing on some symmetrical principle." Even though the style of Regent Street is "somewhat too studied and set", Scott can still admit that "the outline has been successfully broken." Modern Gothic can better the picturesque of Regent Street because "a more accidental arrangement is better — a few houses of one scale and a few of another, some higher than others — a group of gabled fronts, and another with parapets and dormers, or parapets alone, with some little touch of system, though chiefly arranged with a view to varied wants."\(^{19}\)

Scott's belief in the superiority of "accidental arrangement" against the "set and studied" composition permits him to acknowledge the visual excitement of varied forms and competing styles in contemporary architecture. Scott argued that Gothic "allows us the most perfect liberty" to borrow horizontal cornices from Italian Gothic street fronts, or

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\(^{19}\) Ibid., pp. 176-177.
dormers and mansard roofs from the French Baroque (as he had in his
design for the Foreign Office), which "are readily translateable into an
earlier style than that in which they most prevail."²⁰ This eclecticism,
pluralism, or "latitudinarianism" might be interpreted as a lack of
conviction, rather than an evolutionary attitude toward the development
of a modern style. But it is also rather astute visually because most
contemporary urban buildings cannot be seen in strict isolation.
Consequently the whole gamut of ornamental or architectural features
available to designers is potentially present in views down streets.

Despite profoundly laissez-faire statements, Scott does suggest
certain principles in the management of picturesque irregularity.
Government buildings and imposing "architectural" streets require
"stateliness" and a certain amount of reserve.²¹ Other architectural
contexts do not require so much restraint, and it is indeed in these
somewhat more informal contexts that the picturesque variety of Gothic
forms or principles of design are most welcome and amenable to the
development of urban architecture. ²²

Scott suggests that simple Gothic principles — polychromatic
materials, and bold or irregular skylines — might be used to improve
buildings that otherwise would not be considered "architectural" at all.
He suggests it would be possible to improve

those little streets...which contain the residences of the poor,...at
present as offensively ugly as it is possible to fancy.... If the

²⁰ Ibid., p. 173.
²¹ Ibid., p. 206.
²² Ibid., p. 195.
windows were margined with red brick, and perhaps had simple wood mullions, the roofs made moderately high, with a continuous ridge parallel to the street, and just divided by the coped party-walls and chimney-stacks, and with plain dormer windows, these streets would at once become pleasing, and at little expense. They want little more architecture than such a mere touch as this; and our style gives all that is wanted without the slightest effort.23

Scott is also perceptive and extremely practical in his treatment of higher classes of building. Although Scott agrees with Ruskin that relief is desirable in street architecture, he concedes that most urban buildings have flat facades, in order to make the most use of the building lot. But even such buildings can be made more interesting simply by varying heights and employing “terminal outlines in themselves beautiful or picturesque”.24 This leads him to explain ways that roofs are best constructed, a discussion in which fire regulations and gutters have considerable importance. He evinces particular enthusiasm for the picturesque possibilities of gables in street architecture, which also provide useful attic space. In another passage he addresses speculators and asks them to resist the temptation to repeat a single design in the development of large building tracts. He advises builders to vary designs, emphasize vertical divisions, and limit the number of houses that form part of a uniform range. In short, just as in his treatment of housing for the poor, Scott shows himself capable of simple pragmatism (manifested in other areas of his practice in less attractive ways).

23 Ibid., pp. 182-183. It is also important to note that he follows this observation with a seven-page digression on the moral necessity of providing decent housing for the poor. This is not merely well intentioned hand-wringing, as it contains suggestions for legislation to provide adequate funding for social housing.

24 Ibid., p. 171.
Throughout Remarks Scott is concerned with demonstrating that Gothic has universal applicability. What is best for a church is, equally, best for palaces, courts, markets, houses, bridges, viaducts, railway stations, warehouses, factories, agricultural buildings and labourers’ cottages.25 On one level, of course, he is merely elaborating Pugin’s case for the adoption of Gothic; unlike Pugin, however, Scott’s Gothic makes little distinction between building types and hierarchies. Although Scott is aware of the fact that utilitarian structures need little elaboration, it is not that they ought to be plain, but rather that economic constraints make it unlikely that they will ordinarily receive much decoration. Scott’s Gothic can accommodate any limitation, just as it can rise to any possibility.

For Scott the advantage of Gothic resides not only in the rationalism or truthfulness of the style, but also in the possibilities of its visual qualities. Massiveness alone could characterize Gothic, and its details not only include projecting cornices, dormers, gables, colored brickwork, and arches, but the vocabulary of forms might be stretched to include any beautiful architectural features, even domes. The list of building types and the catalogue of details that “we may throw into” buildings present the reader of Remarks with the impression of kaleidoscopic superabundance, a variety and inclusiveness that defy the concept of harmony, an undifferentiated primordial soup from which a new style of architecture will emerge.26 But Scott does, at least briefly, rein in the possibilities in the penultimate statement of his conclusion:

25 Ibid., p. 274.

26 Ibid., p. 217.
What then will be the effect of our classic buildings on our new style? I think it will be little other than to lead us in town-buildings to assimilate our leading forms, in a slight degree, to those by which they must for many years be surrounded.... [We should] study...Italian Gothic...to learn from it so much as will enable us to soften down the asperity of the contrast between our own Gothic and the mass of modern buildings; and to prevent our introducing positive discords while we are developing an architecture which we hope will in due time supersede that hard, ungenial style which at present paralyzes every warm and hearty aspiration for noble architecture in the minds of the generality of our population.27

Of the two competing sides of Scott's argument — the promotion of relentless variety and the desire to "soften down the asperity of contrast" — the first was much more in keeping with the actual architecture of his day and the second successful mostly because architects so frequently reported that they desired harmony. In views along streets, individualistic buildings seem bent on overpowering their neighbours and, especially in the City of London, they appear to be the visual manifestation of the most extreme form of competitive capitalism.28

Scott himself notes this in Recollections, and admits to contributing to this "chaotic state of things" in abandoning "the Middle Pointed confederation" by introducing "many elements of value into the revived style". He describes the recent past as the period of "wild oats" that destroyed the sense of "liberal unity" in the following terms:

There has, in fact, been no end to the oddities introduced. Ruskinism, such as would make Ruskin's very hair stand on end; Butterfieldisms gone mad with its endless stripings of red and black bricks; architecture so French that a Frenchman would not know it.... Byzantine in all forms but

27 Ibid., p. 278.

28 Olsen, Victorian London, pp. 120-122.
those used by the Byzantines; mixtures of all or some of these; “original” varieties founded upon knowledge of old styles, or upon ignorance of them, as the case may be; violent strainings after a something very strange and great successes in producing something very weak; attempts at beauty resulting in ugliness, and attempts at ugliness attended with unhoped-for success.... [These works and others] disfigure our streets with preposterous attempts at originality in domestic architecture.29

Scott here is complaining not only about ridiculous variety but also about a bungling excess that strains any notion of composition. While Scott’s invective is not entirely fair, it is not difficult to find High Victorian buildings in which ferocious individuality depends on an accumulation of assertive details operating more as independent units than as elements in a coordinated composition. This kind of aggressiveness is especially noteworthy when the words of architects are at variance with their work. And, of course, this can be said of Scott himself.

Thomas Harris, in his Victorian Architecture (1860), is also guilty of this mixed procedure.30 Harris describes his design for a proposed terrace of ten houses (illustration 3.7) as having “a uniformity of principle instead of a uniformity of parts. [With] an entire absence of cornices or similar projections, effect is sought by recessed surfaces and the constructional employment of colored brick combined with stone.” Cornices are perhaps the only architectural feature Harris does not employ. It seems rather that “uniformity of principle” means using Scott’s

29 G.G. Scott, Professional and Personal Recollections (London, 1878), pp. 210-211.

30 Thomas Harris, “Design for a Terrace of Houses at Harrow, Middlesex”, Builder 18 (December 8, 1860), p. 672.
entire catalogue of Gothic features in order to satisfy the urge for picturesque multiplicity and irregularity. Whatever else might be said about this building it satisfies Harris's "great rule to be observed": "Keep all projections or variations of outline and surface as bold and imposing as possible." 31

If the Goths might be fairly accused of merely giving lip service to the principle of harmony, James Fergusson might be seen as a proponent of the opposite extreme in his *History of the Modern Styles of Architecture*. In fact, he misuses the concept of the picturesque in order to prove the poverty of the Gothic revival in secular architecture. Although Fergusson allows ecclesiastical buildings of the Middle Ages to be considered "architectural", he claims that the picturesque medieval towns of Northern Europe do not contain individual secular buildings that are "works of art". 32 The reason is simply that they do not produce "architectural effect". 33 This curious and uncompromising divorce of the picturesque from "Architectural Art" is a way of reducing the picturesque to the vernacular, which serves his argument that classical architecture is the only appropriate style for modern secular buildings. Hence, only the contemporary street architecture of Paris (illustrations 3.8 and 3.9) can be admired without reservation: "the street architecture of Paris is unsurpassed by anything in Europe.... Nothing is so creditable to the


33 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 606.
French architects as the truthfulness and elegance with which they have elevated domestic structures into the realm of Fine Art”.\textsuperscript{34} They are fine art essentially because they approximate the forms of monumental architecture. While there is nothing so far that is strange about his argument in favour of regularity, Fergusson concludes his examination of individual Parisian buildings with the statement that:

The great charm...is that in Paris there are not three or four such designs as those quoted above, but three or four hundred—many, it must be confessed, of very questionable taste, and where the ornaments are neither elegant in themselves nor properly applied; but these are certainly the exceptions, and even they tend to produce a variety and richness of effect in the new Boulevards and streets, which renders Paris the richest and most picturesque-looking city of modern Europe. It is the only town, in fact, that affords an answer to the reproach of the Mediaevalists, who, when they single out the dull monotony of Regent's Park Terraces or Edinburgh Rows, need only turn to the new quarters recently erected in Paris to see that the dullness of which they complain is not in the style but in the architects, and that it must be as easy for us, if we had the wit to do so, to make our towns as picturesque, and far more beautiful than they were when filled with the rude and inconvenient dwellings of our forefathers.\textsuperscript{35}

Clearly, what Fergusson meant by picturesque in this statement was not what his contemporaries meant by it. In the 1860s few would acknowledge as picturesque three or four hundred of the designs such as Fergusson illustrates. Fergusson's clearly inappropriate use of the term “picturesque” in this context certainly shows the force of the concept at this time. It also shows that Fergusson was aware of the fact that he was arguing for an aesthetic ideal — regularity rather than contrast — that

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., vol. 4, pp. 249-250.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., pp. 258-259.
ran contrary to general opinions held at the time by members of the architectural profession. This is not to say that the extent and the forms of the rebuilding of Paris were not envied. Many admired the grandeur of Paris.\textsuperscript{36} And this admiration was often tinged with envy over the French government's extraordinary investment in monumental buildings.\textsuperscript{37} Architects could also very occasionally approve of the fact that the French bureaucracy was able to exert control even over ordinary street architecture.\textsuperscript{38} But until the turn of the century it was far more common to criticize the street architecture of Paris for its lack of picturesque qualities: Paris was "monotonous".\textsuperscript{39}

High Victorian architecture lapsed into excess and redundancy because architects genuinely admired visual complexity and excitement in views down city streets. An enthusiasm of this sort was a challenge to established authority just as the Gothic was to the Classical tradition, and the charge of monotony leveled at the streets of Paris was related to the rejection of the cold intellectualism of classicising architecture. Many promoters of the picturesque appreciated variety for more than its visual qualities:


\textsuperscript{37}Donaldson's address at University College, London University, was reported as "The Future of Architects: London and Paris", in the \textit{Builder} 18 (3 October 13, 1860), p. 663; "Imperial Architecture and Imperial France", \textit{Builder} 26 (4 April 1868), pp. 238-239 and Alexander Payne, "London as it is and as it might be" an address given to at the Architectural Association and reported in the \textit{Builder} 30 (27 January 1872), pp. 61-63.


\textsuperscript{39}Oct 13, 1855, p.481 and "Our Streets", \textit{Builder} 31 (21 November 1873) pp. 557-558.
qualities: the political connotations of the picturesque were expressed frequently, but perhaps no more clearly than in a lecture given at the Royal Academy by Anthony James Beresford-Hope. In this talk he is concerned with the fact that the picturesqueness of London that "had grown up under the instructions of different architects and was a series of [separate] pictures" might suffer in comparison to the monumental homogeneity evident in Paris. But Beresford-Hope defends the picturesque characteristics of London streets for this reason: that however much one might admire the monumentality or "speculative magnificence" of Paris, this bought at the expense of the French constitution and the picturesque quality of London is an expression of English freedom. The Building News records audience applause in response to this point, which seems to indicate that there was general acceptance of the notion that picturesque variety is the proper architectural manifestation of a democratic society.40

Perhaps the fact that picturesque variety was equated with democratic traditions, including the freedom of architects to disagree, gave added spice to the battle of the styles as it was played out in print and in the streets. Or perhaps the sheer complexity of large cities made aesthetic tolerance necessary. Indeed, in this same lecture Beresford-Hope articulates the basic formal principles of picturesque street architecture: that the profile of buildings ought to be treated boldly with liberal use of pyramids, towers and cupolas; and that each facade should be treated as "a unit standing by itself, looking more to its height than to

its width”. These principles, while better suited to Gothic, can be used in classical designs.

The British architectural periodical press was concerned with the concept of street architecture beginning with J. C. Loudon’s *Architectural Magazine*, even though the *Architectural Magazine* was almost exclusively concerned with individual urban buildings, and not views down streets. The *Builder*, on the other hand, was deeply concerned with both these aspects of street architecture, articulating principles of design in editorials that called for streets to be conceived in such a way as to avoid both monotony and discordant individualism, and publishing illustrations of newly erected commercial buildings. But just as there is a discrepancy between theory and practice in the work of Scott, the *Builder’s* interest in individual buildings undermines its attempt to promote visual harmony in streetscapes. It does this in several ways. First, the noteworthy examples of street architecture illustrated in its pages are always represented as individual buildings, usually in views that give very little indication of architectural context. Secondly, during the third quarter of the nineteenth century, when buildings were designed in a most heterogeneous array of styles, the *Builder* attempted to represent fairly all factions of the architectural profession: its illustrations therefore give a sense of almost bewildering variety (illustrations 3.10 to 3.113). Thirdly, because the *Builder* appeared weekly it had a constant need for visual material, and tended to equate the “new” with the “newsworthy” (illustrations 3.14 and 3.15). Finally, in the interest of reporting the architectural news it provided unprecedented opportunity for architects to have their ideas published, and they were disposed to disagree.
Despite the fact that the pages of the *Builder* give space to every nuance of opinion, its editors up to World War I — George Godwin and Henry Statham — presented, in numerous editorials and articles, a clear and evolving set of ideals concerning the design of street architecture both as individual buildings and as components of cityscapes. Since their discussion of street architecture as individual buildings was quite different both in content and purpose from their discussion of streetscapes, their treatment of individual buildings will be left to a later chapter.

From the time the *Builder* commenced publication it concerned itself with streetscapes. At the outset, in 1843, it reprinted an article that had originally appeared in the *Quarterly Review* in 1830, in which the writer had insisted that the architecture of London—including its churches—ought to be classic in order to conform to surrounding buildings. In an article appearing in 1846, "A Walk up New Oxford Street", George Godwin observed that "several styles" were present, depriving Oxford Street of "the general effect" found in stylistically consistent streets such as Pall Mall. In order to control this architectural competition he does not advocate the adoption of a particular style, but hopes rather that an assemblage of buildings might share a "general character of design". To this end Godwin suggests that a street should have a "general character of massiveness, or lightness, of height, of verticality or horizontal line; but that consistently with such general requirements variety of design is
desirable.” Godwin does not describe the ways in which this “general character” is to be established, but he never advocates imposing control over the work of individual architects.

Neither does Godwin imagine that architects should follow the general quality of design established by the standard vernacular buildings of London. He makes it clear that even those buildings that survived the Great Fire held almost exclusively antiquarian interest: unsanitary on the whole, their passing was not much regretted, especially as the size of buildings required in the modern metropolis outstripped the scale of the earlier buildings. Later on there is a general acceptance of the permanence of what were then recently erected structures, an increasing awareness of historic context, and a desire that new buildings accommodate the older ones on the same street.

As architectural competition became increasingly palpable in the 1860s, the Builder found many opportunities to decry the dissonant effect of totally different styles of architecture ranged side by side on city streets. It also published addresses given to art and architectural societies that investigate principles by which harmony could be achieved.


to create “order within disorder”. Because it spoke for the entire architectural profession, the Builder did not advocate the adoption of any one style, but Godwin and most contributors to the journal depended on Ruskin and Scott. Not only were their loosely formulated principles of urban architecture applicable to all building types generally, they could also accommodate various factions in the “Battle of the Styles.” While attempting to discover the means by which towns acquired an unselfconscious individualism—“to assume picturesque forms of themselves, as crystals in cooling assume their shape and character”—the Builder was naturally led to medieval towns and the buildings that comprised them.

Throughout the 1860s and 1870s it ran illustrated articles in which the morphology of the picturesque was examined in northern towns of the Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance (illustrations 3.16 to 3.18). In these articles and illustrations the single most significant aspect of the townscape is the broken skyline produced by gables and other vertical projections. Broken skylines produced by gables still


46 “Architectural London in 1884”, Builder 24 (6 February 1864), pp. 93-95; “Street Architecture of the Old Town of Edinburg”, Builder 25 (15
maintain a certain “harmony of main lines” because there are an infinite
variety of details within a few standard forms. Of course this emphasis
on the skyline of earlier towns was consistent with contemporary
architectural practice as it reflected genuine pride in and enthusiasm for
increasing height in buildings. It is also similar to suggestions
articulated by Scott and has the sanction of Beresford-Hope. But
perhaps most important, it is utterly pragmatic: in urban architecture a
broken skyline is usually the only means by which a building can
acquire a complex profile because — as Scott had noted — the practical
conditions of building in cities demand relatively flat facades. Building
by-laws and the economics of construction permit little recession and
projection, even though these were necessarily small gestures are
important for creating incidents of light and shadow that give “force and
picturesqueness” to facades.

Exciting skylines and vigorous details became so important as
evidence of the picturesque that even Professor Robert Kerr felt it was

April 1865), pp. 256-258; (13 May 1865), pp. 326-328 and (27 May
1865), pp. 368-370; “Street Architecture in Liverpool and Elsewhere”,
Builder 26 (3 March 1866), pp. 148-149; “Bell and Clock Towers”, Builder
27 (16 February 1867), pp. 69-71; “Street Architecture in the
Neighbourhood of Picadilly”, Builder 30 (29 June 1872), pp. 498-499;
“Domestic Architecture, Ratisbon: Civil and Domestic Towers”, Builder
38 (20 March 1880), pp. 324-325.


necessary to pay them homage in 1863. In the explanation of his own National Provident Institution on Gracechurch Street in London, written to accompany an illustration of it in the Builder (illustration 3.19), Kerr describes it as follows: “classical architecture alone is calculated to give lasting satisfaction in a London commercial building. At the same time...the picturesque should be acknowledged.... Uninterrupted arcuation throughout, recessed porch and balconies, a special treatment of the splayed angle, a high pitched roof, undisguised chimneys and dormers...supply the picturesque element.”50

This indicates the way in which the picturesque had evolved. It was now concerned with small details rather than large masses, and it was no longer potentially intrinsic to “classical” forms, but was separate from them. Such emphasis eschews grand and imposing effects, if not directly, then at least by implication. The Builder contributed to this interpretation of the picturesque simply because the medieval buildings in which the picturesque was seen to operate were the relatively small buildings of northern European towns and not the palaces of Italian cities. Furthermore, the illustrations run in the Builder as guides to the picturesque emphasized smallness, often representing no more than details.


All in all, the *Builder*’s definition of the picturesque described the buildings of the 1860s and 1870s as much as it represented a disinterested aesthetic ideal. The five illustrations run in the *Builder* over a nine month period in 1875-76 (mentioned above, illustrations 3.10 to 3.14), Kerr’s National Provident Institution (1863, illustration 3.19), and R. L. Roumieu’s London warehouse (1868, illustration 3.15), are opposed to the *Builder*’s picturesque only on account of their extreme diversity. The differences among them are primarily — but not exclusively — due to the variety of historical styles followed. Kerr’s work and Theodore Green’s offices respect stylistic norms more than the others, particularly Roumieu’s strange “roguish” building. The functions of these buildings, and their place within the city block have also affected the character of each design — the corner office buildings, the house and the warehouse, are much more substantial than the buildings with shops on the ground floor. But despite these differences in style, quality and character, they are all picturesque as defined by the Builder. In every instance the skyline is broken, and their details—columns, pilasters, colonettes, oriels, bays, pediments, gables, cornices, dormers, turrets and chimneys—demand attention by their number, scale and complexity. The exaggeration of the ornamental features of these buildings, make them all picturesque despite their willful individuality.

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This fascination with details, and the equation of small features with the picturesque, are also central to J. J. Stevenson's concerns in his *House Architecture* (1880). Written as an apology for the Queen Anne style, *House Architecture* outlines principles of design that would allow a mixture of Renaissance and medieval vernacular forms to exist without discord in a single building. Beyond this, these principles would create a similarity of effect among buildings built at different times using different styles. His views of old towns (illustrations 3.20 to 3.21) show streets of attached buildings most immediately notable for the variety of their heights and skylines. In these illustrations and others, as well as in his text, he shows that buildings in different styles can be made to share a common formal rhythm. In particular, classical details and a tendency toward the horizontal can be accommodated to Gothic verticality, when buildings present their gable ends to the street (illustration 3.22). But throughout the book he is mostly concerned with details, and with encouraging his readers to understand that the Renaissance did not dispel the "perfect naturalness", "freedom", "character and picturesqueness" characteristic of the unselfconsciousness of northern medieval house building.  

This general freedom in the use details from either classicising or medievalising styles is controlled by little more than the dictates of "convenience or fancy". The great recommendation of the

Queen Anne, however, is that style possesses certain refinements that avoid the crude “unrest, loudness and vulgarity” of the modern revival of the Gothic style.\textsuperscript{54}

According to Stevenson, the Queen Anne style has the freedom of Gothic without the inconvenience of its forms: “It is a builder’s style, not an architect’s style, the product of traditions naturally developing themselves.... Classic forms and moldings had become the vernacular of the workmen who, following apparently their own instincts formed the style out of these elements, without working drawings from architects, who were too learned to tolerate its barbarism.”\textsuperscript{55} It is this same spirit he hoped to develop in his own designs when he “made no attempt to follow any particular style, the style grew naturally from using the ordinary materials and modes of work”. This free style is not perfect, and “it does not express greatness and nobleness as some of the great styles of the world have done. It is rather simple and homely and not too great or good.”\textsuperscript{56}

The popularity of Queen Anne had already caused Scott to admit grudgingly (two years earlier in his \textit{Recollections}) that it had become the most successful style of street architecture. “Though many buildings

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p. 348.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p.183.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., p. 331.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p. 349.
may be erected in the so-called “Queen Anne” style, which would otherwise have been gothic, the majority of such would, no doubt, have been erected in the vernacular style of the day, and so far the change has been an unquestionable gain: we have rich colour and lively, picturesque architecture in lieu of the dull monotony of the usual street architecture.”

Indeed, the freedom of details in Queen Anne made it extremely successful for more than three decades because it was perfectly suited to relieving monotony—without disturbing the balance of near symmetry—in large-scale terrace housing with subtle variations of details: porches, bays and gables reveal small differences on inspection; and the patterns made by window ranges and their frames are equally complex (illustrations 3.23). Especially in terrace housing the variety of Queen Anne is much more pronounced than previous exercises in Gothic terrace housing or commercial rows, including Scott’s, and certainly much more varied than Webb’s design for a row of shops (forty years earlier) using traditional urban vernacular forms (illustrations 3.5 and 3.21). Through to World War I these relatively refined means of producing picturesque variety and harmony were used extensively in large-scale building projects.

The strength of Queen Anne (and various shades of vernacular revivalism) was that it was totally amenable to traditional building types,
making streetscapes interesting and houses convenient. It became the modern domestic vernacular any competent builder could work in. It was also adaptable to large houses rendering them comfortable and unpretentious, and — with its emphasis on varied details within the rather simple basic forms of traditional terrace housing — it made far less monotonous streetscapes comprised of the houses of the middle class. Of course the visual poverty of poorer streets was not a problem discovered at this time — nor was it ever really effectively solved — but beginning with the Queen Anne there was a larger repertoire of details (especially molded terracotta) capable of making streets both picturesque and cheap.  

The Queen Anne style also showed that the stuff of vernacular architecture could produce beautiful truly modern buildings in the hands of architects of ability. A 35-part series of illustrations published in the Builder from 1896 through 1899, entitled “Sketches of Street Architecture”, represent work by unknown and obscure architects, as well as those that were, and still are, highly regarded. These show the almost limitless variation of forms that traditional urban building types

57 Scott, Recollections, pp. 375-376.

may assume in the hands of architects of the calibre of C. F. A. Voysey, Arthur H. Mackmurdo, C. R. Ashbee (illustrations 3.25 to 3.27). They also show that variety and complexity in detail need not depend on finicky applied ornament. The short texts accompanying these illustrations are essentially descriptive, not analytical, and the whole series, in fact, shows the "catch-all" use of the term "street architecture" as used in the Builder to refer heterogeneous building types. The Builder's decision to publish examples of notable street architecture illuminates its attitude toward style and strongly suggests that street architecture had acquired a more specific meaning by this time. Most of the buildings are residential, and vernacular or free-classic styles tend to dominate. Even the commercial buildings illustrated are relatively small, with frontages only two or three times the width of ordinary residential buildings: their size in no way approaches that of Harrod's department store, for example, which was under construction at this time.

While this series ran, the Builder's editor, H. H. Statham published Modern Architecture: A Book for Architects and the General Public (1897), in which he describes the general principles of street architecture in a chapter devoted exclusively to this topic. He could sum up the formal characteristics of street architecture by referring to two general

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principles: that details should be varied even when the same builder or architect has built a whole row of buildings; and each building in an attached row should be complete in itself, by clearly articulating vertical edges.\textsuperscript{60} Statham suggests that gables are expensive and inconvenient, and moreover deprive the building of a flat roof that might be turned into a rooftop garden, yet almost every one of the buildings he illustrates in \textit{Modern Architecture} has gables and other very pronounced vertical features\textsuperscript{61} (illustrations 3.28 to 3.34). These illustrations also show that while Queen Anne and its derivatives are especially associated with street architecture, other styles are also appropriate, including Richardsonian Romanesque.

The \textit{Builder's "Sketches of Street Architecture"} and the illustrations in \textit{Modern Architecture} show that principles of design capable of addressing all aspects of urban street architecture as formulated in the 1860s had survived intact to the turn of the century as far as small-scale buildings were concerned. Furthermore, the intimacy and individuality of the picturesque on which these principles were based continued in the architecture of garden suburbs, garden cities, and in residential streets.\textsuperscript{62} It would also be adopted by the London

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., pp. 254-255.
\item Ibid., p. 249.
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County Council for workers’ housing. But despite the success of these principles of design in small-scale urban and suburban buildings, architects were beginning to reject informal relationships in planned urban contexts.

Statham articulated this new desire for greater regularity in *Modern Architecture* in the passage in which he advocated subsuming individual buildings into single designs for broad streets or formally laid-out squares, such as Regent’s Quadrant and Belgrave Square, in contrast to the practice of erecting individualistic buildings in “ordinary” streets. “Stately and effective” or “grandiose” characteristics are proper to more formal or regular architectural compositions, whereas picturesque irregularity is welcome in small-scale individualistic buildings. This acknowledgement of the effect of the site on the characteristics of the buildings has a certain similarity to Scott’s description, made a generation earlier, of the different types of design appropriate to different classes of buildings. However, while Scott advocated greater harmony in important streets, and greater variety in

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and its debt to Price and Knight through the anti-urbanism of Ruskin, Morris et al.

63 See Susan Beattie, *A Revolution in London Housing: LCC Housing, Architects and Their Work 1893-1914* (London: Architectural Press, 1980), especially pp. 106-119, for a description of the sources and an analysis of the designs of Old Oak Estate (1905ff), one of the most successful Garden Suburb designs for workers’ housing undertaken by the LCC.

64 Statham, *Modern Architecture*, pp. 244-245
ordinary streets, Statham here juxtaposes variety, not merely harmony, but also grand and stately effects. It was about this time that most members of the architectural profession clearly separated the idea of the picturesque, and all the characteristics normally associated with it, from their ideas concerning the proper design of monumental buildings—or even of small buildings that comprise monumental urban ensembles.

Although the divorce of the picturesque from the monumental was complete by the 1890s, the process had been relatively slow. As early as 1880, in an article entitled "Urban Architecture versus Street Architecture", George Godwin had felt compelled to voice concern over the fact that the picturesque was increasingly associated only with small buildings. He attempts to make a distinction between "urban architecture", by which he means the buildings of old towns that took form in spontaneous response to functional requirements (producing a picture of "vigorous and racy individuality"), and "street architecture", by which he means something designed intentionally to play a part in creating a vista. While he admires the "palatial street architecture" of Paris, he finds it is ultimately monotonous: symmetry and balance are "tame" without a "relieved outline". He maintains that large buildings, such as recent hotels, need not eschew the picturesque as they approach

65 Ibid., pp. 247.
monumental proportions; the Houses of Parliament serve to show that irregularly disposed towers can give picturesque variety to even the most imposing monumental architecture. Indeed, the increasing scale of commercial buildings requires that public buildings assert their significance not by mere size alone, but by the height and scale of their spires and towers.

Godwin’s concern with imposing features of the skyline seen from a distance is demonstrated by his evocation of the effect of the Houses of Parliament viewed from the opposite side of the Thames. This is only one instance of Godwin’s prescient fascination with significant and imposing towers (as opposed to small spires or pointy features). As far back as 1871 he had rhapsodised that “the roofs of London are rising with portentous celerity”. In contrast to “the low, squat two-storied huts” of old city streets, he could point to many new buildings “rearing great castellated structures to an unusual height”. This process of vertical growth he considers laudable and a harbinger of even better things to come: “Let us raise our warehouses, our offices, our public buildings, to any conceivable height. Let us shoot up our men of business on steam lifts, and double the elevations of the halls and schools of South Kensington”.67 Godwin justifies extraordinarily large towers for their imposing effect in medieval and modern cities.68 They have practical

advantages, too, as building vertically can alleviate suburban sprawl and reduce occupancy costs when ground-rates are expensive.69

Godwin's delight in the sheer height of buildings is echoed by his successor Statham who, in 1892, could describe the relatively simple skyscrapers of Chicago as “very good architecture” despite their lack of ornamentation. The pleasure Statham derives from the general run of Chicago buildings is well expressed in the following:

For typical Chicago buildings impress by mass, not by detail. Their finest quality is that of intensity, and the less the fronts are broken up, the less the walls are interrupted by piers or by strings, the more imposing the structure and the more tremendous the effect.70

Despite Godwin’s and Statham’s genuine enthusiasm for the possibilities of vertical mass as a means of producing really monumental architecture that can lay claim to being picturesque, it became increasingly rare for the picturesque to be associated with monumental streetscapes. By the 1890s it was much more common for Statham and many other members of the architectural profession to look along streets, rather than over rooftops, to find examples of monumental urban architecture. With their gaze directed along the horizon, they were drawn to the streets of Paris, Washington, and Berlin for examples of “grandiose” streetscapes.


Not only are these cities emphatically not vertical, what was once decried as monotonous now had the positive value of regularity. This shift in aesthetic values has been attributed to many things: there is evidence to ascribe this new-found interest in "restraint" as something of a spontaneous reaction against "the boldness and coarseness of the architecture of the third quarter of the nineteenth century". It could also be described as a reaction against the picturesque. And it was also, at least in part, a rediscovery of the Palladian tradition, and a return to the belief that it had been sufficiently naturalized in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to be considered truly English.

Furthermore, circumstances had changed attitudes toward streetscapes. While most architects dismissed Paris in the 1860s as "monotonous", the political undercurrent of this denunciation lost some of its force after the founding of the Third Republic. Moreover, by the 1890s it became apparent that the picturesque irregularity of the Victorian period had deprived London of grand streetscapes. Not only Paris, but also the Ringstrasse in Vienna, and the American City Beautiful movement after the Columbian Exhibition of 1893 in Chicago, gave British architects evidence that the rest of the world was passing

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them by. This kind of nationalism lead to the Baroque Revival of the 1890s when architects emulated Wren, Hawksmoor, Vanburgh and Gibbs in an attempt to compete with the Beaux-Arts architecture of France.74 Architects were reflecting the general mood of the British public in their desire to remake London in such a way that it expressed the power and wealth of an imperial capital.75 The economic expansion of the 1890s provided many opportunities for truly large-scale public buildings and public enterprises on a scale not seen in London since the time of Nash.76 The Admiralty Arch, new government buildings at Whitehall, plans for the Kingsway and Aldwich, and the rebuilding of Regent Street quadrant, were all part of the "imperialization" of London.77

After the turn of the century proponents of imperial schemes and classicism were also advocates for the new field of urban planning. A new generation of architects, both better educated and more ambitious than their predecessors, was attracted to the intellectual demands of classicism and to urban planning, which was fostered in those countries where classicism flourished. The example of Paris, in particular, proved that grand and stately effects depended on rational planning, which in turn depended on the active participation of government. As urban planners also demanded that government exercise its authority to


provide for the health and well-being of the urban population they were able to merge aesthetic and political ideals. The new champions of urban planning and classicism easily rejected the picturesque because of its associations with insularity, pictorialism, medievalism and small-scale buildings, and with a failure of political will which was manifested both in the irregular development of cities and the misery of the urban poor.

Of course, nineteenth-century architects had always hoped they would be called upon to assume social responsibilities even when they had defended the aesthetics of the picturesque. Indeed, the point was made that a well-managed, healthy and humane city need not look imposing, nor must it possess architectural regularity. The Garden City Movement also proved that there is no necessary connection between progressive social ideals and imposing urban vistas. Therefore it was to some extent merely fortuitous that classicism and urban planning coincided and reinforced one another.

The classicists and the urban planners were also antagonistic towards the picturesque because it came to be associated almost exclusively with builders' architecture. Scott and Stevenson, in particular, had noted that the development and success of the modern picturesque depended on the contributions of builders who had learned from architects and had adapted their solutions to lesser buildings, on the whole quite satisfactorily. But Scott and Stevenson were relative rarities among the Victorian architects who wrote; most architects were actively hostile towards builders, who they believed did little to contribute to the architectural quality of cities. This hostility towards builders, and to popular taste in general, was a persistent theme in
architectural writing to World War I, and in many ways it was merely an extension of sentiments expressed by Pugin and Ruskin. But for most of Victoria’s reign, architects were not so much interested in reforming popular taste as they were in defending professional expertise and claiming for the profession purview over all buildings. By the beginning of the twentieth century architects committed to rational planning and classical principles of design, which could only be exercised by full-fledged professionals, found ammunition against the picturesque because they were able to equate individualism and irregularity with popular taste. Rejection of the picturesque beginning in the 1890s was an abrupt and radical reorientation of aesthetic values that depended on new opportunities and new influences; but contributing factors were long-held attitudes towards builders’ architecture that merely intensified and increased in scope in the early years of the twentieth century.
Chapter 4
Street Architecture and the Architectural Profession

By the beginning of the twentieth century street architecture was conceived in very different terms than those that had prevailed when it first became an important issue. This was due to significant changes in the architectural world, especially the effort to distinguish the architectural profession from the building trades. The increasing professionalization of architectural practice in part occurred in response to changes in the nature of architects' work, in particular as it concerned urban building requirements. Cities — especially the city, London — were quantitatively different from those that had existed in the past on account of the size and variety of many of the buildings that composed
Architects were required to master new structural techniques, new styles and to prepare detailed specifications for contractors. Most of these innovations, however, did not greatly affect average commercial and residential buildings — which comprised by far the largest number of buildings constructed — even though many of these were designed in the prevailing style of the day. They were still small, and internal arrangements were little different from earlier urban buildings, which had been, and continued to be, designed by builders. These buildings therefore provided architects with opportunities to enumerate the faults of builders and to decry the deplorable state of popular taste. From about 1850, however, architects were not much inclined to ameliorate these problems by educating the public as Loudon, Pugin and Ruskin had; rather, the failures of an uneducated public seemed to prove that it was necessary for architects to intervene in the design of all buildings in order to improve the architectural quality of cities.

The view that architects alone were competent to design buildings, even buildings that continued to be designed by builders, is directly related to developments within the architectural profession itself. The


early Victorian period had witnessed the founding of important architectural societies — in 1834 the Institute of British Architects (which received its royal charter in 1866), and in 1847 the Architectural Association — as well as influential journals, especially the *Builder* (1842). Although both the societies and journals were important forums for airing competing opinions and discussing contentious issues, these roles depended on their primary mission: to promote the interests of the profession.

While professionalism is often used loosely to describe merely a degree of competence within an occupation, strictly speaking, the chief characteristic of a profession, as opposed to a trade or craft, is that its members possess "a skilled intellectual technique" a layman is unlikely to understand. In short, a professional's work can be judged only by other experts or professionals in the field. Individuals achieve a certain social status by belonging to a profession, but there are far-ranging material benefits to members of occupations that achieve public recognition as professions. Professional accreditation assures an

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individual practitioner's "competence and integrity", which of course suggests that individuals outside the formally constituted profession are likely "unscrupulous and unfit". Professional membership that protects the public against incompetence and charlatanism automatically gives professionals "security of employment and income".\(^5\)

This professional endorsement is extremely important in the fields of medicine, law and engineering because typically there is an enormous gulf between the knowledge of the expert and the ignorance of the layman. But at the beginning of the Victorian period, expertise in the design and construction of many building types was shared among architects, their patrons and builders. Informed laymen really were capable of judging the competence of architects, and some builders and patrons were as competent as architects in the design and construction of some buildings. Indeed, architects were often recruited from the rank of builders at the beginning of the Victorian period.\(^6\) In practice, too, the line between architects and builders had often been rather vague. Adam,


\(^6\) Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary*, pp. 10-25, for the relationship among builders, amateurs and architects up to 1840; see also Frank Jenkins, *Architect and Patron* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961) and Andrew Saint, *The Image of the Architect* (New Haven: Yale, 1983). See Kaye, *Development*, pp. 47-48, for statistical analysis. Kaye's tables show that in the period of 1790-1819, 12% of architects had been apprenticed to a builder whereas none had been after 1850. This reflects a consistent and steady increase in those whose training consisted of having been articled to architects. However, Kaye depends on information on architects contained in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and therefore he is describing only the upper levels of the profession.
Nash and Soane often had financial interests in building schemes that would soon be considered unacceptable for professional architects. It was therefore necessary for professional societies to define the particular expertise of architects in opposition to the potentially competing groups of builders and patrons. In positive terms this meant improving the education of architects in order to ensure that a real gulf existed between the layman and the professional. But the education of architects and the institution of examinations were tremendously contentious issues within the architectural profession, and took decades to resolve. What was not contentious was the establishment of criteria of professional probity that automatically disqualified members of competing groups. This was done with remarkable alacrity at the beginning of professional organization by the exclusion of measurers and those who had any connection with the building trade from membership in the Institute of British Architects.


8 The exact grounds for expulsion were “for having engaged...in the measurement, valuation, or estimation of any works undertaken or proposed to be undertaken by any building artificer, except such as are proposed to be executed or have been executed under the Member's own designs or directions; or for the receipt or acceptance of any pecuniary consideration or emolument from any builder or other tradesman whose works he may have been engaged to superintend; or for having any interest in or participation with any trade contract, or materials supplied at any works, the execution whereof he may be or have been engaged to superintend”. From: Institute of British Architects, Address of the Institute of British Architects, explanatory of their views and objects, and
Although membership in the Royal Institute of British Architects never became a formal requirement to practice architecture in the nineteenth century, and in practice it was sometimes difficult to determine the difference between builders and architects, members of the profession never tired of making clear the distinction between architects and builders.  

The editors and contributors to the *Builder* (founded in 1842) rather quickly adopted the exclusionary tendencies of the RIBA, despite the fact that this entailed a complete rejection of this periodical’s original purpose, which was to encourage the development of Owenite socialism among builders and workmen (as Michael Brooks has noted). Its evolving treatment of street architecture also exposes the ambitions of the journal, to the neglect of the “lower orders” of the building world.

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*the Regulations adopted at their meeting, held July 2nd, 1834, p. 9; quoted in: Kaye, *Development*, p. 81.*


In December 1848 The Builder published a small contribution from Halsey R. Ricardo, the first installment in a series entitled "Suggestions for Street Architecture": two bays and a half from the Palazzo del Te in Mantua, together with a detail of rusticated stone work for windows and doors from a house in Lucca (illustration 4.1). In the following two years it published two more of these "suggestions" as well as seven other illustrations described as "hints." All of the illustrations show windows, cornices and doorways, drawn from Italian renaissance and mannerist architecture. During these same years the Builder also published illustrations of medieval street architecture with the intent, as the accompanying text explains, of showing instances of picturesque variety. Although the Builder continued to publish illustrations of old urban vernacular buildings, it never again described them as "suggestions." The fact that the Builder quickly abandoned these

11 "Suggestions for Street Architecture", Builder 6 (2 December 1848), p. 582.


“suggestions” seems to show a rather deliberate reorientation of editorial intent. The encouragement implied by the term “suggestions” has the smell of a pattern book, whereas a simple description of the building and its history is much more consistent with the higher purposes of archaeology or architectural history. Architects, of course, can be assumed to be interested in architectural history; builders depend on pattern books.

After the brief experiment with “Suggestions”, the Builder published as street architecture only contemporary buildings designed by architects, and in general these were purpose-built commercial buildings. It never illustrated “ordinary” street architecture designed by builders, but the editors and contributors to the Builder found many opportunities to decry both the circumstances that attended the construction of ordinary buildings and the practices of builders.

The basic problem with most street architecture, it would seem, was the fact that it was presumed to be impermanent. After the expiry of the customary 99-year lease ordinary buildings were routinely rebuilt. Most architects seemed to have assumed that this limitation would hardly allow for sound construction, although evidence seems to indicate that even cheap buildings were usually well constructed.15 But architects’ suspicions concerning builders’ practices were very important

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because after Pugin sound construction became the most essential characteristic of all respectable architecture. It seems especially significant in this context that the term “jerry building” is a Victorian invention.

Impermanence was also endemic because of the rapid growth of cities in the middle decades of the century. As the price of land rapidly increased in the centres of towns, especially in the City in London, even very expensive buildings were often demolished soon after their erection to make way for larger structures. Shop fronts were also altered frequently as businesses changed hands, moved, expanded or were modernized. Essentially, much street architecture was as ephemeral as fashion, and serious architects were most emphatically not interested in fashion: the “battle of the styles” was waged over the issue of enduring if not eternal validity. The impermanence of the lease-hold system and the seemingly perpetual rebuilding of cities did not square with architectural ideals.

While respectable architects found the conditions attending street architecture somewhat distressing, it is also true that many speculative builders did not really need their services. This was especially true in domestic architecture. From the 1830s the rich increasingly chose to live in detached houses in suburban developments, and this decreased the demand for architecturally imposing urban terraces. The identification of
houses with social status also promoted caution on the part of real-
estate speculators. The various shades of the middle class were naturally
conservative, as much from naiveté in aesthetic matters as from the clear
understanding of the workings of the social hierarchy. In the design of
houses, as in almost everything else, each group emulated the
appearance of the one above it, and therefore there was a natural
tendency to copy forms that were well established by the emulated
group. This was a significant factor in the increasing suburbanization of
London, and for the survival of architectural characteristics — for
example stucco — long after these had been abandoned in more
advanced circles. The “miles of Italianate stucco façades” in Ladbroke
Grove, Nottinghill, Bayswater, Paddington and Belsize Park give ample
evidence of the survival of Regency architectural styles until well into the
1860s.\(^\text{16}\) Since builders were fully capable of copying earlier terrace
housing, they did not need to pay for the services of architects.\(^\text{17}\) By
architects’ own estimation more than 90% of all buildings constructed
(the vast majority of which would have been houses) were more or less
designed by the builders themselves.


\(^{17}\) John Summerson. “Victorian Villas”, *Architectural Review* 104 (August
1948), pp. 71-72, describes the founding of *The Illustrated Carpenter and Builder* in 1877, which published designs for small houses; builders also
advertised in it for plans and details for which they were willing to pay “a
guinea or two".
Builders also did not need architects to provide them with new ideas for ornaments because they could buy them readymade. Stucco, new materials and the mechanization of some trades made it possible to construct quite elaborate buildings relatively cheaply, often by ordering elements from manufacturers’ catalogues. Cast-iron elements, terracotta details and patent bricks were among the important new materials available to builders. By the middle of the century joinery was also mechanized so that windows, doors and trim could be ordered separately for domestic and commercial buildings, or even as complete façades for shops (illustration 4.2). Manufactured ornament was made possible by the fact that the proportions of whole façades, their windows and doors, and the distribution of most ancillary features, were relatively unvarying for the different classes of buildings. Individuality therefore could only be acquired by using these varied architectural details, and this was the principal means by which the vast majority of buildings were made attractive. Although ornament was truly the “principal part” of street architecture, it was also true that these features were “continually tacked on buildings...merely for the sake of what is termed effect”, as Pugin claimed in 1841.


While there was much in the detail of Ruskin's work that was as divisive and contentious as any other issues debated among architects, his reiteration of Pugin's invective against cheap means of creating individuality in buildings was repeated again and again in the criticism of builders' architecture. 20 But while Pugin and Ruskin attributed this, and bad architecture generally, to conditions that permeated all of nineteenth-century life, most architects much more sensibly looked to their own interests, and put this down to the ineptitude and vulgarity of builders. Whatever their internal disagreements, architects were united in their belief that it was builders who were most guilty of straining after picturesque effects, providing meaningless details piled up in crass and ostentatious display, and striving for novelty for its own sake.

In articles that can be attributed to successive editors of the Builder, Godwin and his successor Statham, and in letters printed and addresses reported in the Builder, the criticism is very much the same for several decades.21 As early as 1844 a correspondent signing himself "Omega" can complain that designs of builders tend "almost invariably to

20 See Robert Kerr, "Architecture and Poetry", address to the RIBA, reported in Builder 28 (19 March 1870), pp. 221-222.

a vulgar excess of ill-placed enrichment, the additional expense of which costs far more than an architect’s commission."22 This kind of thing is repeated regularly and is best summed up by G. E. Street’s 1881 address to the RIBA published in the *Builder*. Street, comparing the relative honesty of houses of the eighteenth century with those of the nineteenth blames “the taste of the nineteenth-century builder [which] is to do everything for display, sacrificing the money which might have made his work at least substantial to an investment in so-called ‘ornaments’ to the show fronts only of his house, which are costly to put up, costly to repair, and hideous in their ghastly unfitness for their place.”23 In response to this, Sir Frederick Leighton speaks for “every lover of the building art” in his agreement with Street that an ordinary building not designed by an architect shows “structural flimsiness” that “vies with depraved vulgarity of taste.”24 In 1897 the *Builder* could still complain of the “ridiculous pretentiousness” of the “latest kind of houses” designed by builders.25

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23 G. E. Street, “President’s Address at the RIBA”, reported in the *Builder* 41 (12 November 1881), p. 599.

24 Ibid.

Even when architects resisted the increasing professionalism of architectural practice, they still had little good to say about builders. This becomes clear in the dispute over examinations and accreditation of architects, in a volume of essays written in 1892 by a number of prominent architects opposed to these proposed innovations. In two essays in *Architecture: Art or Profession*, T. G. Jackson maintains that any building not designed by an architect is inevitably a sorry thing. The problem with the “poor ignorant builders” would be solved if they were required to submit to a course of education less rigorous but directly analogous to the ideal education of the architect. 26 Jackson’s ideal education of the builder would lead to the reduction of the excesses so frequently cited by other architects, and when builders have been improved by education “we might, in fact, hope to raise our ordinary street architecture to the level of the last century, when, without any affectation of architectural effect the sober brickwork and graceful joinery, full of pleasant fancy and quiet imagination, combined to make some of the most loveable homes in England.” 27

On the whole, Jackson’s contributions to *Architecture*, and others by Shaw and Lethaby, seem calculated to annoy the more practical men


27 Ibid., p. 232.
of the profession. These writers’ exalted ideals of the necessary qualifications—personal (Shaw), experiential (Lethaby) and educational (Jackson)—appear very unlikely to be met by many members of the profession. But this is, of course, an internal dispute and these writers are only adding levels to the architectural hierarchy, not really disputing it. Their criticisms of builders’ excess and ignorance are still in keeping with the opinions of most members of the architectural profession.

Though it may seem astonishing to find Victorian architects railing against ornament and blaming builders for its overuse, very early on even the most outspoken critic pointed out that builders were only responding to popular taste, and therefore patronage created many bad buildings.\(^{28}\) This, of course, is part of the too-facile criticism of middle-class taste indulged in by architects. It is tolerable on occasions when architects admit that general taste can only improve by example. In *Architecture* Shaw suggests that the general public can be expected to demand better work when “better art is placed before it.”\(^{29}\)

A decade or so before Shaw made this statement G.G. Scott and J.J. Stevenson had already claimed that the process of improvement was under way. Scott (*Recollections*, 1878) and Stevenson (*House Architecture*,

\(^{28}\) “London as it was in 1800, and as it is in 1844”, *Builder* 2 (7 September 1844), p. 409.

\(^{29}\) R. Norman Shaw, “The Fallacy that the Architect who makes Design his First Consideration must be Impractical”, in: *Architecture: Art or Profession*, pp. 5-6.
1880) both believed that ordinary builders' architecture was improving, and that builders had been especially quick at picking up on the Queen Anne style. But both Stevenson and Scott were not especially interested in defending the position and status of the architectural profession as much as they wanted to promote styles of architecture that could be made use of in any class of building, and by both builders and architects. Stevenson's and Scott's comments, and scattered statements concerning the improvement of street architecture generally, tend to enforce the impression of professional bias in the statements that generally condemn builders' architecture. It is especially significant too that the architectural press did not notice the most extraordinary accomplishment of nineteenth-century builders: they were able to produce an enormous amount of housing, for all but the very poor, in conformity with building acts that demanded increasingly stringent standards, especially concerning sanitation.

While it was usual to fault builders concerning the design of ordinary domestic street architecture, it was typical of the architectural press to fault patronage in their discussion of shops. Indeed, it was


31 For these building acts see Stefan Muthesius, The English Terrace House (Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 33-34.
against shopkeepers that the greater invective was unleashed. According to most architects, shopkeepers were responsible for lowering popular taste in architecture to a mere striving for elaborate enrichment and dazzling display. In 1846 Godwin described cheap stucco, “compo” and other cement ornaments as having “bedizened” New Oxford Street, subverting due regard for proper proportion in street fronts. Before mid-century these sins were compounded by the use of plate glass for shop windows, which made it appear “that a whole facade of heavy architecture rests upon a basement of glass.” This dual complaint against meretricious ornament and the anti-architectural effect of plate glass was a recurrent complaint for decades. Architects were distressed by the distortions of classical proportions and details, the size and the visual instability of the windows, and the lack of integration of

32 James Hine, “Shop Architecture”, a paper read at the Plymouth Athenaeum, reported in Builder 22 (23 December 1864), pp. 948-949.


the shop front with the upper floors. 35 Such criticism had begun in the
Architectural Magazine in the 1830s, but the Builder ascribed this "bad
taste" to the fact that shop fronts were not designed by architects.36 In
1878 H.H. Statham, who would soon succeed Godwin as the editor of the
Builder, succinctly summed up four decades of complaint against shop
fronts:

Outward display leads to architectural treatment equally
pretentious and unstable. A wide space for display in the window
is the first desideratum: consequently the whole of the
superstructure is made to stand apparently on a sheet of plate-
glass, and is in reality anything but sound architectural
construction, since it involves a system of balancing the building
on points on which a great pressure comes, while the supports are
inadequate to resist properly the disturbing effect of unequal
loading, or of any slight settlement of foundations. Architecturally
speaking, however, the more prominent fault in shop architecture
consists in the almost universal addition of a species of joiner's
scenery planted on round the window, with a wooden cornice and
other supposed ornaments which are a mere excrescence on the
real building, are of no use, cost a good deal of money, and
absolutely preclude anything like dignified or solid architectural
effect. No street can look otherwise than flimsy or tawdry in its
effect when its base is lined by these useless pieces of paintershow;
but it would hardly be possible to legislate against them. Their
abandonment must be left to the gradual influence of public

35 Mary Eldridge, "The Plate-glass Shop Front", Architectural Review 123
(March 1958), p. 195, gives "about 1860" as the first date for the
manufacture of huge panes of glass; see also Alan Powers, Shop Fronts
(London: Chatto and Windus, 1989), p. 19. Plate glass was invented in
the seventeenth century, but only when manufacturing processes were
improved around the middle of the nineteenth century did it become
inexpensive enough to be used in most shop fronts.

36 "Street Architecture in Liverpool and Elsewhere", Builder 24 (3 March
taste... under which faith the sham and the show of the shop-front would no longer be required.37

Statham, and others who made similar remarks decrying the pretension and sham of shops, wanted their owners to reject the plate-glass window and the greater degree of ornament that had been the most important innovations in the design of shops around the middle of the century. In effect, they were demanding that all shop owners show the same sort of understated reserve as well-established merchants continued to cultivate. Until well into the 1890s it was typical of conservative merchants catering to the well-to-do to avoid any type of show whatsoever: windows were not used for display, nor, in fact, was the merchandise displayed in the shop itself. Lady Jeune described her recollections of shopping in these establishments in the 1870s:

An afternoon's shopping was a solemn and dreary affair, when one was received at the door of the shop by a solemn gentleman in black, who in due time delivered one over to another solemn gentleman, and perhaps again a third, who found one a chair, and in sepulchral tone of voice uttered some magic words, such as "Silk, Mr. Smith" or "Velvet, Mr. Adam," and then departed to seek another victim. One bought what one wanted and nothing more, and having secured one's goods left the shop as seriously as one arrived. The whole performance left an impression of responsibility and sadness on one's mind, and whether desiring wedding or funeral garments the same solemnity characterized it, and with a great sense of relief the large doors closed behind one.38

37 H. H. Statham, "How Can Street Architecture be Best Improved With Due Regard For Economy", address to the Cheltenham Congress of the Social Science Association, reported in the Builder 36 (26 October 1878), p. 1111.

In the 1870s and 1880s only the most expensive goods were sold in this way and in general the people who continued to patronize these shops were those who at this time would have been considered "old fashioned" in their buying habits. This type of shopper not only continued to shop the way her parents and grandparents had, but it was usual for her to patronize the same merchants. Regardless of the cost of the goods these people purchased, they were relatively few in number because most of the fashionable world tended to be lured to more competitive merchants. This new sort of shopkeeper wanted customers to buy much more than they needed, and display was an extremely important method of stimulating desire. The more fashionable shops were noted for their elaborate displays as early as the Regency and, as Whittock's illustrations show (illustration 2.11), by about the middle of the century plate-glass windows were an essential part of merchandizing competition.

Large shop windows, artificial lighting and eye-catching display were also essential components of shops that cultivated the trade of the less-than-well-off who, throughout the second half of the century, had more money to spend and whose buying power increased enormously.\(^\text{39}\)

Shopkeepers who cultivated this market became very wealthy from small mark-ups on goods and a high volume of sales. The economies of scale made it possible to keep prices low, and they advertised this by cramming as many goods as possible into their shop windows, with the prices clearly shown. In 1830, even before Pugin complained of “astonishing bargains”, Lord Macaulay noted this trend in the Edinburgh Review: “A butcher of the higher class disdains to ticket his meat. A mercer of the higher class would be ashamed to hang up papers in his window inviting the passers-by to look at the stock of a bankrupt, all of the first quality, and going for half the value. We expect some reserve, some decent pride in our hatter and our bootmaker.”

Lord Macaulay is here making an association between the way objects are displayed and social status. He is as disturbed by the vulgarity of the display as he would have been by pushy social behaviour. Essentially they are identical for him, and therefore the merchandising behaviour of hatters and bootmakers should reflect the ideal comportment of the class to whom they cater. Discreet understatement, “reserve” and “decent pride”, should characterize both the goods he buys and the transactions by which he acquires them, because what he buys and how he shops is a significant manifestation of class.

Macaulay's awareness of shopping as a reflection of social status is remarkable only for the fact that it was directed at a type of retail marketing which was just appearing at the time.\textsuperscript{41} As the use of the shop window for the advertisement of goods became more common, the social statement made by the display could become relatively more subtle, and the way the window was arranged automatically indicated the quality of the goods on sale. The display of a huge quantity of ticketed items in crammed shop windows signified "bargains" and a gorgeous display signified "fashion".\textsuperscript{42} And while the distinction between these two categories was subject to a certain blurring, both were opposed to the reserved understatement that characterized more conservative establishments.

Just as the upper classes remained aloof from marketing innovations, so too did the more ambitious members of the architectural profession. Pugin and Ruskin had provided architects with moral and social arguments against flashy ornaments, and the affront to the appearance of architectural stability could be used to condemn the

\textsuperscript{41} Davis, \textit{Fairs}, p. 258.

\textsuperscript{42} George Augustus Sala, \textit{Twice Round the Clock} (London: 1859), p. 77 writes: "In the magnificent linen drapery establishments of Oxford and Regent Streets, the vast shop-fronts, museums of fashions in plate-glass cases...the rich piled velvets mantles are displayed, the moire and glace silks are arranged in artful folds, the laces and gauzes, the innumerable whim-whams and fribble-frabble of fashion are elaborately shown, and to their best advantage."

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apparent flimsiness of plate-glass ground floors. While these arguments had a certain aesthetic validity they also nicely complemented a class-based resistance to these innovations. Architects’ defense of conservative and dignified architecture in general — whether it was well-placed or not — was directly related to their desire to maintain the social status of their profession. They disdained the vulgarity of shops that affronted the values of the conservative upper middle-class elite to which they very much wanted to belong.

While many architects were disposed to view the architectural consequences of these new marketing strategies with contempt, the truth was that for many merchants “architecture” played a relatively insignificant role in their calculations. The most successful shopkeepers were aggressive retailers who stimulated demand and cultivated new markets. Their energies were directed at exploiting opportunities provided by, for example, improvements to public transportation and the ability of producers to manufacture goods previously made to order. Economic conditions determined the location, size and number of shops; notions of architectural propriety only affected the design of shops when it contributed to trade. By the end of the century old-fashioned reticence could survive only in the most exceptional of circumstances, and yet


architects continued to demand dignity and propriety in the design of all shops.

However, just as retailers developed and exploited markets, so too did architects. While the senior members of the profession — or most of those who made addresses or wrote articles and letters to professional journals — tended to market the profession as a dignified and conservative elite, many architects were able to satisfy the demands of shop owners. This new type of patron was a lucrative market that many architects were willing to serve. In other words, many architects could fulfill the needs of shopkeepers when given the chance.

Candor and detachment from the lofty ideals of architectural professionalism and theory is evidenced at a meeting of the Architectural Association in 1867. The Builder printed a summary of an informal talk on the treatment of shop fronts by Thomas Blashill, and recorded the ensuing discussion. Blashill’s preliminary remarks established a link between modern shop fronts with their wide expanse of glass and “the open-fronted shops of eastern and southern countries”. After this obeisance to historical precedent he proceeded to consider the design of shop fronts, fully accepting their modern forms and purpose. Since the shop front is “a necessity of trade, it is useless to exclaim against it on artistic grounds; the whole elevation of the building should take its character from this, which is its most important part.” Working from this premise Blashill and others present at the meeting discussed the size
and positioning of signs, moldings, panes of plate glass, and the fittings within the shop windows with the general concern to make the objects displayed within them as visible as possible from the sidewalk. The *Builder* summarized the rest of the talk but it reported that “plans, sections, fittings and minor details” were “treated in great detail” for the simple but very important reason that no matter how trivial these matters might seem, they are essential to the success of the shop window which is the tradesman's “sole means of introduction to the public by whose custom he must live.” A member pointed out that steps up to shops usually discouraged trade. Another speaker sensibly suggested that a single pane of plate glass for the entire front of the shop was not necessary because sashes well above eyelevel still provided an unimpeded view into the window and this discrete division allowed for relatively smaller panes of glass, which were considerably cheaper. The attitude of those present is probably best summed up by the concluding remarks of the chairman that “the first thing an architect ought to do in designing a shop front was to take his client’s opinion, who, in all probability, had studied the effect of other fronts in his neighbourhood.”

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45 “Shop Fronts”, *Builder* 25 (2 February 1867), pp. 81-82. Thomas Blashill would become the Superintending Architect to Metropolitan Buildings. His title became Architect to the London County Council in 1889, when the L.C.C. was established.
This discussion is remarkable in several ways, not the least of which is the fact that the *Builder* chose to report it. Every other reference to shop fronts in the pages of that journal strongly suggests that architects do not have such casual familiarity with the requirements of shopkeepers, and that architects would not permit the necessities of trade to determine the character of the design of shops. It is also remarkable for the fact that the members of the Architectural Association were concerned only with the shop front and the internal arrangement of the shop itself. This reflects the fact that ordinarily when shops were modernized or constructed the renovations did not extend to the storeys above the shop front. The architectural press very rarely acknowledged this practice, and for the most part chose to illustrate shops only when they were fully integrated with the design of the building that housed them.

The one exception to the *Builder*’s policy of illustrating only entirely new buildings or completely reconstructed façades presents another instance of the gulf that existed between attitudes and the real exigencies of architectural practice. In 1866 the *Builder* illustrated a renovated shop in Bond Street, commending the design because it “avoids the cavernous insecure aspect of the majority of such formations”, and attributing it to Fred P. Cockerell (Sir Charles’s son). In a letter to the editor published a week later Cockerell disclaimed responsibility for the project, finishing his statement with: “when a work of mine is honoured with a place in
your pages, I hope it will be something of more interest to your readers than a shop front.”

Cockerell’s disdain for the building type seems excessive, but this statement is more typical of architects’ pronouncements than the more accommodating attitudes voiced one year later at the Architectural Association. Indeed, the Builder showed its own ambivalence towards shop fronts by waiting over forty years to repeat the experiment (apart from one exception in which Cockerell figures.)

While the architectural profession manifested antipathy towards shops on very many occasions up to World War I, perhaps John Ruskin’s experience speaks most eloquently to doubts about the building type. In the mid-1870s Ruskin opened a shop to sell tea bought in bulk and re-sold in smaller quantities in order to provide the poor of the neighbourhood with “pure tea” as inexpensive as the inferior tea they could normally afford. He had expected that the shop would pay for

46 Fred P. Cockerell, letter to the Builder 24 (10 March 1866), p. 129.

47 The Builder published an illustration of the recently renovated facade of The Society of Painters in Watercolours, Pall Mall in 1875 (p. 371). The renovations comprised only the ground floor and mezzanine level, and the architect was Fred Cockerell. While it might be “more interesting” than a mere shop front it is nevertheless a similarly “slight” work. One can only speculate on the motives of the editor in choosing to break with policy in this particular instance. In 1885 The Building News published, quite without precedent, only the tops floors of a building, leaving only a bit of awning at the bottom of the picture to indicate the presence of shops on the ground floor (The Building News, 49 (28 August 1885), p. 326). The text that accompanies this illustration describes it as based on a drawing shown at the Royal Academy, from which one might infer that the architect himself did not care to exhibit the shops.
itself, including the wages of his mother's two elderly servants, his only employees, who were responsible for repackaging the tea. Unsurprisingly his philanthropic effort did not enjoy a brisk business, and the shop was never able to cover expenses. Ruskin put its failure down to several factors, including "the increase in the consumption of spirits...[which] slackens the demand for tea." But he conceded that the chief impediments to the success of the enterprise concerned the design of the shop. Ruskin believed that by refusing "to compete with my neighbouring tradesmen in either gas or rhetoric" he had discovered "that the poor only like to buy their tea where it is brilliantly lighted and eloquently ticketed." Further, he suspected the success of his shop was most seriously compromised by the fact that it had no sign. This resulted from indecision: he could not decide on the wording of the sign, nor could he "determine whether it should be of a Chinese character, black upon gold; or of a Japanese, blue upon white; or of a pleasant English, rose colour on green."48 While the entire history of Ruskin's shop might be described as evidence of his complete misunderstanding of the necessities of trade, his difficulties over the shop sign show peculiar uncertainties despite the fact that he was no longer opposed to decorative signs in principle, as he was in the Seven Lamps. It is curious, indeed, that the design of the sign

had so much significance for him. He was willing to permit the business to founder rather than to commit to one set of colours and a declaration as simple as the words “tea shop”. He would rather have his good intentions unfulfilled than stoop to commercial expediencies in the design of the shop. While Ruskin’s idealism and economic circumstances were unusual, his resistance to the necessities of trade was much like the attitudes expressed by the more ambitious members of the architectural profession who could hope they would not face the same problems in the course of their careers.

Of course, ordinary merchants and ordinary architects were not so privileged, and shop fronts continued to affront and to evolve. Horace Dan and E. C. Morgan Willmott’s *English Shop Fronts, Old and New* (1907) gives a fair indication of these developments in the first book devoted to actual shop fronts since Whittock’s publication of 1840. The authors are especially keen on recessed shop fronts (illustration 4.3), a recent innovation. They are able to endorse them for both commercial and aesthetic reasons because, on the one hand, the recess permitted shoppers a space to examine the goods in the window away from the congestion of the sidewalk, and the recess itself expressed the fact that the superstructure was supported on a Bessemer beam, not on the plate-glass window. These recesses had the additional value of permitting varied and complicated arrangements of shop windows and entrances, and freestanding display cases could be placed within the recess. The
illustrations show other innovations, including what was called "type fronts": the use of a "house style" in the design of the shop front so that the identity of a chain store would be immediately recognizable. The Kodak stores are examples of this type of design, and they are also similar to other shops in an Art Nouveau style illustrated elsewhere in the book (illustration 4.4). Dan and Willmott also represent Rococo, quasi-Islamic designs, trabeated fronts, arcuated support systems and recent examples of bow-windowed fronts in the Georgian style. Although they include examples of very early shop fronts, these are relatively few in comparison to the number of plates devoted to contemporary ones, which are usually attributed to specific architects.49

Other than having excluded from their illustrations those shops that use only the largest possible quantity of plate glass, the authors seem intent on giving a fair sample of the different sorts of shop fronts. In its review of the book the Builder does not show the same catholicism of taste: though restrained by convention not to criticise the work of fellow architects by name, it shows the same conservativism that had always characterised its attitudes towards shops.50 The Builder singles


50 "Shop Front Architecture", Builder 93 (30 November 1907), pp. 577-578. The only shop the Builder absolutely condemns is a rather florid Rococo affair, and in this the Builder is offending no one: the building is represented as an anonymous design and, besides, it is in Paris.
out for special praise only those that possessed Georgian style bow-fronts, or those with substantial supports in the form of arches or classical orders. The one, notable exception to this staunch support of only those shops following well-established precedents, is the commendation of Mackinstosh's design for a shop at 217 Sauchiehall Street in Glasgow (illustration 4.5). This is a very restrained example of a shop front, and despite the innovations in detail, the basic form of the shop conveys reticence, and dependence on eighteenth-century precedent.

The Builder's attitude is consistent with the response of some architects to Willmott's address at the Architectural Association one year earlier. While some architects could appreciate recessed fronts and Kodak's innovations, Ashbee, Lishman and other unnamed speakers could advocate only older styles, suggesting that there ought to be "competition in reticence instead of showiness."\(^5\) By this time the persistence of these attitudes was aided by the fact that the more exclusive sorts of shops still demanded conservative designs. Indeed, in this one area architects could claim a victory, but a victory perhaps only because they were working for a clientele that needed to project the greatest respect for dignity and propriety. The beginning of the change can be dated to 1882 when J.J. Fenwick chose to have his new shop

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\(^5\) From the discussion following E. C. Morgan Willmott, "The Architecture of Shops", an address given at the Architectural Association and reported in The Builder 90 (10 March 1906), p. 264.
front in Newcastle-upon-Tyne designed by the architect W.H. Knowles. The windows of this shop were no longer stuffed with goods; rather the exclusive character of the establishment was advertised by the fact that only a very few dresses and furs were placed on display.52 This is the beginning of the courtship of the middle and upper classes by all shopkeepers, but especially by department stores, which were founded, and had flourished, selling cheap goods.53

Gordon Selfridge, the American entrepreneur and owner of Selfridge's department store, designed by Daniel Burnham, was especially adept at advertising the dignity of his store (illustration 4.6). Publishing a view of it in 1909, the Builder admired it as a "fine and monumental building", and on at least two further occasions permitted Selfridge to air his opinions in its pages. In the first instance Selfridge makes an interesting distinction between the merchant and the shopkeeper, explaining that mere shopkeepers are responsible for the excessive use of plate glass, sacrificing all indication of architectural support on the ground level to one principle only, the "simple one of selling goods." This sole concern is inappropriate for the merchant who respects "correct architecture and design". Selfridge's statement runs to only four short paragraphs, yet he is able to link "dignity" with


53 Jeffreys, Retail Trading, p. 327.
“correctness” twice, and to state twice, as well, that merchants must be interested in higher concerns than merely selling goods.\textsuperscript{54} Five years later the \textit{Builder} reported a summary of his talk at the Royal Society of Arts in which he expanded on this theme and it was reported he said it was time some of the smaller London shops "were either pulled or burned down and something better built in their stead. He thought the merchant owed it to the community to make his business establishment as architecturally beautiful as possible, so that it might be an ornament to the city instead of, as was too often the case, an eyesore."\textsuperscript{55}

Selfridge's argument is, of course, totally disingenuous. If dignity and correctness did not sell goods, no merchant would advocate their importance. Selfridge's market did require these characteristics as a guarantee of the quality of the goods for sale, and to distinguish his shop from those further down the social or economic ladder. Dignity and correctness were useful marketing ploys because they were relatively exceptional, and hence exclusive. Moreover, the distinction he makes between a mere "shopkeeper" and a "merchant" is calculated to appeal to the prejudices of his audience. Merchants, as Selfridge defines them, are as concerned with art as profit, and therefore their patronage has

\textsuperscript{54} "The Architectural Treatment of Shop Fronts", \textit{Builder} 106 (2 January 1914), pp. 8-11.

cultural value. In this respect modern merchants were much like the merchant princes of the Renaissance. By this assertion department stores, their directors and their customers acquire status, and so too do the architects who design them. Architects can willingly serve the needs of commercial "patrons" without fear of diminishing the status of the profession. The mere shopkeeper must make do, it seems, with the services of the "shopfitter", and in all likelihood this specialist would accommodate the requirements of mere trade as effectively as the architect would sympathize with, and satisfy, the demands of more discriminating patrons. 56

Selfridge had recently emigrated from Chicago where he had worked at the Marshall Field department store, and we might presume it was in Chicago he learned that culture was good for business. In the wake of the Columbian Exposition of 1893, "urbanity", "decorum", "taste", "tradition" and "the genteel etiquette of cultivation" were "paraded" by "the less aggressive and more urbane" Chicago businessmen. 57 Indeed, as we shall see, the White City concept or the City Beautiful Movement had a great deal of importance in Britain from this time, and contributed significantly to changes in the attitudes of

56 So far a murky occupation: the OED s.v. gives as its first instance of the use of the term a heading for "shop fitters" in the list of subscribers to the United Telephone Co., 1885.

British architects concerning views down streets. Although Beaux-arts classicism might be considered an imported architectural mode in the last decade of the nineteenth century, the emphasis on dignity was entirely consistent with the demands of British architects throughout the century. The enthusiasm with which many British architects embraced an architectural ideal that was promoted so that Chicago businessmen would appear more like cultured Europeans seems deliciously ironic.

Selfridges department store itself also shows that dignity is a relative quality in monumental commercial architecture designed according to the Beaux-arts style of the time. The simple mass and silhouette of the building is probably responsible for Goodhart-Rendel's quip that it became the model for many "chaste classical temples for the supply of dry goods." 58 Niklaus Pevsner, looking more at its size and details—especially the richly decorated colossal Ionic columns that create a plastic screen, with extensive glazing behind, below and above it—has suggested that the "vulgarity" of this façade complements Daniel Burnham's "big booming voice". 59 However, in size Selfridge's store is rather unusual, and in smaller streets and smaller buildings, British architects expected "dignity" would not be put on parade; rather it must


be inherent in a conservative reticence and the understated assurance of those secure in their social position.

Although architects knew that shopkeepers deliberately affected “outward archaism” to advertise the quality of their merchandise, the Builder used the criteria of status when it condemned or approved of shop fronts. 60 In the same series of articles that contains Selfridge’s first statement — “The Architectural Treatment of Shop Fronts” — the author has little good to say about the shops of London. They are in general inexcusable for the quantity of plate glass employed, and collectively they create shopping streets that are notable only for their “untidy disorder”. The author would like to rebuild Regent Street, “which contains almost nothing good”, but he approves of the general quality of the shops in both Old and New Bond Street. Bond Street shops are in general small, and the quality of the shop fronts is largely determined by the shopkeeper’s willingness “to spend.” Features singled out for praise include bowed windows, evidence of architectural support, and a general “refinement.”61 Clearly, the author can admire them because they are conservative, and they are conservative because they are exclusive. Bond Street, and the area around Bond Street, was at this time notable for the

60 “The Shop Front”, Builder 105 (26 September 1913), p. 313, summarises an article in the Times (24 September 1913).

Queen Anne style of its shops (illustration 4.7). This style was associated with the “select few”, and characteristically employed deliberately old-fashioned features, including small panes of glass for the shop window.62

While it was pleased with the partial success of conservative architectural values in the design of shop fronts that catered to the refined rich, the Builder found it difficult to admit that reticent designs could be used only by shopkeepers who benefited from a merchandizing strategy that emphasised the elegance and selection of the goods for sale. This is apparent in its enthusiasm for French shop fronts of the First Empire period, photographs of which were included in this series. In 1915 and 1916 the Builder also published designs from a French patternbook (illustration 4.8), which have a great deal of affinity with those in I. and J. Taylor, Designs for Shop Fronts (1792). In the article that accompanies these illustrations the Builder mentions only in passing that shop fronts in Paris are especially good “where the shops displaying luxury objects are congregated”. The Builder generally (and characteristically) finds fault with British shop fronts in comparison to French shops, because “the commercial instincts of the English, accentuated by the increased output of machinery, led to a lowering of the standard of taste; in consequence, the subtlety displayed by the

Parisian architects in their finished designs was unheeded and coarseness and banality were the outcome."63

Selfridge's statements, Bond Street shops, and many of the illustrations in Dan and Willmott's book clearly put the lie to statements like this. By this time it was quite inappropriate for the Builder to assume that shopkeepers who demanded designs that transgressed the rules of architectural propriety did so because they were ignorant of these rules. In the three-part series on shop fronts in which Selfridge first aired his views, two other merchants also contributed statements in which they frankly admit that the only purpose of the shop front is to sell goods. A.S. Cleaver, the director of Robinson & Cleaver, claims that the only aesthetic requirements shop fronts ought to fulfill is that they "please the public", and any demand that some part of the frontage be devoted to solid masonry he describes as a "whim...contrary to all rules of commercial morality and business equity." Although he does not allude to his own shop front, its lavish neo-Baroque upper stories sitting on cast-iron and plate-glass ground floor would perfectly illustrate his statement (illustration 4.9). Swan and Edgar's director, Walter Morford, is even more forceful. He insists that "architects fail to recognise the growing need of a continuous and unbroken line of glass," and cites Shaw's Picadilly Hotel in Regent Street as an instance when architecture

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created a merchandising debacle. He believed that the substitution of heavy stone columns and recessed windows in place of “what would have been considered normal windows” was responsible for the fact that the shops remained untenanted for years, eventually renting at less than half of the original estimate. Clearly, Cleaver and Morford know what is “proper”, both aesthetically and financially, and they know precisely which is more necessary when they come into conflict.64

These are valuable statements for what they reveal concerning retailers’ understanding of the conflict between architectural propriety and successful merchandizing practice, but the circumstances that prompted these statements are even more important. They were part of a long dispute between the architectural establishment and Regent Street businessmen over Shaw’s designs for the Picadilly Hotel and rebuilding of the Quadrant—replacing John Nash’s work of a century before. The frictions that arose among interested parties from 1904, the date of Shaw’s first plans for the Picadilly Hotel, until 1927 when the Quadrant was complete, illuminates complexities attending large-scale urban building projects, especially when a number of levels of government are involved.65 However, the most remarkable aspect of the


dispute over the Quadrant was that shopkeepers were able to compel the Office of Woods and Forests to abandon Shaw's designs, designs that had been universally admired by architects when they were first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1906 (illustration 4.10). Merchants objected to the size of the shop windows. Architects perceived their well-organized, public, and ultimately successful campaign against these designs as a "new and bewildering phenomenon". Although the Builder finally sympathized with shopkeepers in 1911, and sponsored a competition for new designs that would meet with merchants' approval, the fact that shopkeepers would determine the character of a landmark building in such a familiar part of London was still considered distasteful.

Shaw’s original designs and the anger evinced by architects over their rejection also rather dramatically underline the estrangement that had developed between architects and commercial clients since Nash’s day. In Shaw’s designs the massive piers and arches of the ground story give the boldly colonnaded and rusticated upper stories a substantial base, and Shaw steadfastly refused to diminish the ground-floor masonry because this would destroy the monumental character of the design as a


whole. Shaw's work eminently satisfies architectural propriety, and in fact it does this so aggressively that one suspects it was meant to answer Nash's more accommodating buildings, and to serve as a corrective to the general character of commercial architecture of Shaw's time (illustration 4.11). In Shaw's work the ground floor is entirely subservient to the building above it, and this is quite contrary to what was normal practice by then. Cleaver, of Robinson & Cleaver, justifies the designs of ordinary commercial buildings in his statement in the Builder when he declares that shops are the most important part of the buildings that house them, because "the general public sum up the attractiveness or otherwise of a street by the appearance of its shops." Cleaver's opinion does seem justified: people rarely look up in cities, and in most commercial streets special effort is required to see the entire façade of most buildings. But even at this late date many architects seemed especially unwilling to contend with ordinary modes of perception, which are inconsistent with architects' renderings of facades, in either elevation or perspective, particularly in commercial streets.

The Quadrant as it was rebuilt, designed by Reginald Blomfield after World War I and completed in 1927, was an acceptable compromise between merchants' needs and aesthetic form (illustration 4.12).

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68 Saint, Shaw, p. 390.

Keeping to the spirit of Shaw’s original design, Blomfield increased the size of the shop windows and lightened the appearance of the masonry above. The result is a thoroughly integrated facade in which the ground floor seems substantial, yet it provides sufficient display area. This was a triumph of sorts, but not without precedent: before World War I, and even at the time the Quadrant affair was at its most contentious, buildings were being designed that intelligently integrated the large shop window with the upper stories.

However, when architects first railed against large shop windows that created a disjunction between the ground floor and the architecture above it, the charge was legitimate. The Builder published many illustrations in which this transgression is immediately apparent. Some show a pattern of fenestration on the ground floor that is inconsistent with the windows in the storeys above it (illustration 4.13). This building and many others published in the Builder (illustrations 4.14 and 4.15, see also 3.10 and 3.11) have flimsy ground floors supposedly carrying rather heavy superstructures. The steady increase in the size of plate glass panels is readily apparent in the pages of the Builder (illustrations 4.16 and 4.17) right through the first decades of the twentieth century. Although these illustrations amply confirm the prevalence of the glass-bottomed building, and hence explain the Builder’s continual complaints against merchants who seem to have forced architects to compromise ideals to the demands of marketplace, they also show that architects
were learning to accommodate this demand more and more successfully. The later examples show that by the turn of the century the relatively smooth surfaces of the upper floors do not contrast with the shop front as much as the more muscular architecture of the mid-Victorian period.70

There were also architectural authorities who sanctioned insubstantial ground floors. Viollet-le-Duc had suggested architects design glass-bottomed buildings by giving expression throughout the façade to the iron frame that makes such buildings structurally possible.71 This emphasis on the logical expression of structure had been one of the basic tenets of British architectural theory, coming up frequently in the discussion of new materials. One of the Builder’s earliest articles concerning steel-frame construction in the United States condemns American architects for hiding the facts of steel construction, describing such deceptions as “concessions to ancient superstitions”.72

There were also complaints against those parts of the London Building Act of 1894 concerning the dimensions of supporting piers and thickness of walls that made no allowance for the relative strength of steel


In 1905 an architect, Mr. Gibson, went so far as to describe as “monstrous” the practice of covering steel buildings with stone or brick merely to conform to the Building Act. In an address to the Society of Arts Beresford Pite could also suggest that the disjunction between “massive erections of weighty stone and brickwork poised upon the slender brass pillarettes, lace-like arches, plate-glass fittings of shop fronts” could be solved if “the system of proportion compelled by the ground story [were] recognised in the design of the upper ones, and though openings above are not required of the extent of that below, there [could be] a logical symmetry of spacing which would take the first factor and by progressive reduction or systematic subdivision apply the scale and diminish the proportions harmoniously with satisfactory results.”

Dan and Willmott’s *English Shop Fronts* gives further evidence that there were several acceptable methods of reconciling the plate-glass shop front to the building above. The authors suggest that a building containing a shop front ought to employ the same materials for the entire façade of the building and to show the real facts of its construction at all times “with bold honesty.” The authors believe that the problems

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73 “Steel Skeleton Framework and Ferro-concrete Structures in London”, *Builder* 97 (3 July 1909), pp. 5-6, is the report of a meeting of a parliamentary committee during which architects gave evidence.

presented by shops can only be resolved when British architects cease hiding the iron or steel frame with stone and brick above the relative void of the shop fronts. They commend Viollet-le-Duc’s propositions and the work of recent American architects who have created “a logical connection between the shop-front and superstructure”. 76

But while architects were aware of theoretical justification for the glass ground floor, they were nevertheless still not reconciled to the building type. Pite’s reasonable treatment of shop windows is really at odds with the tenor of his address as a whole. In fact, concerning commercial street architecture generally he is against “the outrageous vulgarity of design, ignorance, or defiance of elementary considerations of appropriateness, of proportion, and architectural suitability in expression, and the abominably bad ornamentation that characterise the great speculative building blocks recently erected”. Further, “there seems to be no protection for the public, refined or unrefined, against the insults to taste and national self-respect by which the sordid incapacity of grossly ignorant men deface our finest and most important thoroughfares.” It is important to note that the men he refers to are not architects; they are “building investors who, buying or securing the most

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75 Beresford Pite, “Modern Treatment of Street Architecture”, address to the Applied Art Section of the Society of Arts and reported in The Builder 82 (12 April 1902), pp. 365-367.

76 Dan and Willmott, English Shop-fronts, p. 16.
prominent and serviceable sites, have erected speculative shops and warehouses upon them as ready-made goods for sale.”

Much of this is extremely familiar. Pite’s disgust with the debasement of the noble art of architecture for commercial purposes was an utterly commonplace sentiment. But most Victorian architects tended to direct their criticisms at specific transgressions of architectural propriety, and they restricted their invective to specific classes of commercial buildings such as shops. For the most part Pite’s contemporaries also held out hope that vulgarity of design, incompetence and ignorance would eventually disappear as shopkeepers and shoppers would learn to appreciate good architecture and demand it. While Pite conceded the fact that some commercial buildings were good, and that it was possible to resolve the problem of the shop window, he was much more radical than most of his contemporaries because he condemned the economic system that made bad buildings virtually inevitable. This sort of pessimism was much more akin to Pugin’s and Ruskin’s sweeping denunciations of contemporary culture than it was to the opinions shared by most practicing architects of the Victorian period, whose pragmatism restricted the scope of their criticism. But Pite did not advocate the reform of an economic system, only control over its manifestations. He wanted members of “societies for the promotion of the fine arts and architecture” to form “committees of taste to proffer advice,

[offer] criticism and exercise veto over the design of buildings. In other words, Pite wanted owners to be deprived of their right to final approval over the design of urban buildings, and this power would be given over to architects and other suitably informed individuals.

Professional control of street architecture had been sporadically demanded before this time, but now it was entering the mainstream of architectural theory. For a decade or so prior to this address there had been a steady movement away from an appreciation for picturesque irregularity and an increasing enthusiasm for more harmonious urban landscapes, which would require the subordination of individual buildings to the restrictions of a predetermined plan. Although this development had little direct bearing on architects’ attitudes towards shops, attitudes towards shops furthered the cause of those who advocated more ordered streetscapes. Pite was among the first to do so merely by extending the critique of patronage that architects so frequently leveled at shopkeepers to include commercial clients generally, thus proving the powerlessness of all architects under the prevailing system. Furthermore, by placing the demands of architects and commercial interests in direct opposition he was able to justify the demand that the architectural profession be formally charged with protecting the aesthetic character of the city from the arrogance of commercial clients.
By stressing the conflict between architects and commercial clients it was possible to demand control of architecture generally, seemingly without restricting the scope of architectural individuality. Editorials in the Builder shortly after Pite's address show this careful balance. A short article in 1905, concerning the buildings lining the new streets of Aldwych and Kingsway, condemns the general run of recent hotels and theatres as pandering to a public impressed only by “splendor and convenience”, or by anything merely “astonishing” or “new”. It recommends that the London County Council exercise its power to approve designs in order to obtain a “higher result.” In 1907 the Builder decried the “bane of individualism” obvious in London and admitted to the great pleasure to be derived from “fine architectural schemes...such as adorn Paris, Vienna and Berlin”. It insists, however, that the “autocratic power necessary for such a consummation is not really compatible with the growth and development of the community”. There is only an apparent contradiction between these two articles, because commercial clients are the subjects of attack in the first statement and the freedom of architects is the principle defended in the second. These precise distinctions show rather remarkable professional solidarity because they suggest that architects following only their own inclinations


would never produce the excesses commercial clients have demanded of them.

A. E. Street contributes to this division between architects and their clients in “London Street Architecture”, a four-part series of articles that appeared in the *Architectural Review* in 1905-6. In a lengthy and thoughtful critique of a number of London buildings and streetscapes he reserves his greatest approbation for those, both recently constructed and surviving examples of Georgian vernacular, that are “free from brutal aggressiveness,” “simple, unaffected, dignified” or “diversified without being extravagant”. In stark contrast to “eminently dignified” buildings are the “big, braggart, unregenerate” shops and commercial structures that are “the embodiment of vaunting ambition”. Moreover, they represent “ill manners”, “a flagrant breach of urbanity”, “efforts at sensationalism”, and all characteristic of the “license, ignorance and vaingloriousness” of “enterprise”. These general complaints very neatly complement his scathing description of individual buildings. He is especially critical of Harrods, which he describes as perfectly suited to “popular taste” and “the sort of bait the public gulps eagerly down!” All this vilification of commercial architecture justifies the need for its control, and his terms of approbation of good buildings also explain how control can be exercised, but not “at the expense of the free action of the artist”.  

80 While Street never explicitly states this, it is quite clear that the
qualities buildings possess are human character traits. Understated, polite and courteous architecture is very much like the perfect gentleman who can rather effortlessly and gracefully accommodates himself to the requirements of civilized society. The polished, urbane and cultured architect is inherently governed by restraint, which makes external control unnecessary, and these characteristics make him eminently suited to control others. Likewise, the vagaries and extravagances of commercial architecture require constraint as much as exhibitionist behaviour.

The Builder also linked architecture and social behaviour in order to lobby for imposing civilizing constraints on commercial buildings. In 1913 the Builder suggested that large plate-glass windows could be entirely outlawed because their existence was due only to rivalry among shop owners. The writer argued that the collective exercise of restraint would harm no one in particular, as it would affect everyone equally.81 This point was repeated in the introduction to the series of articles concerning shop fronts in which Selfridge figured prominently. Building promoters' desire to “shock” and their indulgence in miscellaneous “weird fancies” were the subjects of a rather lengthy editorial in the Builder in 1912.82 In this article it was recommended that the great

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ground landlords in London, especially the Crown, assert control over the rebuilding of land leases under the supervision of the RIBA. The Builder argued that unfettered commercial interests produced buildings inimical to the principles of harmony in their “restless appeal to our attention”. The association of individualism solely with commercial rivalry in general also helped weaken respect for individuality regardless of the merits of any particular building. Deviations from regularity or the disruption of “quiet dignity” were described in editorials in the Builder as “vulgarity” or “clamouring”. These were terms of disapprobation that had been formerly reserved to describe specific outré buildings, especially shops. Now they could be used to describe any variation from the norm.

By World War I the profession’s attitudes towards shop fronts meant that all calls for the control of street architecture were implicitly concerned with curbing the “weird fancies” of commercial clients. The development of this practice is apparent in two addresses, both entitled “Colour in Street Architecture”, one from 1894 and the other from 1911. The first, a paper read at the Architectural Association by S. B. Beale, examined the advantages and limitations of a variety of building materials, and it advocated designing buildings in such a way as to inhibit the collection of grime on projecting surfaces. Many architects

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contributed to the discussion that followed and their suggestions were drawn from their observations of a number of London buildings, including the Natural History Museum, and Mansion House, as well as specific restaurants and shops. While most participants in the discussion disapproved of the “hard and glaring” quality of glazed materials, no one was disposed to outlaw or restrict their use. In the second paper, by W. Davidson for the Edinburgh Town Planning Conference, the speaker’s treatment of both materials and methods of keeping them clean was relatively brief. The real purpose of the paper was to complain of “unstudied experiments” in the use of colour and the “atrocities” that ensue when existing buildings are “thrown out of tone or scale” by architects who show “in a new shop front what clever things we can do.” The speaker believed that the only solution to this rivalry would be “the creation of a governing body...that has control over these aesthetic issues.”

There is another tendency in these discussions that helps to justify the need for control, and that is the changing definition of the term

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85 W. Davidson, “Colour in Street Architecture”, address given at the Edinburgh Town Planning Conference and reported in the Builder 100 (2 June 1911), pp. 687-688.
“street architecture”. Whereas it had commonly been used to describe small commercial and residential buildings, it was always capable of being stretched to include urban architecture in general. This occurs in the 1894 discussion of “Colour in Street Architecture”, in which the Natural History Museum and Mansion House are objects of interest, along with shops and restaurants. In A. E. Street’s “London Street Architecture” the term has the same elastic quality because it comprises government, commercial and residential buildings. However, in “Sketches of Street Architecture” which appeared in the Builder in 1897, the term is used in a restrictive sense, referring only to small privately owned buildings. This series illustrates small buildings by well-known architects, and this is quite different from Jackson’s use of the term in 1891, in which it applies only to buildings designed by builders, and not by architects. Indeed Jackson’s use of the term contradicts its original meaning as it was first used to distinguish excellent small buildings from those still adhering to urban vernacular forms. Jackson’s relatively pejorative use of the term, coupled with Beresford Pite’s use of it to refer only to commercial buildings, soon became dominant, especially through editorials that appeared in the Builder.86

86 Pite’s pendant to his “Modern Treatment of Street Architecture” (which concerns only commercial buildings), is “Modern House Design”, Architectural Review 8 (1900), pp. 153-155, and while it concerns urban residences the term street architecture does not appear in it.
This restriction of the term “street architecture” to refer to lesser examples of commercial buildings helped to justify the need for its control, as is apparent in another pair of essays: “The Comparative Desirability of the Formal or Irregular Treatment of Street Architecture in Large Cities”, which won the RIBA silver medal in 1901, and “The Control of Street Architecture” of 1917. The writer of the first essay, Arthur M. Watson, shows enthusiasm for regularly composed streetscapes, which would demand the control of street architecture. But he argues for consistency in street architecture in order to maintain and develop the character of individual streets, such as Pall Mall, Oxford Street and Harley Street. His ideal was not to remake Oxford Street in the image of Pall Mall, but to urge architects to respect the existing streetscape in their additions or alterations.87 The response to “The Control of Street Architecture”, given by Sir John Burnet at the RIBA in 1917, shows that very different attitudes toward street architecture had become common in the years since 1901. In his paper Burnet argued that control was neither necessary nor welcome because architects and their clients were capable of producing designs, without mediation, that would satisfy both aesthetic and commercial criteria. Moreover, he believed that a varied street, even comprised of buildings of “poor or bad design”, is “a more human and interesting place or resort” than “the

finest uniform conception.” At this meeting both these opinions were held by Burnet alone. No one agreed with Burnet concerning the desirability of irregularly composed streetscapes; and his belief that good street architecture could be produced through the efforts of the architect and his client was dismissed as an “idealistic hope.” A. E. Richardson, Aston Webb and W. R. Lethaby participated in the discussion; Richardson was particularly vigorous in his defense of harmony, claiming that London was “overdressed” as a result of a “clamouring for notice” and a “craze for individuality”. In order to control “architectural exhibitions” it was necessary to establish a governing body that would help the architect “overcome the idiosyncrasies of his clients.” It was possible to demand control of these buildings because “street architecture” was understood to be commercial buildings and, further, it was becoming a generally held tenet that architects and their commercial clients were by necessity in conflict.

This perceived conflict helped to fuel the urban planning movement in the years leading up to World War I. Urban planners were aware of the fact that the building or rebuilding of cities in the Beaux-arts tradition would entail concentrating considerable power into their hands, if only to control the inevitable architectural individuality which had attended the uncontrolled development of cities in the nineteenth

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century. However, the supposed incompetence of most commercial street architecture provided further justification for such control. Indeed, the demand for propriety, regularity, conformity and modesty was calculated to impose a hierarchy in the profession that would place those at the top — the writers, theorists, planners and masterminds — in the position of control over the small-time architect and lesser designers, such as shop fitters, who on their own seemed incapable of satisfying these requirements. From the time of Pugin until World War I the ambition of many architects seemed to blind them to the fact that the public might have liked the diversity, experimentation, exuberance and extravagance of shops and commercial buildings as much as their proprietors. Architects' desire to intervene in the design of all street architecture to protect the public from the excesses of commercial clients was a direct assault on popular taste. Buildings that betrayed this taste surely did not affront many members of the public, although they did traumatize respectable and restrained architects. Arguments that advocated the control of street architecture were based on the erroneous assumption that the public was the hapless victim of commercial interests, whereas in reality architectural "exhibitionism" offended only architects' sensibilities. It was the unfortunate legacy of Victorian attitudes towards shops that made architects believe that they could serve the public only by making war on popular taste.
The story of architects’ disaffection with the demands of commercial clients corresponds to other aspects of nineteenth-century architectural history, but with significant qualifications. The great efforts at the reform of design in the second half of the nineteenth century were directed against buildings and goods that were “crude, vulgar and overloaded with ornament”, which were craved by “an uneducated public, a public with either too much money and no time or with no money and no time.”\textsuperscript{89} The Queen Anne style, the first significant evidence of improved “gentlemanly” taste,\textsuperscript{90} and the vernacular revivals associated with it, were superseded by a general admiration for the “discipline and control” of Beaux-arts architecture around the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{91} Attitudes towards street architecture were influenced by these broad changes in architectural ideals, but attitudes towards street architecture also show an underlying continuity throughout this period that is unaffected by these changes. Architects consistently held with the inherited ideals of the cultural elite, the rules of taste and the value of tradition in order to bolster the purview and social status of the profession.


\textsuperscript{90} Girouard, \textit{Sweetness and Light}, pp. 3-5.

Of course not all architects were concerned with professionalism, and in their commitment to individualism many implicitly acknowledged the public's right to expression in street architecture. But within the profession no one argued directly on behalf of public taste as consistently and emphatically as Loudon had in the 1830s. Surely the very real success of popular taste in the mean time made a spokesman unnecessary. Nevertheless, it seems appropriate that a statement that can be taken as a defense of popular taste should be allowed the last word. It is a description of Princes Street in Edinburgh from the 1860s, and surprisingly enough it appeared in the *Builder*:

Few of the houses remain as they were built. The most of them have been converted into warehouses, shops, clubhouses, hotels or insurance offices, the proprietors of which have adopted the style of architecture and variety of elevation which seemed to them best to suit their own tastes and requirements. The presiding genius over these many alterations and additions, if you admit his existence, must needs have held with the melancholy but philosophic Jacques of Shakespeare's As You Like It that "motley is the only wear." In styles the Grecian Doric, the Grecian Ionic, the Venetian, the Palladian, the Gothic, the "nineteenth century medieval" and the modern French are all represented. Motley in very truth; and yet the general appearance of the street is, on the whole, eminently satisfactory.92

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Nineteenth-century attitudes towards street architecture were adopted by architects attracted to the new field of town planning in the early years of the twentieth century. The supposed vulgarity and clamoring of commercial buildings were among the more significant justifications for founding this discipline, which—at its inception—seemed likely to be invested with the power to control civic building in all its aspects. Urban planners felt confident that the piece-meal, erratic and uncontrolled growth of cities would be rectified in the new century. All new streets would be laid out for architectural effect, and streets and the buildings that lined them would be required to complement each other. Street plans and streetscapes following both Beaux-arts and picturesque principles had been the subject of debate in the nineteenth century, and in this respect, too, evolving attitudes toward street architecture continued within the urban planning movement. Familiarity with a broad range of planning problems—especially the proper relationship between street plans and street architecture—led architects
to believe they were uniquely qualified to head up the new discipline of urban planning, controlling the work of surveyors, engineers and architects who would design individual buildings. In the event, planning in Britain was never granted extensive control over the architectural character of cities, much to the frustration of those architects who had become planners. This limitation of scope meant that planners had little control over street architecture, and this in itself would explain the absence of the term from their lexicon. But even in the early years of the profession, when planners were concerned with street architecture, they often avoided using the term. Clearly street architecture had come to denote the small-scale, individualistic disorder of nineteenth-century streets that would be swept away by a new elite possessing the vision, talent and expertise required for the task of systematic civic design.

Nineteenth-century architects consistently lamented the fact that the widening of old streets or the laying out of new ones in the central area of London was undertaken to satisfy only short-term goals or to solve only small-scale problems. When the issue of street widening was raised most architects expressed exasperation with both the shortsightedness of the Metropolitan Board of Works, and the unwillingness of the British government to invest in improvements to London on anything approaching the scale of expenditure that the French were willing to lavish on Paris. For decades, however, architects were usually concerned with the same issues that motivated action on
the part of the Metropolitan Board of Works, meaning that they too were primarily concerned with traffic circulation and the problems of overcrowding and sanitation in slums and rookeries.¹ As late as the 1890s the aesthetic character of new streets did not overly concern either the MBW or most architects.²

However, the general acceptance of the principles of picturesque variety allowed architects to face the contingencies of awkward sites with equanimity, especially in the 1860s when the central area of London was being extensively rebuilt.³ Narrow and irregularly shaped streets cannot produce regularly composed vistas, and this was quite acceptable because, as Reynolds had first noted, the picturesque resides in the shape of streets as much as it does in the forms of buildings. The

¹ While editor of The Builder from 1843-1882, George Godwin might have been as well known as an advocate of social reform as he was as a member of the architectural profession. He wrote many articles for The Builder that vividly described the squalid living conditions of London’s poor—for example, “A Quarter of a Century of London Street Improvements”, Builder 24 (1 December 1866), pp. 877-878 and “About London Improvements”, Builder 35 (18 August 1877), pp. 825-826—as well as three books: London Shadows: A glance at the “Homes” of the Thousands (1854), Town Swamps and Social Bridges (1859), Another Blow for Life (1864).


cramped views of buildings that such streets produced demanded informal compositions and placed a great deal of emphasis on details because most buildings could only be viewed from close range. These constraints were thoroughly acceptable for both ordinary street architecture and monumental public buildings. The Builder's review of Pennethorne's design for the University of London in 1870, which makes this explicit, deserves to be quoted at length:

Many designs of the modern school, which depend for their effect on picturesque multiplicity and even confusion of parts, and which eschew uniformity, may produce almost as good an effect in a confined street site as on a more extended one, depending as they do on parts and not on the whole design for their effect. With a building so essentially Classical in type as the London University, and so completely regular and symmetrical in design, the case is quite different; it requires to be viewed as a whole, and to be so placed that its centre and principal feature may be symmetrically disposed with regard to other buildings or principal objects of whatever kind adjoining it. In this respect there can be no doubt that Mr. Pennethorne's new building is most disadvantageously placed for the exhibition of the design, there being in fact no point of sight whence the whole can be seen at once.... It may be said that the architect should have designed his building for the site and for the view and aspect which it was to enjoy. 5

It is significant that this was written shortly after the 1866 Law Courts competition, and before construction began on G.E. Street's winning design. All the designs submitted to the competition were Gothic, and several of them were symmetrical on the Strand front. The


design that won the competition for Street was not symmetrical, and when it was revised in 1871 the stacks and turrets became even more emphatic. While Street's son records that it was assumed that ultimately the Strand front would be opened up, there seems always to have been admiration for the relationship of the design to the confined site. Since the entire façade could not be seen from any single point of view, the design depended on assertive, somewhat independent details.

Street's first design was a bird's-eye view (illustration 5.1), was unlike other competition designs run in the Builder, and provides a good indication of the character of the street. The elevation used to present the revised plan (illustration 5.2) shows that the constituent parts became more plastic, and the façade became more broken in plan and in outline.

Indeed, there was little reason to condemn picturesque or irregular streets since these provided architects with opportunities to display their command over the problem of accommodating even large buildings to


8 Ibid., p. 166, quoting a letter published somewhere by a Professor Roger Smith describing the "rules" of "street architecture." Smith was the Architectural Association's representative on the Committee of Selection for Architectural Drawings in the International Exhibition of 1872 (from The Building News 22 (19 January 1872), p. 50).
difficult sites. Admiration of skill in dealing with extensive frontages on awkward sites began with Nash in Regent Street and continued into the twentieth century. Shaw's Gaiety Theatre, for example, was praised in the *Builder* because it addressed the street corner; by creating a pivot around an awkward angle Shaw turned a difficulty into "an opportunity for special architectural effect". But in the years between Nash and Shaw most street buildings were not big enough to command their sites, and therefore the most significant problem they presented was their relationship to the architectural character of the street. Picturesque irregularity was as appropriate a principle for these smaller buildings as it was for monumental buildings on confined sites.

Although architects had few reasons to discuss ideal street plans when comprehensive planning was not possible, in the middle decades of the century some opportunities did arise for them to engage in theoretical discussions. One of these occurred at an 1871 RIBA meeting in honour of the recently deceased James Pennethorne. Arthur Cates presented a biographical sketch of Pennethorne's work for the Metropolitan Board of Works, in which he was concerned with ways in which Pennethorne had eased "twisted junctions" and "awkward turns"

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to accommodate traffic. When the discussion moved into the aesthetic realm, Robert Kerr suggested that Pennethorne should be credited with the creation of "several grand lines of thoroughfares". Cates agreed with Kerr and brought up the "noble thoroughfare of Regent Street" as an instance in which government money was wisely invested in this kind of large-scale planning. Among the other members present there seemed to be general agreement about the wisdom of providing substantial government funding for improvements, but they appreciated only the convenience of wide straight streets. When the discussion turned toward a comparison of the aesthetics of London and Paris, the most emphatic statement made concerning the streets of Paris was that in them "art is nowhere".11

Regular streets were less likely to be condemned outright when Paris did not figure in the debate. This was apparent in the discussion following a paper on the rebuilding of Chicago after the fire of 1871 delivered at the RIBA in 1873 by John Burley Waring.12 Architects


12 John Burley Waring, "On the Layout of Cities", Session Papers Read at the Royal Institute of Architects (1873), pp. 141-155. I have been able to consult this only on the internet. The site is entitled: "Urban Planning 1794-1918: An international anthology of articles, conference papers and reports. Selected, edited and provided with headnotes by John W. Reps, Professor Emeritus, Cornell University." As of 11 July 1999 the first page of the site is: http://www.library.cornell.edu/Reps/DOCS/homepage.htm
express admiration for regularly composed street plans, and their remarks reveal considerable familiarity with the planning problems presented by large and complex cities. All who contributed to the discussion agreed that in major thoroughfares there is a logical relationship between convenience and beauty. In general, the consensus was that major streets should not only create adequate traffic arteries, they should also converge at significant public sites. This was seen as both reasonable and beautiful: public monuments are logical destinations for much traffic and their symbolic and practical importance are enhanced when they provide climaxes to architectural vistas created by the streets leading up to them. This principle led to the condemnation of both the American grid-iron system of planning and the confused and tangled streets in most of London. Both were deemed inconvenient — the American system does not allow one to cross the city on a diagonal between important centres, and the London “non-system” provided few convenient thoroughfares to anywhere — and these practical failures were also seen to rob cities of orienting monuments and architectural vistas. John Evelyn’s and Christopher Wren’s plans for the rebuilding of London after the Great Fire of 1666 were also discussed at this meeting, and because both proposed diagonal thoroughfares between important city centres and monuments both were considered

It must be noted that this website gives the page number range in the original publication, but no indication of page numbers within each article.
very good, though Wren's was considered better. Architects noted that
Wren's plan made a strong distinction between minor and major streets,
and the major streets connected significant destinations more directly.

At this meeting Robert Kerr and Charles Barry Jr. were most
responsible for outlining and elaborating the relationship between
convenience and beauty, which they identified with one another, but
John P. Seddon (a self-confessed "Medievalist") could also support this
equation. He did this in the process of rebutting Kerr's charge that he
(Seddon) would no doubt allow aesthetic considerations to interfere with
practicality, preferring "irregularity to symmetry" and "straggling streets
to straight streets" because "this irregularity of arrangement and
succession of architectural tit-bits...charms [Seddon's] sense of the
picturesque." In his own defense Seddon insisted that his admiration of
the picturesque did not mean he approved of "higgledy-piggledy"
arrangements, and he also believed that "grand boulevards" are
necessary components of city plans. Referring to a commission he once
had to lay out a town (Aberystwyth\textsuperscript{13}), on the coast of Wales he described
his work as follows:

I first laid out a wide road parallel with the sea-board, and then,
to catch a grand mountain view at the back, I devised a
quadrant arrangement; I also paid attention to what seemed to
me as not often sufficiently thought of, viz: the advantage when

\textsuperscript{13} He is referring to his 1864 plan for the expansion of Aberystwyth,
Wales. See J. Roger Webster, \textit{The Old College Aberystwyth: The Evolution
you come to a frontage of a river, the sea, or any grand view, of getting a broken outline there, instead of adopting straight parallel blocks throughout. In the plan by Sir Christopher Wren you have the idea partly carried out towards the Thames, where there is a fine crescent proposed. In order to secure as much frontage as possible, and at the same time to prevent the wind from driving directly into the houses, I laid them out in a varied succession of concave and convex crescents, more particularly the latter; which gave me a more pleasing outline than a straight line of buildings, with cross streets abutting up on it.

There are striking elements in Seddon's statement. First of all, the design depends on the qualities of the natural terrain. Secondly, the varied succession of forms along the sea seems to enhance the significance of the street, producing a complex rhythm rather than a series of "tit-bits." Both of these concerns are fully consistent with much earlier picturesque ideals. The desire to complement the natural landscape would have been sanctioned by Uvedale Price and Payne Knight, and the belief that streets could be both varied and imposing would have been endorsed by Britton and Elmes. Indeed, despite the fact that he appealed to the authority of Wren, Seddon's irregularly shaped streets and broken outlines are more consistent with the planning strategy Nash was forced to adopt in Regent Street. In fact, the difference between what Nash achieved and what Wren proposed really defines the difference between Barry's and Kerr's ideals on the one hand and Seddon's on the other. Although Seddon's plan does not contradict Barry's and Kerr's definitions of convenience and beauty, Seddon is mostly concerned with the aesthetic character of the street as a place,
while Barry and Kerr describe streets primarily as traffic arteries and preludes to major monuments.

The participants in the discussion at this meeting did not explore the architectural consequences of such distinctions, but these would animate debates concerning street architecture and street plans into the twentieth century. Many continued to expect that streets should be interesting in themselves, but an increasingly vocal group demanded that streets and street architecture be subordinate to both a predetermined plan and monumental buildings. Conventional associations at first divided these groups along picturesque and classical lines; however, circumstances did not make these choices primarily dependent on aesthetic considerations. Those who continued to defend the picturesque in the modern city believed it was the only way most urban buildings could be perceived in aesthetic terms, whereas those who demanded that urban form follow classical examples demanded that building practices conform to an ideal. For those drawn to the classical ideal the control of street architecture did more than satisfy aesthetic considerations: it also symbolised a comparable hierarchy in the architectural profession.

Large-scale planning would be within the purview of an elite with the authority to exercise constraint over individual architects and their clients. Although the picturesque and classical alternatives first fuelled the debate, and the visual qualities of streets were always important, the
control of street architecture was concerned primarily with power, which made control explicitly and implicitly the most hotly contested issue.

In the 1880s an anticipated increase in local government powers, and widening of their interests, led architects to expect public authority would concern itself with street architecture. As early as 1884/5, the Building News ran a series of editorials demanding legislative control over the design of buildings. These editorials take the position that when new streets are laid out, or old streets improved, some kind of government control should be exercised over the design of buildings in order to avoid "uncouth and ridiculous diversity".\footnote{14} They also demand regulation of the heights of buildings in individual streets, and conformity of buildings situated on acutely angled corners with specific design criteria.\footnote{15}

In 1889, the year the London County Council was established, the possibility that the LCC would concern itself with architecture as part of its power to create and enlarge streets or to initiate and superintend large-scale public improvements brought architectural control to the centre of professional debates. In this year papers and discussions at the Architectural Association, the RIBA and the Edinburgh Art Conference display divisions within the architectural profession concerning the role

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item \footnote{14}{"Street Architecture", \textit{Building News} 48 (29 February 1885), p. 311.}
  \item \footnote{15}{"New Streets and Buildings", \textit{Building News} 49 (4 December 1885), p. 879; "The Planning of Streets", \textit{Building News} 47 (10 September 1884), p. 449.}
\end{itemize}
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of public authority. They also show that architects believed that street plans and street architecture are intimately associated.

"London Street Architecture as it is, and as it might be," a paper read at the Architectural Association in January 1889 by Francis Masey, comes down on the side of much greater government control over street architecture in order to ensure "grand" and "imposing" vistas. He advocates following the example of Paris to create a London that can lay claim to being "a really imperial city". This attitude was by no means general at this time, and few of the architects in attendance found much to praise in Paris. The general consensus was that Paris was monotonous, while the irregularity and picturesqueness of London made it a much more interesting city.

At a meeting of the RIBA in March 1889 J.J. Stevenson read a paper, "The Planning of Streets for Convenience and Architectural Effect," in which the issue of control is examined closely and emphatically rejected. The title of the paper is somewhat misleading

16 Francis Masey, "London Street Architecture as it is and as it might be", a paper read at the Architectural Association and published in the Builder 57 (12 January 1889), pp. 31-33.


18 J. J. Stevenson, "On the Laying out of Streets for Convenience of Traffic and Architectural Effect", Royal Institute of British Architects Transactions, new series 5 (1889), pp. 89-104; reproduced by John W. Reps on his website. (For the full internet citation see note 12 above.) Reps has added a brief introduction to Stevenson's paper in which he
because Stevenson is as concerned with buildings as he is with streets, but his argument is consistent because it condemns the pernicious effect on cities of many building regulations and planning principles.

According to Stevenson, absurd restrictions in building acts which do nothing more significant than limit architectural variety are the natural corollary to planning ideals that demand wide straight streets that are all much alike. Although he makes no apology for admiring variety and contrast, his argument attempts to prove that most rules that go beyond protecting the public from dangerous building practices are neither convenient nor rational, nor are they humane. Concerning streets, he is not at all convinced that every street should be planned to accommodate through traffic or that straight streets are absolutely necessary merely because they produce the shortest distance between two points. He suggests that people might choose to live in streets from which traffic is excluded or that curving streets might be valuable simply because they present pedestrians with stimulating variety. He also argues that specific building regulations are illogical, and that some street "improvements" are nothing of the sort. He singles out for particular vilification the new junction at Hyde Park Corner, which provides a "voyage of considerable difficulty and danger" for pedestrians attempting to cross it (chiefly

notes that some of Stevenson's ideas bear a very strong resemblance to Camillo Sitte's in Der Stadtebau, published in the same year. Both Sitte and Stevenson advocate curved streets, and reject "up in a balloon" planning.
because cabs crossing on a diagonal are constantly “chasing you from behind and charging you in front”). Stevenson can imagine that this “improvement” could only be the product of a mind that was able to dispense with the safety of pedestrians in favour of an absurd abstract principle: that “wheeled traffic cannot make a ninety degree turn.”

Stevenson’s criticism of Hyde Park Corner and other so-called improvements puts into relief his opinion that many building regulations and planning principles defy common sense because they are utterly divorced from real building problems and the real conditions of city living. He ascribes these lapses to the character and mentality of individuals who are attracted to formulating or enforcing rules. These are the surveyor (who likes straight streets because laying them out requires little thought or trouble), and the bureaucrat (who “never does anything he can possibly help doing” and who would especially never “trouble himself with being reasonable”). But as much as Stevenson is opposed to rules and those who find refuge in them, he is particularly offended by the sense of beauty from which they proceed. They seem to be the product of the “idea that a straight line is the perfection of art”:

Streets seem often to be laid out on the idea that we are to look down on them as if we were birds in the air or up in a balloon. The view we get of them from this position is so rare that it need not be taken into account. But the designer seems often to think he has achieved a work of art when he has made an arrangement which looks pretty on his paper plan.
In sum, a combination of bureaucratic inertia, limited imagination, lofty disrespect for the contingent, and general misunderstanding of the purpose of cities are the characteristics that Stevenson attributes to city officials and surveyors as planners. The damage these men had already wrought avoiding real difficulties is only a prelude to what he imagines would happen in the future “when the institution of County Councils will flood the country with new regulations, and new officials to enforce them”. His own ideals are opposed to legislated prescription, and he concludes his paper with the hope that architects would try:

- to make our towns more interesting and beautiful, to give them variety and individual character, making them a collection of buildings each with its own individuality, not, as they are too fast becoming, mere lines of uniform straight streets, without character, without sky-line; and, if it is possible, to give a new aim in laying out our streets, looking not to the beauty of the plan, which can never be seen actually, but to the effect of the elevations of the buildings.

In his conclusion Stevenson reveals that despite the title of his paper, he is more concerned with street architecture than with street plans, but just as his own argument seamlessly shifted between architecture and the shapes of streets, so too did the comments that followed his presentation. The “charm” of irregularly shaped streets was praised; so, too, was the architectural diversity of Oxford’s High Street. Thomas Blashill, then Superintending Architect of Metropolitan Buildings, laconically dismissed Turin as “monotonous” merely on account of the “pernicious” effect of its straight streets.
Blashill developed this remark at the Edinburgh Conference later that year, by which time he was the Architect to the London County Council. In his paper, “The Influence of Public Authority on Street Architecture”, he is less concerned with the lay-out of streets than he is with defending the principle of individuality in the designs of the facades of buildings. It is interesting that Blashill, now with potentially much greater power than Pennethorne, should have argued against too much “authoritative inspection” and for “the rich mine” of individuality that had determined the aesthetic character of London.\(^{19}\) Blashill’s position at this time is important. It shows the continuing strength of picturesque irregularity, but the fact that he feels compelled to argue a very conventional opinion so forcefully shows that the idea of greater government control over the buildings of London was gaining ground.

This sea change is most evident in the pages of the *Builder*, in Statham’s addresses and in his Architecture for General Readers (1896). In 1889 Statham delivered a paper at the Edinburgh Conference, “Architectural Effect in Cities”, in which he wrote:

> In ordinary streets...it is no doubt best to leave each separate tenement to adopt its own architectural treatment.... But when your street is an important one, leading up to a principal square, for instance, or when it is a square designed partially for architectural effect, I do not think it is a false or unreasonable treatment to group the

\(^{19}\) Thomas Blashill, “The Influence of Public Authority on Street Architecture”, a paper read at the National Association for the Advancement of Art, Edinburgh Conference, published in the *Builder* 57 (November. 2, 1889), p. 313.
houses so as to form parts of one main design, and to prevent individual owners from infringing on this.... Nothing like stateliness of effect can well be got without this; only it must be remembered that uniformity in general design does not necessarily imply uniformity and repetition in minor details.  

This is essentially a repetition of an editorial that appeared in the *Builder* two years earlier in which he advocated a unified architectural treatment of whole streets to give them "palatial dignity". Although here and in Architecture for General Readers Statham continued to recognize the value of domes and towers as significant features of the skyline of cities, and the beauty of picturesque irregularity in the older parts of towns, the balance was increasingly in favour of deliberately composed streets and architecture:

The grandest form of architectural design that could be undertaken [is] the designing of a whole city so as to give the greatest effect of climax to its larger buildings.... In England the mischief is that these opportunities are either neglected or taken in hand in a faint-hearted, half-and-half manner, and, if we may judge from the results, by persons who either do not care about or do not understand the matter. London is in itself a whole history of lost and wasted opportunities in this respect; in many cases arising from a poor and short-sighted spirit of economy.

This argument is typical of many statements made by architects at this time. It seems to have been particularly compelling because it

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carried forward into the aesthetic realm the persistent complaint against
the “short-sighted spirit of economy” responsible for the narrow and
inconvenient hodge-podge of London’s streets.23 And Statham’s
tendency to blur the distinction between architecture and streets is also
characteristic of statements of architects at this time, which explains the
ease with which British architects were able to demand the control of
street architecture as a necessary complement to grand street-planning
schemes.

It is also evident that the desire to produce a “stately effect” was
cought up in the concern for national pride. The spectre of Paris—and by
the turn of the century, Berlin, Vienna, Washington and the City
Beautiful Movement in the United States—proved that the absence of the
“palatial aspect” deprived London of “imperial dignity;” it was nothing
more than a “collection of villages”.24 Indeed, in the first decade of the
twentieth century this comparison between London and the other major
capitals of the world was extremely common, and while the spirit of
individualism was often acknowledged as important, the uncontrolled
irregularity of London made its streets appear insignificant.25

23 “London Streets and Buildings Bill: Revised Form”, Builder 67 (21 July
1894), pp. 35-36.

24 “A Note on City Architecture”, Builder 83 (4 October 1902), p. 287.

-Municipal Control of Town Architecture”, Builder 82 (4 January 1902),
pp. 1-3; W. Curtis Green, “Street Architecture: Formal or Regular?”, a
paper delivered to the Liverpool Architectural Society, published in the
Builder 87 (21 November 1903), pp. 514-516; “A Note on Street
Architecture”, Builder 87 (24 December 1904), pp. 660-661; “The
Control of Street Architecture”, Builder 88 (11 February 1905), p. 135;
When British architects advocated stately planning worthy of the Empire they adopted Paris as a ready-made ideal. In “Street Architecture,” a paper delivered at the Society of Arts in 1904, T.G. Jackson admires Paris because new buildings complement old ones, and new streets produce architectural vistas terminating in significant monuments. In contrast, London continued to be invaded by buildings notable for their “self assertion” and “vulgar rivalry”; furthermore, the London County Council’s spirit of economy permitted streets to be widened solely on the principle of “giving a sufficient and convenient roadway at the least possible cost”. He demands that the LCC cease working from “purely utilitarian motives” and take “aesthetic considerations” into account in the planning of streets. Jackson felt that government should attempt to control the architectural character of the city by requiring new buildings to conform to those that already exist in the street, both in scale and style.26

These demands were well on their way to becoming commonplace at this time, but in the discussion following Jackson’s address Stevenson’s and Blashill’s objections to the control of street architecture show continuing divisions within the architectural profession. Stevenson laconically dismissed the problem of scale merely by noting that it is “difficult nowadays to have other than high buildings in

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streets". Blashill thought that no universal principle was ever likely to apply to street architecture because taste is transient and architects are individuals. Furthermore, Blashill believed that the architectural quality of streets is not determined by regularity or irregularity alone, although he thought that individualism was better than regularity in any case. But Blashill's and Stevenson's objections were the opinions of men in their 70s; their opinions were formed by the revolutions in taste they had witnessed over at least 50 years, and by a building scene that had demanded architects cope with very difficult contingencies and restrictions. Their unwavering support of individualism merged aesthetic considerations with a very pragmatic sense of what could be achieved in practice. Though Jackson belonged to their generation, his opinions were much more consistent with younger architects' impatience with plans that have "an accidental haphazard character, with none of the dignity given by regularity", and with public authorities incapable of exercising aesthetic control over the growth of London.

Of course not all architects interested in planning issues were attracted to the Imperial Ideal and the example of Paris. Raymond Unwin, the most articulate theorist of the Garden City and Suburb Movement, and the most influential planner of his generation, continued to argue for the picturesque ideal in which streets are admired for being
interesting in themselves.\textsuperscript{27} He was partial to irregular street junctions, curved streets, narrow streets and broken lines of frontage for their capacity to produce pleasing "street pictures". Unwin admires especially "ever-changing", varied and intimate pictures created by narrow streets that allow buildings to "produce the effect of enclosure", or curved streets that "close from time to time the vista".\textsuperscript{28} Although he can admire streets that are broad and straight, framing significant monuments at their termination, and where a "simple and monotonous treatment may be permitted", he recommends introducing significant breaks in the building line. In this way the street picture does not "remain much the same for its whole length."\textsuperscript{29}

Unwin had little respect for "interminable straight vanishing lines of perspective" and he continued his argument against them in his "Roads and Streets," an article that appeared in the Town Planning Review in 1914. This elaboration of issues raised in 1909 concentrates on the relationship between curved streets and the buildings that line them:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 252 and p. 254.
\end{itemize}
[A curved street] has the special interest of gradually unfolding its varied picture to the beholder as he passes along, and has the further advantage that prominent features occurring on the concave side of the street will at certain points become central features dominating the street picture. These points are all illustrated by the High Street, Oxford or the Klosterstrasse, Berlin. The convex side of the street is, however, somewhat sacrificed, and serves mainly to limit and frame the view. The more interesting buildings should therefore be placed along the concave side. One must never forget in Town Planning matters that while it is the road lines that show upon the plan, it is the buildings that are seen and produce effect. ... Neither a straight line nor a curved line will necessarily produce a beautiful street. Much will depend upon the correct point of emphasis so that the street view will compose into a satisfactory street picture. ... If, for example, we compare the view of the curved line of Holborn with the Karolinenstrasse at Augsburg—streets which have an almost identical line on plan—we shall see how the want of harmony in the buildings and the lack of any point of emphasis near the centre of the picture makes of the former an ugly street, while the latter, although it contains equal variety is, by reason of a certain harmony of style and by the admirable placing of the tower, transformed into a beautiful picture.30

In this passage, and in the photographs that accompany it (illustrations 5.3 and 5.4), Unwin remains committed to the nineteenth-century picturesque ideal.31 His pleasure in Oxford’s High Street goes back to Nash, and his interest in “street pictures” with “points of emphasis” is an echo of Elmes’s and Britton’s approbation of “picturesque and imposing” or “grand and commanding” architectural


scenery. For Unwin, the best “street pictures” are composed around towers, and a varied skyline was always an important component of picturesque streetscapes described by Elmes and drawn by Prout, Shepherd, Ruskin, or Stevenson. And while many Victorian writers were necessarily more interested in small-scale picturesque irregularities, Unwin’s enthusiasm for towers repeats opinion voiced in articles appearing in the Builder in the 1870s and 1880s. Even Unwin’s admission that the shape of a street is not as aesthetically important as the buildings that line it—except when the street is monotonously long and straight—was noted, especially by architects who were not attracted to Beaux-arts planning principles.

Although Unwin continues to defend the principles of the picturesque, he is completely opposed to nineteenth-century opinion on one very significant point. Unwin is convinced that picturesque effects in modern towns can only be produced by the planner, to whom the individual architect and client must be subordinate. While he is careful to explain how this may be achieved without unduly restricting the freedom of individual architects, his arguments for these restrictions are rather interesting. In 1909 he ascribed efforts to disrupt the “street picture” to “the business man who at any rate believes that he must shout if he is to live, and naturally desires his architect to help him to make his building do some of the shouting for him. The young and original architect, too, must become known if he is to secure
commissions, and a little shouting in his earlier buildings may greatly aid him."³² A few years later, in "Roads and Streets," Unwin’s argument is slightly different:

The planner must lay down the right lines, and the architect must in his individual design think first of the whole street effect, and instead of seeking that his building shall overpower all the others by reason of the loudness of its acclamation, must be content for it to take its place, as it were in the orchestra, finding his satisfaction in the success of the whole melody to which it contributes. ³³

In both passages Unwin is invoking the “gentleman’s” argument used so frequently in denunciations of commercial buildings. However, the later quotation gives evidence of a significant shift in emphasis away from an opposition between coarse ignorance and refined judiciousness to a general distinction between architects and planners. Despite Unwin’s opposition to classical regularity, usually demanded in urban as opposed to suburban contexts, on the vital issue of aesthetic control of street architecture, he shows himself to be much more in sympathy with planners of his time than with generations of architects committed to the urban picturesque. Despite their differences over the aesthetic character of streets, members of the Garden City Movement, including Unwin, and Beaux-arts planners all wished to assume authority over street architecture. While the control of street architecture first pitted those who demanded classical regularity against those still committed to

³² Unwin, Town Planning, p. 363.

the picturesque, it eventually divided architects who continued to work as architects from architects who were drawn to the discipline of urban planning. Agreement over the need to exercise aesthetic control over architecture provided cohesion in the planning profession in the years leading up to World War I though, following the logic of the day, this demanded picturesque in the suburbs and Beaux-arts planning in urban areas.34

In the first decade of the twentieth century, government began to concern itself with urban design, and in 1900 the LCC announced a limited competition for the facades of buildings to be erected on both the north and south sides of Aldwych.35 All the designs produced a single unified composition for the entire street, and paid homage to Somerset House. These good intentions were never realized for a number of reasons, all of which arose from a poor understanding on the part of the LCC of the true complexities and demands of such large-scale urban projects for commercial streets. Aldwych was soon built up according to the tastes and requirements of the various businesses that lined it, as was the Kingsway. The Regent Street Quadrant was eventually rebuilt, as we have seen, to a single monumental design, but only after World


35 “Holborn to Strand Street Designs”, Builder 79 (3 November 1900), p. 279. It illustrated them in large format reproductions on November 10, 17 and 24 following pages 418, 444 and 466.
War I, and after considerable wrangling. The only pre-World War I plans that successfully produced a monumental Beaux-arts ensemble in London were Aston Webb's designs for The Mall, especially the Admiralty Arch and the refacing of Buckingham Palace. Architects derived important lessons from these successes and failures. The experience proved that regular architectural ensembles could only be achieved with the active participation of government. However, it was also clear that British public authorities were not very committed to the principle of aesthetic control in areas where competing interests made it difficult to exercise such control.

Even when the British government did concern itself with town plans, its efforts disappointed and occasionally enraged architects. The RIBA boycotted the 1911 competition to design the capital of Australia in Canberra chiefly because the government would adjudicate the design alone, without the benefit of professional architectural advice. But the Town Planning Act of 1909 was the worst of all the disappointments suffered by British architects in these years because it was exclusively concerned with public health. This clear indication that the British

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government was not inclined to concern itself with the aesthetic aspects of town planning prompted the RIBA to hold an international town-planning conference in London in 1910 “to study the architectural problems involved in the improvement and extension of our cities”. 39

About 1400 people attended this weeklong event, which the RIBA managed with considerable skill. Most of the papers and sessions concerned practical issues, including traffic circulation, pollution, sanitation, overcrowding, slum clearance, workers’ housing, provision of greenspaces, development costs, and railway lines. These were vital concerns of the large number of delegates to the conference who came as representatives of local governments. In their papers and recorded comments, architects proved themselves extremely practical men with great familiarity with a wide range of urban problems. This strategy seemed calculated to justify the claim, made at several points, that architects were best suited to supervise this new, complex discipline. Indeed, it is remarkable that in the 744 pages that record the proceedings of the conference, aesthetic issues arise only occasionally, and only one paper addresses architecture exclusively.

But this is not to say that architects had shed their interest in architecture; rather, their comments on architecture were tailored to suit the circumstances. For example, Beresford Pite did not launch into an

attack on the "vulgar clamoring" of commercial architecture, such as he had a few years previously at The Society of Arts. Instead, he confined himself to bland platitudes in his "Architect and Town Planning," in which his most forceful assertion was "the town is too precious a possibility...to be entrusted to consideration only of its expert surveyors and engineers. The problems are architectural, and will be judged as such." Likewise, Leonard Stokes, president of the RIBA, was content with gently chiding John Burns, author of the Town Planning Act, when both men were on the podium at the inaugural meeting of the conference. Stokes said, "I expect Mr. Burns knows we architects think that his Bill did not go quite far enough, and we should like to have seen some more precautions taken to ensure effective planning from an architectural standpoint." C. H. Reilly (soon to join the department of Urban Planning at the University of Liverpool) addressed architectural issues most extensively, and while he did resort to describing much nineteenth-century urban building as "incoherent", "idiosyncrasies" notable for their "hideousness", he rather sensibly suggested that the cause of this was only unfettered individualism, and the situation would soon be rectified by "the new submission of the individual to the


41 "Inaugural Meeting at the Guildhall", in: ibid., p. 58.
community". S. D. Adshead (chair of the same department) also
developed this theme when he explained to his audience the need for a
consistent style in architecture because "no great city can be possessed
of great civic dignity unless in places it conforms to a symmetrical
binding together of parts, unless it subordinates its units to the dictates
of a scheme." 

The civility of these papers is in marked contrast to statements by
these men and others in purely architectural contexts. Architects were
well aware of the priorities of those who framed the Act, which was
mostly directed at the eradication of filth and slums. They also knew that
those who would administer it were concerned with creating workers’
housing on a large scale. Architects-turned-planners needed allies from
outside their profession, and politicians, social activists and bureaucrats
could not be trusted to possess fine architectural sensibilities. Planners
may have wisely assumed that these allies, and potential allies, shared
the tastes of the public in general, and may very well have enjoyed
exactly those commercial buildings respectable architects found

42 C. H. Reilly, “The Immediate Future in England”, in: ibid., pp. 341-
342.

43 S. D. Adshead, “City Improvement”, in: ibid., p. 500.

44 For a succinct review of some of these schemes see: Alastair Service,
“The Architects Department of the LCC 1888-1914”, in: Edwardian
Press, 1975), pp. 406-411. For the politics of planning in these years see
Andrew Saint, Richard Norman Shaw (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University
atrociously vulgar. For the sake of the planning profession they may have wished to avoid confrontations such as Shaw would experience over Regent Street Quadrant, especially as the issues were still theoretical and nothing could be gained from raising them at the Conference. But still, the town-planning movement before World War I held out the hope to architects that they would acquire the power to redesign streets and to compel their clients to submit to master plans. The control of street architecture was an essential component of these ambitions so as to place it “above mediocrity and commonplace”. And from the 1890s to the beginning of World War I, the housing schemes of London and the “imperialization” of its monumental architecture made it seem likely that money would be made available for large-scale building schemes.

Although architecture had a very small place at the Town Planning Conference — and the term “street architecture” does not even appear in the Transactions — a number of articles concerning architecture appeared in the Town Planning Review. This journal, the first British

45 “Civics’ from an Architectural Point of View”, Builder 87 (23 July 1904), pp. 83-84.


periodical devoted to urban planning, was published by the Department of Civic Design at the School of Architecture of the University of Liverpool under the direction of C.H. Reilly, and S.D. Adshead, beginning in 1910. In every volume up to World War I it carried small notices concerning individual buildings and articles such as Unwin’s “Roads and Streets” in which architecture was a significant theme. It also ran articles exclusively concerned with urban architecture. “Paris: Some Examples of Street Architecture” reproduces eight full-page illustrations of houses, and its brief introductory text commended Parisian street architecture for “its studied simplicity” and the “refined relationship of its details”.48 Another article describes recently erected buildings in provincial cities that “are out of sympathy with the rest of the town”.49 C.H. Reilly’s “The Monumental Qualities in Architecture” argues for the adoption of a consistent style of architecture for all buildings so that streets and towns will possess a monumental character similar to Paris.50 Tristan Edwards’, “On the Influence of Town Planning on Architecture” makes a case for requiring buildings to express their position in the hierarchy of social


values. According to Edwards, business buildings should not be permitted to dominate the skylines of cities, as they do in New York. Even the magnificence of Selfridges comes close to an unacceptable "exaltation of Commerce."\textsuperscript{51} These articles are much like Unwin’s “Roads and Streets” because they give clear evidence of the continuing vitality of long-held beliefs. “The battle of the styles”, Fergusson’s admiration of the street houses of Paris, and Soane’s, Pugin’s, and Ruskin’s social hierarchies in architecture are the old wine in the new bottle of urban planning.

These articles, and others appearing in the Builder, also show the continuing gulf between professional expectations and architectural realities in modern cities, and this has direct bearing on the currency of the term “street architecture”. In the second decade of the twentieth century it continued to be used to describe existing urban architecture, in frequent denunciations of contemporary commercial buildings, but in descriptions of ideal urban environments the term became increasingly scarce. As early as 1909, in his Town Planning in Practice, Unwin used the term “street pictures” where once “street architecture” would have been deemed appropriate. This new term is a planning objective because it gives equal emphasis to streets and the buildings that line them. The

*Builder* also searched for a new term. In 1910 it began to run its own planning supplement, "The Monthly Review of Civic Design", with the aim of investigating the "higher aesthetic problems involved in the grouping of individual units in relation to one another, or the consideration of every building from the point of view of its environment".  

Although the design supplement was concerned with architecture, and the *Builder* continued to run articles concerning street architecture in its regular pages, by World War I "street architecture" was rarely used to describe urban ideals.  

In articles concerned with "looking on the street rather than the houses as our unit of design" the task of improvement is described as "civic design," "town planning," "city planning," or "comprehensive street design".  

It would seem that writers for the *Builder* felt it was inappropriate to use a term that was at best redolent of

52 "Monthly Review of Civic Design", *Builder* 98 (7 May 1910), pp. 525-529. It was soon renamed the "Civic Design Section" and under the new name it ran to 1915. After this date the *Builder* ran only small notices concerning town planning.

53 The exception to the two following footnotes is "A Plea for Street Architecture", *Builder* 118 (2 January 1920), p. 13.

nineteenth-century compromises and at worst associated with the urban chaos civic design was meant to curb.55

“Street architecture” was superseded by terms that conjure up a design scope much larger than what was possible in Britain during most of the nineteenth century, but it is also true that planners had fewer and fewer opportunities to discuss urban architecture under any rubric, because it soon became evident they would not be invested with powers wide enough to control development in existing urban areas. This gradual acceptance of defeat is evident in the Town Planning Review in the years leading up to World War I. Although it published articles concerning architecture, these are vastly outnumbered by those concerned with town planning issues that were subject to the provisions of the Town Planning Act. Suburbs that would be newly built fell under the act and therefore their architecture was of immediate concern,56 but existing areas were not covered, and public authority was clearly not inclined to legislate control over the design of urban buildings. This restriction on the scope of the profession meant that the urban planning profession was required to “mature” as a discipline and overcome its


architectural or “design bias”. But, of course, the willingness or unwillingness of government to confer such power on planners was, in fact, moot. Cities in Britain, as well as those in Europe and America, are essentially products of the nineteenth century, and by World War I they had acquired their modern forms, for better or worse.

The term “street architecture” survived World War I only in the lexicon of architectural historians, and only to refer to urban architecture of the Victorian period. John Summerson, Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Niklaus Pevsner use the term for individual buildings, or the general stylistic characteristics of a period or street, usually with a vaguely pejorative connotation, to describe ordinary or mediocre buildings. Clark’s solitary use of the term refers to streetscapes, and in this instance Clark also conveys the aesthetic associations nineteenth-century streetscapes evoked. In the Epilogue to The Gothic Revival (1928), his survey of the revival’s failures begins with the irregular streetscapes its “street architecture” produced: “a series of erosions and excrescences, breaking the line of our streets, wasting valuable ground space, and totally disregarding the chief problem of modern civil architecture”, which is that it is “flat”. In the 1950 edition of the book, Clark appended the following criticism of his earlier statement: “This is


58 See note 3, chapter 1.
the stupidest and most pretentious sentence in the book. I knew little enough about 'modern civil architecture', but if I had stopped to think for a second would have realised that the beauty of all towns depends on 'the waste of valuable ground space;' and I had not to go further than Oxford High Street to see what beauty a street can derive from its line being broken by erosions and excrescences". Clark's admission of his youthful folly is a particularly valuable insight into the attitudes that precipitated it: he was certainly not stupid and his statement is pretentious only to the extent that it is rigid and proscriptive.

"Street architecture" became clouded with unpleasant meanings, especially the "untidy disorder" of British nineteenth-century cities, and this in itself might have been sufficient reason for abandoning the term. It might also be the case that the chaos of city streets seemed reflected in the contradictions, repetitions and vagueness found in the earlier discussions of street architecture. Had planners been interested in the history of the term, they would have noted that the collection of reasonable and unreasonable opinions voiced over the issue fell very far short of being a coherent body of discourse. Individual writers usually concerned themselves with one aspect of the topic, and their statements reflect every nuance of nineteenth-century opinion concerning architecture in general. The discussion of street architecture accurately

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mirrored the state of architectural theory in Britain in the nineteenth century, which Geoffrey Scott, in his influential Architecture of Humanism (1914) described as dependent on "fallacies". Moreover, the building practices and ad hoc compromises that created nineteenth-century street architecture reduced the scope of the discourse, which was always concerned with matters at hand. Street architecture engaged the interest of architects in the nineteenth century because architects admitted that buildings, the character of patronage, and the speed and scale of urban growth were completely unprecedented, and the chaos of city streets was the product of forces that were unpredictable and largely uncontrollable.

However, the discussion of street architecture concerned much more than architectural dignity or theory. Nineteenth-century modes of perception demanded an elastic term capable of referring to both individual buildings and the streetscapes they produced. Unwin, who was the planner of his generation most sympathetic to the nineteenth-century picturesque, was concerned with buildings seen from a distance, as components of "street pictures", which were static compositions very much like those Elmes described on occasion. But Elmes, like most nineteenth-century writers, was capable of dividing his attention between both the near and the far view, describing both the buildings themselves and the picturesque composition they produced. Ruskin's and Stevenson's illustrations and descriptions encompass details, individual

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buildings, and their collective effect in street scenes. Nineteenth-century architectural periodicals also show how easily architects shifted their focus. Individual buildings were street architecture and illustrations of them were meant to show small facts of the design that are readable only at close range. The editors of the Builder, contributors to it, and the authors of addresses it reported, all were also able to admire streetscapes, and assess the relationship of buildings to their sites.

The varied perceptions of nineteenth-century observers enabled them to appreciate large-scale and small-scale picturesque variety, and this satisfied more than just the realities of urban building practices. The picturesque ideal and a capacity to shift one's focus were also quite literally connected to ideal conditions of perception. Beginning with Reynolds, and continuing through the descriptions of Elmes, Ruskin, Scott, and Stevenson, "monotony" was vilified because the city was perceived in aesthetic terms primarily in the process of walking down streets. For these writers the urban picturesque was a kinetic experience comprising an infinite number of scenes and transient events. Their knowledge of the city, its episodes and surprises, came from the slow and easy intimacy of observant pedestrians who were as likely to be attracted to the details of their surroundings as they were to the architectural vista. Time is the most essential ingredient in this mode of perception, and duration made these writers acutely sensitive to monotony and
variety. They were also very much aware of the fact that the city itself changes over time, whether these changes are welcome or not. Whether they approved or disapproved of what they saw, nineteenth-century writers described the city from the street, from the point of view of the average citizen. Of course, it is perfectly natural to examine the city from the street, and it is only worthy of remark because the observer's ideal viewpoint changes around the beginning of the twentieth century. This change seems to typify the great difference between nineteenth-century attitudes toward street architecture and twentieth-century planning ideals. These new representations are really the best evidence of expectations that made nineteenth-century discourse concerning street architecture appear inconsequential, and this did lead to the divorce of town planning from architecture.61

The Royal Academy lent its galleries to the RIBA during the Town Planning Conference of 1910 for an exhibition of maps, plans, drawings and models. A number of images from the exhibition were published in the Transactions; the geometric clarity of the plans, even those representing Garden Cities, show that British planners wanted very much to follow the lead of their European and American colleagues

Almost all of the pictures are concerned with the configuration of streets and therefore they are represented from an elevated or bird's-eye view. This view from a distance has the obvious advantage of showing much more than could be seen from the ground, and inasmuch as they are meant to record the same kind of information contained in maps the new point of view is entirely reasonable. However, these drawings do show buildings, and the fact that these views from “up in a balloon” are divorced from everyday experience, (as Stevenson had noted in 1889) seems to have been part of their attraction. These ideal panoptic images, unlike drawings and photographs of real streets, remove attention from details, and eradicate the transient. Bird’s-eye views were once the exception, but even at this time these images of controlling mastery had become planners’ standard method of representing cities.


63 Helen Meller, Towns, Plans and Society in Modern Britain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 32 describes Tony Garnier’s aerial views for La Cité industrielle (1902), which show airplanes. She suggests the “exhilaration at the limitless possibilities of the future was symbolized by the perspective.”
These elevated perspective views of geometric plans are very different from the intimate and subjective images of streetscapes made by Stevenson and Ruskin (illustrations chapter 3: 3.1, 3.3, 3.17 and 3.19). The technical precision of planners' schemes demonstrates acquired skills and implies an underlying rationality quite different from the "artistic", spontaneous sketches of nineteenth-century artists and architects who delighted in the urban picturesque. Therefore, in content and technique these new types of views also perfectly complement planners' understanding of their role and of the sensibilities that make them suited to their profession. These are described by the Town Planning Committee of the RIBA in the conclusion to "Suggestion to Promoters of Town Planning Schemes":

64 Anthony Vidler, "The Scenes in the Street: Transformations in Ideal and Reality, 1750-1871", in: On Streets, ed. Stanford Anderson (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1978), p. 29, describes the combination of formal geometric planning and aerial surveys in the Haussmannization of Paris as the epitome of rationalist order. See also Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). De Certeau describes the experience of viewing New York from the World Trade Center as experiencing the city with the "celestial eye", which reproduces the "geometrical space of urbanists and planners" (p. 100). "The atopia-utopia of optical knowledge has long had the ambition of surmounting and articulating the contradictions arising from urban agglomeration" (p. 93). De Certeau is depending on Michel Foucault's concept of "panopticism", an uninterrupted hierarchical system of inspection, discipline, regulation and analysis that counters the confusion and indiscriminate mingling of social disorder. The panoptic, an architectural form for correctional institutions, is real but, according to Foucault, it is also a symbol of a disciplinary society: See Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), pp. 195-230.
In the completed town it is the buildings which are seen and produce whatever effect, good or bad, is attained; therefore, the problem of town planning in its final form is essentially an architectural problem. The working out of the exact form in which the requirements can be satisfied so as to produce a fine town is a function of the creative imagination; and it can only properly be performed by one who has had the architectural training necessary to enable him to adjust the proportions of the many parts, so to place the different buildings, and group them upon the ground and in relation to each other that when erected they may compose properly.

For the design of the town plan, the architecturally trained mind is as essential as for the design of a single building; for the work consists in applying upon a wider field and with greater scope the same principles which govern the designing of individual buildings. The appreciation of the relation of masses and voids, the apprehension of the right points for emphasis, and the power to combine into one creation many differing parts by bringing them into harmonious proportion are equally required in the field of town planning if there is to be produced that rhythm in the plan, and that spacious breadth of ordered elevation in the groups of buildings, which so largely constitute the beauty and grandeur of cities.  

This statement, although possibly written by Unwin, is much like others that betray the ambitions connected with Beaux-arts design.

Beaux-arts standards demanded that each building possess “the masterly combination of all the parts so that they unite in one appeal to the imagination and the emotions”, and that monumental buildings


66 The phrase “right points of emphasis” is Unwin’s, and references, in other parts of the “Suggestions”, to the importance of curved streets and places that provide a sense of enclosure, suggests his influence on this document, if not his authorship.

show the architect is capable of “spaciousness of thought” and “largeness of idea”. Of course, such ideals would find their ultimate satisfaction in a unified, magnificently composed city, which reveals relationships that are beautiful because they “compose properly”, are “right” and “harmonious”.

The Edwardian architectural scene was preoccupied with the education and accreditation of architects, and Beaux-arts planning was attractive because its essential qualities were clarity of purpose and demonstration of intellectual technique. As Robert Macleod describes it in Style and Society, the “Beaux-arts system was seen as one which produced a high standard of theoretical knowledge, technical graphic skills and a major emphasis on composition.” These intellectual demands and learned techniques made Beaux-arts design seem the appropriate vehicle for raising the status of the profession. In these years too, Geoffrey Scott, in his Architecture of Humanism, attempted to establish architectural theory as a rigorous intellectual discipline and in the process he reduced picturesque principles to intellectual incoherence. In Scott’s words, the “bewildered energy of Gothic” which “its domestic buildings and streets suffice to prove, admits its deep

68 Blomfield, Mistress, p.157; quoted in Macleod, Style, p. 105.

69 Macleod, Style, pp. 93-94.
indifference to ordered form. It is tangled like the medieval mind itself, in a web of idle thoughts.\textsuperscript{70}

At the beginning of World War I, theorists were developing an architectural discourse concerned with the “expertise” associated with the academic tradition.\textsuperscript{71} On the scale of the city, this ideal was translated into an image of a composed cosmos triumphing over undifferentiated chaos. This clearly served the intellectual and institutional ambitions of both the planning and the architectural professions, and the words, pictures and buildings of theorists, planners and architects were compelling. However, by nineteenth-century standards much of it could be described as, on the one hand, recipes for urban monotony, and on the other, as remote from the puny but real problems of architectural practice. Early twentieth-century ideals are sweeping visions that transcend the awkward contingencies and compromises real cities presented. Sometimes architectural writers accepted these conditions, but the discussion of street architecture

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reveals the contest between the architect and the city that led ultimately to a desire for such controlling mastery.
1.1. Regent Street looking South,

1.2. Part of the East Side of Regent Street,
1.3 Two Houses on the West Side of Lincoln’s Inn Fields
Attributed to Leoni and Inigo Jones
Soane, Lectures on Architecture, plate 47.

1.4 Houses in Great Queen Street, Holborn
Attributed to John Webb
Soane, Lectures on Architecture, plate 106.
1.5 British Coffee House, Cockspur Street, By Robert Adam, 1770
Soane, Lectures on Architecture, plate 60.
2.1 Jackson, *George Sharf's London*, p. 64.


2.3 Royal Opera Arcade Shops, by John Nash. Powers, *Shop Fronts*, p. 52
Dean, *English Shop Fronts*.


Dean, English Shop Fronts.

2.9  Shops in Museum Street, Bloomsbury.
Powers, Shop Fronts, p. 71
2.10  No. 8 Argyle Street, Bath, c. 1828
Powers, Shop Fronts, p. 56.

Dean, English Shop Fronts.

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2.12  No. 9 Ludgate Hill, London, c. 1840.
Tallis, London Street Views, 1840.
Powers, Shop Fronts, p. 56.

2.13  "Ironmonger and Brazier"
Delassaux and Elliott, Street Architecture. 1855, plate 12.
2.14 No 8 Ludgate Hill, 1802, by Papworth Powers, *English Shop Fronts*, p. 60.

2.15 "Temple of Taste"

2.16 "Emporium of Fashion"
Pugin, *True Principles*, 1841, Plate K, fig. 1.
2.17 "Modern Street Buildings"
3.1 Hotel de Ville, Brussels, by Samuel Prout
Brooks, Ruskin, fig. 2

3.2 Upper Reaches of the Grand Canal, by John Ruskin.
Unrau, Ruskin, fig. 92.
3.3 Tower of Strasbourg Cathedral, by John Ruskin. Unrau, Ruskin, fig. 91.
3.4  Foreign Office,
by G. G. Scott.
Muthesius, The High Victorian Movement, fig. 130

3.5  Houses in Broad Sanctuary, Westminster.
by G. G. Scott.
Muthesius, The High Victorian Movement, fig. 128
3.6 St. Pancras Hotel, by G. G. Scott
Muthesius, *The High Victorian Movement*, fig. 135

3.7 Proposed Terrace in Harrow, Middlesex,
by Thomas Harris.
3.8 House, Rue Soufflot, by Le Sueur

3.9 House, Rue des Saussaies, by Le Jeune.

3.10 London Street Architecture: Shops in Oxford Street, by Toley and Dale.
*Builder*, 8 May 1875, p. 417.

3.11 London Street Architecture: Office, Corner of Threadneedle Street and Bishopsgate Street,
by Theodore K. Green.
*Builder*, 27 Nov. 1875, p. 1063.
3.12 London Street Architecture: House in Brook Street, Grosvenor Square, by Charles Forster Hayward. 

3.13 London Street Architecture, by Herbert Ford. 

3.14 The "Horse Shoe Hotel," Tottenham Court Road, by Paraire. 

*Builder*, 10 Oct. 1868, 749.
3.16  Ancient Street Architecture: Maestricht.
*Builder*, 15 April 1871, p. 287.

3.17  Gables in Munster, Westphalia, Germany.
*Builder*, 15 April 1871, p. 286.
3.18  Domestic Architecture, Ratisbon: Civil and Domestic Towers. 

3.20 Street in Ratisbon.
Stevenson, *House Architecture*, fig. 29.

3.21 Houses at Munster.
Stevenson, *House Architecture*, fig. 4.

3.25 Sketches of London Street Architecture—V.
Houses in Hans-Road, by C.F.A. Voysey.
Builder, 19 Sept. 1896, p. 229.

3.26 Sketches of London Street Architecture—XXXIV.
29 Cadogan Gardens, by A. H. Macmurdo.
Builder, 7 Oct.1899. p. 32

3.27 Sketches of London Street Architecture
IX. House at Chelsea, by C.R. Ashbee.
3.28  Street Front, by Bedingfield, Statham. *Modern Architecture.* Fig. 132

3.29  Shop Front, by Batterby and Huxley Statham. *Modern Architecture.* Fig 130

3.30  House, Buckingham Gate, by Blomfield, Statham. *Modern Architecture.* Fig. 137

3.32 New Zealand Chambers, by Shaw Statham, *Modern Architecture*, Fig. 141

3.33 United States Trust, by Gibson Statham, *Modern Architecture*, Fig. 135.

3.34 House Front with Decorative Features, by Beresford Pite Statham, *Modern Architecture*, Fig. 145


Dan and Wilmott, *English Shop Fronts*, plate 34.

4.4b  40 West Strand, London. George Walton.
Dan and Wilmott, *English Shop Fronts*, plate 52.

4.7 40 Old Bond Street,
by W. and E. Hunt.
Builder, 30 Sept. 1905,
p. 343

4.8 Typical French Shop Fronts. From: Thiollet, Principes et Etudes d'architecture, n.d.
Builder, 11 June 1915, p. 548
4.9  Regent Street Quadrant, by Shaw. Hobhouse, *Regent Street*, p. 121


4.16 71 and 72 Strand and 15-17 Adam Street, by Ernst Runz. *Builder*, 22 Aug. 1903, p. 206.


5.3a  Karolinenstrasse, Augsburg.
Unwin, "Roads and Streets," plate 8.

5.3b  Holborn, London.

5.4b Oxford High Street Looking towards Brasenose and Carfax. Unwin, "Roads and Streets," plate 7
5.5 Berlin: Proposed Opera Place, by Mohring, Eberstadt and Peterson. *Transactions of the Town Planning Conference*, p. 329, fig. 17.


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