This book starts from the proposition that, having solved the practicalities of development, the ultimate criterion for evaluating any addition to the city is whether it decorates the city – all development should be judged as an attempt to do this. Writing from an aesthetic approach, the authors state that if there is currently a move to humanize cities again, and ornament and decoration are central to this, then there is a need to discuss the principles that have worked in the past to guide current efforts. Relearning is necessary to avoid making further mistakes. After discussing the theory and philosophy of ornament and decoration, elements are covered in separate chapters: the facade, the corner, etc. Black and white images cover examples from around Europe to support the text. Comparisons are often made with parts of Nottingham, the authors' base. The emphasis is on examples that show how to please and stimulate the beholder walking at a leisurely pace, for whom decoration and ornament take on greater significance.

The conclusions from this study recommend using decoration and ornament with economy and discretion to maximize impact. What is done should be part of a plan. This fits nicely with the snug scenographic convention for thinking about cities that has gained currency in certain areas in recent years. Not many would argue against the pleasure of walking through quiet areas in fine old cities. It is another matter to think that we can do all this again as in the past, except in the stage sets of the limited, tightly managed and sanitised areas of modern cities. We have lost the sensibilities, the craft traditions and the urban involvement that led to the city areas admired by the authors, along with the old ways of seeing. If, now, you have time to walk at a leisurely pace you are probably unemployed or a vagrant and may be thrown out by the security guards! Many of the principles discussed by the authors are, no doubt, still valid. The question is how far can they have useful influence in making a vital modern city? This is a useful book for prompting this question; perhaps a further study could try and address it.

Urban Design: Ornament and Decoration, Cliff Moughtin, Tanner Oc and Steven Tiesdell, Butterworth Architecture, 1995

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