Disappearing Walls:
Architecture and Literature in Victorian Britain

By Benjamin Zenas Cannon

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
English
in the
Graduate Division
of the
University of California, Berkeley

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Spring 2014
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Abstract

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From Discipline and Punish and The Madwoman in the Attic to recent work on urbanism, display, and material culture, criticism has regularly cast nineteenth-century architecture not as a set of buildings but as an ideological metastructure. Seen primarily in terms of prisons, museums, and the newly gendered private home, this “grid of intelligibility” polices the boundaries not only of physical interaction but also of cultural values and modes of knowing. As my project argues, however, architecture in fact offered nineteenth-century theorists unique opportunities to broaden radically the parameters of aesthetic agency. A building is generally not built by a single person; it is almost always a corporate effort. At the same time, a building will often exist for long enough that it will decay or be repurposed. Long before literature asked “what is an author?” Victorian architecture theory asked: “who can be said to have made this?” Figures like John Ruskin, Owen Jones, and James Fergusson radicalize this question into what I call a redistribution of intention, an ethically charged recognition of the value of other makers. Reading novels by Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, George Eliot, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, and theory and history by John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle, I show how authors use architecture to explore the deep kinship between textual and material production, and in doing so admit unsupervisable agencies—both human and natural—into their work.

As I demonstrate, Ruskin and other prominent theorists imagine architecture as a set of dynamic surfaces which are open to the marks not only of humble workmen but also of everyday users and natural processes. Seen from the perspective of his architectural writing, I argue, Ruskin’s theories of literary and artistic vision locate the imaginative ground of literary representation not in unmarked nature but rather in a multiply authored object world. In the theory of the design reform movement and the daringly experimental architecture displays of the Sydenham Crystal Palace, I recover an understanding of creative work as embodied thought that opens itself up to transformative reconstruction and alteration over time. As Hardy struggles textually to embody architectural processes (in Jude the Obscure) and Dickens discovers utopian social possibilities in the failure of architectural planning (in Martin Chuzzlewit), I show how Victorian literature understands the work of the author as a participation, across time and space, in communal and material acts of making.
To Jon and Alice, for raising me curious
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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Ian Duncan for his tireless support throughout the writing of this dissertation—for keeping me going, for keeping me honest, for providing a model of unflinchingly rigorous intellectual work that I will carry with me always. I would also like to thank Kent Puckett, whose incredible range of interest and uncanny instinct for the unthought thought has opened up potentials in my research that I never would have glimpsed on my own. I am very fortunate to have encountered my outside reader, Andrew Shanken, early in my graduate career. His expansive interdisciplinary engagement has profoundly shaped not only this project but my sense of the connections that are conceivable between different forms of cultural production. Thanks to everyone in the Berkeley English faculty for their intellectual generosity and heroic interestedness.

Thanks, above all, to my fellow graduate students, for struggling against the stream with me.
Introduction

In his influential *Against Architecture*, Denis Hollier writes that “There is...no way to describe a system without resorting to the vocabulary of architecture. When structure defines the general form of legibility, nothing becomes legible unless it is submitted to the architectural grid. Architecture under these conditions is the archistrucre, the system of systems” (33). Throughout the 1980’s and 1990’s, architecture, understood as this “system of systems,” occupied a central position in efforts to understand Victorian literature and culture. Literalizing a larger critical turn toward an architecturally metaphorized project of “deconstruction,” critiques of architecture as a mode of social discipline or bourgeois economic dominion formed the basis, in many ways, for a disciplinary understanding of Victorian culture. Gilbert and Gubar’s attic, Eve Sedgwick’s closet, David Miller’s omnipresent Chancery court, Tony Bennett’s exhibitionary complex, Nancy Armstrong’s and Mary Poovey’s domestic interiors—Victorian architecture has provided a model for understanding the very principle of modeling, the ways in which power shapes the world according to an abstract plan.¹

At the heart of this disciplinary understanding are two works which continue, in more and less obvious ways, to frame interpretations of Victorian material culture. Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* figures the panopticon as the paradigmatic epistemic form of the nineteenth century, a model of power relations that extends far beyond architecture proper. Walter Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project* argues that nineteenth-century architecture, with its historicist formal vocabulary and its emphasis on interiority, both expresses and obscures the actual political and economic relationships of the new industrial age. In combining and extending these two readings, mainstream Victorian criticism has generalized the complex configurations of the panopticon and the Benjaminian interior into explanatory figures for the rise of the bourgeoisie and the institutionalization of new social, sexual, and economic relations. Critics tend to read this process of quasi-architectural institutionalization, in turn, as accounting for the rise of the novel as the century’s dominant literary form. By this account, architecture and the novel are essentially interchangeable means by way of which culture exerts force in producing and policing bourgeois subjects. The novel, in this tradition, is essentially architectural—not in the sense of having a concrete aesthetic structure, but rather in that it takes on the cultural work that Foucault and Benjamin assign to real architecture.

This dissertation has two interwoven purposes. First, it takes Victorian architecture theory and practice seriously, seeking to understand its own terms and protocols. I will treat architecture not as a cultural symptomatology but as a complex set of theories and practices that

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is deeply interested in the unpredictable object histories of the buildings it produces and studies. By doing so, my dissertation moves beyond the Benjaminian and Foucauldian paradigms that have long dominated the critical framing of Victorian material culture. Though Foucault and Benjamin are, of course, distinct in important ways—most obviously, in the messianic telos that informs Benjamin’s project—they are univocal in their insistence that we read beyond the surface, that we attend to the structures that subtend the distracting particulars of cultural production. As I will demonstrate, important figures in Victorian thought do not consider architecture primarily as a functional and symbolic medium that builds social and economic structures into real space. For them, architecture is less a set of models for organizing subjects and more a surface that allows us to attend to the multiplicity of intentions that we encounter in the object world. Second, this dissertation reformulates the ways in which we might understand architecture as both a central thematic concern of Victorian literature and a productive theoretical model for approaching it. Far from its being the all-encompassing “system of systems,” authors and theorists in the period experience architecture as multiply split: temporally heterogeneous, socially distributed, conceptually dynamic. Architecture provides a resource for thinking about both the temporal and social distribution of aesthetic intention. Around architecture, aesthetic theorists and novelists consider the limits of their own status as independent makers, and imagine what I call a redistribution of aesthetic intention. Long before literary theorists began to ask “what is an author?” Victorian architecture theory asked: “who can be said to have made this?” Each chapter takes up a work of literature or a body of theory and works through the aesthetic consequences of architecture’s split within it.

In doing so, my project joins and extends a nascent turning-away from a dominant account of the relationship between spaces, objects, and fiction in the nineteenth century. David Kurnick’s 2012 *Empty Houses*, for example, challenges the reflexive critical assumption that the novel as a medium grounds itself in private space and works to produce a private bourgeois subjectivity, emphasizing instead the importance of the public theater as a literary and spatial model for major Victorian novelists. Leah Price’s *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* shows how a straightforward reading of the Victorian bildungsroman as producing a coherent bourgeois self relies upon a denial (by both those novels’ fictional characters and contemporary scholars) of the book’s complex and highly social materiality. In museum studies, works like *Victorian Prism* have begun to complicate Foucauldian and Benjaminian readings of Victorian display culture.

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2 This is as true for architecture history as a discipline as it is for literary criticism’s deployment of it. According to Iain Borden, it is only in the last decade that architecture historians have begun to seriously attend to architecture’s object histories, rather than treating buildings primarily as creations of architects and their clients. Borden offers a similar, if largely undefined, sense of the temporal possibilities of architecture understood beyond individual intention in his “Foreword” to the edited volume *Conjuring the Real*.

3 Lara Kriegel provides a useful summary of this trajectory in her 2006 “After the Exhibitionary Complex.” This tradition, of course, has never been univocal. Mark Crinson’s 1996 *Empire Building: Orientalism and Victorian Architecture* offers a nuanced and locally embedded reading of British building in the Near East, contesting a
In the Victorian period, architecture’s stylistic heterogeneity is often experienced as alienating. It is around architecture that the Victorian period lives most fully its anxieties about belatedness and inauthenticity. The century witnessed revival after revival—Gothic, Romanesque, Greek, neoclassical, Queen Anne’s, Egyptian, Tudor, Palladian—deeply troubling historians who were beginning to develop an art history that understood material production as expressive of a temporally contingent cultural totality. When William Morris declares that “the nineteenth century has no style of its own amidst its wide knowledge of the styles of other centuries,” (“Manifesto” 53) his lament is more than aesthetic. Modernity lacks the organic coherence that would enable architecture to be expressive of either individual intention or a broader cultural sensibility.

This same alienation or disjunction, however, also opens up architecture to other uses. Architecture becomes a site for rethinking social relationships aesthetically and materially, a method of disclosing hidden relationships and generating novel ones. If the building is no longer the site either of an organic cultural totality or of an unfettered aesthetic autonomy, it becomes even more valuable as the site at which historical processes, both natural and human, attain cultural and artistic meaning. Though certain features of a building might erode over time, these are more than replaced by the meanings it accrues. A building is a recording device left on for centuries, gathering associations and accumulating physical marks as it changes into something quite other—and vastly more valuable—than it was at the time of its construction. This dissertation explores how this understanding of architecture animates a broad reconsideration of the primacy of the controlling aesthetic intelligence, and how it can help us to understand the literary experiments of major Victorian novelists.

My first chapter, “The Disappearing Wall,” situates my project in relation to the historiography of Victorian architecture and architecture theory. I argue that taking the decorated wall seriously allows us access to a theory of cultural production as the product of accumulation rather than of mastering ideation. For over a century, theorizations of nineteenth-century built space—most influentially, by Walter Benjamin—have tended to consider its architectural surfaces as a distraction, encouraging us to look through, rather than at, the wall, to read it as a boundary, a symptom, or an abstracted plan rather than as a visually dense object. Contemporary scholarship continues to be deeply informed by this tradition, regarding the Victorian wall as a phantasmagorical surface which criticism must make transparent. Yet the Victorians practiced their own destрукuralization of the wall, in ways that both prefigure and contest this modernist teleology. John Ruskin, like Benjamin, figures the wall as essentially astructural. For Ruskin, though, the wall is a flexible textile surface, one that makes visible an expansive accumulation of human beings and human traces. By decoupling the aesthetic strategy of dissolution from tradition of scholarship that would see such buildings as empty historicist surfaces obscuring mechanisms of imperial domination.
Benjamin’s strongly teleological Marxist modernism, we can see more clearly the choices made by both Victorian and modernist theorists.

My second chapter, “Working on History: Reconstruction and Reform in the Sydenham Crystal Palace and Carlyle’s Past and Present,” considers Thomas Carlyle's Past and Present and the historical architecture displays at the Sydenham Crystal Palace as experimental works that open up material history to other actors and makers. These works, I argue, propose an understanding of both material production and language as media of embodied thought that undergo transformation and reinterpretation over time. In the discourse surrounding the Palace's architectural displays—in writings by the figures who designed and produced them, as well as reviews and essays in the periodical press at the time—I recover an ideal of naïve experimental engagement with the architecture of the past that effaces the distinctions between makers, users, and viewers of historical objects. This openness, I argue, requires us to rethink our account of the Victorian museum as a totalizing institution. At the same time, I suggest that that criticism’s fixation on the cult of the auratic original and the cult of the artist excludes the much more complex processes of reconstruction and restoration that characterize Victorian interactions with historical art objects in general.

“The Cathedral's Labyrinth” (ch. 3) focuses on Ruskin's complex understanding of the relationship between architecture and literary making. Ruskin, I argue, theorizes architectural decoration as an act that takes place somewhere between pure marking and representation. Because of its ability to be simultaneously abstract and representational, architectural decoration comes to serve as Ruskin's central case study for the process of meaning-formation. Ruskin's conceptualization of architectural meaning thus deeply informs his theories of narrative and lyrical writing as well. For Ruskin, as I show, the imaginative ground of literary representation is not unmarked nature but rather a multiply authored object world that operates as nature, providing a provisional origin for aesthetic vision and value. At its most radical, this Ruskinian encounter with historical material production challenges the principle of a human consciousness independent of the object world, imagining thought itself as bounded by and even constituted by interaction with historical forms.

“Quite a Different Verisimilitude': Sculpture and the Order of Resemblance,” (ch. 4) extends my insights about historicism to architecture's companion art, sculpture, tracing narratives of sculptural recognition in Hawthorne's The Marble Faun and novels by George Eliot and Rhoda Broughton. The sculptures and paintings in these novels exercise what I call a weak architectural power, distributing subjects around them not in immobile panoptic configurations but in essentially contingent spatial patterns that make possible new social and erotic relationships. As I show, sculpture is conceived of in the Victorian literary imagination less as a medium that imitates life and more as a medium that insists upon retroactive resemblances between art and life. In proposing modern subjects as the referents of historical works of art, Hawthorne and Eliot present making as a process that is fulfilled only in belated, contingent encounters between historical objects and modern subjects. Rather than producing anxiety about
meaning and originality, confrontations with historical art produce unpredictable forms of community.

My fifth chapter, “The True Meaning of the Word Restoration”: Architecture and Obsolescence in Jude the Obscure considers Hardy's complicated response to the Victorian architectural restoration debate in Jude the Obscure. Jude turns Ruskinian architectural preservation theory into narrative strategy, discovering new techniques for representing character and event through contingent traces and marks left upon material objects. In response to a world rendered incapable of historical meaning by restoration and of contemporary making by preservation, Jude offers its own text as a surface to record these lost marks. Hardy ends up literalizing the novel's own acts of recording in order, in a small way, to assume the memorial function that the restored world cannot. In doing so, he must relinquish as well a vision of the novel as an immaterial vector for authorial intention. Hardy recognizes in this strategy a potential crisis of novelistic form: inviting material processes into its very production, Jude stakes a place out for itself beyond the limits of authorial autonomy.

My dissertation ends with “Transatlantic Notworks, American Unbuildings,” (ch. 6) an exploration of the utopian potential of architectural failure in the transatlantic literary imagination. In the nineteenth-century European imagination, America is the site of futurity, the place of planning, building, and new social and political formations. Dickens's Martin Chuzzlewit and Hawthorne's Blithedale Romance represent this America as already failed, its utopian communities and speculative building schemes doomed in advance by the corrosive solipsism that underpins both fraud and idealism. In response, they offer “monuments to deceased projects” (Dickens's trenchant phrase for Washington D.C.)—narratives that discover quasi-utopian social possibilities in the failure of architectural projects. In doing so, they imagine democracy as a participation in an already-failed project, a process that requires both ambitious plans and their audacious repurposing.

I. DECORATION

This dissertation differs fundamentally from the majority of scholarly treatments of the subject in that it is concerned with Architecture, very much with a capital A—not just buildings, or built space, but rather the aesthetic, professional, and historical discourse that produces buildings as art objects. Though architects and builders are still very much segregated by professional affiliation and class today, a century of modernist-inflected theory has left us ill-equipped to grasp fully the import of the rigorous distinction that Victorian theory makes between architecture and building. Ruskin begins his Seven Lamps of Architecture with a definition of architecture that proceeds from this fundamental difference: “It is very necessary, in the outset of all inquiry, to distinguish carefully between Architecture and Building” (8: 27). It will be helpful, at the outset of this inquiry, to quote at length from Ruskin’s definition:
To build,--literally to confirm,--is by common understanding to put together and adjust the several pieces of any edifice or receptacle of a considerable size…but building does not become architecture merely by the stability of what it erects; and it is no more architecture which raises a church, or which fits it to receive and contain with comfort a required number of persons occupied in certain religious offices, than it is architecture which makes a carriage commodious or a ship swift…

Let us, therefore, at once confine the name to that art which, taking up and admitting, as conditions of its working, the necessities and common uses of the building, impresses on its form certain characters venerable or beautiful, but otherwise unnecessary. Thus, I suppose, no one would call the laws architectural which determine the height of a breastwork or the position of a bastion. But if to the stone facing of that bastion be added an unnecessary feature, as a cable moulding, that is Architecture. (8: 27-9)

This is something that the modern scholar must understand before anything else: architecture is not the science of engineering (raising the church). Neither is it the Foucauldian process of disposing space for the arrangement of bodies and the efficient execution of specific tasks (“which fits it to…contain with comfort a required number of persons occupied in certain religious offices”). Architecture “takes up and admits” these factors, but only as “conditions of its working.” Building, far from being interchangeable with architecture, is merely architecture’s raw material. Architecture happens when “an unnecessary feature” is added to a building, a superfluous piece that exceeds the utility that governs the structure itself and, in doing so, transforms it into art.

The most important and the least understood feature of Victorian architecture is its fundamental commitment to the decorated or ornamented surface. Decoration is, in addition to a set of identifiable artistic practices, a set of related conceptual approaches to what is perhaps the most fundamental problem of architecture: the nature of the boundary between structural or utilitarian necessity and social or aesthetic meaning—between “building” and “architecture.” Ruskin’s definition might sound provocative to us today, but it is, in fact, Ruskin almost at his most conventional; the idea that architecture is decorated construction was accepted, as far as I know, universally. E.A. Freeman, writing in 1849, declares that decoration is the “superadded excellence” (1) that separates architecture from mere building, human construction from mere animal nest-making: “architecture then is the soul, building the body” (6). James Fergusson, a tough-minded advocate of utility in buildings, nonetheless defines architecture as the application of ornament to construction.4 A.W.N. Pugin’s influential declaration that architects must never

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4 True architecture lies in “designing a building so as to be most suitable and convenient for the purposes it was wanted for, in arranging the parts so as to produce the most stately and ornamental effect consistent with its uses, and applying to it such ornament as should express and harmonise with the construction, and be appropriate to the purposes of the building” (The Illustrated Handbook of Architecture, xxv-xxvi).
construct ornaments, but rather decorate construction, (The True Principles of Christian or Pointed Architecture, [1841] 1) has been taken as a proto-modernist attempt to defend architecture’s essential structural honesty from meretricious addition. Yet Pugin, with his prohibition against muddying the distinction between the building and its ornament, insists as strongly as Ruskin on the idea that architecture is the unnecessary added to the necessary: architecture is decorated construction. This material addition is temporally marked: architecture is not, according to these definitions, something that can ever be inherent to a building; it is something that comes into being retroactively, when a decorative feature is “added” to a building imagined as already extant. If architecture, as Ruskin argues, takes building as its raw material, then he is imagining that the building must in some sense exist first. Even if this is not practically the case, for Ruskin this is an essential concept and one that forms the basis, as we will see, of an entire aesthetics.

Decoration, as theorists from the Enlightenment through the present have shown, produces a cultural totality by overwriting the necessary with the unnecessary, symbolically imbuing material utility with cultural significance. However, the value of the decorated surface is also, in key Victorian formulations, predicated upon a fundamental unpredictability and openness to contingent change. The surface accumulates marks, traces, and other residues of use and misuse over time. On the surface, the traces of the individual craftspeople who constructed the building mix with those of the people who have lived in, worked in, renovated, and reconfigured the building over during the course of its history, and also with the marks of natural weathering and aging that change the building’s form over time. For thinkers like Ruskin and his followers, all of these marks attain a status almost equal to that of the intentional marks of the structure’s planners, builders, and artists: architecture is not something that can be made, but rather something that must happen.

Modernist theory went to war with Victorian architecture. More than anything else, modernist aesthetics took issue with the meretricious surfaces of nineteenth-century buildings, which, according to these critics, deliberately obscured not only structure and material but also social and economic relationships. Decoration, by obscuring modern materials with premodern forms, prevented modernity from becoming rationally visible. In Adolf Loos’s seminal 1910 essay “Ornament and Crime,” decoration is at once primitive (the premodern, the savage, the child) and decadent (the criminal, the feminized aesthete)—both too early and too late. An excess in the pathological sense, it is linked not to imagination but to unsanitary accumulation and deviant regression. High modernism advocates that the distinction between decorative surface and structure be erased and decoration’s expressive functions be transferred to structure.

In many ways, the architectural theory and practice of the past forty years has, in its own battle against the rigidity of high modernism, come to embrace, for various reasons, the flexibility of the Victorian split between surface and structure. In Denise Scott Brown's and Robert Venturi’s classic formulation, there are two types of buildings: the “duck” (so called after a duck restaurant shaped like a duck) and the “decorated shed.” The duck compresses structure and surface decoration into a single unified entity (the modernist insistence on a building’s
surface expressing structure and function). The decorated shed, on the other hand, radically
distinguishes between the structure and the signifying surface, recognizing both their essential
difference and their mutual necessity. Decoration, for postmodern theory and practice, becomes
part of a set of strategies for an architecture that attempts to be revolutionarily in excess of itself.
Rather than the modernist program of reduction to function, postmodern theorist-practitioners
like Venturi, Brown, Peter Eisenmann and Bernard Tschumi seek to free architecture from a dead
self-referentiality by unexpected juxtapositions of forms, surfaces, and spatial practices. Both
Tschumi and Eisenmann, in their own ways, define architecture as a principle of excess, Tschumi
asserting (almost in unison with Ruskin) that “the necessity of architecture is its non-necessity. It
is useless, but radically so” (“The Architectural Paradox” 226, emphasis in original). Decoration,
though not necessarily an explicit part of their formulations, is conceptually inextricable from
Tschumi’s “supplement” or “excess.” In terms at least of decoration, postmodernity is Victorian
eclecticism’s earnest student; Venturi and Brown conclude their tremendously influential
Learning from Las Vegas by asserting that they have only really re-learned an explicitly Victorian
sense of architecture’s split: “It is now time to reevaluate the once-horrifying statement of John
Ruskin that architecture is the decoration of construction, but we should append the warning of
Pugin: It is all right to decorate construction but never construct decoration” (163). Viewed from
this angle, there is as much continuity as disjunction between the successive architectural
modernisms. Architecture’s interior is the same for Ruskin and Pugin as it will be for Siegfried
Giedion’s influential modernist critique of Victorian architecture (in Space, Time, and
Architecture), Venturi’s response to this critique, and Eisenman and Tschumi’s detournements—
not the depth behind a surface, but the interior of the surface itself.

Yet the postmodern architecture theory of the 1970s and 1980s is, of course,
interested in these things for different reasons than Victorian theory. Bernard Tschumi, who is
perhaps the modern theorist closest to Ruskin in his interest in the temporality and
transformation of architecture, sees this temporality as making possible the unpredictable use and
misuse of spaces over time. This playful misuse, for Tschumi, produces pleasure by the
transgression of programs set by the building’s initial makers; architecture, for Tschumi, is
essentially the production of structural and behavioral frameworks that can later be pleasurably
violated. For the Victorians, however, this slippage among intentions is not a means for
experiencing transgressive pleasure—not jouissance, subversion, or detournement—but rather
for producing an ethically charged acknowledgement of the value of other makers and users.

The cultural importance of this basic principle extends far beyond architecture as such.
Architecture was the category in terms of which the human-made object world in general was
scrutinized aesthetically, the umbrella medium which served to conceptualize industrial design,
interior decoration, and even sculpture. Many of the century’s most influential theorists and
practitioners of industrial design were trained as architects: Owen Jones, William Morris, James
Fergusson, Matthew Digby Wyatt. Architecture is, as Ruskin makes clear, an amphibious
medium, both fine art and applied art, functional and aesthetic. For several reasons (not only its
cultural prominence but its material permanence), it provided the most important case studies for
the new historicism of design offered by the historians and design theorists in the mid-century. In
the Sydenham Crystal Palace, indeed, design was framed as a problem of architecture, with
immersive architectural displays forming the basis for a comprehensive history of design (a
situation considered in chapter 2).

Architecture provided a way for traditional aesthetic categories to be brought to bear
upon the newly central and contested category of design, and a means of coming to terms with
and controlling a burgeoning system of industrial production and reproduction. Yet architecture
was also the site of a conceptual shift in the very notions of aesthetic hierarchy that underwrote
traditional aesthetics. Architecture requires communal labor to create; its material duration in
time sees it added to and transformed by different architects and workmen over the course of its
lifespan. It thus formed a natural theoretical center for the pervasive Victorian interest in
expanding both taste and artistic agency as a solution to the perceived aesthetic deficiencies of
industrial production. This critique of unitary and undivided making extends far beyond Ruskin’s
famous defense of the aesthetic agency of the laborer in “The Nature of Gothic.” It was, indeed,
common to the industrially aligned design reformers as well. Robert Kerr (an architect best
known for his influential 1864 country house manual The Gentleman's House), writing in 1891
about the aftermath of the Great Exhibition and the fruits of the design reform movement—what
he calls the “Epoch of 1851”—gleefully chronicles the death of the architect and architecture's
shift to an art of horizontally distributed making: “‘Architecture,' the technology of Architectus,
'the chief of the workmen,' was being promptly converted into 'the Industrial Arts', the
technology of the workmen themselves...the spirit of building-art was properly the spirit of the
artizans alone, with a definite, not to say rude, repudiation of this academical Architectus and all
his ways” (142).

I. Architects, Authors, Makers

The implications of the “repudiation of this academic Architectus” ramify into literary
production as well. Over the past two decades, studies of nineteenth-century authorship have
shown repeatedly how the economic and social conditions of the literary marketplace
complicated or undid the ideal position of the autonomous author. Recent work has explored not
only issues of copyright and economic influence but also authorial collaboration, pseudonymous
publishing, and the performance and manipulation of public authorial personas by women.5 This

5 Some interesting examples: William St. Clair’s massive and very influential The Reading Nation in the Romantic
Period shows the great disjuncture between our own sense of the nineteenth-century canon and period’s actual
reading practices. The Romantic period (apart from notable exceptions like Walter Scott) was dominated not by
works of new authors but by cheap out-of-copyright works written decades or centuries before. Beth Palmer’s
Women's Authorship and Editorship in Victorian Culture shows how female authors used the periodical marketplace
to establish media-savvy personae as legitimate authors within an illegitimate and marginalized genre; Rachel
Sagner Buurma’s “Anonymity, Corporate Authority, and the Archive” shows how collective models of authorship
remained very much in force through the end of the Victorian period. Marjorie Stone and Judith Thompson’s
Literary Couplings contains a useful bibliography of recent scholarship on collaboration, especially on literary
work has, in general, been interested less in following Foucault and Barthes in demonstrating the emptiness of the author position than in discovering the highly specific cultural and economic conditions under which that position operated and the ways in which those conditions influenced literary output. In this sense it is closely linked to my project, which seeks not to vacate aesthetic intention but to understand its complicated affiliations. My project follows interdisciplinary criticism by scholars like Elizabeth Helsinger and Kate Flint, which considers input from other cultural and aesthetic discourses that might allow us to understand the cultural conditions of authorship not directly or immediately produced by the socioeconomics of the marketplace.

The influential work of Jonah Siegel, in particular, anticipates my own in important ways. Siegel psychologizes and historicizes Foucault’s insight about the author as primarily a limiting hedge against chaotic excess, locating a pull-push pattern of unfulfillable desire and anxious distancing in the production of cultural and artistic authority in Britain. The relationship between the current artist and past art is, for Siegel, essentially exilic; historical art is both the longed-for lost origin that cannot be recovered and also a troubling accumulation that renders current production impossible. Siegel narrates the evolution of nineteenth-century art culture as the successive failures of various attempts to approach and organize this excess of historical cultural production: neoclassical art theory, artists, authors, museums, and, finally, critics. Ruskin’s solution, according to Siegel, is the Gothic craftsman, a kind of artist-curator who produces original work only through a juxtaposition of historical forms that is essentially preservationist and retentive. Ruskin is, for Siegel, the principal advocate for and greatest exemplar of the artist-curator, who locates the potential for originality in the essentially limiting and constricting work of the critic.

Looked at from the point of view of architecture, however, the situation is quite different. As I will demonstrate, historical accumulation is, in Ruskin’s architectural theory, not something to be anxiously restrained and controlled; it is, in fact, the very origin of aesthetic meaning. Architecture is foundational to Ruskin’s aesthetics, as I show in chapter three, precisely because it is the privileged site of uncontrollable and unforeseeable historical accumulation. For Ruskin and other major Victorian theorists, architecture’s meaning does not only change over time; it is produced over time. This principle animates Ruskin’s account of architecture from initial construction through the entire object life of the building. The process of construction is temporally split; Ruskin imagines the building as a kind of pre-existent frame to which “the unnecessary feature” of decoration is subsequently “added” by the craftspeople who labor on it. The building’s long and unpredictable object history extends this process, allowing it to accumulate the physical marks and cultural and historical associations that will make it truly meaningful. Ruskin declares that “a building cannot be considered as in its prime until four or five centuries have passed over it” (Seven Lamps 8: 241), that “it is in becoming memorial or monumental that a true perfection is attained by civil and domestic buildings; and this partly as they are, with such a view, built in a more stable manner, and partly as their decorations are consequently animated by a metaphorical or historical meaning” (8: 225). The object lives of couples of various kinds (309-33).
buildings offer a model of productively unforeseeable accumulation that carries none of the anxiety that Siegel finds so prevalent in the transactions between contemporary subjects and the surfeit of historical objects that surround them—and thus offers a fundamentally different model of artistic agency than Siegel’s agonized alternation of attraction to original objects and repulsion at their unruly excess. The dynamism and optimism of Victorian historicism is driven by the intense hopefulness of embodiment.

On one hand, architecture is important to Ruskin because it is a site at which the individual personality is present and available, a means by which individuals can remain vivid and real to posterity: “I would have, then, our ordinary dwelling-houses built to last...with such differences as might suit and express each man's character and occupation, and partly his history” (8: 228-29). This may appear to suggest that the building functions as a concretization of individual will; later subjects might live in this kind of edifice, but they can never affect or alter it. Yet this individual never has exclusive reign. Buildings, as Ruskin makes clear, are endlessly expansive in their capacity to record and thus to reflect and express the actions of human beings and others. The building that is built to last is built also to outlast—that is, it opens itself up beyond the intentions of its original builder and accumulates a host of marks and meanings:

[I]t is in that golden stain of time, that we are to look for the real light, and color, and preciousness of architecture; and it is not until a building has assumed this character, till it has been entrusted with the fame, and hallowed by the deeds of men, till its walls have been witnesses of suffering...that its existence, more lasting as it is than that of the natural objects of the world around it, can be gifted with even so much as these possess of language and of life. (8: 234)

A building must mature over time by giving up a portion of its own character and taking on the events and histories of the people who live in and around it. The deeds that hallow the building, the suffering that its walls witness, cannot in any sense be understood as original properties of the building or anticipated in its design. The only control that the original builder can exercise over this object history is to build his or her building to last, to construct the edifice soundly enough so that it can survive to accrue these associations.

This hallowing process does more than give buildings a dramatic story. It accords them, as Ruskin asserts, the density and originary fecundity of nature itself. Over time a building becomes not precisely like nature but rather as good or perhaps even better, “gifted” with “language” and “life” in amounts at least equal to natural objects. A building attains, over time, the capacity to serve as origin in the same way as nature does. Aging is not a process of traumatic erosion of origins either by historical distance or by problematic accumulation. Architecture provides a model of an endless accumulation that never loses its origins, or rather that is something like a continuous origin. Architecture is, for Ruskin, endlessly authentic and endlessly generative of authentic marks. As I show in chapter five, Thomas Hardy, following Ruskin, imagines architectural preservation not as a reactionary attempt to control history but
rather as a way to safeguard this ongoing accumulation. Hardy understands unrestored historical architecture as the site for open-ended and unpredictable narrative, taking it in many ways as a model for his own work as a novelist.

When one puts recent scholarship on authorship into conversation with architectural theory, authorship starts looking less like some kind of ideal of romantic autonomy that is compromised by the forces of the marketplace and more like a mode of thinking with and through a world full of people and forces that demand acknowledgment. This has the potential to change the way we think about Victorian ideas like realism. For instance, as I show in my third chapter, when we read Ruskin’s theory of aesthetic vision alongside his architecture theory, it becomes apparent that his apparently naturalistic or realistic theory of representation is profoundly retroactive. For Ruskin, forms emerge not quite or not exclusively from nature but from the recognition or misrecognition of forms that exist in human-made objects. This process does not, however, constitute a mise-en-abyme that swallows up contemporary production in a sad vacuity of repetition. On the contrary, it makes possible a different kind of originality; as I show in chapter four, on sculpture in Eliot and Hawthorne, retroactive recognition produces originals rather than copies.

II. Architectural Objects, Embodied Thought

My project’s approach to architecture cannot be dissociated from the roughly two decades of scholarship loosely grouped under the heading of the “material turn.” Scholars tend to trace this cluster of thought to Arjun Appadurai’s massively influential The Social Life of Things, an amalgam of Marx and Mauss that discovers commodity forms at work in social relationships from which they are supposed to be barred, and complex affective relationships at work in the midst of the marketplace. This approach has been very fruitful for Victorian studies, producing, recently, John Plotz’s Portable Property. Plotz’s book is especially valuable for its commitment to the shifting and multiplicitous status of “things,” their capacity to become commodities while retaining or developing extra-economic affective charges. This is in contrast to the model offered in, for example, Elaine Freedgood’s The Ideas in Things, which posits a particular historical date at which a respectfully material “thing culture” gives way to a exploitative and mystifying “commodity culture.”

Severin Fowles argues that the problem with thing theory is that it privileges material presence over absent or obscure relationships (25). Yet in Appadurai’s essentially Marxian and anthropological approach, the material object is generally simply a means of understanding deferred or obscured social and economic relationships. An even more radical approach—theory going under the general rubric of “object-oriented ontology” or “speculative realism”—places absence at the very heart of the matter. Radicalizing Bill Brown’s distinction between instrumentalized “objects” and numinously independent “things,” object-oriented ontology

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6 This nostalgia for the lost dignity of things suffuses the material turn and its antecedents, from Heidegger to relatively hard-nosed anthropologists like Appadurai and Thomas.
replaces our normal experience with a world of “weird objects” which “exist in utter isolation from all others, packed into secluded private vacuums” (Harman 1). For these theorists, the universe is a place where objects interact with objects in mysterious and unpredictable ways, and without the conceptual assistance or even the presence of human beings. Both object oriented ontology’s decentering understanding of objects and more anthropologically-minded work in the tradition of Appadurai suggest that the obscure or obscured is the rule rather than the exception, that the material world constantly exceeds or elides us.

This interest in an unstable, obscure, and shifting object world makes room for investigations of materiality beyond the commodity and the panoptic structure. Most relevant for this project is the broader material turn’s interest in emergence, transformation, and process in contradistinction to system. As Appadurai puts it in a recent essay: “In some way, all things are congealed moments in a longer social trajectory. All things are brief deposits of this or that property, photographs that conceal the reality of the motion from which their objecthood is a momentary respite…” (“The Thing Itself” 15). Or, as Nicholas Thomas pithily phrases it in his influential Entangled Objects, “objects are not what they were made to be but what they have become” (4).

This attentiveness to the human-made object’s transition among different states offers a response, as Appadurai suggests, to a capitalist and anthropocentric conceptual framework that alienates objects from both the social conditions of their production and their own material transformation over time. More importantly for the purposes of this dissertation, it also offers a way to think about the human social relationships that the “objecthood” of objects can sometimes occlude. Communal labor—and not just labor but intentional making—becomes visible in the imperfections of objects, their resistance to complete submersion in their functions.

[I]t is not just the materials from which art objects are composed that threaten to break through the illusion of permanence. It is the very action of the artists, the craftsmen, the builders, and the framers that is always waiting to show its hand. The tear in the canvas, the crack in the glass, the chip in the wood, the flaw in the steel are not just signs of *homo faber*, but of the activity that art both conceals and celebrates. (Appadurai, “The Thing Itself” 15-16)

By the second sentence in this passage, Appadurai sounds positively Ruskinian, both in his emphasis on the social and human value of imperfection and in his insistence upon the peculiarly material nature of this value. It is not only, for both Appadurai and Ruskin, that material production allows conceptual access to imperfect but morally valuable human others. For both authors, material objects constitute privileged sites for access to the human, and this is so, perversely, because they are also where the human shapes and is shaped by the non-human. This non-human, for Ruskin and for other influential theorists like Owen Jones, encompasses both the physical properties of the material world as they are encountered as limiting factors in the making of objects—the resistance of wood, stone, glass, and paint to human workmanship—and
also the unpredictable effects of physical processes like weathering and decay over time. Human marks are imperfect because the craftsperson works with recalcitrant material; being able to witness the craftsperson’s struggle to embody thought in a material object makes that thought more accessible to us. On the other hand, the marks of weathering and age are themselves, for Ruskin, among the “essential features” of a building.

[Its age is] the greatest glory of a building...and, therefore, the external signs of this glory, having power and purpose greater than any belonging to their mere sensible beauty, may be considered as taking rank among pure and essential character; so essential to my mind, that I think a building cannot be considered as in its prime until four or five centuries have passed over it. (Seven Lamps, 8, 241)

Decay begins to efface the distinctions between the human and the natural, joining human production to the unpredictable actions of time.

Yet despite the conceptual overlaps between Ruskin’s thought and that of Appadurai, the material turn has, at least in Victorian studies, largely ignored architecture—mostly, it would seem, because architecture is still encountered as the system of systems. When this criticism does consider architecture, as in Elaine Freedgood’s treatment of the Crystal Palace in The Ideas in Things, it is still as the grid of systematization, the oppressive principle of location and definition that curtails the complex materiality of the thing and transforms it into an unproblematic object. This approach to material studies is animated by a Foucauldian suspicion of architecture’s inevitable collusion with oppressive social and political regimes. Freedgood maintains the schema of the panopticon, simply replacing subjects with objects.

The material turn has, like the first wave of postmodern architecture theory before it, rediscovered or at least replicated what is in many ways a Victorian attitude toward the potential of material embodiment. The Victorian period’s articulation of this concept, however, is specifically architectural. Recovering Victorian architectural theory can provide a powerful alternative theory of material embodiment. Most importantly, Victorian architecture theory is refreshingly free of nostalgia for the lost “thingness” of the human-made object. Theorists like Ruskin and Morris observe no essential distinction between thing and object in Bill Brown’s sense. Rather, Victorian theory evinces an attentiveness to the productive simultaneity of these two states.

Because of this, Victorian architecture theory does not have the problem with form that haunts much of the scholarship of the material turn. In the world of the speculative realists, furtive objects retreat from perception, only ever presenting shifting and incomplete aspects of themselves to a human observer. Treating these fleeting aspects as wholly available forms is not only ethically insupportable, but also epistemologically inadequate. As Graham Harman makes clear, this view systematically disqualifies the critical models (new criticism, structuralism, new historicism, deconstruction) by way of which literary criticism experiences and accounts for textual form (“Object Oriented Literary Criticism”). Taken to its logical conclusion, indeed, it
essentially disqualifies form from critical consideration altogether, as apparent form is only ever an insufficient aspect of a fundamentally unknowable whole. Even the much less radical “methodological fetishism” of Appadurai, Thomas, and others is essentially uninterested in the forms of objects; the real object of consideration is the socioeconomic relationships that structure the encounter with the object.

Victorian architecture theory, on the other hand, is intensely interested in form. It is interested in the ways in which form transforms; that is, the ways in which particular forms change over time, both in their individual material instantiations and in their translations and transformations between different objects and object types. The forms that Ruskin obsessively traces over the course of their development duck in and out of meaning and reference, and into and out of intention. In order to do justice not only to the real texture of Victorian aesthetic thought but also to the subjects and objects to which this thought reached out (Ruskin, whatever one makes of his schizophrenic political stances, is unquestionably the great aesthetic enfranchiser of the century), we must learn to look out for the presence of a highly specific architectural principle in literary form and the ways in which this principle animates the experiments of the literary form-makers of the century.
To live in a glass house is a revolutionary virtue par excellence. It is also an intoxication, a moral exhibitionism, that we badly need. (Walter Benjamin, “On Surrealism” 1088)

Glass, as a revolutionary material; glass, as a solution to a nineteenth century imagined as pure wall. There is perhaps no more efficient formulation of modernism's relationship to the Victorian period. In the work of modernist critics like Walter Benjamin, this conceptualization of nineteenth-century architecture functions as a central hermeneutic for understanding the century as a whole. Benjamin's monumental Arcades Project, in particular, uses nineteenth-century architecture—beginning with its titular arcades—to characterize the century as trapped in a frozen dialectic, evincing symptoms of modernity but unable to comprehend them. It is a dialectic, however, whose solution is not a synthesis but rather a kind of exfoliation—the shedding of the etui that covers the pure architectural fabric, the liberation of industrial processes from false formal rhetoric and historical reference.

If, as Benjamin repeatedly asserts, Victorians had trouble seeing the modern potentiality of the glass and cast iron of their own architecture, since the turn of the twentieth century we have had trouble seeing Victorian architecture on its own terms. In the following pages, I will consider what our theories of the nineteenth century have done to its walls, and what those walls might tell us if approached in a different manner. I will begin to trace a Victorian dis-integration of the wall that both prefigures and contests modernism’s obsession with its own disappearing walls. The imperatives of privacy, domesticity, and the production of regulative binaries that we tend to think of as the goals of Victorian spatial practice do not, I will argue, exhaust the wall; in fact, a powerful strand within Victorian architectural discourse itself resists them. Victorian architecture theory performs a dissolution of the wall, and a disengagement of structure from decoration, that anticipate the strategies claimed by modernism—though in the service of the visual presence of historical surface rather than of its effacement. Dominant understandings of Victorian architecture tend to ignore or even erase the particularity of the structures they purport to account for. Criticism tends to consider the Victorian architectural surface as a distraction; it encourages us to look through, rather than at, the wall, to read it as a symptom or as an abstracted plan rather than as a dense visual object. Before thinking about what architecture means for the Victorians, we must understand what we take it as making visually or materially available to us as scholars.

Isobel Armstrong argues that we must carefully distinguish between modernist and Victorian articulations of glass architecture. In modernism, glass strives for an “annihilation of space and time that envisages a cleansed geometry of space” and a concomitant “elimination of history,” while Victorian glass spaces instead pursue “a collapse of space into time that maps
multiple heterogenous times and spaces together” (Armstrong 161). This is by no means a project unique to glass spaces; it is, I will show, already basic to the Victorian conceptualization of the wall itself. In Ruskin’s architectural imagination, the wall—imagined as a flexible, excessive, essentially decorative formation—allows for the reformulation of relationships between past and present, rich and poor, human and natural.

I. Barrier, Structure, and Surface

The often-ignored first volume of Ruskin’s *Stones of Venice* is in large part a lesson in engineering that seeks to demonstrate the logical superiority of Gothic structure.1 This process begins with a list of the parts of architecture and their functions and coordination. It is clear from the beginning that the wall, the only part of architecture than can exist by and for itself, is paramount: “When meant for purposes of mere partition or enclosure, it remains a wall proper” (9: 76). The wall becomes the ur-component from which other structural components are derived. Thus, though there can be a “wall proper,” there can never be a “roof proper”; the roof is made possible by the wall. The roof is even a secondary consideration, one that follows from the wall’s originary existence: “The reader will, perhaps, as heretofore, be kind enough to think for himself, how, having carried up his wall veil as high as it may be needed, he will set about protecting it from weather, or preparing it for weight” (9: 91). In earlier popular conceptions of architecture's origins from Vitruvius on, vertical supports are taken to be prior to or at least independent of the wall (in Antoine Laugier's influential eighteenth-century version, uncut trees constitute the primitive form of the columns of Greek post-and-lintel architecture and thus the origin of all subsequent architecture).2 For Ruskin, though, these vertical supports are simply concentrations of a pre-existent wall. When vertical loads increase, the wall is strengthened by being “gathered up into piers” (9: 99). In Ruskin’s lively and revealing phraseology, “a pier is coagulated wall” (9: 100). Windows, similarly, are characterized not as independent members but rather as a kind of violence done to an already-extant wall—Ruskin calls the shaping of apertures the “annihilation of the thickness of the wall” (9: 217).

And yet this wall, for all of its primacy, is surprisingly insubstantial:

In perfect architecture...walls are generally kept of moderate thickness, and strengthened by piers or buttresses; and the part of the wall between these, being generally intended only to secure privacy, or keep out the slighter forces of weather, may be properly called a Wall Veil. I shall always use this word “Veil” to signify the even portion of a wall, it being more expressive than the term Body.” (9: 80)

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1 See Kristine Garrigan for a sharply critical evaluation of Ruskin’s comprehension of engineering; if it is indeed the case that Ruskin was an indifferent engineer (as seems likely), then his theory of structure is informed even more directly by his broader aesthetics than it might seem.

2 This rendering of the “primitive hut” makes its first appearance in the second edition of Laugier’s *Essay on Architecture*, 1755.
With the “wall veil,” Ruskin explicitly rejects the age-old metaphorization, going back to Vitruvius, of architecture as human body (“it being more expressive than the term Body”). A curious phrase, apparently of Ruskin's own coinage, the wall veil forms the core of his theory of structure and aesthetics in *Stones of Venice*. It is a “veil” in the sense of being a screen between the interior and the exterior (and one here explicitly associated with “privacy”)—it is a veil, though, as well, in the sense of an insubstantial covering. For Ruskin, the wall veil frees surface extension not from the tyranny of being useful but rather from the tyranny of being *necessary*. The wall veil provides a real spatial position for ornament outside of the logic of structure—exceeding an ontology of structural necessity, it breaks into a new ontological space that is, nevertheless, also a real space. Ever careful to assert the essential functionality of architecture overall, Ruskin is nonetheless insistent on preserving the wall's peculiar right to assert a life and a space of its own:

Although, in the first designing of the building, nothing is to be admitted but what is wanted, and no useless wings are to be added to balance useful ones, yet in its ultimate designing, when its sculpture and color become precious, it may be that actual room is wanted to display them, or richer symmetry wanted to deserve them; and in such cases even a useless wall may be built to bear the sculpture... (*Architecture and Painting* 12: 90)

The temporal dimension of this process is vital. “In the first designing,” the building is limited to use; only later, “in its ultimate designing,” when it wriggles between an ontology of use and an ontology of aesthetic value, may the wall be freed. This “useless” wall is not load-bearing but art-bearing; its job is to provide a plane for sculpture and color rather than either structural support or protective barrier.

This essentially counterstructural account of the wall presents a problem for a dominant tradition in scholarship that understands Victorian architectural theory, spatial practice, and ideology as presenting a more or less united front in the construction of a spatially circumscribed domesticity. Treating the Victorian wall as either organizing barrier (Foucault) or as economic symptom (Benjamin)—and usually both simultaneously4—this narrative describes nineteenth-century architectural discourse and practice as oriented primarily towards the production of autonomous interior space.5 Even more recent treatments of nineteenth-century built space that

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3 As Edward Kaufmann emphasizes, this independent wall was conceived in terms of its representational potentiality; Victorian theorists were often hostile to walls attempting symbolic expressions of their own material (see Kaufman, “Architectural Representation in Victorian England” esp. 37).

4 Benjaminian and Foucauldian readings may even imply each other, as Charles Rice suggests when he paraphrases Benjamin's idea of the interior as a surface that records: “the trace of the inhabitant, caught as it is between securing a private identity, and positioning the subject within frames of detection and governance” (10).

5 The classic texts in this tradition would include Nancy Armstrong's tremendously influential *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, which describes the “separate spheres” problem as a spatialization of gender difference produced by the rise
emphasize its complexity—in particular, influential works by Sharon Marcus and Chase and Levinson—tend to recapitulate the central assumptions of this tradition. Complexity, in their accounts, is experienced by the Victorians as the unwelcome intervention of real conditions in an ideal architecture conceptualized almost exclusively as divisive barrier.6

This interior is the site of family, femininity, capitalist consumption, and middle-class subjectivity. It is above all the site of differentiation, the site at which regulative binaries—masculine and feminine, public and private, rich and poor—are produced and reinforced. Vanessa Dickerson writes: “The Victorian house, privatized and compartmentalized as it was, no longer or so obviously constituted a multipurpose or multivalent space. It was increasingly a space defined by an interiority it shared with the female...this interiority, though ostensibly valued, was still based in negation and separations and ultimately associated with subordination” (xiv). This passage immediately reduces the house to its interior space, and that space to its dividing walls. The wall here effects a subdivision that also, paradoxically, produces an abstracted, homogenous, undifferentiated interior. In the wall, increasingly rigid economic, social, and functional distinctions that situate and mark Victorian subjects here find both their expression and ontology. As Chase and Levinson put it, “Victorian domesticity was as much a spatial as an affective obsession. Increasingly, to imagine a flourishing private life was to articulate space, to secure boundaries, and to distribute bodies...The wall represents a barrier that separates privilege from dispossession, and privacy from public life” (143).

The debt to Foucault’s account of Bentham’s panopticon in Discipline and Punish—essentially a set of walls establishing a complex interior in which subjects are situated in disciplinary relation to one another—is clear. For Foucault, the panoptic prison signals the onset of modernity with an architecture of interiority imagined as the distribution and location of human subjects. The nineteenth century brings “an architecture that is no longer built simply to be seen (as with the ostentation of palaces), or to observe the external space (i.e. the geometry of fortresses), but to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control—to render visible those who are inside it” (Foucault 172). Architecture, no longer an object to see or a position from which to see, exits the visual as a material presence; its inhabitants now the objects of vision, the building itself becomes nearly invisible. Even the panopticon’s transparency and optical availability only serve an even more radical interiority that restrains and locates.

Foucault's essentially idealist conception of the prison form—according to which any individual building is merely “a type of location of bodies in space, of distribution of individuals in relation to one another” (214), means that architecture remains typological or figural rather than material. The fact of a building's being built (or even fully imagined or described) is irrelevant; only its expression of methods of control matters. Foucault repeatedly dismisses the

6 See Karen Chase and Michael Levinson, The Spectacle of Intimacy, esp. 5-6; Sharon Marcus, Apartment Stories, esp. 84-95. See also Andrea Kaston Tange’s recent Architectural Identities: Domesticity, Literature, and the Victorian Middle Class. Like Marcus, Chase, and Levinson, Tange posits a monolithic ideology that was complicated by real conditions but not significantly altered by them: “abstract notions of middle-class relationships to space were often at odds with the real, material conditions of existence” (20).
specificity of any given instantiation of the form; the panopticon is “a generalizable model of functioning...the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form...a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use” (205, emphasis added).

Unsurprisingly, then, the wall as visual object is conspicuously absent in much of the writing indebted to *Discipline and Punish* (and, to a lesser extent, *Madness and Civilization*). The wall, though centrally important as barrier and locator, is so abstracted as to be nearly invisible in itself. Indeed, for Foucault the wall's actual existence is irrelevant, since it is only an imperfect physical embodiment of omnipresent and ubiquitous power structures. Since, for these critics, the wall is generated from within (and thus predicted and delimited by) a strictly defined set of power relationships, it is simply a structural “type” of social forces that are distributed throughout real, political, economic, and ideological spaces. Even when the wall’s visibility becomes unavoidable, it often functions simply as another type of barrier or differentiating agent. Chase and Levinson, for example, characterize the change from Georgian brick wall to the ornate Victorian Queen Anne's style as a newly “articulate wall.” Yet this decorated wall only serves as a more profound barrier between subjects and between classes, as it advertises middle-class domestic pleasures publicly while signaling also their inalienable interiority and inaccessibility (Chase and Levinson 145). The surface of the wall, as heavily decorated as it might be, can only contribute to its status as boundary. Even the representational valence of the wall is limited to an expression of its own interiority.

If Foucault’s insistence upon Victorian material production as an architecture reduced to a diagrammatic barrier elides any substantive engagement with surface, then Walter Benjamin’s attention to surfaces and objects should represent a useful alternative. Yet Benjamin's approach is, ultimately, equally abstracting, removing architecture and its companion arts from meaningful visibility. Let us begin with his famous catalogue of the era’s explosion of coverings:

The nineteenth century, like no other century, was addicted to dwelling. It conceived the residence as a receptacle for the person, and it encased him with all his appurtenances so deeply in the dwelling's interior that one might be reminded of the inside of a compass case, where the instrument with all its accessories lies embedded in deep, usually violet folds of velvet. What didn't the nineteenth century invent some sort of casing for! Pocket watches, slippers, egg cups, thermometers, playing cards—and, in lieu of cases, there were jackets, carpets, wrappers and covers. The twentieth century, with its porosity and transparency, its tendency toward the well-lit and airy, has put an end to dwelling in the old sense. (Benjamin *AP* 220-1)

Benjamin sets the tone for an entire tradition of scholarship which considers the nineteenth century an era best understood through its architectural interiors. This passage is often quoted as a convenient shorthand for a Victorian period imagined as “addicted to dwelling” --an age of interiority, privacy, and domestic comfort. Dwelling, in the nineteenth century, can best be understood through the metonym of the case, which both locates its object in a highly specified
way (i.e. it “fits”) and also records its traces in its plush surface. His central example, the compass case, is deliberately ironic: a device designed to organize external space is “embedded” in an entirely opaque interiority (its glass and metal also, perhaps, echoing the glass and iron architecture trapped beneath its own covering). All of this is undone by the modernist revolution, whose porous and transparent architecture renders the complex forms of the case obsolete.

For Benjamin, the cover is emphatically a covering-up, an obscuring of what should be the self-evident structure of the object. As Siegfried Kracauer writes in his ambivalent account of Benjamin's work, “For Benjamin, the world is obscured and obstructed….This is also precisely the basis for Benjamin's belief that it is not necessary to respect the immediate—that the facade must be torn down, and form cut to pieces” (261-2). As both theoretical and methodological grounding for his *Arcades Project*, Benjamin repeatedly invokes architecture historian Siegfried Giedion, who articulates, in effect, a pathologically divided psychology for Victorian architecture. Benjamin quotes Giedion’s most aggressive and typical assertion, from his 1928 *Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferro-Concrete*: “Construction in the nineteenth century plays the role of the subconscious. Outwardly, construction still boasts the old pathos; underneath, concealed by facades, the basis of our present existence is taking shape” (qtd. Benjamin AP 4). In Giedion's terms, Victorian architecture’s “subconscious” is its own proto-modern glass-and-iron construction, which is buried under layers of historically referential decoration. For modernist architecture theory, this becomes an almost literal injunction: just as Freud liberates the real content of the repressed Victorian subconscious on an individual level, the uncloaking of architecture must liberate the repressed content of Victorian material and cultural reality on a mass level.

For Benjamin, this historicist cladding is the central object in his material critique of bourgeois culture, a “critique not of its mechanism and cult of machinery but of its narcotic historicism, its passion for masks” (AP 391). The eventual liberation of culture from bourgeois domination, the “awakening” of modernity from the phantasmagorical dream of the nineteenth century, thus finds its prime example and first actuation in the shedding of decoration from architecture: “In the nineteenth century, this development of the forces of production worked to emancipate the forms of construction from art...A start is made with architecture as engineered construction” (AP 898). The material objects produced by these new forces are so free from the burden of historical forms that they constitute a new relationship between form and meaning: “It is the peculiarity of technological forms of production (as opposed to art forms) that their progress and their success are proportionate to the transparency of their social content. (Hence glass architecture)” (AP 465, emphasis in original). Architecture, here as elsewhere in Benjamin, negates the distance between literal example and metaphor. Benjamin figures the literal transparency of glass architecture as the material instantiation of a metaphorical transparency—i.e. a self-evident correspondence between “social content” and visible structure. Most importantly, this transcendental commensurateness excludes the mediate position that form occupies between idea and material. The new architecture, banishing the decorative forms that formerly encrusted its bare structure, undoes form itself as problem. Form expresses its
economic and social program, not some process of aesthetic choice and transformation. Base and superstructure begin to align.

Architecture, then, is more than privileged metaphor and central object in Benjamin's work. It also provides a methodology. As Detlef Mertins argues, Benjamin's Modernist theoretics of historical progression are premised upon his transformation of “the dynamic dualism of nineteenth century architecture--(self)representation seeking reconciliation with alterity—into a dialectic” (196-7). In other words, Benjamin adopts the nineteenth century's theorization of architecture as split internally between structure and ornament, but transforms it into a dialectic of history itself, with one term representing modernity (structure) and the other representing history (ornament). Benjamin's presumption that material reality contains within it a formal split between regress and progress that may be theoretically exploited has, as its central figure, this notion of a dialectical architecture. The world of the Arcades Project is a world made subject to the methodology of architecture's split.

The displacements and contradictions of advanced capitalism register most prominently in the divide between production and consumption manifested in the bourgeois interior. At the same time, this increasingly decorated and “phantasmagorical” interior functions as a defense mechanism, a historicist fantasy of premodernity used to disavow new economic relations: “The masquerade of styles, as it unfolds across the nineteenth century, results from the fact that relations of dominance become obscured...Economic alibi in space. Interior alibi in time” (AP 218). Nineteenth-century historicism is a cultural formation that seeks only to conceal—from both the new industrial bourgeoisie and those it exploits—the real “relations of dominance.” Benjamin characterizes the decorated surface of the wall as a parasitic deception:

The space disguises itself—puts on, like an alluring creature, the costumes of moods...in the end, things are merely mannequins, and even the great moments of world history are only costumes beneath which they exchange glances of complicity with nothingness...to live in these interiors was to have woven a dense fabric about oneself, to have secluded oneself within a spider's web. (AP 216)

For Benjamin, the decorated wall and the decorative objects it locates are complicit in the desire of the bourgeoisie to disguise its own historical position. Interior space and interior surface are bourgeois camouflage; they both disclaim economic anxieties by removing commodities from circulation and also literally cover modern structure with outmoded historicist forms. Representation here is merely vampirism of an originary object, and history is only present as “so many insect bodies sucked dry”—historical forms without meaningful content. The macabre rhetoric of textiles in Benjamin's descriptions of the interior--“costumes”, “dense fabric”, “spider's web”--seems directed at a target very much like Ruskin's account of the wall as veil. One must never, according to Benjamin, look at the surfaces of an interior; one must look through them, to the economic structuring of the subject whose traces the interior records.  

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7 Marshall Berman identifies this turn away from the material in historical materialism in the proto-modernist Marx
Following Benjamin, for instance, Susan Stewart’s influential formulation of the interior as constitutive site for the collection is schematic to the point of rendering its actual material content invisible: “The collection is not constructed by its elements; rather it comes to exist by means of its principle of organization” (Stewart 155). The wall, and the objects it encloses and places, is valuable only as economic and psychological symptoms.

Ruskin's theoretical dedication to the decorated wall—alongside his fascination with Gothic architectural models—would be, in this account, the necessary consequence of a process of closure and differentiation that is at the same time a process of historical camouflage and disavowal. Sharon Marcus, for example, places Ruskin’s medievalism at the center of the “Englishman's home is his castle” tradition in Victorian architecture theory and practice, in which an obsession with boundaries, barriers, and interiority becomes indissociable from a retrogressive feudal nostalgia (Marcus 90-2). The revolution of modernism stages itself in opposition to this. Because modernism claims above all to derive its ideology from its technology rather than vice versa, the wall must not only be revalued but also re-engineered: theoretically, it is the high tensile strength of cast iron (and, later, steel-reinforced concrete) that makes possible a structure whose roof weight is not borne by its walls. No longer structural, the wall is no longer necessary.

Certainly modernists like Walter Gropius see the abolition of the wall as something made possible by new technologies—and itself making possible an entirely new kind of architecture:

One of the outstanding achievements of the new constructional technique has been the abolition of the separating function of the wall. Instead of making the walls the element of support, as in a brick-built house...the role of the walls becomes restricted to that of mere screens stretched between the upright columns of this framework to keep out rain, cold, and noise.... (Gropius 25-6)

The claims are familiar. New technologies mean that the wall serves no real structural purpose (i.e. it is not load-bearing). The consequence of this is that the wall becomes a choice, one that can be reduced to its barest functional necessity or, even better, replaced entirely by glass. The “growing preponderance of voids over solids” (Gropius 26) is the victory of modern technology, freed from formal replication, over the solid walls of the past. The wall, no longer a central feature as in the nineteenth century, is a “mere screen.”

Yet this is, curiously enough, very similar to how Ruskin imagines the wall. The assonance between Ruskin's and Gropius's basic understanding of the wall is surprising: Gropius's walls are “mere screens stretched between the upright columns of this framework to keep out rain, cold, and noise”; Ruskin's wall is a “veil” which, “between these [piers or columns]...[is] generally intended only to secure privacy, or keep out the slighter forces of weather.” For Ruskin as for Gropius, the wall is not a necessity but a choice—to the extent that it may be invoked or dismissed at will. As Ruskin makes clear, the wall is unnecessary from a

 himself. See All That is Solid Melts Into Air, esp. 93-94.
structural point of view: “supposing that we do not want the wall veil for its own sake, this latter is thinned entirely away...and finally breaks, and we have nothing but a row of square piers” (9: 101). There is no theoretical reason, within this structural framework, that Ruskin's wall, coagulated into the pier and stretched into the wall veil, should not tend towards the glass wall.

Ruskin's structural theory of the wall is, then, in many ways identical to that of the Modernists who follow him. If the modern architectural technologies so vital to Benjamin and Gropius are not themselves, as those theorists claim, responsible for an entirely new way of conceptualizing the wall—if, indeed, this most fundamental conceptual transformation is already anticipated in the architecture whose dialectical opposition authorizes their own—then we must account for the wall's undoing outside of modernism’s ethical-technological teleology (a teleology to which deconstructionist theory commits itself as well). The ambiguous position of the wall—its partial disengagement from structurally necessary members—puts it into play in a way that both of these theories find conceptually useful.

Yet the concept of the “veil,” with its connotations of femininity, privacy, and disguise, does not ultimately convey the extent of Ruskin's radical conceptual dismantling of the boundary status of the wall. John Jordan calls Ruskin's Sesame and Lilies a “foundational text” of domestic ideology, identifying in it a “powerful exclusionary logic—dividing the world into a series of binary oppositions between outside and inside, male and female, secular and sacred” (78-9). The passage he cites suggests just that: “so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unlived, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home” (18: 122). Yet the following sentence makes it difficult to confla te the idea of domesticity with the actual spatial configurations of the Victorian household; “And wherever a true wife comes, this home is always round her. The stars only may be over her head...home is yet wherever she is” (18: 122). Ruskin is certainly committed to an understanding of gender that emphasizes separate political and practical spheres for men and women; however, he also repeatedly resists the spatial literalization of this separation as bounded domestic architecture.

A few pages later, Ruskin delivers a devastating critique of the stupefying literalness of a domestic morality imagined as spatial interiority:

This is wonderful—oh, wonderful!—to see her, with every innocent feeling fresh within her, go out in the morning into her garden to play with the fringes of its guarded flowers, and lift their heads when they are drooping, with her happy smile upon her face, and no cloud upon her brow, because there is a little wall around her place of peace: and yet she knows, in her heart, if she would only look for its knowledge, that, outside of that little rose-covered wall,

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8 Anuradha Chatterjee's comprehensive accounting of Ruskin's theory of the wall veil links it to Sartor's philosophy of clothes, in which significant form itself is not body but covering. According to Chatterjee, the wall veil represents a shift of signification from structure to surface that echoes, if it is not prompted by, Carlyle’s work on clothing (Chatterjee esp. 75-6).

9 Though, as Sharon Aronofsky Weltman shows in Ruskin’s Mythic Queen, Ruskin’s gender politics are surprisingly complex and even potentially radical.
the wild grass, to the horizon, is torn up by the agony of men, and beat level by the drift of their life-blood. (18: 140-41)

The “little wall around her place of peace” is, for Ruskin, as much a matter of bad faith as the bourgeois interior is for Benjamin (indeed, the gruesomeness of the depiction here rivals that of Benjamin's spiders). Women, though still the caretakers of Victorian mythology, are actually exhorted to leave domestic space for the chaotic external world. The bounded interior is, ultimately, the betrayal of interiority rather than its ontological locus; the woman “knows, in her heart”—in her interior—that the interior-as-boundary is a site of distraction rather than ethical immediacy. When the wall becomes fetishized as barrier, it becomes a pathology rather than the site of an ethnically productive domesticity. An interior that produces or reproduces gender difference as spatial difference must, according to Ruskin, undo the political efficacy that that gender difference can have in the world.

The vertical extension of the “rose-covered wall” shifts to the horizontal extension of “the wild grass, to the horizon...beat level.” “Guarded flowers” and “wild grass,” the domestic and the exterior, oppose but also mirror each other. It is this essential commensurateness that is unmade by the wall as barrier. As Ruskin declares in The Stones of Venice, “As far as the architect is concerned, one side of a wall is generally the same as another” (9: 182); in the context of the Sesame and Lilies passage, this declaration has an emphatic moral valence. Ruskin’s ideal for the wall, then, might be described as a kind of Moebius strip, a wall with only one side, which does not constitute a spatial or visual barrier but rather a location for art.

In “The Opening of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham” (1854), Ruskin contrasts new building and making with historical preservation, mourning the objects that are left behind by industrial progress and even by the powerful efforts to encourage original design mounted by the design reform movement. In a remarkable extended metaphor, Ruskin compares these abandoned art objects, in their problematic invisibility, to the London poor. At its root, the problem of preservation is for Ruskin one of optical availability:

It is one of the strange characters of the human mind...that we never thoroughly feel the evils which are not actually set before our eyes. If, suddenly, in the midst of the enjoyment of the palate and lightnesses of heart of a London dinner-party, the walls of the chamber were parted, and through their gap, the nearest human beings who were famishing, and in misery, were borne into the midst of the company—feasting and fancy-free—if, pale with sickness, horrible in destitution, broken by despair, body by body, they were laid upon the soft carpet, one beside the chair of every guest, would only the crumbs of the dainties be cast to them—would only a passing glance, a passing thought be vouchsafed to them? Yet the actual facts, the real relations of each Dives and Lazarus, are not altered by the intervention of the house wall between the table and the sick-bed. (12: 430)
In this passage, Ruskin imagines middle- or upper-class domestic space as engendering a crisis of visibility. The “intervention of the house wall,” far from guaranteeing an ethically productive domesticity, serves only visually to obscure and spatially to confuse the “actual facts, the real relations” of person to person and person to object: “we never thoroughly feel the evils which are not actually set before our eyes.” The supposed ontological basis of Victorian spatial practice—the architecture of domestic privacy—must be undone. Yet this vivid and disturbing passage is not merely a plea for social recognition and a kind of transcendent visibility. It is also an extended metaphor for the abuse and neglect of historical art objects. The social obligations that are impeded by the wall extend far beyond the requirements of philanthropy and brotherhood to neighbors and fellow countrymen. These social obligations are part of a greater responsibility to the makers of the past and to the history that is embodied in the objects that they produced. Ruskin continues, comparing the indifferent rich man eating feet away from the beggar to the average Englishman getting and spending with no cognizance of the material vulnerability of artworks:

If every one of us, who knows what food for the human heart there is in the great works of elder time, could indeed see with his own eyes their progressive ruin; if every earnest antiquarian...could indeed behold, each morning as he awakened, the mightiest works of departed nations moldering to the ground in disregarded heaps; if he could always have in clear phantasm before his eyes the ignorant monk trampling on the manuscript...he would not always smile so complacently in the...petty preservations of his own immediate sphere. (12: 430)

The bourgeois dinner party becomes a conceit for a very English provincialism, opposed to the metaphorical “food for the human heart” contained in historical artworks. The solution is a new kind of sociality that extends in both space and time—out past England to the continent and beyond, back from the present to the work and workers of the past, and forward to the fate of historical art. “[I]f every man, who has the interest of Art and of History at heart, would at once devote himself earnestly--not to enrich his own collection--not even to enlighten his own neighbors or investigate his own parish-territory--but to far-sighted and _fore_ -sighted endeavor in the great field of Europe, there is yet time to do much” (12: 430). Proposing that “an association might be formed” (12: 430) to buy and preserve buildings and paintings that were at risk of ruination or destructive “restoration,” Ruskin imagines an expansive, cosmopolitan, “far-sighted and “fore-sighted” social group constituting itself around historical works of art. In fact, precisely such an association, the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings, was formed twenty years later by Ruskin’s disciple William Morris, and operated on principles almost identical to those proposed by Ruskin’s earlier essay (albeit on a more limited and primarily English basis).

The expansive sociality made possible by the art of surfaces is not simply historical, nor is the art in question only monumental. In Architecture and Painting, Ruskin encourages his
readers to forgo purchases of prints meant to decorate the insides of walls in favor of sculpture to decorate their outsides:

Architecture differs from painting peculiarly in being an art of accumulation. The prints bought by your friends, and hung up in their houses, have no collateral effect with yours: they must be separately examined, and if ever they were hung up side by side, they would rather injure than assist each other's effect. But the sculpture on your friend's house unites in effect with that on your own. The two houses form one grand mass—far grander than either separately; much more if a third be added—and a fourth; much more if the whole street—if the whole city—join in the solemn harmony of sculpture. Your separate possessions of pictures and prints are to you as if you sang pieces of music with your single voices in your own houses. But your architecture would be as if you all sang together in one mighty choir.

(12: 71)

The art-bearing wall radically opposes differentiation and demarcation. Houses no longer preserve neighbors in domestic isolation; instead, the houses “form one grand mass,” coming together in a sublime choir. Decorated architecture undoes the boundaries between home and home and between person and person. Decorating the exteriors of private buildings is for Ruskin a social obligation that effects a sociality of “accumulation”: not, that is, a rigid architectonic grid that arranges subjects in relation to one another, but a responsive and unpredictable aggregation of work by various people. Architecture here becomes a grand public enterprise, but one without planners, without a hierarchy or a central set of decision-makers. Accumulation is precisely the right word for the action of an art that keeps on happening in incremental spurts and contingent contributions, that continues to pile up beside and in addition to the original intentions of those who built the buildings.

Benjamin, as we have seen, understands the nineteenth-century wall as a site both of spatial differentiation and historical camouflage: “economic alibi in space. Interior alibi in time” (AP 218). The decorated wall allows the bourgeois subject to escape his or her social obligations, closing the subject off spatially from the social reality outside while providing a historicist fantasy that allows for an escape into other times. For Ruskin, however, that same decorated wall allows for an escape from this morally deranging interior, making possible responsible interaction between the obscure and the obvious, those inside and those outside, even the living and the dead. In his multiple dislocations of the wall, Ruskin seeks to make a space for the productive and independent visibility of material production. He insists upon its irreducibility to a hierarchical plan, to any particular systemic scheme of arrangement. Ruskin makes the wall at the same time less and more material, abstracted from boundary and structure so that it may be available sensually as form and surface. I have attempted to suggest, on a limited scale, some ways in which our scholarship as a whole might use this idea to move beyond its fixation on boundaries and demarcation—to begin to recuperate, from within a Victorian discourse, the potential of a non-differential Victorian architecture and a non-commodifying visibility.
Chapter 2: Working on History: Reconstruction and Reform
In the Sydenham Crystal Palace and Carlyle’s Past and Present

According to architect and design reformer Matthew Digby Wyatt, a key figure in the creation of the rebuilt Crystal Palace at Sydenham,1 “The great aim and end of the Crystal Palace are to cultivate the imaginative faculty in the workman himself,—to cause its value to be appreciated by the class of employers,—and to make a recognition of it indispensable on the part of purchasers” (Views of the Crystal Palace and Park [1854] 10). The gigantic new museum that opened in the London suburbs in 1854 was perhaps the most ambitious attempt on the part of the midcentury design reform movement to engineer a solution to what it regarded as the historicist unoriginality and outright ugliness of contemporary design. As Wyatt declares in an 1852 lecture, “The debilitating effects of nearly a century's copying without discrimination, appropriating without compunction, and falsifying without blushing still binds our powers in a vicious circle” (“Form in the Decorative Arts” 229). Like its cousin, the “Museum of Manufactures” (later the V&A), the Palace took as its mission the education of a workforce capable of creating original objects and a consuming public capable of appreciating them.

The contents of this new museum were very different from the industrial objects that crowded the original Great Exhibition. The Sydenham Palace’s impresarios hoped to transform industrial production by immersing its viewers in history—to open up, through the past, a path to the future: “the products, no less than the interests, of the Exhibition of 1851 were limited to the present. The contents of the new Crystal Palace, from their intimate alliance with the philosophy of the past, are calculated to operate far more energetically upon the future” (Wyatt Views 8, emphasis in original). At the center of the new structure—and at the design reformers’ hopes for it—stood the “Fine Arts Courts.” Surrounded by ethnographic displays and a park with full-scale models of dinosaurs, these Courts featured an extensive sculptural cast collection and a series of full-scale reproductions and reconstructions of portions of important and representative historical buildings, from the temple at Abu Simbel to the Palazzo Farnese.

Wyatt worked with Owen Jones, the influential designer and theorist, to assemble and design the museum's art and architecture displays. Jones's 1856 The Grammar of Ornament (written during and immediately after his involvement with the Sydenham Palace), might serve as a mission statement for the Palace itself: “To attempt to build up theories of art, or to form a style, independently of the past, would be an act of supreme folly. It would be at once to reject

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1 “The Crystal Palace” was an extraordinarily adhesive nickname given to the original Great Exhibition structure by Punch Magazine, and formalized in its second incarnation. Though scholarship on the Sydenham Crystal Palace has increased to a steady trickle in the past decade (yielding, most importantly, Jan Piggott's history The People's Palace), it remains much less well-known than its predecessor—an irony, since the original Crystal Palace stood for only six months in 1851, while the Sydenham Palace stood for 70 years. The vast majority of people who visited the “Crystal Palace” actually did so at Sydenham: the Great Exhibition had six million visitors, while the Sydenham complex had 60 million in its first thirty years (Altick 483).
the experiences and accumulated knowledge of thousands of years...we should regard as our inheritance all the successful labours of the past, not blindly following them, but employing them simply as guides to find the true path” (2). Much of Victorian design theory, as James Bizup and Lara Kriegel show in their recent histories, saw aesthetics as having an underlying “grammar” or unchanging set of rules common to all styles. As Bizup argues, Owen Jones imagined this teachable set of principles as a solution to mid-century historicism in design; that is, he imagined a reformist pedagogy capable of producing “naturalness” or originality (111-15). In many ways, the Sydenham Palace can be understood as an ambitious attempt to work out something very much like Jones's theory on a massive scale.

The organizers of the Palace, in very obvious ways, attempt to mobilize the past to come to the aid of the present, offering historical objects as lessons and models. Yet they are, as well, intensely aware of Wyatt’s “vicious circle”—that is, the potential for historical knowledge to become “copying without discrimination, appropriating without compunction.” Their paradoxical attempts to teach originality by historical immersion, I will argue, result in a structural tension between the impulse to convey a coherent system or cultural tradition and the impulse to provide the conditions for an unsupervised and unpredictable encounter with that tradition’s objects. Like Jones's Grammar, the Palace provided carefully curated and reconstructed examples of “successful labours” from throughout history. This museum, however, also had to prevent its audience from “blindly following” these historical models. The Palace's organizers imagined the museum as a set of authoritative and visually self-evident reconstructed forms that elided the potentially problematic imagination of its viewers. However, it was largely left up to these same viewers to contextualize, frame, compare, and draw conclusions from the displays. This central disjunction can, I will suggest, best be understood as part of a display strategy that attempts to elide historical, authorial, and formal fetishism—to disengage aesthetic principles from historical context and the halo of the artist as well as, paradoxically, from the precise form of the object itself. The complex operations required by these simultaneously over- and under-determined displays constitute an attempt to rethink the relationship between original making and historical tradition. In a coda, I will turn to Carlyle’s Past and Present to consider Carlyle’s literary reconstruction of St. Edmondsbury in light of the Palace’s architectural reconstructions. As Carlyle collapses together the history of architecture and the history of language, reconstruction becomes a central way of understanding the material and historical indebtedness of literary authorship. Past and Present offers an account of form as reform, locating the potential for originality in an intense engagement with the material specificity of the past.

In approaching the museum as a space designed to elicit complex and varied responses to historical objects rather than simply enforcing obedience, this chapter joins recent scholarship on the Sydenham Palace that emphasizes its multivalent and contested nature. Until very recently,

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2 In terms of “Crystal Palace studies” generally, this transition can best be seen in the changes that take place between Tony Bennett’s influential 1988 essay “The Exhibitionary Complex” and 2007’s Victorian Prism. In terms of Sydenham studies in particular, Nancy Marshall finds that the ambiguous narratives of the geological displays
nineteenth-century museum display has been understood almost exclusively from a broadly Foucauldian-Benjaminian perspective, in which display functions as a means of discipline, mystification, and control by government and capital. Associating the Sydenham Palace with Jones's systematic “grammar” inevitably brings to mind this tradition, one to which the original Crystal Palace is often central. Museum historian Donald Preziosi, for instance, describes the original Great Exhibition as a mechanism that orders and exerts power over an entire world: “The Great Exhibition, as an 'impartial instrument, like the infinitesimal calculus'...in fact crystallized and put into its proper place an imperial fantasy world or imaginary geography of all peoples and products” (Preziosi 113). For Preziosi, the original plan of the Crystal Palace dominates not only its afterlife at Sydenham but actually all of subsequent art history: “We've never left this building” (114). This chapter, however, will explore how the museum exploits the frictions inherent to its supposedly totalizing project in order to open its objects to unpredictable meanings and uses.

The Sydenham Palace’s commitment to a very specific model of visual pedagogy based upon a comprehensive reconstruction sets it apart from institutions with equal range, like the British Museum, that were devoted largely to original art objects. There were almost no “original” objects at all in the Sydenham Palace. Instead, there were casts and reconstructions of famous sculptures and representative buildings from the broadly defined Western architectural tradition. The most salient feature of these displays, and the basis of the museum's often-repeated claim to uniqueness, was their reconstructed completeness. No disfigured Elgin marbles asserted the timeless but vulnerable nobility of true art and its reliance upon sympathetic completion by the viewer; instead, the Palace's Greek Court offered a 214-foot-long (and, shockingly, full-color) reconstruction of the Parthenon's panatheneic frieze as it might have looked on the day of its creation.

In the new Palace, writes Wyatt, “the student's imagination is no longer called upon to clothe with fleshy and muscular tissue the fragments of skeletons which our national collections have alone hitherto provided for his study” (Wyatt Views 12). Wyatt is speaking of Waterhouse Hawkins's reconstructions of prehistoric animals here, but the same clearly holds true for the architectural displays as well. The potentially fallacious individual “imagination” is no longer required; in its stead, the Palace offers expert reconstructions whose wholeness implies a self-

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3 For broadly similar accounts of the Sydenham Palace, see Virginia Zimmerman, who describes the Palace's project as “the understanding and conquest of the inhabitants of distant times and, by extension, conquest even of those past times” (Excavating Victorians 59), and Barbara Black, On Exhibit: Victorians and their Museums, 21-24. This is still, in many ways, the standard account; Anne Helmreich, for instance, offers a very similar interpretation in her 2012 article on the Sydenham Palace on the Branch Collective website.
evident sufficiency. Samuel Philips, author of the Palace's official *Guide to the Crystal Palace and Park*, similarly sees the work of the displays as providing the viewer with an authoritatively constituted object. The Palace promises “to restore [the architectural objects on display], in fact, as far as possible, to their pristine state, in order that the imagination of the spectator may be safely conducted back to the artistic characteristics of distant and distinctive ages” (Philips 46). For both Wyatt and Philips, the incompleteness of the original is potentially dangerous, opening a space for the uninformed imagination that the Sydenham reconstructions “safely,” carefully, close back up. 

Though William Michael Rossetti, in his lengthy 1854 *Spectator* essay “The Epochs of Art as Represented in the Crystal Palace,” is often critical of the specifics of the restorations, he is enthusiastic about the overall potential of reconstruction or restoration as a pedagogical method: “Comprehensiveness and vividness are [the Palace's] great qualifications...It is without exaggeration unique. Other museums give the brick from Babylon; about which you must find out most things save that it is indubitably a brick...This gives not the real brick at all, but a panorama of the Babylon, and a panorama more strikingly interesting and more authentic, and of a wider Babylon, than was ever before shown” (53). Similar pronouncements about the efficacy of this strategy are echoed throughout the discourse surrounding the Palace: visual learning through reconstruction, nearly everyone agrees, is the most efficient and effective way to educate the Palace’s middle- and lower-class audience. In the official *Guide*, Samuel Philips writes that the Palace's strategy is “to educate [its viewers] by the eye” (Philips 3); in Routledge's unofficial 1854 guidebook, *Guide to the Crystal Palace*, Edward MacDermott praises “the attempt...to present to the eye of the visitor exact representations of those varied forms which art has assumed in each nation of the world...” This strategy has “practical value...which cannot be too highly appreciated” (31). Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins, the sculptor in charge of the garden's dinosaur reconstructions, links the Palace's displays explicitly to Swiss educator Heinrich Pestalozzi’s influential theories of visual and physical learning (Secord 141). To a large extent, the Palace's periodical reviewers repeat and reinforce this account: “To pictorial teaching we are all indebted, more or less unconsciously, for what we best know. But none of us have ever had the advantage of it in the comprehensive form in which it is there to be employed” (“The Crystal Palace at Sydenham” *The Mechanic's Magazine* [1854] 486).

This visual comprehensiveness, however, was balanced by an equally comprehensive reticence. The Palace's organizers were so committed to the project of direct visual learning that they excluded text almost entirely. The influential architecture periodical *The Builder*, writing immediately before the museum's opening, states that “We hope...that it is the intention of the directors to affix name, date, and even history to each statue, and model, and tree. Unless this is done, a great power of instruction will be given up” (297). The cultural critic and essayist Harriet Martineau reports in her 1854 review that the architecture and sculpture was indeed “labeled (very properly) with dates and names” (“The Crystal Palace at Sydenham,” 289). However, the hoped-for descriptive “histories” seem never to have been instituted.
This lack of contextualizing information posed real interpretative problems for the museum's visitors. Martineau horrifiedly reports having overheard an older woman mistaking the Pompeian Court for a modern apartment. When a helpful fellow visitor “pointed out the main entrance with its Cave Canem, the wife observed that she supposed the door opened on the railroad,” and then inquired when the new tenants would move in (289). Despite the labels, Martineau observes another family mistaking a sculptural group of Gutenberg, Faust and Schoeffer for Robin Hood and his merry men, while visitors to the garden pull the teeth from the dinosaur models as souvenirs, believing them to be real. Even those with expertise in the subject found the displays baffling; in a review of the Byzantine Court, The Builder expresses the confusion caused by the Court's lack of information: “The whole of this Court will repay the most careful study; but it is a source of mystification to many....Some intelligent guides, not to say lecturers, are greatly needed in the Crystal Palace. At the present moment, it is scarcely possible to find any one to whom the simplest question can be addressed” (498).

Even for those who do not, like Martineau's visitors, get it utterly wrong, the potential perils of the panorama of decontextualized (and atexual) objects are clear. Hovering around the museum is the vexing and unresolved question of what, precisely, people with divergent and incomplete historical awarenesses might be expected to learn from reconstructions of historical buildings without explanatory text. Routledge's 1854 guidebook to the Fine Arts Courts, The Ten Chief Courts of the Crystal Palace, condescendingly celebrates the power of visual pedagogy to make high culture available to the poorly-educated masses:

The poorest peasant may now share in the intellectual pleasures so long enjoyed only by the noble. The newly awakened man cannot at once be appealed to through the reason, but he may be taught through the eyes. Nature teaches us this in her education of the child. It learns first by seeing, then by reading...chroniclers come before historians, because they record the mere external form of things, and not the animating soul. (iv-v)

Visual learning is to be the great equalizer, the strategy that will grant access to culture to those without an educational foundation—access not only in terms of the Palace's proximity to London and its visual completeness, but also in its capacity to be understood without the long historical, aesthetic, and literary tradition that animates these objects for the educated classes. This immediacy, though, is also problematic. In the schema sketched in the above quote, the displays are equivalent to mere “chronicles,” recording only the "external forms of things.” The displays here are multiply thinglike; mere forms themselves, they also correspond to the historical and developmental stage of thing-ness, a childlike materialism with no understanding of causes or structures.

Wyatt, by far the most sanguine about the museum's capacity for educating through the unmediated eye, proclaims that:
In time, we may hope that the whole framework of anthropic science will be vividly displayed within the limits of the Crystal Palace Grounds, and that in a form so easily to be acquired, and so widely avoiding the old laborious processes of teaching, that the simple use of the organs of sight, and little more than the natural instinct of a child, will enable more useful knowledge of common things to be apprehended in an hour, than could be acquired in any other existing Museum by months of patient and persevering study. Could the great author of the Baconian system but rise from his tomb, and witness the materials for comparison and experiment provided for by the present generation in the People's Palace and Park, he might well feel proud of being regarded as the founder of a system of philosophy, to the dignity of which these vast collections cannot but be regarded as a stupendous testimony. (Wyatt, *Views of the Crystal Palace and Park*, 12)

The museum aspires to a totality of display that will not only show but also order and arrange. It will present the “framework” of human knowledge as well as its contents. And yet this “framework” will be conveyed not through a scrupulously supervised didactic program, but rather by its viewers engaging in direct visual “experiment” on the historical and natural objects it contains. Wyatt links the Palace's project to the Baconian empirical tradition, framing the building's displays as a set of objects for unmediated observation and analysis. The Palace's organizers expect attendees to engage with its contents as active experimental workers rather than passive viewers, opening up an entire cultural history not only to a new working-class audience but to a fundamental rethinking of its objects.

What to do, though, with these objects—and where, precisely, the limits of an unmediated experimental vision should be located—remain questions that the Palace ultimately appears not to answer. The organizers' refusal to contextualize or overwrite the displays—their commitment to the mere “external forms of things”—sets the Palace apart from the systems of visual pedagogy prevalent in later nineteenth century “evolutionary” museums designed to convey developmental meta-narratives. According to Tony Bennett, these museums asserted the visual self-evidence of evolutionary processes, but nonetheless relied on extensive didactic labels and diagrams to frame the spaces between objects: “through the web of words that is cast over them, the eye is directed in how to read the spaces between things” (*Pasts Beyond Memory* 176). The Crystal Palace, by contrast, offers no such direction; though Wyatt promises that it allows direct “comparison, as a tangible test of merit” (*Views* 8), the displays themselves do not narrate the historical and geographical gaps between them. Indeed, the Palace's emphasis on panoramic immersion rather than sequential ordering—the inward-facing courts presented styles as distinct interior spaces rather than as positions in a linear series—means that, in many of the courts, it was actually impossible to compare two styles directly, much less to read them as parts of an evolutionary sequence.

If the displays would not resolve themselves into an evolutionary or historical sequence, neither would they resolve into an ahistorical formalism. Rachel Teukolsky has argued that a new proto-formalist discourse arose in the art writing on the sculpture at the original Great
Exhibition; distancing and abstracting, it focused on formal properties to the exclusion of moral or historical associations (100). In some ways it would seem that the Sydenham museum continues this project in the bare visuality of its displays. However, formalism cannot simply be taken to correspond to any particular strategy of display—as Jacques Ranciere argues, what we call formalism is above all a textual practice, a rewriting that asks the viewer to reconsider representational surfaces as non-representational (Ranciere 77-82). Though some features of the written discourse surrounding the museum certainly are more or less formalizing—most saliently, the emphasis on abstraction in Owen Jones's and James Fergusson's theories of ornament—the displays themselves take no such positions. As Piggot notes, Jones's chief of staff George Purchase advocated installing a set of diagrams in each court linking each display to basic formal principles—his proposals were rejected, and Purchase eventually quit (Piggott 79).

The major solution offered to these visually complete but problematically reticent displays was to supplement them with printed guidebooks. The Mechanic's Magazine, ostensibly writing on behalf of the “People's Palace”’s ostensible core constituency of self-improving workmen, is the most concerned with the potential disjunction between the raw visual facticity of the displays and the museum's pedagogical project, and the most insistently upon the apparatus that could potentially correct it. Though the Magazine is, as we have seen, enthusiastic about the Palace's strategy of “pictorial” pedagogy, it is also convinced that the success of this program will, paradoxically, “depend very materially upon the quality of the guide-books...In short, the Palace is an illustrated volume, and those who inspect its pages will need letter-press explanations. We foresee the inconvenient dimensions to which such descriptions would tend to grow, but still we cannot help believing, that without them but little real information will ever be conveyed to the great industrial masses” (Mechanic's Magazine 488). For all of the claims of the efficacy of bare visuals, the displays are able to convey nearly nothing on their own. Even The Builder, with its expert audience of architects and designers, must remind its readers how necessary supplementary materials are to understanding the intentions of the museum: “The visitor to the Crystal Palace, with Mr. Fergusson's book to refer to, before and after his visit...will have no difficulty in understanding that which it has been intended to show” (298). Text must accompany the displays on both ends, preparing viewers and contextualizing what they have seen.

The textual supplements certainly do sprawl to the “inconvenient dimensions” foreseen by The Mechanic's Magazine; the Palace company alone sold fifteen different guides detailing the architecture and sculpture courts, in addition to the unofficial guidebooks available from private publishers and the large number of review articles in the periodical press (many of which are clearly intended to be used as supplements to, or in place of, guidebooks). These supplements do not, however, fold the displays into a comprehensive narrative or convey a unified sense of what it is that viewers are to take away from the museum. Even the official guidebooks are heterogeneous in aim and execution, written by different authors with different relationships to the Courts and to the Palace’s educational program. Owen Jones’s The Alhambra Court in the Crystal Palace, for example, contains his design theory in miniature, including an extensive
discussion of the generation of decorative forms from abstracted natural forms. Celebrity archaeologist A.H. Layard's *The Nineveh Court in the Crystal Palace*, on the other hand, gives a comprehensive account of the current state of Assyrian archaeological studies, but almost no aesthetic commentary. Though many of the guidebooks attempt to subdivide the displays to historical narratives of one kind or another, the courts themselves were not arranged in a strictly chronological sequence, meaning that the more general guides had to choose either to ignore the actual space of the museum or submit to an order that renders senseless a purely developmental or evolutionary narrative. Most, official and unofficial, take the latter course; the Palace company's *Guide*, for example, follows the Courts' actual order fairly closely, tracing a confusing trajectory in which ancient Assyria and the Alhambra intervene between Rome and Byzantium, and Pompeii follows the Italian Renaissance.

The many unofficial guidebooks extend this disorder even further. William Brighty Rands's curious guide-cum-adventure story *The Sydenham Sindbad* disorders the Courts profoundly, for the pleasure of its readers rather than any particular pedagogical purpose: as an inset audience member declares, “you forsook the actual order of the respective Departments in the actual Palace because you wished to vary as much as possible the entertainment you were so kind as to give us” (132). In this book the narrator witnesses festivals in ancient Egypt, interviews a jaunty Apollo, and quotes endlessly from poetry, fiction, travelogue, and drama. *The Sydenham Sindbad* capitalizes upon the Palace's reticence and spatial complexity, giving a wide-ranging and dizzyingly intertextual account of its displays: “I blended all the information I could think of in any way related to the different Courts” (131). Its narrator, in direct contrast to Routledge's atextual "newly awakened man," enters the Palace “with an eye prepared by reading” (131). The excessive inclusiveness of the narrative—"all the information...in any way related"—might be understood as an anxious, regressive response to the displays' reticence, an attempt to reassert a more traditional humanist literary and historical project within the disruptive, atextual space of this new museum. It is also, however, a giddily creative act of historical evocation, one that takes full advantage of the opportunity for performance made possible by the Palace's unwillingness to narrate itself. For Rands, the museum's atextuality authorizes an imaginative and associative freedom that insists repeatedly on its autonomy from the actual displays. By extension, Rands insists too upon the radically contingent and idiosyncratic nature of each viewer's experience: “‘I should like to go, too, and see it all,’ said little Hindbad’...‘Ah!’ cried Sindbad, ‘you, Hindbad, would not see it all, if you were to go exactly where I did, and stand in the same place’” (24). The Crystal Palace's structural dependence upon textual supplementation—its dependence upon a detachable, haphazard, and essentially uncontrollable body of descriptive and informational writing—multiplies and fragments the experience of the museum. Quite simply, an attendee was free to choose not only among guides but among possible orders, frames, interpretations, and ultimately experiences of the Palace.

The Fine Arts courts, then, confront their viewers with forms that only tenuously and unstably map onto schemas and metanarratives, whether historical or formal. Perhaps no other
museum was so focused on the radical potential of the unmediated visual. At the same time, as we have seen, the Palace enacts (and accommodates) an extensive project of textual supplementation. Perhaps no other museum had such an extensive set of official guidebooks, or saw them as so central to its project. Though these two strategies might seem antithetical, they are both dedicated to the process of historical work. The minimally labeled displays require a detachable textual supplement that rapidly demonstrates, in its very excessiveness, the impossibility of a comprehensive account of the objects on view. With its combination of reticence and comprehensiveness, the Sydenham Palace poses the visual immediacy of the object as a problem, disrupting the embedding of the object in narratives of historical progression and cultural evolution. By the same means, the museum disrupts the embedding of the object in ahistorical schemas of auratic or artistic authenticity.

Rossetti, as we have seen, calls the Nineveh court a “panorama of the Babylon,” evoking Stephen Bann's influential characterization of the nineteenth-century historical imagination as “panoramic.” Writing on early nineteenth-century French museums, Bann identifies an immersive display strategy at work that owed more to novel spectacles like the panorama than to the traditional history painting. For Bann, the panoramic, immersive display is a way to reconcile the conflicting demands of “age value”—Alois Riegl's term for the cultural valuation of historical age in and of itself—and the desire to see the object come alive in its original setting (“Art and its Objects”). It attempts, that is, a reconciliation between the desire to witness the passage of time in the object and the opposed desire to revive the past and experience it as it once was. The Sydenham Palace self-consciously participates in this strategy of immersive evocation; Wyatt, indeed, specifically cites the Musée de Cluny (Bann's central case study) as an important antecedent for the Sydenham Palace (Views). Yet the Sydenham Palace does not attempt, in its displays, a reconciliation between these conflicting parameters of the historical object. Jettisoning auratic “age value” in favor of a visual completeness, the Palace jettisons as well the potential for an easy reconciliation between the object's visual immediacy and its historical significance. When the object is a reconstruction, its authenticity can no longer authorize or naturalize the display configurations that contextualize and place it.

This commitment to an unmediated visual encounter with emphatically non-original historical reconstructions means that the Sydenham Palace's displays complicate the set of relationships among object, context, and viewer that inform mid-Victorian encounters with historical objects in general. Jonah Siegel's influential work on museum display and Victorian aesthetics traces the ways in which the author or artist function and what we might call the “aura function” emerge out of a cultural matrix that includes the very forces against which they are hedges. In other words, we might tend to think of the artist overwhelmed by a newly comprehensive and omnipresent historical archive, of aura being threatened by display, while in fact these auratic art makers and objects arise only in response to this archive and its attendant techniques of display. In a recent essay, Siegel argues that the Sydenham Palace illuminates the ways in which the nineteenth century's anxious generation of aura was effected by the very practices of reproduction and repetitive display that also effaced it; auratic authenticity,
according to Siegel, is only ever a function of a repetition intimately linked to commodification ("Display Time" esp. 57-60). Or, as Richard Stein puts it in an essay about the relationship between the original Crystal Palace and the National Portrait Gallery, “aura is not so much a casualty as a product of modern museum culture” (115). Adorno, in his classic “Valery Proust Museum,” makes a very similar point, observing that an auratic “absoluteness” in the viewing of art is complete only in the destabilized space of the museum. Though Valery detests the museum for undoing the sacred, organic relationship between viewer and art object, “[i]t is only in the museum, where paintings are offered for contemplation as ends in themselves, that they become as absolute as Valery desired” (184).

And yet the Sydenham Palace is also, as I have suggested, an experiment in the potential of a museum without aura. According to Siegel, the Anglo-American experience of the Western high art tradition (especially its understanding of genius) was bound inextricably to the multiply overwritten, monument-rich landscape of southern Europe, a cultural configuration he calls the “haunted museum.” The Sydenham Palace, though, deliberately undoes this configuration; the monumental buildings (the Parthenon, Pompeii, the Palazzo Farnese) and sculptural objects of the Grand Tour appear as exemplars of self-contained styles rather than as the palimpsestic sites of the “art romance.” Considering the Alhambra court, an 1854 review in the *Home Companion* declares:

> Enchantment and glamourie have little in common with the Palace of the nineteenth century. The Court of the Lions is there; but he would watch in vain who should look for the apparitions of the murdered Abencerrages on the fatal night, or expect to see the grim spirit of some spell-bound Moor pointing with a shadowy hand to the place of his buried treasure. But we do not want them; they have nothing to do with restorations. They belong to a past age and a mournful ruin, and those who would recall the one amid the scenes of the other, must go further south than Sydenham. (“The Crystal Palace and Park” 383)

Sydenham is a profoundly un-haunted museum, one defined indeed in explicit opposition to the art-romance's auratic and association-rich southern European landscape. The author invokes the associations of the original site only to dispel them with a curt “we do not want them.” In this passage there is, certainly, no little nostalgia for these romantic associations; however, it would be a mistake not to take seriously the finality of that declaration. The Sydenham Palace's organizers—and its attendees, insofar as they accept its basic goals—genuinely “do not want” these associations.

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4 As Bizup notes, the design reform movement's aesthetics generally were not committed to auratic authenticity (see Manufacturing Culture, esp. 118-9).
5 See Siegel, Haunted Museum. For a more extensive consideration of the author and artist function, see Desire and Excess.
Even those who register much greater discomfort with the violence done to ghosts in the Sydenham Palace end up praising its conjectural work. Rossetti, for example, is highly critical of Fergusson's Assyrian Court and its violent deracination of Assyrian art forms:

In the mound of Nimroud or Kouyunjik, the human-headed bull is a fragment of history and of art, making the waste place reecho the hum of a mighty people, and giving forth utterances—obscure, indeed, but memorable and authentic. The ghost haunts its own sepulchre, and is awful. In the British Museum, the fragment is still more fragmentary, the voice still vaguer, but not less authentic. The ghost is brought into the light of common day; we feel less awe at it, but the same surprise and curiosity. No one dreams of taking a liberty with the ghost. In the Crystal Palace...Mr. Fergusson puts leading questions to the ghost, which the ghost is forced to answer in Mr. Fergusson's own words. That gentleman...is quite sure that, if the ghost only knew it, the colours of his particular magic-lantern are the very things to suit it; and he projects them accordingly. He knows all about the ghost's residence, and domiciles the ghost. (73)

Figuring the human-headed Assyrian bull form as the “ghost” of a vanished culture, Rossetti charts its diminishing power as a function of its changing display status. We might read this simply as a comical narrative of the object's Benjaminian transit from cult value to display value, recapitulating the trajectory of Victorian museal display. And yet the object's trajectory here does not simply end with an original object being brought into the museum and put on display. This is the work of art in the age of conjectural restoration; it is not being decontextualized, put on view, or even reproduced that silences the ghost, but rather being speculatively reconstructed. This new completeness, rather than inscribing the original object into a new display regime, measures precisely the distance between the real object and its reconstruction. The phantasm here is displaced by the phantasmagoria, the “magic-lantern” slide projection technology with which Rossetti associates the displays.

For all of Rossetti's reservations, though, he eventually praises the phantasmagorical operations of the Palace's reconstructions: “To cavil at Mr. Fergusson's production...appears to us as futile as it is easy....The very value of the labour bestowed upon it consists not in what is certain, which we can find better and as accessible in the original, but in what is conjectural” (74-75). “Conjecture” separates reconstruction from mere reproduction; the work of thought transforms a fragment into a whole, making historical forms available visually to the present. Rossetti admits this conjecture as labor possessing an undeniable “value.” The Palace's project, then, is not simply reproductive or replicative; it represents the action of contemporary thinkers upon the past. With the aim, to be sure, of discovering and making visible the actual nature of the original object; with the effect, though, that the mental labor of the Palace's makers, as of its visitors, becomes a vital and apparent part of its functioning.

This insistence upon completeness at the price of authenticity means that the museum’s objects are also opened up to a remarkably thorough and nuanced critique. One cannot, after all,
in any meaningful way question either the accuracy or the authenticity of the Elgin marbles; the British press, however, could and did question each object in the Palace’s conjectural displays. In the periodical critiques of the Sydenham Palace, Rossetti's appreciative but skeptical attitude to the reconstructions predominates. Indeed, the museum comes to seem a place for the testing of ideas, a conjectural space that exposes itself to the critiques of, and opens itself to the further conjectures of, both expert and inexpert audiences. In her 1854 review of the Palace, Harriet Martineau is frustrated by its refusal to order itself in a totalizing way: “there should have been, because there might have been, complete order in the placing of everything” (291). Martineau longs for a “complete order,” “a panorama of human history” (291) that would display all of history as a total system—something, in other words, like Preziosi's account of the Crystal Palace as total perspectival system. Yet in imagining the implementation of this system, Martineau proposes a museum which would have to foreground the indeterminacy of its own process:

The question will be—who is capable?...We see enough in the Assyrian and Egyptian Courts to warn us that the imagination of individuals may assume to furnish history, when it has really nothing to offer but ground of conjecture. The best minds must be engaged for such a work; and the best minds will be least jealous of checks on individual notions, and safeguards supplied by variety of illustration. (Martineau 291)

Martineau is, like many reviewers, largely skeptical of the particular features of the Palace's reconstructions. Her solution, however, is not a more definitive and authoritative point of view, but rather a “variety of illustration” from competing experts, each critiquing the others and each, in its critique, acknowledging its own status as conjecture. This “variety of illustration” imagines the museum as a clearinghouse for conjecture that displays not simply reconstructed objects but rather the necessarily incomplete and speculative process of their reconstruction. By the same token, Martineau broadly approves of the museum's strategy of reserve; she is also the most realistic about the mix of correct and incorrect historical information that these supposedly blank and childlike viewers actually bring along. She praises the efforts of working class viewers who encounter the displays with an unsupervised variety of theories about their contents: “how much better to go with an untenable theory than with no ideas whatever!” (Martineau 286).

Andrea Hibbard argues that critiques of the original Palace, including those of the design reform movement, “naturalized the link between objects and knowledge,” facilitating elite control of disruptive new flows of goods and information (157). As we have seen, though, in the Sydenham Palace the link between the visual completeness of the displays and the knowledge one might glean from them was in fact heavily, and very publicly, contested on all sides (Jones himself entered the fray with his entirely unapologetic 1854 *Apology for the Coloring of the Greek Court in the Crystal Palace*, defending his highly controversial polychromatic versions of classical Greek buildings). Discussing competing theories of the origin of the Gothic arch in relation to the Palace's Gothic Court, Routledge's *Ten Chief Courts* closes with what might serve
as a motto for the Sydenham project as a whole: “We need not say that every word of these dogmas is controvertible, but it sets one thinking, and that is all a thought need do, for no thought should tyrannize over another thought” (132). This radical declaration of political equality among “thoughts”--so distinct from the supposed authoritarianism of Victorian display culture—may help us to understand how both the displays and the textual addenda worked to actualize the Palace's complex project of historical reconstruction.

If the historical object is opened up to experimentation and contention through the combination of completeness and reticence in the displays, theoretical writing by its organizers and critics opens it up along a different axis, pushing against Siegel's other limiting parameter of cultural production, the organizing figure of the author or artist. With both the aura and the authority of the displays attenuated by their conjectural completeness, the discourse surrounding this unaурatic museum offers a new category to replace the author or artist figure that might otherwise structure this experience: a materially embodied “thought.” By extension, this discourse offers clues as to what the museum’s organizers imagined to be the value of unmediated (or anarchically overdetermined) visual encounters with reconstructed objects. Some of the most highly articulated critiques of this sovereign figure occur in the architectural writing of James Fergusson, an influential architectural theorist and historian. Fergusson was a major presence in the Sydenham Palace, designing the Assyrian Court and serving as the complex's general manager beginning in 1855. For Fergusson, the rise of the architect-as-artist “subjects Art to the caprices and vagaries of an individual intellect” (History of the Modern Styles of Architecture, 21). This individuality, perversely, forecloses all originality and dooms the architect to a mindless historicism; if the reign of the artist-architect is not ended, “we must be content to allow copying to the fullest extent, and be satisfied with shams” (24). The parsimonious efficiency of the artist function, its unification of the object's unruly materiality and historical genealogy under a single controlling intention, is refigured as a stinginess that produces an object incapable of embodying “thought”:

Perhaps the greatest inconvenience [of the modern system of architecture] is the remarkably small amount of thought of any kind that a modern building ever displays...In one glance you see it all. With five minutes' study you have mastered the whole design, and penetrated into every principle that guided the architect in making it...In a work of true Art, such as a medieval cathedral for instance, the case is different. [You see] the accumulated thought of all the men who had occupied themselves with building during the preceding centuries, and each of whom had left his legacy of thought to be incorporated with the rest...the host of men who, each in his own craft, knew all that had been done before them, and had spent their lives in struggling to surpass the works of their forefathers. (Fergusson 22)

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6 Fergusson limits his critique to architecture and design, reprising a common mid-century distinction between “fine” and “practical” arts. As Kriegel shows in Grand Designs, this distinction was heavily debated (and was, at Sydenham, not observed—the architecture and sculpture courts were, after all, collectively the “Fine Arts Courts”).
The “thought” that Fergusson desires from an object is not the intention of a heroic architect, imposing a unified and totalizing form on the world. Rather it is a “thought” distributed socially (across multiple makers and thinkers) and temporally (across the “centuries” of accumulated technical and formal knowledge that inform every new creative act, by men who “knew all that had been done before them”).

Robert Kerr (an architect best known for his influential country house manual The Gentleman's House), updated Fergusson's History of the Modern Styles of Architecture for a new edition after his death. Writing on the aftermath of the Great Exhibition and the fruits of the design reform movement—what he calls the “Epoch of 1851”--Kerr gleefully chronicles something very much like Fergusson's hoped-for death of the architect and architecture's shift to an art of horizontally distributed making: “'Architecture,' the technology of Architectus, 'the chief of the workmen,' was being promptly converted into 'the Industrial Arts', the technology of the workmen themselves...the spirit of building-art was properly the spirit of the artizans alone, with a definite, not to say rude, repudiation of this academical Architectus and all his ways” (2: 142).

William Rossetti's diagnosis of art generally is remarkably close to Fergusson's diagnosis of architecture. Praising the architectural decoration of the Sydenham Palace's Egyptian court, Rossetti writes that:

> The true aim of Art is to embody a man's thought concerning Nature...It becomes ignoble when, instead of revealing a man's thought about Nature, it conceals his want of thought about her. All faithful early art has done the first, and all futile and effete art the second. For the absence of thought may co-exist with the possession of information. When Art is in her dotage, you may still find in her plenty of information about Nature—more than before, after a certain manner; but the thought is bestowed upon the mere art and the artist. (55)

In becoming autobiographical, art becomes thoughtless. The “faithful, early” artist is in fact no artist at all, merely “a man.” Only when art becomes “futile and effete” does the “artist” enter, marking a destructive turn away from the world and toward the self. In becoming an Artist, the maker loses the capacity for art understood as a mode of thinking about the world. This historical process of becoming-thoughtless lies at the heart of the discourse's critique of modern design. In substituting “information about nature” (which we should probably take to mean detailed, realistic representation) for “thought concerning nature,” the creator loses not only the ability to express valuable thought, but even the thought itself. Routledge's Ten Chief Courts writes this

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7 Fergusson's critique of modern building is so close to Ruskin's critique of Paxton's original Palace in The Stones of Venice that it suggests at least a tacit acknowledgment: “All art which is worth its room in the world...proceeds from an individual mind, working through instruments which assist, but do not supersede, the muscular actions of the human hand, upon...materials which most tenderly receive, and most securely retain, the impressions of such human labour...The quantity of bodily industry which that Crystal Palace expresses is very great. So far it is good. The quantity of thought it expresses is, I suppose, a single and very admirable thought of Sir Joseph Paxton's...that it might be possible to build a greenhouse larger than ever greenhouse was built before. This thought, and some very ordinary algebra, are as much as all that glass can represent of human intellect” (9: 456, emphasis in original).
opposition into the very center of Greek art—"The early sculpture of Aegina and of the Parthenon had—thought, and the later art—finish. It answered to the usual stages of rise and fall" (60).

In ways that parallel closely the arguments of both Fergusson and Rossetti, Owen Jones links a certain kind of technical proficiency to the death of intention:8

The very command of means leads to their abuse: when Art struggles, it succeeds; when revelling in its own successes, it as signal fails. The pleasure we receive in contemplating the rude attempts at ornament of the most savage tribes arises from our appreciation of a difficulty accomplished; we are at once charmed by the evidence of the intention, and surprised by the simple and ingenious process by which the result is obtained. In fact, what we seek in every work of Art, whether it be humble or pretentious, is the evidence of mind...It is strange, but so it is, that this evidence of mind will be more readily found in the rude attempts at ornament of a savage tribe than in the innumerable productions of a highly-advanced civilization. Individuality decreases in the ratio of the power of production. When art is manufactured by combined effort, not originated by individual effort, we fail to recognise those true instincts which constitute its greatest charm. (Grammar of Ornament 14)

“What we seek in every work of Art...is the evidence of mind”: not beauty, not craft or skill, but thought. Though Jones's lament for a lost individuality in cultural production seems an inversion of Fergusson's lament for a lost communality, in fact they are both arguing for the reallocation of intention from large-scale planning to discrete acts of making. Like the “thought” of Fergusson's Gothic artisans, the “evidence of mind” displayed by Jones's individualist savage is not the evidence of a mastering intention, but rather that of a “struggle,” an intention visible primarily in its navigation of its own boundaries.

Approvingly discussing Islamic art, Jones writes that Arab decorative artists “ever worked as nature worked, but always avoided a direct transcript; they took her principles, but did not, as we do, attempt to copy her works...in every period of faith in art...never was the sense of propriety violated by a too faithful representation of nature (Grammar 70). This is, vitally, nearly identical to Jones's approach to historical form: “the principles discoverable in the works of the past belong to us; not so the results” (Grammar 36). Historical form, then, becomes as nature; that is, become something without which cultural production is unthinkable, but something which must be met and worked on by thought before it can be admitted as proper material. In all styles (Jones excepts Egypt) “we can trace a rapid ascent from infancy, founded on some bygone style, to a culminating point of perfection, when the foreign influence was modified or discarded” (22). Jones's child or savage is, paradoxically, also belated, the inheritor of an earlier

8 This passage is quite similar to Ruskin's famous critique of finish in Stones of Venice. As Bizup shows, the basic aesthetics of the pro-industrial design reform movement share a surprising amount with those of the anti-industrial Ruskin.
style that it must work on; the “infancy” of style stands in a primary relation not to nature, but rather to a “bygone style.”

The reformulation or reformation of the author or artist function allows for two distinct but complementary conditions: on the one hand, it authorizes the reconstructive work, empiricist pedagogy, and unsupervised textual supplementation engaged in by the Palace and its accompanying discourse—that is, it opens up historical form to experiment, conjecture, and, by extension, reform. On the other, it closes form around radically particular acts of making. Without a strong artist function to link various formal acts, they close in on themselves, each recording a unique act of embodied thought. These acts, as childlike and “instinctual” as they may be, are at the same time thoughtful transformations of existing forms; the particular vision of progress and reform espoused by the Palace requires both an independent and unsupervised encounter with raw form and also an indoctrination into historical belatedness. The Palace's unauratic displays aim at producing a historical object that must be worked on.

Coda: Past and Present and Reconstructing Reform

Thomas Carlyle was already exploring a broadly similar set of questions a decade before in Past and Present, one the most influential books of the “condition of England” debate out of which the midcentury design reform movement partially emerged. Read alongside the Sydenham Palace, its staging of the relationship between making, thought, and the problematics of historical reconstruction begins to suggest intersections between speculative material reconstruction and questions of reform more generally. Richard Stein, considering Past and Present in light of the original Crystal Palace, argues that Carlyle's thematization of historical indeterminacy inaugurates a tradition of distancing display that both generates and exploits the auratic potency of the individual personality. However, Carlyle also deploys this indeterminacy to explore the historical and material limits of the auratic hero. Past and Present's multiple layers of narrative mediation produce an effect not unlike the Palace's multiplying conjectures; indeed, Carlyle’s historical methodology was, as John Ulrich shows, deeply influenced by the theoretical and practical reconstructions of his friend Richard Owens, the eminent paleontologist who helped design the dinosaur reconstructions at the Sydenham Palace. In Carlyle we can see an early variation on the Sydenham project; a textual version, but one that is every bit as concerned with the visual encounter with historical objects as is the Sydenham Palace.

Re-telling the story of Abbot Samson in Past and Present, Carlyle animates the ruins of St. Edmundsbury with the fantasy of a glasslike translucency: “Beautifully, in our earnest loving glance, the old centuries melt from opaque to partially translucent, transparent here and there” (53). The historical imagination turns time transparent; here, as in the Sydenham Palace, glass is

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9 For a more comprehensive consideration of the historicist preoccupations of progressive nineteenth-century design theory, including Jones, see Debra Schafter, The Order of Ornament, the Structure of Style.

10 For further considerations of Carlyle's ambivalent and ambiguous approach to the problem of historical reconstruction, see Rosemary Jann 33-65; Bizup 150-52.
the imaginative technology that makes the historical surface available to vision. Like Rossetti's "magic-lantern," what Carlyle calls the "real-phantasmagory of St. Edmundsbury" (126) imagines glass display technology as a way to recover history for vision. The architecture that is ambiguously recovered by this operation is insistently, almost obsessively, "real"—"real and serious," an "earnest fact," "entirely real and indisputable"—and an acknowledgement of its reality is tied inextricably to an imaginative experience of its visual availability:

What a Hall,—not imaginary in the least, but entirely real and indisputable, though so extremely dim to us...House and people, royal and episcopal, lords and varlets, where are they? Why there, I say, Seven Centuries off; sunk so far in the Night, there they are; peep through the blankets of the old Night, and thou wilt see King Henry himself is visibly there, a vivid, noble-looking man, with grizzled beard, in glittering uncertain costume...but what gilt seats, carved tables, carpeting of rush-cloth, what arras-hangings, and a huge fire of logs:--alas, it has Human Life in it; and is not that the grand miracle, in what hangings or costume soever? (Carlyle 83)

Though he posits a transhistorical "Human Life" that may deck itself "in what hangings or costumes soever," the visual density and particularity of Carlyle's historical evocation is vital. When we "peep" into the past we see not an abstracted "Human Life" but rather "gilt seats, carved tables, carpeting of rush-cloth, arras-hangings." Carlyle's imagination does not attempt to distil the timeless qualities from this lost world, but rather to give it "vivid" skin and surface, an imaginative visual immediacy. And yet this "entirely real and indisputable" historical surface is also "uncertain." As Mark Cumming shows, the "phantasmagory" is an important and quite specific category in Carlyle's historical writing, denoting a movement from rigorous systemization to virtuosic, speculative evocation (146–48). Carlyle's description operates indexically rather than ekphrastically ("there they are"), making the reader contribute the conjectural labor necessary to this architectural restoration. Carlyle's historical evocations constantly confront his readers with their distance from the objects they are asked to visualize, and with the multiple interventions of thought that enable this encounter with history.

Carlyle's interest in the epistemology and metaphysics of the surface-as-cloth—and the multiply framed narration—signal that Past and Present is very much a continuation of the consideration of form and content begun in Sartor Resartus. In Past and Present, though, Carlyle engages specifically with the historical valence of the problem of form—both the difficulty of extrapolating past forms from present forms and the more profound problem of experiencing reality from within historical forms. “The present respectable Mayor of Bury may be said, like a Fakeer (little as he thinks of it), to have his dwelling in the extensive, many sculptured Tombstone of St. Edmund; in one of the brick niches thereof dwells the present respectable Mayor of Bury” (Carlyle 59). Carlyle transforms “Bury St. Edmonds”--St. Edmund's town—into St. Edmond's tomb, with an emphatic pun on “bury.” The mayor, his social position reconfigured as part of the memorial architecture of the Abbey, also assimilates to it physically. He becomes a
funerary statue, a contemporary elaboration that is also a kind of reconstruction of the original structure, whose own decorative surface has been almost entirely effaced by age. In the ineluctably historical world of *Past and Present*, each new action is at the same time simply a work of elaboration or of repair on a building that precedes it.

At some points, Samson appears as what we might think of as a Carlylean hero, an all-seeing ordering architect: “The clear-beaming eyesight of Abbot Samson, steadfast, severe, all-penetrating,—it is like Fiat lux in that inorganic waste whirlpool; penetrates gradually to all nooks, and of the chaos makes a *kosmos* or ordered world!” (94). Yet even this heroic Samson never attempts more than the rebuilding of an Abbey that is already half ruin. In an echo of Carlyle's own project, Samson's first appearance in the narrative sees him struggling “to have the Choir itself completed, for he can bear nothing ruinous” (75). “All ruinous incomplete things, buildings or other, were an eye-sorrow to the man” (120). The chaos that Samson confronts and masters is a chaos not of primary matter but of historical form. Samson is no hero-architect generating forms out of a pure ideation; he is, like Fergusson's medieval builders, a worker in and on an edifice that predates him and will continue after. Like these workers, too, he is not fettered by the aura of the particular historical object. At one point, Samson does open the shrine of St. Edmund, approaching the cultic relics in a scene that might be taken as an image of Carlyle's own attempts to approach the auratic remains of Samson. However, this transcendental moment is itself a consequence of yet another act of rebuilding; the opening of the shrine takes place only because Samson has rebuilt (on a grander scale) the “ruinous” altar that houses it. The forms in the Sydenham Palace, like the forms that Carlyle begins to make visible in his rewriting of Jocelin, are produced by work done on the past. So, however, are the forms produced by Samson in the past. For Carlyle, the work of the reconstructing historian mirrors and answers the work of his subject.

Carlyle frames his writing as labor on a cultural project that precedes and exceeds any individual actor. In doing so, he extends to his own writing material culture's sense of indebtedness to historical forms:

> Thinest thou there were no poets before Dan Chaucer? No heart burning with a thought, which it could not hold, and had no word for; and needed to shape and coin a word for,—what thou callest a metaphor, trope, or the like? For every word we have, there was such a man and poet. The coldest word was once a glowing new metaphor, and bold questionable originality. ‘Thy very ATTENTION, does it not mean an *attentio*, a STRETCHING-TO?’ (130-1)

Every word, like every concrete form, originates in a historically unique act of making. As in Jones and Fergusson, this amounts to a historical and social redistribution of intention. Taking the reader back before an emblematic first author (“Dan Chaucer”), Carlyle disinters the acts of making that precede (or simply evade) authorship; our ability to speak and think in the present is
utterly dependent upon “work, which somebody has done” (130). As author, Carlyle casts himself wholeheartedly into this historically compromised process:

[Who taught thee to speak? From the day when two hairy-naked or fig-leaved Human Figures began, as uncomfortable dummies, anxious no longer to be dumb, but to impart themselves to one another; and endeavoured, with gaspings, gesturings, with unsyllabled cries, with painful pantomime and interjections, in a very unsuccessful manner,—up to the writing of this present copyright Book, which also is not very successful! (130)]

Carlyle collapses his own authorship into a process that begins in, and never transcends, the “gasping” and “unsyllabled cries” of the first speakers. Like the awkward, struggling sentence in which he describes it, this process includes everything but goes nowhere: a monstrous modifier without a proper grammatical frame to limit it, this sentence presents cultural history as a process that originates in no particular subject and terminates in no particular object. Carlyle's own “not very successful” act of authorship, like that of Jones's struggling savage, conveys real thought only insofar as it makes visible its limits. The very notion of a “copyright Book,” in the context of Carlyle's radical assertion of historical indebtedness, becomes heavily ironic; such speech as we are capable of takes place from within an assemblage of intentions not our own.

Preziosi argues that the original Crystal Palace ushers in a totalizing and messianic Western art-historical project, which “unceasingly shunt[s] an insatiable desire for wholeness between two temporal poles—two Edenic realms of integrity (where might be projected, for example, a concordance or commensurability between the subject and its objects; where Adam and Eve had no need for knowing the names of things; and where in the ultimate future our souls and bodies are reunited)” (105). In Carlyle, however, as we have seen, the time before names is not a time of magical commensurateness, but merely a time before two “uncomfortable dummies” began their productive struggle with inarticulacy. In many ways, language for Carlyle is nothing but history, an accumulation of prior acts through which we are able to communicate. The transformative thought that brings “attention” into the world (and brings us to attention, to attend to this process) is no Adamic naming, with the principle of dominion over the physical coincident with a primitive act of denomination. The act of naming is simply a metaphorical act that repurposes an existing concept for the description of a commonly understood state, “that act of the mind which all were conscious of, which none had yet named” (Carlyle 131).

At the same time, however, language paradoxically begins from scratch with each new, equally “unsuccessful” utterance. We are, according to Carlyle, perennially, chronically, beginning to speak. It is not as children devoid of history, though, that we do so, but rather as thinkers who must still struggle for every enunciation, despite all of “the work, which somebody has done.” Language conserves, if unstably and incompletely, the work of all those who have done real thinking in the past, but it does not make the work of the present thinker easier. Real thought, now as before, begins at its own limits. If, for Jones, “evidence of mind will be more readily found in the rude attempts at ornament of a savage” (Grammar 14) than in the production
of an industrialized society, it is not because the savage occupies a place of prelapsarian purity. It is, simply, that the savage approaches form and meaning as problems that require genuine thought. Like Jones's account of the “infancy” of style, what might at first appear to be an origin is only a discrete, materially bounded act of thought—one which implies neither originary authenticity nor, as its telos, messianic fulfillment. The hoped-for transformation of laborers into thinking makers is, in the end, pure process. Indeed it must be, as form, in *Past and Present* as in the discourse surrounding the Palace, never pauses—is only viable when, in Fergusson's words, it reflects historically embedded workers “struggling to surpass the work of their forefathers.”

Siegel notes that it is the Sydenham Palace, rather than the original Great Exhibition site, which Dostoevsky visited and to which his underground man famously objects. Siegel argues that Dostoevsky objects to the structure's paradoxical permanence, its balancing of ephemerality with potentially infinite returns (“Display Time” 47). More precisely, though, the underground man objects to the Palace's real existence, the fact that its phenomenal presence forecloses the possibilities of becoming. As Marshall Berman demonstrates in his classic account in *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, the underground man is reacting not to the actual building, riven as it was by contradiction and controversy, but rather to its status in Russian thought as a utopia accomplished. The underground man wants to recover a sense of futurity as adventure; the architectural form of the Crystal Palace is, for him, antithetical to a sense of futurity as productive indeterminacy (Berman 220-248). As we have seen, however, it is precisely this sense of futurity that the Sydenham Palace, in its interactions with historical objects, seeks to maintain. In the working-through of a history that is partially a reconstruction, reform attempts to locate the potential for a future that is not merely a repetition.
To call [historical association] beauty is a mere and gross confusion of terms; it is no theory to be confuted, but a misuse of language to be set aside, a misuse involving the positions that in uninhabited countries the vegetation has no grace, the rock no dignity, the cloud no colour, and that the snowy summits of the Alps receive no loveliness from the sunset light, because they have not been polluted by the wrath, ravage, and misery of men.

*Modern Painters II*, 1845 (4:71)

It would be difficult to conceive a scene less dependent upon any other interest than that of its own secluded and serious beauty; but the writer well remembers the sudden blankness and chill which were cast upon it when he endeavoured, in order more strictly to arrive at the sources of its impressiveness, to imagine it for a moment a scene in some aboriginal forest of the New Continent. The flowers in an instant lost their light, the river its music, the hills became oppressively desolate; a heaviness in the boughs of the darkened forest showed how much of their former power had been dependent upon a life which was not theirs, how much of the glory of the imperishable, or continually renewed, creation is reflecting from things more precious in their memories than it, in its renewing...It is as the centralization and protectress of this sacred influence, that Architecture is to be regarded by us with the most serious thought. We may live without her, and worship without her, but we cannot remember without her...[T]here are but two strong conquerors of the forgetfulness of man, Poetry and Architecture; and the latter in some sort includes the former, and is mightier in its reality; it is well to have, not only what men have thought and felt, but what their hands have handled, and their strength wrought, and their eyes beheld, all the days of their life.

*The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, 1848 (8: 223-25)

What are we to make of these two passages? Written only three years apart, they cannot simply (as Ruskin's 1883 note to the *Modern Painters* passage suggests) mark the transformation of a romantic youth into a reflective older man.\(^1\) Something changes radically between these two quotes, not just a reevaluation of an earlier opinion but a reconsideration of the basic operations of aesthetic perception. The catalyst for this change can only be Ruskin's decisive turn toward

\(^1\)“It is curious to note in this passage the single emotion of youth, so often described by Wordsworth. The more advanced perception indicated in the opening paragraph of the “Lamp of Memory” should be compared. As I have grown older, the aspects of nature conducive to human life have become hourly more dear to me; and I had rather now see a brown harvest field than the brightest Aurora Borealis” (4:71).
architecture, the five or so years of concentrated labor that produced *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice*. In Ruskin's thought, architecture *intercedes*—it is not a first premise or foundation from which conclusions may be drawn, but a concept and practice that interrupts other concepts and practices. As we will see, this intercession itself becomes foundational.

In *Seven Lamps*, the imagined loss of architecture precipitates a kind of ontological agoraphobia, not only because it renders the world unfamiliar but because it renders the world, in essential ways, illegible. Most importantly, it betrays nature, allowing us to see how much of its power is "reflected" from an oblique source—that is, precisely how architectural nature already is. The romantic dream of escape into a regenerative nature turns into a nightmare; rather than constituting a primitive plenitude, the beauties of nature are revealed as parasitic, "dependent upon a life which was not theirs." Architecture's loss is a "sudden blankness," an effacement of the human markings that make the world available to experience.

Nature, then, only becomes available to aesthetic experience through history, while history only becomes available to thought through architecture. The history that underwrites art's very possibility enters Ruskin's theory of representation as architecture. Let us be clear: architecture is not simply a figure for history—it does not stand in for or dramatize history as a thematic concern. Nor is it simply a historical object, or one which might feature in a history of representation. Architecture, in this passage, is the interposition of history into perception itself, the marking of vision with a posteriority that paradoxically authorizes that very vision. George Landow frames Ruskin's work on architecture as a bridge between his early aesthetic theory and his later social theory, with "The Nature of Gothic" as a sort of halfway point (60-68; 81-82).² That architecture represents for Ruskin a means of expanding aesthetics into the realm of the social and ethical is clear; however, the sociality implied by this turn is wider, and stranger, than it might at first appear.

In this chapter, I will argue that Ruskin's sense of perception's profound posteriority informs his entire theory of representation. This retroactivity, underwritten by architecture, coordinates various valences of representation—mimetic detail, narrative sequence, allegorical meaning—and coordinates as well the different arts that constitute the potential modalities of representation.³ This chapter has three main movements: first, I will very briefly show how Ruskin's complex theory of representation—one which has at its core an architectural experience of the material world deeply inflected by prior human marking—resists a prevalent philosophical

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² Kristine Garrigan, the most thorough writer on Ruskin's architecture theory, essentially considers it a transition between Ruskin's "art" and "society" stages.

³ The relationship between the arts here goes far beyond analogy—indeed, it is difficult to imagine how we might begin separating out the symbolic meanings and historical narratives that come to inhabit architecture from the structure that already "in some sort includes" poetry itself. Ruskin's sprawling aesthetic theory gets its energy and provocativeness from his fearless conflation of formal categories: painting, for Ruskin, is in many ways a variant of "poetry," while architecture is a visual art constituted at its most basic level by the painting and sculpture that decorate it.
account of the relationship between architecture and thought. In this account, architecture stands in for “the system of systems,” human thought reified into a comprehensive structure that orders and delimits all subsequent thought. Ruskin offers a radically different sense of architecture’s contribution to thought: rather than being a Foucauldian “grid of intelligibility,” it is where history, contingency, and unpredictable association and reinterpretation enter his aesthetics as central principles. I will then specify this by tracing the figure of the labyrinth through Ruskin’s writings, arguing that it serves as a key site for his understanding of representation. The labyrinth, for Ruskin, combines a rich tradition of story and allegory with a widely distributed form that can be alternately an abstract decorative line, a structural diagram, or a mimetic representation. By virtue of its historical distribution and its tendency to drift between representational categories, the labyrinth allows Ruskin’s aesthetics to avoid a restrictive conceptualization of intention. The labyrinth becomes a figure for representation understood as a historical process of marking, interpretation, and subsequent remaking; this process makes representational acts so radically temporal and unpredictable that they only partially belong to any particular maker. I will then consider the architectural nature of the visual and literary detail for Ruskin, exploring the ways in which its peculiarly decorative status might require us to rethink Ruskin's relationship to both visual and literary realism. I reconsider Ruskin's encounter with Joshua Reynolds's neoclassical aesthetics, in which Ruskin sets out his claims for a new appreciation of the historical particularity of visual and narrative art. Architectural decoration, I argue, provides a template by way of which descriptive detail may be reconciled with the demands of allegorical and symbolic meaning. The human-made object world comes to function as a ground for meaning that is granted the ontological status of nature.

I. Architecture, Archistructure

Denis Hollier, channeling Georges Bataille, attacks the irresponsible autopoeisis of architecture: not mimetic, it has no measurable relationship to an autonomous world and thus “produces itself as model.” For Hollier, it is precisely because architecture is the shaping of space—occupying real space with boundary and value—that the structural metaphor it makes available impinges upon every other field of human thought. Structure as a foundational concept or metaphor, argues Hollier, is architecture's more or less nefarious contribution to human thought: “There is consequently no way to describe a system without resorting to the vocabulary of architecture. When structure defines the general form of legibility, nothing becomes legible unless it is submitted to the architectural grid. Architecture under these conditions is the archistructure, the system of systems” (33). This makes architecture the privileged medium of repression, of symbolic control and constraint.

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4 The symbol/allegory distinction is a vital one; Ruskin, however, considers allegory simply a mode of symbolism (in practice, indeed, he often appears to use them more or less interchangeably). See Landow 329.

5 Against Architecture presents Hollier’s account of Bataille's architectural thought, though largely based on writings not explicitly about architecture.
This is, essentially, how architecture appears in many accounts of the relationship between architecture and representation. For thinkers as diverse as Hegel, Bataille, Foucault, and Derrida, architecture is the medium through which systems of thought come to dominate the world and set the parameters for all subsequent perceptual and representational interactions with it. Even accounts of British architecture and literature in the nineteenth century operating very much independently of this continental tradition have tended to characterize the parallel between architecture and literature as one of structural ideation. According to this critical tradition, architecture provides not only a foundational metaphor, but in some ways the site of metaphor as such, the site at which human ideas take over and dominate material vessels. Philippe Hamon writes that architecture constitutes “a privileged shifter, an object in which the structural has become concretized or an object that mediates between the text (a semiotic object) and the real (a nonsemiotic object). Moreover, the building functions as a primary operator of metaphor that allows the real to be rewritten into text or vice versa” (37). Architecture’s omnipresence as metaphor for systems of thought depends upon a correspondence that exists beyond metaphor: architecture is massively literal, instantiating human systems in the real world. This is, for Hollier, a structure that also exists beyond history, and which is as present in the Bastille and high modernism as in the Great Pyramids. For Hollier, the history of architecture, in some important sense, begins only with the advent of the revolutionary anti-architecture of postmodernity.

However, something does change with the radical splitting of architecture into structure and decoration at the end of the eighteenth century. If architecture's structuring power is transhistorical, its own split into structure and decoration is eminently historical. As Anne-Marie Sankovitch shows, the structure/ornament binary is a late eighteenth-century event, a spatial figuration of time onto which a newly historicizing aesthetics projects a periodized view of history. The split allows periodization to become visible as an earlier and more genuine structure covered up by a posterior and less genuine decoration, dividing architecture into a functional, trans-historical structure and a historically conditioned surface covered in decorative ornament. With the advent of the periodized art history—and a Romantic associationist aesthetics—that accompanies this split, architecture becomes a newly vital historical medium.

Ruskin, for his part, is unequivocally and unabashedly opposed to any understanding of architecture’s aesthetic or symbolic value that privileges its structural logic over its decorated surface:

I found...that this, the only admiration worth having, attached itself wholly to the meaning of the sculpture and colour on the building. That it was very regardless of general form and

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6 Implicit in very word “deconstruction” is of course a critical engagement with something very similar to Hollier's “architecture.” Derrida himself engages with the problem both in his writing (see especially “Architecture Where the Desire May Live”) and in his collaboration, with architect Peter Eisenmann, on plans for a deconstructionist public space (see “Point de Folie—Maintenant L'architecture.”) For Eisenmann's own account of the near-impossibility of a “deconstructionist architecture,” see, for example, “Blue Line Text,” esp. 417-420.

7 See, for example, Chris Brooks, Signs for the Times, esp. 145; Ellen Eve Frank, Literary Architecture.
size; but intensely observant of the statuary, floral mouldings, mosaics, and other decorations. Upon which...it gradually became manifest to me that the sculpture and painting were, in fact, the all in all of the thing to be done; that these, which I had long been in the careless habit of thinking subordinate to the architecture, were in fact the entire masters of the architecture. (*The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, “Preface” to the Second Edition, 8:10, emphasis in original)

Ruskin dismisses “form and size”—the extension in space that is the special province of architecture—in favor of an attention to the phenomenal particularity of the building's surface and the symbolic meaning of the art appended to it. The process of appreciation itself repeats the initial act of decoration, overlaying the structure rather than functioning as a distant appreciation of its overall form. Ruskin's “admiration” “attache[s]” itself to the decoration in the same way that the statuary, moldings, and mosaics themselves attach to their ground. Ruskin's position, though it is unusually unequivocal in its utter dismissal of the structural, is only a more vehement version of a definition of architecture with which no mainstream Victorian theorist would have disagreed. Architecture, Ruskin and other nineteenth-century theorists tell us again and again, is *decorated construction*. “No one would call the laws architectural which determine the height of a breastwork or the position of a bastion. But if to the stone facing of that bastion be added an unnecessary feature, as a cable moulding, *that* is Architecture” (*Seven Lamps*, 8: 28-9).

Architecture’s value as decorated surface, though, is ultimately a function as much of its diachronic difference as its visual immediacy: “It is in becoming memorial or monumental that a true perfection is attained by civil or domestic buildings...as their decorations are consequently animated by a metaphorical or historical meaning (*Seven Lamps*, 8: 225). Decoration—already an “unnecessary feature” that can only be “added” *after* a building's structure is established—is itself only “animated” with meaning retroactively. For Ruskin, architecture, rather than producing the world as plan, comes over time to supplement or even replace it as representation:

> We are forced...to live in cities...we cannot all have our gardens now, nor our pleasant fields to meditate in at eventide. Then the function of our architecture is, as far as may be, to replace these; to tell us about Nature; to possess us with memories of her quietness; to be solemn and full of tenderness, like her, and rich in portraiture of her; full of delicate imagery of the flowers we can no more gather, and of the living creatures now far away from us in their own solitude. (*The Stones of Venice* 9: 411)

The “function” of architecture here is limited to its decoration, and the function of its decoration is to substitute for a natural world that no longer exists for urbanized modernity. The historical secondariness that we have seen described earlier as association is inscribed here at the very heart of modern experience. Architecture's mediating surface “is to replace” nature, occupying
the position of the object with its representation.⁸ This schema does not collapse the distinction between representation and primary nature, but it insists that representation can be experienced in place of or as nature. What thus does begin to collapse—though Ruskin will not make it explicit until later writings—is the distinction between representational and abstract art, and between representation and planning or design. If architectural decoration occupies the place of nature, then the tracery, swirls, and other decorative forms whose beauty is dependent upon their resemblance to natural forms⁹ become as natural forms, recovering something of the plenitude of a primary encounter. Giovanni Leoni argues that Ruskin's theoretical undoing of structure is part of an attempt to escape from a picturesque reification of architecture and restore the object to its own essential quiddity. Ruskin's great insight, he writes, is that “architecture cannot be entirely reduced to representation;” through architecture, Ruskin shows us how to “free ourselves from the dominion of representation and return to 'the thing’” (203-04). Here, though, we see that architecture can only escape representation insofar as it substitutes for the real as representation. That is, architecture’s excessive materiality, its insistent “thingness,” is equally insistent upon its instantiation in a sequence of representational and referential relationships.

II. THE LABYRINTH

Over the course of Ruskin's career, the figure of the labyrinth becomes increasingly important as a way to theorize this process:

Of course frets and returning lines were used in ornamentation when there were no labyrinths—probably long before there were labyrinths. A symbol is scarcely ever invented just when it is needed....The early forms of ornament are nearly alike, among all nations of any capacity for design: they put meaning into them afterwards, if they ever come themselves to have any meaning. Vibrate but the point of a tool against an unbaked vase, as it revolves, set on the wheel,--you have a wavy or zigzag line. The vase revolves once; the ends of the wavy line do not exactly tally when they meet; you get over the blunder by turning one into a head, the other into a tail,--and have a symbol of eternity—if, first, which is wholly needful, you have an idea of eternity! (Fors Clavigera 34: 404-05)

According to Ruskin, the labyrinth is an imaginative elaboration of the fretwork that decorates Greek ceramics and architecture. Here, he constructs a story about the origin of that fretwork, and thus the origin of the labyrinth, the Theseus myth and all of the works of narrative and visual art that have been inspired by it in their turn.

⁸ “The Nature of Gothic” thus contains a pun which sits at the heart of Ruskin's theorization of architecture: Gothic's “nature,” its (primarily decorative) attributes, are what make it a “nature” in itself.

⁹ See, for example, “The Lamp of Beauty,” Seven Lamps (8: 138-45).
Yet this origin is no origin, though it occupies the place of one. Every element in this scene is a reworking of an earlier component. Symbolic meaning is profoundly secondary here—but it is not only meaning that is posterior here, it is representation itself. The snake that accidentally, retroactively makes possible the symbol of eternity is itself the result of a mere “blunder,” the retroactive transformation of a ramified line into a representation of a living creature. Instead of straightforward mimesis, we get a retroactive perception that discovers resemblant form in a mark that already exists. The structure of the passage itself enacts this playfully: the “idea of eternity” which must precede the physical marking in order to produce a meaningful symbol does not arrive until the very end of the passage, after the breathless narration of the act of marking has already taken place. Since the resemblance is accidental, the process can begin at any time and any place, and all instances will be ontologically equivalent.

The subsequent history of this “wavy or zigzag line” is long and contradictory. As we will see, it comes to be the schematic model for labyrinths both imaginative and literal. Yet in its most fundamental sense it undoes the principle of the model or blueprint. The model is, as Hollier and others have argued, an ideation that constitutes the limiting blueprint for a structure subsequently produced according to its specifications. This fret, on the other hand, is only a model by a retroactive act of imaginative perception that sees the possibility of a labyrinth in it. The capacity of the fret to suggest imaginatively the possibility of future buildings—of labyrinths both literary and literal—is indissociable from its status as commemorative object: in addition to being the plan for the labyrinth, the fret is also the form by way of which the Greeks “remember” Daedalus' construction (27: 404). The model is simply a position among many others—and by no means the first—through which a form may pass.  

Decoration, in its most literal and meaningless form, intervenes not only between the world and its representation, but also between human ideation and its realization. It thus establishes the parameters not only of resemblance but, to a certain extent, thought. The simple movement of a tool along a wet surface has, at least in Ruskin’s account, space for no impulse beyond itself. The symbol (in its broadest sense), then, requires three temporally distinct moves: a primary act of marking, an act of cognitive linking rendering it the manifestation of a meaning, and its subsequent re-embodiment charged with its new meaning.

This model is surprisingly isomorphic with that proposed by art historian Whitney Davis in his book Replications. Though Davis's primitive inscription takes place in an Aurignacian cave, its basic operation is almost identical: a man or woman, tracing on the wet clay of a cave wall, creates abstract lines and forms; this person or a later artist then retroactively mis-sees some of these traceries as mimetic (that is, having a referent in the world), then reproduces that mis-seeing as a form which is now fully mimetic (a process Davis calls “seeing-as”). Davis's overarching point is that there is never a representational encounter with the physical world unstructured by a previous human encounter—that in fact representation itself may be described

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10 See John Coyle, “Theseus in the Spider.” For Coyle the labyrinth is above all a figure for “restricted vision”—one cannot anticipate the future or see clearly the present (38). Yet this is precisely the point, and the value of it, for Ruskin—one cannot anticipate the fate of the labyrinth in its formal and imaginative convolutions over time.
as the repetition of versions of this initial “seeing-as.” In Davis’s imagined primal scene, the first artist saw the shape of a bison in the abstract, meaningless forms he or she had already sketched (38-45). This schema confronts E.H. Gombrich's account of art as a pre-existing mental “blueprint” that seeks matching forms in nature. For Davis, art is structured before itself, not by a mental map that imposes itself upon the world, but by something like the diacriticality that poststructuralist critics see structuring the “before” of language. Yet this is not an abstract signifying system of pure difference, but rather one that depends upon a principle of mimetic recognition: “image making originated in the discovery of the representational capacity of lines, marks, or blots of color that need not and often do not have a representational—a semantic, semiotic, or significative—status” (Davis 48-49, emphasis in original). Ruskin’s primal scene, like that imagined by Davis, illustrates the retrospective nature of representation and its origin not in nature but in non-representational human markings.

In Ariadne Fiorentina, Ruskin gives a curiously contradictory account of the generation of the labyrinth: as in Fors, the labyrinth derives from Greek fretwork, but this time the fretwork itself derives “from imitation of physical truth, with the spiral waves of the waters of Babylon as the Assyrian carved them” (22: 451). Here the fretwork originates not in unmeaning lines but in a more conventional act of representation. Yet as these particular conflicting accounts date from the same year, 1872, it is unlikely that they represent a conceptually distinct phase in Ruskin's criticism. In fact, Ariadne Fiorentina’s contradictory version of the labyrinth’s origin turns into an instance of an identical process of diachronic “seeing-as,” as the same involuted lines of fretwork subsequently “entangled in their returns the eyes of men, on Greek vase and Christian manuscript” (22: 451). Over time, seeing-as transforms a referential form into a meaningless decorative form, thus making this form available as a model for the labyrinth and a vehicle for other symbolic and mimetic meanings. Ruskin's self-contradiction is, then, a consequence of the retroactive instantiation of meaning in form. If there could be a way of deciding whether the first link in the chain was of “full” or “empty” form, then the origin would become a point of determination. In any event, of course, there is a before to the primitive act of inscription as well, a making ambiguously prior to its marking—namely, that of its ground, the wet clay of the pot, which is already complete in itself, to which the act of marking is already secondary.

11 Like Ruskin and Davis, Gombrich makes little distinction between the blueprint and the representation. Unlike Ruskin, though, his blueprints precede marking: one makes a mark according to one’s internal blueprint, then tries to match it to an object. Ruskin's and Davis' marks have no internal logic—there is not, as in Gombrich, an ideation preceding the marks that determines them. See Gombrich, Art and Illusion. Linda Nochlin stages her own influential account of the rise of realism in opposition to Gombrich; see Realism, esp. 18-19.

12 Jay Fellows might argue that this conflict is part of Ruskin's gradual shift of conceptualization from stable centers to unstable labyrinthine spaces, though the fact that these accounts date from the same year would strongly weigh against such an interpretation; Jay Fellows, Ruskin's Maze, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981, esp. 159-197. Fellows's slightly mad attempt to subsume all of Ruskin's self-contradictory positions in a psycho-aesthetic allegory of competing personae over time stands in juxtaposition to my own attempt to identify a coherent aesthetic and interpretative strategy that requires the simultaneous or sequential operation of these positions.
For Hollier, Derrida, and Tschumi, the labyrinth is a revolutionary anti-architecture, an incomprehensible anti-edifice that undoes architecture's reifying binaries. For Ruskin, though, it occupies the place of the origin of architecture itself, as the site of the retrospective plan and the figure for the work of the maker or builder. It is also the site at which the decorative and structural valences of architecture are reconciled—though their productive difference is never effaced—and at which structure's transformation into mimetic and expressive art becomes possible. Gothic tracery, a close sister to the Greek fret and a fellow art of the labyrinth, gives us a glimpse of the production of decoration out of the decorative involution of structural members. In this boundary moment, structure becomes available as ornament: “In fact, all tracery is a mere multiplication and entanglement of small archivolts...the tracery is formed by the innermost group of the shafts or fillets, bent into whatever forms or foliations the designer may choose” (9: 397-8). Here is yet another origin for the labyrinth, this time in structure itself; again, it is the mis-seeing of form that makes it possible.

Ruskin, insistent as he is upon the radical difference between structure and decoration, view this process with some ambivalence. In Seven Lamps, indeed, he condemns it bitterly. Writing at the height of his anti-classical fervor, he accuses this fretwork of having corrupted Greek and killed medieval architecture. In Seven Lamps, the onset of Gothic decadence is traceable to a very specific and identifiable event: “It was the substitution of the line for the mass, as the element of decoration” (8: 90)--that is, the beginning of Gothic tracery. This monumental change ends with a decoration that betrays its material, attempting to suggest surface forms that occupy a different plane than the underlying structure. Locating the origin of this rift at Rouen, Ruskin writes that, for the first time:

The traceries had caught the eye of the architect...When the stone-work became an arrangement of graceful and parallel lines, that arrangement, like some form in a picture, unseen and accidentally developed, struck suddenly, inevitably on the sight. It had literally not been seen before. It flashed out in an instant, as an independent form. (Seven Lamps 8: 90-91)

In the wandering line of fretwork, decorative physicality escapes spirituality and intention. Fretwork is decadent because it generates form out of form rather than generating form out of intention. It is also, vitally, something that can only be seen retroactively. Tracery itself, as an independent decorative mode, is beholden to the same law of retroactivity as are its labyrinthine products. Thus, though Seven Lamps mourns rather than celebrates the involuted tracery of the labyrinth, the mode of its operation remains identical. Retroactive discoveries of resemblance and accumulations of historical association, as we have seen, fill decorative form with meaning. Yet here that same retroactivity is responsible for the form itself—tracery becomes independent in a flash of retroactive seeing: “like some form in a picture, unseen and accidentally developed...It had literally not been seen before.”

This retroactive view comprehends much more than just architecture:
As I have not space to reason out the points wherein essential beauty of form consists, that being far too serious a work to be undertaken in a bye way, I have no other resource than to use this accidental mark or test of beauty....I say accidental mark, since forms are not beautiful because they are copied from Nature; only it is out of the power of man to conceive beauty without her aid. (Seven Lamps, 8: 141)

This passage seldom turns up in criticism, perhaps unsurprisingly. Much of Ruskin's aesthetic theory seems to suggest that nature is imbued with the presence of God; in order to make art beautiful, one need only represent this numinous nature truthfully. In that schema nature occupies a place directly between humanity and God, and thus functions as a model of a transcendent real. Yet here nature, in its relationship to decorative beauty, presents not a sacred model but simply a set of objects that can—albeit only “accidental[ly]”—function as a “mark or test” of beauty. Art, here, produces human objects that can only retroactively be matched to a natural object in order to determine their beauty. In decoration, though the importance of the relationship between representation and referent is not done away with, the order of the relationship is reversed and causality replaced by a process of seeing-as. It is for this reason that decoration, just as it cannot be determined by its origin, cannot be superseded by its accrual of meaning. Rather, it continues on its own track, retaining its initial status as a mere marking tending towards involution. Architecture, along with other decorative arts, like illumination and embroidery, consistently repeats this initial “scratch.” In Ariadne Fiorentina, Ruskin writes that:

The primitive line, the first and last, generally the best of lines, is that which you have elementary faculty of at your fingers' ends, and which kittens can draw as well as you. The first, I say, and the last of lines, permanent exceedingly,—even in flesh, or on mahogany tables, often more permanent than we desire...engraving, then, is, in brief terms, the Art of Scratch. It is essentially the cutting into a solid substance for the sake of making your ideas as permanent as possible. (22: 320)

This is detail in its most primitive form, identical to the “returning line” incised by the labyrinth's unwitting creator—a line or scratch that constitutes itself as a recognizable specificity against a general ground. It is the “permanence,” or least the pertinacity, of this unmeaning decorative detail that makes its meaning possible, as it becomes available to significance through historical difference. As in Ruskin’s account of labyrinthine fretwork in Fors Clavigera, this line develops “in the primitive work of races...nearly devoid of thought and of sentiment, but gradually developing into both” (22: 319). The line can be created without thought or sentiment, without meaning, but it does not remain meaningless long. The endurance of the decorative line, “permanent exceedingly” in time, means that, in important ways, it outlives the intention of its maker, if its maker could even be said to have executed an intentional act in the first place. Precisely because of its meaninglessness and its easy (and inevitable) repeatability, its origin is
relatively unimportant. If a cat can produce this line as well as a person, who made it and why is less important than its mere existence and its availability for retrospective vision and meaning-formation. “The Art of Scratch” joins the human and natural in their shared predilection for meaningless marking. This marking is instinctual, closer to the unplanned and unmeaning scratching of a cat’s claw than to the full expression of human intention; even the work of Ruskin’s beloved Gothic craftsman is generated by this largely instinctive drive: “gothic tracery itself [is] another of the instinctive labyrinthine intricacies of old” (22: 453). This work’s “labyrinthine intricacies” are “instinctive”; its fully human meaning can only come later.

This theory of representational seeing-as is not limited to Ruskin's writing on the labyrinth. In fact, it is present, to a greater or lesser extent, in all of his writings on representation. His famous passage on the “innocent eye,” for example—which has often been understood as an instance of his desire to overcome interfering mediation and return to a primary experience of the object—is simply a compressed statement of the essential retroactivity of perception:

The perception of solid Form is entirely a matter of experience. We see nothing but flat colours; and it is only by a series of experiments that we find out that a stain of black or grey indicates the dark side of a solid substance, or that a faint hue indicates that the object in which it appears is far away. The whole technical power of painting depends on our recovery of what may be called the innocence of the eye; that is to say, of a sort of childish perception of these flat stains of colour, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify,—as a blind man would see them if suddenly gifted with sight. (15: 27, note)

Mimetic art can only proceed retroactively; form itself is a retroactive intervention in the field of perception. What the innocent eye does, then, is not so much to suspend the operations of a socialized vision as to restore the proper sequence of those operations. At its most basic level, according to Ruskin, perception comprehends the world as a flat plane, to which perception not only of form but of depth is secondary. The ideal painter does not seek to get at the thing in itself, but rather to cover his or her canvas with “flat stains of colour, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify.” Although the work of the painter is representational in the sense that it seeks to repeat on the canvas what the painter sees, in another sense the painter, in these “flat stains” “without consciousness of what they signify,” is repeating the initial unknowing and unmeaning mark of the fretwork’s scrawling potter, or Davis’s cave painter. The rehydration of these marks into a representational scene occurs retroactively, by a process of seeing-as: only over time, by a “series of experiments”, do we learn to see our own flat mental representation as a full reality, a depth occupied by spatially distinct forms. This secondary operation, a differentiation and a seeing-as, links mimetic art in its very essence to the secondary formal work of decoration.

13 Gombrich, for example, scolds Ruskin for his supposed naivete about the innocence of the eye; see Art and Illusion, 297-98.
Caroline Levine sees an analogous process occurring in Ruskin's reformulation of the encounter with art. Rather than seeing the represented object in the art piece, she argues, Ruskin encourages us to register the materials first, and only afterwards see the piece as mimetic (59-60). This is part of what Levine characterizes as Ruskin's skeptical-realist approach, which disciplines the viewer to recognize representational strategies and see the material reality that underpins them. As we have seen, though, this process of unmeaning marking and retrospective recognition does not undo the learned operations of vision, but rather constitutes the entire meaningful content of that vision—it is not a suspension of representational seeing, but its mechanism.

The infantine innocent eye may indeed perceive nature without the deadening formalized rules of perspective, but for Ruskin the child also specializes in the discovery of forms within fields of marks. The child takes instinctive pleasure in decorative involution: in his autobiography, *Praeterita* (1885-89), Ruskin writes that, after a visit to the maze at Hampton court as a child, “I went on designing more and more complicated mazes in the blank leaves of my lesson books” (35: 247). The child's instinct, here, is not true sight but the abstract formal convolution of the maze or fret. However, it is precisely this empty inscription that, retroactively, makes possible an understanding of the entire superstructure of narrative mythical meaning, itself retroactively built upon that very formal complexity: “Howbeit, *afterwards*, the coins of Cnossus, and characters of Daedalus, Theseus, and the Minotaur, became intelligible to me as to few” (35: 247, emphasis added). This understanding depends upon a refusal to make any essentializing distinctions between narrative, emblem, representational object, and literal structure. If, then, the “seeing-as” of historical forms effaces the essential distinction between structure and ornament, between symbolic microcosm and material detail, and between the mimetic and the non-mimetic, it effaces as well the distinction between image and narrative, and between emblem and object. As we will see, this offers a way of thinking about the complex status of the specifically literary detail in nineteenth-century fiction, and its own shifts between mute reality effect and symbolic meaning.

### III. DETAIL, ORNAMENT, ALLEGORY

One account of the rise of nineteenth-century realism characterizes it as the elevation of description to the object of literature. In neoclassical aesthetics, as Cynthia Wall shows, description is explicitly decorative, a subordinate and occasionally suspect rhetorical category. Description-as-decoration can be interruptive, distracting, and even meretricious, obscuring both narrative and meaning with its insistence upon visible surface. In the nineteenth century, in the novel but also in poetry, a formerly excessive mimetic decoration becomes an end in itself. Realism as a literary strategy involves not simply the realistic depiction of characters and events generally, but a greater preponderance of descriptive detail.14

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Though there is no question that Ruskin himself tirelessly advocates “truth to nature” in representation, it is also unclear precisely what this means. Recent criticism tends to emphasize the mediated and mediating character of Ruskinian naturalism; Marcia Werner, following a long critical tradition, argues that Ruskin's theory of representation involves the imposition of abstracting religious structures on natural forms, while Caroline Levine and Alexandra Wettlaufer argue for a skeptical mediation which suspends precisely these structures in order to arrive at a real beyond or before representation. We have, then, a paradox within Ruskin's theory of representation—on the one hand, it is supposed to reveal or undo cultural structures that intercede between the object and the viewer, on the other it is supposed to enact precisely those structures.

Levine quotes George Eliot's 1855 review of the third volume of Modern Painters as evidence of Ruskin's influence on literary realism: “the truth of infinite value that [Ruskin] teaches is realism—the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by the imagination on the mists of feeling, in the place of definite, substantial reality” (qtd. Levine 25). Eliot is reviewing the entire volume, but its most sustained discussion of “realism” and the section to which Eliot presumably refers occurs during Ruskin's famous critique of Joshua Reynolds' aesthetic theory. In his aesthetic defense of detail and historical specificity, Ruskin attacks Reynolds' classicist position that factual particularity does not belong in art: “Instead of finding, as we expected, the poetry distinguished from the history by the omission of details, we find it to consist entirely in the addition of details; and instead of being characterised by regard only of the invariable, we find its whole power to consist in the clear expression of what is singular and particular!” (Modern Painters III 5: 26-7). Ruskin’s defense of detail, for Eliot, suggests his commitment to keeping at bay a solipsistic ideation—those “vague forms, bred by the imagination,” that threaten to substitute for reality. The detail is that which, as Hollier says of mimesis, prevents human work from “producing itself as model.” Like decorated architecture, responsible literature is constituted by the addition of detail, the “singular and particular” that makes it even more specific—and more authentically historical—than historical writing itself. Detail, for Eliot, proceeds from and reproduces “substantial reality;” for Ruskin, however, this detail is also a species of post facto decoration, an accumulation that “distinguishes[,]” that by its “addition” produces literature. Ruskin's primary example of this detail is a stanza from Byron's “The Prisoner of Chillon.” In Ruskin’s reading of the poem, these “singular and particular” details cluster around architecture. The attendant details that Ruskin lists here—the depth of the lake measured from the walls of the castle, the precise nature of the waters—constitute a complex around the castle of Chillon, a literary version of the ornament that clusters on and overwhelms architectural structure. Architectural ornament, Ruskin suggests, is not only the privileged site of a human marking that carries within it an unexploited capacity for representation, but also a vital homologue for the specifically literary detail.

Though Ruskin frames his defense of detail as a critique of Joshua Reynolds’s art theory, at times the attack seems forced. Indeed, within Reynolds's classicizing theory, so forcefully
rejected by Ruskin, ornamental detail is surprisingly central. Ruskin adversarially quotes a lengthy passage on poetry by Reynolds, but separates out the portion on ornament with parentheses: “(Poetical ornaments destroy that air of truth and plainness which ought to characterize History; but the very being of Poetry consists in departing from this plain narrative, and adopting every ornament that will warm the imagination)” (Reynolds, qtd. Ruskin 5: 21). In the explanatory note, Ruskin tells us that “I have put this sentence in a parenthesis, because it is inconsistent with the rest of the statement, and with the general teaching of the paper; since that which 'attends only to the invariable,' cannot certainly adopt 'every ornament that will warm the imagination’” (5: 21, note). Ornamental detail threatens to disrupt the coherence of both Reynolds’s position and Ruskin's critique.

A subtle but significant emphasis marks Ruskin's bracketing of Reynolds's “ornament.” Ruskin stages an opposition here between the “invariable” and the ornamental, an opposition which Reynolds himself does not appear to acknowledge. For Ruskin, once again, ornament is an essentially temporal category. This historical ornament, however, poses a problem for Ruskin as it does for Reynolds. Ornamental detail here is even theoretically parenthetical; Ruskin must include it, but must frame it out as “inconsistent,” an interruptive, heterogeneous object within the structure of Reynolds' theoretics. This parenthesis marks out an inconsistent portion in Reynolds's argument, but it also marks out that portion of the argument that Ruskin cannot reject. The ornamental detail never quite (as Wall argues) gets absorbed into content as description (2). Equally foundational to neoclassical aesthetics as to the Victorian rejection of those aesthetics, the decorative detail brings its complex status along with it as it assumes a newly central role as description. It constitutes “poetry”—for Ruskin, by extension, all literature—but it also remains stubbornly excessive, definitional precisely because it cannot be entirely absorbed into the object it defines.

As Angus Fletcher argues in his classic work on allegory, an “excess” of representational detail is paradoxically where naturalistic and allegorical literature overlap, as it pushes both forms toward an essentially ornamental involution: “this excess is likely to occur in any tenaciously accurate documentary work, or whenever allegory is overtly ornamental” (107). Allegory as structuring framework can quite easily fade into allegory as decorative detail; according to Mario Praz, this was precisely the aesthetic status of allegory by the late eighteenth century: “allegories...fulfill in poetry the same function that the statues had in the parks; they impart to the scene a note of meditation and reverie which shortly was to have a new name: romantic sensibility” (12). In his “Discourses,” in the midst of a vigorous defense of the non-ornamental purity of allegorical and historical painting, Reynolds pauses to admit allegory itself as an acceptable ornament (163-66). The decorative detail marks for Ruskin the eruption of the temporal in the timeless, the specific in the general, the material in the abstract or metaphysical—in literature as in architecture. It also, however, as Praz, Fletcher and Reynolds agree, allows allegory to shade into the representational detail in their shared ornamentality.

In a letter from Ruskin's father to a friend written during his son's preliminary researches for The Seven Lamps, the elder Ruskin writes:
He is cultivating art at present, searching for real knowledge, but to you and me this is at present a sealed book. It will neither take the shape of picture nor poetry. It is gathered in scraps hardly wrought, for he is drawing perpetually, but no drawing such as in former days you or I might compliment in the usual way by saying it deserved a frame; but fragments of everything from a Cupola to a Cart-wheel, but in such bits that it is to the common eye a mass of Hieroglyphics—all true—Truth itself, but Truth in mosaic. (8: xxiii)

Representation here has become strange by being redirected through architecture; this is “no drawing such as in former days you or I might compliment in the usual way by saying it deserved a frame.” Ruskin's work on architecture makes framing impossible, refocusing representation on ancillary elements that do not obey the dictates of conventional subjects of art. As Kristine Garrigan notes, Ruskin's interest in decoration is invariably in a decoration detached from its ground; in his books, this decoration is almost always removed from its context and reframed in close-up engravings (51-57).

As Frances Connely argues of the above quote, this new emphasis on detachment and particularity puts the picturesque detail in the service of an emblematic vision (103). Similarly, John Dixon Hunt argues that Ruskin's project is ultimately the reformulation of the picturesque textural and visual effect as a hieroglyph of the human relationship to God (814). However, this emblematic vision also undoes the very process of the picturesque; “hieroglyphics” and “mosaic” are emphatically not picturesque modes. Hieroglyphics push representation to the point of abstract signification, while mosaic undoes representational perspective to prepare the visual world for its accession to significance. According to Fletcher, “an allegorical world gives us objects all lined up, as it were, on the frontal plane of a mosaic, each with its own 'true,' unchanging size and shape” (104) --the collapse of the representational plane from Albertian framed window to textured wall accompanies an allegorical description of the world.

With these meaningful fragments, we are perhaps not far off from Benjamin's allegory-as-constellation. The figure of allegory is, in Benjamin’s famous formulation in The Origin of the German Tragic Drama, the ruin; allegory abstracts from this ruin a plan, a series of connected fragments that become a spatial layout (177-78). However, Ruskin's attention to these detached details is significantly different from Benjamin's. Ruskin requires the edifice to be at least mostly intact, rather than operating upon a ruined structure, Ruskin's allegorical vision operates upon a

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15 The sense that Ruskin makes history and nature meaningful by occupying (or overthrowing) new Romantic and scientific detail with an older religious comprehension—reclaiming the natural world for meaning by making it allegorical or mythical—has a long tradition in critical accounts of Ruskin's aesthetics. See, for example Harold Bloom, The Ringers in the Tower; George Landow, The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin; Chris Brooks, Signs for the Times; Marcia Werner, Pre-Raphaelite Painting and Nineteenth-Century Realism (esp. 40-41).

16 As Garrigan notes with some irritation, Ruskin's architectural illustrations from this period aspire to precisely this; in the lavish folio editions of illustrations sold to accompany Stones, Ruskin used the extra space not to give structural views of buildings but rather to represent disengaged decorative details as close to their actual dimensions as possible (Garrigan 51).

17 Indeed, Ruskin's critique of the “parasitic sublime” of the picturesque is largely a critique of Ruinenlust.
whole—though disengaged—*decoration*. The relevant term would be detachability rather than ruination; these pieces are modular and mobile. Historical difference generates meaning from the phenomenal particularity of an already secondary decoration.

Allegory’s critical rehabilitation over the past century has tended to emphasize its openness, flexibility, and deconstructive potential—often eliding the fact that, as Fletcher and others note, allegory is above all the mode of hierarchy and system. As Sayre Greenfield reminds us, “to acknowledge a complex metaphor, one already has to know the answers...a moral allegory can only reinforce a known system” (72). Samuel Taylor Coleridge's objection to allegory—that it is unresponsive to reality and represents the imposition of an abstract structure upon actual objects—cannot simply be dismissed as bad faith. It is in fact nearly identical to Hollier and Bataille's critiques of architectural structure.

Indeed, decoration—whether allegorical or architectural—is in its very essence related to systematization. Fletcher reminds us that, in Greek and Greek-influenced Christian philosophy, pure matter is prior to form, and both form and order are instituted by a secondary, explicitly decorative act. In decoration, “cosmetics” reconnects to its root in “cosmos”—a universal order that is decorative, a formal ordering of a shapeless or chaotic initial state (Fletcher 130-35). This ordering, importantly, proceeds by way of distinction and differentiation; because it is a structuring that occurs secondarily, it can only be an additive marking of difference; not a universe proceeding from ideation to execution, but a retroactive imposition of distinction.

Neoclassical theories of architectural ornament recapitulate this sense of decoration as system produced by differentiation. In Claude-Nicholas Ledoux's elaborate formulation in his 1804 *Architecture Considered in Relation to Art*,

Decoration is the expressive character, more or less simple, that we give to each edifice. It distinguishes the altars that play for eternity with the supreme being, from the fragile palace that transitory power sustains. It breathes life into surfaces, immortalizes them with the imprint of every sensation and passion...always surrounded by desires that group themselves within her rays, she isolates herself from the world. (217)

Ledoux's own utopian plans for an *architecture parlante*—buildings that “speak” both structurally and decoratively of their purpose (like his famous plan for a sex-education complex shaped like a phallus)—radicalize this principle of differentiation. Writing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, he is perhaps already responding to a pressure to reconcile the representative valence of decoration with its systematizing tendency. For Ledoux, though, the resultant differentiation “isolates” the building from the world, making it withdraw into its own specificity. Paradoxically, this is how secondary differentiation functions as an ordering force in the world. As the decorated building becomes “surrounded by desires that group themselves within her rays,” it accomplishes what is, for Fletcher, the ultimate end of the hierarchical structuring inherent to ornament: “propriety is not just what someone wants you to do...it is what

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18 See Fletcher, esp. 18-25.
they want you to do, *as a result of their representing the established order*” (140). For Ledoux and for contemporaneous theorists like Sir Joshua Reynolds\(^\text{19}\)—as well as for structuralist theorists like Fletcher and Northrop Frye\(^\text{20}\)—ornament actually tends towards an architectonics of the arts it adorns.

Ruskin’s insistence upon mimetic representation and historical association as primary attributes of decoration, however, makes decoration’s relation to the world more difficult to establish. Ornament, for Ruskin, does not distinguish the figure from the ground as the foundation for an orderly universe, or produce a geometric abstraction to master the world. It detaches itself not only from the structure it decorates but even from the orderly system it produces, allowing it to enter into unpredictable relationships with people and objects.

The decorative detail’s combination of mediation and material immediacy becomes particularly problematic when it is claimed by allegory, especially in literature. Ruskin is a producer of allegories, a critic-mythographer; it is no accident that he serves as Frye's prime example of interpretation in the mythically preoccupied *Anatomy of Criticism*. There can be no doubt that Ruskin is an allegorist, or at least allegoresist, of rare scope and inventiveness. He is, however, also profoundly ambivalent about what he sees as art's (both poetry and painting) allegorical relationship to the world. As Dinah Birch observes, Ruskin rather surprisingly sides with Plato against the poets (66). Indeed, he accompanies nearly every one of his virtuosic close readings of emblematic passages or pictures with a puzzled complaint about allegorical complications of truth. In *Sesame and Lilies*, he writes:

> Not that [the allegorizing author] does not say what he means, and in strong words too; but he cannot say it all; and what is more strange, will not, but in a hidden way and in parables, in order that he may be sure you want it. I cannot quite see the reason of this, nor analyse that cruel reticence in the breasts of wise men which makes them always hide their deeper thought. They do not give it you by way of help, but of reward. (18: 64)

The posteriority not only of allegory but of allegory's comprehension—the fact that meaning is produced retroactively, not “by way of help but of reward”—is deeply troubling to Ruskin.

At its most vehement, this ambivalence registers as hostility to allegory as such. In an 1861 letter to his father during research for his *Munera Pulveris*, Ruskin writes:

> What it all means, or meant, heaven knows...the best wisdom of the world has been spoken in these strange enigmas...and no one listens, and God appoints all His best creatures to speak in this way...but why God will always have it so, and never lets any wise or great man speak plainly—Ezekiel, Daniel, St. John being utter torment to anybody who tries to understand them, and Homer scarcely more intelligible—there's no guessing.” (17: lxiii-lxiv)

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\(^{19}\) See Joshua Reynolds, “Discourse Seven,” 150-165.

\(^{20}\) See *Anatomy of Criticism*, esp. 125-6.
The problem of allegory's necessity is one that haunts Ruskin throughout his career. His recurrent metaphors for interpretation—"piercing", "mining", "extracting"—are metaphors of labor that figure the surface of allegorical art as rock or, less flatteringly, dirt. If gold is "the physical type of wisdom" (18: 64), it is wisdom that sits behind or beneath a decorative representational surface that is encountered as pure obstacle. Ruskin's critique of allegory, then, is essentially a classical rather than a Romantic one. Ultimately he questions the need for a representational surface at all, the need for embodying abstract truths sensually. In his allegoresis, Ruskin oscillates between a mythopoesis and an idealist suspicion of the rhetorical "other-speech" that is allegory.

The central problem of allegory—and, ultimately, the key to its provisional solution—is embodiment, literal and figurative. "Homer...[etc] have hidden all that is chiefly serviceable in their work, and in all the various literature they absorbed and re-embodied, under types which have rendered it quite useless to the multitude" (Munera Pulveris 17:209). Poetic meaning is a question of intertextuality not in the sense of influence and transformation, but in the sense of a sequence that retrospectively locates, "absorb[s] and re-embodie[s]" the meaning of earlier works. But a purely poetic allegorical re-embodiment is still problematically elliptical, "quite useless to the multitude."

The value of allegory for Ruskin is ultimately not, as in neoclassical theory, the cognitive pleasure of encountering an old truth in new guise, but rather the embodiment, compression and detachability of that truth in order that it might become engaged in the world. Allegory produces a portable image that can enter into dynamic interaction with other such images and with non-allegorical reality. Ruskin praises Spenser's ability to compress a complex abstract concept into "one image, which will hardly occupy any room at all on the mind's shelves, but can be lifted out, whole, whenever we want it. All noble grotesques are concentrations of this kind, and the noblest convey truths which nothing else could convey" (Modern Painters 5:133). Ruskin's readings of emblematic figures undo allegory's hierarchical and narrative structure, emphasizing instead the other pole of allegory—its tendency towards a series of paratactically related emblems. Any figure in Spenser may be "lifted out, whole, whenever we want it"—portable and distinct, the allegorical emblem is no longer a component of a coherent symbolic system (or a coherent narrative) but rather a conceptual "concentration." Like architectural ornament, allegorical ornament may be imaginatively disengaged from its structure to become available outside of itself.

In his extended reading of the allegorical sculpture on the Ducal Palace of Venice in The Stones of Venice, Ruskin juxtaposes the figures represented on the palace with similar figures in various other systems—the paintings of Giotto, the moral systems of classical philosophers, and, most importantly, The Faerie Queene. "The reader will, I trust, pardon these frequent extracts from Spenser, for it is nearly as necessary to point out the profound divinity and philosophy of

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21 Elizabeth Helsinger identifies a shift in Ruskin's thought over the 1850s from an understanding of allegory predicated upon a perfect hieroglyphic meaning underwritten by divine truth to a much more flexible account of allegory that traces shifting meanings through intertextuality and etymology (117-18).
our great English poet, as the beauty of the Ducal Palace” (10: 396). No reason beyond this is given, which might seem an odd oversight for an author who devotes a hundred pages to meticulous readings of the facades of the Palace. Yet the very frictionlessness of Spenser’s entrée into the work provides a partial answer to the questions it raises: for Ruskin, there really is no essential difference between literary allegory and architectural allegory, and thus no essential difference between these two great works of late-medieval moral imagination. Mediating sculpture with poetry and poetry with sculpture, Ruskin constructs a giant allegory of historical change (the transformation of the theocentric Gothic into the anthropocentric Renaissance) from pieces of allegorical figuration borrowed—more or less interchangeably—from Spenser and from the Ducal Palace. Paired with, superimposed upon, integrated into and onto architectural decoration, literary allegory's problematic relations with its own representational surface seem to be defused. In Ruskin's praise of Spenser in the Modern Painters passage above, his allegory is figured specifically as architectural decoration—a “grotesque.”

It seems that meaning's embodiment in sense data is, paradoxically, less problematic as that embodiment becomes more material. Allegorical specificity reimagined as literal decoration—the detail reclaiming the density of an encounter in space—seems to somehow rescue poetry from the crisis of allegorical language. If allegory's embedding in picturesque scenes over the course of the eighteenth century—Praz’s “garden walks”—reduces its power and centrality by making it into a purely visual decoration, then it is not by a reversal of this process but by its radicalization that Ruskin recovers allegory. Initially, the reduction of symbol to literalness seems to be a refusal of symbolic meaning, a reduction of representation to the flat manifestness of the natural. Yet this very literalness, as we will see, makes symbolic meaning possible.

For Hollier the Gothic cathedral is, unsurprisingly, the totalizing structure par excellence, a perfectly symbolic edifice that makes concrete the organizational structures that underlie medieval thought in general. In it, sculpture and structure are seamlessly integrated into an organic whole (38–42). Perhaps the closest that Ruskin comes to a similar sense of Gothic totality is in his late The Bible of Amiens:

The architectural form can never well be delighted in, unless in some sympathy with the spiritual imagination out of which it rose. We talk foolishly and feebly of symbols and types: in old Christian architecture, every part is literal: the cathedral is for its builders the House of God;--it is surrounded, like an earthly king's, with minor lodgings for the servants; and the glorious carvings of the exterior walls and interior wood of the choir, which an English rector would almost instinctively think of as done for the glorification of the canons, was indeed the Amienois carpenter's way of making his Master-carpenter comfortable. (33: 124, emphasis in original)

Ruskin's insistence on the literalness of the original edifice makes any symbolic reading—however “foolish and feeble”—difficult. Even what we might think of as a symbolic spatial
distribution—the fact that the cathedral is surrounded by minor buildings for the priests and church workers—simply replicates a real hierarchical distribution. Decoration is not allowed any independent symbolic status at all; it is instead part of a social totality that recasts it in its older role of marker providing class-specific “propriety” or “decorum.”

Yet the cathedral at Amiens is, for Ruskin, massively symbolic. It is the type of all that is great about French religion and culture, the intense spirituality of the French and their kingly capacity for great gestures. At Amiens, as in Venice, architecture makes the physical world legible like poetry—both narratively and allegorically legible—through historical difference over time. In fact, the cathedral itself is a symbolic refiguration of an even earlier event, St. Martin's conversion and canonization. Ruskin acknowledges that this vital event, in his account the origin of French Christianity, may not have a historical origin at all. Its historical status is, however, irrelevant. Because of the retroactive nature of meaning, what matters is not the recovery of an origin but the subsequent embodiments of the symbolic meaning of that event or object. Like the modern cathedral that substitutes its decoration for a vanished nature, Amiens substitutes its own embodiment of the lesson of St. Martin for the historicity of the event itself:

Whether these things ever were so, or how far so, credulous or incredulous reader, is no business whatever of yours or mine. What is, and shall be everlastingly, so,—namely, the infallible truth of the lesson herein taught, and the actual effect of the life of St. Martin on the mind of Christendom,—is, very absolutely, the business of every rational being in any Christian realm. (33: 41)

St. Martin may never have existed, but the narrative of St. Martin, inhabited retroactively with symbolic meaning, produces “actual effects” in both the ethical and the physical world. These results—among others, the cathedral of Amiens—theemselves then become available, through the action of time, to a symbolic vision. Here, mythic narrative becomes emblem, which becomes a real decorated structure, whose ornament then becomes available for another kind of allegorical narrative. In this process of retrospective vision and sequential embodiment, we can begin to see how ornament might be both literal and figurative, closed and open.
The decorative labyrinth at Amiens is “a recognized emblem of many things to the people” (33: 136); most importantly, it is an allegory encompassing the entire course of human life, chronicling the struggles of the soul as it follows the convoluted path toward salvation and finally confronts its own base physicality at the center. This allegory is, according to Ruskin, at the same time an emblem of cultural continuity connecting Christian and Pagan production. It declares the craftsmen’s “pure descent from the divinely-terrestrial skill of Daedalus, the labyrinth-builder, and the first sculptor of imagery pathetic with human life and death” (33: 136, emphasis in original). Ruskin’s note to this declaration points us to book VI of Virgil’s Aeneid, in which Daedalus, the planner and builder of the labyrinth, recreates a schematic plan of it as decoration on a new temple to Apollo which he has built. The bereft Daedalus tries, and fails, to produce a sculpture of the death of his son as part of the decoration:

You, Icarus, too would have figured  
Large in this masterly work, if his rueful pain had permitted.  
Twice he attempted to shape what befell you, in golden relief-work;  
Twice, what fell were your father’s hands. (129)

Daedalus’ work, though Ruskin describes it as affectingly immediate, is in fact dizzyingly mediated: this is Ruskin’s interpretation of a medieval French recapitulation of Virgil’s account of Daedalus’ decorative sculpture. Indeed, the sculpture of Icarus, even in Virgil, never comes into real existence. There is no original object at the center of Ruskin’s string of re-embodiments, only the image of a sculptor struggling and failing to express his very human grief through his medium. Daedalus’ skill may be “divinely-terrestrial,” but he is unable to embody his intention in his work. This must be left up to those who come after. Like the cathedral itself, the labyrinth is not the emblem of a lost origin, but rather of a series of literary, structural, and decorative
reinterpretations, each of which locates new meaning in (and adds it to) to the original over time. In Ruskin’s schema, after all, the labyrinth produces Daedalus, not vice versa.

In *Ariadne Fiorentina*, Ruskin himself is the frustrated labyrinth-maker:

> When I chose the title for the collected series of these lectures, I hoped to have justified it by careful analysis of the methods of labyrinthine ornament...but the labyrinth of life itself, and its more and more interwoven occupation, became too manifold, and too difficult for me; and of the time wasted in the blind lanes of it, perhaps that spent in analysis or recommendation of the art to which men's present conduct makes them insensible, has been chiefly cast away. (22: 451-52)

Again, the individual creator is insufficient to his object. Half Daedalus and half Casaubon, Ruskin creates a sprawling work of detailed elaboration which lacks the basic conceptual structure that would have been provided by a comprehensive treatment of “methods of labyrinthine ornament.” Ruskin’s virtuosic allegoresis or exegesis lacks this structural framework, and his bitter summation of his life’s work repurposes the labyrinth as a figure for failure and loss. Yet the beauty of the labyrinth is that it does not require the success of any individual intention. Ruskin thus does not so much fear the erosion of the artist as structural guarantor as he fears the loss of decorative elaboration and embodiment as spiritual process. He worries that modernity's shift to naturalistic representation is effacing the basic human instinct for the decorative line. We are losing “the instinct, namely, for the arrangement of pure line, in labyrinthine intricacy” (22: 451).

As Ian Duncan shows, Ruskin is preoccupied with the propensity of allegorical or mythical thought to proceed by a “deficit spending” of meaning—where meaning produced exegetically is essentially inflationary—and ultimately attempts to recover the literalness of originary mythic embodiment through labor (78). It is, however, not only meaningful functional work but ornament, produced by the *excessive* application of labor and of meaning, which paradoxically stabilizes this imbalanced economy. The nineteenth century is the age of ornament; but not, perhaps, as we are accustomed to think. The supposed *horror vacui* of the Victorian age—its anxious need to fill up its spaces with decorative objects as a palliative for its bourgeois bad faith or sexual repression—is, for Ruskin, the very ground and mechanism of meaning.

**Conclusion: Second Nature**

In an influential essay, Joel Fineman argues that allegory dramatizes semantic structure's own self-alienation: “Distanced at the beginning from its source, allegory will set out on an increasingly futile search for a signifier with which to recuperate the fracture of and at its source, and with each successive signifier the fracture and the search begin again: a structure of continual yearning, the insatiable desire of allegory” (60). Fineman’s reading is structural rather
than historical, but the assertion that nineteenth-century cultural production is driven by an
allegorizing desire for a lost and irrecoverable origin is shared by critics as diverse as Walter
Benjamin and Jonah Siegel.

For Ruskin, though, decorative work—allegorical, mimetic, literal—brings its own origin
along with it. The decorative involution that constitutes the basis for all other representational
acts never goes away. It is as present in Gothic illumination, rhymed poetry, and modern
garden mazes as it is in primitive ceramics, the margins of a schoolboy’s notebook, or the scratch
of a cat’s claw. In the end, decoration binds the human and the natural beyond representation, in
their mutual marking of the world. The initial mark, the inscription in the world that is the site of
the pathos of all meaning for Fineman, is for Ruskin the site of the reconciliation between
meaning and physicality—not simply because it is generative of meaning, but because it
ultimately locates meaning in a mark not limited by an individual intention. This is not the site of
trauma, but the site of jointure. Making no distinction between representation and symbol, or
indeed between representation and pure “scratch,” decoration, like the architecture it adorns,
accumulates and changes meanings over time. Decoration, for Ruskin, opens up what is
essentially a monistic worldview to meaning through its own temporal self-difference; history
here is not a traumatic fall from prelapsarian wholeness but rather the process whereby discrete
acts of labor produce contingent embodiments of truths that, like the idea of eternity that comes
to inhabit the snake on the side of the unbaked vase, have their own historical trajectories. Even
the idea of eternity, after all, is not eternal. It must, like every other truth, be developed and
redeveloped over time. The origin cannot be lost, because it reoccurs with each new act of
marking.

Lukacs, in his *Theory of the Novel*, despairs of the power of human cultural production to
provide material for the symbols necessary for humanity's cultural life:

> The second nature, the nature of man-made structures, has no lyrical substantiality; its
> forms are too rigid to adapt themselves to the symbol-creating moment...the second
> nature is not dumb, sensuous and yet senseless like the first: it is a complex of senses—
> meanings—which has become rigid and strange, and which no longer awakens interiority;
> it is a charnel-house of long-dead interiorities; this second nature could only be brought
to life—if this were possible—by the metaphysical act of reawakening the souls which, in
an early or ideal existence, created or preserved it; it can never be animated by another
interiority. (63-64)

Ruskin’s theory of representation depends upon the productive dissolution of the boundaries
between the natural world and the “second nature” of human material production. The “art of
scratch” is indeed “dumb, sensuous, and yet senseless.” It proceeds from no real interiority and
thus does not require, for its reanimation, any necromancy. It is architecture’s role to rejoin
decorative detail and natural detail—“second nature” and “first nature”, to give human ornament

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the primacy of a natural encounter so that meaning will not pass from the world. Historicity is recouped—the “second nature” “brought to life” not by a “metaphysical act” but by an emphatically physical and material act—that is, the reintegration of that “second nature” into new acts of representational and symbolic production.
A marble figure does not look like what it is not: it looks like marble, and like the form of a man, but then it is marble, and it is the form of a man. It does not look like a man, which it is not, but like the form of a man, which it is. Form is form, bona fide and actual, whether in marble or in flesh—not an imitation or resemblance of form, but real form.


Painting...is saved from ever being altogether realistic by the fact that it does not possess absolute form. Sculpture, on the other hand, does possess absolute form. Form is form; and a statue, it has been truly observed by Guizot in his book on Fine Art, is not an imitation of the form of a man, but literally the form of a man, no less than are the flesh and blood. This fact makes it most dangerous to proceed a step further on the road to realism.

William Michael Rossetti, “The Epochs of Art in the Crystal Palace” [1854] (70)

“Form is form”: this tautological definition stands at the center of both Ruskin’s and Rossetti’s accounts of sculpture. Ruskin’s uncharacteristically chaotic prose here gives some sense of the sheer oddness of the medium as he understands it. The binary difference that separates representation from its subject collapses in the three-dimensional materiality of sculptural form, and only a kind of sputtering equivalence remains. Ruskin’s and Rossetti’s descriptions foreground the materiality of the art object, but this materiality is not merely textural or visual. Sculptures extend in three dimensions, occupying the same space as the people around them. Sculpture is an imitative art that produces actual objects rather than imitation objects; more precisely, it produces objects whose very status as resemblant forms grants them the phenomenal density of originals. “Form is form”: a shrug of the shoulders, but also a declaration of a radical equivalence between “marble and flesh” which opens both to the unpredictable consequences of their shared status as forms in space.

In Victorian aesthetics, sculpture is both the most abstract of the arts and the least abstract, the body transposed into pure form and a concrete object that shares the viewer's space. As Anna Jameson writes in her guidebook to the Great Exhibition of 1851, sculpture is both “a thought and a thing” (qtd. Hatt 38). In this discourse, sculpture occupies an improbable place vis-a-vis the world of objects it seeks to represent: its images are also things, whose resemblant capacity to denote other objects is entirely coextensive with their material obduracy in being-themselves. As Clement Greenberg will say of minimalist sculptors a century later, “they commit themselves to the third dimension because it is, among other things, a coordinate that art has to
share with non-art” (183). For Victorian sculpture, this shared coordinate means both an appealing formal clarity and also the potential dissolution of that clarity into a world of other equally concrete forms. Sculpture’s insistent materiality means that it operates in three-dimensional space in ways that painting cannot; at the same time, sculptural form is always in danger of dissolving into the non-art that surrounds it. William Michael Rossetti warns sculptors against approaching too closely to realistic representation: this medium’s “dangerous” literalness requires some difference from the objects it represents in order to avoid collapsing into them.

This difference is provided by the privileged subject matter of Western sculpture, the human body itself, and the fundamental antithesis it implies between vital flesh and cold stone. Only the body can mediate between the material and representational obligations of sculpture. According to Alex Potts, Victorian encounters with sculpture largely “took place in a public arena, and the vivid representation of a human figure was almost a necessary precondition for a statue to stand out from other decorative objects and architectural features in its immediate environment” (18). The human form here is the guarantor that sculpture’s materiality will not undo it—that it will not recede into the materiality of its surroundings. As Roman Jakobson frames the problem,

A statue—in contrast to a painting—so approximates its model in its three-dimensionality that the inorganic world is nearly cancelled out of its themes: a sculptural still life would not suitably provide the distinct antimony between the representation and the represented object that every artistic sign includes and cancels. Only the opposition of the dead, immobile matter from which a statue is shaped and the mobile, animate being which a statue represents provides a sufficient difference. (31-32)

This is what Jakobson calls the “basic antimony of sculpture” (32), an opposition powerful enough to upset the rigid equation of “form is form.” It is, however, by no means a stable antimony. Contemporaneous critics worried, for example, that modern dress threatened sculpture’s ability to represent bodies; with its stiff materials and buttons, modern attire had a greater affinity with stone as a medium, meaning that it would appear more real and thus make the human body itself seem less real and lifelike (Read 15). Sculpture requires a radicalization of the figure-ground disjuncture for its safe operation. Its efficacy as representation is predicated upon a kind of maximal bad fit between figure and ground that can only be supplied by the human body. Yet sculpture’s mute insistence that “form is form” redounds upon this body; Ruskin and Rossetti replace Jakobson’s “distinct antimony” between artistic sign and object with a mute equation. “A statue,” Rossetti cautions us, “is not an imitation of the form of a man, but literally the form of a man, no less than are the flesh and blood” (70). Form is form, and bodies made of flesh have no monopoly on the form of the human.

Sculpture behaves somewhat differently from other arts, and when it features prominently in novels we must pause and think about what this might mean for their authors’ representational projects. In the previous chapter, I showed how Ruskin’s aesthetic theory imagines cultural
production as an interlocking series of seeings and mis-seeings that open up human-made objects and stories to unpredictable uses and meanings. In this chapter, I will show how Victorian novelists use sculpture to stage this process of seeing and mis-seeing as a specifically social problem. Sculpture coordinates between physical embodiment and social potentiality; by making human bodies subject to contingent recognitions in real space, sculpture opens up individuals to the process of becoming-other that they undergo when entering into complex social relationships. In Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Roman romance *The Marble Faun*, an entire social world forms and re-forms around resemblances between contemporary subjects and historical objects. In George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* and *Middlemarch*, and in Rhoda Broughton’s *Not Wisely but Too Well*, sculptural encounters define new social and erotic possibilities, marking the integration of individuals into social relationships. Sculpture opens up individual bodies to social difference by opening contemporary subjects to unexpected resemblances. However, this process does not reduce those subjects to phantasmic simulacra, mere circulating copies of artworks. On the contrary, as we will see, the peculiar logic of these sculptural encounters paradoxically produces contemporary subjects as unique individuals: in coming to resemble historical works of art, individuals become not copies but rather *models*.

I. **Architecture, Sculpture, Image: Circulating Originals**

Sculpture superintended the Victorian visual experience in important ways, though less as art practice than as practice for art. In the neoclassical order of the arts, sculpture is central; for Lessing, the *Laocoon* is not only his primary case study for his aesthetic theory, it stands metonymically for the entire corpus of the visual arts. Though Lessing and Winckelmann both praise Greek painting in addition to sculpture, they had very few extant examples of such paintings from which to draw. Sculpture’s greater durability meant that their vision of Greek perfection was essentially sculptural. In the nineteenth century, sculpture continued to preside over aesthetic seeing generally, for painters as well as sculptors. Admission to the Royal Academy was based upon drawings of classical sculptures; once accepted, students could expect to spend months or years repeating this, perfecting their understanding of idealized classical nudes in the “cast school” or “plaster academy” before they could be admitted to the “life school” and allowed to draw from living models (Borzello 68-72). The individual human body could not entirely be trusted; one had to understand its perfected form before venturing to represent its particularity. Living flesh had to be subordinated to conventionalized form.

We might expect that, as naturalism and realism became progressively more pressing aesthetics imperatives, there would be a movement away from this rigid formula toward more flexible and life-based training—and, to an extent, especially in the administration of drawing education, there was. Yet any substantial change was more or less drowned out, by the early 1870’s, by the return to sculpture as both a practice in itself and as a model for painting. Many of the most influential late Victorian artists—G.F. Watts, Frederick Leighton, Lawrence Alma-Tadema—either were sculptors themselves (e.g. Leighton, Watts) or featured it obsessively in
their paintings. Watts, Leighton, and Burne-Jones studied the Elgin marbles extensively during the 1860s; all three kept casts of the marbles in their homes or studios (Smith 139). The British Museum's sculpture galleries, in fact, became increasingly popular over the second half of the century as a training ground for artists, hitting their peak in the late 1880s. Indeed, Ian Jenkins argues that the decline in numbers during the 1850s had more to do with competing institutions like the V&A and Crystal Palace—both of which featured massive sculpture galleries—than with some aesthetic trajectory toward naturalism (30-37).

Due at least in part to a logical extension of the neoclassical idealism that is implicit in the British art establishment’s insistence upon the primacy of classical sculpture—in which physical particularity is to be restrained in favor of a perfected ideal, and any given form is only a copy of some ideal original—Victorian sculptural practice makes distinctions between original and copy difficult to establish and maintain. Because of the aesthetic and economic logic of the nineteenth-century sculpture studio, in which a single form might be produced multiple times for different buyers at different scales and in different materials, “it was entirely possible in the nineteenth century to have more than one 'original' work associated with a single subject” (Beale 54). In sculpture, formal uniqueness is not the guarantor of originality. Resemblance, by the same token, is not a sign of unoriginality. The only object approaching an “original” in the sense of painting or drawing was the maquette or first sculptural sketch, which never left the studio and was often discarded as soon as a more finished version could be produced (Janson 10).

This indeterminacy of freestanding sculpture—its capacity to be, as it were, multiply or serially original, its odd relationship to the real figures it represents—is matched by its complicated relationship to architecture. If, for nineteenth-century theory, architecture is produced by the act of decorating a structure, it is logical to consider sculpture, at least potentially, as architecture with its structure stripped away. Sculpture, seen from this angle, appears not so much as a distinct medium as a border condition of architecture. In all honest or “natural” architecture, as James Fergusson writes in 1855,

Sculpture...was always provided with a niche or pedestal, where it might have been placed after the building was complete, or from which it might be removed without interfering with the architecture. No ornament is so essential or so important to true architecture as sculpture, whether employed as single figures, or as bas-reliefs, or on friezes; but wherever it is introduced, it ought to be in niches or panels, or places where pains have been taken expressly to provide that the construction shall not interfere with them, and never where they seem to have anything to do either directly or indirectly with the construction. (xlvii)

Sculpture's position in relation to architecture is paradoxical. “Essential” but also necessarily distinct; itself astructural, it cannot be allowed to become a part of the building. Visually—if not, as with niched figures, literally—detachable, it manages to be both component and accompaniment simultaneously. Sculpture concentrates the problem of architecture's relationship
to representation and to historicity as a set of representational forms which the wall requires, but which may be removed from it.

The separation of architecture and sculpture is, of course, impossible to achieve. As Phillippe Bruneau argues, in the classical and neoclassical tradition, “statuary is related to architecture...statue and column are basically both rounded plastic forms, one figurative and the other not” (20). Even the distinction between figurative and non-figurative is not customarily observed; they may trade places, as in the caryatid, or even combine, as in the herm (a column with human head and, if male, phallus). Portrait busts—by far the most popular form of statuary in the 19th century—were often mounted on architectural columns, making a kind of de facto herm. Architecture, itself always on the verge of becoming sculpture as form in space (as in the quasi-sculptural solids that stand at the origin of architecture in Hegel's *Aesthetics*) cannot ever purify itself completely of sculptural decoration, without which it is only impoverished construction.

Nineteenth-century writers often describe the relationship between architecture and freestanding sculpture as exilic, with sculpture unmoored from the determinate spatial and symbolic situation provided by architecture. Sculpture’s “divorce from architecture makes it lose half its power,” as William Michael Rossetti writes in 1861 (qtd. Read 17); however, it finds itself able to exert its own quasi-architectural power. Paul Valery, writing on the impoverishment of art in museums, mourns the death of the architecture that once situated and framed the deracinated and aimless sculptures which now crowd museums:

> Their mother is dead, their mother, architecture. While she lived, she gave them their place, their definition. The freedom to wander was forbidden them. They had their place, their clearly defined lighting, their materials. Proper relations prevailed between them. While she was alive, they knew what they wanted. (qtd. Adorno 177-78)

Valery laments the loss not of classical sculptural virtuosity or even beauty, but rather of the architectural order to which it should rightly be subordinated. Architecture can no longer fix sculpture in place and determine the precise parameters of viewers’ encounters with it. Valery’s sculptures are prone to “wander”; they are tragically mobile. This mobility represents a loss of stature and clarity for sculpture, but it also allows sculpture to interpolate itself into physical space in new ways. Even sculpture that seems safely contained in museums is, as Valery suggests, problematically free.

At least in the novels that I propose to discuss in this chapter, these newly freed sculptures, *pace* Valery, *do* know what they want: they want models, living originals which will give their forms a corollary in the real world. Their quasi-architectural occupation of space, their brute presence as form in three dimensions, puts them in intensely intimate but unpredictable relation to human bodies. This enfeebled, freestanding sculpture exerts what we might call a weak architectural power, arranging the movement and visual experience of viewers around itself. If architecture can no longer provide a proper order for sculpture, sculpture still provides
an attenuated and contingent order for the people who surround it. Rather than submitting subjects to the immobile order of a panoptic architecture, freestanding sculpture juxtaposes subjects and images in complex, unpredictable spatial configurations that imply, and facilitate, equally complex social configurations.

II: Roman Recognitions: Images in *The Marble Faun*

The portraiture is perfect in character, sentiment, and feature. If it were a picture, the resemblance might be half-illusive and imaginary; but here, in this Pentelic marble, it is a substantial fact, and may be tested by absolute touch and measurement. (8)

The statue meets its subjects in real space: Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun* opens in the Capitoline Museum, with the chance discovery, by a group of expatriate artists, of a resemblance between their Italian friend and a sculpture of a faun by Praxiteles. This resemblance is so perfect, we are told, that in describing one the author necessarily describes the other. The assonance between Hawthorne’s “absolute touch and measurement” and Rossetti’s “absolute form” is striking: “Painting...is saved from ever being altogether realistic by the fact that it does not possess absolute form. Sculpture, on the other hand, does possess absolute form.” This novel, famous for its ostentatious narrative omissions—we never discover, for example, the nature of the central crime or trauma that motivates the entire plot—is nonetheless fascinated with the absoluteness of form, with the irreducible presence of bodies in space. The novel enacts its interest in real forms not so much by detailed description as by the resemblances it relentlessly establishes between real works of art and its characters. We may never know if the faun-like Donatello's ears are really pointed, as his friends jokingly wonder; what we do know is what Donatello looks like with his ears tucked under his hair, just as we will, eventually, know what the mysterious Model looks like (Guido Reni’s *The Archangel Michael Defeating Satan*), what Kenyon the sculptor's statues look like (William Wetmore Story’s *Cleopatra*), what Hilda the painter's paintings look like (Guido Reni’s *Beatrice Cenci*),¹ and what the architectural and artistic objects they all encounter look like. The novel is flooded with real art objects and more or less realistic characters who resemble them, bound in relationships that make distinctions between ekphrastic and realistic representation difficult if not impossible to draw.² It is vital, then, that the dominant mode of the image in *The Marble Faun* is sculptural. In a novel organized around images of all kinds, sculpture serves as the archetype of the image and its main figuration.

Henry James, in his influential analysis of *The Marble Faun* in *Hawthorne*, lays out the basic terms by which criticism continues to navigate the text. He gives several critiques, but it

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¹ Scholarship agrees that this portrait is not actually of Beatrice Cenci; for simplicity, however, I will follow the novel’s attribution.

² I use ekphrasis in its broad sense here—as the represented presence, rather than strictly the detailed description of, works of visual art in text.
seems to be primarily the different registers of verisimilitude that the novel employs that capture his interest and trigger his reservations:

The element of the unreal is pushed too far...the book is neither positively of one category nor of another...The action wavers between the streets of Rome, whose literal features the author perpetually sketches, and a vague realm of fancy, in which quite a different verisimilitude prevails. This is the trouble with Donatello himself. His companions are intended to be real...whereas he is intended to be real or not, as you please. He is of a different substance from them; it is as if a painter, in composing a picture, should try to give you an impression of one of his figures by a strain of music. (134)

Donatello is heterogeneous to both the “streets of Rome” and to the American characters with whom he fraternizes. This heterogeneity is, of course, his equivocal unreality among characters of greater reality: “his companions are intended to be real...he is intended to be real or not, as you please.” But the “trouble with Donatello” is the trouble with the novel as a whole: not, precisely, a lack of reality, but rather an amphibious verisimilitude, a capacity to be real and unreal alternately or simultaneously, to be “neither of one category nor another.”

James does not exempt Hawthorne's precise accounts of Rome's art and architecture from this critique. On the contrary, they are for James a central cause of the novel's failure:

In *Transformation* he has attempted to deal with actualities more than he did in either of his earlier novels. He has described the streets and monuments of Rome with a closeness which forms no part of his reference to those of Boston and Salem. But for all this he incurs that penalty of seeming factitious and unauthoritative, which is always the result of an artist's attempt to project himself into an atmosphere in which he has not a transmitted and inherited property. (134)

James makes it clear that the problem is not with romance as a genre or with the presence of the “unreal” per se, but rather with the resistance of the novel's “actualities” to creative transmutation. One problem with the novel is clearly that there is too much in it that is unreal; its equal and opposite problem is that there is too much in it that is *too real*—that the touristic verisimilitude of its art objects somehow interferes with the novel's coherence. These objects are not the made-up verisimilar objects of realism, but incontrovertibly real objects, seen and shared by tens of thousands each year in a major European metropolis and by countless others in prints and reproductions. Though James might demur, these objects are the transmitted and inherited property of all of Western culture, made familiar by a century’s worth of grand tours and their literary corollaries.

James' critique still provides, to a remarkable degree, the terms by which criticism continues to negotiate the novel. For many recent critics, this means a repetition of James' negative verdict on the book, with essentially the same rationale. Some critics damn *Marble*
Faun for its substitution of ekphrastic description and touristic tropes for a responsible and realistic engagement with Italy.³ A close variant of this criticism reads the novel as willfully ignoring its historical context and suppressing or displacing its rightful natural subject matter: the political and racial tensions in the leadup to the American Civil War.⁴ The Marble Faun's engagement with Italy and with art objects is, for all of these critics, a departure not only from reality but also from the very ground and possibility of meaningful representation.

Other critics argue for the value of the indeterminate and “unreal” novel described by James, reading Marble Faun as a critical exploration of representation itself rather than a record of any particular reality.⁵ The most compelling versions of this argument are made by Wendy Steiner and Susan Williams. Steiner argues that “The Marble Faun founds the pictorialism of romance fiction in its violation of narrative realism” (97); the novel stages its opposition to realism’s myth of commensurateness between text and reality as the pictorial interruption of a realistic narrative (98). Williams argues, similarly, that because of the novel's incompleteness, readers must construct their own explanatory narratives around the novel's images; in the end, the text becomes a narrative appendix to the images it contains, a working-through of their potential for alternate meanings. In her vision of the novel as an “experiment” that “imagines what it would be like for these works not to be exhibited in a cold museum but rather to live in walking replicas of their originals” (Williams 160), images are never required to confront resemblances that are not, already, copies of themselves. Jonah Siegel makes a very similar argument about the intertextual hall of mirrors that is the Hawthornian “art-romance” genre more generally, declaring that “the mode's particular commitment to the fantastic and to the unavoidable force of other texts...makes it particularly resistant to forms of analysis that want to return to a real it has never inhabited” (Haunted Museum 5).

³ This substitution, these critics allege, does violence not only to the Italian setting, but also to the out-of-place characters who come to occupy it. For Millicent Bell, “remote from his familiar native scene, [Hawthorne's] descriptive faculty was lavished on the antiquities instead of the living present of Rome, and the thinness of his characterization of his Americans removed from their explanatory American world, represent a failure” (21). For Jenny Franchot, “once situated in Rome...[the] sexual, theological, and narrative vocabularies of 'spirit' and (Hawthornian) 'romance' form a style not of subversive de-realization but of orthodoxy, artifice, and literary inhibition” (353). See also Timothy Sweet, “Photography and the Museum of Rome.”

⁴ For Les Harrison, for example, “the failure of The Marble Faun is traceable, in large part, to its European setting...the novel represents a retreat from the contested nature of the antebeullum cultural arena” (49). See also Robert Martin, “An Awful Freedom”; Mark A. R. Kemp, "The Marble Faun and American Postcolonial Ambivalence”; Jean Fagan Yellin, "Hawthorne and the American National Sin”; Jennifer Fleischner, "Hawthorne and the Politics of Slavery”; Eric Cheyfitz, "The Irresistibleness of Great Literature: Reconstructing Hawthorne's Politics." Arthur Riss provides a useful account and critique of this tradition in his “Hawthorne and the Art of Discrimination.”

⁵ Elissa Greenwald argues that “romance reveals the margin of reality which is transformed by consciousness,” accepting James' assertion that the novel is fundamentally “unreal” while controverting his claim that it lacks psychological accuracy (7). See also Alide Cagidemetrio, who reads the novel through Crary's Techniques of the Observer, arguing that the fantastical events of the novel can be understood as a kind of spectral representation whose “real” is not the object world but rather the physiological capacities of human perception; Kristie Hamilton, “Fauns and Mohicans.”
What seems to unite all of these very diverse critiques is that they attempt to assert some boundary or some determinate relation between image and text—and, by the same token, between ekphrastic and realistic representation. Ekphrasis cannot, according to these arguments, tell us anything about the world. At best it can give us some information about the psychological constructs through which a viewer interprets a work. Though an image might represent something that is or was real, it is barred from further interaction from the real in its textual repetition.\(^6\) In a way, this distinction seems reasonable; ekphrasis, after all, makes no claims to realism as the term is generally understood. What, though, are we to make of an ekphrasis that, in describing an art object, also describes a person whom we are supposed to treat as real (or at least, as with Donatello, “real, or not, as you please”)? Everything we know about Donatello's appearance we know only because we know that he looks exactly like a well-known sculpture. However, Hilda—one of those characters who are, according to James, unequivocally “intended to be real”—is equally enmeshed in resemblances. Seeing a copy she has made of Reni’s *Beatrice Cenci* in her mirror instead of her face, she recognizes her own expression in the painting; when a young Italian artist paints a portrait of her, his audiences assume that it is itself simply a copy of the *Cenci*. Neither, however, does it make sense to understand her as a “walking replica” of the painting; in fact, it is she who has produced the replica, and she who serves not as copy, but as model, for a semblant work.

Certainly the question of art's originality is very much at stake here. However, the particular accusations of copying or plagiarism leveled within the world of the novel are universally untrue—from Miriam's quickly retracted accusation of Kenyon before the Cleopatra to the assumptions on the parts of onlookers that Kenyon's bust of Donatello and the portrait of Hilda by the Italian artist Panini are copies (of Praxiteles' Faun and Reni's *Cenci* respectively). Even Hilda's acknowledged copying is described as the miraculous replication of an original rather than the production of a copy from one. Thus it cannot be simply a case of circulating images meeting circulating images, of images mobilized in narrative by idiosyncratic reader-responses. *The Marble Faun* is not interested in the representation of a “real” constituted by its exclusion of images; rather, it is interested in exploring the new kinds of relationships that become available when “form is form.”

As David Freedberg argues in *The Power of Images*, it is impossible effectually to distinguish, in terms of our most fundamental responses, between unreal and real images, or between images and a real from which they might be categorically excluded. Though this might seem similar to the arguments of a Baudrillard, it is in fact opposed; rather than the real melting away into an unsubstantial image, images themselves are accorded some of the density of the real. Our interactions with images, argues Freedberg, are essentially iconolatrous. Freedberg, though writing art history, tellingly invokes Hawthorne in support of his position: “the fact is that Hawthorne knew clearly what I am claiming as one of the underlying principles of this study:

\(^6\) Thus Franchot: “the narrative action, segregated from the place of its own telling by an anxiously intervening narrator, cannot etherealize its location into 'fairy precinct' and so pictorializes it and hence excludes it from the narrative's verbal plane” (353).
that we too have the kind of beliefs about images that people who have not been educated to repress those beliefs and responses have; and we respond in the same ways” (41-42). The fact, then, that Donatello appears to us as a “marble image”—that his particular reality is given to us only insofar as it resembles what is already an image—does not render him phantasmagorical. “The problem with Donatello” is the problem of the image as such, and the “different verisimilitude” of the novel's romance negotiates the difficult space between similitude and verisimilitude. Resemblance, in The Marble Faun, is rigorously agnostic; Ruskin and Rossetti’s maxim of “form is form” sets the tone for a novel in which images can be equally, and interchangeably, realistic and non-realistic. Rather than the mise-en-abyme described by Williams and Siegel, Hawthorne turns the image out to the world and gives it the capacity for realistic representation.

At the heart of the novel’s plot, and of its consideration of the problem of semblance and resemblance, is the mysterious figure of the Model. This man clearly has some sinister connection with Miriam’s past, but the reader is never enlightened as to its precise nature. We are, however, given a detailed, and gruesome, description of his corpse, spanning several pages. Here as elsewhere, the human form is given to us simultaneously as resemblant image and as real, material object: “It was either the actual body—or, as might rather have been supposed, at first glance, the cunningly wrought waxen face, and suitably draped figure—of a dead monk…this image of wax—or clay-cold reality, whichever it might be’ (142). Form, once again, is form—this description anticipates James’ description of Donatello as “real or not, as you please.” Even the “clay-cold reality,” the image’s antithesis, is brought back within the realm of the image in its very materiality, as Kenyon declares his intention to study the dead monk for formal hints; “in the study of my art, I have gained many a hint from the dead.” Miriam sniffs in response that “one clay image is readily copied from another” (142). The Model’s body negotiates its status as material flesh and resemblant image without for an instant losing the precision and exactitude of its form.

In his influential essay “Executing the Model”, Jonathan Auerbach reads Marble Faun as an allegory of its own creation. According to Auerbach, Hawthorne objectifies the problem of the relationship between ideation and concrete expression in the figure of the Model, who must be sacrificed in order for Hawthorne to disavow the mediation implied in that figure. The killing of the model “served to generate the primary plot of the novel” (118); the book's entire plot is an attempt to come to grips with the fundamental disavowal of the “model” necessary for Hawthorne's particular representational project. Attempts to locate and explain the model allegorically often reproduce versions of this account: Jonah Siegel offers an account in which the Model represents the necessarily modern subject of sculpture that pursues Miriam and from whom she must be rescued (Haunted Museum 129); Kevorkian argues that the Model stands for the superstitious mediation that enlightenment rationality must eradicate (139). Auerbach's treatment of the novel imagines it as beholden to a neoclassical idealist aesthetics that does indeed denigrate the model, imagining it as only awkward intermediary between ideation and its material instantiation. However, though this schema is certainly present in the novel, it is by no
means comprehensive or unitary. As I have argued, a different schema of relation between objects obtains to a much greater degree: the principle of resemblance, which requires neither pre-model ideation nor post-model abstraction. In this schema, the ideal proves itself not by perfecting a real which it must subsequently disavow, but by, as we might say, snagging itself on a real object through an occult resemblance. In biological terms, one might describe this as the analogical resemblance of unrelated organisms rather than the homological resemblance of lineally related species.

The Model himself embodies this powerfully. He is “one of those living models, dark, bushy bearded, wild of aspect and attire, whom artists convert into saints or assassins, according as their pictorial purposes demand” (17). The Model’s body, with its bushy beard and wildness of aspect, is both excessively material and unfinished, awaiting the artist’s interpretative hand to settle it into a determinate identity. However, as we find out later, this particular model is both saint and assassin—an ascetic monk noted for his sanctity as well as the murderer whose past crime somehow haunts Miriam. Either of the states into which he can be “convert[ed],” by artists trained to transform indeterminate human bodies into idealized forms, are states that he already occupies in reality. Rather than forcing the Model into some schema, the art that is produced based on his likeness recognizes something already present. The Model first appears to be a figure for the indeterminacy of real matter and for the interpretative imposition of specific form or narrative explanation; he ends up, however, reinforcing the novel’s basic assertion that the idealizing art impulse always discovers outside of the image it produces a real corollary that anticipates it. It is not just resemblance but recognition which organizes the novel’s aesthetic world.

Thus Hilda, the novel's perfect viewer of images, is such by virtue of properly “recognizing” them: “No other person, it is probable, recognized so adequately...the pictorial wonders that were here displayed.” (46). Hilda has sacrificed herself “to the devout recognition of the highest excellence in art” (48). Kenyon, the masculine and active producer of images, on the other hand, compels this recognition; the sculptor draws out the truth of a subject and makes it visible for an audience, “showing them what they could not discern for themselves, yet must be compelled to recognize at a glance, on the surface of a block of marble” (211). These compelling forms are, nonetheless, dependent upon the recognition of others, as when he asks Donatello “tell me whether you recognize any manner of likeness to your inner man?” (212) when showing him his portrait bust. When Donatello replies in the negative, a frustrated Kenyon begins to deface his own sculpture until, “entirely independent of his own will” (212), he produces a likeness which Donatello does recognize. Kenyon’s most precious work is a pair of marble hands he has crafted in secret, modeling them on those of Hilda, whom he secretly loves. Even this act of appropriation—taking a desired form and making it his own through his art—awaits and requires a social recognition. He shows them to his friend Miriam as soon as he can, and is frantic that she recognize them: “Do you recognize this?” (94) “Then you do recognize it?” (94). The artist may compel certain kinds of recognition, but is also subject to the social interaction that
recognition inevitably implies, the necessity of realizing the image’s potential in another’s recognition of it.

Though the act of production may elide or seek to elide the model, the act of recognition insists on the model—to the extent that it produces models itself. When Miriam asks Kenyon how he produced his sculpture of Cleopatra, he answers “I kindled a great fire in my mind, and threw in the material” (99). Kenyon describes a great conflagration of creative energy, one that would so transform any model—here lumped in with the rest of his ambiguous “material”—as to render it entirely unrecognizable. The model, like the clay in which he works, is figured as essentially formless, subordinated to the great form-making furnace of the artistic imagination. This answer, though, does not satisfy Miriam. She marvels at “the womanhood that you have so thoroughly mixed up with all those seemingly discordant elements. Where did you get that secret? You never found it in your gentle Hilda. Yet I recognize its truth” (99). Miriam recognizes a truth that requires a model, a truth that proceeds from social knowledge rather than from individual imagination. As we understand over the next several paragraphs, she recognizes herself in the Cleopatra and thus understands herself to be the model for it. While she may or may not have been a model in a literal sense for the sculpture, her recognition of herself in it certainly seems to be correct. In this novel, misrecognition or seeing-as is never really idiosyncratic; it always seems to be anticipated in the object as some latent resemblance waiting to be recognized.

By describing this process of discovery as “recognition,” Hawthorne ties it to a venerable tradition in Western aesthetics. In Aristotelian theory, anagnorisis or recognition is a transition from ignorance to knowledge, one in which the recognition of a figure or fact has significant narrative ramifications. In Oedipus Rex, the king's eventual recognition of himself as his father's killer forces him to reinterpret the entire narrative. Recognition similarly carries the potential for lost narrative that has been hidden away, as when Penelope requires Odysseus to rehearse for her—and the reader—the narrative of the bed in order to prove his identity. Odysseus’ scar, similarly, hides a narrative that is released in its recognition. In Terence Cave's formulation, “recognition...works against mimesis in Auerbach's sense of the word. The scar is a mark of treacherously concealed narrative waiting to break the surface and create a scandal; it is a sign that the story, like the wound, may always be reopened” (24).

A long tradition in literature uses the recognition of an image—especially a statue—to provide a site for narrative anagnorisis to take place. We might take as a curious example of this another marble faun, this one from Sophia Lee's The Young Lady's Tale, a contribution to her sister’s popular Canterbury Tales cycle (1799). In this story, a woman who believes her husband dead from a duel hears music emanating from the statue of a marble faun in her garden. Investigating the statue one night, she finds “two resembling figures, one half shading the other,” and recognizes her husband, skin painted to resemble marble and draped and masked as a faun, standing behind the actual statue. The possibility that Hawthorne read this story is tantalizing but ultimately unimportant; the recognition scene based around the vivification of a sculpture functions here very much as it does, for example, in Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale—a lost
spouse reemerges from the dead as a painted statue, bringing not only a restitution of loss but also a narrative accounting of the missing years. Recognition, though mediated by the image, functions here properly as anagnorisis, locating individuals in their proper positions as it returns a portion of the plot to narratability. Anagnorisis submits an extant form, retroactively, to explanation by matching it with a story, promising a return to an explanatory origin through narrative revelation.

*The Marble Faun* instead proposes aesthetic recognition as a replacement for narrative anagnorisis. The recognitions that recur again and again in the novel do not, as Arthur Riss would have it, signal the individual's collapse into an undifferentiated sea of images. Neither, however, do they enact a transformational coming-to-knowledge, as in Aristotelian anagnorisis. When Kenyon confronts the Model's body, he literally gets it the wrong way around—upside down, in this case—in his attempts to narrate it: “Those naked feet!...It is a suggestive idea, to track those worn feet backward through all the paths they have trodden, ever since they were the tender and rosy little feet of a baby” (147). This attempt to produce a narrative return to origins as a way of explaining a form is almost comically unnecessary. Miriam and Donatello, to whom the sculptor thought he was speaking, have ignored him; while the sculptor attempts to construct a narrative around the feet, they have already recognized the model by simply looking at his face. Though Miriam, in an allusion to the *Odyssey*, confirms her recognition of the Model by a scar on his arm, it does not yield a narrative, either of the scar or of her past with the man. We are left, as before, with the recognition of a dead monk, one who looks like a wax statue of himself.

Rather than signaling the revelation of interior histories—the movement from muteness to expression that the speaking statue emblematizes so poignantly—these recognitions signal the hesitant, equivocal movement of individuals into broader social configurations. Miriam's recognition of herself as a quasi-model for the Cleopatra turns her first towards Kenyon and later towards Donatello in her desperation to connect. Similarly, Hilda's recognition of herself in the Cenci portrait hanging in her room signals the end of her self-sufficient but unproductive apartness; shortly afterwards, she seeks out the priest, the first step on the road to marriage with Kenyon. Kenyon, as well, is desperate to have his sculpture of Hilda's hands recognized by Miriam, repeatedly asking (“Do you recognize this?” “Then do you recognize it?”). His showing of the hands is not incidental but is, rather, integral to their purpose: only in being properly recognized by a third party can these metonyms of marriage join the social and thus begin to actualize the social force of marriage. The ultimate punishment in the novel is, accordingly, not to have one's sin recognized but to become unrecognizable and thus alienated from all sociality. Kenyon, meditating on this, wonders if:

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7 Arthur Riss describes the novel as a nightmare version of the reader-response imperative—as indeterminacy run rampant, consuming specificity with infinite potential resemblances. For Riss, the corrosive power of the aestheticizing image in the novel "universalizes everything, collapsing all differentiations...In both Rome and the Romance the restraining force of the particular and the individual is erased so thoroughly that nothing limits the resemblances one notices" (241).
Perhaps this is to be the punishment of sin...not that it shall be made evident to the universe, which can profit nothing by such knowledge, but that it shall insulate the sinner from all sweet society by rendering him impermeable to light, and, therefore, unrecognizable in the abode of heavenly simplicity and truth. Then, what remains for him, but the dreariness of infinite and eternal solitude? (238, emphasis added)

There are virtually no public revelations in this novel, and it is never proposed that there should be. The punishment of sin, like its commission, is a private matter. The real punishment of sin in this schema is, as Kenyon proposes, social isolation. The sinner will become “impermeable to light”—that is, will develop an interiority that is fundamentally unavailable from the outside.

The sociality of recognition requires a kind of social proximity of objects and subjects in real space; indeed, the novel's own ekphrastic operations might be described as a positioning of resemblant objects into social relations of resemblance. Recognition is contingent upon the relative spatial positions of bodies and images. Hilda lives with her copy of Reni's Cenci for weeks before catching a glimpse of it in a mirror and recognizing, to her horror, the portrait's expression on her own face. James, in a winking allusion to this, describes Hawthorne's ekphrastic interpolation of William Wetmore Story's Cleopatra sculpture as an image in a mirror: “[The Marble Faun], in its wandering amiability, holds up for a moment a mirror to another work, a little magic mirror from which the reflection, once caught, never fades” (William Wetmore Story 2: 87). In an even more Hawthornian touch, James describes this explicitly as a “recognition”, one that brings aesthetics from the cold realm of criticism into the bounds of the “fraternal” and social: “a recognition, an assimilation, which is not as that of criticism, but something tenderer and more fraternal” (2: 86). This is remarkably close to Hawthorne's own description of sculpture's particular power, which allows one to “see the man at but one remove, as if you caught his image in a looking-glass” (qtd. Gollin 73). Sculpture's presence in real space maximizes the potential for aesthetic recognition and minimizes the distance separating the viewer from the image's resemblances. A mirroring, to be sure, but not an involuted repetition—rather a “wandering” mirror, a mirror which catches certain objects and not others, which is subject to the position of objects in space.

This ekphrastic mirroring provides the basic framework for the novel's narrative, which is ordered almost entirely around trips to see art objects. More precisely, the novel's narrative is ordered around appointments to meet around certain art objects. The characters congregate at the Capitoline Museum, the Vatican Museum, the Villa Medici, St. Peter’s, the Church of the Cappuccini. They meet at painters’ studios and sculptors’ studios. The novel's narrative is organized not around scenes of revelation but around scenes of social interaction that occur in, around, and in relation to historical and contemporary art objects. Though there is something mildly paratactic about this structure—the novel could be rendered visually as a series of images set side by side—these images also provide the connective fabric that links not only person to person but also event to event. Rather than disrupting narrative, the image makes it possible. This was literalized when, later in the century, Tauchnitz published a tourist edition of The Marble
Faun that featured blank pages interspersed throughout into which readers could paste their own photographs of the buildings and art objects described in the novel (see Williams 175-76).

Perhaps the most consequential of these trips-to-see-an-image is Kenyon and Donatello’s journey together to Perugia to see the statue of Pope Julius the Third. Unbeknownst to Donatello, Kenyon has arranged with Donatello’s estranged lover Miriam to meet at a certain date and hour. The statue of the pope under which Miriam and Donatello are to have their recognition scene gains its hierarchical authority from a much more elemental recognition: “No matter though it were modelled for a Catholic Chief-Priest, the desolate heart, whatever be its religion, recognizes in that image the likeness of a father” (247). When Miriam appears to Donatello at the statue, she insists that “his heart must be left freely to its own decision whether to recognize me” (248). This recognition implies a return to the social for Donatello, who has isolated himself in his guilt; his recognition of Miriam paves the way for their reintegration with life (a fact which is immediately made even more broadly social: “Doubtless the crowd recognized them as lovers” [252]).

The recognition scenes around which the plot is structured do not, by and large, answer any of our questions about the plot. By the novel’s end, we understand that recognition cannot or will not provide a site for narrative anagnorisis. The failures of narration or representation cited by the novel's critics—the unfinished or unresolvable portions of the text—are not, in the end, failures of representation so much as failures of anagnorisis. It is not so much that the text does not show us what happens in its correct order; it is, rather, that the anagnoritic scenes that should redress these narrative gaps are ineffectual. The most notorious of Hawthorne’s narrative omissions occurs towards the end of the novel. This is the “land of picture” passage, in which Hawthorne refuses to narrate the details of Hilda's disappearance, instead imagining her attendance at a heavenly convention of painters:

It is better, perhaps, to fancy that she had been snatched away to a Land of Picture; that she had been straying with Claude in the golden light which he used to shed over his landscapes, but which he could never have beheld with his waking eyes, till he awoke in the better clime...Raphael had taken Hilda by the hand...and drawn aside the curtain...that hung before his latest masterpiece...On earth, Raphael painted the transfiguration. What higher scene may he have since depicted, not from imagination, but as revealed to his actual sight! (351)

While this imagined scene might enact an effacement of a certain kind of narrative realism, what it describes is in fact the precise opposite. In the “land of picture”, the visionary, unreal, romantic scenes painted by Claude and Raphael are returned to naturalistic resemblance. Claude's golden light, once visionary, is now a simple fact; Raphael's angel paintings, once idealizing effusions that attempted to glimpse a spiritual truth through the veil of flesh, are now realistic paintings of everyday reality. Idealizing representations, here as elsewhere, are made realistic by being given a model. As soon as Hilda emerges from her unspecified captivity, we are told that “she recognized a familiar and fondly remembered face” (352)—that of Kenyon, waiting below.
Neither this recognition nor Kenyon’s subsequent recognition of Hilda brings with it a narrative resolution. Rather, this narrative resolution is substituted for by an artistic recognition scene.

And yet all of these scenes still function, in various ways, as narrative bridges. All restore narrative sequence even if they do not provide the missing content of the narrative that came before. All of them end periods of waiting; all of them return human bodies to social relation. The recognition scene at the pope's statue returns the narrative to event and sequence after Kenyon and Donatello's protracted aimless movement; the “land of picture” passage unites Hilda and Kenyon and signals the return of narrative progress after Kenyon's waiting. If recognition returns individuals to the social, it also returns narrative to the social space of the novel, allowing access not to some hidden story but rather to the events and action of the social realm—allowing, that is, the social to begin to become public. The Marble Faun uses sculpture to argue powerfully for, among other things, the essentially public nature of narrative, or at least the value of public narrative. Rather than subjects who are determined by their radically hidden interiorities—which the novel preserves for them beyond the reader’s ken—we are given subjects who are, in the end, determined by the complex set of social relationships generated around the images in whose resemblant orbits the characters circulate, form friendships, and woo. The image provides the means for people to get on with their lives. The novel rejects anagnorisis, with its discovery of hidden narratives and unseen truths, in favor of aesthetic recognition. The real story, like real form, is not something located outside of what is already given us in image and narrative—not something that must be revealed or drawn forth or expressed.

If sculpture chooses the third dimension because it is the coordinate that art shares with non-art, then The Marble Faun chooses sculpture for the same reason. Meeting in three dimensions, art and non-art match and mingle. The novel insists upon the capacity for realism of objects not necessarily designed to be realistic. In doing so it insists upon the overlap of ekphrastic and realistic description, of image and text, and, ultimately, of human beings with works of art. Hawthorne renders very strange the truism that art has the power to bridge the divides between people: it is emphatically not the case, in The Marble Faun, that art stimulates awareness of some common humanity that links person to person; on the contrary, art’s linking power lies in the microcosmic operations of idiosyncratic recognition, which make no essential distinction between humanity and nonhumanity, between human and sculpture. The new social relationships that emerge from trips to visit works of art imply, or require, the possibility of humans becoming artlike. Form is form, and the novel suggests that the simple recognition of this fact might draw us into new ways of being with others.

III: FLOWER, STONE, FLESH, GLASS

Yet if form is form, then flesh is certainly flesh. Treating bodies as forms in space allows us to elide their painful vulnerability and their fundamental incommensurability with the stone objects that formally mirror them. In the following section, I will examine novels that explore instead the instability of the sculptural antinomy, the contradiction of living flesh and stone form.
that the sculpture requires. What happens when art and non-art meet inside the same body, when
the sculptural antinomy becomes internalized? What happens when this same antinomy is
uncomfortably literalized, making flesh and stone confront and face one another in their
difference? Not Wisely but Too Well, Rhoda Broughton’s 1867 bestseller about the
misadventures of a girl named Kate Chester who falls for a dashing, Rochester-esque scoundrel
named Captain Dare Stamer, explores the problematic sociality of flesh, and how this very
sociality might threaten to change that flesh into something quite different.

Dare seduces Kate for the first time in his family’s glass-and-iron conservatory. The
atmosphere is intoxicating; the dominant sensual stimuli are smells and colors rather than forms.

There, side by side, gathered from the far east and the far west, blossomed and reigned
Nature’s most regal flower-daughters. Gorgeous, stately flowers, that had hitherto revealed
their passionate hearts, fold after fold, to the fainting air of some cloudless, rainless, brazen
tropic sky, now poured forth all their sweets, put on all their brilliant apparel, under our
watery, sickly sunbeams...with a depth and intensity of colour which our dear, pale-faced
northern flowers never dreamed of putting on. What of man’s devising can be more
intoxicating than one of these temples dedicated to rich odours and brave tints? And when
there stands in this temple, among these gorgeous flowers, a lovely woman—lovely, with the
ripe womanly development of one of Titian’s Venuses, not with the emaciated prettiness of
modern young ladies—the subjugation of the senses may be supposed to be complete. Kate
was in ecstasies. She ran hither and thither, smelling first one, and then another. (1: 237-38)

These non-native flowers, “from the far east and the far west,” produce an overwhelming sense
of otherness; not quite otherworldliness, but at least elsewhere-ness. When Dare and Kate finally
kiss, the context provided by the exotic flowers naturalizes the act: “The flowers rustled their
leaves, and waved their bright heads sympathetically. They had seen something of that kind
before, when they lived in the tropics” (1: 247-48). The conservatory produces an atmosphere or
environment (as Isobel Armstrong notes, Victorian glass buildings were designed above all to
generate discrete internal atmospheres [143]), rather than a coherent set of objects. There is no
stable form here, only something like a Deleuzian unfolding, as the flowers open themselves
“fold after fold.”

Kate’s fleshiness is a central feature of her character throughout the book. Her artistic
corollary here is not a marble sculpture, but a painting by Titian—renowned, then as now, as the
great painter of flesh (as Tom Lubbock puts it, “the only thing that matters with Titian is flesh –
his sumptuous, glowing, rolling oceans of flesh” [“Is Titian’s Painting Worth Saving?”]). This
fleshiness—which she shares with the surrounding flowers in her plantlike “ripe womanly
development”—makes her fascinating and desirable, but also paradoxically resistant to the kind
of visual appropriation that would seek to objectify her. Though Dare is clearly the dominant
figure in this case—he has carefully planned her seduction—the pleasure of the scene is oddly
diffuse. Broughton’s meticulously elliptical language makes it impossible to tell who is seeing
whom and who, precisely, is being aroused or how. “The subjugation of the senses might be supposed to be complete” presumably refers to Dare’s enjoyment of the scene he has engineered. However, there is no clear scopic relation, and no sense of his position as a watcher separate from the scene he is watching. “Supposed” by whom? And of whom? “The subjugation of the senses” might just as easily refer to Kate’s sensual subjugation as she runs deliriously through the flowers. Though vision remains the dominant sense here, its optic clarity has been effaced by a haptic blurring in which flowers, flesh, and moist air commingle.

This indeterminate pleasure of shared fleshy embodiment is made possible by the artificial atmosphere of the hothouse. It cannot survive outside of the conservatory. When their affair becomes known, Kate is sequestered from Dare for several years. When she serendipitously reencounters him, they repeat the initial scene on a much grander scale, in the monstrous conservatory that is the Sydenham Crystal Palace. This encounter, though, takes place not in the greenhouse, which Kate enters but passes through quickly, but rather in the classical sculpture court. The antithesis is clear: living flowers have become dead stone; youthful lust has become adult regret; promising nature has become memento mori. Broughton separates the terms of the sculptural antinomy and provides them with a temporal and causal relationship, weighting them with a moral allegory.

Flowers and sculptures pull the body in opposite directions—on one hand, sensuous flesh, on the other, form in space. The first conservatory scene in Not Wisely but Too Well partakes in a nineteenth-century literary tradition that treats these glass atmospheres as sites for illicit sexual encounters, with bodies opening like hothouse flowers to erotic experience. This seems a far cry from the stone bodies of sculpture, which make the unclothed human form cold and abstract enough that it may be publicly viewed and discussed. Yet these two impulses—and, indeed, the spaces in which they are framed—are contiguous. Conservatories are venues for the cultivation and viewing for displaced nature, for deracinated and out-of-season plants; the glass-walled museum is a site for the viewing of out-of-place and out-of-time images. The classical sculpture, like the hothouse flower, is a refugee from warmer Southern climates. Both conservatory and museum make their objects unnatural by dislocating them spatially and temporally. Elizabeth Ermart argues that, in the Victorian social novel, time's “relentless locality is always a problem” because it limits the scope of social possibility; characters are trapped less in classes than in particular places and times (68). Fictions of museum and conservatory deploy these spatially and temporally deracinated objects to shatter time’s relentless locality and open up obscure social possibilities.8

Kate wanders among sculptures which, temporally and spatially separated from the bodies they initially represented, are trapped in the realm of pure ideation:

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8 As Jonah Siegel shows in Desire and Excess, the neoclassical aesthetics that made marble sculpture the stable baseline for aesthetic clarity and purity itself ironically proceeded from a position of dislocation and loss. The foundational neoclassical aesthetics of Winckelmann and others depend upon a tragic sense of Greek sculpture’s deracinated mobility as well as an unfillable longing for its unrecoverable emplacement.
[O]ne feels inclined—perhaps from aversion to acknowledge that we have degenerated—to doubt whether those god-faces and Titan-frames could have been copied from any mere flesh-and-blood creature....Rather must it have been some divine afflatus breathed into the fashioner's soul... (3: 6-7)

Kate begins to doubt that the statues were ever representational in the first place. She “falls a despising her fellow-beings, her acquaintances—their physique at least” (3: 7, emphasis in original). In context, it seems that she despises not so much their failure to conform to an abstract ideal as their failure to provide a commensurate human form for the sculptures she sees—their failure, that is, to be models. Yet she almost immediately discovers a resemblance that undoes all of this: “That fighting gladiator with the close-shorn shapely head and the extended arms. Ah, yes! There was only one man she had ever known who could stand a comparison with that deathless athlete” (3: 9). That is, only Dare would make these statues representational in the strict sense; he is the missing model that would account for their particular forms as mimetic.

We have moved from atmosphere to mimesis, from a shared sensual subjugation to resemblance and recognition. Sculpture returns bodies to clear spatial relation in three dimensions: Kate sees Dare when he enters, but is not seen by him. Sculpture reasserts itself as weak architecture in three dimensions, allowing and occluding vision as bodies move around it. She sees him with great clarity as a physical form, “One which approached more nearly in physical conformation to Achilles or Telamonian Ajax than to most of the men one sees in the present small-boned days” (3: 10-11). Dare’s “conformation” is mediated through the classical sculptures Kate has been looking at, making him appear to her as a classical figure who simultaneously inhabits the worlds of literary and sculptural representation. The real content of the mirrored seduction scenes might, then, be less the fall from transgressive pleasure into regret than the fall from fleshy intoxication into form. Broughton describes the Sydenham Palace’s sculpture court as a place in which “Venuses and Apollos...try so hard by their dumb influence to convince us, contrary to our reason, that the art that expresses form alone is superior to that other sister-art which can express both form and colour” (3: 4-5). In moving to the sculpture court, we have moved into the dominion of form. Color is drained away, leaving only form in space.

This movement should not be understood to constitute an act of disembodiment. These sculptures are just as erotically charged as the flowers in the hothouse, and perform the same vital connective function; as with Miriam and Donatello in The Marble Faun, this sculpturally mediated recognition reconnects Kate and Dare after years of separation. The Sydenham Palace does not provide an atmosphere in which bodies melt together with one another and with the exotic nature that surrounds them, but rather allows the recognition of a loved body in that which holds itself apart from and away from living nature. Instead of sensual fusion, we get clear recognition. The statue allows for a particular kind of connection that we might call social in the sense that it requires individuation as the precondition for combination.

Not Wisely but Too Well spaces out flesh and stone geographically and temporally, allowing for an allegorical trajectory to their binary opposition. A scene from The Mill on the
Floss—one which might indeed have provided a model for Broughton’s—instead compresses these two principles into a single unstable body. In a conservatory at Park House, the attraction between Stephen and Maggie becomes explicit and irrevocable. As in Not Wisely but Too Well, the conservatory atmosphere causes a long-simmering sexual attraction to boil over. In The Mill on the Floss, though, one conservatory contains both flower and stone. The sculptural antinomy, instead of being spaced out along the coordinates of a moral allegory, collapses inward. A single body is both flesh and the sculpture that articulates that flesh as recognizable form in space:

Maggie bent her arm a little upwards toward the large half-opened rose that had attracted her. Who has not felt the beauty of a woman's arm?--the unspeakable suggestions of tenderness that lie in the dimpled elbow and all the varied gently lessening curves down to the delicate wrist with its tiniest, almost imperceptible nicks in the firm softness. A woman's arm touched the soul of a great sculptor two thousand years ago, so that he wrought an image of it for the Parthenon which moves us still as it clasps lovingly the timeworn marble of a headless trunk. Maggie's was such an arm as that, and it had the warm tints of life.

A mad impulse seized on Stephen; he darted toward the arm, and showered kisses on it, clasping the wrist. (561)

Eliot describes Maggie’s arm vividly, in a languorous sentence in which flesh and stone combine in a single body. We begin with a surfeit of flesh at Maggie’s “dimpled elbow,” but this flesh is immediately given abstract form as “varied gently lessening curves.” Eliot interposes the Parthenon sculpture (presumably the arm belongs to Demeter, whose arm drapes over her mother’s shoulder on the east pediment) between the reader and Maggie's body, both giving us a clear sense of what that body looks like and denying us direct access to it. The sculptural antinomy is put into service as ekphrastic description, generating a charge that increases the erotic presence of Maggie’s body. The “warm tints of life” in Maggie’s fleshy arm are made remarkable by their juxtaposition with the stone arm that resembles it. However, this descriptive use of the sculptural antinomy also imbues Maggie’s body with the tension of stone meeting flesh. Though, as in Not Wisely but Too Well, conservatory flowers surround this couple, flesh does not melt into flesh. The co-presence of stone and flesh in Maggie’s represented arm halts the melding by insisting on the body’s boundaries as form in space.

Yet this statue-metaphor does not halt connections to other bodies. As in Marble Faun, the sculptural recognition scenes in The Mill on the Floss and Not Wisely but Too Well are returns to the social for isolated characters, and returns of the plots to narrative event after periods of inaction. In Not Wisely But Too Well, Kate has spent several years attempting to forget Dare, living a life that is as dreary and uneventful for the reader as for her; in Mill on the Floss, this scene marks the beginning of the end of Maggie’s renunciation and the actualization of her relationship with Stephen. Critics tend to understand Maggie’s transition from self-contained and self-controlled interiority to uncomfortable erotic object in this scene as an act of violence
perpetrated by Stephen. In doing so, they read this passage as Eliot’s free indirect narration modulating temporarily to Stephen’s point of view. The Parthenon sculpture, in this reading, represents Stephen’s attempt to objectify and take control of Maggie’s body. Margaret Homans argues that Maggie becomes both commodity and sexual object in one movement; Stephen’s descriptive recourse to sculpture only intensifies the deadening and fetishizing power of that gesture (175-76); Gaill Marshall argues that “Maggie experiences the moment as one of affront and appropriation, the imposition of her ‘viewer's’ desires upon a form which the statue-metaphor has encouraged him to believe he can control” (15). Yet there is really no evidence in the passage to suggest that this description represents Stephen's point of view. As in Dare’s conservatory in Not Wisely but Too Well, it is unclear exactly who is seeing or thinking here. The sculptural resemblance could originate in Stephen’s thought, but it is more likely generated by the narrator; it is impossible to know for sure. The moment of passionate connection expresses no certain interiority and belongs to no one person. The interposition of the Parthenon sculpture intensifies this decentering rather than stabilizing it: in this scene, sculpture comes much closer to the decentering and boundary-blurring haptic of the hothouse than it does the fetishizing gaze. Rather than a scene of reifying commodification, this is a scene of recognition—we are meant to recognize Maggie’s arm in a prior form rather than simply visualize it through concrete description. The recognition mediates our experience of the lovers' encounter and engages an unwieldy set of historical forms and associations. This is recognition without ownership, mediation without a necessary subjectivity. The description does not reduce Maggie to an art object, but rather produces her as its model. As in The Marble Faun, the circuitous path of resemblance here reaches back through Phidias’s sculpture to the body he represented. Maggie does not circulate as objectified image or objectified commodity—indeed, she cannot properly be said to circulate at all. She exists, in space, as a body that becomes progressively less interior and more fully involved in social relationships.

Yet the sculpture in this scene is, after all, merely a metaphor. It has none of the architectural power of real sculpture, and does not arrange viewers around itself in real space, with all of the unpredictable transactions that implies. Another scene from Eliot—this one very likely in dialogue with The Marble Faun—inscribes the sculptural antinomy in the three-dimensional space of the museum. In Middlemarch, as Will Ladislaw and Herr Naumann wander in the Vatican museum, they discover a resemblance between body and statue that, while not as supernaturally perfect as that between Donatello and the Marble Faun, is just as vital to the plot:

[T]he two figures passed lightly…towards the hall where the reclining Ariadne, then called the Cleopatra, lies in the marble voluptuousness of her beauty...They were just in time to see another figure standing against a pedestal near the reclining marble: a breathing blooming girl, whose form, not shamed by the Ariadne, was clad in Quakerish grey drapery..."What do you think of that for a fine bit of antithesis?" said the German, searching in his friend's face for responding admiration, but going on volubly without waiting for any other answer. "There lies antique beauty, not corpse-like even in death,
but arrested in the complete contentment of its sensuous perfection: and here stands beauty in its breathing life, with the consciousness of Christian centuries in its bosom. But she should be dressed as a nun; I think she looks almost what you call a Quaker; I would dress her as a nun in my picture. (176)

“A fine bit of antithesis”—we cannot help but be reminded of Jakobson’s idea of the basic antimony of sculpture: sculpture requires the human body for its subject matter so that it might resist the force, exerted by its own materials, that attempts to pull it back into the background. The antinomy or antithesis that should, according to Jakobson, be contained within the sculpture—that is, the liveliness of flesh and the deadness of stone—has been literalized, with the sculpture and its live counterpart confronting one another in real space. In realizing itself in a real spatial configuration, its terms have become chaotically mixed. Though Dorothea is a “breathing blooming girl”—Eliot here writes the conservatory flower into Dorothea’s very living essence--her “Quakerish gray drapery” duplicates the gray marble drapery of the statue, transferring to her figure some of the rigidity of the stone. Eliot evokes the worry of Victorian critics that contemporary dress, being so rigid in itself, might lend itself too easily to sculptural representation and thus muddy the clear binary (stone vs. living body) by which the sculptural antinomy functions. In a very obvious sense, Dorothea’s apparent constraint and repression contrast sharply with Ariadne’s sensuousness; it is clear that she is, in a metaphorical sense, stonier than the Ariadne. Yet these contiguities do not remain purely metaphorical. This spatial configuration interrupts or inverts the complementary oppositions which structure the museal viewing of classical sculpture: flesh vs. stone, nude vs. clothed (both figures are in fact clad in gray drapery); spectator vs. object (Ariadne’s half-clothed sleeping figure clearly invites a very unidirectional erotic spectatorship, but Dorothea, the object of an intense looking by Will and Naumann, is herself a sculptural spectator and participating quite equitably in the museum’s visual transactions). Eliot literalizes the sculptural antinomy, but as it realizes itself in three dimensions its oppositions becomes significantly less clear.

Dorothea’s body, here, approaches sculptural form so intensely that it no longer functions properly to anchor the sculptural antinomy. Eliot leaves untouched the other quality that could potentially anchor it, the one that belongs most properly to literature rather than visual art: Dorothea’s interiority. This statue in particular, perhaps because of its arresting visual availability, has a history of imagined or imputed interiority. Alexander Pope Englished a poem by Baldassare Castiglione written from the statue’s perspective, based on its mistaken association with Cleopatra. In it, Cleopatra is trapped inside the statue commissioned by her mortal enemy Octavius, who brings the sculpture to Rome as a proxy for the queen he had hoped to bring back as spoils. This poignant poem figures the creation of the statue as an act of representational violence. In doing so, it generates an interior life for the statue that is figured precisely as its resistance to its stony embodiment. Interiority, rather than flesh, provides the missing term of the sculptural antinomy:
Th’ eluded victor, envious of my fate,  
Vex’d with vain rage, and impotently great,  
To Jove’s high Capitol ignobly led  
The mournful image of a Princess dead.  
Yet not content with this to feast his eyes,  
Lest kinder time shou’d hide our miseries  
Lest the last age our fortunes shou’d not know,  
This breathing stone immortalized my woe:  
This with the noblest force of sculpture grac’d,  
In Rome’s proud Forum young Octavius plac’d[.] (Pope ln. 19-28)

The essentially exilic nature of classical sculpture is inscribed within even Rome itself. This sculpture is a stolen form, brought by force from its sensual native Southern home. Cleopatra’s flesh—the subject of the sculpture, but also the absent term that renders its antinomy unstable—is replaced by Cleopatra’s speech. In *Middlemarch*, though, Eliot evokes neither this tragic history nor the equally tragic story of the statue’s actual subject, Ariadne (though certainly Ariadne’s mythical status as labyrinth-decoder provides an ironic counterpoint to Dorothea’s own deepening immurement in Casaubon’s labyrinthine studies, from which she will be rescued by not by Theseus but by the Dionysian Ladislaw). Eliot forgoes narrative, and the revelation of interiority that it offers, in favor of a complex social negotiation of forms in real space.

This confrontation explodes, rather than stabilizing, the self-contained aesthetic tension of the statue; it also explodes Dorothea’s own self-containment. She is watched, recognized (doubly—by Will as herself, by Naumann as the statue’s mate and match), beginning the transition from an unhappy interiority into a conflicted modeldom. For Naumann, the confrontation between Dorothea and the Ariadne instantaneously renders her a model, in as many senses of the word as one cares to name. Will, clearly uncomfortable with this, declares that “Mrs. Casaubon is not to be talked of as if she were a model” (cite). Nevertheless, he agrees to conspire to make her precisely that, luring her to Naumann’s studio so that the artist can covertly paint her (we might contrast this with, for example, Daniel Deronda’s hostility to Hans Meyrick painting Mirah as Berenice). Barbara Black argues that this scene marks the departure of Dorothea and Will from oppressive social conventions, as they together reject the museum and enter a romantic individuality (117-18). We must, however, be precise about how this process proceeds. Certainly this scene inaugurates a complex series of events in which Dorothea and Will grow closer and Dorothea begins to open up to the possibility of erotically charged love and a fuller self-actualization. This happens, though, not by way of a rejection of artistic spectatorship and museal juxtaposition, but precisely because of it. This recognition scene in the gallery, along with Dorothea’s subsequent modeling sessions, is the genesis of their romantic relationship, eventually bringing Dorothea back from her monotonous isolation. Will and Dorothea do not approach each other as romantic interiorities, but rather as models in real space.
In their fascination with the coming-together of subjects and images in space, these novels explore not only the aesthetics of sociality but the sociality of aesthetics. In his critique of *The Marble Faun*, Henry James suggests that Hawthorne’s foray into Rome and into the genre of the art romance precipitates a crisis of authorship. Hawthorne’s authorship erodes into the “unauthoritative” (*Hawthorne* 134) assembling of touristic objects. This is, for James, as much a geographical problem as a compositional one. The novel’s failure is the “result of an artist's attempt to project himself into an atmosphere in which he has not a transmitted and inherited property (*Hawthorne* 134). *The Marble Faun*'s “factitious” fiction, though engaged deeply with the real object world, lacks the proprietorial connection that would authorize its representations as verisimilar. “The whole thing is less simple and complete than either of the three tales of American life, and Hawthorne forfeited a precious advantage in ceasing to tread his native soil. Half the virtue of *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables* is in their local quality;” Italy, on the other hand, is “a country which [Hawthorne] knew only superficially” (*Hawthorne* 165-66). Rather than deracinated objects, we have a deracinated author, impotent outside of his native milieu. It is, of course, deeply ironic that the consummate expatriate James scolds Hawthorne for writing out of his native land. Yet the aesthetic argument behind it is a serious one.

James’s famous house of fiction imagines the whole body of literature as a house of windows facing outwards, in each of which sits a single author, working alone, viewing the world outside from that idiosyncratic, limited perspective. This perspective circumscribes what can be seen but guarantees the legitimacy and uniqueness of the authorial vision that sees it. Hawthorne, by seeking to “project himself into an atmosphere” outside of his own limited field, violates James’s system. Like Valery’s outrage at the museum’s wandering sculptures, James’s critique is ultimately a defense of an aesthetic emplacement that is simultaneously metaphorical and literal. Like those wandering sculptures, however, this irresponsibly wandering author opens up his art to connections that those lonely observers might never imagine. Hawthorne is, perhaps, less interested in projecting himself into an atmosphere than in assisting in the construction of one. Rather than James’s house of fiction, we might instead imagine a glasshouse of fiction—like the glasshouse modular and indefinitely expandable—in which authors and artists do not sit ensconced in windows but rather meet and recognize one another among the out-of-place, out-of-time objects that they have, communally, assembled in this peculiar artificial volume.
Beginning in the early nineteenth century and continuing through the early twentieth century, England engaged in a massive project of architectural restoration, focusing on ecclesiastical architecture in particular. At its height, between 1840 and 1873, 7,144 churches were restored, with fully half of England’s medieval churches affected (Tschudi-Madsen 24). Nearly everyone living in England would have had a church near them restored. As a young architect, Thomas Hardy participated in several major church restorations; as was often the case for Victorian architects, a significant portion of the income of the firms he worked for derived from restoration projects. Always ambivalent about this work, Hardy eventually became an energetic and vocal activist against it, joining William Morris’s anti-restorationist Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) in 1881.1 Architecture, Hardy argues in a 1906 address to the Society, is the medium in which social life achieves not merely a spatial but also a temporal dimension; architecture becomes, over time, a repository of what he calls “human associations” (“Memories of Church Restoration” 215); for this reason, it is particularly vulnerable to restoration’s attempts to rebuild historical buildings as they once were rather than as they presently are. “The damage done to this sentiment of association by replacement, by the rupture of continuity, is mainly what makes the enormous loss this country has sustained from its seventy years of church restoration so tragic and deplorable” (215). Architectural restoration breaks the “continuity” that is embodied materially in the unaltered historical building; paradoxically, the urge to reclaim and recover the past destroys what is vitally important about it.

The central distinction that Hardy identifies between a restorationist desire to revivify historical objects and a preservationist desire to secure these relics of a “dead art” (214) against tampering preoccupies him as much in his fiction as in his work as a preservationist campaigner. Throughout his career--most densely and problematically in Jude the Obscure (1895), but also in his less widely-read romances of architectural restoration, A Pair of Blue Eyes (1873) and A Laodicean (1881)--Hardy uses the restoration debate to stage a conflict between two fundamentally opposed ways of engaging with the past. Restoration, in this schema, casts history as a traumatic process that must be undone in order to reestablish an originary practice, while preservation understands history as an open-ended production of meaning, one whose very unpredictability means that it can only be made sense of through the traces it leaves upon the material world. For restoration, the idea of an architecture that can be rescued from change

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1 Hardy's biographical relationship to the mid-century restoration movement is complicated. Though his autobiography makes no mention of it, Hardy never altogether stopped his restoration work. He served as an advisor for the restoration of several churches after abandoning his architectural career, and during 1893-4--while writing Jude--was in charge of the restoration of West Knighton church (see The Architectural Notebook, 22, 30-1). For a comprehensive collection of materials related to Hardy’s work with the SPAB, including letters he wrote on its behalf, see C. J. P. Beatty, Thomas Hardy: Conservation Architect.
facilitates an imagination of history as reclamation and, ultimately, repetition. For preservation, historical architecture is socially and aesthetically vital because it is not limited by its origin. This dead art’s tendency towards obsolescence and inutility is accompanied by a potential for unanticipated practices and meanings.

Criticism has had a difficult time contending with Hardy’s apparently schizophrenic approach to history. A long critical tradition has framed Hardy’s fiction as dramatizing the disruption of a pastoral, pre-modern community by an alien, urban modernity. More recently, critics have tended to read Hardy’s fiction as dramatizing the resurgence of a reactionary history that threatens a nascent modernity. By understanding the complex models of history that Hardy engages with in his critique of architectural restoration, however, we can see that these two apparently opposed crises are, in many ways, identical. The problem is most acute in Jude the Obscure: the various forms of restoration that dominate the novel are at the same time reactionary and ruthlessly contemporary, and the vision of history that informs them threatens to sever the world from both past and future. Forrest Pyle argues that, in Jude, the narration of history has become impossible and has instead been replaced by a description of objects: history in the novel is insistently spatial (362-63). According to Pyle, Jude’s narrator attempts to restore a history disrupted by advanced capitalism by performing an “archaeological restoration” upon the fragmentary material objects that have survived (368). As I will demonstrate, however, it is precisely this impetus toward restoration that Hardy resists and to which the radical materiality of history in Jude opposes itself. Instead of restoration, Jude may be understood as guided by an aesthetic of preservation that approaches both history and story as material processes whose significance lies in their essential unrepeatability. Hardy imagines historical architecture’s potential for obsolescence, its unwieldy materiality and even its deadness, as providing a site for a meaningful present and future. Historical architecture is not, as in a standard Whig Gothic plotline, the emblematic object which must be destroyed or cleared away in order to open a path to the future; it is, rather, the concrete object that must be cared for and preserved in order for that future to be comprehensible.

By re-embedding Jude in the Victorian restoration debate that so deeply informs it, this essay will stabilize the somewhat unsteady set of terms—“history,” “materiality,” “restoration,” “revival”—that crop up in scholarly conversation on Jude. At the same time, it will consider how Hardy works through the tension between his fictional narrative and the material histories that are embodied in historical architecture. Hardy calls historical buildings “chronicles in stone”

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2 This view predominated until the late 1970s--for an overview, see the “Introduction” to Merryn Williams, Thomas Hardy and Rural England. This is, more or less, the default position for Hardy criticism that Raymond Williams complicates in his classic The Country and the City (197-200). For a perceptive and nuanced recent version of this claim which specifically addresses architectural restoration, see John Twyning, Forms of English History (143-184).

3 See Patrick O'Malley, “Oxford's Ghosts”; Thomas Radford, Thomas Hardy and the Survivals of Time, esp. 200-25; Shannon Rogers, “Medievalism in the Last Novels of Thomas Hardy.” Julian Wolfreys essentially concurs, though he imagines a positive deconstructive power in the eruption of this Gothic past; see Thomas Hardy (1-30) and Dickens to Hardy, 1837-1884 (193-252).
(“Memories” 204), casting them as homologous to works of narrative fiction like the novel. The materiality of these chronicles in stone, however, makes them vulnerable to the operations of restoration in a way that the infinitely reproducible printed novel is not. In Jude, these threatened chronicles are supplemented and even supplanted by a narratorial persona that repeatedly refers to itself as a “chronicler.” This suggests a situation in which the novel imagines itself to supersede not only an obsolescent architecture but also the process of historical marking that makes it so richly meaningful. At the same time, however, Jude extends the preservationist conception of the trace-rich historical building to the printed book itself, imagining it as a material object whose meaning is shadowed and supplemented by the contingent traces left by its readers.

I. Old Buildings, New Stories

For Hardy, the unique value of ancient architecture lies only partly in its unrecoverable original form, which cannot fully be duplicated by even the most skilled craftspeople. Even more important is its material substance, in which are inscribed the unique and unrepeatable marks of past users and events. In many ways, he writes, “It is easy to show that the essence and soul of an architectural monument does not lie in the particular blocks of stone or timber that compose it, but in the mere forms, to which those materials have been shaped…” (“Memories” 215). As he somewhat surprisingly continues, however, the same does not hold true for historical architecture. Buildings that have aged sufficiently to become what Hardy calls “ancient” or “historical” invert the relationship between form and physical material or substance: “The protection of an ancient edifice against renewal in fresh materials is, in fact, even more of a social--I may say a humane--duty than an aesthetic one. It is the preservation of memories, history, fellowship, fraternities” (213). These associations, though they cannot inhere entirely in the physical building itself, nonetheless depend upon an experience of its material continuity. For this reason, architecture is deeply vulnerable to the process of restoration, which seeks to return buildings to their original forms and functions in order to bring them back into use. It is not form but material substance that carries the echoes of authentic historical experience into the present: “The renewed stones at Hereford, Petersborough, Salisbury, St. Albans, Wells and so many other places, are not the stones that witnessed the scenes in English chronicle associated with those piles” (“Memories” 215). Architecture's material continuity in time makes it a “witness” to history, making it homologous with the historical narrative of the chronicle. Restoration’s “renewal in fresh materials” of architectural form threatens to undo architecture's capacity to witness and subsequently embody history materially.

Understanding Hardy’s commitment to the productive unproductivity of unaltered historical architecture is centrally important to understanding how history operates in the lives of his characters. We might contrast Hardy’s declaration that architecture allows the “preservation of memories, history, fellowship, fraternities” with the bleak incapacity of the harrowed field famously described near the beginning of Jude to preserve those same traces: “The fresh harrow-
lines seemed to stretch like the channelings in a piece of new corduroy, lending a meanly utilitarian air to the expanse, taking away its gradations, and depriving it of all history beyond that of the few recent months, though to every clod and stone there really attached associations enough and to spare” (8). Associations still “really attach” to the material substance of the soil, but are unavailable even to the humans to whom they properly belong. The harrowed field is kept endlessly useful, but in order to remain so it must be remanufactured with each season, giving it an industrial uniformity (the narrator likens it to a “piece of new corduroy,” one of the first fabrics to be widely machine-produced and one which was turned out in huge volumes in the nineteenth century). This “meanly utilitarian” field echoes the central distinction that Hardy makes in “Memories of Church Restoration” between the restorationist and preservationist positions: restorationists approach the historical building as “a utilitarian machine” which “has naturally to be kept going, so that it may continue to discharge its original functions” (204-05), while preservationists insist upon maintaining the functionally deficient but association-rich building in its original state.

The precise nature of the associations with which these buildings are charged is not immediately clear. At first glance, historical architecture might appear as an unalterable, regressive guarantor of past practice, its associations sunk into a history that modern subjects can rehearse but never alter. When Jude first arrives in Christminster, he tours a city whose architecture seems not only ancient but anti-modern, tied so closely to a specific set of thoughts and practices that it excludes anything not of itself: “It seemed impossible that modern thought could house itself in such decrepit and superseded chambers” (73). Jude absorbs himself in a fantasy of Christminster’s history that emerges from a specifically architectural experience of pastness: “After many turnings he came up to the first ancient mediæval pile that he had encountered. It was a college . . . close to this college was another; and a little further on another; and then he began to be encircled as it were with the breath and sentiment of the venerable city” (73). Jude, in his early enthusiasm for the mythical history of Christminster, absorbs himself in a city that seems completely self-contained; he is “encircled” in an increasingly hermetic and closed-off architecture that seems to deny the possibility of historical difference.

Yet in order to achieve this effect, Jude must himself practice a kind of ad hoc restoration, ignoring the signs of temporal disjunction and the adjustments and transformations that the architecture has undergone over time: “When he passed objects out of harmony with its general expression he allowed his eyes to slip over them as if he did not see them” (73). In fact “modern thought,” as Jude discovers shortly, does indeed house itself in these “decrepit and superseded chambers,” in the person of Sue. More importantly, these same superseded buildings change their meaning with this discovery. The buildings of Christminster readily accumulate associations totally foreign to their original functions or the intentions of their builders. When Jude returns to these same buildings several years later, after being compelled to abandon his dream of enrolling at Christminster and falling in love with his cousin Sue, his experience of them is very different:
The city of learning wore an estranged look, and he had lost all feeling for its associations. Yet as the sun made vivid lights and shades of the mullioned architecture of the façades, and drew patterns of the crinkled battlements on the young turf of the quadrangles, Jude thought he had never seen the place look more beautiful. He came to the street in which he had first beheld Sue . . . Hers was now the city phantom, while those of the intellectual and devotional worthies who had once moved him to emotion were no longer able to assert their presence there. (170-71)

Jude has become “estranged” from the city as the site of learning and ambition. Christminster is now the site of a melancholy eroticism. The religious and scholarly luminaries that formerly haunted it have subsided. In their place is a new “city phantom,” that of Sue. The buildings may be decrepit, but this process of aging and weathering produces “vivid lights and shades,” facilitating an aesthetic and emotional experience that is very much alive. Just as the changing light produces new and varied effects as it plays across the weathered stone of the colleges’ façades, Jude’s own experience plays across this architecture, transforming its emotional associations and its narrative meaning. Historical architecture accepts without friction personal history alongside public history.

In Marygreen, similarly, the capacity to accommodate the emotional life of the young Jude is limited to the few unrestored architectural objects that remain in the town: “The well into which he was looking was as ancient as the village itself . . . . He said to himself, in the melodramatic tones of a whimsical boy, that the schoolmaster had drawn at that well scores of times on a morning like this, and would never draw there any more” (5). As in Jude’s pining for his “city phantom,” architecture achieves new meaning as a site of loss, of interrupted or discontinued practice. Yet this loss is contextualized and ameliorated by unrestored architecture. “The well-shaft was probably the only relic of the local history that remained absolutely unchanged” (5), and as such it offers a link between Jude’s current emotion, his personal memories of the schoolmaster drawing from the well, and a communal “local history” that underpins both. This ancient well offers a continuity between new experience and past experience that accommodates continual novelty within a historical framework. Though Hardy distances the reader from Jude’s experience by framing it as childish melodrama, it is clear that the associations that cluster around the well make possible a moment of authentic connection, an emotional intimacy with a past that integrates the personal into the communal.

II. “Scrape and Anti-Scrape”

Hardy’s vision of the open-ended potential of materiality is deeply indebted to preservationist thinkers, most importantly John Ruskin and William Morris. The preservationist position understands architecture to be irreversibly and essentially transformed by temporal processes—both the general process of physical aging and the more contingent action of individual historical events. Preservation (as opposed to restoration) seeks to protect not only the
building itself but also its unique object history—the marks of its makers and users, and the weathering process of time itself. In his foundational *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), John Ruskin describes restoration as the total destruction of a building. Even making allowance for Ruskinian hyperbole, this position is only comprehensible if we understand the building’s value to be primarily historical and associational rather than formal:

> Neither by the public, nor by those who have the care of public monuments, is the true meaning of the word *restoration* understood. It means the most total destruction which a building can suffer: a destruction out of which no remnants can be gathered...it is *impossible*, as impossible as to raise the dead, to restore anything that has ever been great or beautiful in architecture. (8: 242, emphasis in original)

Like Hardy, Ruskin imagines historical architecture’s value to be inextricably linked to its deadness; like Hardy, he associates this deadness with a unique capacity to capture and preserve the marks made by living beings. Preservationist thought imagines history as a process of wearing or stamping into architecture, in which the building is in important ways simply a surface onto which historical events impress themselves. Ruskin writes that the historical building is valuable for “the record it bare [sic] of [its makers and users], and all of the material things that they had loved and ruled over, and set the stamp of themselves upon” (8: 225). Or as he writes a few years later: “[T]he power neither of emperors, nor queens, nor kingdoms, can ever print again upon the sands of time the effaced footsteps of departed generations, or gather together from the dust the stones which had been stamped with the spirit of our ancestors” (“The Opening of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham” [1854] 12: 432).

Restoration theory, on the other hand, imagines history as an accretion or excrescence upon architecture. In British restoration theory, the solution to this accretion tends to be figured as a violent clearing-out or cleansing of the space that makes it fit for ritual practice. Thus the pro-restoration *Ecclesiologist* magazine, in its campaign against church pews (which it regarded as a decadent late imposition on Gothic churches), imagines “the intruders swept away at a blow” and urges “sweeping from our churches these records of a past and unhappy age” (“Pues” [1842] 3). Hardy, tellingly, describes the violence done by restoration in identical terms: speaking of his boyhood church in his “Notes on Stinsford Church” (1909) he mourns “the disastrous restoration about 1840, when the excellent oak pews of Caroline or early Georgian date were swept away” (qtd. *The Architectural Notebook* 23). Even the much more moderate professional guides, like the Royal Institute of British Architects's 1865 restoration handbook *Conservation of Ancient Monuments and Remains*, present restoration as a work of extreme cleansing: “[A] clearance should be made, if possible, of such wall linings,--pavements,--flooring,--galleries,--high pews,--modern walls,--partition,--or other incumbrances, as may conceal the ancient work . . .” (qtd. Denslagen 74).

This distinction, though at least partially a metaphysical one, had very real material consequences. Restoration architects, imagining buildings as being in dire need of rescue from
temporal accretion, often scraped their surfaces down to smooth them and rid them of signs of aging and accidental marks. Preservation saw this scraping as a violation of the building's essential substance. If historical marks are inscribed into the building, rather than built up above its surface, one cannot remove them without damage to the building itself. When William Morris, putting Ruskin's principles into action, founded the anti-restoration SPAB in 1877, it was popularly known as the “Anti-Scrape Society” for precisely this reason. The danger is that the scraped building will become something like Hardy's harrowed field, no longer able to record the traces or make visible the histories that its substance has absorbed over time. This is the explicit message of Hardy’s anti-restorationist 1882 poem “The Leveled Churchyard,” in which smoothing, planing, and leveling characterize a restorer’s profanation of an ancient church:

“From restorations of Thy fane
From smoothings of Thy sward
From jealous Churchman’s pick and plane
Deliver us O Lord! Amen!” (21-24)

Because of the central importance of these varieties of marks, restoration theory posits that architecture attains, over time, a kind of autonomy from the intentions of its original builders. Ruskin and influential followers like William Morris do not make any essential distinction between the original traces of the building’s makers and the incidental marks that it collects over time. The phrase “the stones which had been stamped with the spirit of our ancestors” expresses an agency so vague as to be genuinely indeterminate: it could mean the actual chisel blows of the original masons, it could mean the marks of use or violence on buildings, or, as with “the effaced footsteps of departed generations,” it could mean in some general way the historical traditions and events that have become associated with a material object that was coeval with them. This ambiguity extends to the marks left by simple aging and weathering on the building:

[Its age is] the greatest glory of a building . . . and, therefore, the external signs of this glory, having power and purpose greater than any belonging to their mere sensible beauty, may be considered as taking rank among pure and essential character; so essential to my mind, that I think a building cannot be considered as in its prime until four or five centuries have passed over it. (Seven Lamps 8: 241)

Ruskin designates the “external signs” of age--marks left by weathering and decay—as part of the “pure and essential character” of the building and thus equal to the marks of its makers and users. Under the rubric of the sign, stamp, or mark, these essentially different categories begin to blend into one another. In Ruskin's vision, historical architecture is not only, as we might say, collaboratively authored (by those who make and otherwise physically interact with it, and by

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4 For a broader consideration of the debate, see Nikolaus Pevsner, “Scrape and Anti-Scrape.”
those who perhaps only coexist with it or whose stories become linked with it through arbitrary association), but also, potentially, even self-authored (as its interaction with material forces comes to assume an ontological status equal to that of the original maker's hand). Architecture, at least in its historical capacity, is not something that can be made, but rather something that must happen; here, as in the previous passage, power cannot print or stamp upon buildings the marks that make them meaningful.

One of the major sources of pathos in Jude is that this preservationist suspension of intention extends to Jude himself. Jude finds himself, disastrously, trapped in the anathematized position of the restorationist stonecarver, whose work is not only meaningless in itself, but is destructive of the meaning that attaches to the buildings he works upon. In his 1877 “Manifesto” for the SPAB, Morris insists that restoration stone-carving is by its very nature inferior to the original. In a restoration, “the partly perished work of the ancient craftsmaster has been made neat and smooth by the tricky hand of some unoriginal and thoughtless hack of today” (53). By “thoughtless hack” Morris means simply a skilled modern stoneworker: in effect, Jude Fawley, who works primarily on church restorations and is compelled to duplicate, without being able to match, the decorative work of the original “ancient craftsmaster.” Jude is apparently a talented craftsman, one who possesses a deep intimacy with the medieval stonemasons whose work he struggles to imitate. When walking among the medieval colleges in Christminster, Jude “read[s]” the stonework not so much with his eye as with his body, “stroking” the decorations “as one who knew their beginning,” comprehending the forms as an “artizan and comrade” of the original workers (78). This intimacy, however, does not help him or his fellow stoneworkers match the original work. Hardy's description of the modern restoration work echoes Morris's condemnation almost word for word: the new carving is “marked by precision, mathematical straightness, smoothness, exactitude: there in the old walls were the broken lines of the original idea; jagged curves, disdain of precision, irregularity, disarray” (79). In Morris, spontaneous and irregular work is made “neat and smooth;” in Hardy, this same modern work is marked by “precision, mathematical straightness, smoothness.”

Jude’s narrator, however, unlike Morris, considers this craftsmanship to be irrevocably lost: “[Jude] did not at that time see that medievalism was as dead as a fern-leaf in a lump of coal; that other developments were shaping in the world around him, in which Gothic architecture and its associations had no place” (79). Hardy's famous comparison of the Gothic to a “fern-leaf in a lump of coal”—its relegation to geological time—seems to exclude the possibility of the kind of craft-oriented revitalization of material production envisaged by Morris in endeavors like his Kelmscott Press, Morris & Co., and the utopian News from Nowhere. For Morris, the “hack” can be redeemed and transformed into a “craftsmaster” with the requisite transformation of systems of production and consumption. Hardy, though sympathetic to Morris's overall political aims, was dismissive of his attempts to revivify medieval crafts. "My feeling is...that he wasted on weaving what was meant for mankind at large” (Letters 5: 203).

Yet even if cultural and economic transformations exclude the possibility of architecture’s rebirth, this dead medium retains its capacity to accumulate meaning and to accept
the marks and traces of its users. The fossil fern-leaf, after all, is in its own way an impressed stamp, every bit as meaningful as the stamps that mark Ruskin's historical buildings. The novel is unwilling to follow through on the simple dismissal of the Gothic that this passage appears to offer—the declaration of a modernity in which “Gothic architecture and its associations had no place.” The knee-jerk associations of Gothic—religious orthodoxy, economic and social immobility—might well be obsolete. Yet as we have seen, this obsolescence does not at all limit what architecture might come to mean, or the much more contingent and idiosyncratic associations it might accrue. Indeed, the very capacity of architecture to accumulate meaning over time implies at least its potential obsolescence as a ritual machine.

Sue—the novel's ostensible martyr of modernity (“how modern you are!” gasps Jude at one point [128])—declares that “Gothic is barbaric art” (295), that “The cathedral has had its day . . . . The cathedral was a very good place four or five centuries ago; but it is played out now” (128). However, Sue is also “sentimentally opposed to the horrors of over-restoration,” praising an old priest for his Ruskinian refusal “to let anything more be done to the church than cleaning and repairing” (289). This view might well be that of a progressive woman in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when preservationist views had begun to gain wider currency. Hardy’s repeated staging of the conflict between metropolitan restoring architects and local buildings is, in fact, more a question of practice than evidence of a rural/urban or modern/premodern divide. In Hardy’s novels, the spokespeople for preservation, or even scrupulously limited restoration, are generally progressive, well-educated young people rather than figures of autochthonous authenticity. In A Pair of Blue Eyes, for example, the sophisticated London “literary man” (60) Knight mourns the loss of a restored Cornish church’s tower as “an interesting piece of antiquity—a local record of local art,” while the old-fashioned local parson Swancourt celebrates “the new one...designed by a first-rate London man—in the newest style of Gothic art” that will replace it (291). In A Laodicean, similarly, the metropolitan architect Somerset must protect De Stancey castle from the incompetence and venality of local restorers.

When Sue condemns Christminster as “a place full of fetishists (sic) and ghost-seers” (145), then, we must understand that her modernity is one that opposes itself not to history but to the particular complex of cultural motives and practices involved in restoration. These “fetichists” are Tractarians, a connection Sue makes even clearer a few lines later when she needles Jude about his Tractarianism. The Tractarian or Oxford Movement advocated a restoration of pre-Reformation doctrine to the Church of England; like-minded students and professors at Cambridge formed the Ecclesiological Society (originally called the Cambridge Camden Society) in the late 1830s to carry those aims into the realm of ecclesiastical architecture. With influential allies in Parliament and the Church, as well as a popular architectural periodical that offered best-practice guidance to builders and restorers, the Ecclesiologists wielded a tremendous amount of influence during the massive church

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5 For an extensive history of the movement, see James White, The Cambridge Movement. White emphasizes the important distinction between the Oxford Tractarians' focus on doctrine and the Ecclesiologists' focus on architectural correctness and ritual practice (20-24); Hardy, however, does not seem to observe this distinction.
construction and restoration push undertaken by the Church, the government, and local communities in the middle third of the century.

The destructiveness of restoration is not a polemical overstatement by Ruskin and Hardy; it was, indeed, an explicit tenet of early restoration practice, and associated closely with the re-establishment of pre-Reformation ritual. At its 1847 annual meeting, the Ecclesiological Society voted overwhelmingly to endorse what it called the “Destructive” system of restoration, in which a building's extant style or styles were to be jettisoned in favor of a rebuilding in the purest High Gothic style (Clark 249). The paradoxical principle of a destructive approach to restoration stood at the heart of the British restoration movement's understanding of style; because architectural form was, for the Ecclesiologists, less a historical consideration than a doctrinal and ritual one, a building’s actual form might need to be altered radically in order to make it acceptable for its ritual function. According to Kenneth Clark, this meant that ecclesiastical judgments became indissociable from formal judgments: “between 1840 and 1850 canons of criticism originally ecclesiastical began to be accepted as architectural; an error of ecclesiology was, of necessity, bad architecture” (213).

We might, then, understand restoration according to architectural theorist Bernard Tschumi's description of the ritual use of architecture: “A ritual implies a near-frozen relationship between space and event . . . . When it becomes necessary to mediate the tension between events and spaces and fix it by custom, then no single fragment must escape attention. Nothing strange or unexpected must happen” (162). Ritual is an “implied narrative” (163) of engagement with architecture that prescribes a specific set of actions. Limiting the actions possible in any given architectural space will ideally efface the difference between narrative account and prescription. As Tschumi implies, this intensive linking of action and space is essentially an anti-historical initiative; it attempts to limit the variety of potential events that could happen in any given space. Restoration is antithetical, then, not only to history understood as an unaltered account of past events, but also to history understood as non-repeating narrative—that is, in effect, to futurity.

_Jude_ dramatizes this in its own fictional narrative, as Sue’s religious conversion after the death of her children transforms her from a rebellious freethinker to an orthodox High Church Anglican. Sue believes that she and Jude are being punished for reneging on their original marriage contracts—for having, effectively, personal histories that have transgressed against a primary ritual or sacrament. Like the restorationists, Sue attempts to undo a history understood as trauma by restoring a prior state and negating the intervening time; this recovery of ritual is as architectural as it is moral, facilitated and shaped by spaces that insist upon a history arranged around ritual cleansing and repetition. This fact is clearest in the recrudescence of St. Silas, a church that Hardy alternately describes as “ritualistic” (170) and “ceremonial” (88) in the Christminster suburb of Beersheeba. These appellations designate a heavily Ecclesiological emphasis on ritual; both the young, enthusiastically Tractarian Jude and Sue’s erstwhile employer, Miss Fontover (“a dab at Ritual” [88]) attend the church early in the novel. After the death of her children, Sue begins to repeat the young Jude’s ritualist enthusiasm. During their
last days together in Christminster, Jude notices an “indescribable perfume or atmosphere” (334) of incense about Sue, who admits to having attended services at St. Silas (the ritual use of the censer in Anglican services was controversial, and an important feature of the Ecclesiological reestablishment of pre-Reformation ritual). Later Jude will discover Sue prostrate on the stones of the church: “Jude could discern a huge, solidly constructed Latin cross....It seemed to be suspended in the air by invisible wires....Underneath, upon the floor, lay what appeared to be a heap of black clothes....It was his Sue's form, prostrate on the paving” (338). This is not just any cross; this crypto-Catholic “Latin” piece, “set with large jewels,” is unmistakably an Ecclesiological confection. Sue’s return to St. Silas represents her abdication of independence and agency in prostration to patriarchal authority. St. Silas is the site of the earthly father as well as the heavenly one: it was her father’s work on the construction of St. Silas which first brought Sue, as a child, to Christminster. More fundamentally, however, it represents a turn away from chronicle to ritual, from an architecture that opens up to experience and change to an architecture that enforces repetition. St. Silas corresponds to St. Barnabas, a church established in 1869 by Thomas Combe, an ardent Tractarian. Its neo-Romanesque design was, if not the High Gothic most heavily promoted by the Ecclesiologists, still formulated around the very specific High Anglican ritualism that was their ultimate goal. It is possible that a young Hardy may himself have worked on designs for the church while employed by its architect, noted church restorer Arthur Blomfield. Considered in light of Hardy’s autobiographical repudiation of his youthful career in restoration and revival architecture, St. Silas’s recurrence in the narrative might suggest the vexing recurrence of this architecture in his own history; it is, for Hardy himself as for Jude, a space that will not be superseded, that insists upon its own repetitive program at the expense of the stories and histories of its makers and users.

The narrative repetitiveness of this “ritualistic” church stands in stark contrast to the playful sense of novelty with which Sue approaches the site of her first wedding, St. Thomas’s church in Melchester. In a rare move, Hardy does not alter the name of the building in his fictional translation of it: this is St. Thomas a Becket, a fifteenth-century church in Salisbury. Sue regards the perverse pleasure of the rehearsal--walking down the aisle of the old church with Jude as if they had just been married--as an emotional novelty, unprecedented and unpredictable: "I like to do things like this…They are interesting, because they have probably never been done before” (165). Sue and Phillotson’s second wedding, conversely, takes place in the neo-Gothic church at Marygreen, which manages to be disorientingly unfamiliar without being in any way novel: “‘Where is the church?’ said Sue. She had not lived there for any length of time since the old church was pulled down, and in her preoccupation forgot the new one” (357). The newness of the revivalist church disengages it not only from time, but also from space. By contrast, the very few original carvings that survive, having been picked up from the demolished old church and tacked to the wall in the new, are islands of kinship and connection that perform, as well, a vital locative function during Jude and Sue’s final meeting in the church: “He stood by these [carvings]: they seemed akin to the perished people of that place who were his ancestors and Sue's” (376). The sense of dislocation produced by the restoration contributes to Sue’s sense of
déjà vu during the remarriage ceremony, which she feels “was like a re-enactment by the ghosts of their former selves of the similar scene which had taken place at Melchester years before” (357). It is not exactly that Sue has done this before; after all, getting remarried to the same person is undoubtedly a rare act and might constitute a novelty much more profound than her promenade with Jude in St. Thomas. Yet Sue clearly cannot experience it as anything other than a phantasmic “re-enactment” of the earlier ritual. This is the basic paradox of the restoration movement: while the historical building provides a site for novelty, the new or restored building compels a ritual “re-enactment.”

III. “This Will Kill That”: Printed Text and Imprinted Text

In the struggle over history that Hardy stages in Jude, restoration seems already to be triumphant. Jude’s life is spent in a world whose material fabric is rapidly losing the capacity to connect him meaningfully to past or present. Marygreen’s missing church troubles Jude’s youth as it does Sue’s womanhood; the ancient village well, so freighted for Jude with memories of his beloved schoolteacher, is a fugitive piece of history in a town whose historical continuity has already been largely effaced by restoration and revival:

Many of the thatched and dormered dwelling-houses had been pulled down of late years, and many trees felled on the green. Above all, the original church, hump-backed, wood-turreted, and quaintly hipped, had been taken down....In place of it a tall new building of modern Gothic design, unfamiliar to English eyes, had been erected on a new piece of ground by a certain obliterator of historic records who had run down from London and back in a day. (5-6)

Jude is an orphan and an exile, but Marygreen seems to offer no emplacement or continuity even to its native residents. The “obliterator” here is a metropolitan architect who understands neither local associations nor architecture’s intimacy with historical processes. He has destroyed a building and left in its place something blank and unassimilable, something which not only lacks the associative traces of the original, but which does not seem to have the capacity to begin to accumulate its own. The church’s original site “was not even recorded on the green and level grass-plot that had immemorially been the churchyard, the obliterated graves being commemorated by eighteen-penny cast-iron crosses warranted to last five years” (6). The cast-iron iron crosses that “commemorate” the obliterated graves are memorials of memorials, indices of traces. Industrial objects with no relation to the place or its inhabitants, they carry neither memories of the dead nor the marks of their makers, nor do they have any hope of lasting long enough to accumulate new significances.

Yet if Jude bears bitter witness to the violence done to history by restoration, Hardy also attempts to fold this failing ancient architecture back into narrative--to reignite, in fiction, its capacity for story. We can identify three distinct responses to the social and narrative
impoveryment of architecture in Jude. The first is what I will call memorial translation, in which Hardy translates real buildings and places into fictional ones in order to preserve or memorialize them. Hardy’s authorial commitment to real places means that the novel’s fictional events are nearly always associated with identifiable real buildings; an extensive translation key apparently used during Jude’s composition lists the real counterparts of virtually all of its towns and buildings (reproduced in Holland 144). Nearly all of the buildings that Hardy selected for inclusion in Jude had been, or were in danger of being, restored or replaced. In the context of Jude’s strong preservationist polemic, the inclusion of these buildings carries a charge beyond simple verisimilitude. They are not merely backdrops for the novel’s story, they are places whose own stories have been undone by restoration.

The Marygreen church, for example, “was not even recorded” on the ground it used to occupy; it is no longer stamped into or “recorded” on the material world. It is, however, recorded in the novel. In marking the site of the church, Hardy is not simply manufacturing an emblem of forgetting and loss. Marygreen is based closely upon the village of Fawley, which, like Marygreen, saw its medieval church demolished and replaced with a neo-Gothic church by prominent Gothic Revival architect G.E. Street in 1866 (Pinion 175; Betjeman 125). Hardy does not attempt an imaginative restoration of the old church, but rather marks its absence, giving the vanished church a memorial place in the text. For Hardy’s audience, Jude’s restoration work on Melchester (Salisbury) Cathedral would have conjured up a similar sense of loss. Salisbury was a byword for excessive restoration in the period: James Wyatt’s famously extreme restoration in 1787 earned him the epithet “The Destroyer”; Jude’s work there might correspond to George Gilbert Scott’s controversial restoration from 1860-1878, a catalyst in the formation of the SPAB (Donovan 51-52). The brief glimpse we get of the cathedral, with its “dwindling spire” (125) is, in the context of this history, charged with the pathos of a dwindling building, vanishing piece by piece as Jude and his fellow workers replace its aging stonework. Like the Marygreen church, Salisbury is, as far as its history is concerned, already gone: “The renewed stones at...Salisbury...and so many other places, are not the stones that witnessed the scenes in English chronicle associated with those piles (“Memories” 215). As with the Marygreen church, Hardy does not attempt a fictional restoration, instead simply allowing the vanishing building a place in his story. This process of fictionalizing memorialization extends beyond the buildings themselves, to the characters that interact with them. Jude Fawley takes his name from the real village of Fawley (Jude’s Marygreen), where Hardy’s grandmother Mary Head lived as a child, making him an odd kind of memorial to both the place and the person. Hardy himself designed the tombstone and composed the memorial epitaph for one of Jude’s real-world models: Hardy’s uncle, the cobbler and self-taught scholar John Antell (Gittings 73-74). Jude functions as a memorial to vanished and vanishing places and persons--translated and fictionalized, but nonetheless present in the text.6

6 Though Hardy occasionally attempted to assert significant distinctions between his fictional sites and their real-world models, scholars have generally found this unpersuasive. Simon Gattrell, for instance, shows that the closeness of the correspondence between fictional Wessex and its real models only intensified over Hardy’s career,
Hardy’s second response to England’s impoverished architectural scene assumes a similar process to be operating in reverse. Near the novel’s end, Jude self-consciously prophesies his lasting association with the fictional buildings in Christminster—and, by extension, with their real counterparts in Oxford: "This is old Rubric. And that Sarcophagus; and up that lane Crozier and Tudor: and all down there is Cardinal with its long front . . . when I am dead, you'll see my spirit flitting up and down here among these!" (381). Hardy’s translation key identifies many of these colleges by name: Rubric=Brasenose, Crozier=Oriel, Cardinal=Christ Church. Though addressed to Arabella, Jude’s prophecy is clearly true for the reader as well. Jude’s story, though fictional, unquestionably contributes to the wealth of stories that cluster around these buildings and around the city generally. Perhaps, Hardy seems to suggest, if these real buildings can no longer accept real stories, they can still accept fictions.

Third, Jude employs what we might call a kind of preservationist narrative technique in its own composition: Hardy tells his protagonist’s story partially through the marks and traces, both intentional and accidental, that Jude leaves on and around architecture. In doing so, Hardy exploits the homology between the chronicle in stone and the chronicle in text as a literary effect, fictionally dramatizing architecture’s process of accruing meaningful marks. By way of this fictional process, Hardy grants narrative meaning to types of marks that real architecture will not accept. Jude's work as a modern stonemason may be not only spiritually unsatisfying but, as Morris asserts, actually destructive; the novel, however, both records this work and accords it the weight of real history. The novel also records the more fleeting but equally meaningful marks that Jude makes in and on architecture, from the incidental--the “black mark on the plaster” on the ceiling above his desk “made by the smoke of his lamp” (38) as he studies late in his first rented lodging--to the deliberate, like the bitter quotation from Job that Jude chalks on a wall in Christminster (112). The evanescent surface marks of soot and chalk may leave no lasting print upon the material substance of the buildings, but the novel records and maintains them. Jude’s narrator is the “chronicler” not only of his characters’ “moods and deeds” (278) but also of their marks and traces.

Jude repeatedly asserts that restoration has stripped architecture of much of its capacity to assemble and transmit meaning on its own. In context, then, we might read the novel’s responses to this problem as implying the preeminence of novelistic form over a failing architecture. The richness of Jude’s elegantly constructed story contrasts strongly with the poverty of the material histories that are available to its characters, and the incapacity of local architecture to provide the historical continuity that might give their personal stories context and meaning. If architecture in the real world is having trouble accommodating the marks of its human users, Jude seems to imply, Hardy’s meticulously composed fictional world still allows for stories to be told and for fictional versions of places, marks, and associations to be preserved. If the novel cannot offer a climaxing with the Wessex Novels Edition of Hardy’s works, published in the same year as Jude, and by the same publisher (Osgood, McIlvaine). This edition contained, for the first time, a map of Wessex with Hardy’s fictional place names superimposed over the real sites, making their correspondence an explicit part of the work itself.
material substance to replace that which has been lost, it can at least offer a form that is not subject to material decay.

We might just as well, though, read Hardy’s intense engagement with real buildings more generously, less as an assertion of dominance and supersession and more as a recognition of the potential for stories to percolate back and forth between material buildings and the novel. At the very least, Jude emphatically rejects a straightforward supersession of the material building by the printed text of the novel. In order to understand how Hardy manages this problem, let us look very briefly at the relationship between building and printed text proposed by the central nineteenth-century novel of architectural obsolescence, Victor Hugo’s Notre Dame de Paris (1831), with its famous declaration “ceci tuera cela” (“this [the printed book] will kill that [the Cathedral]” [190]). “The book of stone, so solid and durable, would give way to the book of paper, even more solid and durable.... Printing will kill architecture” (192-93). In the brilliant micro-history of Western art that follows, Hugo argues that, until Gutenberg, architecture was not only the primary means of expressing thought but actually the only means: “all the other arts were obedient and submitted to the discipline of architecture” (197). After the invention of mass printing, however, architecture loses this central position. For Hugo, printing supersedes architecture not only because it is easier to distribute, or because a historical progression towards equality opposes the social and religious hierarchies that produced the most important works of architecture (indeed, Hugo associates Gothic architecture with a kind of proto-democratic egalitarianism). Architecture, for Hugo, is physically vulnerable in a way that printed text is not. The printed book is “even more solid and durable” than the building; the printed text’s near-immateriality and infinite repeatability means that it is everywhere and nowhere, can never be localized and destroyed, and cannot suffer from the vagaries of nature and time. It is immune, in other words, to the materiality of its history. The pre-eminence of the novel in this scheme is obvious: Notre Dame de Paris will supplement, and in certain ways come to supersede, the decaying Notre Dame de Paris. Hardy admired Hugo, and his brief eulogy of the older author playfully takes up Notre Dame’s assertion of the more-than-architectural longevity of fiction: “His memory must endure. His works are the cathedrals of literary architecture” (Life 334). In certain ways, Hardy seems to espouse the model of replacement offered by Hugo; in Jude, the narrator’s pose of concerned but impartial antiquarianism, as in Hugo, intimates a distance not only from the characters but also from the material structures and objects that the novel dutifully records. Moreover, Hugo’s quasi-Hegelian aesthetic history corresponds in important ways with Hardy’s own autobiographical narrative, which represents architecture as the form which must be given up and left behind for the mature work of the man of letters. Yet Jude’s deep commitment to the narrative potential of object history extends, in the end, to the printed book as well as the building.

The last view we get of Jude is of his corpse. This fact is unsurprising, both in that we end the novel in the literal presence of death and in that Jude’s materiality ends up outlasting—awkwardly and even embarrassingly—his intention. Jude is surrounded by his precious, worthless books, “the old, superseded, Delphin editions of Virgil and Horace, and the dog-eared Greek
Testament on the neighbouring shelf, and the few other volumes of the sort that he had not parted with, roughened with stone-dust where he had been in the habit of catching them up for a few minutes between his labours” (396). The books themselves materially embody the central irony of Jude's life, being the objects of his desire and the means of his infinitely deferred escape from work in stone ("[caught] up for a few minutes between his labors"). Yet here they are, as well, finally reduced to material objects that can be marked by this same labor, their covers “roughened with stone-dust.” Stone-dust is by no means the only or the most undignified substance to mark these books; earlier Jude is furious when Arabella marks his “dear ancient classics” with her lard-covered fingers: “In the operation of making lard Arabella’s hands had become smeared with the hot grease, and her fingers consequently left very perceptible imprints on the book-covers” (63). Printed text becomes subject to a very different kind of “imprint”: altered by domestic work as by professional work, printed matter becomes material, becomes an object that—for better or worse—accommodates and memorializes the marks of its users. It is unclear whether these final books include the first Latin and Greek grammars sent by Mr. Phillotson to the young Jude, which were already deeply marked by previous users: the Latin grammar “was an old one—thirty years old, soiled, scribbled wantonly over with a strange name in every variety of enmity to the letterpress, and marked at random with dates twenty years earlier than his own day” (25). Printed text, in Jude, always has a material history, one that registers as a rebuke to the orderly process of printing itself; idiosyncratic marking here stands in “every variety of enmity to the letterpress.” These “wantonly,” almost erotically personal names and dates, even the soiling, make the book a de facto memorial object, in a very real way a chronicle in the preservationist sense, with records of use and misuse legible upon its surfaces. As a species of material chronicle, this book thus escapes its instrumental status as transparent transmitter of data—only, however, by becoming subject as well to the temporal and material processes of stratification and overlay. Like the “superseded chambers” of Christminster's fossil Gothic, Jude's outdated editions are “old, superseded”; print becomes, that is, very much like ancient architecture, tumbling down from the realm of meaningful form into the realm of meaningful substance. It is difficult to imagine that Hardy did not envision his own printed matter as potentially encountering a similar fate.

These printed books clearly no longer correspond to Hugo’s fantasy of nearly immaterial, infinitely repeatable vectors for authorial intention. They have their own unrepeatable object histories, which are radically distant from the intentions of their authors and publishers. Ruskin’s rhetoric of “stamping” and “printing” generalizes the operations of the printing press to the extent that those terms become figures for the record of any human action, metaphorizing material traces as meaningful text. Jude, in its final pages, inverts this rhetoric, imagining printed text as a surface whose real significance lies not in the letterpress but on and around it, in the marks of stone-dust and lard that damage and dirty the material text. It is not simply that books here are material objects; they are material objects to which Hardy accords a status that preservationist theory reserves for historical buildings. Books, like buildings, are “material things that they had loved…and set the stamp of themselves upon.”
In his autobiography, Hardy writes that he abandoned novel-writing after *Jude* because the novel as a literary form was “gradually losing artistic form, with a beginning, middle, and end, and becoming a spasmodic inventory of items, which has nothing to do with art” (*Life* 309). Hardy implicitly casts *Jude*’s preoccupation with materiality as a symptom of a literary mode losing its authoritative form-giving quality and dissolving into the object world; *Jude* ends, quite literally, with an inventory of decaying items, among them its protagonist. When Hardy frames the same problem in terms of architectural preservation, however, the opposition between artistic form and material substance loses its traumatic impact. Faced with the choice between an aesthetically correct renewal of a building and its maintenance as a flawed and decrepit relic, preservation chooses material substance over form: “the artistic instinct and the care-taking instinct part company over the disappearing creation” (“Memories” 216). Something very similar to this “care-taking instinct,” I have argued, animates *Jude* as well, and implies a similar tension between artistic form and material conservation. *Jude the Obscure* is, of course, a rigorously and carefully constructed work of art, designed and executed by a scrupulously craftsmanlike author. If *Jude* arranges, transposes, and aestheticizes its objects, however, it also imagines itself, in certain ways, as a fellow-object that might be marked, beyond its own intention and into an uncertain future, by them in turn.
Chapter 6: Transatlantic Networks, American Unbuildings

In 1842, Charles Dickens visited America for the first time. Full of enthusiasm for its democratic project when he arrived, he rapidly became disillusioned with the country—its coarseness, its slaves, its speculation, its endless tobacco spittle—as he traveled through it. In an 1842 letter to W.C. Macready, he famously writes that “I am disappointed. This is not the republic I came to see; this is not the republic of my imagination” (Letters III: 156). Jerome Meckier argues that this grand disillusionment is responsible for what we understand to be Dickens’s mature intellectual orientation. His profound disappointment with the social experiment of the United States resulted in “the demise of Dickens the utopian dreamer” (243), and led to his abandonment not only of the new world as a model but of utopian transformation as a goal: “After 1842, even when spontaneous combustion of the entire British system seems not only inevitable but desirable,…Utopian counter-proposals are never offered…he gave up hope for a new socio-political arrangement to substitute for England's own” (243). “I infinitely prefer,” writes Dickens in the same letter to Macready, “a liberal Monarchy—even with its sickening accompaniments of Court Circulars, and Kings of Prussia—to such a Government as this” (III: 156). Along with his “republic of the imagination,” Dickens loses the idea of a place outside of and distinct from the options available in European sociopolitical systems that might, in turn, serve as a model for England’s own future.

America’s failure, then, represents the failure of the utopian impulse in its most basic sense: not, necessarily, the pursuit of radical reform, but the generation of imaginative alternatives to the present state of things. In this chapter, I will explore the consequences of this failure in Martin Chuzzlewit [1843-44], the novel Dickens produced immediately after his disillusioning trip west. In Chuzzlewit, America registers as the place of planning and thus of futurity—not merely of utopian futures, but of urban planning, economic projection, and institutional and architectural innovation. The novel’s plot centers around a young British architect of the same name who travels to America to make his fortune, only to lose his money and nearly his life in a land speculation scheme in a planned city called Eden. The failure of America as an imaginative alternative to England seems to extend beyond the failure of the particular model of futurity that it offers, to planning of any kind. Chuzzlewit engages in a wholesale, and apparently indiscriminate, slaughter of potential futures.

Alongside Martin Chuzzlewit, I will consider Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Blithedale Romance [1852], which engages deeply with Dickens’s earlier novel and the problems it raises. In Blithedale, the narrator, a young poet named Miles Coverdale, joins a utopian socialist community outside of Boston called Blithedale, which ends up collapsing due to the incompatible architectural, social, and romantic plans of its participants. Hawthorne reframes a moral allegory basically identical to that of Chuzzlewit in terms of an actual utopian community—Blithedale is based closely on Brook Farm, a real socialist community in which Hawthorne briefly participated—and presents his work as an ambiguously realistic “romance,”
asserting both a place and a form apart from the everyday. In doing so, he provides a way to think about the utopian potential of utopian failure, and about the peculiar position of the novelist in relation to both the extant and the possible.

These fictions of failure radicalize the distinction between that which exists and that which should or might, to the extent that they appear to exclude even incremental change. It is not merely the utopian dreams of idealists that fall victim to these novels’ apparent mistrust of planning. These novels represent the plans of earnest social reformers, hardworking emigrants, young lovers, bitter old men, poets, swindlers, wild speculators, and canny businessmen as overreaching and perhaps dangerous. All efforts to plan for a future different from and better than the present register as solipsistic attempts by individuals to impose their wills upon the world. These novels distinguish not between abstract theory and pragmatic action (between the self-important ponderings of the philosopher and the pragmatic reformer’s concern with the greatest happiness for the greatest number) but rather between the extant and the possible.

Critical accounts of these novels often understand them as critiques of planning and reform, whether politically progressive or regressive. Jeremy Tambling contrasts the liberatory potential of *Chuzzlewit’s* chaotic, “hysterical” (1999 153) urban spaces with the vaguely panoptic plans and projects of its architects: “to be held by the power of architecture is to be held inside ideology” (1999, 155). The Dickensian city is uncanny, irrational and anti-architectural, opposing itself to invasive architectural formations. Steven Connor similarly argues that the novel establishes a binary distinction between rational architectural structures and “incoherent” social space (187); the novel conducts an all-out “assault on architecture” (180) in favor of the social configurations that are threatened by it. Connor and Tambling cast Dickens as a sort of deconstructionist Jane Jacobs, the champion of an organic sociality that opposes itself to rationalizing systems and structures. ¹ Though the political stakes of Hawthorne’s novel of thwarted planning are more fraught, *Blithedale* shares with *Chuzzlewit* an apparent mistrust of the planning and reforming intellect. For some critics, *Blithedale* critiques the hidden ideologies of reform and its uncomfortable contiguity to destructive market forces. ² For others, the novel’s apparent hostility to utopian planning signals a regressive defense of the status quo. ³ Both camps agree that the novel is oriented in opposition to the utopian plans of the Blithedale community, if not defending the moral rightness of the status quo at least demonstrating the impossibility of any real alternative.

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¹ This is, essentially, a version of the more abstract tension noted by other critics between patriarchal or institutional order and disorder in the novel: most influentially, Dorothy Van Ghent’s classic “The View From Todgers’s”; see also Gerhard Joseph’s “The Labyrinth and the Library, which argues that *Chuzzlewit* expresses profound skepticism towards the aesthetic ordering principle that attempts to make sense of the fundamentally disordered world Dickens describes.

² Richard Millington, Robert Levine, and Gale Temple all contend that Hawthorne’s apparent anti-reformist bent contains a critique of the hidden bourgeois and capitalist ideologies of the reformist project.

³ See Yael Ben-zvi, “Clinging to One Spot: Hawthorne’s Native Settlers,” which argues that Hawthorne punishes the utopian community for attempting to unsettle a stable narrative of Puritan settlement and white entitlement.
In both of these novels, though, the extant order of things is plainly intolerable. *Chuzzlewit* rages as hard against the structural exploitation of the weak by the strong, the poor by the rich, and the simple by the calculating as do any of Dickens’s novels. Critical characterizations of *Chuzzlewit* as essentially “anti-architectural” sit uncomfortably next to the praise given in *American Notes* (Dickens’s nonfiction account of his America journey) to the reformist architecture of progressive institutions in the United States. In *Blithedale*, the diabolical Professor Westervelt is the representative of the corrupt “worldly society” to which the community forms the only alternative: “the Professor’s tone represented that of worldly society at large, where a cold scepticism smothers what it can of our spiritual aspirations, and makes the rest ridiculous” (101). “Worldly society” might dismiss the reformist “aspirations” of the Blithedalers, but it is itself unbearable. We should perhaps not say that these novels are hostile to architecture but rather that they identify an impasse at the heart of planning: the social and political configurations that exist are intolerably inadequate; on the other hand, attempts by individuals to rectify them are intolerably skewed to the interests of those individuals. The question then becomes: how do these novels imagine progressive difference within this profoundly flawed real? Precisely what position do these authors imagine their fictions to occupy in relation to that which exists? The novels pose these questions, again and again, in terms of architecture—particularly, as we will see, American architecture.

In this chapter, I will explore the responses of each author to the mutual intolerability of present and future, charting the unexpected channels through which the utopian impulse continues to circulate in each novel. *Blithedale* and *Chuzzlewit* both dramatize the collapse of various futures into the given or extant. However, both of these novels open up—dilate aesthetically as well as conceptually—the time and space between reformist promise and its actualization, between plan and execution. Both works take place, spatially and temporally,

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4 *American Notes*, Dickens’s travelogue of the tour of America that provided much of *Chuzzlewit*’s subject matter, is full of praise for the reformist architecture of institutions in and around Boston: the Perkins Institution for the blind, the factories and dormitories in Lowell, and the asylums and prisons in South Boston. For example, the South Boston poorhouse’s “plan of arrangement” comes in for particular praise:

> “It costs no more than any other plan of arrangement, but it speaks an amount of consideration for those who are reduced to seek a shelter there, which puts them at once upon their gratitude and good behaviour. Instead of being parcelled out in great, long, rambling wards, where a certain amount of weazen life may mope, and pine, and shiver, all day long, the building is divided into separate rooms, each with its share of light and air” (57).

Here it is not so much the institution’s mode of operation as its spatial layout that makes it successful. The poor are divided into rooms, which they can decorate as they please; the workhouse mimics the most salutary elements of domestic arrangements without ever losing its institutional nature and mission. This is not utopian planning, but in its loaded comparison to English workhouses it attains something like that status. Jeremy Tambling accounts for this by positing a distinction between a threateningly empty America, which must be shaped, and an already-full England, which must be protected (see *Lost in the American City*). However, this seems insufficient as an explanation. In *American Notes*, Dickens takes American institutions as models for progressive English practice, images of what English buildings might look like in the future: in short, potential plans for English building.
within the indeterminacy of the plan.\(^5\) We cannot understand these novels simply as critiques of planning or anti-architectural condemnations of human attempts to shape futurity. In the failed plans of America and England, both Dickens and Hawthorne discover oblique utopias, ruined futures that allow for new social configurations in the present.

First, I will provide a brief account of the nineteenth century’s imagination of America as the place of futurity and planning. America was imagined as both empty and chaotically disordered, both as a blank slate for futurity and as unformed matter that must be contended with and violently mastered. This paradoxical fantasy of America influenced thought on planning and futurity in general, particularly in the Carlylean and Emersonian tradition. Dickens and Hawthorne react to this tradition, rejecting the rhetoric of violent self-actualization that accompanies its vision of reform and futurity in favor of a peculiarly selfless sociality. Second, I will explore the consequences of this ethical rejection of self for the novels’ understanding of democratic social configurations. According to Richard Rorty, democratic sociality is both the aim and the matter of Dickens’s works: his wide-ranging imagination creates characters that expand our sympathetic affiliations and thus the functional boundaries of the democratic polis (319-20). Yet both of these novels have problems with sympathy; in both, sympathy emerges less from the imaginative identification of individuals with other individuals than from the breakdown of the selfhood that underpins this model of democracy.

This, I argue, is integral to understanding how Dickens and Hawthorne understand the limits of democracy and the necessity of attempts to imagine past it. Dickens rejects Rorty’s basic assertion that democracy can produce the necessary quotient of productive dissent internally, and thus also rejects Rorty’s vision of an endlessly expanding democracy that will, eventually, have no outside. For Dickens as well as Hawthorne, the failed plan offers a place outside of both British constitutional monarchy and American democracy. In their lengthy chronicles of failed planning, these novels repurpose the very concept of the plan, transforming it from an emblem of the Emersonian individual will into a space of quasi-utopian social possibility. They locate all of their hopes for the future in the plan’s radical indeterminacy and its strange temporality. The failed plan—the unbuilt, the never-to-be-realized—allows for an ambiguous apartness, a space outside of the extant that can be colonized and repurposed by new social formations.

I. American Futures

In order to understand the stakes of these novels’ critiques of planning and building, we must understand the specifically American nature of architectural and sociopolitical futurity in

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\(^5\) By “planning,” I do not mean the anticipation of and provision for future needs, in the sense that a government might anticipate a rise in population over a certain period and put into place a housing plan order to prepare for the additional inhabitants. That variety of planning seeks to maintain a version of the status quo in the face of change. The kind of planning that these authors are interested in is one in which the present experiences a disjuncture between what it imagines or desires and what exists. These plans are designed to effect, in the future, an alternative vision of the present.
the popular imagination of the nineteenth century. Writing on American building tends to posit an opposition between a historically located sociality that is essentially European, assembled over time by way of shared associations and traces, and a futurity that is essentially American and individualistic. In 1854 John Ruskin writes:

> Are there no new countries on the earth...untenanted by the consciousness of a past? Must this little Europe—this corner of our globe, gilded with the blood of old battles, and grey with the temples of old pieties...be utterly swept and garnished for the masque of the Future? Is America not wide enough for the elasticities of our humanity? Asia not rich enough for its pride? Or among the quiet meadow-lands and solitary hills of the old land, is there not yet room enough for the spreadings of power, or the indulgences of magnificence, without founding all glory upon ruin, and prefacing all progress with obliteration? (“The Opening of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham” [1854] 429)

In this passage, Ruskin repeats his familiar distinction between architecture as an experience of shared history and building as an act. It is impossible, for Ruskin, simply to build meaningful architecture: architecture achieves meaning only by accumulating social and historical meaning over time. For Ruskin, architecture includes not only the form and material substance of the buildings themselves but also the associations and memories that cluster around them. Obviously the “blood of old battles” is not something that inheres in actual structures, but rather a common historical experience that architecture makes available to the present in a very material way. However the future, as Ruskin acknowledges, is architectural as well; human exigency and ambition go to realize themselves in architecture. Oriented toward futurity, this new building threatens the associations that are contained in historical architecture. It might be understood as the material realization of human will in the world, and thus opposed to architecture understood in the Ruskinian sense as a primarily associational or memorial medium rather than a functional one. America occupies the first spot—and in many ways the primary one—in his imaginary list of empty places. Because American building dissociates the past and future spatially, it makes possible an ethical futurity, one that is not, as Ruskin says, “founded on ruin and prefaced with obliteration.” This imaginary emptiness elides the central problems of planning and building: not only the question of what should be built and what should not be built (American vastness promises that there will be limitless space for crass “indulgence” as for meaningful “progress”), but also the problem of the violence done to what already exists by the act of building.

Ruskin writes within a long tradition, both European and American, that understands the American landscape as an empty plane, ready to receive not only new kinds of building but also
new forms of government and society. In this way it could function, as it does for Ruskin, as a cultural release valve for an overcrowded and rapidly changing Europe, an open field for progress and democracy so that some continuity between past and present could be maintained. Yet this fantasy America could just as easily be invoked as a placeless justification for the violence of building that Ruskin sought to contain. In his 1833-4 *Sartor Resartus*, Thomas Carlyle follows Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* in universalizing America’s status as the imaginary site for new building.

‘America is here or nowhere’…The Situation that has not its Duty, its Ideal, was never yet occupied by man. Yes here, in this poor, miserable, hampered, despicable Actual, wherein thou even now standest, here or nowhere is thy Ideal: work it out therefrom; and working, believe, live, be free. Fool! The Ideal is in thyself, the impediment too is in thyself: thy Condition is but the stuff thou art to shape that same Ideal out of: what matters whether such stuff be of this sort or that, so the Form thou give it be heroic, be poetic? (149)

Not only place but substance is irrelevant; the shaping will regards the “despicable Actual” as mere “stuff,” “of this sort or that,” making everywhere like America—that is to say: chaotically unformed, positively requiring will to make it meaningful. Of course to say that “America is here or nowhere” is to reinforce, rather than to reject, the continent’s emblematic status as unformed space waiting for the shaping action of the human intellect. In fact, *Sartor* figures the young Teufelsdrockh’s battles with society and appearance as specifically American in their attempts to effect the ideal in the chaos of the real: “Call him, if you will, an American Backwoodsman, who had to fell unpenetrated forests, and battle with innumerable wolves, and did not entirely forbear strong liquor, rioting, and even theft; whom, notwithstanding, the peaceful Sower will follow, and, as he cuts the boundless harvest, bless” (136). “America is here or nowhere” means only that any place harbors a hidden ideal and thus is subject to the violence of building that must draw it out. The intellectual violence of Teufelsdrockh’s project, his “battle…rioting, and even theft,” can be justified in the eyes of a future that they will help to bring about. The fantasy image of America as tabula rasa that must be produced out of chaos by a violent ordering resolves the ethical tension not only between means and ends but also between present and future.

Carlyle’s American disciple and friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson, produced one classic American articulation of this idea in his 1836 “Nature”:

Nature is not fixed but fluid. Spirit alters, moulds, makes it. The immobility or bruteness of nature, is the absence of spirit; to pure spirit, it is fluid, it is volatile, it is obedient. Every spirit builds itself a house; and beyond its house a world; and beyond its world, a heaven. Know then, that the world exists for you....All that Adam had, all that Caesar could, you have and can do... Build, therefore, your own world. As fast as you conform your life to the pure idea in your mind, that will unfold its great proportions. (71)
The architectural rhetoric here is not at all adventitious; what Emerson is talking about is architecture—more specifically, a particularly architectural fantasy of the coordination of concept and execution, of plan and product. “Conform your life to the pure idea in your mind”—that is, build an ideal or mental plan out into the real, either in literal architecture or in some other form of action. For Emerson, the human will undoes nature as a stable configuration and makes it into “fluid, volatile, obedient” matter. Each act of human imagination that realizes itself in the world is a Godlike act of new creation. However, this new creation is one that also makes the world new again. For Emerson, true building or creation runs two of the great catastrophes in Western thought—the fall from Grace and the fall of prideful Caesar—in reverse. This is making as regeneration: in each act of making the human being approaches the state of primitive creation; in doing so, he or she both redeems and rewrites history, to the extreme extent that these two great parables of human hubris come to function not as warnings from the past but as models for the future. For Emerson, as for Carlyle, the world is American, and the individual mind dissolves both new and old worlds into the “stuff” out of which it will build the future.

David Nye locates Emerson squarely in the tradition of what he calls the “second creation” myth. In this nineteenth-century narrative, “Americans used new technologies not to overrun nature but to complete the design latent within it. The second creation, though man-made, was implicit within it” (10). However, we are most natural, in Emerson’s philosophy, when trying violently to supplant nature with our own visions. In his late essay “Wealth,” Emerson presents a vision of America as a nation of “speculators” fighting for dominance, pitting their visions of the future against one another:

Power is what they want…power to execute their design, power to give…form and actuality to their thought, which, to a clear-sighted man, appears the end for which the Universe exists….So the men of the mine, telegraph, mill, map, and survey,—the monomaniacs, who talk up their project in marts, and offices, and entreat men to subscribe: -- how did our factories get built? how did North America get netted with iron rails, except by the importunity of these orators, who dragged all the prudent men in?...This “speculative” genius is the madness of few for the gain of the world…Each of these idealists, working after his thought, would make it tyrannical, if he could. He is met and antagonized by other speculators, as hot as he. The equilibrium is preserved by these counteractions, as one tree keeps down another in the forest, that it may not absorb all the sap in the ground. (6: 93-94)

This is natural, but only in its all-consuming violence; “equilibrium is preserved” only by a careless striving for dominance. “[T]he end for which the universe exists” is not a distant progressive telos, but rather the mere inflicting of the individual will on the world. Here Emerson approaches what Richard Slotkin has influentially named the theme of “regeneration through violence” in American thought, in which a passive, even corrupt world is stirred to life and order.
through the violent reshaping of its substance by active individuals. If America, for Ruskin, represents a vastness that offers hope for a future without loss, for Carlyle and Emerson it offers precisely the opposite—a vision of a ubiquitous destruction that consumes all that exists in order to produce futurity.

Both Hawthorne and Dickens are cynical readers of Emersonian transcendentalism, emphasizing the violence and solipsism of its radical individualism. The energetic speculation celebrated by Emerson is identical to the endless scheming and swindling that Dickens condemns—in both America and England—throughout Chuzzlewit. The novel’s villains are those perfidious speculators who, like Emerson’s “monomaniacs,” “talk up their projects” and “drag[] all the prudent men in”—who care more for the realization of their own ambitions than for those unfortunate enough to get dragged in and ruined by them. Indeed, “Wealth” could be describing Martin’s swindling by the Eden land speculators. In Blithedale, Hawthorne is clearly in close dialogue with Emerson’s vision in “Nature,” but he emphasizes the chaos produced by the process of the human mind unmaking the world for its own purposes. When Coverdale, our narrator and a participant in the utopian community, describes the plans at work in the community, he describes not the making of a world but rather its apocalyptic unmaking:

In truth, it was dizzy work, amid such fermentation of opinions as was going on in the general brain of the Community… I was beginning to lose the sense of what kind of world it was, among innumerable schemes of what it might or ought to be. It was impossible, situated as we were, not to imbibe the idea that everything in nature and human existence was fluid, or fast becoming so; that the crust of the Earth, in many places, was broken, and its whole surface portentously upheaving; that it was a day of crisis, and that we ourselves were in the critical vortex. (140)

As Maura D’Amore notes, popular Fourierist writers in the 1840’s took issue with Emerson’s transcendentalist individualism, advocating instead a regeneration of civilization through collective reform (155-6). George Ripley, the founder of Brook farm (the community upon which Blithedale is modeled), was a member of the transcendentalist inner circle and had a close, if contentious, friendship with Emerson. In the Brook Farm experiment, Ripley attempted to reconcile his conflicting philosophical and practical leanings—an Emersonian belief in the necessary transformation of the individual and a communitarian belief in the transformation of society—using an essentially Fourierist template (Crowe, esp. ch. 6). For Coverdale, however, this awkward compromise amounts merely to a collection of Emersonian hyper-individuals, each with his or her own mutually incompatible project. There is no recognizable communal plan here; rather than building a common future that might reconcile the individual and the social, the Blithedalers are undoing whatever structures made that transaction imaginable previously. Coverdale discovers in Emerson’s rhetoric of fluidity an undercurrent of apocalyptic rupture,

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6 Kevin Rozario explicitly locates Emerson in an American tradition of thought that considered chaos and calamity to be progressive forces (64).
summoning up a vision very much like John Martin's images of the end of the world. Vertigo accompanies not vertical extension but rather the horizontal plan or plot; planning registers as a violence done to the supportive substrate of the earth. “The crust of the earth…was broken”—in a book very much concerned with the physical operations of farming, this is a distressing radicalization of the constructive action of the plow and hoe. Instead of shaping and forming the land by working it, the Blithedalers are unmaking it. “Second creation” and “regeneration through violence” become indistinguishable.

Dickens read Emerson’s first published collection of essays while he was in America, and gives a largely positive account of his writing in *American Notes*:

> [T]he Transcendentalists are followers of my friend Mr. Carlyle, or I should rather say, of a follower of his, Mr. Ralph Waldo Emerson. This gentleman has written a volume of Essays, in which, among much that is dreamy and fanciful…there is much more that is true and manly, honest and bold….And therefore if I were a Bostonian, I think I would be a Transcendentalist. (67)

However, *Chuzzlewit* revisits transcendentalism with much less generosity. Martin meets a set of “Transcendental” “literary ladies” who spout meaningless twaddle:

> 'Mind and matter,' said the lady in the wig, 'glide swift into the vortex of immensity. Howls the sublime, and softly sleeps the calm Ideal, in the whispering chambers of Imagination. To hear it, sweet it is. But then, outlaughs the stern philosopher, and saith to the Grotesque, "What ho! arrest for me that Agency. Go, bring it here!" And so the vision fadeth.' (513)

Even in this cosmos of nonsense, the “stern philosopher” is still in charge, though in this case the figure presides over a set of meaningless abstractions. The problem, for Dickens, is not transcendentalist vagueness and abstraction, but rather the intellectual disconnection and involution that this implies. Certainly “mind and matter” and “Imagination” are as large preoccupations for Dickens as for Emerson. Dickens, however, as countless scholars have noted, works through these big ideas in material and practical ways, and always in the context of a real social and economic world. The “stern philosopher” here floats in abstract space, cut off from the world, a monomaniac even more dangerous than those who haunt the markets.

II. PLANNING, DEMOCRACY, APARTNESS

Richard Rorty, in an essay on the deficiencies of philosophy and the virtues of fiction, calls Dickens “a sort of anti-Heidegger” (308). Philosophers like Heidegger and Nietzsche attempt to substitute one description of the world—and one vision for its future—for the plurality of viewpoints that obtain. Dickens’s deeply empathetic liberal-democratic fiction, on the other hand, seeks to chronicle and comprehend a multitude of perspectives. Dickens, according to
Rorty, presents human progress as a contingent and socially distributed striving toward happiness rather than the result of an individual thinker’s radical attempts to reconfigure society. In doing so, he offers not only a vision but an enactment of Rorty’s ideal democratic society: a pluralism in which a multiplicity of individual perspectives engenders empathy and understanding rather than violent disagreement.

In many ways, *Chuzzlewit* seems to correspond perfectly to Rorty’s model. Most obviously, the central moral arc of the novel involves its main character being shocked out of his selfishness and into an other-oriented sociality. This is, in *Chuzzlewit*, as much an epistemological problem as an ethical one: though he depends almost totally upon others, Martin imagines himself a lone doer. In “Self-Reliance,” which Dickens read in 1842, Emerson declares, “It is only as a man puts off all foreign support, and stands alone, that I see him to be strong and to prevail…Is not a man better than a town?” (184). In *Chuzzlewit*, this question is rendered nonsensical; a man, in essential ways, is a town. Dickens describes Martin’s recognition of his selfishness in Eden with an ambiguous urban metaphor: “With Hope so far removed, Ambition quenched, and Death beside him rattling at the very door, reflection came, as in a plague-beleaguered town; and so he felt and knew the failing of his life, and saw distinctly what an ugly spot it was” (497). The ambiguity of the central metaphor makes it difficult to locate the site of Martin’s consciousness: the “plague-beleaguered town” might be Eden, but it might just as easily be Martin himself. This indeterminacy seems, in context, pointed: to be in the town is to be the town, to acknowledge that one’s selfhood is social in its very essence. In Eden he must come to understand not so much his moral lapses as the essentially interdependent nature of his life. Soon after he arrives in Eden, Martin develops a terrible fever and is cared for by his servant-cum-business-partner Mark Tapley, then must care for Mark when he falls ill in turn.

If any one had taxed him with the vice [of selfishness], he would have indignantly repelled the accusation, and conceived himself unworthily aspersed. He never would have known it, but that being newly risen from a bed of dangerous sickness, to watch by such another couch, he felt how nearly Self had dropped into the grave, and what a poor dependent, miserable thing it was. It was natural for him to reflect—he had months to do it in...Then the curtain slowly rose a very little way; and Self, Self, Self, was shown below. (497)

The “self” upon which Emerson exhorts us to rely is identical with this sad “Self, Self, Self.” Martin discovers here that self is not the autonomous basis of a will that shapes the world, but rather a “poor, dependent, miserable thing,” the object of social pity and the recipient of social support. Because Dickens appears to suggest that the human non-Self will survive death, we might think of it as the soul. It is significant, though, that Dickens himself avoids the word here. In fact, according to the logic of Martin’s moral epiphany, this non-self is too decentered to correspond to the classic conception of the soul. This human non-self might be described as the social person, the person that is capable of acknowledging his or her interdependence with others.
At the core of the pernicious Self are its plans for the future, its fantasies about shaping the world and dictating the course of events. When Martin arrives in Eden and discovers that his plans are failures in advance of themselves, he weeps helplessly, causing the narrator to remark that “[m]any a man who would have stood within a home dismantled, strong in his passion and design of vengeance, has had the firmness of his nature conquered by the razing of an air-built castle” (361). The destruction of real architecture would allow for a response that conserves the self’s centrality. Indeed, it would trigger a “design of vengeance”—that is, a plan that supplements the lost building with the prospect of its symbolic restitution through future violence, and thus promises to instantiate the self even more fully in the world. The destruction of planned architecture, however, unmans (we might more accurately say “unselves”) the architect, disrupting plans that are nothing more than solipsistic attempts to claim and control the future.

The incantation of “self, self, self” reechoes in old Martin’s own attempts to rule the plot of the novel by controlling others with his own plots. He bemoans the avariciousness of his family, accusing them again and again of forming selfish “plots,” “schemes,” and “designs” to gain hold of his fortune. “A new plot; a new plot! Oh self, self, self! At every turn nothing but self!’…Oh self, self, self! Every man for himself, and no creature for me!” (51). The irony of old Martin’s complaints is obvious and pointed; he is the most selfish of all, and exists the least for others. At the end of the novel, he confesses that his disowning of his grandson was prompted by a disappointed “design” he had to marry Martin to his nurse Mary. Of course this is precisely what young Martin has wanted all along, and what constitutes the entire trajectory of the novel’s central plot. The problem is that young Martin fell in love with Mary quite outside of the old man’s plotting; that is, that old Martin’s plan was rendered unnecessary. Old Martin relates “How in the first dawn of this design…Martin had come to tell him that he had already chosen for himself….How it was little comfort to him to know that Martin had chosen Her, because the grace of his design was lost” (755). Old Martin’s violence is, surprisingly, as much a question of artistic planning as of emotional insecurity: at the end, we discover that the motivation for the novel’s entire plot was not, as it might easily have been, old Martin’s jealousy or family pride, but rather a desire to effect by himself and for himself the romance plot that his grandson had already set in action. The ends here are irrelevant; old Martin’s only concern is “the grace of his design.”

In *Blithedale*, it is Zenobia, the novel’s Margaret Fuller character, who wakes up to the destructive selfishness of her love interest, the philanthropist Hollingsworth. Hollingsworth has been hoping to co-opt the community for his own plan for building an institution for the regeneration of criminals. Hollingsworth is a nightmare version of the Emersonian “monomaniac,” a being in whom pure will has erased all other motives. Emerson’s “self-sufficing, and therefore self-relying soul,” (“Self-Reliance” 176) becomes, in Zenobia’s description of Hollingsworth, “a cold, heartless, self-beginning and self-ending piece of mechanism!” (218). The revelation scene in *Blithedale* is so similar to the moral epiphany in *Chuzzlewit*, both in its orientation around the central incantation of “self, self, self” and in its
basic moral message, that it seems to me almost certain that Hawthorne is responding to the
earlier novel.

"With what, then, do you charge me!" asked Hollingsworth, aghast, and greatly disturbed by
this attack." Show me one selfish end, in all I ever aimed at, and you may cut it out of my
bosom with a knife!"
"It is all self!" answered Zenobia with still intenser bitterness. "Nothing else; nothing but self,
self, self! ...I see it now! I am awake, disenchanted, disenthralled! Self, self, self! You have
embodied yourself in a project.” (218)

Zenobia’s damming characterization of Hollingsworth provides us with an admirably apposite
name for the process we have been describing. Hollingsworth, like Emerson’s monomaniacs and
Chuzzlewit’s scheming architects, has sought to “embod[y] [him]self in a project,” to create so
perfect a correspondence between his internal ideal and the objects he hopes to produce that
there ceases to be a meaningful distinction between the two. Indeed, Hollingsworth is, like
Martin, not only a dreamer but an aspiring architect, and his solipsism evinces itself above in the
struggle for material embodiment:

His visionary edifice was Hollingsworth's one castle in the air; it was the material type in
which his philanthropic dream strove to embody itself; and he made the scheme more
definite, and caught hold of it the more strongly, and kept his clutch the more pertinaciously,
by rendering it visible to the bodily eye. I have seen him, a hundred times, with a pencil and
sheet of paper, sketching the facade, the side-view, or the rear of the structure, or planning
the internal arrangements....I have known him to begin a model of the building with little
stones, gathered at the brookside, whither we had gone to cool ourselves in the sultry noon of
haying-time. (56)

Hollingsworth, again, is obsessed not merely with his plan for the future but with its capacity to
“embody” his will. Even the plan must be made as tangible and as complete as possible; the
mind that stretches out to the real world to shape and mold it must have the image of its
satisfaction in front of it as much as possible. Hollingsworth wants to negate as fully as possible
the distance between plan and completion, and to deny others any chance to intercede in the
project in which his will has thoroughly embodied itself.

These novels condemn the selfishness of the plan and the solipsism of planners in favor
of a recognition of the essentially social nature of the self. In that sense, they appear to
correspond to Rorty’s characterization of the novel as a machine for generating sympathy and
social connection. Yet the correspondence is perhaps not so straightforward as it may seem.
Chuzzlewit and Blithedale are both ambivalent about what constitutes meaningful social
connection and where, precisely, the novel might stand in relation to its production. Dickens’s
own explicit statement of purpose for Chuzzlewit declares an aim that is kindred, but certainly
not identical, to that attributed to it by Rorty—not the production of democratic fellowship, but the castigation of its antithesis. “The main object in *Chuzzlewit*,” as Dickens writes in the Preface to the 1850 edition, is “to exhibit in a variety of aspects the commonest of all the vices; to show how selfishness propagates itself” (xlii [in Random House Ed.]). *Chuzzlewit* does not so much teach its readers empathy as confront them with its lack.

In one sense it might seem inexplicable to write a book about selfishness and choose architects for its subject matter. Why not, say, bankers? In another, though, it makes perfect sense. Architecture for Dickens is synechdochic, as it is for Emerson, for all kinds of plans, for will that attempts to impose itself on the world. In order to create a design that is only a set of graphical instructions for a future object, the architect assumes a position of prescriptive apartness. The architect produces visual abstractions of future objects that cannot accommodate—literally have no means of representing in conventionalized graphical terms—the actual social uses to which these objects will be put by their inhabitants. As Alfonso Martinez puts it, the graphical design process cuts architects off from “the world of inhabitants…the people who will live in their buildings…the world they have left to be trained as creators of new objects” (xvi). In other words, architecture’s solipsism may be something inherent to the plan in its most basic operation.

For Rorty, this apartness is an essential part of the Western philosophical project that he contrasts with the social engagement of Dickens’s fiction. The “ascetic priest” imagines the philosophical endeavor in spatial and architectural terms, as a place outside of and apart from the extant that accommodates a particular kind of thinking. Rorty writes that Heidegger “is opting out of the struggles of his fellow humans by making his mind its own place” (311). Rorty frames this Heideggerian separation as demonic, echoing Satan’s declaration of the radical independence of the intellect from *Paradise Lost*: “The mind is its own place, and in it self/ Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n” (I: ln. 254-55). We should take this sentence in both of its senses: both that Heidegger imagines his mind as a place that can be separated from other minds and that he constructs an imaginary place for his mind, like St. Augustine’s City of God (or Pandemonium), from which he can look on and judge culture. Nietzsche makes this even more literal, fantasizing about a future architecture of apartness that will reinvent the monastic spaces of Christian separateness for atheistic philosophy. In his “Architecture for the Perceptive” fragment in his *Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes:

I do not see how we could remain content with [Christian] buildings even if they were stripped of their churchly purposes. The language spoken by these buildings is far too rhetorical and unfree, reminding us that they are houses of God and ostentatious monuments of some supramundane intercourse; we who are godless could not think our thoughts in such surroundings. *We wish to see ourselves translated into stone and plants, we want to take walks in ourselves when we stroll around these buildings and gardens.* (227, emphasis added)

Nietzsche demands a new building for philosophy, or rather presents philosophy as a mental operation that requires a new building in order to take place properly. This is architecture understood as adequation between self and world. In the radical form proposed by Nietzsche, this would be a translation of the thinking self into architecture, yielding a perfect correspondence between space and practice that would in turn allow for a transformative new thought. We

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insists upon an engagement with the social world, using a rhetoric of spatial conjoining. As he writes in a letter to Wilkie Collins, “Everything that happens…shows beyond mistake that you can’t shut out the world; that you are in it, to be of it; that you get yourself into a false position the moment you try to sever yourself from it…” (September 6, 1858, qtd. Marlow 132).

This exhortation depends, of course, upon what we understand to be “the world,” and who we understand to inhabit it along with us. In Rorty’s sense, “the world” would be the ever-increasing democratic polis, which is constantly being added to by, among other things, the fiction of authors like Dickens. Yet Dickens, in his confrontation with American democracy, understands it to be fatally and fundamentally flawed—in need not of a moderate corrective but of a radical alternative. The main problem with America, for Dickens, is that it lacks not people but rather “the people.” There is no viable public, no coherent populace to make sensible decisions according to a democratic vision of collective rule. Jerome Meckier claims that “Dickens found democracy a leveling downward, a movement away from intellect and social grace towards…an uncouth sameness” (272); Schwarzbach similarly claims that Dickens portrayed Americans as “perfectly interchangeable in almost every respect. Individuality was simply gone” (87). These accounts ignore, however, the even more prevalent elevation of individuals to a condition of quasi-aristocratic exception. When Martin attends his first dinner in New York, he finds that there are:

“No fewer than four majors present, two colonels, one general, and a captain, so that he could not help thinking how strongly officered the American militia must be; and wondering very much whether the officers commanded each other; or if they did not, where on earth the privates came from. There seemed to be no man there without a title; for those who had not attained to military honours were either doctors, professors, or reverends. (265)

Martin wonders “where on earth the privates came from;” that is, where one might find the elusive demos. In a recurring joke, each new acquaintance that Martin makes in the United States is introduced to him as “one of the most remarkable men in the country.” Dickens nearly always associates these “remarkable” individuals with the macabre operations of American politics. One of them, the repulsive journalist Jefferson Brick,

'[F]elt it necessary, at the last election for President, to repudiate and denounce his father, who voted on the wrong interest. He has since written some powerful pamphlets, under the signature of "Suturb," or Brutus reversed. He is one of the most remarkable men in our country, sir.'

'There seem to be plenty of 'em,' thought Martin, 'at any rate.' (265)
Brick dissolves the most essential social bond (parent-child) in favor of an incoherent party politics which, as Dickens does not provide us with any details of the politics involved, registers as mindless antagonism. Martin’s mental aside reminds us of the central joke—that Brick is just one of a seemingly infinite number of “remarkable men,” that the democratic polis of America is composed of people, like Brick, who are understood to be exceptions to it. “[T]he only members of the party who did not appear to be among the most remarkable people in the country” are some of the quieter women, who are “strangely devoid of individual traits of character, insomuch that any one of them might have changed minds with the other, and nobody would have found it out” (265). Americans are either remarkable or invisible, possessed either of a violent excess of individualism or a profound lack. The problem of democracy in America is the problem of arranging productive political discourse in a land composed entirely of exceptions and nonentities (or exceptions who are nonentities). Dickens sees an America in which radical individualism has produced a state of persistent incommensurateness between persons, while failing at the same time to produce the kind of meaningful disagreement that might make real political discourse possible. With an antagonistic collection of remarkable individuals rather than a public, even something like Chantal Muffé’s agonistic pluralism (much less a model of communitarian fellowship) seems unthinkable. The irresponsible and violent partisan democracy of America proceeds by the collision of intentions rather than by productive communal labor, like Emerson’s vision of the economy in “Wealth,” in which an “equilibrium” among antagonistic “monomaniacs” is maintained only by constant warfare. If, for Emerson, economic tyranny is avoided only by constant tyrannicide, the “remarkable” Jefferson Brick is more than ready, with his pamphlets by “Suturb,” to wield Brutus’s knife (one might get, as Emerson promises, “all that Caesar had” indeed). Like Hawthorne’s Brook Farm, Chuzzlewit’s America is a communal project with no community—a collection of planners with separate plans, whose solipsism prevents them from agreeing or even linking these plans together.

Political antagonism without rational argument, univocality without empathy: Dickens’s America is a nightmare of Rortyean political life. Worse, however, is the prospect of the actualization of Rorty’s dream of a universal American-style democracy, a system with no outside. Dickens’s response to this problem takes a curious turn; the solution Chuzzlewit proposes to the problem of planning’s solipsism derives from the temporal fluidity of the plans it so strongly decries. The failed plan provides a way to imagine meaningful difference within a democracy apparently designed to quell it.

III. On Planning

In order to understand Chuzzlewit’s and Blithedale’s interest in the danger and potential of the architectural plan—as opposed to architecture itself—we must understand what a plan is, and why it is distinct from other kinds of making. Most fundamentally: architects do not make buildings, not really. Builders make buildings. Unlike painters, sculptors, and writers, architects do not create things, but rather plans for things. The realization of their plans is always deferred
to an indefinite future. According to Marco Frascari, “The role of architects is to produce design, an act of graphical magic, a kind of divining that describes a future built event” (qtd. Martinez xiv). This drawing still “describes” an object; its peculiar situation upsets not the relations of resemblance that obtain between the artwork and its object, but rather the order of operations that otherwise would govern that resemblance. “Drawing in architecture is not done after nature, but prior to construction; it is not so much produced by reflection on the reality outside the drawing, as productive of a reality that will end up outside the drawing. The logic of classical realism is stood on its head” (Evans 165). Though realistic representation always transforms its objects, it relies upon the understanding that at least some version of these objects exists outside of and prior to their representation. The architectural plan, however, precedes and produces the object it represents. The plan is projective, both in its status as graphical projection and in its necessary orientation toward futurity.

Except it does not always, or perhaps even generally, work so seamlessly. Both *Chuzzlewit* and *Blithedale* are interested in the plan’s indeterminacy, its capacity to waver between representation and fantasy, prediction and fraud. The strange temporality of architectural work and the essential distinction that obtains between plans and products opens up an epistemological gap between the present and the possible. In these novels, the plan is often associated as much with hypocrisy as with solipsistic ambition. *Martin Chuzzlewit*, in particular, appears to generalize its critique of architecture to a critique of the gap between planning and execution. In *Chuzzlewit*, hypocrisy is repeatedly characterized not only as a performance that attempts to obscure selfishness behind a righteous facade, but also as indefinitely deferred action. This brand of hypocrisy conveniently dispenses with things as they are by recourse to a promised future. Pecksniff’s detractors, we are told, find a curious resemblance between the architect and his horse, “in his moral character, wherein, said they, he was full of promise, but of no performance. He was always in a manner, going to go, and never going” (71). America, for Dickens, inflates this Pecksniffian strategy into a national principle. When Martin goes to purchase his stake in the Eden scheme, he finds only a disappointingly dirty and cramped shack. However, this shack is just a placeholder, a promise of what will later be: “It was but a temporary office too; for the Edeners were 'going' to build a superb establishment for the transaction of their business, and had already got so far as to mark out the site. Which is a great way in America” (339). Clearly this building will never be built, as almost none of the buildings in the planned city it advertises will be built. It exists only as a tantalizing possibility, a future marked out that may—but never will—be attained. This is not only a “great way,” but the only way, in Dickens’s America.

The Eden scam is predicated upon plans being interchangeable with descriptive drawings. General Choke tells Martin to “see the maps and plans, sir; and conclude to go or stay, according to the natur’ of the settlement” (334). The paper plan attains the status not merely of representation but of evidence:
'Heyday!' cried Martin, as his eye rested on a great plan which occupied one whole side of the office. Indeed, the office had little else in it, but some geological and botanical specimens, one or two rusty ledgers, a homely desk, and a stool. 'Heyday! what's that?'

'That's Eden,' said Scadder…

'Why, I had no idea it was a city.'

'Hadn't you? Oh, it's a city.'

A flourishing city, too! An architectural city! There were banks, churches, cathedrals, market-places, factories, hotels, stores, mansions, wharves; an exchange, a theatre; public buildings of all kinds...all faithfully depicted in the view before them.

'Dear me! It's really a most important place!' cried Martin turning round.

'Oh! it's very important,' observed the agent.

'But, I am afraid,' said Martin, glancing again at the Public Buildings, 'that there's nothing left for me to do.'

'Well! it ain't all built,' replied the agent. 'Not quite.' (341)

Martin does not simply mistake the representation for the thing itself, or a sham object for a genuine one. The genius of the Eden scam is that it does not require any actual fraud, only the plan’s ability to be taken both for a representation of an object and as an unrealized framework into which an ambitious person like Martin can insert himself. The plan is dangerously protean: on one hand, it “proves” Eden’s existence (“I had no idea it was a city”), while on the other it allows Martin to imagine his own buildings taking their places within it. Its victim is, of course, himself a creator of plans, someone who might reasonably be expected to know better. The fact that he does not suggests that producing plans is no guarantee against seduction by them, and that those most comfortable within the in-between world of the “going to” are also those most vulnerable to the false futures of others. Seth Pecksniff and, later, Jonah Chuzzlewit both lose their fortunes in speculative scams that blow up in their faces. Even the corrupt Eden land agents have themselves been scammed by the unnamed architect who produced the plan originally: “[N]ever mind whose work it is, or isn't,' said the agent sulkily....P'raps he cleared off, handsome, with a heap of dollars” (342). The plan serves no master; though it may certainly be used a tool of deception, it cannot be said to be the means of working one individual’s will in the world. Even while critiquing the link between planning and unhealthy personal ambition, Dickens identifies in the plan a mutability and excessiveness that suggests it might never be quite at the service of any individual.
Clearly the indeterminacy of the plan constitutes a basic part of the satire to which both of these novels subject utopian planners and futurist scammers—Pecksniff, after all, is an architect who never builds anything, a hypocrite who never follows through. There is something both comical and pathological about the plan that never nears completion and the architect whose projects are merely pretexts. Yet a “finished” building is by no means a guarantor of a sound project, as the Anglo-Bengalee insurance fraud in London amply demonstrates. Montague Tigg, a drifter and grifter, carries out a Ponzi scheme through a bogus life insurance business whose main advertisement is the solidity and finish of its offices, located:

[I]n a new street in the City, comprising the upper part of a spacious house resplendent in stucco and plate-glass, with wire-blinds in all the windows, and 'Anglo-Bengalee' worked into the pattern of every one of them…Within, the offices were newly plastered, newly painted, newly papered, newly countered, newly floor-clothed, newly tabled, newly chaired, newly fitted up in every way, with goods that were substantial and expensive, and designed (like the company) to last…Solidity! Look at the massive blocks of marble in the chimney-pieces, and the gorgeous parapet on the top of the house! (410-11)

Nick Yablon persuasively links Dickens’s unflattering representations of untimely American ruins to his descriptions of ruinous American financial institutions whose banknotes are underwritten by nothing more than empty promises (75-81). Yet the novel’s most impressive fraud is British. As many scholars have noted, the Anglo-Bengalee is Eden’s much slicker but equally ruthless metropolitan sister. Underwritten, like Eden, by empty promises of colonial limitlessness (a nonexistent estate in Bengal serves as collateral for the business), the Anglo-Bengalee is just as vacant as Eden, and its investors actually worse off; after all, Martin does actually own fifty acres of real land in Eden, while shares in the Anglo-Bengalee correspond to nothing at all. Tigg recounts how he realized that, “provided we did it on a sufficiently large scale, we could furnish an office and make a show, without any money at all” (409). The building’s high degree of finish is an inversion without difference of the fraudulently unfinished buildings in America, rendering architectural finish and presence utterly meaningless. Presence is the biggest fraud of all, and the plan, for all of its immateriality and mutability, is less dangerous than this ostentatiously “substantial” building.

The operative distinction in *Chuzzlewit*, then, is not so much between the possible and the actual as between the failed plan and the completed one. For Dickens, failure is the open sesame of utopian possibility; he imagines a kind of salvage law as applying to the ruins of projected futures, making their contents available for redistribution among those whose present is insufficient. The weird temporality of the plan opens up a potential for difference in a system with no outside. Particularly in America, a kind of participatory social and political activity becomes conceivable in the failure of the monomaniacal projects that the nation’s remarkable men compulsively generate. For Dickens, Washington D.C. is a fitting capital for the United
States, if only in the sense that it is as preposterously overblown and underperforming as everything else in the country. In his *American Notes*, he writes:

> It is sometimes called the City of Magnificent Distances, but it might with greater propriety be termed the City of Magnificent Intentions; for it is only on taking a bird's-eye view of it from the top of the Capitol, that one can at all comprehend the vast designs of its projector, an aspiring Frenchman. Spacious avenues, that begin in nothing, and lead nowhere; streets, mile-long, that only want houses, roads and inhabitants; public buildings that need but a public to be complete...are its leading features....To the admirers of cities it is a Barmecide Feast: a pleasant field for the imagination to rove in; a monument raised to a deceased project, with not even a legible inscription to record its departed greatness. (129-30)

The American capital is, like the rest of the country, ruinous before it is completed. As in the rest of the country, this ruination is produced by the empty ambition of plans that cannot, and perhaps were never meant to be, realized. A “city of magnificent intentions,” it promises more than it can ever accomplish; a “monument raised to a deceased project,” it is dead rather than in-process. It has the infrastructure for democracy but not its economic and social content; it has streets without people or houses, public buildings without a public. The “aspiring Frenchman,” as Dickens sniffily calls him, is Pierre L’Enfant, whose ambitious plan for the capital city was only partially complete by the time of Dickens’s writing.
As Nick Yablons shows, Dickens writes from within a European-American discourse that struggled to reconcile Enlightenment schemas of imperial progress and decline with the newness of American cities and their “unnaturally” rapid and volatile development. The repeated booms and busts of speculation led to a landscape littered with half-completed structures. This in turn led to an unhitching of the rhetoric of ruin from an experience of deep time, allowing visitors to comprehend partially realized speculative cities as ruinous rather than incomplete (75).

Washington is the example par excellence of this fact.

Yet this is by no means the only English response. Frances Trollope, for example, whose popular American travelogue Dickens read before his own tour, was excited by the spectacle of becoming that Washington presented:

I was delighted with the whole aspect of Washington; light, cheerful, and airy….It has been laughed at by foreigners…because the original plan of the city was upon an enormous scale, and but a very small part of it has been as yet executed. But I confess I see nothing in the least degree ridiculous about it; the original design, which was as beautiful as it was extensive, has been in no way departed from…the appearance of the metropolis rising gradually into life and splendor, is a spectacle of high historic interest. (164-5)

Trollope is delighted by the city rising into being according to plan; she sees simply an incomplete, but whole, intention, gradually being brought to fruition. Trollope’s commitment to the integrality of the developing plan is key to understanding Dickens’s departure from her description: for Trollope, the plan is still exclusively L’Enfant’s, has “in no way departed from” his original idea.
For Dickens, however, understanding the city as untimely ruin opens up possibilities beyond L’Enfant’s intention. America’s untimely ruins are, for Dickens, not merely disastrous failures. They are also sites at which the speculative plans that produced them open themselves up to participation from outside. Washington is a “pleasant field for the imagination to rove in”; like the depictions of Rome whose eighteenth-century depictions so often feature tourists walking leisurely among the city’s ancient ruins, Dickens’s characterization of Washington disengages the city’s plan from the business of governance and capital, refiguring it as a quasi-natural leisure space. Dickens shifts the balance of imaginative power in favor of the spectator and thus to some degree redistributes intention to the broader public from the monopolism of the architect. The viewer has access to L’Enfant’s vision here—can “comprehend” its framework and fill it up with his or her own houses and people—but is not subordinated to it. Dickens’s lost “republic of the imagination” is, to some degree, restored here.

The most important of the deceased projects in Chuzzlewit is, of course, Eden. Rodney Edgecombe identifies a revisionist pastoral operating in Chuzzlewit, in which the originary garden is not something to be recovered but rather something to be worked towards and instantiated in the urban and the modern (383). The pastoral may, as Edgecombe argues, be a mode that Blithedale rediscovers in urban London. It is certainly not, however, available as part of a straightforward process of planning. Indeed, Eden is a powerful satire of the ideal of regeneration through planning or building. As proof of his honesty as a proprietor of the planned community of Eden, the corrupt General Choke asks: “Would I, with my principles, invest capital in this speculation if I didn't think it full of hopes and chances for my brother man?’…’What are the Great United States for, sir,’…’if not for the regeneration of man?’” (334). The General presents America, and specifically the planned community, as the site of a regenerative return to nature, a species of Nye’s “second creation” in which humanity will redeem both itself and fallen creation by constructive acts of will. The plan here promises a utopian future that is also a return to an originary purity.

Dickens modeled Eden on Cairo, Illinois, a planned city whose proprietors hooked investors (including, to Dickens’s great indignation, English investors) with famously overblown prospectuses. In American Notes, Dickens visits Cairo and is thoroughly disgusted: the city is “vaunted in England as a mine of Golden Hope, and speculated in, on the faith of monstrous representations, to many people’s ruin.” It is “A dismal swamp, on which the half-built houses rot away” (190). Cairo’s ruination of its investors is literalized in the city’s status as half-built ruin. Yet its fictional double is, however much the perfidious General Choke may think he is lying, a site for “the regeneration of man.” Eden is, in its perverse way, a utopia, in which the extinguishing of personal ambitions produces a version of the classless America that might have been. As a speculative plan, Eden provides a site both geographically and conceptually apart from the everyday operations of American society; as a failed plan, this apartness becomes available for purposes other than those imagined by its projectors. Yablon argues that Dickens’s American critics were able to see half-built speculative cities like Cairo as containing future
promise, while Dickens himself could only see them as ruins (105). It is precisely as ruins, however, that Dickens saw their potential.

Eden is a radical rebuke to the political and economic antagonism of American culture. It strips away not, as Choke would have it, the vices of civilization, but rather the monomaniacal ambition that claims nature as its model and mirror. In extinguishing the individual’s striving toward futurity, Eden represents a model of unselfish cooperation and mutual aid. Dickens represents Eden’s culture of assistance not as pragmatic association for mutual benefit, but rather as altruistic helping. Though Martin has done nothing at all to merit their help, the other inhabitants of Eden, “regardless of themselves, attended him” (495) in his worst sickness. In helping, these people are “regardless of themselves”; incurring risk counter to their own interests, they are beyond the selfishness that dominates the world outside of Eden. The extremely poor settlers of the place drop everything to help Martin:

They had some medicine in their chest; and this man of sad experience showed Mark how and when to administer it, and how he could best alleviate the sufferings of Martin. His attentions did not stop there; for he was backwards and forwards constantly, and rendered Mark good service in all his brisk attempts to make their situation more endurable. Hope or comfort for the future he could not bestow. The season was a sickly one; the settlement a grave. His child died that night. (488)

This man cannot bestow hope, but he can and will bestow aid and labor—even, as this passage implies, potentially to the detriment of his own family. Goodness, we discover in the Eden segment, is to labor for one another not only without selfishness but also without hope. Martin—and not only Martin but every other ambitious migrant who has come to Eden to make his or her fortune—must submit to the discipline of hopelessness in order to discover the virtue of communal labor. In Eden, not only ambition but all hope for the future is “quenched.” Even Mark “looked on their condition as beyond all hope” (490). Yet as soon as both Mark and Martin have recovered, they assist the other inhabitants in their sad attempts at farming and living: “They helped each other after their own manner in these struggles, and in all others; but they worked as hopelessly and sadly as a gang of convicts in a penal settlement” (499).

This profound hopelessness is, perversely, Eden’s real redemptive force. Though the novel has often been read as a Christian allegory, the redemptive power of hopelessness sits uneasily in a conventional Christian framework that regards hope as one of the theological virtues and a requirement for the salvation of the soul (one must be hopeful if one truly believes in the redemptive capacity of Jesus’s act of sacrifice). Eden is much closer to the Inferno’s motto of “Abandon All Hope” than to Christ’s gospel of redemption. As Martin and Mark near Eden, they enter a space that explicitly signals moral allegory: “As they proceeded further on their track, and came more and more towards their journey’s end, the monotonous desolation of the scene increased to that degree, that for any redeeming feature it presented to their eyes, they might have entered, in the body, on the grim domains of Giant Despair” (360). In Pilgrim’s
Progress, Christian and Hopeful are able to flee the Giant Despair’s realm by using a key called Promise (emblematic of Christ’s promise to sinners to redeem them from death) to open the doors of the castle and escape. There is, however, no such sense of hopeful promise in Martin and Mark’s escape. Pilgrim’s Progress ends with Hopeful helping Christian over the river of death to reach the Celestial City. The American segment of Chuzzlewit ends with Martin’s pathologically cheerful (though as stoically void of hope as Diderot’s Jacques the Fatalist) servant Mark helping him over the Atlantic to London, not—following the Bunyan parallel to its logical conclusion—to the dreamed-of Celestial City but to the nightmarish City of Destruction from which Christian started on his journey. In Pilgrim’s Progress, hope for a better state is perhaps the central theological principle; in Chuzzlewit, it is the thing that must be gotten over. “We left home on a mad enterprise, and have failed. The only hope left us, the only end for which we have now to try, is to quit this settlement for ever, and get back to England” (498). “The only hope left” is the strict inversion and perfect canceling-out of their previous hopes, an ignominious return to the old world without having achieved anything in the new.

Later Martin, in speaking of his American experience, will slightly qualify his earlier pronouncements of hopelessness: his condition in Eden was only “almost hopelessness and despair” (626) and “almost hopeless circumstances” (715). This slight qualification, while it certainly mischaracterizes the depths to which Martin sank in Eden, does accurately describe his condition for the rest of the novel. “Almost hopelessness” is, it would appear, the state of the redeemed man. This not-quite-despair is regress rather than progress, a chastened and penitent return to the past rather than a hope for the future. Instead of finding a way to make a living himself, his new hope is to return to beg his grandfather to help him: “I came resolved to say this, and to ask your forgiveness; not so much in hope for the future, as in regret for the past; for all that I would ask of you is, that you would aid me to live” (628). Even after his return, Martin does not cling to “hope for the future,” only “regret for the past.”

We might understand not only America, but also the whole course of Martin’s story, as a “deceased project.” As Eden’s disastrous failure erases individual interests and creates a morally productive community of hopelessness, so Martin’s failed ambitions create a truer and more honest community around him. Beginning with his grandfather, Martin reactivates his social network, applying to friends he had disregarded or offended for help. Community, which he had

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8 For a consideration of Dickens’s use of the English religious literary tradition in his figurations of urban spaces, see Alexander Welsh, The City of Dickens.

9 For this reason, Martin Chuzzlewit may be the only Dickens novel in which the young hero is not disciplined by entering into a profession and making a living. Indeed, young Martin nearly ruins himself in attempting to find honest work: even his doomed attempt to buy into Eden is less a land speculation than a strategic bid to secure steady work by being the only architect in the new city. We must not forget that Martin is an economic migrant, and that his hopeless wanderings are increasingly desperate attempts to find honest employment. Martin Chuzzlewit turns the moral economy of Great Expectations, Little Dorrit, and Our Mutual Friend inside out: Martin’s accession to inherited fortune allows the novel to remove him from his ethically suspect profession. It is unclear whether Martin, even at the end of the novel, ever returns to architecture, or indeed ever works again.
spurned in his earlier arrogance, is readmitted to the ruins of his life. The social, we begin to see, might from a certain angle be understood as a sedimentation of failed plans. Even in the dense, apparently stable heart of London, we find a social world composing itself around monuments to deceased projects.

Dorothy Van Ghent's extremely influential essay “The View From Todgers's” has set the tone for several generations of scholars interested in the threatening materiality of Dickens's novelistic world. Van Ghent sees in *Chuzzlewit*'s London scenes a world dissolved into nauseating thingness, a world in which everything must be mentioned because nothing in itself has a definite meaning. For Van Ghent, the Dickensian comic grotesque is merely a compensatory strategy to assert some control over an object world that has become monstrous through its lack of meaningful plan or order. This is, essentially, the dark obverse of Rorty's characterization of Dickens as anti-philosopher; without recourse to an order that is external to it, the given or apparent world is in danger of losing all of its coherence and dissolving into a nightmare of disconnected objects.

However, the view from Todgers's isn't totally disordered, and the neighborhood around it isn't quite labyrinthine. It is presided over by the Monument, which organizes its entire neighborhood as the most visible landmark. The view from Todgers’s certainly encompasses a host of unruly objects, but above all it includes, “upon the house-tops, stretching far away, a long dark path; the shadow of the Monument” (133). The Monument’s shadow, ambiguously menacing as it is, also provides a “path,” a clear visual line of passage through the labyrinthine scene. This Monument is, like half-built Washington, very much a “monument to a deceased project.” Designed by Christopher Wren and Robert Hooke as a monument to the Great Fire of London, it summons up the presence of Wren's famous unbuilt plan for London, which would have seen much of the city rebuilt after the fire along grand avenues and plazas (fittingly, Wren’s plan was one of L’Enfant’s models for his grand design for Washington D.C.).

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10 And also, perhaps, for Eden--Wren’s plan is orderly but not quite gridded; its main streets radiate out in spiderweb patterns from a network of piazzas, a configuration that Phiz echoes in his illustration of Eden in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. 

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In this sense, Dickens’s London is haunted by a phantom coherence, an absent great plan. The plan would have remade the central part of the city almost entirely, eradicating old streets and thoroughfares, ignoring old property lines and building lots. Though the fire had already destroyed or damaged the majority of the buildings in the area of the plan, Wren’s plan would have entailed destroying what remained and, more drastically, fundamentally altering the layouts of the city’s streets and neighborhoods. Had it been instituted, the plan would have displaced the survivors and disrupted whatever social relationships the city’s original layout made possible. As a failure, however, its Monument provides a highly necessary coherence, an object and a site around which to arrange spatial and social relationships.\(^{11}\)

Julian Wolfreys takes issue with Van Ghent’s characterization of the novel’s urban disorder as traumatic, seeing in it instead an impressionistic subjectivity that makes possible “an awareness of other subjectivities” (181), precisely in its labyrinthine indeterminacy. In a sense, Wolfreys is echoing in a phenomenological register Conners’s defense of the social potential of “incoherent” urban space. In the end, though, people have to be able to find one another in order for a novel, or social life itself, to happen. Wolfreys may be right, in some metaphysical sense, that “knowing where the Monument is will not save you” (157). In a practical sense, though, it will, and does. Though we are told that the neighborhood surrounding Todgers’s is completely impenetrable and the house itself virtually unreachable, the older Martin finds it easily enough: “he was driven to the Monument; where he again alighted, and dismissed the vehicle, and walked towards Todgers's” (156). When Tom Pinch, upon first arriving in London, gets lost amid the streets, he winds up at the Monument.

[This], by dint of not being true to Goswell Street, and filing off into Aldermanbury, and bewildering himself in Barbican, and being constant to the wrong point of the compass in London Wall, and then getting himself crosswise into Thames Street, by an instinct that

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\(^{11}\) In John Ashford’s 1856 poem “The View From the Monument,” in *London: Past, Present and Future*, the Monument provides a vantage point from which apparent disorder yields to a hidden order:

Behold a Universe! World threading world!
Each man being one, whose subjects are his deeds,
Thoughts, motives, and though all he heeds
Be various and opposing, yet he’s whirl’d,
In fated orb, his revolutions furl’d
In moral system, mark’d, and as the star,
World of material worlds, which seems most far
In wild eccentric course from order hurl’d,
When it obeys most true harmonious laws;
So, howe’er errant, he one sovereignty
Shall own; the proudest man cannot be free,
He serves though he confronts the ruling cause,
Which plants the cotter ‘neath the thatch of straws,
And bids the monarch on his throne to be (19).
would have been marvellous if he had had the least desire or reason to go there, he found himself, at last, hard by the Monument. (545)

The Monument is the final term of this breathless sentence, the arrival that ends both the reader’s and Tom’s disorientation. It provides not only an end point but a “hard” terminus, a place where Tom “found himself”—that is, a place in a litany of areas that are disorientingly unconnected. It is also a site for encounters: soon after arriving, Pinch meets his former employer’s daughter Charity, who is by this time living at Todgers’s, and is integrated into a social network that combines new and extant relationships. The Monument is not merely the most prominent landmark in the neighborhood and thus useful for intentional navigation; it is also a vital site for unintended encounters, for recognition and reunification. Most importantly, the Monument is where Mark is accidentally reunited with the nameless inhabitants of Eden, the neighbors whom he and Martin helped and were helped by: “‘Neighbours in America! Neighbours in Eden!’ cried Mark. ‘Neighbours in the swamp, neighbours in the bush, neighbours in the fever. Didn't she nurse us! Didn't he help us! Shouldn't we both have died without 'em!” (776). The Monument allows for a weak version of Eden sociality as Mark sweeps up the hopeless, nameless emigrants and brings them back to live at his pub.

In Dickens’s Master Humphrey’s Clock, in a passage published less than a year before he departed for the United States, Wren’s great St. Paul’s Cathedral provides the occasion for a meditation on the melancholy disappointment of the completed plan and the social productivity of the failed intention:

As I looked afar up into the lofty dome, I could not help wondering what were his reflections whose genius reared that mighty pile, when, the last small wedge of timber fixed, the last nail driven into its home for many centuries…he mused, as I did now, upon his work, and lost himself amid its vast extent. I could not quite determine whether the contemplation of it would impress him with a sense of greatness or of insignificance; but when I remembered how long a time it had taken to erect, in how short a space it might be traversed even to its remotest parts, for how brief a term he, or any of those who cared to bear his name, would live to see it, or know of its existence, I imagined him far more melancholy than proud, and looking with regret upon his labour done. (106-07)

Dickens imagines Wren looking upon his largest and greatest work and feeling dwarfed by his creation, to the point that he “los[es] himself” in the giant space. At the same time, paradoxically, Dickens’s Wren is disappointed by its smallness, both the physical smallness of the space and the smallness of the amount of time for which he will be able to experience it. The building is both too large and too small to accommodate the architect’s self: he both loses himself in it and feels it insufficient as a method of transcending his own physical and temporal limits. His attempts to project the self into the future—to embody himself in a project—signally fail, though the project itself has been completed. “[L]ooking with regret upon his labor done,” Wren miserably inverts
the paradigmatic scene of satisfaction with creative work: “God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.”

The operations of St. Paul’s clock mirror the imagined self-involvement of its architect and provide Dickens with an emblem for the fragmentation and solipsism of the city as a whole:

In that close corner where the roofs shrink down and cower together as if to hide their secrets from the handsome street hard by, there are such dark crimes, such miseries and horrors, as could be hardly told in whispers. In the handsome street, there are folks asleep who have dwelt there all their lives, and have no more knowledge of these things than if they had never been, or were transacted at the remotest limits of the world....Does not this Heart of London, that nothing moves, nor stops, nor quickens,—that goes on the same let what will be done, does it not express the City’s character well? (108)

This unrelenting and unresponsive heart, like those of the London residents among whom it beats, has no capacity for empathy or social feeling. Yet as Dickens completes his takeover of Wren’s edifice, he ultimately reimagines it as providing an expansive counterpoint to the self-involvement of its citizens. St. Paul’s, in its heartless, impersonal regularity, also provides a unifying commonality that works against the spatial and social fragmentation of normal city life:

The streets are filled….The jails are full, too…nor have the workhouses or hospitals much room to spare. The courts of law are crowded…and every mart of traffic has its throng. Each of these places is a world, and has its own inhabitants; each is distinct from, and almost unconscious of the existence of any other. There are some few people well to do, who remember to have heard it said, that numbers of men and women—thousands, they think it was—get up in London every day, unknowing where to lay their heads at night; and that there are quarters of the town where misery and famine always are. They don’t believe it quite,—there may be some truth in it, but it is exaggerated, of course. So, each of these thousand worlds goes on, intent upon itself...

Heart of London, there is a moral in thy every stroke! as I look on at thy indomitable working, which neither death, nor press of life, nor grief, nor gladness out of doors will influence one jot, I seem to hear a voice within thee which sinks into my heart, bidding me, as I elbow my way among the crowd, have some thought for the meanest wretch that passes, and, being a man, to turn away with scorn and pride from none that bear the human shape.

(Master Humphrey’s Clock 108-09)

The moral lesson of St. Paul’s is double: one must, in an obvious way, learn to be unlike this gigantic emblem of urban impassivity; one must have a heart that slows and quickens, one must be able to empathize, to attune one’s own emotional rhythms to those of one’s fellow humans. Yet in figuring this edifice as a monumental failure, Dickens also gives this impassivity a
socially constructive potential. The architectures of everyday assembly, economic activity, discipline, and hygiene constitute separate worlds, each of which is “distinct” from and “unconscious” of the others. The impersonal operations of St. Paul’s clock demolish the apparent difference between these micro-worlds, obliging their inward-turned individuals and partial communities to recognize the moral lesson of sheer physical proximity. It is, vitally, not the labyrinthine incoherence of the city that allows this moral epiphany. Indeed, this involuted and fractured built space is precisely what makes the moral recognition of proximity so difficult. Dickens conjures up an emblematic architectural scenario to illustrate the problem: a “close corner where the roofs shrink down and cower together as if to hide their secrets from the handsome street hard by” (Master Humphrey’s Clock 108). The closeness and the shrinking and cowering-together of the poorer buildings denies visual access to them, allowing the residents of the “handsome street” to ignore the suffering of their inhabitants. Though all Londoners cannot see one another, nearly all can either see or hear St. Paul’s; its impersonal, metronomic regularity reminds residents that they must recognize the inaccessible worlds of others. As in Chuzzlewit, a moral lesson of sympathy and connection follows on the moral chastisement of the architect as his building is repurposed. In order for architecture to be able to fulfill its function as social connector rather than mere monument to “self, self, self,” Dickens must imagine Wren’s will as being defeated even in the completion of his great work. Dickens performs a perverse but necessary act of violence against the architect, imagining St. Paul’s as the ruin, rather than the fulfillment, of Wren’s intention. In alienating Wren from his creation, Dickens makes it public; in doing so, he is able imaginatively to construct an empathetic public to which it can belong. The parallel that this establishes with Dickens’s own authorial clock-construction is not accidental: the frame device of Master Humphrey’s Clock involves an antique clock full of old manuscripts, which a group of friends read to one another. Dickens, like Wren, is a clock-builder; unlike Wren, however, his clock is a site of communal story, of authorship reimagined as the social sharing of texts with their own peculiar histories.

In these novels we cannot take seriously the Ruskinian fantasy of America as a place where building can proceed on empty ground. However, as these novels wrap stories around failed plans or projects, their unreal or incomplete architecture comes to resemble architecture in the Ruskinian sense—that is, architecture that has become associational and memorial rather than primarily functional, and which has, for this reason, become communal imaginative property. The novels locate the potential for memory, association, narrative, and social meaning in the plans that also threaten all of those things.

The Blithedale Romance takes up the social potential of the breakdown of architectural projects as a specifically narrative question. Hollingsworth, the blacksmith philanthropist who hopes to co-opt Blithedale for his own utopian institution for the reformation of criminals, jealously guards the plan for his future edifice from all outside interference—specifically, as Hawthorne makes clear, from involvement in others’ stories: “Unlike all other ghosts, his spirit haunted an edifice, which, instead of being time-worn, and full of storied love, and joy, and sorrow, had never yet come into existence” (56). Hollingsworth's fantasy is a paradoxical one:
the building his still-living ghost haunts is not yet built—is, indeed, itself a kind of ghost. This is a haunting without association, without the stories that accompany architecture as it witnesses events through time. There exists a species of ghost whose haunting constitutes not the residue of trauma but a protest of the place against its repurposing, an insistence upon a rigorous continuity of intention over time. Hollingsworth’s ghost is of this variety. He does not only experience a ghostly temporal disjunction by projecting himself imaginatively into the future; he also jealously guards the singularity and individuality of that projection. If the edifice were to become real, Hawthorne suggests, it would immediately begin to slip away from Hollingsworth. It would become “full of storied love, and joy, and sorrow”; that is, full of story over which Hollingsworth could exercise no control. This essentially Ruskinian building would have exceeded the intention of its original maker to the extent that its real meaning would be in the stories and associations that its inhabitants and the whole surrounding community add to it.

At a different moment, the narrator Coverdale offers a parallel but inverse vision of the future, and of the individual’s relation to the project:

> When we come to be old men,…we will look back cheerfully to these early days, and make a romantic story for the young People....In a century or two, we shall, every one of us, be mythical personages, or exceedingly picturesque and poetical ones, at all events. They will have a great public hall, in which your portrait, and mine, and twenty other faces that are living now, shall be hung up….In due course of ages, we must all figure heroically in an epic poem; and we will ourselves—at least, I will—bend unseen over the future poet, and lend him inspiration while he writes it. (129)

The binary oppositions between Coverdale’s future vision and that of Hollingsworth are pointed. Hollingsworth’s vision involves a rigidly defined object, and is fundamentally projective. Coverdale’s vision imagines a playful multiplicity of stories rather than a single controlling intention, and is fundamentally retrospective; he imagines the future looking back and reconfiguring the present, rather than the present controlling the future. Rather than embodying himself in his project, he imagines the project assimilating him as it repurposes his own story into a mythical narrative. Coverdale’s ghost does not haunt the edifice to guarantee his original vision, but rather whispers inspiration to narrative poets. The public hall, built by everyone and owned by no one, displays representations of the entire community, for the use of the entire community. Coverdale imagines himself becoming public, becoming assimilated to the communal architecture of the public hall.

Coverdale’s vision, as we already understand by this point in the novel, can never be. The pressures exerted by conflicting individuals upon the community are too great to be withstood.12

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12 Priscilla is the only character whom Coverdale describes as planless, “a leaf floating on the dark current of events, without influencing them by her own choice or plan (168).” She is, not coincidentally, the only one for whom the ending might be described as happy. In our last glimpse of her, she has arrived at a distinctly Jane Eyre-like resolution, leading her ruined love and master around with a “veiled happiness in her fair and quiet countenance”
No public will come to constitute itself around any “great public hall,” and no shared stories will unite it. Hawthorne’s response to this is, in a sense, the novel itself; one might even say, his whole body of fiction. In Hawthorne's preface to *Blithedale*, he writes that he chose Brook Farm for his subject because its odd status as utopian commune gives it some of the distance from everyday reality that is difficult to achieve in the matter-of-fact world of contemporary America:

In the old countries, with which Fiction has long been conversant, a certain conventional privilege seems to be awarded to the romancer; his work is not put exactly side by side with nature; and he is allowed a license with regard to every-day Probability, in view of the improved effects which he is bound to produce thereby. Among ourselves, on the contrary, there is as yet no such Faery Land, so like the real world, that, in a suitable remoteness, one cannot well tell the difference, but with an atmosphere of strange enchantment, beheld through which the inhabitants have a propriety of their own. This atmosphere is what the American romancer needs….With the idea of partially obviating this difficulty…the Author has ventured to make free with his old, and affectionately remembered home, at BROOK FARM, as being, certainly, the most romantic episode of his own life—essentially a daydream, and yet a fact—and thus offering an available foothold between fiction and reality.

(2)

The complaint is, for Hawthorne, a familiar one: America has no tradition of romance or of folk literature, and thus expects a pedestrian realism in its fiction. Hawthorne, in response, “makes free” with Brook Farm—that is, repurposes the real project for his own narrative. The real community failed, as Coverdale intimates, because of the conflicting individuals who had different plans for its future, who vied to complete it, each in their own image. Hawthorne does not seek to complete Brook Farm, but rather makes use of it as a site for fictional narrative. In doing so, he is not rebuking it or exploiting it so much as he is reopening it, making it available for other stories and other uses. Like Dickens’s Washington, Brook Farm is a failure that is also “a pleasant field for the imagination to rove in.”

In the strikingly similar preface to his later *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne makes it clear that America’s hostility to fiction is a product of its lack of ruin—its lack, that is, of architecturally grounded historical associations:

Italy, as the site of his romance, was chiefly valuable to him as affording a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon as they are, and must needs be, in America. No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong....It will be very long, I trust, before romance writers may find congenial and easily handled themes, either in the annals of our stalwart republic, or in any

(242).
characteristic and probable events of our individual lives… Romance and poetry, ivy, lichens, and wallflowers, need ruin to make them grow. (4)

Here, Romance is a mode of representation that seems so deeply dependent upon its correlation to a particular landscape that it cannot exist in everyday America; Europe’s association-rich landscape is able to accommodate Romance where America cannot. The actual settings that the two novels choose are diametrically opposed. The Marble Faun’s Italian setting allows Romance to take place in its proper environment, in the ruinous milieu that makes its semi-verisimilar plot and characters seem organically integrated. Yet as we have seen, Blithedale deploys a very American, very progressive utopian community for precisely the same purpose. The unreality of the utopian community allows for the particular kind of unreality Hawthorne claims as the province of the Romance. This is, vitally, the same kind of unreality made available by the ruin. America is filled with speculative plans and Europe is filled with historical architecture on its way to ruination, but these two situations can no longer be understood as opposed. They are certainly not identical, but they are—as far as the work of Romance goes—interchangeable. In both, the original intentions of the architect have been either left undone or effaced over time, leaving room not only for the participation of the community but for the participation of the author. America is indeed “here or nowhere,” though in a quite different way than Carlyle meant. Rather than imagining the world as potential matter for a primary act of making, Hawthorne imagines an act of making that can only take place within the failed intention of others. This highly productive “foothold between fiction and reality” is the gap between intention and result, no matter whether it shades into the past or the future.

IV. Conclusion: Writing at the End of the Self

With Hawthorne’s establishment of the indeterminate place of fictional composition, we can begin to address the irony that underlies both of these novels’ critiques of selfishness, of solipsistic planning, and of the individual will: they are both intricately plotted and planned works of art created by individual authors. I began this chapter by asking how authors imagine progressive apartness within works that also function as critiques of that same apartness; I have proposed that they accomplish this by reimagining plans as sites of productive failure. Now I must adjust this question slightly and ask: how do these authors imagine the necessary apartness of their own status as creators? If architecture, as I have argued, serves as the emblem of making in these novels, how does their critique of the solipsistic designer, plotter, and planner redound on their own literary designs, plots, and plans?

Jonathan Auerbach identifies a central ambivalence in Hawthorne about the precise relationship between the novel and the world it represents: on the one hand, the world is an ambiguous and unruly place that must be reworked into a coherent whole by the artist; on the other, “Blithedale’s social and aesthetic coherence is provisional at best, depending as it does on the solitary musings of a speculative man” (117). This “speculative man” is the narrator Miles
Coverdale, who is composing the story of the Blithedale community many years after its failure. The use of a self-consciously limited and flawed intradiegetic composer, according to Auerbach, ensures that we cannot misunderstand Hawthorne’s theories of the Romance as assertions of a radical aesthetic autonomy. Blithedale frankly acknowledges that its author is simply a person among others, no more entitled to form imaginary worlds than any of the other characters who seek to do that same thing. Clark Davis similarly argues that Blithedale’s political critique is made possible by “an ethical space, a space of self-consciousness and self-limitation” (106) between realism and fantasy that is “meant to isolate the individual as an inherently limited subject” (107).

The novel’s central opposition, however, as we have seen, is not precisely between fantasy and realism, but rather among the many equivocal and highly compromised acts of composition and arrangement that vie for pre-eminence. Coverdale, like Hawthorne himself, writes from within the failed intentions of others. This becomes clearer when we examine the postscript that ambiguously mirrors Hawthorne’s preface. Blithedale’s final chapter contains Coverdale’s sad account of his life after the end of the main storyline:

> It remains only to say a few words about myself. Not improbably, the reader might be willing to spare me the trouble; for I have made but a poor and dim figure in my own narrative, establishing no separate interest, and suffering my colorless life to take its hue from other lives. But one still retains some little consideration for one’s self; so I keep these last two or three pages for my individual and sole behoof. But what, after all, have I to tell? Nothing, nothing, nothing! (244)

It turns out that Coverdale does in fact have something to tell. He confesses, in the novel’s final line, to being in love with Hollingsworth’s love interest Priscilla. Coverdale is, however, probably right that, at this point, the reader might have been willing to spare him the trouble. He is a somewhat sour and uncongenial character to begin with; more importantly, though, his autobiography simply comes too late in the novel. “The Blithedale Romance”—that is, the gothic drama of love, jealousy, mesmerism, hidden ancestry, and suicide that forms the stuff of the story—is already over. The novel, as a plot, is finished. It is only from this peculiar position after and outside of the main story, however, that Coverdale can write. Coverdale stakes out a place for his own story of failure at the end of his story of a failed project.

Coverdale’s authorial position is that of a passive spectator, powerless either to dictate the action or to participate in it: “As for me, I would look on, as it seemed my part to do...The curtain fallen, I would pass onward with my poor individual life, which was now attenuated of much of its proper substance, and diffused among many alien interests” (157). Coverdale feels himself “compelled (often against my own will, and to the detriment of my own comfort) to live in other lives” (160). In Blithedale, authorial sympathy is possible only at the limits of selfhood, and seems more catastrophe than triumph. The acts of sympathy necessary for the composition of a story so decenter the composer that he is “attenuated of much of his proper substance,”
putting him in an odd position relative to the work he is producing. This functions partly as an assertion of the realism or at least accuracy of the story; since Coverdale presents himself as too insubstantial and diffuse to alter events aesthetically, they must therefore be, as it were, telling themselves. The novel, as we have seen, again and again thematizes the failure of shaping intellects to alter the world according to their plans. Matter, as Coverdale learns a short time into his residence at Blithedale, is resistant to the shaping power of thought; one can certainly form the substance of the earth through physical labor, but it remains stubbornly physical, refusing to become Emerson’s spiritually volatilized matter: “The clods of earth, which we so constantly belabored and turned over and over, were never etherealized into thought....Our labor symbolized nothing” (66). Thought and matter cannot interpenetrate. Matter cannot ever quite be sublimated and granted the grace of aesthetic form.

On what, then, does the authorial intellect work? The answer can only be that the “stuff” upon which the author works is made up not quite of material but of plans and intentions for that material, of hoped-for and unwrought and impossible futures. That is, the author requires someone else’s intention to work on. Coverdale’s final gesture becomes more comprehensible: the act of admitting a kind of personal failure and the act of asserting the authority of the author are potentially identical. Of course, Coverdale is not interchangeable with Hawthorne. He is, however, as Auerbach shows, the figure by way of which Hawthorne works through the problem of his own authorial autonomy.

A similar problem, and a similar approach, defines the ending of Chuzzlewit as well. The novel does not end with the conclusion of the promised “Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit”—indeed, he is conspicuously absent from the final two chapters, and Dickens seems just as happy to be rid of him—but rather with a very brief account of Tom Pinch’s later life. This account is framed musically, with Tom at his organ playing into the evening: “What sounds are these that fall so grandly on the ear! What darkening room is this! And that mild figure seated at an organ, who is he! Ah Tom, dear Tom, old friend!” (781). Tom’s organ music constitutes, quite literally, a postlude to the novel. It is also, vitally, an act of narration: “in those sounds with which it is thy wont to bear the twilight company, the music of thy heart speaks out: the story of thy life relates itself” (781).

Two of these three apostrophized questions are answered; the third is, pointedly, not. “These” sounds are Tom’s organ notes and the story of his life, “that” figure is Tom, but the reader never learns “what darkening room is this!” We might be curious to know this fact. Young Martin, at the height of his youthful ambition, had condescendingly planned to build exactly such an organ nook for Tom to play on: “I shall build an architectural music-room on a plan of my own, and it'll look rather knowing in a recess at one end. There you shall play away, Tom, till you tire yourself; and, as you like to do so in the dark, it shall be dark” (192). In the context of this earlier quote, it seems that Martin has succeeded at least in this one obscure “plan of my own” among all of his other failures. Tom appears to be playing into the darkening evening just as Martin had fantasized. As it turns out, however, Martin is not the only one with similar plans for Tom. When Tom’s sister Ruth and her architect fiancée John Westlock decide
to invite Tom to live with them in the country, they immediately begin constructing elaborate fantasies about how they will accommodate him, “to that extent that they had already purchased him a select library and built him an organ, on which he was performing with the greatest satisfaction” (766). Indeed, Tom’s organ does not have to correspond to any of these; it could just as easily be the organ he plays in the local church in Wiltshire for much of the novel, or in a different church, or really anywhere.

It is entirely unclear, then, which architect’s plan is triumphant, if either may be said to be. *Chuzzlewit’s* comic structure terminates, as it must, with a set of marriages, but they do not result in pairings that are stably tied to and delimited by architectural spaces. Both Martin and Ruth claim Tom for their respective households. It appears, however, from the jumbled images at the end—one cannot be certain, because Dickens is deliberately obscure—that young Martin, his new wife Mary, Tom Pinch, his sister Ruth, her husband John Westlock, and all of their children end up in some very odd hybrid household in the country. Holly Furneaux, expanding upon Kath Weston’s influential idea of “families of choice,” sees similar configurations as making a place for multiple affiliations and kinds of desire in a single household—particularly, for Furneaux, cathetcated homoerotic desire (153-57). *Chuzzlewit’s* hybrid households certainly exhibit complex strata of desire. More saliently, they embody a complex set of intentions that do not quite belong to any single person.

Whoever built, or did not build, this organ nook for Tom, we might be tempted to see him as architecture’s final victim, an impotent and failed human whose potential is delimited and attenuated by the “recess” into which its architectural configurations force him. Yet this configuration, though it might constrain his story, also makes it possible. Tom’s story is told musically, in the most ethereal and insubstantial medium, and the one that corresponds least to any given physical structure. Tom’s instrument of choice, though, requires a massive architectural infrastructure; the organ is the least ethereal, the most material and most architectural possible. Tom’s final act of narration is made possible by the architecture that also marginalizes and constrains him, by the overdetermined set of plans or intentions from which he is able to speak: someone else’s plot, someone else’s organ, probably even someone else’s song, but Tom’s story. Both Tom and Coverdale assume control, in a limited way, of the story at the end, asserting their equivocal status as authors. Yet they are both speaking from within other peoples’ stories, to which their own failed lives are mere appendages. As images of narration and composition, they present deeply compromised emblems of authorship.

Dickens undertook his trip to America not only to view the republic of his imagination, but also, more pragmatically, to lobby for an international copyright agreement. And lobby he did, though ultimately without success, in public speeches and in personal appeals to congressmen in Washington. A partisan debate has simmered since the publication of *American Notes* about how much of Dickens’s antipathy toward American culture might be understood as

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13 Ironically, the most damaging infringers were at home; in 1844, while writing *Chuzzlewit’s* installments, Dickens successfully sued Messrs. Lee and Haddock for pirating *A Christmas Carol*, only to be saddled with £700 in legal fees when they declared bankruptcy.
bitterness about this failure. It is not necessary here either to rehash or to attempt to add to this debate, but certainly the broader question is relevant to the problems of authorship we have been considering.

When Martin returns to London from America, he discovers that Pecksniff has stolen his design for a grammar school (having, according to Martin, “put four windows in, the villain, and spoilt it” [522]) and won an open contest with it. Gerhard Joseph reads Pecksniff’s theft of Martin’s design as a displaced image of Dickens’s own failure to secure an international copyright agreement. In the context of novel’s moral structure, as Joseph notes, this scene is surprisingly ambivalent (Joseph 1991). When he sees the plan, Martin cries “I invented it. I did it all” (522), a deeply suspect declaration from someone who is supposed to have left his ego behind in the swamps of Eden. Larisa Castillo, similarly, sees the novel’s contestations of inheritance as reflecting Dickens’s profound dissatisfaction with the logic of authorial “natural right” that underpins copyright law. Yet one wonders not only whether Martin’s strident protestation is justified in an absolute moral sense, but also whether his own design would have been accepted without those four windows—that is, exactly how Pecksniff changed the design, and whether he might actually have improved it. Mark Tapley comforts Martin by telling him that “Some architects are clever at making foundations, and some architects are clever at building on ‘em when they’re made” (524). This is obviously a swipe at Pecksniff for appropriating Martin’s “foundations”; it is equally, however, an image of collaborative work, however undesired. If, as Joseph proposes, we read this scene as a consideration of authorship, one wonders whether Dickens imagined that his own work might in some way benefit from, as it were, being taken back up and having a few windows added to it.

This kind of unintended collaboration, as we might call it, was a common feature of the nineteenth-century media scene. Pecksniff’s windows might, for example, open onto the many stage dramatizations of Martin Chuzzlewit that appeared over the course of the century, ranging from straightforward adaptations like Martin Chuzzlewit: A Drama in Three Acts and Martin Chuzzlewit: or, His Wills and His Ways; to a German version, Tartuffe Junior, oder Martin Gelderman und seine Erben; to one-act sketches like Mrs. Sarah Gamp’s Tea and Turnout and Town and Todgers’s; to, perhaps most suggestively, Joseph Dilley and Lewis Clifton’s Tom Pinch. A Domestic Drama in Three Acts, a play that reoriented the novel’s plot around the character that the authors determined to be its real hero, Tom Pinch. They might open beyond this, to the processes of authorial influence and intertextuality that constitute the whole body of literature.

The kind of intertextuality that Blithedale practices upon Chuzzlewit could not conceivably be affected by copyright; indeed, it is subtle enough that it has gone unnoticed even by critics. Hawthorne lamented the distortions of the literary marketplace caused by the lack of a transatlantic copyright agreement, although less out of justice to English authors than out of a sense that America would never develop a viable literary marketplace if its authors had to

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14 For a comprehensive list of nineteenth-century adaptations of Chuzzlewit, see the remarkably named Shafto Justin Adair Fitz-Gerald’s Dickens and the Drama, 173-84.
compete on cost with pirated British books.\textsuperscript{15} Blithedale implicitly takes up the problem of transatlantic copyright, and the question of American creation, neither by asserting the cultural autonomy of American authorship or the right of free reproduction. Instead, the novel establishes an indefinable place from which authorship might proceed, presenting American authorship as an attenuated postscript to the American political and social activity it records—but a postscript that also declares the insufficiency and failure of that activity. Hawthorne engages with Chuzzlewit in numerous ways, most recognizably in its condemnation of “self, self, self.” It is fitting, and of course not accidental, that the language of the central moral message of unselfishness should be the most self-consciously indebted to another author. Blithedale takes up, and indeed radicalizes, the challenge that Chuzzlewit poses: to write without selfishness and with a profound consciousness of the obligations one bears to the intentions of others—yet not, despite this, to lose one’s sense that fiction can and must produce oblique alternatives to the monstrously overbearing force of these very intentions.

\textsuperscript{15} See Crowley, 1-3.


Fitz-Gerald, Shafto Justin Adair Dickens and the Drama. London: Chapman & Hall, 1910


