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Figure 2.7 Haymarket Theatre terminating the vista from St James Square, London

Figure 2.8 Cantilevered signs, York



2.8

particular part of the street allows the viewer to approach the feature from many different angles and so to appreciate the embellishment fully. The closing wall of a street "T" junction offers similar opportunities for decoration (Figure 2.7). The termination of the vista may take the form of a tower or a projecting bay.

The closer the viewer is to a building the greater the opportunity to see and appreciate intricate detailing. The bland flat elevation at close quarters is at its most boring. For those parts of the building seen at a distance of about twelve metres (40 ft), the first six metres (18 ft) of the building constitute the area seen most readily and are the place where detailed ornament should be concentrated. From this position of about twelve metres, areas of the façade above six metres become more difficult to see with comfort; the head has to be tilted considerably and a conscious effort made to appreciate detailing on a wall higher than about twelve metres or at an angle of forty-five degrees to the eye. From distances

greater than twenty-four metres (80 ft) larger areas of the façade can be seen as a pattern but decoration has to be bolder to be observed and features such as windows grouped to form more dominant objects in the field of view. Solving the problem of foreshortening in perspective, that is, the apparent loss of size in objects at greater distances from the eye, was well known to the Ancient Greek architect and sculptor. For them, it was common practice to increase in size the mouldings furthest from the eye. Those projections and details at heights above a three storey building, if they are to impinge strongly

on the viewer's perception, need to be more robust than corresponding details at ground level. In narrow streets where the façade is rarely seen as a frontal elevation large overhanging string courses, highly modelled cornices, projecting bays, undulating wall surfaces, cantilevered signs, clocks and flower boxes are appropriate forms of street decoration (Figure 2.8).

THE STREET

Vitruvius in the first century AD described the street scenes used at that time as theatrical backdrops (Vitruvius, 1960). The general formal qualities of the scenes still retain a powerful image for the European urbanist. The three scenes according to Vitruvius are tragic, comic and satyric. Each street scene has a quite distinctive decorative effect. In the tragic scene, the street is 'delineated with columns, pediments and statues'. It is a formal classical street. The comic scene in contrast is the home of the ordinary man and is decorated with balconies, rows of windows and dwellings. Serlio (1982) in *The Five Books of Architecture*, published between 1537 and 1545, illustrated the scenes described much earlier by Vitruvius. The comic scene Serlio depicted as an informal arrangement of town houses, towers, chimneys, balconies and windows with pointed or round arches. It is a mixture of styles typical of many Victorian streets in Britain. The satyric street Vitruvius describes as being decorated with 'trees, caverns, mountains and other rusticated objects in a landscape style'. This description could fit many suburban developments in the garden city style. The three theatrical scenes of Vitruvian origin are still part of a living urban tradition and are vital concepts in the urban designers repertoire.

Streets constitute the most common parts of the city. Within the framework of generic street types outlined by Vitruvius there is great variety. Streets

can vary in length, cross section, shape, character, function and meaning. In addition, streets may change some or all of these qualities over time. An appreciation of the street façade and its decoration is dependent upon an understanding of the street's development, context, role and function. Using case studies this section of the chapter aims to analyse the ornamentation of street façades in terms of these factors. It will also explore the role of decoration as a unifying theme in an urban realm of great complexity.

Urban streets can be broadly grouped into three functional types. First, there are the great civic streets dominated by civic buildings such as theatres, concert halls, museums and government offices. A particularly good example is Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington DC. Second, there are the commercial streets - the streets with which we most often identify our city. Regent Street, London, Boulevard Haussmann, Paris and Fifth Avenue, New York, fall within the category of commercial streets. Third, there is the residential street. Residential streets constitute the largest part of urban areas. They vary considerably in terms of their decorative quality ranging from the monotonous to the richly decorative.

There is no well-defined boundary between street types. As cities grow or decline, commercial streets may give way to residential functions or vice versa. In addition, at any given time streets may possess two or three of the main functions. However, a street may be classified according to its main characteristic and this is usually clearly distinguished.

CIVIC STREETS

The civic street lends itself to the decorative treatment associated with the Vitruvian tragic scene. Grand scale in civic streets is achieved using vertical elements. Columns, pediments and other classical elements are used to achieve a unity despite the