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FURNISHING THE MODERN STREET:
THE CRITICAL RECEPTION TO STREET FURNITURE DESIGN
IN POSTWAR BRITAIN

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Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Edinburgh
College of Humanities and Social Sciences
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ABSTRACT

In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, many of the British government’s attempts to rebuild the social order and improve standards were experienced through design. This was true not only in the home and in the workplace, but also in the everyday civic environment of the street. Ensuring that objects as ubiquitous as lampposts, litterbins and parking meters adopted the visual language of modern design – while at the same time, remaining inconspicuous - was perceived as being vitally important by the authorities concerned. For it was through such objects that Britain’s new social and cultural agenda was given physical expression, and Good Design was deliberately introduced into people’s everyday lives.

Yet for a category of object designed to be ignored, postwar street furniture prompted considerable debate. For some members of the public, the new designs were grotesque, and represented a defacement of the country and its landscape’s individual character. While for others, modern street furniture design was a means of civilizing Britain’s streets. The design of these objects also drew strong feelings from the groups involved with its improvement, including central and local government, the Council of Industrial Design and other state-advisory bodies, manufacturers, and civic groups. Sometimes this multi-layered group worked to improve the design of street furniture together, and sometimes in opposition.

This thesis is concerned with the critical reception of street furniture design in postwar Britain, and the debate these objects prompted. It emerges out of an interest in the systems and structures underpinning design culture, and a belief that reading the banal built world expands our knowledge of how political power works. Rather than prioritise the designed objects themselves or the intentions of those responsible for producing them – such as the designers and manufacturers – the thesis will expand the debate to include the wide variety of contemporary viewpoints that were expressed, both in public and private, in response to the promotion, dissemination and design of modern street furniture. Extending the discussion beyond the official design narrative to other, equally important voices reflects a more accurate picture of the process through which street furniture was discussed, understood and even determined during this period.

Using extensive primary material from archives, contemporary periodicals and newspapers, and interviews with street furniture designers practicing in the postwar period, the five chapters of this thesis address the different arguments employed by the multiplicity of voices active in the debate. While many of these arguments focused on dichotomies - between old and new, local and central, modern and traditional - the thesis contends that postwar dissent over street furniture was informed by wider debates about Good Design, design’s relationship to high and low culture, its social and moral responsibilities, and taste. The dominance of such themes throughout the thesis reflects the wider social context of the period, which witnessed considerable changes to the authority of its institutions and cultural hierarchy, as well as more timely debates about power, influence and class in the shaping of public life.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title page</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Illustrations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author’s Declaration</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.i  Argument</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.ii Locating Street Furniture in Secondary Literature</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.iii Disciplinary Framework and Methodology</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.iv Parameters of the Debate</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.v  Chapter Structure</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precedents and Beginnings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1  A Nineteenth Century Context to the Debate</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2  Raising Standards: Making a Case for Good Design</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Council of Industrial Design: Official Articulations of Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furniture Design</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1  Good Design in the Employ of the State</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2  ‘Persuasion and Education’</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3  The Practice of Good Design</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Great and the Good: Power and influence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1  ‘Ivory Towers’: The Architectural Review</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2  Soft Power: Negotiation and Diplomacy</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3  Directing Public Opinion</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal Vandalism: Resistance to Modern Street Furniture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1  Official Deadlock: The Failures of the First Ad-Hoc Street Furniture Committee</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2  Street Furniture Confrontations</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3  Outrage and the Response of Local Government</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond Good Design: A Period of Transformation 1960-1974</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1  ‘Deadly Good Taste’</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2  Standardization, Monotony and the Rejection of Taste</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. Telephone box, Ardnamurchan. Personal photograph, May 2012

Figure 2. Public telephone in a Japanese district of São Paulo, Brazil. Personal photograph, September 2012

Figure 3. Street lights in a Japanese district of São Paulo, Brazil. Personal photograph, September 2012

Figure 4. Contemporary Morris column, Glasgow. Personal photograph, September 2009

Figure 5. Clear Channel wayfinding signage in Glasgow. Personal photograph, September 2009

Figure 6. Appropriation of memorial benches in Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh. Personal photograph, June 2011


Figure 8. Gold Olympic postbox, Edinburgh. Personal photograph, November 2012

Figure 9. ‘Sham’ lampposts, reproduced by John Gloag, Industrial Art Explained, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1946. First published 1934), p.84

Figure 10. Utility cartoon, Punch, 9th October 1946, p.291

Figure 11. CoID cartoon, Punch, 27th November 1946, p.474


Figure 13. CoID, lamp standards at Tooting Bec, 1954. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton (DCA2649/ 2502)

Figure 14. CoID-approved lamppost designed by Basil Spence, in CoID, 8th Annual Report, 1952-53, p.21

Figure 15. Visitors to the Design Index, in CoID, 15th Annual Report, 1959-60, p.20

Figure 16. Destroyed Street Furniture Advisory Committee minutes, Design Council Archive, University of Brighton. Personal photograph, January 2011

Figure 17. Photograph of civic slovenliness in central London. In ‘Marginalia: Excess of hazards’, the AR, July 1949, Vol.105, No.107, p.355

Figure 18. Waine edged bus shelter, in Design, No.69, September 1954, p.30
Figure 19. Double bracket ‘trifoil’ lamppost designed by Jack Howe, in *Design*, No.118, October 1958, p.48

Figure 20. Cover, the *MJ*, 25th January 1952, No.3075, Vol.60

Figure 21. Outdoor seating, *Design*, No.54, June 1953, p.31

Figure 22. Lampposts produced by Concrete Utilities Ltd., in ‘Case history’, *Design*, No.69, September 1954, p.27

Figure 23. Seating designed by Brian Leather, and John Sheldon for the Festival of Britain, in *Design*, No.32, August 1951, p.4

Figure 24. Metal Chairs designed by Ernest Race for the Festival of Britain, 1951. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton (DCA0044/626/19)

Figure 25. Cigarette bin designed by James Cubitt and Partners for the Festival of Britain, in *Design*, No.32, August 1951, p.7

Figure 26. Litterbin designed by Jack Howe for the Festival of Britain, in *Design*, No.32, August 1951, p.7

Figure 27. Old Fullers Kiosk, in *Design*, No.59, November 1953, p.35

Figure 28. New Fullers Kiosk, in *Design*, No.59, November 1953, p.35

Figure 29. American parking meter, in *Design*, No.63, March 1954, p.6

Figure 30. Concrete bus shelter designed by Jack Howe, in *Design*, No.69, 1954, p.21

Figure 31. Bollard, in ‘Street Furniture: A design folio prepared by the CoID’, no date, p.3. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton. Book L

Figure 32. Railings, in ‘Street Furniture: A design folio prepared by the CoID’, no date, p.4. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton. Book L

Figure 33. Bus stops, in ‘Street Furniture: A design folio prepared by the CoID’, no date, p.5. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton. Book L

Figure 34. HRH Prince Phillip visiting an open-air street furniture exhibition on London’s South Bank. In CoID, *17th Annual Report*, 1961-62, p.19


Figure 36. Litterbins, ‘Street furniture: List of Approved Designs 1963’, (CoID, and the Scottish Committee of the CoID)

Figure 37. Parking meter advertisement by Venner, in the *MJ*, 29th June 1956, p.1502
Figure 38. International parking meters, *Design*, No.88, April 1956, p.34


Figure 40. Fashion spread with parking meters, *Country Life*, 13th October 1960, p.831

Figure 41. Cartoon about parking meters, *Punch*, 17th October 1956, p.455


Figure 43. Still from *Cool Hand Luke*, (directed by Stuart Rosenberg, Jalem Productions, 1967, USA), from [http://bldgblog.blogspot.co.uk/2012/02/whered-road-go-cool-hand-luke-1967.html](http://bldgblog.blogspot.co.uk/2012/02/whered-road-go-cool-hand-luke-1967.html) [accessed 1st August 2013]

Figure 44. Manhole cover, in ‘The Submerged Third’, the *AR*, August 1948, No.620, Vol.104, p.50


Figure 46. Street furniture ‘sunning themselves’, in ‘Townscape’, the *AR*, December 1949, Vol.105, No.636, p.371

Figure 47. ‘Virile’ fire hydrant, in Ian Nairn, ‘Townscape’, the *AR*, April 1958, Vol.123, No.735, p.280

Figure 48. Avenue column, in Peter Varney, ‘Miscellany – Survey of Street Lighting’, the *AR*, July 1951, Vol.110, No.655, p.54

Figure 49. Illustration by Gordon Cullen, in ‘Townscape: Outdoor Publicity’, the *AR*, May 1949, Vol.105, No.629, p.248

Figure 50. ‘Genteel’ litterbin, in ‘Lettering’, the *AR*, January 1952, Vol.111, No.661, p.59

Figure 51. Warning sign, in ‘Lettering’, the *AR*, January 1952, Vol.111, No.661, p.59

Figure 52. Drawing of a piazza by Gordon Cullen, ‘Townscape’, the *AR*, August 1951, Vol.110, No.656, p.137

Figure 53. Drawing of benches and litterbins by Gordon Cullen, ‘Special Number on Canals’, the *AR*, July 1949, Vol.105, No.107, p.61

Figure 55. Satirical poem about the RFAC, in *Punch*, 24th August 1955, p.207


Figure 57. Street furniture in the style of municipal rustic, in Donald Campbell, ‘Townscape: Municipal Rustic’, the *AR*, October 1952, Vol.111, No.670 p.237

Figure 58. Cover, Ian Nairn, *Counter Attack*, (London: The Architectural press, 1957)


Figure 60. ‘Counter Outrage’, *Punch* 13th February 1957, p.247

Figure 61. ‘Counter Outrage’, *Punch* 13th February 1957, p.248

Figure 62. Lamppost, ‘Counter Attack’, the *AR*, July 1957, Vol.122, No.726, p.78

Figure 63. ‘Counter-Attack’, the *AR*, June 1958, Vol.123, No. 737, p.422

Figure 64. Illustration of Hackney High Street, *Design*, No.69, September 1954, p.19

Figure 65. ‘Avenue’ lamppost produced by Concrete Utilities Ltd., Morecambe, in [http://www.simoncornwell.com/lighting/manufact/cu/gallery/index.htm](http://www.simoncornwell.com/lighting/manufact/cu/gallery/index.htm) [accessed 25th September 2013]


Figure 67. Revo concrete lamppost in Greenwich, loose in 'Crooms Hill: Opposition to Design of Lamp Standards', N.A. Cat. Ref. BP 2/103

Figure 68. 30ft street lighting steel column (model LC201) made by Stewarts & Lloyds Ltd. Displayed at the exhibition of street furniture organised by the CoID and held on the South Bank, London, 1960. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton [http://www.vads.ac.uk/large.php?uid=61745&sos=43](http://www.vads.ac.uk/large.php?uid=61745&sos=43) [accessed 1st August 2013]

Figure 69. Lampposts in Chelsea, in ‘Columns in Context’, *Design*, February 1960, No.134, p.36

Figure 70. Lampposts in Chelsea, *Country Life*, 29th December 1960, p.1592

Figure 71. Dolphin lamps designed by George Vulliamy on Thames Embankment, in [http://dobraszczyk.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/11.jpg](http://dobraszczyk.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/11.jpg) [accessed 1st August 2013]

Figure 72. Brighton’s seafront lanterns, in the *MJ*, 17th January 1964, p.152
Figure 73. Illustration of street furniture by Gordon Cullen, in Ian Nairn, *Outrage*, (London: The Architectural Press, 1955), p.370


Figure 77. Advertisement by Concrete Utilities Ltd, in the *MJ*, 14th September 1956, p.2112

Figure 78. Poem, in ‘Shedding More Light on a Lipstick Problem’, the *MJ*, 10th April 1959, Vol.67

Figure 79. White metal litterbin designed by Derek Goad and John Ricks of Donald Forrest, in *Design*, June 1961, No.150, p.52

Figure 80. Cartoon about standardization, in *Punch*, 30th January 1946, p.108

Figure 81. Directional traffic signs designed by Jock Kinneir and Margaret Calvert, 1957-61. Design Council Slide Collection, http://www.vads.ac.uk/large.php?uid=63115&sos=2 [accessed 1st August 2013]

Figure 82. Photograph of F-type litterbin, designed by David Mellor in 1966 for GPO. Loose in 'Pillar Box: Proposed New Design', N. A. Cat. Ref. BP 2/126

Figure 83. F-type litterbin, designed by David Mellor in 1966 for GPO. On display at London’s Design Museum. Personal photograph, July 2013

Figure 84. Traffic lights designed by David Mellor for the Ministry of Transport, 1965-70. In *David Mellor: master metalworker*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Galleries and Museums Trust, 1998)

Figure 85. ‘Design for Coordinatioin’, ‘Streets Ahead’ brochure, external view. Personal photograph, January 2011. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton.

Figure 86. ‘Design for Coordinatioin’, ‘Streets Ahead’ brochure, internal view. Personal photograph, January 2011. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton.


Figure 88. Hellman cartoon in the CoID’s *Street Furniture from Design Index 1972-73*, (London: the CoID, 1972), p.1
Figure 89. Old and new lampposts, in Nicholas Taylor and David Watkin, ‘Lamp-posts: Decline and Fall in Cambridge’, the AR, June 1961, Vol.129, No.772, p.425

Figure 90. New lampposts, in Nicholas Taylor and David Watkin, ‘Lamp-posts: Decline and Fall in Cambridge’, the AR, June 1961, Vol.129, No.772, p.425

Figure 91. Historic lampposts in Manchester Square, in ‘Lowering of Standards’, Design, No.245, p.28

Figure 92. ‘Cheerful’ street furniture, in José Manser, 'Magic Gardens Round the Bush', Design, No.273, September 1971, pp.55

Figure 93. Litterbins in Kensington Gardens, London. Personal photograph, May 2011
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Attending conferences and talks during this project has allowed me to discuss my work with others from around the world. Conversations with delegates and fellow speakers at conferences in Brussels, London, São Paulo, Glasgow and Istanbul have all informed this project. So too, have conversations with colleagues at Glasgow School of Art, as well as Glenn Adamson, Sarah Teasley, Ghislaine Wood and Stephen Hayward.

The help of staff at local libraries and archives was invaluable, especially those who generously searched their archives for references to street furniture on my behalf, many to no avail. These archives span the distance of Britain and are too numerous to name. However, I would particularly like to thank the Mitchell Library in Glasgow, the Glasgow School of Art Library, the British Library, the National Art Library, the National Archives, the National Library of Scotland, London Metropolitan Archives, City of Westminster Archives, and MoDA. Special thanks goes to Lesley Whitworth of the University of Brighton’s Design Council Archive.

Two of the figures I interviewed for this project were instrumental in helping me to understand how the debate worked in practice. As such, I would like to thank Kenneth Grange and Margaret Calvert, who kindly welcomed me into their homes to re-tell their account of this period.

Finally, I would like to thank all of my friends, but particularly Alexandra Dugdale, Jessica Kelly, Sheila McCubbin, Jennifer Olley, Kerry Spring, Lynsey Wells, and Kasia Zych for their generosity, hospitality and support throughout this project. In addition, I want to thank my family - especially my mum, dad and sister - and Fred, for helping me through the highs and lows of writing this PhD. I couldn’t have done it without you all.
AUTHOR’S DECLARATION

Ideas here have been presented in different forms and at various stages at several academic conferences between 2010 and 2013. These conferences include the ICDHS Design and Craft conference in Brussels in September 2010, Nostalgia in the 21st century hosted jointly by the University of Strathclyde and the ESRC in September 2011; Cultures of Surveillance at University College London between September and October 2011; the ICDHS Design Frontiers conference in São Paulo, Brazil in September 2012; and the ISCH Artefacts, Culture, and Identity conference in Istanbul in September 2013. Proceedings from the 2012 ICDHS conference are available online through Editora Edgard Blucher. This paper was also commissioned as a substantially extended piece of text by Priscila L. Farias and Paul Atkinson and will be published in 2014 in Design Frontiers: Selected Papers of the 8th ICDHS Conference, (México: Designio, 2014).

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis; that the following thesis is entirely my own work; and that no part of this thesis has been submitted for another degree or qualification.

Signed

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### ABBREVIATIONS

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<tr>
<th>Code</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AJ</td>
<td>The Architects Journal</td>
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<td>AP</td>
<td>The Architectural Press</td>
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<tr>
<td>AR</td>
<td>The Architectural Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>BBC</td>
<td>The British Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>BoT</td>
<td>The Board of Trade</td>
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<tr>
<td>BQR</td>
<td>British Quarterly Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAI</td>
<td>The Council for Art and Industry</td>
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<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>The Civic Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>CoID</td>
<td>The Council of Industrial Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIA</td>
<td>The Design and Industries Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>FT</td>
<td>The Financial Times</td>
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<tr>
<td>GG</td>
<td>The Georgian Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>GPO</td>
<td>General Post Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>LCC</td>
<td>London County Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>MJ</td>
<td>The Municipal Journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoHLG</td>
<td>The Ministry of Housing and Local Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoT</td>
<td>The Ministry of Transport</td>
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<tr>
<td>NBA</td>
<td>National Brassfoundry Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>OoW</td>
<td>The Office of Works</td>
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<td>RFAC</td>
<td>The Royal Fine Art Commission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Even before the Second World War had ended, members of the British government and civil service were planning the nation’s route out of the Blitz-damaged rubble. Like many of her counterparts across Europe, Britain’s housing stock was in ruins, her economy was in crisis, and her people in desperate need of reassurance that their sacrifices had not been in vain. Among the many pressing issues faced by Britain at this time, was how best to rebuild the country. But what form should these changes take, and how would they be achieved? Perhaps most importantly, given the incoming Labour government’s promised social changes, who would decide?

Such questions dominated design debates during the immediate postwar period. For some, the damage inflicted upon Britain provided an unexpected opportunity to start from scratch and radically change the look of the country; while for others, the threat posed by modern development was equal to the devastation of the Blitz. One area where this debate was most intensely expressed was through the design of street furniture. Indeed, up until the mid-1970s, the design of objects as varied as lampposts, parking meters and bus shelters divided opinion across Britain’s social, political and cultural spectrum, producing a heated debate. Modern litterbins, for instance, were criticized by the *Architectural Review* in 1952 as too ‘genteel’, and parking meters were condemned by *Design* magazine two years later for their ‘thick, insensitive “jelly mould” contours’. In 1958, the Director of the Council of Industrial Design derided rustic bus shelters for their ‘self-conscious’ qualities, and according to the Royal Commission for Fine Art, modern letterboxes looked ‘rather teutonic’. The plurality of opinion about lampposts was particularly extreme. Some within central government abhorred the new designs, describing them in 1953 as ‘dreadful concrete gibbets’, while municipal figures celebrated them as a ‘modern achievement’. Even up to 1969, members of the public rejected modern lampposts as little more than ‘concrete

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giraffes’ with ‘awkward swellings’ capable of making any street resemble ‘a prisoners-of-war compound’. And even the design of signage provoked controversy; with one London resident in 1961 lamenting the way that modern signage replaced the ‘happy disorder’ of English towns with ‘extreme dullness’. Yet why did a category of object that many would perceive as banal, draw such strong opinion, and what does the intensity of debate about street furniture design reveal about the broader anxieties of the time?

i.i Argument

This thesis examines how the postwar British street was shaped, and who had the power to shape it. It is not a chronicle or inventory of street furniture across Britain, or even a design analysis, but a study of the multiple interests, agendas and alliances that shape the street and the designed objects within it. In this respect, what follows is a thesis about a discourse, in which different actors and different forms of power and influence emerge at a unique point in British history. During postwar Britain, the debate on street furniture was particularly divisive, drawing strong feelings from the design profession, government ministries and local authorities, Cabinet, civic pressure groups, manufacturers and the public alike. These different groups fought against and alongside one another - simultaneously in some cases – and as a result, the debate quickly developed a polycentric quality, reflecting the burgeoning multiplicity, complexity, and contradictions of this unique period.

The design culture of the postwar period has drawn renewed interest in recent years, largely through reappraisals of its central actors. For instance, considerable attention has lately been shown towards the late Ian Nairn, one of the AR’s idiosyncratic writers during the 1950s, and perhaps best known for spearheading the magazine’s Outrage campaign against environmental abuse by municipal authorities – a subject that chapters three and four will return to. There are several high profile examples that reflect a renewed interest in Nairn, including recent screenings of his television work and BBC documentaries, the publication of biographies and new editions of his

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books. An equally sizeable volume of literature published since 2010 focuses on the German historian Nikolaus Pevsner and his role in postwar architectural and design culture, including Matthew Aitchison’s book *Visual Planning and the Picturesque*, Stephen Games’ *Pevsner: The Early Life* and most recently *Nikolaus Pevsner: The Life* by Susie Harries. Though all distinctly different in terms of objective, what is clear from these books is that Pevsner’s opinions on architecture and design dominated the middle years of the last century when other voices were increasingly struggling to be heard and cultural consensus was breaking down. These examples not only illustrate a timely reassessment of Pevsner and Nairn, but also the persistence of interest in postwar British design debates. Evidently, lots of people still care about the design culture of this period, and opinion is no less divided than it was in postwar Britain.

Given the divisive nature of postwar design debates and the multiplicity of actors participating within them, this thesis seeks to examine the street furniture debate as holistically as possible. As such, rather than prioritise the intentions of those responsible for producing these objects – such as the designers and manufacturers – this thesis expands the account to include a wide variety of viewpoints that were expressed in response to the promotion and dissemination of modern street furniture design in postwar Britain. Extending the discussion beyond the official design narrative to these other, equally important voices reflects a more accurate picture of the process through which the design of street furniture was discussed, understood and even determined in the postwar period. I propose that it is only by assessing how contemporary organizations and individuals responded to the design of objects like lamp posts, benches and parking meters that this thesis can draw the fullest sense of their social and cultural significance. In other words, how society thinks, talks and writes about design informs part of design’s social construction and gives it a sense of meaning beyond its existence as physical matter.

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The intensity of the debate about street furniture design reveals a great deal about the broader anxieties of the time. The postwar world experienced enormous changes concerning international borders, empires, political ideologies, cultural hierarchies, commercialism and the problem of democratic freedom. According to architectural historians Sarah Goldhagen and Réjean Legault, these changes prompted considerable international anxiety that knew no national or local boundaries, and affected designers and architects, as well as the discourse of modernism as a whole. The needs of the common man were urgent, and those associated with modernism believed it was increasingly important to engage with this issue; few, however, could agree on how best to develop a style that would accommodate ‘this changing, and some believed, increasingly leveled, society’.

One way in which these unresolved anxieties were expressed was through discussions about the design of street furniture. While the debate was outwardly concerned with the style of bus stops and benches and their relationship to the British landscape, in fact, street furniture emerged as a forum through which postwar anxieties around taste, class, snobbery, and authority could be discussed. Street furniture exemplifies the way that different agents have historically sought to shape the street and its uses according to their own social, economic and political purposes. As a consequence, street furniture is well placed to reflect anxieties about power, influence and class in the shaping of public life. Such anxieties were particularly relevant during postwar Britain - a period in which design was brought under government control to a far greater degree that ever before, but which simultaneously witnessed an increase in voices participating in discussions about design, the role of the state, and power more generally. In such a context, the question of who has the authority to make design decisions on behalf of others, and the manner in which those decisions are made, becomes critical.

Illustrating how the debate on street furniture reflected these broader social, cultural and political anxieties provides a number of useful insights into the power balance between different groups in postwar Britain. As a category of everyday design, street

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10 ibid. p.17
furniture reflects the broad range of tensions and conflicts that characterize the uses and appropriation of public space by different agents. The thesis illustrates how the struggles between progressive modernizers, conservative establishment forces, and the increasingly vocal untrained masses, came into conflict over how street furniture was designed and who was responsible. At the same time however, it shows that the boundaries between these different high and low groups were more nuanced than conventional understandings of the postwar period might otherwise suggest. Identities were slippery, and some groups were forced to battle on several fronts simultaneously – both alongside and against one another.\textsuperscript{11} The debate on street furniture therefore, reflects the complex ways in which power was expressed in postwar Britain - beyond just legislative power - and how groups drawn from out-with the elite that had determined British culture up until that point, were increasingly able to make themselves heard.

\textbf{i.ii Locating Street Furniture in Secondary Literature}

Understandings of the term ‘street furniture’ vary. Broadly speaking, it refers to a category of object that is located in outdoor space, generally in the street, but also in roads and public parks. In the period under discussion, street furniture generally referred to industrially produced functional objects like litterbins, rather than the peripheral fabric of the street, i.e. pavements, or structures like fountains or bandstands, which often combined a monumental or sculptural role. The term has its roots in the area of planning, where it was first used by J.C. Riddell in his report on postwar housing.\textsuperscript{12} Sources prior to this date tend to use the expression ‘street equipment’ instead, though it continued to be used in some contexts throughout the 1950s.\textsuperscript{13} There are an extensive number of objects that can broadly be described as street furniture, and as such, it is helpful to divide the category into sub-categories denoting each object’s specific purpose. On this basis, street furniture includes transport and traffic management objects (such as bicycle racks and bus shelters);

security and safety objects (such as street lamps, bollards and railings); public health and utility objects (such as litterbins and signal boxes); communication objects (such as poster display units, signage and postboxes); and finally social or decorative objects (such as benches and planters). While distinctly different in form and purpose, all of these objects can be collectively referred to as street furniture, and will be for the remainder of the thesis.

Throughout western history different communities and cultures have sought ways to furnish the street. For instance, social objects like benches, according to the architectural historian Yvonne Elet, have been found in the ruins of classical Greece. And archaeologist Jeremy Hartnett has located street-side benches in Roman Pompeii. In Britain, G.T. Salusbury-Jones has drawn upon court documents and church records to show that benches, as well as other street furniture like paving and stalls for livestock, regularly featured in medieval English streets. Security and safety objects like street lamps have an equally long history, and the social historian William T. O’Dea claims that even the residents of ancient Babylon devised methods for this purpose. Like benches, the social service provided by street lighting has not lost its relevance for the modern city. Indeed, while the method of lighting the streets may have changed, the basic dual purpose of street lights has remained largely the same: as a psychological means of securing the streets through light, and lighting the path of nocturnal travellers.

The historical development of other objects of street furniture was largely dependent upon external factors. For instance, transport and traffic objects like traffic lights and bus stops were developed to meet the requirements of the motorcar and the public transport system; and telegraph poles have a historic relationship with the railways. Communication objects like postboxes and telephone boxes were dependent upon first developing the technology and networks necessary to transmit information and distribute mail on a large scale. And the historical emergence of litterbins follows

18 See ‘Cultures of Surveillance: An Interdisciplinary Conference’, UCL, 29th September – 1st October 2011
socio-economic patterns contingent upon wealth, attitudes to waste and public health. While the relevance of some examples of street furniture may have lapsed in certain contexts - horse troughs, pig pens and so on - it is worth considering that every object of street furniture that has ever been placed in the public realm met the needs of someone.

As designed objects within public space, street furniture is subject to the input of numerous forces which monitor and regulate that space, and thus give it shape.\textsuperscript{20} Several parties are often accountable for the design of street furniture, including designers and engineers, manufacturers, municipal authorities and planners, central government regulators, as well as a host of local civic bodies. Indeed, the industrial designer David Mellor – whose street furniture designs are discussed in chapter five - once described the production of street furniture as characterized by a ‘design by committee’ approach.\textsuperscript{21} In some ways, the academic fragmentation of the study of street furniture mirrors that of its production since research on the subject can be found in a diverse number of academic disciplines, including architecture, landscape design, urbanism, sociology and industrial design. Its position on the margins of these disciplines can be attributed to the traditional perception that street furniture is less significant than the architecture that surrounds it, and represents a trivial category of everyday design. In this respect, they are what photographer Ian Leith describes as ‘official ephemera’.\textsuperscript{22}

\textbf{Street furniture and identity}

Historically, interest in the field of street furniture has tended to concentrate on its formal values, and there are a number of coffee table books and photographic studies of urban street furniture.\textsuperscript{23} Existing literature that specifically focuses on the subject is often presented through a strong nostalgic or sentimental lens. Indications that past interest in the field was driven by a sense of its imminent loss are reflected in the fact that a large proportion of the existing literature on street furniture was published

\textsuperscript{21} Llio Teleri Lloyd-Jones, \textit{David Mellor: Design}, (Suffolk: Antique Collectors Club, 2009), p.26
between the late 1970s and 1980s. It is likely that the research published at that time sought to increase the public's awareness of what was left and commemorate what had been lost. One particularly well-publicized case involved telephone boxes during the 1980s. According to architectural historian and former chairman of the 20th Century Society, Gavin Stamp, interest in Gilbert Scott's red box was largely due to the Thatcher government’s controversial process of asset stripping, which allowed for the commercial sale of the British telephone network and the removal of the iconic red box from many of Britain’s streets.

While many examples remain across the UK – see fig.1 below - the debate prompted by the removal of the red telephone box from Britain’s streets reflects the sense in which street furniture has been associated with national identity, an understanding which is discussed in chapter two. For many people during the 1980s, the replacement of the red telephone box with the alternative BT model was not just a Conservative attack on nationalization and state-ownership, but also on the very fabric of British identity. This period not only marks the end-point of the thesis, but also an end to the drive to replace decorative cast iron street furniture with modern designs. At this point, the changes affecting the design of street furniture are significant, and heritage-style furnishings came to be employed as a means of reinstating the past within the public realm, arguably as a way to invoke a lost national identity. In *Theatres of Memory*, Raphael Samuel discusses this phenomenon - which he regards as 'retrofitting' - in which an aestheticized version of Victorian street furniture found widespread application in civic spaces once dominated by postwar modern design. The contrivance of historicist street furniture - such as electrically powered 'victorian-style' street lamps complete with gas flicker, and the resetting of cobble stones over

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existing macadamised surfaces - has been acknowledged by several writers as anachronistic and informed by feelings of nostalgia.²⁹

Later studies continue to locate street furniture within understandings of identity. For instance, in the mid-1990s, the Spanish urban historian Màrius Quintana Creus reported that,

'urban elements lend a city its identity, making it recognizable to us: Britain’s telephone booths, Paris’ metro entrances, New York’s industrial paper

containers, London’s stone slab pavements or the local-stone pavements of several Italian towns'.

That street furniture might not only be able to convey the meaning of a place but even restore or renew its identity, is an interpretation that may account for the importance attributed to its renewal after WW2. There is an increasing body of literature that presents street furniture in this light, both in Europe, but also increasingly in Asia.

These studies contend that street furniture is well placed to provide a sense of visual coherency for neighbourhoods in need of new identities, strengthening their character and improving the public's relationship to them. The telephone kiosk and street lamps depicted in fig.2 and 3 demonstrate this identity-driven use of street furniture in the context of the Japanese district of Liberdade, in São Paulo. In these examples street furniture is used as a cipher for the narrative of regeneration, in which - as a means of altering the identity of a space – such objects can project a new face upon the street. This understanding of street furniture can equally be traced to the postwar period in Britain, and is therefore a prominent theme within the thesis.

Street furniture's regenerative value has been addressed from a number of perspectives more recently too, several of which have drawn their examples from Barcelona. Located in Catalonia, Barcelona is a city whose urban regeneration in the 1990s attracted considerable design interest, of which street furniture informed a small but significant part. The importance of Barcelona lies in its identity-driven approach to regeneration, which many other post-industrial cities have subsequently borrowed. This approach manifests in re-imagining the city through physical changes in the landscape so as to promote a new identity or reinforce certain unique visual characteristics associated with a region. In the case of Barcelona, one thinks of Gaudi symbolism and urban patterns of broken tiles. And Glasgow, Scotland’s largest city,

31 See Toshio Nakagawa, Hoang Pham, Shigeru Yamada (eds), *13th ISSAT International Conference on Reliability and Quality in Design* (Seattle, 2007)
32 See Kin Wai Michael Sui, *Urban Renewal and Design: City, Street, Street Furniture* (Kowloon, Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 2007)
34 Mireia Freixa, ‘From Craftsmanship to Cruise Ships: Antoni Gaudí and the Trencadís Technique’ in Javier Gimeno-Martinez, Fredie Florè (eds), *Design and Craft: A History of Convergences and
Figure 2. Providing a sense of visual coherency for neighbourhoods in need of new identities: Public telephone in a Japanese district of São Paulo, Brazil 2012.

Figure 3. Projecting a new face upon the street: ‘Japanese-style’ street lights in a Japanese district of São Paulo, Brazil 2012.

adopts a similar approach with Charles Rennie Mackintosh-inspired signage, lettering, and street lamps.35

**Street furniture and economics**

In postwar Britain, the campaign to re-imagine public spaces through modern street furniture can also be understood as promoting a new identity for the country and its landscape after the war. Today this use of street furniture can be understood in the context of regeneration projects, which often have economic agendas at their centre. Indeed there are several available studies on the sense in which cities have economic ‘interests’, though few of these focus on street furniture.36 The Marxist geographer David Harvey has also studied the way that the city itself could be perceived as an expression of economic capital, and the way that capitalism creates a particular spatial configuration within the city that in turn affects its physical shape.37 While little of Harvey's work explicitly relates to the content of the thesis, nevertheless both *The Urbanisation of Capital* and *The Condition of Post Modernity* address the anonymous detail in the built environment, i.e. the bits that evade architecture and which often lack authors. His minute reading of these elements, like roads and walls in Baltimore for instance, provides a way of analysing the different agendas underpinning the debate around street furniture.38

More recently, the private sector has shown increased interest in the design of the street, and as a result several academic studies have drawn a relationship between street furniture and commercialism.39 This association is not new however, and one only has to refer to period photographs from Paris, Vienna or London in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to discern the abundance of outdoor advertising, many using Morris columns. Interestingly, Morris columns are a type of

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35 Ellie Herring, ‘Restyling a City: Glasgow and the Mockintosh Experience’ in ibid. pp.120-123
38 See David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000)
39 Michael Erlhoff, Philipp Heidkamp, Iris Utikal, *Designing Public*, (Birkhauser and Verlag, 2008)
street furniture currently experiencing a resurgence, perhaps because of their nostalgic appeal (see fig.4).

Nevertheless, the commercial influence upon contemporary street furniture has taken different forms. According to Javier Nieto Santa, who wrote about the relationship between contemporary street furniture and private firms in the mid-1990s, advertising companies are increasingly able to lever themselves into the street furniture market by offering to provide the service to the local authorities for free in return for advertising space. In offering this free service, global companies like JC Decaux and Clear Channel not only price the smaller industries and manufacturers which once produced and sold street furniture out of the business, but also command a huge amount of commercial power within the city as a result (see fig.5). For Santa,

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'the emergence of such large economic agents is hindering the very progress of the market, leading to excessive homogenization of street furniture. Madrid is beginning to look very much like Paris and Lisbon'. Arguably, Madrid looks like Paris because most of its 19th century architecture is Parisian, but there is some value in Santa's statement. The homogenisation of street furniture design coupled with the overwhelming presence of advertising which is increasingly sanctioned by local authorities keen to reduce costs, has resulted in the perception of poorer quality streets. Thus, the irony of regeneration is that by seeking to promote the unique identity of a city, many such places often end up looking more and more alike.

Figure 5. The homogenisation of street furniture design: Clear Channel way-finding signage in Glasgow, 2009.

41 ibid.
42 Indeed the use and design of street furniture is regularly the focus of discussion in the mainstream media, public campaigns, and the tabloid press, particularly when such objects are considered by the public to have been misused or poorly designed.
Analysis of present perceptions of street furniture shows that the international difference between contemporary street furniture designs is considerably less marked than it used to be. This extraordinary aesthetic convergence is partially linked to economies of scale - after all, just how many different kinds of bus stop can Europe afford to have? While the specific historical limits of the thesis do not extend beyond the 1980s, nevertheless this discussion about nationalism, street furniture’s relationship to commercialism, and the threat of homogenization has implications for the postwar period. After WW2, organizations like the Council of Industrial Design promoted the advantages of a ‘British look’ for economic reasons, and appeared to measure the quality of street furniture on the basis of its national characteristics - a theme the thesis will return to in chapter two.43

**Street furniture and power**

A further understanding of street furniture, which is particularly important for the thesis, concerns its application as a means of controlling the street and those who use it. As a consequence of the way that street furniture has historically been placed within the street, analysis of these objects provides a useful means through which to measure variations of patronage, influence and the balance of power in public space. Street furniture is well placed to reflect these themes as it exemplifies the way in which different agents have historically sought to shape public space for particular social, economic and political reasons. Certainly in the 19th century drinking fountains were widely used by the Temperance Movement to dissuade the public – particularly the working classes - from drinking alcohol.44 Bandstands have a similar morally charged legacy concerning appropriate leisure activities.45 And even benches in Renaissance Florence were found to play a similar role in conditioning ways of using the street, and reflecting a society’s values.46

Archaeologist Jeremy Hartnett's research on urban benches in Roman Pompeii grapples with similar themes, such as the way that benches can be physically appropriated and embodied with meaning. Most of us are familiar with initials carved onto benches, recording lover’s trysts or even just the type of temporary ownership shown above. Hartnett treats the bench as a social artefact, and examines the way that urban improvement in the form of benches was used by Roman property owners to increase their influence and standing, and curry favour with the street’s users. Despite the context being Roman Pompeii, the tension that Hartnett exposes is a central problematic within street furniture, in this instance between property owners' desire for 'visibility and prominence on the street and the nuisance their constructions created for the broader population'. This problematic is central to understandings of street furniture: it is both an improvement to the street, and simultaneously an obstacle. As Harrett demonstrates, this problematic gives rise to the historical association of street furniture with clutter. Studies of street furniture as clutter can be

48 See *Nostalgia in the 21st Century*, ESRC Seminar Series, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, 23rd September 2011
found in the context of broader discussions of modernity and the 19th century city.\textsuperscript{50} It is also regularly the way that contemporary popular culture understands street furniture, and increasingly, municipal authorities and other urban stakeholders publicise their efforts to resolve the problem of clutter.\textsuperscript{51} This understanding is also represented in the postwar debate on street furniture, and will be addressed later in the thesis.

Given that the etymology of street furniture uses the metaphor of the street as a room, it is perhaps unsurprising that other readings of the expression associate it with themes of domestication, and even notions of femininity. Urban and social historian Peter C. Baldwin posits this understanding of street furniture in \textit{Domesticating the Street}, in which he characterizes 19th century urban reform as being driven by a move to create a feminized ‘outdoor parlour’.\textsuperscript{52} In this context, according to Baldwin, street furniture was understood as an ornament that was applied to decorate the street, and therefore impose the feminine values of gentility and morality upon the street's users. This relationship between morality and urban improvement is an important one within the thesis as is the metaphor of the street as a room, which several contemporary agents employed during the street furniture debate. For instance, according to the \textit{Municipal Journal} in 1963, the famous maxim of William Morris ‘have nothing in your home which you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful’ was ‘no less applicable to the outdoor rooms formed by the streets and squares of Britain’s towns’.\textsuperscript{53}

This understanding of street furniture as reform disguised as urban beautification harks back to a time when schemes were overlaid upon the city, and the city was adorned.\textsuperscript{54} Baldwin is not alone in his understanding of street furniture's capacity to domesticate public space. In his essay 'Scenes of the Street', architectural historian Anthony Vidler describes the 19th century use of street furniture in Paris as being indicative of the interiorization of the street. In redecorating the street, as one would a room, Vidler suggests that the French state sought to simultaneously modernize the city, as well as

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\textsuperscript{50} James Winter, \textit{London's Teeming Streets 1830-1914}, (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993)
\textsuperscript{51} See the redevelopment of Kensington High Street, and London's Exhibition Road by The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, \url{http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/subsites/exhibitionroad.aspx} [accessed 30th May 2012]
\textsuperscript{52} Peter C. Baldwin, \textit{Domesticating the Street: The Reform of Public Space in Hartford, 1850-1930}, (Ohio, The Ohio State University, 1999)
\textsuperscript{53} 'Restoring Order to the Street Scene in Britain’, the \textit{MJ}, 15th March 1963, Vol.71, p.737
calming the city’s populace, and making the city legible. Further efforts were expressed through the standardization of street furniture across the city, and Vidler reports that,

‘from the bench to the lamp, the kiosk to the pissoir, the railing to the tree guard, the pavement to the drain – so that even as the trace of the route united a hitherto parcelled out city so did the objects of its use remind the citizen of one, uniformly governed Paris’. 55

Though Vidler is here commenting upon the way in which the anxious state sought to represent its control over the city - and therefore determine the social forms taking place within it - nevertheless, these ideas about standardization, power and control are important for the thesis. All three are represented in the postwar debate on street furniture, illustrating their continued association with state-sponsored design schemes.

Street furniture’s relationship with power and social regulation is arguably most clearly represented through the literature on street lights. The use of light as a means of controlling space and the behaviour of those who use it, is the subject of a substantial body of literature, spanning urban history, architectural history, and social and cultural history. 56 Recent studies have approached the subject from the discipline of criminology, in which street lighting is assessed as a means of tackling crime. 57 More recently, public design researchers Kin Wai Michael Sui and Hong Yang Song have opened the discussion up still further to consider instances where CCTV cameras are employed as alternatives to street lighting. Sui and Song’s study also touches upon another important theme that has often been associated with the public realm, and by extension, street furniture, namely: agency. In their work in Hong Kong, Sui and Song found that while the public believes public space belongs to them, they still hold the local authority responsible for maintaining it. 58 This observation touches upon a

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58 Kin Wai Michael Sui, Hong Yang Song, ‘Street Furniture and Night: Design for Contemporary Lifestyles’ the International Journal of the Humanities 8, No.1, 2010, p.270
substantial volume of literature that addresses the issue of authority and the design of the city.\textsuperscript{59}

Sociologists have also addressed street furniture in terms of agency. The most well-known of these studies is by William H. Whyte in \textit{The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces}, which was based on an experiment in a small urban park in New York.\textsuperscript{60} In his experiment, Whyte used benches as a means to measure behavioural forms, and therefore gauge how best to design public spaces – a human-centred approach which several subsequent studies have made use of.\textsuperscript{61}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure7.jpg}
\caption{Garry Winogrand, \textit{New York World's Fair}, 1964}
\end{figure}

In a visual context, these social and cultural themes are also addressed by novelist Geoff Dyer in \textit{The Ongoing Moment}.\textsuperscript{62} Dyer focuses on the symbolism of the bench in the photographs of Brassai, Weegee, Andre Kertesz and Garry Winogrand. In their


\textsuperscript{60} William H. Whyte, \textit{The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces} (New York: Project for Public Spaces, 1980)


photographs, the bench conveys a sense of sadness and loneliness, but as Dyer notes, they also - in the case of Garry Winogrand's photograph *World Fair* (fig.7) - appear as props or stages on which performances take place.\(^6^3\) As objects that each of us is forced to engage with daily, street furniture has a profoundly social role as the backdrop to our everyday lives. This understanding partly explains why street furniture prompted so much debate during the postwar period, since the design of such objects affected everyone.

### i.iii Disciplinary Framework and Methodology

The thesis is located within the disciplinary framework of design history. In order to gain a sense of disciplinary context, a full survey of several design history periodicals was initially conducted, including the *Journal of Design History*, the Design History Society *Newsletter*, *things*, *Design Studies*, and the *Scandinavian Journal of Design History*. Surveying these periodicals, as well as general histories of design, revealed the absence of critical studies on street furniture. Nevertheless, design history is an appropriate disciplinary framework for several reasons. Firstly, as a significant agent within postwar discussions of street furniture, material produced by and associated with the Council of Industrial Design and its magazine *Design* is a prominent source of official discourse for the thesis. Concerned specifically with design matters, the CoID’s output has been the subject of several design history studies already.\(^6^4\) Thus further research on the CoID’s influence upon street furniture design is best placed within the same context. Moreover, as a considerable volume of material associated with street furniture's critical reception in the postwar period was published in specialist design magazines - such as the *Architectural Review* - situating this study within the disciplinary framework of design history is appropriate.

\(^{63}\) ibid. p.136

Through design history it is possible to address the socio-political and cultural meanings of designed objects. As the proceedings of an early conference on design history in 1976 stated, the subject is defined as being concerned with ‘artefacts – things created by man to fulfill a particular function and thus satisfy a social need’.

Though an interest in the significance of the artefact is shared by several disciplines - including archaeology, cultural studies, and art and architectural history - design history is the most appropriate context in which to examine the cultural meanings of industrially produced objects, such as street furniture. One explanation for this is that, while these other disciplines often avoid using the term design and rarely engage with design practice or process, design history provides a framework to understand street furniture design’s social, economic and political role.

In relation to the long-standing academic disciplines of art and architectural history, design history is relatively new. Perhaps unsurprisingly therefore, its practitioners have regularly sought to define and redefine the field. Having emerged out of a period of considerable social, cultural and political change, design history discarded a whole series of previously accepted values including the concept of objectivity, the West’s dominance, connoisseurship, the narrative of history as a series of movements and isms and the limitations placed upon appropriate subjects of study. Yet it can also be understood as overlapping with and drawing upon a number of other fields, including anthropology, sociology and urbanism. It is, according to British design historian Judy Attfield, an androgynous hybrid discipline. In borrowing some of its tools and methodologies from these fields as well as from the study of everyday life and social, political and economic history more generally, design history can be understood as having a certain amount of inherent flexibility from which to analyse the subject of street furniture.

67 The question of appropriate objects of study within design history was not resolved easily however, and an example of this tension was revealed in a dispute between several figures in the mid-1980s. See the *Design History Society Newsletter*, No.24 February 1985, p.6; the *Design History Society Newsletter*, No.25 May 1985, pp.4-6
Yet how do you write a design history of street furniture? There are many legitimate ways that one could approach the design history of these objects. By tracing the changing shape of lampposts, parking meters and benches one could write a strictly formal history of street furniture. Alternatively, one could privilege the designers of street furniture - its heroes, in other words – to produce an authographic history. A sociological study would be equally possible, where the uses and appropriation of street furniture could be analysed. And, even a linguistic history could be written to account for the etymology of the term itself. However, none of these examples are adequate to account for the critical debate about street furniture that occurred in Britain after the war. While the formal, sociological and linguistic elements of street furniture’s history are of course important, this is a thesis about how different people talked about the design of such objects, during a period of immense social, cultural and political change.

For design history, such questions of methodology and representation are pivotal, but its models have often attracted criticism in the past for the debt they owe to other disciplines. Back in 1987, the anthropologist Daniel Miller labelled design history ‘bizarre’ and characterized it as,

‘a form of pseudo art history, in which the task is to locate great individuals such as Raymond Loewy or Norman Bel Geddes and portray them as the creators of modern mass culture’. In some respects Miller may have been correct in his portrayal of design history in this way. Certainly, the design activity during the 1980s may have contributed to Miller's perception, particularly the work of self-styled design guru Stephen Bayley and the V&A's Boilerhouse project, which promoted a canonical narrative of heroic good design drawn from the twentieth century. And yet, over and above the historical context in which Miller made his remarks, the history of design history reveals the extent to which early practitioners of the discipline adopted a canonical or biographical approach to writing about design.

Nikolaus Pevsner's Pioneers of the Modern Movement, a book which clearly reflects Miller's characterization, can be understood as an early canonical text on design history. First published in 1936 and later revised as Pioneers of Modern Design from

William Morris to Walter Gropius, the book charts the heroic figures that pioneered modern design, including Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Peter Behrens. Like much of the design polemic that this thesis draws upon, Pioneers of the Modern Movement stands as an exercise in myth-making as much as a historical text.

As already noted, a significant volume of literature has been published about Pevsner in recent years. Matthew Aitchison’s 2010 book Visual Planning and the Picturesque illustrates Pevsner’s importance in codifying Northern European ideas about the picturesque into a British context, through the lens of the 1950s British Townscape movement spearheaded by the AR. Stephen Games’ Pevsner: The Early Life looks at issues of nationality and identity in Pevsner’s life, as well as his role at the centre of what Games’ calls ‘a broad cultural consensus’ in postwar Britain. Other books, like Nikolaus Pevsner: The Life by Susie Harries mine both his personal and professional life.

However, while these books show that Pevsner’s opinions on architecture and design dominated the postwar cultural landscape, they also show that he was not a particularly active agent in the street furniture debate. According to Aitchison, ‘popular and mundane parts of the built environment such as signage [and] street furniture’ are absent from Pevsner’s work on visual planning, thus distinguishing him from the wider Townscape movement. Harries’ confirms this position. She cites the artist John Piper’s perception of Pevsner’s appointment as assistant editor at the AR, as threatening the eclectic nature of the magazine. Piper, according to Harries, ‘relished the accidental in art, the spontaneous design to be found in odd corners of everyday life’ – such as street furniture – whereas Pevsner preferred to discuss cantilevers and curtain walls. While this is not an entirely fair assessment - after all, his objective for the Buildings of England series was to ‘develop in people an appetite for looking’ and

73 Stephen Games, Pevsner: The Early Life, (London: Continuum, 2010), p.2
75 Matthew Aitchison (ed), Visual Planning and the Picturesque: Nikolaus Pevsner, (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010), p.29
there is some evidence that Pevsner did concern himself with street furniture on occasion - nevertheless, there is little to suggest he was an active force in the debate.77

Despite this, Pevsner is an important figure within the thesis - not least for his later involvement with the AR - and his impact will be discussed further in chapter one and three.78 He is also important in terms of design history’s methodologies. For American design historian Victor Margolin, design history grew initially as a response to literature by Pevsner, like Pioneers of the Modern Movement, first celebrating it and then criticizing it.79 An early example is Objects of Desire: Design and Society by Adrian Forty, which challenged Pevsner's canonical model, as well as his approach to privileging the designer at the centre of design historical accounts when it was first published in 1986.80 As the architectural writer Reyner Banham’s doctoral student – who was himself Pevsner’s doctoral student - Forty perceived the history of design as being a history of societies, in which design reflects the economic, social and cultural context of particular societies at particular times in history.81 This thesis adopts a similar approach, in that it does not focus on the personalities or designers within the postwar street furniture debate, but the society in which the debate took place and the issues that were debated.

More recently, design history has sought to further the 'democratization of subject matter' as Margolin described, and broaden out design history to include popular culture and mass-produced goods.82 In the postwar period, figures like Banham were instrumental in their contribution to this approach.83 Banham is a central figure within this thesis – particularly in chapter five - not only for his specific contribution to postwar design debates, but also in his approach to design writing more generally. Partly as a result of figures like Banham, it is possible to discern a shift in the 1960s from the Pevsner approach to design, which celebrated the status of the designer, to

78 Pevsner later worked on the editorial board of the AR, which regularly reported on street furniture.
80 Adrian Forty, Objects of Desire: Design and Society, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986)
81 ibid. p.8
one which rejected the authority of the author. However, in many ways, Banham can be considered to have shared Pevnser’s enthusiasm for design history. The Journal of Design History credits Banham as a leading pioneer and most enthusiastic supporter of design history.84 His interest in popular everyday culture, particular that emerging from the US, extended the reach of design history’s subject matter to include almost anything from hand-drills, automobile design, picnic kits and cigarette packaging. In validating the study of objects once deemed trivial, Banham's influence upon this thesis is significant.

Semiotic theory

The responsibility for opening up design history’s subject matter extends beyond Banham, however. For design historian Nigel Whiteley, Banham’s writing was itself ‘symptom of a paradigm shift resulting from the explosion of an urban, sophisticated popular culture’.85 These ideas about cultural authority and the increasing power of popular culture, constitute central themes within the thesis, and will be repeatedly returned to. However, Whiteley also suggests that semiology was also influential in this paradigm shift. Through examples like Mythologies by French writer Roland Barthes, Whiteley claims that semiotic theory provided the tools which enabled design historians to unpick the meaning of objects.86

For disciplines like cultural studies, semiotics provides a model for interpreting objects, attributing meaning to them, and examining how they are used and understood as commodities. Both cultural studies and material cultural studies have produced a significant volume of literature on this topic, several of which are considered important texts within design history.87 Less important however, is the way that

85 Nigel Whiteley, 'Design History or Design Studies?' Design Issues, Vol.11, No.1, Spring, 1995, p.38
cultural studies presents its findings, and in this respect design history can be distinguished from the latter. Taking its tropes from linguistics, semiotics has also influenced how public space is discussed or ‘read’, and some of these texts pass a cursory glance over street furniture. Against this background post-structuralism, also known as postmodernism, has also had an impact upon discussions of the way in which identity can be imprinted upon a city and thus accord it meaning.

Semiotic theory's relevance for discussions about street furniture is somewhat limited however. While it may present models for writing about contemporary street furniture, it is unlikely that the protagonists of the postwar debate read Barthes. It does nonetheless have some resonance upon the key organising principle of the thesis. In its examination of the critical reception of postwar street furniture, structuralism offers a way of thinking about the effect of representation upon the generation of meaning or meanings. Given that the design of modern street furniture during this period prompted such a broad debate, it is possible to question Barthes' suggestion that the way an object is represented and discussed affects our understanding of it, to the extent that eventually such ideas become embedded in the object. As this thesis will demonstrate, the meaning of postwar street furniture was neither accepted, nor shared by the general populace. Nevertheless, reflecting upon the cause of that lack of acceptance will in turn reflect how those people understood and discussed the designed environment, and power more generally.

A better understanding of the production of meaning in the designed environment can also be reached through literature on reception theory. In his critical introduction to the

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88 According to Nigel Whiteley, 'cultural studies can be infuriating in its density and obtuse intellectualism. Many books and articles are written in a way which confound understanding and undermine clear good communication…Conventional design history, to its eternal credit, usually was written in direct, simple and intelligible language', in Nigel Whiteley, 'Design History or Design Studies?', Design Issues, Vol.11, No.1, Spring, 1995, pp.40-41


subject published in 1984, Robert C. Holub considers the emergence of reception theory in West Germany during the late 1960s as an answer to a methodological crisis in literary studies. Much like semiotic theory, reception theory reflects ‘a general shift in concern from the author and the work to the text and the reader’.\(^2\) Moreover, within a framework like reception theory, it is possible to consider why meaning is produced, how it is used, and who makes use of it. Resituating this approach into a design context then, means that objects like street furniture cannot be fully understood by merely examining the way they are produced or analyzing their form. Instead, it is necessary to understand the perceptions of these objects and how they have been understood in a broader context, which is the basis of this thesis.

This methodological approach is increasingly adopted in studies of design, and several scholars provide examples for how this can be achieved. The work of cultural theorist Ben Highmore for instance, maps closely on to the approach taken in reception theory, in that he examines design without designers, and by doing so, reveals the systems and values by which we live our daily lives. Highmore is interested in issues of legibility and interpretation within the city, where experiences are dependent upon what the American sociologist Charles Wright Mills called ‘second-hand worlds’: worlds ‘determined by meanings…received from others’.\(^3\) This understanding is a useful one for the thesis, since it reflects the density of meaning within the street furniture debate, where arguments and value judgments were interpreted differently by those involved. Another approach is adopted by Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius in their book *Towerblock*, which surveys the design of postwar public housing in Britain.\(^4\) *Towerblock* reveals the conflict between designers and producers not only for control of the direction of modern housing but also historical reaction to their design by a variety of different agents. The study provides a model for how postwar design can be understood from the perspective of how it is perceived by a diverse range of people, all with their own agendas and prejudices, rather than merely through the physical objects of design.

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Another useful model for the thesis, which focuses on the production of meaning in design culture, is by art historian Jules Lubbock in *The Tyranny of Taste*. Lubbock defines his wide-reaching enquiry as one that is concerned with the ‘political economy of design’, i.e. a holistic study that reflects upon the contextual factors such as public policy and economics, which expose why Britain has come to look the way it does. His approach to the history of Good Design mirrors the approach taken in this thesis, which is not necessarily about what took place in development of street furniture design, but the perceptions of what happened. A similar approach is taken by Richard J. Williams in *Brasilia after Brasilia*, which examines Brazil’s capital as a discursive object within the context of architectural discourse in the 1960s. Indeed, Williams chooses not to distinguish between ‘discursive, and actual, objects’, preferring to regard understandings of Brasilia as being based on ‘a multiply authored, dynamic process’ rather than a singly authored work of art. According to Williams, ‘I am interested primarily in what people say about a place or a building, so that act of speech or writing, however seemingly ephemeral or inaccurate, is taken as evidence if it appears to move the debate in a particular direction’. Like Lubbock and Williams’ work, this thesis looks at the multiplicity of voices within the postwar debate on street furniture, since it is only by examining what contemporary people thought of street furniture that I can convey why the street was shaped in the way that it was.

**The everyday**

The methodology of this thesis has also been informed by the study of the everyday. Street furniture can be considered as a category of object within the everyday, since such objects are so ubiquitous as to render themselves almost invisible, despite their public-ness. For design historian Jeffrey L. Meikle, the earliest design historians overlooked the everyday, indeed Pevsner, 'had little use for the opinions and reactions of ordinary men and women. In fact, the objects most often used in daily life were practically invisible because they existed beneath taste, outside an established canon of design classics'.

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96 ibid. p.229
98 ibid. p.306
Yet such a hierarchical approach was heavily criticised by the original founders of design history, who 'perceived an opportunity to set an expansive populist agenda for the study of the material world'. In acknowledging and legitimising the voices of the previously marginalised and dispossessed - women, the poor, ethnic minorities and so on - the design historians of the 1970s also extended their pluralistic approach to recognising the extent of the material world. For many design historians, it was through the analysis of the most ordinary everyday objects and experiences that social and political systems and practices were revealed.

Analysis of everyday practice has a considerable legacy, particularly within French philosophy. Writers like Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau understood the production of the everyday as a means of escaping the alienation of capitalism, in which trivial everyday acts and objects could critique and revolutionize oppressive social and political structures. Research by Lefebvre and de Certeau laid the foundations for a significant body of work on the everyday object, and a substantial volume of literature on this subject has since been published in relation to Eastern Europe. Several novels have also sought to analyse the minutiae of everyday life, such as Nicholson Baker's fictional work *The Mezzanine*, which - according to Meikle - glories in,

>'careful observation and precise description of phenomena so limited in scope that they often fall below the threshold of everyday consciousness - yet so common that they provoke universal recognition when articulated.'

In its detailed approach to the everyday, *The Mezzanine* can be compared with Georges Perec’s *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, which conducts a semiotic analysis of the micro and macro elements within the city. Perec’s work is a useful example of how urban details like street furniture might convey bigger stories other than itself. And yet, while these works inspired and informed design historians during

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100 Ibid., p.191
the 1980s and 90s, some felt that the narrowness of design history required revision. In 1991, design historian Matthew Turner criticized the discipline’s rejection of the everyday design object – particularly those which were anonymous and banal - and stated that:

'Designs of an altogether humbler nature occupy the bulk of the registers, and accordingly represent the manmade world as it is encountered by most of us, most of the time. Overlooked, if not despised by mainstream design historians, this is the world of vegetable peelers…candy dispensers, coffin handles, and ballpoint pens. It can range from 19th century Indian bullock carts to 20th century atomic radiation shields; from badges with the legend "Remember Pearl Harbor" (1942) to artificial limbs'.

In some respects, Turner's criticism of design history was valid at its publication in 1991, for at that point very few design historians had dealt with the objects he lists though that has since changed.

Where this thesis is concerned, one useful example of the way in which design history has dealt with the everyday object can be found in things, a journal founded by a group of young historians and writers, and published by the Royal College of Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum between 1994 and 2010. Its contributors were broadly united by design history and a belief that,

'it is only by looking at the world of things as a whole - not only beautiful ones; and not only their making, but also their buying and selling, their wanting and their using - that the road can be opened up for a meaningful debate on the nature of good design'.

As if to prove its interest in all things, the first issue of things contained a range of essays addressing the design of combs, cash registers and 1930s screen-printing, proving that no object was deemed too trivial or too extraordinary to study. Yet even at a relatively early stage, things recognized that such a radically inclusive approach to design might have unforeseen consequences. Drawing upon Theatres of Memory by Samuel, things acknowledged that the problem with its own approach was that,

\[107\] Since Turner's comments, design historical studies on artificial limbs have been published. For further details refer to Katherine Feo's research in the Journal of Design History, Vol.20, No.1, 2007
\[108\] things was published somewhat sporadically in its final years, and became an exclusively online journal/blog from 2010. See www.thingsmagazine.net
\[109\] things 1. Winter 1994, p.6
\[110\] ibid.
‘such close up views "domesticate" the subject of history, making the personal seem all-important and the larger forces of social, political and economic change all but irrelevant’. In other words, by focusing on the ordinary and the everyday, things risked overlooking bigger social, political and economic changes. Yet it was precisely these larger issues - the grand narratives of society, politics, culture and economics - that had attracted the attention of things to the trivial objects of personal experience in the first place.

One of the interesting qualities about things was the way it reflected the inherent tensions within design history, concerning an appropriate field of enquiry. For in its simultaneous drive to define itself and to reject categorisation, each successive issue of things extended its study more broadly than the last, so that eventually it rejected the authenticity of historical account, and the term design itself. This urge to define and build boundaries while simultaneously opening up those boundaries developed into an ongoing obsession for things, and perhaps in a broader sense, for design history as a whole.

things provides a useful model on how ordinary objects can act as vehicles for bigger stories, and equally how design history can accommodate the study of the everyday. Though such ideas are increasingly commonplace, both in design history but also in the broader cultural spectrum, it is possible to use this model in the thesis as a means of seeking out grand narratives in everyday objects like lampposts and litterbins. Though few design history studies of the everyday object include street furniture - with the exception of Judy Attfield's discussion of heritage bollards in Wild Things - nevertheless a broader context appears to be emerging. For instance, sociologist Ben Highmore issued a 'sideboard manifesto' in 2009 urging for more analysis on the anonymous designed objects that form our ‘designed environment’, which could extend to street furniture. In addition, there is a growing trend to re-examine the role of the object, indicated by the publication of several recent books on the subject.

111 'Now and Then', things 4, Summer 1996, p.3
112 'A Kiss in the Dark', things 5, Winter 1996-7, p.4; things 6, Summer 1997, p.3; things 10, Summer 1999, p.3
114 Ben Highmore, The Design Cultures Reader, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2009), p.xiii
This trend is also reflected in contemporary documentaries, exhibitions and radio programmes. Street furniture has also been within the public eye more recently, and was displayed within the V&A’s 2012 exhibition *British Design from 1948: innovation in the modern age*, the Design Museum’s *Extraordinary Stories* and its Kenneth Grange exhibition *Making Britain Modern*. According to co-curator Ghislaine Wood, two prominent themes within *British Design from 1948* were the studio and the street, which were represented in the gallery by recreating a street from

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116 See Gary Hustwit’s 2009 documentary ‘Objectified’; the Museum of Broken Relationships in London and Zagreb; Radio 4’s History of the World in a 100 Objects.
the 1960s. Many of the objects within the simulated street, such as Kinneir and Calvert’s signage and Mellor’s traffic lights are discussed more fully in chapter five. Recent attention to street furniture can also be seen in press coverage during the London 2012 Olympics concerning gold postboxes – see fig.8 above - which illustrate the degree to which street furniture remains able to provoke debate.

i.iv Parameters of the Debate

Within the postwar street furniture debate a number of voices were present, including designers, architects, design journalists, architectural historians, local government agencies, central government ministers and civic pressure groups. Collectively, they represent a wide range of elite, conservative and progressive interests within the debate – in other words, high and low voices from the social and cultural spectrum. Many of these voices engaged in the debate in multiple guises - contributing articles to design magazines, writing letters to newspapers, sitting on design committees, advising the government and the public – and in these different roles, their arguments and agendas changed accordingly. Identities were flexible in postwar Britain, and it was possible, and even necessary on occasion, to maintain several outwardly conflicting opinions simultaneously, depending on the public or private context in which such views were expressed. Some voices are represented to a greater degree than others, largely because of difficulties in recovering primary source material. The sources consulted reflect the parameters within which the thesis is working, and are listed below.

High and low

Since much of the debate about street furniture design occurred at a government level, a large proportion of the primary material was found in the National Archives in London. The National Archives holds an invaluable collection of government files, white papers, correspondence and minutes recording decisions pertaining to street furniture design involving Cabinet, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, and the Office of Works. It also holds photographic and

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117 Email correspondence with Ghislaine Wood, 17th June 2013
118 Alexandra Topping, ‘Royal Mail Backs Down Over Golden Postbox in Ben Ainslie’s Home Town’, the Guardian, 16th August 2012
documentary material by the Royal Fine Art Commission, a government-funded body which actively engaged in the debate and is discussed in more detail in chapter three. The Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture Collections Centre at the University of Middlesex was able to provide the RFAC’s Annual Reports. Together, this material represents the public and private voices of government ministers, civil servants and RFAC committee members and the way in which they engaged with the public, the CoID and local authorities. It also illustrates the internal tensions within government and the RFAC over street furniture design, reflecting the progressive and conservative forces at work within both groups.

Another important voice in the street furniture debate was the government-supported Council of Industrial Design. Made up of architects, civil servants and designers, the CoID was the official body responsible for street furniture design during the postwar period, and was perceived as being both progressive and conservative within the debate by different groups. The Design Archives at the University of Brighton provided much of the material relating to the CoID. As an organization, its official and unofficial voice is represented in the street furniture debate through a variety of different sources including Annual Reports, letters and internal memorandums, but also through promotional material like design folios, exhibition guides, and catalogues. Unfortunately, the CoID’s Street Furniture Committee minutes were all destroyed, meaning that internal debates within the Committee specifically about street furniture cannot be represented in the thesis. The Design Archive does, however, hold some correspondence between officers of the CoID and other organizations, which records the presence of a debate. Smaller archives like the Gordon Russell Archive were able to provide letters by the late CoID director. A further way to represent the participation of the CoID in the street furniture debate was through its magazine Design. As such, a full survey of Design between 1949-1974 was conducted to present the organization’s official voice during the course of the debate, and show how the CoID’s ideas manifested visually.

During the course of the debate, magazines and periodicals were an essential means of generating and disseminating opinion about street furniture across the political and cultural spectrum. Magazines like the Listener, Country Life, Punch, the Architects Journal, the Spectator, the New Statesman, and Art News and Review were consulted.
on occasions where street furniture was discussed. Articles and correspondence published in the national and local press were also surveyed in order to gain a sense of how different constituencies contributed to the debate, and their reaction to it.

Contemporary design magazines like the *AR* were also included in this postwar periodical survey, since its editors and contributors played a significant role in the debate, both publically and privately. The *AR* is an especially rich source, since it illustrates the tensions between high and low forces in postwar Britain - a major theme within the thesis. Through Townscape, and Ian Nairn’s Outrage and Counter Attack series’, the *AR* provides an invaluable source of textual and visual polemic for the thesis, in which street furniture emerges as a divisive subject even in elite design circles. What is special about the *AR* is that it supported vernacular design against the ravages of local government planners, while simultaneously championing the modern movement. The ambivalence of the magazine’s position is symptomatic of the complexity of the debate as a whole, in which seemingly opposing forces - progressive and conservative - could be represented simultaneously, subject to ones perspective. My understanding of the *AR*’s position draws on avant-garde theory, such as Renato Poggioli’s 1968 book *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, which addresses the necessity of the avant-garde to battle on two fronts: against both the dominating culture of the establishment and the untrained public. Poggioli’s characterization of the avant-garde is useful for the thesis, since it illustrates the complex relationship elite groups maintain with the democratic or liberal societies in which they operate; expressing hostility towards that culture but simultaneously only being able to flower in such a climate.¹¹⁹ This theme will be examined in more detail in chapter one.

Newspapers, and specialist design and architecture magazines are also useful in representing the public’s voice, which would otherwise be difficult to locate. Information on the general population’s response to street furniture is often mediated through these forums. Both *Design* and the *AR* published letters from their readers, which have been employed within the thesis to illustrate how interested members of the public engaged in the debate. Members of the public routinely wrote letters of complaint about street furniture to government ministries and government agencies.

Where possible, these have been included to demonstrate the relationship between the two groups, and to trace the development of the debate more generally.

Published design polemic was also an equally useful source of material. Analysing the papers and lectures published by 19th century design reformers is an essential means of understanding their arguments about design, and to trace the genealogy of the main themes within the thesis. Likewise, the manifestos, pamphlets and reports produced by groups like the Design and Industries Association, and texts by interwar design figures like John Gloag, Antony Bertram, Noel Carrington and Herbert Read, all chart the progress of design reform and the modern movement in early 20th century Britain. Such material is not necessarily representative of the divisions with the debate – and particularly not the public’s voice - but it does show the established positions of the design elite and the avant-garde, the emergence of a cultural consensus and the views of those in privileged cultural positions.

Yet polemical evidence like this poses its own problems. While the material produced by the elite or avant-garde groups within this debate may have generated considerable noise – as indicated by the fact that it was published - the actual enactment of their ideas about street furniture took place on a municipal level. Recovering this quieter municipal material is more difficult, however. As a result of successive years of municipal reorganization, and departmental restructuring, recordkeeping tends to either be arbitrary or fragmented. Of the 23 local authority archives contacted for the thesis, not one had kept detailed records on the actual way in which postwar municipal committees, planners, borough engineers or municipal architects discussed, designed, commissioned, or selected street furniture. In the majority of cases, only official minutes survive - in which decisions on street furniture are merely formally recorded and any sense of internal debate is absent. This absence may be attributed to traditional (albeit frustrating) ideas of good recordkeeping, or it may reflect the sheer scale of municipal machinations during the postwar period, where the reach of each authority prevented detailed records from being kept on the minutiae of every decision for which it was accountable. Whatever the reason for this absence, it not only highlights the low status of records associated with street furniture, but also the widespread perception of such objects as trivial.
To circumvent these problems, representing the municipal voice has been approached obliquely. While some local authority archives were able to provide records on specific controversies – such as the London Metropolitan Archive and Westminster Archive – in the main, periodicals like the Municipal Journal have proved invaluable as evidence of municipal involvement in the debate. Using the articles, news items and letters published by the MJ between 1952-1968, it has been possible to represent the municipal voice to some extent. Letters from municipal figures were routinely published in design magazines, including the ones already listed, and the National Archives hold some records detailing interaction between central and local government.

Although the voice of the author has not been prioritized over others, nevertheless interviews with postwar street furniture designers have also been an important source of information for the thesis. The testimonies of designers like Kenneth Grange and Margaret Calvert make an interesting contribution to understanding how good street furniture design was actually practiced during the early postwar period. Their interpretation is of course subjective, but by describing their first-hand experiences of designing parking meters and signage, as well as whether the accompanying debate affected the design process, Grange and Calvert provide a unique perspective on the debate for the thesis.

While much of the material consulted throughout the project has been text-based, photographic material and illustrations provide another perspective on the debate, showing how the players listed so far manifested their ideas about street furniture visually. This material has been found in a wide variety of contexts, including architecture and design magazines from the period, government files, annual reports and catalogues. Unfortunately, few local authority archives retained photographs of street furniture, even in cases where specific objects provoked debate. This absence can be attributed to the fact that, according a London archivist, historic photographs of the street tended to omit street furniture on the basis that their presence would have ‘spoiled the picture’. Taking my own photographs has also allowed me to partially circumvent this absence, and as a result much of the visual material within the thesis is comprised of personal photographs taken during the research process. Though many of

120 Correspondence with Frances Johnson, Camden Local Studies and Archive Centre, September 2013
these images are not central to the narrative, they provide an entry point into the subject of street furniture for the reader. Having originally trained as a design practitioner, I am interested in how many of the ideas within this thesis about street furniture manifest visually, or have been represented visually.

In addition to the material already listed, other miscellaneous sources have also been consulted, in order to represent the wider context to the debate. Such sources include documentary footage and contemporary film, autobiographies, cartoons, poems, popular songs, and fashion spreads. The value of sources like this lies in the way they show how the debate about street furniture manifested more broadly than just the central figures involved. They also demonstrate the significance of such objects in a social and cultural context, and how they were interpreted by those outside avant-garde culture.

i.v Chapter Structure

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Together they follow a broadly chronological structure. Individually, each chapter presents the debate from a different perspective, drawing upon different conversations between and among different groups. While a discussion of the anxieties of the period extends through the thesis, each of these conversations loosely focuses on a particular theme.

Chapter one focuses on the historical framework to the postwar street furniture debate, and sets the scene for the chapters to follow. It introduces the reader to a set of arguments and ideas about design that shaped the critical debate on street furniture design in postwar Britain. Broadly speaking, it acts as an exposition of debates about taste, class and snobbery, Good Design, design and nationalism, soft power, standardization and monotony, and traces their prehistory in the general design debates of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By analysing the polemic produced by figures as varied as Augustus Welby Pugin and William Morris, Nikolaus Pevsner, John Gloag and Herbert Read, as well as organizations like the Deutsche Werkbund, the Design and industries Association, the Council of Art and Industry and even the BBC, this chapter examines how these debates were shaped and brought closer to government-sponsored efforts to improve design. Framing the background to these
ideas locates the postwar street furniture debate in a historical context and allows the reader to trace its lineage. This chapter also ties these ideas to more recent literature on the postwar period, illustrating the degree to which such ideas continue to be relevant today. Though very little of the material in this chapter specifically relates to street furniture, it is important because it provides the basis to the debate that followed and establishes the broad conceptual landscape for the thesis. By setting the scene in this way, this chapter provides the genealogy for the ideas that underpinned the debate, which are carefully examined in later chapters.

Chapter two looks at the role of the Council of Industrial Design in promoting Good Design after the war, and its effect on street furniture design. It loosely focuses on the theme of taste within the debate. The first section will address the way that the CoID’s mechanisms and powers were harnessed to promote a particular interpretation of modern street furniture. The second section will examine the various methods of persuasion employed by the CoID to reach the different groups identified as being influential upon the design of street furniture, and some initial response to those attempts. The third section will focus upon the way in which the CoID’s interpretation of Good Design was actually applied in practice, through the example of Kenneth Grange’s 1958 parking meter. Together, these three sections illustrate the top-down version of the street furniture debate, as represented by the CoID and Grange. This is the official narrative to the postwar modernization of street furniture, as told by those who were at the centre of those changes. Their contribution relies not only on Good Design discourse, but it also draws upon other contemporary notions of taste and consensus. Reflecting upon the complex role performed by the CoID in relation to street furniture will show the nuances and inconsistencies in the official articulations of the debate.

Chapter three covers the other influential voices that were present in the debate, outside the official boundaries of the CoID but still situated within elite culture. It specifically addresses the themes of soft power and influence, as well as class and taste. This chapter shows that the debate on street furniture design included a number of design bodies and individuals – including the Architectural Review, the Royal Fine Art Commission and the Civic Trust – who participated in the debate, sometimes in a semi-official capacity, and thus often had the ear of government. The lines of division
between these groups – both between themselves, and in relation to central government – was ambiguous. However, they made a significant intellectual impact upon the debate, and demonstrate the multiple interests that affected it as well as the way that power during the 1950s was dispersed. Section one focuses upon the contribution of the AR, and how its attention to street furniture not only reflected the magazines’ deliberately cultivated position on the margins of good taste, but also its interest in urban development and authority more generally. The second section will look closely at the soft power expressed by other elite or state-funded groups present in the debate, such as the RFAC and the CT. The third section examines the way that these internalized debates gradually spilled out to include the public, and how elite groups tried to manage public opinion. While these elite voices might not seem entirely representative of the wider view within the debate, they make an interesting contribution to the thesis. They were loud, articulate, able to communicate their message through a variety of channels and as a result, able to shape the debate.

Chapter four takes the debate beyond the enlightened voices of the design world and the intelligentsia, to include municipal planners and borough engineers, MPs, civil servants and members of the public. Rather than merely focus on the comparatively noisy voices represented in chapter three, this chapter will examine the way in which these quieter voices contributed to the debate, and intersected with each other through complex negotiations that tended to occur in private. The broad themes addressed in this section are influence, snobbery and class and taste. The first section will examine the debate that ensued between central and local government and design specialists over a proposed booklet on street furniture between 1949-1954, which ended in failure. The second section will look at a number of public controversies concerning street furniture, particularly lighting, during the 1950s and early 1960s, and the depth of hostility towards local government that developed as a result. The third section will analyse local government reaction to the AR’s publication of Outrage, and the arguments used by engineers and planners to defend themselves against accusations of incompetence where street furniture was concerned. As a whole, chapter four illustrates the level of resistance to modern street furniture that emerged not just from the public, but also between the authorities jointly responsible for its improvement, including government. Identifying these internal divisions illustrates the extent to
which the postwar street furniture debate was characterized by one confrontation after another, and between almost every party involved.

Chapter five assesses how the critical debate on street furniture design moved from questions about the definition of Good Design, to a critique of the design establishment itself. It specifically looks at changing notions of taste, and arguments about standardization and monotony within the debate. The first section will address the challenge to Good Design by writers like Reyner Banham, and the implications for organizations like the CoID. Section two will analyse the way in which the debate on street furniture shifted to accommodate a greater emphasis on function and standardization over and above the moral values of Good Design. Section three will examine how the voice of the public gradually replaced that of the elite in validating street furniture design, and the effect of that shift on the style of street furniture during the 1960s and 70s. Together, these three sections illustrate the social and cultural transformations that took place during in the 1960s and early 70s, and the effect upon good street furniture design. The final section of chapter five will form a coda, which establishes the historical boundaries of the debate.

Together, these five chapters provide a picture of the way that the postwar debate about street furniture was able to reflect the social and cultural tensions of the time - about class, taste and power. This picture will show that opinion was divided on what good street furniture meant, and as a result, the process by which street furniture was modernized became fraught with conflict and confrontation. By examining how street furniture was designed, discussed and understood in postwar Britain - by a wide variety of different and sometimes interconnected individuals, organizations, publications and committees - the thesis illustrates the complexity of the period, and the nuanced way in which social and cultural power was dispersed. In design context, this account provides another perspective on the development of a more plural design culture, and raises questions about the power that some individuals and organizations have in shaping the designed environment. What follows here then, is a thesis about the process by which the postwar street was furnished, and how debates about seemingly banal objects like street furniture can reflect the complex struggles that give shape to public life.
CHAPTER ONE
PRECEDENTS AND BEGINNINGS

The anxiety people expressed about street furniture design in postwar Britain was not unusual; indeed it had considerable precedent. Arguments about design in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reflected the same anxieties about taste, standardization and aesthetic monotony, design and nationalism, soft power, class and snobbery. They even remain relevant in discussions about street furniture today.\(^{121}\) In this chapter I will account for the design history of these ideas, since it is through this intellectual framework, that postwar street furniture was discussed, understood and even determined.

1.1 A Nineteenth Century Context to the Debate

Many of the ideas articulated during the postwar debate about street furniture design can be traced to the 19\(^{th}\) century. Located within the fastest developing industrial economy in the world at that time, Britain experienced many of the problems associated with such rapid change before her continental or US counterparts. Accordingly, design emerged as a forum to express anxieties about these social, cultural and environmental changes. One of the key voices within 19\(^{th}\) century design debates was the architect and writer, Augustus Welby Pugin, whose polemic emphasized the importance of design’s social, moral and national responsibilities.\(^{122}\) For Pugin, design was grounded in nationalistic fervour and religion, and according to historian Michael Collins, his crusade against neo-classicism contributed to the debate about the appropriateness of particular styles in a national context, and their moral value.\(^{123}\) For Pugin, this sense of moral value also extended to objects; after all, according to art historian Jules Lubbock, it was Pugin,

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\(^{122}\) See Augustus Welby Pugin, The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture, (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1895. First published by John Weale, London 1841)

‘who, under the pressures of the intense social and political turmoil of the 1830s, perceived that any artefact, be it a building, a chair or a dinner plate could be made an object lesson in how we should conduct our lives’.124 This model of the ‘object lesson’ provides a worthwhile example for the thesis. For although Pugin was unconcerned with street furniture design – as far as we know - his argument that an object ought to educate its user on a moral level, as well as stylistically, became a fundamental issue within design debates after WW2.125

Style can be considered an entry-point into Pugin’s interpretation of design and morality, and for him stylistic disorder was symptomatic of social disorder. Pugin objected to the ‘meretricious ornament’ and ‘cheap deceptions of magnificence’ that tempted the lower classes of society at that time.126 For Pugin, popular taste was bad, and in his 1843 essay An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England, he criticizes the taste of the masses for ‘fiddle-headed spoons, punchy racing cups, cumbersome tureens and wine coolers’.127 Such objects, he said, ‘corrupted design and decayed taste’ and were therefore dangerous to the very fabric of society.128 As a result of such badly designed objects, ‘taste had fallen to its lowest depth’ according to Pugin, and only the beautiful and the true could ‘overthrow…modern paltry taste and paganism’.129

The relationship Pugin draws between design, class and taste is an important precursor to the debate, since a wide range of organizations and individuals in postwar Britain shared Pugin’s anxieties. However, these ideas extended beyond Pugin, and as the 19th century progressed, the relationship between design, class and taste became increasingly important to the country as a whole. An event like the 1851 Great Exhibition demonstrates the increasing importance of such ideas - both within design culture but also for the state - since it was organized with the intention of improving

125 For an example of an ‘object lesson’ see the bread plate Pugin designed for Minton ca.1850. http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O8058/waste-not-want-not-bread-plate-pugin-augustus-welby/ [accessed 27th September 2013]
128 ibid. p.51
129 ibid. p.1 and p.56
public taste. Academic studies of the Great Exhibition are well accounted for, but in the context of the thesis, its value lies in the way in which the benefits of high standards of design began to be promoted by government, largely on economic grounds. Many of those who objected to the Great Exhibition, did so on the basis that the exhibits on display were allegedly harmful to Britain’s export trade. But why was the improvement of design justified in this way?

For Lubbock, one obvious answer is that design became important for commercial reasons. The Great Exhibition was a means to showcase Britain’s industrial might – at the expense of France, her greatest competitor - and her export potential. Thus the concern expressed about the quality of these export designs, was based on simple economics. And yet, as Lubbock explains, such an answer would only be adequate if,

‘the energies of the design pundits and the institutions associated with them, had indeed been directed towards improving the competitiveness of British manufacturers, with making their products more commercial, more popular, more fashionable. This was not the case. Instead, their efforts were against the prevailing fashions, the taste of the public at home and abroad: in short, against the market’.

That the argument of these reformers was not purely based on the competitiveness of British goods but on something else, leads one to speculate on what that something else was. For his part, Lubbock considered the moral and social influences of design as being the active factor in these historical debates. In other words, how the design of an object affects the public that buys or consumes it is more important than how it performs in the economic market. This tension is important for the thesis, for it not only reflects the critical attitude of design reformers to popular taste – as already discussed in the context of Pugin - but also places the improvement of design out-with a financial system that recognizes value only in monetary terms.

These ideas about the social, political and economic responsibilities of design grew in importance as the 19th century progressed, largely under the influence of art historian John Ruskin, and the architect, designer and writer, William Morris. Together they developed the theoretical underpinnings of the Arts and Crafts movement, but one of

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The most important idea for which they are known was that design could improve society.\textsuperscript{133} The reason why a new society was necessary is familiar, however. Like Pugin, Morris perceived the society in which he lived to have morally failed. Specifically, he regarded it as ‘incurably vicious’ and in need of significant social and political change.\textsuperscript{134} In a lecture on ‘The Lesser Arts’ given in 1877, Morris attributed this viciousness to the ignorance of the public for wanting cheap, badly made and ugly things, regardless of the implications for the maker.\textsuperscript{135} Thus Morris hoped the example set by his own design practice would ‘lead to a higher form of society’.\textsuperscript{136}

Morris’s belief that design could improve society had lasting consequences for postwar Britain, since many important figures and organisations continued to promote this understanding throughout the street furniture debate. Another important idea, which can be attributed to Morris, is the belief that every member of society should benefit from design. Like a number of other figures associated with the Arts and Crafts movement, Morris was a socialist and his political views undoubtedly affected his belief that design ‘must be made by the people and for the people’.\textsuperscript{137} Design for everyone, regardless or class or status, is a central theme within the debate on street furniture design, and will be returned to throughout the thesis.

Yet the provision of design for everyone has a contradiction at its very heart, and in this respect, there are inconsistencies between Morris’s ideals and their practical application. On the one hand, Morris has been described as a true prophet, largely because of his concern for social conditions.\textsuperscript{138} On the other hand however, Morris considered the public to be an unintelligent mass in need of education. This


contradiction eventually saw Morris withdraw from reality, back to a ‘world of poetry and beauty’.\textsuperscript{139} While much of Morris’s thinking was political by nature, there persisted an uncomfortable reality to his ideals, as Design and Industries Association member Noel Carrington later recalled:

‘most of Morris’s disciples were drawn from the middle class, so too were his patrons. Though Morris could train working class apprentices to carry out his designs, he never produced in sufficient quantities to market goods at a price which the mass of people could afford.’\textsuperscript{140}

This uncomfortable reality between theory and practice meant that despite his best intentions, Morris’s customers remained the elite within society.\textsuperscript{141} It is an important point, because it exemplifies the underlying presence of class in 19\textsuperscript{th} century debates about the benefits of high standards of design, and raises a question about who these improvements were actually for. After all, there is an obvious difficulty in outwardly trying to provide better design for everyone if you doubt the public’s intellectual capacity to appreciate it.

Many of the ideas outlined so far affected discussions about the design of consumer goods and architecture; but they also had some impact upon discussions about street furniture. In an essay by John T. Emmett in the \textit{British Quarterly Review} in 1880, Emmett objected to the lamp standards in Trafalgar Square, which he described as ‘absurd contrivances’, and he derided the fact that,

‘the public see such things but cannot understand them, take them for magnificent and so pass by; and thus by constant habit of neglect, they have entirely lost the faculty of reasonable observation; sound discriminating criticism being scarcely known.’\textsuperscript{142}

That such lamps were mistakenly perceived by the public to be magnificent when in fact, they merely sought to disguise a technological effect was at the root of Emmett’s complaint. Like others before him, Emmett blamed the public’s lack of education and taste for poor street furniture design – an argument which would dominate the postwar street furniture debate.

\textsuperscript{139} ibid. p.24  
\textsuperscript{140} Noel Carrington, \textit{Industrial Design in Britain}, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1976), p.22  
\textsuperscript{141} Shortly after Morris’s death, the way in which design was consumed by the different strata of the class system was investigated more fully by the sociologist Thorstein Veblen. Though not referring to Morris or the Arts and Crafts per se, Veblen’s \textit{Theory of the Leisure Class} can be distinguished from other cultural or design commentators in terms of his analysis of the way in which taste and class collide at this time.  
The Deutsche Werkbund

The 19th century ideas discussed so far, about design’s relationship to class and taste and its social, economic and cultural responsibilities, proved to be extremely influential internationally, and even provided ‘the roots of modernist thinking’, according to design historian Penny Sparke.143 At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, designers and craftspeople across Europe perceived British design culture, and the writings of Morris in particular, as providing an

ideological model for their own efforts to raise design standards. One group that developed these ideas even further was the Deutsche Werkbund. Established by the writer and architect Hermann Muthesius in 1907, the Deutsche Werkbund can be considered a German interpretation of the Arts and Crafts Movement combined with mass manufacturing.¹⁴⁴

The Deutsche Werkbund is important for the thesis for several reasons. Its efforts to raise design standards depended on many of the same arguments already discussed, concerning design’s relationship to taste and class, power and the nation state. At the beginning of the 20th century, Germany was still a relatively new country, having only recently unified. The artists and designers involved with the Werkbund sought to realize a vision of the new country in which industry would shine a new light upon the applied arts. By doing so, they hoped to revitalize every object from ‘the sofa cushion to urban planning’.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, as design historian Jeremy Aynsley identified in his recent book *Designing Modern Germany*, the Deutsche Werkbund sought to give ‘the world a face’.¹⁴⁶

The Werkbund’s attempt to create a practical alliance between art and industry was informed by the idea that well-designed goods could potentially benefit people’s everyday lives. In this way, the Werkbund continues a key idea from 19th century British design debates: namely, that men are molded by the objects they are surrounded by. According to historian Joan Campbell, Muthesius believed that,

‘once manufacturers were made aware that by producing cheap imitations and fashionable novelties they were damaging the national character through pollution of the visual environment…they would abjure their evil ways and address themselves to their proper task of creating a modern German home whose honest simplicity would beneficially influence the character of its inhabitants.’¹⁴⁷

While the improvement of the nation’s character was considered a value in itself, the rewards of this shift would be threefold. Not only would manufacturers be acting

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¹⁴⁴ A period Muthesius spent working as a cultural attaché in the German Embassy in London between 1896 and 1904 was significant in familiarizing him with the Arts and Crafts movement, which influenced the underlying objectives of the Werkbund. See Hermann Muthesius, *Das Englische Haus*, (Berlin: Wasmuth, 1904-5)


morally, their behaviour would make good business sense. Moreover, the national effects of this shift would improve the reputation of the German Reich on the world market, and free her from the tyranny of her competitor: the French.\footnote{ibid. pp.14-5} In this way, economic, ethical and patriotic sentiments were mobilized in order to further the ends of a design reform organization that dealt mostly with aesthetics.

As an association, the Werkbund is also important for the thesis because it provided a professional model for 20\textsuperscript{th} century British design reform – informing the shape of organisations like the Design and Industries Association and the Council of Industrial Design. It drew together university professors, traditional craftsmen, fine artists, industrialists, and politicians, illustrating the interaction between intellectual, artistic, social and political factions on questions of design.\footnote{ibid. pp.5-6} The Werkbund also recognized that it was only by working with industry and government, and influencing their decisions, that widespread design reform could become a reality. According to Campbell, the Werkbund argued that,

‘modern governments, through enlightened building programs and purchasing policies, could affect significantly the general levels of taste. As a result the Werkbund strove to convert to its cause officials responsible for decisions on matters on design’.\footnote{ibid. p.45}

In this way, the Werkbund provides another model for the British reform movements of the 1920 and 1930s in recognizing the power of forces out-with design culture to invest in improving design standards. Modernist architect, Le Corbusier recognized this too, when he observed that the goal of the Werkbund was to connect power and culture.\footnote{Charles Eduard Jeanneret, ‘Etude Sur le Movement d’Art Decorative en Allemagne’ (1912, repr. NY: Da Capo Press, 1980) p.24, in Frederic J. Schwartz, \textit{The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture Before the First World War}, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), p.116}

However, there are other parallels between the Werkbund and the postwar groups engaged in design debates, namely the contradictions in their approach. For a start, despite the Werkbund’s claim that design should benefit ordinary people, many of its principle figures catered only for the wealthy, largely because their work was so costly to produce.\footnote{Joan Campbell, \textit{The German Werkbund: The Politics of Reform in the Applied Arts}, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p.24} According to Campbell, this contradiction emerged from the belief, held by many members of the Werkbund, that they were an elite ‘whose main purpose was
to shape the thinking while remolding the environment of the dominant classes in a hierarchically ordered society’. Like their English counterparts, few members of the Werkbund could reach the public they so desired because of their simultaneous belief that high culture should be the product of an exceptional minority.

A further contradiction in the Werkbund’s approach can be found between its social objectives and its aesthetic preferences. For some, the association’s interest in giving the world a face meant that it was overly concerned with unnecessarily beautifying ordinary things. According to German economist, Werner Sombart,

‘although useful articles need not be ugly, hot water bottles and umbrellas are simply not fit objects for the artists attention. Some things are better left in undistinguished obscurity and need to be formed with practicality rather than beauty in mind’. Sombart’s suggestion implies that useful articles – which might include street furniture – ought to be valued on the basis of practicality and not beauty. Like Sombart, Adolf Loos also suggested that members of the Werkbund would make a much more practical contribution to society if they ‘went off to sweep the streets!’ In this way, it is possible to discern a continuing perception that the design reformer is less concerned with resolving the practical problems of everyday life, and more concerned with serving purely aesthetic ends – an argument that can also be found within postwar design debates.

While the Werkbund might have failed to achieve some of its objectives, many of the arguments it engaged with – such as design’s social, national and economic responsibilities, design’s relationship with the state, as well as questions over taste and class - remained very much alive throughout the 20th century. Some of these arguments are traceable to 19th century Britain, while others are unique to the Werkbund. The next section will show how design debates evolved in early 20th century Britain. It will look closely at how groups like the Design and Industries Association consolidated many of the ideas already discussed, and worked to disseminate them by aligning their interests with the state.

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153 ibid. p.290
154 ibid. p.291
155 Werner Sombart cited in ibid. p.31
156 Adolf Loos cited in ibid. p.29
1.2 Raising Standards: Making a Case for Good Design

By the early 20th century, Britain’s design profession was beginning to realize that the cooperation of government was essential in order to improve design standards. Borrowing the example set by the Deutsche Werkbund, several organizations and prominent individuals emerged in Britain that were wholly committed to this task. Among them were the Design and Industries Association, the Council for Art and Industry, as well as men like Herbert Read, Nikolaus Pevsner, Anthony Bertram, and William Richard Lethaby. Their efforts preceded, contributed and informed postwar debates about street furniture design, and the involvement of the state.

The Design and Industries Association

One group that was particularly important in the early 20th century was the DIA. Founded in 1915 by ‘a handful of practical enthusiasts’, the DIA’s value for the thesis lies in the way in which it disseminated a set of existing arguments and ideas about design, as part of its efforts to raise design standards. Several of its members later became pivotal figures within the debate on street furniture design and in some cases, members of the central organizations involved, like the Council of Industrial Design and the Architectural Review. Like them, the DIA balanced a concern for aesthetics with an awareness of social, aesthetic and economic practicalities. Its slogan was ‘Nothing Need be Ugly’, and it worked to break down the barriers that separated well-made and beautiful design from everyday people. William Richard Lethaby, one of its principle members, observed during a 1916 DIA talk to an Arts and Crafts society that,

‘by thinking of art as a special matter dealt with by special people called architects and painters and musicians we have gone too far to banish beauty from our towns and lives. What I mean by art then is not an affair of the few but everybody.’

Clearly, Lethaby believed that everyone should have access to beauty and he rejected all forms of elitism. The idealism underpinning this approach is familiar, having

160 Lethaby in Raymond Plummer, Nothing Need Be Ugly, (London: DIA, 1985), p.27
featured in both Morris’s polemic about design and the objectives of the Werkbund, and it continued to be relevant in discussions about street furniture after the war.

In undertaking this idealistic project, the DIA employed a language that would later come to be known as Good Design discourse. Good Design is a discourse that represents a sequence of ideas, beliefs and practices that were consolidated in the early 20th century, and which functioned in order to attribute or recognize value in design. As a qualitative judgment, it was often based upon anxiety over the social, moral and economic consequences of design, and while Good Design has never been an objective method of discerning quality, it has often been used as if it were. This was certainly the case with the DIA, which published a report in 1917 arguing that good design was ‘well fitted to its purpose’, and ‘good design and good workmanship produce beauty in all objects of use’. Bad design, by contrast, was aligned with bad workmanship, ornament and barbarism.

During the period in question, the promotion of Good Design was a key objective of the DIA, as it would be for the CoID after the war. The DIA applied pressure upon the British government to support Good Design in state-funded projects. It can be understood as a motivating agency: including the state within design debates, and influencing nationally accepted standards of design and notions of taste. Its methods of operation were discreet, with business-like committees and benign propaganda, but its biggest success lay in recognizing design’s relationship to industry, and therefore to the economic health of a nation. One of the DIA’s main ambitions was to address the standard of British exports, and the perceived threat that foreign rivals would out-do the English on their own terms, i.e. using English methods but better. In its founding statement, the DIA observed that ‘foreign competitors have taken over our ideas, have more fully exploited them and then have turned them back on ourselves’. In this light, one can see the DIA as a response to the Deutsche Werkbund, through the

161 ‘Good design’ was an expression used by the DIA from 1917 onwards. Its application was as a value judgement rather than a representation of Good Design discourse. While the work of the DIA was instrumental in giving shape to Good Design discourse, it would be anachronistic to suggest that at this stage the expression was meant in that way. For evidence of its early application by the DIA see Arthur Clutton Brock, *A Modern Creed of Work: The 4th Pamphlet of the Design and Industries Association*, (London: The DIA, 1917)
162 ibid. p.4
anxiety that the standard of foreign competition caused British design reformers, as well as government ministers. Yet the example also illustrates the continuing relevance of nationalism within design debates, and the perceived threat to the export trade. As the following chapters will show, reference to exports is one way that design reformers have traditionally garnered legitimacy on an official level.

**Cultural hierarchy between the wars**

Yet the DIA did not only wish to address the risk posed by foreign markets and foreign manufacturers; it also wanted to address the poor quality of goods produced by British industry and the lack of taste shown by the domestic market, i.e. British consumers. Both issues were related of course, for without a demand for better goods from the British public, industry was likely to resist pressure from either government or the DIA. While its own literature reinforced the view that the DIA, ‘could do much towards encouraging a more intelligent demand amongst the public for what is best and soundest in design’, it acknowledged that it was probably only the professional classes who would support the production of ‘attractive and carefully designed modern work’.  

According to the DIA, there was plenty of design catering to the upper echelons of society, but standards were low in the field of industrial design catering for the needs of the lower/middle classes. The central question then, was how best to improve the taste of lower and middle-class consumers?

The way in which the DIA engaged with the public exposes a familiar theme in the thesis involving taste. For at the same time as the association encouraged the public to demand ‘what is best and soundest in design’, it simultaneously sought to overcome their ‘atrophied taste’. In this sense, the DIA’s perception of the public is consistent with the examples cited earlier, in which the public were routinely characterized as having little or no taste. Seeking to improve the public’s taste, while at the same time deriding it, placed members of the association in a deliberately superior position – exposing a tension which runs through the thesis.

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165 ibid. pp.3-4  
For D. L. LeMahieu in *A Culture for Democracy*, the intellectuals and the cultivated elite during this period ‘shared a fundamental allegiance to the notion of cultural hierarchy’. The Englishman, the DIA observed in its 1922 report, was ‘fond of saying that he knows what he likes when he sees it. But there he is usually mistaken. Men have to learn to know what they like’. Educating the public on matters of taste became a cornerstone of the DIA’s programme, rather than blaming the public for their poor taste. Yet for the DIA, education was useless unless something was done about the quality of the products available. This was particularly pressing because the public’s taste was, ‘subject to suggestion; and if beset with articles ill made and ill designed but following some new and violent fashion, it will come to believe that these are the articles which it wants’. Thus the public’s perceived vulnerability in matters of taste convinced the DIA that it could only persuade this malleable group to desire superior products, if those products were available. As such, before it could persuade the public, the DIA would first have to deal with those responsible for producing ill-made articles. This scenario is a familiar one, and will be revisited in later chapters.

One of the key qualities to design debates is a tendency to attribute blame. For the DIA, there were many groups guilty of perpetuating bad design, including designers, manufacturers and commercial travellers. The latter was widely perceived to know what the public wanted, and the DIA regretted that, ‘it is his taste that controls design…so design is controlled by no taste at all, by any actual likes or dislikes, but only by a general desire to follow some imaginary standard’. Evidently, the DIA perceived the taste of the commercial traveller to have little substance, while its own taste was beyond reproach. Yet reaction to the DIA’s attitude was unsurprisingly hostile. For its part, British industry questioned who they were, and what their objective was. The actions of the DIA set a precedent for the later debate on street furniture, in which a distinct division between design reformers and manufacturers (as well as travelling salesmen, and industrial designers) emerged.

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170 ibid. p.6
171 ibid. p.8
172 ibid. p.10
Addressing the poor taste of manufacturers has been a constant issue within design debates since the 19th century. In the 1930s and alongside the work of the DIA, a number of writers also became involved. One of which was the art critic Herbert Read who, in his book *Art and Industry*, attributed the rise in poor taste to inertia between manufacturers and consumers, which he said,

‘continue to pass the buck to each other – the buck in this case being the responsibility for the perpetuation in nearly every trade except engineering, of design that has neither beauty nor efficiency’.  

Both the manufacturer and the consumer were equally to blame, according to Read, and he anticipated the standard defense of the manufacturer as representing the view that,

‘from a highbrow artistic point of view…my products may be bad; but they are what the public wants, and if I were to adopt your good designs I should lose trade. If you will first educate the public then I will produce articles of good design’.  

Likewise, Read also regarded the salesman with disdain:

‘He is usually a middleman of some kind…He, Mr Jones, the head salesman of Smiths Universal stores, is a middle-middle class man with a nice little home in the suburbs, and every suggestion that comes before him he mentally compares with the comforts of that nice little home’.

Once again, it is possible to interpret the arguments used by writers like Read through a social lens, in which the superior cultural position was occupied by a well-educated professional, and the lower position, by a member of the public concerned more with status and comfort than with ideas, however noble. Read’s social snobbery is difficult to overlook here, and illustrates the continuous presence of class in debates about design, as well as the social perspective of those providing most of the commentary.

The notion of class was also present in how the DIA approached public participation. According to Raymond Plummer, a former DIA member, the association was ‘all for democracy, but the thought of democracy influenced by “the pictures”…is a gruesome thought.’  

That popular culture was so distasteful to the DIA reflects the social, cultural and even economic distance of its members from the general public. According to LeMahieu, ‘many intellectuals held contradictory or unconsciously

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175 ibid. p.188. Read’s reference to ‘good designs’ also suggests that by 1934, it was emerging as a meaningful expression.  
176 ibid.  
ambivalent views about commercial culture’ during the interwar period.\footnote{D.L. LeMahieu, \textit{A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind between the Wars,} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.103} Indeed, for LeMahieu, interwar culture ‘was an intricate mosaic of shifting opinions among complicated individuals who could not agree among themselves’.\footnote{ibid.} Some of those complicated individuals believed that ‘their own tastes should appeal universally’, while others - including the writer T.S. Elliott - deliberately set their tastes at a remove from what was popular.\footnote{ibid. p.140} For LeMahieu, ‘aversions to cultural phenomena often became as important a barometer of cultural refinement as preferences’, and he defined cultural hierarchy in Britain as having involved two specific discourses.\footnote{ibid. p.104-5} The first of which involved a reaction to commercial culture ‘that permitted intellectuals to distance themselves from the crowd and what was widely perceived as its generally debased instincts’\footnote{ibid. p.107} The second discourse meant establishing certain boundaries to defend what intellectuals felt was a superior culture, a difficult task when subjectivity was often at the root of those preferences. Even harder was the task of establishing when that culture proved successful, since unlike the movie box office, high culture ‘possessed no such convenient, reasonably certain mechanism to determine the aesthetic merit’.\footnote{ibid. p.121} The most significant threat to culture, according to contemporary perceptions was the concept of egalitarianism, and LeMahieu’s interpretation of the interwar period was that intellectuals believed that ‘the creation and appreciation of art required talent, training, and experience none of which the general public shared in equal proportions’.\footnote{ibid. p.120}

LeMahieu’s interpretation of the interwar period reflects a tendency on the part of cultivated elites to position themselves at odds with mainstream culture, so disgusted were they by the taste of their fellow men. It is a position that can be discerned in the writings of Pugin, Morris and Read, as well as the Deutsche Werkbund and the DIA and it continued well into the postwar period. The argument presented by these different voices - between campaigning to educate the untrained public, but simultaneously highlighting the authority of design specialists – is a central tension within the thesis. Renato Poggioli’s 1968 book \textit{Theory of the Avant-Garde} explores
many of these themes, in particular the connections between the avant-garde, the elite and the intelligentsia and their relationship with other dominant social, political and cultural groups, like the public or the government. According to Poggioli, the avant-garde can be understood as a highly specialized, intellectual body of observers whose behavioural codes amount to a series of positions or ‘poses’. 185 Such poses are predestined to be unpopular – and indeed, are often deliberately so - since the avant-garde actively opposes the culture and taste of the majority. While Poggioli calls this pose ‘snobbism’, he also claims that avant-garde groups tend to be formed outside of class distinctions, or at least on ‘the margins of, or over, the other classes’. 186 This explains, he says, the mixed feelings towards the avant-garde from which ‘radicals and conservatives look on at it from opposite sides’. 187

There are significant parallels between Poggioli’s understanding of avant-garde culture and the issues that dominated the design debates discussed so far, concerning popular culture and public opinion, and high culture and the elite. His characterization is also valuable within postwar design culture and the relationships exposed in the street furniture debate. Certainly, the debate reflected social snobbery and anxiety over class, but the boundaries between different cultural groups was more nuanced. Anxiety over the separation between elite and popular culture began to be expressed by the design profession as early as the 1930s. Writing in 1934, the design writer and member of the DIA John Gloag, attributed it to a perception that the designer ‘is still outside the scheme of things, still a queer, outlandish, incalculable creature in the view of most ordinary people’. 188 Yet, while Gloag might have understood how this separation occurred, he condemned its perpetuation in the 20th century. Though he acknowledged that ‘the public doesn’t know itself what it wants’, he argued that the designer could not continue to stand at a distance from his fellow man since it was incompatible with the social, economic and political problems of the 1930s, and the ideals of democracy. 189 Aligning such an approach with the ‘dictatorial highbrow’, and accusing it of being no better than the commercial approach, Gloag questioned the

186 ibid. p.85 and p.90
187 ibid.
methods harnessed by idealists. While he might have respected the honesty of the intellectual critics and reformers who believed that ‘people ought to like good design’, nevertheless, Gloag stated that,

‘to impose the taste of the few on the many is tyranny; even though it is done in the interests of improved design. In a democracy, people must be educated and persuaded, so their interests may be carried to the point of observing and comparing before they choose and buy the things they have to use and live with in their homes. This is a long job.’

Gloag’s observation about the size of this project was perceptive, for persuading the public that good design meant modern design had a number of considerable obstacles to address first.

‘A special body of men trained in aesthetics’

Despite its alleged virtues, modern design – as articulated by its supporters - was not universally popular. This negative reaction was not simply a reaction to the policing of taste; it was also symptomatic of a general dissatisfaction with the modern forms and materials with which good design had gradually become aligned. Historian Adrian Forty discusses the anxiety caused by certain materials in his recent book *Concrete and Culture*, which examines concrete as ‘one of the agents through which our experience of modernity is mediated’. According to Forty, concrete made a significant contribution to one of the most disliked qualities of modern design: its apparent ability to erode local differences. He examines this effect through a number of examples, including Jacques Tati’s film *Playtime*, which he says is about ‘the disorientations produced by modern architecture’ through the flattening of space and repetitive international presence of the same material.

These perceptions of modern design continued after the war, and are reflected in the street furniture debate through anxieties expressed over concrete lampposts, but also through issues like standardization and monotony.

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191 ibid.
194 ibid. p.101
Besides modern design’s capacity to erode local differences, many British people during the 1930s perceived it to be uncompromising, continental and often ugly. Even Herbert Read, who played a significant role in facilitating modern design’s acceptance in Britain, felt in 1934 that the public’s reaction was justifiable given modern design’s bleak, pioneering functionalism.\textsuperscript{195} For Nikolaus Pevsner however, English modernists were missing the point. Modern design might be cold, but it was ultimately pioneering.\textsuperscript{196} Accounting for the apparent neutrality of modern design, Pevsner claimed that ‘only ideologies differ…as for the West, a certain democratic sameness must be accepted’.\textsuperscript{197}

As already established in the introduction, Pevsner is an important figure within the design debates of the 1930s and 1940s. Yet he also represents the consolidation of Good Design discourse with modern design. For design historian Stephen Hayward, Good Design ‘came of age’ through Pevsner’s book \textit{Pioneers of Modern Design}, since it is both about Good Design, and a text reflecting the characteristics of Good Design.\textsuperscript{198} And design historian Paul Greenhalgh described it as ‘a vision of how the designed world could transform human consciousness and improve material conditions’.\textsuperscript{199} Pevsner’s impact on design debates of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century can also be measured through his 1937 report on \textit{Industrial Art in England}, which advanced many familiar arguments about design, society, class and taste. In his report, Pevsner confronted the evidence that the lower classes did not dislike ‘showy, vulgar, sentimental and meretricious objects […] as thoroughly as one would wish them to’.\textsuperscript{200} For Pevsner, taste was ‘an expression of inner harmony, dignity, cleanliness’; and according to historian Susie Harries, logically this meant that for Pevsner poor taste was ‘a reflection of inner disharmony, indignity, grime, the indicator of a damaging and undesirable way of life and an ailing society’.\textsuperscript{201} Pevsner attributed bad taste to social conditions and exploitation under capitalism, but he also believed that if the

\textsuperscript{197} Matthew Aitchison (ed), \textit{Visual Planning and the Picturesque: Nikolaus Pevsner}, (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010), p.181  
\textsuperscript{201} ibid. p.184
masses were taught to recognize better design, and it was made affordable, then they would learn to want it, leading to improvements in social conditions more generally.

For historian Stephen Games, Pevsner was an elitist, rather than a pluralist. He evidently believed in cultural hierarchy. Certainly when *Industrial Art in England* was published, some reviewers characterized Pevsner’s analysis of taste as dripping with self-satisfaction and superiority. Though this argument might owe more than a little to xenophobia, nevertheless Pevsner did act as the moral conscience of his readers. By introducing an overt sense of moral fervor to his discussions about taste and class, modern design in Britain was understood as having fundamentally social ends - an interpretation that would continue long into the postwar street furniture debate.

A further idea that links Pevsner to broader contemporary arguments about design was his belief in the supremacy of the state, and the duty of the artist to accept the control of the state over his or her work. During the mid-1930s this argument gained momentum and official channels like the British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC] emerged as active forces in stimulating debate about the importance of design. In 1937, the BBC commissioned the arts and fiction writer Anthony Bertram to produce a series of broadcasts about design in cooperation with the DIA. According to Bertram good design could ‘satisfy the needs of people; their need of practical, honest, cheap, lasting and beautiful things to use and see in their everyday lives.’ However, Bertram shared Pevsner’s anxiety about taste. While he noted that ‘very few of us agree as to what good looks are’, he simultaneously doubted the suggestion that ‘everyone is born with the capacity to judge design’. Only education, according to Bertram, could lead to improvements in taste, and lift people out of the ‘social crippledom’ that such disadvantages caused. He proposed that specialists in design

204 ibid. p.222
205 ibid. p.123
208 ibid. p.19
209 ibid. pp.13-4
210 ibid.
ought to be considered the experts that they were, and that ‘the anger of the untrained must be braved’. And, like Gloag, Bertram also called for ‘a special body of men trained in aesthetics’.

Bertram’s BBC broadcasts also addressed an aspect of street furniture design that would cause considerable anxiety within the postwar debate, namely standardization. For Bertram, the design of street furniture was severely lacking, and he attributed this problem to the absence of any sense of unifying control over the design of street furniture. Those who could act, he said, merely ‘kick their heels just as they please’ and as a result, the quality of objects as varied as lampposts and tram standards were generally shocking – ‘the bus shelters are usually the only good looking things in some industrial cities’.

As part of his BBC broadcasts, Bertram cited one listener who requested ‘a controller of design in every city, an official responsible for lettering, lampposts, refuges, subways, public lavatories, in fact everything in the street’. Condemnation of this kind had some precedent. In 1934, chief executive of London Transport, Frank Pick, had criticized street lighting, signage and other ‘equipment’, in terms of their function, efficiency and rationality. Pick found the quality of bollards particularly poor, and he reported that,

‘their deplorable variety may be attributed to the fact that our local authorities, even when socialistic in politics, are confirmed individualists in design – and London has many local authorities.’

For Pick, as the head of a large organization like London Transport, modern design meant standardization, which left little room for individualism. In the context of street furniture, this idea would prove particularly divisive, as chapter five will discuss.

Aligning Good Design with government

The late 1930s represents an important shift in British design culture, because at this point, the elite voices which had positioned themselves at a discreet distance from

211 ibid. p.13
212 ibid. p.18
213 ibid. p.27
214 ibid. pp.27-8
217 ibid. p.103
popular taste, sought to extend their influence upon it. One of the central ways in which this was achieved was through strengthening Good Design’s relationship with government and lobbying for greater powers. Many within the design profession recognized that only the state had the resources to engage in comprehensive control and raise design standards on a mass scale. As such, many believed that their campaign would benefit from the appointment of an independent body endowed with ‘executive powers’, rather than simply ‘an advisory board’. And in a report submitted to the government on the proposal, art critic Roger Fry observed that ‘many manufacturers are utterly at sea in the matter of design. For one thing they have lost contact with educated taste’. Establishing a central council would, implied Fry, remedy this problem by advising manufacturers and acting on behalf of the public, whose taste was ‘neither cultivated nor discriminating’.

The appointment of a Council for Art and Industry testifies to the success of this campaign; nevertheless, it was short-lived. The war put a temporary stop to these advances and the CAI fulfilled very few of its supporter’s hopes. Wartime did however provide the unique conditions for state-supported design reform, and the comprehensive dissemination of Good Design. The Utility Scheme was just one opportunity which brought together several of the figures active in design circles during the 1930s. Utility was a centralized manufacturing scheme in which hundreds of small firms were asked to make one range only, following the advice of the Utility committees. The objective was to produce well-made but simple goods, in order to replace or renew items during wartime. Nonetheless, the style of Utility products was in keeping with DIA recommendations, and the preferences of those who actively pressured for improvements informed by European modernism. This foreign association was later parodied by Punch, as the cartoon below shows.

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218 DIA, Art and Industry Report. Of the Committee Appointed by the Board of Trade Under the Chairmanship of Lord Gorell on the Production and Exhibition of Articles of Good Design and Everyday Use, (London: DIA, 1932), p.31
220 ibid. p.46
Yet Utility also effectively provided an opportunity for important interwar design figures to finally apply their ideas in practice, and as a result, by 1943 government was convinced that such a thing as Good Design existed. According to Cecil Weir’s sub-committee report on *Industrial Design and Art in Industry*, published the same year,

‘since there is such a thing as recognizably good design, and since there is not a fundamental conflict between “giving the public what it wants” and good design, then a Central Design Council, not directly responsible to a government department should start work’.

Yet the Weir report, as it became known, acknowledged the difficulties that might ensue as a result of the formation of such a body, particularly concerning the perception that the government was effectively censoring taste and installing an aesthetic dictatorship. In its defense, the report observed that,

‘The state already acknowledges the principle of discrimination in matters of taste, which not only operates in all purchases for museums and galleries, but in selection for international exhibitions, etc. If the State is to accept its responsibility towards design as an end in itself, as an amenity for the

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consumer and as an essential tool in our economic life, the existence of an authoritati
ve body is inevitable.'

That body would emerge as the CoID the following year, and as the following chapter will discuss, those suspicions about its motivation would persist. It would also face many of the same challenges that its predecessors had, and would rely on the same set of ideas in order to tackle them.

**Conclusion**

Prewar arguments about design’s relationship to the state, as well as issues like cultural hierarchies, taste, class, the economy, standardization and nationalism, reflected similar anxieties to the postwar debate, and established the intellectual framework through which street furniture could be discussed. The diverse range of figures and organizations that wrote about design in the 19th and early 20th centuries established a set of ideas that their equivalents in the postwar period were able to invoke. Addressing these ideas provides a broad conceptual landscape for the remainder of the thesis, and places the arguments used in the street furniture debate in a historical context. The following chapter will examine the emergence of the Council of Industrial Design as the official authority on the design of street furniture in postwar Britain, and its reliance upon the same set of ideas within the street furniture debate as introduced in this chapter.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE COUNCIL OF INDUSTRIAL DESIGN: OFFICIAL ARTICULATIONS OF STREET FURNITURE DESIGN

As the government’s voice on matters of design, the Council of Industrial Design represents the most significant official body within the postwar street furniture debate. Though it had no direct powers and operated mainly through persuasion, the CoID’s focus upon issues like taste, Good Design, and the different responsibilities of modern street furniture had a considerable effect upon how street furniture during this period was understood and discussed. This chapter examines the role of the CoID in shaping the debate, and in turn, influencing the design of the postwar British street.

2.1 Good Design in the Employ of the State

By the early 1940s, the view that an official machine was necessary to ensure better standards in design was shared by many parties, both in and outside of government. Neither the Design and Industries Association nor the Council for Art and Industry had achieved their objectives and the formation of a body more closely linked to government had several advantages. According to former DIA member, Noel Carrington, the Board of Trade believed that establishing ‘an organization under its own wing and with its own officers would be more trustworthy’. In light of this, a series of meetings were held by the BoT in 1944, with a view to creating a trustworthy body that would influence and encourage higher standards in British manufacturing. The Council of Industrial Design was the product of these meetings.

The organization was founded in 1944 by Hugh Dalton, President of the BoT, on an initial government grant of £55,000. According to the CoID’s first Annual Report, its primary task was ‘to promote by all practicable means the improvement of design in the products of British industry’. For Dalton, the organization’s role was to,

‘make a sustained effort to improve design, and to bring industry to recognize the importance of this task. You have to arouse the interest of ordinary men and women…if you succeed in your task, in a few years time, every side of our

224 The CoID, 1st Annual Report 1945-46, p.5
daily life will be better for your work…men and women in millions will be in your debt, though they may not know it…Industry itself will have much cause to thank you."^225

The CoID was expected to fulfill this broad remit by promoting the value of well-designed goods to both the general public and the industrial sector. Indeed, as the image below indicates - albeit satirically - one of the services provided by the CoID involved matching designers with clients. In doing so, the CoID was also expected to

Figure 11. Cartoon in Punch (1946) satirizing the CoID’s role as an interface between designers and industry.

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perform an important economic role for the BoT because improving the public and industry’s ability to ‘appreciate the need for good design’ was considered to be the best way to rebuild Britain's export trade.\textsuperscript{226} By all accounts, Britain was in a very difficult economic position after the war, and therefore any attempts to reinvigorate British industry by the BoT ought to be seen in this light.

And yet the CoID’s role in the field of design went beyond economics. The organization’s second director - Gordon Russell - is credited as having put in place the essential structure for the CoID that remained largely intact until the mid-1980s. The organizational model was as an educational and advisory service for the public, industry and municipal authorities. The CoID's interpretation of Good Design was thoroughly endorsed through exhibitions, symposiums and conferences, publications, the Design Centre and Design magazine. Russell was also noted for his interest in the reform of design education, particularly where he believed it could perform better for industry. As such, the CoID also assisted in the training of designers, and provided an interface between designers and industry. The combination of all these different services for different audiences - including the public, retailers, industry and educationalists - would establish a balance that the CoID strove to maintain: both serving industry and designers, and acting in the interests of the public.

Russell’s organizational model for the CoID was familiar, however, especially concerning education. As chapter one demonstrated, education was a central policy for many design reformers; even Pugin was said to have regarded that ‘building without teaching or explaining is useless’.\textsuperscript{227} Henry Cole and Prince Albert also adopted an educational approach in the Great Exhibition of ‘convincing by showing, reforming by exhibiting, encouraging industry to alter its aesthetic’.\textsuperscript{228} Though these ideas might have been important for the CoID, its main inspiration seems to have been the DIA, principally because it absorbed many of its policies on design. This caused some


\textsuperscript{228} Fiona MacCarthy, \textit{A History of British Design: 1830-1970}, George Allen and Unwin 1979 (first published by George Allen and Unwin in 1972 as \textit{All Things Bright and Beautiful}), p.82
resentment, and in literature produced by the DIA in the 1980s, Raymond Plummer stated that the CoID left,

‘the DIA feeling that its main task had been take over by an official machine, rich in resources and yet perhaps, also with a hint of bureaucracy and some of the dogmatism of the Establishment’. 229

In many ways, Plummer’s observation was astute, for despite continuing to exist as a charity, the DIA did lose out to an official machine. 230

Yet what did Good Design mean in 1944? For Pevsner, it meant modern design informed by modernism, a style whose ideological underpinnings could be traced to Pugin. 231 Modern design’s wholesale adoption by Britain towards the end of the war can be attributed to its alleged neutrality, a reading I draw from design historian Jonathan Woodham. According to Woodham, whose work on postwar British design culture overlaps with my own, modern design survived association with the totalitarian powers of the 1930s. 232 While the official styles of both Germany and Russia fluctuated, by the end of the war both appeared to obsessively favour a grotesque perversion of monumental classicism for their cultural artefacts and architecture. Modernism was largely rejected by the Nazis, at least in their conspicuous architectural projects, because of its perceived associations with Bolshevism and cosmopolitanism, a by-word for Jewish culture. Equally, while early forms of modernism had thrived in Russia, such as Constructivism and Suprematism, these avant-garde expressions were considered bourgeois once Joseph Stalin took power. Modernism then, was the least tainted style to emerge after the war, and was used internationally as a way to forge a new identity for the future. 233

Yet practicalities like cost and access to materials were just as important as questions of style in postwar Britain. Another position is that, by the time the Weir report was published in 1943, Britain’s reconciliation with modern design was already underway. In her book Re-forming Britain Elizabeth Darling demonstrates that ‘narratives of modernity’ were applied across the country by reformers, as part of a ‘carefully plotted

229 ibid. p.64
campaign to exploit prevailing tendencies to the modern’ – an argument that maps very closely on to the evidence discussed in chapter one.234 According to Darling, the reiteration of these narratives ‘allowed radical ideas to become first familiar and subsequently acceptable to politicians and their advisors’, and in this way, the modern became allied with reform more generally.235 Such narratives of modernity were reflected in a variety of diverse examples, ranging from debates about living conditions, the design of housing and health centres, terms like hygiene and decency. Modernity was even reflected in the posters hung in soldiers barracks in 1942 showing modern design.236 The poster shown in fig.12 was another example of the visual propaganda the government used to promote modernism during the war.

Figure 12. WW2 propaganda poster by Abram Games depicting Berthold Lubetkin’s Finsbury Health Centre, London.

Utility was also hugely influential in promoting modern design, and some historians would even argue that the CoID was the surviving progeny of the scheme.237 As

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235 ibid.
236 ibid. p.209
chapter one discussed, Utility was one of the first instances which brought under state-regulation, the ordinary objects that the public engaged with daily, but it also tended towards one style: modernism. When later asked about Utility’s dependence on modernism, Gordon Russell was said to have responded, ‘I am never for forcing the pace, a limited advance and then consolidation is a sound principle, both in war and peace’.238 Such a benign attitude was emblematic of the CoID.

**Street furniture and the CoID**

Though much of its central work focused on consumer goods, the remit of the CoID extended to a wide variety of everyday objects, and in this respect it is possible to discern a relationship between Anthony Bertram’s aspirations for everyday design and the CoID’s aspirations for street furniture. In a letter from Russell to the *Times* in August 1950, he claimed,

‘Either we care enough to insist on well designed and appropriate things everywhere or we do not. But can we hope to satisfy increasingly critical customers in export markets or even complacently regard ourselves as civilized people if we ignore the design of the commonplace things which all of us use everywhere everyday?’239 Justifying the improvement of commonplace things as a way of civilizing the country is an important idea, and one that had considerable precedent, as Gropius’ comments in the last chapter indicate. Russell’s interest in the commonplace reflects the agenda of the CoID as a whole, and quickly extended into the wider designed landscape, particularly street furniture. For the CoID, street furniture was an important example of commonplace things that required attention, since ‘it is in its minor equipment and detail that an age reveals its character’.240 Examples of minor equipment included telephone boxes, fire equipment, litterbins and lamp standards – all of which were considered equally capable of improving or destroying the character of a landscape. Thus improving such objects, quickly became one of the CoID’s aims, and one for which it was both nationally and internationally recognized.241

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240 *Design*, No.32, August 1951, p.3
241 For instance, in 1948 the CoID was consulted by the Österreichischer Werbedienst on ‘the best means of combating unsightly excrescences, disfiguring perversions of proportions and tasteless exaggerations’ in the city. See ‘Translation of a Letter from Dr Koch, from the Österreichischer
Besides the CoID’s aim to civilize Britain’s commonplace things, the organization’s early interest in street furniture can be attributed to a number of other factors. Firstly, the war had caused considerable damage to Britain’s built environment and street furniture had been affected as a result. Much of it needed to be replaced, but the question was how? As an organization dedicated to modern design, the CoID shared the RFAC’s view that the damage inflicted upon street furniture during wartime provided an unexpected opportunity whereby,

‘every effort should be made to use to the best advantage the exceptional opportunity of starting from scratch which is presented by the creation of new towns and the redevelopment of blitzed areas’.

Bombing raids had certainly caused significant damage to British towns and cities, and there was a sense of urgency to redevelop the country and build housing. Streets would also need to be built, and much of the debate that ensued around street furniture was because of this practical issue. Yet war damage does not account for the rise in interest alone. Another reason justifying street furniture’s renewal has been attributed to a rapid increase in car ownership after the war. The proliferation of urban transportation required substantial modernization of Britain’s roads, which in turn, called for equipment to light them. Manufacturers of street furniture quickly took advantage of the demand, producing street lamps in much the same way as they had done before the war. The image below indicates the continued use of prewar styles in 1954.

Yet for the CoID, the immediate postwar years presented a new start for the country, not least in design terms, and manufacturers could not simply continue producing street furniture according to pre-war standards. Others knew that this was exactly what industry wanted to do. According to a feature on industrial design in 1946, the Architectural Review claimed that the CoID was ill-equipped to sell ‘design to manufacturers who must

Werbedienst’, Vienna, to the CoID, 30th November 1948, in ‘Design: Correspondence and Minutes’, N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/127


know only too well that output, however shoddy, cannot possibly overtake demand for several years to come.244 The problem was compounded by the fact that many manufacturers held the view that ‘British made’ was a marker of excellence in itself, and that design was superfluous - being one of the ‘perversities of foreigners’ (much like Punch’s satirical interpretation of Utility in fig.10).245 At the time, there were a number of large manufacturing firms producing street furniture, such as General Electric Company, Osram and Thorn, which perceived street lighting as a rich territory. Indeed, given the urgency with which the streets required modernization and the availability of central funds to pay for that process, it represented a considerable

244 ‘Industrial Design’, special number of the AR, October 1946, p.92
245 ibid. p.92
commercial opportunity. There was, according to the industrial designer, Kenneth Grange, ‘big money’ to be made in street lighting. These firms had departments devoted to nothing but street lighting, and according to Grange, the standard of work they produced was ‘as sophisticated as anywhere in the world’. Yet the CoID’s perception of standards clearly differed from Grange. In a lecture given some years later, one CoID officer recounted that these manufacturers,

‘rapidly produced designs based on tired, worn clichés of the day and…found no difficulty in selling these in vast quantities as there was no longer an enlightened patron interested in good taste, as the original gas-lighting boom’.

Raising awareness that tired, worn clichés were no longer acceptable was one of the ways that the CoID sought to educate manufacturers. And, by doing so, street lighting was one of the first areas where the CoID sought to improve industrial standards.

But what part of industrial standards required improvement? Prior to the 1950s, the design of street furniture, particularly street lighting, was largely a matter for engineers rather than architects or industrial designers. For engineers, the street lamp was a technological and practical solution to a problem, in which appearance was less important than questions of optics, height, distance, maintenance and weather resistance. While visual style is of course an inevitable consequence in the production of any object, the appearance of street furniture was not prioritized in the way it should have been, at least according to the CoID. For the CoID, improving the standard of street lighting meant improving how it looked, as well as its effectiveness. The image below shows an early example of what the CoID understood as an improvement.

Street lighting was the first example of street furniture to provoke debate after the war, which explains why the CoID focused so much on these objects during the early 1950s. It was encouraged in this regard by the Ministry of Transport and the Royal Fine Art Commission. Up until the beginning of 1952 the RFAC was responsible for maintaining visual standards in street furniture design, but some years earlier, it had begun to express concern about falling design standards. In a letter from Russell to the Times, he referenced the comments of Lord Crawford, Chairman of the RFAC, who had made it clear that,

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246 Interview with Kenneth Grange, 21st November 2012
247 ibid.
248 The CoID, Notes For a Lecture Given to Durham County Council Planning Officers on Wednesday the 27th Jan 1960, p.1, in 'Street Furniture Articles and Lectures' (1432.15 Pt III)
‘in "passing" designs for lamp-posts and other street furniture, the Royal Fine Art Commission is often in the unfortunate position of having to select the least offensive’. 249

Both the RFAC and the CoID agreed that poor standards were intolerable. As such, together with the MoT, the RFAC recommended that the CoID be given responsibility

for the approval of lighting columns and brackets for Grade A roads. While there was a transitional period during the 1950s – in which designs that had been previously approved by the RFAC were considered valid even if they had not been approved by the CoID - a timescale for this process was devised. Yet once the responsibility for street lamps was awarded to the CoID, it became increasingly obvious that standards ought to equally apply to other types of street furniture as well. Thus, in 1959, the MoT issued a directive to regional engineers that all street furniture, with the exception of litter bins, should be selected from the CoID’s approved list of products. Though there was no compulsion for them to do so – with the exception of lighting – it nonetheless meant that, by 1960, the CoID became the British government’s official authority on the design of street furniture.

The Street Furniture Advisory Committee

The element of the CoID which dealt with street furniture directly was the independently appointed Street Furniture Advisory Committee. It was established in 1949 and made up of 10 members, who were responsible for judging street furniture designs that had been submitted by manufacturers. Members of the committee relied upon a secretary to liaise directly with manufacturers to ensure that the products they submitted fulfilled certain criteria, and those that did not meet the committee’s standards were returned with recommendations for improvement. Once identified as having met those requirements, the products were included in the Design Index, which was a photographic database of all the products selected by the CoID. The image below shows visitors using the service. However, for some manufacturing firms this meant their products had been approved by the committee, an interpretation which caused the CoID considerable consternation. One CoID document reflects the anxiety the term caused:

‘we constantly try to persuade firms whose items are accepted for Design Index to use the word “accepted” or “selected” rather than “approved”, explaining

251 The CoID, 15th Annual Report 1959-60, p.23
252 The CoID, Notes taken for a lecture given to Durham County Council planning officers on Wednesday the 27th January 1960, p.2, in ‘Street Furniture Articles and Lectures’ (1432.15 Pt III)
253 The committee also included J.M. Richards from the AR.
that as we are not...an official approving body, misuse of the word “approved” may lead to misunderstandings. Unfortunately our own staff members do from time to time use the word “approved” themselves in this connection and this weakens our case when approaching manufacturers’. This discussion about nomenclature indicates the level of confusion regarding the remit of the organization, both in and outside the CoID. Yet, unlike other committees, the Street Furniture Advisory Committee did actually have the power to approve street lighting.

The power to approve street furniture was bestowed upon the CoID by the MoT in a combined effort to raise the general standards of design. Partly because of its relationship with the MoT, the committee’s main purpose at first was to improve the

Figure 15. Visitors using the CoID’s Design Index, 1959-60.

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255 ‘Use of the term CoID Approval’ in ‘Street Furniture Articles and Lectures’ (1432.15 Pt III)
daytime appearance of lampposts, and approve those which achieved this aim.\textsuperscript{257} Once items had been approved, the committee’s secretary acted by subtly pressurizing local authorities to select from these designs, which were in turn expected to purchase them from the manufacturers in question.\textsuperscript{258} Ensuring that manufacturers produced products likely to meet the CoID’s approval was essential, for if the right products were not available then any influence possessed by the CoID over local government would be wasted. The MoT enforced local government compliance through policy, but there was also a financial incentive to comply, because CoID-approved designs were partially subsidized by the MoT.\textsuperscript{259} For design historian Nigel Whiteley, such an approach exemplified the CoID’s belief in government intervention, control and planning, much like Utility.\textsuperscript{260} For others, it amounted to a bribe for Good Design.\textsuperscript{261}

The way in which the committee operated in the area of street furniture and its relationship with the MoT, reflects the mechanisms of the CoID as a whole. Though it did not have enforceable powers – except in the area of lighting for Grade A roads – the CoID’s subtle powers of influence cannot be underestimated, since it had the power of the government on its side. For archivist Lesley Whitworth, rather than being seen as a department of government, the CoID must ultimately be seen as a mediator between government and industry, and a way for central government to apply arm’s-length pressure upon manufacturers. In this way, the CoID could be viewed as a latter-day Quango: state-funded and appointed by government, but broadly autonomous in spirit. Another way of understanding the CoID is as a consultative body, which could not engage with the design process directly, but could use its independently appointed committees to act on its behalf. As such, the CoID also could distance itself from its committee’s decisions, but equally benefit from their supposed impartiality. For the Street Furniture Advisory Committee at least, one member later stressed that ‘we did not have, nor have we ever, sought any powers’.\textsuperscript{262} Given this statement was made during a lecture on street furniture to planning officers in 1960, it can be seen as

\textsuperscript{257} The CoID, \textit{8th Annual Report 1952-53}, p.9
\textsuperscript{258} David Davies, ‘The Street Scene’, the \textit{Times}, (1432.15 Pt III); and Notes on Pedestrianisation Symposium, 17\textsuperscript{th} April 1973, in 'Street furniture - Articles and Lectures on Street Furniture. Correspondence' (1432.15.1 Pt 1)
\textsuperscript{259} See ‘Design of Lamp Standards: Including Painting and Guidance by RFAC’, N.A. Cat. Ref.: MT 95/210
\textsuperscript{262} The CoID, Notes for a Lecture given to Durham County Council Planning Officers on Wednesday the 27\textsuperscript{th} Jan 1960, p.1, in 'Street Furniture Articles and Lectures' (1432.15 Pt III)
deliberately modest, for it is likely that the CoID was keen to underplay its hand in such an environment. Instead, as the CoID’s fifth Annual Report claimed, the committee achieved its agenda through ‘persuasion and education’.263

The role of the Street Furniture Advisory Committee is clearly important. Its acceptance or rejection of certain designs had enormous consequences for Britain’s street furniture, particularly street lighting. Unfortunately, the minutes of committee meetings were routinely destroyed by the CoID, as the image below indicates, and therefore it is impossible to know the nature of their discussions or the reasons why particular decisions were made. Nevertheless, a number of points can be made about the committee – the way it worked, how it was appointed, and what its objectives were – using a broad range of other documents. In the absence of the committee’s minutes, this will help explain why it existed and why it may have made the decisions that it did.

![Figure 16. Good record keeping: Destroyed street furniture committee records.](image)

263 The CoID, 5th Annual Report 1949-50, p.2
Legislation and taste

The legislative changes that occurred after the war had a significant effect upon the remit of the CoID and its Street Furniture Advisory Committee, as well as much of the debate on street furniture that later ensued. The 1947 Town and Country Planning Act is especially significant. It was introduced by the left-leaning Labour government of the time - a party which was committed to public initiatives - and put in place a wide range of state controls affecting land use. One of the most significant – and disliked - of these controls was the introduction of planning permission, meaning that land ownership no longer conferred ultimate development rights. The Act also gave locally elected leaders responsibility for the urban landscape of their surrounding district, and provided financial assistance to encourage them to do so. Thus what had once been practiced in private increasingly became a public service. This had repercussions not only for architecture, but also for street furniture, which was exempt from planning controls. In this respect the Act was extremely important in assigning responsibility for street furniture to local authorities.

According to art historian Jules Lubbock, the 1947 Act also had an ideological agenda. For him, it was essentially a piece of permissive legislation, which bestowed almost unlimited powers upon local government. It also, ‘removed all statutory obstacles in the shape of bye-laws and no imposed no new statutory regulations in their place’. In fact, the Act was made deliberately vague in terms of local government consent, in part because planning was considered a continuous process, but as a result, local government became more powerful than the public. It is Lubbock’s view that the Act, ‘effectively nationalized the land by nationalizing all its development rights; in theory at least, planning authorities were placed in the position of the aristocratic landlords of the 18th century, with the same freedom to promote positive development on a large scale, instead of merely regulating the developments of other people and preventing abuses’. The suggestion that postwar Labour government gave local authorities the same powers as 18th century aristocratic landlords is one that many might question. However, for many besides Lubbock, the Labour ideals of collectivism and participation were a screen for what was in effect a continuation of the same approach.

265 ibid. p.349
as there had been for centuries – where powerful groups were able to act in the way of their choosing, without any mechanisms in place which could hold their actions to account. As this thesis will later show, local government behaved as if it was unanswerable to the general public, whose objections were routinely ignored. According to Lubbock, the developer could act on his right to appeal within the framework of the Act, but the public had ‘a capacity, not legally defined, only to make objections. They do not even have to be heard’.266

Yet the Act also affected the CoID’s contribution to the street furniture debate. According to Lubbock,

‘because the 1947 legislation was permissive rather than regulatory, everything depended on key institutions and public bodies being under the control of the right chaps’.267

Lubbock’s point suggests that the make-up of organizations like the CoID - and its committees - were key to using the Act effectively. They were essentially another instrument of government, in which the right appointment of members was essential to frame the important issues and to use their influence to effect change. As has already been discussed, many of the original 18 members of the CoID were drawn from various committees relating to the BoT and Utility, and Jonathan Woodham perceives signs of aesthetic continuity in the ColD's interpretation of Good Design, largely based on its membership.268 In his research on the subject, Woodham draws upon a number of letters which demonstrate that taste was fundamental to CoID membership. Referring to the candidate S.C. Leslie's suitability for the position of first director of the CoID, then director of the National Gallery, Kenneth Clark spoke of his concern that, 'we do not know what Mr. Leslie's taste is like. It would be disastrous if, having been given a fairly free hand, he were to turn out to have bad taste'.269 Evidently, discussions of Good Design and taste were often linked, but to what extent did this affect the Street Furniture Advisory Committee, and did the issue of taste underpin the decisions it made on street furniture?

266 ibid. p.348
267 ibid. p.350
269 Thomas Barlow, Letter from Sir Thomas Barlow to Kenneth Clark, 20th December 1944, BT64/3635, in ibid. p.56
Without the recorded minutes it is impossible to know for certain, but it is likely that taste was a factor in many of the Street Furniture Advisory Committee’s decisions. CoID officers often cited taste during municipal lectures on the subject.\textsuperscript{270} Indeed, in an issue of \textit{Design} from 1950, the editorial comment clarified the CoID’s position on taste by stating that, 'it is no part of our purpose to belittle commercial success…but it is no part of our job to agree that the lowest common denominator of public taste is ipso facto good design'.\textsuperscript{271} For many manufacturers however, the CoID had established a dictatorship on matters of taste. Certainly, the way in which the CoID’s committees made their selection was not clear, and many manufacturers held a suspicion that the CoID represented a centrally orchestrated agenda. In his 1968 autobiography, Russell disputed this accusation:

'As I have already said, I have no wish to be a design dictator and during my time at the council I always strenuously avoided being associated with any measure which might appear that we were restricting the freedom of manufacturers to sell anything they cared to produce. Our job was to persuade them that a standard existed and that it was worth their while to up-grade their production so as to attain it. It is sometimes said that there is no such thing as good or bad design, that it has no real measurable standards, that it is in fact, just a matter of personal taste. But it is readily accepted that there is a standard of, say, honesty or driving or housing, so why not one of design?\textsuperscript{272}

Russell’s view was typical during the 1950s, in which cultural authority was held by a small number of men, whose personal taste was perceived as standing in for Good Design.

The taste of the CoID has been discussed from several perspectives already, and is often linked to class. According to Lesley Whitworth, one of the CoID’s tasks was to promote design as a social and economic good, and she rejects suggestions that it was either arranged along class lines, or that it promoted a narrow view of middle class taste.\textsuperscript{273} Other historians disagree. For Woodham, the social formation of the CoID was such that many provincial manufactures felt suspicious about the alleged cultural elitism of a body firmly rooted in the metropolitan taste-making circles of the South-East of England.\textsuperscript{274} And it is his view that the CoID represented the 'establishment' in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item The CoID, \textit{Notes for a Lecture Given to Durham County Council Planning Officers on Wednesday the 27\textsuperscript{th} January 1960}, p.1, in 'Street Furniture Articles and Lectures' (1432.15 Pt III)
\item Design, No.14, February 1950, p.1
\item Gordon Russell, \textit{A Designer's Trade}, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1968) p.263
\item Conversation with Whitworth, January 2012
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
its promotion of metropolitan cultural authority.\textsuperscript{275} In her book \textit{Did Britain Make it? British Design in Context 1946-1986}, Penny Sparke draws on original testimonies from CoID members that give further credibility to Woodham’s argument. According to Paul Reilly, third director of the CoID, the supposed elitism of the CoID’s taste and its endorsement of particularly middle-class values can be easily defended. He recounts,

‘showing Aneurin Bevan round a furnished house at the Ideal Homes exhibition. He [Bevan] said that he thought the Council was quite right in furnishing in middle class taste since the working class never seem to get it out of their heads that the middle class know better than they do how to spend money. We wanted to improve everything. Of course, today working class values rate more highly than they did in the 1950s and 60s’.\textsuperscript{276}

While Reilly’s openness about the issue of class may seem particularly candid, it is important to place his statement into a broader context. Accusations that the CoID was a uniquely class-driven body are not wholly accurate, since the society in which it existed was one in which class boundaries remained relatively distinct. Many other cultural organizations operating during the postwar period were equally affected by questions of class, not least the BBC.\textsuperscript{277}

**Representing whose interests?**

Yet acting in the public’s interests was only one part of the CoID’s remit, for it had a number of other loyalties too. Given that the CoID represented the official design viewpoint, it would be easy to assume that it aligned itself with other cultural organizations, sharing their views and supporting their agendas. However, at least during the 1950s, this was not the case, and loyalties were often tested. An example can be drawn from an article published in 1950 by Reilly in \textit{Art News and Review}’s regular series The Shape of Things. In ‘Who Cares for Street Furniture?’ Reilly suggested that in fact, very few of the CoID’s allies cared about street furniture, which was a ‘public disgrace’.\textsuperscript{278} He called the standard of existing street furniture

\textsuperscript{275}ibid. p.119
\textsuperscript{278}Paul Reilly, ‘The Shape of Things: Who Cares for Street Furniture?’ \textit{Art News and Review}, Vol.11, No.22, 2\textsuperscript{nd} December 1950, p.6
‘abysmally low’, which exposed a national tolerance for ‘civic slovenliness’. An image reproduced from a 1949 issue of the AR below, indicates the type of slovenliness described by Reilly (fig.17). He also accused RIBA of being a professional body ‘more concerned about the welfare of its members than with the wellbeing of public amenities’ and the RFAC of being an organization which ‘intervenes only when requested’. However, private letters held in the National Archives show that both RIBA and the RFAC questioned the diplomacy of the CoID’s approach. Therefore, if the CoID was not prepared to temper its attitude to its fellow lobbyists, then where did its loyalties lie? Given its dependence on government, one might imagine that the CoID’s loyalties would be clear, but occasionally even relations between the CoID and government appeared strained.

Figure 17. Civic slovenliness: boundaries between Green Park and Piccadilly. The AR asked sarcastically, ‘is the chicken wire there to protect the holly hedge?’

279 ibid.
280 ibid.
281 Letter from Bill [RIBA] to Godfrey Samuel [RFAC] 15\textsuperscript{th} December 1950, loose in ‘Design: Correspondence and Minutes’, N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/127
In March 1958, Russell gave a paper on ‘The other duties of an engineer’ to the Institute of Municipal Engineers, which focused on aspects of civic design. Excerpts from his talk were published by a number of national newspapers, including the *Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*, and periodicals like the *Municipal Journal*. During his talk, Russell made a number of pronouncements on the style of street furniture, and he declared that it needed to be given ‘a real sense of style, which is not at all the same thing as being styled or streamlined’.  

‘wainey-edged elm weatherboarding does not make a bus stop look rural: it makes it look self-conscious. To put a thatched roof over a badly designed petrol pump is no doubt a well-intentioned form of camouflage but surely it would be better to design the pump well and give it a straightforward background in harmony with its surroundings’.  

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284 ibid. p.5
An image of a ‘wainey-edged’ shelter can be seen above. Russell also claimed that street furniture should be ‘efficient and economical to produce but had style and fitted naturally into the street’. Yet the contentious part of his talk was less on these questions of style, as much as the way that Russell blamed those he considered responsible for bad street furniture design. For Russell, the lack of good street furniture was principally caused by the MoT’s subsidy system. The Daily Telegraph reported Russell’s view that, ‘the main difficulty now is that the best of the designs which have been achieved with much blood and sweat may never be seen by the public because they cost a few shillings more than second-rate ones, and the Ministry of Transport grants are based on the lowest tender’. Russell’s allegation focused on the point that local authorities could often only afford to purchase the cheapest street furniture available, which was not always Good Design. Good street furniture, Russell said, should ‘as a rule be straightforward, simple and unobtrusive’, which was not (Russell implied) what local authorities were able to purchase due to meagre Ministry of Transport grants. The lamppost reproduced below shows the type of apparently ‘unobtrusive’ design the CoID approved in 1958. The MoT however, reacted badly to Russell’s comments, particularly his additional view that, ‘power today rests in the hands of the State, local authorities and immense corporations, who usually demonstrate it by displays of such dreariness and boredom that the citizens brain is numbed.’ Internal correspondence within the MoT records that several people questioned the fairness of Russell’s remarks, and eventually he was invited to ‘put the matter right’. Russell replied with an apology in the event that he had ‘embarrassed the Ministry of Transport’. Evidently, relations between the CoID and government were delicate at times, and the balance of power over street furniture was not clearly divided: even at the centre, there were differences of opinion.

289 Internal correspondence from J.G. Ashley, Highways Management and Services Division, 12th March 1958, to Mr. Eales and Mr. Gillender; internal correspondence from RGS Hoare to Mr. Gillender, 17th March 1958; letter to Gordon Russell, from Reep Lintern, MoT, 18th March 1958, loose in ‘CoID: Design of Street Lighting Equipment’, N.A. Cat. Ref.: MT 109/132
Figure 19. An apparently well-designed ‘unobtrusive’ lamppost designed by Jack Howe, and promoted in Design in 1958.
However, as already noted, street furniture was a category of design that involved other parties, besides central government and design organizations. The CoID was also forced to work with local authorities and manufacturers as part of its project to improve standards. Here too, there were examples of shifting loyalties. At times the
CoID defined itself as 'an ally of industry'.\textsuperscript{291} While, at other times, it appeared to align itself with local authorities. For instance, in a lecture given to Durham County Council planning officers in 1960, a member of the Street Furniture Advisory Committee conceded that,

‘we tend to feel that our work on street furniture is very much a lone battle. To come and discuss it with our allies and supporters, if I might class you as that, is of course a very welcome change’.\textsuperscript{292}

Such an opening statement might imply strategic flattery, but it might also suggest that the CoID knew the support of local authorities was key to its agenda. After all, as the main purchaser of street furniture, local authorities were the ultimate target market in terms of influencing the design of the street. The MJ’s 1952 cover reproduced below confirms local authority interest in the subject. For the CoID, ensuring municipal support was crucial, which meant that tact and diplomacy were key to negotiations with this group. Nevertheless, at this particular lecture in Durham, the speaker accused local councils of being so thoroughly absorbed in internal politicking that the importance of furnishing the street to the best possible standards was often forgotten.\textsuperscript{293} This view was also articulated by Reilly in a letter to Lord Snowdon (by then, a member of the CoID) in 1962, in which he noted that,

‘all lighting is…paid for from the rates, therefore not only is the industry extremely cut-throat but with few foolish exceptions the Councils are very niggardly and usually spend the minimum.’\textsuperscript{294}

It is unlikely that such a view would have been expressed to the local authorities themselves, and sadly Reilly does not specify which ones he classed as niggardly. In this respect, the medium of a letter is crucial in allowing Reilly’s points to be made privately. Reilly also noted that the strategy often used by the salesmen of street furniture manufacturers consisted of flattering ‘the ego of some empire building engineer who will not on principle use anything acceptable to his rival engineers in nearby boroughs.’\textsuperscript{295} Thus, competition between local authorities was also a factor to be accounted for in the CoID’s negotiations on street furniture.

\textsuperscript{291} Design, No.91, July 1956, p.11
\textsuperscript{292} The CoID, Notes for a lecture given to Durham County Council planning officers on Wednesday the 27\textsuperscript{th} January 1960, p.1, in ‘Street Furniture Articles and Lectures’ (1432.15 Pt III)
\textsuperscript{293} ibid.
\textsuperscript{294} Paul Reilly, Lamp Post Feature: Notes sent to Lord Snowdon (confidential), 19.3.62, p.4, in ‘Street Furniture Articles and Lectures’ (1432.15 Pt III),
\textsuperscript{295} ibid. p.3
Manufacturers were also criticized by the CoID, particularly for failing to appreciate the value of design, or for applying it too late in the production process. In his letter to Snowdon, Reilly noted that,

‘until quite recently there were only three professional designers regularly engaged on the problem. There is now a slight increase of professionalism but the majority are still designed by salesmen or directors…The firms who have a design policy find that at sales level it tends to be forgotten by salesmen who must have an order.’

Such a statement is revealing, since it suggests that even in 1962, the CoID had not managed to persuade everyone about the value of Good Design. Moreover, Reilly’s comment implies that the process by which street furniture – particularly street lighting – came to be placed in the street, was complex and involved few professional designers. Industry’s priority was profit, and local authorities’ priority was cheapness, leaving design on the margins of this transaction.

The CoID’s engagement with the issue of street furniture was not a simple one. This complexity can be attributed to the multiplicity of parties that also engaged with the issue, as well as to the approach adopted by the CoID. In assigning blame upon those it considered responsible for bad street furniture design, the CoID risked isolating itself since no one wanted to take on this responsibility. As a result, the CoID was repeatedly forced to use different arguments for different groups, shifting its loyalties according to the audience. Yet how did it try to engage with the multiple parties who were interested in street furniture, and what was its advice? The following section will examine the various methods used by the CoID to reach these audiences, and the arguments it employed to convince them of modern street furniture’s value.

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296 ibid.
297 An interesting point made by one local authority some years later was that when lighting schemes were put out to tender, manufacturing firms and not local authorities often made design decision on appropriate columns and fittings. This problem was allegedly compounded by some manufacturers who ‘do not always offer their full range to the smaller authority in remote parts but offer only a limited choice – perhaps of lines they seek to clear’, in ‘Value of Experience in Street Light Planning’, the MJ, 25th September 1959, Vol.67, p.2647
2.2 ‘Persuasion and Education’

The Council of Industrial Design’s advice on street furniture was disseminated through a number of channels, including Design magazine, design folios, exhibitions, national competitions, and catalogues. These channels provided a forum for the CoID’s message about good street furniture design and, in the case of Design, a forum for public reaction.

Design magazine

Published between 1949 and 1994, Design magazine can be considered as the CoID’s mouthpiece, much like Crafts magazine can be see as the mouthpiece of the British Crafts Council today. While the clarity of vision – both in terms of tone and visual identity – that was originally expressed in Design was eventually diluted, nevertheless, it remains a useful means of representing the CoID’s voice in the debate on street furniture.

Reflecting back upon its formation in 1970, Design defined its early years as a ‘propaganda magazine’ combining a pulpit message with a crusading determination.\(^{298}\) That message concerned the value of modern design, which was 'loud, clear and endlessly repeated'.\(^{299}\) Design promoted this message to a readership that included manufacturers and designers, through a variety of ways, not least visually.\(^{300}\) Indeed, while Design was able to retain some degree of autonomy by publishing articles that offered alternative interpretations to the organization’s agenda, the visual style of the magazine, its photographic identity and tone was entirely consistent with the CoID.\(^{301}\)

Photography was used by Design as a further means to promote the CoID's message of Good Design, indeed, as a 1965 issue clarified, it was only 'by getting pictures and captions of well-designed products in print' that this message could truly be promoted.\(^{302}\) The specific point of view that such photographic material adopted was unambiguously formalist – as the benches below show - and was used by Design to

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\(^{298}\) Design, No.253, February 1970, p.56
\(^{299}\) ibid.
\(^{300}\) CoID, 4th Annual Report 1948-49, p.5
\(^{302}\) 'Point of View', Design, No.204, December 1965, p.26
educate its readership on the qualities of Good Design.\textsuperscript{303} Concrete street furniture lent itself particularly well to being photographed, a theme that design historian Adrian Forty discussed in his recent book, \textit{Concrete and Culture}.\textsuperscript{304} For Forty, photographs of concrete cooling towers by Bernd and Hilla Becher – or in the case of this thesis, \textit{Design}’s images of concrete lampposts – illustrate the extent to which photography has done a great service to concrete. \textit{Concrete and Culture} is interesting because it relates the repugnance that people feel about concrete’s materiality to our experience of modernity.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure21.png}
\caption{A ‘first class’ example of outdoor seating, according to \textit{Design} in 1953.}
\end{figure}

\textit{Design} magazine was primarily used as a means of promoting the benefits of Good Design, and the very first issue in 1949 set out what this meant. The Leader comment proposed that ‘good design is not simply a question of personal taste’ but a question of standards.\textsuperscript{305} The notion of standards was repeated frequently across consecutive volumes of \textit{Design} throughout the early postwar period, and particularly the notion that such standards could only be upheld by professional organizations like the CoID. Russell wrote \textit{Design}’s first feature ‘What is Good Design?’ in which he upheld this definition. For Russell, Good Design was \textit{‘an essential part of a standard of quality’}, and conversely, bad design was a ‘deterrent of production and sales’.\textsuperscript{306} A number of conclusions can be drawn from Russell’s definition. In the first place, bad design was perceived as having an effect on sales. Thus in order to convince manufacturers of the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{304} Adrian Forty, \textit{Concrete and Culture: A Material History}, (London: Reaktion, 2012), p.225
\textsuperscript{305} \textit{Design}, No.1, January 1949, p.1
\textsuperscript{306} Gordon Russell, ‘What is Good Design?’ \textit{Design}, No.1, January 1949, p.3
\end{flushleft}
value of Good Design, it was often presented as good for business, and as ‘a strong selling point’. Yet as already established, postwar business for manufacturers was strong because of the increased demand for street furniture by local authorities, for whom design was less important than cost.

A second point that can be drawn from Russell’s definition of Good Design lies in the way it was defined as much through establishing positive values as through rejecting negative ones. Good Design was not ‘precious, arty or highfalutin’. Russell characterized Good Design’s counterpoint as ‘clichés [which] are not the right answer to a human need’. Such clichés took the form of unnecessary ornament or expression of historic style – indicated in three of the lampposts shown in fig.22 - and this approach was consistently attacked in Design during the 1950s, particularly in relation to street furniture. Much of the language used to describe bad design can be situated in wartime propaganda of good and evil, as this editorial comment from 1950 illustrates:

‘there is still a world of difference between the moderne and the contemporary and there is still the old dragon of the pseudo-antique to be slain, but the day may be nearer than we think when the battle will be, not between different styles or periods, but between good and bad within the same idiom’.

Defining the rejection of bad design - in this case, the pseudo-antique - as a dragon to be slain, is indicative of an attitude after the war, where themes like morality, duty and patriotism were often employed by the CoID as part of its campaign to improve standards.

In 1951, the subject of street furniture was first featured in Design as part of its coverage of the Festival of Britain. The CoID had assumed responsibility for the Festival’s industrial design, and furnished the South Bank site with appropriately modern street furniture, including litterbins designed by James Cubitt and Jack Howe, public seating by Ernest Race, planters by H.T. Cadbury Brown, and signage by Robin

308 ibid. p.3
309 ibid.
310 For example, in 1958 Design reported that ‘many appreciate the fact that old lamp standards are now outdated, and that replacements should not merely consist of pathetic reproductions of Victorian designs which inevitably lack the true qualities and charm of the originals and misuse modern materials and production methods’. In Design, No.114, June 1958, p.45
Figure 23. This seating shows ‘fresh thought given to an old problem’. Designed by Brian Leather, and John Sheldon, for the Festival of Britain, 1951.

Figure 24. Freedom of line: Metal chairs designed for the Festival of Britain by Ernest Race, 1951. Concrete planters by H.T. Cadbury Brown can be seen in the background.
Figure 25. Flimsy and effeminate, but a ‘neat use of steel’: Cigarette bin designed for the Festival of Britain by James Cubitt, 1951.

Figure 26. Jaunty litterbin designed for the Festival of Britain by Jack Howe, 1951.
Day and Milner Gray. Lionel Brett, author of ‘Detail on the South Bank’ justified these modern designs to readers of Design, by reporting that,

‘anyone can see that if these objects are well designed you get an atmosphere of fun and gaiety instead of restriction and control. Bollards, lamp-posts, shelters, litter bins, seats, kiosks; how they can murder a scene, and how they can enliven it’.

Such a joyous approach to the design of street furniture is striking, and Brett even supports the use of colour in street furniture design:

‘there is no need for street furniture to apologise for itself by camouflage colouring or tamely traditional design. If it is to be useful it must be noticeable, and England is grey enough without neglecting these opportunities for a blob of colour’.

The four examples reproduced above show to some extent the jaunty angles, freedom of line, new use of materials and whimsy that Brett and others celebrated. Brett also pronounced that ‘it is easy to see that this style of the fifties will be thought flimsy and effeminate by the next generation, but we should lose no sleep on that account’.

Perhaps slightly ominously, Brett also voices his concern that the 1950s style ‘has reached a degree of refinement from which there is no advance except by a complete change of direction that nobody wants’.

In the following years, the CoID’s interpretation of Good Design would undergo considerable changes, but this article in 1951 shows a much more relaxed interpretation. This may be due to the context in which these objects were situated, in that the Festival was intended to act as a breath of colour, pleasure and wonder in an otherwise grey war-damaged city.

*Design* also defined street furniture in terms of good and bad. For instance, in November 1953 two kiosks were depicted in *Design*: one old and one new – see below. Of the relationship between the two, *Design* observed that,

‘the ornate mouldings collected dirt and were difficult to clean. The new kiosk was designed to give maximum display value combined with the greatest possible storage space, and to reduce cleaning to a minimum’.

While this observation might appear as merely factual, there is a clear value judgement being made by *Design* regarding the ability of the kiosks to perform their purpose, and

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312 Lionel Brett, ‘Detail on the South Bank’, *Design*, No.32, August 1951, p.3
313 ibid.
314 ibid. p.5
315 ibid. p.6
317 *Design*, No.59, November 1953, p.35
Figure 27. According to Design, the ornate mouldings of this Fullers Kiosk ‘collected dirt and were difficult to clean’.

Figure 28. By contrast, this new Fullers Kiosk was designed to give maximum display value and was apparently easier to clean.

no recognition of the role of aesthetics or taste in that decision. Likewise, in a 1954 issue of Design the aesthetic of American parking meters (fig.29) is criticized:

‘this standard American design with its thick, insensitive “jelly mould” contours and heavy handed lettering is to be made in this country by Venner Ltd. Alone it will not look pleasant, but seen in a row along a pavement or spaced at intervals around a London square its contribution to street furniture can only be deplored’.

In this instance, both the manufacturer and American design more generally attract Design's scorn. However, Design's sensitivity to particular forms and the ambiguity of

318 Design, No.63, March 1954, p.6
its recommendations is difficult to discern from a historical remove. Indeed, identifying the differences between a bad parking meter, and a good parking meter is difficult if not impossible, partly because the advice seems to have changed fairly regularly.

![Figure 29. A standard American parking meter design with its ‘thick, insensitive “jelly mould” contours’](image)

*Design* also appeared to measure the quality of a product on the basis of its national identity. As the rejection of American parking meters demonstrates, in *Design*’s early editions the nationalistic argument rarely seems far from the surface. This prejudice might be attributable to the propaganda issue already mentioned, but it could equally be attributed to the CoID’s own emergence as a body dedicated to promoting the work of British industry at a time when the country’s export market was threatened. The CoID’s First Annual Report credits America as posing the biggest threat, since its
progress 'has made many of our exports old-fashioned and less acceptable.'\textsuperscript{319} On this basis, it seems likely that American products would have been criticized because of their negative effect on British industry.

\textit{Design as a forum for debate}

As a CoID channel for the promotion of Good Design, \textit{Design}'s coverage of street furniture clearly reflected the wider concerns of the organization. Yet, \textit{Design} is also a useful marker of the public’s response to modern street furniture. \textit{Design} published letters in almost every issue, many of which concerned street furniture. As early as 1950 there were complaints about the way street furniture looked. Many of these complaints were initially made in the pages of national newspapers and focused on lampposts. A particularly vocal critic at this time was the writer John Betjeman, whose article 'Ugly Lamp Posts' published by the \textit{Times} in August 1950 was one of the first to criticize modern street furniture.\textsuperscript{320} Betjeman described modern lampposts as 'gibbets', 'frightful' and 'clumsy' provoking considerable debate and official responses from both the CoID and the Royal Fine Art Commission.\textsuperscript{321} Later that month the \textit{Times} responded to the level of interest, by observing that,

‘lamp posts have possibly affected the life of ordinary people much more than they commonly realize…The chief need is for better educated taste among matters of lamp posts as well as in local authorities who have the choosing of them’.\textsuperscript{322}

The CoID concurred with the \textit{Times}, and sought to use \textit{Design} as a means of spreading this message.

In 'New Lamp Posts in the New Towns' published by \textit{Design} in June 1952, the CoID rejected Betjeman’s interpretation of modern lampposts. While Betjeman perceived concrete lampposts as 'sick serpents', the CoID praised their 'smooth unbroken lines'.\textsuperscript{323} Yet Betjeman’s criticism continued, and in a letter to \textit{Design} the following year, he claimed that because of the high-masted lampposts approved by the CoID,

‘towns like Chippenham, Devizes, Wantage, Abbingdon and Wokingham, and cities like Lincoln and Exeter have been ruined by tall poles with hideous bases

\textsuperscript{319} CoID, \textit{1st Annual Report 1945-46}, p.6
\textsuperscript{320} John Betjeman, 'Ugly Lamp Posts', the \textit{Times}, 16\textsuperscript{th} August 1950
\textsuperscript{321} Letters to the Editor: 'Ugly Lamp Posts', the \textit{Times}, 19\textsuperscript{th} August 1950, p.5
\textsuperscript{322} Leader comment, the \textit{Times}, 25\textsuperscript{th} August 1950, p.5
\textsuperscript{323} 'New Lamp Posts in the New Towns', \textit{Design}, No.42, June 1952, p.29
with jazz modern decoration on the bottom and giants' match strikes on the sides.’

Betjeman also disputed the aesthetic judgment of the Street Furniture Advisory Committee, writing that:

‘It is not safe to say that what a committee has chosen as a decent design for one place will look well anywhere. Certainly nothing could look worse than the lamp-standards in Salisbury…and I do not like the idea of standardized designs for the whole country where anything more obtrusive than public seats is concerned.’

Clearly Betjeman’s point about standardization is important, but his central point here concerns context. While he cared little for the design of the lampposts themselves, the bigger problem concerned their relationship to the locations in which they were installed.

However, the relationship an object of street furniture had with its immediate surroundings was beyond the remit of the Street Furniture Advisory Committee, and therefore the CoID refused to accept liability for badly sited street furniture. Its job was ‘make sure that only good designs are available for local authorities to choose from’, rather than approve specific objects for specific sites. Such were the number of these complaints however, that the CoID was forced to remind readers that criticism of CoID-approved street furniture was often misdirected, and responsibility rested with the local authority concerned.

Complaints like these gave rise to a perception that CoID approval was based on appearance rather than function. This view was expressed by the Secretary of the National Brassfoundry Association, who wrote to Design in 1954 about a bus shelter designed by Jack Howe (see fig.30). According to this reader,

‘In that the primary function of a bus shelter is to afford protection from the elements and particularly from rain, I would describe the shelter that you illustrate as being a dismal functional failure, as evidenced by the fact that the pavement below it in the illustration is wet all over’.

Such an oversight was evidence enough for some, that the CoID’s central priority was based upon aesthetics. But did Good Design mean good-looking design?

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324 John Betjeman, Letter, Design, No.55, July 1953, p.6
325 ibid.
328 Letters page, Design, No.72, December 1954, p.46
For Reyner Banham, who often contributed to *Design* during the 1950s, the magazine’s narrow understanding of modern design meant that it increasingly did focus on the appearance of objects. Writing in 1955, Banham claimed that *Design’s* rejection of ornament,

‘seems to lie in a misplaced desire for unity at a time when diversity and differentiation of product-aesthetics seem to offer the most exciting rewards in the field of design since the Bauhaus’.  

Banham justified his point further by writing of the Swiss architect Le Corbusier, who,

‘saw, as Adolf Loos seems to have seen and as Ruskin and Morris failed to see, that to stretch a single aesthetic standard over expendable and perennial products indifferently was a short cut to the neurotics’ ward’.  

While Banham’s point was made in reference to the automobile industry, his general argument can be extended into the context of street furniture, where a single aesthetic standard was emerging by 1955. This approach, warned Banham, was likely to end in

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330 ibid.
disaster, and he encouraged *Design*’s readership ‘to accept, exploit and enjoy the fact that we no longer have to trim ourselves to fit into a single procrustean aesthetic’.\(^{331}\)

Banham’s warning proved prophetic, and will be examined in chapter five. By 1956, the CoID was compelled to defend its approach to aesthetics through *Design*, which clarified that,

‘From a commercial point of view pleasing looks cannot be relegated to the last place on the list of priorities and the Council's insistence on treating them as an essential aspect of good design does not run counter to a commercial bias.’\(^{332}\)

Placing this justification in the context of commerce was a deliberate attempt to appeal to these complaints, but it failed to succeed. In the same issue, the matter of appearance and styling is raised by a reader of *Design*, in reference to lampposts:

‘Much as I admire the lampposts approved by Mr. George Williams and the CoID… I must remind you that the primary purpose of any lamp standard is to give light. The design of the posts, although important, is only a secondary problem… while Holborn and Westminster have well-designed lights with bad styling, Paddington and some other boroughs have badly designed lights, with good styling laid on top, I believe that the CoID has always decried “styling”. Why does it not do so now?’\(^{333}\)

This reader’s point about styling must have engaged *Design* sufficiently, since it also published a response by the president of the Association of Public Lighting Engineers, who said:

‘Engineers are always having to make compromises; but aesthetics are outside their ken, and it is a relief to have the *imprimatur* of the CoID on certain designs. This does not stop the argument, but it keeps us out of it’.\(^{334}\)

This diplomatic response demonstrates the president’s reluctance to criticize a body whose ‘*imprimatur*’ was legally required for the Association’s designs to be passed. The example shows that the public voice of this debate, certainly when official organizations or associations were involved, was expected to be tactful. But it was also used tactically, since publishing a comment by the Association of Public Lighting Engineers meant that *Design* could deflect the heat of the debate away from the CoID.

Yet sometimes the CoID used *Design* to rigorously defend its approach to street furniture. As the last section showed, manufacturers were often hostile to what many considered as centrally orchestrated interference in their business by bodies like the

\(^{331}\) ibid.

\(^{332}\) *Design*, No.91, July 1956, p.11

\(^{333}\) ibid. p.53

\(^{334}\) ibid.
CoID, and the level of criticism that such designs received only made matters worse. In 1956 Design reported that, according to some manufacturers, the level of criticism street furniture received was due to the CoID’s ‘central interference’. 335 Such an accusation went against the grain of persuasion and education, and as a result Design claimed that manufacturers of street furniture,

‘must take a good deal of the blame for the muddle of our streets since he has largely been responsible for the “fashionable” element in their furnishings. He has in the past, largely without professional advice, often forced upon the public through the engineer or surveyor a set of ugly styles which represent his private interpretation of modern trends. This sort of thing is evil enough in the consumer goods we buy over the retail counter…but at least we can please ourselves whether or not we buy.’ 336

In this example, it is possible to argue that, rather than using Design defensively, it was often used to attack those who undermined the CoID, in this instance: manufacturers of street furniture. Other groups who failed to seek professional advice – i.e. the advice of the CoID – also came under pressure in Design, which was routinely used as a means of shaming local authorities for street furniture schemes which did not comply with CoID advice. 337

Design folio

Other channels through which the CoID sought to disseminate the values of Good Design included its design folios. Described as a ‘monthly series of pictorial essays on design appreciation’, such folios were produced by the CoID from 1948 onwards, and covered a broad range of topics. 338 According to Penny Sparke, the object of the folios was to educate readers – particularly those considered design literate - on modern design, and encourage them to consider ways that the design of the objects in question might improve. 339 As the last section showed, the education of the public was considered a vital means of promoting the CoID’s agenda. 340 The CoID shared the RFAC’s view on the subject whereby, ‘positive action…must start much earlier. To get good designs at all one must have good designers at the beginning rather than at

335 Design, No.88, April 1956, p.27
336 ibid.
337 See chapter four
340 By 1949 over 1400 schools subscribed to the folios. See the CoID, 4th Annual Report 1948-49, p.5
To that end, the design folios were distributed widely among educational associations and other bodies across Britain. Indeed, a further aspiration of the scheme was that schools would eventually compile their own library of images, like the ones included in the design folios to ‘illustrate everyday objects of good design’. This, it was hoped, would eventually affect the designers of the future.

As part of its interest in commonplace things, the CoID published a design folio on street furniture in 1951. It is an impressive large-scale document, complete with an introductory essay, twelve lithographs, and shorter essays accompanying each plate. The folio defines street furniture as ‘art made compulsory’, which it borrowed from the *Observer*. The importance of street furniture can be attributed to its compulsory nature, in which,

‘given ones inability to avoid street furniture, much therefore hangs on the choice of this furniture and its siting, for individually pleasant pieces can be rendered guache and ill-fitting if they be jumbled together without thought to scale or composition.’

With a view to addressing these problems, the folio encouraged its readers to engage in activities which would improve their understanding of street furniture design, including environmental analysis, sketching, collecting illustrations of different street furniture designs, and reading texts on urban design. Furthermore, through the lithographs, the folio presented the reader with several examples of street furniture ‘past and present, at home and abroad, from which we can draw our comparisons and on which we can start basing our judgement.’ The modern street furniture was presented as a means to solving the problems posed by the period examples.

The folio presents a further way to represent the CoID’s position in the debate on street furniture. For instance, one of the plates depicts modern railings from a municipal housing estate built in 1949 – see below - and the folio celebrates their

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344 ibid.
345 ibid. p.2
346 ibid. p.1
Figure 31. Historic street furniture depicted in the CoID-produced Folio for purposes of comparison.

Figure 32. ‘Invariably uniform’ modern railings celebrated in the CoID-produced Folio.
‘invariably uniform’ characteristics, particularly because ‘individualism…is avoided’.\textsuperscript{347} Another plate depicts a steel and concrete street lamp, and the folio explains that the materials used to fabricate the lamp rendered it unfit to accommodate ornament. ‘The finished effect’, the folio claims, ‘is of grace and dignity, and their simplicity is such that either would look well in any setting. They are content, quietly and unostentatiously, to serve their purpose’.\textsuperscript{348} Other examples included in the folio were considered less enlightened, and it is through such examples that the value

\textsuperscript{347} ibid. p.4
\textsuperscript{348} ibid.
system of the CoID is reflected. Fig.33 depicts two bus stops - ‘one good and the other better’ - and the corresponding text is accompanied by a line drawing of a bad example of a bus stop. The folio reports that this bad example ‘looks as though it reached its shape by accident’, and its lettering ‘can only be called vile. No component has been considered in relation to another and the complete article is singularly ugly’. Of the bus stops reproduced above, the ‘better’ one has been assigned this role because its superior and simpler design makes the manufacturing process easier and far cheaper; and, as a result of fewer corners and crevices, is simultaneously easier to maintain.

Besides providing visual examples of good street furniture design, the folio also reflects the difficulties the CoID experienced when preparing the folio, for there are a number of continental examples but only one British example by the British Transport Executive. The folio was clearly intended to encourage an increased respect for design, and particularly an increased respect for modern street furniture.

Exhibitions

While the 1951 design folio on street furniture was directed at people who were design literate, such as design students, the exhibitions the CoID staged were directed at everyone. Exhibitions were an important means through which the CoID tried to promote Good Design, and the ‘Britain Can Make It’ exhibition held in 1946, and the Festival of Britain in 1951 were both early examples of this approach. Apart from the Festival of Britain, one of the first exhibitions specifically on street furniture was held in May 1953 in London’s Victoria Embankment Gardens. The exhibition was organised jointly by the CoID and the Corporation of Birmingham, and presented 70 designs of outdoor seating from 41 manufacturers. A further exhibition on seating was held later that year as part of the Royal Horticultural Display at the Chelsea

349 ibid. p.5
350 ibid.
352 Also known as the ‘Britain can’t have it’ exhibition, the ‘Britain Can Make It’ exhibition was an important project for the Design Council. See Penny Sparke (ed.), Did Britain Make It? British design in context 1946-1986, (London: Design Council, 1986)
353 The CoID, 9th Annual Report 1953-54, p.8
354 ibid. p.10

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Flower Show. Design magazine had earlier launched a competition for manufacturers to design outdoor seats for the exhibition, in which the brief clearly stated that ‘reproductions of historic styles were not likely to win places’. The competition was orchestrated to stimulate interest in the design of street furniture, and promote modern design. Indeed, according to internal CoID correspondence, the exhibits that were permitted to take part were ‘lightweight contemporary’. Despite this particular focus on modern design over other styles, there does not appear to have been much debate about street furniture design as a result of these exhibitions. Even Betjeman considered the aesthetic qualities of modern seating to be comparatively unobtrusive.

The second significant exhibition on street furniture was held in 1961 on London’s South Bank. On open-air display were a range of 42 well-designed but standard objects of street furniture, including lighting columns, bus shelters, litterbins and outdoor seats. The exhibition was an opportunity for the public, as well as local authority planners and engineers, and even His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh – fig.34/35 - to see the best examples of modern street furniture design that manufacturers could supply, in an area already associated with the CoID. The South Bank exhibition was expected to be permanent, but while it may have been well received initially, records held by the Design Archives in Brighton, show that by 1966 the exhibition was considered to have lost its value. The process by which this occurred demonstrates the relationship the CoID had with manufacturers, as well as the objective of its street furniture exhibitions.

In July 1966, a series of internal memos began to circulate within the CoID about the South Bank exhibition, most of which focused on the cleanliness of the site, and maintenance costs. One CoID officer expressed his anxiety that, as a result of the apparently ‘disgraceful condition’ of the site, manufacturers could decide within their trade associations to ‘gang up on us’ and ‘back out en masse.’ The threat, real or

355 The CoID, 10th Annual Report 1954-55, p.10
357 Letter from George Williams to P. Fellows dated 29.07.53, in ‘Royal Chelsea Flower Show - Display of Outdoor Seats’, (1401.1)
358 John Betjeman, Letter, Design, No.55, July 1953, p.6
359 CoID, 22nd Annual Report 1966-67, p.18
360 The CoID, Memo from Mr Chapman to Mr Fellows dated 19th July 1966, in 'Street Furniture - South Bank Exhibition' (1432.21.1)
Figure 34. HRH the Duke of Edinburgh visiting the CoID’s open-air street furniture exhibition, London 1961.

Figure 35. Members of the public looking at litterbins on the South Bank, London 1960.
perceived, that industrial sponsors could effectively withdraw their exhibits demonstrates the power balance between the two groups. Vandalism and maintenance problems on the site continued for several years, and in 1968 the CoID reported that,

‘Unless specifically invited, local authority engineers and architects do not appear to visit the site in any numbers and it is felt by manufacturers that the project has lost its usefulness as a shop window for their products…In general manufacturers no longer feel that exhibiting on the South Bank is a warranted expense. Most of those still exhibiting are doing so out of loyalty, and there would be no regrets if we were to say that the exhibition was to be disbanded’.

This report is an interesting document in a number of ways. That the exhibition was intended as a shop window for manufacturers reflects the broader objective of the CoID’s exhibition programme; but the reference to loyalty between the CoID and manufacturers suggests a more nuanced relationship than might be otherwise assumed. Clearly, this relationship was not always characterized by hostility and at times, the two groups might even have seen themselves as allies.

Eventually the exhibition did close, largely because so many of the manufacturers wanted to withdraw their exhibits, but only after a series of discussions about the possibility of moving the exhibition to the Design Centre. While street furniture was included in other exhibitions staged by the CoID, another important example was the Streets Ahead exhibition in the Design Centre in 1971. While Streets Ahead continued many of the themes that characterized the CoID’s approach to Good Design, there were considerable contrasts between it and the street furniture commissioned for the Festival of Britain. These contrasts will be discussed more fully in chapter five.

**Street furniture catalogues**

Besides exhibitions, the CoID also sought to influence the design of street furniture through catalogues. This method of engagement with street furniture was first discussed in 1950, in Design. In 'Planning the Catalogue' Design stated that 'a good catalogue, it must be remembered, has to perform two main functions: (a) to present

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362 It appears that the main reason for not relocating the exhibition was cost, but also because many within the CoID felt that few visitors to the Design Centre were in a position to buy the goods on display in any case, ibid.
information, (b) to create a desire for the goods.\textsuperscript{363} It also added that, 'however technical the subject, an attractive and contemporary appearance is invaluable'.\textsuperscript{364} Using this model, the CoID published an illustrated catalogue of the best British street furniture in current production every two years from 1963 onwards. The designs were selected from the Design Index, which in turn had been approved by the Street Furniture Advisory Committee. Manufacturers did not pay to be included in the catalogue, but they did contribute to the publication costs.\textsuperscript{365} Essentially, the catalogues functioned much like working manuals on good street furniture design, since they were distributed to every local authority and civic society in Britain.\textsuperscript{366}

![Figure 36. Litterbins from the first street furniture catalogue produced by the CoID, 1963.](image)

The first street furniture catalogue was published in 1963. As the image above shows, the catalogue contained greyscale images of approved street furniture designs arranged into categories.\textsuperscript{367} The information given for each product is largely technical and manufacturer's contact details are provided at the back of the catalogue. The photography is formalistic. Most of the products are photographed against a neutral studio-like background, and few are taken in context with human subjects. The catalogues were published throughout the 1960s and 70s, and to some extent, the catalogues follow the same stylistic format. There are some changes though. For instance, successive issues reflect an increasing pressure for transparency and

\textsuperscript{363} 'Planning the Catalogue', \textit{Design}, No.14, February 1950, p.6

\textsuperscript{364} ibid.

\textsuperscript{365} See \textit{Street Furniture from Design Index 1965-66}, (London: CoID, 1965)

\textsuperscript{366} However, according to David Davies in 'Streets Ahead' the first list of approved lighting column designs was produced in 1954, the \textit{MJ}, 8th January 1971, p.47, in 'Street Furniture Articles and Lectures' (1432.15 Pt III).

\textsuperscript{367} \textit{Street Furniture: List of Approved Designs 1963}, (London: CoID, 1963)
openness about the way in which they are assembled and funded. Indeed, it is not until 1972 that all the members of the Street Furniture Advisory Committee are listed.\footnote{See Street Furniture from Design Index 1972-73, (London: CoID, 1972)} New categories of street furniture were added to each successive catalogue and later catalogues reflect an increase in advertising-related objects.

Together with *Design* magazine, design folios and exhibitions, the CoID’s street furniture catalogues were employed as a further method to promote the cause of Good Design. All of these examples engaged with street furniture - albeit in different ways and to different audiences - and as such, they represent an important means of understanding how the CoID engaged with the street furniture debate, and what its contribution was. The following section will look at an example where good street furniture design was actually practiced. By examining the process by which the parking meter was designed in the late 1950s, the final section of this chapter will examine the extent to which the CoID’s impact was actually felt on the ground.
2.3 The Practice of Good Design

As one of the few remaining street furniture designers who practiced during this early postwar period, Kenneth Grange provides an original account of the debate. Grange was responsible for designing Britain’s first coin-operated parking meter in 1958, a commission he won largely because of his association with the Council of Industrial Design. His work embodied the modern aesthetic promoted by the CoID, and he was often championed by the organization as a result. Yet the parking meter was a particularly contentious object of street furniture. While some regard it in a public-spirited light, even as ‘a life improving innovation’, it was not a view shared by everyone. In 1967, it was described as a ‘monster’, and in 2008, as ‘one of the most reviled symbols of modern life’. At its early development, it was perceived by some within the design elite as an American intrusion, but was welcomed by local authorities as a commercial endeavour. For the public, it was little more than a further disciplinary measure that would curtail its liberty to freely park where it liked. Certainly, both the design and purpose of the parking meter has – and continues to be – controversial, and it is the least liked of all street furniture.

Britain’s first parking meter

The parking meter was an American invention, designed to alleviate traffic problems in the inner parts of Oklahoma City. First referred to in Britain in 1953 as a ‘metering instrument’, and dismissed by the Automobile Association on financial grounds two years later, the parking meter aroused considerable public interest in the early postwar period. From 1954, parking meters were even regularly discussed at a senior level of government. For instance, according to a memo prepared by the Ministry of Transport on the 26th of November 1954, ‘the experimental use of parking meters to ease traffic congestion was recommended in the Report of the Working Party in the Inner Area of London’, but that ‘legislation is required if parking meters are to be

371 The MJ, 23rd October 1953, Vol.61, p.2300
372 The MJ, 14th October 1955, Vol.63, p.2750
used, on however small a scale, in this country’.373 Their value lay in inducing ‘motorists to garage their cars, while keeping the streets suitable for parking available for the short term parker’.374 A more obvious value, though one not directly articulated at this stage, was the parking meter’s ability to generate revenue for the local authorities concerned.

The following month the MoT presented a memo to Cabinet at a meeting in 10 Downing Street – a meeting which included the serving Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden and Harold MacMillan. The memo concerned the Road Traffic Bill, and the possible inclusion of a provision ‘authorizing the introduction of parking meters’ in the inner area of London.375 Those present at the meeting expressed some concern that the proposals ‘might well prove unpopular’.376 Nevertheless, ministers decided that an experiment with parking meters ought to be carried out, but insisted that they were in no way ‘committed to the permanent adoption of this device’.377 That parking meters would in fact come to be a common feature of the urban landscape testifies to the success of this initial experiment.

The route of the parking meter into British consciousness began with one London borough. After Cabinet’s decision to approve a pilot scheme, Westminster Council elected to run the scheme in 1956 and approached the firm Venner to help them do so. Venner was a British manufacturer that, according to Kenneth Grange, ‘owned pretty much all of the business on our streets, in terms of the clockwork mechanisms…that switched the lights on and off, and these mechanisms were stored in the posts. And if you counted the number of posts in the country, that was a big business’.378 Venner then, was a large and well-regarded firm whose clockwork mechanisms were considered to be ‘extremely reliable…expensively made and well constructed’.379

373 ‘Road Traffic Bill: Parking Meters’, Memo by the Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation, 26th November 1954, N.A. Cat. Ref.: CAB 129/72 0011, p.1
374 ibid.
375 ‘Cabinet Conclusions of a Meeting at 10 Downing Street on the 2nd December 1954’, N.A. Ref. CAB 128/27 0081, p.4
376 ibid. p.4
378 Interview with Kenneth Grange, 21st November 2012
379 ibid.
Little wonder then, that Venner was the firm Westminster decided to use in its parking meter project. According to Grange, representatives from Westminster Council and Venner travelled to America and selected an existing meter called the ‘park-o-meter’. Other accounts suggest that Venner had in fact anticipated the demand for meters in advance of the pilot project, and had already obtained a license to produce the American ‘park-o-meter’.\(^{380}\) Certainly, Venner had begun to advertise its parking

meters in the Municipal Journal in 1956, as fig.37 indicates, in which it stated that ‘the British-made Venner Park-O-Meter is in full production’ and that some municipalities were already planning their installations. Indeed, later that year the MJ reported that interest in the parking meter had drawn large crowds at the Public Works and Congress exhibition due to the perception that it was soon to become an important local authority purchase.381 Nevertheless, irrespective of when and how Venner selected the ‘park-o-meter’, it was the meter to be used in the Westminster pilot project. It was, Grange describes, a mechanically sound, banjo-shaped meter (see also fig.29).382 This meter was ‘the one that had been ordered and contracts had been signed and Westminster were promised a delivery of these things installed in particular parts of Westminster’.383 They were, according to Grange, ‘all set to go. They were going to import these things, doctor them slightly to suit our coinage, and off they go. Nice job’.384

However, despite preparations for the pilot scheme nearing completion, the project was temporarily suspended between 1956-1957. As the previous sections have already indicated, the CoID had been asked by the MoT to advise manufacturers on objects of street furniture, among them parking meters. George Williams, the CoID officer responsible for street furniture, wrote in Design in 1956 that the problem with parking meters concerned their ‘individual design’.385 Seemingly, the MoT had already permitted a number of manufacturers to develop designs for future parking meters, giving them a ‘free hand’ according to Williams. He added that,

‘The Ministry will expect a “pleasing outward appearance” and has invited manufacturers to consult the CoID on this aspect. Those already submitted to the CoID show that much more attention to form, proportion and detail is necessary before they should be allowed to take their place in the street’.386 Those already submitted can be seen in fig.38 below, but another that required further work was the Venner meter soon to be installed on the streets of Westminster. Having discussed the matter with the Royal Fine Art Commission, the CoID deemed the meter unacceptable for the British streetscape.387

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381 The MJ, 23rd November 1956, Vol.64, p.2779
382 Interview with Kenneth Grange, 21st November 2012
383 ibid.
384 ibid.
385 George Williams, ‘Street Furniture: A Review of the Use and Abuse of Lampposts and Parking Meters’, Design, April 1956, No.88, p.28
386 ibid.
Despite having no enforceable powers in respect to the official approval of parking meters at this time, both Westminster Council and Venner deferred to the CoID’s position. The reason why they did so is not clear, though Grange attributes this to the respect each organization had for the CoID, which was ‘the only governmentally backed institution that anybody trusted and looked to’.\footnote{Interview with Kenneth Grange, 21st November 2012} Unfortunately, records for the CoID’s decision no longer exist, but it is possible to piece together a sense of its reasoning from Williams’ remarks in Design. Of the Venner park-o-meter design in question, Williams’ notes that, while showing, ‘at least some regard for appearance…the finished results are far from good and their repetition at 7-ft intervals along the pavement would, to say the least, become irksome’.\footnote{George Williams, 'Street Furniture: A Review of the Use and Abuse of Lampposts and Parking Meters', Design, April 1956, No.88, p.35}
William’s remark bears startling similarity to a comment in Design two years earlier, cited in the previous section.\(^{390}\) It is also interesting that the term ‘irksome’ justified the suspension of a local authority pilot scheme, despite the supposed respect that Westminster Council and Venner had for the CoID.

According to Grange, the result of the CoID’s pronouncement was that Venner ‘were over a barrel because they had a delivery to meet’.\(^{391}\) However, because one of the services provided by the CoID involved matching designers with clients, Venner requested its help to correct the rejected design. In turn, the CoID forwarded names of approved designers to Venner, which is how Grange was awarded the commission to redesign the park-o-meter.

Writing in the 2011 *Kenneth Grange: Making Modern Britain* exhibition catalogue, design historian Fiona McCarthy described Kenneth Grange as one of the most important British product designers of the postwar period. His work, she said, was part of ‘all our histories, our best remembered objects’, including the Kenwood Mixer, the high-speed train, and the re-modelled Hackney cab.\(^{392}\) For McCarthy, Grange’s parking meter was representative of the heroic period of British design, inspired by postwar optimism.\(^{393}\) It was produced in a period when products were designed ‘not just for a design elite but for the public good’.\(^{394}\) Yet the CoID played a key role in this process, and can be understood as an interface between manufacturers and the design profession.

Having been awarded the commission, Grange was provided with little more than a park-o-meter (see fig.37). Despite some suggestions that the existing design was an American intrusion, Grange himself notes that his sole objective was to make the existing banjo-shaped design simpler, rather than British.\(^{395}\) As such, Grange opted for an inverted tear-shaped form. The result was, according to architectural writer Deyan Sudjic, ‘a smooth, suave, sand dune of an object’, which was ultimately,

\(^{390}\) See *Design*, March 1954, No.63, p.6
\(^{391}\) Interview with Kenneth Grange, 21\(^{st}\) November 2012
\(^{393}\) ibid.
\(^{394}\) ibid.
‘an extraordinary object, a fact that we failed to recognize at the time only because of its very ubiquity. Its sculpted shape transcends the boundaries of inside and outside. Neither furniture nor appliance’. 396

396 ibid. p.18
Sudjic’s praise for the meter is typical of contemporary understandings of design, and design journalism. In the period of its conception however, it is unlikely that anyone would have described Grange’s parking meter using such terms. Almost certainly, the CoID would not have described the meter in such an abstract way.

**Consensus and like-minds**

During the course of redesigning the parking meter, Grange had very little contact with other organizations, apart from the CoID. Yet to what extent did the CoID’s ideals about Good Design come to be reflected in the parking meter? According to Grange, the CoID did not present him with a brief, and nor did it have,

‘a tick-list of things to achieve at all, but somehow there was enough consensus among those of us who were either beneficiaries of the Council or came to be used by the council…I mean, we were all of like minds, there’s no question about it’. 397

The suggestion that those who worked with the CoID were generally in agreement is not necessarily reflected in other literature from the period. However, Grange’s experience was that,

‘the relationship between quite a lot of big players in our industries and the Council was very good, so the actual Council of people sitting around a table always represented modernist thinking and usually a lot of good business brains from a lot of big firms’. 398

In this way, Grange clearly did not see the CoID as sitting outside industry; but rather, that the two made decisions together. Nevertheless, he did concede that individual members often behaved differently depending upon the circumstances. For instance, while CoID members were committed to modern design on a professional level, their personal taste often differed quite considerably. Their homes, according to Grange, ‘were all antique. This was the intellectual way to steer themselves past this judgment of taste, and if it was old it was ok’. 399 Grange defines this attitude as a form of ‘clear good-hearted conservatism’, in which a respect for older things was a type of non-taste, in which lies ‘a certain honesty’. 400

That those who worked with the CoID were of ‘like minds’ is a theme that recurs throughout Grange’s account of his experience in re-designing the British parking

397 Interview with Kenneth Grange, 21st November 2012
398 ibid.
399 ibid.
400 ibid.
meter. He describes it as a collective ‘aesthetic view’ that those who worked with the CoID shared, and which even developed among the designers themselves. Despite some people’s personal preference towards Georgian, everyone, according to Grange, ‘wanted to show themselves to be modern…they understood the difference between modern American styling and modern Scandinavian design. These represented the poles of taste’.

While Grange believes that the way in which American design was often caustically dismissed – and he recounts that there were ‘plenty of slightly sort of limp wristed remarks, some of which were quite spiteful’ – the reason that the CoID often rejected American styling was often due to a difference in form. This attitude to American design was a common one at the time. Even the Architectural Review doubted whether streamlining could satisfy serious designers in England. For Grange, while the American streamlined designs in chrome were often ‘functionally excellent’, their styling was considered to be very heavy-handed, and ‘more overtly theatrical than it was here’. By contrast, Grange shared the CoID’s position that ‘what we were aspiring towards…represented European and not American’ [design]. Indeed, the taste underpinning much modern design from the period was, according to Grange, essentially ‘upper-class European’. While the Scandinavians always used natural starting points, ‘whether than was stones, or wood, or mountains or flowers…the American interpretation of that was just more Broadway, more theatrical’. Britain, by contrast – and Grange’s work in particular – was said to reflect ‘an aesthetic sensibility that is rooted in European Modernism but enthused with a warm approachability’.

For Sudjic, Grange represents ‘pragmatic English modernity…the perfect expression of undogmatic, unideological, innocent and yet not unsophisticated modernity’. According to Grange, the reason for such an approach to modernity was because in Britain,

401 ibid.
402 ibid.
404 Interview with Kenneth Grange, 21st November 2012
405 ibid.
406 ibid.
407 ibid.
there were enough designers and enough liberation allowed by the marketplace that we could develop a wider range of detail...I hope we’ve been more lenient in a lot of stuff in terms of what our modern design is. We’re not so ruthlessly simplistic’. 410

The simplistic designers were ‘a few stalwarts who persisted in the Germanic Bauhausian movements’, represented by figures like Dieter Rams who was ‘absolutely unremitting in terms of what he allowed’. 411 In contrast to Rams, Grange insists the British modern style emerged through consensus.

Yet Grange’s point about consensus is not altogether convincing. Indeed, there is plenty of evidence to suggest the contrary was also true. It is possible that Grange’s unwillingness to speak negatively about any of the parties involved reflects the discretion of a professional. Alternatively, perhaps his attitude is typical of many designers, in which reflecting upon one’s own practice is not particularly common. Like many designers, Grange expressed himself through his work, and as a result, it is unlikely that the social or political context in which he worked would have had much impact upon his practice. Much more likely to have affected his work, would have been practical constraints imposed by the client, such as cost, availability of materials and so on. Moreover, ultimately there was a client relationship that had to be served, so the extent to which Grange could venture an opinion might have been curtailed. A designer like Grange would not have been in a position to criticize. Indeed, some have claimed that the reason Grange was so successful was precisely because of his proximity to industry, and his ability to prioritise that relationship over others. 412

However, in the parking meter project, Grange acknowledged that he felt an even greater responsibility towards the public. 413 While some might conclude that Grange’s work on the parking meter was essentially an act of government-sponsored beautification, for Grange the process was much more than merely a question of style. 414 It was a matter of giving the public what it deserved, namely ‘to join the modern world’. 415 This was a view, he believes, that everyone involved in the design profession shared. Each figure was trying to ‘upgrade all sorts of things…[and]
pressing for better stuff generally across the country’. The notion that the British public deserved modern design aligns with a point made by Penny Sparke, for whom Grange’s work exhibits a ‘life-long commitment to modernism’, within which was ‘the idea that mass production has the capacity to bring “good design” within the reach of everyone’. \textsuperscript{417}

\textbf{Reaction to the parking meter}

For many people, parking meters soon became a cipher for the urban landscape, as the 1960 \textit{Country Life} fashion spread below suggests.\textsuperscript{418} The wardens enlisted to monitor the meters also became firmly rooted in popular consciousness, not always as figures of respect – see fig.41. In a 1960 film made by British Pathé called \textit{Wardens Are So Courteous}, the work of wardens monitoring parking meters is depicted – see fig.42.\textsuperscript{419} Indeed such was their considerable presence that they were even credited in popular music. For instance, the 1967 song ‘Lovely Rita’ by The Beatles concerns ‘Rita’ the meter maid, a contemporary term for female parking warden. In the same year as ‘Lovely Rita’, a film was produced by British Pathé called \textit{Parking Meters}, which depicted the manufacture of meters at a plant in Kingston on Thames, London.\textsuperscript{420} Describing the 25,000 or so meters in Britain as ‘monsters’ and ‘worse than one-armed bandits, and just as hungry for your cash’, the narrator of the film reports that the one mitigating factor about parking meters is their export value.\textsuperscript{421} According to \textit{Parking Meters}, 50 countries import these meters meaning that ‘you see we aren’t the only sufferers. They are a world-wide scourge. But they’re a sizeable source of overseas revenue’.\textsuperscript{422} The objective of the film is clearly to present an alternative perspective on such ‘monsters’ and their economic value. And yet negative perceptions of meters simply would not disappear. Indeed, several films were produced during the mid-

\textsuperscript{416} ibid.
\textsuperscript{418} \textit{Country Life}, 13\textsuperscript{th} October 1960, p.831
\textsuperscript{419} \textit{Wardens Are So Courteous}, 19\textsuperscript{th} September 1960, British Pathé, \url{http://www.britishpathe.com/video/wardens-are-so-courteous/query/parking+meters} [accessed 6\textsuperscript{th} December 2012]
\textsuperscript{420} \textit{Parking Meters}, 12\textsuperscript{th} August 1965, British Pathé, \url{http://www.britishpathe.com/video/parking-meters} [accessed 6\textsuperscript{th} December 2012]
\textsuperscript{421} ibid.
\textsuperscript{422} ibid.
1960s, which used the parking meter as the symbol of an oppressive state, such as *Cool Hand Luke* (fig.42).

Figure 40. *Country Life* fashion spread with parking meters, 1960.

The title sequence of *Cool Hand Luke* sees an intoxicated character played by Paul Newman, carefully removing the ‘heads’ of parking meters, before being arrested and sentenced to prison for the crime. The film is about control, authority and ultimately freedom. The role of the parking meters then, acts as a cipher of Newman’s resistance to authority. (*Cool Hand Luke*, directed by Stuart Rosenberg, Jalem Productions, 1967, USA)
Figure 41. Cartoon satirizing new parking meters and the effect on wardens, *Punch* 1956.
Figure 42. Film still from *Wardens Are So Courteous*, British Pathé 1960.

Figure 43. Film still from *Cool Hand Luke* showing Paul Newman removing the ‘heads’ from parking meters.

The negative perception of parking meters, as represented by *Cool Hand Luke*, was one that Grange rejects as being overblown however. For Grange, protests against modern street furniture were very few, ‘it was the occasional sensational disaster that would have been covered and made a lot of noise but it didn’t reflect the wider view’. However, documents from the time indicate that there was a palpable sense of anger about the design of parking meters. For instance, in February 1957, the *MJ* questioned the extent to which the Mayor of Westminster had to search his conscience over the mounting protests, and emphasized the importance of the design of the new

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424 Interview with Kenneth Grange, 21st November 2012
parking meters.\textsuperscript{425} The MJ was also critical of government for only asking the CoID to advise on a ‘pleasing outward appearance’ for the meters.\textsuperscript{426} Design, the MJ added, ‘is not such a matter of individual taste as is so often expressed, there are rules of design as much as there are rules of any other art; and there are many educated in the art; the manufacturers could do well by consulting them’.\textsuperscript{427} Other magazines like the AR also examined the subject of parking meters, and criticized their design.\textsuperscript{428}

So why did Grange not recognize the plurality of opinion concerning his work? One explanation might be found in the availability of information concerning these public protests. While they were regularly reported in national newspapers and design magazines, it is possible that Grange was not aware of such reports. Moreover, material produced by government would have been confidential. Grange simply would not have had access to such material. Another explanation might be found in his own relationship with the CoID. Grange was a designer with considerable public patronage, and powerful structures backing him up. He was also one of the CoID’s recommended industrial designers, as well as one of its judges, and a serving committee member. Grange’s world was one where he benefitted from the CoID in many ways, and because it was such a closed world, perhaps he was not aware that there were many who did not share his experience. In such circumstances, it is possible for a designer to have operated with very little knowledge of the reception of his work.

Alternatively, Grange’s lack of engagement with reaction to his work might be related to the context in which he was working within: that of a state-dominated economy. In such a context, it is highly likely that as a designer, one did not worry about feedback from the market, because it simply did not matter. Such an attitude to the market is difficult to understand in today’s economy, which is dominated much more by private interests and competition. To place this into a contemporary context, one only has to consider high profile developments like Heathrow’s future runway expansion in order to detect a shift in attitude towards public opinion. In balance however, it is possible that for Grange the process was not entirely conscious. Just as Grange could hold the

\textsuperscript{425} ‘Design Must Not Be Forgotten in Creating Parking System’, the MJ, 22\textsuperscript{nd} February 1957, Vol.65, p.391
\textsuperscript{426} The MJ, 8\textsuperscript{th} June 1962, Vol.70, p.1740
\textsuperscript{427} ‘Design Must Not Be Forgotten in Creating Parking System’, the MJ, 22\textsuperscript{nd} February 1957, Vol.65, p.391
view that a preference for Georgian was a form of non-taste, it is also possible that those who re-designed Britain after the war accepted modern design equally uncritically. In this way, one can assume that there was not an explicit consciousness of style. The like-minded attitude, the shared aesthetic view and the sense of consensus that characterizes Grange’s account of the parking meter project, must be viewed in this light.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the role of the CoID at the centre of the postwar debate on street furniture. It focused on the context from which the CoID emerged, its objectives and methods, as well as the extent to which it was able to extend its influence over the design of the parking meter. It also provides a broad picture of how the CoID affected the debate on street furniture as an official voice on the subject, and how the public, manufacturers and local government reacted to its involvement. The following chapter will assess other voices in the street furniture debate, to reflect a more accurate picture of the interests and agendas involved as a whole.
CHAPTER THREE
THE GREAT AND THE GOOD: POWER AND INFLUENCE

Alongside the Council of Industrial Design, several other professional organizations and individuals wielded considerable power and influence within the street furniture debate, some even on an official basis. Magazines like the *Architectural Review* and organizations like the Civic Trust and the Royal Fine Art Commission had an enormous impact on postwar street furniture design, and represent the wider intellectual context to the debate. The views expressed by these different agents sometimes overlapped and sometimes stood in opposition, both to each other and to the CoID. As a result, the debate on street furniture design developed a polycentric quality, in which power was fragmented among the design elite, and opinion divided. This chapter shows that in the absence of legislative power, soft power became extremely important in the postwar street furniture debate.

3.1 ‘Ivory Towers’: The *Architectural Review*

The *AR* was an important voice in postwar design debates, but it was also extremely peculiar and contradictory. On the one hand, it maintained an aesthetic interpretation of design, celebrating the picturesque and providing critical commentary from the margins; but on the other, it doggedly campaigned for higher standards and held abuses of power to account. These contradictions were exposed during the *AR*’s involvement in the postwar debate on street furniture design.

Founded in 1896, the *AR* was published by the Architectural Press, which also owned the *AJ*. Considered by those within the AP as ‘the more dignified’ of its publications\(^{429}\), the *AR* had from the outset demonstrated its commitment to the ‘artistic, as distinguished from the business side, of architecture’, and in many ways its focus on the aesthetics of architecture continued.\(^{430}\) But from the 1920s onwards, the *AR* engaged more actively with modernism, commissioning pieces by several of its


leading figures, including Le Corbusier, Ernö Goldfinger, and Walter Gropius. Like the CoiD after the war, the AR was pro-modernism, and its owner, Hubert de Cronin Hastings, employed several writers who shared his overtly modernist agenda, including Richards (editor between 1937-1971), Pevsner and Banham among others. Such figures worked together to promote modern design from a highly self-conscious aesthetic position.

The AR’s aesthetic agenda can be traced to a special supplement published in January 1947 called ‘The Second Half Century’. In this supplement, the four members of the AR’s editorial advisory board - Richards, Pevsner, Hastings and Osbert Lancaster – outlined their editorial policies for the readership. They claimed that, despite being an architectural magazine, the AR’s remit went beyond architecture, particularly ‘the right sort of architecture’, and extended to deliberately ‘flout good taste’. That taste, particularly good taste, was a quality that the AR understood negatively can be placed in the context of a book published in 1933 by Betjeman, former assistant editor of the AR. In Ghastly Good Taste, Betjeman defined good taste as synonymous with the conventional or the status quo; and in terms of style, with the historical or neo-historical. He perceived modern design as sitting outside of taste, and associated with more enduring values like function and unity as a result of being led by technical figures like engineers.

In ‘The Second Half Century’, the AR defined one of its objectives as ‘the need to demonstrate the unity, or rather the indivisibility, of the arts’; underneath which was the less tangible but no less bold objective, namely ‘visual re-education’. Like the CoiD, the editors of the AR asserted that the only way to improve the taste of the public was through re-educating them on the values of modern design. Yet re-education of the eye was an idea shared by several other design writers from the period, including John Gloag, whose interwar work was discussed earlier. Gloag’s book The English Tradition in Design was published the same year as ‘The Second Half Century’.

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431 ibid.
433 ‘The Second Half Century’, the AR, January 1947, p.21
435 The Second Half Century’, the AR, January 1947, pp.22-3
Half Century’, and was part of a series edited by Pevsner, thus illustrating the intimacy of these circles. According to Gloag,

‘the eyes of the English died some time between 1830 and 1880, and people soon sank to the level when they ‘mistook comfort for civilization’. Only slowly and painfully did the nation recover its sight, and it is still more than half blind’. 436

Gloag’s point is useful because it locates postwar design debates in a historical context, and demonstrates the continued relevance of the ideas and themes discussed in chapter one. It also links these ideas specifically to street furniture since, according to Gloag, what allowed some privileged people to see again, were glass and steel bus shelters, cast iron telephone kiosks and pillarboxes.

As part of its dedication to visual re-education, the AR encouraged its readership to follow certain exercises, one of which included the denial of ‘the pleasures of historicism and antiquarianism’. 437 Following such exercises, the AR claimed, would lead to a visual re-birth and a ‘new keenness of perception’ to revitalize the modern movement. 438 Yet this approach primarily focused on re-educating the eye to appreciate the subtleties of the environment, and for its part, the AR promised to address,

‘extravagant or surprising objects or scenes, such as a surrealist municipal seat on the front at Swanage or an exotically decorated butcher’s shop on the Old Bath Road, which on the surface, but on the surface only, seem to have so little in common with the normal practice of architecture by normal beings’. 439

By concentrating on apparently random examples of visual culture, landscape and townscape the AR sought to exercise the visual nerve of its readership and underline the ‘importance of the pursuit of visual life’. 440 That municipal seating was included under this category, suggests that highlighting the design of street furniture was clearly part of the AR’s attempts to visually re-educate the public.

For the AR, visual re-education was a call to arms for seeing, which - while not motivated by political or moral revolution - was no less evangelical, for it went beyond mere propaganda and communication. According to the AR, ‘to those for whom visual relations matter, the capacity to see represents itself as a way of

437 ‘The Second Half Century’, the AR, January 1947, p.25
438 ibid.
439 ibid.
440 ibid. p.24
salvation’.

The language adopted here echoes wartime propaganda, and in this respect there are clearly parallels between the AR and the CoID. The AR’s use of terms like ‘salvation’ testifies to this, as does the supposition that the process would ‘re-create a visual culture which will help to re-create civilization’.

The campaign was presented as a battle for aesthetic rather than political values, which would be ‘arduous and unpopular and extremely difficult to explain’, as well as attracting little more than ‘expense, criticism and ill-will’. Yet this was a battle that the AR could fight, based on the fact that it was ‘unrope to any guide…hacking its own way up the ice-slopes of modern experience’.

The position cultivated in this supplement is not just independence, but self-enforced marginalization, a penance – it is implied – that had to be endured as a result of being enlightened. As the previous chapters have shown, this evangelical approach has considerable historical precedent over and above its links to WW2 propaganda. Like many other design campaigners before it, the AR can be seen as representing an elite group of people lobbying for increased aesthetic sensitivity.

And yet lobbying for increased aesthetic sensitivity at a time when cities across Britain were faced with enormous challenges - due in part to decades of civic under-investment as well as the effect of the Blitz – shows a peculiar sense of remoteness from the social, cultural and ultimately, practical concerns of modern design after the war. According to Richard J. Williams in The Anxious City, the AR’s approach ‘holds the city to be an aesthetic object, a source of spectacular pleasure for a privileged observer.’ It is possible to argue that the distance cited by Williams underlines the AR’s elite position in this debate – and thus the thesis as a whole – but to what extent did it inform the AR’s approach to street furniture?

Street furniture: The subtleties of the environment

Street furniture was included in the AR’s supplement on visual re-education as an example of a category of design that the public too often ignored, as part of its campaign to draw attention to the designed environment, and promote modern design.

441 ibid. pp.23-24
442 ibid. p.25
443 ibid. p.26
444 ibid. p.25
445 ibid. p.24
446 Richard J. Williams, The Anxious City, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2004), p.31
Throughout the late 1940s and early 50s, street furniture was used by the AR as a means of alerting its readers to the subtleties of the urban environment. One of the first instances when the AR used street furniture in this way occurred in August 1948, when it published a short feature on a manhole cover (fig.44).\(^447\) The accompanying black and white photograph depicts the manhole cover in the street, with little sense of the surrounding environment – i.e. buildings, people or traffic – in the frame. The text is poetic, and there is a pervading sense of animism. For instance, the manhole cover is described as having ‘a life, personality; a patter and texture of its own’.\(^448\) It is also described as being part of a body of objects that often slipped under the consciousness of the public, and unfortunately even the professional designer. There had been, lamented the AR,

‘a total visual blackout, a conspiracy on the part of the eye to ignore whole slabs of the world out there, and though the streets are one of the most important visual elements in the townscape their objective existence, apart from the buildings, the street itself, curbs, lamp posts, hydrants, manhole covers, never swing into view.’\(^449\)

Drawing attention to a manhole cover in this way, suggests that the AR shared the CoID’s interest in everyday objects, but it also shows that the AR’s ability to promote modern design both visually and textually.

In a similar example the following year, the AR alerted its readers to the importance of the street floor (fig.45). Using the same animistic tone it adopted to describe the manhole cover, the AR described the accompanying photograph in which,

‘the granite sets break in waves against the cliff of the curb, the bicyclist throws a cloak of shadow as of a cloud upon the sea, the drain cover awaits the shower that will suck heedless match-ends through fifteen avid little mouths into the sinister underground organization that underlies the city.’\(^450\)

That an object as mundane as a drain could be described in such terms, testifies to the value the AR assigned street furniture, as well as its own self-conscious aesthetic agenda. It was also a further example to which the town planner was allegedly blind.

\(^447\) ‘The Submerged Third’, the AR, August 1948, No.620, Vol.104, p.50
\(^448\) ibid.
\(^449\) ibid.
Figure 44. In 1948, the AR reported that this manhole cover had ‘a life, personality; a pattern and texture of its own’.

Figure 45. In a similar way, this drain concealed a ‘sinister underground organization that underlies the city’.
Figure 46. In 1949, the AR drew its reader’s attention to these objects ‘sunning themselves’.

Figure 47. According to Ian Nairn, this American fire hydrant displayed ‘unexpected virility’.
Such elements, ‘the trivia of the visual scene’ as the *AR* defined them, were essential determinants of the quality of the urban realm. That the *AR* was interested in trivia is indicative of its refusal to comply with conventional subjects and standards of taste. Instead, its editors encouraged their readership to engage with ‘the vast field of anonymous design and unacknowledged pattern which still lies entirely outside the terms of reference of official town planning routine’.

Encouraging the public to open their eyes and look at street furniture – unlike the town planner - was the first of many steps in the *AR*’s campaign to improve design standards.

Like the manhole cover and the street floor, street furniture continued to be described by the *AR* in poetic terms. For instance, the banal objects in fig.46 were described as ‘sunning themselves’. Street furniture was even regarded as a form of urban sculpture by Andrew Hammer in 1951, for whom ‘in a fully realized townscape every street is its own sculpture gallery’.

Others writing for the *AR* shared Hammer’s interpretation, including Banham who claimed that lampposts had a certain surreal quality. Even Ian Nairn – whose impact upon the built environment of postwar Britain is currently attracting considerable attention – had opinions about street furniture, and once described an American fire hydrant as displaying ‘unexpected virility’ (see fig.47).

Drawing attention to the sculptural or humanistic qualities of street furniture like this owes a considerable debt to surrealism, in which the mysteriousness and irrationality of the everyday is elevated. This sensibility is borrowed in part from psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud’s work on the unconscious, in which the edges of consciousness are important despite their perceived marginality. The *AR*’s approach to street furniture appears to adopt this sensibility, which serves to further emphasize its artistic perspective on the debate.

Yet the *AR* also engaged in value judgments, much like those discussed in chapter one. For instance, in a feature on the treatment of junctions, verges and margins, the *AR* defined the best of these as being ‘simple, functional and have a feeling of unassuming...

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452 ibid. p.371
Figure 48. No.26 was described as capable of destroying the ‘character of many unassuming suburban streets’, while no.27 apparently reflected a ‘coarseness of detail’.
rightness; the right thing in the right place used in the right way’.\textsuperscript{457} It also discussed how street furniture could be used in the wrong way, by highlighting poor examples. At the start of the 1950s, this tended to mean concrete lampposts, which the \textit{AR} characterized as ‘among the worst offenders in the contemporary street scene’.\textsuperscript{458} Several specific models were singled out by the magazine as part of a 1951 survey on street lighting. For instance, the Avenue column (fig.48) was described as capable of destroying the ‘character of many unassuming suburban streets’; and other columns were described as incongruous and ugly, or showing ‘a coarseness of detail that is peculiar to the modern concrete lamp-standard’.\textsuperscript{459}

The subtleties of the urban environment were also important to the \textit{AR} because they reflected standards of taste and could therefore be used to improve such standards. For a magazine that cultivated a position outside conventions of taste, it is interesting that the \textit{AR} would simultaneously seek to comment on this issue. An early example can be found in a 1949 feature on the lack of advertisements in the New Towns then under construction. Advertisements, or outdoor publicity, according to the \textit{AR}, represented one of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century’s most valuable contributions to urban scenery, as the drawing by Gordon Cullen below reflects. Yet to its detractors, it could only serve to ‘vulgarize public environment and degrade public taste’.\textsuperscript{460} Such views were incompatible with the \textit{AR}, which held that to omit outdoor publicity from the New Towns ‘would seem to be an act of genteelism reminiscent of the days when the designer ignored everything that didn’t fall into line with his own private taste’.\textsuperscript{461} However, despite condemning the private taste of the designer, the \textit{AR} was willing to recognize the levels of tastes that identified different levels of society. For instance, in support of its case that publicity ought to be permitted in the New Towns, the \textit{AR} claimed that,

‘public taste is already vulgar and already has the one merit of vulgarity, i.e. vitality. To put publicity into a strait-jacket, to restrain it, will not improve public taste but simply kill off its vitality. The solution surely is to let the public express its vulgarity, for expression is itself a form of education. In this way the public and its publicity will improve together.’\textsuperscript{462}

\textsuperscript{458} Peter Varney, ‘Miscellany – Survey of Street Lighting’, the \textit{AR}, July 1951, Vol.110, No.655, p.51
\textsuperscript{459} ibid. p.54
\textsuperscript{460} ‘Townscape: Outdoor Publicity’, the \textit{AR}, May 1949, Vol.105, No.629, p.248
\textsuperscript{461} ibid.
\textsuperscript{462} ibid. p.249
The point made here is useful for the thesis on a number of levels. Principally, it reflects the social distance of the \( AR \) from the public. It also suggests that the \( AR \)’s visual re-education campaign was based on the premise that, despite having some positive qualities, public taste was classed as vulgar. In other words, while the \( AR \) was on the one hand actively flouting good taste, it was simultaneously reinforcing the idea that the public’s taste was in need of re-education, and thus subscribing to a form of

Figure 49. According to the AR, outdoor publicity represented one of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century’s most valuable contributions to urban scenery.

Figure 50. The lettering on this litterbin was described as representing the ‘genteel sissy’.
cultural hierarchy. The paradox highlights an attitude to public opinion that has considerable precedent, as chapter one demonstrated, but it also illustrates the way that class and taste underpinned much of the debate on street furniture design during this period, even for magazines like the AR.

The AR’s understanding of street furniture in relation to taste can also be seen in a report it published in 1952, on the use of ‘genteel’ lettering in street furniture. For the AR, use of the term genteel was intended to imply good taste, and the negative connotations that have already been established. According to its report, ‘the worst enemy of the public notice, as of the public speaker, is the soft and the sissy, and the worst kind of sissy is the genteel sissy’. Helpfully, the AR illustrated its report with an example of genteel lettering on a litterbin and some lettering on a seaside warning sign, which it clearly preferred (see figs.50/51). Describing the sign, the AR claimed,

‘its stentorian voice would reach the back row and beyond in the teeth of a 60 m.p.h. gale – a splendid example of straight-from-the-shoulder visual oratory and straight-from-the-shoulder English too’.

Besides the nationalistic fervour with which this particular sign was celebrated, the negative references to genteel lettering serve to reinforce the AR’s objective to flout good taste. But the report also demonstrates a further way in which the AR’s coverage of street furniture can be situated in a historical context. By comparing a good example of lettering with a bad one, the AR was continuing a method of visual rhetoric employed by design reformers since at least the Great Exhibition.

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464 ibid.
Townscape

A further way in which the AR employed powerful visual rhetoric was through its series Townscape. Developed largely in the 1940s and 50s by Hastings and Pevsner, Townscape was, until recently, more closely identified with the magazine’s art editor Gordon Cullen. The original idea for the series was to expand concepts of urban design and visual planning, and Pevsner’s research on the picturesque provided its foundations. According to Matthew Aitchison’s recent study on Pevsner’s early impact on Townscape – which he referred to as ‘visual planning’ - Pevsner’s approach was based on the simple idea that ‘planning should serve the views it creates’. Qualifying this scenographic approach, Pevsner argued that conventional planning concerns including ‘housing, slum clearance, traffic regulation etc. […] are indispensable, but visual planning is also indispensible, and if the whole of a town is in the end not visually pleasing, the town is not worth having’. As a result of Cullen’s later popularization of the series, Townscape gradually shifted from purely modernist idioms to accommodate a broader range of picturesque references. Aitchison’s book challenges the notion that Pevsner’s original idea promoted ‘modern architecture as the only valid idiom for new building’, as well as later perceptions of the campaign as ‘quite the opposite of modernism: conservative, reactionary, and nostalgic’. Rather, Aitchison suggests, the truth is more nuanced and complex.

Townscape reflects a great deal about how the AR applied its visual re-education campaign to city planning more generally, and street furniture specifically. It was used as an umbrella category within the AR to examine the design of railings, kerbs, junctions, verges and margins, street furniture, pavements and other miscellaneous aspects of the urban scene. Largely due to Pevsner’s influence, Townscape represents a ‘theory of the city derived directly from the picturesque’, according to Richard J. Williams, and certainly the illustrations that Cullen produced were typical of the contemporary picturesque style of the period. As a highly skilled draughtsman, Cullen produced colourful, hand-worked drawings for Townscape, resulting in a

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467 ibid. p.5 and p.14
highly aestheticized expression of postwar urban planning (fig.52). In many ways, the imagery produced in Townscape expressed the aesthetic ideals of the AR more generally. A city’s inhabitants are seen at a distance, in a variety of everyday situations and designed environments, and the illustrations are helpfully labeled 'do' and 'don't', much like in Design magazine (fig.53). The visual language of these illustrations is also distinct. Good townscape designs are often represented with light washes of colour and complete with idealized human situations, and bad townscape designs are represented by darker versions of the existing environment, with monstrous street furniture, cluttered streets and chaotic scenes of traffic and pedestrians colliding (see chapter four).

Figure 52. Cullen’s idealized piazza, in ‘Townscape’, 1951.

469 ‘Special Number on Canals’, the AR, July 1949, Vol.105, No.107, p.61
However, Townscape reflects a much more radical position than its stylized imagery might suggest. Townscape can be seen as an early way in which the AR sought to protect public space – and therefore street furniture - from defilement by ‘those who decide public matters.’ Indeed, its focus on environmental design was intended to reflect the AR’s anti-authoritarianism. In this way, the politics of Townscape can be understood as a means of challenging the status quo in postwar Britain. By criticizing the actions of those in charge of city planning and street furniture, the AR tried to position itself outside the centre of power and align itself with the public to serve their interests. But how did the public respond to what were essentially aesthetic aims?

According to Richards, ‘many readers, I think, soon became bored with the subject of Townscape and critical of some of the stereotypes offered as solutions’. Such stereotypes were central to Cullen and Nairn’s campaign to re-imagine Britain and

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thus present a better version. But as the AR’s letter page suggests, it wasn’t necessarily
the stereotypes that irritated readers, but the subjects themselves. For one Liverpool-
based reader in 1952, the magazine’s subject matter was too trivial and he asked for
some proper criticism instead of just criticizing the lettering on litterboxes.472 He also said,

‘We know these things are important, but surely if the REVIEW really wants
to improve design it should begin not by attacking the fringes, but by striking
downwards towards the very root of the problem’.473

For the editors, however, ‘the treatment of the fringe is often symptomatic of what is
happening at the core’.474 This is an important point, since it illustrates the reason why
the AR paid so much attention to street furniture. Evidently, the AR used street
furniture as a lens through which bigger issues could be revealed, or as an ‘acid test of
good town design’.475 Later reports on bollards, lamp posts and litterbins were also
approached in this way.476

The margin and the centre

Yet the AR was not content with evaluating everyday objects of design. Its self-
imposed exile on the margins of taste also created an opportunity for the magazine to
assess the taste of other design organizations, particularly those in more powerful
positions like the CoID. In a report on industrial design in 1946, the AR characterized
the CoID as little more than a ‘government department…however able’.477 Such a
comment deliberately carried with it connotations of bureaucracy and conventionality,
and the AR underlined its reluctance to leave the issue of design standards to the CoID
alone, because of its links to government. While the two organizations were markedly
different, they often found themselves in conversation with each other. One such
conversation occurred in 1951, when the AR published a progress report on the CoID
following its work on the Festival of Britain.

472 Peter Lowden, Correspondence, the AR, January 1952, Vol.111, No.661, p.64
473 ibid.
474 Editors response, ibid.
475 C. Forshoe, ‘Street Furniture: History of the Bollard’, the AR, September 1953, Vol.112, No.681,
p.191
476 ibid; Peter Varney, ‘Miscellany – Survey of Street Lighting’, the AR, July 1951, Vol. 110, no. 655,
p.54; ‘Marginalia: Litter in the Parks’, the AR, October 1955, Vol.118, No.706, p.211
477 ‘Industrial Design Special Number’, the AR, October 1946, p.92
The *AR*’s assessment of the CoID’s contribution to the Festival of Britain can best be described as tepid. While it had praised the South Bank’s street furniture some months earlier, its ‘CoID Progress Report’ claimed that out-with this category there were ‘quite a number of real atrocities on show and a very large number of aesthetically indifferent products’. In order for standards to improve, what was required was ‘firm aesthetic guidance’, and the *AR* asked:

> ‘is the CoID hampered in its selectivity by the Board of Trade behind it, naturally used to judging success in terms of figures and especially export figures? One would like to know?’

In many ways, this question goes to the root of the relationship between the two organizations, since aside from the Festival of Britain, the *AR* was essentially concerned about the role of government in setting aesthetic standards. As an arm of government, the CoID effectively set these standards. While for the *AR*, they were far too low; rather than being daring, the CoID merely desired to ‘keep on the safe side’.

For Gordon Russell, such criticism missed the point. He responded to the *AR*’s ‘CoID Progress Report’ two months later, pointing out the realities that an organization like the CoID faced, including shortages of material and labour, rising costs, taxes and quotas, and fear of nationalization. According to Russell, many manufacturers were hostile to the CoID and did not understand the importance of design in any case. Working in this environment demanded that the CoID was open to compromise, and Russell admitted,

> ‘I cannot help feeling that when the *Architectural Review* says we have a lack of belief in a high aesthetic standard and have opened the flood-gates, whilst the National Brassfoundry Association complains that selection was far too drastic, we cannot be so far out’.

That the *AR*’s aims were unrealistically lofty and industry's pessimistically low was the central point made by Russell, and it illustrates the middle position adopted by the CoID.

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478 ‘Street Furniture’, the *AR*, August 1951, Vol.110, No.656, pp.119-120
479 CoID Progress Report, the *AR*, December 1951, Vol.110, No.660, p.349
480 ibid.
481 ibid. pp.351-2
483 ibid. p.75
What is interesting about this argument is that both the CoID and the AR inhabited the same world, and it is likely that Design had the same readership as the AR. It does therefore have an internalized quality, for the AR responded by commending Russell’s battle for Good Design ‘down in the market place’ with its ‘appalling realities’. There was however, it said, a place for the ‘ivory-towerish’ approach. The AR’s ivory tower was otherwise known as the Bride of Denmark pub, and Russell may even have drank there with AR staff. The AR added that it was,

‘in the fortunate position of being free to use any means, however base, to propagate its ideas: Design, on the other hand, can never escape the shackles of public responsibility…could it not be a little more adventurous [or] approximate more closely to its fairy godmother Graphis, and play down the paternal uncle, His Majesty’s Stationary Office?’

Sarcasm aside, the attitude of the AR was clear: while it represented independence from government, and high artistic standards, Design – and by extension the CoID – remained a government department.

Yet this argument between the AR and the CoID prompted others to contribute, many of whom were aggrieved parties caught in the crossfire. The National Brassfoundry Association - which had been characterized by Russell as resistant to design’s value – criticized the CoID’s dominance, adding that it was,

‘extremely unlikely that there are no important groups disagreeing with the Council on many matters. We believe that such groups exist but that they are unorganized and inarticulate through (a) being spread out over the country, (b) lack of secretarial help, etc., and (c) lack of cash. An artistic group centred on London backed by public funds and a propaganda magazine is in too strong a position and may very readily become exclusive. Past experience shows us that the best work is produced when there is plenty of articulate opposition’.

The AR quite clearly represented one such voice of opposition. And yet, the qualities that the NBA lists as being indicative of an exclusive approach are as applicable to the AR as they are to the CoID. There is an irony then, in publishing a warning about the threat of exclusivity in the AR.

Questions about the AR’s exclusivity were raised by one of its own writers and photographers, Eric de Maré, the following year. In an open letter to the magazine,

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484 Editors reply, ibid.
485 ibid.
486 See Richard J. Williams, The Anxious City, (London: Routledge, 2004), pp.31-34
488 David Pye, Correspondence, the AR, February 1952, Vol.111, No.662, p.134
489 Correspondence, ibid., p.422
Maré questioned whether its ‘exclusively visual propaganda which only a handful of people appreciate can have any noticeable effect on our frightful environment’.\(^{490}\) The 20\(^{th}\) century, according to Maré, lacked any degree of visual order, and therefore purely aesthetic and architectural agendas were unlikely to improve the environment. Instead, change must be grounded in political and economic ideas of reform, for the ‘social pattern as a whole creates the environment and until the aesthetes have the backing of the public they must go on crying in the wilderness without avail’.\(^{491}\) Maré also speculated on the future of magazines like *AR*:

‘Can we go on sitting in our snug little room with the blinds down playing Chopin quietly to ourselves much longer? The rumbling outside is beginning to drown even for us the music no one else can hear anyway. I implore you at least to fling up the window for a breather and have a look outside – all around and not just down at that fascinating floorscape’.\(^{492}\) Maré also predicted that the new culture that had emerged after the war was in danger of premature death because it was ‘being attended to by clumsy midwives’.\(^{493}\) True to form, the *AR* responded with a denial of any wrongdoing:

‘Mr. de Maré implores us to fling up the window for a breather, which it is our habit to do; not to shout exhortations out of it or make speeches on economics out of it but to look out of it and discuss what we see’.\(^{494}\) Thus the *AR* presented itself as offering a mirror to society, rather than seeking to make any broader political or economic statements. From this exchange, it is clear that the *AR* represented a more aesthetically driven approach to postwar design debates, than other groups. And yet, its disinterested position on the political backdrop to aesthetic decisions was changing. As Maré prophesied, aesthetes were beginning to realize that unless they had the support of the public, their campaigns would be of little value. The next section will discuss the multiple interests that affected the debate on street furniture, and the way in which power was dispersed.

\(^{490}\) Eric de Maré, Correspondence, the *AR*, April 1953, Vol.112, No.675, p.273
\(^{491}\) ibid.
\(^{492}\) ibid.
\(^{493}\) ibid. p.274
\(^{494}\) ibid.
3.2 Soft Power: Negotiation and Diplomacy

The *Architectural Review* was not the only alternative voice to the Council of Industrial Design. In fact, there were several other organizations that also engaged in the debate on good street furniture design. Organizations like the Royal Fine Art Commission, the Georgian Group, and the Civic Trust often overlapped, not only in terms of their objectives, but also in terms of the people who set them up and even ran them.\(^495\) Such a degree of overlap suggests that the design profession in the postwar period was a relatively intimate – though not always congenial – circle, many of its key figures having been educated together, served on wartime ministries together, or were simply linked through social and family ties.\(^496\)

And yet, while the networks producing, advising and contributing to these different bodies and publications might have looked relatively cozy, the way in which their voices were expressed was significantly different. While the *AR* was a privately financed magazine able to express a variety of often contradictory views, and take a public stand on the issues it felt strongly about, several of the other organizations listed were publicly funded, and therefore had to express themselves through negotiation and diplomacy behind the scenes. This distinction between public and private is important, as it demonstrates the way in which different organizations could or could not raise their voice within the debate on good street furniture design, depending on the financial or political powers made available to them.

**What is soft power and who used it?**

Soft power is a useful lens through which to examine the relations between these different official and semi-official groups during the postwar period. Originally coined

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\(^{495}\) The lines of division between these groups – both between themselves, and in relation to central government – was ambiguous. J.M. Richards for instance, edited the *AR*, as well as sitting on the street furniture committees of the RFAC and the CoID. John Betjeman was associated with the *AR*, as well as sitting on the board of the GG and the RFAC. The CT operated its own independent schemes for revitalizing streets, as well as managing the *AR*’s Counter Attack Bureau, a service provided by the *AR* for the public to complain about municipal design.

\(^{496}\) Richards’ autobiography *Memoirs of an Unjust Fella* gives a strong sense of the professional and personal links that defined the design elite at the time. See also the RFAC, 15th *Annual Report 1957-1958*, p.4, MoDA Ref. 720.6041
by Joseph Nye in an article he published in the journal *Foreign Policy* in 1990, soft power was a concept specific to the Cold War era, and essentially refers to an informal type of power that relies on influence rather than force or legislation.\(^{497}\) This might mean cultural power, or corporate power. More recently, Nye’s concept has been extended into a variety of other contexts and is proving especially topical. The London-based magazine *Monocle*, for instance, publishes an annual soft power survey that, in contrast to the *Sunday Times* Rich List or *Art Review*’s Power 100, measures the effect of a country’s brands, soap operas, popular songs, education system and sporting events on global power relations.\(^{498}\) The current coalition government has also shown a fondness for the concept - perhaps for ideological reasons - and it regularly encourages its partners in the cultural sector to recognize soft power’s value.\(^{499}\) Even the British Council produced a report earlier this year on soft power and

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\(^{499}\) Charlotte Higgins, ‘British Culture Should Be Seen as Commodity, says Maria Miller’, the *Guardian*, 24\(^{th}\) April 2013
how it can be harnessed in the economic race with Asia. Clearly, soft power is now increasingly understood as an important way of subtly extending one’s interests without the need for legislation or armies.

Soft power’s application during the postwar period already has some precedent. In Peter York’s book *Style Wars*, the British historian A.L. Rowse is credited as having said, ‘in the sixties…the soft people ran things and now it’s time for the hard men’. The soft people, Rowse implied, might constitute voluntary groups, or committee members that took decisions on the basis of advice. They might have a working relationship with the state, but might also rely on networks of unelected people. The hard men by contrast might also have a relationship with the state, but could equally be characterized as independent or corporate figures able to make direct decisions without consultation, relying less on influence and more on legislative or market forces. While Rowse’s comment was made in the context of 1980s Britain – arguably, a period characterized by one particularly hard woman – nevertheless, it retains some value in the context of the 1950s. As Richards once said, the 1950s was a time when ‘committees of one kind or another were formed and dissolved’. Though committees in themselves are not necessarily indicative of soft power, their powerful presence in the 1950s - alongside collaborative societies, civic engagement groups, voluntary organizations, and a way of working that was often performed behind the scenes - suggests that soft power is a useful concept in this context.

One of the organizations that can be understood in light of soft power was the Royal Fine Art Commission. Having been appointed under Royal Warrant in 1924, the RFAC’s remit was to ‘inquire into such questions of public amenity or of artistic importance as may be referred to them from time to time by any of our Departments of State’. In this way, the RFAC was no more distant to government than the CoID. It had two main functions, which were often in conflict: to safeguard Britain’s man-made and natural heritage, and to encourage new works. Its powers did not exceed beyond information requests or site visits, and it was only permitted to advise on cases

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504 ibid. p.5
with national significance. According to the *Municipal Journal*, the RFAC was ‘able to arrange a marriage de convenance between beauty and utility’.\(^{505}\) Effectively, it provided high-level advice on artistic matters for central and local government and other public bodies, and often advised on cases of artistic controversy.\(^{506}\) Such high-level advice was mostly supplied by practicing architects, who constituted about half the board, but sculptors, engineers, historians and others interested in aesthetics were equally represented.\(^{507}\) People like Kenneth Clark, John Piper, Maxwell Fry, Henry Moore and John Summerson - many of whom also worked on other publications and advised other bodies – were all, at one point, members of the RFAC.\(^{508}\) They met to discuss a wide range of issues, including the powers of planning authorities, the construction or repair of buildings and bridges and, importantly for the thesis, the siting of street furniture.

A similar organization to the RFAC in its use of soft power was the Georgian Group, though in other respects it was a very different organization – being a purely private pressure group. According to its own website, it was formed in 1937 by Lord Derwent, Angus Acworth and Robert Byron, but several figures associated with the *AR* were active members at one time.\(^{509}\) Initially a sub-group of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, the GG quickly gained enough momentum to function independently, which it continues to do today. Primarily set up to protect Georgian architecture, the GG soon began to advise on Georgian environments, which included period street furniture. The specific role it played in the debate on street furniture is discussed more fully in chapter four. Suffice to say at this point, that the GG was active in the street furniture debate.

In order to contribute to the debate on street furniture, both the GG and the RFAC were forced to employ soft power tactics. The GG had no formal power, and largely relied on private networks of influence and association, but the government had, from the outset, built in the soft qualities of the RFAC. When the MoT made the CoID

\(^{505}\) The *MJ*, 25th June 1954, Vol.62, p.1406
\(^{507}\) ibid. pp.7-8
\(^{509}\) ibid., p.128; The GG, [http://www.georgiangroup.org.uk/docs/about/index.php](http://www.georgiangroup.org.uk/docs/about/index.php) [accessed 14 December 2012]
responsible for the appearance of street furniture in 1952, the RFAC became responsible for the siting of specific objects but only in cases of national public amenity.\textsuperscript{510} Inherent in this clause were several ambiguities, after all, how was the RFAC expected to enforce its advice without the support of legislation or any executive powers? And, at what point was street furniture considered a national and not a local public amenity? Just as ambiguous, was how the RFAC could advise on what was an appropriate object of street furniture in a specific context, without first addressing the issue of appearance.

To some extent, these ambiguities weakened the RFAC in several ways. For Richards, it meant that the practice was,

‘to accept its advice about policies and designs for which the government is responsible, or government permission necessary, only when that advice happens to accord with the government’s convenience. Since the body is appointed by Parliament to advise it, the Government should surely feel obliged either to follow its advice, or if there is a good reason for not doing so, make the reason public’.\textsuperscript{511}

And Richards cited a second weakness on the part of the RFAC, which was,

‘a habitual reluctance to come out in the open, to announce its disquiet about any proposal at an early enough stage for public opinion to be effective. To rally public opinion has always been the Commission’s strongest weapon, but too often it has preferred to negotiate behind the scenes with, I believe, the idea that it should not antagonize the public authorities it has to work with’.\textsuperscript{512}

Both weaknesses are related, for if the RFAC was unwilling to sour relations with the very public authorities it was set up to monitor, this was possibly due to government routinely ignoring its advice when inconvenient. Moreover, despite the RFAC’s role as watchdog for public amenities, the public often remained ignorant when it did represent their interests, because its private way of working did not lend itself to publicity. The RFAC could try and improve details of a scheme that it fundamentally disapproved of, but in doing so, it inevitably ran the risk of being held responsible for the scheme itself. This left the RFAC in the difficult position of having to caveat every claim it made lest it caused offence, and being liked and respected by no-one unless it was convenient for them to do so.

\textsuperscript{512} ibid.
Royal Commission

If you’re pestered by critics and hounded by faction
To take some precipitate, positive action
The proper procedure, to take my advice, is
Appoint a Commission and stave off the crisis.
By shelving the matter you daunt opposition
And blunt its impatience by months of attrition,
Replying meanwhile, with a shrug and a smile,
"The matter’s referred to a Royal Commission."

A Royal Commission is strictly impartial,
The pros and the cons it will expertly marshal
And one of its principal characteristics
Is getting bogged down in a sea of statistics.
So should you, perhaps, for inaction be chided
An answer to all men is aptly provided;
You simply explain, again and again,
"The Royal Commission has not yet decided."

Let the terms of its reference lack proper precision
That arguments lengthy may hold up decision,
And then, while they fumble with fact and with figure,
The conflict within the Commission grows bigger.
And so, when at last its report is provided,
If clamour for action has still not subsided,
You say with a pout "The matter’s in doubt.
The Royal Commission is somewhat divided."

Thus, once a Commission its session commences,
All you have to do is to sit on your fences
No longer in danger of coming a cropper,
For prejudging its findings is highly improper.
When the subject’s been held for so long in suspension
That it ceases to call forth debate and dissension,
Announce without fuss "There’s no more to discuss.
The Royal Commission’s retired on a pension."

If delay quite indefinite be your endeavour,
There’s nothing to stop the thing sitting for ever,
Till its members, worn out by their manifold rigours,
Die off, one by one, like the ten little niggers.
Though, shrouded with cobwebs, a sight for compunction,
A few frail survivors may labour with unction,
If someone asked why, they'd sadly reply,
"The Royal Commission’s forgotten its function."

Geoffrey Parsons

Figure 55. Satirical poem about Royal Commissions in Punch, 1955
While satirical poems were even composed about the pointlessness and apathy of Royal Commissions – see above - in fact, its institutional weaknesses were typical of the period. The political context of the 1950s appeared to oscillate in its approach to state control depending on which party was in office, and as a result, the power of cultural and aesthetic bodies like the RFAC was limited. This posed serious challenges for the RFAC in its appointed task concerning the siting of street furniture. Yet, it also had implications for the broader debate. The effect of these ambiguous powers – or soft powers – meant that no organization or design body knew exactly which part of street furniture design was under its control, making any contribution to the debate fraught with challenges, and bringing each group into conflict with the others. To some extent, these overlaps in power merely served to exacerbate the internal debate on street furniture within design circles, as the following part of this section will show.

**Internal debates**

An early example of these internal debates occurred in 1950, when the RFAC commented on the appearance of street furniture in its Annual Report. At this point, the RFAC was still effectively responsible for approving the design of street furniture, and its stance was that ‘aggressive modernistic shapes’ in street furniture was not desirable, and was indeed worse than classical styles.\(^{513}\) Such forthright views placed the RFAC in a bind, since if it maintained an active presence in the debate on street furniture – as it was formally expected to do by the MoT – it would inadvertently attract scorn from other voices in the debate. Its comment on the appearance of street furniture inevitably had this effect, not least from the AR, whose commitment to modern design has already been established. In a report the AR published on the RFAC the following year, the magazine condemned the ‘deplorable’ standard of Britain’s street furniture, much of which had been approved by the RFAC, and it encouraged the RFAC to publically state that ‘no worthy designs at present exist’ rather than being associated with sub-standard designs.\(^{514}\)

Yet the AR did not only condemn the RFAC’s approval process, it also fundamentally criticized its methods, particularly its policy of,


\(^{514}\) ‘The Royal Fine Art Commission’, the *AR*, April 1951, Vol.109, No.652, p.206
‘getting minor modifications made to unsatisfactory designs by means of careful diplomacy, on the principle no doubt that some improvement is better than none, and that by this means it can retain the co-operation of the offending architects’. 515

The AR argued that such a weak policy was counter-productive to the improvement of street furniture, since ‘by following a policy of compromise, and by setting out to act as a mere ameliorative agent, [the RFAC] is undermining its own influence’. 516 The AR also reminded the advisory body that,

‘if anyone was in a position to stand up to a Ministry that seeks to put expediency before public amenity it is the RFAC, and, once more, if it had resolutely stuck by its opinions instead of allowing itself to be satisfied with a compromise it would have received so large a measure of support that the Ministry would very likely have been compelled to change its mind’. 517

Yet the AR was dismayed to find that the RFAC seemed reluctant to use those powers, leaving the public to fight the battle alone. To emphasise this point, the AR reminded the RFAC that it had been established as a public watchdog against a system in which,

‘accomplished facts are thrust on the public without their previous approval or consent – the reverse of the democratic principle, the aesthetic equivalent of taxation without representation’. 518

The role of the RFAC then, was to act on behalf of the public and protect their interests, and unless it did so, it was effectively considered an ally of the forces working against the public. Indeed, as far as the AR was concerned, the RFAC increasingly resembled ‘the authority by which Authority excuses the aesthetic crimes it commits’. 519 It was, in other words, a rubber-stamp approval used by public bodies ‘to camouflage their disasters’. 520

This argument is useful on several levels, largely because it raises a fundamental question: what was the point of setting up an organization to approve site-specific designs which the critics disliked, which could not advise on local cases that were close to the public’s heart, and whose advice was routinely ignored by government and other public bodies, since there was no compulsion to refer street furniture designs to it and, in any case, it had no power to enforce its advice? The point, according to the AR, was that the RFAC had influence, since it could ‘wield much power by the mere fact of publically labelling a wrongly conceived project as contrary to the public

515 ibid. p.205
516 ibid. p.206
517 ibid.
518 ibid. p.207
519 ibid.
interest’. In other words, the RFAC had more influence than a magazine like the AR, because of its status as a state-funded body and because of its relationship with numerous high profile figures. This amounted to serious leverage in the debate. As such, rather than having no power the RFAC just wasn’t using its soft powers to full advantage.

These soft powers were instrumental in shaping the street furniture debate during the 1950s, which explains the AR’s frustrated attitude towards the RFAC. Yet this argument also exposes the AR’s own perceived role within the street furniture debate – as an aesthetic watchdog, committed to safeguarding artistic standards – as well as its perception of the RFAC as a conciliatory body, able only to preside over mediocrity. No doubt the RFAC would have rejected the AR’s characterization, but it goes some way to illustrate the way in which different groups within postwar design circles perceived each other. To some extent, state funded advisory bodies like the RFAC handicapped magazines like the AR, and left the public confused about who was ultimately responsible for maintaining street furniture standards. Yet at the same time, the gulf between the RFAC and the AR was superficial. Both Richards and Betjeman were Commissioners for the RFAC during the early 1950s, while simultaneously working for the AR. As such, internal debates within design circles can be potentially misleading, because they suggest that these groups were in constant conflict with each other. In fact, despite maintaining independence from each other publically, in private these divisions seem much less distinct. This is an important point to make, as it explains why the debate on street furniture adopted a somewhat artificial quality between the design elite.

The same tension can be discerned between the RFAC and the CoID. Against the ministries, the RFAC and the CoID were privately allies, but publically they had several disagreements. For instance, in its 1952 Annual Report, the RFAC made a depreciating comment about lampposts, and the extent to which inappropriate designs were ‘particularly noticeable in some of our more attractive country towns’. For Russell, the RFAC was missing the point and in a letter to the Times, he pointed out

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523 The RFAC, 10th Annual Report 1950 and 1951 (London: November 1952) pp.6-7, MoDA Ref. 720.6041
that bad design remained bad regardless of whether it was installed in a beautiful setting since no district deserved badly designed street furniture. What Russell’s letter reflects, is not only a point about hierarchies of place and the continuation of Good Design discourse, but that using a forum like the Times was an important way in which organizations like the CoID – and for that matter, the RFAC – could deploy their soft powers. The AR’s report on the RFAC can be seen in the same light, since all of these examples show that the press was used as a way of bringing the debate about design standards – and therefore, street furniture - into the public eye.

**Public initiatives**

By the early 1950s, organizations like the RFAC began to realize that their influence over those who actually made the decisions on street furniture largely existed in name only. In the majority of cases, neither central nor local government showed any attempt to accept or implement the RFAC’s advice, and without executive power, the RFAC’s soft powers had limited effect. Despite advising on 75 cases involving lighting schemes in 1957, the constraints placed upon the RFAC meant that its influence was often confined to denouncing particular cases where its advice had been overlooked. But criticizing the use of ‘tall lamp-posts of inappropriate design’ in Whittlesey and Paddington was of little use when such statements were made in its Annual Reports, a channel that simply did not have a broad enough reach. As a result, organizations like the RFAC began to realize that engaging the public was a far better way of furthering its interests. Encouraging the public to become involved in the street furniture debate and lobby government for higher standards, was a much more effective way of fulfilling its obligations to the Ministry of Transport than seeking to change the minds of those who actually made the decisions on street furniture. Influence remained a key instrument of change, but it was redirected towards the public. Because of this shift, the RFAC were able to become increasingly critical of

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524 Gordon Russell, Letter to the Editor, the Times, 24th June 1952
525 In 1957, the RFAC questioned why the MoT was so reluctant to invite its opinion, or indeed any other aesthetically motivated body. It claimed that designs for the new traffic signs adopted by the ministry were prepared by a committee ‘on which those interested in the general appearance of street furniture were not represented’. See 14th Annual Report of the RFAC – 1955 and 1956, (London, February 1957), p.15, MoDA Ref. 720.6041. Moreover, records held in the National Archives show that the RFAC was regularly forced to reject street furniture cases because of their local qualities. Signage in Christleton was one example, and grit bins in Chelsea was another. See ‘Discussions on the Design of Street Furniture’, N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/279
local authorities, whose actions often prevented the public from participating in design decisions until too late in the process.\(^{528}\) Evidently, because of the ambiguous nature of the RFAC’s remit, and its lack of legislative power, the only way in which the RFAC could effectively extend its interests was by encouraging the public to fight on its behalf.

Yet the RFAC were far from being the only organization to adopt this approach. In fact, the 1950s was a period characterized by government-funded public initiatives, voluntary organizations and preservation societies. One of the most significant of these was the Civic Trust, which was an independent civic-amenity initiative founded in 1957 by the minister of Town and Country Planning Duncan Sandys, to ‘mobilise the energies of all who care about these things and provide a focus for thought and initiative’.\(^{529}\) According to Richards (who served on Sandys’ committee of advisors prior to the CT’s formation) it was conceived as ‘a permanent organization to support and coordinate the work of local amenity societies and educate the public in matters of planning and conservation’.\(^{530}\) Funded through industry, the CT was a form of soft power, since it had no executive powers, and was careful not to antagonize the public authorities it worked with. According to the RFAC, the CT’s remit where street furniture was concerned was to be tackled through ‘propaganda and education’.\(^{531}\) Yet unlike the RFAC, the CT was also engaged in design projects.

One of its first design projects was the Magdalen Street scheme in May 1959. The project centred upon an ordinary street in Norwich, which the CT’s 1960 film *The Story of Magdalen Street* described as ‘dingy and down at heel’.\(^{532}\) Led by designer Misha Black – who had also worked with the CoID on the Festival of Britain - the CT’s project focused on revitalising the street by clearing it of excess street furniture and remodelling and rationalising it where necessary, re-painting the shop fronts according to Black’s colour scheme, and re-designing all the visible lettering using 13 pre-selected typefaces (see fig.56).

\(^{529}\) Duncan Sandys, ‘Comment: Ten Years of Civic Action’, *Design*, No.224, August 1967, p.20
\(^{532}\) *The Story of Magdalen Street*, 1960, sponsored by the Civic Trust, directed by Pamela Wilcox Bower, East Anglian Film Archive, [http://www.eafa.org.uk/catalogue/304](http://www.eafa.org.uk/catalogue/304) [accessed 14th December 2012]
Figure 56. The Civic Trust’s Magdalen Street scheme sought to establish ‘certain limits of visual good manners, within which the utmost variety could be achieved’. Though not expressly modern, the redesigned street reflects the picturesque colour palette of the Festival of Britain.

According to *The Story of Magdalen Street*, the point of the scheme,
‘was not to impose a dreary uniformity throughout the street but only to establish certain limits of visual good manners, within which the utmost variety could be achieved’.

The CT’s efforts in this project were initially a success, and drew the praise of several well-known figures such as Sir Basil Spence, and even the CoID. Indeed, its film speculated that Magdalen Street could be ‘the beginning of a movement which may well entirely change the appearance of our whole country’.

In some ways, the Magdalen Street project, and others of its type that followed, did have an effect on the appearance of Britain, if only for a short while. Yet while the style of the project gradually seemed less daring or even relevant, the central point of the exercise was to have a greater impact. Indeed, much like all of the CT’s endeavours, the ultimate objective proved that ‘our surroundings need not be taken for granted. They are man-made, and can be changed if we wish it’. Encouraging the public to take a greater role in the landscape they lived in, and the everyday objects that surrounded them, was a central development during the 1950s. Yet, while organisations like the RFAC and the CT capitalised on public interest in street furniture design, they also actively encouraged the public to become involved in these projects and the broader debate. Since they had no legislative power, influencing the public became the strongest weapon the RFAC and the CT could use to improve standards in street furniture design. The next section will reflect more fully on how this process was achieved, and its implication for the authority of the design profession itself.

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533 ibid.
534 ibid.
3.3 Directing Public Opinion

During the 1950s, the tide of opinion among the design elite was slowly moving towards greater inclusion of the public voice in the debate about street furniture. However, if public opinion mattered - and by the mid-1950s it was increasingly seen to – then the general consensus seemed to be that it would have to be carefully managed. On this basis, many of the design groups that encouraged the public’s participation, did so by framing the debate and alerting the public to what constituted good and bad street furniture design. They perceived municipal authorities as the chief offenders where bad street furniture was concerned, because of their considerable power to furnish the street combined with a pronounced lack of design awareness or training. As a consequence, the design elite sought to steer the course of the debate, and positioned themselves directly against municipal authorities.

Municipal authorities: A faceless enemy

Within the postwar design elite, the Architectural Review was arguably the first voice in the street furniture debate to actively try and initiate public action, since if the public could be encouraged to participate then it was likely they would lobby for higher standards. The AR’s anti-authoritarianism meant that its efforts initially manifested in attacks on municipal authorities, given their responsibility for buying, installing, maintaining and sometimes even designing street furniture. As such, the AR directly contributed to the process by which municipal authorities were discredited in the debate on street furniture.

The AR’s negative attitude towards municipal authorities began shortly after the war. At first, the magazine merely made comments about their work being ‘unimaginative’ but it quickly developed into a broader disdain for municipal figures like borough engineers, planners and surveyors, who lacked adequate design training but were in a position to make design decisions.\(^{536}\) As a result of their increase in power, the designer was reduced to ‘a mere extra, doing “background stuff”’.\(^{537}\) The AR criticized the puritan culture of the town council, in which beauty was something to be scared of.

\(^{536}\) ‘Special Number on Canals’, the AR, July 1949, Vol.105, No.107, p.61
\(^{537}\) Gordon Cullen, ‘Focus on Floor’, the AR, January 1952, Vol.111, No.661, p.33
and ‘everything must be seemly, rigid and controlled’.\textsuperscript{538} This approach was described as a sort of ‘unnecessary and restrictive buttoning up’, in which the liveliness and character of a place was under threat from faceless municipal powers.\textsuperscript{539} These municipal powers were to be feared because their taste in street furniture was considered so poor. One expression of this lack of taste became known as municipal rustic, which manifested as small rock gardens in city centres complete with ‘rubble walling, crazy paving and thin finicky ironwork’ (fig.57).\textsuperscript{540} Found materials like logs and roughly hewn wood were often incorporated as benches. Collectively, the \textit{AR}, the Royal Fine Art Commission and the Civic Trust deplored municipal rustic, for its contrived sense of rural charm imposed on urban public places.\textsuperscript{541} What was particularly objectionable was that the style reflected the taste of anonymous amenities committees, who mistakenly perceived it as an expression of whimsy. For the \textit{AR}, municipal authorities needed to be educated on the subtleties of urbanity to avoid these errors.\textsuperscript{542}

Figure 57. Municipal rustic: an expression of whimsy?

\textsuperscript{538} Eric de Maré, ‘Buttoning Up’, the \textit{AR}, April 1952, Vol.111, No.664, p.233
\textsuperscript{539} ibid. p.235
\textsuperscript{540} The RFAC, 11\textsuperscript{th} Annual Report – 1952 (London: July 1953) p.5, MoDA Ref. 720.6041
\textsuperscript{542} ibid., p.290
However, the AR’s condemnation of municipal rustic reflected an underlying anger about the impact powerful groups were having on the environment more generally. This culminated in Outrage, a special issue published by the AR in 1955, which argued that the true townscape was under threat from anonymous amenity committees, whose lack of design awareness was allowing landscapes to be ruined by miles of cable and wiring, ugly lamp posts and pylons, inappropriately designed benches, as well as a host of other overpowering alien elements. Outrage will be discussed more fully in chapter four, where it will be studied in relation to reaction from municipal authorities. Suffice to say at this point, that by the mid-1950s municipal authorities were increasingly being seen as accountable for unsightly street furniture.

Yet it was not just the critics who perceived municipal authorities in this way, but also the public. Like the letter page of Design, the AR also published correspondence from its readers, many of whom criticized municipal authorities. One reader accused ‘civic authorities’ of showing contempt for public space, and a pronounced absence of taste.543 Another reader from Blackheath complained about the proliferation of rustic benches and ‘a veritable forest of poles’ that had invaded his community.544 Indeed, this particular letter raises an interesting question about who was actually protecting the public’s interests. The perception among readers was that municipal authorities did not fulfill this role, but according to Trevor Dannatt, neither did the preservation societies, which were destroying the authentic character of Blackheath. Rather than rebuilding the ‘original nondescript but honest buildings that were damaged’, Blackheath’s buildings were being styled into ‘polite Georgian’.545 So who was protecting the public’s interests?

According to the AR, ‘a few frustrated intellectuals’ were trying to protect the public’s interests - a statement that at once distinguishes the AR from municipal authorities, as well as making a claim for superior intelligence – not through artistic channels, but by going straight to the municipal authorities themselves.546 For instance, writing in the Municipal Journal in 1956, Betjeman proposed a number of ways that municipal authorities could prevent the uses of bad street furniture. According to Betjeman,

543 Correspondence, the AR, January 1955, Vol.117, No. 697, p.82
544 ‘Blackheath Then and Now’, Correspondence, the AR, October 1956, Vol.120, No.717, p.212
545 ibid.
municipal authorities could invite a local artist to participate in their street furniture committee meetings, and the county planning officer could also become more involved in the siting and design of street furniture.\textsuperscript{547} Without the application of such measures, Betjeman warned that public feeling would only increase:

'I foresee the day when local residents associations and amenity bodies will march on their town hall to end the tyranny of officials and local councillors who will keep dragging party politics into aesthetic matters'.\textsuperscript{548}

Betjeman’s proposals not only demonstrate a faith in the planning system, but also the perception that by making decisions on street furniture, municipal authorities were meddling in aesthetics, a subject in which they had no authority. Officials in municipal authorities had no validity as artists, yet that was the role they were performing in furnishing the street. This is a fundamental point within the postwar street furniture debate, and by making it in the context of the \textit{MJ} Betjeman was trying to take his argument into an arena where it might be heard by those who actually made the decisions for shaping the street.

In fact, the process by which design decisions were made by government agencies began to dominate the street furniture debate around this time. The \textit{AR} published several features on planning and the way in which its machinery was routinely bypassed.\textsuperscript{549} In addition, it criticized the ways in which decisions could be made by municipal authorities without any degree of openness or transparency. One important means by which the \textit{AR} tried to defend both its own artistic authority and the public from municipal authorities’ attacks on the urban environment, was through a series called Counter-Attack.

\textbf{Counter Attack}

In light of its willingness to improve Britain, combined with a sense of frustration after Outrage, the \textit{AR} published ‘Counter-Attack: The next stage in the fight against subtopia’ in 1957. Public opinion, author Ian Nairn argued, had reached new levels of dissatisfaction with the visual crimes routinely committed by the ‘new oligarchy of government departments’.\textsuperscript{550} Such crimes were committed ‘either by local government

\textsuperscript{547} John Betjeman, 'Design of Street Furniture', the \textit{MJ}, 9\textsuperscript{th} November 1956, Vol.64, p.2673
\textsuperscript{548} ibid.
\textsuperscript{549} R. Furneaux Jordan, ‘London County Council’, the \textit{AR}, November 1956, Vol.120, No.718, p.303
\textsuperscript{550} ‘Counter-Attack: The Next Stage in the Fight Against Subtopia’, the \textit{AR}, June 1957, Vol.121, No.725, p.405
Figure 58. The cover image for Counter Attack shows that street furniture, particularly lampposts, was central to its agenda. It also references Outrage, showing its connection to that earlier campaign.

Figure 59. Besides providing advice for shelters in each landscape, Counter Attack also cautioned its readers against ‘dowdy’ shelters.
departments being their own planning authorities, or by central government departments being outside planning all together’.\textsuperscript{551} A laissez-faire attitude in government was perceived as ultimately responsible, for it allowed local government to behave ‘like a ludicrous cut-rate edition of national politics…resulting in amenity becoming a minor political counter.’\textsuperscript{552} The only option for a magazine like the \textit{AR} was to devote its energies to improving the situation itself and ‘arm the public with arguments against the wrong way and examples of the right way of doing things’.\textsuperscript{553} The argument adopted here demonstrates the \textit{AR}’s emerging alliance with the public. For the first time, the design elite and the public were broadly united against a common enemy: municipal authorities.

Much of the advice provided in Counter Attack concerns street furniture. Addressing this is useful for the thesis because it illustrates how the \textit{AR} engaged with the debate at this time, and also because it clearly articulates the \textit{AR}’s understanding of right and wrong where street furniture is concerned. For instance, while horizontal objects were considered to flow and blend with the landscape, Nairn advised the public that ‘erecting a vertical automatically means that man is interrupting the landscape to say something’\textsuperscript{554}. Nairn also helpfully arranged street furniture into categories according to the most appropriate context. For example, in the category of seating, monumental types were considered suitable for metropolitan settings; neat, mass-produced types were considered suitable for towns, sophisticated and dainty seating was suitable for ‘arcadian’ landscapes, and rough and workmanlike seating was suitable for the countryside.\textsuperscript{555} Wild landscapes were reported to have no need for seating. The same model was applied to shelters – see above – and railings, and readers were advised that metropolitan settings should extend walls instead of railings, or use only monumental designs; ‘light and deft, never shouting’ railings were to be used in towns; arcadia would use ‘simple and subtle or neat/parklike’ designs, and countryside settings would use horizontal types,
Figure 60. In this ‘Counter Outrage’ cartoon, Punch satirises both the AR and local authorities’ approach to planning.

Figure 61. In this cartoon, Punch depicts a chaotic scene of municipal improvement, involving numerous articles of street furniture.
that were ‘rough and firm’. Nairn’s advice on lamp standards was that they be ‘crisp and small or make them thin - really thin’. The tone of Counter Attack implies that any deviation from these principles by municipal authorities simply meant that they were not committed to Good Design. In such an event, the reader – as a member of the public and a ratepayer - could legitimately protest.

The guidelines Nairn set out in Counter Attack owe a considerable debt to the discourse of Good Design for the way in which improvement is defined in terms like right and wrong. It also reflects a somewhat patronizing attitude, in which the public was to be schooled by a group of self-confessed intellectuals. Even at the time, this attitude did not go unnoticed. Counter Attack was later satirized in *Punch*, which argued that the *AR*’s idealized landscape did not meet the needs of ‘plain, ordinary folk’, which included ‘kiddies, doggies, old folk and cripples’. In response, *Punch* produced its own version called ‘Counter Outrage’, which pretended to give municipal authorities an opportunity to respond. As the images above show, *Punch*’s interpretation depicted a scene where local authorities would ‘whitewash each other and everything else in sight’. However on the whole, Counter Attack was considered successful by the *AR*, since it became a regular series. This series was run by the Counter Attack Bureau, and provided a forum for readers to publically denounce municipal authorities.

**The Counter Attack Bureau**

The *AR*’s Counter Attack Bureau was developed in association with *The Observer* until 1959, at which point responsibility transferred to the CT, though it continued to be published in the *AR*. The Bureau offered a free service for readers, who could write in with specific cases of the visual crimes committed by municipal authorities. In return, the Bureau promised that ‘each case will be followed through to the end, prodding and nagging local or national authorities for months on end if necessary’. Publishing the progress of these cases was meant to illustrate that ‘outrage is continuing unabated, despite attempts to pooh-pooh the whole idea by those most

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556 ibid. p.365  
557 ibid. p.393  
558 ‘Counter Outrage’, *Punch*, 13th February 1957, p.246  
559 Marginalia, the *AR*, April 1957, Vol.121, No.723, p.221  
560 ‘Counter-Attack’, the *AR*, August-September 1959, Vol.125, No.751, p.135  
And while the AR acknowledged that the Bureau could not guarantee success, it aimed at the very least, to ‘give the outrager a good run for his outrage’.

It also conceded that the Bureau’s advice would not necessarily be in line with what the public desired, but that ‘it will always be genuine and never influenced by a “party line”, implicit or expressed’. Moreover, given the limited influence the public had over municipal authorities, the AR claimed ‘it is high time to open the drawbridge and let them back in again; if the bureau can help to do that it will have fulfilled its purpose’. And, as a final warning to municipal authorities, the AR declared that ‘little brother is watching you again’.

The Bureau dealt with several cases involving street furniture. For instance, in 1957 it reported on a case involving concrete lamps in Abingdon – see fig.62 - which were eventually replaced with steel after the RFAC was invited to mediate. In another example (fig.63), the authorities overseeing Bushey, Herts and Banstead were criticized for ignoring public pressure over their non-CoID approved lampposts. In Roehampton, the borough engineer who deliberately specified swan-neck lamp standards was derided for his poor taste. The street furniture recommended by the borough of Southwark for the LCC’s 1958 Elephant and Castle scheme created a scene the AR described as ‘downright squalor’ and ‘sickening’. And St. Marylebone Council was criticized for denigrating their opponents as ‘regency bucks’.

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562 ‘Counter-Attack’, the AR, April 1957, Vol.121, No.723, p.273
564 ibid.
565 ibid.
566 ibid.
567 ‘Counter Attack’, the AR, July 1957, Vol.122, No.726, p.78
571 ‘Counter Attack’, the AR, November 1957, Vol.122, No.730, p.348
Outrage combated: Abingdon, Berks. The concrete standards around the Town Hall, shown in Outrage, 7, have been removed and replaced by steel standards and brackets, 8, which are not elegant, but—far more important—light and unobtrusive. The photographs convey the change exactly: before, you saw Post-Restoration dormers competing ineffectively with a Post-Planning swan-neck; now you see Abingdon Town Hall first and the lamp-standard second. We wish the Town Council could be credited with this improvement: in fact they merely carried out the change at the request of the Fine Art Commission.

Figure 62. The offending lamppost is here represented alongside its lighter, less obtrusive replacement.

68. Bushey, Herts, and Banstead, Surrey (Borough Surveyors). The recent gallant fight

by A. E. Matthews to prevent an ugly post, 1, being put outside his house at Bushey has revealed

Figure 63. Together with A.E. Matthews, the Counter Attack Bureau waged a gallant fight against this ‘ugly’ lamppost.
The language used in this series reflects a highly class-conscious society, in which hierarchies are constantly being defined. The public is routinely referred to as ‘minions’, who are pitted against municipal authorities, otherwise known as the ‘High-ups’.\textsuperscript{572} Clearly, the series was not just about visual crimes, but about class, and the struggle for power: the power of local government to make design decisions, despite their allegedly bad taste; the power of central government whose laissez faire attitude effectively sanctioned these crimes; and the perceived lack of power by the \textit{AR} to do anything about it. Central government’s argument was that getting involved would only be harmful because it would ‘rob the freely elected Local Authorities of their present discretion [and] interfere with individual freedom’\textsuperscript{573} For the \textit{AR} however, local authorities were in fact ‘the worst present-day offenders against individual freedom’.\textsuperscript{574} And it added that,

‘With local authorities acting as many of them do at present, rigorous planning cannot give the citizen less freedom, because in these matters he has none already; and it might at least assure him of a fair hearing. The whole planning system is a gift to any local Napoleon’.\textsuperscript{575} The alternative, according to the \textit{AR}, would be difficult and complex, but it was better, they said than,

‘Tin-pot Fascism, which is where we are drifting at the moment – and not through too much central planning, but through too much power in the wrong hands through the muddled application of a mixture of control and \textit{laissez-faire}.’\textsuperscript{576} This point about control reflects the inherent contradictions within the postwar political landscape, but if the wrong hands implied municipal authorities, then whose were the right hands?

The \textit{AR} clearly believed that the views of the design elite ought to have a far greater bearing on decisions relating to design, than those who lacked the proper knowledge i.e. municipal authorities. And yet, municipal authorities were freely elected representatives of the public – the same group that Counter Attack was directed towards. So was the \textit{AR} guilty of re-presenting private concerns as public ones in its campaign for public justice? In order to answer this question, it is useful to momentarily step back and consider historian David Solkin’s book \textit{Painting for Money}. While the subject matter of \textit{Painting for Money} might not have much explicit

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{572} ‘Counter-Attack’, the \textit{AR}, June 1957, Vol.121, No.725, p.451
\item \textsuperscript{573} ‘Counter Attack’, the \textit{AR}, February 1958, Vol.123, No.733, p.141
\item \textsuperscript{574} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{575} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{576} ibid.
\end{itemize}
bearing on this thesis, nevertheless, Solkin’s examination of connoisseurship in 18th century Britain offers a useful parallel with postwar Britain. He showed that in the 18th century ‘people of quality’ – i.e. those privileged social groups at the upper tier of the class hierarchy - tended to define themselves as connoisseurs so as to further their own interests. To some extent, Solkin depicts a cultural landscape that is remarkably similar to postwar Britain, in which magazines like the AR perceived themselves as representing the authority of connoisseurship. By characterizing municipal authorities as dictators – akin to Big Brother from George Orwell’s 1984 - the AR was able to appropriate the intellectual and cultural high ground, and reinforce its own legitimacy.

Conclusion

A variety of groups associated with the design elite engaged in the postwar campaign to improve the standard of street furniture. These interlocking professional design alliances were powerful, and addressing the way that they extended their influence – upon the government, the public, and each other – not only reveals the nuanced way in which power was expressed during this period, but also the different interests at stake in the debate. Yet it also shows the limits of that power, and the way in which central government sought to use the soft power of these groups against the hard power of municipal authorities. The design elite clearly sought to represent its own interests, but equally, it often presented their campaigns in altruistic terms, which presents something of a paradox. For while magazines like the AR and other design organisations sought to capitalise on public interest in street furniture design, they were also simultaneously reluctant to give up their privileged position as advisors and interpreters. Yet surely if you encourage the public to speak up, you also have to listen to them?

CHAPTER FOUR
MUNICIPAL VANDALISM: RESISTANCE TO MODERN STREET FURNITURE

Most of the decisions that shaped the postwar street were made away from the public gaze in local government committee meetings. And, much to the frustration of central government and design professionals, few of those responsible had any design training. This chapter examines the exchanges between them to provide a more nuanced picture of how the debate on street furniture design was actually enacted. It also exposes the internal conflicts over official taste, a lack of consensus between different groups, and tensions about influence, snobbery and class.

4.1 Official Deadlock: The Failures of the First Ad-Hoc Street Furniture Committee

Government’s direct involvement in the postwar debate on street furniture design began in 1949, when the Ministry of Transport hosted two important meetings on the subject. The first took place in February 1949 and concerned lamp columns, however it is the second meeting in July 1949 that is more significant for the thesis. The Royal Fine Art Commission and the Council of Industrial Design had petitioned the MoT to convene an informal private discussion on the design of street furniture. Privacy was stressed due to the delicate nature of the debate, and around 14 interested bodies participated from other government ministries, local government and industry, as well as the design organizations that jointly hosted the meeting. The meeting had been called for a number of reasons, not least the perception that wartime damage to street furniture provided an unexpected opportunity for renewal. The Festival of Britain, scheduled to take place in 1951, was another incentive, and the RFAC and the CoID hoped that some progress on street furniture could be made within that two-year window. However, while the postwar physical and cultural environment might have been ready for such substantial changes, the economic context was less permissive. Rationing was still in place and materials like steel were strictly controlled. As such,
the objective of the meeting was not to encourage ‘large-scale scrapping of existing equipment’ but simply to start early thinking on the subject.578

Despite suggesting that their objectives were relatively benign, the RFAC and the CoID opened the meeting by warning those present that insufficient progress was being made in street furniture design.579 It is telling that at this early meeting, design required definition for those present, and the RFAC and the CoID described it as ‘that choice of form or colour, which, after meeting purely functional demands, gives an article its final appearance’.580 Design was clearly equated with appearance, for as both organizations argued:

‘there is in every case an aesthetic element, even if it is only in the choice of a particular curve for a lighting bracket or the precise proportions for a sand-bin; it is with this "extra" that we are here primarily concerned’.581 That the meeting would focus on this ‘extra’ element is extraordinary, precisely because of its ambiguity. Being able to ‘study the situation more closely’, the RFAC and the CoID were ‘perturbed’ by contemporary street furniture, much of which they said looked as though ‘a large collection of miscellaneous objects had been dropped from a great height and left where they happened to fall’.582 Ill-considered colours, unsatisfactory forms and lack of spatial relationship between objects was considered largely to blame, the causes of which ranged from a ‘general uncertainty of taste and poverty of invention’, to an increased demand for public services and therefore street furniture, and the multiplicity of authorities responsible.583 Both the RFAC and the CoID reasoned that the importance of individual items of street furniture was ‘comparatively insignificant’, but that the complete effect was important to address because the uneducated were unable to distinguish exactly which element of the street was to blame. This placed, they said,

‘a special obligation on those responsible for the design of street furniture; they cannot rely on public opinion to analyse their efforts properly and tell them whether they have done well or badly’.584

579 Memo on street furniture design, submitted by the RFAC and the CoID to a conference of departments and organizations interested at the Ministry of Transport, 8th July 1949, p.1, loose in ‘Design: Correspondence and Minutes’, N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/127
580 ibid.
581 ibid.
582 ibid. pp.2-3
583 ibid. p.2
584 ibid.
Clearly, all those present at the meeting were in some direct or indirect way responsible for street furniture, either through producing, approving, funding or merely installing it. Yet public opinion is entirely discounted as a means of validation. The implication was that the uneducated public could not make any valuable contribution to the debate.

One of those present was Leonard Howitt, the city architect of Manchester, and representative of the Association of Municipal Corporations. Howitt challenged what he perceived as a tendency by the RFAC and the CoID to dictate a sensitive issue like taste from above, and he contended that,

‘such an attitude would no doubt meet with objection from the Association of Municipal Corporations, and in any event it is questionable whether compulsion should be exercised in matters of taste’.

Pre-empting the reaction by other local authorities across the country, Howitt added that ‘equally objectionable would be…the control of street furniture in any national body’, and that ‘in such matters there should be complete freedom of choice by the Local Authority’. According to Howitt, badly designed or shoddy street furniture was not the fault of local authorities, but manufacturers. Other local government representatives joined Howitt in questioning the speed by which sufficient improvements could be made to street furniture in advance of the Festival of Britain. According to Mr. Swallow, of the Urban District Councils Association, not only were ‘Local Authorities too preoccupied with more urgent matters to send people to meetings on this subject’ but they also ‘would not have any time to do anything before the 1951 exhibition’. Mr. Woolnough from the Rural District Councils Association concurred, and asked that ‘Local Authorities be left to do it their own way’.

For the RFAC and the CoID, the position presented by local government at this meeting risked producing a stalemate in the debate. It was pride, they supposed, that prevented local government from allowing others to comment or criticize their street

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585 Leonard Howitt, 'Design of street furniture', statement to conference at Ministry of Transport, 8th July 1949, p.1, loose in 'Design: Correspondence and Minutes', N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/127
586 ibid.
587 ibid. p.2
588 'Design of Street Furniture: Notes of a Meeting Held at Ministry of Transport', 8th July 1949, p.1, loose in 'Design: Correspondence and Minutes', N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/127
589 ibid. p.4
furniture. Yet this attitude also had an impact upon their own position, after all, how could they hope to exert influence over a group that openly resisted outside interference? To accept that local government was fully competent in its approach to street furniture would have undermined the meeting, as well as the foundations of the RFAC and the CoID’s involvement in the debate more generally. At the very least, local government needed to acknowledge that street furniture design could be improved. And yet despite these unresolved issues – and the expression of further doubts before the meeting closed - the outcome was that a small committee be established, representing multiple interests and agendas. This small committee can be understood as the first of its kind after the war, in which a broad range of representatives - with the exception of the public – joined together to discuss street furniture.

**Lobbying after the meeting**

In the months after the meeting, a number of the design groups present sought more informal ways to pursue their agenda. In some ways, it is possible to discern the soft powers discussed in chapter three clearly in operation. For its part, the RFAC perceived the principle obstacle to better street furniture design as local government’s resistance to ‘compulsion in matters of taste’, and its contention that ‘any necessary coordination for the purpose of combining designs harmoniously should be local’. To circumvent this, the RFAC privately considered trying to challenge the 1947 Town Planning Act, which exempted street furniture owing to an idea that ‘it would be better to leave them to be coordinated by local consultation than to overburden the planning authorities with the task of controlling them’. An alternative proposal was to remind the ministries of their power in this matter, given that the Act provided ‘a valuable opportunity for guiding design in consultation with bodies on the aesthetic side’. They also continued to apply indirect pressure to government. For instance, in advance

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591 Doubts about the Committee’s workability were expressed by a representative from the Railway Executive, nevertheless a committee was formed which included the RFAC, the CoID, Urban District Councils Association, Rural District Councils association, Association of Municipal Corporations, County Councils Association, LCC, Ministry of Town and Country Planning, MoT, MHLG.
592 'Design of street furniture', 7th October 1949, p.4, loose in 'Design: Correspondence and Minutes', N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/127
593 ibid.
594 ibid.
of Betjeman’s attack on street lighting in the *Times*, the RFAC privately advised him on his argument, and was even given the opportunity to correct any errors and reinforce certain arguments prior to publication.\textsuperscript{595} Such an arrangement suggests that despite its official status, the RFAC clandestinely acted alongside Betjeman in his public attack on street furniture, as a further means of lobbying government and rousing public interest in the debate using more informal means. It also exposes the existence of networks of soft power.

Like the RFAC, the newly established CoID also privately lobbied government, and presented itself as a useful ally in the fight against bad street furniture design. In December 1949, Russell wrote privately to J.R. Willis, the Minister of Transport to inform him of the CoID’s valuable skills. According to Russell, local government’s unhelpful attitude meant that the CoID and the RFAC could perform a useful role in liaising with manufacturers, a relationship the CoID had already established through the Festival of Britain.\textsuperscript{596} He also added that in the case of street lighting,

‘we have already found that many of the larger manufacturers producing excellent lighting units are extremely worried about the inability of the user authorities to select the appropriate column and equipment’.\textsuperscript{597} That user authorities, i.e. local authorities, might be unable to identify and therefore purchase good street furniture design, was a clear rejection from manufacturers of their responsibility. For their part, the CoID and the RFAC appeared to lay the blame squarely at the feet of those purchasing bad design - local authorities - and Russell’s letter emphasized this point to Willis, perhaps in an effort to convince him to act against local authorities.

Other design bodies also sought to influence government on street furniture around this time. As chapter three discussed, the Georgian Group was active in lobbying for more controls over local authorities. For example, in 1951 Lord Rosse of the GG wrote to Hugh Dalton – who was by then working at the Ministry of Local Government and Planning – to ask for his support in the GG’s campaign against unsightly lampposts. According to Lord Rosse,

‘the effectiveness of planning control and measures for the preservation of buildings of special architectural interest are going to be gravely impaired if

\textsuperscript{595} ‘Street Furniture’ [memo on a private lunch with Mr. Lees-Milne], 22\textsuperscript{nd} May 1950, loose in 'Design: Correspondence and Minutes', N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/127
\textsuperscript{596} Letter from Gordon Russell to J.R. Willis, MoT, 8th December 1949, p.1, loose in ibid.
\textsuperscript{597} ibid.
lamp standards, which are perhaps the most conspicuous of street furniture are to be erected by reference solely to considerations which take no account either of planning or of aesthetics’.

And Lord Rosse petitioned Dalton to issue a directive to local authorities drawing their attention to the importance of ensuring that lighting schemes relate to the character of a place. As a former President of the Board of Trade and an enthusiastic supporter of modern design, Dalton had considerable influence on matters of this kind, and possessed strong views on the subject of street furniture. Eventually Dalton responded to Lord Rosse, after several drafts, but he admitted that,

‘I feel that this is one of those matters where we should get much better results by educating local councils to a higher standard of taste. This is not being left to chance.’

Clearly, government believed that it would be better for local authorities to deal with the matter voluntarily rather than by regulation. However, Dalton’s reassurance that the matter was not being left to chance was a direct reference to the newly formed joint committee on street furniture.

### The street furniture booklet

Despite the initial difficulties, doubts and reservations, the ad-hoc committee formed in July 1949 eventually agreed to publish a street furniture booklet. This booklet would act, the committee hoped, as an explanatory text for engineers and planners in local authorities, and subtly educate them on standards of taste in the process, without actually forcing them to change their methods. As the RFAC claimed shortly after the initial meeting,

‘it seems better to aim at digging channels of effective but informal cooperation in relation to actual requirements as they arise or have to be planned for than to create further formal machinery that may accomplish little or nothing of real use’.

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598 ‘Street Lighting’, letter from Lord Rosse of the GG to Hugh Dalton, Minister of Local Government and Planning, 24th May 1951, loose in ‘Street Lighting: General Questions and Correspondence on Design Amenity and Aesthetics’, N.A. Cat. Ref.: HLG 51/847

599 Records in the National Archives show that several draft letters produced by the ministry were refused by Dalton, who described them as ‘inconceivably pompous!’ and ordering one in particular to be rewritten in ‘more conversational English - with less fat complacency’. It shows how important the issue of street furniture was to him. In ‘Draft reply to Lord Rosse from Ministry of Local Government and Planning’, with amendments written in red ink by Hugh Dalton, 16th June 1951, [Signed by HD 17th June 1951], loose in 'Street Lighting: General Questions and Correspondence on Design Amenity and Aesthetics', N.A. Cat. Ref.: HLG 51/847

600 Reply to Earl of Rosse from Hugh Dalton, Ministry of Local Government and Planning, 28th June 1951, loose in ibid.

601 'Design of Street Furniture', 7th October 1949, p.5, loose in 'Design: Correspondence and Minutes', N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/127
It is clear from the outset then, that neither the committee nor the booklet had any underlying force, and merely served as another effort to induce informal cooperation from local authorities.

Figure 64. Photographs like this one of Hackney High Street were used by the CoID to demonstrate the intrusion of street furniture, which produced a ‘hopelessly muddled and un-coordinated effect’.

The CoID was asked by the committee to prepare the booklet - subject to committee approval – and its first attempt reflects the organization’s attitude to local authorities. It defined the problem of street furniture as a municipal one because, ‘visitors from tidier countries must often leave with the impression of a gargantuan municipal hoarder, reluctant like his domestic counterpart, to discard anything that might conceivably “come in”’. Blaming local authorities for displaying a psychological sickness in their attitude to street furniture was perhaps a less than ideal way to begin a booklet devised for local authorities. Yet the CoID continued in this vein by warning that placing the responsibility for street furniture into the custody of the community was dangerous, because once ‘something is everyone's business, it becomes no-one's business’.

Good street furniture design was also presented as being important not just for its aesthetic values, but for the preservation of a nation’s values – a reference that echoed wartime propaganda. Such values were being eroded by the actions of local authorities, which had created a ‘petrified forest of concrete standards towering above

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602 Typescript of Street Furniture Booklet, p.1, loose in ibid.
603 ibid. p.3
a tangled undergrowth of bollards and litter bins’ (fig.64). Therefore the objective of
the booklet was defined as educating local authorities on Good Design, which
according to the booklet,

‘implies a sympathy with its background. But to attempt to answer this as some
have done by disguising petrol stations as thatched cottages and bus shelters as
half timbered summer houses has only one logical sequel - to dress every
country Hwy in knee-breeches and make a posthorn standard equipment on
every rural bus route’. Rather than nostalgically return to the past – or even worse, a contrived appropriation
of rusticity - the CoID used the booklet to promote Good Design.

Yet the first draft was not a success. Even the RFAC – a supposed ally of the CoID on
design matters - objected to it on several levels. One commissioner, the British art
historian John Summerson, responded to the draft booklet by asking:

‘For whom is this prepared? If for secondary school children it is satisfactory.
If for local authorities is too whimsical, too arty, too general and lacking in
relevance of method…As it stands, the book seems to be completely useless except as popular propaganda. At no point does it go to the root of the matter
or assist in a practical way. There is, besides, too much play with the PAST. A
Georgian bollard may be all right but any fool can see that it is not "elegant". And early Victorian pictures seem to teach a very doubtful lesson’.

Summerson’s reservations about the booklet largely concern its lack of practical
application and excessively artistic approach, yet the tone in which he delivers this
view is blunt.

Summerson’s attitude was shared by Richards, who advised the RFAC on how to
convey Summerson’s remarks to the CoID. Responding to a letter the RFAC had
drafted, Richards said:

‘I am not so happy. I think this is a case where, even at the cost of causing despondency in the CoID, the Commission ought to be outspoken. We all
agreed - I did - most emphatically with John Summerson’s forthright
c damnation of the whole tone and conception of the booklet - and, although
I realize that the report he gave to the Commission could not be passed on to
Gordon Russell as it stood, I feel that your letter should be just as critical…your
second paragraph, though obviously intended to soften the blow, in fact gives
the impression that the Commission did not dislike the booklet and merely had
minor criticisms to make. I think that instead of that very diplomatic sentence,
we should take the bull by the horns and say outright that the Commission did not feel that the booklet was at all the sort of thing that was required’. 607 Evidently, there was strong opinion on street furniture design and on how it ought to be represented in the booklet, but the example shows the private debates that took place on the matter as well, in which different parties had different approaches. Taking into account Richards’ suggestions – but not necessarily his direct approach – the RFAC eventually wrote to the CoID with the view that ‘we do not feel that it is on the right lines in its present form’. 608 It also recommended that the CoID considered the local authority perspective and what their real requirements might be, and even proposed some ways of restructuring the booklet according to municipal departments, e.g. Highways, Parks and so on.

As a result of these comments, the CoID produced a second draft in 1952. The response from the RFAC however remained critical. While commissioners such as Lionel Brett and the sculptor Henry Moore reluctantly gave their approval without necessarily supporting the booklet, others like Frederick Gibberd claimed that ‘the approach tends to be rather unreal and rather artistic’ and not at all valuable as a handbook of technical advice for local and highway authorities; indeed, he felt as if he was ‘being talked down to’. 609 Prof. Geoffrey Webb argued that ‘I don’t much like the “scout master” tone of some of the text’, and he warned that there was ‘too much insistence perhaps on the need to run to the Commission on every occasion’. 610 And Charles Wheeler accepted that while the need for this booklet was urgent, it did not fulfill its objectives to ‘supply the help it is intended to give’. 611 Following the doubts of its commissioners, the RFAC wrote again to the CoID proposing that, without relying upon examples from abroad or from the past, the booklet ought to answer practical questions for borough engineers and highway committees over, ‘what current designs are considered good, whether they have official approval, whether they comply with regulations and where they are obtainable’. 612

607 Letter to Godfrey Samuel [RFAC] from J.M. Richards, 16th October 1951, loose in 'Design: Correspondence and Minutes', N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/127
608 Letter to Gordon Russell from Godfrey Samuel [RFAC], 23rd October 1951, loose in ibid.
609 Draft Booklet on Street Furniture - Comments by members of RFAC: May-July 1952, loose in ibid.
610 ibid.
611 ibid.
612 Letter to Gordon Russell from Godfrey Samuel [RFAC], 12th July 1952, loose in ibid.
Through the various drafts of these letters to the CoID from other design bodies like the RFAC, it is possible to see that articulations of the debate varied according to how public the channel of communication was. Even correspondence between organizations reflects a professional tone, consistent with the constraints of the organization. Yet it is clear that the individuals involved did possess strong opinions, and were prepared to voice them privately. Moreover, it is also clear that there was debate on the issue of street furniture even within the design elite. Largely as a result of these differences, the RFAC began to distance itself from the booklet from 1952 onwards. Yet what was government’s reaction?

**Government reaction to the booklet**

The Ministry of Transport and the Ministry for Housing and Local Government shared the RFAC’s attitude towards the booklet, and felt that the CoID should ‘take full responsibility for publication’ - both in terms of cost and message. As far as the MHLG was concerned, the booklet was ‘an urgent necessity’, but it privately doubted whether the MoT or the Treasury would fund the booklet or consider it as too much of a luxury. Clearly there were divisions within government about the booklet, and whose responsibility it was. Indeed, in an internal memorandum from the MHLG, one civil servant warned the deputy secretary that,

‘I would suggest that we, as a Department, should be a bit careful about getting too deeply involved in what is a matter of very great controversy and might lead us far afield. That does not mean that we should sit back: I think our province is to stimulate and do what we can to support and help the CID [CoID] in their endeavours'.

To some extent, this private opinion confirms the distant attitude of government to the whole debate, but it was by no means representative of the entire ministry. Handwritten below this memorandum is a response from the deputy secretary, stating that:

‘I don’t at all want to be too careful about getting too deeply involved. The whole subject seems to me of very great importance to civic and moral amenity and I think that we might well take a leading part (when Transport are plainly prepared to do so) in a campaign for education and improvement.’

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613 ‘Street Furniture’, internal letter to Deputy Secretary, 19th March 1953, from Mr Beaufoy, p.1, loose in ‘Street Lighting: General Questions and Correspondence on Design Amenity and Aesthetics’, N.A. Cat. Ref.: HLG 51/847
614 ibid. p.2
615 ibid. pp.2-3
616 ibid. p.3
Evidently, even within the MHLG there was debate about how best to approach the subject of street furniture, and government was not at all united on the matter.

The disagreement within the MHLG clearly caused sufficient consternation because others then sought to diffuse it. Another civil servant, Miss WM Fox responded with her view that,

‘I would like, if I may, to say how heartily I agree about the need to improve the design of street furniture generally and with the view that we ought to take at least a leading part, if not the lead, in any campaign for improvement. I have it very much on my conscience, particularly when one sees some of the frightful lamp standards one sees about, that most street furniture is permitted local authority development.’

Despite her explicit reference to ethics, Fox seems to have approached the disagreement with the interests of the ministry at heart. She reminded the deputy secretary that ‘we have a much better defense against attack if we are ourselves helping in the educational process’ of improving street furniture, and moreover that,

‘I am sure that to spend some money in attempting to educate local authorities and the public generally is likely to produce better and cheaper results than would follow if we felt obliged as a result of the present mess to go back on the permitted classes, and to require express application to be made for new street furniture’. 

Fox’s comment reveals why government was so resistant to being more active in the debate, a resistance that seems largely financially driven. In light of these potential costs, Fox sought to clarify the level of support the ministry could offer, suggesting that,

‘as to involving ourselves deeply I think there is a distinction to be drawn between getting involved in a campaign for better street furniture and identifying ourselves with any particular designs, or schools of design’. 

The implication here is that the CoID-produced booklet was clearly aligned with a particular school of design, and that being seen to be supportive of that approach, could result in questions being asked about government taste, a point which Fox makes. Thus in order to avoid any serious risk – financial or otherwise – all the ministry could do was ensure that expert technical advice was available to each local authority to help them make the right decisions concerning street furniture.

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617 Letter from Miss WM Fox to the Deputy Secretary, 24th August 1951, loose in ‘Street Lighting: General Questions and Correspondence on Design Amenity and Aesthetics’, N.A. Cat. Ref.: HLG 51/847
618 ibid.
619 ibid.
This example is useful, because it illustrates government’s hesitancy about contributing too much to the street furniture debate, as well as the unofficial position of some of its employees. Clearly, there were some individuals working for government who did want to contribute more to the debate, and considered it to be a moral duty. Others resisted on financial grounds, but also because of the potential risk this controversial issue of taste could have upon the credibility of government. Other ministries shared this anxiety about taste. For instance, Willis, the Minister of Transport, wrote to the CoID in 1953 with his concerns that the booklet was turning into propaganda ‘to educate public taste than a guide to the technical officers of local authorities on the selection and placing of street furniture’.\(^{620}\) Evidently, the MoT expected the booklet to be the latter, and was reluctant to participate in efforts to influence taste.

Suspicions about the agenda of organizations like the RFAC and the CoID had been circulating within government for some time. For instance, during the Festival of Britain, some officials characterized the CoID’s involvement as showing little practical sense for economic realities, and more interested in appearance.\(^{621}\) The RFAC faced similar accusations. In 1950, A.E.N. Taylor from the MoT wrote to the RFAC with concerns at the way it was behaving towards the street lighting industry on lantern design, in which he said:

> ‘I think we all agree that this attention to aesthetic design is a good thing and should be encouraged, particularly as for the present the approach from the manufacturers is a voluntary one’.\(^{622}\)

However, having met with industry representatives, Taylor relayed to the RFAC his impression that,

> ‘they were getting a little disheartened as, amongst other things, they felt that insufficient attention was being paid to the advisability of compromise owing to the present financial conditions’\(^{623}\)

Taylor also added that a realistic attitude ought to be made compatible with the RFAC’s artistic values. Such artistic intransigence also placed the MoT in a difficult position. During a meeting on the subject of concrete lighting standards in 1951, the

\(^{620}\) Letter to Paul Reilly 30\(^{th}\) March 1953 from JR Willis, loose in 'Discussions on the Design of Street Furniture', N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/279

\(^{621}\) See 'Joint statement for the press by the LCC and the Council of the Festival of Britain', p.3 in 'Lansbury Housing Sites 1-5', and Letter to Cyril Walter, Director of Housing and Valuer, from G Barry in 'Lansbury Housing Sites 1-5', LMA Ref. No.CL/HSG/2/31


\(^{623}\) ibid. p.2
MoT acknowledged that its authority would be compromised if it were to 'refuse to agree to lighting schemes which...were required for safety purposes because the schemes were objected to on aesthetic grounds'.

Thus, while recognizing the value of artistic advice, clearly the priorities of the MoT were more practical in nature.

Thus it was in this practical sense that the MoT hoped the street furniture booklet would make a positive contribution, so that it could at least ‘set people thinking about the subject and might help to form a public opinion which would influence Local Authorities’. Others within the MHLG were more anxious about to whom the booklet was directed. Internal correspondence reveals that some within the MHLG believed that,

‘partly it must be the manufacturers and engineers...but should it also be the engineer and the man who ought to judge, in placing his orders whether a particular design is appropriate for the place in which he wants to use it?’

It was largely these unresolved issues that led to government dissatisfaction with the booklet, indeed at one point, the MHLG even considered publishing its own advice for engineers to complement the CoID’s advice. This was not financially possible however, and instead the MHLG urged the MoT to consider the extent to which ‘they can and will exercise control’ over the booklet.

By 1953, the ad-hoc committee’s deliberations were beginning to frustrate those other parties involved in the debate. Having had no satisfaction from Dalton’s assurances in 1951 that the improvement of street furniture would not be left to chance, Lord Rosse from the GG petitioned Dalton’s replacement, Harold MacMillan for his help on street lighting. Using the same argument he adopted towards Dalton, Lord Rosse pointed out that local authorities seemed more concerned with ‘comparative cost and efficiency’ than with ‘the aesthetic considerations involved’ with street furniture. While MacMillan may have shared Lord Rosse’s dislike of what he later described as ‘the unsightly gibbets which have been put up in what seem to be quite unsuitable places’,
he could not promise any more than Dalton could.\footnote{Copy of a letter dated 22nd December 1953 to Lord Rosse from Mr. Harold MacMillan, loose in 'Discussions on the Design of Street Furniture', N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/279} He also claimed that it would only be through the influence of groups like the GG, rather than direct government control, that progress could be made especially when the matter required the reconciliation of several interests, including finance, road safety and aesthetics. MacMillan's rejection clearly articulates the soft power role that the GG – but to some extent, even the CoID, the RFAC and the CT – were both expected and forced to perform.\footnote{See conference on ‘The Street Scene’ held by GG at Cheltenham, 23rd-26th March, 1953, loose in 'Discussions on the Design of Street Furniture', N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/279; Annual report of the GG cited in the MJ, 9\textsuperscript{th} July 1954, Vol.62, p.1569}

During the early 1950s the GG held several meetings on street furniture, at which local government was routinely blamed for the perceived damage it caused to the urban environment. In his address to one meeting in February 1954, Betjeman warned the GG's audience that it was the ordinary ‘dim’ places in England that would be ruined with inappropriate street furniture if nothing were done (see fig.65). For it was in such places, according to Betjeman, that,

‘the Engineer was seldom intelligent or enlightened enough to seek advice from CoID, RFAC or the amenity societies. He took the course of least intellectual effort and chose the cheapest standard from the catalogue of, say 'Concrete Utilities' which satisfied Engineering requirements - more particularly if it was passed by the "Royal Fine Art Commission". It was useless to expect such men to consider the aesthetic aspects or the suitability of standards to the street scene'.\footnote{'Street Lighting: Note of a Meeting held on Tuesday 16th February 1954 by the Georgian Group', p.1, loose in 'Discussions on the Design of Street Furniture', N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/279}

Betjeman’s dislike of local authority engineers and their choice of lamp standards is expressed here through their alleged lack of aesthetic education, their distance from the intellectual hub of cities, and less directly, their class. All these factors seemingly amounted to a lack of taste. The CoID - whose officers also attended the meeting - concurred with Betjeman’s condemnation of the local authority engineer, adding that the CoID would seek to impress upon the ministries ‘the involvement of planning
officers who were clearly much better able to consider the aesthetic aspect’. 632 MacMillan had in fact been invited to the meeting however, and he reiterated the government’s position that planning permission should not be required for the installation of every lamppost, largely because of the burden it would place on the planning machine, but also because he believed the authorities entrusted with this responsibility ought to be capable of doing the job properly.633

By 1953 the booklet still wasn’t considered good enough for government to sponsor or fund, and no other organization’s help was forthcoming either.634 Thus after almost

632 ibid. p.5
633 ibid. p.2
634 Even the MJ refused to help launch the booklet. See correspondence to Mr. Phillips from Mr. Waddell, 8th October 1953, and correspondence to Mr. Phillips from Mr. Beaufoy, 26th October 1953,
four years of development, Russell was forced to write to the MoT to state that the booklet would be abandoned, and the material re-worked into a feature in *Design* magazine.\(^{635}\) It is unclear what further actions the committee took, or whether it even met again, but records show that both the MoT and the MHLG continued their discussions on how best to improve street furniture, especially lighting.\(^{636}\) So, given the failure of this project, what value does it have for the thesis?

This episode with the street furniture booklet exposes a number of important realities within the debate, most obviously that even the official parties involved in this debate could not agree on the subject of street furniture. Yet it also shows how these different parties actually worked together and what their agendas were, as well as the different strategies each group adopted in order to extend their own interests, both publically and privately. Ultimately, while the conversation between them concerned street furniture, the underlying argument was largely to do with power and the controversial issue of official taste. But what of the public’s taste? After all, part of the reason this issue was so controversial was because of public opinion. The next section will closely examine the intersection between the conversation these groups were having, and the public debate.

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\(^{635}\) Letter from Gordon Russell to Mr. JR Willis, MoT, 30th March 1954, loose in 'Street Lighting: General Questions and Correspondence on Design Amenity and Aesthetics', N.A. Cat. Ref.: HLG 51/847

\(^{636}\) Letter from Mr. SWC Phillips, MHLG, to Mr. Willis, MoT, 30th April 1954, p.1, loose in 'Street Lighting: General Questions and Correspondence on Design Amenity and Aesthetics', N.A. Cat. Ref.: HLG 51/847
4.2 Street Furniture Confrontations

While the official bodies concerned were unable to reach an agreement on how best to improve the standard of street furniture design, public debate on the subject was increasing. Indeed, even before the booklet on street furniture had been officially abandoned, controversies over street furniture were emerging in streets across the country. Letters were regularly sent to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government protesting about particular street furniture schemes, particularly modern street lighting, and one man in Stoke-on-Trent even chained himself to an old light fitting on his Victorian estate as part of an unsuccessful attempt to resist its removal.\(^{637}\)

A particularly early controversy over street furniture occurred in Highgate in 1953. The conflict began when a resident, Lady Norah Ritson, wrote a letter of complaint to the borough engineer at St. Pancras Council, Mr. Bainbridge, about the new lighting scheme outside her home - a scheduled Ancient monument - in Highgate Village.\(^ {638}\)

According to Lady Ritson, the introduction of concrete neon lighting standards had no place in ‘one of the oldest and most unspoiled parts of London’, and she added that the standards were,

‘needlessly grotesque, the design is poor, the colour ugly, and the light they throw is atrocious, making every human face seem sub-human. This is a grave defect, and against public policy, in a village place frequented by courting couples’.\(^ {639}\)

Lady Ritson's objection to the colouring of lighting and its adverse effects on the pallor of pedestrians was a frequent complaint by the public, and will be addressed again in the next section. Lady Ritson’s further objection that the height of the lighting scheme ‘makes attempts to sleep a fantasy. One either has air and an impossible light, or no air and darkness’ also implies the negative social consequences of electrically lighting the streets at this time.\(^ {640}\) Moreover, according to Lady Ritson, the lack of other protests was because ‘the public have been bludgeoned into apathy’.\(^ {641}\)

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\(^{638}\) Letter to Mr. Bainbridge from N. Ritson, Highgate 14\(^{th}\) August 1953, loose in 'Street Lighting: General Questions and Correspondence on Design Amenity and Aesthetics', N.A. Cat. Ref.: HLG 51/847

\(^{639}\) ibid.

\(^{640}\) ibid.

\(^{641}\) ibid.
Unfortunately, no photographs of the offending concrete lampposts are currently held by the archive now responsible for Highgate, however the image above shows an advertisement by Concrete Utilities, in which the same borough engineer in the Ritson
example is celebrated for his use of the ‘Avenue’ column. While it is not certain whether this model was used in Highgate, nevertheless it gives a sense of the designs used by St. Pancras Council at the same time, and the taste of Mr. Bainbridge.

Lady Ritson’s letter is an unusual example of public feeling about street furniture. Her social status, the status of her home, as well as her reference to public policy, suggests a high level of education, and an awareness of effective strategies to use towards government. Not content with merely involving the borough engineer, Lady Ritson also wrote to the MHLG and relayed her horror upon discovering that, after speaking with Mr. Bainbridge, St. Pancras Council were not obliged to consult any other authority in the upgrade of council lighting except the MoT and the Commissioner of Police. In this letter, Lady Ritson claimed that,

‘I find it very difficult to believe that the general public who value the historic and aesthetic amenities of this country are aware that these matters can be settled by a local council who have often no knowledge, no interest in, and no desire to preserve, beautiful irreplaceable historic places’.

Sharing the disdain that countless others had expressed before her for the insensitivities of local government, Lady Ritson suggested that an architect ought to be consulted before such changes took place, given the matter involved ‘the preservation of something so important to the background and fabric of our country’. Her suggestion that only the aesthetically trained were capable of making decisions on street furniture had considerable precedent, as the previous chapters attest.

Internal correspondence within the MHLG reveals the extent to which opinion on how best to respond was divided. One civil servant privately declared that ‘my sympathies are entirely with Lady Ritson, but hard cases do not make good law’. This particular employee also conceded that given advice on the matter already existed, the ‘tragedy is that borough engineers and the local authorities seem unable or unwilling to take advantage of it’. Yet rather than seeking to alter policy, the MHLG’s advice seems

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642 The archive now responsible is Camden Local Studies and Archive Centre.
643 Letter to the secretary of the MHLG, from Lady Ritson, Highgate 22nd August 1953, loose in 'Street Lighting: General Questions and Correspondence on Design Amenity and Aesthetics', N.A. Cat. Ref.: HLG 51/847
644 ibid.
645 ibid.
646 ibid.
647 See Leonard Howitt in 'Design of Street Furniture', statement to conference at MoT, 8th July 1949, p.2, loose in 'Design: Correspondence and Minutes', N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/127
648 Memo to Mr. Waddell, 25th September 1953, loose in 'Street Lighting: General Questions and Correspondence on Design Amenity and Aesthetics', N.A. Cat. Ref.: HLG 51/847
648 ibid.
to have been consistent: for ‘the authorities concerned to be awakened to their responsibilities, and become better educated in doing the job’. 649 Several draft letters circulated around the MHLG, and suggestions varied from advising Lady Ritson to ‘redirect her attack to the Metropolitan Borough Council and build up local agitation in support’, to somewhat patronizingly reminding her that ‘I know you would agree how important local government really is’. 650 What was consistently clear however, was the ministry’s opinion that it could not ‘pull the chestnuts out of the fire’, nor ‘properly intervene’ in the matter. 651 The explanations given for its lack of direct involvement is attributed to the need for local government to take responsibility for these issues because,

‘the tendency to shift the point of decision to higher and more remote authorities is bad for local government and peculiarly bad where the question at issue is essentially one of taste’. 652 Evidently, the ministry’s anxiety stemmed from this issue of taste, and it was at pains to communicate to Lady Ritson that it was busy ‘sponsoring the use of good design’ but that ‘good advice has an unfortunate way of not making much impression on the people it is meant to benefit’. 653 Given the timing of this advice, the MHLG might have been referring to the street furniture booklet discussed earlier.

What is interesting about this example is that, while publicly justifying its inability to intervene, the MHLG was simultaneously willing to offer its support to Lady Ritson’s campaign privately, by encouraging her to ‘keep pegging away at the Council and try to stir up interest on the part of the members’. 654 Campaigning was not only recommended by government but also by the Georgian Group. 655 Yet some within the MHLG objected to the official line that was to be taken, and wished to adopt a more direct approach. One employee confided in a memo to a colleague that,

‘I do not feel willing to write the letter proposed to Lady Ritson. I share her feeling that considering the things we do interfere with we might well take a more active part over street furniture…why can't we - jointly with Ministry of

649 ibid.
650 Draft letter to Lady Ritson, no date, loose in ‘Street Lighting: General Questions and Correspondence on Design Amenity and Aesthetics’, N.A. Cat. Ref.: HLG 51/847
651 ibid.
652 Draft letter to Lady Ritson (no.2), no date, loose in ‘Street Lighting: General Questions and Correspondence on Design Amenity and Aesthetics’, N.A. Cat. Ref.: HLG 51/847
653 ibid.
654 ibid.
655 ‘Street Lighting’, note of a meeting held on 16th February 1954 by the GG, p.1, loose in 'Discussions on the Design of Street Furniture', N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/279
Transport - publicly express horror at the hideous erections and call attention to whatever it is that CID [CoID] have done - and generally make a stir?  

As the previous section showed, there were seemingly very good reasons why the ministry could not ‘make a stir’, based on economics and the controversial nature of the topic, but also because it would undermine relations between local and central government.

Eventually the MHLG did reply to Lady Ritson. The message was broadly the same as that expressed in numerous earlier drafts, i.e. that really nothing could be done, and the minister reasoned that increased centralization was not the answer:

‘there is far too much control and regulation and form filling in the world, and if one has a system of local government one really ought to let the Local Authorities be responsible for matters of local importance’.

Entitling local authorities to make these decisions without central supervision, the minister added, would ensure improvements in the quality of local government. He did however agree with Ritson that ‘the heavy concrete stands in Highgate Village are disastrous’, but proposed that ‘a body independent of government’ might be better placed to deal with such matters given that ‘government pronouncements on aesthetics are not always successful’. The minister’s only advice was to tread ‘a long and weary road’ and basically:

‘keep at it. If only more members of the public would create a stir about the aesthetic atrocities perpetrated or permitted by public authorities, we should really make progress’.

Thus the MHLG’s official position was for protesters to simply focus on arousing public feeling by vigorously campaigning, despite potentially being able to intervene. The language used in the MHLG’s letter to Lady Ritson is surprisingly candid, though whether it would have expressed itself in such terms to local authorities is rather less likely. While the controversy over lighting in Highgate village achieved very little, especially for Lady Ritson, the example is extremely useful for the thesis since it illustrates the degree to which opinion even in the MHLG was split on how to address the problem of street furniture design. It also demonstrates the way in which ministers

656 Internal correspondence, 8th October 1953, to Mr. Phillips from Mr. Waddell, loose in 'Street Lighting: General Questions and Correspondence on Design Amenity and Aesthetics', N.A. Cat. Ref.: HLG 51/847
657 In fact the letter was addressed to Norah, implying that relations between Lady Ritson and the MHLG were friendly.
658 Letter to Lady Ritson, 22nd October 1953, from A. Sharp, p.1, loose in 'Street Lighting: General Questions and Correspondence on Design Amenity and Aesthetics', N.A. Cat. Ref.: HLG 51/847
659 ibid.
660 ibid. p.2
661 ibid.
privately sympathized with such campaigns but could not publically admit as much, and shows the pressure this placed upon other groups within the debate.

‘Concrete gibbets’ in Greenwich

A further controversy over street lighting occurred in Greenwich in 1956. The dispute began when a resident of the area – J.A.C. Platts – wrote to the Royal Fine Art Commission asking for its help preserving the Crooms Hill area in Greenwich. According to Platts, the area was under threat from Greenwich Council, whose installation of large concrete lampposts (see fig.67) was, he said, ‘turning this beautiful road into a subtopian by-pass’.662 The RFAC agreed to take the case on.663 It then wrote to Harold Whetstone, the Town Clerk of Greenwich Council reminding him of the importance of architectural setting when using particular lamps, and requested work be temporarily suspended until a meeting could be held and a resolution found.664 Whetstone responded by claiming that ‘the Council has special regard to the aesthetic appearance of the columns to be used’ and that the concrete Revo columns in question were in fact approved by both the Council of Industrial Design and the Royal Fine Art Commission.665

The case in Greenwich placed the CoID and the RFAC in an embarrassing position, since the local authority had effectively acted in accordance with their guidelines. This however, did not satisfy the public, for whom the lighting standards made Greenwich look like ‘a prisoners-of-war compound’.666 Clearly, approved street furniture was just

662 Letter from J.A.C. Platts to the RFAC, 28th June 1956, loose in 'Crooms Hill: Opposition to Design of Lamp Standards', N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/103
663 Extract from minutes of the 341st meeting of the RFAC held on 11th July 1956, loose in 'Crooms Hill: Opposition to Design of Lamp Standards', N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/103
664 Letter to Harold Whetstone, the Town Clerk of Greenwich, from Godfrey Samuel, RFAC, 7th July 1956, loose in 'Crooms Hill: Opposition to Design of Lamp Standards', N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/103
666 Letter from JAC Platts to the RFAC, 14th September 1956, loose in 'Crooms Hill: Opposition to Design of Lamp Standards', N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/103
as likely to incite public protest as objects that had been rejected. Some years earlier, the RFAC had predicted that cases like this might occur, but the issue remained
unresolved. This inherent weakness suggests that opinion on what constituted good street furniture design was split, and as a result Greenwich Council refused to alter its plans. It acknowledged however, that since residents primarily objected to the use of concrete, it was prepared to install steel lampposts if others contributed to the cost. At this point, the RFAC appealed to the MHLG to intervene. It must also have written to the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments as a letter was sent to the RFAC with its view that ‘Greenwich Borough Council are rock bottom out of a rock bun and their official Mr. Clinch [the borough engineer] is about on the same degraded level’. Following the RFAC’s appeal, the MHLG wrote to Greenwich Council to say that it shared the view of the RFAC - that the lampposts should be steel and not concrete - and that Greenwich Council was the financially responsible party as the area was an outstanding architectural masterpiece. Indeed, according to the MHLG ‘the scheme adopted should be as unobtrusive as possible’. But what constituted an unobtrusive scheme?

For groups like the CoID and the RFAC, an unobtrusive lighting scheme meant steel standards (see fig.68), though many disputed this interpretation. In a letter to the MoT in 1956, the Stanton Ironworks Company complained that, ’everything hinges on the word "obtrusive", as I feel that some people might consider that, in certain circumstances and depending upon the type, a concrete column is less obtrusive than a steel column’.

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667 During the approval process for lighting columns, the RFAC raised the objection that ‘fashions change and designs approved by the Commission many years ago might not be passed by them today’, in minutes of a meeting held on 5th March 1951 by the MoT, signed by JRW, in 'Design of Lamp Standards: Including Painting and Guidance by RFAC', N.A. Cat. Ref.: MT 95/210

668 Platt also notes that ‘the Blackheath Society, having found out by accident that the lighting was to be changed, wrote to the Council offering their help in the selection of suitable standards. They received a reply stating that their offer could not be accepted as the meeting at which their letter was read was the meeting at which the standards were chosen’, in a letter from J.A.C. Platts to the RFAC, 14th September 1956, p.2, loose in 'Crooms Hill: Opposition to Design of Lamp Standards', N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/103

669 Letter from Godfrey Samuel, the RFAC, to the Secretary of the MHLG, 22nd February 1957, loose in 'Crooms Hill: Opposition to Design of Lamp Standards', N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/103


672 ibid.


Figure 68. 30ft street lighting columns made by Stewarts & Lloyds Ltd – an example of the type of unobtrusive steel designs favoured by the CoID, on open-air display in 1960.
And as the voice of local authorities, the Municipal Journal was equally dubious about the unobtrusive qualities of steel because,

‘the fallacy of the case for steel is that is no more marries with old and picturesque property than does any other medium. Any form of modern street lighting fails to conform with by-gone periods’ ⁶⁷⁵

This view was supported by Royal Saint Marylebone Metropolitan Borough Council in 1957, which stated that 'modern equipment – street lighting - cannot be made to harmonise with a background a century or more in age unless by bogus “olde world” treatment’. ⁶⁷⁶ Evidently, for many groups outside of the design elite, the decision to favour steel over concrete was based on little more than visual preference.

Adrian Forty’s recent research on modernism and materiality focused on concrete and the negative associations many people have with it. Forty suggests that, typically understood as being cheap, concrete is also perceived as requiring little or no skill. ⁶⁷⁷

What makes concrete interesting for the postwar street furniture debate is the way in which it both divided opinion and created alliances among different groups. Unusually perhaps, the public largely sympathized with the CoID and the RFAC in their campaign for steel lampposts, since in the majority of public protests over street lighting, the use of concrete was central.

Government however, appears to have been divided on concrete lampposts. According to a MHLG memo in 1953, ‘Transport seems to think there is nothing wrong with them.’ ⁶⁷⁸ The MoT’s position probably has less to do with taste, and more to do with economic constraints, since even in 1953 the MoT remained responsible for releasing steel for use in lampposts and lanterns at a time of shortage. It was a subject that caused considerable friction within government. ⁶⁷⁹ Nevertheless, such difficulties did not, according to the MHLG ‘excuse some of the dreadful designs which were adopted’. ⁶⁸⁰ And by 1953 restrictions upon steel were slowly being relaxed, leading

⁶⁷⁵ ‘Self Appointed Expert is the Curse of Local Government’, the MJ, 26⁰ April 1957, Vol.65, p.887
⁶⁷⁶ The MJ, 27⁰ September 1957, Vol.65, p.2031
⁶⁷⁸ ‘Street Furniture’, internal letter to Deputy Secretary, 19th March 1953, from Mr Beaufoy, p.2, loose in ‘Street Lighting: General Questions and Correspondence on Design Amenity and Aesthetics’, N.A. Cat. Ref.: HLG 51/847
⁶⁷⁹ According to Beaufoy: ‘As you know, we had quite a battle to keep the concrete standards out of the High Street at Canterbury and to get Transport to release about 3-tons of steel as an alternative’, loose in ibid.
⁶⁸⁰ Internal correspondence to Mr. Phillips from Mr. Beaufoy, 26th October 1953, loose in ‘Street Lighting: General Questions and Correspondence on Design Amenity and Aesthetics’, N.A. Cat. Ref.: HLG 51/847
the MHLG to conclude that ‘there seems to be no reason why these horrors should continue’. The subject clearly aroused strong feeling within the MHLG because Mr. Beaufoy, one of its civil servants, proposed issuing a ‘circular to local authorities encouraging them to do something better than the dreadful concrete gibbets which we all abhor’. The expression ‘concrete gibbets’ appears to have been a popular one within government, and Beaufoy also added,

‘if somebody is prepared to allot enough steel for a purity campaign, then it seems to me for the Minister of Transport to tell his people that, in future - no gibbets! No doubt, however, manufacturers have hundreds and perhaps thousands of them in store and whether he would be prepared to make a stand, I do not know.’

Beaufoy’s comment reveals the extent to which the MHLG and the MoT differed in their approach to street furniture, and even the variable tastes of government. But it also exposes one of the stark realities within the debate, which the public might not have understood or even been aware of. Concrete lampposts were considerably cheaper than steel, and did not involve additional MoT permission. Moreover, if manufacturers did have excess stock of ‘concrete gibbets’, the MoT could hardly prevent them from selling that stock on aesthetic grounds, which would have inevitably led to accusations of a centralized taste-making campaign.

It was against this background that the case in Greenwich unfolded, much to the disdain of all concerned. Having applied some pressure to Greenwich Council, the MHLG received a clear rebuttal. Since no other body was prepared to supplement the cost of steel lights, the minister wrote to the RFAC to inform it that Greenwich Council was ‘adhering to their decision not to budge unless we (or you) paid the difference in capital cost’. Evidently the minister decided not to oppose Greenwich Council – despite having the powers to do so - since he added in his letter to the RFAC that he was ‘sorry that this has not ended happily’. In the months after this exchange, various other parties tried to apply pressure on Greenwich Council -

681 Street Furniture’, internal letter to Deputy Secretary, 19th March 1953, from Mr. Beaufoy, p.2, loose in ‘Street Lighting: General Questions and Correspondence on Design Amenity and Aesthetics’, N.A. Cat. Ref.: HLG 51/847
682 Internal correspondence, 26th October 1953, to Mr. Phillips from Mr. Beaufoy, loose in ‘Street Lighting: General Questions and Correspondence on Design Amenity and Aesthetics’, N.A. Cat. Ref.: HLG 51/847
683 ibid.
684 Extract from minutes of 378th meeting of the RFAC, 9th December 1959, loose in ‘Crooms Hill: Opposition to Design of Lamp Standards’, N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/103
686 ibid.
including Betjeman and members of the public – but the RFAC were forced to acknowledge that, where the concrete lamps in Greenwich were concerned, ‘we are not in a position to insist’. In its correspondence with other residents of the area, the RFAC also asked them to,

‘please act with discretion as the situation is a little delicate, and it might be wiser not to let the Council know of our interest until we are able to write to them officially’.688

That a dispute over lighting in Greenwich should be characterized as delicate by the RFAC implies that the inter-workings of each of these bodies was not always entirely transparent.

Another case involving Greenwich Council surfaced shortly after, though on this occasion the result was slightly different. In 1959, a relighting scheme had taken place in Blackheath prompting community protests. According to CoID officer Peter Whitworth, ‘the old cast iron columns were taken down and replaced by clumsy concrete ones with the pimple lanterns’.689 The controversy had been reported in the Daily Telegraph, which stated that the replacement lampposts were RFAC-approved, placing considerable strain on the relationship between the CoID, the RFAC and Greenwich Council.690

Despite these protests – from the residents, as well as the RFAC and the CoID - Greenwich Council explained it could not justify spending public money to purchase new lights, so the residents – led by Mrs. Ian Davidson - eventually bought ‘slim aluminium ones with well proportioned lanterns’ as replacements themselves.691

Whitworth explained that ‘the new high mast columns and lanterns are a triumph of technology, for not only do they look more graceful, they provide more light with less

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688 ibid.
689 Peter Whitworth, ‘Street furniture’, the Times Review of Industry, 11.10.1962, in ‘Street Furniture Articles and Lectures’ (1432.15 Pt III)
690 The Daily Telegraph, 8th December 1959. For further details on the communication between these groups after the Daily Telegraph report, see ‘Telephone Message One: from Peter Whitworth (CoID), 8th December 1959, Subject: Street Lighting, Blackheath’, p.2, loose in ‘Crooms Hill: Opposition to Design of Lamp Standards’, N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/103
691 Peter Whitworth, ‘Street furniture’, the Times Review of Industry, 11.10.1962, in ‘Street Furniture Articles and Lectures’ (1432.15 Pt III). For information on the possible lantern used, see http://www.simoncornwell.com/lighting/manufact/aei/cat/cat1960s-1/58.htm [accessed 25th September 2013]
cost and fewer columns’. The CoID were happy to promote this story – even three years after the event - given that the replacement choice of lantern validated its own recommendations about modern design and the designers it recommended, but also because of Davidson’s attitude to municipal authorities. For the CoID, the whole exercise had proved that ‘constructive criticism can pay dividends if handled with tact, diplomacy and patience’ – the very approach the CoID had cultivated since its formation. What is interesting about this story is that modern lighting design was not necessarily the problem, but the imposition of one style without the resident’s consent.

Both examples in Greenwich expose the inherent weaknesses within the CoID’s and the RFAC’s approval system: the first example because it illustrates the CoID’s position out-with the borders of public taste, and the second example because it illustrates the confusion generated by such a complex system. Yet they also reveal the power of local government to ignore external pressure, even from central government. The only reason that the public won the argument in Blackheath was because they were financially able and willing to cover the cost of replacement lampposts, a fact that demonstrates considerable commitment on the part of the residents. What it also shows is the limits of the RFAC’s soft power, indeed, it is difficult to know the extent to which any impact was actually exerted by the RFAC in its clandestine dealings in either of these controversies behind the scenes. Yet not all lighting schemes ended like this, and there were occasions when government did intervene.

**Government intervention**

A rare example of intervention by government was reported in the *MJ* in the same year as the dispute in Greenwich. In 1956 a disagreement over aesthetics broke out between Eton College and Buckinghamshire District Council, which sought to install modern lamp standards in the vicinity of the college. After rejecting both the concrete and painted steel lamps proposed by the District Council, Eton College invited the RFAC

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692 Peter Whitworth, ‘Street furniture’, the *Times Review of Industry*, 11.10.1962, in ‘Street Furniture Articles and Lectures’ (1432.15 Pt III)
693 Paul Reilly, *Lamp Post Feature: Notes sent to Lord Snowdon (confidential)*, 19.3.62, in ‘Street Furniture Articles and Lectures’ (1432.15 Pt III)
694 Peter Whitworth, ‘Street furniture’, the *Times Review of Industry*, 11.10.1962, in ‘Street Furniture Articles and Lectures' (1432.15 Pt III)
to mediate. According to the MJ the RFAC was quoted as saying that ‘the appearance of Eton was of national as well as local concern’, and it suggested that additional care ought to be taken to consider the surroundings of the college before installing what were alleged to be inappropriate lamp standards. When the District Council rejected the RFAC’s recommendations and tried to proceed with its original plans, Eton College asked the MHLG to intervene. Following this appeal, the MHLG awarded the College an exemption from national regulations on lighting standards, forcing the District Council to retreat.

The government clearly had the power to intervene in the street furniture debate when it desired to, despite its claims to have no authority on the matter. Ministerial intervention could be arbitrary, but the government often acted against the introduction of modern street furniture, at least in certain circumstances. For instance, Cabinet minutes from 1962 reveal that the use of concrete opposite Westminster Abbey was deliberately prevented because it ‘may look shoddy’. And in 1964, Victorian lamp-standards were protected so as not to ‘detract from the character of two streets which contributed to the beauty of the St. James Park area’. All three examples indicate that government tended to intervene in areas that its own members – or social class - were likely to frequent. It also raises serious questions about who exactly was shaping public life.

'15-foot spectres' in Kensington and Chelsea

Though the previous examples might indicate the prevalence of double standards on the part of government, there are plenty of caveats to such a claim. For instance, in 1960 the modernization of lampposts by Kensington Borough Council in 1960 provoked considerable public anger. Country Life, Design and the AR all took an interest in the case, as did the London Evening Standard which published a report by stage designer Oliver Messel about his 'considerable consternation over the unsightly
Figure 69. New lamps in Chelsea: The Borough Council’s installation is pictured on the left. On the right, Design’s preference was temporarily erected (and taken down again) to show that ‘a modern column is the most appropriate solution in an old street’.

Figure 70. According to Country Life, the ‘old lamps were married to their surroundings. The new lamps are married to nothing but tawdriness and vulgarity. The old blended perfectly with the skyline; the new pierce it with unwonted asperity’.
new lamp posts which are being put all over Chelsea to replace the extremely attractive old ones [which have] great character and charm’. Besides publicly drawing attention to this issue, Messel also privately wrote to the Office of Works and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, to inform them that Kensington Borough Council had purchased ‘huge quantities of hideous lamp posts to replace all the old ones in Kensington’, and that by doing so, numerous small residential streets of considerable architectural merit would be spoiled. For both ministries, the issue was ultimately a planning problem, however the OoW conceded that ‘the demolition of lamp-posts does not require planning consent, and although the erection of new ones does, there is a blanket exemption in force’. While the exemption could be withdrawn, the OoW stated that after considerable analysis in the wake of the AR’s Subtopia series, it had decided that ‘nothing very useful could be done about it’.  

Records show that the ministries communicated between themselves on whether they ought to protect lampposts by listing or scheduling them under the Ancient Monuments Acts, or Section 30 of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1947. In a letter to the MHLG, permanent secretary for the OoW, John Hope wrote,

‘I understand that legally, there is no objection to this, and indeed you have listed a lamppost and I have scheduled a pillar-box. It is clear however, that this is not the most appropriate way to deal with this problem, and I imagine that somewhere amongst your armoury of planning powers, you have the right weapon’. Unfortunately, the MHLG was unwilling to use these apparent powers, and its minister, Henry Brooke, replied that,

‘usually the reason why people complain about the loss of old lamp-posts is that they dislike the new ones put in their place. It seems to me that the best way of tackling this problem is to make sure that the new ones are well-

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703 ibid.
designed and that their design fits the surroundings. A lot has been done and is being done to bring this about’. 

In this respect, Brooke could have been referring to the collective work of the CoID and the RFAC, as well as the CT. It was their work, he proposed, that was ‘more likely to bring about useful results than the direct exercise of planning powers’. Indeed, the main aim for the MHLG seems to have been to encourage local authorities, ‘to realise for themselves what kinds of lamp-post are suitable in different settings. It has been very encouraging to see in recent years how several offending councils have been vigorously set upon by their own ratepayers’.

The position of the ministers was later conveyed in a letter to Oliver Messel, in which direct ministerial intervention was said to be much less effective than local action.

The CoID took a different approach, preferring to shame Chelsea Borough Council. Since its installation of period lanterns went against the advice of the CoID, Design reported that the implication of such ‘nostalgic yearnings’ for such outdated products was a rejection of ‘progress’. It also stated that, ‘unless the sorry lesson of Chelsea is quickly comprehended, this pathetic concession to the past may yet be inflicted on residents of other elegant London boroughs’. For the AR, the case merely reflected the arrogance of local authorities. According to author Derek Barton, badly designed lampposts were not just ‘an affront to the eye’ but also an affront to a public who were ‘seldom informed or consulted about them’. The lampposts in Kensington and Chelsea had prompted considerable discussion – even being described in Parliament as ‘15-ft. spectres’, and 'replicas of dustbins’ – and Barton reported that the problem ‘aptly illustrates a general threat to good design’.

Barton’s reference to Good Design suggests that even in 1960, street furniture could be understood through this discourse. However, Barton also situated the controversy in a political context, in which the issue was ‘one of those delicately balanced situations between governors and governed.

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706 ibid. p.2
707 ibid.
709 Design, No.134, February 1960, p.34
710 ibid.
712 ibid. pp.411-5
which abound in British democracy’. He gave the examples of several London councils which had experimented with different methods of involving ratepayers in their decisions, and cited Chelsea Borough Council as the least inclusive. Chelsea, according to Barton,

‘has chosen its new lamp-posts with an absolute minimum of publicity and has then gone half-heartedly and disingenuously through some of the motions of giving the citizens a chance to criticize without, it would seem, the least intention of allowing criticisms to bear any fruit’. Rather than invite participation on matters of such great community importance, Barton claimed that council meetings were ‘virtually proceedings for rubber stamping decisions reached in secret by committees’. The implication here is that committees were known for reaching decisions by mysterious and often questionable methods. Barton also criticized the borough engineer, ‘who, judging by the tone and style of his correspondence, is of the authoritarian variety’. According to Barton, the power wielded by local authorities was disproportionate to that of the citizen, and their methods were undemocratic. That the complete modernization of Chelsea’s lighting was more expensive than merely converting the existing lamps to electricity was attributed to pure regimentalism. And in his concluding comments, Barton summarized by stating that,

‘as long as the provision of street lighting is considered primarily as a road engineering matter, English towns and boroughs will continue to be defaced by inappropriate street lamps in the name of efficiency and ‘cheerfulness’ by councillors without the aesthetic judgement to stand up to the advice of technicians’. Thus not only were councillors to blame for their lack of aesthetic sensitivity, but borough engineers were derided as technicians who bullied their councils into retreat.

The street lighting controversy in Kensington and Chelsea serves to illustrate the increasingly public nature of these disputes, and the central role they occupied in popular discourse. Yet it also supports the view that local authorities often ignored

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713 ibid. p.412
714 According to Barton, ‘the Marylebone Borough Council…went to the length of putting up three different types of lamp outside the Town Hall and inviting citizens to ballot for their choice (as it turned out, the preference was for the most expensive)’ in ibid.
715 ibid.
716 ibid.
717 ibid.
718 ibid. p.415
719 ibid. p.416
720 ibid.
outside advice unless forced to do so by government or by a financial incentive (as shown in Blackheath).

A ‘folly’ on the South Bank

Evidently, by the start of the 1960s there had been an aesthetic shift, in which historic or period styles of street furniture were widely considered to be more desirable than modern forms. This was a view held not only by the public, but also by some local authorities. For instance, in 1962, London County Council embarked upon a programme of relighting the riverside walk along the South Bank. As part of this programme, the LCC’s General Purposes Committee sought to purchase 35 replicas of the 1860 Victorian dolphin-style lampposts originally designed by Vuillamy (fig.71). Early on in this process, Design had discovered the LCC’s plans and described them as a folly. According to Design, ‘this expensive proposal…will fill with gloom the hearts of all those who associate the Festival of Britain site with the first great upsurge of modern design in this country since the war’. It continued,

‘No doubt the LCC has reasons for this choice, but what seems incredible is the report that it is unwilling to consult either the Civic Trust or the Royal Fine Arts Commission on a matter of such considerable public interest. Even more strange, in view of the fact that the CoID's open air street furniture exhibition has stood next to County Hall for two years, is that no-one thought it worthwhile consulting the Council's street furniture panel’. That a body as significant for the capital as the LCC could forego CoID advice on street furniture suggests that the CoID had considerably less influence than it thought.

On the basis of records held in the London Metropolitan Archives, it would appear that the CoID’s reservations about the scheme had little or no effect upon the LCC’s plans. By the end of 1962, the LCC’s chief engineer, architect and valuer published a joint report on the proposed scheme, and justified it on the basis that dolphin-type lampposts would help retain a sense of continuity on the riverwalk. The comptroller of the LCC questioned the financial cost of the dolphin-type lamp columns, but his

721 ‘LCC General Purposes Committee Papers and Minutes October-December 1962’, p.378
722 Design, No.169, January 1962, p.27
723 ibid.
Figure 71. According to Design in 1962, these dolphin-style lamps ‘will fill with gloom the hearts of all those who associate the Festival of Britain site with the first great upsurge of modern design in this country’.

concern was dismissed.\textsuperscript{725} Two days later, the chairman of the General Purposes Committee, Freda Corbet, was asked by Mr. Sebag-Montefiore whether she agreed that,

\textsuperscript{725} Concurrent report 17th October 1962 by the Comptroller of the Council Frank Holland, Minute 6542. 11th November 1962 Presented to Council on 22nd October 1962, p.1, in ‘LCC General Purposes Committee Papers and Minutes October-December 1962’
‘there is a body of opinion holding that apart from the outrageous expense of this old-fashioned type of lamp column, it will be quite out of place in front of the modern buildings of the south bank.’

In reply, Corbet stated that:

‘while I am prepared to believe that some people might consider them out of place in the extended wall, I cannot think that the cost of preserving a traditional feature of the London scene will be regarded as excessive’.

Sebag-Montefiore also asked whether Corbet would consult the RFAC or the Civic Trust (but interestingly not the CoID), which Corbet declined, and the proposed plan went ahead. Besides reflecting the power of the LCC and its ability to ignore criticism from the CoID, the controversy on the South Bank also demonstrates the increasing interest in historic styles of street furniture.

Public resistance to renewal

By the mid-1950s and early 1960s, modern street furniture design was increasingly rejected by the public. The Municipal Journal reported on several examples in which the public registered their regret at the renewal of their town’s street furniture. In 1955, residents of Shrewsbury were reported to have mourned the departure of old street water conduits largely because of their indirect function as hand warmers. And on some occasions other uses were found for obsolete street furniture. For example, in 1956 a local contractor in Bradford bought his local authorities’ old police boxes and sold them on as garden huts and tool sheds. This, it seems, was quite a common practice, as was the decorative use of telephone boxes in gardens some years later.

Visitors from other countries also found modern street furniture challenging. For example, in reference to a new street furniture scheme in Windsor in 1961, Rita W. Myers from Vancouver asked,

‘What has happened to “old England”? Where once the aged Tudor beams and white plaster represented our mother country to us we now find that grandma has turned skittish and decked herself in Bermuda pink, Nassau blue and grass green…How can we now look at this home of kings, at its stately battlements and ancient buildings without being reminded by the brightly coloured buildings that we are living in a modern world?’

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726 Point no.13 By Mr Sebag-Montefiore of the Chairman of the General Purposes Committee [Freda Corbet], 13th November 1962, in ‘LCC Minutes and Records 1962’, p.838
727 ibid.
728 The MJ, 2nd December 1955, Vol.63, p.3269
729 ‘People and Places’, the MJ, 1st June 1956, Vol.64, p.1245
730 ‘Windsor Face-Lift Sets Seal on Civic Trust Campaign’, the MJ, 19th May 1961, Vol.69, p.1624
Myers condemned Windsor’s face-lift, proclaiming that,

‘Modernization of such a place totally destroys charm and atmosphere and also the authenticity of its architecture. It leaves landmarks like Windsor half history and half a bad copy of America today.’\(^{731}\)

While foreign perceptions of a country might often differ from the way in which a nation perceives itself, Myers’ argument reflects a typical attitude to renewal that was shared by many within Britain.

![Decorative lanterns being made for Brighton’s seafront in 1964.](image)

The main complaint about modern street furniture appeared to be based on its appearance, and some local authorities like Old Bosham Parish Council even rejected its own modern street lighting scheme for being too ugly.\(^{732}\) And, when in 1960 Chipping Camden erected a pilot scheme of electric street lamps and asked residents to vote on their preference, they voted overwhelmingly to return to gas lamps.\(^{733}\) Yet even more industrial places adopted this approach - including Belfast, which sought to retain its period light fittings.\(^{734}\) Even some modern housing schemes adopted a similar model. For example, in 1962 the development corporation of Merthyr Tydfil installed a period water fountain in one of its schemes on the basis that it would ‘add

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\(^{731}\) ibid.

\(^{732}\) The *MJ*, 29\(^{th}\) May 1959, Vol.67, p1466

\(^{733}\) This may not be surprising given the Arts and Crafts legacy of the area, see the *MJ*, 16\(^{th}\) December 1960, Vol.68, p.3993

\(^{734}\) The *MJ*, 26\(^{th}\) October 1962, Vol.70
just that touch of originality and tradition needed to associate the modern scheme with the past of the old town'. In Brighton decorative lanterns were commissioned for the seafront in 1964, with no public protest (fig. 72). Clearly, a pattern can be detected whereby period street furniture was either being retained or commissioned from the 1960s onwards. However, what this whole section demonstrates is that by the mid-1960s, it was clearly more difficult for local authorities to push decisions through without sufficient consultation. And, with press support, residents could hope for a more positive outcome than they might have only a few years earlier. One aspect of this debate remained constant however: if any one party was to blame, it was the local authority.

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735 The MJ, 16th November 1962, Vol. 70, p. 3536
736 ‘Brighton’s Seafront Lanterns’, the MJ, 17th January 1964, Vol. 72, p. 152
4.3 Outrage and the Response of Local Government

As this chapter has so far demonstrated, almost every party involved in the debate on street furniture blamed local authorities for poor standards. In some ways, this is hardly surprising, after all, local authorities were the biggest developer in the country at the time, and had the most responsibility for street furniture, in addition to a host of other duties. During the 1950s, local authorities across Britain were increasingly challenged over their lighting schemes. Lighting engineers in turn, responded by becoming much more vocal about their critics and the arbitrary nature of their criticism. Thus, in an effort to diffuse what was becoming an increasingly hostile situation between the public and local government over lighting, the Municipal Journal began to publish extensively on the subject. According to the MJ, local government should avoid trying to create 'an architectural style which is too often unrelated to the actual site', and while designing ‘specials’ was impracticable, the most appropriate design was presented as being 'an elegant modest column'. In this respect, the Council of Industrial Design and the MJ appeared to be united. However, local authorities often had their own idiosyncratic ideas about what constituted well-designed street furniture.

The CoID tended to advise local authorities that well-designed street furniture was unobtrusive. Thus a well-designed litterbin not only held litter but also concealed it. Scarborough’s Health Committee had other ideas, and the MJ reported in 1955 that it had painted all of Scarborough’s litterbins cream instead of green, on the basis that green litterbins attached to lampposts were ‘drab and offer no incentive to people to use them’. Windsor Council was equally resistant to unobtrusive litterbins, and in 1958 it painted its litterbins red and yellow to make them stand out more. Trying to adopt a similar approach, Whickham Urban District Council painted 130 of its litterbins in ‘gay pastel shades’ in 1962, but was forced to bow to pressure from Durham County Council which refused to grant planning permission to fit

738 ibid. p.2215
739 ‘Exhibition Marks a Step Forward in Design of Litter Bins’, the MJ, 14th October 1960, Vol.68, p.3198
741 The MJ, 6th June 1958, Vol.66, p.1374
Whickham’s newly painted litterbins to lampposts unless they were repainted grey.\textsuperscript{742} In Carrickfergus, County Antrim in 1961, litterbins painted in Ireland’s national colours were repeatedly targeted by ‘local patriots’, who threw the bins into the sea until they were finally installed outside of the town hall.\textsuperscript{743} And it wasn’t just litterbins that proved contentious. In 1956 Prudhoe District Council enforced a cream doorstep rule when some housewives tried to paint their doorsteps red, so as not to ‘upset the colour scheme’.\textsuperscript{744} And in 1957, the Dover Works Committee painted its signs yellow - despite protests from the local art school - reasoning that ‘this design hits you right between the eyes. It will be excellent publicity for Dover’.\textsuperscript{745} These examples not only illustrate the way that local authorities resisted outside interference, but also the complexities of local government. The dispute between Whickham Urban District Council and Durham County Council particularly reflects this, in that even within a relatively small area, it was possible to have different authorities making different decisions about design.

Inevitably, given its readership, the \textit{MJ} was always eager to defend the design decisions of local authorities, despite the fact that such decisions were often reached without any design training. According to the \textit{MJ} in 1952, such decisions were made on the basis of little more than intuition or even instinct, in that the difference between a good or bad design was that ‘you get quite an active feeling of pleasure from the one and a feeling of general discomfort from the other’.\textsuperscript{746} Nevertheless, unqualifiable instincts were routinely conflated with taste, and for the \textit{MJ} at least, 'local planning authorities, despite anything their critics might say to the contrary, generally show innate good taste'.\textsuperscript{747} For critics like Professor Richardson, this couldn’t be farther from the truth, and taste was an issue that local authorities simply did not understand.\textsuperscript{748} Others, like Peter Shepheard, suggested that taste had nothing to do with poor street furniture. Such objects were merely the 'municipal after-thoughts' of an overburdened borough engineer, since ‘nobody commits ugliness on purpose’.\textsuperscript{749} While several others agreed with Shepheard’s observation, the level of anger directed

\textsuperscript{742} ‘In Defiance of a Colour Bar by Durham County Council’, the \textit{MJ}, 6\textsuperscript{th} April 1962, Vol.70, p.990
\textsuperscript{743} ‘That Controversial Litter Bin’, the \textit{MJ}, 15\textsuperscript{th} September 1961, Vol.69, p.2937
\textsuperscript{744} The \textit{MJ}, 12\textsuperscript{th} October 1956, Vol.64, p.2379
\textsuperscript{745} The \textit{MJ}, 15\textsuperscript{th} February 1957, Vol.65, p.324
\textsuperscript{746} ‘Landscape Architecture in County Development Plan’, the \textit{MJ}, 7\textsuperscript{th} March 1952, Vol.60, p.495
\textsuperscript{747} ‘Good Taste in Planning’, the \textit{MJ}, 30\textsuperscript{th} December 1955, Vol.63, p.3469
\textsuperscript{748} Prof. AE Richardson, ‘The Rebuilding of London’, the \textit{MJ}, 29\textsuperscript{th} July 1955, Vol.63, p.2057
at local authorities was increasing, and one example from 1955 captures this particularly well.

**Outrage**

Depending on one’s interpretation, Outrage was either a special issue of the *AR* or a prophecy of doom. Certainly it was a well-written piece of polemic by Ian Nairn, which in no uncertain terms accused local authorities of destroying towns and cities though misplaced interventions, and a lack of sensitivity or care. Such authorities had, according to Nairn, the 'most power and often the least awareness of the visual responsibility that should go with it'. 750 By imposing a 'creeping mildew' of monotonous design upon the whole country, Nairn prophesied that soon 'the end of Southampton will look like the beginning of Carlisle, the parts in between will look like the end of Carlisle or the beginning of Southampton'. 751 What masqueraded as Improvement, Progress or Amenity he said, was in fact subtopia: a state that signalled an 'annihilation of the site, the steam-rollering of all individualism of place to one uniform and mediocre pattern'. 752 According to Hugh Casson, who was by that point serving on the *AR*’s editorial board, the concept of subtopia was,

> 'the result of making a universal ideal of the suburban fantasy, taking it from its original context where it was admirable, and applying it to the whole country, where it is horrible'. 753

Through examples of blight as varied as pylons, arterial roads, and street furniture - also known as unwitting agents that were 'treated by their authors as though they were invisible' - Outrage blamed local government for essentially making Britain's visual landscape indistinguishable. 754

Through a series of rhetorical images of British places, Outrage was, according to Casson ‘a tourist guide in reverse, picking out the bad, not the good’. 755 And street furniture was a key feature of this inverse guide to Britain. For instance, standardized concrete lamp standards were blamed for stamping 'any scene in which they appear

751 ibid.
752 ibid. p.371
with their own apathetic pattern and if the scene is fragile, as Warwick is, or having a hard time to stay intact anyway like Blackrod, it disintegrates’.\textsuperscript{756} Particular styles were also attacked, including municipal rustic – familiar from chapter two - which

combined anti-urbanism with pastiche rural. The guilty style was deemed responsible for,

‘wrecking the environment so than man can everywhere see the projection and image of his own humdrum suburban life: mild lusts, mild fears, mild everything - a herbaceous border’.  

Outrage also identified several specific sites that were particularly poor in terms of street furniture. Bours Hill in Oxford was considered typical of the problem, having framed its skyline between concrete lamp standards (fig.76). Leamington had shown some ingenuity in 'the careful choice of the wrong lamp standards for the wrong place', and Warwick's lamp standards had a bad case of 'elephantiasis'. Benches in Stafford and Lancashire showed little taste by either the buyer or the manufacturer, and the litterbins in Lakeland 'robs the landscape of spontaneity'. Kendal had only one lamppost in its market place, which was described as overpowering, clumsy and callous.

Figure 74. Apparently tasteless benches in Stafford and Lancashire.

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757 ibid., p.386  
758 ibid., p.403  
759 ibid., p.411  
760 ibid., p.416/p.420  
761 ibid., p.436  
762 ibid., p.431
Figure 75. Standardized concrete lamp standards like these were blamed for stamping 'any scene in which they appear with their own apathetic pattern'.

Figure 76. Bours Hill in Oxford was considered typical of the problem, having framed its skyline between concrete lamp standards.
Since the *AR* had been involved in the debate on street furniture since 1949, Outrage can be understood as an extension of that existing involvement. Yet it is possible to situate the argument underpinning Outrage in a political as well as an aesthetic context. The *AR* defined its intention in publishing Outrage as drawing the world's attention to ‘an offence being committed on the nation which it is no one's business to prevent’.  

In this sense, Outrage blamed both local authorities and the public ‘since the public authorities respond to public opinion, the ultimate responsibility rests on the public no [sic] the Authority’. Thus in order to draw attention to municipal blight, the *AR* sought to shock because,

> 'unless we are shocked into awareness, the consequences of our visual laissez-faire may make us incapable of distinguishing good from bad and we may be mutated into subhumans without our ever knowing it has happened. It's not just aesthetics and art work: our whole existence as individuals is at stake, just as much as it ever has been from political dictatorship, Left or Right; and in this case the attack is not clearly defined and coming from the other side of the globe, but a miasma rising from the heart of our collective self.'

Using an argument that draws heavily upon the rhetoric of political freedom, Outrage also reminded readers that,

> 'you have eyes to see if you have been exasperated by the lunacies exposed in these pages; if you think that they represent a universal levelling down and greying out; if you think that they should be fought, not accepted. Don't be afraid that you will be just one individual registering dissent. It is your country that is being defaced, it belongs to you…So use your double birthright - as a freethinking human being and as a Briton lucky enough to be born into a country where the individual voice can still get a hearing.'

Such lunacies, according to Outrage, could be dealt with on a very simple basis. By writing letters and organizing campaigns, the *AR* encouraged its readers to act, for ‘in trying to keep intact the identity of your environment you will maintain your own as well.’

While not everyone agreed with Outrage - the *Scotsman* called the *AR* itself a ‘subtopian production’ – many readers reacted positively. Outrage clearly affirmed the viewpoint of the *AR*, but it also framed the street furniture debate during

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764 ibid.
766 ibid., p.451
767 ibid., p.452
769 Correspondence, the *AR*, October 1955, Vol.118, No.706, p.211
the 1950s more generally. It did this by placing street furniture in an aesthetic context, in which badly designed or badly sited street furniture constituted a visual crime. It also located the debate in a moral context, whereby bad street furniture was equated as being morally wrong. And lastly, it placed street furniture in a political context, suggesting that those who were responsible for the damage - local authorities – were abusing their power and threatening the freedom of the British people. From this point onwards, the street furniture debate became a forum for discussing aesthetic, moral and political crimes within postwar culture. Yet what did local government think about Outrage, and how did it respond?

**Local government reaction to Outrage**

While there is evidence that those within the Ministry of Transport were impressed by Outrage - and even had copies distributed among other ministries – nevertheless, the mood was not shared by local government. Several local authority figures wrote to the *AR* to defend their colleagues. One reader – a planning officer for the Isle of Ely County Council – complained that ‘unhappily many of the things that Outrage condemns are outside the control of planning authorities’. This was the point, according to the *AR*, for all too often ‘planning machinery is completely bi-passed [sic] – not even overridden’ so that carte blanche is instead given to each government department ‘and to anything that has a flower bed in it’.

Another forum for this debate occurred in the letter pages of the *MJ*. The first of these letters was sent by a well-known geographer and government advisor Laurence Dudley Stamp in 1956, who sympathized with Nairn's characterization of the municipal engineer as a 'despoiler of Britain'. Nairn, according to Dudley Stamp, had shown, "the incredible jumble of incongruous developments of all sorts which, spreading like a rash over the whole country, were eliminating not only the

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770 Memo on the issue of street lighting and the RFAC's powers, sent by H. Gillender, 15th February 1957, to Mr. Lovell, in *Design of Lamp Standards: Including Painting and Guidance by the Royal Fine Art Commission*, N.A. Cat. Ref.: MT 95/210
771 Correspondence, the *AR*, December 1955, Vol.118, No.708, p.352
772 ibid.
773 L. Dudley Stamp, 'Municipal Engineer a “Despoiler of Britain”’, letter, the *MJ*, 30th November 1956, Vol.64, p.2823
beauty created by centuries of loving care and thought but even the little touches of regional differentiation. Indeed, Dudley Stamp added that the municipal engineer was more responsible than any other individual for this blight, because with 'bigger and better bulldozers, noisier and nastier pneumatic drills, unlimited supplies of cement and numerous nauseating new materials' combined with his 'expert knowledge', the municipal engineer had an unfair advantage over the other committee members on his council. This power, combined with the engineer's supposed lack of training in art, architecture, the local history and regional geography of Britain, or even local geology, biology and history, placed the engineer in a dangerous position able to 'destroy - it may be unwittingly - all traces of the past which have made this country what it is'. As such, 'the municipal engineer of today is in the unhappy position of being at least potentially one of the greatest vandals of all time'.

Dudley Stamp’s letter lit a fuse within the debate, and in the following issue of the MJ Edinburgh's city engineer, W.P. Haldane questioned the justice in Stamp's argument. Rather than blame the engineer – who only had the interests of the ratepayer at heart - Haldane argued that Dudley Stamp ought to consider the engineer as an ally in the fight against 'municipal vandalism' since 'so often when attempts are made by municipal engineers to apply restraint the cry of “harsh bureaucracy” is raised – raised successfully by the developers'. Another reader based in Kent echoed Haldane's view, suggesting that while Dudley Stamp's view had become fashionable, it showed 'a complete lack of knowledge of engineering works, and worse still, a dismaying regimentation of ideas'. Rather than blame the municipal engineer, such 'horrors of subtopia' were 'thrust upon them by the CoID, or perhaps the Fine Art Commission'. The argument continued until the end of 1956, drawing letters from a range of organizations, including East Suffolk and Norfolk River Board and the CoID. In January 1957, the city surveyor of Manchester joined the row, and questioned the need for 'a dreary monotony of street furniture' and claimed that 'there is ample scope for

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774 ibid.
775 ibid.
776 ibid.
777 W.P. Haldane, ‘Subtopia, “Engineer is Not the Culprit”, letter, the MJ, 7th December 1956, Vol.64, p.2869.
778 ibid.
779 ibid.
780 KE Cotton, 'Letter to the Editor', the MJ, 14th December 1956, Vol.64, p.2923; Mr. Williams, ‘Letter to the Editor’, the MJ, 28th December 1956, Vol.64
individuality in the design for lamp-posts, guard rails, litter baskets and all other items which go to make the street scene.\textsuperscript{781}

Others took the view that the issue was lost on a visually blind public. For instance, one reader in Durham asked,

'at the risk of being considered cynical I might ask who cares? Professor Stamp evidently cares…I care, a lot of other people care, but a far larger number of people do not care what a thing looks like as long as it is cheap enough, it works, and it is outside somebody else’s front door'.\textsuperscript{782}

Such a view on the antipathy of the British citizen where aesthetics was concerned would harmonise with John Gloag's view of Britain as being aesthetically illiterate, discussed in chapter one. Sir John Rothenstein, Tate Gallery director, also shared this view, believing that ‘people generally remained curiously blind to how things looked’.\textsuperscript{783} Yet it was precisely this attitude which the CoID railed against. This particular Durham reader defended the training of engineers, but argued that if it was possible to instill in the engineer a sense of his responsibility in designing the environment then,

'the engineer can be a substantial ally in preventing the disfiguration of the country provided he gets some support and does not have the edge to his keenness so blunted that eventually he tires of the whole thing, slumps in his chair and says bitterly to an uncaring world “if that’s what you want – well have it!”

And another reader complained about the subject of good taste:

'What to me is objectionable is the current fashion of assuming that all borough engineers are complete morons in this controversial subject of what is good taste (of discrimination, call it what you will) and what is not. In these matters of balancing functional efficiency, economy and appearance, there are no divisions of black and white but many shades of grey'.\textsuperscript{784}

The local authority opinion that the CoID and the RFAC regularly undermined their intelligence was not new, and nor was the idea that compulsion in matters of taste should be avoided. What was new however, was that local authorities had a voice, and were prepared to use it to defend themselves.

\textbf{Rejecting ‘opinionated busy-bodies’ in the interests of the ratepayer}

\textsuperscript{781} R. Nicholas, 'Letter to the Editor: "Individualism in Street Furniture”', the \textit{MJ}, 4\textsuperscript{th} January 1957, Vol.65, p.10
\textsuperscript{782} AC Wildsmith, 'Letter to the Editor', the \textit{MJ}, 4\textsuperscript{th} January 1957, Vol.65, p.10
\textsuperscript{783} The \textit{MJ}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} April 1965, Vol.73, p.1162.
\textsuperscript{784} HD Hargreaves, 'Letter to the Editor', the \textit{MJ}, 4\textsuperscript{th} January 1957, Vol.65, p.10
Soon after Outrage, local authorities became far less passive when dealing with their critics. And as the MJ's remit was to represent the interests of local authorities, it often became the means through which those critics were reproached. Thus, in the aftermath of Outrage, the MJ reported that,

‘the fierce critics particularly, would often do well to acquaint themselves with all the factors before rushing into destructive criticism and also to realize that the Committee responsible for public lighting consists of conscientious, public spirited citizens who have the general wellbeing of the whole community at heart in their difficult task of providing adequate lighting within what can be called, at best, a meagre budget’.785

The MJ also questioned the substance to some complaints, citing one example where a man complained about a street light’s effect on his prize winning chrysanthemums, and another where a woman suspected the light of providing those with evil intent to spy on her.786 Such complaints were made not about the aesthetic qualities of the lamps but the light itself. Indeed, such was the confidence in the work of local authorities that the MJ felt able to describe the tall concrete column as ‘a modern achievement’, and announce that,

‘without wishing to seem immodest or boastful or be accused of being complacent we can in the country say that there is little doubt that the general standard of street lighting in Great Britain today, whilst no means as high as all concerned would desire, will bear comparison with that anywhere in the world.’787

Such confidence was allegedly owing to the skills of British manufacturers, as well as the temperament of the British public and the British climate.

For the MJ the biggest threat to local authorities delivering well-designed street furniture was the obsessive ‘crank’.788 These amateur enthusiasts were often self-appointed critics, whose objective was merely to,

'publicly castigate engineers and surveyors, impugning their professional capacity, starting from the assumption that, being public servants they are bereft of any artistic appreciation'.789

The MJ called for the voice of the municipal officer to finally be heard outside of the committee room because 'the critics are getting publicity out of all proportion to their case or merits'. Indeed, the article informs its local government readers that,

785 ‘Public Lighting’, the MJ, 8th March 1957, Vol.65, p.503
786 ibid.
787 ibid.
789 ‘Self Appointed Expert is the Curse of Local Government’, the MJ, 26th April 1957, Vol.65, p.887
the time has come to fight back, to analyse and appraise their case and who that it is essentially phoney, that these alleged classic traditionalists are about as important as Aunt Matilda laying down the law on a dock dispute’. What form this fight would take was not elaborated upon, but the report did question the foundations of these critics, or ‘opinionated busy-bodies’ as arbiters of national taste. Their criticism - or 'carefully calculated thrown-off brilliancy’ – could, according to the MJ ‘quickly destroy the long deliberations of a council committee’. It also defended the ‘anonymous and far from colourful public officer’, whose expert but drab accounts were less newsworthy than the ‘public invective and eye-catching simile’ written by public figures. Despite this, the MJ warned against giving into pressure from these critics because,

`we must be extremely careful that sentiment and artistic trends do not entirely dictate policy – the functional aspects of design must receive much, if not most, consideration.`

Thus despite aesthetics playing an increasingly important part in the selection of street furniture, the view of the local authority was deemed more important. Indeed the MJ summarized with the view that, ‘the uninfluenced and unfettered decision of a council is the more likely to commend itself to those who pay the bill’.

The references here are easy to relate to the Architectural Review and Design – both of which represented a position described in the MJ as ‘long haired “art-for art’s-sakers”’ - and it shows the debate in action. Yet what this article in the MJ also demonstrates is the use of the same arguments that were used in Outrage: aesthetic, moral and political. Perhaps as government predicted – given its reticence about engaging too deeply in the debate – local authorities interpreted interference as a negation of its ‘democratic control’. For the MJ, local government was ‘one of the strongest bulwarks against a dictator state’, and it only had the interests of the community at heart. The first consideration of the lighting engineer, for instance, was the performance of his installation and his duty to ratepayers, who were unlikely to appreciate expensive, experimental schemes. Moreover, lighting remained ‘of the
Figure 77. The argument used in this advertisement by Concrete Utilities, is dependent upon ideas of technological progress, and the notion that local authorities should act in the best interests of their ratepayers.
town, for the town, to serve and contribute to the appearance of the town’. The point made by the MJ is clear: as elected officials we act in the interests of the ratepayers, and not the interests of the design elite. This was a view that manufacturers of street furniture relied upon, as the advertisement above indicates.

This argument by local government concerning its democratic rights to make design decisions appears to have solidified. Indeed, when one reader of the AR complained about the redevelopment of Russell Square in 1961 - which he said was under attack by ‘municipal schizophrenia’ - the chairman of the Highways and Works committee for Holborn Borough Council responded. According to C.F. Burke,

‘Mr. Hall is anxious to preserve what he describes as a lost spaciousness, loneliness, freedom, but maybe these characteristics could only be equated with the use of the square by the few as against the great numbers of the general public that have shown their appreciation of the present scheme in the most practical way – by its use.’

Clearly Holborn Borough Council sought to justify its improvements by reverting to the issue of access, and thus of class and privilege. Local government was thus keen to align itself with the people.

However, to some extent, it is possible to argue that the criteria on which the design profession judged street furniture was not the same as that applied by local government. Indeed, the MJ suspected that those on specialist design committees only cared about ‘the appearance of columns during the daylight hours! That and nothing else.’ For some local authorities, lighting was expected to ‘pierce the gloom and to make British people and cities gay, exciting and glamorous’, whereas for others it had a social function. Like Lady Ritson’s complaint discussed earlier, many local authorities considered the effect of different types of street lighting on women’s make-up prior to choosing a new installation. Poems were even written about the subject. And it was even discussed at municipal lighting conferences, as one delegate explained:

‘the pedestrian had usually completed a heavy day at work and was entitled to consideration in walking out with a companion whose features and dress

*Correspondence*, the AR, October 1961, Vol.130, No.776, p.226
*Correspondence*, the AR, December 1961, Vol.130, No.778, p.374
‘Self Appointed Expert is the Curse of Local Government’, the MJ, 26th April 1957, Vol.65, p.887
‘Shedding More Light on a Lipstick Problem’, the MJ, 10th April 1959, Vol.67
should be seen it reasonable or even complimentary colour rendering. She should not appear to be dressed in drab material and having yellow or colourless features.

While it is difficult to imagine street lighting engineers discussing such matters today, clearly this was an issue which affected many people. The conference delegate also warned that though the advice given by bodies such as the CoID and the RFAC was valuable,

‘surely the moral uplift of appreciative colour distinction at night is at least of equal aesthetic value. I have yet to hear of these bodies – so keen on aesthetic values on daylight appearances – raising their voices against the destruction of colour values during dark hours in areas used predominately by pedestrians’.

There is no evidence to suggest that either the CoID or the RFAC were remotely concerned with the effect of lighting on lipstick or its social effects on courting couples. However, the example reflects another difference in criteria between design

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805 ibid.
organizations and local government. Such differences contributed to the tensions and conflicts that developed over street furniture.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a detailed picture of the relations between the different bodies involved in the postwar street furniture debate, and how they interacted with each other. It has particularly represented voices from out-with design circles, such as local government, but also government ministries and the public. These voices were relatively quiet within the debate, at least in comparison with the CoID and the *AR*. By focusing on the development of a jointly produced booklet on street furniture, specific controversies over street lighting, and local government fall-out after Outrage, this chapter has shown that opinion was split in both local and central government, as well as within the public body, and the design elite. But was it just the appearance of street furniture that aroused such a passionate debate? Or was it ideas like taste, authority, and the role of the state? The next and final chapter will pick up these themes and show how street furniture provided a forum to challenge the idea of Good Design during the 1960s and 70s.
CHAPTER FIVE
BEYOND GOOD DESIGN: A PERIOD OF TRANSFORMATION
1960-1974

By the early 1960s, the links between street furniture design, taste and the establishment began to be scrutinized much more closely and on a much wider scale. Formerly accepted ideas about why street furniture was important, what it should look like, and who should be responsible, were seen as increasingly restrictive. As a result, the street furniture debate shifted to accommodate a greater emphasis on issues like standardization and aesthetic monotony, but also on questions about institutional accountability and the rights of the untrained. 806 This chapter will examine the transformation Britain underwent during the 1960s and 1970s, and the consequences for the street furniture debate.

5.1 ‘Deadly Good Taste’

Throughout the 1950s, the street furniture debate reflected an anxiety about what such objects looked like and the effect they had on their surroundings. Modern lampposts for instance, were disliked for looking out of place in winding country lanes or for their seemingly oppressive height. 807 Their glare was criticized for its impact on courting couples and women’s make-up, or the sleeping habits of those nearby. 808 And yet the question of who was fundamentally responsible for making the decision that authorized the design of these lampposts was overlooked.

By the early 1960s however, Britain was in the middle of a transformation. Though it might not have felt like it for those living outside major cities, it is a widely accepted view of the period in question. 809 This transformation was, according to historian

806 Contrast this with Bertram’s call for ‘a special body of men trained in aesthetics’, as discussed in chapter one. See Anthony Bertram, Design, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: A Pelican Special, Penguin Books Ltd, 1938), p.18
807 John Betjeman, Letter, Design, No.55, July 1953, p.6
808 Letter to Mr. Bainbridge from N. Ritson, Highgate 14th August 1953, loose in ‘Street Lighting: General Questions and Correspondence on Design Amenity and Aesthetics’, N.A. Cat. Ref.: HLG 51/847
Arthur Marwick, experienced largely in terms of opportunities and freedoms, in which individuality, diversity, equality and prosperity sat alongside wider access to education, housing and healthcare. Yet it was also expressed through design – not just stylistically, but also the way in which design was understood and discussed. By 1960, Good Design and those who promoted it were increasingly criticized. As government’s official voice on Good Design, much of this criticism was directed at the Council of Industrial Design, particularly the way in which it evaluated designed objects. Such criticism was part of a wider campaign to recognize the voice of the consumer and represent his/her interests. It was led by magazines like Which? and the Shoppers Guide, whose independent tests on the performance of British products, illuminated the inconsistencies within the CoID’s own evaluation procedures. Although these consumer guides did not assess street furniture, the example is useful because it illustrates a real example – i.e. outside the design elite – where the CoID’s authority as an organization was compromised. As a result of these tests, the CoID was perceived to be complicit in a farcical evaluation process at the public’s expense.

The subsequent commentary about the CoID’s inconsistent evaluation criteria reveals the extent to which questions about Good Design and taste dominated the debate. While some journalists, like Kenneth J. Robinson in the Spectator, defended the CoID and claimed that ‘those of us who try to preach about good design being practical have to take a lot on trust (after all we can’t afford to set up elaborate testing laboratories)’. Others took a firmer line. Fellow Spectator critic Katharine Whitehorn castigated the CoID for its inconsistencies – reflected, she said, in the Design Awards - and she recalled that her ‘timid questions about practicality were received with a vague surprise.’ Whitehorn also perceived the designs on display for the Design Awards as too tasteful, too elegant and attractive. They were, according to Whitehorn,

‘all right and proper, sane and fine. But perhaps somewhere there is an ecstatic lunatic commissioning something absolutely preposterous that will knock these eighteen into an agreeable, pleasing and appropriate cocked hat.’

*ibid.*

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811 John Archer, Letter, *Design*, No.143, November 1960, p.91
812 Kenneth J. Robinson, ‘But Does It Work?’, the *Spectator*, 22nd January 1960, No.6865, p.122
813 Katharine Whitehorn, ‘Intents and Purposes’, the *Spectator*, 20th May 1960, No.6882, p.749
814 ibid.
Whitehorn’s perception of the CoID as representing a rigid understanding of modern design was even shared out-with the right-of-centre context of the Spectator. Indeed two years earlier at a Society of Industrial Artists event, the Left-leaning poet Stephen Spender made a speech criticizing the CoID’s narrow interpretation of modern design, in which functionalism translated into ‘bareness, simplicity, squareness or roundness, solidity, seriousness’.

What unites both Spender and Whitehorn’s comments was the perception that the CoID was being strangled by its own restrictive understanding of taste, and that dullness was winning out over genuinely imaginative and novel forms.

Even members of the public increasingly saw good taste as something to be wary of. Writing in response to Whitehorn’s article in the Spectator, Cecilia Scurfield observed that,

‘Deadly good taste and design for design’s sake, with too little regard for practical use, seem to me to be the main pitfalls into which organizations like the CoID are likely to fall’.

Unwilling to let such perceptions go unchecked, the CoID responded quickly – as it often did - with a firm but deftly phrased defense of its approach. Its director, Paul Reilly, replied:

‘It is surely premature for Mrs. Scurfield’s attack on “deadly good taste” while good design is still so scarce a commodity, but if…she equates “deadly good taste” with “styling” and “gimmicky sales-boosting ideas”, then I am with her all the way, though “deadly bad taste” might have been a better description’.

That Reilly chose to defend the integrity of the CoID from attack by a member of the public not only emphasizes the influence of the Spectator but also implies the fragility of the CoID’s authority.

Inevitably, the CoID felt compelled to respond to such criticism through its own official channel Design. Functional efficiency was not the only criterion of value, Design reported in May 1961, and neither should appearance be considered ‘a dirty word’, since good appearance only meant that standardization, safety and consumer needs ‘have been brought together in a sensible and logical way’. However, an example of street furniture that the CoID promoted as conveying these qualities can be

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816 Cecilia Scurfield, Cambridge, ‘Designs of the year’, Correspondence, the Spectator, 27th May 1960, No.6883, p.767
819 Design, No.149, May 1961, p.37
Figure 79. ‘Town number one litter bin’: Not only attractive but ‘ideal for crowded pedestrian ways’.

seen above. Though the CoID judges thought this white litterbin was ‘attractive to
look at…easy to clean [and] ideal for crowded pedestrian ways’, it is hard to imagine a less practical object of street furniture. Perhaps as a result of objects like this, *Design* was repeatedly forced to readdress the question of appearance in 1961. In one example, *Design* responded to the hypothetical concerns of a manufacturer who complained about the degree of criticism his product received, and it reported that:

"surely it would be better", they say, "to explain what is good about the good things and what is bad about the bad". There is of course much good sense in these comments. But there is also a degree of misunderstanding of our motives…We believe there are valid reasons for choosing the most interesting looking designs for analysis…our intention is less to provide a guide to what is best on the market than to suggest, through a close study of individual products, what are the things that really matter in design’. The implication here is that only a select group of professionals with superior taste could define the things that really mattered in design. It was an attitude which was increasingly rejected by others, such as Kenneth J. Robinson who had earlier observed that ‘some people really like to make design sound as complex as possible’, and he rejected the notion that design required ‘a special understanding’. For the CoID, this kind of defense exposed it to be an organization desperate to continue the illusion of its authority.

**Reyner Banham and questions of taste**

Challenges from the public were quickly supported by challenges from other architecture and design critics, which made a far greater impression. Described by J.M. Richards as having ‘a stimulating way of taking the opposite line to what everyone expected’, Banham was an important figure in architectural and design history, particularly so for the development of the latter. He was also particularly aware of the relationship between class, taste and design, perhaps because of his own working class background. While he did not write about street furniture, he did write broadly about modern architecture and design for a range of publications including the *Architectural Review, Design, the New Statesman* and the *Art News and Review*. Banham was a critic of the CoID, and writing for the left-of-centre news magazine the *New Statesman* in 1960, he rejected its fixation on slogans like ‘a good design is

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820 ‘DCA 1961’, *Design*, No.150, June 1961, p.52
821 ‘Comment: The case for criticism’, *Design*, No.150, June 1961, p.43
forever’, as well as the boy-scout language it used, which he described as ‘campfire jargon’ with its references to ‘sock-pulling-up’ operations. He also accused it of being fundamentally patronizing, particularly when commerce met the public’s demand, which the CoID perceived as ‘playing down to the lowest common denominator of public taste’. Such a conflation of populism and bad taste was at the core of Banham’s objection to the CoID, for whom ‘the old standardized and unquestioned public school pink-propositions that all common taste is bad and all commercialism is evil appear to need some revision’. He also asked ‘how can you condemn public taste as “low” without adopting a position of snobbery intolerable in a Liberal let alone a Socialist?’ The issue clearly centred on the principle of democracy, and Banham observed that ‘the concept of good design as a form of aesthetic charity done on the labouring poor from a great height is incompatible with democracy as I see it’.

While little of this discussion refers to street furniture, Banham’s argument against the CoID goes straight to the heart of the thesis, in which discussions of lampposts and parking meters reflected increasing anxiety about exactly whose taste was informing the design of street furniture. As the previous chapters have shown, postwar Good Design was associated with reconstruction and economic progress, but it was also linked to what design historian Stephen Hayward has called an ‘elitist taste culture’. The relationship between Good Design and taste has already been established, but for Banham, it reeked of snobbery. For example, the following year, Banham published another article in the New Statesman about the CoID’s methods of assessment. According to Banham, the CoID was aware that they had ‘some lemons on the books’, but were unable to act because of two fatal institutional flaws. The first flaw was attributed to the CoID’s literal interpretation of the slogan form follows function, but the second flaw was legislative. Government, according to Banham, had created ‘a

824 Reyner Banham, ‘The End of Insolence’, the New Statesman, 29th October 1960, p.644
825 ibid.
826 ibid. pp.644-6
827 ibid. p.646
828 ibid.
conscience without limbs, able to worry but not to act, and like other impotent consciences it has festered’. Banham’s observation echoes a point made earlier likening the CoID to a government department, but it also shows his sensitivity towards the CoID’s moral agenda. Banham wondered whether improving the nation’s taste was a morally sound objective, and he doubted whether it was ‘a fit occupation for grown men any how – at any rate, not if “taste” is interpreted in the narrowest middle-class sense that the Council understands.’

Banham’s concern about the moral and class-based agenda of the CoID was shared by a number of other influential figures at this time. For instance, in 1962 the designer Misha Black - whose bench designs were celebrated by the CoID, and who directed the Civic Trust’s Magdalen Street scheme - criticized the organization in Motif for adopting ‘a position of moral self-righteousness no different from that of the sermonizing total abstainer’. Indeed, for Black, anyone who deliberately sat outside of popular taste assumed ‘that his taste, his appreciation of what forms properly reflect his period, is more righteous, or at least more sensitive, than that of the public for which he is working’, which effectively amounted to a moral judgment upon society. Black’s view is representative of a growing sense of skepticism about standards of taste and the distance those who promoted it maintained from wider society.

The CoID’s alleged class bias had shadowed the organization from the start. Partly this can be attributed to a perception held by some, that the CoID’s dictates on Good Design and official taste represented the establishment. For Jonathan Woodham, the CoID’s appointed role as cultural leader that knew what people wanted or needed was...
increasingly rejected as ‘unwanted paternalism’. Yet according to Arthur Marwick, such challenges were part of a broader tendency to mistrust authority and state control, which can be linked to the ‘satire boom’ during the 1960s, characterized by the weekly magazine *Private Eye* which launched in 1961 and the BBC television shows *That was the week that was*, which aired from 1962. Both examples challenged the assumed coziness of British society, and derided those behaving foolishly or hypocritically. Lampooning the establishment became a powerful means of holding those in positions of power to account.

Nevertheless, the anxiety expressed by Banham and Black about cultural leadership and its democratic implications eventually reached government. In his 1965 white paper, *A Policy for the Arts: The First Steps*, Prime Minister Sir Alec Douglas-Home sought to clarify government’s position on cultural leadership by announcing that,

> ‘the relationship between artist and state in modern democratic community is not easily defined. No one would wish state patronage to dictate taste or in any way restrict the liberty of even the most unorthodox and experimental of artists’.

Such a claim extended to ensuring high standards in many aspects of British life, not least its urban surroundings and landscape. According to Douglas-Home – Britain’s last truly aristocratic PM - it was only by ensuring the central place of the arts in everyday life that Britain could regard herself as a civilized community, thereby repeating the notion that Good Design civilized its users. The document credits the work of the CoID in this regard, but states that,

> ‘no democratic government would seek to impose controls on all the things that contribute to our environment and affect our senses. But abuses can be spotted and tackled, high standards encouraged…It is partly a question of bridging the gap between what have come to be called the "higher" forms of entertainment and the traditional sources…and to challenge the fact that a gap exists. In the world of jazz the process has already happened: highbrow and lowbrow have met.’

It is representative of the distance between this thesis and Douglas-Home’s statement that a conservative genre of music like jazz is referenced in this way, however the central point of the white paper was that culture was understood to be more varied.

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839 ibid. p.6
840 ibid. p.16
than previously thought. Thus state-funded organizations like the CoID were expected to reflect a range of interests, voices, tastes and interpretations, so as to represent the full breadth of cultural practice in Britain. In other words, to continue perpetuating the gap between high and low culture was no longer acceptable. But how could an organization committed to raising standards of taste fulfill these expectations?

**The instability of established viewpoints**

Once the sacred truths about Good Design and questions of taste were perceived to be negotiable, the CoID was forced to reconsider its remit. The value-laden binary distinctions that formed the central spine of the CoID - between good and bad, old and new, modern and old-fashioned, enlightened and unenlightened, progressive and reactionary – had undergone considerable stress. What had begun as a question about consumer protection had gradually extended into whether it was possible to measure the qualities of any product, or indeed define Good Design at all. The mid-1960s was a period of change for the CoID, and its statements about Good Design reflect this. Writing in the *Municipal Journal* in 1967, CoID officer David Davies defined well-designed street furniture as ‘no different from that of other articles with industrial design content: fitness of purpose, proper use of materials, and of course, good appearance’. 841 That same year however, *Design* acknowledged that Good Design was beginning to appear authoritarian, sterile, ‘middle-aged and middle class’, and it attributed this reaction to the ‘anything goes’ attitude of swinging London. 842 Indeed, such was the pressure upon the CoID that it was forced to acknowledge that 'good design is not a constant but a variable’, a concession which essentially undermines the whole concept. 843

What was much harder for the CoID to accept was the suggestion that there was no moral basis to Good Design. Since its formation, the CoID had promoted the idea that Good Design could be used as a social tool to improve people's environments and therefore their quality of life. Even as early as 1935, Gordon Russell had declared: ‘is it too much to hope that in learning to design our cups and gas fires, our chairs and

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842 ‘Comment: Function and the Aesthetic Free for All’, *Design*, No.213, September 1966, p.27
843 Paul Reilly, ‘Comment: The Expanding Frontiers of Industrial Design’, *Design*, No.221, May 1967, p.27
lampposts we may in the end learn to design our lives? With no apparent irony, Russell’s comment reflected a moral judgment upon the existing state of people’s lives, a position which was no longer acceptable by the 1960s. Invariably, Banham led the chorus of this criticism. Alongside the architect Henry Dreyfuss, Banham criticized the perceived relationship between morality and style at the International Design Conference in Aspen in November 1966. In line with previous statements, Banham rejected the idea that an object could reflect the morality of its author as demonstrably false, claiming that ‘the glitter of a morally sound style does not guarantee a stainless reputation to the product in use’. Such a direct rejection of modernism’s inherent morality also rejected the original terms of Good Design.

Yet Banham’s speech at Aspen went much further than just criticizing the theory underpinning modern design. He also made the link between the actions of postwar design reformers, and their counterparts in the 19th century. Looking back, Banham proposed that men like Ruskin and Morris were responsible for the ‘British tradition of worrying about the state of design’, which had led to one of the most misunderstood notions in cultural history: the concept of moral improvement through design. According to Banham, this concept was both ‘one of the great intellectual resources of our times…[and] also one of its most powerful sources of confusion’. And it led designers to go to ‘camp meetings in the mountains to be told what’s right and what’s wrong’ – a reference to the context in which his comments were made – which represented an attempt on the part of the design profession ‘to keep itself morally pure by public self-examination’. Such self-examination, according to Banham, was allegedly wasted because of the self-regarding nature of the design profession, which elevated ‘the demands of private conscience’. To support this point, Banham returned to Morris and his followers who, he said,

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845 ‘Point of View’, *Design*, No.215, November 1966, p.25
847 ibid. p.166
848 ibid. p.167
849 ibid.
‘believed the only good product was one that brought pleasure to its producer. You will hear this proposition usually in the guarded and inverted form that mass production is evil because it brings no pleasure to the worker, but which ever way you phrase it, the whole conception is anti-social and perverse. No more in design than in dentistry can society accept that the first responsibility of its servants is to please themselves’.  

Banham’s analysis goes to the inherent tension at the centre of postwar Good Design – which he called the ‘evil backside on the face of public concern’ – in which design was simultaneously used to improve standards for the public good, and also conform to what a select group of people believed to be good. For Banham, this approach was deliberate, because it reinforced ‘the belief that design is a thankless task [which] definitely appeals to the martyr complex that design has inherited from its artistic forbears’. Moreover,

‘being out of step was a guarantee to their consciences that they were in the right, for design is also part of the great progressive do-gooder complex of ideas based upon the proposition that the majority is always wrong, that the public must be led, cajoled, sticked and garroted onward and upward’.

The picture painted by Banham is familiar from previous chapters, in which the public was routinely depicted as unable to identify Good Design without the help of design professionals. Banham’s comments are valuable because they bring a set of ideas about design together. Banham’s awareness of the relationship between 19th century design debates and 20th century Good Design discourse illustrates the links between different chapters of this thesis, but it also provides an interpretation of why design reformers used the idea of morality to justify what was essentially taste. The concept of moral improvement through design not only discredits existing design – which might be quite popular – and therefore positions the reformer at a distance from the public, but it also elevates the status of the task to a higher plane. The result is generally self-righteousness on the part of the reformer, and hostility from everyone else.

‘The Challenge of Pop’

Largely as a result of attitudes like Banham’s, the CoID was forced to acknowledge that its attempts to educate the British public on Good Design, and thus improve its

850 ibid.
852 ibid.
taste, were not working. Even as early as August 1965, Design had conceded that ‘one thing is certain and that is that design education conducted as an exercise in how to acquire good taste is doomed’.853 Perhaps in recognition of this, Paul Reilly published ‘The Challenge of Pop’ in the AR in 1967. Reilly’s article is an important articulation of the CoID’s understanding of Good Design at the end of the 1960s since, while he admonished the CoID for encouraging sober designs when sobriety was out of step with the period, many of his arguments remained within the framework of Good Design discourse. Even his decision to publish in the AR suggests a desire to speak to like-minded people, (or ‘a band of strolling aesthetes’ according to Banham).854 For instance, Reilly spoke of the temptation ‘to swim with the tide’, and in doing so, divided popular and elite culture, much like Pugin had done a century earlier.855 He also spoke of his regret that ‘a consensus of informed, unostentatious, almost neutral solutions’ no longer dominated design culture.856 Such seemly values, he said, were criticized by the ‘trades’ for being ‘clinical, hygienic, aseptic and so avant garde as to be out of touch with the market place’.857 In this way, Reilly reinforces the view that commercial culture was regressive, unseemly, and contrary to Good Design – another position that has considerable precedent.

However, ‘The Challenge of Pop’ is also full of contradictions. For instance, Reilly noted that,

‘We are shifting perhaps from attachment to permanent universal values to acceptance that design may be valid at a given time for a given purpose to a given group of people in a given set of circumstances, but that outside those limits it may not be valid at all; and conversely there may be contemporaneous but quite dissimilar solutions that can still be equally defensible for different groups – mini skirt for the teenager, something less divulging for the matron; painted paper furniture for the young, teak or rosewood for the ageing – and all equally of their times and all equally susceptible of evaluation by a selection committee’.858

Clearly, while willing to accept the validity of interpretation, Reilly felt compelled to maintain the authority of the committee as ultimate evaluator. In his efforts to remind the AR’s readers that the CoID was ‘unashamedly adventurous and obviously interested by, if not itself the initiator of, current trends’, he also characterized its

853 ‘Comment: Moving Education Upstream’, Design, No.200, August 1965, p.17
856 ibid.
857 ibid.
858 ibid.
committees as defined by ‘colour and pattern, even of gaiety and festivity’ (a view that was unlikely to have been shared by many others). Reilly considered the value of the CoID’s committees to have only increased as a result of Carnaby Street, because there was an ever-greater need for ‘compass and helm than was apparent in the world they have replaced’. Reilly’s comments are extraordinary, since they imply that Carnaby Street inadvertently created more committees. For Reilly however, this placed the CoID at the centre of design culture again ‘even if the things of which we are at the centre seem to be in conflict with much of the doctrine handed down to us’. Reilly continued,

‘It is, though, just because so many established canons and received ideas seem to crumple in face of the kinky flamboyance of this permissive, precocious, commercially successful popular culture that extra care must be taken to examine each twist and turn afresh.’

That ‘extra care’ could only be provided by the CoID, whose discipline, and ‘common sense in the midst of nonsense’ would continually seek the truth, and ‘sift the contributors from the charlatans when confronted with the challenge of pop’.

Reilly’s article is symptomatic of a major re-think among the CoID, which desperately sought to retain its authority amidst widespread criticism. By March 1968 however, Design at least appeared to accept that in order to safeguard its future, some of its established doctrines would have to be revised. According to the artist and writer Christopher Cornford's article 'Cold Rice Pudding and Revisionism', the narrow view of Good Design was puritan and mean. Moreover, Cornford identified a paradox within the ‘design establishment’, which he said was,

‘common to all situations where something like a revolution has been achieved, whereby the one-time pioneers, without losing their…sense of being the avant-garde, have now transmuted into elder statement, and conceivably in some cases into inadvertent reactionaries.’

While the CoID now qualified as reactionaries, Cornford attributed this status to the influence of figures associated with the Bauhaus, which had imposed upon Britain the narrow view that there could only be one ideal interpretation of Good Design. This interpretation was a platonic ideal which had led British design to a sterile dead-end,

859 ibid. p.256
860 ibid.
861 ibid.
862 ibid.
863 ibid. p.257
864 Christopher Cornford, 'Cold Rice Pudding and Revisionism', Design, No.231, March 1968, p.46
865 ibid.
and reminded Cornford of 'cold rice pudding. It is plain, nutritious, highminded and off-white'.⁸⁶⁶ That Good Design could be likened to a bland school dessert reflects the extent of the turn-around forced upon the CoID by the new social, cultural and political context it found itself in. Cornford’s observation was that contemporary society’s appetite for being force-fed a monotonous diet of Good Design – which was essentially based on making an object look tidy - was waning, and its desire to experiment with richer and more exotic design styles was in turn increasing. But did this spell the end of Good Design?

⁸⁶⁶ ibid. p.47
5.2 Standardization, Monotony and the Rejection of Taste

While popular taste during the 1960s embraced individualism and diversity, there was simultaneously an official acceptance of standardized production in state-funded design projects. Thus even while government was rejecting cultural leadership and urging organizations like the Council of Industrial Design to reflect a broader range of tastes, it was at the same time making design decisions on behalf of the nation that rejected individualism. Signage, public lettering, and postboxes were all affected by these national design projects during the 1960s. These ubiquitous objects relied on a broad set of ideas out-with the doctrine of Good Design to give them shape, including modernization, functionalism and standardization, as well as methods like systems design and ergonomics.

**Standardization and aesthetic monotony**

Standardization is a key theme within postwar design debates. Standardized methods of production had played a major role in the state’s wartime economy controls under Utility, but it also influenced the design of street furniture. Standardization had several advantages in this context, since if the design of a lamppost was standardized, mass-produced and installed across the country, then it would not only increase efficiency and reduce production costs, but also act as a visual cipher of modernity, and help combat the visual anarchy or clutter that many abhorred. Despite these advantages, complaints about the standardization of street furniture began almost immediately after WW2, and by the time it was discussed in government two years later, that sense of discontent had increased.\(^{867}\) In response to questions in the House of Commons in 1952, the Ministry of Transport rejected any evidence that ‘differing types of street lighting cause confusion or that to standardize them would necessarily improve efficiency in lighting’.\(^{868}\) Others disagreed, and one Member of Parliament observed that London alone possessed an ‘extraordinary variety of lighting’ and that ‘uniformity

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\(^{868}\) ‘News of the Week: “Standardised Street Lighting Rejected”’, the *MJ*, 7th March 1952, Vol.60, p.466
has a great deal to be said for it.\textsuperscript{869} Cabinet took a different view, and according to the Transport minister,

‘I would say that there are disadvantages in absolute standardization because streets are quite different – the colour of building materials and the height of buildings are different’.\textsuperscript{870} Clearly at this point, the topic of standardization was seen to be acceptable in the context of illumination alone, but not in the context of the design itself. Standardizing technology was one thing; standardizing the appearance of technology was another.

In 1952 standardization and uniformity were often conflated to mean the same thing. Both were used negatively, and even today, there are regularly reports in the press that present standardization as a threat to individuality.\textsuperscript{871} In 1952, the Municipal Journal recognized the need to distinguish between the two expressions, particularly given the importance of street furniture to local authorities. It clarified between ‘uniformity of type and standardization of performance’, in which ‘uniformity in almost any sphere is something to be discouraged’, yet standardization by contrast was to be admired.\textsuperscript{872} In this early period, both standardization and uniformity were routinely linked to a further term: monotony, which was offensive to many people. This perception reinforces the distance between the 1950s-60s and today, where monotony is often aligned with minimalism. Even during this early period, visual devices like monotony and repetition were highly valued by some of those at the upper end of the cultural

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig80.png}
\caption{Cartoon in Punch satirizing standardization, 1946.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{869} ‘Why Street Lighting Cannot Conform to One Standard’, the MJ, 28\textsuperscript{th} March 1952, Vol.60, p.671
\textsuperscript{870} ibid.
\textsuperscript{871} Rowan Moore, ‘Michael Gove’s Standardised Schools Not Such a Class Act’, the Guardian, http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2013/apr/14/michael-gove-standardised-school-architecture [accessed 17th April 2013]
\textsuperscript{872} ‘Why Street Lighting Cannot Conform to One Standard’, the MJ, 28\textsuperscript{th} March 1952, Vol.60, p.671
spectrum. For others however, it just seemed boring. When applied collectively, standardization, uniformity and monotony were often understood as defining modern design itself. Indeed, as president of the Royal Academy Professor AE Richardson claimed in 1955, modernism expressed ‘a similarity which is monotonous’. 873

Where the CoID was concerned, it was committed to promoting standardized street furniture, since it offered a way to extend the rational values of Good Design over the British landscape. 874 Yet extending those rational values across Britain – a country which was made up of a wide variety of landscapes, all with their own individual character and identity – threatened the very character and identity of those landscapes that many held dear. 875 The CoID defended its approach, by advising that local authorities should ‘maintain and intensify the differences between places’ rather than annihilate them. 876 Yet it was precisely the perceived lack of visual distinction between places that upset so many people, as indicated by Outrage. As a result, the debate shifted to accommodate an alternative expression – coordination – which was presented in the *Architectural Review* at least, as being the principle goal in street furniture design. Street furniture that was not coordinated was intractable and disrupting to the coherence of the streetscape, and merely contributed to the ‘litter of unrelated, generally ill-designed junk with which our streets are festooned’. 877 Yet the problem with street furniture was considered almost impossible to solve when authority for the design of the street – and the numerous objects of street furniture - was so fragmented. Thus in recognition of this problem government sought to rationalize (and nationalize) some of Britain’s street furniture.

**Standardized signage on a national scale**

There are several important examples of street furniture having been standardized during the late 1950s-1960s, and because of the scale of these projects, they made an enormous contribution to the look of Britain. One of the earliest of these concerned road signage. In 1957, the MoT established the Advisory Committee on Traffic Signs

874 Design, No.76, April 1955, p.8
875 See John Betjeman, Design, No.55, July 1953, p.6
876 David Davies, ‘The Contribution of the CoID to Improve Standards in Street Furniture’, the *MJ*, no date, in ‘Street Furniture Articles and Lectures’ (1432.15 Pt III)
for Motorways, known as the Anderson committee after its chairman Sir Colin Anderson. The objective of the Anderson committee was to address the problem of signage for the Preston bypass, then under construction. Graphic designer Jock Kinneir was appointed as design consultant, in partnership with his former student Margaret Calvert. The initial scheme was a success, but according to Calvert, it was only because of the foresight of a civil servant called J.B. Usborne that it was later extended to the entire road network. This subsequent phase of the project was under the authority of the Worboys committee, which reported in 1964. Both committees represented a familiar group of people, many of whom had connections with the CoID - for instance, Worboys acted as CoID Chairman and Kinneir was ‘on their list’ – or were associated with the AR, such as Hugh Casson. While neither organization was directly involved, the overlaps between the same figures on similarly high profile design projects reinforces the notion that those responsible for design decisions were drawn from a relatively small pool of professionals.

In an interview with Calvert, she claimed that the objective of the signage system was primarily about legibility, in which design mannerisms were deliberately avoided, and the lettering was complementary, i.e. ‘there quietly but not the main story’. The appearance of the signs – see fig.81 - was influenced by a need to distinguish between commercial signage and official signage, and that as official signage they had to look credible and authoritative. Standardization was the only means of achieving this aim. Yet taste was also an underlying issue within the project and Calvert claimed that both she and Kinneir deliberately sought to position their designs outside of the framework of good taste, which for Calvert ‘meant death…conventional, boredom, safety. It lacked personality. It was a three-piece suite in olive green’. Instead, Calvert wanted the project to express ‘the spirit of the age’. In an interview between Rick Poyner and Calvert from 2004, she insisted that ‘style never came into it. You were driving towards the absolute essence’. Seen from a distance, however, there is evidence of style, and certainly evidence of an aesthetic consciousness. For instance, Calvert

879 Interview with Margaret Calvert, 4th July 2013
880 Ibid.
881 Ibid.
882 Ibid.
recounted how Hugh Casson had impressed upon Kinneir his preference that the signs ought to be ‘as dark as old dinner jackets’, despite the fact that Kinneir wished them to be lighter in tone.\textsuperscript{884} Casson’s expression reflects the class dimensions of the period, and his involvement shows that committees regularly took design decisions.\textsuperscript{885}

\textsuperscript{884} Interview with Margaret Calvert, 4\textsuperscript{th} July 2013. See also ‘Battle of the Serif’ in \textit{AGI: Graphic Design Since 1950}, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007)

\textsuperscript{885} The role of civil servant J.B. Usborne can be seen in the same light.
Certainly the MoT had a preference for how the signs should look, and acted against professional advice in order to pursue this preference.\textsuperscript{886}

The fact that Kinneir and Calvert’s designs – not only the Transport font which continues to be used as the British government’s official typeface, but also their coordinated system of pictograms and colour coding – have endured to the present day, and been adopted in many countries worldwide, is a testament to its success. They are now considered to be iconic, and express a sense of zeitgeist as Calvert intended. In recognition of this, they were displayed in the V&A’s 2012 \textit{British Design from 1948} exhibition, and currently feature in the Design Museum’s \textit{Extraordinary Objects} exhibition. Yet despite their current success, reaction to their designs in the 1960s was mixed. According to Calvert ‘the public were completely for it’, and the only barrier came from professionals like the sculptor David Kindersley - whose own submission was rejected by the MoT for looking too traditional, despite proving more legible – and Ken Garland, the editor of \textit{Design}, who disliked Transport’s lower case L’s.\textsuperscript{887}

Records from the time also show that the public were not ‘completely for it’ as Calvert suggests, and that projects of this kind caused unprecedented problems since many people preferred the idiosyncratic nature of Britain’s signage. In a letter to \textit{Design} in 1961, W.P. Jaspert wrote,

\begin{quote}
Sir: there is obviously a good case for better standards in some signposting…But there is also a considerable danger in too much good design and design planning. Part of the attraction of English towns…lies in the happy disorder…in the streets, many of which would otherwise be very drab indeed. When one returns from abroad where endless grey streets depress the clean town scene…Most contemporary architecture is so plain in any case that it needs hiding behind posters and signboards. Many of the new shopping streets here and abroad show that too much art direction and insistence on uncluttered buildings produce a degree of standardization which makes for extreme dullness.\textsuperscript{888}
\end{quote}

Jaspert’s argument draws upon the anxiety already outlined concerning standardization and its relationship to monotony, and therefore dullness. But where did this anxiety come from? It might be attributed to the public’s association of modern design with foreign-ness, or even a fear of socialism with its visual imagery of repetitive rows of

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{886} According to Calvert, readability tests were conducted on a range of signs, and though the Kinneir/Calvert system did not score particularly highly, the MoT rejected all the other systems.\textsuperscript{887} Interview with Margaret Calvert, 4\textsuperscript{th} July 2013\textsuperscript{888} WP Jaspert, Letters page, \textit{Design}, No.168, January 1961, p.81
\end{quote}
high-rise blocks. Alternatively, it might reflect an appreciation for eccentricity and a tradition of the picturesque. For government however, these complaints about monotony were minor in view of the sign’s advantages, not least the improvements in road safety for all users, and so the system went ahead.\(^{889}\)

**Letterboxes and traffic lights**

Another significant standardization project during this period was by the industrial designer David Mellor. In 1966 Mellor was commissioned by the General Post Office to design a new letterbox. He seemed the obvious candidate for such a project since he had already designed lighting equipment and bus shelters for the firm Abacus. Mellor was, according to former rector of the Royal College of Art, Christopher Frayling, a ‘pioneering industrial designer with an emphasis on the industrial’, and also one of the ‘most go-ahead members of a design establishment still dominated by tweed suits and committees who liked bracing walks in the Cotswolds’.\(^{890}\) Mellor’s brief for the letterbox can be placed within the context of standardization, despite the fact that British letterboxes from the most rural locations in Scotland to the busiest streets in the nation’s capital were easily identified by their shared visual language, not least the striking colour red. Nevertheless, according to Fiona MacCarthy (and Mellor’s wife), Postmaster-General Anthony Wedgwood Benn (the late Tony Benn) believed that Gilbert Scott’s original design from 1879 could be improved.\(^{891}\) As Labour minister and a modernizer, Benn had argued in 1964 that ‘the most distinguishing characteristic of a vigorous society is one in which the future is more real and important than the past’.\(^{892}\) And in the context of the letterbox, he would put this argument into practice. Benn’s opinion was that a rectangular design would be much better for holding square letters, and would, in turn, bring the organization into line with other nationwide attempts to modernize. While the cost of Mellor’s F-type letterbox was expected to be more expensive to produce than Gilbert Scott’s cylindrical cast iron design,

\(^{889}\) For further details on the government’s commitment to the system, see loose files in ‘Street Furniture: Traffic Bollard Design and Location; Policy’, N.A. Cat. Ref.: MT 112/163

\(^{890}\) Interestingly, Mellor later joined such a committee at the CoID. See *David Mellor: Master Metalworker*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Galleries and Museums Trust, 1998) p.viii


Figure 82. F-Type Letterbox designed by David Mellor for GPO, 1966. It was described by the Royal Fine Art Commission as 'rather teutonic'. 
nevertheless the GPO expected to easily retrieve those costs through increased efficiency.  

Yet attempts to impose a uniform style of street furniture upon Britain prompted considerable public criticism, and Mellor’s F-type letterbox was no exception. As predicted by MacCarthy, the new box shown in fig.82 made ‘a lot of enemies: enemies of progress, imbibers of nostalgia; men who shudder at the Council of Industrial Design’. In a rare show of disunity, even the Royal Fine Art Commission seemed to dislike it, describing Mellor’s F-type as 'rather teutonic', echoing Kenneth Grange’s derisory comments about Dieter Rams in chapter two. By contrast, the CoID perceived it as a vast improvement on Gilbert Scott’s letterbox, a point it made visually in one of its subsequent street furniture catalogues. While the efficiency of the new design was not disputed – it reduced collection time by half – nevertheless a national campaign developed to preserve the older models. One aggrieved reader wrote to the Daily Mail with the strapline ‘please let’s keep our CURVES’, and another reader of the Scotsman warned of the effect the new sharp edged boxes might have on drunks. Like other objects of street furniture, particularly the telephone box, an emotional attachment developed towards the original letterbox. For MacCarthy, they represented ‘minor traditions, gently extolled in screeds on the highways and byways of Britain’. And even today, there are regularly reports in the national news concerning the cultural value assigned to the letterbox (see fig.8). 

Following eight years of development, only 205 F-type letterboxes were ever produced and even then, they were painted contrary to Mellor’s specifications. Whether this was the result of public criticism is unclear, but Mellor became increasingly involved with design for the public sector over the course of the 1960s. He was even appointed as design consultant by the MoT for its plans to redesign the

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893 ‘Pillar Box: Proposed New Design’, (loose in file), N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/126
895 ‘Pillar Box: Proposed New Design’, (loose in file), N.A. Cat. Ref.: BP 2/126
897 David Mellor: Master Metalworker, (Sheffield: Sheffield Galleries and Museums Trust, 1998), p.57
899 Alexandra Topping, ‘Royal Mail Backs down over Golden Postbox in Ben Ainslie’s Home Town’, the Guardian, 16th August 2012
Figure 83. Mellor’s F-Type letterbox is now considered sufficiently iconic to be displayed in the Design Museum in London.

Figure 84. Traffic lights designed by David Mellor and exhibited outside his factory in Derbyshire.
national traffic signal system between 1965-70, with a view to rationalizing the existing system, and making traffic lights more conspicuous [see fig.84]. He considered such projects ‘as an important opportunity for changing the visual culture of the country as a whole’.\textsuperscript{900} Mellor’s increased involvement in the public sector reflects the view held by Paul Reilly, for whom the sector represented enormous potential for influence.\textsuperscript{901} After all, the standards of the public sector were perceived to be low, and simultaneously, there were considerable sums of money to be spent. This combination left plenty of room for development for organizations like the CoID, and highlights another practical reason why the organization became so involved in the street furniture debate.

However, even though these design projects were informed by issues of style, taste and even class, the debate turned on ideas like standardization, modernization and systemization.\textsuperscript{902} Thus both Kinneir and Calvert’s signage system and Mellor’s F-type letterbox were considered improvements because they rationalized an existing system and rejected taste, and were more efficient. In fact, discussions about good street furniture design throughout the 1960s seem dominated by these themes. For example, the CoID’s street furniture catalogues from this period praised objects that integrated into all environments, especially those which were anonymous and invisible.\textsuperscript{903} The MJ echoed the CoID’s calls for the standardization of street furniture, and even went one step further by proposing a flexible form of street furniture design, comprising component parts that could be applied in different ways, unifying the height and depth of objects like guard rails and bus shelters.\textsuperscript{904} While the MJ acknowledged that such a system would face criticism – and even be perceived as ‘bleakly structural and without character’ - it stated that ‘self-consciously “fine” design’ was not appropriate for ‘workaday objects’ like street furniture, a point it made repeatedly.\textsuperscript{905}

Yet, the language used to justify these good street furniture designs seems remarkably distinct from the original doctrine of Good Design, employed to improve public taste

\textsuperscript{900} David Mellor: Master Metalworker, (Sheffield: Sheffield Galleries and Museums Trust, 1998), p.30
\textsuperscript{901} ibid. p.54
\textsuperscript{904} ‘Restoring Order to the Street Scene in Britain’, the MJ, 15\textsuperscript{th} March 1963, Vol.71, p.737
\textsuperscript{905} ibid; the MJ, 17\textsuperscript{th} May 1963, Vol.71, p.1434; the MJ, 2\textsuperscript{nd} August 1963, Vol.71, p.2241
and society. Did this mean that Good Design was no longer relevant in relation to street furniture by the mid-1960s? Had the design profession stopped trying to improve public taste and society?

Ergonomics and social improvement

Perhaps in a drive to excise the controversial issue of taste from Good Design, over the course of the 1960s technology and science were increasingly understood as capable of solving design problems. One of the ways in which this change was expressed was through the framework of ergonomics. In an introduction to ergonomics in Design in 1967, it was described by Maurice Jay as ‘an established design tool', which focused on the relationship of the designer to the user. According to Jay, ergonomics provided a system that could meet the needs of all end users through technology, as long as design became increasingly anonymous and uniform. He called for the situation to be accepted by designers and encouraged,

'greater humility on their part and a realisation that, in the twentieth century urban situation, design and architecture (unlike painting) are not valid media for exercises in aesthetics or the expression in visual terms of philosophical comments on society'.

Jay’s statement appears to overlook the fact that even anonymous and uniformly styled objects expressed an aesthetic style. Yet in rejecting style, Jay assumes an underlying moral duty on the part of the designer, in which,

'the designer must begin to accept a role as a member of a team of social engineers whose aim, in an industrial democracy, can be none other than "the greatest good of the greatest number". Only in the jungle - or the desert - is it possible any longer to justify a more romantic or personal attitude'.

What Jay was essentially suggesting was that designers ought to act as social engineers, a expectation that was remarkably similar to the 1950s, when design was used as a means of civilizing both people and space. In the context of 1967 however, Jay’s comments are remarkable.

Perhaps as a result of these inconsistencies, ergonomics was not accepted uncritically. Even Design wondered whether ergonomics was a cuckoo in the design nest. It also reported that ergonomics had achieved the status of a science applied as 'a sort of

907 ibid. p.48
908 ibid.
909 Design, No.225, September 1967, p.19
universal panacea' for design problems, or a tool used by the designer to give 'his decisions a scientific backing'.

In this respect, ergonomics can be seen as part of the technocratic culture which emerged after WW2. And yet, despite observing considerable problems concerning the application of ergonomic theory, Design resisted the urge to reject it altogether, reporting instead that the industrial designer 'must regard it as an essential part of the design solution. Otherwise he may find himself doing little more than the job of a stylist.' This point returns to a familiar anxiety expressed throughout this thesis, in which design professionals deliberately sought to distance Good Design from questions of appearance, and instead aligned it with a higher social, moral, cultural or even esoteric purpose. Ergonomics represents another way of elevating the design process, and trying to determine behaviour.

In many ways though, the debate about ergonomics relates to broader discussions about technology and function, particularly the aestheticization of function. And it was repeatedly referenced in relation to street furniture. For instance, in 1969 a reader of the Financial Times described Britain’s lampposts as,

‘concrete giraffes that hold the light source some 30 feet from the ground; needing at least nine times the power of lights at 10 feet high, to give the same ground intensity.’

The point made by this reader was that, not only were these lights ugly, but they were also technically inferior to the lights they had replaced, despite looking functional. Doubt about the uses of function sat alongside doubt about the technocratic jargon that accompanied it. For instance, in a letter to the CoID in 1968, the chairman of Bath Preservation Trust spoke of his concern that ‘highly specialized technical information and statistics’ was repeatedly used to justify decisions of taste, which the Trust was unable to fight. Jargon is used here as a convenient means of defensive action, while simultaneously disarming the opposition.

910 ibid.  
912 Design, No.225, September 1967, p.19  
914 James Ker Cowan, Letter to the Editor, ‘Standards of Lighting’, the Financial Times, 21st Jan 1969  
915 Hugh P. Craillon, Letter to David Davies, ‘Street Lighting in Historic Areas’, 11th July 1968, in ‘Street Furniture - Articles and Lectures on Street Furniture. Correspondence’ (1432.15.1 Pt 1)
Promoting standardized street furniture and critiques

Despite these concerns, the functional values of Good Design continued to be promoted by the official organizations involved in street furniture design during the 1970s. In 1971, the CoID staged an exhibition in the Design Centre on the subject of standardized street furniture. Titled ‘Streets Ahead’, the exhibition included benches, fencing, litterbins and paving that could be used by local authorities as a kit of parts. The underlying message was that such objects would restore dignity to an otherwise cluttered streetscape, ease flow and create order. Sponsored by British Steel, part of the exhibition included a model showing a unified system of street furniture (see fig.87), and an expensively produced pull-out brochure. Industrial sponsorship was not new, but in this context it reinforces the links between the CoID and the state.

Figure 85. ‘Streets Ahead’ brochure. The exhibition included benches, fencing, litterbins and paving that could be used by local authorities as a kit of parts.

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916 See ‘Restoring Order to the Street Scene in Britain’, the MJ, 15th March 1963, Vol.71, p.737
Figure 86. ‘Streets Ahead’ sought to eliminate ‘the concept of street furniture as single objects’

Figure 87. View of the exhibition ‘Streets Ahead’ at the Design Centre, 1971

Yet response to Streets Ahead was mixed. The *Journal* from Newcastle upon Tyne, praised systematized street furniture and hoped that the CoID’s ‘efforts will give pace
and direction towards eliminating the concept of street furniture as single objects’.

Others, however, were not so supportive. The Eastern Daily Press from Norwich, announced that ‘the only trouble is, the grey angular conformity of the designs is as depressing as the present clutter is irritating’. In a similar vein, Neil Steadman writing for Architectural Design, characterized the exhibition as a,

‘dreary display...none of the exhibits obviously improved information flow and while the resulting clutter around Piccadilly may not have the dignity of British Steel’s coordinated street furniture, it’s good enough for me.’

A further complaint was the lack of colour on display, a point that Michael Sharman took up in Building Design:

‘it’s easy to argue that coloured street furniture might intrude...but certain essential public services need to be defined by colour coding...Adding colour would...provide a much-needed identity to the greyness of drab slab streets.’

Besides the grey qualities of the exhibits, Sharman also complained about their scale, reporting that ‘it’s confusing coming eye-to-eye with street lamps – they’re just not designed for eye level viewing’. Yet if the colour and scale of the display was considered objectionable, the underlying premise of the exhibition was even more so. The most damning assessment of Streets Ahead was published by Architect 69, which declared the exhibition horrifying, not just for the exhibits themselves but also for the CoID’s propaganda about clutter, and the author noted that,

‘I admit that for months I went about looking at the forests of road signs and quite happily selecting the information I needed to know. And I suppose other people have done the same. But we must try to stop thinking like that if we’re going to help the cause of good design. We must first pretend that bad design is bad for us. Then we’ll be on the way to believing that good design does us good in some way’.

While such strong views – and sarcasm - were not necessarily representative, nevertheless, it is striking that by 1971, criticism of Good Design had reached such levels.

Street furniture catalogues also prompted anger from the press and the public. For instance, in the 1972 catalogue Neville Conder contributed an essay about the ownership of the street. Conder disparaged the use of street furniture as ‘beauty symbols’, particularly planters because of their use as vessels for flowers, and he

917 Victor Reeve, ‘Steeling the Streets to Stop Clutter’, the Journal, Newcastle upon Tyne, 21 January 1971, in ‘Streets Ahead’ (76)
921 ibid.
922 Architect 69, February 1971, in ibid.
Figure 88. According to the *Municipal Review*, ‘design conscious authorities using the Catalogue would never allow their streets to get into such an unsightly mess’.

warned that ‘well-designed street furniture cannot be used as a symbolic gesture for salving the conscience of people who have allowed streets and spaces to become rotten’.\(^{923}\) Clearly, Conder’s point was not just on the use of particular types of street

\(^{923}\) *Street furniture from Design Index 1972-73*, (London: CoID), p.38
furniture, but also on the lack of responsibility and confused sense of ownership for Britain’s public spaces. A particularly persuasive image was used to support his claim. Drawn by Louis Hellman – cartoonist for the *Architects Journal* – the cartoon above depicts a scene in which clutter eventually subsumes the streetscape (fig.88). To combat such scenarios, Conder encouraged authorities ‘to become far more arrogant in their ownership of the road so that they can act as gardeners and insist on a design discipline’.  

Encouraging arrogance reflects an imperial approach to planning, which shows just how out of touch the CoID was in some respects.

Given the criticism Condor levelled at others who had responsibility for street furniture, it is perhaps unsurprising that response to the catalogue was mixed. For *Wolverhampton Magazine*, the catalogue demonstrated the CoID’s ‘very good taste’, and it noted that,

> ‘this excellent volume should prove both utilitarian and pleasing…all that remains is for those authorities who have to incorporate street amenities in their scheme show good taste. There perhaps is the rub!’

While this excerpt relies upon ideas of taste – which was increasingly seen as outdated – it nevertheless, shows support for the CoID. Others also shared this view. For instance, *Building Design* observed that ‘the more public spirited of the local authorities refuse to accept any item which could be in its pages but isn’t’. And in the *Newark Advertiser*, the Secretary of the Nottinghamshire Association of Parish Councils encouraged the people responsible for choosing lighting standards to first refer to the CoID’s catalogues.

Unsurprisingly however, others criticized Conder for exaggerating the problems of the urban realm to further the CoID’s agenda. For instance, the *Municipal Review* rejected Hellman’s characterization of a cluttered streetscene in that ‘design conscious authorities using the Catalogue would never allow their streets to get into such an unsightly mess.’ *Surrey Life* took issue with Conder’s portrayal of flowers as a ‘license for ugliness’, and reported that,

> ‘in lashing out at local authorities for using flowers in an attempt at brightening things up…he may find few sympathizers in Surrey…Design problems cannot

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924 ibid.
927 ‘New Lights don’t Match Villages it is Claimed’, *Newark Advertiser*, 27th May 1972, in ibid.
be rectified overnight and if ugliness can be alleviated by the use of well planted floral aids, which many Surrey councils employ, there seems little sense in suffering “squalor” merely to emphasize Mr. Conder’s contention’.  

In a similar vein, Cardiff’s Western Mail reported that several lamps approved by the CoID had angered villagers of the Lower Wye Valley, which were described as ‘suitable for an urban motorway but are completely out of place in the Wye Valley’.  

For readers of the Nottingham Evening Post, modern concrete lighting standards were spoiling some of Nottinghamshire’s prettiest villages. And for others in Newark, modern lights were,  

‘totally out of keeping with the rural heritage of our villages…We don’t want a return to the ornate wrought ironwork of the Victorian era. We are not against modern design. What we want is good design’.  

Clearly, anger towards modern street furniture had not abated, but what this report shows, is that by 1972 references to Good Design were increasingly made by the public. Indeed, throughout the 1970s, the public regularly appropriated the discourse of Good Design in their dealings with authority. Yet what did Good Design mean once it was out of the hands of the design profession?

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929 Surrey Life, April 1972, in ibid.  
930 ‘Too Many New Lamps Anger Villagers’, Western Mail (Cardiff), 9th June 1972, in ibid.  
931 Letters Page, Nottingham Evening Post, 6th March 1972, in ibid.  
932 ‘New Lights don’t Match Villages it is Claimed’, Newark Advertiser, 27th May 1972, in ibid.  
933 For instance, in 1974 HG Bellamy, a bus driver, wrote a letter to the MoT on the design of bollards, which Bellamy claimed was merely a ‘question of correct design’ in ‘Letter from HG Bellamy to Minister for the Environment’, 7th January 1974, in ‘Street Furniture: Traffic Bollard Design and Location; Policy’, N.A. Cat. Ref.: MT 112/163
5.3 Good Design in the Public’s Hands

By 1970, it appeared that an ideological change had taken place in design culture. That year Design applauded the 'end to dull theory' and therefore the end to any sort of 'philosophical base for action'. It declared that the previous decade's design profession had displayed 'quite appalling ignorance and arrogance', and therefore any suggestion that street furniture was more than just a category of inanimate objects in the street, that it could improve the nation’s taste, increase export revenue, or even civilize society, no longer seemed credible. In fact Design even announced in 1973 that 'the architect cannot and should not be seen as a social policy maker'. But what underpinned this marked change in policy? And did it signify a break with Good Design in general?

Public participation and official encouragement

Authority within design became more fragmented during the 1960s and 70s, and the public more involved in design decisions. This can partly be attributed to the wider intellectual context of the period. A key philosophical idea that gained strength after the war concerned the rejection of objectivity, which can be located within the context of postwar French linguistic theory, also known as structuralism or semiotic theory. One of the central figures within semiotic theory is Roland Barthes, whose 1957 book *Mythologies* proposed that modern society is perpetually constructing myths to add value to phenomenon. Thus the meaning of representations of Greta Garbo, soap powder, the Citroen DS, or a red rose also included our associations we have of those things. A red rose meant a flower, but in certain situations it also meant romance. These ideas by Barthes and others lent credibility to the notion of interpretation.

While it is unlikely that participants in the postwar street furniture debate were reading Barthes - in any case, the first English translation was not published until 1972 – nevertheless, semiotic theory shows that the wider intellectual context of the period was becoming increasingly aware of ideas like interpretation and subjectivity. This has

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936 Design, No.297, September 1973, pp.64-65
implications for design, and particularly the notion that an object could be inherently good because of its appearance, function, or production. Such associations were no longer credible in the light of semiotic theory – and also because of figures like Banham - which challenged the notion that Good Design was non-negotiable. In this light, it is possible to see how the advice given by organizations like the Council of Industrial Design came to be understood as little more than opinion.

And yet outside this elite intellectual context, the design profession was already showing signs of realizing that other opinions existed besides its own. Whether one looks at the non-plan theories of Banham, Peter Hall and Cedric Price, or the iconoclastic work of Archigram, Colin Buchanan’s research on pedestrianisation, or the increase in community activism, it is clear that the rights of people were being increasingly represented during the 1960s. This change is also reflected in books like *Architecture without Architects* by Rudofsky in 1964, or even the 1969 Skeffington Report which encouraged public participation in planning. Within the context of street furniture design, groups like the Royal Fine Art Commission and the *Architectural Review* had, even as early as the 1950s, been trying to involve the public in design decisions, as chapter three discussed. Though the efforts by these elite groups had initially privileged their own role as mediators – and therefore limited genuine participation by the public – nevertheless, by the 1960s, their efforts appear more practical. The *AR* for instance, published several articles in 1961 encouraging readers to stand up to their local ‘philistine or dictatorial’ lighting and borough engineers and even provided a set of arguments to use against them.938 The RFAC also sought to offer more practical help. Indeed, in its 1961 Annual Report, the RFAC suggested ways in which the public could use its services more effectively, and thereby increase their chances of getting their voice heard in street furniture disputes.939

Even establishment groups like the Civic Trust became much more active in advising the public on how to improve their own surroundings. Its founder Duncan Sandys, considered participation by the public on urban development to be vital, not only because of the extent to which the face of Britain was due to change, but also because of his view that,

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938 Derek Barton, ‘Converting gas lamps’, the *AR*, September 1961, Vol.130, No.775, p.196
'action in Whitehall and in the town hall was not enough by itself, and that we would never achieve the highest standards unless the public took a much livelier interest in its surroundings'.

The CT’s objectives were largely accomplished by encouraging the formation of local civic and preservation societies, organizing conferences and events, and by offering grants to restore and improve the environment. Its recognition that the public’s views counted, and that architects, designers and planners had a responsibility to respect and listen to those views was significant. As a result, public participation in the design debate increased dramatically, to the extent that between 1959 and 1972 the number of local amenity societies concerned with the design of the built environment quadrupled. By the end of 1973, the CT estimated that ‘some 300,000 people belonged to over 1000 civic and local amenity trusts throughout the UK’, of which it had advised over 900. The CT also initiated hundreds of schemes to improve the environments people lived in, and was closely involved with several legislative changes which occurred throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Even the CoID began to express its concern for the opinions of others. As early as 1965, Design acknowledged that 'somewhere along the line of technological progress people have been overlooked'. The following year, the magazine’s editors reported that ‘if design is to mean anything at all, it must operate at the level of ordinary people’. It is likely that this concern stemmed from the social and political changes taking place in Europe and America, but it could also relate to a growing perception that despite its idealistic beginnings, modern design was failing communities. In light of these changes, Design’s editorial noted in 1968 that, ‘it would seem the right time for a major rethink along the lines of what people really want’. But what did people really want?

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940 Duncan Sandys, ‘Comment: Ten Years of Civic Action’, Design, No.224, August 1967, p.20
942 Ibid.
944 Design, No.204, December 1965, p.25
945 ‘Comment’, Design, No.205, January 1966, p.17
A romantic attachment to the past

According to Kenneth Grange, postwar Britain was ‘romantically attached to her antiquities’ and never quite managed to reconcile ‘the theatricality of the old with the novelty of the new’. Grange’s statement conforms to a mythologized perception of Britain as a conservative country, resistant to modernity and modernism. Yet it is also very class-determined, and reflects Grange’s own agenda as much as it reflects any wider truth about Britain. Certainly what did emerge during the 1960s and 70s was a confrontation between the traditional and the modern. Yet does this suggest that modernity and traditionalism are oppositional values? Though it might appear to be the case, Arthur Marwick argues in *Culture in Britain since 1945*, that the debate between the two is a false antithesis and to dwell too much on it ‘is to miss the interactive and iterative nature of all living culture’.  

More recently, historian Miles Glendinning proposed that these ideas about the past are linked to the conservation movement during the 1960s and 1970s. Glendinning credits conservation as ‘a part of modernity’ rather than a mirror to it, especially during the period in which this thesis is situated. He also suggests that during the postwar period, the conservation movement initially adopted a moderate approach largely because of the need to rebuild rather than restore, and as a result, was unable – and to some extent prevented – from occupying a position at the centre of power. Yet as a result of the radical redevelopment of Britain after the war, which increasingly provoked resistance on the part of the public, a voluntary system of national and local pressure groups emerged to fill the vacuum, among them, the CT. For Glendinning, by this point, ‘the machinery of modernist renewal became appropriated by the conservationists’, which were able to use its structures for alternative ends. In light of these legislative changes, government also increased its subsidization of conservation activities, and in 1970 - European Conservation Year – government established the Department of the Environment, headed by a Cabinet minister.

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947 Interview with Kenneth Grange, 21st November 2012
950 ibid. Chap.8/p.16 [transcript]
951 ibid. Chap.8/p.25 [transcript]
952 Other official agencies were also formed which lobbied for environmental standards, including the Countryside Commissions, the Central Council for Physical Recreation, and the Nature Conservancy.
Clearly, the activities of organizations like the CT had a cumulative effect on changing government’s perceptions of who had the authority to make design-based decisions, so much so that by 1972, the CT was able to claim that ‘we are in the middle of a revolution in public thinking’.  

The CT’s work at this time reflected an increased interest in conserving Britain’s past, which included its historic street furniture. The issue was widely discussed at the beginning of the 1960s, and even *Country Life* published several reports on gas lamps. In one such report, *Country Life* claimed that across Britain ‘people with cultural and aesthetic tastes’ were protesting against their removal, despite the fact that they were routinely labelled as either ‘fusty and muddle-headed’ or ‘mischief-makers and reactionaries’.  

It was not a view shared by Paul Reilly, who privately maintained in 1962 that:

‘the answer to the lighting problems of today and tomorrow does not exist in the past. Much as we regret the passing of the few fine examples, we should be capable of producing something better than the pathetic reproductions which invariably misuse modern materials and manufacturing techniques. It is our responsibility to make our lampposts as representative of the best of today as those of the past were of their day’.

While the position of the CoID and *Country Life* is unsurprising, given their respective audiences, other circles within the design profession did show signs of change. For instance, from the 1960s onwards the *AR* actively campaigned to protect Britain’s historic street furniture. Though this might seem surprising for a magazine committed to modernism, the *AR*’s relationship with conservation can be understood in light of Outrage and Counter Attack, which campaigned against the homogenization of the British landscape and the unrestricted power of local government. As such, the fact that many of the *AR*’s campaigns involving street furniture from 1961 onwards were distinctly pro-tradition and anti-uniformity, is not necessarily the big shift in policy that it might otherwise appear to be. Indeed Derek Barton’s 1961 article ‘Converting gas lamps’ reflects that modernity and conservation were distinctly not oppositional within the *AR*. Barton claimed that in the right street, Victorian lampposts ‘achieve the requisite blend of solidity, just scale and gently ornate character’, and can often be

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954 *Country Life*, 29th December 1960, p.1592
955 Paul Reilly, *Lamp Post Feature: Notes Sent to Lord Snowdon (Confidential)*, 19th March 1962, p.1, in 'Street Furniture Articles and Lectures' (1432.15 Pt III)
easily changed from gas to electric without excess expense. Though Barton’s advice differs somewhat from Townscape, it was as much reflective of the AR’s anti-authoritarian position as it was with the democratization of design.

Yet the AR’s growing tolerance of historic street furniture brought it into conflict with other organizations, like the RFAC. In 1961, the AR criticized the RFAC for approving the removal of the cast-iron lampposts in Cambridge. According to the AR, Cambridge’s 26 different types of streetlamp punctuated the intricate systems of courts and passageways of the city, and were an integral way of spatially linking these spaces for the pedestrian. Six years earlier, the city council had implemented an electrification scheme, which not only required the older models to be replaced by newer ones but also that a degree of uniformity be established over the city – see images below. For the AR, this meant that,

‘at night one is aware of nothing but a grandiose procession of triumphal columns of light leading nowhere. The Royal Fine Art Commission gave its consent. The lamps have been objects of derision ever since they were put up’.

The reason for the derision was said to have little to do with design necessarily, but to do with their siting and variety. It was not due to the fact that ‘one is “Georgian” and the other is “modern”, but that, unlike the 1823 designs, they only give lighting. By day these do nothing but stand in the way’. Clearly the AR’s objection to these lamps was visual, since their anonymous, homogenous qualities made no positive contribution to the landscape of Cambridge. As the AR reflected, ‘the flexibility of a creative mind and the vision of a dynamic society, variations within a greater unity – these are missing; the standard type is supreme’. But how did these intellectual discussions affect what happened on the ground?

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956 Derek Barton, ‘Converting Gas Lamps’, the AR, September 1961, Vol.130, No.775, p.194
958 ibid. p.426
959 ibid.
Figure 89. The *AR* described the scene in Cambridge in 1961 as ‘all very sad and messy’.
Figure 90. This stockade of lamp standards was considered ‘unpleasant’ in Cambridge, according to the AR in 1961.
Fighting uniformity on the ground

There are a number of instances during the late 1960s, where public protests about street furniture successfully managed to overturn decisions by local authorities. One of these occurred between 1969 and 1971 when the City of Westminster tried to replace six ornamental gas-lamps with modern electric lamp standards in Manchester Square, Marylebone (fig.91).960 Its justification for the scheme was that the old lamps were corroded and it was necessary for safety reasons to replace them.961 However, following protests from local residents, the relighting scheme was suspended in March 1969 until a compromise could be reached.

Figure 91. Lamp standards in Manchester Square: According to Design, ‘their design (in cast iron and steel tube) is pleasantly elaborate and suggests an earlier period’.

960 City Engineer’s Report to the Highways Committee by F.J. Cave, City Engineer, 23rd June 1970, p.257, in ‘City of Westminster Highways Committee Minutes of proceedings’, February-November 1970
961 City Engineer’s Report to the Highways Committee by F.J. Cave, City Engineer, 16th December 1969, p.382, in ‘City of Westminster Highways Committee Minutes of proceedings’, July 1969-December 1969; City Engineer’s Report to the Highways Committee by F.J. Cave, City Engineer, 29th September 1970
The row between the residents and the City of Westminster centred upon the style of the lampposts – characterized by the *Marylebone Mercury* as ‘stark, modern design’ – and their lack of sympathy with the 18th century environment in which they were installed. According to the *Daily Telegraph*, Westminster Corporation’s relighting scheme was made in ‘the sacred name of uniformity’. And the City of Westminster was also criticized for failing to consult either the Manchester Square Trust or the RFAC, despite its assurances. What is perhaps even more remarkable is that *Design* even criticized the City of Westminster for its plans, and it reported that ‘the existing standards are of no great age…but their design (in cast iron and steel tube) is pleasantly elaborate and suggests an earlier period’. By contrast, the new designs were reported as being ‘horizontal tubular fluorescent jobs which are now becoming drearily familiar in the West End’. After several alternative options were proposed, the ornamental lamps were eventually replaced and as a result, by 1971 the *Evening Standard* was able to report that the ‘council engineers have gone into full retreat. A crane has been moved in to uproot the modern lamps, which have stood unlit for the past two years.’

In contrast to the lighting controversies identified earlier, this example in Marylebone illustrates that by the early 1970s, it was clearly more difficult for local authorities to push decisions past residents without sufficient consultation. And, with press support, residents could hope for a more positive outcome than they might have only a few years earlier. But it also reflects a widespread rejection of monotony and standardization, resulting in a change in accepted styles of street furniture. Even the CoID was prepared to recognize the value of elaborately designed period street furniture in Marylebone. In fact, the CoID began to recommend the safeguarding of historic street furniture as a means of retaining the character of a town. In its 1972 street furniture catalogue, it even went as far as praising the same Victorian...

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962 ‘Keep the Old’, the *Marylebone Mercury*, 4th November 1969
963 ‘Uniformity before All’, the *Daily Telegraph*, 16th March 1969
964 ‘Keep the Old’, the *Marylebone Mercury*, 4th November 1969
965 John Allerton, ‘Point of View: Lowering of Standards’, *Design*, No.245, May 1969, p.28
966 ibid.
Embankment lamps that a decade earlier it had criticized as backwards. But what had prompted this stylistic shift?

To some extent, public anger about the monotonous quality of Good Design throughout the postwar period resulted in a drive to preserve existing models of street furniture, but it also resulted in a greater acceptance of different styles. Writing in the *Spectator* in 1967, Mario Amaya attributed this shift to a growing consciousness about style, in which ‘the preoccupation with the way things look has come to mean that more people are aware than ever before of the visual environment’. This in turn represented 'an upgrading of taste, a keener awareness of the things around us as they infiltrate our lives and our art'. In light of this change, the modern aesthetic adopted by the CoID began to be perceived as ‘puritan’ and ‘damn dreary’ in comparison to the other brightly coloured products available. Writing in the *Society of Industrial Arts Journal*, Michael Wolff stated only designers like Ken Adam, Mary Quant and John Stephen had ‘given people a bang in the last two years’, and that, ‘It is their zing and their zest and their vigorous understanding of what design is all about which should be one of the main contributions of industrial designers to modern society. It'll be a great day when cutlery and furniture design…swing like the Supremes’.

For Fiona MacCarthy, the designs promoted by the CoID most certainly did not swing, but it was slowly coming round to the idea. Writing in *Design* in 1970, the journalist Ken Baynes stated that:

‘Today the pedantry and purism of functionalism seems irrelevant, a debased coinage in the riotous but cramped environment of the mid-twentieth century. The direction for design should surely be related to the central theme of the present, to the growing concern with the individual and the expression of his individuality in the context of society. If this means more decoration, more colour, more flamboyance, a closer link between entertainment and everyday life, design has no brief to impose its own more limited morality.’

Baynes’ statement illustrates the extent of the turnaround of the CoID, which had - since its formation - concerned itself with imposing a sense of morality upon design.

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968 Street Furniture from Design Index 1972-73, (London: CoID, 1972), p.34
970 ibid.
971 Leslie Julius, Correspondence, *Design*, No.293, p.81
The type of street furniture promoted in *Design* during the 1970s includes a Mickey Mouse telephone kiosk and a brightly coloured ‘cheerful’ scheme by José Manser for

Figure 92. 'Magic Gardens round the Bush': ‘Cheerful’ street furniture in Shepherds Bush, 1970.
Shepherds Bush (fig.92). That an organization dedicated to promoting Good Design could validate the kitsch and the cheerful, suggests that by the 1970s the street furniture debate had lost its intensity and the opinions of its main contributors had come closer together. Though readers of Design continued to complain about ‘monstrosities’ in the street, and Design complained of ‘glaring and unrelenting’ signage, and more cases of ‘municipal vandalism’, nevertheless by the 1970s the focus of design had generally moved from the pressing problems of urban infrastructure, and with it, street furniture. Even the Times celebrated street lamps that looked like ‘giant egg timers with double spheroids balanced on silver clouds’. As the V&A’s British Design from 1948 exhibition catalogue identified in 2012, by the 1970s design was more concerned with the ‘more mobile surfaces of the body and the exciting spaces of pleasure’. Street furniture design was simply not discussed to the extent that it had been, nor did it provoke the same level of controversy.

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977 Philip Howard, 'Carnaby Street Restyled in Spectacular Fashion', the Times, 4th October 1973, p.2
5.4 Coda

1974-5 marks the terminus of the thesis. By this point, the volume of coverage specifically about street furniture – articles, essays and letters – rapidly decreased, so that by the end of mid-1970s the debate lost its intensity. Instead, design debates began to reflect the growing economic difficulties of the time, and with it themes like vandalism, neglect, urban decay, social disorder and blight. Evidently, promoting aesthetically pleasing environments and tasteful street furniture would not address the complex problems that society faced. In fact, magazines like Design had started to discuss these themes as early as the late 1960s, when it complained about the ‘deadness which is everywhere’.979 The lack of care for the environment even attracted royal attention in 1967, when Princess Margaret complained about abandoned cars and empty sites, and vandalism was also discussed to a greater extent.980 Books like Oscar Newman’s Defensible Space from 1972, Charles McKean’s Fight Blight from 1977 and Designing against Vandalism edited by Jane Sykes in 1979 also suggest that the design profession shifted its focus during the 1970s to reflect upon society’s ills, and design’s impact on the world more generally. But how did these shifts affect the way that street furniture was designed and understood?

Between the late 1970s and the 1980s, the changes affecting street furniture were significant, particularly in terms of the institutional framework in which it was controlled. During this period, Britain’s cultural organizations underwent significant political changes, which had a considerable impact upon their authority. Faced with ongoing challenges, organizations like the Council of Industrial Design were eventually forced to recognize the new pluralistic culture they existed within.981 The CoID changed its name to the Design Council in 1972, which allowed the organization to bring engineering alongside industrial design, and four years later it was awarded the status of charity incorporated by Royal Charter.982 By the 1980s, the British public were said to be more aware of design than ever before, and in the vacuum left by state-supported design reform, a rash of architecture and design magazines like Blueprint

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981 According to Peter York, ‘culture became pluralist (or shot to bits) even if the money and power didn’t move an inch’, in Peter York, Style Wars, (London: Sidgwick and Jackson Limited, 1980), p.13
emerged. These magazines spoke to a much wider public than \textit{Design} or the \textit{Architectural Review}, whose apparently ‘ingrown’ qualities made them appear less relevant.\textsuperscript{983}

More significant ideological changes occurred in the 1980s when Mrs Thatcher was in office. These changes affected the power balance between local and central government, but they also affected cultural institutions. Thatcher’s government did not share the postwar vision of a powerful centralized welfare state, celebrating free enterprise, deregulation and the primacy of the individual instead. Only three years after she took power, Thatcher declared,

\begin{quote}
'innovation and initiative cannot flourish if they are smothered by a state that wants to control everything. We shall not blaze again the trail that Brunel, Morris and Marconi found, if we consign their successors to the consensus of the committees and excessive and irksome regulation'.\textsuperscript{984}
\end{quote}

The message was clear: the postwar cultural landscape had changed irrevocably, and a consensus-based approach by state-supported committees who strangled creativity would no longer control design culture.

Yet the changing role of public agencies, the advent of deregulation, and the loss of power held by local government had a specific effect upon the design of the urban realm, and therefore the design of street furniture. During the 1970s and 80s, much of the debate around street furniture, particularly Gilbert Scott’s red telephone box, centered upon its imminent loss. The intensity of the public’s campaign to protect traditional telephone boxes was equal to 1950s campaigns against concrete lampposts. It also shows that the Conservative government could appear just as brutal towards the past as municipal authorities during the 1950s.

At the same time however, the political climate of the 1980s was much more willing to commodify the past. And as a result, heritage-style street furniture became extremely popular across Britain – and elsewhere – as a means of reinstating the past within the public realm, arguably as a way to invoke a lost national identity. These ideas are discussed more fully by historians Patrick Wright and Raphael Samuel. For Samuel,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{984} Margaret Thatcher, 8\textsuperscript{th} December 1982, cited in ibid. p.91
\end{flushright}
municipal authorities during the 1980s used cobblestones, Victorian-style litterbins like the black and gold model above, and cast iron bollards as ‘a kind of talisman of historicity’. Yet he also pointed out that underneath this ‘period dress’ was actually modernization in disguise. New ‘old’ street furniture signalled a change in ideological occupancy, just as municipal authorities had tried to signal a change in occupancy during the 1950s. Heritage-style furnishings can be placed within a context of the Conservative policies of Thatcher, whereby pitched roofs, neo-Victorian decoration, and other changes in the built environment seemed to ultimately reflect a change in public ideology. The emergence of heritage and neo-Victorianism as a style, policy, and political agenda can also be placed within wider discussions about authenticity, national identity and class, and in relation to influential figures like Roy Strong. Because of these socio-political and cultural changes from the mid-1970s onwards, the postwar street furniture debate changed substantially and provides a fitting terminus for the thesis.

986 ibid, p.75
CONCLUSIONS

In a private letter to Lord Snowdon in 1962, Paul Reilly advised him on his new appointment as member of the Council of Industrial Design. Since part of the job involved engaging with street furniture, Reilly considered it wise to warn Snowdon that ‘practically no two artists, painters, sculptors, architects or planners seem to agree on this subject’. 987 The design of street furniture was certainly divisive. Indeed, by the 1960s some members of the CoID suggested it had merely become ‘fashionable’ to protest about street furniture, and all that was needed to incite such a reaction was ‘for an official body to erect or remove something from a public place’. 988 Others perceived the criticism of street furniture as having become a ‘sport’ in which works committees and engineers were baited by ‘eminent architects, aged actors and journalist alike’, and ‘the excitement of blooding one or other of the contestants has tended to eclipse the real problem’. 989 But what was the ‘real’ problem? And why did street furniture cause such controversy in postwar Britain?

This thesis has shown that street furniture constituted a forum for debates on a range of important issues after the Second World War. These issues were often expressed through debates about design, particularly Good Design, design’s relationship to the state and official taste, the implication of different styles, and design’s use as a tool to improve society. Yet though these debates outwardly focused on design, it is important to look at them in a broader context. After the war, Britain underwent a period of immense change in which the political landscape of the country, its cultural expectations, standards of taste and class hierarchies were rigorously debated. Design acted as a means through which these bigger narratives could be discussed. Thus postwar discussions about the design of lampposts for instance, were not solely concerned with questions of style, but were also shaped by questions about the taste of those responsible, their social position within society, and their authority to make decisions about such objects.

987 Paul Reilly, Lamp Post Feature: Notes Sent to Lord Snowdon (Confidential), 19.3.62, p.5, in ‘Street Furniture Articles and Lectures’ (1432.15 Pt. III)
988 The CoID, Notes for a Lecture given to Durham County Council Planning Officers on Wednesday the 27th Jan 1960, in ibid.
Class

Within the postwar debate about street furniture, several themes particularly stand out. One of these concerns class since, as the previous chapters have shown, much of the discussion about what street furniture should look like and who was responsible was articulated in terms of the social hierarchy. This is most clearly expressed in the relationship between the different voices within the debate. Arguably, organizations like the CoID and the Royal Fine Art Commission, and magazines like the *Architectural Review*, perceived themselves as representing the cultural elite or occupying the intellectual higher ground. In fact, much of the rhetoric by these groups against the public, borough engineers, planners, and manufacturers, was couched in terms of education, taste, and proximity to the marketplace – all of which are implicitly class-based. Modern street furniture was not only represented as expressing the values of Good Design, but was also perceived as a means of improving the public’s taste, and there was a distinct perception that middle class taste was ultimately preferable to the taste of the general public. Such an attitude eventually came to be seen as patronizing since it constituted an intolerable moral judgement upon society and reflected the social divisions within Britain. That the street furniture debate became so controversial is partially down to this argument, in which taste and class became conflated together.

Aesthetic monotony

A further theme that stands out is aesthetic monotony. Much of the anxiety about modern street furniture was linked to a perception that such objects would threaten the visual character and identity of the country. A landscape in which all street furniture looked the same regardless of context and where idiosyncrasies were systematically removed, was a truly frightening prospect for many people in postwar Britain. Given the number of campaigns against the seemingly repetitive, boring, monotonous qualities of modern street furniture, it would appear that some people preferred the pre-war decorative, cast iron equivalents. Expressions of this fear could be understood as a desire to protect the diversity of Britain - seen in terms of its culture, environment, and design vernacular – but it could also be attributed to ideas about Britain as an
island prone to eccentricity, individualism and separatism. Alternatively, as chapter five speculated, it might be concerned with the relationship between monotony and ideas of foreignness in which modern street furniture design represented the unchecked power of the state, which in turn was seen as threatening the democratic rights of British people.

There are several paradoxes within this debate about monotony however. For a start, those who were responsible for street furniture on the ground – local authorities - were democratically elected to represent the interests of their communities. Though some people might have objected to their methods and taste on occasion, local authorities were not dictators of totalitarian regimes, and could (at least theoretically) be held to account for their actions. Secondly, while many people were emotionally attached to pre-war street furniture, its detractors claimed that such objects were not only ugly and largely responsible for the messy clutter of Britain’s streets; but were also representative of a stratified social system, which was increasingly seen as incompatible with postwar social reforms. Besides this somewhat dubious social justification, these two positions reveal an implicit flaw in the debate about monotony. Despite its alleged inconspicuousness, modern street furniture was highly visible since it looked considerably different from pre-war designs and often bore very little stylistic relationship to the context in which it was situated. Thus, objects which were designed to be ignored, were simultaneously expected to deliberately adopt the visual language of modern design, and therefore attracted considerable attention and even hostility. These contradictory expectations expose a fundamental irony within the postwar street furniture debate.

**Internal contradictions**

Another aspect to the debate that particularly stands out concerns the internal contradictions of its key participants. As the thesis has shown, many of the organizations and individuals involved performed different roles in private and in public. Moreover, sometimes individuals within these groups adopted critical positions that were at odds with the policy of the group as a whole. Evidently, the complex, polycentric qualities of the debate even extended to the internal make-up of the key participants. The CoID for instance, publically maintained its approach to good street
furniture design as one of benign persuasion for the benefit of improving the nation’s
taste and economy. Privately however, the CoID and other design alliances lobbied the
government for greater powers, and fought to regain control over design decisions that
were increasingly been made – erroneously, they believed – by local government,
whose members often had little or no visual training. Moreover, the taste of these
professional design alliances often informed perceptions of Good Design and, because
of its subjective nature, advice on how best to improve standards of street furniture
design fluctuated.

Local and central government also reflect these internal contradictions. Local
government for instance, was able to independently effect significant change on the
ground, without necessarily consulting other bodies or the communities they
represented. Yet some authorities did defer to the authority of specialist design bodies
and/or listen to the opinions of their constituents. There were also often differences of
opinion between local authorities and country councils, suggesting that local
government was not united in its approach to street furniture design. Central
government was also wrought with contradictions. For instance, ministries were
unwilling to interfere with the subject of modern street furniture design since it was an
issue they believed was a local responsibility. To interfere in the debate about these
objects would have undermined the autonomy of local government, placed additional
pressure on the planning system as a whole, and required policy changes that
government was unwilling to develop. It would also have signalled official standards
of taste, a controversial venture for any government. Despite this, many ministries
privately sympathized with public campaigns against modern street furniture, and in
some cases even worked against local authorities to protect pre-war designs. So what
was going on?

**Power struggle**

The postwar street furniture debate exposes a power struggle, in which powerful,
interlocking professional bodies were forced to work together on an issue in which no-
one had complete autonomy, but which public and professionals felt very strongly
about. The postwar period was unique in this respect, largely because of the power that
local government possessed to effect change over the designed environment. Indeed
even in May 1971, *Design* was still reminding its readers that ‘in amenity and visual terms, local government, on a collective basis, can make or break the quality of Britain’.\(^990\) Yet central government was ultimately responsible for empowering local authorities through the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act. Moreover, while ministries were reluctant to use powers that might have forced local authorities to adhere to specialist design advice - even though they were simultaneously sponsoring the latter in their quest to improve design standards – they did occasionally override municipal design decisions. Government clearly took a view on standards of design and taste, despite its claims to the contrary. And by doing so, it was able to radically alter Britain’s urban landscape, as well as inadvertently create the perfect conditions for intense debate and power imbalances.

Such a complex network of relations characterizes the postwar street furniture debate, for each party involved had its own agenda and objectives. And this sense of multiplicity is typical of the postwar period. Indeed, as the industrial designer David Mellor once said, the street furniture industry was characterized by the ‘design by committee’ approach.\(^991\) Implicit in Mellor’s comment, is a sense that street furniture was one area of design defined by banality and the absence of a unifying vision or leadership; where individuality was subservient to consensus. In other words, here was a category of design where a great many people talked a great deal, but achieved very little. But to what extent is this true?

**The consequences of the postwar street furniture debate**

For design bodies like the CoID, the debate achieved a lot. Indeed, the CoID believed its mission to improve street furniture design had been largely successful, and its influence tangibly felt. Even by 1960, CoID officers felt able to tell a group of planners in Durham that ‘fortunately the murmurings a few years ago of the long haired boys in the wilderness were heard and there is now a satisfactory climate of opinion’\(^992\). At the same time however, the postwar debate on street furniture existed at a distance from the actual enactment of street furniture within the street. As this

\(^{990}\) Leader, *Design*, No.269, May 1971, p.21  
\(^{991}\) Llio Teleri Lloyd-Jones, *David Mellor: Design*, (Suffolk: Antique Collectors Club, 2009), p.26  
\(^{992}\) The CoID, *Notes for a Lecture given to Durham County Council Planning Officers on Wednesday the 27\(^{th}\) Jan 1960*, p.3, in *Street Furniture Articles and Lectures* (1432.15 Pt. III)
thesis has shown, many of the voices within this debate were able to generate considerable noise, but the actual enactment of their ideas occurred at a much quieter, municipal level. While a minority of street furniture projects prompted high-profile controversies and therefore a lot of noise, the majority did not. Indeed, the majority of local authorities across Britain during this time were able to make decisions on design and determine the design of the street largely unimpeded. As such, while the voices that dominate throughout the thesis might have made certain symbolic and emblematic things happen, nevertheless, it is equally important to recognize that the noisiest voices do not always describe the majority of action, and that what goes un-remarked upon is just as central to the full story.

While the intervention of design specialists and other centrally funded bodies might have been tolerated in the immediate aftermath of the war, resistance to efforts at improving the public’s taste or imposing a particular aesthetic came from both the public and the professional sphere soon afterwards. Interventions in this regard, however subtle, seem to have become increasingly unwelcome, and in some cases it was even ignored. The notion that Good Design existed and could be employed to improve society – or in the case of street furniture, to civilize the street and its users - was increasingly called into question. And while organizations like the CoID and the RFAC often deflected criticism by blaming local authorities, manufacturers and even the public for their poor taste or lack of regard for Good Design, such criticism might have been related to perceptions of authority more generally, and the rapidly changing social and cultural landscape the design profession found itself within. Recognition that other perspectives on design, drawn from out-with the elite groups which had determined British culture up until that point, eventually affected these bodies and forced them to adopt a less hierarchical tone. Simultaneously, the public became considerably more active in the debate and able to make its voice heard.

The relevance of the thesis and future research

While the thesis is about a historical debate, the ideas represented in it are equally relevant in a contemporary context. The importance of street furniture lies in its ability to project values and embody meaning within public space. It constitutes the background to our everyday practices. As a result, the broad objective of this research
has been to focus on ways in which different agents try to control the meaning of design and for what purposes. It emerged out of an interest in the systems and structures underpinning design culture, and a belief that reading the banal built world expands our knowledge of how political power works. In other words, looking closely at lampposts and litterbins and the way that people have talked about them, has allowed me to reflect on the significance of these objects, how they are used, and what they mean.

The object of this research has not been on the actual objects of street furniture per se, but rather on the way in which objects like postboxes and parking meters can arouse a passionate debate despite their otherwise mundane qualities. Locating this research in the context of design history might seem odd therefore, given its outward reliance on things. Yet design history is a disciplinary framework which is neither ‘narrowly specialist in content or sectarian in tone’. It also offers a way of engaging with objects in this way. The hybrid status of design history mirrors that of street furniture in its marginalization and perceived triviality, but it also increasingly provides a framework to think out-with the conventions of the great designer, and instead focus on these questions of power and meaning. Design does not exist in a vacuum. Rather, as design historian Nigel Whiteley described in 1995, ‘it exists, instead, in real lives, real situations, real places, and real time’. Street furniture testifies to the truth of Whiteley’s observation, since it features in most people’s lives and as such, reflects an accessible category of design that this thesis has sought to mimic, not only in terms of narrative, but also in form and tone.

There remains room to develop many of these ideas further. For example, no detailed study has been published on the uses of heritage-style street furniture within 1980s Britain and what this signified within the political and ideological climate of the time. This would be a valuable follow-on from the thesis, particularly because design culture during the 1980s was undergoing a period of intense change, where ideas about the state, the role of the individual, and Britain’s status internationally, were in flux. The contemporary uses of street furniture, and the role of multinational advertising companies like JC Decaux and Clear Channel, would equally be a useful study to

embark upon. The role of such companies in providing street furniture to local councils for free in return for advertising space, has fractured the state's active role in furnishing the street and raises familiar questions about just who is responsible for the designed environment.

Clearly this story is far from complete, but it goes some way towards reflecting the complex debate that street furniture provoked after the war. Ultimately, what it shows is that street furniture became a forum through which class, taste and authority could be debated, exposing in the process the struggle for power within the design of the street. By looking closely at how postwar street furniture was discussed, understood and even determined, this thesis allows us to reflect on the diverse range of groups, individuals and organizations that shape the street, and in turn, our everyday lives.
APPENDIX 1: KENNETH GRANGE INTERVIEW

Hampstead, London, 21st November 2012

EH: [I introduce the background to the project and ask him about his involvement in street furniture design]

KG: Let me talk about street lighting – guess it was the first territory in which people were particularly interested in the appearance, well as the effectiveness of street furniture. The effectiveness was another responsibility of an august body, which perhaps for the sake of this I’ll call the M of T [Ministry of Transport]. They had strict rules about the level of lighting on the street, which was measured in lumens and a whole other set of proper measurements. That was requirement placed then on such industry as was capable of meeting those lighting needs. And there were firms who made nothing but street lighting, They were much closer to architecture than product, and therefore almost certainly the first designers of street lighting were engineers, who needed to get a particular luminaire at a particular height at a particular distance. There were a set of mathematical formula that would have helped them do that, and then there was the question of keeping the rain out, so they stuck a lid on it, and that’s an honourable and very long lasting tradition from gas lamps to all that stuff, and if you were trying to draw a picture of the developments and sophistications of street lighting, the designer like myself came in pretty late in the process. At the start it was engineers, who then came under pressure to look to architects, who contributed their views to it, and then later on it came to us.

The man I used to work for, Jack Howe, was an architect, and he was the first generation of product designers in this country [who] were at least related to, and often were architects. [reason for this is that] architects were inevitably the first port of call when you wanted an aesthetic view for something that was fundamentally necessary to the cities. So lighting was a rich territory, and Jack was responsible for a few street lighting columns, and there was big money in this. So the big players, the GEC’s, the OSRAM’s, the THORN’s, the EMI’s and so on, had departments strictly concerned with street lighting. And if you look back at the photographs, you’ll see that street lighting in this country in the immediate post-war years was as sophisticated as anywhere in the world. And more universally sophisticated, so it wasn’t only the smart bits of the city of London that got treated, but the THORN’s and the EMI’s, they designed lamps to go right across the country because the road usage conditions set the standards for those roads – Class B roads etc, and lamps at particular distances - like an inescapable, forensic need for lighting to be of such a quality. And therefore the first evidence of people concerning themselves with how the bits of the street related to the immediate surroundings, particularly buildings, was entrusted to architects, and that’s where I, as Jack Howe’s assistant, benefitted from that. Because he was still doing buildings, and doing bits of hardware, of which the lighting columns and litterbins and bus shelters, and all the other junk that litters our streets.

Jack was an interesting character. He was Gropius’s chief assistant in this country. It’s remarkable that I could work with Jack who was connected to such an important part in our design culture.

EH: And where do parking meters come in?
KG: That came in out of...well, I think parking meters was the first commercial endeavor to hit the street scene. There might have been other things like what the butler saw or whatever, but the parking meter was I believe, wrapped up in all sorts of others justifications...but the parking meter was seen by some smart visitors to America as a source of revenue. Westminster Council was the first in this country to run a pilot scheme, and I got the job because they had done a deal with a manufacturer here called Venner. Venner owned pretty much all of the business on our streets, in terms of the clockwork mechanisms...that switched the lights on and off, and these mechanisms were stored in the posts. And if you counted the number of posts in the country, that was a big business. And they had to be extremely reliable, so expensively made and well-constructed and Venner were a big player. Therefore when Westminster decided to go into parking meters, Venner were the first in line. Probably they went together to America, and chose a very good meter – very good mechanically – called the park-o-meter. And this was one that was typically we call a banjo shape. And that was the one that had been ordered and contracts had been signed and Westminster were promised a delivery of these things installed in particular parts of Westminster, quite a big number.

Now the other thing that’s interesting about this tale...the government, I suppose going back to the 50s, was involved in the Britain Can Make It exhibition and the Festival of Britain, had entrusted large chunks of responsibility to the CoID, and one of those responsibilities that then slipped into their package of work was having an authority to approve or disapprove anything that was going on the street of the cities in the country. And the park-o-meter was the first victim of this, because Venner with Westminster were all set to go, they were going to import these things, doctor them slightly to suit our coinage, and off they go – nice job. But such as you need planning permission today, you needed the approval of the council, and they disapproved it. And they [Venner with Westminster] were over a barrel because they had a delivery to meet. I can’t speak more highly of the way the Council ran its affairs, because one of its affairs was matching designers with clients. So when the parking meter was rejected, naturally Venner said to the Council, well you’ve rejected this so help us find someone to correct it, and the council gave them a list of half a dozen designers or names and you interview and appoint them, and that’s how I got the job. A direct result of government determination to have a view about the quality of design on the streets. And it would have applied to anything else, and not surprisingly there were competitions and exhibitions.

Soon after that I got a job as designer working for a firm making window fittings...and the relationship between quite a lot of big players in our industries and the Council was very good, so the actual council of people sitting around a table always represented modernist thinking and usually a lot of good business brains, from a lot of big firms – JCB and Henry Hope sat on the Council – and so, they were part and parcel of the council, trying to upgrade all sorts of things. And so when the council launched a competition for street furniture, I think specifically litterbins, Henry Hope asked me to design them. So there’s another example where people were pressing for better stuff generally across the country.

EH: And that ‘better stuff’, did it constitute a particular taste of design?

KG: Good question, there was insofar as they collectively had an aesthetic view. There was enough consensus among the judges who all wanted to show themselves to be
modern. They understood the difference between modern American styling and modern Scandinavian design – these represented the poles of taste. The council would pretty often have rejected the American styling – which hadn’t got to the excesses of the great tailfins on cars and so on – but quite a lot of sort of jokey references could be made to that sort of territory. There were plenty of slightly sort of limp wristed remarks, some of which were quite spiteful, but there was no doubt, and enough consensus, what were regarded as appropriately modern of the future – what we were aspiring towards, which represented European and not American [goes on to describe his work for Kodak].

Scandinavian design was clearly the iconography, whereas the American territories – the American influenced bits of the world - got bits of streamlining, and nice chrome, and functionally excellent, [but] very heavy handed styling, and styling was more overtly theatrical than it was here, because if you don’t mince words, there was a Scandinavian style as much as there was an American style – but the Scandinavian style started with much simpler lines and patterns, but they weren’t without decoration and a bit of romance, but they were beautiful, really lovely things, but almost always using natural starting points – whether than was stones, or wood, or mountains or flowers. Whereas the American interpretation of that was just more Broadway, more theatrical. So in terms of taste, it was upper-class European.

EH: Did the CoID want a more British type of design?

KG: [they just wanted] simpler.

EH: Were you given a brief by the CoID?

KG: I was given a park-o-meter. No the Council didn’t, and that’s important that that should be made clear, the Council didn’t have a tick-list of things to achieve at all, but somehow there was enough consensus among those of us who were either beneficiaries of the council or came to be used by the council, so within ten years I was asked to sit on one of the juries. I mean, we were all of like minds there’s no question about it. What’s fascinating about it, was that you’d sit there with men I became good friends with, they would say their piece and work towards assembling enough modernist icons and vocabulary that there was enough general agreement. But if you go to their homes…they were all antique. This was the intellectual way to steer themselves past this judgment of taste, and if it was old it was ok. It could be ugly but if it was old it was ok.

EH: Is there a conflict there?

KG: That’s possible too. But insofar as the people on the board – lets say there was ten designers/architects and ten manufacturers – the ten manufacturers went home to old houses and old furniture. Clear good-hearted conservatism. And the architects and designers went home to old houses but without enough references, like this home, to be regarded as modern. And interestingly, there was usually an infiltration of modern, usually in the more functional bits of the house, [the kitchen/bathroom etc] there’s a certain honesty about non-taste – if it’s old and its Georgian, I don’t have a view about taste. When it comes to curtains maybe that’s where it gets tricky.
EH: Was there a pressure on designers of street furniture because of the public nature of the subject and the variety of opinions on what constituted good taste?

KG: No, I think it’s a good territory to discuss. Anything associated with the street, was a reflection of the transport, so if you expected your buses to be more modern than the year before then everything associated with them was modern, and appropriately so. There were odd hiccups when your street and those buses and cars are like defaulters going down ancient street. Streets are part and parcel of the fabric of the city.

If I’m absolutely honest, round here [Hampstead] are very old streets. So when they decided to stick a lamp on the corner of my house here, there had been agreement to get an old lamp in, with the right details. Whereas if this house was in Copenhagen everything would be modern – it’s a very interesting debate on the point at which the theatricality of the old really should have dominance over the novelty of the new.

EH: Was there a resistance to the modern in the UK?

KG: Yes, underlying, we’re a very conservative society and full of contradictions. We’re as alert and as modern in our commerce as anywhere in the world, and there’s a fashion for modernism. But it’s treated theatrically rather than as an inevitability. Whereas other bits of the world have had it so long - in Scandinavia, they have only ever seen modern things around them, no possible cause to look backwards. Whereas we’re so romantically attached to our antiquities. And I’m quite schizophrenic about it – in absolute truth, I wouldn’t change some of our funny bollards and fences around here. Its really quite simple, must that be a clear change in your romanticism, between that wall and the street here, should let it seep out. That’s the game. We’re that bit more romantic, or sympathetic to the romantic bit of ourselves to let the two intertwine.

EH: Was there a state-sponsored element to the parking meter project?

KG: Yes. Successive governments governmentally haven’t had a view on design, and they have chosen willfully to not have a view. They get into trouble when they try to take responsibility for modern ways of behaving – like employment exchanges or hospitals or whatever – when they have to declare a view, and they employ an architect or designer to speak for them…These public situations, like the parking meter, make it very clear, the designer has a number of responsibilities. One is to the client, because without that piece of commerce none of you is going to have a job. That’s the merchant, I call it. There’s [a responsibility] to the industry that you’re working with, because unless you help one another technically you wont get advancement. But the biggest responsibility you have is to the user, and when you’re working that closely with the commercial side, these two: the user and the client are interdependent in terms of function, and in terms of how they perceive themselves. Take Apple: they want to be perceived as the leader of high achievement – which is function, taste etc – their client base shares that ideology. When that commercial imperative is taken away, the designer takes on much more responsibility for the public’s part in this. And that’s when the designers and the architect becomes more champions for the publics modernist stance… if today I was designing a parking meter, I wouldn’t expect the government to take anything more than a public interest in it, a public stance, on the design, but I would take it upon myself to think well, they
deserve to join the modern world, so I’m going to try and persuade them that this is best, modern. Fortunately, there’s plenty of things around us that won’t make that such a difficult job, but at that time it was immensely difficult. Because the common place was at most the 30s, and in many cases further back still. So we were living in, our background was an inheritance of enforced poverty of the war years, terrible lack of money right across the whole spectrum. So that by the time we came to the late 30s things were getting better, but they hadn’t marched on so firmly as they had in Scandinavia or in America. So those people who were expected to make a judgment about what they wanted in the immediate postwar years, were looking back over a visual experience of the previous 20-40 years, and that’s why it was easy to produce something modern, and it was accepted was because what they were looking at as commonplace originated such a long time before. A good example of that was the flat iron I designed for Morphy Richards sometime in the 50-60s, and it was what I thought as modern. I realized that the reason the client thought it was great was because they were still making irons designed in 1935, so I was replacing a 1935 design, so you do anything and it’s going to be better.

EH: Was the street furniture business different from other products you designed?

KG: No. But I knew what I was doing and where I was going. The truth is that what was modern then is pretty damn modern today, so it’s a long lasting vocabulary. If today, someone said, ‘we want to re-launch that parking meter’, there’s only a few changes I would make – stylistic changes, some clear functional changes. Little I would press for. We had already started to find a vocabulary among ourselves as designers. Overt decoration didn’t come into it, which is so subject to fashion.

EH: Is there a paradox between good design and the taste of elite groups?

KG: Design council abandoned that role. They were the only governmentally backed institution that anybody trusted and looked to.

EH: What about the Royal Fine Art Commission?

KG: No, if anything they were safeguarding the old, but we didn’t have anything to do with them. Apart from one time we had a terrible run-in with a bloke who used to wear velvet slippers to the office, terrific brain but absolutely ruthless in his pursuit of high style, think his name was Quinlan terry, a friend of Prince Charles…Regency/Georgian. But anything without those particular styles, you’d never get passed him. He was head of the Royal Fine Art Commission. There would be times when those sorts of people wielded terrific power. If it was expected to sit in modern circumstances, then it was ok. For the most part, planners didn’t come into it. There was enough of a consensus among most designers. There came to be a few stalwarts who persisted in the Germanic Bauhaus-ian movements – so Dieter Rams, very important, but absolutely unremitting in terms of what he allowed. In this country, there were enough designers and enough liberation allowed by the marketplace that we could develop a wider range of details. In his words [Dieter Rams] a surface is either dead flat or perfectly round, and one doesn’t smoothly run into the other. I hope we’ve been more lenient in a lot of stuff in terms of what our modern design is. We’re not so ruthlessly simplistic. I say him, but I think he’s just a good example of what he stands for.
EH: Did the backlash against street lamps affect you?

KG: I know that in street lighting there was a sort of clash between steel poles and spun concrete. And the concrete guys certainly looked backwards for a time. But Jack’s concrete posts are just beautiful, dead simple, and more closer to the straight steel poles. But the competition was coming from some pretty dramatically angled concrete offerings, and they must have had a lot of success.

I do remember a story about somebody smashing into a concrete post, and it snapped and flew down the road, and for a little time, concrete was doomed. In the same ways that tower blocks suffered badly from one bad block. But outside of that, I don’t think there was such a big backlash, we would have to look at the examples. I can picture the ones that were conspicuously different to the ones Jack was making, none of which are still around today. [He then goes on to describe the technical differences in steel/concrete and the way in which a ladder had to be used to fix the concrete lamps, whereas the steel ones could be fitted with a hinge and laid down – thus in many ways one could see the design change as being largely practical. He also explains the sense that despite the pages of magazines being full of complaints, actually modern street furniture was everywhere, and was therefore accepted].

No - It was the occasional sensational disaster that would have been covered and made a lot of noise but it didn’t reflect the wider view. The technicalities could be quite fundamental to big changes and why things happened. Also [other factors would have influenced what actually took place, what designs were installed and which ones taken away, including] the labour available to do things, and the sheer cost of maintaining things in a particular way. And concrete was inexpensive, and there was a time that our industry was one of the leaders in spinning concrete. [goes into detail about visiting a lighting manufacturer in Littlehaven] and not surprisingly his plant was on the back of the beach – he had all the ballast and sand he needed for his lamps – he just went to shovel up the beach for ballast – denuding the beach in the process. If you think about it, it’s an enchanting little tale.

EH: Did your recent work for Adshell differ from the parking meter project?

KG: Not a lot. The Adshell experience offers another structure of that client relationship. Its all a business of trade-off – none of the equipment or maintenance is paid for by the local authority, it’s all paid for by the advertiser. It’s astonishing. Advertising is often seen as the villain of the piece, but if you actually stand back, it’s the sheer welter of poles and the disorganization that is the real villain.

The architect with a level playing field in never as good as the one with the shared site. The forces that affect things, the questionable things that come into it – sometimes you have the most arcane discussions about what the driver should see, or what his union thinks he should see, and sometimes that’s not always the best for the passenger. But the benefit is so substantial that it’s a fair game.

EH: Finally, was there anything questionable about the parking meter process?

KG: The parking meter – no I don’t think so. But another one was designed for GEC, which at one time was the biggest engineering firm in the country, and they were very well-set to design the mechanics for a card fed meter. But they could never get the
local authority to share the revenue that they collected from the cards. I don’t think GEC foresaw these problems or they were misled.
APPENDIX 2: MARGARET CALVERT INTERVIEW

Islington, London, 4th July 2013
[Interview was unrecorded, at the request of Margaret Calvert. What follows below are informal notes from the meeting]

Essay by Margaret Calvert can be found in Alliance international graphic design, graphic design since 1950, published by AGI. ‘battle of the serif’.

Official font used prior to Transport was Gill, which in turn had copied Johnston.

Objective of an official type is to be complementary – there quietly but not the main story. They were there to inform.

[Describes the signs as having] no design mannerisms, purely functional, and [conveying] the essence of a statement.

Modernism was not something she directly thought of – didn’t think ‘I have got to be modern’ it was more about expressing the spirit of the age.

Regarding standardization – hates the term uniformity, but thinks that her signs were a personal expression. But they also had to be credible and authoritative, it had to convey the basic sense of the message. Would hate her pictograms to be the same everywhere, and likes the variety you see in signage all over the world.

Another reason for the signs looking like they did was because there was a need to distinguish between commercial signage and official signage.

There were masses of signage manufacturers.

It was more important to get the grammar of layout right.

Ken Garland – editor of Design – didn’t like her font at the time, but does now.

Hugh Casson wanted the green signs to be ‘as dark as old dinner jackets’, even though Jock Kinneir wanted them lighter.

The Council of Industrial Design didn’t have anything to do with the project, although Jock Kinneir was ‘on their list and that was how you got work’. Although some of the members of the Worboys committee were also connected to the CoID, and Worboys was the Chairman of the CoID. Royal Fine Art Commission were also involved.

For them, when they were designing the signs for the Preston bypass, they had no inkling that it would later be extended to all of Britain’s roads. In fact the only reason that it was, was that a civil servant called JB Usborne, proposed that the system could be extended to the entire network.

There were no threats posed by the public to the system. In fact the public were ‘completely for it’. The problems all came from the professionals rather than the public. The only threat came from a sculptor, David Kindersley who objected to the lettering because he had designed the lettering used before. He had also submitted a
design to the Ministry of Transport, which was all capitals and a very traditional type – which despite proving to be more legible, was rejected.

The Anderson committee went on a tour of Europe but they didn’t take their design consultant [Jock Kinneir] with them. And this is an important point – Jock Kinneir was the consultant, MC was his assistant, and should always be credited in that order.

Jock Kinneir always used to say that ‘signs are for sick architects’ [as in, architects aren’t doing their jobs properly if you need signs to direct people].

Good taste meant death. It also meant conventional, boredom, safety. It lacked personality. It could be expressed by the three-piece suite in olive green.

The only government agenda there was in the whole project was that the Conservative government of the time wanted to rush it through. Dennis Marples had motoring investments.

Thought it was exciting to be involved with the public, but it didn’t really strike her as a big project, until one time her and Jock Kinneir were in a bar at a theatre, when he said ‘this will be the biggest project any graphic designer in Britain will ever work on’. She describes it as a moment she will never forget.

Today, street furniture in steel is going out of fashion because the steel just gets stolen. Now working on a gov.uk project with the Transport type.
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307


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