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## Parade's End?<sup>1</sup> Shop/Houses in New Zealand

This paper looks at New Zealand's early 'shop house' architecture from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Commonly constructed from unreinforced masonry they are required to respond to updated NZ earthquake strengthening codes and regulatory frameworks since the Christchurch earthquakes of 2011.

The purpose of the paper is to draw attention to the forms and significance of these buildings before they disappear. Elevated ideals of modern progress resonate in this historicist architecture making these shop buildings complex artefacts, as they look both forward and back. Their heritage status is uncertain and their hybrid character would appear to have significance for their inclusion in the historic record, insofar as the NZ shop house is hardly discussed in the literature. This hybrid character, however, also offers a complex elision of domestic and working space that seems relevant for the contemporary city.

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<sup>1</sup> *Parade's End* is Ford Madox Ford's novel published in four parts between 1924 and 1928. Set in England and the Western Front of WWI it describes a society in upheaval. The Parade of the title refers not only to the military parade but also to the stiff codes of propriety maintained by the protagonist, Christopher Tietjens, a gentleman who nevertheless recognises he is living through profoundly changing times; the dismantling of the pastoral aristocracy, the shifting British Empire, and the ascendancy of women's suffrage to name a few.

## Introduction

This paper grew out of a joint research project with Auckland photographer Allan McDonald and Krystina Kaza, called *The Unstable City*. McDonald had long been engaged in a kind of reflexive impulse to record the city around him. Almost a daily practice, his interest in Auckland's urban expansion and old buildings dates back more than a decade. McDonald's sensitivity to social context is acute and his gaze brings attention to the tenuous future of Auckland's older buildings, in which he finely observes social change and a vulnerable social fabric. Below the verandas of now faded shop fronts, signage, racks of goods and paraphernalia often signal a messy vitality and newer migrant communities clustered in many parts of the city. Ethnic and economic diversity mark these buildings, and their marginal physical condition amplifies the precariousness of both their social and economic stability.

Allan's photos of old Auckland buildings prompted my particular focus on early twentieth century buildings, in which both commerce and living occurred. A row of small shops, called a parade, is a common sight in local suburban and old town centres. Another prompt is the updated NZ earthquake legislation following the 2011 Christchurch earthquakes, which has significant implications for them. Many of the shop buildings are plastered unreinforced brick masonry (URMs) and considered at risk from earthquake. The buildings' owners are now required to meet updated structural codes and regulations in more stringent time frames. Failure to do so will unleash a regulatory process asking owners to demolish their buildings.<sup>2</sup> The summary message to such building owners is "strengthen or demolish". The impact of these regulatory changes on character streets, such as Ponsonby and Jervois Roads in Auckland's well-heeled suburbs, will be significant, but the returns from period buildings in these parts of town may give them a fighting chance. More worrying is the impact, which the reductive "strengthen or demolish" policy might have in the small towns of New Zealand, largely closed-up already, or containing the second hand shops that Allan McDonald has already lovingly photographed. Increasingly reluctant insurers and bank lenders bring pressure to bear, tenants get flighty and building owners face the prospect of paying to strengthen or, worse, paying to demolish their already empty buildings.

## Early NZ Arrangements

A pragmatic contingency on the details of family and economic life is seen often in the two storey, purpose-built urban shops of New Zealand's towns and this paper will look later in more detail at the 1920s shops of Otahuhu, south of Auckland.

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2 The Building (Earthquake-prone buildings) Amendment Bill passed its first reading on 5 March 2014. In the words of Minister Maurice Williamson "This Bill will ensure earthquake-prone buildings are dealt with in a timely manner by way of a nationally consistent system and will require information about earthquake-prone buildings to be made available to the public." <http://beehive.govt.nz/release/earthquake-prone-buildings-bill-passes-first-reading> Accessed 23rd June 2014.

It is interesting, however, to recollect New Zealand writer Katherine Mansfield's short story "Woman at the Store" (1912) which suggests the domestic accommodation of commerce or, perhaps the 'commercial accommodation of the domestic', in the most intimate of ways. Set in nineteenth century colonial New Zealand, the story tells of a woman who hides a secret, the killing of her abusive husband. Remoteness and isolation were factors. When the coach stopped coming through, she suggests it was lack of business that drove her half crazy. Whatever the reasons, the woman's store is a place for travellers to stop and provision, and a place in which the elision of domestic and commercial space occurs. A passing traveller sits in her kitchen while he listens as the woman roots through her 'store' for comestibles. Later of course another kind of accommodation occurs when one of the travellers seeks her bed for the night.

The architecture was described as "a whare roofed with corrugated iron ... It was a large room, the walls plastered with old pages of English periodicals ... there were four doors - one, judging from the smell, let on to the Store', one on to the 'backyard,' through a third I saw the bedroom."<sup>3</sup> Whare, Maori for house in European usage, referred to the primitive; and corrugated iron accompanied colonial life almost as a matter of course. The depiction of harsh colonial conditions is architecturally represented by culturally and functionally impure categories.

New Zealand suburban corner stores (an example might be H. D. Burrage's grocery store on Surrey Crescent, Auckland from the early 1900s) were frequently timber-framed houses with a commercial façade applied to the street frontage. A readily adapted arrangement that, in many instances was built, as new, with a veranda that lined the street edge. The residential character of the Penrose Dairy, Grey Lynn<sup>4</sup> or J. J. Sheriff's Store in Milford<sup>5</sup> is largely taken for granted in local histories. Jess Barnaby who grew up in the Penrose Dairy recalls the elision of domestic and commerce yet again. "We were not open on Sunday but if you wanted milk or butter or cream you came around our back door."<sup>6</sup>

## Lack of Scholarly Attention

Shops and living above or behind them have a long history. One of the more familiar versions is in South East Asia, in particular, the Singaporean or Malaysian shop-house with its five-foot way. Variations of the hybrid shop and house, frequently not designed by architects, are found all over the world and throughout history, yet have received relatively little attention. Perhaps the associations of 'filthy commerce' linger? Quite by coincidence, Mansfield, was described as "the

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3 <http://www.katherinemansfieldsociety.org/assets/KM-Stories/THE-WOMAN-AT-THE-STORE1912.pdf> 2-3, accessed 17 February 2014.

4 Kaaren Hiyama, *High Hopes in Hard Times A History of Grey Lynn and Westmere* (Auckland: Media Studies Trust, 1991), 24.

5 David Johnson, *Auckland by the Sea* (Auckland: David Bateman, 1988), 89. J. J. Sheriff store image held by Auckland Public Library.

6 Hiyama, *High Hopes*, 53.

brassy little shopgirl of literature who made herself into a great writer.”<sup>7</sup> Do architectural and societal class distinctions dog the humble shop? The economic clout, the status and scale of the department store, and the office building, tend to attract more research attention. It is clear that the local shop and the high street are victims of rapidly changing consumer patterns but a recent UK report discusses the “increasing attention on the social and economic value of neighbourhood parades in local communities.”<sup>8</sup>

Howard Davis's book *Living over the Store* (2012) claims to be the first book to deal solely with this vernacular urban form in which domestic life is situated specifically within an urban commercial context. He says there is a continuum of hybrid shop/houses ranging from the family shop/house to the building with independent apartments above or behind shops.<sup>9</sup> Being neither civic, nor institutional nor iconic buildings they have attracted little attention in architectural literature and it is this hybridity, Davis suggests, which explains their absence from the historical record or usual architectural taxonomies. Davis distinguishes architectural historian, Nicholas Pevsner's functional approach, in which a building is a factory or a bank or a temple, from the French theorists, J.N.L. Durand and A.C. Quatremere de Quincy who looked to formal typologies, courtyards, pavilions et cetera as a way of organizing architectural history. In both approaches examples of pure form or singular function are sought, and the transitional hybrid examples are marginalised.

Pevsner asserts that shop design scarcely changed between Trajan's Market in the early second century and Renaissance Italy.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore he argues that the planning is of little interest. The counter either ran parallel with the street in the earliest examples or, in the case of larger shops, perpendicular to the street, which allowed people to enter into the space of the shop. It was in the technical development of glazing systems and the stylistic changes of shop fronts that, he argues, the greatest interest in shop design is to be found.<sup>11</sup> Only briefly does he mention in the case of a block of 1791 Parisian shops that there were residential flats above them. Pevsner's horror of the “debased” styling of many Victorian shop fronts leads him to abandon any further description.<sup>12</sup> “There is no point in following the shop through the rest of the nineteenth century and into the

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7 Irish writer Frank O'Connor in his classic study of the short story, “The Lonely Voice,” accessed 28 February 2014. <http://www.nzedge.com/katherine-mansfield>

8 *Parades of Shops - Towards an understanding of performance and prospects* Report, Genecon LLP Department for Communities and Local Government June 2012, accessed 20 February 2014 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/6330/2156925.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6330/2156925.pdf)

9 Howard Davis, *Living Over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2012), 4.

10 Nikolaus Pevsner, *A History of Building Types* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), 257.

11 Pevsner, *Building Types*, 258. The evolution of plate glass saw the multiple little panes of Georgian shopfront give way to large sheets of glass. “Many complained that visually the plate glass shop window resulted in the painful impression of the masonry of the upper floors being supported entirely by glass.”

12 Pevsner, *Building Types*, 260 “Examples among shop fronts are Fortnum and Mason's - very debased - as illustrated by Whittock in 1840 and - even more debased - a shop in Regent Street Quadrant as illustrated in the *Companion to the Almanac* for 1841 where it is called ‘Renaissance or Elizabethan’.”

twentieth ..."<sup>13</sup> Functional drivers for shop design do attract Pevsner's attention: "Could things be made more comfortable for the customer? Yes - He can for instance be protected from rain. Hence the medieval arcaded streets of Italy, of Southern France, of Innsbruck and Berne. Yet more convenient is the street reserved for walkers and entirely roofed over. Such are the oriental bazaars." His text segues into a description of the Parisian arcades or passages and he does note that the Galeries de Bois were described by the writer Balzac as "stinking and of ill-repute, the place of business of ... prostitutes", amongst others."<sup>14</sup> Somewhat effortlessly he returns us to the theme of the paper with the reference to multiple forms of accommodation. (The influential Arcades Project by Walter Benjamin stands as a critical text for the cultural study of Parisian street life.)

In spite of Pevsner's lack of enthusiasm for them, this paper is particularly interested in shops of the early 20th century, for their eclectic and hybrid historicist styling, for their cross-programming of the domestic and commercial, and their social implications for the urban context. If the shop house does not appear greatly in standard historical accounts nor does it figure highly in vernacular histories. Davis points out a possible reason for this; while the shop/house exhibits cultural distinctions there are also evident universal qualities, and universalism, he observes, is a condition that is often resisted by vernacular architectural historians, who prefer to emphasize the specifics of individual cultural forms.

## The Singaporean Shophouse

A well-documented vernacular exception to this is the Singaporean shop house, described by heritage architect Lee Ho Yin, as "anglo-chinese urban vernacular". The building type, initially imported into the Malay Peninsula by early Chinese immigrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, shows the influence of the commercial row house commonly found in Guangzhou and other southern Chinese coastal cities. Sir Stamford Raffles, an official of the British trading East India Company and acting on behalf of the British government in Singapore, exerted considerable influence over the shape of the colony, with the introduction of specific building regulations in 1823. They prescribed the arrangement, width, height and material specifications of commercial buildings.

"Raffles also stipulated that for the sake of regularity and conformity, the linear rows of commercial buildings were to have a uniform front. In addition they were to be linked on the ground floor by 'a verandah open at all times as a continued and covered passage on each side of the street'... This continuous public covered walkway was popularly known as the five-foot way due to the minimum depth required by law."<sup>15</sup>

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13 Pevsner, *Building Types*, 260.

14 Pevsner, *Building Types*, 261.

15 Lee Ho Yin, "The Singapore Shophouse," in *Asia's Old Dwellings: Tradition Resilience and Change*, ed. Ronald. G. Knapp (Oxford [et al.]: Oxford University Press, 2003), 122.

Lee tells us that the Chinese land speculators subdivided their plots into as many long narrow plots as possible in order to maximise the number of shophouses that could be developed. They were limited to a practical width of building by the maximum length of beams and joists from locally felled timber, typically between 15 and 20 feet. The long narrow shophouse necessitated the introduction of an air well in the centre of the building and the cooking and toilet facilities were traditionally at the back of the building on the ground floor in the same manner as the Southern Chinese original.<sup>16</sup> Lee paraphrases another architectural historian Norman Edwards. "Ideologically Raffle's building regulations were essentially a combined expression of his idealised architectural notions of Georgian London and practical experience of the climatic conditions in colonial India [...]. However they were also a practical and far-sighted means of regulating the urban built environment in terms of planning, construction, fire safety, and appearance [...]."<sup>17</sup> Not only did this new Anglo-Chinese architectural type inform Singapore's orderly development, but also, Raffles' building regulations were subsequently adopted by towns throughout the Malay Peninsula and substantially "served to establish the architectural character of shophouses throughout Malaya."<sup>18</sup>

What is so interesting about the Singaporean shop house is the idea that it might be the combined intelligence of both British and Asian architectural traditions at work. It brings to mind Anthony King's important work on the bungalow<sup>19</sup> in which he shows how it spread globally during 19th and 20th centuries and the role that colonialism played in the formation of the ideas underpinning the bungalow. His book spans Britain, Asia and the final chapter discusses the Australian bungalow. Across the globe, King argues, "...the bungalow with its origins in colonialism was to contribute to a new, outer suburban phase of capitalist urbanisation."<sup>20</sup> King's bungalow, eventually a global building type, exhibits both the hybridisation and transformation that accompanied its movement from one place to the next.

This paper proposes a similar arc of global influences and capitalist expansion may have accompanied the emergence of the shop/house as it shifted from Britain via Asia to the New World. This paper limits itself to a number of New Zealand examples from the 1920s and floats the idea that their vernacular character in this case is a rich mix of translated influences.

## Otahuhu, Auckland

Allan McDonald's artistic attention to Auckland's urban buildings coincides with Auckland City's increased attention to traditional town centres. A recent heritage survey of Otahuhu in South Auckland undertaken by conservation architects, Matthews and Matthews, has provided much of

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16 Lee, "The Singapore Shophouse," 123.

17 Lee, "The Singapore Shophouse," 123.

18 Lee, "The Singapore Shophouse," 122.

19 Anthony D. King, *The Bungalow, The Production of a Global Culture*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed. 1995), 90.

20 King, *The Bungalow*, 90.

the data for this paper. Otahuhu, now home to many of Auckland's Pacific Island communities, was a rapidly expanding industrial centre in the 1920s, south of the main urban centre of Auckland. Major railway workshops and three freezing works serviced a prosperous agricultural sector close to Auckland. Expanding employment opportunities supported a growing population, which in turn stimulated the commercial development of the Great South Road, with over a dozen multi-tenancy shop house buildings going up on the main street of Otahuhu throughout the 1920s. The early timber framed buildings were steadily replaced by rows of shops or 'parades' in plastered brick masonry construction.<sup>21</sup>

Many were built and owned by Thomas Clements, an enterprising businessman who in addition to having a substantial and successful building company served on the Otahuhu Borough Council for many years and subsequently became the mayor of the borough from 1929-1935.<sup>22</sup> Clements purchased a number of sites on the Great South Road and built the Central Buildings at 471-481 Great South Road in 1926, as well as the Progressive Buildings at 423-433 Great South Road in 1927. The company also constructed the building at 323-325 Great South Road built for Mrs Gardener (1926).<sup>23</sup>

Matthews records that none of Clements' buildings were architecturally designed and, "All those drawn around the 1920s are in a similar style and it is possible that the drawings were prepared by an in-house architect or draughtsman."<sup>24</sup> Little detail is included on the drawings, though shops designed by architects, Grierson and Aimer for E. J Wilkins on the Great South Road show only a little more attention in this regard with Craftsman Oregon pine doors and drawn architectural detail treatment of window reveals and the street elevation.

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21 Buildings built during the 1920s include:

273 Great South Road (1927)  
 257-285 Great South Road  
 293 Great South Road (Kingsway House)  
 303-317 Great South Road (1930s?)  
 323 Great South Road (1926 Gardeners Building)  
 327 Great South Road (192?)  
 357 Great South Road (1929 Forders Store)  
 375-377 Great South Road (1926 Grinters Building)  
 391-401 Great South Road (1920s, Kents Building)  
 423-433 Great South Road, (1927, Progressive Building)  
 451-453 Great South Road (1925 Gaiety Theatre)  
 455-461 Great South Road (1925, Victory Buildings)  
 471-473 Great South Road (1926)  
 475-483 Great South Road (1926, Central Buildings)  
 276-282 Great South Road (1920s, Margett's Building)  
 288-296 Great South Road (1920s, single level building)  
 292-296 Great South Road, (1920s, two storey building)

22 From Progressive Buildings Historic Info by Jane Matthews

23 Auckland Council Archives, OTB 007 169, Record ID 527809 Gardeners Building.

24 From Progressive Buildings Historic Info by Jane Matthews.

The plan drawing of the Progressive Buildings suggests that some leases were arranged prior to construction and from 1927 the building housed a range of retail businesses, which included milliners, dressmakers, bakers, confectioners, butchers and a chemist.<sup>25</sup> The Progressive Building was designed with five shops at ground floor level, with living rooms and kitchens behind and bedrooms and bathrooms at the upper level.<sup>26</sup> The position of the stairs leading directly from the shops to the domestic areas of the house, suggests the shops were to be inhabited by the shopkeepers and their families. Fitted kitchens and internal bathrooms show the impact of modern design thinking on domestic services areas though WCs remained external, often located in single story lean to additions and accessed from communal concrete landings. This space shared by two shops and their apartments dictated close neighbourly relations. In the interests of composition the central shop has a larger footprint and arched head doorway, which organised a symmetrical hierarchical front elevation. The planning, however, democratised the space allocated to the housing above with equally sized apartments. No provision for private cars is apparent though laneways down the back of the shop building provided the necessary goods access. Today many of these buildings have been modified to allow for separate access to the upstairs and fire separations and separate leases for business activities have filled the former bedrooms of the shopkeeper

In McDonald's photographic images the Victorian and Edwardian façades above the verandas contrast with the scenes of contemporary street life below. Temporal complexity is apparent in a conventional historical interpretation of these buildings too. Italianate, Stripped classical, Gothic and Spanish Mission styles all typify the period of these buildings, styles which varied broadly and were promulgated through a proliferation of magazines and stylebooks from the mid 1800s. The 19th century revival of styles, visible in these shops, recalled ideas of the past. This historicism has been interpreted as symptomatic of a cultural anxiety about the profound change wrought by the Industrial Revolution.

Nevertheless, built to return incomes on investment, the procurement of commercial buildings is most often driven by economic contingency and profit motive. Clements' speculative investments are no exception. Telling is the naming of some buildings and many are inscribed with the family name, the boldly cast lettering hinting at the monumental hopes and aspirations of the original owners. Further to this the naming of the *Progressive Building* (1927) and the R.J. *Cates Progress Stores* (1922) in Dominion Road Balmoral suggest the progressivist ideals which informed social reform and political movements in early twentieth century Britain and America. Do they reflect a society that eagerly looked beyond the crushing futility of the 'Great War' and that may have been buoyed by the adoption of the new term 'Commonwealth' to describe their community of nations in 1926? (No longer subordinate to Great Britain, all the Dominions of the British Empire would be equal in status). Elevated ideals of modern progress resonate in this historicist architecture. So these shop buildings become rather more complex artefacts, as they look both forward and back.

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<sup>25</sup> From Progressive Buildings Historic Info by Jane Matthews.

<sup>26</sup> Copies of Street Directories held at the Otahuhu Historical Society, 1927-60.

## Conclusion

So why is it important to look again at these rather ordinary buildings? As mentioned at the beginning they face an uncertain future in light of their vulnerability to earthquake. There is another reason to look more closely at these parades of shops before they go, even if most retail has fled the traditional high street for green field sites. American urbanist Jane Jacobs, long observed the destabilising effects of urban blight on the city, of New York throughout the 1950s. She defended old buildings "Cities need old buildings..."<sup>27</sup> she said. She argued the case on grounds of economic diversity. Old ideas, she said, occupy new buildings - because old ideas represent low risk economically- but new ideas need low rent, low yield environments in which to incubate. There those ideas can flourish or fail on their merits. Without old buildings in cities to harbour innovation she argues, we limit intellectual and creative diversity. Her argument sounds like the current one about diminishing biodiversity and its impact on the environment.

In the drive to make sustainable cities we could perhaps re-evaluate the complex and sensitive architecture of the early twentieth century shop house. Their compact communal organisation, their reduced reliance on the car and their fine-grained urban scale, all contribute to the vitality of the street, in the compact city model. It is not just their viable live-work urban morphology that is attractive but also the complexity they offer socially, economically and culturally. Much is made of the hybrid programme, as a conceptual tool for questioning the status quo and for investigating contemporary modes of urban life yet this hybridity has previously disqualified much architecture from a place in the historic record. Whether New Zealand's early twentieth century shop houses survive the earthquake regulatory regime is a moot point. Their contribution to the creative capital and heritage character of our cities may be lost. Nevertheless shop house hybridity offers an old solution that seems relevant to contemporary conditions.

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<sup>27</sup> "Cities need old buildings so badly it is probably impossible for vigorous streets and districts to grow without them." Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities: the failure of town planning*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1961), 244.