



# By Accident or Design: Writing the Victorian Metropolis

*Paul Fyfe*

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# By Accident or Design: Writing the Victorian Metropolis

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## **By Accident or Design: Writing the Victorian Metropolis** Paul Fyfe

'On the banks of the Thames it is a tremendous chapter of accidents'. As Henry James surveys London in 1888, he sums up what had fascinated urban observers for a century: the random and even accidental development of this unprecedented form of human settlement, the modern metropolis. *By Accident or Design: Writing the Victorian Metropolis* takes James at his word, arguing that accident was both a powerful metaphor and material context through which the

Victorians arrested the paradoxes of metropolitan modernity and reconfigured understandings of form and change. Paul Fyfe shows how the material conditions of urban accidents offer new and compelling modes of analysis for intellectual and literary history. Through extensive archival study and interdisciplinary analysis of urban-industrial accidents, risk management, and civic improvements, *By Accident or Design* reclaims the metropolis as ground zero for some of the most important thinking about causation in the nineteenth century. It demonstrates the centrality of interdependent concepts of design and accident not only to metropolitan discourse, but also to current critical discourse about the formal and circulatory dynamics of Victorian metropolitan writing. Thus, this book offers a new vocabulary for the dialectics of the modern city and the signature forms of writing about it, including the newspaper, the illustrated periodical, the industrial novel, and urban broadsheets.



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