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Introduction
The Victorian Interior: A Collaborative, Eclectic Introduction

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The ten closely related essays that comprise this volume focus on Aestheticism and Arts and Crafts, the two principal vanguard British artistic movements between Pre-Raphaelitism and early Modernism, paying particular attention to some of the most significant interiors associated with the two movements, and investigating the complex overlap between them.[1] In so doing, *Rethinking the Interior* provides a timely, accessible introduction to the changing spatial, sensory, aesthetic, iconographic, historiographic and political character and significance of a wide range of Victorian interiors.

Alongside powerful revisionary analyses of some of the period's best-known examples, such as Morris and Co.'s Green Dining Room at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the London homes of Frederic Leighton, William Morris and Oscar Wilde, the volume introduces significant new case studies. It includes, for example, a unique iconographic analysis of the superficially 'Aesthetic' church at Studley Royal, Yorkshire; the important, but previously neglected, architectural practice of Richard Coad and James MacLaren; one of Socialist artist Walter Crane's New England commissions; and the queer interiors of Vernon Lee, Alfred Taylor, and Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon.[2]

Rather than endorsing the metropolitan bias of much contemporary cultural and architectural history, our case studies challenge the popular consensus that Aestheticism was an urban fashion and Arts and Crafts a rural phenomenon, and respond to recent globalising and localising turns across the humanities. The forthcoming chapters examine interiors metropolitan and provincial; owned and rented; purpose-built and renovated; 'Occidental' and 'Oriental'; sacred and secular; Buddhist, Christian and

Islamic; domestic and commercial; 'private' and 'public'; bourgeois, bohemian and queer; homosocial and heterosocial; middle-class and aristocratic; hybrid and eclectic; urban, suburban and rural.[3] We commence, perhaps predictably, in South Kensington, Holland Park and Chelsea – common focal points in studies of the Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts movements – but we journey on to Yorkshire, Cornwall and the English Midlands; pass through a brief grand tour of Paris, Berlin, Florence, Rome and Naples; travel over the Mediterranean to Morocco; and cross the Atlantic to visit Rhode Island.[4] In so doing, *Rethinking the Interior* re-emphasises the local, European, Circum-Atlantic and imperial contexts of Aestheticism and the Arts and Crafts movement.[5] At the same time, our contributors concern themselves with the imaginative geographies to be found *within* Victorian interiors. Bearing in mind Fiona MacCarthy's persuasive argument that the interest of many late-nineteenth-century British interiors derives not from their conventional layout, but from their 'build-up of extravagant detail', our chapters emphasise the sequence and juxtaposition of objects exhibited in interiors, rather than the exterior elevations or ground plans of buildings.[6]

As well as venturing to a diverse array of locations, and given the significantly Janus-faced character of Aestheticism and Arts and Crafts, the volume's range of historical references is equally broad, stretching from Classical antiquity through Byzantium to the Viking age; from the high medieval through the early modern to the Georgian and Regency; and on to the visionary future of Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1891). In addition, our contributors introduce some new personalities. The familiar trajectory of Victorian cultural history would have us begin with A.W.N. Pugin, John Ruskin and Henry Cole, then move on to Christopher Dresser, the great exhibitions and Morris and Co., while other familiar figures would include Edward Burne-Jones and Morris's extended families; Algernon Charles Swinburne and their peers within Oxford Aestheticism; the Holland Park circle of Leighton, William Burges and G.F. Watts; E.W. Godwin, Wilde, James McNeill Whistler and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Chelsea set; and the Art Workers Walter Crane and C.R. Ashbee. While powerful revisionary readings of many of these figures appear here, the expanded range of characters populating our chapters reflects important recent studies of the so-called Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood, of women in the Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts movements, and of queer Aestheticisms. Consequently, André Gide, Marc-André Raffalovich, Alfreds Taylor and Douglas, and Edmund Gosse find here in their more or less immediate neighbourhoods Vernon Lee, the Misses Pater, Marie Spartali Stillman, Louise Jopling, Emilie Barrington, Mrs Comyns Carr, Mary Jeune, Mrs Pfeiffer (Mathilde Blind's Aesthetic sister) and A. Mary F. Robinson.[7] Other artists brought into the story include John Singer Sargent, Henry Holiday, and Robert Louis and Fanny Stevenson, whilst Coad and MacLaren join the group for the first

time along with George Robinson, Lord Roberts, and the Hasan family in Tangiers.

The disciplinary and theoretical grounding of *Rethinking the Interior* is also appropriately eclectic. Our contributors emerge from and cross a wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds: English Studies, History, Victorian Studies, Art and Design History, Popular and Material Cultural Studies, and the History and Theory of Architecture. Their methodologies, meanwhile, range from the new historicist, through the Marxist, feminist and queer theoretical, to the post-colonial, phenomenological and deconstructive. Taken as a whole, the essays are not intended to present a single, univocal viewpoint. Instead, the book offers a broad, comparative overview of recent developments in the field. It is also worth noting that if, at first glance, the book's case-study format seems to suggest a traditional outlook that contrasts with the more explicitly theoretical and social-historical rationales of much recent scholarship, our decision stems from a conviction that closely read, precisely contextualised investigations of particular spaces stand the best chance of attaining historical precision and avoiding generalisation and vagueness.

The chronological organisation of the essays, and the 'Timeline' that we include to enable our readers to locate important events within the period, should also not obscure the frequent points of overlap between practitioners, interiors and movements. Nor should it be imagined to endorse a standard linear history of the period. Rather, our contributors repeatedly problematise the question of periodisation and the extent to which any moment in an interior's history is representative. They also demonstrate the potential intertextual, iconological and aesthetic complexity of Arts and Crafts and Aesthetic interiors, challenging continuously the disciplinary belief that such sophisticated hermeneutics can only be expected from 'fine art'.[8]

We intend *Rethinking the Interior*, then, to be performative: in the way in which its methodological, theoretical and historiographic variety resonates with and validates the eclecticism of many of the interiors discussed; in its collaborative endeavour; and in its simultaneous commitment to considerations of synchronic and diachronic narratives, to temporal unfolding and spatial co-existence.

Timeliness

Rethinking the Interior responds to a range of developments in the academy and museum world since the 1990s. For example, the history and theory of the domestic interior has been enjoying a significant scholarly renaissance from a number of disciplinary perspectives. This is perhaps best emblematised by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) of Great Britain's

decision to fund, between 2001 and 2006, an interdisciplinary Centre for the Study of the Domestic Interior. With the specific aim of developing new histories of the western interior from 1400 to the present, this Centre combined the expertise of scholars at three institutions, the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), the Royal College of Art and Bedford Centre for the History of Women at Royal Holloway College within the University of London.[9]

The AHRC's renewed interest in the interior was not unique. Nineteenth-century decorative art has repeatedly attracted the international gallery-going public. A spate of popular Morris retrospectives marked the centenary of his death in 1996. These were followed in 2004 by 'William Morris' Textiles' at the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow, and 'Morris and Company' at the Art Gallery of South Australia, while in 2004–2005, 'The Beauty of Life: William Morris and the Art of Design' travelled from the Huntington Library, California to the Yale Center for British Art. The V&A, meanwhile, debuted 'Art Nouveau' in 2000, 'International Arts and Crafts' in 2005, and is proposing 'Aestheticism: Beauty in Art and Design 1860–1900' for *c.* 2011. In the same period, many of the interiors that feature in our volume have proved consistently popular tourist destinations and scholarly fascinations.

In addition, the last 20 years have witnessed a significant range of titles that set out to illustrate, theorise and differentiate between the various stylistic tendencies found in Victorian interiors. These have included Charlotte Gere's *Nineteenth Century Decoration: The Art of the Interior* (1989); Joanna Banham, Sally Macdonald and Julia Porter's *Victorian Interior Design* (1991); Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd's *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth-Century Interior* (1999); Charles Newton's *Victorian Designs for the Home* (1999); Charlotte Gere and Lesley Hoskins's *The House Beautiful: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetic Interior* (2000); and Thad Logan's *The Victorian Parlour* (2001). Raising the profile of the Victorian interior and making accessible the fruits of invaluable primary research, such books have helped to make this broad and varied field easier to navigate.

However, what such texts have gained in breadth, they have tended to lose significantly in interpretive depth.[10] Thus, whilst *Rethinking the Interior* will repeatedly acknowledge its debt to these various books, the volume breaks new ground by investigating in a more focused, theoretically wide-ranging and interdisciplinary way the relationship between the Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts movements through the close study of specific interiors. This is a particularly crucial intervention because scholars repeatedly treat Aestheticism and the Arts and Crafts as if they were either simply interchangeable or directly opposed, and because whilst academic scholarship on Aestheticism has focused on the movement's literary, painterly and sculptural, rather than decorative arts, practitioners, scholarship on the Arts and Crafts tends to

emphasise the movement's politics over its patterns, to borrow a phrase from Morna O'Neill.[11] With this in mind, *Rethinking the Interior* seeks to re-emphasise Lionel Lambourne's claim that the main achievement of the Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts movements was to 'place new and powerful emphasis upon the importance of the decorative arts'.[12]

Chronology: *c.* 1867 – *c.* 1896

Rethinking the Interior focuses its attention on the last third of the nineteenth century, a particularly significant moment in British cultural and architectural history, and a period of rapid and dramatic social, economic and cultural change. For example, between 1850 and 1900, according to Deborah Cohen, average income per head nearly doubled, while the middle class tripled in size. Bourgeois families, on average, paid only around 10 per cent of their income in rent and, as part of a broader shift from evangelical asceticism to lifestyle Aestheticism, were inclined to redecorate their homes every seven years, adding to their extant possessions even more frequently.[13]

As well as being the age of the great exhibitions, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the founding, in 1852, of the Museum of Ornamental Art (ancestor of the Victoria and Albert Museum, the world's largest museum of design and decorative arts), and the 1877 opening of the Grosvenor Gallery. With its ceramics, moveable chairs, Whistlerian friezes and interspersed pot-plants, the latter is now credited with being one of the first and most influential galleries to have employed an elaborate domestic interior to make the case that the post-Renaissance distinction between fine and applied art should not be taken for granted.[14]

In addition, the period considered in this book saw the emergence of the artist's house as a distinct architectural category.[15] Although Mark Girouard cautions us that 'too much can be made of artists' houses as a separate phenomenon', like the Grosvenor, such novel spaces productively confused the aesthetic and the domestic. They presented professional artistic activity as a form of recreation or unalienated labour; they encouraged the idea of life as art; and they emphasised the original personal and domestic contexts of artistic production as valuable sites for scholarly and popular concern.[16] These interiors also became increasingly accessible and influential because of the periodical press's growing penchant for illustrated 'celebrity' interviews and 'through-the-keyhole' journalism.

During this period there was a rapidly expanding market for journals concerned with the fine and applied arts and affordable, copiously illustrated books on home decoration which dealt with the interior for the first time 'as a stylistic whole rather than as an assemblage of parts', as was the case with earlier pattern books for furniture.[17] As writers and readers

of this literature, the mid-Victorians developed a range of specialist, but quickly fashionable, new vocabulary concerned with matters Aesthetic. For instance, while the term 'interior decoration' had been coined and popularised earlier in the century by Thomas Hope's *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* (1807),[18] according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the concept 'aestheticism', as another form of the phrase 'art for art's sake', was first employed in 1855. 'Aestheticise' was introduced in 1864; 'aestheticist' and 'aesthetic', as the name for an art movement, in 1868; 'aesthetic' as a characteristic pertaining to persons or animals in 1880; and the noun 'aesthete' in 1881.[19] These lexical and conceptual developments were accompanied by the emergence of the first professional theoreticians concerned with the cultural meanings of applied art. A.W.N. Pugin's *Contrasts* (1836) and *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (1841), and John Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* (1851–53) preceded Charles Darwin's and T.H. Huxley's mid-century theories of natural selection and Emile Zola's novelistic Naturalism, which shared an emphasis on the determining effects of natural and artificial environments. Karl Marx's famous writings on commodity fetishism appeared in 1867, to be followed three decades later by Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Classes* (1899), with its influential account of conspicuous consumption.

While our volume explores a rich spectrum ranging from the objectification of people to the anthropomorphisation of objects, and is informed throughout by Marx's analysis of commodification and Veblen's account of conspicuous consumption, it seeks to challenge the still-dominant sociological account of the interior, which emphasises issues of generalised class distinction. It prefers a more iconographical and queer theoretical account of the specific meaning of interiors to their irreducibly particular patrons, producers and visitors, taking as paradigmatic Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's deceptively simple belief that 'people are different from each other'.[20]

In addition, with the specific relationship between Aestheticism and the Arts and Crafts movement as its focus, the volume concentrates its attention on the period between *c.* 1867 and *c.* 1896.[21] Although the histories of both movements commence well before 1867, as our Timeline attests, that year is particularly suitable as a starting point in several ways.[22] It was the year in which the first public 'Aesthetic' or 'Arts and Crafts' interior – Morris and Co.'s Green Dining Room – opened at the V&A; when the Burne-Jones family first moved to the Grange; and when Godwin first decorated his own chambers at 197 Albany Street in Regent's Park, applied Japanese motifs to the interior of Dromore Castle in County Limerick, and published his first articles on his own design schemes.[23] In addition, Bruce Talbert published *Gothic Forms Applied to Furniture, Metalwork and Domestic Purposes*, while a *Fortnightly Review* article by Sidney Colvin introduced notions of Aesthetic autonomy into English art rather than literary criticism.[24]

Whilst the 30 or so years after 1867 are a particularly rich period for the Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts movements, the book concludes, in many ways in *media res*, in 1896. This was the year of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society's fifth exhibition in London, in which the Central School of Arts and Crafts opened, in which Charles Rennie Mackintosh won the competition to design the Glasgow School of Art, and in which Sigfried Bing's Maison de l'Art Nouveau premiered in Paris. We conclude in 1896 because this was the year in which two of the most influential artistic figures of the period – Morris and Leighton – died; and because of the disastrous effects of the Wilde trials of 1895 on Aestheticism's fortunes.[25]

By ending in 1896 rather than 1895, however, *Rethinking the Interior* seeks to articulate an alternative point of view to that offered by W.B. Yeats's apparently paradigmatic 'tragic generation' of male aesthetes, emblematised by Simeon Solomon's homelessness and Wilde's imprisonment and nomadic exile.[26] Indeed, many accounts see the Arts and Crafts movement continuing well into the twentieth century, while a number of Aestheticism's male as well as female practitioners continued to practice business as usual for years.[27] However, rather than seeking to provide an exhaustive narrative of the two movements, our volume is interested in investigating the period of their closest interrelation and in exploring how a detailed examination of Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts interiors might help us arrive at a more nuanced understanding of 'Victorian' architectural space. In the rest of the Introduction, we will outline our reasons for taking on these particular challenges.

Rethinking Aestheticism and Arts and Crafts

This volume examines for the first time the extent to which we can usefully differentiate Aestheticism and Arts and Crafts. With this in mind, our contributors challenge both caricatures of Aestheticism that fail to notice its practitioners' political activism, and accounts of Arts and Crafts that fail to notice its adherents' eroticism and treat as interchangeable the aesthetic qualities of the radically different objects its major theorists produced and endorsed. The essays collected here also leave as a deliberately open question whether the 'and' connecting 'Aestheticism' and 'Arts and Crafts' in our subtitle is best understood as dialectic, associative, contrastive or temporally consecutive, since the evidence suggests that the two movements are potentially 'very different yet closely related', in Lambourne's helpful phrase.[28]

For example, we might be tempted, from the evidence of the Whistler–Ruskin trial of 1878 or Morris's 'The Art of the People' (1879), to suggest that Aestheticism and the Arts and Crafts movement were polar opposites.[29] Yet it is worth pointing out that Wilde published both the Aestheticist manifesto, *Intentions*, and *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* in 1891 and that Godwin's

supposedly 'Aesthetic' interiors express a conventionally 'Arts and Crafts' ideal, in which the arts are unified within an architectural framework.[30] Morris papers and Crane friezes were also found in both 'Aesthetic' and 'Arts and Crafts' interiors;[31] and, as Sally-Anne Huxtable's essay reveals, the decoration of the supposedly Arts and Crafts Green Dining Room had a potentially poisonous undercurrent that we would more usually associate with Decadent Aestheticism.[32]

Rather than employing the terms 'Aesthetic' and 'Arts and Crafts' as if they were either interchangeable or completely opposed, *Rethinking the Interior* argues that Aestheticism and Arts and Crafts were interrelated in some complex and specific ways. The volume seeks to emphasise the frequent overlaps between, and the almost endless differentiations within, the two movements, suggesting that any attempt at generalisation cannot do justice to the specific examples considered.[33] Indeed, as our contributors repeatedly demonstrate, Aestheticism and the Arts and Crafts movement cannot be divided or unified in any simple way historically, geographically, spatially, stylistically or ideologically, or by the cultural and political contexts and modes of attention that the objects and interiors associated with them have been understood to endorse.

However, while we believe that it is neither possible nor desirable to sum up the relationship between Aestheticism and the Arts and Crafts movement concisely, we are keen to highlight one particular point of exchange between the two movements: our volume proposes that Aestheticism is more political and Arts and Crafts more aesthetic than standard accounts have tended to allow.[34] By politicising Aestheticism and aestheticising Arts and Crafts, we do not intend to undermine the aesthetics of the former or the politics of the latter. We rather seek to correct the imbalances in the scholarship of both movements. In addition, in the light of a range of recent writings on beauty that have made a variety of persuasive political claims for the aesthetic, we hope that the volume leaves open the possibility that politics and aesthetics may not always be easily distinguishable, and that the political possibilities of both Aestheticism and Arts and Crafts may be perceived to exist not alongside, but within, those movements' aesthetic activities.[35]

In seeking to bring aesthetics and politics together in our analysis of Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts interiors, and exploring what happens when we take seriously the aesthetic character of interiors and their contents, we participate in what Ivan Gaskell has characterised as a new theoretical turn in which 'aesthetic evaluation is returning to art-historical practice'.[36] This provides an important corrective to those scholars of the Arts and Crafts movement in particular who have tended to privilege its theories over the formal particularities of its products.[37] But though it perhaps manifests itself particularly strongly in the field of Arts and Crafts, the undermining of the aesthetic is a broader issue that cuts across many historical disciplines. In

the words of John Styles and Amanda Vickery, the materiality of objects is 'bypassed and with it our ability to grasp how objects impinged physically on those who handled them, altered them, put them to work, positioned them alongside other objects, cleaned them or simply gazed longingly at them'. Many self-declared social historians of art have taken this approach, prioritising an interest in contexts of class conflict over and above 'the connoisseur's focus on the art object, because of its association with an older, conservative art history'.[38]

Because both Aestheticism and the Arts and Crafts movement valued beauty, however, we have sought to embrace the aesthetic turn within contemporary art historiography.[39] We also draw inspiration from Fiona MacCarthy's 1994 biography of Morris because of the unusual way in which objects and interiors come alive in her hands, enabling her to steep us deeply in Morris's sense of the visual and tactile appeal of his objects, visually scrutinising and stroking the things Morris made so as to understand better the significant meanings of his objects' appearances and textures.[40] We claim MacCarthy's methodology as exemplary because where Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts interiors are concerned, we need to be fully alert to what Pater described as the 'visible, tangible, audible loveliness of things'.[41]

Along with investigating the aesthetic power of Arts and Crafts, our volume highlights Aestheticism's political and pragmatic credentials, providing a corrective to accounts of Aestheticism that take at face value its practitioners' employment of the phrase 'art for art's sake'. Satires of Aestheticism have dogged the movement ever since its inception. They were a staple of literary modernism and subsequent critical theories sympathetic to the early twentieth-century avant-gardes. For example, and as we have already seen, Yeats's *The Tragic Generation* (1922) exemplified a masculinist Modernist disdain for an Aestheticism that centred on the poignantly brief lives of a range of male artists and poets, a paradigm anticipated and echoed in numerous publications during the first half of the twentieth century.[42] Indeed, Lambourne has noted that one of the most remarkable things about the satirical comments on the movement is that they are 'remembered more vividly than the subject satirised'.[43] In the face of such satire, Aestheticism has seemed to retreat further and further back from the site of activism.

In reframing both Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts interiors as potentially avant-garde interventions, however, we have drawn on Regenia Gagnier's strategically helpful distinction between 'practical aesthetes and decadents'. *Rethinking the Interior* thus prefers not to characterise as paradigmatic the decadent retreat of J.K. Huysmans's narrators, in *A Rebours* (1884), from the social and the political into an increasingly self-enclosed and escapist, private gallery space; or, in *La Bas* (1891), into a satanic enclave. Rather, we foreground Huysmans's later narrator's practical aesthetic investment in the interior of *La Cathedrale* (1908), a Gothic space with the potential for Ruskinian and Puginian

historical, social, political, ethical and cultural critique. Our contributors have been inspired and enabled to do so by Gagnier's strategically helpful unification of Ruskin, Morris and Wilde as 'three of the greatest aesthetes' and 'social critics' of Victorian industrial capitalism and mass society, and by her emphasis on their powerful political legacies.[44] *Rethinking the Interior* prefers Gagnier's earlier version of the complex interrelation of Aestheticism and Arts and Crafts to her later argument that although Aestheticism and Arts and Crafts were both involved in an 'aesthetics of evaluation', Arts and Crafts *practitioners* tended towards a 'moral consumption', based on whether artisanal labour was 'creative or alienated', while Aesthetic *consumers* were primarily concerned with their own tastes, identities and 'pleasured bodies', irrespective of ethical and religious questions and consequences.[45]

Gagnier's earlier formulation seemed to us preferable for many reasons, one of which we will elaborate here. In 2006, Diana Maltz argued that in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, aesthetes and social reformers formed a tightly knit social circle of 'Missionary Aesthetes' who imagined that 'manifestations of aesthetic style' in the fine as well as the applied arts were 'remedies for urban degradation'. Toynbee Hall was just one 'Aesthetic' institution concerned with ameliorating the misery of the urban poor. Built in fashionable Queen Anne style, it featured works by Burne-Jones, Watts, and the de Morgans, as well as Morris and Crane. Speakers and visitors to Toynbee included Wilde, Pater, Morris (who lectured on Gothic architecture) and William Blake Richmond (who lectured on handicrafts). Regular visits were organised for the poor to the studios of artists including Hamo Thornycroft and Lawrence Alma-Tadema, carefully curated spaces that Maltz sees as offering a 'fitting merger' of 'artistic interests' with service in the public sphere.[46]

Maltz's examples pose a rhetorical question: do we consider the 'missionary' in 'missionary aestheticism' a kind of qualifier? *Rethinking the Interior* keeps the question open. It asks in specific cases to what extent, at what moments, and in what ways, Aestheticism was missionary or akin to an Arts and Crafts political agenda. The volume also keeps in dialectic tension for both movements questions of beauty and utility, pleasure and politics. In addition, where Maltz provides the social and cultural history of 'fin-de-siècle Ritualism as a species of missionary aestheticism', Jane Hawkes's essay significantly develops our understandings of this discourse of 'churchly aestheticism' by reconstructing the precise iconological significance of one particular ritualised interior.[47]

Eclecticism and Modernism

Just as *Rethinking the Interior* emphasises a dialectic relationship between Aestheticism and Arts and Crafts, it replaces a further supposed binary

25 MAR 16

with a complex interrelation when it comes to the relationship of both movements to Modernism. At first glance, commentators have often been tempted to imagine as polar opposites, on visual and conceptual grounds, supposedly 'cluttered', populist, bourgeois, feminine, historicist, and Orientalist Victorian interiors and the bourgeois-bating, primitivist and abstract interiors of international Modernism. There are good reasons for asserting this apparent dichotomy. Whereas the Modernist avant-garde characterised itself as alienated, uncanny and militaristic, Aestheticism and the Arts and Crafts movement embraced the homely and domestic. Whereas Charles Baudelaire's paradigmatic 1859 account of 'The Painter of Modern Life' focused on the urban flaneur's encounter with the modern metropolis, in the same year Morris and Philip Webb were building the suburban, neo-Gothic Red House to escape it. Whereas at least the title of Adolf Loos's widely cited 1908 essay suggested that ornament was a crime, few Aesthetes or Arts and Crafts practitioners would have been without Owen Jones's *Grammar of Ornament* (1856). Whereas the Vorticists 'blasted' decorative art in 1914, aesthetes famously sought to 'live up to' their blue china. Whereas Le Corbusier sought to remove from his International Style interiors 'absurd bric-a-brac' and a 'conglomeration of useless and disparate objects', Victorian interiors are famous for those items; and whereas Clement Greenberg's Abstract Expressionists positioned themselves in opposition to the 'decoration', 'wallpaper patterns' and 'knick-knacks of the middle-class home', Morris and Co. thrived by offering precisely such goods.[48]

However, we wonder whether some of the chief witnesses for the critical prosecution of Aestheticism over the last hundred years might have been protesting too much. After all, while there was a Royal Command Performance of Frank Burnand's Aesthetic satire, *The Colonel*, at Abergeldie Castle in Scotland, key 'art furniture' props were borrowed for the performance from the Prince and Princess of Wales's own collections. Similarly, while Queen Victoria herself referred to 'those foolish aesthetic people' who carried 'peacock's feathers, sunflowers and lilies', Morris and Co. carried out royal commissions to redecorate St James's Palace between 1866 and 1881.[49] George du Maurier was able to satirise Whistler's extended circle so effectively because he and the Butterfly had shared a Bohemian apprenticeship in Paris, while Edward Linley Sambourne, again famous for his satiric cartoons of Aestheticism in *Punch*, lived in a paradigmatic South Kensington aesthetic interior.[50]

Yet, if a white cube minimalism is widely recognised to be a Modernist achievement par excellence, and if *Rethinking the Interior*'s primary concern had been to argue for the proto-Modernist credentials of Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts interiors, or for Modernism as a kind of late-Victorianism or long-nineteenth-century phenomenon, we could easily have featured chapters on Whistler, Wilde and Godwin's white rooms in Chelsea and M.H. Baillie Scott or Ernest Gimson's whitewashed cottage interiors.[51] We could also

have foregrounded Pater's 'The Child in the House' (1894) which features an evocative description of the 'noticeable trimness and comely whiteness about everything' within the space of his childhood home.[52]

Indeed, as our contributors demonstrate, ours is already a period in which a specifically anti-Aesthetic Modernist rhetoric of whiteness had begun to emerge. This can be seen in Diana Maltz's account of Vernon Lee's involuntary shudder as she sat down in her clean white dress in the Rossettis' 'grimy, dingy, filthy aesthetic house'; in John Potvin's account of Will Rothenstein's sense of a 'gross' and 'soiled' Wilde similarly seating himself on the 'white scrubbed kitchen chairs' chez Ricketts and Shannon; and in Imogen Hart's account of the desire of Morris's immediate successors to emphasise his purported preference for whitewashed walls over his own wallpapers.[53]

This seductive account of Aestheticism and Arts and Crafts, as proto-Modernist, has been the agenda of many scholars, from Nikolaus Pevsner's groundbreaking *Pioneers of Modern Design From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (1936), through Elizabeth Aslin's *The Aesthetic Movement: Prelude to Art Nouveau* (1969), to Deborah Cohen's recent *Household Gods: The British and their Possessions* (2006).[54] However, useful as the strategy once was in undermining the Modernist myth of self-origination within a discipline still constellated around international abstract modernisms, we believe that such rhetorical moves come at a considerable conceptual cost. The historiographic centre of Victorian and Modernist art history holds; Arts and Crafts and Aesthetic interiors risk becoming just more of the same; and we are in danger of losing an eclectic selection of potentially significant revisionary and/or oppositional examples.[55]

If the history of Victorian interiors has, then, generally been written from the margins – which has understandably inclined its scholars in a centripetal, Modernist direction – *Rethinking the Interior* adopts an alternative, centrifugal orientation. We seek to rewrite Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts interiors from the presumption of their disciplinary centrality, historiographic importance, and assured interest for scholars in other fields and parts of our own discipline. With this in mind, we turn our attention away from the relation of the Arts and Crafts and Aesthetic movements to French, German and Scandinavian Modernism, deliberately ending our volume at the moment when Art Nouveau was beginning to take off across Europe.

Similarly, rather than brushing it under the Persian rug, as something that is obviously in embarrassingly bad taste that we are rhetorically baffled and appalled by, *Rethinking the Interior* embraces and focuses its attention on the question of Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts eclecticism.[56] We resist interpreting it, as many of our predecessors have, as exemplary of Victorian over- or under-confidence, either identifying in it an imperial belief that styles from all times and places could be mastered or reasoning that the so-called dilemma of styles signified a complete lack of originality.[57] Indeed, we choose not to cast

the Victorians as unblessed with purist, post-nineteenth-century sensibilities, but ask, rather, how we might be lacking, if we are unable to understand, explain or enjoy eclecticism.[58] And as the essays in this volume demonstrate, plenty of Victorians evidently took great, and sophisticated, aesthetic pleasure in their interiors.

It is worth making this claim explicit because, from a contemporary aesthetic perspective, Victorian eclecticism and so-called clutter are, perhaps, the hardest aspects of Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts interiors to come to terms with. After all, we could not be more used to employing the Victorians as a foil to modernity, and it is harder to imagine anything further from the Modernist 'less is more' creed than many of the interiors analysed in this book. For this reason, we can understand why Cohen was tempted to argue defensively in 2006 that the 'clutter' we associate with Victorian interiors did not emerge before the end of the nineteenth century.[59]

However, given the widespread circulation of what Michel Foucault has called the 'repressive hypothesis' around the Victorians, it has been interesting for us to recognise our contemporaries' responses to nineteenth-century 'clutter' as a way in which we might potentially be repressed. For example, while we might initially be inclined to scoff at many nineteenth-century British domestic interiors; and while many scholars have been unable to resist, in Elizabeth Prettejohn's phrase, the potential 'pleasures of aggression against the Victorians'; we recognise that if we are condescendingly laughing at, rather than along with, our nineteenth-century forebears, the joke may be upon us, since the Victorians surely could not have been entirely immune to the discourse of camp, kitsch and pastiche.[60]

We have, therefore, sought to find some alternative, empathetic frameworks of interpretation through which eclecticism might have been viewed then and could be appreciated now. For example, if we cannot imagine living amongst so much potentially interpretable and evocative detail, and find it tiring to contemplate, it may not be evidence of our superior taste. It may be because everything looks 'cluttered' whilst it is still unfamiliar or because we do not have the leisure time or Victorian polymathic expertise to master such interiors' complex aesthetics. It is also worth remembering that, particularly for spaces in which we are inclined to live, rather than merely visit or glance at, the endlessly complex, eclectic visual field preferred by many Aesthetes and Arts and Crafts practitioners and consumers is perhaps more suited than a white box if we wish our interests to be maintained over a lifetime.[61]

With this in mind, and rather than simply being overwhelmed by – or pointing dismissively to – Victorian 'eclecticism', *Rethinking the Interior* pays detailed attention to the complex relationships between specific spaces, objects and images within given rooms; to the ideas, attitudes, feelings and contexts they may relate to or purport to embody; and to the way in which specific, irreducibly idiosyncratic visitors or spectators responded to them in their own

idiomatic ways. In so doing, we seek to establish whether such apparently 'eclectic' relationships are more or less organic or chaotic, of binary or fractal complexity, more akin to inter-sets or subsets, metonymy or synecdoche. In particular, the repeated appearance of concepts of 'harmony' in the case studies presented suggests a more considered and self-conscious approach to groups of objects than the 'clutter' stereotype might have led us to expect. We also identify in many of our interiors a complex aesthetic articulation of the ever-changing but organic relationship of individuals to collectives within utopian politics in this period, an idea summed up beautifully by Paul Holden's concept of 'humanist eclecticism', that might be difficult but also crucial for us to recover. In addition, we believe that the insights of deconstruction and systems theories might prove particularly useful for understanding interiors better, particularly in relation to degrees of systematicity.[62]

For example, much traditional scholarship on the interior has been structured around sets of binaries, particularly masculine/feminine and public/private. Our various case studies, however, suggest that Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts interiors are not *either* masculine *or* feminine, public *or* private, but rather *both* masculine *and* feminine, public *and* private; *neither* masculine *nor* feminine, public *nor* private; or at some moments/to some extents/from some viewpoints masculine, feminine, public and private.[63]

We take a similar approach to questions of self-conscious intention. For instance, scholars have often been inclined to view the interior as either a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, self-consciously curated to an infinite degree, or almost entirely unselfconscious, being the result of a learned taste and/or slavery to fashion.[64] By contrast, the case studies contained within this book, whilst emphasising the potential art-historical density of meaning to be found in 'decorative' and 'functional' objects and interiors, highlight the middle ranges of agency. For instance, one end of the spectrum might, perhaps, best be exemplified by Jane Hawkes's brilliant reading of the highly self-conscious, integrated and orthodox iconography of Studley Royal church.[65] At the other end of the spectrum might be Sally-Anne Huxtable's reading of the potential pagan resonances of the Green Dining Room. Meanwhile, understandings of objects as themselves queer abound, in the camp connotations of Anne Anderson's Aesthetic teapot; in Vernon Lee's account of Rossetti's 'frowsty' home, in Diana Maltz's essay; in the 'queer old' iconographies William Guest discovers in Morris's *News From Nowhere*; and perhaps possibly even in the case of the 'pervert Marquis' Samuel Robinson's otherwise highly orthodox Studley Royal.

Taken together, these various interventions contribute to the de-simplification of Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts interiors by refusing to dismiss the former as superficial and the latter as morally didactic. It also becomes problematic to separate our examples into movements with distinct systems of meaning when we consider that Burges, the designer of the iconographic scheme at Studley Royal, was an intimate part of the Holland Park circle, a

neighbour of Leighton and a host to Whistler and Wilde, thus raising the possibility that these figures, whom we associate with Aestheticism, might have understood and employed such iconographically complex systems, and dissuading us from purely sensuous readings of 'Aesthetic' interiors.

Bodies of Evidence

At the same time, the essays collected here remind us that taking the 'reading' of texts, photographs, illustrations, ground-plans, elevations and inventories as a methodological paradigm only gets us so far. Many of our contributors are alert to the problematic ways in which previous scholars have treated particularly visual or verbal representations of the interior as if they were immediately apparent, neutral windows onto the Victorian world. This problem, as it relates to interiors more generally, forms the central question around which Barbara Penner and Charles Rice's special issue of *The Journal of Architecture* in 2004 was built.[66] As Rice explains, the 'imagistic sense of the interior is not simply transparent to its spatial sense. This presents problems for conventional ways in which the evidence of the interior is gathered to reconstruct and interpret historical conditions of domesticity.'[67]

In the light of these challenges surrounding the evidence of the interior, our contributors foreground the complex issue of mediation. *Rethinking the Interior* explicitly considers the ways in which Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts interiors are mediated by historic and contemporary subjectivities and through a range of genres including letters, diaries, paintings, photographs, illustrations, ethnography, travel writing, essays for periodicals, more formal art-historical and theoretical scholarship, and home-decoration manuals.

In addition, we rarely see cellars, attics, bedrooms, bathrooms, staircases and servants' quarters in period depictions of interiors; and because we never gain views through their windows, extant photographs of Arts and Crafts interiors frequently emphasise the idea of them as Huysmanian retreats *from*, rather than interventions *in* the world.[68] Photographs, elevations and ground-plans, meanwhile, whilst amenable in some senses to *close* reading, in that they are static, in focus, and framed more or less consciously, simultaneously generate an inevitably *distant* reading or *viewing* experience, creating a two-dimensional screen, scene or image, rather than a spatial experience, ecology, environment or microclimate. These media place the viewer's point of orientation towards particular objects at a perspectival distance outside the frame, thereby foregrounding some objects and disappearing or de-emphasising others. We also rarely see these (generally day-lit) spaces inhabited, let alone by more than one person, and anyone we do see is usually in formal wear or studio clothes.[69] This has the effect of emphasising our own and our sources' Aesthetic solipsism, bourgeois rectitude, and focus upon objects for their own sake,

rather than Arts and Crafts radical cross-class and cross-gender collectives, or evoking what took place after dark. Extant photographs also have the effect of framing us, as viewers, somewhere between voyeuristic intruders into 'private' spaces; visitors to a more public, preserved, museum-like setting; Ruskinian spectators trying to recover producers' subjectivities; readers of 'celebrities at home' features; and, rather more uncannily, audiences of turn-of-the-century ghost stories (particularly since many of the famous images of Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts interiors are posthumous).[70]

Taking up some of the challenges posed by Penner and Rice, the essays collected here take seriously the methodological and historical problems associated with the formal and ideological complexity of Victorian interiors and their temporary, often-changing character. They ask: How do we make a (temporally and geographically) distant material world evocatively sensible and interpretable? How might we best approach the Victorian interior as the subject of embodied formal, abstractly theoretical *and* historical/archival analysis? To what degree does the surviving evidence represent, respond adequately to, and therefore enable us to reconstruct imaginatively the complex aesthetic, temporal, spatial, physical, and ever-evolving environmental, ecological and ideological character of a nineteenth-century interior, rather than simply representing a more superficial, single moment in its history?[71] These questions have broad implications for our own discipline. After all, art historians tend, for understandable reasons, to focus on analyses and contextualisations of single images and objects within their frames and pedestals, their accounts usually accompanied by de-contextualised reproductions with neutral or contrasting backdrops that foreground the object's internal relations, rather than its contextual interrelations.[72]

From one angle, the interior appears to be the opposite of sublime, given the way that it envelops a densely detailed, perhaps picturesque environment, rather than opens out into an indefinite spatial extension. At the same time, the large scale, sheer number and complexity of possible, co-perceived sources of attention and their interrelation and interference make Victorian interiors sublime in another sense, as conceptually ungraspable, or nearly 'baffling arrangements' in Diana Maltz's helpful phrase.[73] Indeed, as Aslin has demonstrated, although '"picturesque" was a favourite term of commendation' and 'necessary attribute of any successful design' in the late 1870s and 1880s, the relationship between the various disparate elements of many Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts interiors was less 'immediately apparent on purely stylistic grounds' than most products of international Art Nouveau with its 'sinuous organic line and sensuous curves'.[74]

We are inclined to the discourse on the sublime here because of the almost impossible number of different surfaces, textures, angles, lines, colours, objects, images, pieces of furniture, and other components that any exhaustive account of an interior would need to encompass, within a never-static set

of determining environmental conditions; and also because of the complex way in which those objects and spaces interact dialectically with any given subjectivity. Thus, according to Pater, within Victorian interiors, 'inward and outward' are 'woven through and through each other into one inextricable texture – half tint and trace and accident of homely colour and form, from the wood and the bricks; half mere soul-stuff, floated hither and thither from who knows where'.

There is, perhaps, also something Proustian as well as Paterian, something of the *memoire involuntaire* of the Madeleine – which is to say, something intensely and idiosyncratically evocative and involved in a dialectic exchange or complex feedback mechanism – about everything and everyone we encounter in Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts interiors. After all, like Proust, Pater acknowledged the way that he owed to the apparently 'insignificant [...] influences of the sensible things' that happened to surround him in his childhood home 'many tones of sentiment afterwards customary with him, certain inward lights under which things most naturally presented themselves to him'; and how 'indelibly' such influences affected him.[75]

One way of dealing with these problems of evidence and mediation is to accept the inevitable subjectivity, embodiedness and time-specificity of our encounters with interiors. In abandoning the assumption that an objective, 'real' interior exists somewhere beyond the frames of our visual, and the pages of our textual evidence, our concern becomes instead the often elusive ways in which interiors can be experienced, valued and interpreted. *Rethinking the Interior* therefore embraces to a perhaps unusual degree the embodied first-person experiences of many of our contributors in the actual interiors they were working on, providing further evidence that, again in Sedgwick's words, '*I* is a heuristic; maybe a powerful one'.[76]

With this in mind, our volume self-consciously challenges Peter Thornton's exclusive preference for period illustrations and his assertion that all modern views are misleading.[77] Instead, following the lead of both MacCarthy and Gere, we encouraged our contributors to experience at first hand (if still extant) their chosen interiors.[78] Certain limitations remained, of course, aside from the obvious problems of any given interior's changing historical character, its fading or darkening hues, the wear and tear of its materials, and the various environmental conditions pertaining at any particular visit. Nevertheless, our contributors made good use of the first-person experience by holding banisters, running their fingertips over tiles, and cupping newel posts in their hands, even if various objects and spaces were inevitably out of reach. As a result, our volume seeks to go a step further than the current 'phenomenological turn' within sculpture studies, in which questions of sight and space have largely predominated over tactile and epidermal experiences, let alone the kinds of olfactory and auditory sensations articulated by Pater and evoked in the ensuing chapters.[79]

It is important to make this clear because some of the language used in this book might otherwise be misleading. For instance, the first chapter explicitly concerns itself with 're-reading' the Green Dining Room, and literary and textual evidence abounds throughout the volume. However, unlike Thad Logan's *The Victorian Parlour* (2001), *Rethinking the Interior* does not take reading as its exclusive methodology, and our contributors' close engagement with evidence of various kinds forms an important corrective to volumes such as Cohen's *Household Gods* (2006), which, in spite of its lavish illustrations, omits to analyse closely a single image.

Logan's book provides a useful precedent for the iconographic readings within this volume by considering objects, within interiors, as part of a 'vast semiotic system' with the goal of achieving 'a more nuanced and interesting reading of the language of domestic interiors'. Our volume, however, seeks to resist Logan's 'logocentricism', according to which interiors are 'read' as if their elements could be broken down into individual letters, words, phrases and speech acts.[80] Here, we are interested in the often indivisible visual, spatial and phenomenological experience of interiors, taking our cue from what Robert Blair St George has described as the 'visceral materiality of quotidian existence'.[81] Our volume therefore takes unusually seriously the historiographic potential of a more nuanced account of the problematic, but powerful, potential relationship between embodied, present-tense, first-person accounts of interiors at particular moments and more obviously historical forms of evidence. Indeed, we hope that our volume might provide a significant corrective to accounts whose conceptualisations of interiors are based solely on distanced 'readings' of photographs, period texts, ground-plans and other architectural drawings, and to Freudian psychoanalytic accounts which prioritise narcissism, fetishisation, objectification, sublimation, desire and the so-called gaze over other kinds of immersive, aesthetic, affective, haptic and somatic experience.[82]

Rethinking the Interior seeks, then, to take seriously both subjectivity and intersubjectivity and to pay attention to what Mark Girouard characterises as the period's 'more or less' aesthetics.[83] If the titles of our various chapters give a slightly misleading sense of the interiors discussed as the work of individual, usually male, high artists or theorists, then we hope that the essays themselves, like this introduction, tell a different, more eclectic and collaborative story.

Notes

1. The standard surveys of the Arts and Crafts movement are Pevsner, 1960; Naylor, 1971; Callen, 1979; Lambourne, 1980; Cumming and Kaplan, 1991; Carruthers and Greensted, 1999; and Livingstone and Parry, 2005. The standard surveys of Aestheticism are Hamilton, 1882; Gaunt, 1942, 1945, 1952; Johnson, 1969; Spencer, 1972; Lambourne, 1996; and Prettejohn, 1999a and 2007.