

Art, Decoration, and the Texture of Modern Experience: The Interior Before 1900

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the critical fascination among artists, architects, and their publics with the interior and its image at the end of the nineteenth century. Focusing primarily on Belgium and France, it argues that the ambition to create work that engaged, confronted, and constructed the shifting texture of the wider world motivated much of this representational engagement with the interior. Whereas it had once constituted a paradigm for bourgeois fantasies of protective retreat, by the 1880s, new challenges of modernity prompted a destabilization and reconfiguration of the interior's representational and cultural resonances. These challenges included sweeping industrialization and urbanization, developments in psychological research, an increasingly fractured political landscape, and the combined juggernaut of exploitation and attempts to resist it. Questioning the widespread assumption that the interior was merely a defensive, nostalgic asylum from a turbulent and spectacular modern world, in my account it is rather recognized as a pervasive paradigm integral to modern life and an index of cultural transition at the turn of the century.

In seeking to create work that critically engaged this revolutionizing modern world, artists and designers were faced with new formal problems. They responded by attempting to evoke experiential realities of such a world through new configurations of the spatial environment. Focusing on case studies that traverse a range of media, national and political boundaries, and critical ambitions, this dissertation assesses how material, psychological, or political components of an older program of the bourgeois interior were individually engaged,

and challenged, through experimental artistic practices. Subjects of analysis include: James Ensor's painted interior scenes and their prompts to visually remodel a relation of the self and the *stuff* of everyday life, the materials and materiality of modern existence; Édouard Vuillard's *intimiste* paintings and "environmental" pictorial practices in relation to changing conceptions of interiority and the modern, psychological self; and Henry van de Velde's socially-inflected experiments in which he conflated notions of the activated, charged surface of contemporaneous painting with enlivened interiors realized in architectural design.

As these case studies attest, the interior provoked no single response; however, by the end of the century and in response to its reimagined resonance in the wider culture, fruitful interplays arose between pictorial concerns and the architectural, lived environment. These experimentations with the interior were activated with the goal of evoking the complexities of experience in the modern world. Such complexity, I demonstrate, was not founded in the progressive dissolution of one form of representation for another, but rather in negotiating the ways in which we might understand the world—and the image—to continually and vibrantly negotiate between private and public, individual and collective, space and picture plane. By reassessing the role of artistic practice across media in this way, the interior offers itself up as a tool, a way in, to dynamically address the relation between the individual, phenomenological encounter with the image and broader conditions of historical change. This "interior effect," I argue, also has powerful consequences for the study of late-nineteenth century art and culture, and for a productive reassessment of the interplay between Art and Architectural History.

CHAPTER ONE
Introduction: The Interior as a Way of Knowing

[T]he interior picture I want to show here, (is) an interior picture that does not become perceptible until I see through the exterior. Perhaps there is nothing striking about the exterior, but when I look through it, only then do I discover the interior picture, which is what I want to show, an interior picture that is too delicate to be externally perceptible, since it is woven from the soul's faintest moods. If I look at a sheet of paper, it perhaps has nothing remarkable about it for immediate inspection, but as soon as I hold it up to the light of day and look through it, I discover the subtle interior picture, too psychical, as it were, to be seen immediately.¹
— Søren Kierkegaard (1843)

...and in the apartment eternity and history merge.²
— Theodor Adorno (1962)

Most people see with their intellects more often than with their eyes. Instead of colored spaces, they become aware of concepts. Something whitish, cubical, erect, its planes broken by the sparkle of glass, is immediately a house for them—a House! If they change position, the movement of the rows of windows, the translation of surfaces which continuously alters their sensuous perceptions, all this escapes them...
[T]hey have such a vague notion of the difficulties and pleasures of vision, that they have invented beautiful views. Of the rest they are unaware.³
— Paul Valéry (1894)

This dissertation explores the complex connotations and critical possibilities of the interior and its image in the later-nineteenth century. This period was distinct for the ways in which

¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* (1843), trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 173.

² Theodor Adorno, "Constitution of Inwardness," in *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 44.

³ Paul Valéry, "Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci," quoted in Robert McCarter, *The Space Within: Interior Experience as the Origin of Architecture* (1894; New York: Reaktion, 2016), 63-4.

artists, architects, and their publics sought to critically engage, challenge, and construct the shifting texture of the wider social world by evoking the environment of a small room and the contents therein. It has been a common theme in studies of late-nineteenth century art and culture to contend that with the advent of an industrialized, spectacular, and turbulent public culture, artists disengaged from the world beyond the walls of the home and rather took up ephemeral arenas of organicism, decadence, fantasy, and bourgeois isolation. I offer another account of the fin-de-siècle interior. This overlooked history is demonstrated here by three case studies that traverse a range of media, national and political boundaries, and critical ambitions. In each of these instances, I show how material, psychological, or political components of an older program of the bourgeois interior were individually manipulated in response to an array of upheavals that insisted upon their redefinition. As the period unfolded, new representational, cultural, and ideological paradigms began to outstrip the interior's previous purchase on the world, and reformulation became increasingly necessary. The highly-charged paintings of James Ensor, display practices and decorative programs of Édouard Vuillard, and interior architecture by Henry van de Velde examined here open up discussion as to how intense experimentation with the aesthetic paradigm of the ostensibly private interior was inseparable from (and vitally dependent upon) cultural and ideological transformations in the broader collective of European society.

The impetus for this study emerged from the rather straightforward, if somewhat striking, observation of two synchronic phenomena endemic to the cultural production of the 1880s and 1890s. First is the profound, pan-European fascination amongst artists, architects, writers, and their publics with the domestic interior and its image. Painters from Gauguin and Whistler to Liebermann, Hammershøi and Munch; architects and decorators such as Loos, Serrurier-Bovy,

Vuillard, and van de Velde, as well as critics and writers from Baudelaire to Huysmans and Mallarmé, Chekhov and Proust, took up the interior with unbridled fascination.⁴ Images of the home flooded architectural journals, photographic albums, and new decorating manuals.⁵ Sheer numbers alone might have provided the basis for another kind of project. Significantly, perhaps the most concentrated series of mass upheavals to the public world heretofore encountered occurred simultaneously. These included rapid urbanization and industrialization in metropolitan centers such as Brussels, Paris, and Lyon; the popularization and maturation of a body of medical research that served as the roots of modern perceptual psychology and a *culte de moi*; unprecedented imperial expansion among European nations punctuated by the Berlin Conference in 1884-5 that led to the “scramble for Africa” in the 1890s, as well as similar exploitation in parts of Asia and the Middle East; advancements in transportation and communications technology that dramatically compressed time and space while also standardizing it; and an increasingly fractured European political landscape.⁶

⁴ Michael Fried has indicated that interiority and its expression in “absorptive worlds or cloisters” defined much of nineteenth-century French painting. See Michael Fried, *Manet’s Modernism: Or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 218.

Literary manifestations of this theme include, but are certainly not limited to, Charles Baudelaire, “La Chambre double” (1862); Joris-Karl Huysmans, *À Rebours* (1884); Marcel Proust, “Chardin: The Essence of Things” (1895) and later *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1906-1922); Antonin Chekhov “The Man in the Case” (1898); Henry James, “Picture and Text” (1893).

⁵ The late-nineteenth century boom in popular journals dedicated to home decorating was a phenomenon that swept through Europe and America, and was partially precipitated by technological developments such as halftone printing as well as a burgeoning cult of domesticity and taste. Aside from periodicals, several publications made decorating instructions and home fashion trends abundantly available. These included Henry Havard, *L’Art dans la maison: Grammaire de l’ameublement* (1884); Jules Hoche, *Les Parisiens chez eux* (1883). For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Lisa Tiersten, “The Chic Interior and the Feminine Modern: Home Decorating as High Art in Turn-of-the-Century Paris,” in *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*, ed. Christopher Reed (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 21.

⁶ The most comprehensive comparative account of the fin-de-siècle social landscape in France and Belgium, and particularly its relation to art and artists, remains Eugenia W. Herbert, *The Artist and Social Reform: France and Belgium, 1885-1898* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).

While one understanding of this convergence dictates that these mass, public changes effected a retreat or sacrificial “turn inward” to the interior, I maintain that there is a more complicated explanation for this confluence. Refuge from the chaos of public life in modernity is certainly one paradigm for the interior, though it is not the only one. Writing in the 1960s, Theodor Adorno perceptively described this sentiment when he recounted that “[I]nwardness became a blatant ideology, a mock image of an inner realm in which the silent majority tries to get compensation for what it misses out on in society. All this tends to make interiority increasingly shadowlike and insubstantial.”⁷ Rather than rendering its significance passively or interpreting it as “insubstantial,” the present study unravels the various ways in which ardent experimentation with the interior and its image in these years might be understood to have actively mediated the experiences of modernity with particular vividness and efficacy. In so doing, I also offer an alternative to recent scholarly interpretations of artistic modernism as a necessarily singular, heroic, and public phenomenon which was antagonistic to the domestic, private realm.⁸ My reassessment therefore casts the interior as a particularly fruitful site, and useful category, for understanding key developments in late-nineteenth century art, as well as in the nature of modern experience at this juncture.⁹

By recasting the interior in this way, this study fundamentally reinterprets the relation between interior and exterior, private and public. In essence, “interior” is a relational term,

⁷ T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 169-170.

⁸ See, for instance, Reed, *Not at Home* (1996). Jenny Anger has addressed some of these issues internal to conceptions of modernism in her article, “Modernism at Home: The Private Gesamtkunstwerk,” in *The Feeling of Seeing: Modernism, Postmodernism, and Beyond, A Festschrift for Kermit Swiler Champa*, ed. Deborah Johnson and David Ogawa (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 211-43.

⁹ This an understanding of the interior as a “category” shares some similarities with Julia Prewitt-Brown’s conceptualization of the bourgeois interior as a “medium” through which to parse bourgeois values in nineteenth-century fiction. See Julia Prewitt-Brown, *The Bourgeois Interior: How the Middle Class Imagines Itself in Literature and Film* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 7.

denoting that which is enclosed by the other and delimited by an outside. It is commonly defined as “that which is opposed in all senses and in all uses to *exterior*.”¹⁰ Any definition of an inside, however, is necessarily bound to what lies outside of it—to the structural, sometimes insidious and often conflicting, material and ideological forces that assemble those internal realities. This describes what Adorno called the most basic, though only apparent, paradox of the interior. He professed:

In order to explain the image of the interior historically, a sociology of inwardness would be necessary. The notion of the *intérieur* is only apparently paradoxical. Inwardness exists as the confinement of human existence in a private sphere, which should be able to broadly transcend the power of reification. However, as a private sphere it does itself belong, even though polemically, to the social structure.¹¹

While the term denotes a turning away from society through mechanisms of confinement, either physical or psychological, it also relies dialectically on external, societal power from which to construct its terms. Heeding Adorno’s call for such a “sociology,” this dissertation unveils a key moment when the interior was given real aesthetic, cultural, and political urgency across Western Europe, and especially in Belgium and France. The late-nineteenth century French and Belgian contexts were notable for their sharing of a common language and certain set of cultural practices; however, their social and political climates, as well as their individual relationships to design reform and industrialization, were in conspicuous contrast to one another.¹² In breaking beyond the confines of a single national artistic tradition, and fluidly moving between the two

¹⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

¹¹ Adorno, *Kierkegaard*, 87. This dialectic between the interior and the exterior formations is also discussed by Georg Simmel, though in less explicit terms. See Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* (1907), ed. and trans. David Frisby (London: Routledge, 1978).

¹² The most comprehensive comparative account of the fin-de-siècle social landscape in France and Belgium, and particularly its relation to art and artists, remains Eugenia W. Herbert, *The Artist and Social Reform: France and Belgium, 1885-1898* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).

contexts, I allow the interior to function as a tool with which to account for ideological difference and contingency, and point to the ways in which this model might extend meaningfully further afield— to Vienna, Germany, and Britain. Individual challenges to artistic paradigms of the interior are here read as a set of complex mediations of cultural and ideological transformations in terrains of the collective, social world. Rather than simply reading these images as illustrative icons of modernity, this study addresses the procedures that such mediation took through the visual vocabulary of the interior as they were played out in the later-nineteenth century. Questioning the widespread assumption that it was simply a defensive, nostalgic response to modernity, the interior in my view resists such reification and is rather recognized as a pervasive cultural paradigm integral to modern life and as a complex index of cultural transition at the *fin de siècle*.

The Interior as Space and Image

Despite its ubiquity in contemporary parlance, “interior” is a rather diffuse term that has a variety of meanings in discussions of art and culture, several of which are in tension with one another. In the realm of Western pictorial art, it may recall seventeenth-century Dutch genre scenes by painters such as Johannes Vermeer or Pieter de Hooch [Figure 1], a reference that certainly came to mind for late-nineteenth century viewers, as we will see. It likewise evokes interior designs for built environments—the dripping chandeliers, ensconcing curvatures, and stained glass of the *Jugendstil*; or organic materials, spatial plans, and tactile surfaces of twentieth-century modernist design. The term might call up more polemically self-aware and contemporary artistic representations such as installations by Louise Nevelson, Louise

Bourgeois, or the films of Chantal Akerman [Figures 2, 3].¹³ Given our cultural realities at present, the interior might best be understood in an abstracted sense, as the digital platforms from which our private lives are wholly subsumed into the realm of public and political life (and vice versa). Taking into account these multiplicities, the task of pinpointing a universal definition of the term rapidly begins to make little sense. At the same time, these examples share some resonances and reveal a clear continuity with the paradigmatic interior of the nineteenth century. The interior has at some level retained a set of overarching concerns that include a space of privacy enclosed from the outside world, psychological intimacy and individual experience, and adherence to a logic of bourgeois consumption. The precise definition, however, remains rather slippery. Its exact meaning and the ways in which these concerns are arrayed dramatically changes depending on context. Indeed, the concerns raised by ornamented Biedermeier interiors of the 1830s are very different from those cultivated by Henri Matisse's painted scenes circa 1910 or Maya Deren's interiorized filmic world in 1940s California.¹⁴ Due to the radical contingencies implicit in the meaning of "interior," and its complex relation to the exterior social world, a valid case can be made for pursuing historical specificities of the term.

Part of my interest in the interior as an object of analysis lies in the myriad associations that it evoked, and continues to conjure, and how pursuit of the conditions that fostered those

¹³ These artists have been subjects of comprehensive, trans-historical studies of the interior and interiority, as well as independent considerations of their particular interventions. See Alex Potts, "Louise Bourgeois: Sculptural Confrontations," *Oxford Art Journal* 22, no. 2, (January 1999): 37–53; Harmon Siegel, "The Black Wallpaper: Louise Nevelson's Gothic Modernism," *The Art Bulletin* 99 no.4 (January 2018): 168–190; Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, "Unbelonging Interior: Chantal Akerman's *Là bas*," in *Interiors and Interiority*, ed. Beate Söntgen and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 435–456.

¹⁴ On Matisse, see Temma Balducci, "Matisse and Self, or The Persistent Interior," in *Interior Portraiture and Masculine Identity in France, 1789–1914*, ed. Temma Balducci, Heather Belnap Jensen and Pamela J. Warner (New York: Routledge, 2017). On Deren, see John David Rhodes, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (London: British Film Institute, 2011), and forthcoming work by Andrew Witt. Deren's own writing is also a significant point of interest for this topic. See, for instance, Maya Deren, "poem no. 29, undated 39," quoted in Helen Hanson, *Hollywood Heroines: Women in Film Noir and the Female Gothic Film* (London: Tauris, 2007), 38. She writes: "This room, housing the flesh. An interior of thresholds."

associations results in a vibrantly comparative, interdisciplinary, and trans-historical analysis. Following from the concept-based methodological model proposed by Mieke Bal, I employ the interior as a “travelling concept” that guides my inquiry across a constellatory cultural and representational field.¹⁵ In the late-nineteenth century, “interior” garnered many associations. These definitions differed by geographic region, political allegiances, or representational commitments, and often they were conflated in the very same subject. This study follows the interior across this landscape that is normally divided and in so doing provides an opportunity to learn more about the interior itself as well as the consistencies, shifts, tensions, and contradictions in the broader cultural field. In so doing, I hazard a new historical construct with which to account for the shifting representational and historical topography of the 1880s and 1890s. In this sense, the interior is shown to operate like a language, both stable and contingent, and might, as Adorno once said (certainly invoking Baudelaire), be best understood as the site where eternity and history merge.¹⁶

The present study traces the meaning of the interior across Belgium and France in the 1880s and 1890s, though it also reaches to Britain and to Central Europe, as we will see. It traverses political commitments and artistic media and, crucially, a transition from the emblematic understanding of the bourgeois interior of the mid-nineteenth century to that of the *fin de siècle*. Received conceptions of the interior functioned as a crucial nexus of concerns related to bourgeois subjectivity and ways of knowing the modern world. As such, the interior also provided a critical platform which artists and architects of the *fin de siècle* both reacted against and tenuously, but persistently, held. As I demonstrate, an older archetype of the interior

¹⁵ Mieke Bal and Sherry Marx-MacDonald, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

¹⁶ Adorno, “Constitution of Inwardness,” 44.

typified by the cozy comforts of the Biedermeier style or the comforting home in the Romantic novel was eroded, manipulated, and made strange along three principle lines in concert with wider shifts in the ideological landscape. My chapters deal with them in succession. First, there emerged a visual remodeling of a new relation between the self and the *stuff* of everyday life, the materials and materiality of modern existence. Second, imaging of the interior increasingly sought to reconcile changing conceptions of interiority and the modern, psychological self. Finally, architects and social theorists of the 1890s attempted to give form to a politically charged interior liberated from the bounds of the bourgeois home.

Such an understanding of the interior as a nexus of these concerns emerged with modern life itself. Its significance was deeply entangled with other developments of the early-nineteenth century such as modern capitalism as well as corresponding systems of organized labor and urban living. The interior was variously described as retreat, impression, and image of a new middle class whose place of leisure was newly distinct from their place of work. The advent of industrialization that effected this division between the private sphere of the home and the political sphere of public life has been the subject of several Marxist cultural analyses.¹⁷ For example, Jürgen Habermas notably described how in his view the public sphere arose as a

¹⁷ Richard Sennett highlighted the ways in which the public sphere of capital, industrialization, and politics should be understood in contradistinction from the Romantic idealism and passivity of the private interior. See Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Norton, 1974). Also Geoff Eley, "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992); Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

This division of public and private spheres has also been taken up by feminist cultural historians who have pointed to the ways in which gender relations intersected with the effects of capitalism. See Hannah Arendt, "Chapter II: The Public and the Private Realm" (1958), in *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 24-72; Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 75 (University of North Carolina Press, 1988): 9-39; Janet Wolff, "The Culture of Separate Spheres: The Role of Culture in Nineteenth-Century Public and Private Life," in *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power, and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class*, ed. Janet Wolff and J. Seed (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 117-134.

historically distinct entity in the nineteenth century; and, as its antithesis, the private sphere acquired public significance.¹⁸ Thus, the interior “emerged” as a significant, modern site for the new bourgeois class. The implications of this new space of the home as retreat are perhaps best (and most frequently) articulated by Walter Benjamin. He states,

For the private individual, the place of dwelling is for the first time opposed to the place of work. The former constitutes itself in the interior. Its complement is the office. The private individual, who in the office has to deal with reality, needs the interior to sustain him in his illusions...From this arise the phantasmagorias of the interior—which for the private man, represents the universe. In the interior, he brings together the far away and long ago. His living room is a box in the theater of the world.¹⁹

For Benjamin, and for many contemporary thinkers before him, it was the retreat from the business of everyday life which provided a counterpart to the neurotic stimulus of metropolitan, public existence. Thus, the interior became the literal space of middle-class living, but also acquired a symbolic function as the “home,” understood as the very image of a particular, modern, bourgeois class.²⁰

By the 1830s, the term “*intérieur*,” which had since the sixteenth century referred to spiritual or reflective inwardness, now also connoted the space of the inside of a building or room and especially the artistic *image* of such a space.²¹ “Interiority”—a sense of self newly conceived to be held *inside*—became inextricably bound in the popular imagination to a

¹⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962).

¹⁹ Walter Benjamin, “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” in *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, trans. Howard Eiland, Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingston, and Harry Zohn (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 38.

²⁰ This English term “home” was adopted by the French and Belgians (and others) to evoke a sense of familiarity and material comfort. This ideal was associated with a British sensibility of “coziness” that became an ideal to be emulated abroad. See Hermann Muthesius, *Das englische Haus: Entwicklung, Bedingungen, Anlage, Aufbau, Einrichtung und Innenraum* (Wasmuth, 1904).

²¹ “Interior,” in *Oxford English Dictionary* (1971).

physical, domestic environment.²² “The *intérieur* is a mental space as well as a physical one,” became a sentiment that pervaded artistic circles.²³ Charles Baudelaire translated Edgar Allan Poe’s essay on home decoration (1840) into French in 1857, and in Baudelaire’s own poem from 1862 entitled “The Two-Fold Room” (*La Chambre double*) he describes an isolated interior space that functions as a vivid metaphor for the imaginative mind. Stéphane Mallarmé in the mid-1860s echoed Baudelaire’s insistence that physical seclusion was necessary for artistic innovation where imaginative and real could be conflated in a productive dream state.²⁴ Consequently, the interior by mid-century acquired a two-fold definition as both an architectonic structure and a psychological space of subjectivity and inner self. It came to define the physical *and* psychological space of a new class which was caught in the throes of self-definition.

This insistence on inwardness as a physical as well as a psychological state, and on the binding of these two spatial registers, persisted into the following decades. The interior became the privileged site of self-definition, operating as both space and image of a new subject formation. For example, we might think of Jean des Esseintes, the protagonist of Joris-Karl Huysmans’ iconic 1884 novel, *À Rebours*, who retreats to his opulently decorated and all-embracing aesthetic interior to live a life of fantastical and supremely decadent existence. Echoing these critics in his reflections decades later, Benjamin likened the relation between the

²² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1988). This issue of the limits of the self held inside the physical body, and its intersection with the body held inside the physical space of the domestic interior, is thoughtfully addressed by Susan Sidlauskas in her book, *Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth Century Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). The most comprehensive account of historically-contingent, discursive, scientific, and artistic relationships obtained between the physical interior and subjective interiority is Beate Söntgen and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth eds., *Interiors and Interiority* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), see the introduction in particular.

²³ Jean-Michel Rabaté, *Given: I° Art 2° Crime: Modernity, Murder and Mass Culture* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2006), 85.

²⁴ Stéphane Mallarmé, *Correspondances*, II vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), I: 223.

bourgeois interior and its occupant to the criminals in the first detective novels wherein the task was to interpret the traces left by the occupants of the interior as clues—not of a crime but of their bourgeois subjectivity.²⁵ Artists such as Henri de Braekeleer and Gustave Leheurte idealistically depicted their painted subjects in secluded, sumptuous worlds stuffed with furnishings, *bibelots*, and material commodities wherein the environment is knowable, fixed, and presents a set of visual clues to the identity of its inhabitant [Figure 4].²⁶ In 1867, Édouard Manet portrayed the writer Émile Zola inside his studio, surrounded by furnishings, sketches and prints, and books so as to indicate the interior character of his sitter.²⁷ Photographic portraiture followed close behind: albums such as *Nos contemporains chez eux* were executed with the express purpose of representing notable figures in their private homes so as to disclose something of their interior life [Figures 5, 6]. Critic Edmond Duranty would go on to famously proselytize the necessity for the new mode of painting to embody “a study of states of mind...as reflected in the gestures (the subject) makes and all of the aspects of his apartment, the environment in which he

²⁵ “The criminals of the first detective novels are neither gentlemen nor apaches, but private members of the bourgeoisie,” Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 155–156. Jean Baudrillard describes the interior as the mirror of modern man, an anthropomorphic homology constructed between dweller and dwelling.

See Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (1968), trans. James Benedict (New York: Verso, 2006).

²⁶ On the phenomenon of “bricobracomania,” or the collecting instinct underpinned by the nineteenth-century bourgeois desire to possess (and particularly its effects on art), see Rémy Saisselin, *The Bourgeois and the Bibelot* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984). Naomi Schor has cited this phenomenon in the interiors of the nineteenth-century naturalist novel, a tendency that she cites as “an inclination...towards a position of complete exteriority” (though paradoxically held within the interior itself). See Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 2008).

²⁷ Studies of the mid-nineteenth century painted interior read this portrait with regard to this earlier notion of bourgeois subjectivity. See *Interior Portraiture and Masculine Identity in France, 1789–1914*, ed. Temma Balducci, Heather Belnap Jensen and Pamela J. Warner (New York: Routledge, 2017).

evolves and develops.”²⁸ In each of these instances, the interior was expressed as integral, nostalgic, harmonized, and whole; it operated as space and image of individual subjectivity—both symptom and stimulus of bourgeois aesthetic, political, and private fantasies. It represented and shaped a way of knowing the world that was material, interiorized, and utterly bourgeois; the interior realized what art historian T.J. Clark has termed “a very nineteenth-century word”—*belonging*.²⁹

The present study begins from a point in the 1880s when the integrity of such a world came under scrutiny, and a sense of belonging was harder to obtain. The bourgeois desire to be *at home* in the modern world was frustrated and made strange by its perpetual deferral—a sense of belonging was continually suggested though never quite achieved. As it extended into the twentieth century, such a sentiment would become Freud’s *Unheimlich*; this is the nineteenth-century haunted house.³⁰ Precisely because the interior and its image provided the binding thread—the interface—between individual, private experience and the historical formation of the larger collective, it became the realm through which ideological shifts were most intimately felt.

²⁸ He continues: “In actuality, a person never appears against neutral or vague backgrounds. Instead, surrounding him and behind him are the furniture, fireplaces, curtains, and walls that indicate his financial position, class and profession. . . . [T]he language of an empty apartment must be clear enough to enable us to deduce the character and habits of its occupant.” Louis-Émile Edmond Duranty, *La Nouvelle peinture à propos du groupe d’artistes qui expose dans les galeries Durand-Ruel (1874)*, in *The New Painting, Impressionism, 1874-1886: An Exhibition Organized by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco*, ed. and trans. Charles Moffett (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 1986)

²⁹ T. J. Clark, *Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013). Clark’s emphasis on this term is largely indebted to his reading of the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, whom Benjamin also cites. “This seeking for *my* home. . . was *my* affliction. . . Where is *my* home? I ask and seek and have sought for it; I have not found it.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1891), quoted in Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. and trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 20.

³⁰ Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” *The Standard Edition of the Collected Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, Alix Strachy (London: Hogarth Press, 1925); Also see Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992). Vidler’s discussion of the nineteenth-century origins of the *Unheimlich* in his chapter entitled “The House” is particularly illuminating.

Later-nineteenth century artists such as James Ensor, Édouard Vuillard, and Henry van de Velde were no longer satisfied with an understanding of the interior as an unproblematic and exclusive haven of bourgeois belonging. Contingent realities of the wider world—from socialist revolt to the psychological dimensions of a new culture of proximity effected by communications technology and imperial expansion—put pressure on the intimate experience of materials and commodities, interiority, and class politics so integral to the interior’s emergence. In seeking to create work that critically engaged this revolutionizing modern world, artists were faced with new formal problems. They responded by throwing into question conventional forms of representation and moving beyond simply picturing these new realities iconographically. Instead, they sought to evoke experiential realities of the modern world through new configurations of the spatial environment. For them, modern realities had transformed and so too did the demands of picturing.

Method, Materials, Meaning

The domestic interior has garnered a significant amount of interest in the fields of Art History, Architectural History, and Cultural Studies in recent years. Building on the fascination expressed by nineteenth-century writers for this site whose image seemed to negotiate an utterly modern and bourgeois form of existence, and reflecting a recent critical fascination with the spaces of everyday life, scholars have taken up the subject of the interior with some enthusiasm.³¹ Several works have emerged as specific meditations on the interior. However, a

³¹ Alla Myzelev and John Potvin, eds., *Fashion, Interior Design and the Contours of Modern Identity* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010); Janet McLean, ed., *Impressionist Interiors* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 2008); Charlotte Gere, *Nineteenth-Century Decoration: The Art of the Interior* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1989); Tag Gronberg, “The Inner Man: Interiors and Masculinity in Early Twentieth-Century

clear divide has been upheld between studies of the architectural interior by historians of design, and the aesthetics of deeply psychological, often Symbolist, dream worlds studied by historians of painting and literature.³² The latter tend to take the problem of interiority and expression of the self as a guide for reading painted narrative scenes as windows onto a world, while the former have treated the connection between formal innovations in domestic building and a certain strain of cultural theory.³³ My study builds upon this important work, but recasts the interior as a multivalent category that is both image and environment, and necessarily reconsiders the boundaries between Art and Architectural History.

Among the many pieces of scholarship that engage the interior in painted representations, Susan Sidlauskas' *Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth Century Painting* (2002) remains a touchstone for such considerations in Western painting from the middle of the nineteenth century to World War One. Sidlauskas excavates the ways in which shifts in notions of selfhood—in interiority—were not simply reflected but enacted within the forms of nineteenth-century

Vienna," *Oxford Art Journal* 24, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 69–88; Anca I. Lasc, *Visualizing the Nineteenth-Century Home: Modern Art and the Decorative Impulse* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).

³¹ Studies of pictorial representations of the interior most notably include Hollis Clayson, "Threshold Space: Parisian Modernism Betwixt and Between (1869-1891)," in McLean, *Impressionist Interiors*, 14-29; Felix Krämer, *Sad unheimliche Heim: Zur Interieurmalerie um 1900* (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 2007); Susan Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth Century Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); André Dombrowski, "Poetry, Portraiture, and Interiority: Paul Alexis Reading to Emile Zola," in *Cézanne, Murder, and Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

³² Studies of pictorial representations of the interior most notably include Hollis Clayson, "Threshold Space: Parisian Modernism Betwixt and Between (1869-1891)," in McLean, *Impressionist Interiors*, 14-29; Felix Krämer, *Sad unheimliche Heim: Zur Interieurmalerie um 1900* (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 2007); Susan Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth Century Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); André Dombrowski, "Poetry, Portraiture, and Interiority: Paul Alexis Reading to Emile Zola," in *Cézanne, Murder, and Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

³³ Recent architectural histories of the interior have included: Stefan Muthesius, *The Poetic Home: Designing the 19th-Century Domestic Interior* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2009); Robert McCarter, *The Space Within: Interior Experience as the Origin of Architecture* (London: Reaktion, 2016).

painting. According to her, painters from Edgar Degas to Walter Sickert sought out to reconcile two “insides”—that of the home and the inside of a bourgeois individual—through pictorial form. Her analysis of Vuillard’s *Interior, Mother and Sister of the Artist* (1893) [Figure 7] for instance, addresses the formal conflation of background and foreground which links the figures literally and metaphorically to their setting, and reveals a larger understanding of the interior as “continuous with, indeed *inseparable from*, that self.”³⁴ Employing contemporary writings from psychological journals, cultural analysis, and art criticism to make her case, Sidlauskas claims that these pictorial environments literalized the inner spaces of the self, creating an expanded narrative around the figures and into the background of the painting.

My analysis of Vuillard in Chapter Three is similarly concerned with interiority as it is enacted by the structures of the image—in particular the ways in which flatness and depth, background and foreground, operate in a complex interplay so as to destabilize normal viewing procedures. Rather than addressing the methods by which these and similar pictures simply narrate, or literalize, a sense of interiority for the subject represented, I appeal to the procedures by which Vuillard’s images, as well as those by Ensor, also function as environments themselves, obtaining a dynamic relation between spectating subject and work. In this sense, I treat pictures not as solely narrative, codified images confined to the surface of the canvas, but also as objects that exist spatially and materially, and exert a presence in the world outside of the work of art. In so doing, I extend Sidlauskas’ contribution to thinking through the pictured interior and understand it in a two-fold sense: both as illustrative depiction and embodied, phenomenological encounter in the space of beholding.

³⁴ Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self*, 91.

As distinct from Sidlauskas' account of pictorial dynamics, much of the architectural history of the interior has focused on pragmatic utility, material structures, and related cultural analyses predominantly concerned with themes of domesticity, gender, and industrialization. Architectural historians Hilde Heynen, Charles Rice, and Sharon Marcus have provided particularly profitable and astute accounts on the topic of the interior. Heynen's "Modernity and Domesticity" (2005) considers the modern built interior and the material conditions of the cult of domesticity as inextricably tied to the cultural advances of modernity while also disavowing the assumption that one is antithetical to the other.³⁵ Her broad account is quite literal in its understanding of the interior as a built, useful, and functional space rather than an image, be it metaphoric or otherwise.

In *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (2007), Charles Rice treats the interior largely as a conceptual problem, and by deeply engaging with the work of modern writers and critical theorists—Walter Benjamin and Sigmund Freud predominantly—deftly puts forth the claim that the interior "emerged" in the modern period as both space and image and insists that we must dexterously understand it as such.³⁶ Rice claims that this duality is the defining structure undergirding the interior's cultural import in the modern period. His analysis takes theory as its subject and though he does not discuss specific buildings or images at length, he has produced a key contribution to our understanding of the interior's discursive, conceptual relation to architecture and modernity. Rice's book incorporates methodologies from Cultural Studies wherein a concept—the interior in this case—motivates broad navigation across

³⁵ Hilde Heynen, "Modernity and Domesticity: Tensions and Contradictions," in *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture*, ed. H. Heynen (New York: Routledge, 2005), 129.

³⁶ Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (London: Routledge: 2006).

a field unhindered by medium and in so doing he makes use of poetry, theoretical writings, art, architecture, and social history, though he is not concerned with the aesthetic dimension of particular examples. Following this vein of what we might understand as a cultural history of architecture, Sharon Marcus' *Apartment Stories* (1999) is the most exhaustive account of the infrastructural developments to the Parisian built environment and ensuing cultural messages from this shift in the period between 1850 and 1880. As opposed to Rice's more general history, Marcus carefully recounts the "interiorization" of the city by tracking new apartment architecture, isolation of public spaces such as gardens and *lavoirs*, and ensuing new social practices. In her view, private life did not emerge as solely a nostalgic antidote to the public sphere. Rather, Haussmannization itself directly promoted the containment of urban spaces and therefore the functional and symbolic containment of the modern self. While Marcus does not treat pictorial images, her combination of the history of pragmatic, built structures and literary images provides an expansive model for analysis.

Any history of the nineteenth-century interior must robustly engage historian Debora Silverman's ground-breaking study, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, Style* (1992). Silverman's spectacularly penetrating account of how the style resulting from decorative arts reforms during the French fin de siècle visualized a cultural turn to psychological inwardness remains invaluable to my thinking about the nature of interiority as it was given material form. My engagement with the architectural Art Nouveau and the ways in which it was constructed in Belgium, and evoked by practices of artistic display in France, owes a great deal

to Silverman's research.³⁷ Her account introduces a model for addressing this material of the everyday, the individual, and the visual, as lived experience inextricably bound to the mass formations of history through a series of complex mediations. This approach has gone on to influence a range of architectural studies concerned with cultural and political histories.

The present project extends many of these threads—art, architectural, and cultural history—seeing them not as separate expressions, but as vectors of inquiry that are internally organized by the interior itself. As outlined above, the nineteenth-century interior was multivalent, referring to (and shuttling between) space and image, both psychological projection of self and architectonic form. It therefore requires that the analyses we bring to bear are equally multilayered, accounting for the aesthetic dimension of images, whether two- or three-dimensional, and the ways that they ask their audiences to see and act. By appealing to logics of pictorial flatness and architectural environment, the interiors discussed here each operate as both lived space and visual picture. Van de Velde's designs for instance, were understood to be socially charged precisely because they appeared somehow picture-like. Vuillard's flat, framed easel paintings, on the other hand, intimate a virtual, architectonic environment in which the beholder is a part. Such a dual agenda, I argue, prompts us to reconsider the nature of representation in the later-nineteenth century. Awareness of such a duality also reveals how our constructions of terms like "interior" are shaped by later understandings of artistic modernism that have stressed a burgeoning medium specificity in this period, thereby affecting the questions that we impress upon images of all sorts.

In lieu of employing medium and discipline as categories to inform the structure and

³⁷ Silverman's revisions to that original study in the form of her scholarship on colonial impulses in the Belgian Art Nouveau open up possibilities for further scholarship on the Belgian interior. See Debora L. Silverman, "Art Nouveau, Art of Darkness: African Lineages of Belgian Modernism, Part I," *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 18, no. 2 (2011): 139-181.

character of analysis, I excavate the numerous ways in which materials—paint, wood, metal, the space of a small room—were understood to evoke and challenge the interior’s various dimensions and resonances. In so doing, I suspend entrenched understandings of the late-nineteenth century as a time in which a concern with medium came to the fore, and instead advance an account of inter-medial exchange that is usefully navigated by the concept of the interior.³⁸ I therefore rethink the nature of surface itself and, following Jacques Rancière, ask how works in distinct media—painting, decoration, and architecture—might resemble one another and operate in a shared material language that is at once concrete and symbolic. In such a formulation, materials are distinct yet equivalent common surfaces in which signs, forms, and acts are expressed. As Rancière puts it:

(By) drawing lines, arranging words or distributing surfaces, one also designs division of communal space. It is the way in which, by assembling words or forms, people define not merely various forms of art, but certain configurations of what can be seen and what can be thought, certain forms of inhabiting the material world.³⁹

In my view, artists and architects of the later-nineteenth century were acutely concerned with such a model in which one would regularly draw from the other’s toolbox, and as such our historical work should adopt that same dexterity. Such an approach opens up the representational field by allowing individual images themselves to drive the structure of analysis. They are permitted to function as both descriptive expressions—a painting of a domestic scene or

³⁸ This position is best characterized by Clement Greenberg who argued in 1960 that the underlying ambition of the modernist movement was to “eliminate from the effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art.” For him, this would positively render each art “pure.” See Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” *Forum Lectures* (Washington DC: Voice of America, 1960), in *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 755.

³⁹ Jacques Rancière, “The Surface of Design,” in *The Future of the Image* (London: Verso, 2009), 91.

wrought-iron banisters depicting leaves and flowers in an Art Nouveau home, for instance—and as non-signifying, naked presence as things themselves, such as the large block of painted canvas on the wall or the enclosing wooden door of a room.⁴⁰ This reconsideration recasts extant networks of cultural histories as well. As I contend in my final chapter, for instance, considering van de Velde in relation to contemporaneous Belgian avant-garde painters rather than French Art Nouveau designers with whom he is so often aligned significantly alters the social landscape in which figures such as Théo van Rysselberghe, August Endell, Georges Seurat, Josef Hoffmann, and Otto Wagner are normally cast.

In her book, *Photographic Architecture in the Twentieth Century* (2014), Claire Zimmerman has demonstrated how, in a slightly later moment, photography and photographic practices affected the very terms of architectural building where each expressed parallel (and often interlaced) concerns with the representational image. In so doing, she understands works by modernist architects such as Mies van der Rohe as inherently imagistic. These conditions, she argues, necessarily require a reassessment of the definition of the image wherein we might understand both three-dimensional architecture and two-dimensional photographs as functions of the broadest class of representation.⁴¹ I extend Zimmerman’s challenge back to an earlier moment in which the built interior was not only somehow imagistic (though expressed in different terms and affected by profoundly different causes), but the ostensibly flat picture also evoked an environment spatially occupied by the viewer. Ultimately, I argue that experimental

⁴⁰ This describes Rancière’s “double poetics of the image.” See Rancière “The Future of the Image,” in *The Future of the Image*, 11.

⁴¹ Claire Zimmerman, *Photographic Architecture in the Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014). Her reference here to “functions of the image” is to Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 1-31. Hans Belting’s theorization of “medium” also serves as instructive to this definition. See Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, trans. T. Dunlap (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

imaging practices of the interior operate in the neglected, though crucially instructive, hybrid space between two-dimensional art and the built environment, between contemplative aesthetic distance and immersive physical presence. I contend that this formal complexity was the result of an attempt to engage, challenge, and construct the experiential realities of the modern world in which configurations of the self, the environment in which it was a part, and representation, were continually renegotiated. In such a reappraisal of the tendencies embedded in Art and Architectural History, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of not only the interior, but also the formal strategies employed by those committed to creating a form of representation commensurate with the swiftly modifying texture of the modern world. This task required a set of tools that previous practices and independent aesthetic paradigms simply could not furnish.

Chapter Summaries

Each of the artists considered in the present study responded to this challenge for a mode of picturing the interior that would sufficiently mediate, and index, changing cultural values and ideologies. Chapter Two analyses James Ensor's easel paintings of interior scenes and rereads their divided reception in Belgium between 1881 and 1886. Paintings such as *Russian Music (La Musique russe)* (1881) [Figure 8], I argue, were indicative of an attempt at visually remodeling competing ways of knowing the immediate world, particularly with regard to the materials and materiality of the interior. This painting depicts the contents of a rather commonplace interior—the upholstery of the furnishings, the moldings on the mantle, the top hat on a mahogany table. Upon a slightly longer look, these materials appear to be alluded to but then obscured by substantial, tactile paint handling. The facile integrity of the interior is here called up and then made strange, and contemporary critics landed on this heavy paintwork as the point upon which

to stake their interpretive claims. One faction of domestic critics read this painted mark, or *tache*, as realist and constitutive of the material reality of the commodities of a room, and they drew on a precedent of regional Flemish painting to do so. Another, more modernist, camp set the work in dialogue with international precedents and discourses from architecture and psychophysical aesthetics, interpreting this very same visual phenomenon as evocative of an atmosphere that could be psychologically “entered” through a process of empathetic projection elicited by the materiality of paint. One critic, Émile Verhaeren, claimed that these effects invoked the viewer’s interior world, thereby eliciting an embodied experience of interiority: “we enter, like actors, into the represented scene,” he wrote. This conflict in the critical reception—between emphases on materials and on materiality—points to the destabilizing nature of Ensor’s picture (a scene that is hard to settle into, to say the least), and also to the dual status of the interior itself at this moment. It was both materially embodied site and psychologically rendered image, and so functioned as the ideal paradigm to collapse conflicting ways of knowing the world, and the self’s relation to that world, during a period in Belgium characterized by tremendous modernization and ensuing cultural upheaval.

Chapter Three considers Édouard Vuillard’s *intimiste* decorative environments and exhibition spaces in order to identify shifting definitions of interiority as they corresponded to new conceptions of psychological and architectonic, physical space in 1890s France. Accounts of Vuillard’s artistic displays and encounters with his artworks from this decade have adopted a somewhat anachronistic definition of interiority drawn from twentieth-century modernist precepts. In these formulations, interiority is defined as a subjective effect of the individual’s encounter with the autonomous artwork. However, in the 1890s, artists such as Vuillard were reformulating the interior in visual modes that were informed by recent revelations about

perception, inhabited space, and newly-expansive global spatial regimes. I argue that in the 1890s Vuillard attempted such a feat through his *intimisme*, a heretofore undefined term which evolved throughout his oeuvre from small paintings displayed in intimate galleries to larger decorative programs for private apartments that staged a charged interaction between viewer and work in the space they shared. By focusing on this concept of *intimisme*, I show how Vuillard's intensely suggestive staging of the psychodynamics of viewing reached outside of painting to concurrent architectural discourses, as well as other "environmental" art forms such as tapestry, theater, and exhibition design, in order to reconfigure interiority in partially external terms. Vuillard's *intimisme* ought therefore to be understood as a reckoning with interiority in visual terms, and as a response to a culture that was experiencing profound transformations in conceptions of the psychological self.

Chapter Four addresses the socio-political components of the bourgeois interior through an examination of Henry van de Velde's architectural reforms of the 1890s. Through a set of successive strategies that he called "experiments," and set within the context of his own politics as well as the cultural division of the Belgian workers' party, van de Velde challenged received notions of the architectural interior as a realm of exclusivity and bourgeois retreat. He did this by engaging the logics of Neo-Impressionist painting and the photographic mass image in the creation of spectacularly imagistic interior environments [Figure 9]. By refusing to read these architectural interiors within the context of visually similar, yet more politically conservative, French Art Nouveau designs, this chapter argues for the formal and ideological affinities between Belgian avant-garde painting and contemporaneous architectural design. It also introduces the more general issue of a socially charged, "optical," or "pictorial," built environment as an alternative to the proto-modernist interiors of the 1890s that privileged

function, space, and tactility, and have come to dominate histories of interior architecture.

The great irony is that while van de Velde's earliest production from the 1890s vehemently stressed a commitment to developing a connection between the interior and the collective, free from the tyranny of bourgeois isolation, just two decades later he would be castigated for indulgent complicity with bourgeois individualism, out-of-touch idealism, and fashionable artistic expression in the Werkbund Debates of 1914.⁴² In the image saturated, mass media culture of twentieth-century Germany, his interiors took on a different guise, and it is this work with the Werkbund to which most histories of design refer. However, while it did take on a variety of forms and connotations, van de Velde's persistent concern with the interior was never divorced from the collective world outside its walls, be it socialist-fueled anxieties of Belgian capitalist oppression in the 1890s or the commercial, image-saturated culture of Wilhelmine Germany. Ultimately, his interior architecture mediates the shifts in his own practice, while also mirroring the changing character of design's relation to bourgeois society itself. By placing my study of the fin de siècle in relief against this more familiar stage of van de Velde's career in Germany, I underscore the persistent nature of the relationship obtained between the interior and the exterior social world, a relation that remains utterly contingent and was renegotiated at every turn. The interior therefore functions as a fertile index, an archive, of cultural transition

⁴² See Hermann Muthesius and Henry van de Velde, "Statements from the Werkbund Conference of 1914," in *The Industrial Design Reader*, ed. Carma Gorman (New York: Allworth Press, 2003), 88-92. The centrality of the interior in the backstory to this division between "individualists" and those advocating for industrial production based on "types" is profound. While van de Velde led the former, the latter position was spearheaded by none other than Hermann Muthesius who, just a decade prior, had published the most singularly exhaustive account of the modern interior, *Das englische Haus* (1904-5). Such a distinction as it relates to the designed interior was elaborated in the recent exhibition, organized by Christian Witt-Döring and Matthias Boeckl, *Two Ways of Modernism: Josef Hoffmann, Adolf Loos, and Their Impact* at MAK (Austrian Museum for Applied Art/Contemporary Art in Vienna) in 2015.

throughout the modern period.⁴³ Since its “emergence” in the early-nineteenth century, the interior evolved by way of a nonlinear route in correspondence with the developments of modernity itself, never fully disappearing, and (despite its best efforts) never fully escaping its bourgeois nature, but repeatedly cast into doubt and continually taking on new form.

⁴³ While Benjamin claims that the interior “emerged” in the early-nineteenth century, he also maintains that it was shattered and met its demise with the Jugendstil, and van de Velde’s work specifically, at the century’s end. “The liquidation of the interior took place in the final years of the nineteenth century, in the work of the Jugendstil...though it had been coming for a long time. The Jugendstil sounds the death knell of the genre.” Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 20.

CHAPTER TWO
The Other Side of Matter: Ensor's Interiors and the Belgian Art World

Art is not a singular interpretation of a universal nature, but the plastic expression of an intimate emotion through the medium that nature provides.⁴⁴
— Guillaume De Greef (1882)

...[I]t meant immersion in the physical world, a rediscovery of the self the other side of matter...⁴⁵
—T.J. Clark (1973)

In art, the true point of reference continues to be the subject... Granted, the subject cannot and must not speak the language of immediacy. But it can and does continue to articulate itself through things in their alienated and disfigured form.⁴⁶
—T.W. Adorno (1970)

In December 1922, at a banquet held in his honor by the monthly review, *La Flandre littéraire*, and long after he had been inducted into the canon of Belgian modern art, James Ensor reflected back on his early paintings from the 1880s. With his characteristic acerbic tongue and ironic tone—it remains ambiguous to what degree he sincerely believed his own words—he proclaimed:

⁴⁴ Guillaume De Greef, “Le Niveau de l’Art : Abrégé de psychologie, d’après Herbert Spencer,” *L’Art moderne* (26 March 1882).

⁴⁵ T.J. Clark, “On the Social History of Art,” in *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 19.

⁴⁶ T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), ed. Gertel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. C. Lenhardt (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 158.

I want to tell you of all my battles, my pictorial ramblings in service of art and the state... Since 1881 and my first salon with the circle of *La Chrysalide*, and driven by peaceful and good intentions, I overthrow all pictorial conformities. A hailstorm of criticism crashes down on me... people abuse me, people insult me, I am crazy, I am stupid, I am bad, incompetent... My placid “interiors,” my “bourgeois salons” are all the foyers of revolution.⁴⁷

Amongst an audience of members of the francophone Belgian intelligentsia accustomed to his biting jabs and abject ploys at the expense of the artistic establishment, this last line received little notice. Indeed, very few scholars have commented on these remarks, and those who have ask little of this bizarre, haughty one-liner.⁴⁸ While it is enticing to read this appeal rather literally, such an interpretation no doubt benefits from hindsight and is inflected by the more self-consciously oppositional tenor of Ensor’s later and more well-known works. In art historical scholarship, Ensor’s interiors have predominantly been understood as icons of psychological tension and ambivalence running just below the surface of middle-class life in the *Belle Époque*.⁴⁹ The interior has long occupied a position as near antithesis of revolution or social engagement in histories of modernism; however, in this quotation Ensor identifies his interiors

⁴⁷ « Je veux vous exposer mes luttes, mes randonnées picturales au service de l’Art et de l’Etat [...] En 1881, dès mon premier salon, au cercle ‘*La Chrysalide*’ et bien qu’animé de bonnes intentions pacifiques, je bouleverse toutes les convenances picturales. Un grêle d’éréintements s’abat sur moi ; je ne lâche plus mon parapluie depuis lors ; on m’injurie, on m’insulte, je suis fou, je suis sot, je suis méchant, mauvais, incapable, ignorant, [...] mes ‘intérieurs’ placides, mes ‘salons bourgeois’ sont foyers de révolutions....» James Ensor, “Discours prononcé au banquet offert à Ensor par *La Flandre littéraire* (22 December 1922),” *La Flandre littéraire*, reprinted in *Mes écrits* (Éditions Nationales: Liège, 1974), 121.

⁴⁸ The most notable exception is the work of Marnin Young, who devotes an entire chapter of his most recent book to a compelling treatment of Ensor’s interiors, thus constituting the only such in-depth study of which I am aware. See Marnin Young, *Realism in the Age of Impressionism: Painting and the Politics of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

⁴⁹ This reading of psychological tension or boredom has dominated scholarly discussions of Ensor’s early interiors, however routinely stops short of elaborating on the underpinnings of such tension in either pictorial or cultural terms. Susan Canning has quite rightly pointed to the psychological dimension of these rather banal scenes where, as she sees it, “ambivalence mixes with artifice to suggest the tension, boredom, and disappointment that hover just below the surface materialism of middle-class life.” See Susan M. Canning, “James Ensor: Carnival of the Modern,” in *James Ensor*, ed. Anna Swinbourne (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 32.

with just that. While recognizing his ironic tone, his reflection on this oft-overlooked early imagery seems entirely too provocative to ignore. Were they entryways to a social revolution? Painterly provocations? A comment on the status of the bourgeoisie itself? The questions remain to be asked: to what kind of revolution might he have been referring and, moreover, why interiors?

On the surface of things, Ensor seems to have been speaking about pictorial avant-gardism. However, his language is ambiguous and it remains unclear as to whether the claim to revolution was his own or that of his critics. Whatever the case, invoking the image of the bourgeois interior as a site of revolution (pictorial or otherwise) is arresting, especially given the seemingly benign nature of the subject matter. Ensor's paintings depict relatively ordinary situations from his life in his family home in the Belgian seaside resort town of Ostend.⁵⁰ On the first floor was a curiosity shop run by his mother and sister that sold masks, among other things. The top floor served as Ensor's studio, while the second floor functioned as the primary residence [Figures 10, 11].⁵¹ The scenes depicted in the family domicile are entirely ordinary—his mother taking tea, his sister tucking into a large meal, friends gathered around the piano. How could the “placid” and utterly ordinary imagery of the middle-class home be understood to serve an avant-garde agenda, and what were the pictorial conformities that he presumed to have

⁵⁰ Susan Canning maintains that *Russian Music* (1881) was not actually staged in the Ensor residence at 23 rue de Flandre in Ostend, but rather at the home of Ernest and Mariette Rousseau in Brussels. This is a compelling and intriguing reading; however, while this would certainly change some interpretations of the intimate character of these scenes, my concerns here are not with the specific social implications of locations depicted. Rather, my interests lie in the ways in which audiences reacted to the painterly procedures enacted upon such typological scenes of middle-class life.

⁵¹ Ensor spent three years in the *Académie des Beaux-Arts* in Brussels from 1877-1880 after which he returned to Ostend. He met several colleagues in Brussels who would go on to become his collaborators and friends, and spent a great amount of time in the city even after his return to the coast.

overthrown?⁵² What criticality—indeed, what “revolution”—could such an image of these drawing rooms have offered as an arena of experimentation within the terms of representation itself in 1880s Belgium?

This chapter addresses these questions in two ways, one particular and one further reaching. First, I concentrate on a few of Ensor’s exceptionally intriguing paintings of interior scenes produced between 1881 and 1882, and the critical discourses they garnered in public exhibitions throughout the 1880s —chiefly a set of split commitments in the avant-garde that turned on understandings of the relations between painting and the material world. As these painted interiors were aggressively exhibited between 1881 and 1886, the question rapidly emerged: would Ensor’s pictures be understood as realist in nature, capitalizing on the pictorial depiction of material fact, or as psycho-physical invocations of powerful effects of painterly surface that could affectively absorb a spectating subject? The collapse of these two options in Ensor’s works, and as it was applied to the interior specifically, offers a key to thinking through the ways in which later-nineteenth century artists and their publics critically manipulated a previously held paradigm of the interior’s integrity in response to larger cultural shifts. Such a tension in the reception of Ensor’s interiors, I will show, is symptomatic of a larger reorganization of ways of knowing the material world, and the self in relation to that world, best articulated by challenges to dominant understandings of the bourgeois subject’s relation to her intimate, everyday environment. By attending to the nuances of just a handful of paintings and their reception in a few short years, Ensor’s pictures afford navigation of the shifting terrain of a broader tension undergirding this moment: between a resolute commitment to material

⁵² Marnin Young offers one answer to this question in his analysis of the competing temporal structures at play in Ensor’s interiors, and their ideological import in view of the decidedly bourgeois subject matter combined with the social context of late-nineteenth century Belgium. My analysis here offers yet another response.

outwardness, commodities, and common matter; and a permeating concern for subjective consciousness typified by understandings of the interiorized space of the psychological self. The commitments that critics held within this dialectic reveal important ideological stakes of the (re)formulation of bourgeois subjectivity in a young nation caught in the throes of cultural flux, as well as the possibilities for painting to offer itself up as a guide to such a tension. The immediate experience of a picture, both its form and its content, therefore functions as mediation and metaphor for the experiential realities of the modernizing world. In this way, the interior emerges as an essential tool with which to account for the modifying nature of aesthetic and social experience in Belgium at the end of the century. In the case of Ensor, this was vitalized by his treatment of the environment of an everyday interior scene through the medium of paint.

“A Feeling for Life and Its Limits”

Ensor’s painting initially entitled *Chez Miss* (1881) [Figure 8] is the picture that both began and concluded his renown as “the painter of interiors.”⁵³ He is now known mainly for his slightly later, radically non-realist and expressionist mask paintings; however, in the early 1880s Ensor’s artistic identity rested on pictures such as these. *Chez Miss* was frequently exhibited over six years, from its first showing in 1881 at the Triennial Salon in Brussels and lastly in 1886 at the Brussels-based independent artistic society of *Les XX (Les Vingt)*. This final showing has come to dominate readings on early Ensor. In the exhibition space that winter, his picture hung alongside Fernand Khnopff’s *Listening to Schumann (En écoutant du Schumann)* (1883) [Figure

⁵³ This moniker is used widely in contemporary criticism as in, for instance, A.J. Wauters, “Aux XX,” *La Gazette* (March 14, 1886).

12].⁵⁴ Ensor was enraged at what he saw as the blatant similarities between the two pictures and lambasted Khnopff in the pages of *L'Art moderne* for plagiarism, igniting a firestorm of controversy amongst the avant-garde. As if to formally stake his claim to the subject, Ensor changed the title of his painting so that when Anna Boch purchased it that March for her private collection on the fashionable Avenue de la Toison d'Or, it was referred to by its current name, *Russian Music*. This disagreement was the occasion, so the mythology goes, that prompted Ensor's move away from picturing the bourgeois interior and into a wholly different painterly mode.⁵⁵ It is misleading, however, to take this myth at face value because in actuality Ensor stopped producing such works in 1882, after completing his last great interior, a work entitled *The Oyster Eater (La Mangeuse d'huitres)* (1882) [Figure 13]. He did however, continue to feature them in public exhibitions for some time after, and brought together the three most critically ambitious of such pictures for the exhibition of *Les XX* in 1886, thereby perhaps indicating the significance he saw in this particular stage of his career. After 1886, however, *Russian Music* was not publicly shown again until 1905 and did not enter the public collections of the Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique until 1927, thereby effectively erasing the interiors from the Ensor myth. Examining the ways in which he and his critics conceived of these pictures within their robust exhibitionary program in the 1880s, however, serves to recover some of the complexity of Ensor's oeuvre and explicate how it modelled a transition in the nature of bourgeois experience over the course of the 1880s.

⁵⁴ The persistence of this mythology is demonstrated most vividly by the placement of these two pictures in the *Musée Fin de Siècle* in Brussels where they currently hang side by side. See Henry Bounameaux, "Ensor-Khnopff : La Querelle d'une image ?", *Bulletin des Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique* 41-42, nos.1-4 (1992-1993): 127-47.

⁵⁵ Xavier Tricot has pointed to 1887 as the most crucial year in the development of Ensor's art, citing his move away from interiors of the earlier mode, and the death of his father. See Xavier Tricot, *James Ensor: The Complete Paintings* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2009).

This picture depicts a rather typical, commonplace scene from the life of the bourgeoisie. Almost painfully so. It might at first recall another contemporary and rather conventional image with which it shares several thematic similarities—Gustave Caillebotte’s *Woman at the Window* (*La Femme à la fenêtre*) (1880) [Figure 14]. In both paintings, a young woman, clad in a black dress with hair tied back neatly, is represented with her back turned towards the viewer while her male counterpart is represented less anonymously and from either the front or side, he is absorbed in his own psychological world. Ensor’s subject is demurely composed and plays the piano for her a male listener. The environment is an elegant, if somewhat restrained, middle-class salon by the standards of the 1880s, though its decorations are rather *haute* considering the Ensor family’s petty bourgeois status. At left, a heavy curtain is tied back with a luxuriously thick and silky rope, allowing light to stream in from the window onto the piano. The wallpaper and the framed, indistinct landscape painting are generically tasteful and recognizable, as are the *chinoiserie* vase and bell jar sitting atop the mantelpiece. A top hat, that sartorial marker of the middle class, is turned over atop a mahogany table that stands upon a densely woven carpet. Indeed, upon first glance this world—this “universe of the bourgeois citizen”—appears utterly recognizable and knowable, its contents contained and placed just so.⁵⁶ At first it seems to conform to the norms of the interior as refuge and retreat as is intimated by Caillebotte painting and many others, wherein all is knowable and removed from the contingencies of the exterior and of history. In this manner, the interior seems to function as an asylum from the world—a unique bastion against the deluge of exterior time and space.⁵⁷

In a slightly different context, T.J. Clark has called this phenomenon “room space.” In his

⁵⁶ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 19.

⁵⁷ John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, *Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1.

most recent book, *Picasso and Truth* (2013), Clark characterizes the beginning of the twentieth century, and by extension modernity itself, by the breakdown of something that he calls “bourgeois society.” In Clark’s estimation, the “retrogression from the interminable present” of public catastrophe was modernism’s “most persistent note.”⁵⁸ His claim is an intriguing one: that many of the modern artists we know so well (Bonnard, Picasso, Matisse, to name a few) were all invested in retrogression, in seeking to restore, though never quite achieving, a characteristically nineteenth-century bourgeois commitment to the space of a small room and the little possessions held therein, to the universe as room-bound and thus within reach—a “feeling for life and its limits.”⁵⁹ This understanding of the interior as a tightly bound haven of bourgeois belonging was central to the dominant nineteenth-century European worldview. It was the cockpit of the bourgeoisie whose true inhabitant was the collector and whose “most profound enchantment,” Walter Benjamin famously asserted, was “the locking of individual items within a magical circle in which they are fixed as the final thrill of acquisition passes over them.”⁶⁰ Collectable, attainable, definable, and fixed; this was the world of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, a class that was “like no other, addicted to dwelling” and against which the modernists of the twentieth

⁵⁸ Clark cites the interiors of Pierre Bonnard, Matisse’s Moroccan apartment, Mondrian in his dream chamber, Brancusi among the totems, Schwitters in his erotic cathedral, Malevich in his coffin, Duchamp’s *Étant donnés*, and Jackson Pollock in his log cabin as instances of a resentment, or retrogression, that is consistent among the most important and critical of the century’s modern artists. He continues by describing modernity’s later casualties—for example King Léopold II’s tyrannical expression of the white man’s burden, technologies of mass destruction in World War One, Franco’s bombing of the Basque town of Guernica, colliding imagined communities based on nationalism, race, and class—to have formed the perpetually near catastrophic backdrop to which the bourgeois, now in a situation of crisis, viewed a perilous world, and themselves, from the precarious comfort of their living rooms. He writes: “[S]o what is modern art but a long refusal, a long avoidance of catastrophe, a set of spells against an intolerable present?” T.J. Clark, *Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.), 14.

⁵⁹ Clark, *Picasso and Truth*, 14.

Susan Sidlauskas has identified interiority as a specifically nineteenth-century sense of self marked by physical, architectural, bodily, social containment. See Sidlauskas, *Body, Place and Self*, x.

⁶⁰ Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Book Collecting,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 60.

century both reacted against, and onto which they insistently grasped.⁶¹

A close reading of *Russian Music* necessarily builds on Clark's insights as to the significance of the interior, though the image compels us to take this framework in another direction. I seek to show that the projection of the interior at its peak in the later-nineteenth century figured not simply as a refuge but engaged and played out the problematic of bourgeois subjectivity with particular intensity and vividness. While overlooked in accounts by both Clark and Benjamin, this contention parallels the modernist's later grappling with the image of the interior, though in a different key and to different ends. As Ensor's images reveal, the interior in the later nineteenth century was to a degree a safe arena of retreat and belonging as Clark suggests, but it was from this vantage point of provisional security that deep fractures and alterations in the bourgeois sense of inner self and outer material world became manifest, thereby lending themselves to artistic critique.

The impulse to know and define the self neared collective obsession amongst this newly-minted class. Historian Peter Gay has described this phenomenon of a "turn inward," by pointing to a profusion of autobiographies and self portraits, individual histories and character driven novels, and the ubiquity of published letters and diaries on the market beginning in the mid-nineteenth century.⁶² To attempt to know the self was to turn inward by reading its exteriorized markers. We might think of the appeals to readability through the *physiologies* or the practice of phrenology; both were popular attempts to address the problem of anonymity in the new, industrialized city by formalizing readings of the inner person through exterior, material

⁶¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Third Printing edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2002), 220.

⁶² Peter Gay, *The Naked Heart: The Bourgeois Experience from Victoria to Freud* (New York: Norton and Company, 1996), 8.

qualities.⁶³ The interior was another such expression. It was the universe of the private citizen, the self expressed through four corners of a room. On this point and citing a popular nineteenth-century proverb, architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc bombastically announced in 1853: “[S]how me your furnishings and I will tell you who you are.”⁶⁴ The supposition to know an inhabitant through her choice of upholstery and interior accouterments reflected two larger trends: first that bourgeois subjectivity was understood as somehow malleable, that the self could be fashioned and, by participating in these practices of self-definition, could be individuated and read. Second, however pervasive and ambitious the impulse to read the interior self through exteriorized and mass-produced goods, this was another perpetually frustrated project. This did not, however, inhibit the bourgeoisie’s vociferous desire for self-definition. In fact, it perpetuated it. The most sustained appeal to the interiority of the nineteenth-century individual was through the image of the bourgeois home.

The domestic interior and the commodities that furnished the private lives of those bourgeois subjects were the realities of their particular world. Indeed, as detailed in the art and writing, most of the century was observed and experienced from middle-class drawing rooms, and the imaging of that environment came to stand for a way of knowing the world that was particular to the nineteenth century and particularly modern. Considering one’s relation to the interior disclosed a way of knowing the self in relation to a new commodity culture, to a burgeoning interest in positivism and external fact, and to bourgeois frustrations of self-

⁶³ On the phenomenon of the *physiologies*, see Richard Sieburth, “Same Difference: The French Physiologies 1840-42,” in *Notebooks on Cultural Analysis: An Annual Review* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1984). Sieburth draws on Walter Benjamin’s reading of Balzac and Baudelaire to propose that confidence in the legibility of modern Paris through the *physiologies* made it so codified and transparent so as to be phantasmagoric (and therefore utterly unreadable and undifferentiated).

⁶⁴ « Montre-moi ton mobilier, et je te dirai qui tu es ». Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné du mobilier* (1858), quoted in Alina Payne, *From Ornament to Object: Genealogies of Architectural Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 76.

definition. However, as the century progressed, a conception of the interior as a refuge of bourgeois belonging where one could grasp “a feeling for life and its limits” became increasingly fraught. It evolved into a fertile site of irony and critique; its association with exteriorized materials, the bourgeois self, and interiorized experience was variously defined and constantly renegotiated. The bourgeois composure that had been knitted into mythologies of middle-class drawing rooms was coming undone.

Richard Thomson has referenced this phenomenon and labeled it the “ironized interior.” He points to later-nineteenth century interior imagery as an arena for skepticism and critique, though the extent to which this was the case and the scope of its reach has not been thoroughly explored.⁶⁵ The sheer expansiveness of the visual culture of the interior in Belgium might indicate something of the effect. By the end of the century, its imaging had reached new heights; the visual culture of modernity had thoroughly taken hold of the spaces of privacy. Painters such as Gustave de Jonghe, Constant Cap, and Jan Verhas were among the many successful artists working with the motif in a naturalistic, academic style.

Undoubtedly the most popular of these interior paintings in Belgium were those by Alfred Stevens. Exhibiting widely both domestically and abroad, Stevens became *the* painter of interiors in Western Europe. Ensor almost surely saw his *A Passionate Song (Un Chant passionné)* (1875) [Figure 15] upon its exhibition in Brussels in 1880, as a drawing from his personal sketchbook makes clear [Figure 16]. Whereas Ensor’s rendition of this singing subject

⁶⁵ Richard Thomson, “Review: Paris, Amsterdam, New York: Signac,” *The Burlington Magazine* 143, no. 1180 (July 2001), 442-45. Also see Marnin E. Young, “After Courbet: Realism and the Specter of History 1871-1889,” (Ph.D. diss, University of California Berkeley, 2005), 224. Susan Sidlauskas has discussed a similar phenomenon of an interior made strange—in her case to give form to new modes of interiority—that she terms the “expressive interior.” See Susan Sidlauskas, “A ‘Perspective of Feeling’: The Expressive Interior in Nineteenth-Century Realist Painting,” (Ph.D. diss: University of Pennsylvania, 1989).

appears a study of solids and voids, textures and surfaces, Stevens lavished attention on the details: the brass tacks of the upholstery, the draped blue silk over the piano, the gilded frame of the mirror, thereby giving clues as to the class and character of the subject. This is an untroublesome painting of an haute-bourgeois woman who is easily identified by the accouterments around her. Her dress is fine, but not at the height of the latest fashions, and she is passionately enthralled in the refined feminine activity of singing. This is an interior that is readable, integral, and arrangeable. This is Clark's room space.

As it happened, Ensor hated Stevens for the banal facility and "licentious mediocrity" of his depictions.⁶⁶ At first approach, Ensor's *Chez Miss* seems to confirm a similarly apprehensible interior; it appears as a world close-at-hand and peacefully contained. Initially it recalls contemporary Northern interiors in the naturalist tradition—the meticulous recordings of Henri de Braekeleer or Stevens, or genre scenes from the Dutch Golden Age by Pieter de Hooch or Johannes Vermeer [Figures 17-19]. Upon a closer and slightly longer look, the picture begins to resist that integrity. Those altogether mundane figures that we initially recognized become increasingly undone and obscured by the thickest and heaviest oil paint laid upon the canvas. Objects become indistinguishable from their surroundings and increasingly unrecognizable. Ensor at once engages and resists the colonization of the interior by the larger visual culture for which Stevens was a prime example, making it seem unfamiliar and contrived.

The only way that this painting might be seen as inviting clarity and ease of apprehension is if it is seen at a distance. Upon its exhibition in 1882, it garnered a reaction from one particularly perceptive Belgian critic who would become Ensor's champion, Émile Verhaeren.

⁶⁶ Ensor called the paintings of Stevens banal, his colorations "jam-like." He wrote: « Ses peintures sont banales, son coloris confituresque ; elles n'inspirent aucun sentiment élevé, aucun grand parti pris. Elles révèlent une médiocrité licencieuse prête à toutes les concessions : demi-qualités, chic, roueries, basse roublardises ». James Ensor, "Les Frères Stevens," *Le Coq rouge* (March–April 1896).

He alluded to this quality of *Chez Miss*:

Although hung high, Ensor attracts looks. Moreover, his canvases adapt to their placement, for they are made to be seen from a distance... As to his personages, they don't make much of an impression; one distinguishes them poorly in the canvas, where the background encroaches on the foreground, where there is a confusing slippage between beings and things.⁶⁷

Contemporary experience of viewing the picture replicates Verhaeren's description. When filing down the stairs of the Fin-de-Siècle Museum in Brussels towards the wall where this picture now hangs, the ease of first glance becomes increasingly confounded with each approaching step: is that the clock that initially appeared to be underneath the bell jar or is it a figurine? The relation between figures is obscured as well. The passage between the man's shoe and the lace covering on the piano bench demonstrates the extent to which the limits of things first appear and then seem to crumble, withering into a confusing mass [Figure 20]. And that floor! This is a floor upon which one could drop something and it would be swallowed whole. This staged resistance to our ability to contain the image of the interior is enacted by means of the substantial facture, or paintwork, laid thick so as to sit plainly between the figures, at once confusing their boundaries and disconnecting them from one another.⁶⁸

Ensor's *Afternoon in Ostend (Après-midi à Ostende)* (1881) [Figure 21] from that same

⁶⁷ « Bien que logé haut, Ensor, attire les regards. D'ailleurs ses toiles s'accrochent de ce placement, elles sont faites pour être vues de loin. Avant tout, Ensor paraît être un excellent peintre d'accessoires, ses meubles et ses appartements ont les mêmes qualités que ses natures mortes. Quant à ses personnages ils impressionnent peu ; on les distingue mal dans ses toiles où le fond empiète sur les premiers plans, où il y a une glissade d'êtres et de choses confondus ». Émile Verhaeren, "Le Salon de Paris," *L'Art moderne* 2, no.22 (28 May 1882): 171-173.

⁶⁸ Anne Leonard has highlighted another pictorial means by which Ensor's figures are disengaged from one another. She notes the performer's hidden face and the listener's gaze off into the distance, reading this as indication that each is psychologically isolated, concentrating on the aesthetic object of music rather than one another. Leonard compares this device in Ensor to Degas' painting *Manet and His Wife* (1858-9). See Anne Leonard, "Picturing Listening in Late Nineteenth Century Painting," *The Art Bulletin* 89, no.2 (June 2007): 266-286.

year instigates a similar viewing process. Two female figures sit on either side of a covered table in a typical bourgeois parlor. The folded hands and neatly tied bonnet of Ensor's sister Mitchie, on the left, seem to hold within those two knots the entire sentiment of bourgeois comportment so often associated with the interior itself. Confirming this sentiment, some scholars have described this picture as a "graceful inventory of all the material possessions" of a well-appointed lower-middle class drawing room.⁶⁹ The chairs upon which they sit—one ornately sculpted wood, the other upholstered—are tasteful but not ostentatious, the trinkets on the hearth and the mantelpiece are refined and, though decidedly bourgeois, entirely quotidian. Initially, there appears to be relative distinction between Mitchie's dress, the tablecloth and floor, and the chair of the woman on the right. However, after a moment it becomes unclear where the tablecloth ends and the dress begins. These thick swatches of white, green, grey, and black paint appear to sit between the boundaries of figure, material possessions, and space, thereby disrupting any facile descriptiveness of the scene. This is a picture that formally instigates procedural unfolding of the viewing process for its beholder, compelling one to stand back and move forward. It demands protracted attentiveness—a "critical reading."⁷⁰ The formal structure of the painting frustrates the expectation of immediate apprehension of the pictorial space—what Michael Fried has termed "instantaneity" or "presentness"—and consequently hinders the legibility of the interior.⁷¹ Surfaces and substances, space and time, are here confused and disoriented for the viewer. This effect was befuddling to audiences who declared Ensor's interiors to be "superb seen from a distance" though deeply confounding, and in many cases

⁶⁹ Canning, "James Ensor: Carnival of the Modern," 31.

⁷⁰ Ross Chambers denotes such "critical reading" as a broadly oppositional stance to the "culture of impatience." See Ross Chambers, "Flâneur Reading (On Being Belated)," in *Loiterature* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 214.

⁷¹ Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism: Or, the Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 344.

objectionable, upon closer consultation.⁷² While contemporary viewers noted a likeness to more familiar images of the interior in the visual culture at large, they insisted that Ensor's were indeed "something else."⁷³

This playful dance between initial recognition and material obfuscation enacted in *Chez Miss* and *Afternoon in Ostend* is consistent across Ensor's other interior scenes. While three principle pictures painted between 1881 and 1882 —*Chez Miss*, *Afternoon in Ostend*, and *Bourgeois Salon* [Figure 22]— are now known as "the bourgeois interiors," several other contemporaneous works now scattered across public and private collections depict similar scenes and employ these same formal tropes. For instance, in a smaller picture from 1881, *The Lady in Blue (La Dame en bleu)* [Figure 23], the sitter's dress, chair, shadow, and floor oscillate between thick marks of paint and oddly merging forms in an exaggerated enactment and complication of "two-foldedness" wherein depiction is achieved by shuttling between evocative material presence and representational picturing.⁷⁴ Such an effect is amplified in this image, where the rather defined and naturalistic rendering of the curtains drastically diverges from the ways in which the fabric of the dress and the carpet below are painted. The floors in Ensor's interiors do some profound work in this regard, exploiting this tension while also distorting the normal spatial regime of the pictured domicile, of bourgeois enclosure—a topic to which I return in a later portion of this chapter. While Ensor went on to paint pictures of working-class subjects

⁷² Verhaeren, "Le Salon de Paris," 171.

⁷³ Even when condemning it, an anonymous critic referred to as "M.W." said as much: « Son bonhomme sale et pensif, est superbe vu à distance ; c'est le peuple dans sa crotte, et, sans viser à l'art socialâtre — cette hérésie!— M. Ensor nous empoigne à cette misère simple qu'il décrit en écrasant le fusain comme une pâte, en le pétrissant, en le griffant de zébrures à la pointe de ses longs ongles de dandy ». M.W. "L'Essor," *La Jeune Belgique* 2 (1882-3): 354.

⁷⁴ On "two-foldedness" see Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), and for a particularly nuanced extension of this interplay between picture and painting see Michael Podro, *Depiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

during this time, such as *The Drunkards (Les Pochards)* (1883) [Figures 24], this painterly effect is most markedly enacted in his images of bourgeois daily life and in the construct of the specifically-bourgeois interior. The implications of his thickly-laid painted mark, or *tache*, in this particular context had contemporary critics hung up as well and became the point upon which they staked their interpretive claims. It collapsed a set of divergent commitments in the Belgian avant-garde on the relation between the painting and broader reality.⁷⁵

Theater of Matter: The Realist *Tache*

For audiences in the 1880s, as for contemporary viewers today, Ensor's interiors were consistently notable for this painterly disruption. The functions of such procedures were, however, construed entirely differently between those critics committed to a realist interpretation of Ensor's materiality, and those dedicated to an understanding based on the effects of painterly materiality in its own right. This tension was played out in Ensor's distinctive deployment of the painterly *tache* within the specific context of the Belgian art world during a moment of self-conscious reappraisal and cultural renewal. In seeking to unearth some of this complexity, we might first return to the artistic and discursive milieu in which resonances of the *tache* took root for one faction of Belgian critics encountering these interiors in the years around 1880. In so doing, I will demonstrate how one way of seeing the small, thick marks of paint emerged from a broader set of ideologies nascent in the Belgian social world at the time.

Ensor made his Brussels debut in June 1881, sending several works from his home studio

⁷⁵ My aim here is to avoid the restrictive binary of autonomy versus engagement, and rather point to the two different ways that art was understood to engage the world, and how this was ideally expressed through the motif of the interior.

in Ostend to the independent artistic society of *La Chrysalide*.⁷⁶ The exhibition drew Bruxelloise audiences primarily to view the work of a young cohort of Belgian painters. Domestic critics writing for periodicals such as *La Chronique* and the newly-founded *L'Art moderne* immediately pointed to the affinities between Ensor's work and those of a slightly older generation of Belgian painters known as the *tachistes*. This group had emerged in the 1860s with intent to propose an alternative to official art in the Salon, and to affirm a Belgian aesthetic independent from historically French cultural dominance. The most popular of the paintings in the exhibition of *La Chrysalide* was *L'Effet de lune* (1879), a work by the slightly older artist Guillaume Vogels that employed heavy handed, thick, and workman-like spreading of paint to serve a realist scene. Though now either lost or known by another name, descriptions in contemporary reviews indicate that the work bore close resemblances to *Ixelles, Rainy Morning (Ixelles, matinée pluvieuse)* (c.1883) [Figure 25]. The *tachistes*—Vogels, Périclès Pantazis, and the younger cohort of Willy Finch, Jan Toorop, Théo Hannon, and James Ensor, many of whom met at the Brussels Academy in 1877-80—created their paintings of everyday life by the use of painterly smears that seemed “randomly brushed on” and “fierce troweling.”⁷⁷ By emphatic insistence on the materiality of paint, they seemed to evoke the broader, non-art material facticity of the world beyond the picture plane. As one critic writing for the daily business newspaper *L'Echo de Bruxelles* reported in 1885: they are “*tachistes*, they express an idea, render a scene...through...a

⁷⁶ In 1875, when the avant-garde *La Société libre* dissolved, several residual members formed *La Chrysalide*. These included Constantin Meunier, Louis Artan, Félicien Rops, Alfred Verwée, Théodore Baron, and Louis Collart. Membership was composed of solely Belgian artists, and they held salons from 1876 to 1881.

⁷⁷ Camille Lemonnier, *L'École belge de peinture 1830-1905* (1881) (Brussels: Éditions Labor, 1999): 56. Michel Draguet has termed that fierce troweling and impasto that calls attention to the material weightiness of the picture Ensor's “theatre of matter.” See Michel Draguet, “Ensor: A Theater of Matter,” in *James Ensor*, ed. Anna Swinbourne (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 90.

sheet (*plaque*) of paint (*pâte*) spread more or less thickly on the canvas.”⁷⁸

A stylistic vocabulary based on the depictive capacities of pigment as matter, and an emphasis on the manipulation of humble and insistent materials more generally, was coming to define Belgian artistic identity around 1880. Visual artists and writers alike were celebrated for an insistent depiction of “truthful” material substance. For example, Constantin Meunier created gritty paintings of harsh landscapes, and then factory workers and laborers, in a blackened realist style dominated by a reduced palette and thick rendering. These were created just a few years before the production of his iconic sculptural works that engaged similar themes, though did not exploit the same material complexities as the realist paintings. Likewise, Émile Zola’s 1885 novel *Germinal* became an icon to a generation of Belgian progressives and blistered with descriptions of coalminers sullied with soot and sweat.⁷⁹ It represented contemporary social issues, with laborers viscerally pushed to the point of strike, alongside thick descriptions of the cobblestones, black pits, and harsh winds of Northeast France and its border with Belgium. Just a few years later, Camille Lemonnier wrote the Belgian counterpart to Zola’s novel—his *Happe-chair*, published in 1887. This aesthetic tendency was nurtured by the broader influence of thinkers such as Auguste Comte and Hippolyte Taine that fostered a culture of scientism from their positivist faith in impassive metaphysical fact, scrupulous objectivity, empirical

⁷⁸ Robert Hoozee has clearly stated that in Belgian art, *tachisme* was perfected in the 1880s chiefly and emphatically by James Ensor and Guillaume Vogels. See Hoozee, *Paris-Bruxelles, Bruxelles-Paris. Les relations artistiques entre la France et la Belgique, 1848 – 1914*, ed. A. Pingeot and R. Hoozee (Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, Paris: Réunion des Musées nationaux 1997), 148.

⁷⁹ A contemporary review in *l’Art moderne* described these features of “black and sinister” settings in Zola’s novel with explicit reference to the social question, and then to Meunier’s illustrations. See “Germinal,” *L’Art moderne* (12 April 1885): 113-15.

observation, and impartiality wedded to the study of life from the exterior.⁸⁰ The popularity of a material aesthetic in Belgium also intensely resonated with historical circumstances as the nation had recently achieved independence by means of the mass exploitation of domestic raw materials such as coal, iron, and zinc. This burgeoning aesthetic spoke to a national identity on at least two levels and capitalized on the matter-of-fact nature of materials and materiality both. Belgian painters seemed to engage the brute non-art materiality of their medium more than ever before in efforts to depict the realities of their immediate environment.

Ensor's friend and fellow *tachiste*, Guillaume Vogels, divided his time in the late 1870s between a house painting and decoration business, and collaboration with Pantazis on the short-lived *Cercle de la pâte*.⁸¹ This *cercle* took as its core objective the exploration of the organic power of color *as matter*. This was the work of the *tachistes*; critics described their paintings as "impossible, thrown together, akin to (the work of) whitewashers and poster hangers."⁸² Ensor met Vogels immediately upon his arrival in Brussels in 1879, probably through his relationship with Mariette and Ernest Rousseau, a professor at L'Université libre de Bruxelles, who regularly hosted meetings of the liberal circle of local literary, artistic, and intellectual elite. Vogels and Ensor maintained a close working relationship and developed a startlingly similar painterly style in the early 1880s. Ensor's *The Lamplighter (Le Lampiste)* and works by Vogels such as *Rotten*

⁸⁰ Linda Nochlin has provided a rather useful explication of the relation between mid-century Realism and scientism in her book, *Realism* (New York: Penguin, 1971). Roland Barthes points to the abundance of concrete, "superfluous" detail in the descriptions of found in nineteenth-century novels that, he argues, lend the effect of heightened realism. See Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect," in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. R. Howard (Berkeley University of California Press, 1989), 141-148. Also see Roland Barthes, "Change the Object Itself: Mythology Today," in *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 165-70.

⁸¹ Vogels and Ensor first met in the circle of Brussels' Francophone intellectual elite who had gravitated towards l'Université libre de Bruxelles, and specifically in regular salons held in the home of Ensor's close friend, Professor Ernest Rousseau.

⁸² Anon., *L'Art moderne* (19 February 1888): 67.

Weather (Temps de chien) (1875) [Figures 26, 27] were exhibited alongside one another in 1884.⁸³ In *The Lamplighter*, the thick steel-greys, blues, and slight greens that make up the base of the lamp appear as though they have been haphazardly smeared and gouged in multiple directions so as to emphasize the plastic qualities of the oil paint. The swath at the bottom reveals variegated layers of white and grey pigment, and a black smear in the middle looks as if to have been applied horizontally with a thumb and then gouged vertically with the pointed end of a brush. This application can only be described as an exploitation of the depictive capacities of matter—of scraping and smearing the flesh tones, of gouging and troweling the dark greys that comprise his overcoat, of globules of white and gold paint that make up the lamps. Likewise, in Vogels' painting, the rainy streets provided "the feeling (*sensation*) of material reality, that of the drizzle that soaks and freezes."⁸⁴ Ensor's friend and colleague Willy Finch adopted this same sensibility, as evidenced in his studies of weathered boats at the seaside [Figure 28], with paint handling which bears a profound similarity to Ensor's *The White Cloud (Le Nuage blanc)* (1884) [Figure 29]. *Tachisme* denoted this constitution of an immediate and vital sense of material reality achieved through the invocation of objective matter. Theirs was a realism borne not of unvarnished, traditional, naturalistic depiction or resemblance, but of close observation transformed into material substance. This is the painterly materiality that arrests our easy viewing of *Russian Music*, and that constitutes the material substance of the accessories that Ensor depicted so evocatively. Recognition of everyday material realities is here not hindered,

⁸³ These two pictures were exhibited at the independent artistic society of *Les XX* in Brussels. For a complete list of exhibited works, see Pierre Sanchez, *Le Salon des 'XX' et de la Libre esthétique - Bruxelles: Répertoire des exposants et listes de leurs œuvres 1884-1914*, (Dijon: l'Échelle de Jacob, 2012).

⁸⁴ « la sensation de la réalité matérielle, celle de la bruine qui mouille et qui glace ». Georges Eekhoud, "Chronique Bruxelloise," *Chronique des Beaux-Arts* (17 February 1884): 53.

but rather extended by the intervention of this thick materiality of the *tache* wherein one interacts with, exacerbates, and transforms the other.⁸⁵

Painted over the winter of 1880-81 in his home studio in Ostend and first exhibited in Brussels, *Chez Miss* traveled only once outside of Belgium in these years. In the spring of 1882 it hung in the Paris Salon, where Édouard Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882) [Figure 30] was also shown.⁸⁶ Manet's painting celebrated anecdotal and fleeting moments, and thematized shallow, elusive surfaces, shadows, and quick-handed execution that alluded to the transience of the space of the *café-concert* and other icons of modernity. The reflection of the male customer at the bar is especially thin, almost translucent in effect, and one gets the sense that the brushstrokes could be wiped clean without much effort. In his critical assessment, Verhaeren claimed the whole surface to be "no more than a reflection."⁸⁷ By contrast, and rather than fusing immediately to an illusory surface plane, Ensor's swaths of paint do not give the impression of superficial covering, but of density of matter. Due to their weight and heft in relation to the size of the canvas, they do not appear as though they could be wiped away or amalgamated. One gets the feeling upon viewing Ensor's picture that those arresting *taches* are not just covering or reflecting the objects and figures, but are integral to their basic existence. His surface is packed with material substance that appears woven together, and given equal weight, across and all over the picture plane.

⁸⁵ Michael Podro has helpfully elucidated this point. He writes, "[A]t the core of depiction is the recognition of its subject, and this remains so even when the subject is radically transformed and recognition becomes correspondingly extended; it remains so not because we seek the subject matter despite the complication of painting but because recognition and complication are each furthered by the other, each serves the other." Podro, *Depiction*, 6.

⁸⁶ Manet's picture was also shown two years later in Brussels, after his death in 1883. See "Exposition de l'Œuvre d'Édouard Manet à l'École des Beaux-Arts," *L'Art moderne* (27 January 1884).

⁸⁷ Verhaeren, "Le Salon de Paris," *L'Art moderne*, 2, no. 20 (14 May 1882): 157.

Critics who insisted on Ensor's realist painterly execution did not consider *Chez Miss* a double portrait, even though contemporary scholarship makes much of its representation of Ensor's sister and his friend Willy Finch in the family home in Ostend. Contemporary commentators rather saw it as a study of the objective realities of the interior of a room. Ensor himself indicated as much, specifying that it should not be taken as a portrait but rather as a rather unremarkable interior scene. Despite the familiar motif, however, Ensor's interiors behave very differently from those in the tradition of Northern genre scenes. Unlike the works of Braekeleer or de Hooch before him, *Chez Miss* denied the possibility of the unfolding of moral tales or anecdotal scenes. In spite of its narrative title, critical reception of *Afternoon in Ostend* similarly evaded any mention of its characters or their activities. Indeed, in lieu of any recognition of Ensor's mother and sister taking tea, these critics focused instead on the way the wood stove picked up the light from the window, the trinkets on the mantel, the draperies and tablecloth, employing the descriptive language of still life painting rather than of genre scenes. These pictures seemed to exploit scenes so banal—scenes that Marnin Young has termed “realist standards”—that they evaded any discussion of time and space, of narrative itself, and rather stood as studies of the physical realities of the environment.⁸⁸ Resisting the temporal-emotional unfolding of earlier precedents, they seemed to constitute a fragment of the material world. Offering the viewer little in the way of unfolding or capacity for imaginative engagement, they rather functioned as “concrete moment(s) of perceived temporal fact.”⁸⁹ Ensor scholar Herwig Todts has quite rightly designated such pictures, particularly *The Oyster Eater* [Figure 13], as “slice(s) of interior space”— isolated extractions from a room. They therefore more strongly

⁸⁸ Young's turn of phrase refers to the musical “standards”—a composition established popularly and modified slightly among repertoires. Young, “After Courbet: Realism and the Specter of History,” 157.

⁸⁹ Nochilin, *Realism*, 31-32

resemble still lives than genre scenes that are thematically similar such as Jan Steen's *Girl Eating Oysters* (1658-1660) [Figure 31].⁹⁰

Ensor's interiors do indeed operate in the pictorial mode of the still life. They are, however, also somewhat different from the tradition of Dutch still lives as exemplified by Frans Snyders' *Kitchen Scene (Le Garde-manger/Keukenstuk)* [Figure 32], a picture now residing several floors above *Russian Music* in the Musées royaux. In this grand painting, the material abundance of the scene of the kitchen maid and the sensational bounty is devastatingly plentiful and rendered so as to demonstrate the opulence at a pleasing distance. However, in Ensor's *The Oyster Eater*, the depicted materials and sheer painterly materiality are barely held within the picture plane. The folds of her dress create a bizarre construction of space and substance, while the thick pigment that makes up her swollen fingers stages a visceral reckoning with an abject materiality of fabric, flesh, and paint. *Tachiste* paintings stood not as anecdotal moments in the daily life of the home or as descriptive accounts of material opulence, but as studies of arranged material things and their constitution as matter—of the forlorn foodstuffs in *Le Chou*, folds of fabric in *Étoffes*, a table of small trinkets in *Le Flacon bleu*, or a daily meal in Vogel's *Les Œufs sur le plat* [Figures 33-35].

In this light, Verhaeren's critical response to the Parisian exhibition of *Chez Miss* in 1882 warrants another consideration. According to him, Ensor's interiors were "more than portraits," and rather resembled still lives, offering themselves up as studies of the physical dimensions of exceedingly ordinary objects.⁹¹ Again, he wrote:

Foremost, Ensor seems to be an excellent painter of accessories, his furniture and his apartments have the same qualities as his still lives. As to his

⁹⁰ Herwig Todts, *Ensor Revealed* (Brussels: Fonds Mercator, 2010), 43.

⁹¹ Émile Verhaeren, *James Ensor* (Brussels: G. Van Oest & Cie, 1908), 28.

personages, they do not make much of an impression; one distinguishes them poorly in his canvases, where the background encroaches on the foreground, where there is a confusing slippage between beings and things.⁹²

As a painter of accessories, Ensor was repeatedly praised for his “beautiful and decisive still lives,” and even when working within the parameters of the populated interior, he still retained a commitment to the material stuffs of the apartment over and above the narrative scene.

More than any association with modern foreign influences, Ensor’s *tachisme* recalled for domestic audiences a Belgian realist understanding of the world as depicted through the material substance of paint. It seemed to harken back to a tradition of the midcentury school of Tervuren. Affectionately called the “Belgian Barbizon”, this group of painters embraced plein-airism and a realist insistence on depiction of moments of concrete observation. Hippolyte Boulenger for instance, rendered landscapes—waves, rocky cliffs, cloud formations—by means of the palette knife in a subtle variation of earth tones [Figure 36]. Ensor’s painterly technique is patently similar to Boulenger’s, but also to that of Guillaume Van Strydonck, Hannon, Pantazis, Louis Artan, and Louis Dubois [Figure 37]. Ensor’s own, *The White Cloud*, one among some 100 seascapes painted between 1875 and 1884, recalls these precedents and, while dissimilar in subject matter from the interiors, is consistent in his method of execution.⁹³ Just as the modern landscape painter in Belgium embraced the *belle tache*, and used the palette knife to trowel on vibrant pigments, Ensor employed this technique to construct the atmosphere of his indoor

⁹² Verhaeren, “Le Salon de Paris,” 156.

⁹³ Ensor himself painted some 100 seascapes between 1875 and 1884, and while his subject matter in all likelihood changed towards the end of this period, his painterly technique remained largely the same.

scenes.⁹⁴ In 1882, as one *L'Art moderne* critic maintained while reviewing the exhibition of young painters at *Le Cercle artistique*, the most exceptional modern art in Belgium was realist, marked by a poverty of subjects, quotidian scenes, absence of emotion, weight of the facture, and somber tones. It was painting that followed in the footsteps of Tervuren, of De Groux, Boulenger, and Dubois that was critically prized.⁹⁵

Unsurprisingly then, Ensor became known as the “heir of Dubois” who himself was affectionately deemed the “Belgian born Courbet.”⁹⁶ Both Dubois and the French realist were “painters of the eye and feeling; they render beautiful, sanguine still lives and rich physical organisms in an art that is above all *material*.”⁹⁷ For his use of the palette knife and the *lourde tache*, Ensor’s work recalled that of Courbet himself, who enjoyed unparalleled popularity in Belgium in the 1860s and ‘70s and whose very identity had, of course, come to be represented by the palette knife itself.⁹⁸ This Belgian appropriation of Courbet cannot be overestimated; despite his heritage, the *franc-comtois* painter became an artistic idol to the young nation in the development of a budding tradition based on a realist aesthetic. Indeed, his work became so popular on the Belgian markets that when the 1878 posthumous Courbet exhibition in Brussels took place, many of the works were sourced from local collectors. Courbet had spent much of his time in Belgium since the first of many Northern exhibitions of his work in 1851, finding it an

⁹⁴ « Voyez les toiles de cet original ostendais qui a nom James Ensor ! Où trouvez plus d’intensité de vie et de justesse de coloris, mêlées à plus d’observations dans le caractère et de sincérité dans le rendu de l’atmosphère ambiante ? [...] Aussi aime-t-il les ‘belles taches’, et volontiers il se sert du mâle couteau à palette pour truelle ses pâtes vibrantes et pour les étendre sur la toile, voluptueusement ». Théo Hannon, “Exposition de l’Essor,” *Chronique artistique* (1883): 22-24.

⁹⁵ “L’Exposition du Cercle Artistique” *L’Art moderne* 17 (23 April 1882): 130.

⁹⁶ Camille Lemonnier, *L’École belge de peinture* (Brussels: G. Van Oest, 1906), 12.

⁹⁷ Lemonnier, *L’École belge de peinture*, 112. Emphasis mine.

⁹⁸ Ensor’s exposure to Courbet probably came directly from the 1878 exhibition while he was still living in the capital, but also through a series of mediations that Marnin Young has traced by way of his mentor and fellow *tachiste*, Périclès Pantazis, who had trained for a time in the Courbet’s Parisian atelier and subsequently adopted the rich and worked approach to the painterly mark.

escape from what he saw as the oppressive atmosphere of the French capital. His indebtedness to seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish painting, emphasis on the quotidian and contemporary, and most of all his realist painterly style (the likes of which were concurrently being honed in Belgian artistic circles) drew direct affinities between Courbet and the Belgian artistic milieu. Perhaps most famously, in his notes for *Pauvre Belgique*, Charles Baudelaire went so far as to make this equation in 1864: “philosophie des peintres belges, philosophie de notre ami Courbet.”⁹⁹ Courbet’s later seascapes such as *Immensity (L’Immensité)* (1869) [Figure 38], which was exhibited in 1882 in Paris along with *Chez Miss*, confirms the sensibilities that Courbet himself espoused decades prior: “[P]ainting is an essentially concrete art and can only consist of the presentation of real and existing things. It is a completely physical language, the words of which consist of all visible objects.”¹⁰⁰ Courbet and Dubois, and by extension Ensor, represented the material world with all its most strikingly materialistic qualities.

These critics seemed to believe that in Ensor’s hands the bourgeois universe of the interior became vitalized by a disruption of facile recording and by introducing a way of apprehending the world through its material facticity. The nineteenth-century interior was a collection of commodities, of tactile and impressionable things—upholstered furnishings, heavy draperies, abundant house plants, and trinkets— where, to reference Benjamin yet again, the modern subject left traces and impressions. It was the reality of the bourgeoisie, constituting its most intimate physical relation to the explosive market for furnishings, mass production of textiles, and consumption of collectibles that characterized the material conditions of modern society. This was an empirical relation grounded in positivist belief where understanding the

⁹⁹ Charles Baudelaire, “Pauvre Belgique” (1864), quoted in *Paris-Bruxelles*, 933.

¹⁰⁰ Courbet (1861), quoted in Nochlin, *Realism*, 25.

world meant “a rediscovery of the self on the other side of matter.”¹⁰¹ Ensor facilitated this rediscovery by slightly undoing the interior, thus invoking its materialistic qualities (understood in all of the base conventions of the term: materialist, non-art, common matter) so as to evoke the modern subject’s relation to the phenomenal world all the while participating in a process of self-definition.

For critics in the early 1880s who were writing in domestic, general publications and attending exhibitions of *La Chrysalide* and *Le Cercle artistique* in Brussels, an understanding of Ensor’s technique seems to have been fueled by efforts at cultural nationalism and the desire to mythologize him into a newly invented tradition of Belgian art. On the *cinquantenaire* of national independence, this had become a politicized issue amongst a cultural elite who claimed that “(historic) French dominance had retarded the development of a national school.”¹⁰² Over the course of midcentury, since its independence from French political domination in 1815 and then from the Dutch in 1830, Belgium had emerged as a prosperous, industrial, and independent European nation. This was evident in the modernization and rapid internationalization of the capital city of Brussels and later matched by King Léopold II’s tremendous imperial reach in the final decade of the century. The nation was quickly evolving as distinct and independent, and was perceived to be in need of foundational traditions and a national aesthetic that would imply continuity with the past while simultaneously celebrating modern developments. The impulse to create a unified national art and construct a Belgian cultural identity emerged against the backdrop of the Flemish movement, conceived to vitalize a domestic culture free from dominance of French cultural rule and internationalism more broadly. This movement, to which

¹⁰¹ Clark, “On the Social History of Art,” 19.

¹⁰² Camille Lemonnier, *Histoires des Beaux-Arts en Belgique : peinture, sculpture, gravure, et architecture* (Brussels: M Weissenbruch, 1881), 3.

Ensor himself passively sympathized, considerably complicated the efforts at the establishment of a Belgian national tradition. The schism between Flemish-speaking Flanders and francophone Wallonia widened after French was retained as the official language of state bureaucracy in 1830 and an increasingly internationalist agenda was pursued in the capital. Additionally, the major political crisis of the Schools Conflict (1879-1884), wherein the conservative Catholic party clashed with the secularist Liberals on issues of religion in education, only worsened these divisions.¹⁰³ In 1836, the seat of Catholic higher education came to be (and remains) the Catholic University in Flemish-speaking Leuven, while that of Liberal, internationalist and secular education became L'Université libre. It was also at these universities that the seeds of a revival of Belgian arts and letters were sewn in the 1880s, most notably through the establishment of more than twenty five new journals between 1874 and 1884, thereby further complicating the tensions between Catholics and Liberals, Flemish nationalists and Belgian nationalists, Francophones and Flemish-speakers.¹⁰⁴ The young country was wracked with divisions along nearly every line—linguistic, cultural, political, and religious—and the rifts it effected were often blurred. The creation of a Belgian national aesthetic that might bind together disparate groups was a particularly challenging task, yet one that seemed to many more necessary than ever before.

As part of this bid included in the *cinquantaire* year, the newly inaugurated Palais des Beaux-Arts (now the Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique) held the monumental *Exposition historique de l'Art belge 1830-1880*, showcasing fifty years of Belgian art with the

¹⁰³ In 1884, the issue was settled on paper with the defeat of Walthère Frère-Orban's Liberal government by Catholic leader Jules Malou who instated religious education laws. These political, ideological, and cultural divisions, however, remained nascent in late-nineteenth century Belgium.

¹⁰⁴ See Susan Marie Canning, "A History and Critical Review of the Salons of "Les Vingt", 1884-1893" (Ph.D. diss, Pennsylvania State University, 1980), 10.

implicit agenda of creating a legible lineage for a national school. The catalogue featured a livret as well as descriptions of the modernized, industrialized city of Brussels itself. Though not included in the exhibition (1880 was slightly early for him; *Chez Miss* had not yet been painted), Ensor no doubt saw the show and his critics surely would have.¹⁰⁵ Contemporary naturalist genre scenes were shown alongside canvases by Dubois, Artans, Vogels, De Groux, Braekeleer, and Coosemans so as to “write” a history of Belgian art based predominantly on a hermetic, realist, “theatre of matter.”

For these critics so concerned, Ensor’s imaging of the interior was a medium through which to articulate a system for knowing the phenomenal world informed by a larger cultural understanding of Belgian artistic tradition. It represented a relation of the self to one’s immediate environment, and also to the new idea of the Belgian nation. That way of knowing, however, was fraught and contested by another set of critics who rebuffed realist claims and thought Ensor’s same pictures behaved in a very different way.

Into the Represented Scene: The Symphonic *Tache*

All of Ensor’s critics, no matter their commitments, agree on an initial reading of *Chez Miss*—recognition of a familiar scene followed by its disruption by the *tache*. As I have shown, some understood Ensor’s painterly materiality as distinctly realist, embodying the material world and immediate environment of the interior, while other critics understood it in completely divergent terms. These viewers were likewise embroiled in efforts to assert a national style;

¹⁰⁵ The impulse to define a national aesthetic tradition was codified a few years later when writer and critic Camille Lemonnier set out to write the history of Belgian art with his *L’Histoire des Beaux-Arts en Belgique 1830–1887* (1887).

however, they looked to international, more modernist influences to assert a meaning for Ensor's distinct painterly materiality and its purchase on the world. This tension—between an understanding of materiality of paint as realist on the one hand, and as productive in its own right on the other—had particular resonances in the image of the interior, a motif that, as I will show, negotiated this shifting understanding of the individual's relation to materials and materiality with particular efficacy.

Camille Lemonnier was the critic perhaps most unsettled by Ensor's realist label. He concluded: “[I]n aiming for the natural, [Ensor] falls into the artificial; his canvases...refract it into a diffusion of showers and sparks.”¹⁰⁶ Here, Lemonnier recounts the same viewing process resulting in painterly materiality that others understood as a realist *tache*, but here its supposition of realist authority is evacuated. In its place is a valuation of the formal components of the picture—color, texture, variegation of tone—that were understood to be, more than anything, affective. The greatest qualities of *Chez Miss* and similar interiors were found in the “nervous, ethereal qualities of his vision that led to sensual and rich realizations” in the spectator.¹⁰⁷

Upon its exhibition in 1884, progressive Belgian writer Georges Eekhoud described one of Ensor's interiors, *Seule* (later titled *La Coloriste*) (1880) [Figure 39], as beguiling in its colorism: “[I]t has the prized sense of the value of tones and composes prodigious symphonies while remaining in a unique scale. Its color blends together, harmoniously degrades, it caresses and subjugates the eye by initially bewildering it.”¹⁰⁸ Yet another critic, Philéas Mur, though

¹⁰⁶ In response to Vogels' *L'Effet de pluie*, Lemonnier said something along similar lines: « La réalité a une solidité, une unité de trame, une finesse de contexture qui doivent se réfléchir dans le tableau; ce respect de la vérité matérielle en moins ; la peinture dégénère en une débandade de coups de brosse qui tourne à la maculature et substitue à la science de la coulée grasse et serrée ». Camille Lemonnier, “L'Art à l'Exposition universelle—Ceux qui n'exposent pas,” *L'Artiste* (31 August 1878).

¹⁰⁷ Lemonnier, Special edition dedicated to James Ensor, *La Plume* (May 1898).

¹⁰⁸ Georges Eekhoud, *Chronique des Beaux-Arts*, (17 February 1884): 53.

contradictory in his assessment of the overall quality of Ensor's work, struck a similar chord in 1885 upon the exhibition of *Afternoon in Ostend* in Brussels:

Ensor, enormously gifted, spoils his natural gifts with an irresistible need to dazzle. In my opinion it is not just his careless drawing that viewers find disconcerting: in his still lives, certain objects, appearing as an interesting and lush symphony of colors, would, to a physicist, seem more akin to strange and unstable, bizarre phenomena randomly violating all rules of perspective.¹⁰⁹

Even when critics diverged on the merit of Ensor's work, many arrived at a similar interpretation—they struck the viewer and took her aback, they were “interesting” and “delicious” (*savoureuse*) explorations of the effects of color afforded at the expense of depictive truthfulness. Several critics commented on his skillful coloration, but when turning their attention to the realist or naturalist elements of the picture, concluded that it must have been rendered at the moment of an earthquake.¹¹⁰ For Lemonnier, Eekhoud, and Mur, all young writers associated with the modern literary circle around *La Jeune Belgique*, Ensor was heir to a colorist tradition that emphasized formal harmony and sensation. Far from reading the *tache* as constitutive of the material world outside of art, these critics read it as a painterly stimulus set up to elicit psychophysical responsiveness in the beholder. The *tache* still staged a disruption, but

This picture was titled *Seule* at both the 1882 Paris Salon and the 1884 Exhibition of Les XX, and it was only in 1887 it was known by its current name, *La Coloriste*.

¹⁰⁹ « Ensor, généreusement doué, gâte ses dons naturels par un irrésistible besoin d'épater. J'admettrais qu'il déconcertait les visiteurs mais autrement que par des négligences de dessin. Certains objets de ses natures-mortes, intéressante et savoureuses symphonies de couleurs, fournirent au physicien de bizarres phénomènes d'équilibre instable et enfreignent à plaisir toutes les règles de la perspective ». Philéas Mur, “Salon des XX,” *Chronique des Beaux-Arts—Anvers* (1885):156.

¹¹⁰ « celle qu'il a nommée *Une après-dînée à Ostende*, donne la vague idée d'un appartement qui subit l'oscillation d'un tremblement de terre ». Anon., “Sixième exposition annuelle de l'Essor,” *L'Art moderne* 2, no.20 (15 January 1882) :19, quoted in Young, *Realism in the Age of Impressionism*, 176. Similarly, another writer remarked: « Ce salon bourgeois est d'une jolie couleur ; mais l'artiste aurait bien fait de ne pas le peindre pendant un tremblement de terre ». X.Y.Z., “A Travers les arts: Les XX,” *La Meuse* (4 March 1886): 6.

with very different results.

This critical position invoked the work of earlier-nineteenth century Romantics—Eugène Delacroix in France and J.M.W. Turner in Britain. The subtle tonalities in passages such as the table cloth and carpet in *Afternoon in Ostend*, or the clothing and modulated skin tones in *Seule*, recalled atmospheric effects in works such as Turner’s *Light and Colour (Goethe’s Theory)—the Morning after the Deluge—Moses writing the Book of Genesis* (1843) [Figure 40].¹¹¹ Here, pigment is built up and colors modulated so as to create a sublime and all-encompassing atmosphere within the limits of the canvas. Similar to Ensor’s works, Turner’s marks of paint sit atop the surface just shy of amalgamation. Broadly speaking, these comparisons divulged a larger commitment to color as distinct and artefactual, and as a powerful instigator for ideated sensations, for pleasure and pain, in the perceiving audience. This interest in affective form can be traced back notably to early-nineteenth century French aesthetic theory. Taking hold especially amongst Romantics, a more focused attention to the capacities of color, line, and form as they produced coordinated and predictable effects in the spectator was increasingly theorized and made coherent over the course of the century.¹¹²

Aligning Ensor with a colorist tendency, and with Delacroix specifically, recalls Baudelaire’s 1846 assessment of *The Barque of Dante (Dante et Virgile)* (1822) [Figure 41], a work that he found “truly stupefying” and “poetic.” In perspicacious terms that resonate here, Baudelaire asserted these qualities of the work:

¹¹¹ Verhaeren, *Ensor*, 7.

¹¹² Much of what I have to say on “affective formalism” comes by way of discussions with Todd Cronan whose book *Against Affective Formalism: Matisse, Bergson, Modernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014) introduces the issue of affect as it has circulated in theories of modern art. His discussion of “art as affect machine” in the late-nineteenth century is particularly engaging, not least because of my slight reinterpretation here regarding his claims concerning the objective and exteriorized character of aesthetic response as well as the role of intentionality in these debates.

A painting by Delacroix...always leaves a profound impression, an intensity that increases at a distance. Ceaselessly sacrificing the detail to the ensemble, and reluctant to weaken the vitality of thought to a clear and more calligraphic execution, he fully exploits the illusive originality that is the intimacy of the scene.¹¹³

According to Baudelaire, Delacroix sacrifices detail and forfeits precisely delineated execution in the interest of the profundity of the overall impression. In his assessment of Ensor, Verhaeren recalls these same sensibilities—the work was most effective when viewed from a distance so as to appreciate the overall formal ensemble.¹¹⁴ This was not an instance of detailed recording, as we see in Braekeleer, Khnopff, or Stevens, or even an embodiment of the physical reality of things, as realist critics professed.¹¹⁵ Seen in this distant view, Ensor's paintings, like Delacroix's, lessen the burden of detail and line, and therefore allow the harmonizing qualities of color and form to perform as instigators to powerful responses in the spectator. In so doing, painting's relation to the world seemed renegotiated and put into question: was the evocation of the material conditions of the painted mark an indication of Ensor's effectiveness in representing the world of the interior or in the effects of painting upon a viewing subject in that world? The

¹¹³ Charles Baudelaire, "Salon de 1846," in *Charles Baudelaire, Baudelaire, Œuvres complètes*, ed. Michel Jamet (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1999), 651.

Years later, Paul Valéry would reflect on the trinity of artists he saw to have been collectively most concerned with capturing the mind of the viewer by sensorial means. He writes: "Delacroix, Wagner, Baudelaire—all great theorists, bent on dominating other souls by sensorial means. Their one dream was to create the irresistible effect—to intoxicate, or overwhelm...they sought in abstract mediation the key to absolutely certain action upon their subject—man's nervous and psychic being...[It was] the ambition of such violent and tormented minds, anxious to reach and, as it were, to possess that tender and hidden region of the soul by which it can be held and controlled...They wish to enslave; ...to bring us into bondage." Paul Valéry, *Degas, Manet, Morisot*, trans. David Paul (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), 136-137.

¹¹⁴ Michael Fried has discussed the role of the detail (*morceau*) and *tableau* in French art criticism of the second half of the nineteenth century in his article "Painting Memories: On the Containment of the Past in Baudelaire and Manet," *Critical Inquiry*, 10 No. 3 (March 1984): 510-542.

¹¹⁵ Michelle Facos has speculated that Khnopff's picture, that she describes as a "luxurious personal refuge," was inspired directly by Huysman's novel, *À Rebours*. See M. Facos, *An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century Art* (London: Routledge, 2011), 357.

latter position became increasingly prominent as the decade progressed, and especially with a faction of literary, liberal critics who were looking to aesthetic precedents outside of Belgium. In the rapidly modernizing and cosmopolitan capital, now referred to as the “crossroads of Europe,” such ideas from further afield were more prevalent than ever before.

In the 1880s, this interest in affective form was on the rise in European art-critical discourse and the burgeoning field of psychophysical aesthetics. While several scholars have thoughtfully treated this phenomenon by looking closely at French Neo-Impressionist paintings and the new types of effects they elicited in their viewing audience, the broader vogue for a science of perception, accessed through vision of formal stimuli (including, though not simply, dots and points) though grounded in the body, had expansive roots.¹¹⁶ Investigations into the physiology of perception extended back most notably to Goethe’s *Theory of Colors* from 1810 and Humbert de Superville’s experiments from the 1820s, though it was not until the final decades of the century that the field was revived by widespread, abiding interest in these theories of perceptual responsiveness. This revival was propelled by Hermann von Helmholtz’s research which focused on the optical processes involved in the perception of plastic form, and in the theories of his most widely read exponent in France, Hippolyte Taine. The latter’s *On Intelligence (De l’Intelligence)* (1870) demonstrated an interpretive model for coming to know the world that was reliant upon sensation and responsiveness to outward material fact—a science of bodily reception that was, as John Gage has described it, “unlike (the work of the) scientist, exclusively concerned with effects.”¹¹⁷ To understand Ensor as a colorist in the mid-1880s was to consider his painting to be hovering somewhere between mimesis and affect, symptom and

¹¹⁶ See Martha Ward “Psychophysical Aesthetics,” *Pissarro, Neo-Impressionism, and the Spaces of The Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹¹⁷ John Gage, *Colour and Meaning: Art, Science, Symbolism* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 175

stimulus.

As the decade progressed, the explosive craze for color theory and psychophysical aesthetics, particularly, though not solely, through interest in divisionist painting, swept through the Belgian avant-garde. By the mid-1880s and with Ensor as a notable exception, the Neo-Impressionist style had taken hold of the imaginations of Belgian contemporary painters, demonstrating a larger infatuation with the novelty of pointillist technique. In 1883, *Les XX* was founded under the mandate that each year it exhibit 20 foreign artists alongside 20 domestic ones, thereby exposing the Belgian public to works by Frenchmen Georges Seurat and Paul Signac, who were widely perceived to have employed the theories of psychophysical aesthetics in their production.¹¹⁸ Shortly thereafter, the majority of Belgian painters adopted pointillism: former *tachiste* Willy Finch painted landscapes in this fashion, as did Jan Toorop, and even Henry van de Velde created works such as *The Beach (La Plage)* (1888) before turning to a more focused career in the applied arts. Anna Boch painted Neo-Impressionistic and pointillistic scenes; and former *tachiste*, Théo Van Rysselberghe, emerged as one of the foremost Neo-Impressionist painters of his generation [Figures 42, 43]. They embraced the 1885 discoveries of Frenchman Charles Henry's "scientific aesthetic" in which he argued that, regardless of a picture's thematic associations or symbolic functions, abstract elements acted upon the nerves and reliably generated feelings of pleasure or pain, happiness or sadness, in the normative viewer. In the first Salon of *Les XX* in 1884, for instance, the walls were dominated by a rather even division between the work of older Belgian realists such as Louis Artan, Charles van der Stappen, and the recently deceased Pantazis, and a set of international artists, including Joseph

¹¹⁸ In 1891, Seurat publically admitted to the influence of Henry's theories on his own working method, identifying a direct relation between cheerful, solemn, and sad effects and certain precise combinations of formal properties such as line and color. This was subsequently attributed by French critic Gustave Kahn as a direct reflection of Henry's theories. Gustave Kahn, "Seurat," *L'Art moderne*, (April 5, 1891): 107.

Israels, Max Liebermann, John Singer Sargent, and James McNeil Whistler. Though many of this later cohort professed an interest in colorism, just three years later, in the *Les XX* exhibition of 1887, the walls were overtaken by works of expressive color and form, where pigment was conceived as affective and charged, its presence more thoroughly conceived as “colorism” than as “materiality.”

If one were pressed to identify the moment of visible summation for this explosion of color theory these amongst Belgian artists and critics, it would be the exhibition in 1887 of Georges Seurat’s massively-scaled depiction of bourgeois leisure, *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte—1884 (Une Dimanche après-midi à l’Île de la Grande Jatte—1884)* (1884-6) [Figure 44].¹¹⁹ The trend to deconstruct colors into individual painted marks amplified throughout 1884, 1885, and 1886 with exposure to the work of Seurat, Pissarro, Dubois-Pillet, and Signac; however, it was with the arrival of the *Grande Jatte* that this tendency reached its apogee. Seurat’s work was an explicit meditation on the effects of arranged, colored dots on the audience and may seem entrenched in Henry’s physiological theories of affective form. Upon its debut at the eighth Impressionist exhibition in 1886 in Paris, *L’Art moderne* published a lengthy article dissecting “chromatic theory” inspired by the work of the Neo-Impressionists. Penned by critic and ardent supporter, Felix Fénéon, it described the viewer’s reaction in the face of such paintings as “sudden complimentary perceptions...(they) let the color move the viewer, vibrate on brusque contact, and recompose at a distance; the paintings envelope their subjects.”¹²⁰

Though radically different in appearance—Ensor’s paintings, and those of Turner and Delacroix mixed colors on the canvas, whereas Seurat’s technique isolated marks of pigment that were then

¹¹⁹ For an extensive treatment of this image and contemporary color theory see Paul Smith, *Seurat and the Avant-Garde* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

¹²⁰ Félix Fénéon, “Chromatic Theory,” *L’Art moderne* (1886).

optically mixed on the retina—the language used to describe the effect is startlingly similar to that used by Mur, Lemonnier, or Eekhoud.¹²¹ In fact, in his review of *La Grande Jatte*, Lemmonier obviously drew from this theoretical ground in making clear the task of such work:

[It has] the gift of profoundly moving its viewer, and of instigating a feeling of vibration and percussive contact that stimulates the nerves and brain. Such stimulation is normally divided in the majority of people, those who are anaesthetized by intellectual refinement and certain aesthetic work. The interference by the work of art, properly so called, instigates the natural poetic faculties.¹²²

The fanfare around the arrival of Seurat's work at *Les XX* cannot be overestimated. 1887 was labeled the “Year of the *Grande Jatte*” and audiences bowed to the veritable altar as it was installed in the new museum of fine arts. It “caused a scandal...When it was exhibited, it precipitated sudden cases of mental alienation and tremendous apoplexy,” wrote Belgian critic, Edmond Picard.¹²³ This exhibition heralded the painter's esteem in Belgium, but also stood as a formal benchmark for the popularity of the painterly style and theoretical tendencies that came to be known as Neo-Impressionism. The exhibition that February was not a complete changing of the guard—it did include a large group of naturalist paintings by de Braekeleer, several by late-realist painter Jean-Francois Raffaëlli, and by Norwegian “Impressionist” (perhaps better understood as *tachiste*), Fritz Thurlow.¹²⁴ The layout of the exhibition, however, made clear the

¹²¹ This process, based on the recent work of Rood and Chevreul, is described in Fénéon's review, “La Grande Jatte,” *L'Art moderne* (6 February 1887): 43-44.

¹²² Lemonnier, “Les arts en Belgique,” 16.

Verhaeren also wrote: « *La Grande Jatte* me sollicitait à oublier toute couleur et ne me parlait que de lumière. Je fus conquis des yeux ». Verhaeren quoted in Canning, *A History and Critical Review of the Salons of Les Vingt*, 147-148.

¹²³ « À Bruxelles, la *Grande Jatte* ferait scandale. Il y aurait, si elle était exposée, des cas subits d'aliénation mentale et des apoplexies foudroyantes ! » Edmond Picard, quoted in Henry van de Velde, “Georges Seurat,” *La Wallonie* 6 (March/April 1891):167-71.

¹²⁴ For an in-depth treatment of the particulars of individual exhibitions of *Les XX* see Canning, *A History and Critical Review of the Salons of Les Vingt* (1980).

development of the Belgian school, as it directed visitors first through an antechamber of older Belgian painters—Louis Artan, Henri de Braekeleer, and Eugene Smits—before directing them into the main galleries. The rest of the exhibition was accessed through a curtained door and featured the work of domestic and foreign artists, punctuated by *La Grande Jatte* which received by far the most critical attention.

To align Ensor's interiors with colorism was not to align him with Neo-Impressionism (though some critics, including Lemonnier, surely did), although the valuation of affective response was consistent across the two cases. Ensor, along with a few critics, took the Neo-Impressionist application of dots to be overly objective and banal, lacking in representational depth.¹²⁵ His interiors did, however, elicit a powerful and affectively-charged sense of interiorized feeling. Repeatedly described to have elicited “symphonic” effects, they recalled the theorizations of Richard Wagner—particularly his conceptualization of “orchestral color”—and the long-held association of music as the most evocative and absorptive of the arts. Rather than the oft-held association of intimacy with passivity, Ensor's pictures evocatively instigated a vital and embodied experience of interiority, wherein the depiction of the interior was exacerbated by the prompting of “intimate impulses” by means of the materiality of paint.

Viewing works such as *Chez Miss*, spectators seemed to feel enveloped in a decorative atmosphere and to psychologically intuit the experience of enclosed space. In fact, taking another sustained look at the picture, that strange floor comprised of the most abrasive *taches* disrupts the depictive space of the bourgeois interior but also our relation to the scene. Whereas we encounter the main figures and piano from one perspective, the floors (up to the point of the man's shoe and the table legs) appear to tip the picture forward into our space. This perspectival “tipping,” or

¹²⁵ See Emile Verhaeren, *James Ensor* (Bruxelles: Van Oest & Cie, 1908), 44.

conflation of spatial regimes, happens across Ensor's interiors—we see it in *Afternoon in Ostend*, *The Oyster Eater*, and most profoundly in *A Bourgeois Salon*. Here, the floor, comprised of thick *taches* as if to mimic an ornate carpet, is quite jarring to the viewer who attempts to find a suitable physical viewpoint from which to take in the image. Instead, she is confronted and enveloped into the scene through the rather masterful manipulation of the space of beholding. Thus, this feeling of envelopment (and disorientation) that viewers reported upon seeing happens on two levels: by way of the psychophysical responsiveness elicited by the *tache*, and also by the formal willingness of the picture to tip out into our space, thereby eliciting a psychological and bodily projection into the environment. These slanted and spatially disorienting floors are striking for their correspondence to the floors in Dutch paintings such as those by Vermeer. However, they also evoke contemporaneous stage design, with floors angled up so as to more thoroughly engage the audience.¹²⁶ This is not modernist flatness but something closer to painting-as-environment. At least partially so. More evocatively than any other critic, Verhaeren expressed this in one of the most intriguing pieces of criticism on Ensor's paintings:

Chez Miss...possesses all the artistic merits that we ordinarily recognize in him. Excellent daylight, intimacy, life, broad execution...despite the fact that this could be just anybody, we sense *our* life, our existence, our daily routine filtering through... And that is the rare and glorious gift of this painting, to be an evocation of such life, that from the start it allows us to *enter it, so to speak*,

¹²⁶ On theater as trope in late-nineteenth century painting, and in Ensor's work in particular, see Claire Moran, *Staging the Artist: Performance and the Self-Portrait from Realism to Expressionism* (New York: Routledge, 2017), particularly her discussion of "Aesthetic Performances."

*as actors in the represented scene.*¹²⁷

Ensor's interiors negotiate between more traditional depictions of representational space and an evocation of a spatial environment. Language contemporaneously used to describe the experience of entering into a room—"enclosure," "atmosphere," and "overall harmony"—was employed by critics to describe the effect of viewing these easel paintings. This language was also marshalled to describe the new initiative of the performance of chamber music in individual, enclosed artists' studios throughout Brussels in the 1880s.¹²⁸ Externally instigated, powerfully interiorized feeling and spatial enclosure were increasingly interconnected in the art criticism.

An understanding of vision as it was tied up with a network of responses, including spatial understanding, imagination, and emotions, was coming to define a particularly influential strain of thought in the overlapping fields of aesthetics and perceptual psychology, particularly in the German tradition. In 1873, Theodor Vischer revived earlier Wagnerian ideas of embodied beholding and responsiveness in a theory of *Einfühlung* (usually translated in English as "empathy")—the reciprocal experience of exchange and transformation between a work and its audience. Spectatorship was reconfigured and understood not as simply visual, but rather involved in a process wherein the self was overtaken by aesthetic effects while simultaneously

¹²⁷ « Chez Miss – c'est le titre de sa nouvelle œuvre – possède tous les mérites d'art qu'on lui reconnaît d'ordinaire. Jour excellent, intimité, vie, exécution large, indiquant une sûreté et une audace de maître. Le sujet est tout simple : une femme joue du piano, un jeune homme l'écoute. Et pourtant à travers cette donnée si 'première venue', nous sentons notre vie, notre existence, notre train-train journalier qui filtre. Nous revivons un de nos heures défuntes ; nous avons le souvenir d'une visite analogue faite quelque part dans un salon bourgeois, l'après-dîner, alors que pour répondre à notre prière, la miss de la maison se met au piano et nous joue du Mendelssohn ou du Schubert. Et c'est là le rare et glorieux don de cette peinture, d'être une évocation de vie telle, que d'emblée elle nous fait entrer pour ainsi dire comme acteurs dans la scène représentée ». É. Verhaeren, "Chronique artistique," *La Jeune Belgique* (1 October 1883): 431-438.

¹²⁸ Anon., "Les Concerts : Le Quatuor A.L.B.K.," *L'Art moderne* (27 March 1881).

enforcing a powerful, physical sense of selfhood.¹²⁹ “The viewer,” Vischer wrote, “unconsciously projects its own bodily form—and with also the soul—into the form of the object.”¹³⁰ Vision was embedded in the body, the psychological self held inside as well; optical encounter was closely tied to psychophysical experience; sensation was at once physical, psychological, and emotional.

Such considerations were not limited to Vischer, and extended in the 1880s by Heinrich Wölfflin into the psychological understanding of architecture. Taking these theorists as prime examples, Juliet Koss has brilliantly rebuffed claims that the nineteenth century witnessed a separation of vision and the perceiving body.¹³¹ By turning close attention to theories of aesthetic empathy and thus placing the eye within the viewer’s body, theories of vision and formal affect at the end of the century became not confirmations of pure opticality normally propagated by persistent accounts of modernism, but rather a readjusted way of understanding the relation between the artwork and a beholder who corporeally inhabited the world. The persistence and pervasiveness of empathy aesthetics was such that Verhaeren could claim that encounter with the deeply-moving daylight, loose execution, and atmospheric or “symphonic” environment of the painting could cause the viewer to lose oneself and enter visually, and bodily, into the scene.

Far from a random meditation on the painted mark, even for those critics who understood Ensor’s pictures as fundamentally affective in nature, the fact that they specifically represented

¹²⁹ “I entrust my individual life to the lifeless form, just as I...do with another living person. Only ostensibly do I remain the same although the object remains an other. I seem merely to adapt and attach myself to it as one hand clasps another, and yet I am mysteriously transplanted and magically transformed into this other.” Theodor Vischer, *On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics* (1873) reprinted and translated in *Empathy Form and Space*, ed. and trans. Harry Mallgrave (Los Angeles: Getty Center for the History of art and the Humanities, 1993), 90.

¹³⁰ Theodor Vischer quoted in Juliet Koss, “On the Limits of Empathy,” *The Art Bulletin*, 88, no. 1 (March 2006): 140.

¹³¹ Koss, “On the Limits of Empathy,” 140.

the interior is important. It provided the sense of enclosure by thematic, visual, and by extension spatial, means. This led Verhaeren to later claim that Ensor's interiors fueled ambitions for an externally-derived *intimiste* decorative program that would lead to the interior environments of Édouard Vuillard.

Interiorizing External Realities: or, Ensor Before the Mask

To paint an interior that would allow one to affectively experience the decorative, enclosed atmosphere of a small room seems, at least initially, an entirely different project from depicting the material substance of an interior and its contents. In her comprehensive study of the development of the exhibitions of *Les XX*, Susan Canning makes the claim that the development of avant-garde art in *fin-de-siècle* Belgium highlighted a discrepancy between perceptual and pictorial reality, thus stressing larger fears about the social relevance of art.¹³² How could art address the pressing social concerns of the day, especially if it was understood to simply constitute a “pictorial reality”? Canning claims that over the course of ten years, *Les XX* steadily dismissed an older, staid, realist style, for a symbolically charged, decorative one. In the early 1880s however, these seemed two existing positions on a dialectical axis where at one end was a way of knowing the world through matter—through the fabrics, trinkets, and commodities of the bourgeois interior—and at the other, by a deeply felt experience evoked through the materiality of paint. Over the years of their exhibition between 1881 and 1887, Ensor's interiors seemed to split this aesthetic difference. They responded to the materials and materiality of the interior in two different ways nearly simultaneously: by addressing the more traditional space of

¹³² Canning, “A History and Critical Review of the Salons of Les Vingt,” 451.

representational depiction and prompting in the viewer an immediately and affect-laden sense of spatial environment. One critic writing for *La Revue indépendante* meditated on this split between sensibilities associated with the large *tache* of the realists and the *point* of the Neo-Impressionists painters when he wrote: “[I]t would be beneficial to define what will become of the *tache* from now on: (marks like a) mosaic or like the head of a pin.”¹³³ For a moment in the mid-1880s in the Belgian avant-garde, and with regard to Ensor’s interiors in particular, a consensus had not yet been reached.¹³⁴

The interior was the ideal motif for such a collapse. By this moment at the end of the century, this tension defined the double bind of the interior itself. To depict the interior was to invoke descriptive recording of the exterior realities of one’s immediate environment *and* to evoke the modern, psychologized self by instigating a powerfully affective visual environment. The term *intérieur* stood for a notion of psychological and perceptual interiority but also, as the century progressed, a site of architectural and spatial enclosure.¹³⁵ On this point, literary theorist Sharon Marcus has brilliantly pointed to the contemporary creation of enclosed spaces in Paris—private gardens, hidden *lavoirs*, and new apartment architecture—and connects this physical containment, or “interiorization,” in the modern city to an amplified the valuation of introspective experience in conceptions of the modern self.¹³⁶ These circumstances gave birth to

¹³³« J’aurais bien d’autres questions à poser d’autres réserves à faire. Il me semble par exemple que dans ce tachisme pour ainsi dire mathématique et serait bon de définir ce que deviendra la TACHE désormais ? Mosaïque ou tête d’épingle ? Dans les salles d’exposition qui ont peu de profondeur ou de recul, la seconde hypothèse permettrait de regarder les tableaux plus facilement ». “Beaux-Arts : Les Indépendants,” *La Revue indépendante : politique littéraire, et artistique* (1890): 359-6.

¹³⁴ Several scholars, most notably Susan Canning and Leah Boston, have written on the shift in the Belgian avant-garde from a realist mode to a Neo-Impressionist one. Leah Boston, “Political Vision: Art and Revolution in the Salons of Les XX (1884-1893)” (PhD diss, Northwestern University, 2007).

¹³⁵ Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior* (London: Routledge, 2007).

¹³⁶ See Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth Century Paris and London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

the interior as a particularly nineteenth-century concept, and so came its two-folded connotation as both a material, architectural phenomenon and as a signifier of subjective bourgeois consciousness.

How Ensor's interiors negotiated this split points to a larger tension in *fin-de-siècle* culture between a resolute commitment to material outwardness and a permeating concern for internal subjective consciousness. A culture of positivism, exteriorized fact, abundant materials, and a particularly-inward looking Belgian aesthetic tradition stoked a relation to reality that was utterly physical and embedded in the realities of the world beyond the picture plane. The most immediate reality for the bourgeoisie, their "universe," was the domestic interior—the repository for these objects of material outwardness *par excellence*. Commodities were plentiful in new department stores, increasingly apparent in mass imagery, and a "democratization of luxury" meant they were more widely available than ever before.¹³⁷ Naomi Schor has characterized the abundance of these objects in late-nineteenth century descriptions, both visual and textual, as an "inclination towards a position of complete exteriority."¹³⁸ While consumer goods and objects of luxury were more available than ever before, the advent of the *psychologie nouvelle*, as well as research into psychophysical aesthetics and the stimulus of the metropolis, effected a simultaneous and powerful interest in inwardness.¹³⁹ Hypnotism and hallucination became topics upon which international congresses convened, a cult of the self drew critical and artistic interest in individual dreams and subjective experience flourished. The interior, in its two-folded guise, came to stand for this psychological interiority as well as the physical make-up of a small room.

¹³⁷ On the "democratization of luxury," including everything from household goods to furnishings and clothing, see Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987).

¹³⁸ Naomi Schor, *Zola's Crowds* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 132.

¹³⁹ On the medical research underpinning this turn inward see Debora L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-siècle France: Politics, Psychology, Style* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992).

Thus, the interior as a dual concept distilled a larger parallel tension in the later-nineteenth century between two divergent systems of knowing the material world and the bourgeois subject's relation to it.

As the 1880s came to a close, Ensor's interiors became almost-wholly understood to be affective in nature and this tension was all but lost. Brussels became increasingly internationalized and younger, Neo-Impressionist critics looked to international influences and responsive effects in defining a national style. Ensor's interiors increasingly lost their strong associations with material fact, identification through commodities, and containment. Contemporary understandings of such interiors slid further and further away from external facts, and towards an ephemeral and psychologized world—a “mystical current” that divorced art from the demands of reality. Maurice Maeterlinck wrote his psychological exposé *Intérieur* (1895) that captured the public imagination, and Symbolist painters explored dream worlds within immaterial interior environments. After 1886, the Belgian avant-garde increasingly embraced an aesthetic based on the evocation of sensation and interiorized feeling, a tendency that was harnessed by the political left as a “social art” that they thought might be used to manipulate the feelings of the masses.

After the defeat of the Liberal Party in 1884 and the ensuing years of socialist oppositional presence in the capital and political upheaval across the country, progressive writers such as Lemonnier, Verhaeren, and Eekhoud rallied around the cause of what they termed “*L'Art social*.” Appearing to negate the authority of an earlier dialectic, *L'Art moderne* co-founder and *Les XX* organizer, Edmond Picard, wrote in his call for this social art in 1884: “[W]hat language must art speak to the masses in order to prevent the numbing effect of materialism and assure

them they have a soul?”¹⁴⁰ The overarching belief was in art’s potential to reform outer, social reality by way of the strength of an inner feeling in the spectator. Art and the world were still related, but the terms of that relationship were not nearly as contested as they had been mere years earlier. Aside from the year of *Russian Music*’s final public exhibition, 1886 was also the year of the largest uprisings of the working classes. In the thick of this crisis, socialist theorist and intellectual, Jules Destrée, lamented the lost integrity of social bonds on the pages of *L’Art moderne*, proclaiming that “[A]ll social securities are voided, all social relations dissolved.”¹⁴¹ For a moment in the 1880s however, an understanding of representation through material effectiveness and one based on painterly effects seemed two viable options, two ends on a dialectical axis. As the critical reception shows, Ensor’s pictures became the medium through which critics staked their interpretive and ideological claims as to the nature of the relation between painting and social reality, and between the bourgeois self and the realities of one’s immediate environment.

This tension so identified within Ensor’s interiors and their reception was far from a turn away from the social world of the 1880s, as some scholars claim, but rather directly related to shifting and contested modes for its active engagement that were molded by the ideological climate of 1880s Belgium. They were perhaps not the “foyers of revolution” that Ensor professed them to be so many years later in that speech with which this chapter began, but they were intimately and inextricably tied with contemporary social reality by means of a complex

¹⁴⁰ Edmond Picard, *L’Art moderne* (1884): 354.

Lemmonier, in an article entitled “L’Art nouveau,” expressed his hopes for the effects that the new art could have on the mind of the viewer. *L’Art moderne* (March 13, 1887): 85.

This is the subject of Chapter Three of this dissertation, on the political utility of interiority in the designs of Henry Van de Velde and in contradistinction to the work of the French Art Nouveau designers working in Nancy.

¹⁴¹ Jules Destrée, *Art et socialisme* (Paris: Hatchette, 2016).

operation of mediation in the early 1880s. With this in mind, we might rethink the arc of Ensor's oeuvre in these years, and recapture some of the complexity of these early pictures (and the interior altogether) so often disregarded as rather placid studies lacking critical edge.

At the end of the 1880s, Ensor's pictorial practice took a turn, one that would eventually make his career as "the painter of masks" and lead the first curator of the Museum of Modern Art, Alfred Barr, to claim Ensor of the late 1880s as quite possibly the boldest, living modern painter.¹⁴² In 1886, *Chez Miss* exited the public sphere and hung in Anna Boch's private collection, and Ensor abandoned exhibiting the critically powerful interiors that he had made in the early 1880s. Subsequent pictures, such as *Skeletons Attempting to Warm Themselves* (1889) [Figure 45], abandoned the bourgeois interior and its complexities while still depicting inside spaces. In this scene, three skeletons dressed in discarded bourgeois clothing huddle in the foreground of an evacuated room around a woodstove upon which is written "Pas de feu" and, under it, "en trouverez vous demain?" This is not a bourgeois interior nor does it enact complex pictorial dynamics in its formal procedures. While the common assumption with works such as this is that they offer the first of Ensor's social engagements by way of metaphoric and morbid commentary on the human condition, I contend that this interior, with its emptied out atmospheric effects, thin rendering of paint, and material immiseration, rather offers something of a slow disengagement with the social world at this very moment of political acuity.

While his turn to imagery of masks is normally understood as a radical, social statement in the wake of the political turmoil of 1886 by way of satire, images such as this and *The Astonishment of the Masked Wouse* (*L'Étonnement du Masque Wouse*) (1889) [Figure 46] instead reveal a slow disentanglement from the social in both a real and metaphorical sense. This

¹⁴² Alfred H. Barr, *Masters of Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1955), 34.

move to crazed, fantastical caricatural interior scenes loses the tensions made possible in the vitalized bourgeois interior: between material outwardness and psychological interiorization, between pictorial representation and the affective space of beholding—what Kierkegaard years earlier had called the interior’s dialectic between mere existence in physical space and reflective interiority.¹⁴³ This tension as it was enacted in the bourgeois interiors, I argue, was woven into and vitally connected to the ways of understanding—and engaging—the world of later-nineteenth century Belgium. Ensor’s bourgeois interiors from the early 1880s therefore might be thought of as the ultimate mediators of a critical transition regarding the nature of materials in both the interior and its image. They negotiated between more traditional pictorial depictions and the picture as a charged environment that might be “entered”—between knowing the world through matter and knowing through externally instigated, interiorized response. They prompt a type of looking that necessarily confronts the viewer with a mediated and embodied type of vision which, as Herwig Todts has stated, really meant a “way of seeing—a way of observing and representing (and embodying) reality.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* (1843), trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J., 1987), 173.

¹⁴⁴ Herwig Todts in *James Ensor*, ed. Luc Tuymans (London: Royal Academy, 2016), 24.

CHAPTER THREE

Installing Interiority: Vuillard's *Intimisme* and the Culture of Proximity

In that continuity of becoming which is reality itself, the present moment is constituted by the quasi-instantaneous section effected by our perception in the flowing mass, and this section is precisely that which we call the material world. Our body occupies its center.¹⁴⁵
—Henri Bergson (1896)

L'intimisme [...] est sans doute un pôle constant du dynamisme imaginaire, une configuration de l'espace, du temps et des échanges entre l'individu et le monde.¹⁴⁶
—Daniel Madelénat (1989)

Over the course of the 1890s, the young Édouard Vuillard experimented with an exceptionally wide span of artistic modes. These range from small paintings of everyday life to much larger decorative programs for private homes and exhibitions, as well as designs for the Symbolist theater and later experimentations with print [Figures 47-50]. The disparity between these modes has often been cast as progressive explorations in view of development towards a modernist aesthetic.¹⁴⁷ Despite these discrepancies, most notably between his early easel paintings exhibited in small private galleries and the somewhat later and certainly larger decorative panels, all are concerned with the aesthetic known as *intimisme* to contemporary

¹⁴⁵ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (1896), trans. N.M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 138-9.

¹⁴⁶ Daniel Madelénat, *Intimisme* (Paris: Press universitaires de France, 1989), 13.

¹⁴⁷ See Gloria Groom, *Édouard Vuillard: Painter-decorator: Painters and Projects 1896-1912* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Katherine M. Kuenzli, *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism: Painting and the Decorative at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010).

critics and later scholars alike. The term elastically accommodated these differing approaches to pictorial practice however its precise definition has gone undetermined.¹⁴⁸ In one sense, it referenced small scenes of psychological, narrative intensity—windows into a world of anxiety and *ennui* concealed just below the veneer of everyday domestic life—and in another it referred to an intimate, private environment in which the viewer was a part. This chapter takes the following as its central problem: how might one account for the shifting nature of Vuillard’s *intimisme* from a depictive, representational mode to one of pictorial decoration? What does a study of *intimisme* as it was invoked across these artistic modes, situations, and discourses, render apparent that other methods of approaching this material have not? Lastly, what might addressing this problem through Vuillard’s own invocations to the language of the interior offer as explanation regarding the ideologies that affected such a transition?

Crucial to the argument of this chapter is a contention that, in the context of the late-nineteenth century, concepts such as *intimisme*, interiority, and interior were bound together and operated as compound categories whose resonances regularly tread across ideologies, media, and artistic aims. Mass upheavals to the texture of European society in the 1890s created the fertile ground for these terms to modify, become diffuse, and poly-form. These included but were not limited to the proliferation of a multiplying and transforming art market, an especially fraught set of contestations to long-held understandings of everyday experience, and especially a new conceptualization of interiority based on research in perceptual psychology as well as new

¹⁴⁸ Daniel Madelénat’s 1989 study is one of the few pieces of contemporary scholarship that explores this problematic emerging from the wide usage of the term “*intimisme*” in the nineteenth century. His book takes a wide-angle view and considers painting, poetry, prose, and philosophy from across the century. See Madelénat, *Intimisme* (1989).

architectural and spatial regimes.¹⁴⁹ Scholarship on Vuillard's work, on the artistic group of the *Nabis* to which he belonged, and even on the decorative aesthetic in 1890s France, have for the most part neglected to cross such disciplinary divides. Questions internal to architectural discourse have rarely made contact with those of painting, and the opposite holds true as well. Through the case of Édouard Vuillard in the 1890s, this chapter seeks to account for some of the terms of that shifting ground on interiority by closely following Vuillard's *intimisme* across a diversifying representational, discursive, and cultural field. In so doing, first I consider his small-scale painted depictions of domestic life in his family home as they were exhibited in new, intimate gallery settings in the early 1890s. I demonstrate that through a series of consistent formal devices and display strategies, Vuillard created a sense in which the picture did not simply depict an interior scene into which one might peer from the outside as if through an open window, but also projected into the space of the beholder, a space that was physically intimate and interior-like. This transition in the connotations of *intimisme* ought to be understood in response to an essential transition in understandings of interiority in the 1890s, notably as it related to issues of design and display, the domestic interior, and to psychological understandings of spatial experience more generally. I argue that Vuillard's *intimisme* in the mid-1890s comprised a turn to the creation of material environments that was informed by his

¹⁴⁹ Regarding changes to the art market, Nicholas Green has proposed that the opening of the Hôtel Drouot, the Parisian auction house which specialized in public sales of art, antiques, and furnishings, signaled a more general shift in modes of consumption as early as the mid-1850s. He claims that physical proximity to the Bourse, Paris' stock exchange, and the fashionable cafés and galleries in Paris' West End, gave concrete form to contemporary interest in financial speculation, and inspired its application to the market in modern art where gallerists began to intervene as valuing experts thereby bolstering a commercial art market that was already growing (and privatizing). Considerations such as avant-garde dissatisfaction with the Salon system, and the private exhibitions of The Impressionists (1874-82) of course, contributed to this shift as well. See Nicholas Green, "Circuits of Production, Circuits of Consumption: The Case of Mid-Nineteenth Century French Art Dealing," *Art Journal* 48, no.1 (1989): 29-34. Also see Nicholas Green, "Dealing in Temperaments: Economic Transformation of the Artistic Field in France during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Art History* 10, no. 1 (1987): 59-76.

involvement with other “environmental” art forms—namely avant-garde theater and tapestry—that distorted conventional distinctions between two representational registers: the figural, narrative depiction of space and the evocative, specular construction of an embodied world in which the “whole of (social) space proceeds from the body.”¹⁵⁰ This transition in the representation of interiority is best understood as a vitalized negotiations between older connotations based in narrative or inner thoughts extending from the eighteenth century, and new notions of the psychological self associated with the body in space which emerged in part from German aesthetics and architectural theory.¹⁵¹ *Intimisme* in this later formulation collapsed the distance between two “interiors”—the interior of the self and the interior space of a room. They subsequently became proximate and, in some cases, the two were conflated.¹⁵² Vuillard’s *intimisme* then, when tracked across these years and read through the language of the interior and interiority, indexes a transition regarding notions of the private self wherein interiority became

¹⁵⁰ Henri Lefebvre described the modern experience of space as such: “[S]pace is first of all *my* body counterpart or “other,” its mirror-image or shadow; it is the shifting intersection between that which touches, penetrates, threatens or benefits my body on the one hand, and all of the other bodies on the other.” Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (1947), trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992), 184.

My use of the term “representation” here is partially indebted to Todd Cronan’s definition of the term which diverges from more customary usages in Art History, and connotes illustration, likeness, or figuration. Instead of seeking a distinction between figuration and abstraction, Cronan takes an ontological view. “Representation,” he asserts, “defines the ontological difference between the work of art and the world ‘outside’ it.” He also seeks to defend it against reduction to a monolithic entity—a “deadening form of communication”—rather than a varied set of practices that mediate our connection to the world. Though my reasons for coming to such a conclusion differ from Cronan’s, this definition is a useful one. See Cronan, *Against Affective Formalism: Matisse, Bergson, Modernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 6-7.

¹⁵¹ On the longer history of this concept see Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). See also Jan Goldstein, *The Post-Revolutionary Self: Politics and Psyche in France 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley, Reprint edition (New York: Vintage, 1988).

¹⁵² This notion of two “insides” and the limits of the self as a central problematic of nineteenth-century painting is the overarching concern in Susan Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

powerfully, spatially articulated and, in some sense, *exteriorized*. It also provides a more comprehensive picture of the interventions of an artist who has been relatively well studied but rarely by way of the vagaries of this durable concept.

Defining Privacy: The Pictured Interior

At the very close of his 1908 biography of the painter James Ensor, the most astute and committed of Ensor's critics, Émile Verhaeren, connected his early work to a surprising contemporary source. He wrote of the work of the French *intimistes*, Édouard Vuillard and Pierre Bonnard, contending that their painterly manipulations of the image of the domestic interior recalled tableaux of a similar motif by Ensor himself.¹⁵³ This association between a Belgian painter known best for later commentaries in the form of carnivalesque figures in arid, evacuated settings rather than for this work to which Verhaeren refers—interiors such as *A Colorist* (1880) or *Russian Music* (1881) [Figures 39, 8]—and the *intimiste* aesthetic of Vuillard in the 1890s makes for a highly anomalous comparison. It is also in many ways entirely sensible. To my mind, Verhaeren's analogy raises two productive questions. First, what in particular about the work of Vuillard and Bonnard approximated any possible understanding of the depicted atmospheres in Ensor's interiors from the decade prior?¹⁵⁴ My analysis here centers on the case of Vuillard because of the intensity of his engagement with the interior and interiority, though

¹⁵³ Émile Verhaeren, *James Ensor* (Bruxelles: G. Van Oest & Cie, 1908), 103.

¹⁵⁴ In the context of mid-nineteenth century art criticism, "*atmosphère*" was normally used to describe the tangible, overall integrity of represented environments which surround a subject—the *enveloppe*— or, in this case, the pictured environment of Ensor's home in the seaside town of Ostend. By the 1880s, the two terms were tied together as critically commonplace, *enveloppe* being defined as: "[T]o veil, to soften the modeling of certain bits of painting. One says that a figure needs to be more *enveloppée*, to indicate that it should be modeled less drily, that its contours should be merged into the ensemble, should appear surrounded by atmosphere." Adeline, *Lexique des termes d'arts* (1884), quoted in John House, *Monet: Nature Into Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 221.

the connection to Bonnard is appropriately intriguing as well and might form the basis of another study [Figure 51]. Second, why is this association between Ensor and Vuillard so striking, so peculiar, a veritable red herring in the scholarship? Is the answer to this question perhaps something more than meets the eye?

By emphasizing the absence of comparisons between two artists who critically engaged and vitalized the standard, nearly ubiquitous motif of the domestic interior, the second question is symptomatic of one of the underlying complexities that motivates this dissertation. In this period, ambitious makers, audiences, and commentators widely and critically invoked the pictorial vocabulary of the interior and renegotiated its terms based on ideological commitments fostered further afield. This chapter considers just one of those negotiations. Verhaeren may have been the first and only critic to mention Ensor's interiors and Vuillard's in the same breath even though the two artists, while not exact contemporaries (Vuillard was eight years junior to his Belgian colleague), were featured in similar exhibitions and critical milieux—in avant-garde venues just adjacent to Neo-Impressionist heavyweights of the late 1880s and early 1890s. Combined with the relative force of these oeuvres, this occlusion demonstrates the need for a comprehensive study of the late-nineteenth century interior that embraces the heterogeneity and flux of these terms while also recognizing their proximity to consistency, intelligibility, and normative modes of signification. In so doing, this chapter attempts to answer the first question that Verhaeren's pairing raises—what about Ensor's depiction of interiors approximates the *intimiste* apartment in Vuillard's conception? To answer this question, we might elucidate something of what interiority meant and how it changed in 1890s France by tracing permutations of its parallel concept—*intimisme*—and its relation to the interior.

In the 1890s, the word *intimisme* (in French, as in English) had rather imprecise and

abundant connotations.¹⁵⁵ Applied broadly to pictures, decorative arts, design, music, and literature, it connoted both a social, interactive amicability or set of correspondences and, most importantly, a physical proximity between the self and inanimate things. Such a sensibility certainly had hints of an earlier, Baudelairean, impulse. In the Salon of 1846, Baudelaire described Romantic art's capacity to impart a sense of *intimité*, by which he meant a reflective, imaginative inwardness. He claimed that contemporary art married an appropriate choice of subject matter with a manner of feeling expressed through colorism and formal harmonies appropriate to the subject, thereby conveying "intimité, spiritualité, couleur."¹⁵⁶ By the 1890s, *intimisme* had retained many of these romantic tenets including a charged, sensorial affect married with externalized form. According to one of the most engaged voices on the issue, critic Camille Mauclair (who had certainly read Baudelaire's Salons), it was the manifest, harmonious relation between beings and objects, a latent psychology of things normally expressed in purely exteriorized form.¹⁵⁷ For an artwork to be *intimiste* in this moment, it necessarily straddled some combination of absorptive themes, familiarity of subject matter, affective stimulus, and spatial

¹⁵⁵ The English word "intimacy" or "the intimate" (and its French cognate, *intimité*) behaved very similarly in the period. However, and as I will show, the French terms present a slightly more nuanced set of issues. I therefore use *intimisme* throughout this text to refer to both the artistic tendency and the set of broad, affective associations that it raised.

¹⁵⁶ « Qui dit romantisme dit art moderne, — c'est-à-dire intimité, spiritualité, couleur, aspiration vers l'infini, exprimées par tous les moyens que contiennent les arts ». Charles Baudelaire, "Salon de 1846," in *Salon de 1846*, ed. David Kelley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 125.

The connection between Baudelaire's conception and the later-nineteenth century painter's appears occasionally in the critical reviews. In fact, it was perhaps this association with Baudelairean romanticism and the sentiments elicited by the great colorists of Northern Europe and Britain—to Turner especially—that caused Verhaeren to make the connection between Ensor and Vuillard. The former appeared, at least to some critics (including Verhaeren), as a great colorist in the tradition of the Romantics.

See also F. Fagus, "Gazette des Beaux-Arts," *La Revue blanche*, 28, No. 216 (June 1902): 215-16. He writes: "But Baudelaire also created '*intimiste*' poetry, music about intimate things. Like Vuillard, the arranging symphony of juxtaposed colors, which is so precisely similar to the harmonic iridescences of the composer Debussy, is at the same time and above all a symphony of substances."

¹⁵⁷ Camille Mauclair, "Les Intimistes," in *Un siècle de la peinture française, 1820-1920* (Paris: Payot, 1930), 159.

proximity; however, the particular configuration of these components remains rather ambiguous.

Though Vuillard has emerged as an emblematic *intimiste*, the nature of this aesthetic has received little sustained treatment across and between the vastly different types of work that he created throughout the 1890s.¹⁵⁸ In fact, art historical scholarship remains completely divided on the nature of Vuillard's *intimisme*. For instance, Gloria Groom, Anna Chave, and Guy Cogeval refer to the diminutive easel paintings from the early 1890s, rendered in oil and depicting everyday domestic scenes, as *intimiste*.¹⁵⁹ John Russell has made the explicit point that Vuillard's intimate sensibility was derived from his "saturation in a feminine world," thus making clear the assumption of intimacy with feminine passivity though he does little to define what parameters constituted this aesthetic.¹⁶⁰ More recent scholars such as Katherine Kuenzli have considered the large-scale decorative commissions for private interiors from the mid-1890s to constitute this reference, and make a compelling case for the affective power of this form of "intimate modernism."¹⁶¹ The issue, therefore, appears unresolved amongst art historians as well: was Vuillard's definition of *intimisme* constitutive of an iconographic, narrative reading of small paintings depicting interiors, *or* the creation of a private, decorative environment designed to provoke an embodied experience of interiority in the spectator? Instead of pursuing a definitive resolution to this debate, I seek to bridge the gap by arguing that each represents a discrete

¹⁵⁸ This is also true of Vuillard's close friend and collaborator, Pierre Bonnard, however I limit myself in the chapter that follows to the work of one artist whose production over the course of the 1890s makes this issue strikingly apparent. This model could be applied to Bonnard as well, though with slightly less intense impact given the nature of his decorative programs.

¹⁵⁹ See Groom, *Édouard Vuillard: Painter-decorator*, (1993); Anna Chave, "Vuillard's 'La Lampe'," *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin* 38, no. 1 (1980): 12–15; Guy Cogeval, *Edouard Vuillard* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

¹⁶⁰ John Russell, *Vuillard* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 12.

¹⁶¹ Kuenzli, *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism*, (2010).

moment in *intimisme*'s conceptual transition over the course of the 1890s.¹⁶²

To undertake such a task, we might return to the discursive milieu in which the term initially took root. Its first recorded use was by novelist and critic Joris-Karl Huysmans in 1879, with reference to an unidentified watercolor by Jean-Francois Raffaëlli entitled *The Ragpicker (Le Chiffonnier)*. According to Huysmans, Raffaëlli evoked *intimisme* by confining an identifiable figure within his most appropriate and personal, and thus emotive, setting. In this case, it is the recently abandoned outskirts of the industrialized city where the rag-picker, alone with his dog, provides a “great appeal” for the viewer precisely because of his “authentic” enclosure within an environment mostly composed of a heap of rubbish.¹⁶³ Confirming this sentiment, Mauclair claimed the mid-century French realist painter Jean-Francois Millet to have been an *intimiste* of the finest sort. Works like *The Angelus (L'Angélus)* (1857-9) [Figure 52] depicted figures so entrenched, so confined, so absorbed, in the countryside in which they were depicted that they elicited a poetic sense of life familiar, authentic, and contained within their own material world. In this case, Millet's picture used pictorial tropes of shading, depth, and density to convey the sense that the French peasantry belonged, both formally and metaphorically, to the brown tilled earth and wide-open wheat fields in which they were

¹⁶² Merel Van Tilburg has presented a paper on this transformation of the term, though to my knowledge has not yet published this material. Merel Van Tilburg, “L'intérieur d'âme: projections of the unconscious in Fin-de-Siècle interiors by Vallotton and Vuillard,” *Redefining European Symbolism c.1880-1910 (Conference on the Nabis)*, Amsterdam (28 October 2011).

¹⁶³ « Raffaëlli est un des seuls qui aient compris l'originale beauté de ces lieux si chers aux intimistes. Celui-là est le peintre des pauvres gens et des grands ciels ! Son chiffonnier, seul, avec sa chienne et prêt à picorer dans un monceau de détrit, a grande allure ». Joris-Karl Huysmans, “Le Salon de 1879,” *L'Art moderne* (Paris: Charpentier, 1883), reprinted in Madelénat, *Intimisme*, 20.

Following this first usage, in an 1881 article, “L'Exposition des Indépendants,” Huysmans recalls in the work of Paul Gauguin a tendency to impart « plusieurs vues de ce quartier intimiste par excellence » that he described as « spleenétique ». Huysmans, reprinted in *L'Art moderne* (Paris: P. V. Stock, 1903), 267. That same year, Huysmans described the work of British artist and printmaker Walter Crane as follows: « s'attachant à rendre certains coins de la vie intime » comme « l'intérieur d'une cuisine et d'un office (...) ; la salle à manger, avec sa large fenêtre au fond ouvrant sur des jardins et toute la famille assise ». Huysmans, “Le Salon officiel de 1881,” *L'Art moderne* (Paris: Charpentier, 1883), 220.

represented at the end of a day of work, pausing together at the sound of the church bells in the distance.¹⁶⁴

The entirety of Millet's tableau is netted together wherein subjects and objects, figures and milieu, spatially cohere as parts in a whole. Each figure appears in a state of interiorized self-reflection, though is also bound to the other, and to the rest of the scene, by color, line, and tone. This sense in which a figure might be formally immersed in a depicted milieu was a concern that preoccupied artists and critics of the period. As Susan Sidlauskas has recounted in reference to the represented arena of the home, around the mid-nineteenth century, the conventionally "dead" spaces between furniture, empty recesses in corners and in hallways, were conceived as inalienable parts of an animated, total, artistic image. The task of representing the "primordial connectedness" of objects and bodies was a preoccupation of art theorists, playwrights, novelists, and painters at this juncture.¹⁶⁵ The practice of animating the relationship between a figure and her surroundings came to comprise a representative mode for the figuring of interiority or subjectivity—a sense of the self in its most authentic milieu. This depended upon the "interrelations, the attachments, the acts of resistance and withdrawal" between figures and things.¹⁶⁶ To contemporary critics such as Mauclair, this was *intimisme*—a physical relation forged into shared spatial existence.

By the later decades of the century, *intimisme* had retained this association with

¹⁶⁴ Mauclair, *Un siècle de peinture française*, 151. Upon the exhibition of several works by Pierre-Auguste Renoir at the exhibition of *Les XX* in 1886, Belgian critic Camille Lemonnier described them as *intimiste*, similarly citing their pictorial structure and for conveing the essence of their chosen subject. See Camille Lemonnier, *L'Art moderne* (21 February 1886): 58.

¹⁶⁵ Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self*, 8. Sidlauskas names many figures that she finds to have been preoccupied with this issue—Flaubert, Zola, Dardou, and Dumas—though her case study centers around the art theorist and teacher at the École Gratuite de Dessin, Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran, and his concern with giving representational form to what he called a "perspective of feeling."

¹⁶⁶ Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self*, 9.

representational containment within a pictorial milieu, and thus indicated an environment for the depiction of psychological interiority of the subject. Now, however, it was more often associated with domestic scenes. The sense in which the self could be “read” through its environment in art was exacerbated by the popular metaphoric equation between the domestic interior and bourgeois interiority. In artistic circles, *intimisme* was increasingly connected to works harkening back to the precedents of Jean-Siméon Chardin whose scenes of everyday life such as *The Diligent Mother (La Mère laborieuse)* (1740) [Figure 53], Marcel Proust described in 1895 as “intimate” and “comfortable,” where the essence of things and that of beings were beautifully (if mysteriously) charged and given equal weight. Chardin equated faces, feelings, and objects in a delicate poetics of familiarity and vivacity wherein, Proust maintained, “a pear is as living as a woman.”¹⁶⁷

Intimisme thus connoted a naturalist, domestic scene imbued with psychological, anecdotal intensity so as to foster a sense of belonging to an authentic and contained, and thus recognizable, world. In the realm of contemporary painting, the term was called upon to describe works such as the 12 small domestic scenes that Vuillard exhibited in 1893. As they hung on the walls of the private Parisian gallery named for its proprietor, M. Le Barc de Boutteville, they elicited the following criticism from critic Maurice Cretnitz, who described Vuillard as:

¹⁶⁷ Marcel Proust, “Chardin: The Essence of Things” (1895), trans. Mina Curtiss, *Against Sainte-Beuve and Other Essays*, ed. John Sturrock (New York: Penguin, 1994), 100-107. For an astute interpretation of these writings, see Satish Padiyar, “Proust and Old Time: On ‘Chardin’ and ‘Watteau’,” *Oxford Art Journal* 39, no. 2 (1 August 2016): 311–319. Additionally, a very recent study of Chardin offers a remarkable reading of the material dimensions of Chardin’s art and the relationship obtained between the material dimensions of his craft and the interiorized dimensions of his artistic labor. See Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, *The Painter’s Touch: Boucher, Chardin, Fragonard* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

In 1899, Henri Ghéon would recall: “Vuillard has Chardin’s sense of intimacy, he penetrated into the hidden life of rooms and of things, giving them sentimental significance by creating an atmosphere for them.” Henri Ghéon, “Lettre d’Angèle,” *L’Ermitage* 8 (April 1899) 314-315.

“(one of the) exquisite *intimistes*... who know(s) how to fix this very calm and gentle happiness, this elusive butterfly that seems to flutter about in the atmosphere of a friendly room, it is the whispers in the darkened corners, the friendly light and the lampshade, the most supple and harmonious line of familiar objects, this light touch of material and this gracefulness of gesture, the alarmed eye of the baby and the tender look of the mother, the wife who reads or who sews, finally of these pleasing attitudes, of the animal in its home.”¹⁶⁸

For Cremnitz in the early 1890s, *intimisme* sustained its association with a fixed scene in which objects are proximate and “at home” in both a literal and metaphoric sense. The relation between the figures and objects that he describes is one that might be described as nearly maternal tenderness, correspondence between materials and beings—a poetics of nurtured belonging.¹⁶⁹ This sense of intimacy came not purely from neo-romantic subject matter or Symbolist mysticism, but rather from a psychological, interiorized relation depicted in painted, material form and translated to a charged sense of intimate presence. Friend and fellow painter Maurice Denis confirmed such a sentiment when he commented on the emotion expressed by Vuillard’s works wherein sensory and spiritual forms were synthesized into a decorative “corresponding beauty.” He declared the *intimistes* to have “preferred ... expression by décor—by harmony of forms and colors, by the materials used—to pure expression by the subject represented. They believed that there existed a plastic, decorative equivalent to all human thought—a

¹⁶⁸ Referring to Vuillard and Bonnard, Cremnitz wrote: « deux exquis intimistes. . . c’est qu’ils savent fixer ce bonheur très calme et très doux, insaisissable papillon qui semble voltiger dans l’atmosphère d’une chambre amicale, c’est le chuchotement qui rôde dans les coins du pénombre, c’est la lumière amie et l’abat-jour, la ligne plus souple et plus harmonieuse des objets qui nous sont habituels, ce frôlement d’étoffe et cette gracilité de geste, l’œil effaré du bébé et le regard attendri de la mère, la femme qui lit ou qui coud, enfin toutes ces attitudes, qui plaisent, de l’animal en son gîte ». Maurice Cremnitz, “Exposition de quelques peintres chez le Barc de Boutteville,” *Essais d’art libre* (December 1893): 231.

¹⁶⁹ Though not central to my argument here, the gendered (and specifically maternal) connotations of *intimisme* are the subject of a forthcoming book by Francesca Berry. See Berry, “Maman is my Muse: The Maternal as Motif and Metaphor in Edouard Vuillard’s *Intimisme*,” *Oxford Art Journal*, 34, no. 1 (2011): 55-77.

corresponding beauty.”¹⁷⁰ Vuillard’s paintings appeared combinations of powerfully absorptive, metaphoric iconography and investment in a harmonious, underlying unity to create a truly intimate picture within the limits of the tiny canvas.

One such canvas was Vuillard’s *Under the Lamplight (Sous la lampe)* (1892) [Figure 54], a small picture exhibited in 1892 at one of six *Expositions de peintres impressionnistes et symbolistes* held between late 1891 and 1894 at Boutteville’s.¹⁷¹ These small exhibitions were part of a larger trend (in the words of one critic, an “epidemic”) of independent, often commercial, exhibitions of avant-garde painting held in the winter months over the course of the 1890s.¹⁷² These were not juried nor did they normally privilege the exhibition of single artists or styles but were rather arranged as eclectic ensembles that “reunited,” in the words of another critic, works that “do not worship at the same chapel.”¹⁷³ In the “miniscule” room on the rue Le Peletier, cave-like and painted blue, Symbolist painters such as Émile Bernard and Louis Anquetin exhibited alongside Paul Gauguin, Vincent Van Gogh, and Toulouse-Lautrec, as well as Neo-Impressionist painters like Paul Signac and Camille Pissarro, and the group that referred

¹⁷⁰ « Ils ont préféré dans leurs œuvres l'expression par le décor, par l'harmonie des formes et des couleurs, par la matière employée, à l'expression par le sujet. Ils ont cru qu'il existait à toute émotion, à toute pensée humaine, un équivalent plastique, décoratif, une beauté correspondante ». Maurice Denis, “Préface de la IXe exposition des peintres impressionnistes et symbolistes” (1895), reprinted in *Théories 1890-1910 : Du Symbolisme et du Gauguin vers une nouvelle ordre classique* (Paris: l’Occident, 1913), 25-29. Also see Charles Baudelaire, “Correspondances,” *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Jacques Crépet, 19 vols. (Paris: Connard, 1923), 1:17.

¹⁷¹ Vuillard’s entries to this exhibition included: *Sous la lampe*, *Déjeuner*, *Femme couchée*, *Ravaudeuses*, *L’Effet du soir* (pastel), *Figure de femme* (watercolor). See “Catalogue de la 3^{ème} exposition des peintres Impressionnistes et synthétistes,” in *Post-Impressionist Group Exhibitions*, ed. Theodore Reff (New York and London: Garland, 1982).

¹⁷² Alexandre Georget, “Notes sur l’art,” *Echo de Paris* 40 (December 26, 1891): 314. Another writer, Jules Antoine, referred to « l’époque des petits salons » in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts* (1 February 1890). The most notable other example of small salons from this period was the exhibition society of the Salon de la Rose + Croix whose intimate displays mimicked several features of Boutteville’s; however, they did so with the express purpose of returning to a neo-conservative Symbolist occultism espoused by their leader, Joséphin Péladan.

¹⁷³ Gustave Geffroy, “Chez le Barc de Boutteville” (28 November 1892), reprinted in *La Vie artistique* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1893), 381-2.

to itself as *Les Nabis*.¹⁷⁴ The latter was primarily composed of painters Pierre Bonnard, Paul Sérusier, Maurice Denis, and Paul Ranson, and Édouard Vuillard.¹⁷⁵ Exhibiting for the first time in 1891, they achieved their first veritable success with the public at Boutteville's in 1892, and by 1894 supplied the majority of the works on view.¹⁷⁶

Sometimes known as *Interior with Two Women (Intérieur avec deux femmes)*, this is a diminutive painting, oil on cardboard, and measuring just 37.5 x 45.5 cm. In many ways this work is prototypical of Vuillard's prolific production from the very early 1890s. These easel paintings depict mysterious and psychologically charged, if anecdotally banal, scenes from his home shared with his mother and sister at 10 rue Miromésnil in Paris. This relatively tiny composition depicts a scene that is entirely commonplace—two women, assumed to be the mother and the sister of the artist, absorbed in the task at hand (though not immediately apparent, that task is probably sewing given Madame Vuillard's occupation as a corset maker). Each is dressed in dark tones, and large swaths of flat black and grey make up their shadowed clothing. The women sit either side of a table; the figure on the left has her back nearly fully confronting our view, while the other woman shields her face with her hand. Each exists in predominantly unmodulated shadows but for the bright glare of the lamplight illuminating just a few distinctly

¹⁷⁴ This eclecticism waned as the exhibitions progressed, and the Neo-Impressionists increasingly abandoned Boutteville's in favor of the *Salon des Indépendants*, leaving the Symbolists to provide the majority of the works on view by 1894.

¹⁷⁵ Félix Vallotton, Jan Verkade, Henri-Gabriel Ibels, Ker-Xavier Roussel as well as sculptors Georges Lacombe and Aristide Maillol participated briefly.

¹⁷⁶ In a letter to Jan Verkade, Paul Ranson proclaimed in late 1891: « notre peinture a son succès chez Boutteville rue Le Pelletier (sic) ». Paul Ranson (1891), reprinted in George Mauner, *The Nabis: Their History and Their Art, 1888-1896* (New York: Garland, 1978).

The Nabis' first group exhibition was held in the summer of 1891 at the chateau of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, outside of Paris. Vuillard contributed several small drawings and a tiny domestic scene titled *L'Intruse*. Several critics found the exhibition, and particularly Vuillard's contributions, powerfully moving; however, Félix Fénéon was less enthusiastic. Writing for *Le Chat Noir*, he remarked at Vuillard's indecisiveness and "literary quality," and while he granted that some of the passages were charming, none were spectacular. Félix Fénéon, "Quelques peintres idéistes," *Le Chat Noir* (19 September 1891): 202.

demarcated portions of their faces. The lamp at center casts a low, radial glow, setting the figures in near complete silhouette. The head of the sitter at left is framed by the window behind her, and she is neatly tucked between the chair on which she sits and the table upon which the pure-black lampshade appears. The areas meant to indicate clothing are particularly flat, in keeping with the Nabis' early Synthetist principles of dismantling the illusionistic facility of oil painting. As such, they operate as pieces of a harmonic arrangement as much as the furniture depicted or the upper portion of a cheek, and in so doing recall the "decorative" aesthetic that critics such as Albert Aurier deemed to have extended from Paul Gauguin, particularly his *cloisonnisme* and use of expressive form from the late 1880s [Figure 55].¹⁷⁷

For nineteenth-century viewers, Vuillard's painting would have unquestionably appeared as broadly indicative of a genre rather than a specific scene. It resonated with a visual culture of the interior that was, as we have seen, omnipresent. Perhaps equally recognizable, this rather common pictorial formula comprised of women in darkened tones and against an open window, seated either side of a table and working in silence, is paradigmatic of interior genre scenes extending back to seventeenth-century Dutch painting. This was so capaciously the case that several critics considered these small scenes to be modern interpretations of paintings by Pieter de Hooch [Figure 56].

Without the hint of facial expressions or inflected detail, this tiny picture suggests an atmosphere of containment and relative stillness, of absorption in the task at hand. This made the works seem "intimate," a word that in art criticism was connected, as we have seen, to scenes of

¹⁷⁷ The work of Paul Gauguin was deemed the essential aesthetic precedent for the Nabis. Not only are there formal similarities between their Synthetist technique and those of Gauguin, but it was in response to Gauguin's work that critic Albert Aurier outlined the terms of the new painting in 1891. See Aurier, "Le Symbolisme en peinture: Paul Gauguin," *Œuvres*, 211-213.

an intensely absorbed subject represented as tied to her milieu.¹⁷⁸ *Under the Lamplight* gives the sense of quiet concentration and intense inwardness of each of the depicted characters. In other words, the scene is anecdotally contained; there is no indication of varied action or narrative unfolding, no impending decisive moment or interruption of this stillness—a feature only made more apparent by the endless duration associated with these repetitive tasks. This painting presents the interior as static; we as viewers do not await the entrance of a stranger or anticipate clamor from the street, but instead the space of the small room appears integral and close at hand. The world of this tiny and dimly lit room is familiar and its subjects seem to occupy intense psychological lives in close concert with the commodities that make up their material world. As one art historian has described it, this picture depicts “a human situation without necessarily depicting human incident.”¹⁷⁹

Vuillard’s little interior scene forgoes the detail of particular characters or action for the

¹⁷⁸ Michael Fried claims that the term “*intimité*,” or “intimacy,” was used only in reference to scenes of absorption and thus constitutes one of their hallmark features in art of the 1860s and 1870s. Michael Fried, *Manet’s Modernism: Or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 235. In his review of its exhibition at Boutteville’s, the critic Albert Aurier remarked that *Under the Lamplight* conveyed “the bittersweet emotions of life and tenderness of intimacy.” G-Albert Aurier, “Les Symbolistes,” *Revue Encyclopédique* 2 (April 1892): 474-86.

¹⁷⁹ Chave, “Vuillard’s ‘La Lampe’,” 12.

larger symbol of a small room as an icon of psychological interiority.¹⁸⁰ It disassembles physiognomy and detailed representation for the sake of decorative synthesis and in so doing, depicts the overall sense of a room, harmonized and still. This is the world of the petty bourgeoisie *par excellence* and, through its standard symbolic format, denotes the exemplary icon of bourgeois comforts. Gustave Geffroy confirmed, writing in response to this and other pictures such as *The Seamstresses (Les Ravaudeuses)*, and *Reclining Woman (La Femme couchée)* [Figures 57, 58], that Vuillard “continues to display a delightful, witty *intimisme* in which he blends the melancholic and comic.”¹⁸¹ In other words, this is a scene that is easily identifiable; it affords an intimacy based on a balanced mix of everyday sensations, melancholic and comic, that are conveyed in a rather unproblematic—even easy, *comfortable*—navigation of the scene. Geffroy here found Vuillard’s *intimité* entirely at home in the world. Critics agreed that it was closely tied to the iconographic context but especially to his expressive and evocative use of form.

¹⁸⁰ This sacrificing of the detail to the ensemble as it came to be espoused in decorative painting has a distinctly Baudelairean resonance. In the Salon of 1846, he writes: « Un tableau de Delacroix, *Dante et Virgile*, par exemple, laisse toujours une impression profonde, dont l’intensité s’accroît par la distance. Sacrifiant sans cesse le détail à l’ensemble, et craignant d’affaiblir la vitalité de sa pensée par la fatigue d’une exécution plus nette et plus calligraphique, il jouit pleinement d’une originalité insaisissable, qui est l’intimité du sujet ».

And elsewhere : « Je ne veux pas en conclure qu’un coloriste doit procéder par l’étude minutieuse des tons confondus dans un espace très limité. Car, en admettant que chaque molécule soit douée d’un ton particulier, il faudrait que la matière fût divisible à l’infini ; et d’ailleurs, l’art n’étant qu’une abstraction et un sacrifice du détail à l’ensemble, il est important de s’occuper surtout des masses. Mais je voulais prouver que, si le cas était possible, les tons, quelque nombreux qu’ils fussent, mais logiquement juxtaposés, se fonderaient naturellement par la loi qui les régit ». Charles Baudelaire, “Salon de 1846,” in *Salon de 1846*, ed. David Kelley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 125

Michèle Hannoosh has argued for the possible range of political significance to Baudelaire’s emphasis on synthesis, over and above the detail. She opens up the possibility that one might conceive of the subordination of the detail to the ensemble as one might the individual to the collective. See Michèle Hannoosh, *Baudelaire and Caricature: From the Comic to an Art of Modernity* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 129-36.

¹⁸¹ « ... continuent à affirmer un *intimisme* d’un humour délicieux, sachant mêler la mélancolique et le comique ». Gustave Geffroy (28 November 1892), reprinted in *La Vie artistique* (Paris: E Bentu, 1893), 378.

In pictures such as these from 1892 and 1893, Vuillard's *intimisme* functioned along the lines of a Symbolist aesthetic. It called up an "intimate reality" and the "feeling of things" espoused in such circles.¹⁸² It reflected the precepts adopted by its powerful advocate, Albert Aurier, who in March 1891 defined Symbolism as *idéiste* and *synthétique*, a combination of iconographically subjective content and decorative form. He described the new painting as a "formal *enveloppe*" of signs that went through a necessary simplification of objective, material elements so as to express precisely the *idéic* significance of the subject.¹⁸³ *Under the Lamplight* merged a motif both widely used and overwhelmingly associated with bourgeois selfhood and introspection, with a harmonious and contained atmosphere.¹⁸⁴ For most critics, this approach made Vuillard's interior scenes particularly pleasing. Like *Under the Lamplight*, *The Seamstresses* is also a formally synthetic composition at the expense of particular detail and imparts a powerful sense of figures absorbed in the quiet focus of introspective work. Vuillard's *intimisme* thus initially seems to denote the depiction of the world of silent reflection and psychological introspection, of small comforts and psychologically absorbed enclosure where the relation between figures was contained within the limits of the maximally packed picture

¹⁸² "The concern with the representation of nature logically turns theater into the supreme art. The purpose of painting, of literature, in contrast, is to provide, by means specific to each, the feeling of things. Not the image but the character should be expressed. Once this principle is accepted, what is the point of reproducing the thousand details the eye perceives? ...A silhouette suffices to express a physiognomy; the painter...with or without retouching, only seeks to put down, in a few lines and in characteristic colors, the intimate reality, the essence of the object he sets out to paint." Édouard Dujardin, "Cloissonism" (1888), reprinted in *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology*, ed. and trans. Henry Dorra (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 177-181.

¹⁸³ Albert Aurier, "Paul Gauguin ou le symbolisme en peinture" (1891), reprinted in *Symbolist Art Theories*, 192-201.

¹⁸⁴ Critic Félicien Fagus, for instance, made the connection between the seemingly "intimate" poetry of Charles Baudelaire and these early paintings of Vuillard which he interpreted as equivalent. He wrote: "[B]ut Baudelaire also created '*intimiste*' poetry, music about intimate things. Like Vuillard, the arranging symphony of juxtaposed colors, which is so precisely similar to the harmonic iridescences of the composer Debussy, is at the same time and above all a symphony of substances." F. Fagus, "Gazette des Beaux-Arts," *La Revue blanche*, 28, No. 216 (June 1902): 215-16.

plane.¹⁸⁵ Such a mode of picturing more closely adhered to depiction of the ideal, or dominant ideology, of a restrained and harmonious bourgeois interior than to anything else. The logic of the painting's subject was transposed and translated into its mode of pictorial representation.

What is particularly striking about *Under the Lamplight* when considered as it was displayed at Boutteville's in the winter of 1892 is how formal dynamics of the picture challenge and extend this initial understanding of *intimisme*. Simply considering Vuillard's aesthetic as depictive and set within the limits of the picture plane and its relatively large frame is, I argue, to stop short of fully grasping how it developed in concert with interiority over the course of the 1890s. In fact, it is the formal complexity operating in *Under the Lamplight* that first calls up, and then abuts against, *intimisme* as it had been understood in the decade prior in Huysmans' and Cremnitz's formulations.

After evoking the orderliness and containment of the interior, this picture stages a disruption to that familiarity and fix prized by critics. It does so by means of two devices: first, through perspectival disorientation by means of spatial compression, and second by means of its small scale in relation to the intimate environment of Boutteville's gallery space. At first approach, this work operates as an uncomplicated expression of psychological intensity in the dark, endless hours of domestic labor. As one is drawn into, and perhaps settles into, this small picture—making sense of the two figures, the balance of darks and lights, the red on the table top setting off the red of the wallpaper at left, at the perspectival recession towards the open window—one's view is partially obstructed by the unresolved swatches of various brown paints connoting what must be a chair in the bottom right foreground. Could it be an armchair with a piece of chocolate-brown fabric resting on the seat and ottoman below? It is somewhat unclear.

¹⁸⁵ Susan Sidlauskas has noted this compositional disruption and figure-ground manipulation and reads this in predominantly metaphoric terms. See Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self*, 97-121.

Even more unsettling is the bizarre perspective in which it is constructed, far different from the stable perspective of the rest of the picture. The initial attempt to position one's viewpoint in response to the demands of the central scene of the table and lamp is confused and thwarted by this strange area of the picture that operates within a different perspectival system from the rest of the image. It demands that the viewer move about, attempting to reconcile the spatial compression inside the picture with the position of one's body outside of it. That lower, right hand corner requires that we be several feet closer and slightly higher up in order to understand the chair within the same perspectival system demanded by the rest of the scene. Such confusion and formal disruption—such spatial disorientation—operates not simply within the illusionistic space of the picture but also, decisively, in its orientation to the beholder.

Several scholars have commented on this spatial compression in Vuillard's early works and critics at the time commented on the formal disruption to illusionistic, normative modes of painted representation as well. I maintain that the most important manipulation to Vuillard's *intimiste* aesthetic circa 1892 was the development of such compositional devices consistently used to disrupt the integrity and depth of the depicted interior. This, in turn, served to destabilize the viewer's relation to the picture on the wall. Formal compression is here exacerbated and animated by large objects (or are they swatches of paint? With early Vuillard, we may never quite reconcile the two) in his foregrounds that require a different perspective from the rest of the picture. This device, I argue, makes these small canvases appear infinitely more proximate than any other painting on the wall.

Iterations of this device appears across the majority of Vuillard's interior pictures that

were exhibited at Boutteville's in 1892 and 1893—easily over twenty works.¹⁸⁶ In *The Blue Sleeve* (*La Manche bleu*) (1893) [Figure 59], a seamstress is set at a table in the corner of a dining room where she labors over a large sheet of cloth and, in the extremely compressed foreground, her blue sleeve and the chair back seem to protrude against the surface skin of the lower right corner of the painting. That blue sleeve and chair almost puncture the scene, making strange their relation to the world outside the picture plane while also squeezing out any surplus space between foreground and background. As with *Under the Lamplight*, this problematic foreground is decidedly less resolved than the rest of the composition; the paint has been directly applied to the still-visible board support and evokes a tactility that, combined with this bizarre perspective, compels the viewer to reach out to touch it just as one might run one's fingers between the folds of a drapery or over the buttons on a tufted, upholstered sofa. A similar mechanism appears across several works: *The Linen Closet* (*Le Placard à linge*) (1893) and *Madame Vuillard Sewing* (1893) [Figures 60-61] wherein oddly tilted furnishings, patterned screens, and striped textiles in the foreground perform this same function.¹⁸⁷ What feels forced to the limit in these pictures is the compression of interior space. Objects appear fit to burst out of such narrow pictorial limits, barely held in by narrative screen, canvas, and frame. This structure nearly projects the picture—both compositionally and metaphorically—into spaces exterior to its form. Here, it is used to break the illusionism of the scene while simultaneously functioning to make the picture more “real”—more tactile, more viscerally connected to the world outside of

¹⁸⁶ Elizabeth Easton has remarked on the spatial distortions of this image and made the causal connection to photographic apparatus of the time. See Elizabeth Wynne Easton, *The Intimate Interiors of Edouard Vuillard* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 9-17

¹⁸⁷ The latter two of these pictures were shown at Boutteville's and while the former was not, the effects are strikingly similar.

the frame —than what we normally understand to have been the case.¹⁸⁸ Combined with an arresting appeal to pattern, itself a means of breaking down normal modes of pictorial attentiveness, these pictures function to assert their crude “thingness” and, in the words Jenny Anger, make the painting fall back into the world of things.¹⁸⁹

Some scholars have indicated that this compression and confusion of perspective might indicate a “photographic” aesthetic informing Vuillard’s early works.¹⁹⁰ Setting aside concerns of influence or mode of production, the comparison to the small scale of the photograph does hold water in at least one sense. These pictures are small and require their viewer to get up close, to move about in an attempt to reconcile the inconsistencies of perspective. They demand to be treated not as distant paintings on the wall but as objects of private contemplation and use as one might handle a daguerreotype or a precious, keepsake photographic print.¹⁹¹ They realize the interior as a site of calm and absorbed activity then break out of that underlying, structural surface towards the space of the viewer, giving new meaning to a remark by Denis who, on encountering them at Boutteville’s, remarked that “it is difficult to step back.”¹⁹² In this respect, these were among the *closest* pictures of the early 1890s.

One approach to interpreting this spatial compression between figures and their

¹⁸⁸ T.J. Clark notices a similar device—what he terms a “pictorial proposition” —in the early work of Picasso. He claims that how Picasso’s paintings behave at their bottom edge is crucial to our readings of them, and the ways in which they anticipate such action. He writes: “[F]orms arranged along the baseline are one main key to his pictured world’s proximity to us, and this is often what painting as a whole is trying hardest to pin down.” See Clark, *Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 64.

¹⁸⁹ Jenny Anger, *Paul Klee and the Decorative in Modern Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 8. On the aesthetic use of patterns and patterning, particularly its effects on viewer responsiveness, see E.H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979).

¹⁹⁰ Most notably Easton, *The Intimate Interiors of Edouard Vuillard*, (1989).

¹⁹¹ Francesca Berry has made an intriguing argument for Vuillard’s *The Linen Closet*, claiming that it functions much like a domestic cupboard in itself, filled to the brim with textiles and fabrics. See Berry, “Maman is My Muse,” 60-61.

¹⁹² Maurice Denis (1893) quoted in Groom, *Beyond the Easel*, 38.

environment is to translate it into a symbolic equivalence between the interior of the house and the interior character of the subject. In the case of Raffaëlli's rag picker, the setting of the *banlieue*, heap of rubbish, and his dog might translate into a particular, interior character of that subject given depictive terms.¹⁹³ While Vuillard indeed retained some of this older definition of *intimisme*, a close examination of his pictorial dynamics suggests that he extended this concern with milieu out into the environment of the small and enclosed, darkened space of the gallery and, in so doing, extended the definition of *intimisme* altogether. Vuillard's particular approach here departs from a concern with space as it is confined within the frame, and increasingly evoked a sense of proximity between picture and intimate exterior world which the viewer occupied.

Retrospectively and with this in mind, it might not simply be the figure in the appropriate, and thus emotive, setting that would have made Raffaëlli's work seem *intimiste*, even several years later. It might also have been the fact that it is a watercolor, small in scale and meant to be viewed in close proximity or in isolated environments conducive to private reflection. At private galleries and public exhibitions alike, watercolors were exhibited in a room of their own, often behind a curtain, and on stands at chest height, tilted towards the viewer's body at an angle so as to physically suggest an intimate viewing encounter.¹⁹⁴ These were not images that one would happen upon as one might a large painting on a wall, but objects that were

¹⁹³ Francesca Berry, for instance, has accounted for the spatial compression of foreground and background in Vuillard's paintings of the 1890s by pointing to Huysmans' discussion of Raffaëlli, arguing that the compression of foreground and background, and the evacuation of space between figures, exacerbates the sense of absorption of a figure into their milieu. See Berry, "Maman is My Muse," 60. Susan Sidlauskas attends to a similar set of concerns in her discussion of Vuillard's *Mother and Sister of the Artist* (1893) wherein she advances a metaphoric reading of the relation between the figures and the environment in which they are enveloped. See Sidlauskas, "The Surface of Existence: Edouard Vuillard's *Mother and Sister of the Artist*," in *Body, Place, and Self*, (2000); Sidlauskas, "Contesting Femininity: Vuillard's Family Pictures," *The Art Bulletin* 79, no.1 (March 1997): 85-111.

¹⁹⁴ R. dos Santos, "Un Coin du Salon: Aquarelles et pastels," *Moniteur des arts*, (16 May 1884).

more often expressly taken out for personal viewing and consulted in close range. This imparted a sense of intimate possession and private encounter. Such a sensibility seemed a feature of Cremnitz's *intimisme* as well when he described Vuillard to have achieved an ability to "fix" the familiar elements and objects of a room and make it "friendly," close, familiar. In this case, we might interpret this to mean a proximity not just to the other elements in the picture, but to the viewer outside of it. Vuillard's small canvases operated as depictions of a domestic scene, but also as fragments in the décor of a room in which they were hung—just as clocks, cupboards, upholstered furniture, or even wall hangings might behave.¹⁹⁵

This tendency progressed along with the contemporaneous and remarkable rise of *petits salons*. The following year, private dealer Paul Durand-Ruel mounted a retrospective of Mary Cassatt's pastels and prints of domestic life. Running from the beginning of November until the end of December, the show bypassed Cassatt's more typical, larger, painted scenes of maternal bliss in favor of smaller works such as *Under the Lamp (Sous la lampe)* (1883) [Figure 62]. In its subject matter, use of perspective, and forms, this soft-ground etching makes a remarkably resonant comparison to Vuillard's later painting of the same name. Moreover, both elicit a similar, intimate form of attention from their audience. As an image of Durand-Ruel's exhibition space makes clear, the rooms of the gallery were subdivided by walls, plush curtains, and plants. The viewer was invited to consult the small works at eye level on the wall while some were set

¹⁹⁵ Prompted by such displays, Maurice Denis meditated on the role of pictures in the decoration of the modern home after seeing the Exhibition of Independent Artists in 1892. He wrote: « J'imagine assez nettement le rôle du tableau dans la décoration de la maison moderne. Soit un intérieur précieusement disposé par un peintre de goût comme Pierre Bonnard : avec des meubles de style neuf et des tentures de dessin imprévu ; un intérieur clair, simple, et plaisant, ni un musée, ni un bazar. A de certaines places, mais en petit nombre, des tableaux de dimensions convenables et d'effet approprié. Je les veux de noble apparence, de beauté rare et fabuleux : qu'ils ajoutent au luxe des colorations et des arabesques sans âme, la poésie de la vie intérieure ; et qu'on y trouve tout un monde d'émotions esthétiques, pures sans doute d'alliages littéraires, et d'autant plus hautes ». Pierre Louis (Maurice Denis), "Sur l'exposition des Indépendants," *La Revue blanche* (April 1892): 232.

upon dado ledges for consultation that mimicked the position one might take while perusing a book [Figure 63].¹⁹⁶ Other critics compared works such as Vuillard's (and Cassatt's) to the precedent of Francisco Goya whose etchings compelled their viewer to get up close in order to apprehend the often shocking subjects rendered from the trace of the artist's hand, and only perceptible at such intense proximity. To liken his works to etching more generally was instructive, for it was certainly the "defining art of privacy," appreciated for its privileged and exclusive form, ability to convey the intimacy and artistic sensibility of the artist's hand, and demand for an unreservedly personal mode of encounter.¹⁹⁷

Progressively, for a picture to be *intimiste* around 1890, it needed to be encountered in a constrained, enclosed, and proximate viewing environment that mimicked the experience of domestic space. This "intimate" art in the early 1890s mixed domestic subject matter with efforts

¹⁹⁶ Similarly, in response to the exhibition of watercolors at the somewhat more physically open and public boutique gallery of Georges Petit in 1889, art critic and design reformer Émile Cardon wrote: « C'est un art délicat, intime, aimable, qu'on ne peut bien apprécier que dans un milieu de choix, élégant, distingué ; il demande quelque soin et un peu de mise-en-scène ; il lui faut une lumière discrète; le grand jour de la rue ou de la place publique ne lui convient pas ». Émile Cardon, "Aquarellistes chez Petit" *Moniteur des arts* (18 January 1889): 24.

¹⁹⁷ The issue of reproducibility complicated the association of nineteenth-century prints, particularly etchings and engravings, with privacy. While both etchings and engravings elicited close, intimate looking, engraving was seen as the more reproductive medium whereas etchings were interpreted as individual expressions of the hand of the artist and invited closer inspection to appreciate the subtleties of the artist's touch. The distinctions between the two, however, were sometimes muddled—the practice of the *peintre-graveur* indicates the intermingling of the two media and complications to notions of privacy and reproducibility. See Peter Parshall, "The Darker Side of Light: Prints, Privacy, and Possession," in *The Darker Side of Light: Arts of Privacy 1850-1900*, ed. Peter Parshall, S. Hollis Clayson, Christiane Hertel, and Nicholas Penny (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2009), 2-41. Important to this study is Charles Baudelaire's 1862 essay, "Peintres et aquafortistes," which Michèle Hannoosh has analyzed as a key text in the revival of an older art form that informed modern artistic sensibilities, as well as Baudelaire's more general aesthetic thought. See Michèle Hannoosh, "Etching and Modern Art: Baudelaire's *Peintres et Aquafortistes*," *French Studies* 43 (1989): 47-60. Drawing on the association of prints with intimate, close looking (and complicating the distinction regarding privacy between printing media), later in 1892 Durand-Ruel mounted a series of -similarly small monotypes of landscape scenes by Edgar Degas. In his critical review of the exhibition, Geffroy alluded to the quasi-private spaces of their display when he described these as "tapestries hung in secret boudoirs." Gustave Geffroy, *La Vie artistique*, 1 (1892): 177.

to physically and aesthetically collapse the distance between the work and the world, where the limits of the self and that of the material environment encroached upon one another. Viewers at once encountered these pictures as enclosed and removed, as if peering in a window from the street, while also encountering it as a phenomenological, *exteriorized* event in which their body was implicated in the space of representation.

Intimisme should therefore be understood to have participated in a larger cultural discourse around the “annihilation of distance” as it was directly linked to a popular ideology of bourgeois subjectivity.¹⁹⁸ The fin-de-siècle interior was the realization of a cultural moment wherein distances were manipulated and imperial expansion, combined with technological innovation, made what had been previously unattainable now within grasp, available for personal possession, and easily within reach. Conceptualizations of space had been manipulated so as to seem profoundly expansive while also distinctly attainable. Jules Verne’s *Around the World in 80 Days* (1873) made great imperial extents of the globe seem traversable and knowable from the comfort of one’s armchair. While not new, the massive extension of railroads in these years made faraway places feel close and reachable. In *The Human Beast* (1890), Émile Zola described the railroad network as “a huge body, a gigantic being lying across the earth, his head in Paris, his vertebrae all along the line, his limbs stretching out into the branch lines, with feet and hands in Le Havre and the other terminals.”¹⁹⁹ Individuals from across the middle classes were now able to leave their home in Paris and within a few hours arrive in relatively any city in France. Telephones too created the opportunity to connect from one’s home to other countries by means of technology that Marcel Proust described as an “admirable sorcery” that rang with the sound of

¹⁹⁸ Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918*, 2nd edition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003), 214.

¹⁹⁹ Émile Zola (1890) quoted in Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, 213.

distance overcome.²⁰⁰ This was the worldview of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, a class that newly conceived of the world as both limitless and close at hand. On this larger phenomenon, Walter Benjamin later meditated on the modern bourgeois desire to “bring things close to themselves or even to the masses...to possess an object in the closest proximity.”²⁰¹ Benjamin in this instance is speaking about the impetus behind reproducible printing techniques, of consumer desires propagating capitalist (re)production, but also anticipates an implicit argument for the interior. The new middle-class individual could buy a cheap, manufactured copy of an image-laden illustrated newspaper and, in sitting down to read it, could effectively collapse the distance between events from across the globe recounted on its printed pages and the immediate environment of one’s living room.

Such a cultural climate persisted throughout the 1890s and Vuillard’s aesthetic developed parallel to, but also distinct from, these debates. This is perhaps most eloquently summarized in an anecdote from the late 1890s, when Gustave Geffroy encountered Vuillard’s easel paintings on the walls of the monumental exhibition nave of the Palais de l’Industrie. He subsequently remarked rather bluntly: “[T]hey are fine paintings, but it is a shame that they are exhibited here; they function better in apartments.”²⁰² What in particular made works like *The Seamstresses* work in the apartment that Geffroy imagined and seemingly fall short in the grand hall designed for the public exhibition of the great achievements of French art and industry? Though the

²⁰⁰ “It is an admirable sorcery which brings before us “invisible but present, the person to whom we have been wishing to speak, and who, while still sitting at his table, in the town which we know nothing, but of which he is going to inform us, finds himself suddenly transported hundreds of miles.” Marcel Proust, *Guermantes Way* (1920) (New York: 1970), 93-4. The first international line, from Paris to Brussels, was implemented in 1887.

²⁰¹ Walter Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography” (1931), *Screen* 13, no. 1 (March 1, 1972): 20.

²⁰² Gustave Geffroy quoted in Antoine Salomon, *Vuillard: The Inexhaustible Glance: Critical Catalogue of Paintings and Pastels* (Lausanne: Switzerland, 2003), 149. Geffroy’s investment in the decorative aesthetic led to several works of criticism over the course of the 1890s and on January 6, 1908, he assumed the directorship of the state tapestry manufacturer, The Gobelins, in Paris.

exhibition space was indeed immense at 190 meters long by 48 meters wide and constructed of exposed glass, massive semi-circular trusses, and cast-iron beams, it must have been more than a matter of proportions. Several works on view that year fit those dimensions and while that may be part of the story, it cannot constitute its entirety. What larger assumptions could Geffroy have been working with regarding the nature of contemporary exhibitions and effective encounter with the work of art, and precisely how was the middle-class apartment implicated in all of this?

Two Appeals to “Interiority”

Over the course of the 1890s, the culture of artistic display was undergoing acute transformations and one divisive issue was the best method of exhibition so as to allow for the picture to effect an interiorized, charged sensation for the individual spectator.²⁰³ This interest came from a variety of sources: from embrace of a decorative aesthetic in advanced painting, development of psychophysical aesthetics closely tied to new medical research pioneered in France by Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot and drawing on recent studies in optical responsiveness, from the renewed interest in the private self among writers and poets. It was also informed by contemporary interest in a Symbolist dream world made popular in theater and literature by Stéphane Mallarmé and Alfred Jarry, among others; and the increased individualism, physical enclosure, and privatization of public places resulting from the modernization of urban

²⁰³ While these developments have generally been understood as constitutive of a self-propelled “affective turn” in art, my interests here are in generating a more nuanced set of terms for what has in the past been broadly construed as a move towards formal abstraction and, thus, an interest in viewer responsiveness. On the philosophical and art-critical underpinnings of this phenomenon, see Cronan, *Against Affective Formalism* (2013).

infrastructure and the laissez-faire policies of the Third Republic.²⁰⁴ Around 1890 these issues coalesced to create what seemed to be two viable methods for artistic display to achieve that sense of interiority in the audience where what was at stake was the definition of the term itself.

The first of these options is best expressed in response to the seventh annual exhibition of the independent artistic group, *Les XX*, in Brussels. Before the opening in January 1890, *vingtiste* and Neo-Impressionist painter, Théo Van Rysselberghe, wrote to circle secretary Octave Maus on the proposed particulars of the installation in the galleries of the Musée d'art ancien, atop the hill on the Rue de la Régence [Figure 64]. He proposed that the paintings on view hang against a fabric that he had sourced himself in an olive green (a slight departure from the red more commonly found in the Salon), punctuated with small gold (or red or blue) insignia and numbering [Figure 65]. In the proposal (which was largely carried into effect), individual paintings were positioned along the picture rail at heights appropriate to their size and organized by artist. While not hung in quite a single row, they were set against the wall sparingly and with a broad expanse of background space above them so as to give an effect of openness and place the individual works in undistracted focus [Figure 66]. By all accounts, this exhibition in the grand galleries of the former Palais des Beaux-Arts was the most successful in the history of the group, drawing unprecedented crowds into the open halls of the exhibition to view the work of 32 painters and sculptors on view.²⁰⁵ For most critics, the particulars of the galleries and

²⁰⁴ On new medical knowledge and psychological research in France, see Debora Silverman, "Psychologie Nouvelle" in *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992): 75-108. For a general account of the "turn inward" (accounted for on aesthetic terms by Silverman), see Peter Gay, *The Naked Heart: The Bourgeois Experience from Victoria to Freud* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996).

²⁰⁵ The exhibition drew 5347.50 francs in revenue (the majority of this amount, 2809.50, coming from one-time entrance tickets sold for 50 centimes each). This was 685 francs more from the previous year and entirely doubled from 1884, the year of its inception. See "Petite chronique," *L'Art moderne* 9 (2 March 1890): 71.

installation practices were an afterthought. For many, they did not enter into the discussion at all. They were preoccupied with recounting the splash made by the newly-invited painter on view, Vincent Van Gogh.²⁰⁶ Throngs drawn to lay eyes on *Wheat Fields, Sunrise (Champ de blé, soleil levant)* (1889) [Figure 67], as well as Georges Seurat's *Chahut* (1889-90) [Figure 68], were forced to navigate amorphous crowds and grand spaces peppered with palms, draperies, red velvet door hangings, and marble stands upon which the sculptures were placed. The public, expansive, open galleries for the relatively well-spaced pictures on the wall seemed overlaid with a sort of faux domesticity in the form of decorative furnishings and décor.

This overlay of the aesthetic of the private realm atop a public space recalls another space, erected just a few years later and several miles down the hill—Victor Horta's *Maison du peuple* [Figure 69], a building that was cast as a “domestication” of the urban social though in slightly different ways and to different ends.²⁰⁷ The domestic, decorative overlay at *Les XX* proved distressing to one particularly articulate critic, French painter Paul Signac (who, as it happened, also had several paintings on display in the exhibition that winter). He critiqued the appropriateness of the viewing environment to the desired effect of the pictures on display. In so doing, he bemoaned what one art historian later called “hyperbolic aestheticism” and “injurious splendor” when he described the exhibition:

“[it is] certainly decorative, but...destructive of the harmonies of the paintings, which are the victims of this luxury. The typical (*normale*; neutral) exhibition

²⁰⁶ *Les XX* was founded upon the precept of twenty domestic, member artists who each year voted to extend an invitation to twenty international artists.

²⁰⁷ In her discussion of public Art Nouveau architecture, Amy Kulper has discussed this method of overlaying of aesthetics of the private realm atop public spaces—a phenomenon that she sees most clearly in Victor Horta's *Maison du peuple* and one that she labels his “ubiquitous domesticity.” See Amy Kulper, “Private House, Public House: Victor Horta's Ubiquitous Domesticity,” in *Intimate Metropolis: Urban Subjects in the Modern City*, ed. Vittoria di Palma, Diana Periton and Marina Lathouri (New York: Routledge, 2009), 110–131.

of paintings will be that where, to the exclusion of all colored [decorative] objects (catalogue, wall hanging, flowers, frames, even women's hats), only the colors of the paintings will sing the triumph of their undisturbed harmonies."²⁰⁸

According to Signac, the viewer was unable to experience the harmonic effects derived from perceiving color combinations in the large pointillist scenes by Seurat, van Rysselberghe, Anna Boch, or smaller works by Van Gogh and Gauguin. This interest in spectatorial effect had come to dominate discourses on Neo-Impressionist painting, and specifically the capacity of certain formal properties to elicit universal, interiorized, responses in their viewers.²⁰⁹ According to Signac, because of the external threats imposed by the exhibition space, these effects were thwarted. At least partially so. It was too decorative, too cluttered, too domestic, somehow too private, and threatening to the emphatic, affective power of the pictures on the wall. Signac's opposition to the exhibition on these grounds is particularly intriguing for the way it presents a position in the debate that occupied artists and audiences of the late-nineteenth century: between

²⁰⁸ « Certainement décoratifs mais destructeurs par leurs complémentaires de l'harmonie des toiles victimes de ce faste. L'exposition normale des œuvres peintes sera celle où, à l'exclusion de tout objet colorant (catalogue, tenture, fleurs, cadres, même chapeaux des dames), seules les teintes de toile chanteront dans le triomphe de leurs harmonies inviolées ». P.S. [Paul Signac], "Catalogue de l'exposition des XX," *L'Art et critique* (1 February 1890): 76-7.

Signac's remarks are very thoughtfully treated by Martha Ward in her article on the Impressionist spaces of display. An intriguing footnote accompanies her analysis: "[I]f we estimate the probable effects of Neo-Impressionist installation, the viewer seems to be distinctly separated from the image, and especially in the case of Seurat's landscapes, the depicted scene itself is made to seem remote and otherworldly by virtue of the contrast with the heavy and dark frame. Seurat reportedly wanted to simulate in these experiments the effects of lowering the house lights at Wagner's theater at Bayreuth, whereby the spotlight stage became the unique center of attention; E. Verhaeren, "Georges Seurat," *Société nouvelle* II (Apr. 1891): 433." See Martha Ward, "Impressionist Installations and Private Exhibitions," *Art Bulletin* 73, No. 4 (December 1991): 620.

This model for design of art installations continued at *La Libre esthétique* from 1891-3 where many critics similarly condemned the "bibeloterie."

²⁰⁹ Signac was the most outspoken painter regarding this connection between Neo-Impressionist and romantic aims for affective response, though James Ensor and his critics also made the connection between Neo-Impressionism (particularly Seurat) and the "harmonic" atmospheres of Delacroix or Turner. See Paul Signac, *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impersonnisme* (Paris: Floury, 1911); and Émile Verhaeren, *James Ensor* (1908).

tableau and *décor*.²¹⁰ The latter position was articulated in an exhibitionary trend happening nearly concurrently in Paris at independent, private exhibitions such as those at the boutique gallery of M. Le Barc de Boutteville.

In 1894, Signac also expressed his dissatisfaction with the small, dark, and comparatively cluttered decorative displays at Boutteville's. In a journal entry, he ironically lauded the capacities of such a display to highlight the "ignorance, laziness, and pretention" of the paintings he found least effective and therefore most objectionable: those of the *intimistes*—Vuillard, Denis, and Bonnard.²¹¹ So objectionable were the works on view that the environment of the gallery, cramped and dark, was needed to distract from their flaws. In Signac's view, paintings that could stir some emotion and affective response in their viewer were more appropriate to the grand and clear spaces of public exhibitions than to confusing enclosed spaces such as those on the rue Le Peletier.

As though in direct retort, the critic Émile Bergerat condemned the public nature of the Salon and encouraged audiences to see paintings at the "truly private and intimate space" of the Maison Durand-Ruel just around the corner from where Boutteville's would be situated, also in the West end of Paris, on the Rue Lafitte.²¹² The little gallery space was dimly lit and adorned with red walls. As previously mentioned, partially in response to the privatization of the art

²¹⁰ See Steven Z. Levine, "Décor/Décoratif/Décoration in Monet's Art," *Arts Magazine* 51 (February 1982): 18.

²¹¹ « Que ne sont-ils restés dans le noir de la boutique de Boutteville, où l'on pouvait encore laisser prendre à leurs merdes mystérieuses ! Ici, tout cela paraît maigre, pas peinture pour un sou, pas fichu ». Paul Signac (diary entry of 10 Dec. 1894), quoted in John Rewald, "Extraits du journal inédits de Paul Signac 1894-95," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 6, vol. 36 (July-Sept 1949): 119.

On this topic, Martha Ward has pointed to the Signac's description, in his journal from 1894, of the "normal museum" wherein art works should be hung in a single row with plenty of space between them, in bright rooms and with little decoration, so the viewer may appreciate them independently from any distraction. See Ward, "Impressionist Installations and Private Exhibitions," 620.

²¹² E. Bergerat, "Chronique parisienne," *Gil Blas* (17 May 1891).

market under the economic recession of the 1870s and '80s, the decade saw a veritable explosion of these private exhibitions by independent artistic circles and private dealers installed in small boutique or domestic spaces that afforded an available alternative to the vast expanses of the public *salles des expositions*. For instance, in 1877 the Impressionists began mounting their group shows in bourgeois apartments temporarily rented out for the occasion, a practice they maintained until their final exhibition in 1886. Increasingly, throughout the 1880s, other privately sponsored or commercial galleries were subdivided and furnished as *petits salons* so as to approximate the feeling of contemporary domestic space. This, Martha Ward has incisively argued, precipitated illusions of the private domain that provided a “loose but suggestive counter play between definitions of private and public, autonomous and decorative, intellectual and sensual” that, I maintain, thematized issues of contemporary interiority itself.²¹³

I see this position—the instantiation and propagation of an intimate environment for the display of art—as an essential and competing force in debates regarding the culture of display in the 1890s. Considering this position reveals an alternative to conditions more commonly encountered in histories of public display that have privileged the autonomous painting on the wall. Considering pictures and their mode of display as an interrelated aesthetic demands a heretofore overlooked question of definition and appeal. On the one hand, Signac argued for the propensities of affective response to the pictures on view, an interest that he made clear in his commitments to psychophysical aesthetics and the idea that, simply put, perceiving certain color combinations could provoke an emotional, psychic response.²¹⁴ He thus implicitly assigned qualitative value and definition to interiority as deeply-held sensation effected upon a normative

²¹³ Ward, “Impressionist Installations and Private Exhibitions,” 604.

²¹⁴ This pseudo-science was indebted to the experiments of Charles Henry. See Paul Smith, “Wagnerian Painting,” in *Seurat and the Avant-Garde*, ed. Paul Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 105–55.

viewer by encountering formal attributes of paintings alone.²¹⁵ On the other hand and in Paris, paintings were becoming increasingly integrated into decorative and more familiar interior environments, casting new spatial valence on art viewing and interiority itself. Both sides seem to have been betting on a common effect—we might call it interiority—but each proposed a unique cause. In and around 1890, the jury was out and opinions were split: would the desired effects of this “interiority” (and thus the confirmation of its very definition) be achieved through the autonomous effects of individual communion with the *tableau* or through the all-encompassing atmospheric effects of the paintings within an intimate environment or *décor*?²¹⁶

Received notions of interiority have tended in recent years to align with the former definition—interiority as inwardly metaphysical, immaterial, and wholly un-embodied (visual) encounter with an isolated art object. Jonathan Crary has characterized late-nineteenth century viewing by a “metaphysic of interiority” that he describes as “decorporealized,” or radically disjointed from the sensorial experiences of the world in which the viewer (and the work) physically inhabit.²¹⁷ On this topic, Rosalind Krauss has claimed that after about 1860, aesthetic discourse became organized around the continuous surface of the exhibition wall, a wall that was increasingly structured for the display of art alone. Painting, according to her, internalized the

²¹⁵ The recourse to theories of perception here was thin. Implicit in this argument is a perceived difference between the quality and effectiveness of formal components of paintings and those of *décor* to provoke responses. Such a distinction does not appear in Charles Henry’s theory of normative responsiveness. See Charles Henry, *Quelques Aperçus sur l’esthétique des formes* (1895)

²¹⁶ This distinction between the *tableau* and *décor* might be given added depth by considering it against another dualism—*tableau* and *morceau*— which Michael Fried has claimed to have been a primary feature of French painting and criticism of the 1860s. Here, the distinction is between a unified, whole picture and a distinct portion, or “piece,” lacking a perspectival ensemble. See Michael Fried, *Manet’s Modernism: Or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 277-280. While this concern with the *tableau* largely holds true to my context in the 1890s, *décor* might be considered as something akin to an exteriorized *morceau*, a piece of a larger ensemble not within the limits of the picture but within the context of the larger viewing environment.

²¹⁷ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century*, New edition (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 58.

flattened and compressed spatial organization of the surface upon which it hung and viewership came to connote a personal, quasi-mystical encounter with the autonomous object hanging on an austere museum wall.²¹⁸ Informed by later modernist imperatives, each of these scholars has promoted a notion of interiority that leaves the interior behind.

The other appeal to interiority however—one brought about by spatial, decorative, and interior-like conditions—has received substantially less scholarly attention, especially for the ways that it was tied to a range of artistic modes, aesthetics of display, and architectonic space in the nineteenth century.²¹⁹ Linguistically, this distinction presents a bit of a challenge. Our contemporary definitions of “interiority,” “or the private experience of insidedness and affected feeling, side steps the distinction. “*Intérieur*” is closer, with its dual association of psychological projection and spatial enclosure, image and space, self and environment; however, it denotes a site rather than a condition that might describe other media or situations. In 1890s France, the

²¹⁸ Rosalind Krauss, “Photography’s Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View,” *Art Journal*, 42, no. 4 (1982): 311-319. This definition of interiority as an art historical problem has been informed by twentieth-century precepts of modernist painting and the encounter with discourses of modernist autonomy. The personal, ephemeral encounter with the charged painting hanging on the wall was, in turn, the mark of the psychological life of the artist and had very little to do with the interior as a material form.

For instance, Robert Motherwell described the viewing of art in 1951 as: “a true mysticism...that grew up in the historical circumstance that all mysticisms do, from a primary sense of a gulf, an abyss.... Abstract art is an effort to close the void that that modern men feel.” Robert Motherwell, “What Abstract Art Means to Me” (1951), in *The Writings of Robert Motherwell* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 159. Merleau-Ponty also voiced his critiques on this subject, recalling André Malraux’s characterization of modernist art in *The Voices of Silence*. He writes: “(Malraux’s mistake is to) define modern painting as a return to subjectivity—to the ‘incomparable monster’—and to bury it in a secret life outside the world.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,” (1960), in Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Michael B. Smith, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting* (Northwestern University Press, 1993) 249.

More recently, Michelle Facos has argued for the ephemeral, Symbolist roots of modern art, while Laurent Jenny has recognized these hermetic tendencies to interiority in a project to recover their contemporary complexity. See Michelle Facos and Thor J. Mednick, eds., *The Symbolist Roots of Modern Art* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Laurent Jenny, *La Fin de l’interiorité* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002).

²¹⁹ Notable exceptions are found in the work of Juliet Koss and Katherine Kuenzli. See Juliet Koss, *Modernism After Wagner* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Kuenzli, *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism* (2010).

term best used to describe this other, increasingly popular aesthetic appeal to “interiority” that Signac so derided was *intimisme*. Deployed widely in discourses on decorating, design, art and display, “*intimisme*” sheds a bit of the art historical baggage of the encounter with the autonomous art object, and rather returns the broader concept of interiority to the interior and, as such, can offer a more comprehensive account of each of these durable concepts.

Despite a relative dearth in scholarship on nineteenth-century spaces of display, Martha Ward’s, “Impressionist Installations and Private Exhibitions” (1991) remains iconic in this regard. This essay undertakes the decisive reorientation of the study of nineteenth-century painting away from isolated analyses of the artworks and towards a dialectical consideration of those works and the contexts for their display—in her words, “the ways that sites and installations shaped aesthetics and defined art.”²²⁰ In so doing, Ward challenges received ideas about nineteenth-century display practices and their effects as constitutive of a prehistory of modernist autonomy or the white cube. She instead argues for the heterogeneity of exhibition design within a more general turn towards privacy and privatization amongst Impressionists and independent artists of the 1870s and early 1880s. My interests here begin where Ward’s leaves off both conceptually and chronologically. I draw on the frame of her investigation—the provocative pairing of the spaces of exhibition and a larger culture of the privacy—and veer in a slightly different direction. Undergirding my investigation is a fundamental recasting of the interior from the “decorative and non-discursive mode” that Ward and others have suggested. I contend that as Vuillard’s work developed, he constructed the conditions for an *intimisme* that was decreasingly concerned with an immaterial, psychological interiority that might be considered as a retreat from the outside world, and increasingly invested in the construction of a

²²⁰ Ward, “Impressionist Installations and Private Exhibitions,” 618.

dynamic effect that was exteriorized and interior-like. This becomes apparent upon considering his next move which took him beyond the small pictures exhibited in private galleries and into the creation of large decorative environments.

Pictorial Decoration: or, *Plein-Air Intimisme*

In his review of the 1893 exhibition at Boutteville's, Albert Aurier remarked that, given the decorative potential of the works on view, it was high time that Vuillard break away from small easel paintings and instead conduct work on a grand scale. This followed from his earlier remarks on such paintings that he thought, when confined to a small canvas, nearly always seem ready to burst out of the frame. His call for a decorative aesthetic that would reconcile new ideas about picture making, and the abandonment of easel painting, with the parallel revival of the Arts and Crafts, was ultimately adopted by the Nabi as their veritable battle cry. "Walls! Give them walls!" he implored.²²¹

This more general call for *décors* that would accord with modern living characterized much of critical discourse of the Parisian avant-garde. Maurice Denis echoed Aurier's call for a decorative art, and Jan Verkade captured the feeling of the new movement when he proclaimed

²²¹ "Gauguin, it must be repeated, like all *Idéiste* artists, is above all a decorator. His compositions find themselves confined by the limited confines of the canvases. One would be tempted, at times, to take them for fragments of immense frescoes, and they nearly always seem ready to explode the frames that unduly limit them! ...Come now, a little common sense, you have among you a decorator of genius. Walls! Walls! Give him some walls!" G-Albert Aurier, "Le Symbolisme en peinture" (March 1891), 192-201. Another strong voice on the subject was Octave Uzanne's who remarked that "young artists finally realized that art should be exclusively personal and decorative," See Uzanne, "Les Idéistes et les choses d'art," *L'Art et l'Idée: Revue contemporaine du dilettantisme littéraire et de la curiosité* (January 1892): 74.

While the specific (and varied) connotations of "the decorative" are not my prime concern here, they have been very well elucidated in relation to the social ambitions of fin-de-siècle French painters by Katherine Brion. See Katherine Brion, "Decorative Painting and Politics in France" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2014).

there to be no longer any need for traditional easel pictures at all, and that there was only demand for large-scale decorations.²²² Vuillard heeded this call. On August 21, 1894, he received eight hundred francs in commission from Alexandre Natanson, editor of *La Revue blanche*, to create a series of decorative panels for his home at 60 Avenue de Bois in Paris. Entitled *Public Gardens (Les Jardins publics)* (1895), these panels mark a significant turning point in Vuillard's *intimisme*. The series consists of nine panels: a triptych of *The Nursemaids (Les Nourrices)*, *The Conversation (La Conversation)*, and *the Red Sunshade (L'Ombrelle rouge)* [Figure 70]; and three pairs made up of *The Two Schoolboys (Les Deux écoliers)* and *Under the Trees (Sous les arbres)* [Figures 71, 72]; *Little Girls Playing (Les Fillettes jouant)* and *Asking Questions (L'Interrogatoire)* [Figures 73, 74]; *First Steps (Les Premiers pas)* and *The Walk (La Promenade)* [Figure 75, 76]. These are images of women at leisure in the sunshine, children at play, and nannies watching over their charges, all against a verdant landscape. At nearly life-sized, these panels marked his departure from small-scale easel paintings of domestic scenes [Figure 77]. From this moment forward, he would become predominantly known as a "painter-decorator," though he still remained an *intimiste*. How could this be the case? What could *intimisme*, intimacy, or even interiority have meant with regards to these works that have so fully abandoned the depiction of the home and why this change of course?

Despite his turn towards exterior scenes, Vuillard maintained the spatial compression and vertical backdrop that he had developed in scenes such as *Under the Lamplight*. In the pair composed of *The Two Schoolboys* and *Under the Trees* for instance, the foreground is large and

²²² Jan Verkade echoed: "Away with easel pictures! Away with that unnecessary piece of furniture! ...The work of the painter begins where that of the architect is finished. Hence let us have walls, that we ma paint them over... There are no painting, but only decorations." Willibrord Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, trans. John L. Stoddard (New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1930), 88.

unpopulated, perpendicular to the wall; the figures are flat and unmodulated, appearing almost as paper dolls pasted on to a background. The low horizon line of blue and the intricate, decorative patterning of the foliage at top envelopes the figures and seems to push the picture right up into our space, its tactility and materiality compelling us to reach out and touch it.

In Natanson's *rez de chaussée*, these panels were set against the four walls of the rectangular room and raised three and a half or four feet off the ground [Figure 78, 79]. Each employ formal rhythms and patterning that compliments the next and their very thin, nearly imperceptible, wooden frames reduce any impediment to visual continuity across the series. The triptych, for instance, is held together by the repetition and continuation of a fence across all three and the balanced tonal harmony uniting the dark umber of the young boy's suit, the skirt of the sitting woman, and the umbrella of the sunshade, as well as the repetitive patterns of the ground and foliage throughout the series. These formal tropes distinguish Vuillard's panels from similar works such as Maurice Denis' *Autumn (L'Automne)* and *Spring (Le Printemps)* (1892) [Figure 80], whose decorative borders contain each panel as individual, distinct formal entities. So, while Vuillard's subject matter was distinctly public, the formal arrangement of the works felt engulfing and physically intimate. This was the general sentiment among viewers once the panels were unveiled, in early 1895, at a spectacular fête with a guest list that included 300 artists, poets, critics, and playwrights.²²³ This decorative environment in the Natanson home appeared to more than one commentator as *intimiste*—not a new descriptor for Vuillard's art, but one that, in the mid-1890s, was increasingly associated not just with painting but also with Symbolist theater.

Vuillard's involvement with experimental theater, at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre run by his

²²³ Toulouse-Lautrec curated the event. He designed the invitations, mixed "American cocktails" and famously wore a waistcoat fabricated out of an American flag.

studio-mate and fellow Nabi, Aurelien Lugné-Poe, and the Théâtre d'Art, ran the gamut from program production to set design. Much has been made of his participation in the theater for the influence that its program of psychological dramas and existential naturalism may have had on his choice of subject matter.²²⁴ Vuillard's exposure to this theatrical form however, transformed the nature of his art and the connotations of his aesthetic on two levels. First, it influenced what one might call his narrative tone. His charged scenes of domestic unease were sometimes directly taken from the theatrical dramas, Maeterlinck's *l'Intruse* and *Intérieur Mystère* for instance.²²⁵ On another level, however, he also adopted a painterly aesthetic in which engagement with the audience was manifestly intimate, taking cue from theatre designs in which the physical space between art on stage and viewers was compressed.

Departing from traditional set design, this approach rather engaged the entirety of the theater, implicating the audience directly in the performance and thus forging a physically and emotionally empathetic relation between art on stage and viewer in the audience. Lugné-Poe and his Nabi colleagues admittedly and emphatically looked to the example of Richard Wagner in his productions for his theater in Bayreuth so as to achieve an encompassing formal synthesis in which the set, actors, audience, and even music, comprised a unified representational tissue that would sensorially and psychologically overwhelm the spectators. In his 1894 set designs for Ibsen's *The Master Builder* for instance, Vuillard sought to abolish conventional stage

²²⁴ Genevieve Aitken "Les peintres et les théâtres français autour de 1900 à Paris" (PhD diss., Université Paris Sorbonne, 1976); Merel van Tilburg, "Staging the Symbol: The Nabis, Theatre Decoration, and the Total Work of Art" (Ph. D. diss., Université de Genève, 2012).

²²⁵ For instance, in 1891 he created a small narrative painting that depicted scenes from Maeterlinck's play, *L'Intruse*, and critical reviews of its exhibition noted the thematic likenesses. Maeterlinck's play, for which Vuillard designed the set for its premiere at Odéon was scheduled to open on the 20th of May for an event honoring Paul Gauguin and Paul Verlaine. Hippolyte Lemaire, "Théâtre Vaudeville, représentations au bénéfice de MM. Paul Verlaine et Paul Gauguin," *Le Monde illustré* (30 May 1891): 431; Gaston Calmette, "Pour Verlaine et Gauguin," *Le Figaro* (14 May 1891): 2.

perspective, blurring the boundaries between performers, surroundings, and audience by employing subdued lighting, minimal furnishings, colored gauze scrims, and a bountiful coverage of autumn foliage that extended out from the stage into and amongst the bodies of the audience.²²⁶ Details in set design were suppressed for the sake of a broad, diffuse effect that constructed a unified, animated whole. In theatrical terms, *intimisme* connoted a binding, a destruction of boundaries (both physical and psychological) between viewing subject and the work, thus assembling a world in which interior and exterior, proximity and distance, were increasingly confused, substituted, and elided.²²⁷

In his Natanson commission, Vuillard translated this physical enclosure and Wagnerian synthesis from the theater to painting wherein the audience engaged the work not through a detached reckoning of the eye but by means of direct bodily feeling.²²⁸ The implications of this translation have yet to be explored as a crucial feature of *intimisme* in the 1890s. As a sketch of their installation makes clear, the individual components of *Public Gardens* were meant to hang behind chairs, compliment an adjacent armoire, and suture together a soothing environment around which the inhabitant could go about her daily tasks [Figure 81]. The panels create an interior and, in so doing, evoke a sense of interiority that has as much to do with spatial enclosure as it does with reflective feeling or narrative subjectivity. The total, proximate, and encompassing *intimiste* environment of the experimental theater is here expressed by

²²⁶ Lugné-Poe (1894) cited in Claire Frèches-Thory and Antoine Terrasse, *The Nabis: Bonnard, Vuillard, and Their Circle* (New York: Rizzoli, 2003), 268-9.

²²⁷ Susan Sidlauskas has introduced more general pictorial innovations in the painted representations of interiority through discussion of theatrical conventions in her chapter on Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran's concept of a "perspective of feeling." See Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self*, 10-20.

²²⁸ This wording is Wölfflin's, and though originally employed to describe the experience of encountering architecture, is appropriate here as well. See Heinrich Wölfflin, "Prolegomena to a Psychology of Architecture," in *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893*, intro and trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikononou (Santa Monica: Getty Center for History of Art and the Humanities, 1994), 149-152.

coordination of painting, architecture, and objects of décor.

In the production of set designs, Vuillard learned a distemper painting technique that he would go on to apply to *Public Gardens*. This technique, painting *à la colle*, made the surface of the canvas appear matte and densely textured. Rather than the slick sheen of varnished academic paintings, Vuillard's surfaces asserted a "primitive" or "object-like" presence that appeared to some critics to claim that they imitated the textural warp and weft of woven wool. This indicated his other great influence in conceiving of his decorative commissions—tapestries. In a journal entry of July 1894, just months before accepting the Natanson commission, and accompanied by a sketch of two panels of *Public Gardens*, he wrote:

Visited Cluny yesterday ...Contemplating the tapestries, I think that by enlarging it, pure and simple, my little panel can be the subject of a decoration. The humble subjects of these decorations at Cluny! Expressions of an intimate feeling on a bigger surface, that's all!²²⁹

To invoke tapestry was to call up not just its decorative associations, but also the perceptual experience of integral and continuous fibers, overwhelming scale, tactility, perspectival compression, and envelopment within a room. In a lecture given at the *Société Centrale des Architectes* entitled "Tapestry in France and Its Application to Apartment Design," Jules Geffrey espoused the merits of grand tapestries for the ensuing, soothing feeling and harmonious effects elicited by their installation. To invoke tapestry, he argued, was to disturb a normative perspectival system for art viewing, supplanting it for large-format *objets* in the constitution of a

²²⁹ Vuillard journals, fol. 44, Ms 5396, Bibliothèque de l'Institut de France, Paris.

room.²³⁰ Often compared to the grand, publically exhibited paintings of Seurat or murals by Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, whose work also elicited such comparisons, Vuillard's example is particular for the way that it invoked, in his words, an "intimate feeling."²³¹ The intricate and repetitive patterning that critics compared to weaving and the flattened, compressed perspective that invoked these associations with tapestry made the panels of the Natanson room all-encompassing, overpowering, and close. The *Seigniorial Life* tapestries [Figure 82] that Vuillard surely would have encountered at Cluny are a case in point.²³² The figures are pressed up against the surface of the image, the background is flat and patterned in a series of formal rhythms and decorative arabesques. This integral flatness evoked an essentially, palpably, crafted surface.²³³

This "tapestry aesthetic" was a widespread concern of artists and art critics around 1900, and several Nabi artists including Aristide Maillol and Paul Ranson even worked directly in the

²³⁰ « La tapisserie n'est pas un tableau. Elle ne doit pas être appliquée à plat comme une toile tendue sur châssis ; elle tombe librement formant de larges plis qui dissimulent les singularités du dessin. Malgré ces plis, le sujet ne reste pas moins très apparent, et la muraille se trouve couverte du haut en bas d'un fouillis d'objets, de figures, de tons, de feuillages de l'effet le plus plaisant et le plus harmonieux ». Jules Geffrey, "La tapisserie en France et ses applications à la décoration d'appartements," *Société Centrale des Architectes* (28 April 1887), 10.

²³¹ Félix Fénéon stated that Seurat's *Grande Jatte* (1886) "unrolls, a monotonous and patient tapestry." Fénéon quoted in Cindy Kang, "Wallflowers: Tapestry, Painting, and the Nabis in Fin-de-Siècle France" (PhD diss., New York University, 2014), 10. In 1892, Albert Aurier referred to paintings depicting Breton figures by Sérusier as "magnificent tapestries of high warp." Georges-Albert Aurier, "Deuxième Exposition des peintres impressionnistes et symbolistes," *Mercure de France* 5, no.31(1892): 262.

²³² While it is unknown which tapestries Vuillard encountered at Cluny, it was probably these. *Seigniorial Life* entered the collections at Cluny in the mid-nineteenth century under the title *Scenes of Private Life*.

²³³ Joseph Masheck, "The Carpet Paradigm: Critical Prolegomena to a Theory of Flatness," *Arts Magazine* 51, no. 1 (1976): 82–109. Merel Van Tilburg's work on the Nabis offers a very good extension and revision of this theory. While her emphasis on narrative is somewhat different from my concerns, Van Tilburg similarly seeks to recast the role of a tapestry aesthetic in conceptions of this early moment of experimental, modern picture making, and in turn reconsider our understanding of modernism itself. See Merel van Tilburg, "Staging the Symbol: The Nabis, Theatre Decoration, and the Total Work of Art" (Ph.D. diss, Université de Genève, 2012); Merel van Tilburg, "The Figure in/on the Carpet: Félix Vallotton and Decorative Narrativity," *Konsthistorisktidskrift/Journal of Art History* 83:3 (2014): 211-227.

medium.²³⁴ In his 1890 manifesto, Maurice Denis famously compared the pictures he held in high esteem to works of “haute tapisserie.”²³⁵ With regard to painting, a tapestry aesthetic represented a more nuanced notion than simply “decorative” which, though indicating a great many things, connoted works that were simplified in form and made to coordinate with architecture more generally. In a 1910 text, Hungarian critic Leo Popper presented a useful definition of this representational strategy in a rather unlikely comparison that he staged between the paintings of Paul Cézanne and Pieter Brueghel the Elder. His focus was a concept that he called *Allteig*, or unity of matter. As far as Popper was concerned, Cézanne and Brueghel were antidotes to Impressionist atmospheres that simply enveloped their subjects within the depicted fiction. Instead of creating a represented scene arbitrarily held together with light and color fleeting between figures as they receded into the background, he claimed that these artists assimilated the air between objects and subjects into a solid embodiment of matter distributed with unified weight. Conceiving of his painting as a radical departure from Impressionism, he claimed that Cézanne “ties atmospheric style and matter together.”²³⁶

²³⁴ See Kang, “Wallflowers,” (2014); Merel Van Tilburg, “Rethinking the Carpet Paradigm: Critical Footnotes to a Theory of Flatness (Yayoi Kusama, Mai-Thu Perret, Louise Bourgeois),” *Metatextile: Identity and History of a Contemporary Art Medium*, ed. Tristan Weddigen and Marco Costantini (Berlin: Edition Imorde, 2011), 111–42.

Outside of a formal, or phenomenological, concern with tapestry, there was of course the concern of the “meaning.” Charles Baudelaire saw the rediscovery of medieval tapestries in France as an expression of the grandeur of Gothic Catholicism. See Charles Baudelaire, “Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris” in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 791.

²³⁵ Maurice Denis, “Définition du néo-traditionnisme,” *Art et critique* 65 (23 August 1890): 540–542, and no. 66 (30 August 1890): 556–558.

²³⁶ “Jede Malerei gab seit jeher statt der Mannigfaltigkeit der Stoffe... ein besonderes Material von einheitlichem, spezifischem Gewicht... dem unfreiwillig die mystische Rolle zufiel, zu einen, was Gott getrennt hatte,... der als ein, 'Allteig' alle Stoffe ausdrücken durfte.... Das eigentliche Material der Malerei, die Farbe, eine Einheit schafft, die alle letzten Unterschiede ertränkt.” Leo Popper, “Peter Brueghel der Ältere 1520(?)–1569,” *Kunst und Künstler* (1910): 600–603.

For an enlightening discussion of this text, see Ferenc Gosztanyi, “The Early Reception of Cézanne in Hungary, 1906–10: Fülep and Popper,” in *Cézanne and the Past: Tradition and Creativity*, ed. Judit Geskó (Budapest: Museum of Fine Arts Budapest, 2012), 179–190.

This suturing of the components of the picture together as one might manipulate dough or pulp, wool or matter, can be seen in Cézanne's painting from the 1890s. In *Boy with a Red Waistcoat (Le Garçon au gilet rouge)* (1888-90) [Figure 83], the figure appears constituted by the same matter as the objects surrounding him. The blueish-grey sleeve and the drapery appear to be of equal value and weight, distinct yet existing in a world evacuated of air and space. Similarly, in *Madame Cézanne in a Red Dress (Madame Cézanne en robe rouge)* (1890) [Figure 84], the figure's hands have the same weight and substance as the spoon, and the drapery has the same value as her face, though both are stitched together in a dense mass of matter that provides the viewer the express impression of a "world all at once."²³⁷ This effect makes the pictures appear at once terribly impenetrable and inscrutably, viscerally close. We see this conflation of background and foreground, this manipulation and even distribution of matter, in Brueghel's *The Wedding Dance* (1566) [Figure 85] as well. This weaving of the components of the picture together—the figures, foreground, houses, and background—for Popper marked a departure from artistic strategies that depicted a world visually apprehended from a distance and rather created an art of solid foundations that would unify painting profoundly with the world once again and, in his terms, would be "a sibling of architecture."²³⁸

Seeing Brueghel and Cézanne in this light is rather advantageous for understanding the pictorial strategies of Vuillard's tapestry aesthetic in the 1890s, for all three undertake similar operations. Vuillard left behind the depicted atmosphere of the small room in his earlier easel paintings and extended these concerns into the outside world. In his execution of pictorial

²³⁷ This point on the weight of the hands and spoon is T.J. Clark's, and I see this density of matter operating across much of Cézanne's portraits from c.1900. He writes, "The woman's hands (or her hair with its geological parting) have the same weight and distinctiveness as the spoon. And yet spoon, hair and hands are fitted like cogs or levers into the picture's naive, elaborate offer of the world-all-at-once..." See T.J. Clark, "Relentless Intimacy," *London Review of Books* 40, no. 2 (25 January 2018):13-16.

²³⁸ Popper, "Peter Brueghel der Ältere," 603.

density and spatial compression between forms, figures, and objects in his large decorative works, he achieves a solid atmosphere embodied in material, externalized terms. Such an aesthetic effectively collapsed the distance between painting and world, and in so doing, created a sense of spatially-derived interiority for the viewer just as one might feel cozily ensconced in the familiar space of one's home.

For Vuillard, theater and tapestry each provided a model for arts that were particularly attuned to issues of display, of scale, and proximity. The critic Roger Marx, writing in the twentieth century on the subject of the *Public Gardens*, referred to him as a *plein-air intimiste*.²³⁹ Subject matter, or the sense of atmosphere depicted within the limits of the picture plane, was no longer sufficient to impart a sense of *intimité*, or *intimisme*. Under these new conditions, a landscape might construct the effect of interiority just as easily as a genre scene could. As such, Vuillard continued working in this aesthetic throughout the 1890s, in his landscapes commissioned for the decoration of rooms in private homes such as a commission for the library of Adam Natanson on the Rue Jouffroy entitled *Landscape: Window Overlooking the Woods* (1899) [Figure 86], and a densely packed, tapestry-like painting entitled *Walking in the Vineyard (Promenade)* (1897-9) [Figure 87] that hung in an interior that Henry van de Velde designed for Karl Ernst Osthaus at Hohenhof [Figure 88].²⁴⁰ By abandoning the motif of the depicted interior for an aesthetic that engaged the proximity and evocative beholding of experimental theater with the scale, tactility, and interlocking matter of tapestry, Vuillard achieved an *intimisme* that took on a modern guise.

By the mid-1890s and in Vuillard's hands, *intimisme* was not restricted to the isolated

²³⁹ Claude Roger-Marx, *Vuillard* (New York: Éditions de la Maison Française, 1946), 121.

²⁴⁰ The painting was initially made to be hung in the Parisian home of Jack Aghion, and did from 1898-1900. In his designs for the interior of a private residence at in Germany's North Rhineland-Westphalia, van de Velde designed the entirety of the room to compliment Vuillard's painting.

interior of contained narratives, private pleasures, or cultivated personal taste as it had the decade prior in Impressionist images of mothers and children. Nor was it limited to the nostalgic milieu of quiet duration, “cozy” comforts, or hemmed-in restraint adopted from the British model of the “home” espoused in French decorative manuals of the 1880s. It likewise refused constraint to Spire Blondel’s harkening back to the *ancien regime* in his call for “intimate” arts in the construction of the domestic sphere meant to provide a realm for refined and private cultivation.²⁴¹ Vuillard’s were no such “polite accompaniments to bourgeois existence,” but rather animated interior environments.²⁴²

Given their dynamic character, *Public Gardens* and other decorative schemes of the 1890s were much more resonant with French adaptations of Wagnerian aesthetics as they were applied in the arts outside of theater as well. Vuillard and the other Nabi artists were not conversant in the particulars of Wagner’s ideas nor had they visited his theater in Bayreuth, but they did latch on to a series of aesthetic principles derived and adapted from nineteenth-century German aesthetics. In 1885, Symbolist poet and friend, Stéphane Mallarmé, wrote an essay in which he beseeched artists to realize Wagnerian ideas of totality. He described the ways in which the structure and narrative of Wagner’s music bends and breaks apart so as to communicate through enlivened symphonies of line and color, enveloping the actors and audience in swelling

²⁴¹ Spire Blondel, *Grammaire de la curiosité : (L’Art intime et le goût en France)* (Paris: C. Marpon et E. Flammarion, 1884), 356; Henry Havard, *L’art dans la maison (grammaire de l’ameublement)* (Paris: E. Rouveyre et G. Blond, 1884).

²⁴² Several scholars have understood Vuillard’s interior scenes as peaceful accompaniments to modern living rather than disruptions to the spatial relation obtained between viewer and work. See James Dugdale, ‘Vuillard the Decorator. First Phase: The 1890s,’ *Apollo* 81, no. 6 (February 1965), 99–100; Roseline Bacou, “Décors d’appartements au temps des Nabis,” *Arts de France* 4 (1964); Nicholas Watkins, “The Genesis of a Decorative Aesthetic,” in Gloria Groom, ed., *Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, and Roussel, 1890–1930*, exh. cat. (Chicago and New Haven: The Art Institute of Chicago in collaboration with Yale University Press, 2001).

rhythms and harmonies.²⁴³ These tenets were certainly taken up by the Vuillard and his contemporaries, and included a musical approach to form and color, a desire to converge the arts, and to connect art and viewer through a process of spatial integration, sensorial stimulation, and empathic projection. Following the influence of Mallarmé, but also T  odor de Wyz  wa and the *Revue wagn  rienne*, Vuillard adopted these ideas as the platform for an aesthetic based on individually experienced interiority derived from formal, external principles.²⁴⁴ As with the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art, Vuillard created painting that was “musical” in its forms, powerfully affective, and generated a sense in which external form could give shape to the interiority of its beholder.²⁴⁵ The constructed space of a gallery, or a theater set, and of a decorated room could fashion the intimate conditions for the extension and expression of the psychological self—for interiority in a form that was representable and, to a certain extent, externalized. In contradistinction to the Wagnerian ideal however, Vuillard did not wish to disseminate these effects to the broad public or to the masses, but rather he applied these principles to the private realm. The total environment that Vuillard created in Natanson’s apartment seemed to merge intimacy and enclosure with Wagnerian understandings of bodily and psychic space. From *wagn  risme*, as from the experimental theater and tapestry, he recast *intimisme* in interiority’s transformed image. This strategy codified conditions for a real

²⁴³ St  phane Mallarm  , “Richard Wagner, r  verie d’un po  te fran  ais,” *Revue wagn  rienne* (1885; reprint Geneva: Slatkine, 1968): 199-200.

²⁴⁴ Only confirming these sentiments, Vuillard wrote in a journal entry from that year, 1894, that “[T]here is an effect that results from a certain arrangement of colors, of lights, of shadows. It is this that one calls the music of painting.” Vuillard journals (1894), fol. 44, Ms 5396., Biblioth  que de l’Institut de France, Paris

²⁴⁵ The emphasis placed on manipulation of the masses by means of individual sensation has come to be seen as the most alarming feature of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, particularly as it was played out in the twentieth century. We should remember, however, that the nineteenth-century origins of this idea were based on its emancipatory effects, rather than on social control to which it is now most often associated. This issue is discussed by Juliet Koss in her exceptional historical genealogy of the concept, *Modernism After Wagner* (2009)

alternative to the passivity and capitulation associated with other iterations of the interior, and the ephemerality and autonomy implicit in other formulations of interiority. In the methods set out by the *plein-air intimiste*, interiority and the interior both asserted their presence in spatial, exterior form, and no longer required the narrative terms of private domestic life to do so.

These conditions were exceptionally resonant at this moment in the 1890s, when the concept of space was for the first time defined and employed in architectural and psychological discourses. In an 1893 lecture entitled “The Essence of Architectural Creation,” August Schmarsow famously defined architecture as essentially spatial (as opposed to structural or formal) and thus capable of producing the conditions of psychological projection—of projecting an interior sense of self into a three-dimensional space. In this address, Schmarsow contended that it was not simply the material, structural components of a building that comprised an architectural aesthetic but, rather, “the work of art come(s) into being when human aesthetic reflection begins to transpose itself into the whole and to understand and appreciate all parts with a pure and free vision.” This vision, this sense of self projected into an aesthetic form, is constituted through space.²⁴⁶ Such “aesthetics from within,” as he called them, derived from an understanding of the process of perception where the mind outwardly manifests a knowledge of bodily sensations onto the experience of external forms. Our sense of space then, is derived from a personal, interiorized set of visual encounters and intuited sensations. He goes on: “... we have learned to experience ourselves and ourselves alone as the center of this space, whose coordinates intersect in us.”²⁴⁷ For Schmarsow, the architectural interior was fundamentally spatial and inextricably bound to the self—a self (re)constructed in physical, corporeal, and exteriorized

²⁴⁶ August Schmarsow, “The Essence of Architectural Creation” (1893), quoted in Harry Mallgrave, *Modern Architectural Theory: A Historical Survey, 1673-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 198.

²⁴⁷ Schmarsow, “Essence of Architecture Creation,” 286-7.

ways.

Augmenting these discourses in 1893 was Adolf von Hildebrand's understanding of aesthetic perception as fundamentally temporal, spatial, and most of all embodied. According to him, the "spatial imagination" was directly tied to one's experience of visual forms, thus uniting optical perception, interior subjectivity, and physical presence.²⁴⁸ Older models of disembodied vision were wholly replaced by a densely embodied, subjective system of interiority. Extending from the research of Hermann von Helmholtz, such a self was anchored in conceptions of a seeing, perceiving subject who operated with a model of perceptual cognition that merged mechanical, binocular optics (so as to account for the perception of depth and spatial awareness), brain, and physiology of the senses.²⁴⁹

This understanding of the self as fundamentally oriented inside a body in space, was also the context through which Henri Bergson, writing in the mid-1890s, came to the framework for his treatise on the continuity of experience. Extending many of the precepts of duration and memory from Helmholtz into a theory of metaphysics, Bergson accounted for reality experienced as a movement of the perceiving body through time and space, filling in perceptual information for the mind as it was incrementally supplied by the eyes. For Bergson, the material world was realized through one's own perception of self within the expansive mass of time and space.²⁵⁰ According to these principles, an inner sense of self was not isolated to introspective

²⁴⁸ Adolf von Hildebrand, "The Problem of Form in the Fine Arts" (1893), quoted in *Empathy, Form, and Space*, 288.

²⁴⁹ Hermann von Helmholtz, "The Recent Progress of the Theory of Vision" (1867), in *Hermann von Helmholtz, Science and Culture: Popular and Philosophical Essays*, ed. David Cahan (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 27. For a comprehensive discussion of Helmholtz's theories as they relate to understandings of interiority and naturalist photography, see Douglas R. Nickel, "Peter Henry Emerson: The Mechanics of Seeing," in Robin Kelsey ed. *The Meaning of Photography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

²⁵⁰ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 140.

retreat or passive meditation, or conceived as a mechanical perceiving conduit, but rather enacted a powerful, dynamic, and reciprocal relationship between corporeal, psychological self and the material world.

This understanding of the relation between physical, exterior space and the interiorized, perceiving self, has significant consequence for thinking through the nature of Vuillard's *intimisme*. His articulations of an *intimiste* aesthetic in the mid-1890s disclose an affinity with ideas of empathetic projection, a spatially-derived sense of self, and a harnessing of the phenomenology of the designed interior to serve such effects. These ideas were in all likelihood relayed to him through theater design, tapestry, and perhaps through an understanding of the contemporary, decorative interior. In the mid-1890s, Vuillard's *intimisme* was no longer the depicted world of a "modern de Hooch" but an evocative, architectonic, Art Nouveau *Gesamtkunstwerk*.²⁵¹ This is most tellingly demonstrated in the next artistic mode with which he experimented: the publically-displayed interior.

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In 1895, Vuillard exhibited a table service, a stained glass window, and most notably, a decorative painting series entitled *The Album (L'Album)* [Figure 89], at the Parisian gallery run by Siegfried Bing, Maison de l'Art Nouveau.²⁵² As Annette and Brooks Beaulieu have shown, the panels themselves reveal Vuillard's possible initial intentions for their installation in the antechamber to Bing's gallery rather than a private commission, making most spatial sense when conceived in relation to this site [Figure 90]. Vuillard conceived the display of the five panels,

²⁵¹ In his critique of the 1895 Bing exhibit, Meier-Graefe makes the distinction between the Goncourt interior aesthetic associated with the Rococo revival in 1890s France and the Art Nouveau aesthetic that he aligns with French *wagnérisme*.

²⁵² The series was ultimately bought by Thadée Natanson for display in his private home.

installing them in the small room on the gallery's main floor, blacking out two windows and carefully orchestrated the lighting from an overhead fixture.²⁵³ The all-over patterning, large size, carefully sequenced movements, and formal rhythms were subsequently described by critics as demonstrating a “musical” character and effecting a physical amicability, or correspondence, between beholder and the decorative environment of the room. In his review of the exhibition as a whole, Julius Meier-Graefe was sure to distinguish this approach to the total environment of the room from other interiors that he had derided on the basis of aristocratic seclusion or alienation. Interiors “are not museums,” he wrote, “but spaces in which to live,” move about, and occupy.²⁵⁴ In this installation (as with his collaboration between van de Velde and Paul Ranson down the corridor), Vuillard constructed a set of formal procedures and material devices redolent of his earlier works—undulating rhythms, formal complements, compressed pictorial surfaces, and enclosing tapestry-like surfaces— so as to effect a powerfully charged, externally-articulated sense of interiority that derived from the corporeal (and thus psychological) *feeling* of an interior constructed in material conditions.

The affinities between later works such *The Album, Landscape Overlooking the Woods* and earlier paintings such as *Under the Lamplight* is a matter than can be usefully elucidated by tracking larger manipulations to the sense of interiority, or self, as it was understood through the interior. *Intimisme* provides the best roadmap, or rough guide, across this modifying discursive terrain. In the 1880s as we have seen, the term indicated a “fix,” or containment, that artists described within the bounds of the picture plane, thereby operating as a window upon a domestic world an interior that was integral and constrained. What Vuillard did with his small scenes such

²⁵³ Annette Leduc Beaulieu and Brooks Beaulieu, “The Thadée Natanson Panels: A Vuillard Decoration for S. Bing’s Maison de l’Art,” *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* (Autumn 2002) <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn02>

²⁵⁴ Julius Meier-Graefe, “L’Art Nouveau. Das Prinzip,” 3-4 *Das Atelier* 6, no. 5 (1896): 2-4.

as *Under the Lamplight* was to call up the interior and its association with disembodied interiority, and make it strange, disrupt it, push the bounds of the picture into the space of the viewer. At Boutteville's, this space was an evocative and "private" interior world where the picture seemed to occupy the space on a human scale and the distance between work and self was compressed. In the early 1890s, such displays seemed to confirm the artwork's physical "presence" and entrenchment in the material world which their viewers inhabited while also making her acutely aware of her own perceiving body in the space of the gallery. As his practice evolved to large-scale decorative programs, the demands placed on the environments in which painting was a part multiplied. Vuillard was a painter exceptionally attuned to issues of design and display, equally concerned with the image as mimetic depiction and as object. His *intimisme*, therefore, ought to be understood in this light—across and between painting and design, narration and evocation, alienated enclosure and inter-subjective encounter.

Vuillard's pictures must also be understood as different in kind from other painted interiors such as those by Mary Cassatt or Edgar Degas to which they are so often compared. Understanding them in this way, through an expansive yet historically rooted conception of *intimisme*, abuts against early understandings of the interior *atmosphère* that Edmond Duranty notoriously espoused in 1876, emphasizing it as the ideal setting in which to read the inner character of the painted subject—where the interiority of the sitter could be read through "furniture, fireplaces, curtains, and walls" depicted on the canvas.²⁵⁵ Rather, Vuillard's case affords us recognition of an interiority that was not simply narrated within the pictorial window, but vociferously enacted in dialogue with a viewing subject who occupies an atmosphere not of

²⁵⁵ Louis-Émile Edmond Duranty, "La Nouvelle peinture à propos du groupe d'artistes qui expose dans les galeries Durand-Ruel" (1874), in *The New Painting, Impressionism, 1874-1886*, ed. and trans Charles Moffett (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 1986)

depicted narrative but of material substance—an environment in the real world.

CHAPTER FOUR
The Interior and the Social: Van de Velde's *Architecture of the Idea*

Of course, much of what is external to the former [the individual] is internal to the latter [the collective]: architecture, fashion—yes even the weather—are, in the interior of the collective, what the sensoria of organs, the feeling of sickness or health, are inside the individual. . . They stand in the cycle of the eternally selfsame, until the collective seizes upon them in politics and history emerges.²⁵⁶
—Walter Benjamin (1939)

In considering the interior as it directly relates to the social realm, the most common assumption is that it simply does not. We imagine the home as a place of retreat and leisure positively disengaged from the politics of collective life, a place of solitude or perhaps sociability rather than social utility—a “refuge from urban invasiveness,” so to speak.²⁵⁷ Walter Benjamin, whose meditations continue to haunt the topic as something of a critical specter, somewhat affirmed this sentiment when he proclaimed the realities of modernity to have been experienced out of doors and in the office whereas the private individual was sustained by the interior as nourishing refuge where he could maintain his (not her) illusions.²⁵⁸ This mythology dominated contemporary conceptions of the interior around 1900, wherein it was understood to

²⁵⁶ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 389-90.

²⁵⁷ Debora L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 17.

²⁵⁸ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 167.

be fundamentally bound to the social, though necessarily separate, illusory, and passive.²⁵⁹

However, as demonstrated by the cases of James Ensor and Édouard Vuillard, the interior as it was represented in the 1880s and 1890s effectively mediated shifts in the culture at large, working both within and outside the bounds of an earlier model of bourgeois purchase on the world. While Ensor and Vuillard destabilized the interior so as to negotiate changing understandings of the modern individual's relation to materials and materiality on the one hand, and psychological interiority on the other, this chapter considers artistic experimentations in view of confrontations to yet another of its received assumptions—class politics.

Central to the mythology of the nineteenth-century interior is an implicit understanding of its specifically bourgeois nature. Its “emergence,” we ought to remember, coincided with the advent of structured leisure time, itself a result of industrialization. A permeating culture of decadent and Symbolist aesthetics certainly provided a model for the interior depicted as such, predominantly though not exclusively in painting and literature. We need only recall Georges Rodenbach's poetic hermeticism in *Le Règne du silence* (1891) or *Les Vie encloses* (1896), Paul Verlaine's *Jadis et naguère* (1884), Maurice Maeterlinck's psychological dramas, or the ephemeral worlds portrayed by “painters of the imagination” such as Fernand Khnopff or Félicien Rops.²⁶⁰ Other artists and designers however, proposed alternative paradigms informed

²⁵⁹ According to Charles Baudelaire, and Benjamin following him, modern life (and therefore art) is characterized by these dualities that are in effect two sides of the same coin: interior and the street; eternal and fleeting; lived material space and the dreamlike, reproduced image. The realities that effected this structure, the conditions of capitalist modernity, are the very conditions that the reformers of this study sought to overcome. See Charles Baudelaire, “The Two-Fold Room” (1862), in *The Poems in Prose, with La Fanfarlo*, ed. Francis Scarf (London: Anvil, 1999), 37; and Silvia Acierno and Julio Bacquero Cruz eds., *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (Paris: Sandre, 2009).

²⁶⁰ This moniker used for these Belgian Symbolists is taken from Baudelaire's espousal of a Romantic art that submits itself to the imagination, what he deemed to be the “queen of the faculties.” For Baudelaire, this imagination was stoked in the hermetic chamber of interior life. See Charles Baudelaire, *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (1863).

by pressing social goals. Galvanized by volatile mass upheavals that brought questions regarding the role of the individual to the fore, as well as leftist political commitments amongst the avant-garde, these reformers sought to recast the relation between the private interior and the world. The interior, they thought, need not be cordoned off from the social, or even understood as its passive counterpart, but could rather be recast as a crucial site for its active engagement. It was, after all, the arena in which the majority of daily life was enacted, the theater in which the banalities of modern existence played out. These efforts were construed in service of the dream of envisioning an interior which was not subject to the conventional duality between secluded, alienated, private space and the open, active, public exterior.

In fin-de-siècle Belgium, these issues were particularly urgent. By the late 1880s, the country was wracked with social unrest. In the wake of the defeat of the Liberals to the Catholic Party in 1884, the *Parti ouvrier belge (POB)* was founded in 1885, precipitating a wave of uprisings the following year. Over the course of 1886, the working class majority across the Meuse and Hainaut regions took a stand against the conservative Catholic government in a series of bloody uprisings protesting a society split in two: the enfranchised bourgeois and the powerless working class masses. Though (violently) quelled, these uprisings sparked long-lasting and far-reaching inquiries into the conditions of the laboring classes. Louis Bertrand would equate this year in Belgium with 1871 in France—“our *année terrible*,” he called it—and

The connection between Baudelaire and Rops surpasses a case of thematic resemblance. In 1866 Rops created an etching that served as the frontispiece to Baudelaire’s *Les Épaves* and demonstrates a nuanced interpretation of the subtleties of Baudelaire’s imagery. See E. Holtzman, “Félicien Rops and Baudelaire: Evolution of a Frontispiece,” *Art Journal* 38, no.2 (1979): 102-106.

Edmond Picard implored writers to “dip their pens in red ink.”²⁶¹ While the Bruxelloise artistic and intellectual avant-garde did not necessarily share the experience of the laboring classes, they certainly took up the common enemy in a fight for secularism and freedom of expression. This chapter explores some of their key experimentations and tactical strategies for reforming the architectural interior in the context of political contingencies of the early 1890s. Such reforms were especially pressing in Belgium where a volatile political landscape intermingled with boldly experimental aesthetic avant-gardism and a long-held preoccupation with the relation between art and life.

There was no greater proponent of such reforms in Belgium than the Antwerp-born and Paris-trained designer, artist, and theorist, Henry van de Velde. Explicitly concerned with the interior as a bourgeois form and as a site for the rather banal enactment of everyday life, he made it the most important focus of his reform efforts during these years. In fact, these activities were concentrated within a seven-year span between 1893 and 1900, directly on the heels of this political galvanization of the avant-garde. His rhythmic and evocative built interiors, such as the smoking room he designed in 1895 with Georges Lemmen [Figure 91], have become in some ways emblematic of Art Nouveau innovation as it is typically conceived.²⁶² However, they are also set somewhat apart in the popular imagination from the work of enduring Art Nouveau designers such as Victor Horta, Hector Guimard, Louis Majorelle, or Auguste Delaherche

²⁶¹ Louis Bertrand, *La Belgique en 1886* (Brussels: 1887), 5-7; Edmond Picard, “L’Art et la révolution,” *La Société nouvelle* 2 (1886): 208. Picard’s call also appeared in *L’Art moderne* 6, no.29 (18 July 1886): 225. « L’heure est venue de tremper la plume dans de l’encre rouge ».

²⁶² This design is often credited to Henry van de Velde alone. However, as Jane Block reminds us, Belgian painter Georges Lemmen was van de Velde’s chief associate during the 1890s. In 1899 *L’Art moderne* hailed the two as twin “initiateurs de la Renaissance.” See Jane Block, “A Neglected Collaboration: Van de Velde, Lemmen, and the Diffusion of the Belgian Style,” in *The Documented Image: Visions in Art History*, ed. Gabriel P. Weisburg and Laurinda S. Dixon (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 147-166.

[Figures 92, 93] without clear explanation as to why or how so. One answer to this conundrum is the material breadth and temporal concentration of this stage of his career. This was a phenomenally productive time for the young painter-turned-designer. He gave several theoretical public lectures in concert with the cultural division of the *POB* and his earliest design work became visible to a wide public—a popularization that would ultimately lead to his first invitation to Germany in 1899 (which he would eventually accept in 1900). Aside from his own oeuvre and those works implicated under the broad denomination, “Art Nouveau,” a set of socially-charged architectural reforms in the final years of the century vitalized critical debates on the interior and social life (some of which aligned with his own concerns and some of which did not). These preoccupations coalesced uniquely in the specific social and artistic milieu in which van de Velde worked, namely the crossroads of cultural production that was 1890s Brussels, though naturally found corollaries further afield.²⁶³ Combined with his own politics, this allowed for the conditions of his larger reform goal—to lift the (bourgeois) interior out of the bourgeois home.

In pursuing the particular operations of these reforms, the investigation that follows has a two-fold thrust. First, I aim to take a focused look at a representative selection of van de Velde’s work from when he was still in Belgium—between his turn towards a full-scale preoccupation with the applied arts in 1894 and his relocation to Berlin in 1900, a move that accompanied a transition towards slightly more modernist looking designs and an abatement of his politically-

²⁶³ This understanding of fin-de-siècle Brussels as the cultural “crossroads of Europe” has been emphasized in numerous recent exhibitions of Belgian art, most notably the reinstallation of the collection of the *Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique* as the *Musée Fin-de-Siècle* (2012). Directed by Michel Draguet, this installation stresses Belgian cultural exchange and material import from France with whom they share a language, but also Central Europe and Scandinavia, and geographically-proximate Britain. These exchanges are conceived as a central feature of the artistic renaissance of the 1890s. See Paul Aron, Michel Draguet et. al., *Bruxelles fin de siècle* (Brussels: Flammarion, 1994)

charged theoretical writings. Initially, I was compelled to look more intently at this period by a seemingly rather mundane observation regarding the pervasiveness of the Art Nouveau, in many ways the first “international style.” How was it that key practitioners such as Louis Majorelle or Émile Gallé [Figure 94] could be reviving eighteenth-century artisanal techniques in Nancy under the auspices of state craft reform to ensure against erosion to the French social structure, while others such as van de Velde in Belgium could be operating in such a similar aesthetic mode though lecturing in the *ouvrierist* headquarters at the *Maison du peuple*?²⁶⁴ This remains one of the more engaging questions of art as it developed in an increasingly global context. Aside from tracking slight stylistic differences, how was it that vernacular forms of larger aesthetic languages became imbued with widely divergent “meanings” over and above the intentions of their individual makers? What other ideologies, from aesthetic to political discourses, interpolated portions of a broader aesthetic “look” and just how did that process unfold? In responding to such a query, the first goal of this chapter is to delve into the ways in which van de Velde’s theories of art, his designed interiors, and the imaging of those environments were tied to a network of specific, local practices that in some ways had more in common with contemporaneous painting in Belgium than with Art Nouveau architecture in France. Second, I will show that by mapping out these various contexts, contrasts, and parallels, what emerges is an alternative aesthetic impulse in design at the end of the nineteenth century from that more commonly considered. This tendency envisioned the possibility of “realist” social engagement across media and, in the context of architecture, relied heavily on the effects of

²⁶⁴ In 1894, van de Velde criticized the efforts of Gallé and Delaherche for approaching the applied arts as unique artistic expressions and seeking to endow their works with psychological subtlety, refinement, and even feminine characteristics. He deemed them to be decadent, individualistic creators and likened them to the characters in Huysmans’ novel, *À Rebours*. See Henry van de Velde, “Première prédication d’art,” *L’Art moderne* (21 January 1894): 20.

surface and visibility rather than spatial program or function to do so.

Van de Velde's attempt to reconfigure the interior out of the weakening clutches of bourgeois exclusivity was executed by three principles means and this chapter will discuss them in succession. It is important to note that while this study is primarily concerned with the work of one individual, Henry van de Velde, his reforms emerged from a deeply integrated cultural network of late-nineteenth century Europe to which 1890s Brussels functioned as a cultural nodal point. His attempts to negate pervasive associations of the interior as a site of bourgeois isolation, and thus yoke it to the causes of the collective, drew on an extant and effective language of the interior while also looking more widely to other "languages"—that of socialist aesthetics, paradigms of avant-garde painting, and operations of the mass image. He drew the interior into a rather unexpected contextual arena in each of these instances, undertaking what he himself called "experiments."²⁶⁵ In so doing, van de Velde negated older tendencies that he no longer deemed commensurate with the demands of modern life, while also activating salient similarities and differences in the service of his larger social aim.

First, he considered the interior in its extant form—as a decadent retreat predominantly associated with French luxury and taste—and conceived it within the context of socialist theories of art, a developing discourse on which he was actively implicated through his involvement with politically-inflected intellectual circles in Brussels. Second, he exploited his earlier preoccupations as a painter, as well as his close collaborations with Neo-Impressionist colleagues, to consider how the interior might function within a language normally reserved for two-dimensional art works. Of course, this equation could only go so far; however, he did

²⁶⁵ In his manuscripts, van de Velde uses the English term "experiment" as opposed to French (or Dutch) terms such as "expérience" or "exercices" (the latter he does employ though only very occasionally), perhaps indicating his indebtedness to, and fascination with, the scientism of Americans such as Ogden Rood or mechanisms of industrial production.

develop a distinctive conception of the interior as *optical environment*. As it turns out, many of the most intriguing experimentations with the interior in this moment were produced separately from design itself, through an appeal not to architectural building proper but by a painter and through considerations of painterly effects. Such efforts, I will show, were conceived as experiments with a fluid interplay between contemporary understandings of painted, optical surface and spatial, lived environment. What happens when the logic of Neo-Impressionist painting is applied to a “real” space? Moreover, is one less real than the other? The present study asserts that one crucial, if initially paradoxical, feature of the interior’s social criticality at the end of the nineteenth century was the dominant role played by logics of avant-garde picturing in conceiving a critical vocabulary for the experience of the lived environment. Van de Velde’s vision of the architectural interior shared with contemporary advanced painting a concern with actively blurring the boundaries between art object and the world whereby intimate experience could become free of the traditionally bourgeois, decadent model of the interior. Rather, by “experimenting” with making claims to the scientific rigor of optics and color theory with which Neo-Impressionism is so often associated, van de Velde appealed to a rather anti-bourgeois sense of the interior and, most importantly, constructed a scientifically-derived and objective connectivity—an interface—between the viewing subject and the spatial, social, lived world. This, he thought, deemed him a “realist,” indicating an investment in, as he put it in 1901, “a rediscovery of, and return to, (social) life.”²⁶⁶

Following from these experimentations, I demonstrate that in his efforts to liberate the interior and reach a larger public, van de Velde primarily visualized the interior as image. Perhaps more than any other at the time, his work was markedly dominated by mass circulation

²⁶⁶ Henry van de Velde, *Die Renaissance im modernen Kunstgewerbe* (Berlin: Bruno & Paul Cassirer, 1901), 43.

of photographic representations in the press across Belgium, France, Germany, Britain, and Austro-Hungary; ephemeral displays in exhibitions both at home and abroad; and was advertised extensively by means of his self-made branding. It was precisely this renegotiation of relations between private and public, painting and architecture, pictured and lived space, that was early van de Velde's greatest intervention into the terms of interior as a category for engaging the texture of the social world (and art's relation to that world). This transmutation within an array of discourses—artistic, social, and commercial, from across Europe—provided the means of experimentation for elevation of the interior to social ends and, as I will show, ultimately later led to its commercial exploitation in a mass media, even more thoroughly visually oriented culture of the twentieth century.

Before the modernist dictates for how the interior of the home should be conceptualized— before Le Corbusier's "machine for living" or Mies van de Rohe's opulent materials and imagistic tableaux, and prior to the modernist relation between architecture and photography—late-nineteenth century designers with van de Velde chief among them experimented with how the interior might affect considerations of building, of images, and the correlations between the two. In so doing, they were motivated by political goals and thus wove a relation between aesthetics and the social that has heretofore not been adequately nuanced nor thoroughly explored. Far from alone in his conviction that reforms to society could and should happen at the level of the intimate visual environment, a host of artists and designers in this moment—August Endell, Théo van Rysselberghe, Adolf Loos, Josef Hoffmann—brought such questions to the fore and asserted their convictions as to how the architectural interior should relate to other media, to interiority, and to the collective. For van de Velde in this early moment of his career, interiority need not be so thoroughly tied to the interior at the expense of the social,

architecture need not be understood as separate from recent developments in pictorial arts, and the interior need not only exist within the confines of the bourgeois home. As a result, he also partially deconstructed the social connotations of the desirable interior from being exclusively, traditionally bourgeois, and rather understood it as a dynamic environment with permeable walls. This chapter addresses those exercises, their key terms, and the ways in which they were encoded in the years directly before 1900.

Deliriums of Ugliness

The first of van de Velde's experiments with the interior was executed in a series of lectures and writings composed against the charged backdrop of Brussels in the early 1890s.²⁶⁷ In these instances, the young van de Velde conveyed his views on contemporary art and design, and his vision of a new aesthetic order that would replace what he viewed as the dominance of a decadent aesthetic. The most emblematic of these writings is one lecture entitled "Le Futur de l'art" delivered at the opening of the yearly exhibition of *La Libre esthétique* in 1893 and published the following year as *Déblaiement d'art* in the progressive mouthpiece, *La Société nouvelle*.²⁶⁸ With the explicit goal of inducting a new social and aesthetic order, van de Velde identified elements of contemporary decadence that he thought advantageous to social renewal,

²⁶⁷ Among his most charged writings from these years are the following key texts: *Cours d'arts d'industrie et d'ornementation* (Brussels: Moreau, 1894); *Déblaiement d'art* (Brussels: Vve Monnom, 1894); *Aperçus en vue d'une synthèse d'art* (Brussels: Vve Monnom, 1895); "Première prédication d'art," *L'Art moderne* (31 December 1893): 420-421; (21 January 1894): 20-21; (28 January 1894): 27; "Une prédication d'art," *La Société nouvelle* 11 (December 1895): 733-44. These are accompanied by several pedagogical treatises from the Antwerp Academy and l'Université Nouvelle de Bruxelles, as well as a trove of unpublished manuscripts and journal entries currently held in the Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Bibliothèque royale Albert I, Brussels.

²⁶⁸ *La Libre esthétique* was officially opened in 1893 after its predecessor, *Les XX*, disbanded the previous year as a result of political differences amongst the membership.

and also those that he deemed best swept away. According to him, social reforms will be most efficiently realized by first addressing the interior of the home. He asserted that they should be materialized aesthetically first, and ought to be “inscribed on the walls of our rooms, in the structure of our furniture, and will safeguard us against an intrusion of a contrary sentiment.”²⁶⁹ Central to this intervention was van de Velde’s pointed critique of one of the most fundamental fantasies of the nineteenth-century interior—its status as an index of individual wealth, character, and ambition; both effect and cause of divisions in a society that he perceived to have fallen into decline. In his vision for reform and regeneration, he foretells that collective ideals “will be housed in our future foyers...for now at least some of us will take pleasure in the renewal of select domiciles, whose strong vitality and artistic frenzy will [give] us a glimpse of a vision which only future generations will witness.”²⁷⁰

Crucial to understanding this period in van de Velde’s production is a recognition that, unlike the more familiar and later stage of his career, the 1890s were for him a time of tenacious and interwoven political and artistic theorizations. It was also characterized by his significant involvement with the most robust cultural division of any workers’ party in Europe at the time. In 1892, he moved from his post at the Antwerp Academy to an appointment at the newly formed L’Université nouvelle de Bruxelles, where his faculty colleagues comprised much of the progressive intellectual avant-garde including writer Émile Verhaeren, anarchist geographer

²⁶⁹ Henry van de Velde, *Déblaiement d’art* (Bruxelles: Editions des Archives d’Architecture Moderne, 1979), 10.

²⁷⁰ « Et c’est en nos foyers d’avenir qu’elles seront abritées.... et tout au moins partiellement jouirons-nous de ce renouveau en les foyers de quelques-uns, dont la vitalité forte et la frénésie d’art peuvent ce miracle de nous donner un aperçu du spectacle qu’une autre génération que la nôtre verra ». Van de Velde, “Une prédication d’art,” 739.

Élisée Réclus, as well as socialist lawyer and arts editor Edmond Picard.²⁷¹ As I will demonstrate, an essential feature of van de Velde's reform of the interior in these years happened even before his first foray into architectural design, and rather came about on the printed page and in lectures to a broad audience in this milieu. Therefore, we might understand his efforts to launch the interior into the critical public sphere to have begun with this 1893 address to a crowd that included the cultural division of the party and the editors of *L'Art moderne*—Picard, Jules Destrée, and Octave Maus— and later to an extensive, progressive readership.

As it appeared in *La Société nouvelle* in 1894, the text begins with a long exposé on the “abominable perversion” of recent art, and the degradation of aesthetics since the Middle Ages at the hands of the mercantile classes under market conditions.²⁷² An egoism, as he called it, had taken hold of the arts and a new agenda was required—one that would no longer serve the individual but the totality of mankind.²⁷³ According to him, a thoroughly bourgeois sensibility was responsible for this state of affairs and thus the best appeal to a renewal of art, and therefore of society, was to reform the most bourgeois form of all. His tone is radical and laced with the

²⁷¹ The complexity and volatility of political positions in the 1890s is made doubly clear by considering the fact that Picard, who in 1866 wrote the “Manifesto of the Workers” and in 1886 was imploring writers to “dip pens in red ink,” was by the first decade of the twentieth century a virulent proponent of anti-Semitism, racism, nationalism, and later Fascism.

²⁷² « Et l'art fut à la merci de toutes les sollicitations payennes, philosophiques et puis aux exigences bourgeoises. À l'heure dont nous nous souvenons tous, le Bourgeois vivait dans un décor voulu de vertu apparente et solide, d'austérité laide, revêtu de housses blanche. Le revêtement blanc d'églises s'était étendu aux maisons. Les meubles n'étaient pas plus provoquants que les lits où s'appendaient des rideaux ingénus et l'on put croire que la vertu s'était installée parmi les hommes ». Van de Velde, *Déblaiement*, 10.

This should certainly call to mind the writings of William Morris in England. Van de Velde was intimately familiar with Morris' work and even delivered a lecture on his principles for social and aesthetic reform in 1898 entitled “William Morris: artisan et socialiste” at the Maison du peuple that was later published under the same title in *l'Avenir social*. He also authored another essay on Morris: “Artistic Wallpapers,” *L'Art moderne* 13 (18 June 1893): 193-195; and its sequel (25 June 1893): 22-204

²⁷³ When van de Velde refers to such a totality, he normally uses the phrase “Dieu, la justice, la communauté” thereby connoting a political collective, as well as a spiritual one. For instance, see van de Velde, “Une prédication d'art,” 739.

language of a Christian second coming.²⁷⁴ This agenda for art's return to an "honorable purpose" is outlined in the *Déblaiement* as a three-part strategy: first, he identifies the interior as an ideal site of social and aesthetic regeneration; then he imagines the application of socialist-inspired theories of art, and lastly he appeals to the broadly democratic unity of the arts as espoused most famously by William Morris and the Arts and Crafts reformers in Britain.

While there had of course always been places of dwelling, it was the association of the interior with a new middle-class space of leisure, self-fashioning, and consumption that animated its particularly loaded and intensely symbolic character. As anxieties rose over bourgeois values, modern ills, and cultural degeneration across Belgium, the interior emerged as a realization and catalyst for the divisions in a society that van de Velde and others claimed to have fallen into decline. Fin-de-siècle Belgium represented a particularly acute case of a country that had experienced immensely rapid industrialization—by 1865 it was only matched by England in its industrial development and fortitude—however it was also comparatively late to develop labor reforms and enfranchisement for the very workers who shouldered this progress.²⁷⁵ The gulf between what were perceived to be bourgeois indulgences and working-class concerns could not have been wider nor more glaring. The importance of the interior was due not only to its

²⁷⁴ The multitude of references to Christianity in this period, both implicit and explicit, are brilliantly discussed by Stefan Jonsson with regard to the imagery of James Ensor's painting *Christ's Entry into Brussels* (1888). Jonsson identifies a dominant rhetoric of Christian imagery interlaced with the socialist discourses in late-1880s and early-1890s Brussels. See Stefan Jonsson, "Society Degree Zero: Christ, Communism, and the Madness of Crowds in the Art of James Ensor," *Representations* 75, no. 1 (2001): 1–32.

²⁷⁵ For an overview, see Eugenia W. Herbert, *The Artist and Social Reform: France and Belgium, 1885-1898* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).

connotation of that which was held inside—*qui est au-dedans*—but also to what it shut out.²⁷⁶ Its perceived complicity with deleterious features of capitalist modernity rendered it an apt, even obvious, arena for political critique.

For van de Velde, the interior was equal parts ideology and aesthetic paradigm, and thus an ideal site for his social reforms; however, the ways in which those two were entwined and reconceived has remained somewhat unclear. What he did throughout the 1890s was to peel back the underlying assumptions of what this concept meant, and then manipulate those components so as to develop a model of the interior commensurate with the demands of contemporary reality, particularly as it was expressed in his immediate circle in Brussels. The first of those assumptions concerned its most prevalent contemporary paradigm— the decadent aesthetic.

At best, the interior represented the sensitive expression of the private, modern soul in material form. It was a salubrious retreat from the maddening stimulus of the metropolis. New concerns over clinical states of neurasthenia, the pathological and mechanistic overstimulation of internal states of the individual by external stimuli, became an inescapable concern of writers, reformers, and artists. Not only had studies of the taxation and over-exertion of the nerves garnered considerable attention in the medical community by the 1880s, but in the 1890s warnings over such *surmenage* had taken hold of the popular imagination as well. In France,

²⁷⁶ The *Grand dictionnaire universel du dix-neuvième siècle* has an entry for “*intérieur*” that reads: « Qui est au dedans: Les parois intérieure d’un vase. Une cour intérieure. Les parties intérieures du corps. La terre est arrosée de fleuves tant extérieurs qu’intérieurs, qui transpirent à travers sa surface. Qui appartient à l’État, à l’association, au corps, et non aux choses qui sont hors de lui : L’organisation intérieure d’un pays. La paix intérieure d’une famille. Nul gouvernement n’a le droit d’intervenir dans les affaires intérieures d’un autre gouvernement. Qui concerne l’âme, la nature morale de l’homme : L’estime est un aveu intérieur du mérite de quelque chose. L’homme est régi par un sentiment intérieur qui l’avertit que toute oppression est illégitime ». *Grand dictionnaire universel du dix-neuvième siècle*. 17 vols. (Paris: Administration du Grand Dictionnaire Universel, 1866-90). Gustave Flaubert’s satirical entry for “*intérieur*” reads: “the caste inviolate.” Flaubert, *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* (1850-1880) (Paris: L. Conrad, 1913).

Doctor Fernand Levillain published an inexpensive and popular book entitled *La Neurasthénie* (1891) with an introduction by Dr. Charcot, and popular journals such as *L'Illustration*, *La Plume*, and *La Revue* published articles and advice columns on the implications of urban nervous degeneration on the “exhausted generation.”²⁷⁷ In 1896, Émile Zola professed something of an about-face from his more commonly-cited celebration of spectacular public life in the city, perhaps indicating the seriousness of such exhaustion: “[W]e are sickened by our industrial progress, by science; we live in a fever, and we like to dig deeper into our sores.”²⁷⁸ As Debora Silverman has cleverly articulated, the discovery that the interior of the human organism was a sensitive nervous mechanism prone to exterior suggestion swiftly augmented the value and importance placed upon the interior of the home. The domestic realm was viewed as refuge and protection against physical and moral degeneration, a healthy chamber, which was repeatedly posed against the nervous erosion wrought by abrasive, “tormenting,” external stimuli and the inanity of the metropolis. The home, then, gained an unprecedented level of popular aspiration to privacy from the middle classes. It was precisely the effects of the spectacular public world that precipitated this shift. The interior became a retreat, healthy incubator, and middle-class refuge for sensuous and artificial pleasures. Its representation followed suit.

In the 1880s initially, and persisting through the next decade as well, this model of the interior as retreat for the aesthete from the dangers of the urban environment was epitomized by the widely-admired account of the aesthete collector, Edmond de Goncourt. First published in 1881, *La Maison d'un artiste* was resuscitated in regular iterations throughout the following two decades. Silverman has argued that this text, a two-volume narrative inventory of the contents of the home that he shared with his brother Jules, provided many of the foundations for later

²⁷⁷ Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*, 81.

²⁷⁸ Émile Zola (1896) quoted in Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*, 80.

iterations of the modern French interior. The Goncourt home was positioned in the popular imagination as the epitome of aestheticism, decadence, and self-cultivation; and embodied a retreat from the material social world into one dominated by aesthetic experience.²⁷⁹ Joris-Karl Huysmans, himself a young protégé of Goncourt's, modeled much of his iconic description of the decadent asylum on the 1881 text thereby only further promulgating such an aesthetic.²⁸⁰ Goncourt constructed the home as a chamber, uniformly decorated in the style of an eighteenth-century aristocratic salon. He conceived it as a nourishing stimulus of sensuous pleasures for the modern psyche newly understood to be prone to decorative suggestion. This environment, with its soft curvatures, artfully arranged trinkets, tapestries and wallpapers, lamps, *fauteuils* and *canapés*, was understood by its advocates as a secluded, alimentative, and affective *chambre mentale* [Figures 95, 96].²⁸¹

At worst, such an interior stood for the injurious epitome of fashionable decadence, embodiment and agent of ills imposed upon a social body that had descended into class division, moral degradation, and cultural degeneracy. In this view, the closed off and exclusive sanctuary was not “healthy,” but inherently pernicious. With it came claustrophobic anxiety, oppression by an indulgent and amoral middle class, and a complete absence of orientation amidst a world

²⁷⁹ See Diana Periton, “The Interior as Aesthetic Refuge: Edmond de Goncourt’s *La Maison d’un artiste*,” in *Tracing Modernity: Manifestations of the Modern in Architecture and the City*, ed. M. Hvattum and C. Hermansen (London: Routledge, 2004), 137-155.

²⁸⁰ Susan Sidlauskas has also discussed pictorial representations of an interior that ceded to the “anti-modern” impulses of organicism, interiority, and soothing comforts, in her argument for a fin-de-siècle counter discourse based on anxiety, disorientation, and illegibility. Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self* (2000).

²⁸¹ Goncourt himself wrote of the stimulation this space provided: “I have to spend an hour in this cabinet and in this *boudoir d’Orient*. I have to fill my eyes with the patina of bronzes, the different golds of the laqueurs, the iridescences, the bright reflections from the vitrified materials, the jades, the colored glass, the shimmering silk of the *foukousas* and the Persian rugs, and it is only after contemplation of these burst of color, only after this vision which excites me, irritates me, so to speak that little by little...I feel the hairs on my neck begin to rise and very gently a little fever begins to occupy my brain, without which I can write nothing worthwhile.” Edmond de Goncourt, *Journals*, (2 July 1883).

encroaching from the outside. Elaborate interiors packed with *objets d'art* simply replaced public excitement with private stimuli. The Goncourt's house, in this interpretation, fed nervous agitation in a way that provided neither suitable pleasure nor repose, and offered stimulation that was equally noxious as that encountered on the streets from which the inhabitants had retreated.

In accounting for this fin-de-siècle ideal of the interior, particularly as it embodied elements of artistic decadence, several scholars have emphasized the role played by contemporaneous theories of the nerves, and the self as something that might be externally manipulated.²⁸² The research of Dr. Charcot at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris is often cited for its construction of a model of biological determinism made wildly popular amidst a culture eager for scientism, readability, and visual knowledge of interior character. The social connotations of this stimulating interior are comparatively less discussed. Contemporary critics however, were quick to make this connection between aesthetic decadence and class politics. It was initially associated with moral and cultural decline, a state of social degradation caused by indulgence in intense refinement, nihilism, negation of the natural, artificiality and listless indolence.²⁸³ To its dissenters, decadence connoted complacent *ennui* over and above hard work, and a perverse pleasure taken in transgressing social and moral norms. While initially associated with literature of Baudelaire and Théophile Gautier in France, by the 1890s it took on the more general character of spectacular and perverse gratification in a modern society that had grown excessively indulgent and over stimulated as a consequence of capitalist, bourgeois culture.

²⁸² Joyce Henri Robinson has discussed the idyllic paintings of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes as emblematic of a fin-de-siècle ideal of a soothing, anti-neurasthenic interior. See Robinson, "Hi Honey, I'm Home," in *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*, ed. Christopher Reed (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 122-125.

²⁸³ One might here think back to Paul Verlaine's poem depicting a bored and degenerate Roman aesthete at the end of the Empire. Verlaine, "Langueur" (1883) in *Verlaine: Œuvres poétiques complètes*, ed. Yves-Gérard Le Dantec and Jacques Borel (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 370-372.

Instead of the embrace of a modern melancholia that had Baudelaire described decades prior as “spleen,” by the 1890s such a “magnificently ornate style, where all the resources of language and prose are used with an impeccable hand” was understood by some as an unfortunate, even abject, consequence of an oppressive capitalist culture.²⁸⁴

Collective concern over devitalization and degeneration resonated throughout 1890s Europe; however, its most outspoken critics took an explicitly political, moralistic position from both the right and left. William Morris in England stood vehemently opposed to the individualism, fashionability, and artificiality of the decadent interior from a leftist perspective, while Max Nordau maligned what he saw as the moral corruption of Symbolist artists in his hotly debated book, *Degeneration*, in 1893 (and, intriguingly, included Morris in this list). Unlike Morris’ socialist-inflected concerns, Nordau’s was an explicitly moralizing, racist, militaristic argument for its abolishment. In Paris, an artistic and literary circle around the writers Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, and Jean Moréas (following the legacies of Baudelaire and Gautier) came to associate artistic, and thus social, freedom with these tenets of inward reflection, expression of an abstract ideal, and romantic primacy of aesthetic experience.

A tension arose between those condemning the exclusivity of the new tendency as “decadent” and those wishing to rather configure it as “symbolist,” a distinction that became important for the political fortune of the avant-garde.²⁸⁵ In the 1890s, political allegiances within

²⁸⁴ This description is from Charles Baudelaire’s, “Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe” (1857), in *Curiosités esthétiques: l’art romantique* (Paris: Bordas, 1990), 619.

²⁸⁵ Jean Moréas in 1885 responded to an article by Paule Bourde, “Les Poètes décadents,” *Le Temps* (August 6, 1885) by issuing a manifesto on Symbolism, its aims, and his preference for the term *symboliste* over *décadent*. See Moréas, “Les Décadents,” in *Le Dix-neuvième siècle* (11 August 1885).

the avant-garde were more volatile than ever before, and an aesthetic adopted by one group was often interpolated as the *raison d'être* of another. The aesthetic of enclosure, inwardness, and idealist romanticism was for the aforementioned critics supremely liberatory, progressive, and positively evocative of artistic symbolism. Other critics however, deemed it a capitulation to conservative, complacent self-indulgence, and “decadent” entropy. Anarchist intellectuals such as Elisée Reclus and Pierre Kropotkin, both of whom played key roles in the development of the cultural wing of the *POB* in Brussels and the closely-aligned Université nouvelle de Bruxelles, stood outwardly opposed to decadence on grounds described by the latter position. Reclus famously defended Zola’s writings against charges of decadence and, in citing the work of John Ruskin, attacked the immorality of decadent arts that evoked “scenes of vice, and a thousand filthy things that it would be simpler to leave in the dirt.”²⁸⁶ Kropotkin elsewhere leveled similar assaults, describing them as “the suffocating filth of a sewer, the boudoir of a whore of high degree.”²⁸⁷ “Suffocating,” “swamp,” “syphilitic canker”— the isolation of the decadent container appeared to these writers to only fuel the fires of vice and social perversion, and to deepen the trenches between social classes. The increasingly tumultuous social climate of the early 1890s made the exclusivity of the decadent interior even plainer and reinforced the borders between the bourgeois seclusion enacted inside and the world lived outside. In the early 1890s, that “outside” was characterized by social concerns inherited from the turbulent late-1880s in Belgium, and the

In 1886, Moréas published the Symbolist Manifesto in a literary supplement to *Le Figaro*. His explication does a great deal of work to distinguish Symbolism from Decadence. The latter he accuses of pomp, servility, and consumerist materialism, whereas Symbolism should “clothe the ideal in a perceptible form” and have the sole purpose of expressing the dream of “the Ideal.” Jean Moréas, “Le Symbolisme,” *Le Figaro* (18 September 1886): 1-2

²⁸⁶ Ruskin quoted in Jesse Cohn, *Anarchism and the Crisis of Representation: Hermeneutics, Aesthetics, Politics* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press: 2006), 153.

²⁸⁷ Kropotkin quoted in Cohn, *Anarchism and the Crisis of Representation*, 153.

unrest that carried into strike in 1893; the sharp divisions set out in France by the Dreyfus Affair beginning in 1894; and spasms of anarchist terrorism in Belgium, France, and Italy. Looking from the outside in, the interior of the nihilistic bourgeoisie seemed to delight in elite consumption and crass seduction of a social world shut out.²⁸⁸

In April 1893, ouvrierist Émile Vandervelde led a General Strike in which 200,000 laborers participated in a bid for universal male suffrage. Concurrently, van de Velde penned the text of the *Déblaiement*, to be delivered to an audience comprised of nearly every major figure of the arts division of the *POB*. Van de Velde's treatise engaged this critique of recent conceptions of decadent art, its relation to the social body, and particularly how these issues were played out in the domestic interior. For him, the interior represented both an icon around which society's maladies came to rest as well as an instrument of its salvation.²⁸⁹ Rather than a complete "clean sweep" as the title suggests, in the *Déblaiement*, van de Velde proposes a rethinking of an extant form—not a wholesale abandonment but a partial negation and radical reconfiguration. The interior was the most fertile ground for the establishment of a social order that he would describe in rather utopian terms as a "shining road of gold that the sun traces in a vast sea." He continued: "[T]he times have come (wherein) an idea of love will be shared by all humankind; at that time

²⁸⁸ With regard to this decadent ideal of "shutting out" the social world of the masses (and thus the world of capital), Rosalind Williams has underscored how, in Huysmans' *À Rebours*, Des Esseintes does initially retreat to his fantastical interior in an attempt to escape the reifying logic of bourgeois consumption, only to find this an ultimately unattainable goal at the book's end. See Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass-Consumption in Late-Nineteenth Century France* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982).

²⁸⁹ « Le Foyer, pour van de Velde, est le lieu où se cristallisent toutes les menaces qui pèsent sur l'individu moderne, c'est aussi un lieu dont celui-ci peut apprendre à conjurer les sortilèges pour en faire l'instrument de son émancipation ». Fabrice van de Kerckhove, "Introduction," in *Henry van de Velde: Récit de ma vie (Berlin-Weimar-Paris-Bruxelles), 1900-1917*, eds. Anne van Loo with Fabrice van de Kerckhove (Brussels: Versa-Flammarion, 1995), 35.

art will come to light in a new form. The earth is in labor and will bring forth a flower.”²⁹⁰ In so professing, he responded to a call that the Belgian avant-garde had been making since 1884— for an “art nouveau” that would do away with old styles in favor of an art commensurate with modern realities. In the early 1890s, van de Velde critiqued these “old” styles for what he took to be their part in social degradation. The “new” art nouveau that he envisioned concerned aesthetics and social life, and operated under the assumption that the two were vitally tied. Although he admitted that it was entirely possible to espouse radical politics without any commitment to this Art Nouveau, and to engage a decorative style without any knowledge of politics, the correspondences between the two were, in his view and in the view of a certain section of the intellectual avant-garde connected to the workers’ party, simply too rich in possibility to ignore. He embraced and held fast to an underlying assumption regarding the powerful effects of the intimate environment on the individual psyche and the importance of aesthetic consideration of everyday life in the (re)construction of a cohesive social body.

It was this capacity to affect the psyche of the individual in her everyday life that made the interior so perilous and so vital to his reforms. The 1890s were particular in this regard for how those concerned with both aesthetics and social agendas embraced the critical possibilities of inwardness. As in Huysmans’ opulent and psychological retreat, Goncourt’s “clinic of sensory analysis,” or Wagner’s “orchestral color,” the intimate environment was thought to be deeply suggestive, affective, and in many cases morally corrupt. This suggestiveness, however often misdirected, intrigued him. In articulating the decisive link between the interior of the home and the moral, interior character of the citizen, he appealed to such a logic in one of the most striking passages from the *Déblaiement*. He writes,

²⁹⁰ Van de Velde, *Déblaiement*, 24.

[O]ne detects a longing for a décor corresponding to the state of the soul we have in normal living, this or that part of our abodes. For indeed, we are wasting our strength if we try to laugh, in spite of everything, in a banal interior, to nourish our deep and eternal thoughts in frivolous rooms. *In the long run, décor gets the better of us. We acquiesce, despite our best efforts, to its enduring suggestiveness.*²⁹¹

This passage demonstrates more effectively than any other van de Velde's awareness of the instrumental capacities of the home. It was the place most intimately experienced by the everyday citizen and thus bound to the formation of the soul and, by extension, its amelioration. This link between the decorative elements of an environment—motifs on the walls and the structure of the furniture—and the psychological state of the viewer was not a new conception at this moment. In fact, such a Mallarméan understanding of the suggestiveness of formal stimulus in the environment on the internal sensibility of the individual was central to preoccupations with the “decorative” aesthetic of the fin de siècle that was also internal to discourses on decadence.

Marie Jeannine Aquilino has traced the late-nineteenth century fascination with the decorative aesthetic in century French art, beginning with grand mural painting, or *décorations*, from decades earlier. She identifies a set of consistent concerns in its development over the course of the century: flat areas of color, harmonious arrangement, simplified forms, and integration into an architectural environment, all served as components of this accessible, collective art. Towards the end of the century, however, the criteria changed so as to integrate a

²⁹¹ « Déjà l'aspiration se manifeste vers un décor correspondant à l'état d'âme que nous apportons, en des conditions de vie normale, en telles ou telles parties de nos demeures. Car nos forces s'épuisent à vouloir rire, malgré tout, dans un décor d'ennui ; à nourrir des pensées d'éternité ou de profondeur seulement dans des chambres de frivolité ; et puis, à la longue, le décor finit quand même par avoir raison de nous. Nous obéissons, malgré tous nos efforts, à sa suggestion permanente ». Van de Velde, *Déblaiement*, 21. Emphasis mine.

“new and intimate mode of public art.”²⁹² Far from mere decoration, art critics of this period such as Claude Roger-Marx and Albert Aurier propagated an art that was not necessarily public; however, it remained non-illusionistic and aspired to mass communication through the science of psychophysical responsiveness and simplified forms.²⁹³ Painters from Paul Gauguin to Édouard Vuillard and Maurice Denis extended this logic of popular communication through a “decorative” aesthetic in their paintings, a tendency that became one of the most persistent, if later maligned, concerns of fin-de-siècle art.²⁹⁴ The late-nineteenth century French revival of decorative styles from the eighteenth century—replete with arabesques, unrestrained material opulence, and personal luxury—provided an undeniable model of decorative suggestiveness to these artists.

While van de Velde’s theory of suggestiveness in the *Déblaiement* and elsewhere certainly paralleled many of these assumptions of the communicative capacities of form, his aims were somewhat different. His interest in communicating elevated ideals was not limited to the medium of painting, and he did not locate these ambitions in public art.²⁹⁵ He was concerned with recuperating aesthetic ideals once found on public monuments for the private interior. In

²⁹² Marie Jeannine Aquilino, “Painted Promises: The Politics of Public Art in Late Nineteenth-Century France,” *The Art Bulletin* 75, no. 4 (1993): 704.

²⁹³ See Gustave Geffroy, “Les Œuvres décoratives au Salon de 1886,” *Revue des arts décoratifs* 6 (1886): 321-328.

²⁹⁴ For an extensive account of the social and political resonances of decorative painting in France see Katherine Brion, “Decorative Painting and Politics in France 1890-1914” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2014). Also see Katherine Kuenzli, *Intimate Modernism* (2000).

²⁹⁵ In his writings, van de Velde normally refers to “ornamentation” wherein he appears to be referring to something other than applied architectural ornament. See his manuscript on *l’ornement* (c.1920), unpublished text, Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Bibliothèque Albert I, Brussels. He writes: « L’art est l’ornement merveilleux de la vie. Il ne peut être autre chose parce que tous les arts sont d’essence ornementale. La musique et la poésie sont l’ornement du parler, la danse l’ornement de la marche, la peinture et la sculpture sont les ornements des surfaces vierges et nues ». Fs X 1269, Fonds van de Velde, Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Bibliothèque Albert I, Brussels.

Also see Elie G. Haddad, “On Henry Van De Velde’s “Manuscript on Ornament.” *Journal of Design History* 16, no. 2 (2003): 119-38.

fact, he set about insuring that it was the private, everyday spaces of intimate life that were most suggestive. He maintains that such ideals of communal affect, once reserved for monuments, should now take refuge in domestic interiors.²⁹⁶ In such an environment, a powerful totality could be forged between self and the world in which the viewer was immersed. The tenets common to both the decadent interior and Symbolist decorative painting were ripe for reform precisely because of their capacity to “get the better of us.”

Aside from formal suggestiveness, there is another way in which one might conceive of received notions of a charged interface between individual and interior environment. The interior décor was widely understood, and critiqued, for the exaggerated and abstracted relation such a collection of objects obtained to the individual who collected them. This broad phenomenon of the collector’s experience of commodities is what Emily Apter has described as a “virulent attachment to things” in a world of “hyperbolic accumulation.”²⁹⁷ The sheer abundance of accumulation in the nineteenth-century home, the material stuffs of everyday life, represented the most intimate relation of the self to the known world. This was a world of commodities, their debris and residues, of plush, iron works, *schlock*, books, toys, velvet crushed under the weight of women’s dresses, and heavy curtains — a “catastrophe of things.”²⁹⁸ Packed within the casing of the home, the interior became a cocoon of commodities, cushioning the collector like the

²⁹⁶ « C’est en le foyer de chacun de nous qu’on trouvera inscrit l’idée génératrice de chacun des monuments, auquel nous confiions précédemment assez naïvement la mission de symboliser et de professer les articles de notre foi, soi Dieu, la justice, la communauté ». Van de Velde, “Une prédication d’art,” 739.

²⁹⁷ Emily Apter, “Cabinet Secrets: Fetishism, Prostitution, and the Fin de Siècle Interior,” *Assemblage* 9 (June 1989): 6–19.

²⁹⁸ This wording is used by Adorno to describe Benjamin’s fascination with *stuff* in his investigation of bourgeois culture. The language is the most compelling I have found to describe a phenomenon that is in many ways indescribable. Theodor Adorno, “A Portrait of Walter Benjamin,” in *Prisms* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 227-243. While a turn in recent years has approached the word “stuff” as code for object-oriented ontology or “Thing Theory,” I am rather employing it here to designate a particular historical phenomenon associated with the full rise of consumer capitalism and industrial production in the nineteenth century.

railway passenger for whom modern shock-absorbing furniture technology was supposedly conceived.²⁹⁹ In the interior, the collector removes these objects from the external realm of reality and the market, these *things* no longer straightforwardly signify as commodities; rather, they became extensions of the collector herself, near physical appendages of the body, and intoxicating components of an intimate social drama of the private sphere.³⁰⁰ The interior therefore became both repository for the objects, and the site of their transformation. This was the powerful force of the interior under capitalism—chairs, vases, and settee cushions became somehow extensions of the self, locked in a magical ring, and reified in the interior.³⁰¹ The relation between beings and things was understood to be transformed in the home—a site at once removed and never truly severed from the publicity of the market—where a complex relation between objective use values and subjective personal ones divulged the ultimate fetishism of the commodity form.³⁰² In this formulation the process of production, of value as it is constructed in the public sphere is blocked and replaced by the phantasmagoric, the dream, the “unspeakable” subjective values of display and spectacle. This comprised a further element of the interior’s

²⁹⁹ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: Trains and Travel in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Anselm Hollo (New York: Urizen Press, 1977), 123.

³⁰⁰ Walter Benjamin affirms this sentiment when he recalls the bourgeois interior of the 1880s in which “there is no spot on which the owner has not left his mark...[A]nd conversely, the *intérieur* forces the inhabitant to adopt the greatest number of habits—habits that do more justice to the interior he is living in than to himself.” Walter Benjamin, “Experience and Poverty,” in *Selected Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 2:734.

³⁰¹ Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Book Collecting,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 60

³⁰² “The mysterious character of the commodity form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves... It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things.” Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977), 164-5.

A fetishism of a different sort became salient in twentieth-century formulations—the fetishism administered by the unconscious, as espoused by Sigmund Freud. For an exceptional reflection on Marx and Freud’s theories of fetishism see Laura Mulvey, “Some Thought on Theories of Fetishism,” *October* 65 (Summer 1993): 3-20.

suggestiveness, and, according to progressive critics such as Jules Destrée, also represented the vanity and ultimate alienation of bourgeois decoration.³⁰³

In keeping with his political position, van de Velde sought to offend this standard. In 1894, the icon of the bourgeois, decadent interior remained Goncourt's *Maison d'un artiste*. While it was first published in 1881 as a detailed description of their citadel of eighteenth-century décor, it was repeatedly revived by 1890s craft reformers in both France and Germany. Meticulous descriptions of the fantastical, interiorized world filled its pages. First installed with their vast collection in 1869, the “*château*” at Auteuil was described by its owner as a *tour de force* in the spirit of the *fêtes galantes*, “signaling the richest and most complete container of eighteenth century that exists in Paris.”³⁰⁴ Framed drawings by Boucher and Fragonard hung above *canapés* designed to accommodate the hooped skirts of the *ancien régime*. Individual *objets* were given animate sensibilities, speaking to the brothers as personalities in the enshrined home. The bed had been originally made for the princesse de Lamballe and, according to an autobiographical entry, gave Goncourt the true sense of escape from the realities of post-1848 Paris—a world that “threatened to become public” [Figure 97]. He continued in what is now no doubt its most memorable passage: “[S]ocial life is undergoing vast evolution. I see women, children, households, and families in the cafés. The interior is dying. Life threatens to become public...I am a stranger to what is coming...like these new boulevards, lacking in curves,

³⁰³ Jules Destrée, *Art et socialisme* (Paris: Giard et Brière, 1898), 7. These sentiments are echoed in Jules Destrée and Émile Vandervelde, *Le Socialisme en Belgique* (Paris: V. Giard et Brière, 1898). This general idea of “vanity” of the decadent aesthetic, and in particular decoration, is addressed by Paul Bourget in his 1883 text wherein he defends a sort of middle position for the artist not as laborer, but as an intellectual worker for the betterment of society as it was then understood. Van de Velde, however, following the stance taken by William Morris in “The Decorative Arts and Modern Life” (1877), insisted that art must be fully integrated into the social world and therefore must be free of such vanity, and serve the many rather than the few.

³⁰⁴ Goncourt quoted in Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*, 21.

implacable axes of straight lines.”³⁰⁵ While the extent to which the Goncourts resuscitated aristocratic reactions to modernization in this closed, gilded world was not typical in French society at large, it did come to stand for the image of the interior more broadly. Their house, and with it their aesthetic sensibilities, embodied striking affinities with what would become official French design reform, namely the unity of the arts and an ideal of interiorized and organic retreat.³⁰⁶ My point here is that Goncourt’s image of the interior did have certain commonalities with van de Velde’s initial formulation—the suggestiveness of the décor, the vital link between the interior decoration and the state of the modern soul—however the ideology of exclusivity and reification, a bourgeois dream of a private world, was what van de Velde would vehemently reject in 1894.

The disdain was mutual. The reception that van de Velde received from none other than Edmond de Goncourt upon the 1895 exhibition of three of his interiors is a case in point. He reported that they were nothing short of “a delirium of ugliness.”³⁰⁷ At the commission of French gallerist and state craft reformer Siegfried Bing, van de Velde created three rooms in the newly-opened Maison de l’art nouveau on Paris’ rue de Provence that December.³⁰⁸ The first was a dining room with mantelpiece of ceramic tiles created by Théo van Rysselberghe, painted panels by Paul Ranson, table service by Édouard Vuillard, and furniture made of domestic cedar and

³⁰⁵ Edmond de Goncourt (1860) quoted in T.J. Clark, “The Bar at the Folies-Bergère,” in *Wolf and Lamb: Popular Culture in France from the Old Regime to the Twentieth Century*, ed. J. Beauroy and M. Bertrand (Saratoga: Anma Libri, 1976), 247.

³⁰⁶ Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*, 20.

³⁰⁷ Edmond de Goncourt and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal, mémoires de la vie littéraire*, 4 vols. (Paris: Fasquelle & Flammarion, 1956), 4:893.

³⁰⁸ The invitation was extended after Bing and Julius Meier-Graefe visited van de Velde in Belgium earlier that year, to see the interiors of his new home of Bloemenwerf. Meier-Graefe subsequently became, and remained, one of his greatest champions.

copper ornaments [Figure 98].³⁰⁹ The second room was a *cabinet d'amateur* constructed of lemon wood, lighter in color than the other woods, and decorated with fabrics by textile designer P. Isaac. The last was a *fumoir* with ensconcing walls of exotic Congolese padauk hardwood, upholstered in textiles designed by van de Velde himself, and adorned with decoration by Belgian painter Georges Lemmen [Figure 99]. These designs were, significantly, produced specifically for Bing's gallery and similar arenas of display, and never executed as built spaces to be lived in or used. Additionally, they were in actuality no more "popular" or affordable than more familiar décor of the Parisian bourgeoisie. For the Bing commission, he used slightly more expensive and exotic materials whereas the majority of his commissioned designs in Belgium were executed in less ostentatious domestic woods. However, the look and appeal of the designs were sufficiently different, sufficiently suspect, so as to destabilize the ideal of the interior as privileged, refined, and elite realm of isolation that so many identified with French décor. They were still bourgeois interiors, but they were sufficiently anti-bourgeois so as to raise violent reactions and reconsiderations of what the interior was, who it should serve, and how it should look.

That look was, however, informed by theories of utility that served to provide a purified formal language as distinct from contemporary "decadent" design. As such, comparison with Goncourt's quintessential interior of the period was surely in the mind's eye of the viewing public that winter. The persistence of the Goncourt home in the French imagination through the end of the century should not be underestimated. Many reformers and critics in the 1890s held it up as a normative ideal, frequently citing it as an example of an interiorized, decadent sensibility

³⁰⁹ In his *Récit de ma vie*, van de Velde indicates that he used more expensive materials, such as Congolese woods, in the French commission than he had in others. In his journals, he indicates the use of African "padauk" hardwoods as well as domestic cedar and *bois de citronnier*. Fs X 42, Fonds Van de Velde, Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Bibliothèque Albert I, Brussels.

they thought to be appropriate to the intrusions of modern life. In 1892, for instance, writing for the recurring feature on *l'Habitation moderne* in the French periodical, *Revue des arts décoratifs*, Gustave Geffroy (a young protégé of Goncourt's) published an exposé, *La Maison des Goncourts*, wherein he described both the house and the book as an enumeration of the individual *objets* collected by means of elite taste and instinct. Geffroy writes that the house in Goncourt's formulation served as a veritable physiognomy, indicating the intellectual refinement and individuality of the inhabitants through their "science of decoration."³¹⁰

Aside from the original text, circulation of a collection of evocative photographs of the house at Auteuil, commissioned in 1883, would have made the interiors on view at Bing's all the more arresting. One photographed view captured the corner of the dining room, bursting with contrasting neo-rococo tendrils, the wall panels depicting an Arcadian landscape and *trompe-l'œil* wallcovering [Figure 100]. Whereas in van de Velde's dining room, the decorative panels are unobstructed, mirroring the repeated forms in the rest of the design, here the lighting fixtures are mounted atop the panels and compete with the other decorative elements for attention. The mirror is mounted so as to directly rival its ornate background, the reflection of the decorative mayhem from the other side of the room, and the painted ceiling. The ornamental fireplace screen provides yet another instance of distracting excitation as does the patterning of the carpet. Each object seems to equally solicit the viewer's attention, asserting itself as a unique possession of the collector rather than harmonizing into the whole. This is in contrast to van de Velde's interior wherein the decorative motifs are repeated in the panels, the dishware, and the lighting fixtures combining to form a unified and harmonic synthesis. Whereas Goncourt's décor is a

³¹⁰ Gustave Geffroy, "L'Habitation moderne: La Maison des Goncourts," *Revue des arts décoratifs* (1891): 146.

barrage of plush, historicized collections of things, van de Velde's is soothing and composed, it is corresponding, organic, and relatively unadorned. Particularly in this photograph with its dramatic contrasts in the lighting, the heavy door set just ajar and the oblique angle, one is given the sense of near claustrophobia. In another, wider, view of the dining room, this one from 1890, we see Edmond de Goncourt quite literally tucked between the mirror and a small, sculptural figurine as if they were physical extensions of his body [Figure 101]. Set amongst the decorative painting, the hanging clock, the covered table, he is part and parcel of the interior itself. Rather than a respite from urban invasion, the home appears to be consuming its inhabitant by means of an explosion from the inside.

When Edmond de Goncourt visited the van de Velde interiors at Bing's on December 30, 1895, he was wholly dismayed by this sharp contrast. The décor on view did not allow any one object to stand out as privileged token nor did it bespeak the refined taste of the recent revival of rococo fashions. While some critics such as Thadée Natanson from the *La Revue blanche* and Camille Mauclair from the *La Revue de la renaissance* defended the innovative designs, others reacted with outrage. Van de Velde recalled that outside the exhibition, Rodin could be heard announcing: "Van de Velde is a barbarian!"³¹¹ Goncourt, however, was more articulate. He derided the designs along social lines, saying as follows:

At the Bing exhibition: ...our country, heir to the coquettish and curving furniture of eighteenth-century languor, is now menaced by this hard and angular stuff, which appears to have been made for crude cave and lake dwellers? Will France be condemned to these windows...borrowed from ship's portholes...to these small tables akin to the sinks in decrepit dentist's offices? And will Parisians really sleep in a bedroom lacking all taste, on a mattress poised as if on a tomb?³¹²

³¹¹ Recounted in van de Velde journals, Fs X 42, Fonds van de Velde, Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Bibliothèque Royale Albert I, Brussels

³¹² Edmond de Goncourt and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal, mémoires de la vie littéraire*, 895.

Goncourt's refined sensibilities were, in short, wildly offended. There is much to be said about the nationalist currents of his critique; however, Goncourt also accused van de Velde's interiors of a deviant relation to the social body.³¹³ In this instance, the decoration of the middle-class home seemed indistinguishable from that of cave dwellers, ships, or dentist's offices—from those outside the realm of bourgeois sociability altogether. He went on to state his disdain for a designer whose plans for the house of a count were indistinguishable from the decoration of the home of a country doctor. Goncourt saw before him an erosion to the standing of the bourgeois home (and the bourgeoisie itself), a model of the interior as modern refuge that stood for protection of the French social structure itself.³¹⁴ His aesthetic, directly inspired by eighteenth-century aristocracy, resonated with the official adoption of the rococo into the national *patrimoine* in the 1890s, informed by gaining nationalist ideals of French identity and an anti-democratic class exclusivity propagated by the French Third Republic.³¹⁵ In his writings and his home, Goncourt took an ameliorative stance against what he saw as the threat of erosion to the class structure of France after 1848. Van de Velde's interiors were therefore objectionable because they afforded no distinction between the exclusive, individuated realm of the aesthete-collector and the anonymous porthole of a mercantile ship. Van de Velde's conception of the

³¹³ For a very insightful discussion of the isolationist undercurrents of the “*style étranger*” see Sophie Basch, *Marcel Proust et le modern style : Arts décoratifs et politiques dans À la recherche du temps perdu* (Turnhout: Brepolis, 2014).

³¹⁴ It has been widely noted that, though bourgeois themselves, the brothers claimed aristocratic (or at least haute bourgeois) lineage from their mother and their attachment to the social hierarchy of Old Regime France was apparent in their identification of the threats the post-1848 world in their writings and, most importantly, in their house.

³¹⁵ The taste for the rococo proceeded in successive waves throughout the nineteenth century. For instance, Napoléon III and Empress Eugenie notoriously adored the style for its association with revelry, opulence, and luxury, thereby popularizing it in the Second Empire. The revival of the style in the 1880s and 1890s was more solidly informed institutionalized efforts at a specifically French revival of the decorative arts informed, in part, by competition from international markets and cultural nationalism.

interior was decidedly something else.

This brings us back to the *Déblaiement*, published a year and a half before this exhibition in Paris. Van de Velde here professed that art had entered into a progressive decline thereby existing outside of living itself.³¹⁶ This regime ought to be supplanted with an art based in primal beauty, in work, and in so doing will displace the moral bankruptcy found in decadent, vain expressions so as to unite rather than divide the population.³¹⁷ In this revolution, the decadents will no longer control art and it will instead be created for the people. He writes:

For a long time now, dishonorable purposes have roused in us little sense of revulsion, and today an avenue of monuments rises that will consecrate the ignominious despoilment of the human spirit and its enslavement by innumerable damnable abstractions. It happens that a class of men whose hearts have remained as unspoiled as their hands by any share of the gold that has soiled us all—I mean the people—are gathering the remains of art (what is left, unspoiled).³¹⁸

If the object of *Déblaiement* was the style of the interior, then the overturn of the moral degradation imposed on the population at the hands of the decadents was the theme. Personal notes on unpublished manuscripts make the connection even clearer, including one line—"*contre capitalisme*"—inscribed across the top of the page in block letters with red ink.³¹⁹ Van de Velde imagines transposing the interiors ideologically modeled after the Goncourts into those modeled

³¹⁶ van de Velde, *Déblaiement*, 10.

³¹⁷ van de Velde, *Déblaiement*, 25-6.

³¹⁸ « Car depuis bien longtemps le but le plus déshonorant nous répugne à peine et voilà que sort de terre une avenue de monuments qui marquera l'ignominieux dépouillement de l'esprit humain et son asservissement aux abstractions chiffrées et damnables. Or, voilà qu'une classe parmi les hommes, dont le cœur est resté intact comme leurs mains de tout partage de l'or qui nous a souillé tous—je veux dire le Peuple— va recueillir l'Art ; c'est la pureté de son cœur et la naïveté de son esprit qui pousse l'Art à élire domicile chez lui et, quand ce reconurent ceux-là qu'une rancœur infinie des choses, une gêne insurmontable dans le commerce avec les hommes confinaient de plus en plus au sommet des Tours, ils sacrifièrent joyeusement leur cher isolement et se rendirent aux Maison du peuple ». Van de Velde, *Déblaiement*, 23.

³¹⁹ Fs X 43 Fonds van de Velde, Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Bibliothèque royale Albert I, Brussels.

after the Maison du peuple.

This stance held particular weight in Belgium. Aside from aesthetic differences and divergent attitude towards national tradition, Belgian craft reform was not institutionalized by the state as it was in France. Belgian artists and designers worked outside the bounds of official culture and thus had license to be significantly more radical in their ambitions. In France, aside from his foray into establishing a private gallery, Bing was employed by the government of the Third Republic to revive industrial arts in the face of increasing pressure from international markets. Meanwhile, to the North, the artistic avant-garde became both ideologically and institutionally tied to the rampant leftist politics of the period through the development of a progressive circle around l'Université nouvelle, founded in 1894 by Edmond Picard among others. For his part, van de Velde was hired as a lecturer at the university, offering a course on the popular and industrial arts that first semester.

In his teachings, van de Velde extended many of the sentiments first apparent in the *Déblaiement*. He pointed to the ornamental, everyday arts as the site of his reforms, and emphasized the role of suggestiveness while also deriding the current model of bourgeois aestheticism. Through public lectures, pamphlets on the arts and social life, and regular curricula, the Université nouvelle provided the institutional framework for craft reform that in France was governed by the state and the *Union centrale des arts décoratifs*. In articulating the mission of the arts courses to be offered at the university, the great Belgian writer and critic Camille Lemonnier spoke directly to van de Velde's sensibilities. He wrote:

Utility, as you will find out, is not a factor leading to the degeneration of a work of art; quite the contrary, it clarifies art's purpose and contributes to making it universally necessary. Thanks to utility, art absorbs the immense and human contribution of the applied arts. Their final impact is seen in the form of art that is quintessentially synthetic and harmonic. This is decorative, or, more precisely, ornamental art. This is the completion of a cycle, the reunion, so to

speak, of all the members of a great, ideal family. One of your professors, a refined artist, whose study, *Déblaiement d'art* contains many suggestive pages, will initiate you into this theory which is merely a return to the truth.³²⁰

Offered in both 1894 and 1896, this return to “truth” was taught in van de Velde’s course on the popular and industrial arts wherein he conveyed the importance of formal beauty coupled with utility and functionality. For him, a theory of utility in the arts that was not an end in itself, but prompted a purification of aesthetic principles as well. He emphasized similar commitments as he saw them in the teachings of John Ruskin, William Morris, Cobden Sanderson and Walter Crane, and particularly their heralding of essential beauty and the role of the artist-laborer.³²¹ Morris’ Red House [Figures 102, 103] was for him an important precedent for these concerns, and he relayed this sentiment in his teachings. This course was but one of the developments of a handful of initiatives to foster the relationship between socialism and aesthetics, notably influenced from the British model but also incorporating the espousal of a powerful aesthetic sensibility of essential beauty in form.

In their writings and their lectures, Van de Velde’s faculty colleagues—including Reclus, Verhaeren, Picard, and Kropotkin—all championed the relation between utility and beauty that was free of bourgeois fashion. Jules Destrée’s 1896 text, *Art et socialisme*, originally published

³²⁰ « L’utile, on vous l’apprendra, n’est pas une condition de déchéance pour l’œuvre ; au contraire, il précise sa destination et contribue à en généraliser la nécessité. Grace à lui, l’art s’attribue l’immense et si humaine collaboration des arts appliqués. Tous ensemble trouvent leur expression définitive dans la forme d’art synthétique et harmonique par excellence, l’Art décoratif, ou, pour mieux dire, l’Art ornemental. Alors s’accomplit le cycle, la réunion au même giron de tous les membres dispersés de la grande famille idéale. Un de vos professeurs, un subtil artiste de qui vous avez pu lire récemment une étude par plus d’une page suggestive, *Déblaiement d’art*, vous initiera à cette théorie qui n’est que le retour à la vérité ». Camille Lemonnier, “Les cours relatifs à l’Art à l’Institut des hautes études,” *L’Université nouvelle : organe de l’école libre d’enseignement supérieur* 4 (18 November 1894): 27.

³²¹ Van de Velde’s notes on Morris, and his lecture notes on art and ornamentation, are held in the Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Bibliothèque Albert I, Brussels (FS X 1188, Fonds van de Velde). Van de Velde taught rhetoric of aesthetic purity in utility while also establishing the importance of an essential beauty—an interest that was less critically suspect in Catholic Belgium than it was in Britain.

in the Brussels-based periodical, *Le Peuple*, most efficiently set out the tenets of the *POB*'s education policies, and crossed over into the curriculum at l'Université nouvelle. Combined with an impulse derived from Walter Crane in England of an *art dans tout*, Destrée argues for the necessity of the arts in the new society, pointing out the great error in thinking of art as simply the domain of the wealthy. In so doing, he also calls for a reorganization of existing hierarchies, both aesthetic and social. Destrée and his circle ultimately advocated a need for beauty of all different sorts—of accessible aesthetic pleasure married with rational functionality.³²²

These principles were also expressed in van de Velde's interiors. In a review of the exhibition at Bing's in 1895, Julius Meier-Graefe explicitly contrasted his approaches with that of the Goncourts. Despite its display in the spaces of the gallery, he lauded van de Velde's interiors precisely for their marriage of accessible, aesthetic pleasure and functionality, two features that were in his mind (and van de Velde's) intimately related and appropriate to their social cause. He elaborated:

Today, one discovers that houses are spaces in which to live...nothing contradicts this (older model) as much as the principles of discrete rooms, of comfortable furniture, and of practical forms embodied in Japanese and, to a greater degree, modern domestic realms. But the reasons for this are not merely practical, but aesthetic, and are shared by anyone who sees any art object belonging to any historical age become an anachronism as soon as it enters a modern dwelling...The taste of modern man hates all that resembles a knick-knack. He suffers in the ineradicable bric-a-brac logic of the Parisian Second Empire...he demands light, air, and color.³²³

Van de Velde's interiors, as they were rhetorically drawn into the debates on decadence in the early 1890s, asserted a comparative utility and, as such, a formal aesthetic that aspired to

³²² Van de Velde echoed this concern in several instances. He professed in 1894: « Il faut le retour à l'unité de l'art. Il y a décadence par ce qu'il y a rupture de l'unité ». Van de Velde, "Première prédiction d'art," *L'Art moderne* (21 January 1894).

³²³ Julius Meier-Graefe, "L'Art Nouveau. Das Prinzip," *Das Atelier* 6, no.5 (1896): 2-4.

equanimity and accessibility to the world outside their walls. Such an Art Nouveau sought to harness the effects of a decorative aesthetic, parts of which were also embraced by the decadents though to different ends. By drawing the interior into the discourses on decadence and decoration in the early 1890s, he was able to tease out some room for maneuver that rendered the possibility of the interior as an instrumental, and perhaps even somewhat oppositional, form of aesthetic experience that could effect sympathetic communion and oneness with the world. In so doing, the interior was not so much conceived in terms of what it could keep in or out, but rather that its components were freely accessible to the masses. He evoked such a sentiment in one of the most critical passages in the *Déblaiement*, writing:

Landscapes are rooms that can be chosen at will, and we will choose the most expansive and most colorful...accordingly, it will be appropriate in the future to borrow the patterns of landscapes, to employ for the design of our apartments the significant lines they themselves display which generate such compelling sensations.³²⁴

Here, van de Velde harnesses the language of decorative suggestion; however, he conceives it not as a *chambre mentale* of the aesthete, but instead as an accessible and suggestive landscape. We might understand this portion of the *Déblaiement* as a recuperation of some of the key principles of the decadent interior, while also marking a radical departure from its effects of alienated social corrosion. Van de Velde envisions an apartment—a space of everyday life—that will burst out of the decadent asylum and borrow its characteristics from the organic exterior. In

³²⁴ « Les paysages sont des chambres d'élection et nous choisissons les plus vastes et les plus colorés, les prairies, sillonnées de ruisseaux, parsemées de fleurs, pour y lâcher notre joie ; ce sont les bois clos, qui sollicitent nos rêvasseries indéfinies, nos aspirations mal définies ; les grandes drèves sont les chambres d'amertume et c'est aux grands bras protecteurs des arbres que nous confions nos douleurs, afin qu'ils les endorment. Aussi conviendra-t-il, à l'avenir, d'emprunter l'ordonnance des paysages, d'user pour l'édification de nos appartements des lignes significatives qu'ils utilisent, génératrices de si impérieuses sensations ». Van de Velde, *Déblaiement*, 22.

so doing, he prescribes an interior that will be socially viable, beautiful, and endow new form to the relation between life and art. In carrying out such a prescription in the following years, his built interiors took on an arrestingly experimental form commensurate with the tenor of this “new” Art Nouveau.

The Architect as *Form-Artist*

This chapter has heretofore concentrated on the ways in which van de Velde’s understandings of the interior, derived largely from textual and theoretical evidence, were motivated by his investment in its enduring efficacy and by his political ambitions. His reforms took root amidst the artistic, intellectual avant-garde and socialist circles in 1890s Belgium, a context notable for how these groups were often one and the same.³²⁵ Whereas in the previous section of this chapter the object of my analysis was the interior as a theoretical topic, the present section moves along with van de Velde’s own chronology to consider the interior as a visual, dare I say “real,” object in the world (a loaded phrase that I plan to complicate in what follows). At issue here is not a structural break from the stance that he took in texts and treatises of the early 1890s or a move to an entirely new set of motivations. Quite the opposite. Where his built interiors from these years may initially present themselves as wholly different from the concerns of his earlier preoccupations as a pedagogue and academic, or a painter, a closer look at the visual evidence and surrounding discursive context suggests otherwise.

³²⁵ While many European avant-garde groups were connected to progressive politics, the arts section of the *Parti ouvrier belge* is a rather unique instance of official cultural programming within the structure of the political party. In the 1890s, advanced Belgian artists, writers, and intellectuals were more often than not proactively involved in the *Section d’art* or the newly established l’Université nouvelle (est. 1894). The most authoritative and widely circulated art periodical, *L’Art moderne*, for instance, was edited by the secretary of the *POB* arts section and professor at the university, Edmond Picard. Socialist leader, Émile Vandervelde, was a founder of the academy.

This understanding of van de Velde's projects complicates the more commonly accepted understanding that in 1894 he broke with painting entirely as a consequence of a fated introduction to the work of William Morris by his friend and fellow Belgian painter, Willy Finch, and wholly abandoned his earlier occupation for a practice in the applied arts. He writes in his journal when recalling the emblematic work of this moment, a tapestry called *Angel's Watch* (*La Veillée des anges*) (1893) [Figure 104], that this transition was met with more shock and outrage than was necessarily warranted.³²⁶ I contend that this move was a continuation of a theoretical project to lift the bourgeois interior out of the bourgeois home that he had been developing throughout the early 1890s. Such a transition simply represents a change of object upon which he launched his "experiments" that had been previously deployed in two dimensions and in text. Thus, what is at issue in this chapter is both a new, considered look at the continuity of van de Velde's practice during these years, as well as a representative model for a larger and heretofore unconsidered reform tendency in fin-de-siècle interior architecture. This tendency turned on a reconfiguration of the relation between the interior and the social by constructing an optically enlivened surface derived from advanced, progressive theories of painting.³²⁷

Before parsing this dimension of van de Velde's approach to the interior and the social, it is important to consider the role of the social with regards to architecture more broadly. I have described the rather fraught circumstances of the former above, and much of the awkwardness of that definition stems from the abundant connotations that the interior acquired at the end of the

³²⁶ Henry van de Velde, journal entry "Tapisserie" (1900), Fs X 38, Fonds Van de Velde, Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Bibliothèque royale Albert I, Brussels.

Interestingly for this study, van de Velde exhibited his paintings in Paris in the early 1890s, at the exhibitions of Nabis artists at the gallery of M. Le Barc de Butteville.

³²⁷ The air of scientism as it was attached to pointillist painting found many forms, one being its label of "chromoluminarism" in France. Though not nearly as ubiquitous in Belgium, the French use of the term referred to the optical surfaces of Seurat and Signac who were widely assumed to have relied on the pseudo-scientific theories of Charles Henry to construct their highly affective paintings.

nineteenth century. As previously demonstrated, at this moment it was generally considered to be the antithesis of those material affinities, connections, and relations binding the individual to the larger whole of society. As a result, a radical rethinking of the interior seemed a profitable solution to challenging received cultural and aesthetic paradigms. Lending further depth to this critique, architecture more generally was simultaneously being reconceived with an eye to how it might best bind to, and serve, the needs of the larger collective.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the dominant discussion on this issue concerned the quality of shared labor that went into the construction of buildings (though largely restricted to the terms utility, *convenience*, etc.). As touchstone for this concept, in 1849 John Ruskin formulated a notion of the social (what he means when he uses the adjective “living”) that endured through to the end of the nineteenth century. He proclaimed: “I believe the right question to ask...is simply was it done with enjoyment—was the carver happy while he was about it? It may be the hardest work possible...but it must have been happy too, or it will not be living.”³²⁸ This understanding of the social character of buildings found in the procedural method of their construction extended from England to Belgium where geographic proximity and a general fascination with British political aesthetics was more pronounced than in France, a nation that was at the time slightly more conservative and isolationist in this regard. While this emphasis on the nature of production persisted into the twentieth century, modernists also looked to a building’s use in determining its social purpose. The project of a social architecture became ameliorative, consisting of the development and conceptualization of spatial programs aimed at

³²⁸ John Ruskin, “Seven Lamps of Architecture” (1849) quoted in Adrian Forty, “Dead or Alive: Describing the Social,” in *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary for Modern Architecture* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2008), 103.

reform of the collective.³²⁹ The threshold between these two propositions regarding what a connective tissue between architecture and the collective might look like is precisely where the fin-de-siècle architects were located. The urgency of their particular political charge dissipated rather quickly, and more thoroughly modernist models would replace their propositions in the decades that followed. This moment around 1900 however, ought to be understood as a ground of experimentation where aesthetic issues prompted by real political urgency were hashed out, and the material conditions of viable solutions remained up for debate. Van de Velde and some of his Belgian contemporaries were enthusiastic inheritors to the tradition of thinking about democratized and joyful labor imported from the British Arts and Crafts—the names William Morris, Cobden Sanderson, and Walter Crane appear repeatedly in popular manifestos of the period—and were also compelled to develop conditions that would prompt a social reform in the user. Their reforms, however, assembled a different set of tools than those employed by the more familiar progenitors to the modernist model who turned to space and program as the appropriate materials to achieve such a social goal for interior architecture. Instead, van de Velde and his contemporaries turned to the vivid effects and effectiveness of the optically enlivened surface, thereby separating themselves from some contemporary architects who considered such concerns to be merely decorative.

Accordingly, perhaps the most arresting experiment in destabilizing the traditionally bourgeois interior in these years was one that seems at first paradoxical, especially from the point of view of architectural history and its engagement with progressive politics. Retrospectively, one often thinks of architecture's relation to the social or political in terms of function—communal housing or factory architecture are good examples. Van de Velde's case opens up a

³²⁹ Forty, "Dead or Alive," 107.

window onto an intriguing alternative specific to the 1890s. His primacy of form and animated surfaces recast the interior as an optical environment that could, so he thought, achieve a new relation between intimate, individual experience and exterior, social life —what he termed a “realism”—that he believed had not been achieved in any medium in recent memory.³³⁰ This perceived relation between art and life was in many ways more resonant with avant-garde theories of painting in Belgium than with the Art Nouveau architecture in France with which it is often equated. These paradigms for painting provided a social utility, a function of form, that he thought capable of obtaining a synthesis between interior experience and collective consciousness.

Something of this complexity emerges when considering one individual photograph of van de Velde’s first built interior, his personal home known as Bloemenwerf, on the outskirts of Brussels [Figure 105].³³¹ The photograph is one from a series taken in 1899, four years after its construction, by the designer’s longtime friend Charles Lefébure. The extent to which these photographs came to constitute the principles of van de Velde’s interior aesthetic by means of dispersal and dissemination in the press is the subject of the final section of this chapter. For now, I wish to consider the ways in which this image frames the interior here represented and prompts a unique reading of the prime concerns integral to reforms during these years. In many ways, the questions and convolutions explored in this section are posed by a sustained look at this photograph of Maria Sèthe van de Velde at the piano.

Like so many of the critically intriguing interiors of the period, it first appears as a rather familiar scene, a standard in the lexicon of genre imagery of the later-nineteenth century. One

³³⁰ Van de Velde, *Déblaiement*, 6.

³³¹ Bing and Meier Graefe made a visit to the home in 1895 after which Bing invited him to design for his gallery Art Nouveau and Meier Graefe for his gallery of *Maison moderne* as well as his office of *Art décoratif* in Paris a few years later.

might recall James Ensor's *Russian Music* (1881) or Wilhelm Hammershøi's *Interior in Strandgade, Sunlight on the Floor* (1901) [Figure 106] to name just two, both imaging women pictured from behind. Any familiarity however, is then destabilized by the oblique angle, the dramatic use of lights and darks, and the position of the sitter turned away from the camera's view. The audience is given only partial access to a female subject engrossed in music amidst a well-appointed home, turned away from our gaze so as to demonstrate with no hesitation both her own absorption and the limited extent to which we are to come to know her individuality. In this instance, it matters very little that this is the wife of Henry van de Velde, a designer and decorator herself. Rather, what this photograph does make clear is that her environment, the stuff of her surroundings, and how that environment is represented ought to be considered first and foremost.

The scene is captured from an angle and through the frame of an open door from one room over, a darkened space where one imagines the photographer hiding behind the heavy, swooping, Arts-and-Crafts-style doorframe. This serves to emphasize the sense that one is peering from the outside in, and that this is a somewhat privileged viewpoint into a private world. Our eye enters the room by following the parallel lines of the floorboards through the open door as the scene transitions from dark exterior toward the bright interior of the room in which Mme. van de Velde is located. She sits upon an imposing chair and beneath an ornamental palm, the folds of her dress neatly tucked in at the center of the brightest point in this recession, between the threshold of the entry door and the back staircase that leads to a dark, rectangular hallway. She is hemmed into a physical arena that is proximate and enclosed by multiple devices of spatial compression. In contrast to the dark and chaotic historicist interiors of the period that were chockablock with *bibelots*, this enclosure is spatial, formal, and while we can perceive light

and air circulating throughout the room there is no doubt that this is a world physically closed in.³³²

This interior is situationally contained, a framed and illuminated private realm between walls, heavy doorways, and darkened passages. The sense of enclosure is augmented by an implicit understanding of Maria's absorption in the activities of reading and listening to music, indicated by the passage of the picture in which her head is perfectly framed within the bright white of the sheet music and her obvious disinterest in the beholder, plainly evoking a psychological world of interiorized absorption.³³³ In an unnervingly exact centering of her head within the white block of the sheet music—it does not at any point near the edge and not even a tendril of hair falls below the frame—the composition insists on the strict distinction between the psychological space of her mind and the rest of the room. We cannot see her hands nor her face, so it is impossible to know whether or not music fills the room, or the level of her absorption in reading notes from a printed scale.³³⁴ While masking any indication of individual subjectivity,

³³² The use of windows and natural light was particularly notable at Bloemenwerf, especially in comparison to contemporaneous historicist, dark and imposing, interior design that one might encounter in the image of the Goncourt residence or in the photographic album, *Nos contemporains chez eux* (c.1890).

³³³ Michael Fried's influential historical and theoretical studies on absorption as a central preoccupation of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century painting have significantly informed my reading of interiors and interiority. See, among other works, Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) and *Menzel's Realism: Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century Berlin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). Also see Anne Leonard, "Picturing Listening in the late Nineteenth-Century," *The Art Bulletin* 89, no.2 (2007): 266-286

³³⁴ The illegibility of the printed music to our eye recalls a similar illegibility in the depiction of printed books read by women in nineteenth-century painting. This point is Bridget Alsdorf's and she makes reference to the work of Kathryn Brown whose scholarship on feminine interiority and the spaces of public life has been influential to my thinking on this topic. Alsdorf underscores Brown's discussion of women readers in paintings by Manet and Degas, and how this issue of illegibility both enticed and frustrated a captive viewer, consequently raising questions about the "imaginative independence" of these female subjects. See Kathryn Brown, *Women Readers in French Painting: A Space for the Imagination* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 6; Bridget Alsdorf, "Hammershøi's Either/Or," *Critical Inquiry* (Winter 2016): 274.

the photograph explicitly indicates a delineation of the conventional indicators of individuated, psychic interior life from the physical interior of the house. The architectonic interior is demarcated from a reflective interiority associated with the mind while itself being resonant with a rather different, more composite and less exclusively private sense of interior. Above the piano is a painting by the Belgian pointillist Théo van Rysellberghe of Maria herself sitting at a harmonium, this time showing her absorbed face in profile thereby nearly reflecting the scene in mirror-like fashion [Figure 107].³³⁵

The longer one considers this image, with Bloemenwerf's oft-held associations of the artist's house with the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the more dynamic it becomes. In her study of the Nabis artists' engagement with *wagnérisme* and Art Nouveau decorative projects, Katherine Kuenzli has referenced this very scene in the van de Velde house, pointing to the continuity in the patterning and forms of the clothing, chair, and the architectural elements to insist on Bloemenwerf's status as a unified and charged total work of art within the private realm.³³⁶ While this image does certainly contain corresponding elements, I maintain that this interior represented here operates as a rather discontinuous amalgamation of parts. What I suggest is that the photograph indicates a pulling apart, a peeling back, of the tight binding between interior as space, interior as image, and interiority as such. This interior is in a sense a total work of art—one can read this from the furniture designed by van de Velde and corresponding clothing

³³⁵ Bridget Alsdorf discusses this pictorial device wherein the sitter's head is framed, turned away from the viewer, against the white rectangle of sheet music with regard to the painted interiors of Wilhelm Hammershøi and what she sees as a Kierkegaardian understanding of the interior. By this she means a coexistence of two poles of domestic life: reflective interiority and material existence in physical space. See Alsdorf, "Hammershøi's Either/Or," 272.

³³⁶ Kuenzli, *Intimate Modernism*, 151-2.

designs—however it is different *in kind*, and represented as somewhat unraveled, undone.³³⁷ Each dimension is isolated quite literally by its own frame—the frame of the door, that of the white sheet music, of the picture on the wall—which sets each off in our conscious consideration as individual, constitutive components rather than as an inter-medial synthesis.³³⁸ The photograph does not present its viewer with an image of the interior stitched together and whole; rather, by the oblique angle from which it is taken and the overt framing devices, any intimation of an integral screen of the interior image is punctured and sliced through. This interior at Bloemenwerf is composed as a rather awkward marriage of parts. The seams show. This image illustrates in formal terms the procedures that van de Velde was undertaking in undoing the integrity of the interior as a received concept. This does of course implicate the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, as most studies of the interior in this moment should and do, however my focus is rather on the interplays and renegotiations between these various elements—building, pictorial surface, and interiority—and how their relation to one another was reorganized to serve van de Velde’s social goal in the years around 1900.

The operations of this image are striking when contrasted, for instance, with a photograph of the interior architecture of Victor Horta and his Hôtel Tassel (1893-7) [Figure 108]. In the

³³⁷ As Juliet Koss has attested, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is definitionally malleable, taking on a variety of forms, however it does adhere to two principles in each of its morphologies: (i) it is a work that achieves a synthesis of different art forms, (ii) and it has the potential to hold a powerful, overwhelming, effect over numerous people simultaneously. See Juliet Koss, *Modernism After Wagner* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

³³⁸ In her analysis of van de Velde’s later work with the Deutscher Werkbund and the surrounding political landscape in Wilhelmine Germany, Katherine Kuenzli has similarly understood the designer’s approach to the total work of art as markedly different from that of his contemporaries and even from older understandings of the nineteenth-century concept of the harmonious, multimedia, affective environment. She claims that this modification to the concept operated by way of an amalgamation of painting, sculpture, and architecture, rather than by harmonious binding. Katherine Kuenzli, “Architecture, Individualism, and Nation: Henry van de Velde’s 1914 Werkbund Theater Building,” *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 94, 2 (January 2012): 251-273.

image of Horta's interior taken by the firm Bastin and Evrard—perhaps the most iconic image of the most iconic designer of the Art Nouveau—the interior is presented as a seamless whole. Our eye approaches through the opened passageway, progressing along the curving lines of the individual steps, the whiplash stalks in wrought iron, the decorative painting on the wall. None of these elements are represented as isolated but rather one form bleeds into the next in an unobstructed, rhythmic, spatial synthesis. Better still, we might return to the example of Edmond de Goncourt in his dining room [Figure 101] discussed earlier in this chapter, wherein the collector is quite literally ensconced within the objects in the home and there is no obvious distinction between his person, the objects within the space and the enclosure of the room. Lefébure's photo of van de Velde's room does something quite different. The present study is not however one of compositional strategies in late-nineteenth century photography. What I have been describing is not a transparent architectural method either. However, following the initial proposition of the image regarding the individual dimensions of the interior does turn out to be a rather productive line of enquiry when one considers this in the context of van de Velde's project of the 1890s. A considered look at how the each of these separate logics —painting, the space of the interior, and the notion of interiority—remained distinct yet interlacing practices reveals significant dimensions of his critical approach.

The latter two of these three “dimensions” of the interior—interiority and the space inside a small room—have been discussed in the preceding section as key features of his “experiments.” The representation of absorbed listening or reading and the metaphoric isolation of Maria's head against the sheet music focuses attention on the long-held association of interiority and psychological effect. This, I showed, was a key concern of van de Velde's that he attempted to recuperate to a certain extent but also reform through an aesthetic mode that sought

to foster subjective equanimity over and above fetishism and decadent indulgence.³³⁹ The room within which Mme. van de Velde is enclosed represents another dimension of the interior—perhaps the most obvious one. This central room adheres to the reformist, universalist sensibility of utility in design. Not only is the space quite literally an enclosure in a paired down, Arts and Crafts-style house, but every element from chair to wallpapers was designed by the van de Veldes (except in a few instances in which upholsteries were ordered from Morris and Co.) [Figure 109, 110]. This is a design style of essential beauty in form married with practical utility in keeping with the progressive views of Morris, Destrée, and Picard, and the teachings at l'Université nouvelle.³⁴⁰

The painting by van Rysselberghe hanging on the wall, *Maria Sèthe at the Harmonium* (*Maria Sèthe à l'harmonium*) (1891) [Figure 107], is intriguing not just for how it represents the very scene depicted in the photograph. It is also interesting for how it bespeaks a direct connection to van de Velde's preoccupation with advanced forms of painting, both in his own practice and in his thinking about interiors. The placement of a pointillist canvas on the walls of an interior designed by van de Velde is rather commonplace during these years before 1900. In this central room at Bloemenwerf for instance, another such picture hung on the wall: Georges

³³⁹ The popularity of Wagner in Belgium should not be minimized or deemed mere coincidence. Connections between Belgium and Germany remained amiable throughout the latter decades of the nineteenth century (as opposed to the case with France) and the Wagner Society in Brussels was vitally active during the 1890s, particularly amongst avant-garde circles. Secretary of *Les XX* and *La Libre esthétique* Octave Maus, for instance, was a key member. See Edmond Evenepoel, *Le Wagnérisme hors d'Allemagne: Bruxelles et la Belgique* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1891).

³⁴⁰ Similar chairs designed in 1895 were upholstered in Morris' "Dove and Rose" pattern and appear in van de Velde's interiors displayed at Siegfried Bing's gallery in 1895-6, and for Herbert Esche's apartment in Chemnitz in 1898 as well. Originally designed in 1895 for his sister, this iconic chair was soon produced in a Brussels-suburb workshop established in 1897, wherein he often employed Morris textiles. For van de Velde's own thoughts on furniture design see his article in the German periodical *Pan* 3. No.4 (February 1898): 260-263. I am indebted to Jan Van Nimmen's writing for pointing out this history. See van Nimmen, "Henry van de Velde in Germany and Belgium: Part One," *Nineteenth Century Art Worldwide*, Vol.12, 2 (Autumn 2013).

Seurat's *Grande Isle*. One might also point to the sitting room he designed in Chemnitz (1897) featuring a divisionist landscape, or to the offices of *l'Art décoratif* in Paris (1899) in which editor Meier-Graefe's teak desk sits directly below Seurat's *Chahut* (1890) [Figures 111-113].³⁴¹

This affinity that van de Velde appears to have maintained with Neo-Impressionist painting in these contexts raises the question: in what ways could his interiors from the 1890s be said to invite modes of viewing that were already being activated by “scientific” painting? Did this offer a novel solution to the perceived problematic of the bourgeois interior? The equation in Lefébure's photograph between Maria at the piano represented in paint and in the “real” space of the built environment offers a rather remarkable proposition. In Chapter Three, I argued that certain Neo-Impressionist painters became increasingly interested in experimentation with the spatial dimensions of the picture in ways that intimated the conditions of a proximate viewing environment that approximated the conditions of a domestic interior. Though in converse terms, my discussion here operates by way of a similar cross-lacing. In the years around 1900, and in van de Velde's practice in particular, the tension between interventions in real space and a continued fascination with insistent effects of surface instigated a radical blurring between the private, enclosed interior and exterior, social world. What van de Velde found in discourses on psychological responsiveness to large, optically contrived pointillist painting was a retention of some activated, critical intimacy without the deleterious baggage of withdrawal that he associated with a more traditional paradigm of the interior environment. For him, a political or utilitarian edge need not necessarily eschew visual or sensory immediacy. In fact, this tension between perceptual immediacy of the visual environment, whether it be the optical field of a

³⁴¹ In a slightly different configuration, van de Velde's design for the dining room of Count Harry Kessler (1898-9) featured Seurat's painting *The Models (Les Poseuses)* (1886-1888).

painting or the “pictorial” orientation of his interior designs, and connection to a collective social world disrupted the ideal of the interior as a self-sufficient and fully realized entity thereby critically animating it while also negating older, outdated associations.

Van de Velde’s interest in pointillist painting, best represented in Belgium by van Rysselberghe, was initially rather personal. Van Rysselberghe had been the teacher of Mme. van de Velde and a long-time friend of her husband, and had also sponsored his invitation to *Les XX* in 1888.³⁴² They had collaborated on a dining room for the Bing commission in 1894 and, with Georges Lemmen, comprised a formidable artistic and social unit in the Bruxelloise artistic avant-garde of the 1890s. Their interest in form, optics, and sensory experience came into focus after the exhibition of Georges Seurat’s great divisionist picture *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of la Grande-Jatte* [Figure 115] at the annual exposition of *Les XX* in Brussels, thereafter marking 1887 as “the year of Seurat.” Van de Velde recalled his first experience in front of the work:

In front of *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of the Grande Jatte* by Seurat, I was thrown aback and struck by an inexplicable emotion. From that very moment it became impossible for me to resist the need to fully absorb the theories, the rules, and the fundamental principles of this new technique.³⁴³

This certainly seems to have been the case. His paintings such as *Village Facts: The Girl Mending a Stocking (Faits du village VII : La fille qui remaille)* (1890) [Figure 115] demonstrate a remarkable study of Seurat’s technique, one that came to constitute the whole of divisionism in

³⁴² The other sponsor was A.J. Heymans. The letters of advocacy are reprinted in Madeleine Maus, *Trente années de lutte pour l’Art* (Bruxelles: l’Oiseau bleu, 1926), 133.

³⁴³ « Mise en présence du *Dimanche à l’Île de la Grande Jatte*, je m’étais senti bouleversé, en proie à un inexplicable émoi et dès ce moment il devenait impossible de résister au besoin de m’assimiler les théories, les règles et les principes fondamentaux de la nouvelle technique ». Fonds Van de Velde, manuscripts, 46. Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Bibliothèque Albert I, Brussels.

the popular imagination.³⁴⁴ More so than even van Rysselberghe's works, van de Velde's picture is entirely constituted by a compilation of spots of paint. As a comparison between this work and his friend's *Portrait of Mme. Charles Maus* [Figure 116] from that same year makes clear, van Rysselberghe simply applied pointillist dots atop an already resolved painted form while van de Velde constituted an image completely by the materials of paint and color alone without any naturalistic under-painting at all [Figures 117, 118]. The result is an image that appears to vibrate before the eyes. While it does partially draw one in to recognize the scene of a girl mending clothes, its composition comprised entirely of objective spots of pigment (rather than traditional techniques of illusionistic modeling) creates a solid, whole, and acutely *material* surface. This painting represents a subject matter redolent of the realist vocabulary of the midcentury—humble images of the lower classes engaged in quotidian tasks—however he also broke with the demands of naturalist representation in favor of a more literal depictive mode of artifactual abstraction.³⁴⁵ Van de Velde himself articulated this “realist” understanding of Neo-Impressionist technique in a remarkable short article published that same year in which he described it as essentially “color and the vast field of its sensual pleasures...*the Real beyond the Real: the 'life of Things.'*”³⁴⁶

³⁴⁴ At the exhibition of *Les XX* in February 1889, Van de Velde (now a member of the group) had the opportunity to meet Georges Seurat, now exhibiting for a second time, and discuss Neo-Impressionist theory. The following year, van de Velde exhibited his series of pictures entitled *Faits du village* at *Les XX* that modelled a similar technique.

³⁴⁵ See Brendan Prendeville, “Seurat and the Act of Sensing: Perception as Artifact,” in *Seurat Reviewed*, ed. Paul Smith (State College: Pennsylvania State Press, 2010), 165-187.

³⁴⁶ Le NÉO-IMPRESSIONISME. Sait-on seulement ce qu'il tente ? *Objectivité* stricte pour les uns—à courtes vues—*Réalité*. Alors que c'est plutôt : *Couleur* et le champ vaste de ses voluptés et de ses crises. Sensualité à l'écoute des heurts les plus choquants, des caprices les plus fugaces, des harmonies les plus tendres. Divers états d'âme à ces Largo, Andante, ou Allegretto de couleur ! *Réalité*, la notation de ces voix ? la *Couleur* ! cette informulée et changeant signification dont se revêtent les choses ! ... Au résumé, s'annonce un avenir... Les indices se proclament hautement en telles œuvres—fixant l'*AU DELA RÉEL* ; 'la vie des choses' et ces inoubliables paysages du Premier des néo-impressionnistes [Seurat]. Fixer le Rêve des réalités, l'Informulé planant sur elle, les disséquer impitoyablement pour voir leur Âme,

With this in mind, it is crucial to understand that van de Velde's interest in painting was of a particular nature, rather than a more general concern. Naturalist, illusionistic, rendering of a hemmed-in atmosphere that recedes into pictorial depth, such as Henri de Braekeleer's *The Antwerp Cathedral* (1872) [Figure 119], held no interest for him. In fact, it only affirmed an outmoded, tenuous relation between art and viewer.³⁴⁷ Rather, he transformed such a motif into pictures like *Woman at a Window (Femme à la fenêtre)* (1890) [Figure 120]. This scene depicting a woman sitting at the threshold of an open window denies its beholder the imaginative projection into a depicted fiction such as one encounters in the Braekeleer. The picture is instead cropped, flattened out, and brought intimately close by a normative science of optical responsiveness that instigated an interface between viewer and work. While surely somewhat depictive, such paintings were also for him excerpted fragments from a larger shared spatial world where the viewer is compelled to feel as though she too is looking through a window, rather than peering upon a self-enclosed tableau.

Interest in a "realist" relation between the picture and viewer achieved through the manipulation of the surface of the painting had a longer tradition in Belgium and in van de Velde's personal practice. Regional painting from the 1850s through until the mid-1880s was dominated by a preoccupation with northern landscapes and thick materialities of paint (following from a strong contemporary interest in Courbet, among other things).³⁴⁸ Van de Velde

s'acharner à la poursuite de l'Intangible et se recueillir—dans le silence—pour en noter la mystérieuse Signification. » H. van de Velde, "Notes d'Art," *La Wallonie* (February-March 1890), 90-93. Emphasis mine.

³⁴⁷ Fs X 40, Van de Velde journals, Fonds Van de Velde, Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Bibliothèque Royale Albert I, Brussels.

³⁴⁸ For an astute analysis of this fascination with Courbet in Belgium, see Marnin Young, *After Courbet: Realism and the Specter of History* (Ph.D. diss, University of California—Berkeley, 2007); *Courbet en Belgique* (Bruxelles: Musées royaux, 2013).

himself initially experimented with the *tachiste* technique in the 1880s [Figure 121] alongside James Ensor, Willy Finch, and van Rysselberghe. This emphasis on the depictive capacities and base reality of painted matter—the constitution of a rough materiality of the landscape through an insistent materiality of paint (or, in Ensor’s case the use of thick impasto to depict the materials of the interior)—offered an appealing alternative to more traditional illusionism while also retaining a commitment to painting as such. In the decades that followed, some artists pursued new approaches to this realist impulse. In so doing, many were captivated by an “objective” science of perception emblematic of divisionist technique.

This wave of fascination in Belgium began with a moment in September 1886, when van Rysselberghe and the critic Émile Verhaeren saw Seurat’s picture in Paris at the *Exposition de la Société des Artistes Indépendants* and subsequently invited him to exhibit in Brussels. There is much to be said about the larger move amongst the Belgian avant-garde from a traditionally realist mode of depicting the landscape, peasant life, and laboring classes towards a more modernist painterly mode.³⁴⁹ Van de Velde himself reflected on this shift in his marvelously poetic, Symbolist-inspired treatise entitled *Du Paysan en peinture* (1891), delivered as a lecture to *Les XX*.³⁵⁰ Despite van de Velde’s sympathies with their broader ideology, the naturalist technique and theatricality of artists like Jean-Francois Millet or Charles De Groux, who

³⁴⁹ See my discussion of this issue in Chapter Two of this dissertation, also Susan Canning “A History and Critical Review of the Salons of “Les Vingt”: 1884-1893” (PhD diss., The Pennsylvania State University, 1980).

³⁵⁰ “What had to be done was to bring the peasant closer to ourselves, and take him away from the atmosphere of the theater. The stage on which the exaggeration of his gestures, and the visual heaviness of his poses, wore him out more than hard labor itself!...They are inclined to simpler, more servile, more external attitudes [*Ils affectionnent des attitudes plus simples, plus serviles, plus de dehors*]”.

Van de Velde, « Du Paysan en peinture », *L’Art moderne* 8 (22 February 1891): 61.

T.J. Clark discusses van de Velde’s lecture in his analysis of Camille Pissarro’s *Two Young Peasant Women*, and points out van de Velde’s indebtedness of the French painter’s images of rural labor. See T.J. Clark, “We Field Women,” in *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 122-125.

depicted the realities of the lower and working classes under the auspices of an *art social*, no longer satisfied such ambitions in his view.³⁵¹ Rather, everyday realities were better evoked by more abstracted, evocative, pictorial environments that he thought could be appreciated by the ordinary individual. The ideal “social art,” for van de Velde, would be comprised by “the intimacy of a less episodic, less decorative décor, so true and powerfully evocative that it fiercely embraced its subject (of real life).”³⁵²

There are two rather interesting components to van de Velde’s proposition in *Du Paysan en peinture*. First, he claims that a more thorough and enduring relation between art and life—what he elsewhere calls “*vérité*”—will be achieved not directly in the form of naturalism or depiction of the social body, but instead from the evocation of an *environment* that could facilitate a common experience of the collective. No longer should painting simply evoke or depict the world, but it also ought to stimulate the experience of that world. He picks up this thread of the inefficacy of more traditional modes of depiction explicitly in a text published in *L’Art moderne*, originally delivered as a lecture given at the Royal Academy in Antwerp in 1893:

“[T]he evolution of idea and the condition of social life are no longer accommodated by the tableaux or the statue... They are rather accommodated by the interior, mosaics, embroideries and tapestries, the membrane of a large skeleton that was edified in architecture. And those that will wait to leave profitably transparent the harmonious silhouette and the rhythmic ordinances...”³⁵³

There is an undeniable vocabulary of socially charged Symbolism here. While of course this

³⁵¹ van de Velde, “Première prédication d’art,” (1893).

³⁵² Van de Velde, “Du Paysan en peinture,” 61.

³⁵³ Henry van de Velde lecture for a course on the Ornamental and Practical Arts, L’Université nouvelle (1892). Fonds van de Velde, Archives et Musée de la littérature, Bibliothèque Albert I, Brussels.

confirms more generally-held sentiments as to the social potentiality of the unity of the arts and “idéic” form, there is another intriguing set of issues as to the nature of representation at play. While aspiring to democratize art and give it a social purpose, the “episodic” or narrative element of naturalist painting or sculpture effectively enlarged the gulf between art and the general population. According to him, naturalist depiction of solemn figures saying grace over a humble meal as in De Groux’s *The Benediction (Le Bénédicité)* (1861) or *The Gleaners (Les Glaneuses)* (1857) [Figures 122, 123], designed to be shown in the bourgeois space of the Salon, failed to satisfy the social goals of reform for those very classes. Van de Velde disparaged the theatricality in peasant scenes by Millet, and instead turned to the peasant imagery of Camille Pissarro precisely because of his use of form, the emphasis on optics, and imitation of high frescoes. He believed that Pissarro had found the ideal marriage of an “authentic” peasant theme and an objective, “architectural,” truth in paintings like *Apple Picking at Éragny-sur-Epte (La Récolte des pommes à Éragny-sur-Epte)* (1888) [Figure 124] that allowed for conditions he termed an “*architecture plus vraie*” and “*une atmosphère véritable*.”³⁵⁴ For van de Velde, the issue is not straightforwardly that décor should replace painting but rather that in both painting and interior architecture, the designer should aspire to the most essential forms, colors, and patterning so as to prompt an elemental, sympathetic response in the spectator and thus craft a

³⁵⁴ « Lors, Camille Pissarro l’alla quérir aux hautes fresques où son emphase, procédant comme les lignes de son vêtement de la spéciale optique requise et le scrutant de plus près, il lui découvrit une architecture plus vraie ». Van de Velde, “Du Paysan en peinture,” 61.

This “truth” is quite different from that which Walter Benjamin describes in his context for the bourgeois interior. He writes, “[T]he true has no windows. Nowhere does the true look out to the universe. And the interest in the panoramas is in seeing the true city. ‘The city in a bottle’—the city indoors. What is found within the windowless house is the true. One such windowless house is the theater; hence the eternal pleasure it affords. Hence, also, the pleasure taken in those windowless rotundas, the panoramas. In the theater, after the beginning of the performance, the doors remain closed. Those passing through arcades are, in a certain sense, the inhabitants of a panorama. The windows of this house open out onto them. They can be seen out these windows but cannot themselves look in.” Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, F, 24.

synthesis between art and the inhabited world.

This theoretical stance on the overturn of painting came from a surprising source: contemporary painting itself. As with van Rysselberghe's picture, Pissarro manipulated small patches of color and shape in accordance with the most recent scientific theories of colors associated with the work of Michel Eugène Chevreul in France and Ogden Rood's publication of "Scientific Theory of Colors" in America.³⁵⁵ The material evidence indicating van de Velde's fascination with painterly discourses on the science of perception is supported by extensive textual record. In his personal journals and in published papers, he espouses the technique and is laudatory of the two painters that for him constitute its apogee—Georges Seurat and Paul Signac.³⁵⁶ He spoke widely and wrote often on the scientific theories in which form and color were understood to have a normative, charged and interiorized emotional response in the spectator—*any* spectator. This theoretical stance came from Chevreul and Rood, but also somewhat indirectly from theories of optics by Hermann von Helmholtz and a science of responsiveness extending back to French academic reformer and statesman, Charles Blanc, who had adopted a less overt and idealist theory of affective form in architecture in a 1867 treatise within the textbook, *Grammaire des arts du dessin*.³⁵⁷ In this formulation, the normative response elicited by these works was not associated with conventional pictorial effect;

³⁵⁵ Though not mentioned in his notebooks, Charles Henry had also published a new volume, *Quelques Aperçus sur l'esthétique des formes* in 1895.

³⁵⁶ "Deux jeunes peintre, tous les deux parisiens, Georges Seurat [...] et Paul Signac cherchent séparément, sans se connaître, une technique qui leur permettrait d'appliquer à la lettre, rigoureusement les lois plus récents physiciens, Chevreul et N. C. Rood [...] Depuis longtemps je me sentais hanté par l'idée que non seulement le tableau était devenu le résultat d'un démêlé entre l'artiste et l'émotion qu'il s'évertuait à fixer [...] mais encore que le dernier d'entre eux avait atteint les limites au-delà desquelles c'est le vertige et l'abîme." Van de Velde, (no date) Fonds van de Velde, Archives et Musée de la littérature, Bibliothèque Albert I, Brussels.

³⁵⁷ I have elsewhere considered Blanc as a particularly useful model for thinking through some of these issues in a paper entitled "Charles Blanc's Social Function of Form" presented on the panel "The Art History of Architectural History," Association of Art Historians, 2015.

representational depth and imaginative absorption came to matter very little in light of this larger aim. The materials of paint, form, and line instead came to simulate, or create, a world rather than simply reflect it.³⁵⁸

Rather than placing pointillistic technique within the context of debates about “the decorative,” or even what we have come to locate as the moment of transition between more traditional modes of naturalist depiction and more abstracted forms of representation, the issues at play here require a more immediately distinct set of terms. These fit more firmly in the contemporary debates about what constituted “the real” in art. In his earliest mention of this, in a review of Seurat’s painting *Chahut* from 1890 for the Francophone Belgian journal *La Wallonie*, van de Velde designated an illustrative and fitting term to this interest in the painterly possibilities of social synthesis in pursuit of realist truth: “the architecture of the idea” (*l’architecture de l’Idée*).³⁵⁹

An initially rather perplexing turn of phrase, what could he have meant by this “the architecture of the idea” in 1890?³⁶⁰ It certainly resonated with the constitution of an environment that eschewed a primacy of representation for a formal vocabulary that was in van de Velde’s mind more “real,” or closer to connecting to the world itself. What is striking about this phrase used in relation to a two-dimensional picture is its conflation of the idea of

³⁵⁸ See S. Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). Halliwell provides a very good discussion of two modes of imitation and their relative investments in creating a world. The first is constitutively separate and depictive, the other is a part of a larger whole.

³⁵⁹ H. van de Velde, “Notes sur L’Art: Chahut,” *La Wallonie* (1890): 123.

³⁶⁰ He follows this initial use of the term with an elaboration on *Chahut*: « Et à ceux qui revendiqueront la souveraineté de l’œil dans l’empire de l’Harmonie des lignes, je dis cette phrase — pourquoi en moi demeurée d’un vieux bouquin sur ‘LES PRINCIPES DE L’HARMONIE » . *Ibid.*, 123.

In 1890, “idée” would certainly recall Moréas’ 1886 manifesto of Symbolist aesthetics wherein he espoused the expression of subjective truths in objective forms. See Moréas, *Symbolist Art Theories*, 150-52.

architectural environment and that of subjective reflection that we might often associate with painting or music. In other words, it seems to explicitly connect the seemingly opposed realms of collective and individual, real and interiorized ephemerality, structural built environment and psychological space. How could a painting be “architecture” and how could architecture be constituted not by building materials but by an ephemeral “idea”?

The phrase also carries the connotation of a structural understanding of the material elements of a painting that is reminiscent of certain early theorizations of ornament and ornamentation. “Architecture of the idea” could be interpreted as a “scaffolding” of an uncultivated response, a schema for a set of responses and maintenance of order. This rhetoric of a conditioned responsiveness to color and form ran rampant amongst practitioners of Neo-Impressionist painting, and we know from his personal correspondence that van de Velde was closely connected to theorists such as T  odor de Wyzewa, Paul Signac, and Seurat. Where van de Velde’s contribution differs from others’ is that he adopts it as a condition in all of the arts regardless of medium. We might then, consider a comparison between *Chahut* and a built interior from 1898 Salon “Arts and Crafts” in The Hague [Figure 125, 126].³⁶¹ Both of the works employ a stunning degree of attention to optical effects, line, and repetitive pattern. Consider the upswept decorative elements encircling the ceiling of the room, their mirroring on the fireplace and against the window. They operate similarly to the legs of the dancers in Seurat’s picture, to

³⁶¹ The comparison between van de Velde and Seurat’s *Chahut* is made in the opening essay of the issue of *L’Art d  coratif* dedicated to Henry van de Velde. The essay stresses the relation between the painting and van de Velde’s own pictorial works rather than across the two media. The discussion turns on the influence of the theories of Charles Henry in *Quelques aper  us sur l’esth  tique des formes* (1895) in which he recites the calculated effects of lines and color in the forms of an ordinary object or in ornamentation. The author also cites the research of Chevreul on the immutable laws of colors and the expression of the line. Intriguingly, this follows a comment on the oft-held accusation pointed toward van de Velde— the absence of a connection to the external world. See *L’Art d  coratif* 1 (October 1898): 7.

the repetitive manipulation of paint and color, to the evocative and heightened visuality of the painting where the environment is immediately, visually charged. In both cases, the instantaneously apprehended and elemental colors and forms were understood to literally and universally effect a deeply-felt experience of emotional connectivity—the lines of the ceiling decorations and the forms of the dancers legs, with their diagonally upswept lines, effect a response of *gaité*—and achieve a connection to the world outside of themselves through a science of human perception unfettered by culture and the realm of high art. Color and form are here not illusionistic or naturalistic but artifactual materials experienced in a universally intimate way thereby effectively connecting the individual to the real world.

This emphasis on materials over and above concerns of medium was most keenly referenced when van de Velde succinctly stated his goal in those years: to create work that employed “materials as malleable as sentences and as supple as thought.”³⁶² The use of the word “materials” is crucial. His understanding was not that paint specifically should affect these vital responses, nor was it that wrought-iron banisters or decorative wallpapers in three-dimensional environments should solely claim this capacity. In 1893 he reiterated such a conviction directly, indicating that the media of pastel and tapestry, so long as they adhere to the laws of lines and colors, are no more or less “truthful” than one another.³⁶³ Such a leveling out of artistic media by treating them as distinct materials that constitute the environment offers a powerful model for

³⁶² « ce rêve va pouvoir se réaliser de matériaux ductiles qu'on tordra comme des phrases et qui seront aussi souples que la Pensée ». Van de Velde, *Déblaiement*, 21.

The Getty Research Institute holds a collection of correspondence between van de Velde and his Neo-Impressionist colleagues on topics ranging from the uses of “pure” form, psychophysical aesthetics, and personal exchanges between friends. This collection predominantly features correspondence with Paul Signac, Téodor de Wyzewa, and Théo van Rysselberghe from the late 1890s to the 1920s. Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

³⁶³ Fs X 38, “Tapisserie” (1893), Fonds van de Velde, Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Bibliothèque Royale Albert I, Brussels.

reconsidering aspects of van de Velde's practice.

If materials were the impetus then the binding thread was the *rythme intime*, a phrase van de Velde borrowed from a popular 1890s text by art critic and anarchist Jacques Mésnil. It indicated a sort of interiority that was individually experienced yet universally affective. In the realm of architecture and design, these tenets resonated with taxonomies of ornament and contentions as to the representational burden of ornamentation emerging at the time. They also drew from an explicitly racist logic of "primitive" forms that, in the Belgian context, were somewhat informed by the contemporaneous, highly visible, and phenomenally devastating exploits in the Congo Free State.

The same lines, curves, and colorations that were examined within a universalist logic of optics and visual responsiveness were also discussed in terms of the "*style Congo*" and the "*ligne belge*."³⁶⁴ Art Nouveau designers such as van de Velde, Paul Hankar and Victor Horta were deeply implicated in the ideology of formalism partially derived from the culture of colonial exploitation. Most obviously, Van de Velde and Horta were charged with designing the interior of the exhibition of African objects at the 1897 Colonial Exhibition in Tervuren and made use of the same formal vocabulary we see in van de Velde's interior designs. That same year, in a review of the exhibition of *La Libre esthétique*, a reviewer described the Art Nouveau interiors of Brussels as embodying the essential forms of the flora and fauna of the Congo.³⁶⁵ Years later, van de Velde outlined the terms of a "new ornament"—an organic and essential form that he referenced as the "dynamagoc line," supposedly drawn from peoples unfettered by culture, that

³⁶⁴ See Silverman, "Art Nouveau, Art of Darkness," (2011).

³⁶⁵ "Les industries d'art au Salon de la Libre Esthétique," *Art et Décoration: Revue mensuelle d'art moderne* 3 (March 1897): 44.

would, so he thought, achieve a realism and a return to life [Figures 127, 128]³⁶⁶ This return to life turned on an understanding of unvarnished, literal reality that envisaged form, be it architectural or pictorial, as indicative of an essential truth that was ultimately informed by a racist ideology propagated by present colonial realities.

The socialist fascination with the perceived social equanimity derived from the use of “primitive” forms is troubling and profoundly paradoxical. This iteration of socialist aesthetics employed the logic of a rather base, underlying, and common set of forms that paralleled this explicitly racist logic of form. Van de Velde himself describes the forms in his furnishings, textiles, and wallpapers as “uncultured” and with origins in “primitive civilizations.”³⁶⁷ In searching out an aesthetic that would unthether the beholder from the bonds of bourgeois exclusion, it must be acknowledged that van de Velde appealed to an aesthetic that in some ways undermined that very project by employing an equally oppressive logic of another sort. This appeal to primitivism in service of an ostensibly social aim is echoed far beyond van de Velde’s particular practice: in the Alois Riegl’s *Stilfragen* (1893), he argues that successive iterations of ornamentation corresponded to an increase in intelligence as a result of “racial development.” Echoes of such determinism could be heard throughout European intellectual circles in this moment and in texts from Riegl to Wölfflin to Blanc, and presage Georg Simmel’s essays on ornament from 1907-8 which demonstrated how universal, decorative forms might connect individual subject to mass, collective experience.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ H. van de Velde, unpublished manuscript (1900?), Fs X 42, Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Bibliothèque royale Albert I, Brussels.

³⁶⁷ « Je déclarais — sans plus — que tout être qui n’avait pas perdu absolument la conscience des besoins les plus normaux de notre existence matérielle pouvait ce qu’avaient pu les êtres aux premières de notre humanité et les plus arrières de civilisations primitives ». Van de Velde, “Aperçus en vue d’une synthèse d’art” (1896).

³⁶⁸ See Georg Simmel, “Das Problem des Stiles,” *Dekorative Kunst*, 11, 7 (1908): 307–16.

The construction of surfaces that were assumed to elicit an intimate, charged effect regardless of intellectual ambition or cultivation can be seen across van de Velde's interiors from this period. We see this utility of form in the bedroom from the 1898 Munich exposition, Herbert Esche's living room in Chemnitz, and to a lesser extent in the interiors at Bloemenwerf. Such use of form resonated with architectural projects outside of Belgium as well. One might consider the interior in August Endell's Atelier Elvira in Munich (1898) [Figure 129, 130] as an intriguing cognate to this tendency. His evocative forms, whiplash curves, and enlivened surfaces appeared to glitter and vibrate upon encounter. This was complemented by his own views on design as expressed in an 1896 review of the Munich exhibition of decorative arts. In Endell's treatises, *On Beauty* (1896) and *Possibility and Goal of a New Architecture* (1898), one hears reverberations of van de Velde. He encouraged artists to become more empathetic, emotional, and less intellectual. By diverging from more outwardly tectonic or rationalist tendencies, Endell believed that architects might achieve something of the relation between art and life that his Belgian colleague initially found in the language of painterly form. Endell maintained that the architect should work in form and color because "a sense of form is the basic precondition of all architectural creation: it cannot be intellectually learned...The architect must be a *form-artist*."³⁶⁹

The architect as form-artist takes on new meaning when elaborated in the context of van de Velde's project from the 1890s. He imagined the interior as an imagistic optical field wherein intimate experience and universal engagement were not mutually exclusive. Thus, we ought to understand "form" in terms more similar to its use in pictorial arts than its application in three-dimensional ones. Van de Velde's dining room exhibited in The Hague in 1898 in this sense

³⁶⁹ "Der Architekt muss Formkünstler sein, nur durch die reine Formkunst führt der Weg zu einer neuen Architektur." August Endell, "Möglichkeit und Ziele einer neuen Architektur." Endell, *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* 3 (March 1898): 141. See also Endell, *Um die Schönheit: Eine Paraphrase über die Münchener Kunstausstellung in 1896* (Munich: Franke, 1896).

behaved very much like Endell's interior. In the Elvira example, the whole space appears more like a screen rather than a collection of spatial units compiling to form a program. Standing back from a distance, looking upon the interior, it appears as an illusion of deceptively unified two-dimensionality—a subjective surface as opposed to an objective flat plane of a canvas, though carries out much of the same effects in the experience of the viewer.³⁷⁰ Similarly, van de Velde manipulated the environment of the interior so as to refuse a sense of physical enclosure in a spatially complex environment. The balance of the dark bottom half of the walls and lighter top half, the repeated floral motifs on the fireplace, the side walls, and down the legs of the furnishings are woven together into a unified and all-over experience for the eyes. This room appears like a screen, an image, upon which forms and colors were arranged for a viewer not entirely compelled to move throughout the space.

The comparison with Endell could easily be reinforced by a broader set of examples. Such “optical interiors” appear in Josef Hoffmann's Palais Stoclet in Brussels [Figures 131, 132], and in the work of Joseph Maria Olbrich, and Charles Rennie Mackintosh. In slightly varying ways, each celebrates an interior architecture of colorful surface pattern with overlapping layers of decoration and psychologically immersive synthesis. Hoffmann, for one, extensively adorned the surfaces of his walls, and coordinated these with glittering, sumptuous paintings by Gustave Klimt. Here we must distinguish between two different surfaces—the evocative surface of three-dimensional objects, walls, and ornamentations in the rooms; and what we might think of as a surface of the image, a pictorial screen that the viewer perceived optically and all at once. For Hoffmann and for van de Velde, the surfaces of the interior—the walls, textiles, built-in furnishings—functioned not as simply expressions of the structure of individual

³⁷⁰ I am here borrowing this terminology of the “subjective surface” and its effects from Riegl. See Alois Riegl, *Historical Grammar of the Fine Arts* (1897-98) (New York: Zone Books, 2014), 188-189.

objects, nor as wrapping to interiorized tectonic space, but rather as components of an open, woven together, visual and perceptual field. Through their stunningly ornamental and visually synthetic presentation, these interiors could be perceived *as pictures*, and offered themselves over to visual (rather than immediately tactile) apprehension. They appeared as an integral pictorial field conceived by Riegl's as a "solid surface of color" that stitched together the visually enlivened surface of (three-dimensional) forms into a productive hybrid of both. These interiors offer themselves up to the eye all at once; they stimulate a disembodied vision and prompt a powerful, interiorized response. Just as paintings such as *Chahut*, having shed their heavy frames and theatrical subject matter, operated as components of a shared, communal reality in which the viewer was a part, van de Velde's interiors offered an intimate arena for aesthetic reflection but did so without recourse to isolation or enclosure.

While Hoffmann and Endell's interiors are similarly visually scintillating, the affinities they share with van de Velde's only take us so far. Upon entering the Elvira Store, one projects oneself empathically, but also literally, into the space. One can see the undulating iron from all angles and is guided up the stairway.³⁷¹ While similarly ornamental, van de Velde's interiors, however, encourage a much more frontal view. The dining room from The Hague exposition for instance, is evocative to the eye and the light streaming in would have enlivened the visual effects. However, there is only room for the roving eye here. There is little spatial manipulation of that visual absorption, no invocation to see the room from multiple angles. Given the placement of the decorative forms on only one side of the furniture, and the majority of ornaments on only the one wall, the viewing position is more or less fixed. This is space that

³⁷¹ This is somewhat similar to Horta's *Hôtel Tassel* wherein one is first led through the central winter garden and then the salon which functions as a set of spatial sequences available from all angles as the viewer is guided through.

does not encourage the viewer to physically enter or circulate and therefore is more like a certain type of modern picture than a spatial program. Likewise, it does not offer itself over to an oblique-angle viewpoint that might, as in the Lefébure photograph of Bloemenwerf that began this section, compel a slicing through and puncturing of the integrity of the screen. Instead, it first visually captivates the viewer with a “solid surface of color” wherein the whole image is seen from a distance and taken in all at once, just as one would view a large painting on the wall. Only after does it draw its viewer in to a near view of individual objects in the room—the fireplace and objects on the mantel, the wooden chair, the side desk— highlighting their tactile, three-dimensional effects. Van de Velde’s “optical interiors” shuttle between these two poles; they are both opened up and enclosing, imagistic optical surfaces, and evocative three-dimensional environments no longer confined within the heavy walls of the apartment.³⁷² His interiors are equal parts tectonic space and imagistic tableau; interior space and “frontal,” open pictorial field.³⁷³

Whereas the more familiar architectural theory of surface aesthetics by Gottfried Semper emphasized the “directionality” of space as a function of surface—the carpet should point to access routes and the floor design should emphasize spatiality—van de Velde’s interiors somewhat differ. They operate more like the surfaces of grand paintings wherein ornaments, motifs, space, and line are stitched together in a visually animated “membrane.” There is an ideal

³⁷² Again, these terms “near view” and “distant view” as well as its effect (“a solid surface of color”) are from Riegl’s terminology. See Riegl, *Historical Grammar*, 187.

My use of “opticality” here, it should be noted, does not connote autonomy as in a later modernist model, but instead pursues the conditions for a powerfully enacted “realist” connectivity between the two-dimensional surface and the embodied, perceiving viewer.

³⁷³ This issue of “frontality” is interestingly found in Le Corbusier’s Cubist paintings where, as Rosalind Krauss has maintained, the viewer is confronted with “pictorial space...which cannot be entered or circulated through; it is irredeemably space viewed from a distance, and is therefore eternally resigned to frontality.” Rosalind E. Krauss, “Léger, Le Corbusier, and Purism,” *Artforum* (April 1972): 52.

position at which to view the interior of the dining rooms from The Hague with their all-over, screen-like qualities, and it is the same position from which to view a large Neo-Impressionist canvas— from a distance of several meters in front, and straight on.

This representation of the interior as optical environment—as a something of a pictorial surface, while also retaining its status as a built, three-dimensional environment—represents an alternative to another paradigm of the architectural interior at this moment. In 1898, when van de Velde was still working in Belgium, though his works were traveling throughout Central Europe, and just after Endell had implored architects to be form-artists, Adolf Loos wrote his now iconic treatise interrogating Semper’s ideas, *The Principle of Cladding*. He proclaimed:

The architect’s general task is to provide a warm and livable space. Carpets are warm and livable. He decides for this reason to spread out one carpet on the floor and to hang up four to form the walls. But you cannot build a house out of carpets. Both the carpet on the floor and the tapestry on the wall require a structural frame to hold them in place. To invent this frame is the architect’s second task... There are architects who work in a different way. Their imagination does not form spaces, but sections of walls. That which is leftover around the walls then forms rooms.³⁷⁴

For Loos, the architectural materials of the interior are space and mass. For him, surfaces are dressings which contain and enclose space, carpets are tectonic and envelop the inhabitant, provide warmth and physical sensations. The practice of building interiors for Loos is the practice of constructing and manipulating inhabitable space in which bodies are compelled to move throughout rather than make room for the roaming eye of a comparatively immobile viewer.³⁷⁵ In Loos’ case, nothing is “merely decoration” for, as he notoriously made clear in

³⁷⁴ Adolf Loos, “The Principle of Cladding” (1888), in *Spoken into the Void*, 66.

³⁷⁵ This of course follows from Adolf von Hildebrand’s now-iconic statement in *Das Problem der Form in der Bildende Kunst* (1893) that architecture distinguishes itself from all other arts by its primary concern — space.

Ornament and Crime (1908), decoration is directly linked to social degeneration rather than social synthesis. For him, images and optical effects dematerialize reality and destroy any essential harmony of living. In his view, the progressive, modern interior should be restrained in its ornamentation and designed for a body to move about and to *live* in. As distinct from van de Velde's pictorial metaphor, Loos conceived of the interior with a theatrical one—as a stage set for everyday living.³⁷⁶ It was also, however, wholly closed off, hidden by the mask of an austere façade, containing small enclaves and complex sequences of spatial enclosures inside.

Whereas the van de Velde bedroom from 1898 is enlivened by dynamic surfaces on the walls, textiles, and furnishings, creating for the viewer a screen stitched together for the eye to traverse, the bedroom design for Lina Loos is comparatively banal to our vision [Figure 133]. It invites us to imagine the body immersed in those plush carpets, the corner bedroom, and beneath the hanging curtains. There are no evocative, painterly forms; dazzlingly imagistic patterns are nowhere to be found. Though both are built interiors, the van de Velde more similarly evokes the effects of a spectacular, evocative picture whereas the Loos interior is principally an inviting space.³⁷⁷ Whereas form and utility as they are mobilized by Loos have been traditionally interpreted as more socially engaged, van de Velde's optical interiors evince a wholly different tack at the problem of the social. Though he has eschewed artistic form in service of a social aim, in Loos' model bourgeois comforts are fully supported through a functional and spatial plan that is meant to serve as stage for the routines of normal living rather than a screen to view from a

³⁷⁶ For an astute discussion of this “theater box,” see Beatriz Colomina, “Intimacy and Spectacle: The Interiors of Adolf Loos,” *AA Files* 20 (Autumn 1990): 5-15.

³⁷⁷ This interior—this “bag of fur and cloth”—has been compared to a womb by Beatriz Colomina in her intriguing analysis of the gendered nature of Loos' interiors and his use of space “as we feel it.” Colomina quotes a turn of phrase by José Quetglas by describing this interior as an “architecture of pleasure,” and “an architecture of the womb.” Beatriz Colomina, “The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism,” in *Sexuality and Space*, ed. B. Colomina and J. Bloomer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 92.

distance [Figure 134, 135]. This is a different execution from the traditional bourgeois, bibelot-filled interior from earlier in the century; however, it similarly provides a “safe and secure position” in which the inhabitant might feel at home, secured from the invasiveness of the street. In direct opposition to Loos’ mandates for a modern interior, van de Velde in this instance instead embraces surface and image not to delineate space but to render the possibility of an interiorized experience commensurate with, and connected to, a broader reality outside the bounds of bourgeois enclosure. In his ideal social(ist) world, this reality would, of course, have no need for protection.

The Interior Leaves the Home

Van de Velde’s strategy for disrupting an essential division on which bourgeois society was founded—the creation of an interior that was radically separated from the exterior—operated by conceiving the built interior as somewhat pictorial. His investment in the formal logic of Neo-Impressionist “realism” and his intimation of an ideal, frontal viewing perspective provided the basis for his plotted renegotiation of the interior’s received, entrenched, terms. As I have argued, this interior operated like an image, exhibiting many affinities with contemporaneous large-scale pointillist painting. However, this likeness could only be taken so far and ultimately comprised a subjective surface—a deceptively unified view that appeared to the eye like a two-dimensional screen—while in actuality they were, of course, three-dimensional environments.³⁷⁸ These interiors did, however, also exist as literal images—as

³⁷⁸ This terminology of a “subjective surface” is Riegl’s. He defines such a view as that which appears as a surface from a distant viewpoint, though in reality it is merely an illusion of visual faculties. This, he opposes to the “objective” surface that comprises the sides of a three-dimensional form, readily apparent upon close inspection. See Riegl, *Historical Grammar*, 189.

commercial photographs and exhibitions displays. In fact, more than any architect of this moment, van de Velde immersed the interior in the emerging language of mass culture. In so doing, he did in essence release the bourgeois interior from the traditional cloisters of the home. However, the question of what form this took and where it ended up has yet to be resolved.

Through such a language of mass culture, the 1890s interiors traveled not only outside the home but also across Western Europe in popular exhibitions, as well as well-circulated decorating journals and commercial catalogues. In so doing, they retained their status as somewhat private spaces while also constructing a strategic relationship with mass media wherein the experience of the individual, intimate environment was tied to that of the collective in an entirely new, complex way. This immersion held within it a rather striking irony: the interior, founded upon an opposition to the world of the masses, the market, and commodity culture, was now operating in the language of its antithesis. Van de Velde's final experiment was his most modern move yet. By immersing the interior into these forms of communication, he proposed a new configuration of the interior's relation to the modern world and consequently brought to bear the changing nature of such a collective, and the bourgeoisie itself, in the years around 1900.

An evocative visuality and emphasis on surface are among the many commonalities between van de Velde's "optical" interiors exhibited at Bing's in 1895 or The Hague in 1898, and Endell's Elvira Store or Hoffmann's Palais Stoclet; however, there remains one particularly salient difference. Despite his rhetoric of aesthetics and practical utility, the majority of van de Velde's interiors from the 1890s were not made to be inhabited or used. Even the designs that were executed for individuals were not thoroughly lived in—the van de Veldes occupied Bloemenwerf for a matter of months, and the room designed for Count Kessler at Hohenhof was

only occupied on rare occasion. Instead, his output in the 1890s was dominated by a rigorous international program of public exhibition of model interiors destined for display alone, operating more like prototype images than realized homes. It was only in 1899 that he began to seriously acquire customers and commissions for private homes.³⁷⁹ So while these interiors were functionally freed of conventional constrictions of daily use, they were instead put to work for larger representational tasks. Given his background as an artist, as well as his previous involvement with exhibition societies such as *L'Association pour l'art* in Antwerp, and later *Les XX* and *La Libre esthétique* in Brussels, it is perhaps little surprise that van de Velde prioritized high-profile exhibitions, in both public venues and in private galleries, even after his turn to the applied arts.

While his program of exhibitions was certainly noteworthy for its intensity, this strategy was part and parcel of a larger exhibitionary trend. In 1892, both *Les XX* and *L'Association pour l'art* introduced applied arts into their more familiar display programs of painting and sculpture. The latter exhibited paintings and posters by van de Velde, Seurat, Bonnard, and Toulouse-Lautrec in a single row along the wall, incorporating ceramics by French designer August Delaherche into this format normally reserved for display of the fine arts [Figure 136, 137]. This integration of the applied arts, however, swiftly evolved into the exhibition of entire interior environments displayed to a wide, middle-class public. In Belgium, this tendency was largely indebted to the overwhelmingly positive reception of one such exhibition in Liège of interiors

³⁷⁹ Van de Velde et Co. was founded in late 1897 with a quickly established customer base, 80% of whom were German. These conditions led to the firm's relocation to Berlin in 1900.

crafted by Belgian designer, Gustave Serrurier-Bovy in 1896.³⁸⁰ Of course, in the international context such a model was soon after demonstrated in the full interiors at Art Nouveau Bing in Paris and subsequently in a similar gallery run by Julius Meier-Graefe, Maison d'Art Moderne, on Brussels' Avenue de la Toison d'Or.

As we have seen, in 1895 van de Velde executed the bedroom, dining room, and smoking room that were shown for four months at Bing's gallery in Paris, and then traveled to Dresden in 1897. Other interiors were featured in that Dresden exhibition and in the Salon "Arts and Crafts" at The Hague [Figures 138, 139]. His robust and frequent contributions to these shows compelled him to create interiors specifically for these venues and, subsequently, his designs (along with those by his contemporary, Victor Horta) came to stand for Belgian modern design itself in the popular imagination. Fully constructed as three-dimensional spaces that included furnishings, lighting, wallpapers, and textiles, his interior designs were however physically cordoned off so as to restrict circulation and perambulation by visitors. As is most clear in a view of the bedroom from "Salon Arts and Crafts," the rooms on display were "framed" by ornamental archways that mimicked the motifs found inside the room [Figure 140]. These devices served to demarcate the space of the viewer from the display, and provided the perspicuous sense of peering through a window (or picture) frame into an environment in which the viewer might imaginatively project herself, but could not physically enter. Significantly, designs were installed elevated on a platform slightly raised above floor-level and therefore functioned as something akin to a stage,

³⁸⁰ This trend of a growing number of *maisons* for public exhibition, in the model of Bing's Parisian gallery, was particularly pronounced in Belgium. Other notable examples included a similar display undertaken by Mm. Uiterwijk and Cie for the "Arts and Crafts" exhibition in The Hague (in which van de Velde participated) and the galleries of Mm. Keller and Reiner in Berlin. See "Chronique de l'Art décoratif," *L'Art décoratif* 1 (October 1898): 48.

inhibiting normal circulation while also serving to offer the work up to the audience's view.³⁸¹ This orientation, combined with the directives of the "frame," established that these interiors were meant to be viewed from a specific, frontal viewpoint, and by the eye alone.³⁸² These displays were primarily meant to be consumed visually and relatively instantaneously—in distant, optical terms first and as useful, livable, tactile environments second.³⁸³ As I have demonstrated, there is one ideal place from which to view the decorative wallpapers, patterning on the pillow shams and its repetition in the bedframe and moldings. That place is directly in front, and from several meters back. Doing so allows one to take in the scene all at once and see the entirety of the room as an imagistic visual field. The body, in this instance, was implicated not by its immersion in space "as we feel it" as in the case of Loos, but rather by keeping the body *out* it operated as a visual screen interface that was transposed into space.

The interior in these temporary exhibitions was thus available for nearly immediate consumption to a public wider than ever before. The asylum of the bourgeoisie, the cloistered extensions of the private self, was now available for immediate consumption by hundreds of viewers each day for the price of an entry ticket. The slow duration implicit in lived routines of the domestic realm was here evacuated and in its place was one directly available to many eyes.

³⁸¹ This method of exhibiting interiors on a raised platform is still used today. A notable example is the display of Belgian Art Nouveau interiors in the Musée d'Orsay.

The comparison might be made here to the period room of the early-twentieth century American museum, however the difference is of course that this device was conceived with the express purpose of "entering into" a period distant from one's own. In van de Velde's configuration, physical entry was not permitted.

³⁸² Christian Witt-Döring refers to such a "frame" as one of the defining literal and conceptual features of artistically-designed ephemeral exhibition spaces in turn-of-the-century Vienna. He recounts its centrality to the logic of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and "communication of content through osmosis." See *Josef Hoffmann: Interiors 1902-1913*, ed. C. Witt-Döring (Neue Gallerie Museum for German and Austrian Art New York; Prestel, 2006), 36.

³⁸³ This is the inverse ordering of the ideal viewing mode (as espoused by Riegl in his attribution of the near, or tactile, view and the distant, or optical, view) desired by many of the modernists. For this issue as it relates to photography of Bauhaus textile designs see T'ai Smith, "Limits of the Tactile and the Optical: Bauhaus Fabric in the Frame of Photography," *Grey Room* 1, 25 (January 2006): 6-31.

One reviewer in Dresden reported a sudden “*frappe*” upon seeing the displays—an all-over visual shock that hit him instantaneously.³⁸⁴ The space and time of taking tea and retiring to one’s drawing room was now sped up, and opened out, so as to be consumed by the salon-going masses in a matter of seconds.³⁸⁵

While van de Velde certainly did open up the interior into the wider world, he also brought the far reaches of the world inside. Through materials and motifs—decidedly British textiles, exotic Congolese hardwoods, and dynamagoc lines—he collected from the reaches of the wider world, gathering them in the interior not as fetishized *objets* but as powerfully suggestive motifs of both universal affect and decidedly global reach. One critic in 1897, commenting on the display of a dining room by Victor Horta at *La Libre esthétique*, noted that these modern Belgian designers had undeniably “brought the organic motifs and the materials of the Congo into the Bruxelloise private home.”³⁸⁶ The interiors were instantaneously available, opened up to the language of the masses and to consuming the world in a single sweep. It was, to invoke Benjamin’s words, an “interior which brings together remote locales and memories of the past,” and in this sense operates as “a box in the theater of the world.”³⁸⁷ An older model of time and space of the interior that prized enclosure, duration, and compression was now replaced with the new understanding of bourgeois experience dominated by disclosure, instantaneity, expansion. Such a manipulation logically led to a series of more concrete questions: was the

³⁸⁴ In so doing, this echoed van de Velde’s own experience of having been “bouleversée” in front of Seurat’s picture exhibited at Les XX in 1887.

³⁸⁵ A tension between “the instant” and “consciousness of eternity” is a fundamental paradox introduced by Kierkegaard that he thinks central to modern human existence. It is given is granted acute, and rather unexpected, resonance here. See Soren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* (1843), trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J., 1987), 58-60.

³⁸⁶ “Les industries d’art au Salon de la Libre Esthétique,” *Art et Décoration: Revue mensuelle d’art moderne* 3 (March 1897): 44.

³⁸⁷ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 19.

interior so displayed public or private? Proximate or wide open? Image or space?³⁸⁸ Considering these interiors in such a way—as intimate physical spaces offered up as pictorial screens for public consumption—summons important questions for our own time as well precisely because of their imbrication in the habitual modifications of capitalist, consumer desire conceived as profoundly intimate while also abstractly undifferentiated.

These questions were only exacerbated by a prolific program of photographic reproduction. While van de Velde's designs were certainly known through exhibition both at home and abroad, it was his unprecedented course of photographic documentation that laid out these issues with particular lucidity. To this day, Lefébure's photographs of Bloemenwerf function as icons of Belgian Art Nouveau architecture. The images of Maria Sèthe wearing a reform gown designed by van de Velde and set against the Arts and Crafts wallpaper were, and have remained, demonstrative of the fin-de-siècle artistic renaissance in modernizing Belgium [Figure 141]. As early as 1881, mass-printed images of architectural scenes appeared in high-volume print publications; however, the frequency with which they appeared was significantly amplified after about 1895 with the development of half-tone printing.³⁸⁹ Right around this time, photographs of van de Velde interiors appeared in nearly every print journal dedicated to arts and decoration from across Western Europe. The French periodical *Art et décoration*, for example, featured a single page article entitled "Un intérieur moderne" in September 1897, with an image of the dining room at Bloemenwerf taking up half of the page.³⁹⁰ The British publication, *The*

³⁸⁸ These questions were initially posed by Beatriz Colomina regarding the work of Adolf Loos and architectural media. Their relevance to van de Velde's case and the culture of the interior more broadly around 1898 struck me as startlingly incisive. See Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*, 4.

³⁸⁹ Anthony Burton, "Nineteenth Century Periodicals," in *The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines*, eds. Trevor Fawcett and Clive Phillpott (London: The Art Book Company, 1976), 9.

³⁹⁰ M.P.V. "Un Intérieur moderne," *Art et décoration* 3 (March 1897).

Studio, in September 1896 published photos of an interior decorated with panels by the French painter Albert Besnard, and in 1899 the German publication *Innen-Dekoration* published a swath of photos of fully articulated interior scenes by van de Velde as well.³⁹¹

The most notable however, was the publication of an issue of *L'Art décoratif* entirely dedicated to van de Velde in October 1898.³⁹² It featured a biographical essay, his own writings, examples of his ornamental designs, and large photographs of his interiors [Figure 142]. Whereas other publications had more commonly provided instructions for how one might decorate one's home by following a set of ordered principles, offering images of individual pieces of furniture, wallpaper samples, lighting that might suit those directives, *l'Art décoratif* offered up the interiors all at once. An issue of the Belgian decorative arts journal *La Gerbe*, for instance, featured an extended article on home decoration which was accompanied by several photographs—a chandelier by Gisbert Comaz, wallpaper and textile designs by Léon Bochons, and individual pieces of furniture by Wilhelm Hols and Paul Hamesse [Figures 144].³⁹³ *L'Art décoratif* by comparison featured full-page spreads of a van de Velde bedroom, a salon, a sitting room, and when individual elements were featured it was only to reiterate their cohesion with the full interiors featured. It was as if his entire interiors were transported on the pages of the journal. In so doing, they also deviated from other circulated interior scenes that propagated an aristocratic or historicist interior as we might encounter in albums of notables photographed in their abodes such as in *Nos contemporains chez eux* [Figure 144], and instead widely promoted a fresh image of fashionable, reformed, middle-class individualism.

The mass dissemination of photographic images did indeed open up the interior to the

³⁹¹ “Studio Talk,” in *The Studio* 7, no. 37 (15 April 1895).

³⁹² The same issue was published in German for the journal, *Dekorative Kunst* (also under the directorship of Julius Meier-Graefe).

³⁹³ “L’art d’ameublement,” *La Gerbe: Revue d’art décoratif Belge* 4 (November 1898).

world, however this too had a double charge. While the interior was opened up, the exterior was also let in. The great majority of readers of *L'Art décoratif* and similar publications consulted these publications at home, and immersed themselves in the pages as they would a book while seated in a comfortable armchair.³⁹⁴ Increased literacy amongst the middle class, the development of cheap reproduction technology, and the marketing of interior decoration as a leisure pastime for women all encouraged the upswing in this domestic activity.³⁹⁵ While the interior was, through reproduction and circulation, immersed in this public medium, it was also consumed individually, contemplatively, in the comfort of one's own home. The interior *as image* was publicized so as to be consumed in an act of solitary experience and intimacy that occurred when an individual held up a copy of *L'Art décoratif* and traveled in their most interiorized thoughts through the individual "rooms" on the page. Contemporary accounts of intimacy associated with the reading, with the sensual feel of paper, and a rarefied sense in which one might silently peer into the homes of others from one's own interior furthered this complex conflation of public intimacy. The mass-produced journal in some ways took on the role of the interior itself, becoming the site where the experience of interiorized contemplation, individual reflection, and private retreat was cultivated in the form of a mass commodity. Surfaces of the printed pages became both practical objects of attention but also objects of conceptual,

³⁹⁴ A characterization of the armchair as the quintessential quell to the modern stimulus is taken up by several writers as the stand-in for the interior around 1900. Julius Meier-Graefe, for instance, associated the armchair with the dream-like repose of the bourgeois interior in his "Das moderne Milieu" (1901). Henri Matisse recalled in his "Notes of a Painter" (1908) that he dreamed of « un art d'équilibre, de pureté, de tranquillité, sans sujet inquiétant ou préoccupant, qui soit, pour travailleur cérébral, pour l'homme d'affaires aussi bien que pour l'artiste de lettres, par exemple, un lénifiant, un calmant cérébral, quelque chose d'analogue à un bon fauteuil qui le délaisse de ses fatigues physiques ». Henri Matisse, "Notes d'un peintre," *La Grande revue* 52, no. 24 (25 December 1908): 741-2.

³⁹⁵ As Kathryn Brown has thoughtfully argued, these developments made interiority portable—the interiorized activity of reading could be bought, sold, reproduced, and transported, to a degree heretofore unknown. Brown, *Women Readers* (2012)

interiorized contemplation.

It thus became a medium through which a renegotiation between inside and outside, individual and social world, was conducted. On the one hand and under the auspices of political ambitions, van de Velde opened up the interior to the wider world, creatively negating its powerful associations with bourgeois isolation. On the other hand, however, that opening up occurred under the terms of bourgeois consumption rather than the socialist awakening that he had imagined just a few years prior. The same photographs that appeared in *L'Art décoratif* in 1898 also appeared in an advertising and commercial campaign for the decorative firm of *H. van de Velde et Cie : industries d'art et d'ornementation*. The catalogue, published in both French and German in 1899, features the very photographs that are so familiar from these years. Under the title “*boudoir*” is the image of the sitting area in Chemnitz interior with a following page itemizing the various furnishings, under “*chambre à coucher*” appears the image of the interior exhibited at The Hague, under the “*cabinet de travail*” is the office shown in Munich in 1898 [Figures 145,148]. This rather elaborate marketing campaign allowed for the expansive reach of these interiors, and also for the now iconic van de Velde brand insignia that he developed directly from the dynamagoc lines of extant furnishings. The insignia appeared everywhere from stationery to advertisements [Figure 149] as if the motifs of the interior were trickling out onto the page and traveling through the post.

By means of this brand development in the final years of the 1890s, the dynamic waves, swooping curves, and bold areas of solid pigment that were found in the interiors, on pillow shams, and climbing up fireplaces, were now extracted and placed into advertisements [Figure 150]. In journals from across Western Europe, Van de Velde’s design firm was represented as a commodity in the language of the masses by means of a simple, ornamental fragment of the

larger decorative program. A formal motif of the private interior had also come to metonymically stand for the whole of the commercial enterprise.

This was most notable in the advertisement for the Continental Havana Company in Berlin [Figure 151]. Van de Velde created a formally compelling and recognizable advertising form so as to appeal to the desire of middle-class consumers. When the store was unveiled in 1900, that very insignia and its associated motifs were unveiled to have been integrated into the interior design [Figure 152]. The language of the bourgeoisie—of advertising, commerce, self-fashioning, and mass culture—had been brought into the interior. Whereas the asylum of the aesthete collector had previously been stuffed with textiles, figurines, clocks, furnishings, family mementos, lamps, and books, this interior of a commercial space was similarly stocked, not with objects divulging the character of the bourgeois individual, but rather with the indicators of another sort of bourgeois individualism—consumer desire in the mass market.

The interior in van de Velde's case had now become a site of topographical contradictions, that, as Walter Benjamin imagined, could not withstand the exterior.³⁹⁶ The exterior, however, also intermingled with the interior. This result was not the socialist utopia that van de Velde had imagined in the *Déblaiement*, but rather a new middle-class interior that responded to the shifts in the bourgeoisie and its relation to design itself. This was not a bourgeoisie defined by a sense of isolation from the public realm or the market, from the life of politics and the street, but rather one profoundly imbricated in consumer culture, modern communication, and production. The interior was opened up to the masses; however, those masses were not the disenfranchised collective that van de Velde and his colleagues had invoked in 1893, but rather the changed face of the bourgeoisie. Van de Velde's interiors at this moment

³⁹⁶ “With Van de Velde, the house becomes the plastic expression of the personality.” Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (1939), 20-21.

therefore performed a double operation: they erupted the private into the public, as several cultural theorists have propounded, while also inviting the public into the private.³⁹⁷ The former most thoroughly resonates with Walter Benjamin's assertion that with modernity, "the living room appears on the street" and for the flâneur the exterior becomes the private dwelling wherein "he is as much at home among the facades of houses as the citizen is in his four walls. To him, the shiny, enameled signs of businesses are at least as good of a wall ornament as an oil painting is to a bourgeois in his salon."³⁹⁸ This was not, however, the entirety of the van de Velde effect, for the public also erupted into the private. His interiors therefore maintained something of a perforated boundary where interior and exterior, individual and social intermingled without fully dissolving their walls.³⁹⁹ We might return to those prophetic lines in the *Déblaiement* wherein he writes that "[L]andscapes" after all, "are rooms that can be chosen at will."⁴⁰⁰ Rooms, however, were also opened up to the world.

This interior therefore might best be understood not through the metaphor of erosion from the inside so often connected with the Art Nouveau, but rather by reorganization of an

³⁹⁷ On this "eruptions from inside" in the context of van de Velde, see Adolf Loos, "Poor Little Rich Man" (1900). See also Walter Benjamin's claim expressed in his notes on the Jugendstil which he claims that the interior is liquidated with van de Velde.

Where privacy might normally indicate a right to remain "out of the picture," the conditions of modern technology and lived experience coincides, as Beatriz Colomina has so aptly put it, with the publicity of the private. Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*, 269.

This conflation of public and private is also redolent of discourses on reproductive technologies, particularly photography. Barthes writes: "[T]he age of photography corresponds precisely to the irruption of the private into the public, or rather, to the creation of a new social value, which is the publicity of the private: the private is consumed as such, publicly." Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (1980) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 98.

³⁹⁸ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 18.

³⁹⁹ This language of a perforated screen that conceptually replaces solid walls may recall Beatriz Colomina's use of the "screen" in a different context. See Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994); See also Colomina, "The Split Wall," 74-131.

⁴⁰⁰ Van de Velde, *Déblaiement*, 22.

This should also recall Benjamin's profession that: "[M]ore than anywhere else, the street reveals itself in the arcade as the furnished and familiar interior of the masses." Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 21.

interior that is intact yet pierced. This might best be described by Theodor Adorno's metaphors of the window mirror. He writes of this furnishing common to the nineteenth-century interior which "projects the endless row of apartment buildings into the bourgeois living room." In such a perceptual illusion, he professes, the interior "dominates the reflected row at the same time that it is delimited by it."⁴⁰¹ This apparent interpenetration of inside and outside; however, never fully dissolves the interior or the solitary individual inside of it. For all its intimation of a crumbling of enclosure—the outside is let in and the inside out—it persistently upholds the situation of the space of a room and the contents held inside.

Van de Velde's interiors from around 1900 performed a negotiation between private enclosure and public exposure that proved radically different from the reform he imagined just a few years prior. However, to claim that his designs became wholly divorced from ambitions to tie the interior to the social is slightly misleading. Through a series of experimental and provocative reformulations, he did manoeuvre the interior out of the clutches of bourgeois isolation, reconfiguring it as a powerful interface between individual experience and the wider world. The terms of such a world, however, had shifted over the course of just a few years. The great irony is that the work for which van de Velde is now better known—his later design practice in Germany with the Deutscher Werkbund—ultimately led to the famed debates in 1914 wherein, as a result of his desire to have the artist dictate the terms of mass production, he was accused of elite bourgeois expression and out-of-touch idealism, the very accusations that he himself had leveled against Émile Gallé, Auguste Delaherche, and Joris-Karl Huysmans two

⁴⁰¹ Theodor Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 44. For an incisive critique of the optical devices in conceptions of the interior-exterior dichotomy in Walter Benjamin and others, see Tom Gunning, "The Exterior as Interior: Benjamin's Optical Detective," *boundary 2* 30 no. 1 (2003):105-130.

short decades prior.⁴⁰² In the image saturated, mass-media culture of twentieth-century Germany, his interiors took on a very different semblance from those early experiments in the 1890s; however, van de Velde's persistent concern with the interior was never divorced from the collective world outside its walls, be it socialist-fueled anxieties of Belgian capitalist oppression in the 1890s or the commercial, image-saturated culture of Wilhelmine Germany.

By following his experiments throughout this comparatively neglected portion of van de Velde's career and by attending to the ways in which he appealed to logics of other media, we obtain a new understanding of the arc of his practice and are also compelled to appreciate the persistent nature of the relationship obtained between the interior and the exterior, social world. Continually fraught, the terms of this relation were, and continue to be, renegotiated at every turn. Its persistence is only matched by its mutability. Accounting for the collective weight around those shifts and the constellation of their terms, I contend, offers up the most salient social reading of the interior. We might best understand the represented interior in these years not as a transparent reflection of modern life or even a casualty of modernist negation, but rather as a dynamic interface through which artists, architects, and their publics struggled to relate individual experience to the world itself.

⁴⁰² See Hermann Muthesius and Henry van de Velde, "Statements from the Werkbund Conference of 1914," in *The Industrial Design Reader*, ed. Carma Gorman (New York: Allworth Press, 2003), 88-92.

EPILOGUE: The Interior Effect



Figure 153 Henri Matisse, *The Window*, 1916.
Oil on canvas. Detroit Institute of Arts.

In 1916, Henri Matisse painted the rather modestly titled picture, *The Window* [Figure 153], now hanging in the Detroit Institute of Arts. Nearly life sized, it depicts an unoccupied room, a cane chair in profile, a wooden table with surface just large enough to offer up a vase of wildflowers. The table sits atop what we assume to be a wooden floor due to the intimation of parquet patterning, the chair on an ornamental carpet emerging from the bottom of the canvas (a device which might remind one of Vuillard's small paintings from the early 1890s). The table, chair, flooring—all of the objects except for the swiftly executed chair against the back wall (or is it a motif in the decor? And where is the floor upon which it must stand?)—are cut across by a

flat, and at times translucent, sheet of white paint. Rendered in varying tones and values of white, this long rectangle is meant to represent a curtain hanging from the open, upper-floor window and traverses the entirety of the canvas from top to bottom edge. The longer one stands in front of this picture, the more times one's eye passes down the length of that curtain—along the outermost edge of that left panel running parallel to the dado on the back wall and then precisely down that thick, black line indicating the edge of the table's neck before spilling onto the carpet and meeting the bottom lip of the canvas; or along its other side, parallel to the window frame, meeting the edge of the radiator and chair arm precisely—the more profoundly perplexing a task standing in front of this painting becomes.⁴⁰³ Matisse's objects, the components of a rather commonplace small room, seem to burst out of the structure of the scene, refusing expectations of pictorial order while also retaining some commitment to its depictive representation as such.⁴⁰⁴ Color, too, contributes to the work's representational instability. Hues in this limited palette of matte blue-greens, blacks, whites, and ochres migrate into neighboring areas of the image, or stop short altogether so as to reveal the bare canvas, and they fail to change in value from foreground to background (though to call the painting's lower half “foreground” is perhaps to suggest more spatial order than is evident). The intimations of depth derived from the open window behind the chair and the differentiation in size between the furnishings are thwarted by a carpet that stands nearly straight up against the picture plane, as does the wooden flooring. The picture's stripped down, squeezed-out space exacerbates this internal drama. There is no space,

⁴⁰³ The idea of “in front” is even complicated here: how far in front? Gaining from what proximity? See T.J. Clark, “Room,” in *Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 64.

⁴⁰⁴ The confusion of pictorial order, a conflation of classical compositional and perspectival techniques with a “failure to coalesce,” was a common critique of Matisse's earlier paintings such as *Luxe, calme, et volupté* (1904) and *Le Bonheur de vivre* (1906) by critics such as Charles Morice and Julius Meier-Graefe. See Alistair Wright, “Arche-tectures: Matisse and the End of (Art) History,” *October* 48 (Spring 1998): 44-63.

no air, between background and foreground here, yet the legs of that table appear suspended, unable to rest on any surface. This is a picture of fits and starts, of settling into one system of viewing only to be betrayed and replaced by another. The reason for this is that Matisse's unassuming picture of an interior occupies two spatial registers at once (though neither entirely): the depictive space of a small room and the contents therein, *and* a flat surface whose objects refuse to settle into their own space and instead tilt out into ours— a spatially-embodied environment that is not a window into a world but rather tectonically constitutive of a world itself. This picture is both wallpaper and window, environment and depiction.

Standing in front of this picture in Detroit, looking at it now, the arc of this dissertation seems to propel toward *The Window*. This study has argued that rather than conceiving of modernity as something that occurs after the interior's demise, the interior in fact functioned as a complex category integral to modern life and offers a barometer of the changes in individual experience affected by the social world at the end of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰⁵ In so doing, it has tracked various formal propositions proffered in response to an artistic problem endemic to this moment—namely how one might give form to new models for the experience of intimate space. These propositions, and the conditions that they sought to satisfy, were renegotiated at nearly every turn. In performing a powerful mediating function, the interior also posed a set of formal problems, and subsequent possible solutions, in artistic practice that carried on into the twentieth century. This dissertation has drawn attention to these experimentations in the late-nineteenth century by attending to the ways in which we might usefully conceive of such practices as

⁴⁰⁵ The language used in the primary and secondary literature to describe the interior is unnervingly marked with temporal strictures: “emergence,” “birth,” “consummation,” “liquidation,” “death.” See Walter Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 9; Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (London: Routledge: 2006).

engaged in inter-medial exchange—the ways in which, to put it bluntly, pictures might act like three-dimensional environments and environments might imitate the behavior of two-dimensional pictures. Prompted by real demands integral in such works, this methodological stance also has consequence for later, twentieth-century experimentations with the interior that took up a different key and were executed to different ends. Such a model leads us to Matisse's *Window*.

The complex category of the interior assembled a set of questions that continued to engage artists, architects, and their publics: how might one represent a site that is both space and image, both objectively architectonic and psychologically subjective, both collective and individual? Moreover, how might one undertake such a task within the confines of one's own medium? In reassessing principal understandings of this moment in the early-twentieth century as one of burgeoning medium specificity, an understanding that has influenced scholars to subsequently divide their commitments accordingly, the interior prompts us to recast the net. It compels us to consider Matisse's picture not simply as a two-dimensional plane, or even a step towards a distinctly modern, wholesale breakdown of representation as such.⁴⁰⁶ Instead, it offers up a mode of picturing that is in some ways architectural. Without the compression of spatial registers, without that white sheet running from top to bottom of the canvas or those upright

⁴⁰⁶ This issue of modernism's "dissatisfaction with representation" and the problems it raises for the interpretation of art as it engaged modern realities is elucidated in a suggestive account by Todd Cronan. In his view, a central line of modernist discourse turns on art's efforts to dissolve representation and access a form of "lived experience" understood as "prior to" depiction. Addressing many scholars in the field who have set out to understand this dissolution of representation in modern art, Cronan recasts the issue by insisting that the beholder's bodily response to the art work is irrelevant to a work's meaning if it does not take into account the intention of the artist. My interests do cross into the purview of Cronan's analysis and express a similar skepticism with what has been understood as the distinctly modern breakdown of representation. My approach, however, insists that we ought to reconsider the nature of representation as such, and look for changes in formations of pictorial image-making in an expanded sense—a sense that embraced both depiction and the spatio-architectural configuration of the world in which the image (and the viewer) exist. See Cronan, *Against Affective Formalism: Matisse, Bergson, Modernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

floors, Matisse's image would have a different tone; we would be put more decidedly into the realm of *picturing* (or flattening out, disbanding altogether). However, what Matisse's painting does create is the critically intimate experience of the interior as both space and image. It is an approach to painting that borrows from the language of the architectural. This is similarly enacted in another one of his interior scenes, *Harmony in Red* (1908) [Figure 154], in which a flower pot perched at the bottom edge of the canvas (or is it a motif on the table cloth?), and the frame of the window perform an analogous oscillation between depicted scene and architectural environment.⁴⁰⁷ Standing in front of *The Window*, attending to its procedures, is to be shuttled between looking through the window in the background while also encountering a tectonic manipulation of the space of the gallery room and adjusting our bodily relation to the wall. It presents the impossible contrivance of such a relationship without deadening the effect. This we might conceive of as an extension of Ensor's interiors that proved so hard for their viewers to settle into precisely because they toed the threshold between realist, depictive "truth" and charged presence of the picture on the wall. It might also recall the ways in which Vuillard attempted to reconcile conflicting understandings of interiority in his *intimiste* paintings by evoking something of a decorative environment rather than solely an anxious narrative fiction. Of course, by the twentieth century, the prompts were altogether different.

What I suggest, however, is that mobilizing the interior as a methodological *way in* to image making practices of the modern period opens up a representational complexity that extends beyond the examples explored in the pages of this dissertation. Rather than limiting our considerations of the image to the two-dimensional plane, we ought to expand our scope of what

⁴⁰⁷ Yve-Alain Bois has referred to this picture when describing the visceral and nearly physical "violent aggression" of Matisse's "walls of paint." See Bois, "On Matisse: The Blinding," trans. Greg Sims, *October* 68 (1994).

images might be and attend to the ways in which they perform a set of incitements to a viewer who not only views paintings, but also feels the weight of walls, the strife of psychological anxiety, the banality of physical existence, the materiality of fabrics and furnishings. What becomes swiftly apparent is that in an effort to represent modern experience with ever greater fidelity, painters began to employ their materials to do architectural work, and architects returned the bid.

As I have shown, Henry van de Velde's architectural projects from the 1890s ought to be understood within the discursive and phenomenological context of his pictorial practice as well as that of his contemporaries. I have demonstrated that in an effort to reform the bourgeois interior along social lines, van de Velde created interiors that in some ways mimicked the optically-enlivened surface planes of large Neo-Impressionist paintings. Such considerations of the interior as imagistic, optical, even pictorial, persisted into the following century as well, particularly in the architecture of Josef Hoffmann, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Joseph Maria Olbrich, and even Bruno Taut.

Hoffmann's interiors from the early 1900s are designs of tremendous ornamental artistry, employing evocative patterning to optically stunning effect. His design for the drawing room of the residence of Max Biach (1903-05) is a powerfully suggestive evocation of repetitive patterns, symmetrical frames and windows, and a light fixture whose faceted glass ornaments are reflected in the faceted mirror and thus array the light across the room so that it may "refract it into a series of showers and sparks" (to use Verhaeren's phrasing, in reference to Ensor). The shape of the framed, rectangular glass display cases mimics the frame of the gas fireplace, the picture on the wall, and the frame of the door. The swooping inlays on the cabinet doors are repeated in the pattern on the window hangings and in the wallpaper [Figures 155, 156]. This room is one upon

which the eyes feast as they would upon a large canvas. In the Biach spare bedroom, the optical nature of the design is only confirmed. The small, abstract pattern repeated on the textiles, upholstery, and wallpaper functions to flatten out the scene to our eye, distorting any anticipated sense of spatial recession [Figure 157].

Undoubtedly, there is something to be said for the argument that these works appear imagistic to eyes that do, for the most part, encounter them through the flat medium of photography. However, the very fact that interiors such as these, and van de Velde's, were taken up with such verve by photographers in this moment might rather affirm the sense in which these interiors were somehow more "optical" than those of their predecessors or even their contemporaries.⁴⁰⁸ One need only recall that when the journal *Das Interieur* published images of Hoffmann's interiors alongside those of his contemporary Adolf Loos [Figure 133], the latter retorted that the priorities of his own interior designs could not be transmitted through the pictorial medium.⁴⁰⁹ Where Loos' designs emphasized immersive, tactile, proximate, and ensconcing interiority in a "theater of daily life," Hoffmann's operated in a more liminal space of representation wherein they demanded a proximate, spatial encounter, while also pushing their viewer back to take in the scene optically and all at once, from a more restrained distance.⁴¹⁰ Hoffmann's built interiors were somewhat pictorial and therefore achieve a critical and complex

⁴⁰⁸ This general point is made by Claire Zimmerman, *Photographic Architecture in the Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014). A similar claim is made in another form, and with an emphasis on the "screen," by Beatriz Colomina. See Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).

⁴⁰⁹ "I say, however: a good construction, when rendered as an image on a flat surface, makes no impression. I am most proud of the fact that the interiors which I have created are entirely without effect when photographed, and that the inhabitants of my dwelling cannot recognize their own homes in a photographic image." Loos, *Das Interieur* 4 (1903): 28-29. These priorities were most notoriously elaborated in his later theory of the *Raumplan*.

⁴¹⁰ This shuttling between a "near view" and a "distanced view" was explicated by Riegl in 1898. See Alois Riegl, *Historical Grammar of the Fine Arts* (New York: Zone Books, 2014), 187.

intimacy that was vitalized by the concept of the interior itself as it was conceived between space and image, individual and collective, public and private.⁴¹¹

Hoffmann's interiors such as the drawing room at the Biach residence solicit a concern with the surface of objects—with elaborate ornamentation on the window hangings and the wallpapers and evocative materials in the upholstery and the tilework—and also appear as pictorial planes themselves. They prompt their viewer to suspend three-dimensional vision for the moment and see the room as a subjective surface plane, stitched together and flattened out by all-over form, pattern, and motif. Seeing the interior in this way has critical import for contemporary considerations of pictorial effects on the *outside* of buildings in Central European architectural discourse in the first decades of the twentieth century. The façade of the building, no longer entirely burdened with the task of load bearing, was in essence “freed up” to other tasks and became a point upon which ideological claims as to the representational character of buildings were stamped. On one side of the debate was Adolf Loos who proposed that a building's surface exterior disclose nothing of its interior richness, and on the other was Otto Wagner who propounded the merits of the representational surface of buildings. As modern architectural history unfolded, the latter was relatively sidelined for the hardline modernism of the former. While the sense in which ornamental facades of buildings might be thought of as “pictorial” cladding, or “picture architecture,” has been thoughtfully pursued by Claire Zimmerman and others, the sense in which such an exteriorized, mass image was brought *inside*

⁴¹¹ T.J. Clark sees such criticality of the intimate—a beckoning in and then staunch refusal—in the work of Cézanne and, ultimately, in the work of Picasso. He sees this operation operating vividly in Picasso's *Guitar and Mandolin on a Table (Still Life in front of a Window)* (1924). His analysis of this picture has ultimately led Clark to believe that Picasso (rather than Matisse) represents the most salient point of extension to the protracted concerns of bourgeois interior of the nineteenth century. Clark, *Picasso and Truth* (2013). Also see Clark, “Relentless Intimacy,” *London Review of Books* 40, no.2 (25 January 2018): 13-16.

the home has received less attention.⁴¹²

Considering a comparison between the spectacularly ornamental façade of Otto Wagner’s Majolica House (1889-99) and van de Velde’s interior from 1898 [Figures 158, 159] demonstrates the potential for such considerations. The façade of Wagner’s building, covered in glass tiles with a floral motif in pinks, blues, and greens, appears to mimic the all-over forms, the decorative synthesis, and the frontally-oriented optical stimulation of the van de Velde design. We see a similar pictorial surface intimated in Hoffmann’s interiors wherein one is drawn in by the surface effects of an environment apprehended immediately and all at once. They draw us in yet effortlessly keep their distance. This “picture” applied to the outside of the Majolica House is brought inside with van de Velde and with Hoffmann, as well as several others throughout these first decades of the century. These interior architects brought the pictorial plane, the ornamental façade, the mask, inside the walls of the apartment thereby negating older associations of bourgeois isolation while also activating a new, reorganized tension between interior and exterior, individual experience and mass image, picture and building, that had acquired entirely new social recourse in a world after 1900.

I propose that Matisse’s picture undertakes a similar set of tasks. Setting *The Window* next to Hoffmann’s Biach drawing room provides the best argument for this restructuring to our conceptions of representation that I have been attempting to describe. Following the long, white curtain running from top to bottom of Matisse’s picture, consider the frame of the window, that of

⁴¹² For instance, see David Leatherbarrow, Moshen Mostafavi eds., *Surface Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005); Sylvia Lavin, *Kissing Architecture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). Another example is Claire Zimmerman’s thoughtful and carefully researched analysis of three early-twentieth century research studies that, in her words, “expose architectural and photographic correlates, but also more generally concerned themselves with the conceptualization of the building surface as picture—as ‘image architecture.’” See Zimmerman, “Bildarchitekturen: Architectural Surface, Circa 1914,” in *Photographic Architecture*, 21-47.

the dado, and the canvas itself. Are these operations so different from those enacted by the frames of the Hoffmann's glass-fronted cabinetry, the fireplace, or the door? Where Matisse employs the materials of oil paint and raw canvas to evoke the sense of a small room and its contents, Hoffmann uses wood, fabrics, tiling, and glass. Both images operate in the space of representation found in this very indeterminacy, and each appeals to experience in both visual and immersive terms. They each propose a productive solution to engaging the experience of the modern world itself. Such a proposition prompts a radical reconsideration of this protracted period from a moment of reckoning with modernism's ultimate dissatisfaction with representation to one in which complex image making processes were activated. We see this in examples that include, but are not limited to, Matisse's painterly oeuvre in the first two decades of the century and in this "imagistic" architecture that would be later sidelined as out-of-touch idealism.

Such experimentations were activated with the goal of representing the complexities of experience in the modern world. This complexity was not founded in the progressive dissolution of one form of representation for another as later modernists would have us believe, but in negotiating the sense in which we might understand the world—and the image—to continually and vibrantly negotiate between proximate and distant, private and public, individual and collective, space and picture plane. We might call this instigation to reconsider the nature of the image "the interior effect."

FIGURES



Figure 1 Pieter de Hooch, *Mother Nursing Her Child*, c.1674/1676.
Oil on canvas. Detroit Institute of Arts



Figure 2 Louise Bourgeois, Cell (Glass Spheres and Hands), 1990-1993. Glass, metal, marble, wood, fabric. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne



Figure 3 Chantal Akerman, *Là-bas*. Film still. 2006



Figure 4 Henri de Braekeleer, *The Game of Cards* (Het Kaart spel/La parti des cartes), 1887. Oil on canvas. Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels.



Figure 5 Edouard Manet, Emile Zola, 1868. Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Figure 6 Dornac and Cie, Ernest Lavisse (from the series Nos contemporains chez eux), c. 1890. Albumen silver print mounted on cardboard. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.



Figure 7 Édouard Vuillard, Interior, Mother and Sister of the Artist, 1893.
Oil on canvas. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 8 James Ensor, Russian Music (La Musique Russe), previously known as Chez Miss, 1881. Oil on canvas. Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels.



Figure 9 Henry van de Velde, Salle à manger,
Salon “Arts and Crafts” at The Hague, 1898.



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Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp.



Figure 11 View of the Ensor home at 23 rue de Flandre, Ostend c.1885. Albumen silver print.
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Figure 34 James Ensor, The Blue Flacon (Le Flacon bleu), 1880.
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Figure 50 Édouard Vuillard, *Landscapes and Interiors: The Cook* (*Paysages et Intérieurs: La Cuisinière*), 1899. Lithograph in five colors on chine volant paper; second and final state. Norton Simon Art Foundation, Pasadena.



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Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris



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Figure 55 Paul Gauguin, Vision After the Sermon (Vision après le sermon), 1888.
Oil on canvas. Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh



Figure 56 Pieter de Hooch, Woman Reading a Letter, 1664.
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Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Figure 59 Édouard Vuillard, *The Blue Sleeve (La Manche bleu)*, 1892.
Oil on cardboard. Collection Malcolm Wiener, New York.

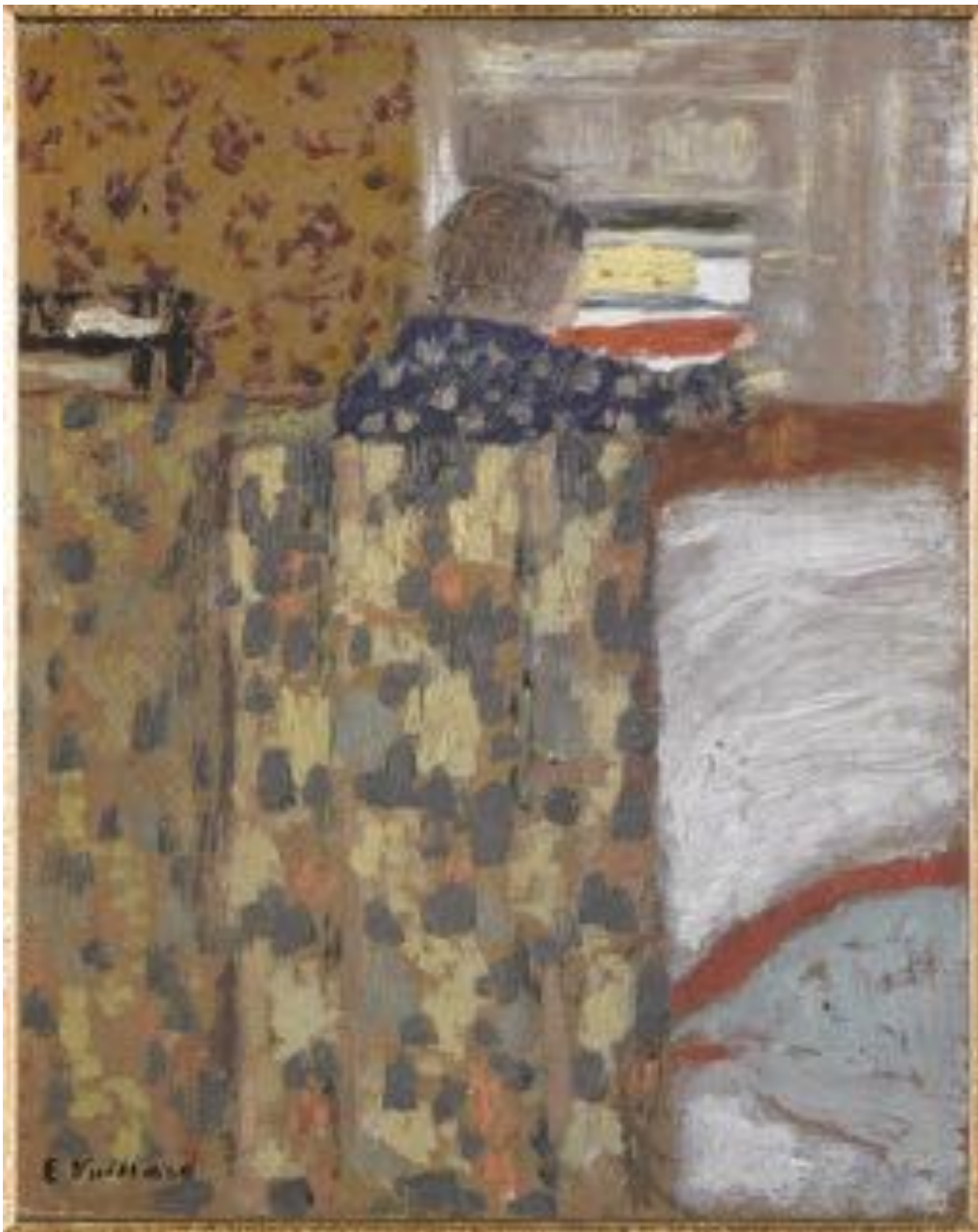


Figure 60 Édouard Vuillard, The Linen Closet (Le Placard à linge), 1893.
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Figure 61 Édouard Vuillard, Madame Vuillard Sewing (Madame Vuillard cousant), 1893.
Oil on cardboard. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Figure 62 Mary Cassatt, Under the Lamp (Sous la lampe), c.1883.
Soft-ground etching and aquatint. Art Institute of Chicago.




Figure 63 Anon., Galerie Durand-Ruel, rue Laffitte, 1893.
Bibliothèque Nationale, Département des Estampes, Paris.




Figure 64 Théo van Rysselberghe, letter and sketch addressed to Octave Maus with suggestions for the display of paintings at Les XX, 1890. Archives de l'art contemporain en Belgique, Brussels

faïe couverte de bandes d'étoffe
ensemble : $4 \times 1^m 30 = 5^m 20$

5^m20, c'est depuis la cimaise
jusqu'à la tringle, tout en haut,
(environ) - Les faïes accrochées
avec des œils et faïes
coccus en haut et faïes
Tomber l'étoffe en plus droit.
faïe faïe des poncifs et
faïe tempormer par
des Gargans, le chiffre 

en or, rouge ou bleu clair,
un peu partout sur l'étoffe.



faïe attacher avec petits clous d'étoffe
à la cimaise pour que ça
tombe droit. Les tableaux
seraient posés sur la cimaise.
ceux à étages pendus par le haut

Dépense :

je suppose 4 salles -
environ 400 mètres courant.
400 mètres x 4 (4 larges d'étoffe)
= 1600 mètres. (comptés simplement)
 $1600 \times 0.55 \text{ fr.} = 880 \text{ francs.}$
couture à 900.

La caisse paierait : cette
année-ci 300, l'année prochaine
encore 300. resteraient 300 à
payer par 15 xx istes solvables,
donc un lozin par Chacun de nous
Qu'en pensez-tu ?
Il faut un bannière après la

faïe d'étoffe. Quatre, le rouge,
mais l'année du nord quel sera

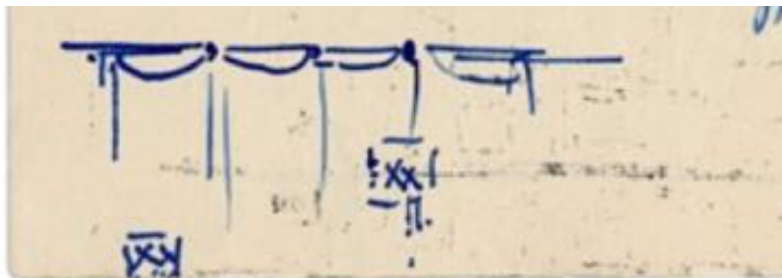


Figure 65 Théo van Rysselberghe, letter and sketch addressed to Octave Maus with suggestions for the display of paintings at Les XX, 1890. Archives de l'art contemporain en Belgique, Brussels.



Figure 66 Exhibition display of Les XX, c.1892.
Archives de l'art contemporain en Belgique, Brussels.



Figure 67 Vincent van Gogh, Wheat Fields, Sun Rise (Champ de blé, soleil levant), 1889.

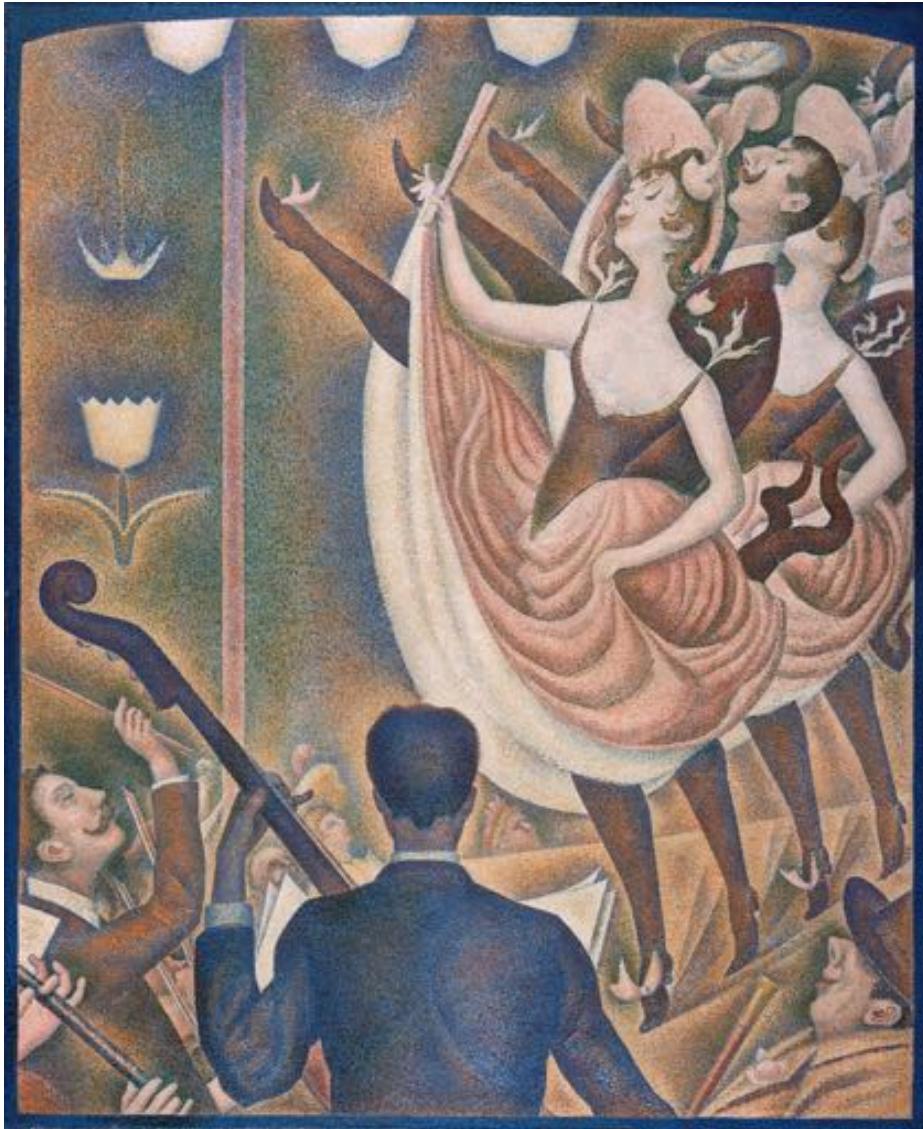


Figure 68 Georges Seurat, Chahut, 1890.
Oil on canvas. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.



Figure 69 Victor Horta, Maison du peuple, 1895-99. Brussels.



Figure 70 Édouard Vuillard, Tryptic from Public Gardens (Jardins publics): The Nursemaids (Les Nourrices), The Conversation (La Conversation), The Red Sunshade (L'Ombrelle rouge) 1894. Tempera on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Left: Figure 71 Édouard Vuillard, Public Gardens (Jardins publics): Two Schoolboys (Les Deux écoliers) Musée royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels.

Right: Figure 72 Édouard Vuillard, Public Gardens (Jardins publics): Under the Trees (Sous les arbres), 1894. Tempera on canvas. Cleveland Museum of Art.



Left: Figure 73 Édouard Vuillard, Public Gardens (Jardins publics): Girls Playing (Les Fillettes jouant); 1894. Tempera on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Right: Figure 74 Édouard Vuillard, Public Gardens (Jardins publics): Asking Questions (L'Interrogatoire) 1894. Tempera on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Left: Figure 75 Édouard Vuillard, Public Gardens (Jardins publics): First Steps (Premiers pas) 1894. Tempera on canvas, Private collection, Paris.

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Figure 77 Installation view, Five panels form the decorative series, Public Gardens.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

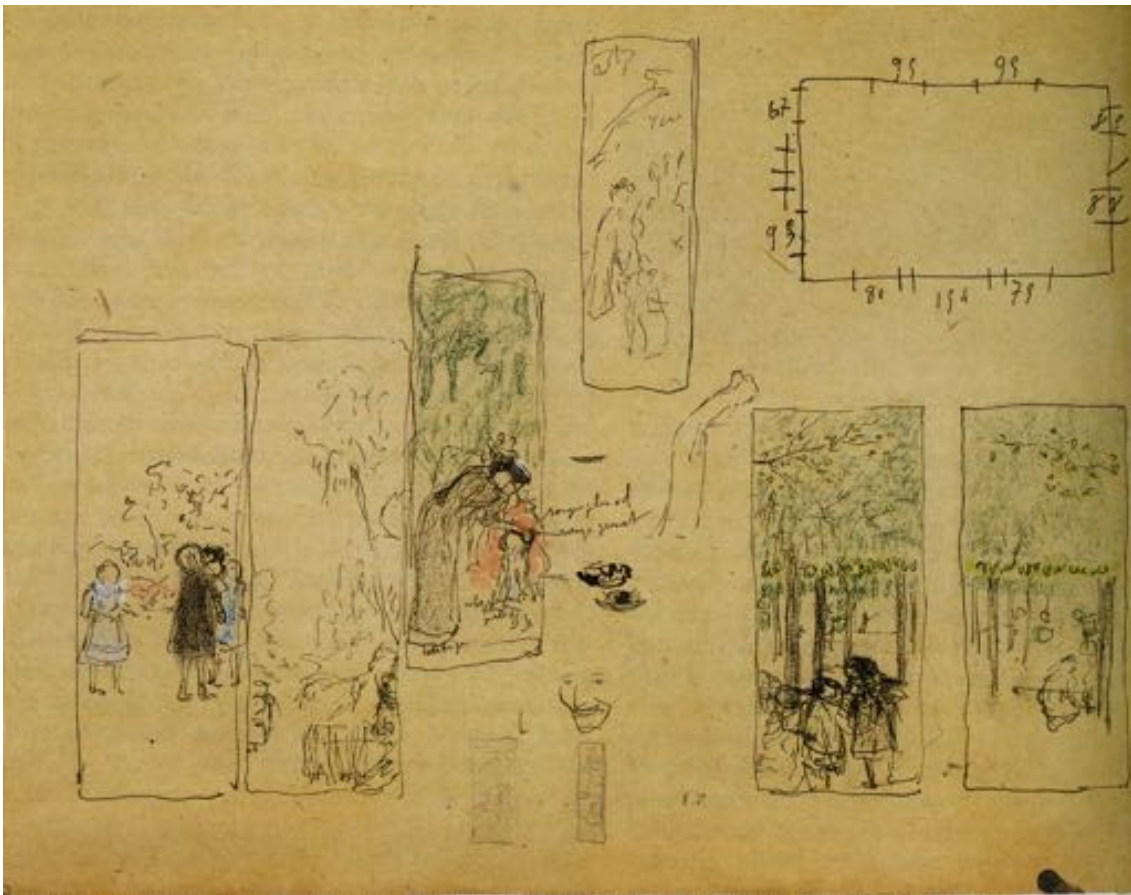


Figure 78 Édouard Vuillard, Studies and installation plan for Public Gardens, 1894.



Figure 79 Installation photograph of Vuillard's Asking Questions in the Natanson's apartment, 60 Avenue de Bois, c. 1895.



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Figure 84 Paul Cézanne, Madame Cézanne in a Red Dress (Madame Cézanne en robe rouge), 1888-90. Oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 85 Pieter Bruegel The Elder, The Wedding Dance, 1566. Oil on panel. Detroit Institute of Arts.



Figure 86 Édouard Vuillard, Landscape: Window Overlooking the Woods, 1899.
Oil on canvas. Art Institute of Chicago.



Figure 87 Édouard Vuillard, *Walking in the Vineyard (Promenade)*, 1899. Oil on canvas.
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Figure 88 Édouard Vuillard, *Walking in the Vineyard (Promenade)* installed in an interior designed by Henry van de Velde in the home of Karl Ernst Osthaus, Hohenhof, Germany, 1907.



Figure 89 Édouard Vuillard, panels from the series, The Album: The Striped Blouse (Le corsage rayé); The Stoneware pot (Le pot de grés); The Dressing Table (La Table de toilette), 1895.

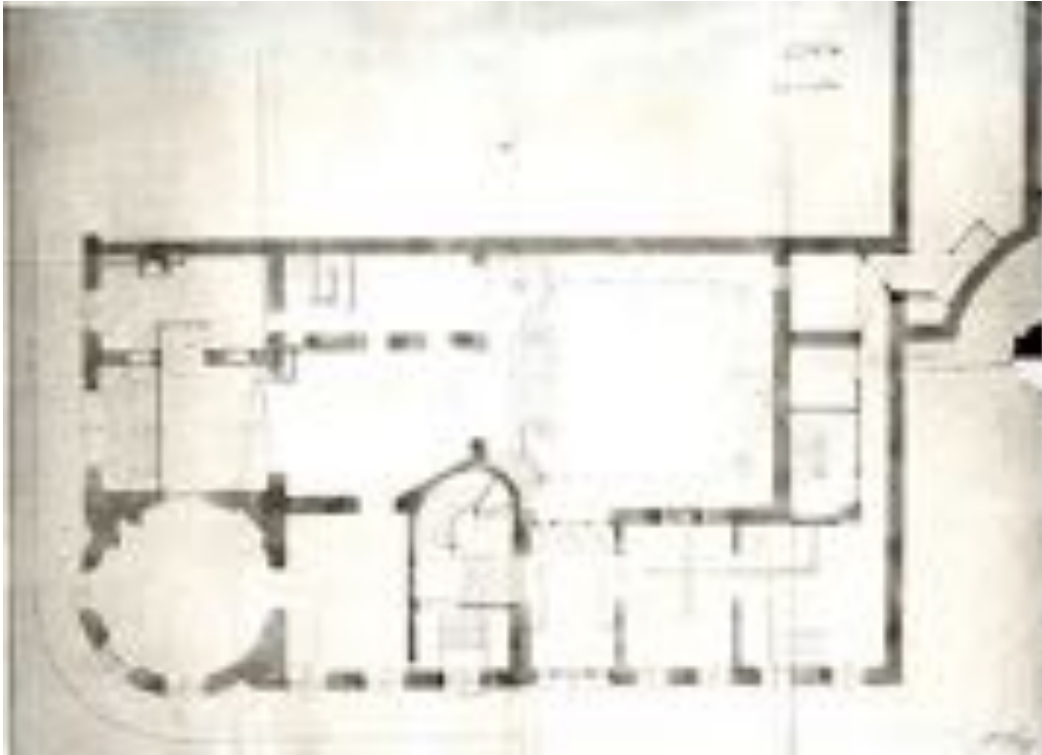


Figure 90 Ground floor plan of Siegfried Bing's Maison de l'Art Nouveau, 22 rue de Provence, 1895. Institut Français d'Architecture, Paris.



Figure 91 Henry Van de Velde and Georges Lemmen, smoking room for Siegfried Bing's Salon de l'Art Nouveau, rue de Provence, Paris, 1895. Printed in L'Art Décoratif (October 1898).



Figure 92 Hector Guimard, Castel Béanger, 1895-8. Exterior and interior photographs. Paris.



Figure 93 Auguste Delaherche, ceramic vase, c.1890. Stoneware. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 94 Émile Gallé, “Ombellifères” cabinet, c1902. Birchwood, rosewood.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 95 Ferdinand Lochard, Photograph of the salon of the Goncourt's house at Auteuil, 1883.
Albumen silver print. Musée Carnavalet, Paris.



Figure 96 Ferdinand Lochard, Photograph of the bedroom of the Goncourt's house at Auteuil, 1883, 1886. Albumen silver print. Musée Carnavalet, Paris.



Figure 97 Ferdinand Lochar, Photograph of cabinet de travail in Goncourt's house at Auteuil, 1886. Albumen silver print mounted on cardboard. Bibliothèque nationale de France.



Figure 98 Henry van de Velde, Dining Room for Siegfried Bing's Salon de l'Art Nouveau, rue de Provence, 1895. Furniture and design by van de Velde, painting by Paul Ranson, table service by Édouard Vuillard.



Figure 99 Henry Van de Velde and Georges Lemmen, smoking room for Siegfried Bing's Salon de l'Art Nouveau, rue de Provence, Paris, 1895. Printed in L'Art Décoratif (October 1898).



Figure 100 Figure 100 Corner of the Goncourt dining room, 1883.
Albumen silver print. Musée Carnavalet, Paris.



Figure 101 Edmond de Goncourt in his dining room.
Albumen silver print. Musée Carnavalet, Paris.



Top: Figure 102 William Morris and Philip Webb, The Red House (upstairs interior), 1859. Bexleyheath.

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Figure 104 Henry van de Velde, Watch (La Veillée des anges), 1893.
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Figure 106 Wilhelm Hammershøi Interior in Strandgade, Sunlight on the Floor, 1901.
Oil on canvas. Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen.

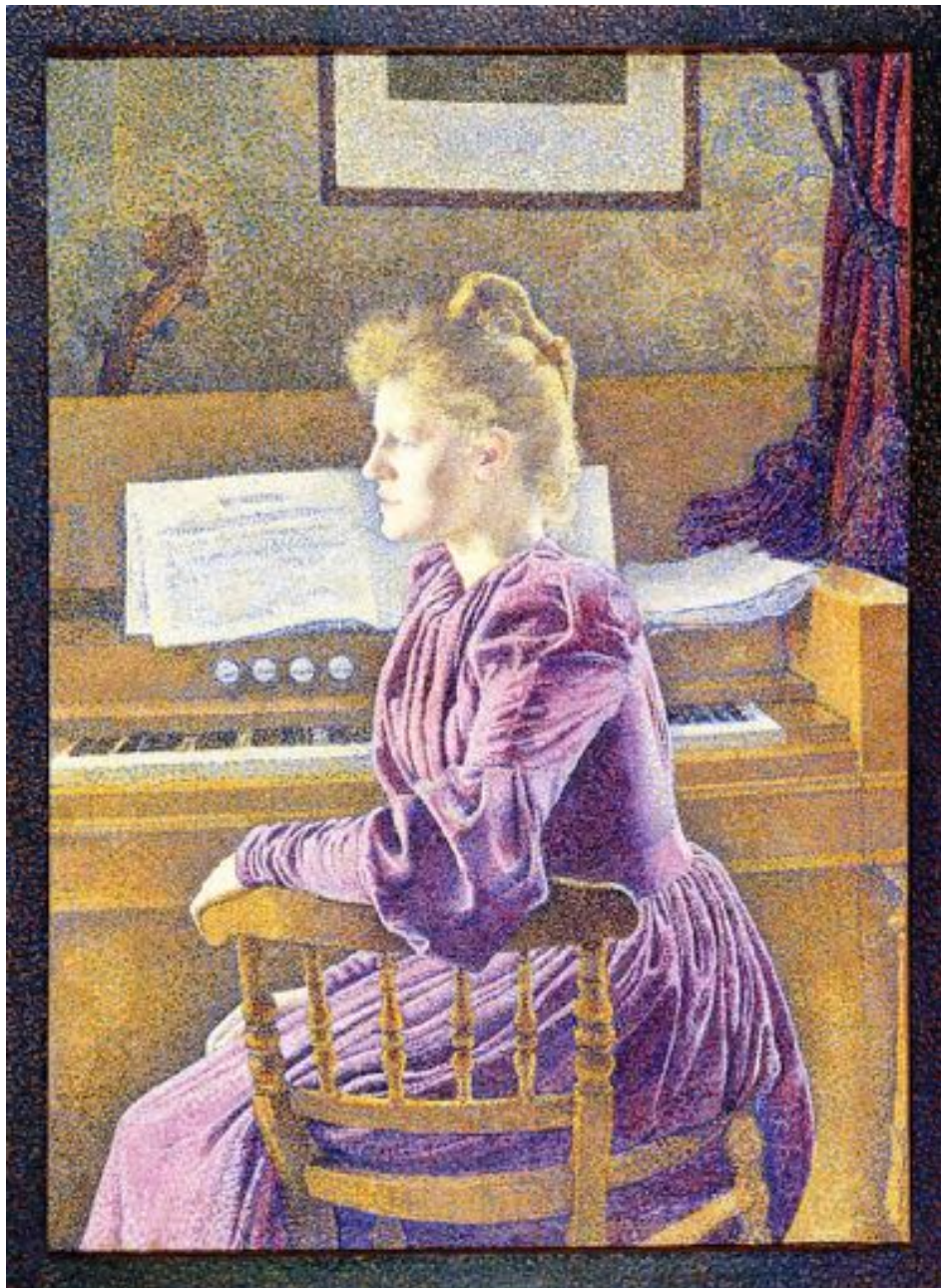


Figure 107 Théo van Rysselberghe, Maria Sèthe at the Harmonium, 1891.
Oil on canvas. Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp.



Figure 108 Victor Horta, Hôtel Tassel, 1893-7. Brussels.



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Archives d'Architecture Moderne, Ixelles.



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Archives d'Architecture Moderne, Ixelles.



Figure 112 Henry van de Velde, interior at Chemnitz, 1897.
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Figure 113 Henry van de Velde design, editorial office of Dekorative Kunst on the Rue des Petits-Champs, Paris featuring Georges Seurat's Chahut, 1898.



Figure 114 Georges Seurat, A Sunday Afternoon on the Isle of La Grande Jatte — 1884
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Oil on canvas. Art Institute of Chicago.



Figure 115 Henry van de Velde, Village Facts: The Girl Mending a Stocking (Faits du Village VII : La fille qui remaille), 1890.

Oil on canvas. Musée royal des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels.



Figure 116 Théo van Rysselberghe, Portrait of Madame Charles Maus.
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Top: Figure 117 Detail: Théo van Rysselberghe, Portrait of Madame Charles Maus

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Figure 119 Henri de Braekeleer, The Antwerp Cathedral, 1872. Oil on canvas. Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp.



Figure 120 Henry van de Velde, *Woman at a Window (Femme à la fenêtre)*, 1890. Oil on canvas. Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp.



Figure 121 Henry van de Velde, Sunlight (Soleil), 1888. Oil on canvas. Kunsthalle, Bremen.



Figure 122 Charles de Groux, *The Benediction (Le Bénédicte)*, 1861.
Oil on canvas. Musée royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels.



Figure 123 Jean-Francois Millet, The Gleaners (Des Glaneuses), 1857.
Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

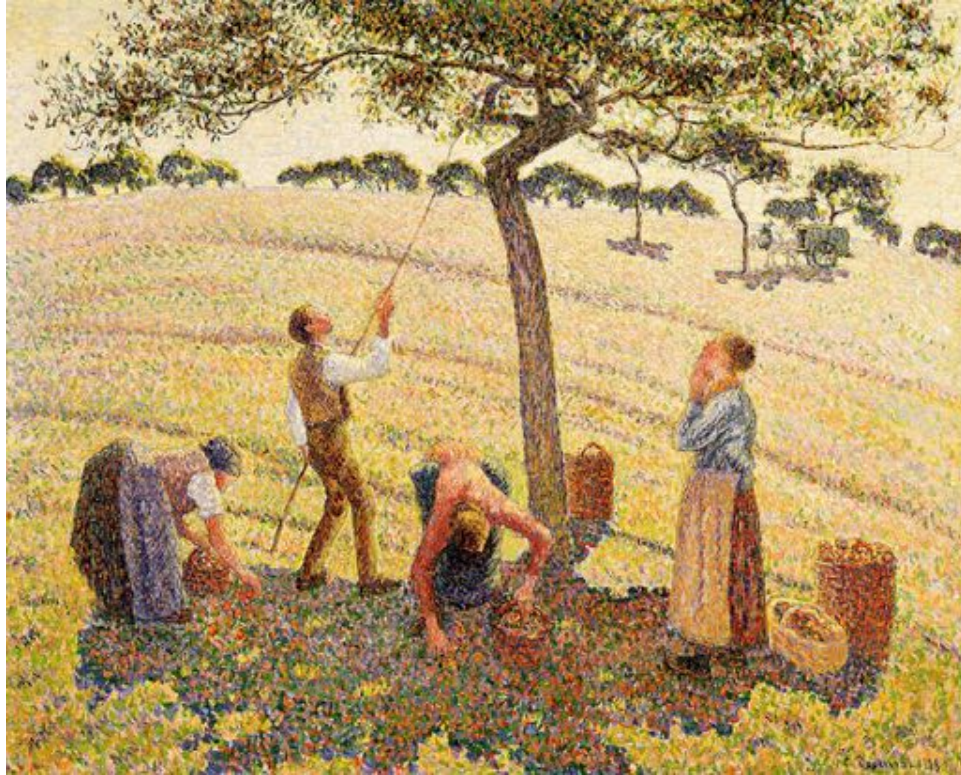


Figure 124 Camille Pissarro, Apple Picking at Eragny-sur-Epte (La Récolte des pommes à Eragny-sur-Epte), 1888. Oil on canvas. Dallas Museum of Art.

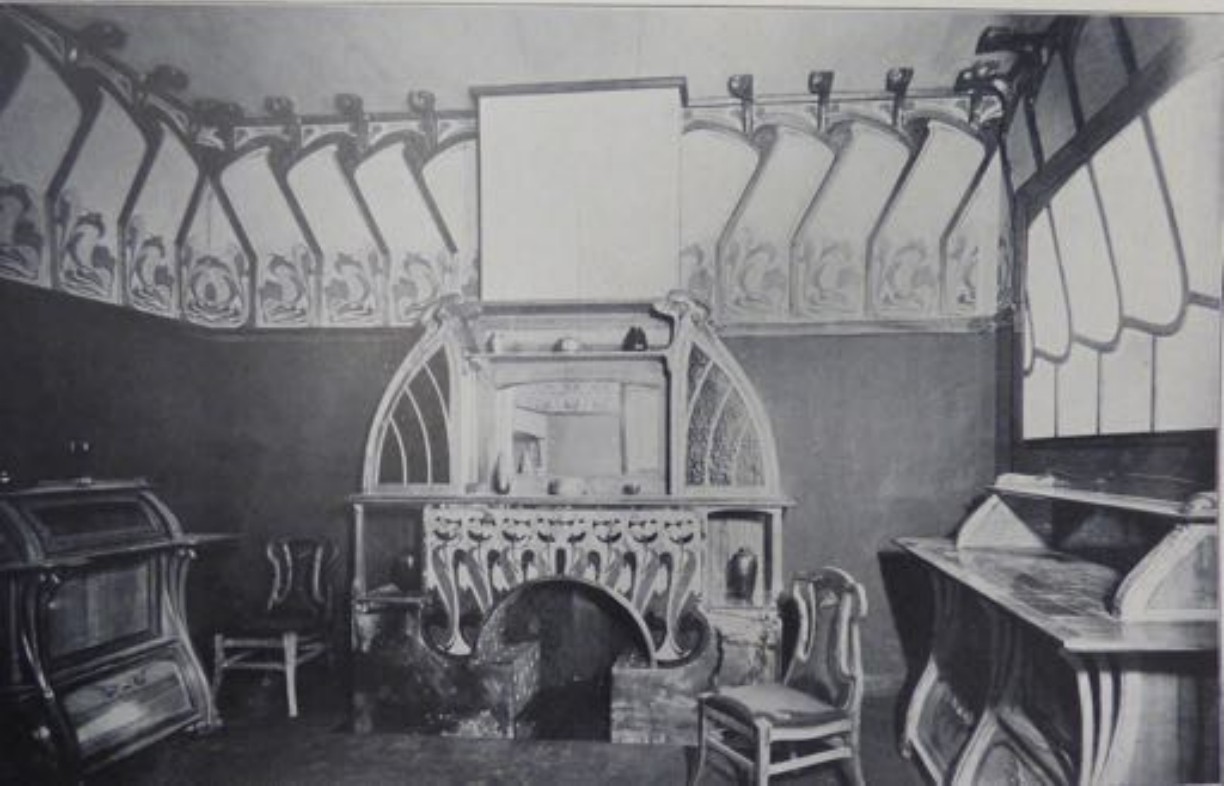


Figure 125 Henry van de Velde, Salle à manger, Salon “Arts and Crafts” in The Hague, 1898.
L’Art décoratif, Special Issue devoted to van de Velde (October 1898).

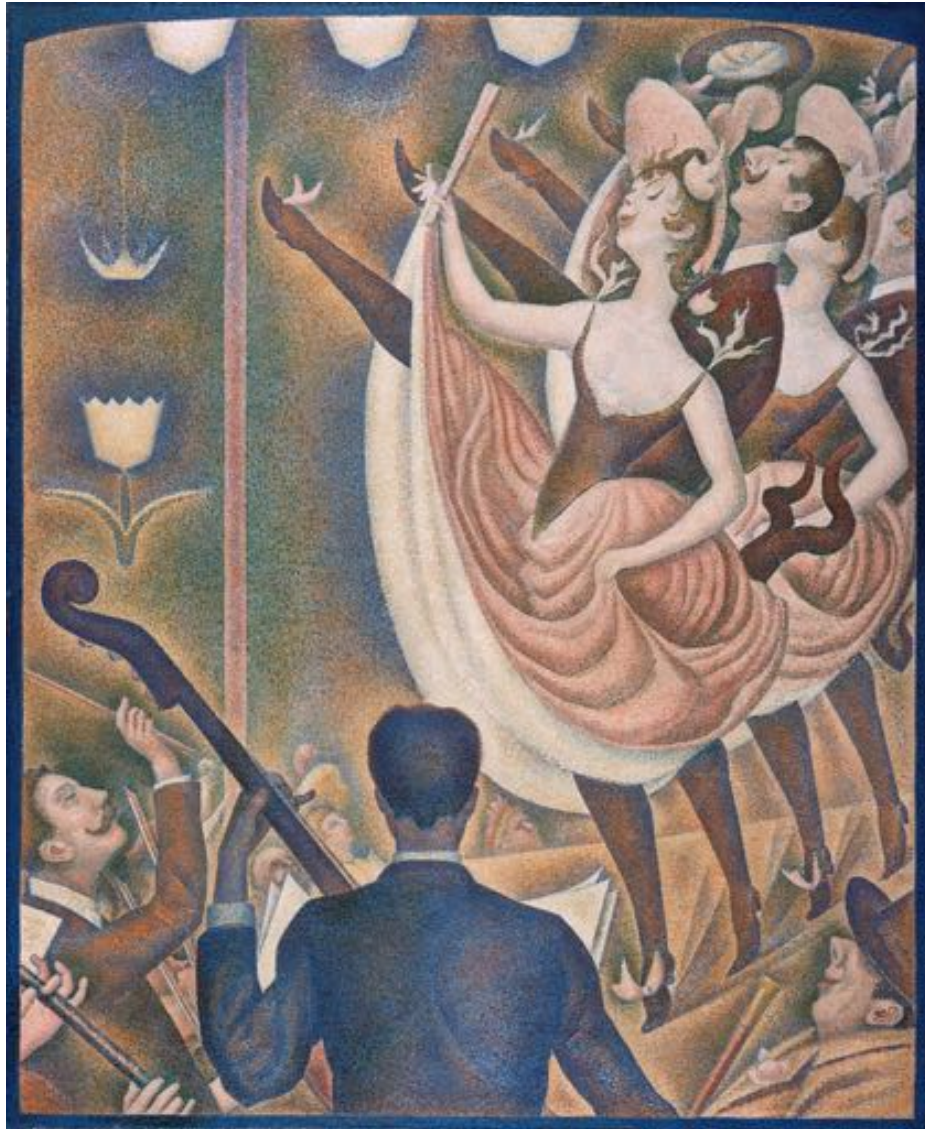


Figure 126 Georges Seurat, Chahut, 1890.
Oil on canvas. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.



Figure 127 Henry van de Velde, Decoratieve plantencompositie, c. 1892–93.
Pastel on paper. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

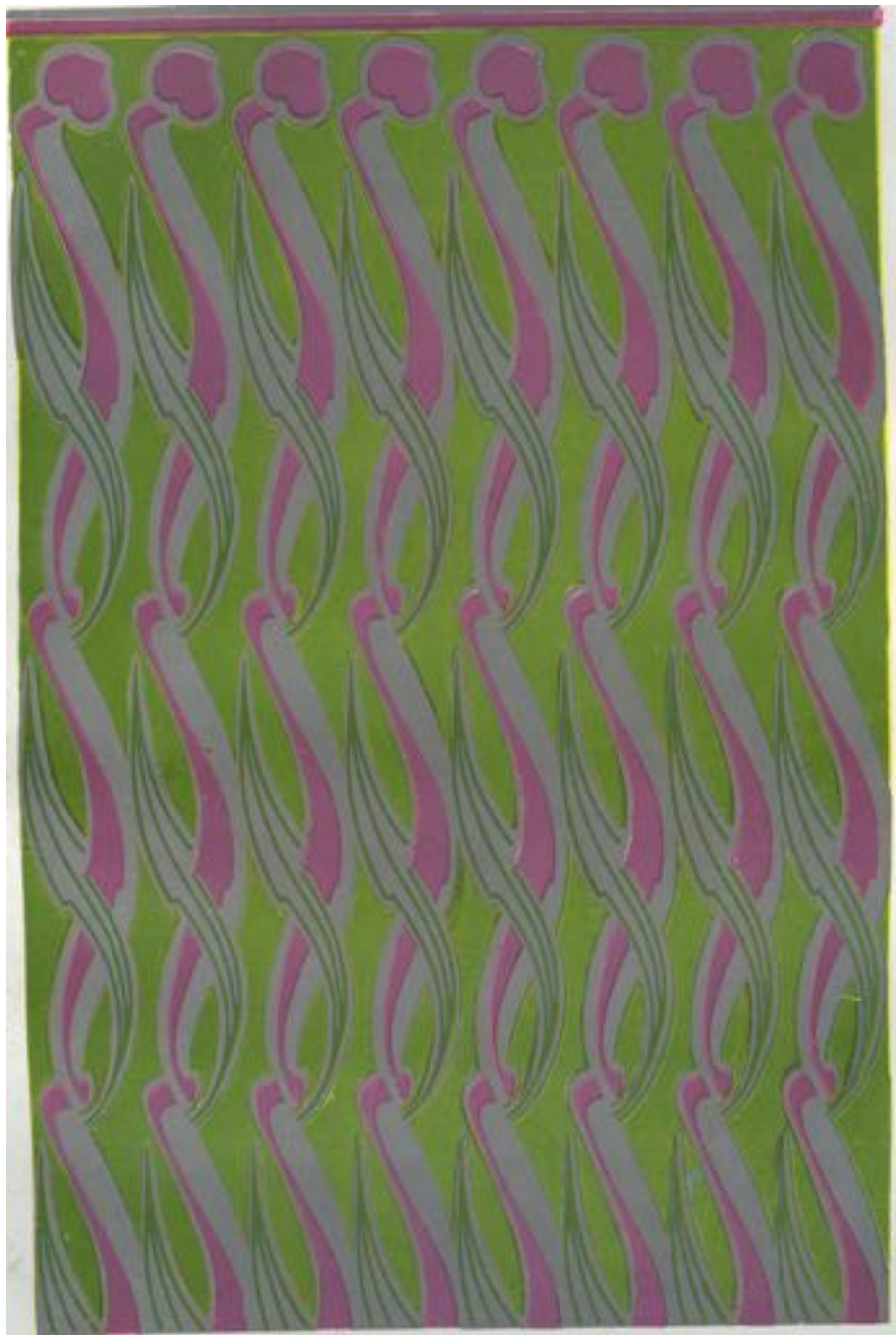


Figure 128 Henry van de Velde, “Dynamagogique” wallpaper design, c.1896.



Top: Figure 129 August Endell, Atelier Elvira (staircase), c.1900. Munich.
Bottom: Figure 130 August Endell, Atelier Elvira (interior view), c.1900. Munich.



Figure 131 Josef Hoffmann, Palais Stoclet (living room), 1905 Brussels.

Figure 132 Josef Hoffmann, interior of Palais Stoclet (dining room, with murals by Gustave Klimt), 1905. Brussels.



Figure 133 Adolf Loos, Lina Loos Bedroom, 1903, Vienna.



Figure 134 Adolf Loos, Study in Dr. Hugo Haberfeld apartment, 1899.



Figure 135 Henry van de Velde, cabinet de travail (with sculpture by Constantin Meunier), exhibition in Munich, 1898-99.



Top: Figure 136 Installation view of exhibition of L'Association pour l'art (Antwerp) showing work by Georges Lemmen, 1892. Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Brussels.

Bottom: Figure 137 Installation view of exhibition of L'Association pour l'art (Antwerp) showing work van de Velde, Lautrec, and Delaherche, 1892. Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Brussels



Figure 138 Henry van de Velde, Salon design, Dresden Exhibition of Applied Arts, 1897.



Figure 139 Henry van de Velde, chambre à coucher, Salon “Arts and Crafts” at The Hague, 1898.



Figure 140 Henry van de Velde, view of salle à manger as installed at Salon “Arts and Crafts” at The Hague, 1898. Photograph from *L’Art décoratif* (October 1898).



Figure 141 Charles Lefébure, Maria Sèthe at Bloemenwerf, c1894.
Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Brussels

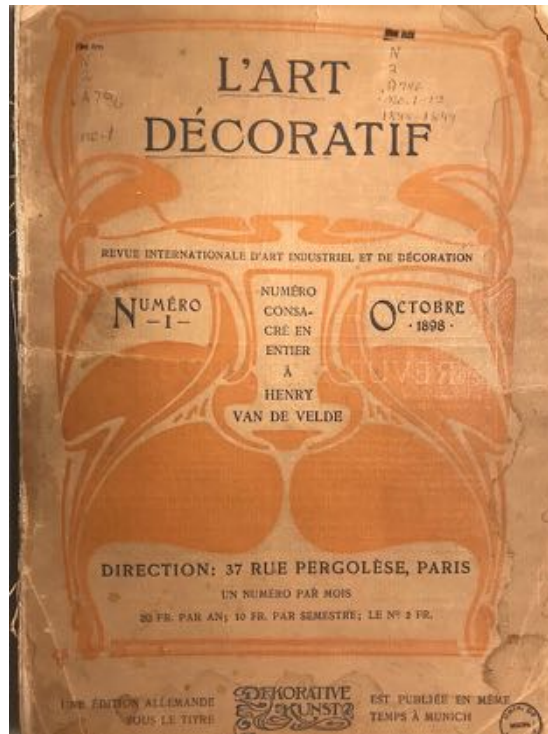


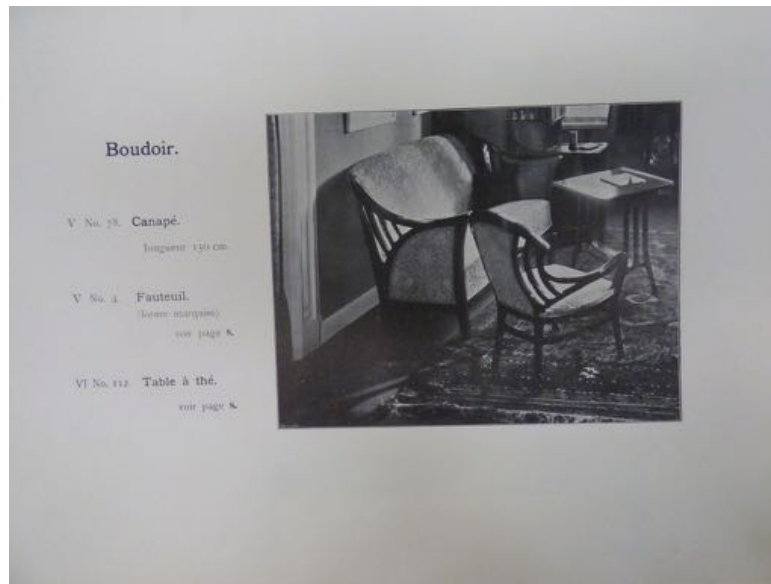
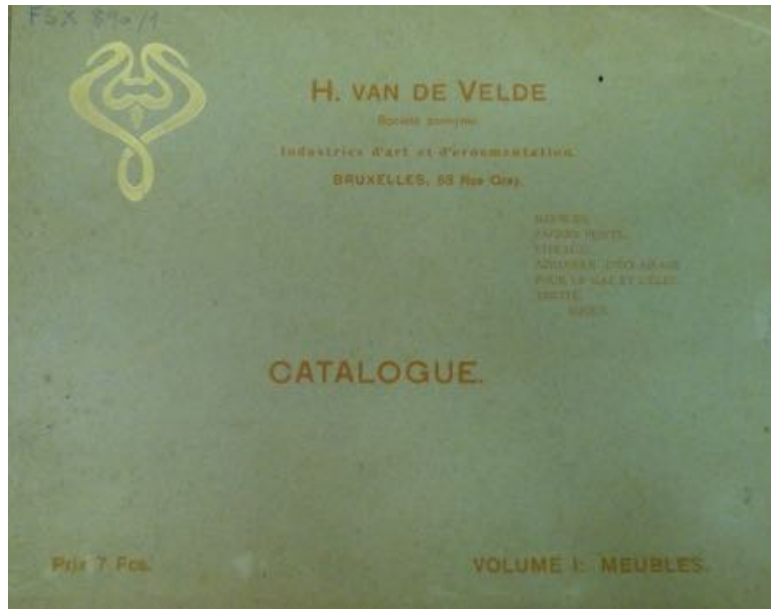
Figure 142 L'Art Décoratif, Special Issue devoted to Henry van de Velde (October 1898).



Figure 143 Issue of La Gerbe featuring furnishings by Wilhelm Hols and Paul Harnasse (November 1898).



Figure 144 Dornac and Cie, Alphonse Daudet (from the series Nos contemporains chez eux), c.1890. Albumen silver print mounted on cardboard. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.



Top: Figure 145 Catalogue, H. van de Velde et Cie : industries d'art et d'ornementation, 1897.

Bottom: Figure 146 "Boudoir," Catalogue, H. van de Velde et Cie : industries d'art et d'ornementation, 1897.

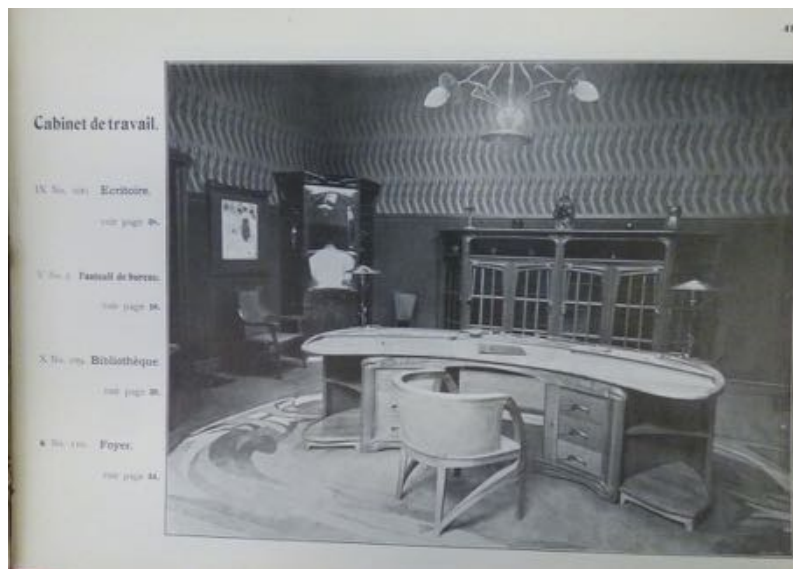
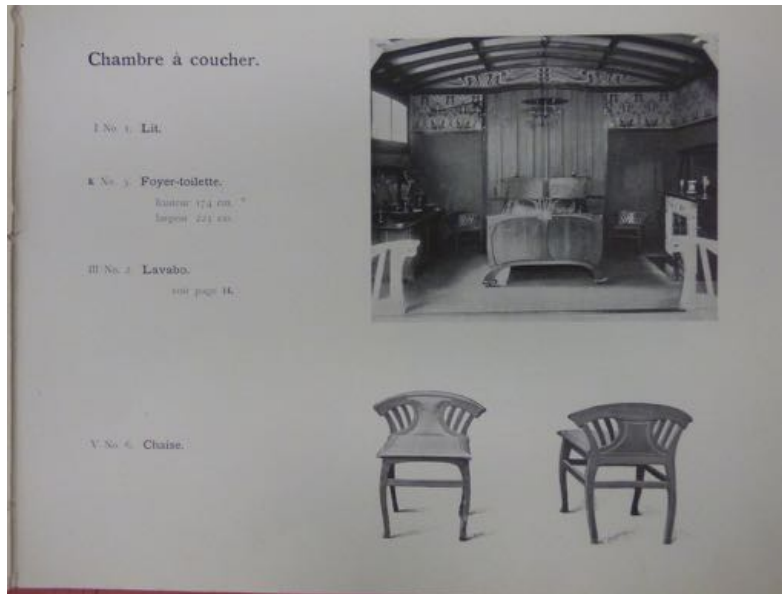


Figure 147 “Chambre à coucher,” Catalogue, H. van de Velde et Cie : industries d’art et d’ornementation, 1897.

Figure 148 “Cabinet de travail,” Catalogue, H. van de Velde et Cie : industries d’art et d’ornementation, 1897.



Figure 149 Advertisement for Catalogue, H. van de Velde et Cie : industries d'art et d'ornementation, as it appeared in Art et Décoration (1899).



Figure 150 Henry van de Velde, Continental Havana Company, 1900. Berlin.



Top: Figure 151 Advertisement for the Continental Havana Company, Berlin, 1900 (with van de Velde insignia in bottom right).

Bottom: Figure 152 Henry van de Velde, detail of interior of Continental Havana Company, Berlin, 1900 (with van de Velde insignia on the wall).



Figure 153 Henri Matisse, *The Window*, 1916.
Oil on canvas. Detroit Institute of Arts.



Figure 154 Henri Matisse, Harmony in Red, 1908.
Oil on canvas. State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

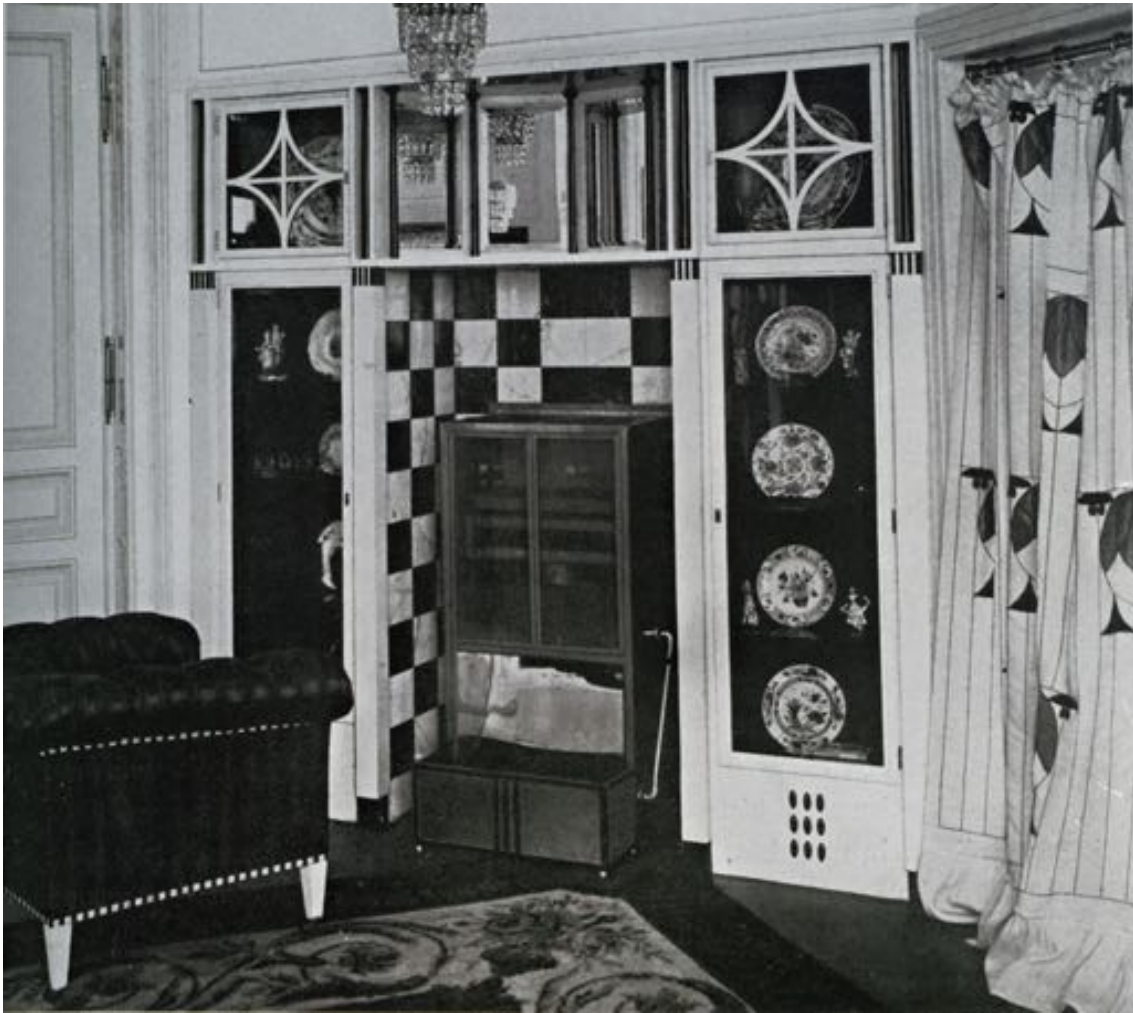


Figure 155 Josef Hoffmann, drawing room of the Max Biach residence, Vienna, 1903-5.



Figure 156 Josef Hoffmann, seating area in drawing room of the Max Biach residence, Vienna 1903-5.



Figure 157 Josef Hoffmann, spare bedroom in drawing room of the Max Biach residence, Vienna, 1902-3.



Top: Figure 158 Otto Wagner, Majolica House (façade, detail), Vienna, 1889-99.

Bottom: Figure 159 Henry van de Velde, salle à manger, 1898.

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Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

James Ensor sketchbooks

Musée départemental Maurice Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye (France)

Archival materials related to the exhibitions of the Nabis artists

Vuillard dossier

Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Henry van de Velde correspondence

Théo van Rysselberghe correspondence

Paul Signac correspondce

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