

A state of critical becoming: Colour, convention (Orientalism) and eclecticism in the aesthetic interior.

Locating genius in the secondary imagination, Romantic discourses positioned artistic agency as atomistic and undemocratic, the inherent capacity of a gifted few. Seeking to address this problem, Victorian concepts of 'many-sidedness', disinterestedness, and cosmopolitanism reworked the romantic imagination by identifying an alternative form of creative accomplishment: the critical temperament. Aimed not at the replacement of artistic genius but identifying alternative modes of invention, such Victorian critiques not only democratised the imagination (artistic agency) but made visible new strategies for cultivation and self-improvement.

The aim of the current paper is to draw parallels between Victorian understandings of the imagination and more recent attempts by the art historian and theorist Barbara Maria Stafford (2001) to revive the ancient ideal of Analogy; a 'metaphoric and metamorphic practice for weaving discordant particulars into a partial concordance' while avoiding the 'subsumption of two inferior, dichotomous terms into a superior third.' The significance of Analogy for Stafford is two fold: First, in an age in which 'we possess no language for talking about resemblance, only an exaggerated awareness of difference' it offers new opportunities to [re] discover a rhetoric that speaks of 'sameness in otherness,' a topic once central to western philosophy, theology, rhetoric, and aesthetics. Secondly, and possibly more importantly for Stafford, it helps to visualise the 'connective aspects of cognition' or the 'pictorial nature of consciousness.'¹

Suggesting that the Victorian critique on the imagination was motivated by similar objectives, the aim of the current paper is to explore the centrality of such principles to the decorative strategies of the late nineteenth century aesthetic interior. The paper will consider theories on colour, artistic convention (or Orientalist form) and eclecticism as outlined in Oscar Wilde's 1891 essay the 'Critic as Artist.'² In considering the links that bind these decorative devices to Victorian theories of agency, both artistic and critical, the paper will also examine the role played by the aesthetic interior in the cultivation of an aesthetic sensibility and critical temperament; the "becoming" of an aesthetic or critical state represented by colour, Orientalist form and the eclectic juxtaposition of divergent styles or traditions.

A Victorian critique of Romantic agency.

Dividing the mind into two distinct faculties—'Imagination' and 'Fancy'— and locating the production of the 'higher' or fine arts within the former, the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) established romantic agency as a cognitive process that was atomistic, subjective and undemocratic.³ The significance of the Imagination for Coleridge and his colleagues was that it represented the sole faculty within man that was able to achieve the romantic ambition of reuniting the worlds of the self and of nature. Noting that 'every Power in nature and in spirit must evolve an opposite, as the sole means and condition of its

¹ Barbara Maria Stafford, *Visual Analogy: Consciousness as the Art of Connecting* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), 9-10.

² Oscar Wilde, "The Critic as Artist, Part I: With some remarks upon the importance of doing nothing," and "The Critic as Artist, Part I: With some remarks upon the importance of discussing everything," in *Intentions* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 95-149 & 153-217.

³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, J. Shawcross ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), vol. 1, 202.

manifestation,⁴ a proposition that pre-empts the colonial and Orientalist discourses of the later nineteenth century, the role of the imagination, Coleridge concluded, was to 'coalesce' such opposites. Defining this cognitive ability as 'ESEMPLASTIC,' a term he borrowed from the Greek meaning to 'shape into one' and to 'convey a new sense,' Coleridge also identified such processes with the higher arts, 'the wider and deeper powers of some poetry' and that which distinguished the good from the mediocre or bad.⁵

Coleridge's thesis is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it tied artistic agency to a cognitive process that was not only centred on the visualisation of opposites but one that also sought to remove or overcome "difference" through a process of coalescence or synthesis. Secondly, while seeking to produce something 'original' and with no natural equivalent, an outcome that allowed the romantic poet to claim his practice as a 'repetition' of the 'eternal act of creation', this process also encouraged an atomistic subjectivity, a mode of representation that was unable to detach itself from the individuality or "genius" of the artist. Attempting to 'make the senses out of the mind—not the mind out of the senses,' Coleridge's imagination ensured that thought and reality grew indistinguishable and intelligent self-consciousness became inseparable from perceptions of the world.⁶ The romantic desire to integrate self and nature,' as Michael Sprinker has argued, simply disguised the 'imperialistic designs of the imagination on the real world.'⁷

Troubled by a self-referential subjectivity, romantic agency was also autocratic and exclusive. Distinguishing Imagination from Fancy, Coleridge also divided the Imagination into primary and secondary processes. In doing so, he linked art to a newly liberated subject—a 'superior voluntary controul [sic]...co-existing with the conscious will.'⁸ Enabling the artist to invent outside the constraints of tradition, convention or even perception, the secondary imagination marked out that which was truly original and unique.⁹ Drawing a distinction between acts that were unconscious and those that were intentional and deliberate, however, the secondary Imagination also identified acts that were exceptional. While the primary Imagination was for Coleridge the 'necessary imagination,' as it represented man's ability to learn from nature, and as such, was common to all people, the secondary imagination revealed a superior faculty that could only be associated with artistic genius. Thus the production or judgement of the higher arts (and the subjectivity represented by a liberated will) was also denied to the ordinary person. Such knowledge and insight was significantly confined to an elite and cultivated few.¹⁰

Writing in 1891 on the conceptual connections between art and criticism, the Irish playwright and aesthete Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) expanded the above romantic ideals by positioning criticism as a new and alternative mode of artistic agency. In a series of essays published as a small volume entitled *Intentions*, Wilde explored the state and role of English art, and more specifically the literary, visual and decorative

⁴ Coleridge, "The Friend," in G.T. Shedd, ed., *The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1853), vol 2, 91n.

⁵ Coleridge in the tenth chapter of *Biographia Literaria* described this ability of the imagination as "Esemplastic." Noting that esemplastic was a word he borrowed from the Greek 'to shape,' Coleridge explained that it referred to the imagination's ability to "shape into one, having to convey a new sense." He felt such a term was necessary as "it would aid the recollection of my meaning and prevent it being confounded with the usual import of the word imagination." Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, vol. I, 86. See also I. A. Richards, *Coleridge on Imagination* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1962), 96 & 84.

⁶ As Coleridge was himself to point out, "the identity of thesis and antithesis is the substance of all being." Coleridge, "The Friend," vol. 2, 91n.

⁷ Michael Sprinker, "Ruskin on the Imagination," *Studies in Romanticism* 18 (Spring 1979): 116-7.

⁸ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, vol. I, 193, 202.

⁹ Richards, *Coleridge on Imagination*, 96 & 84.

¹⁰ James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 344.

arts, the public's capacity to appreciate these, and the value or influence of modern criticism.¹¹ Defining art within these essays as 'imaginative and pleasurable work,' one that 'invents, imagines and dreams,' and which has little relation to 'fact,' Wilde demonstrates his initial adherence to a romantic thesis of agency.¹² Aligning such values not only with the artist but also the critic, however, Wilde goes on to suggest a new and alternative theory of artistic invention.

Occupying the same relation to the work of art that he criticises as the artist does to the visible world of form and colour, the aim of the critic, Wilde argued, was not to explain the intent of the artist or determine the truth of the work, but simply to represent the 'impressions' the work has produced on the critic himself.¹³ Labelling criticism as the 'only civilised form of autobiography,' as it chronicles the 'spiritual moods and imaginative passions of the [critic's] mind,' it is for the critic, he concluded, that 'pictures are painted, books written, and marble hewn into form.'¹⁴ Seemingly 'esemplastic' in motive, Wilde's critic also participated in the atomistic heroism of romantic agency. 'It is only by intensifying his own personality' Wilde suggested, could the critic interpret the 'personality and works of others.' The 'more strongly this personality enters into the interpretation the more real ... the more satisfying, ... convincing ... [and] true' it becomes.¹⁵ Yet, Wilde's critic breaks with a romantic thesis in two important ways. Maintaining a romantic reliance on opposites, as a means and condition of both manifestation and representation, Wilde's critic avoided the coalescence of such binaries. In doing so, the Victorian critic, unlike his romantic predecessor, was able to acknowledge and accommodate the principle of "difference" or variation. Linking agency to a cognitive process that was analogical rather than metaphorical in intent, Wilde's critic also sought to side stepped the subjectivity of the romantic imagination.

Wilde achieved this by arguing the importance of the critic to occupy multiple lives and views points at any one time, be they racial, geographical or historical. Suggesting the development of the critical spirit was dependent not only on an understanding of the nineteenth century, but also of 'every century which preceded it,' and that to 'know oneself, one must know about all others,' Wilde also stressed the importance of the critic to empathise with the art of all ages and places. 'There must be no mood with which one cannot sympathize, no dead mode of life that one cannot make alive.'¹⁶ Importantly for Wilde, the inability of the 'artist' to escape his own subjectivity—to be many-sided—also disqualified him from the act of criticism.¹⁷ Recalling John Stuart Mill's earlier identification of alternative modes of Victorian accomplishment that sat alongside artistic genius, the artist, unlike the critic, was unable to move interchangeably between these two roles.¹⁸

In making this distinction, Wilde claimed three important functions for the late-Victorian critic. Firstly, in occupying multiple lives, the critic was positioned as 'absolutely modern' by realising not only 'our own lives but the collective life of the race.'¹⁹ Secondly, the critic could facilitate a process that remained in Wilde's view open ended and 'incomplete.' Locating the critic's method in 'those modes which suggest reverie and mood' rather than the 'obvious'—'art forms that have but one message to deliver'—also

¹¹ Oscar Wilde, "The Critic as Artist, Part I: With some remarks upon the importance of doing nothing," and "The Critic as Artist, Part I: With some remarks upon the importance of discussing everything," in *Intentions* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 95-149 & 153-217.

¹² Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying" in *Intentions* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 21-22.

¹³ Wilde, "Critic as Artist," 136-7, 142-143 & 139 respectively.

¹⁴ Wilde, "Critic as Artist," 139.

¹⁵ Wilde, "Critic as Artist," 155-156.

¹⁶ Wilde, "Critic as Artist," 172-3.

¹⁷ Wilde, "Critic as Artist," 185-6.

¹⁸ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (London: John W. Parker & Son, 1859) cited by David Wayne Thomas, *Cultivating Victorians: Liberal Culture and the Aesthetic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 47.

¹⁹ Wilde, "Critic as Artist," 172-3.

ensured that all 'interpretations [were] true' and none 'final.'²⁰ Finally, and perhaps most importantly for Wilde as an aesthete, the critic in the acknowledgment of the 'incomplete' could also enact a conceptual process (rather than represent) that which revealed the "beautiful" in art.

It is through its very incompleteness that Art becomes complete in beauty, and so addresses itself not to the faculty of recognition nor to the faculty of reason, but to the aesthetic sense alone, which while accepting both reason and recognition as stages of apprehension subordinates them both to a pure synthetic impression of the art as a whole taking whatever alien emotional elements the work may possess, uses their very complexity as a means by which a richer unity may be added to the ultimate impression itself.²¹

The Decorative Arts and Analogy.

While Wilde's thesis of incompleteness calls to mind the canvases of the impressionist artist, both French and English, which were regularly labelled as unfinished or preliminary, this was a property he felt could also be attached to the decorative arts. Turning to the discipline of late-nineteenth century design, Wilde identified two common strategies as representative of the above intentions. The first was the use of a keynote colour, be it in painted image or a decorated interior. Unify a composition into 'a harmonious whole', colour also left the work open to a multitude of readings: 'Mere colour, unspoiled by meaning, and unallied with definite form can speak to the soul in a thousand different ways.'²² A reliance on 'artistic convention', a practice Wilde labelled 'Orientalist' achieved a similar result. Decorative rather than pictorial in motive, the appeal of Orientalism, lay in its 'frank rejection of imitation, its love of artistic convention, [and] its dislike for the actual representation of any object in Nature.' Embodying the 'transmutation of visible things into beautiful and imaginative work,' it also offered a counter to the 'imitative spirit' in Western art, one focused on life and nature, and one that was ultimately for Wilde, 'vulgar, common and uninteresting.'²³ Associating block colour and artistic convention, practices common to the decorative arts and design, with the representation of 'incompleteness,' Wilde also identified such practices with an agency that was critical rather than artistic (in a romantic sense) in nature. In doing so, he also intimately linked the decorative arts to the modern and democratic development of the critical temperament. The decorative arts and their reliance on block colour, artistic convention or Orientalist forms, Wilde suggested, not only prepared the 'soul for the reception of the true imaginative work' but also developed within the viewer a 'sense of form' that was the 'basis of creative no less than of critical achievement.'²⁴

Importantly, Wilde attributes this thesis to his reading of the Greek philosopher Plato. Drawing on Plato's observation that the true aim of education was a 'love of beauty,' and that the best methods to achieve this were the 'development of temperament, the cultivation of taste, and the creation of a critical spirit,' Wilde drew upon Plato's conviction that the such objectives were dependent upon the characteristics of one's physical surroundings. A beautiful environment would intuitively build within the observer taste, judgement and ultimately critical discernment.²⁵

Wilde's interest in the aesthetic values of colour and artistic convention is in itself unsurprising. Defining attributes in an emerging 'Art for Art's sake' ethic, both represent a growing Victorian interest in formalist

²⁰ Wilde, "Critic as Artist," 147-8.

²¹ Wilde, "Critic as Artist," 147-8.

²² Wilde, "Critic as Artist," 147-8.

²³ Oscar Wilde, "Decay of Lying," in *Intentions*, 25.

²⁴ Wilde, "Critic as Artist," 199-200. Kevin H.F. O'Brien, "'The House Beautiful': A Reconstruction of Oscar Wilde's American Lecture," *Victorian Studies* 17, no. 4 (1974): 396.

²⁵ Wilde, "Critic as Artist," 194-5.

values and a desire to break art's attachment to narrative and moral instruction.²⁶ In linking his thesis to Plato, however, Wilde provides new insight into the functioning of these values within an aesthetic sensibility. Barbara Maria Stafford in *Visual Analogy, Consciousness and the Art of Connecting* (2001), explains Plato's thesis as one that is determined by the ancient ideal of 'participatory analogy.' Distinguishing participatory from proportional analogy, a method based 'on establishing quantitative proportions using a geometrical language of equality and inequality,' the rhetoric of participation relied on a 'a mimetic vocabulary of similarity and dissimilarity.'²⁷ Identifying the latter 'specifically with Plato' — who 'declared that analogy was the most beautiful bond possible' — Stafford goes on to describe analogy as a 'metaphoric and metamorphic practice for weaving discordant particulars into a partial concordance' that 'spurs the imagination to discover similarities in dissimilarities.' Analogy, like Wilde's thesis of incompleteness, reverie or mood, continues to acknowledge 'difference' by avoiding the 'subsumption of two inferior, dichotomous terms into a superior third (as in Hegel's principle of *Aufhebung* or Marx's theory of exchange).'²⁸ Importantly, it can also be contrasted with the 'associative method' inherent to Romantic theories of artistic agency—'allegory or disanalogy'—an opposed method for relating part to whole which in its desire for complete synthesis failed to discriminate and acknowledge 'competing characteristics.'²⁹ Suggesting that participatory analogy is celebrated by Plato in the *Timaeus* (29-30) and the *Republic* (472 b-e), where he developed the notion of an 'image sharing or partaking in a pattern,' Stafford goes on to argue that for Plato the method represented both a 'metaphysics and a logic, a vision and a form of reasoning' that allowed us to infer the ontological and phenomenological likenesses binding seemingly unrelated things.³⁰

For Stafford, a revival of analogy offers present day art practice the opportunity to develop a 'language for talking about resemblance' and to counter an 'exaggerated awareness of difference' in contemporary western culture. Significantly, this too was a concern for Wilde and his contemporaries. As already noted in the opening sections of this essay, Wilde was critical of English educational systems in the nineteenth century. His complaint focused on the exaggerated role these gave to memory and the accumulation of information. 'We in our education systems, have burdened the memory with a load of unconnected facts.' 'We teach people how to think' yet 'we never teach them how to grow.'³¹ Advocating the re-introduction of 'wisdom' and the development of a critical temperament in education, Wilde also encouraged a return to the critical strategies of the ancient Greeks, the analogical practice of reconnecting unlike things (be it form, media or discipline), as a means of enacting this process:

The Greeks did this, and when we come in contact with the Greek critical intellect, we cannot but be conscious that, while our subject-matter is in every respect larger and more varied than theirs, theirs is the only method by which this subject-matter can be interpreted.³²

Wilde was importantly not alone in such sentiments. The inability of modern of man to develop strategies to accommodate the unprecedented quantities of data acquired in the modern age, leaving him 'sunk under a mass of facts,' was also identified by the German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) as the great problem of the Modern age.³³ For the social critic and art theorist William Morris (1834-1986),

²⁶ Stephen Calloway, "The Search for a New Beauty" in Stephen Calloway and Lynn Federle Orr, eds., *The Cult of Beauty: The Aesthetic Movement 1860-1900* (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), 11.

²⁷ Stafford, *Visual Analogy*, 2-3.

²⁸ Stafford, *Visual Analogy*, 8-9.

²⁹ Stafford, *Visual Analogy*, 58-60.

³⁰ Stafford, *Visual Analogy*, 89.

³¹ Wilde, "Critic as Artist," 209.

³² Wilde, "Critic as Artist," 209.

³³ Alexander von Humboldt, *Cosmos: A Sketch of the Physical Description of the Universe*, trans. E.C. Otté. (London: Henry G Bohn, 1849), vol. 2, 370-71.

the decline of the arts in Western society, and its division into the fine and lesser or decorative arts, was a direct result of the progress of the western intellect and its accumulation of knowledge. 'As the thought of man became more intricate and more difficult to express' both knowledge and the arts were divided into discrete disciplinary units of specialisation.³⁴ Arguing that in the past 'handicraftsmen were *artists*,' and that it was only in 'latter times, and under the most intricate conditions of life that they [had] fallen apart from one another,' Morris concluded that it was only when 'the thought of man became more intricate, more difficult to express,' that 'art grew a heavier thing to deal with' and 'labour was...divided among great men, lesser men, and little men.' The result, he continued was 'ill for the Arts altogether.' The lesser arts became 'trivial, mechanical, unintelligent, incapable of resisting the changes pressed down on them by fashion or dishonesty.' The fine or higher arts, on the other hand, while 'practiced for a while by great minds and wonder-making hands, unhelped by the lesser,' lost 'the dignity of popular arts and [became] nothing but dull adjuncts to unmeaning pomp, or the ingenious toys for a few rich and idle men.' The sole solution to this decline was to reinvigorate the 'lesser arts' of handicraft and to once again elevate the craftsman to the status of the artist.³⁵

Morris's elevation of the decorative arts was achieved by his, and previously John Ruskin's (1819-1900), identification of the hand — craftsmanship and the physical labour of making — with the imagination, and in turn, artistic agency.³⁶ Importantly, the strategies of artistic convention, or Orientalist form, valued by Wilde, were openly excluded from this project. In 1858, in a lecture entitled 'The Deteriorative Power of Conventional Art over Nations,' Ruskin rejected the contribution of 'artistic convention' to the reformation of British decorative arts and design.³⁷ Ruskin's lecture was presented at the opening meeting of the Architectural Museum at the South Kensington Museum in London, an institution, which following the International Exhibition of 1851, was founded to improve the design, production and appreciation of British decorative arts.³⁸ The focus of Ruskin's critique was the architect Owen Jones and author of the *Grammar of Ornament* (1856) and a strong advocate of artistic convention.³⁹ For Ruskin, not only was the process of abstraction which convention engendered openly dismissive of a mimetic function of art, it also denied the operation of a liberated and autonomous will on which art proper (according to doctrines of the secondary imagination) was dependent. The practice of artistic convention enslaved the artist and removed "his" ability to invent, imagine and to poetically create. Rendering the artefact mute by disconnecting it from its motive (the imagination), it also opened the door to machine production and the removal of the craftsman from the art process. Wilde's identification of Orientalism with the critical temperament openly challenged Ruskin's view. Identifying such practices not with artist agency as it is defined within romantic thought, but with a Victorian ideal of criticism, an alternative mode of accomplishment that is different to, yet equal to

³⁴ William Morris, "The Lesser Arts," a lecture given to the Trades' Guild of Learning in 1877, reprinted in Christine Poulson, ed., *Morris on Art and Design* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 157.

³⁵ Morris, "The Lesser Arts," 157. Morris's lectures appear to be a response to the thesis developed by James Ferguson who argued that architecture was the result of three distinct types of labour; the mechanical or "technic," the "aesthetic," and the "phonetic." James Fergusson, *An Historical Enquiry in the True Principles of Beauty in Art, More Especially with Reference to Architecture* (London: Longman, 1849), 104. For a discussion of Fergusson see Peter Kohane, *Architecture, Labor and the Human Body: Fergusson, Cockerell and Ruskin*, Ph.D thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1993, chapter 5.

³⁶ John Ruskin, "The Nature of Gothic," (1853) in E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, eds., *The Works of John Ruskin* (London: George Allen, 1903-12), vol. 10, 180-269 & especially 180-189.

³⁷ John Ruskin, *The Deteriorative Power of Conventional Art over Nations: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at the Opening Meeting of the Architectural Museum*, South Kensington Museum, January 13th, 1858 (London: George Allen, 1905), 1-53.

³⁸ Hermione Hobhouse, *The Crystal Palace and the Great Exhibition. Art, Science and Productive History. A History of the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002); Elizabeth Bonython and Anthony Burton, *The Great Exhibitor. The Life and Work of Henry Cole* (London: V&A Publications, 2003).

³⁹ Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* (London: Day & Son, 1856).

Romantic “genius”, Wilde was able to reassert the ‘artistic’ credentials not only of criticism but also of artistic convention. Importantly this link to art proper was now made through a process of analogy – a conceptual process of connecting and contemplation — rather than in the physiological labour of the hand.

The aesthetic interior as a state of critical becoming.

Writing in her recent paper on the Oxford poet and painter Walter Pater (1839-1894), and drawing on the 1870s description of Pater’s home by the author Mary Ward (1851-1920), Maureen Moran observes the coming together of objects within the aesthetic interior; Morris wallpaper, spindle-legged tables and chairs, blue plates and pots “from Holland,” framed embroidery, engravings by Renaissance artists and simple flower arrangements. Seeing this as deliberate attempt to set up a careful juxtaposition of the natural and the artificial, the medieval and Renaissance, and the handmade with the mass produced, Moran goes on to argue that such displays announced for the Oxford intellectuals a new art of discrimination and their rejection of the ‘overstuffed values of mid-Victorian design.’⁴⁰ Drawing parallels between Pater’s literary descriptions of the House Beautiful and the environmental determinism of the ‘genetic’ psychologist James Sully (1842-1923), who suggested ‘the contents and order of arrangements of environments ... determine the form of our mental life,’ Moran also explored the link of such arrangements to nineteenth century theories on mental progress.⁴¹

Taking into account Wilde’s interest in Plato, and by extension analogy, some additional insight into the mental life that was intended for the occupant of the aesthetic interior can be inferred. Was this oppositional display, like colour and artistic convention, intended also to have a critical function? Were the decorative strategies employed within the aesthetic interior, including the use of colour, Orientalist form and eclecticism, intended to function as triggers for the cultivation of a new critical sensibility built upon the associative processes of analogy?

Some evidence to support such a conclusion is found in the 1882 descriptions of artist’s houses described by the late-nineteenth century commentator, Mary Haweis.⁴² Examining the houses for the artists Sir Frederick Leighton, William Burges and Alma-Tadema, the former and latter purpose built and including dedicated studio spaces, Haweis’ descriptions associate the stylistic diversity of the building’s interiors with the agency of the resident artists. This is perhaps most explicit in Haweis’ description of the eclecticism, extreme in both its temporal and geographical range, of Leighton’s house.⁴³ Built for artist by the architect George Aitchison (1825-1910) in 1865, the house was initially very simple, with the studio taking up much of the second floor. Through a series of additions, undertaken up to 1895, including an ‘Arab Hall’—for Leighton’s collection of Syrian tiles—a winter studio, a silk room and Narcissus Hall, the house grew in stylistic and decorative complexity. The end result, as Haweis explained in 1882, was a series of rooms which represented a ‘gradual progress and ascent’ that terminated both for the artist and his visitors, in the studio itself. Importantly, this progress was undertaken through a series of spaces that were stylistically, geographically and temporally diverse: ‘reviving now antique, now medieval, now *Renaissance Italy*, from *Florence* to *Rome*, down through regal *Naples*, on to Cairo itself.’⁴⁴ ‘Passing ... from the *Moorish* dream’ [the Arab Hall] to ‘*England*’ (the dining room which included ‘several *Constables* and a lovely *Mason*’) such

⁴⁰ Maureen Frances Moran, “Walter Pater’s House Beautiful and the Psychology of Self –Culture,” *English Literature in Transition* 50, no. 3 (2007): 291.

⁴¹ Moran, “Walter Pater’s House Beautiful and the Psychology of Self-Culture,” 295.

⁴² Mary Eliza Joy Haweis, *Beautiful Houses: Being A Description of Certain Well-Known Artistic Houses* (New York: Scribner & Welford, 1882).

⁴³ For a more recent description of this ‘extreme eclecticism’ see, Jason Edwards, “The Lessons of Leighton House: Aesthetics, Politics, Erotics,” in Jason Edwards and Imogen Hart, eds., *Rethinking the Interior, c.1867-1896* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 85-110.

⁴⁴ Haweis, *Beautiful Houses*, 3. Italics Haweis’.

geographical and temporal juxtapositions were also attained by the organisation of the decorative arts within each space. A principle demonstrated in the dining room, with its large 'ebonized sideboard' crowded with blue and white china, both '*Nankeen* and old *English*, and a Turkish coffee set, and flanked on either side by 'Arab chairs,' similar effects were also achieved in the stone stairwell—lined with paintings by '*Tintoret*, *Legros* and *Watts*'—the Arab Hall, incorporating Syrian tiles, *Zenana* and Walter Crane frieze, and the studio itself; combining eastern carpets, artistic studies, plaster casts of the Parthenon frieze, Greek fragments, *Bristol* pottery, books, pots and other general 'usefuls.'⁴⁵ Failing to reconcile this diversity into a single or hybrid style the aim, as Haweis pointed out, was to offer 'a vision of each' as it is seen through 'modern eyes.'⁴⁶ Rejecting archaeological correctness to generate effect and mood, such juxtapositions, recalling Wilde's thesis on incompleteness, also suggests a mode of cognition and visualisation centred on the associative methods of analogy.

Purpose built as an artist's house and studio, it is perhaps not surprising that the design would reference Victorian theories of artistic production. Yet, Wilde's identification of the critical temperament as a mode of agency that, unlike the romantic imagination, was accessible to the general population suggests an additional reading of the interior. Opened to the public on a regular basis— on Sunday afternoons and Show Sunday prior the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition—the house also served to build the public's critical capacity.⁴⁷ Visually confronted on such occasions by the diverse styles, historical periods and modes of production displayed, unified and artistically displayed by the architect and artist according to colour and pattern, the interior also provided opportunities for the observer to note features, both shared and varied, across the diverse design traditions displayed. In doing so, the observer would enact the very cognitive processes—analogue rather than allegorical—that Wilde attributed to the critical temperament. A site of "artistic becoming" for the principle occupant of the house, the artist Lord Leighton—one represented by the work undertaken within the second floor studio— for Leighton's clients or the general visitor, the "becoming" that was encouraged, was one that was critical rather than artistic.

Conclusion

Identifying block colour and Orientalist form with 'incompleteness,' Wilde links the sensibility of the Aesthetic Interior not only with an 'Art for Arts sake' ethic—the representation of a new ideal of beauty—but also, and more importantly, to the development of a critical temperament. Asserting the artistic status of criticism, Wilde locates his understanding of the critical temperament within a broader Victorian critique of artistic agency, one that sought to counter the atomistic subjectivity of the romantic imagination with more inclusive and democratic systems of invention. Comparing such objectives with the critical strategies of the ancient Greeks, and Plato specifically, Wilde's thesis can also be attached to an analogical mode of reasoning, a conceptual process of comparison and contrast which in seeking out similarity across a diverse range of objects or facts continued to acknowledge the inevitable and often irreconcilable presence of difference and variety. Associating such conceptual modes of reasoning with the use of colour and 'Orientalist' practices (artistic convention) common to the decorative arts, Wilde thesis also offered new understandings of the eclecticism of the aesthetic interior; the visual juxtaposition of the natural or manmade, medieval and Renaissance, mass-produced or handcrafted, or Western and Oriental, be it within a single room or throughout an entire house. Recalling the parallels made by Moran between the order and arrangement of objects within the aesthetic interior and James Sully's theories on mental life or progress, Wilde's thesis suggests a new link to the analogical processes underpinning Victorian conceptions of the critical temperament. Thus, while the eclecticism of Lord Leighton's house is described by Haweis as the representation of artistic becoming—the 'gradual ascent and progress' towards Leighton's second floor

⁴⁵ Haweis, *Beautiful Houses*, 4-10.

⁴⁶ Haweis, *Beautiful Houses*, 3.

⁴⁷ Daniel Robbins and Reena Suleman, *Leighton House Museum, Holland Park Road Kensington* (London: The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, 2005), 65.

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studio—Wilde’s theory of criticism suggests that it should also be read, and from the perspective of Leighton’s clients and visitors, as an ascent to and cultivation of a critical “becoming”; a democratic and alternative mode of artistic agency that was not only distinct from romantic genius (Leighton himself) but one that was equal in value and accomplishment.