

## [Victorian and Edwardian Interiors \(SFEVE Annual Conference\) 27-28 January 2022](#)

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Type:

Conference

Date:

January 27, 2022 to January 28, 2022

Location:

France

Subject Fields:

Cultural History / Studies, Art, Art History & Visual Studies, Literature

VICTORIAN & EDWARDIAN INTERIORS (Université Toulouse Jean-Jaurès, 27-28 January 2022)

An international conference organized by the C.A.S (EA 801) in collaboration with the SFEVE (Société Française d'Etudes Victoriennes et Edouardiennes)

Confirmed Keynote speakers:

Claudia Kinmonth (Member of the Royal Irish Academy, independent cultural historian, former researcher in the Furniture Department of the Victoria & Albert Museum)

Charlotte Ribeyrol (Université Paris Sorbonne, VALE)

Penny Sparke (Director of the Modern Interiors Research Centre, Kingston University)

As we gradually come out of a long period of enforced global confinement which has challenged us, amongst other things, to take a 'journey round [our] room[s]' (Xavier de Maistre) and reconsider our assumptions about inside and outside, the 2022 SFEVE conference invites scholars to look afresh at the historical emergence, material manifestations and cultural significance of the interior in the long nineteenth century. Building on recent interdisciplinary research in material studies, architectural design theory, the Victorian architectural imaginary and the poetics, politics and phenomenology of dwelling, this conference seeks to explore the multiple facets of the interior from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the end of the Edwardian era.

Central to the concept of 'interior' is the imbrication of the word's spatial, physical, emotional, mystical and political meanings. 'Interior' came into use in the English language in the sixteenth century to mean inside as divided from outside, but also more specifically to describe the deeper, more spiritual nature of the soul within the body. Derived from the Latin 'intus' (i.e. 'within'), 'interior' is a comparative form, whose meaning is accentuated in the superlative 'intimus' (i.e. innermost, deepest, most secret, most private). From the early eighteenth century, 'interiority' was used to evoke inner character and individual subjectivity. But from the middle of the eighteenth century the 'interior' was also a geo-political term used to refer to the domestic affairs of a state and to the territory that belongs to a country. It was only at the beginning of the nineteenth century that, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the 'interior' came to mean 'the inside of a building or room especially in reference to the artistic effect; also a picture or representation of the inside of a

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building. Also, in a theatre, a “set” consisting of the inside of a building or room.’

Thus, as Charles Rice notes, the nineteenth-century interior is inherently double, both a physical three-dimensional space and at the same time an image—a painting, print, theatrical backdrop—which can ‘be imagined and dreamed, and inhabited as such’ (2). While nineteenth-century conceptualizations of the interior were clearly linked to important questions of public health, territorial expansion, historical knowledge and the exploration of the body, subjectivity and the unconscious, the Victorians thus foregrounded the idea of the interior’s deliberate and artful constructedness. In some of the commemorative colour prints of colonial interiors on display at the Crystal Palace in 1851, for example, the theatricality of the interior is regularly emphasized through the presence of visitors/spectators peering through drawn curtains.

In fact, the notion of ‘interior decoration’, appearing for the first time in Thomas Hope’s 1807 *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration*—and popularized through countless Victorian and Edwardian periodicals and manuals—firmly articulated the idea of the interior through decor. This new preoccupation led to the founding in 1837 of the London School of Design, rebranded in 1853 as the Museum of Ornamental Art (today known as the Victoria & Albert Museum). The interior became understood as the creation of a scenography, complete with adornments and furnishings which served to soften, conceal or transform—however fleetingly—the architectural structure, in order to make it livable, hospitable and culturally legible. In Vlad Ionescu’s words, the interior can thus be seen as the ‘moment when a building receives its cultural significance [and] “speaks” to its users’ (2). Such a dynamic, dialogic, relational approach to the interior is particularly striking in the nineteenth-century print culture through which a great variety of interiors were depicted and shaped. The idea of the interior as relational is also poignantly captured in numerous works of literature. One memorable example (among many) can be found in Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times*, in the following exchange between Louisa and her dying mother: “‘Are you in pain, dear mother?’ ‘I think there’s a pain somewhere in the room,’ said Mrs. Gradgrind, ‘but I couldn’t positively say that I have got it.’” (chap. 9)

If, as Walter Benjamin famously put it in the 1930s, ‘[t]he nineteenth century, like no other century, was addicted to dwelling,’ this conference, however, will attempt to qualify and/or revise Benjamin’s conceptualization of the Victorian interior as ‘the étui of the private individual’ (9), as well as his rather sinister notion that the nineteenth century encased the person ‘so deeply in the dwelling’s interior that one might be reminded of the inside of a compass case, where the instrument with all its accessories lies embedded in deep, usually violet folds of velvet’ (220). Instead, we wish to broaden the scope of attention to Victorian and Edwardian interiors not limited to the bourgeois, domestic and urban. Participants are therefore encouraged to consider a diverse array of interiors. Proposals may for example consider:

- \*interiors which enabled a renewed critical engagement with the exterior rather than an anti-historical retreat from the world

- \*complex or problematic interiors (such as public interiors, utopian/political/militant interiors, transparent interiors, gendered interiors, queer interiors, working-class interiors, cosmopolitan interiors, colonial interiors, natural interiors, etc.)

- \*the aesthetic experiences, cultural practices, or socio-economic transformations made possible

through the decorating/designing of interior spaces/rooms

\*how interiors and interiorities were staged, mediated and/or marketed, and the role played by new visual technologies (stereoscope, photography, museum displays etc.)

\*how the interior was represented across political, scientific, medical and architectural discourses

\*the poetics, aesthetics, politics and economics of the interior in literature, art, magazines, book design and material culture

\*the articulation between interiors and subjectivity, objects and people, the material and the immaterial

\*various forms of dwelling, as well as the allied notions of 'home', homelessness and homesickness

\*issues of preservation, renovation and re-use of nineteenth-century interiors

\*contemporary re-interpretations of the nineteenth-century interior in neo-Victorian fiction, heritage cinema, etc.

Please send a 300-500-word abstract (for a 20-minute presentation followed by 10 minutes of question/discussion) with a short bio-bibliography to Catherine Delyfer ([catherine.delyfer@univ-tlse2.fr](mailto:catherine.delyfer@univ-tlse2.fr)) AND Amélie Dochy ([amelie.dochy-jacquard@univ-tlse2.fr](mailto:amelie.dochy-jacquard@univ-tlse2.fr)).

Deadline for submissions: 10 July 2021

Notification of acceptance: 30 July 2021

Publication: a selection of peer-reviewed articles will be published in a special issue of *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens*

Languages of the conference: English and French

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