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John Ruskin, William Morris and Walter Pater: From Nature to Musical Harmony in the Decorative Arts

John Ruskin, William Morris et Walter Pater : de la nature à l'harmonie musicale dans les arts décoratifs

Martine Lambert-Charbonnier

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RÉSUMÉS

FRANCAISENGLISH

L'argument de Ruskin selon lequel l'essentiel, en tout art, est de façonner avec les mains ce que l'œil voit clairement brouille les frontières entre les beaux arts et les arts décoratifs. En prônant une nouvelle expérience de la nature propre à dévoiler la vérité à l'observateur, il inspira un nouveau style de décoration intérieure à William Morris, qui tentait de promouvoir l'artisanat face à la production de masse qu'il considérait comme aliénante pour la dignité de l'homme. Le renouveau gothique fut pour lui le moyen de donner un nouvel élan à la culture victorienne en prônant l'observation attentive de la nature et les valeurs de l'artisanat. Tout en créant un environnement qui ouvrait l'homme à la beauté de la nature, les arts décoratifs protégeaient l'homme de la laideur de l'époque industrielle. Les motifs créés par Morris étaient recherchés par les esthètes qui, sensibles à l'esthétique épicurienne de Walter Pater, souhaitaient faire de leurs intérieurs le miroir de leurs rêves et de leurs aspirations. Sa célébration de la musique dans *La Renaissance* comme idéal vers lequel tous les arts tendent renforça l'idée de la décoration d'intérieur comme composition musicale propre à l'éveil des sens chez l'esthète. L'article examine dans quelle mesure les intérieurs esthétiques témoignent de l'ambiguïté entre le retrait dans les rêves et le désir de redécouvrir vérité et beauté de la nature.

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Mots-clés :

[arts décoratifs](#), [décoration d'intérieur](#), [nature](#), [mouvement « Arts and Crafts »](#), [gothique](#), [esthète](#), [industrialisation](#), [motif](#), [perception](#), [l'art pour l'art](#)

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TEXTE INTÉGRAL

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1John Ruskin's claim that what is essential in all art is to fashion by hand what the eye sees clearly, blurred the divide between the fine arts and the decorative arts. Advocating a renewed experience of nature proper to disclose truth to the beholder, he inspired a new form of interior design with the arts and crafts movement in which art fulfilled a social function. William Morris, who acknowledged his deep admiration for Ruskin, created the Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co with the aim of creating beautiful and restful environments proper to revive men's senses and restore their dignity—which he considered had been damaged in the industrial revolution. Though the company produced objects that the lower classes could not afford, it created more simple and sober interiors—as testified by Michael Field's *Durdans*—which countered mass production in the industrial age. For William Morris there was moral truth in this revival of the decorative arts, since craftsmen would re-discover the freedom of creating objects as well as convey for others the exhilarating experience of being close to nature. There was, however, some dilemma in the movement between the desire to redeem the present from the ugly industrial age and a longing for a past age. Following John Ruskin's praise of the Middle Ages in *The Stones of Venice*, the decorative arts participated in the gothic revival which celebrated a time in which craftsmanship freed men and helped them reach truth through a close observation of nature. While the decorative arts created an environment conducive to a better

appreciation of natural beauty, they also sheltered the aesthete from the ugliness of the industrial age. Patterns designed by Morris were loved by aesthetes who wanted their homes to mirror their dreams and aspirations and who embraced Walter Pater's epicurean aesthetics. Walter Pater's celebration of music in *The Renaissance* as the ideal towards which all arts should aspire, fostered the idea of interior design as a musical composition enhancing pure perception for the aesthetic mind. We will examine to what extent aesthetic interiors show this ambiguity between the desire to re-discover natural beauty and truth and the retreat into aesthetic dreams.

- 1 I am using two different versions of the lecture entitled 'The Lesser Arts of Life': the 1877 lectu ([...](#))

2The rise of manufacturing was a main issue for Ruskin and Morris, who feared that this would deprive men not only of their pleasure in making objects, but also of their whole identity, by reducing men's role at work to a mere manual gesture that did not involve the mind. In 'The Lesser Arts of Life', William Morris claimed that '[m]echanical Toil will sweep over all the handiwork of man, and art will be gone' (Morris 1908, 211).¹ For his reflection on the consequences of manufacturing on human labour he was much indebted to John Ruskin's ideas in 'The Nature of Gothic'—which he directly referred to in 'The Lesser Arts' as 'the truest and the most eloquent words that can possibly be said on the subject' (Ruskin 1908, 5).

- 2 In the Preface to Felibien's *Conférences de l'Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture* (1669).

- 3 'La régénération esthétique, c'est la restauration de l'unité de l'art, une unité perdue depuis la ([...](#))

3Countering Adam Smith who advocated the division of manual tasks in *The Wealth of Nations*, Ruskin claimed in 'The Nature of Gothic' that: 'It is not, truly speaking, the labour that is divided; but the men:—Divided into mere segments of men—broken into small fragments and crumbs of life; so that all the little piece of intelligence that is left in a man is not enough to make a pin, or a nail, but exhausts itself in making the point of a pin, or the head of a nail' (Ruskin 1903, X, 196). The crushing power of machines is enhanced by the analogy between man and the objects he makes, since instead of being at his service machines end up mastering him, cutting him into bits and pieces and turning his hand into a mere tool disconnected from his intelligence. Manufacturing, he explains in *The Two Paths*, is opposed to art, because it does not involve man's intelligence but is merely 'the making of anything by hand . . .', while art involves 'the operation of the hand and the intelligence of man together'. 'Then FINE ART is that in which the hand, the head, and the heart of man go together' (Ruskin 1905, XVI, 294). Ruskin blurs the border between the arts by redefining the power of man's invention as the 'spirit of touch' (Ruskin 1903, X, 200)—and therefore according to the soul's involvement in the work produced, while for Felibien it depends on the subject of the painting.² This definition of art is consistent with Walter Pater's 'inventive handling' (Pater 1986, 83), which admits of no separation between design and execution, resulting in a reappraisal of the decorative arts. Moreover, for Ruskin the decorative arts have a moral function because they could contribute to restoring man's individual unity—of the hand, the mind and the heart. His argument is close to Aristotle's classification of three activities of a human being—making, doing and knowing—, which serves as a basis for his defence of man's excellence in craftsmanship, moral virtue and logic. The decorative arts also fulfil a useful social function in people's daily lives which is to beautify men's daily surroundings. They achieve what Jacques Rancière calls 'aesthetic recovery': 'Aesthetic recovery consists in restoring the artistic unity that was lost with the separation between the "fine arts" dedicated to the sole contemplation of museum visitors and the so-called decorative arts which serve a practical goal and are integrated into the decoration of a building' (Rancière 163).³ Thus Ruskin emphasizes the importance of decoration in art in *The Two Paths*—giving the example of Titian's frescoes in Venice: 'And all the greatest art which the world has produced is thus fitted for a place, and subordinated to a purpose. There is no existing highest-order art but is decorative' (Ruskin 1905, XVI, 320). Mural paintings on Victorian public buildings were encouraged by Ruskin who, for instance, advised Acland about the best ornamentation for the Oxford Museum in a letter of 1859: 'The highest art in all kinds is that which conveys the most truth; and the best ornamentation possible would be the painting of interior walls with frescoes by Titian, representing perfect Humanity in colour' (Ruskin 1905, 231). He thought that images of moral truth after the style of Titian would enhance the educational experience of visiting the new museum, which was created to host science collections to broaden the views of educated men at Oxford.

4Ruskin favoured places of recreation for the decorative arts because he considered that a state of repose was essential for people to recover their acuteness of perception, which was being dulled in daily toil:

The question of greatest external or internal decoration depends entirely on the conditions of probable repose. It was a wise feeling which made the streets of Venice so rich in external ornament, for there is no couch of rest like the gondola. So, again, there is no subject of street ornament so wisely chosen as the fountain, where it is a fountain of use; for it is just there that perhaps the happiest pause takes place in the labour of the day, when the pitcher is rested on the edge of it, and the breath of the bearer is drawn deeply, and the hair swept from the forehead, and the uprightness of the form declined against the marble ledge, and the sound of the kind word or light laugh mixes with the trickle of the falling water, heard shriller and shriller as the pitcher fills. What pause is so sweet as that—so full of the depth of ancient days, so softened with the calm of pastoral solitude? (Ruskin 1903, VIII, 161–62)

- 4 'to see the impotence and rigidity settling upon the form of the developed man; to see the types wh (...)

5Repose is the requisite state of mind for enjoying art because it allows the mind to perceive beauty as an experience of all the senses—sight, hearing, feel, touch and taste. Restoring the acuteness of the senses is therefore another artistic aim for Ruskin, who in particular laments the degraded sense of sight in daily routine, quoting John Locke's *Essay in Human Understanding in Modern Painters*: 'Men usually see little of what is before their eyes. They forget the great truth told them by Locke, Book ii. Chap. 9, §3: "This is certain, that whatever alterations are made in the body, if they reach not the mind, whatever impressions are made on the outward parts, if they are not taken notice of within, there is no perception"' (Ruskin 1903, III, 141). By referring to Locke's theory of the formation of ideas and opinions and how they testify to man's superiority over animals, Ruskin emphasizes the moral importance of perception and the fact that weaker perceptions are degrading for man. Thus the 'fountain of use' he describes proves the usefulness of the decorative arts which reclaim eyesight from the 'over use' of the senses,⁴ allowing the mind time for true perception in a restful pause from daily occupations—a happy pause in a day's labour.

6Since the decorative arts are instrumental to restoring man's perception, they fully participate in the aesthetic quest, especially if we consider the Greek meaning of *aesthesis* (perception). In 'The Lesser Arts' William Morris claims that 'the other kind (the lesser arts), called into existence by material needs, is bound no less to recognize the aspirations of the soul and receives the impress of its striving towards perfection' (Morris 1882, 177). It is interesting to notice that while echoing the word 'needs', the second part of the sentence sounds quite similar to Walter Pater's words defining Luca della Robbia's sculpture as bearing 'that intimate impress of an indwelling soul' (Pater 1986, 41). As an advocate of art-for-art's sake, Pater considers that the decorative arts contribute to the aestheticization of daily life, but his focus is individual, rather than social, when he acknowledges that art is the intimate expression of the artist's own genius—of his own artistic quality that merges the matter with 'the form, the spirit of the handling' (Pater 1986, 86). According to the Hegelian perspective that art contains the unity of nature and the spirit, and is both a human product in a sensuous medium and the embodiment of the ideal, he believes that the decorative arts create objects of use which convey an aesthetic ideal: 'And this principle [the fusion of the matter and the form] holds good of all things that partake in any degree of artistic qualities, of the furniture of our houses, and of dress, for instance, of life itself, of gesture and speech, and the details of daily intercourse . . .' (Pater 1986, 138). Pater does not deny the moral and social function of art, but he gives primacy to the formal features of design—which also define the artist's spirit. In 'A Prince of Court Painters'—a short imaginary life of Watteau—Pater shows to what extent the decoration of a room enshrines the dreams of the artist and those of his time:

He has completed the ovals:—The Four Seasons. Oh! The summerlike grace, the freedom and softness, of the 'Summer'—a hayfield such as we visited today, but boundless, and with touches of level Italian architecture in the hot, white, elusive distance, and wreaths of flowers, fairy hayrakes and the like, suspended from tree to tree, with that wonderful lightness which is one of the charms of his work... I am struck by the purity of the room he has re-fashioned for us—a sort of *moral* purity; yet in the *forms* and *colours* of things. (Pater 1912, 22–23)

7The contemplation of nature provides colours, lines and motifs for Watteau to express his ideal world in his pattern of *The Four Seasons*, designed for Marie-Marguerite Pater's house in the imaginary tale. According to the Hegelian *Zeitgeist*, the artist also embodies the aspirations of the world he lives in—and in his works he conveys the values of the Enlightenment in eighteenth-century France, in particular the ideal of freedom.

8For William Morris nature is much more than a source of inspiration for his patterns, it is above all an everlasting power which could help man reclaim the moral values and the beauty lost in the industrial age. In 'The Prospects of Architecture in Civilisation', he explains that art should contribute

to the regeneration of man and society by reviving man's lost link with nature in his everyday surroundings: 'the very flowers of the field would have but given place to flowers fashioned by man's hand and mind: the hedge-row oak would have blossomed into fresh beauty in roof-tree and lintel and door-post' (Morris 1908, 180). The decorative arts re-create a rural setting in people's homes by designing patterns that do not idealize nature, but emulate its creative power. Nature becomes a guide for the decorator who 'fashions' flowers just as nature would create them, to fulfil the moral aim of restoring man's unity in his own life as a craftsman. In the 1877 lecture entitled 'The Lesser Arts of Life' and delivered in Manchester, Morris insists that 'the brain that guides the hand must be healthy and hopeful, must be keenly alive to the surroundings of our own days' (Morris 1882, 183). By referring to everlasting growth in nature William Morris enhances durability in art versus change, which became a dominant value in the industrial age, and he complains about the fickleness of Victorian fashion, in contrast with craftsmanship which seeks to represent enduring forms of beauty: 'People say to me often enough: If you want to make your art succeed and flourish, you must make it the fashion: a phrase which I confess annoys me . . . Well, such advisers are right if they are content with the thing lasting but a little while' (Morris 1908, 16). The reflection on durability also reveals the paradox of the decorative arts which claim the full status of art but are threatened by use just like common objects. Ruskin recognizes that art should not be too elaborate if 'placed where it is liable to injury, to wear and tear' (Ruskin 1889, 15). For Pater this issue also reflects a deep concern, since the aesthetic mind aims to build enduring forms of beauty from the Heraclitean flux of perception, so fickleness in fashion could threaten personality in art: 'Only, methinks 'tis a pity to incorporate so much of his work, of himself, with objects of use, which must perish by use, or disappear, like our own old furniture, with mere change of fashion' (Pater 1912, 23). For William Morris the fickleness of fashion is opposed to the eternal growth and renewal of nature, which nourishes man's soul, as he explains in 'The Lesser Arts': 'love of nature in all its forms must be the ruling spirit of such works of art as we are considering' (Morris 1882, 183). Fashion would bridle man's power of invention by submitting him to the whims of the wealthy. To revive the lost link to nature is also to recover the values of older times—especially the Middle Ages—when he thinks men were freer in their hearts and in their art.

9Nature as a ruling master of forms echoes Ruskin's praise of naturalism in 'The Nature of Gothic', with love of nature being defined as the third character of the Gothic style. In particular Ruskin praises the medieval craftsman's love for natural forms of vegetation, describing not only how he took pleasure in accurately reproducing them, but also how his own work conveyed natural growth.

Both Greek and Roman used conventional foliage in their ornament, passing into something that was not foliage at all, knotting itself into strange cup-like buds or clusters, and growing out of lifeless rods instead of stems; the Gothic sculptor received these types, at first, as things that ought to be just as we have a second time received them; but he could not rest in them. He saw there was no veracity in them, no knowledge, no vitality. Do what he would, he could not help liking the true leaves better . . . (Ruskin 1903, X, 232)

10According to Aristotle, God as pure thought moves each form of nature towards perfection, so that repose is seen as the ultimate achievement of movement. Ruskin's view fits in with this vision of perfection, because the medieval craftsman cannot 'rest' until he has transcribed the natural form accurately in his material. When craftsmanship conveys natural growth, it reproduces life in nature and participates in the general move of all things to perfection. This could also be the meaning of William Morris's blossoming flowers in the previous quote from 'The Lesser Arts of Life': the creation of true life in homely architecture, as if real stones were endowed with organic growth by the skill of the artist. When art follows nature as a truthful guide, there will inevitably be some roughness in the work according to Ruskin, since the craftsman will respect the material without trying to polish it too much. Moreover, roughness is also a moral quality because it testifies to man's own humility when confronted to the greatness of nature. Roughness becomes a feature of gothic, in contrast with Greek perfection:

The Greek sculptor could neither bear to confess his own feebleness, nor to tell the faults of the forms that he portrayed. But the Christian workman, believing that all is finally to work together for good, freely confesses both, and neither seeks to disguise his own roughness of work, nor his subject's roughness of make. (Ruskin 1903, X, 234)

11The search for a 'good'—truthful—representation, even at the expense of aesthetic fineness is reminiscent of the opposition between what Ruskin defines as the 'Theoretic faculty' in *Modern Painters*, that is a 'moral perception and appreciation of ideas of beauty', compared to what he calls 'Aesthetic', which degrades the apprehension of beauty 'into a mere operation of sense' (Ruskin IV,

35). The search for truth may sometimes be achieved at the expense of aesthetic perfection, but it does not make the result inferior, quite the contrary, since imperfection is a sign of greater freedom of execution for Ruskin. Not surprisingly perhaps Walter Pater, more concerned with aesthetics than with morality in art, favours Greek art as the spirit of a naturalist *renaissance* in gothic art:

The conventional vegetation of the Romanesque, its blendings of human or animal with vegetable form, in cornice or capital, have given way here, in the first Pointed style, to a pleasanter, because more natural, mode of fancy; to veritable forms of vegetable life, flower or leaf, from meadow and woodside . . . He (the artist) is no longer a Byzantine, but a Greek—an unconscious Greek. (Pater 1913, 118–20)

12For Walter Pater the Greek spirit is essentially free and inspires a truthful love of nature in architecture for the most beautiful effect, thanks to the balance between Dionysian perception and Apollinian order. To Ruskinian roughness Walter Pater, the aesthete, prefers delicate fineness as the achievement of the craftsman's aesthetic quest.

13However, for Ruskin and Morris who were concerned with the rise of machinery in the age of industrialization, the issue of imperfection was particularly important. Following Ruskin, Morris emphasized that roughness testified to man's skill and execution—hence to the unity of man's hand and mind—, in opposition to mechanical perfection.

Furthermore, if any of these things make any claim to be considered works of art, they must show obvious traces of the hand of man guided directly by his brain, without more interposition of machines than is absolutely necessary to the nature of the work done. Again, whatsoever art there is in any of these articles of daily use must be evolved in a natural and unforced manner from the material that is dealt with: so that the result will be such as could not be got from any other material; if we break this law we shall make a triviality, a toy, not a work of art. (Morris 1882, 182)

14The 'obvious traces of the hand of man' are the individual features which are crushed by machine work and its uniform execution. In opposition to the repetitive process of technology, which constrains matter, art works in perfect harmony with nature and its natural growth, according to an image we analysed above. Bearing in mind Walter Pater's definition of art, we may argue that while for Morris, nature is the principle presiding over the fusion between form and matter—for Pater, it is the artist's soul. The difference may explain the duality at the core of the arts and crafts movement, whether it is designed to enhance man's perception of nature or to reflect the aesthete's soul.

15Using natural patterns in interior design is a way for William Morris to educate the senses and revive the link to nature:

Now it is one of the chief uses of decoration, the chief part of its alliance with nature, that it has to sharpen our dulled senses in this matter: for this end are wonders of intricate patterns interwoven, those strange forms invented, which men have so long delighted in: forms and intricacies that do not necessarily imitate nature, but in which the hand of the craftsman is guided to work in the way that she does, till the web, the cup, or the knife, look as nature, nay as lovely, as the green field, the river bank, or the mountain flint. (Morris 1882, 4)

16Through the metaphoric transfer of water suggested by 'the river bank' and the green colour, freshness becomes an experience of all the senses—feel, taste, sound and sight, so that the unity of perception mirrors the unity of man which Morris wishes to restore through art. Moreover, decoration is described as a formal arrangement of lines into patterns, which frees artistic design from imitation, though it emulates two essential features of nature, abundance and variety with its 'intricacies' and 'wonders'. Thus patterns intertwine man's aesthetic impression with his moral apprehension of nature as a living and structuring power:

On the contrary, unless you know plenty about the natural form that you are conventionalizing, you will not only find it impossible to give people a satisfactory impression of what is in your own mind about it, but you will be so hampered by your ignorance, that you will not be able to make your conventionalized form ornamental. (Morris 1905, 151)

- 5 See passage on the Gothic style above.

17 Morris's praise of conventionalized patterns is in sharp contrast with Ruskin's criticism of conventional patterns in Greek and Roman art, which he argues restrict invention, probably because he thinks they do not convey life in nature.⁵ Yet William Morris's patterns reconcile formal arrangement and the impression of growth in nature, while being fully consistent with the material conditions of home decoration—especially on flat walls and panels. By using natural colours and elaborate forms Morris contrives to revive indoors the experience of being in nature: 'Morris believed that plant forms in patterns could, if treated correctly, create an atmosphere of nature within the home' (Leonard 92). This view is tightly connected to his vision of the garden-city, in which man would not be estranged from nature in his daily working and living environment. In his biography of William Morris, Jack Lindsay explains that Morris's decorative designs were not merely an attempt to reproduce the forms he loved in nature, but also to convey a sense of natural growth so that inside his home man would feel at one with nature. Morris's daughter May remembers how her father was inspired by his strolls around Kelmscott House to conceive some of his wall paper designs: 'We were walking one day by our little stream that runs into the Thames, and my Father pointed out the detail and variety in the leaf-forms, and soon afterwards this paper was done, a keenly-observed rendering of our willows that has embowered many a London living-room' (Morris M. 1966, 36). The word 'embowered' is interesting as it reflects some ambiguity about the effect of William Morris's design, which was meant perhaps both to arouse man's perception of nature and to shield him from the ugliness of the new industrial age. The idea of the 'bower' suggests the romantic idea of rest and harmony with nature, dear to Morris's heart, a place from which nature may be observed and enjoyed, but also a screen which hides the person from the outside world. The ambiguity was commented by Coleridge in his poem 'Lime Bower', in which he described it both as a prison and a place proper to the contemplation of nature. The concept reflects the ambiguity of interior design in some aesthetic homes, which display Morris-style patterns inspired from nature, but also enhance the inner soul's personal associations—then achieving a goal totally different from the initial idea, which was to open the mind to the outside world.

18 The interpretations of Michael Field's two houses, Durdans and Paragon convey these ambiguities, especially as Michael Field moved from Morris-style decoration at Durdans to embrace Charles Ricketts's design at Paragon. Even at Durdans Charles Ricketts remarked that the house seemed to achieve Walter Pater's ideal of 'crystallization': 'The place spoke of a love of books, art, travel and flowers. I noticed on one of the tables one of those early paper covered editions in which Nietzsche first appeared; otherwise, the general atmosphere was that crystallized by Walter Pater, a survival of the less flamboyant phase of the Aesthetic movement' (Ricketts 1). The image of the crystal is used by Walter Pater in *The Renaissance* to convey the ideal of art, because its transparency evokes the fusion of simple form and intense perception—classical sobriety and romantic passion. Certainly Michael Field sought simplicity in interior design for her mind to feel free to engage in literary creation. In a letter to Katherine Bradley dated of 5th August 1882, Edith Cooper admired the simplicity of Ruskin's house she had just visited: 'There is the lesson of Brantwood. Monastic simplicity,—the one thing needful for the highest attainable art' (Bickle 56). Yet she also wanted to be surrounded with objects that reflected her tastes and her aspirations, as is testified by an entry in *Works and Days*: 'Today's dreams and desires—the tongs with which the angel makes living coals of our lips to-day—these are the things to be expressed in our walls, in our furniture, in our dress' (Parejo 2). Durdans was decorated according to the aesthetic lines of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co, with wallpaper, furniture and carpet bought at the factory, but the aesthetic mind gave subtle colouring to the rooms, as implied in the phrasing above. Eventually Michael Field moved away from Morris-style decoration to embrace Charles Ricketts's aesthetic design in their second house, the Paragon, which used a whole range of colours to create a suitable mood in each room: 'In colouring a house, see that the temper of each room is kept. When a room hides from the sun, provide it with colours and hangings that love the shade: the green of green shadows in the heart of a wood, blue of that blue haunting a grot, the colours found under the sea. Place also mirrors in it that listen to you, that look like pools' (Delaney 18). Colours are evocative of secluded places, offering a refuge for the aesthetic mind, with many mirroring effects conveyed by the image of water. 'The colours found under the sea' echo Pater's subdued tonalities 'some faint light under sea' (Pater 1986, 79) which give subtle colouring to Mona Lisa's eternal and mysterious soul in *The Renaissance*. Charles Ricketts's symbolic use of colour to describe moods also conjures up Whistler's colour harmonies in his *Nocturnes* according to Pater's ideal of music: 'Nature contains the elements, in colour and form, of all pictures, as the keyboard contains the notes of all music. But the artist is born to pick, and choose, and group with science, these elements, that the result may be Beautiful—as the musician gathers his notes and forms his chords, until he bring forth from chaos glorious harmony' (Whistler 12). Since music has the unique power to create harmonies for the soul, nature is no longer the moral and aesthetic model the artist should follow, but rather a 'chaos' which needs his musical, ordering mind. Whistler advocates aesthetic principles opposed to what Morris and Ruskin believe

in—the inspiring power of nature for the artist to re-create the earthly harmony that was lost in the industrial age.

19 John Ruskin praised nature as a guide for man's moral and aesthetic education to counter some of the evil consequences of industrialization—in particular working conditions in factories where man's function was reduced to a mere manufacturing process. Taking cue from Ruskin, William Morris wished to revive craftsmanship in order to strengthen man's power of perception as well as his awareness of the eternal values of nature, so he designed a new style which was partly inspired from the Gothic period. The paradox of creating new designs in modern times while looking up to past centuries, goes some way to explaining the subtle contradiction in some aesthetic homes between the desire to open to nature and the withdrawal into the House Beautiful as a shelter for one's own dreams. On the one hand, Ruskin and Morris wanted craftsmanship to benefit society as a whole, especially by adorning public buildings with objects and images elevating the soul and reviving the link to nature. On the other hand the new style suited aesthetes seeking objects and patterns for their Houses Beautiful to mirror their dreams and aspirations. Whether complying with the model of nature with Ruskin and Morris or to the ideal of music with Pater and Whistler, interior design created homes which enhanced perception and nurtured the educated soul.

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NOTES

1 I am using two different versions of the lecture entitled 'The Lesser Arts of Life': the 1877 lecture, included in the 1908 Longmans publication of *Hopes and Fears for Art* and the 1882 lecture, originally entitled 'Some Minor Arts of Life', an expanded version of the 1877 lecture, included in the 1882 Macmillan publication of *Lectures on Art*.

2 In the Preface to Felibien's *Conférences de l'Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture* (1669).

3 'La régénération esthétique, c'est la restauration de l'unité de l'art, une unité perdue depuis la séparation entre les 'beaux-arts', voués à la seule contemplation des visiteurs de musée, et les arts dits décoratifs parce qu'ils sont mis au service d'une fin pratique et intégrés à la décoration d'un édifice.' My translation.

4 'to see the impotence and rigidity settling upon the form of the developed man; to see the types which once had the die of thought struck fresh upon them, worn flat by over use . . .' (Ruskin 1903, VIII, 194).

5 See passage on the Gothic style above.

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POUR CITER CET ARTICLE

Référence électronique

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