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# The Velvet Touch: Fashion, Furniture, and the Fabric of the Interior

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## **Abstract**

This article engages with Walter Benjamin's critical readings of velvet linings in nineteenth-century domestic interiors and fashions in *The Arcades Project*, as well as Jacques Derrida's more recent etymological and symbolic excavation of the *hymen* as textile, to argue for sensuous textiles as literal and figurative mediators of the nineteenth-century bourgeois desire to possess, articulated in the act of touching. Through an examination of velvet's "softening" of the domestic interior over the course of the nineteenth century and significant parallels between domestic furnishings and women's fashions, it explores an age in which

sensuality was subsumed within the fabric of everyday life, but palpably present in the lining's "velvet touch." Within the cultural landscape of an increasingly modern Paris, marked by Haussmannization, industrialization, and a burgeoning consumer economy, velvet gowns and linings functioned not simply as protection from modernity, but also as facilitators of a new consumerist paradigm of suspended gratification. The article employs evidence ranging from period costumes and upholstery to the writings of Emile Zola and Marcel Proust, as well as the decorative paintings of Édouard Vuillard and the Art Nouveau furniture of Eugène Gaillard, in support of the ultimate claim that *fin-de-siècle* design reformers attempted to overturn the sexual politics of drapery by fusing surface with substance.

**KEYWORDS:** velvet, drapery, upholstery, Walter Benjamin, Édouard Vuillard, Art Nouveau

"Boredom is a warm gray fabric lined on the inside with the most lustrous and colorful of silks. In this fabric we wrap ourselves when we dream." So writes Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*, his epic compilation of texts on bourgeois culture in nineteenth-century Paris (2002[1939]b: 64). During the final twelve years of his life, from 1927 to 1939, Benjamin worked on his vast project like an ambitious spider, weaving textual fragments together with his own critiques to form an intricate fabric, which functions at times like a tapestry, flashing crystal-line images before the reader, and at times to blur and to blind—the text becoming in Benjamin's words "plush for the eyes."<sup>1</sup> Throughout the *Arcades*, Benjamin proposes sensuous textiles as *mediators*—metaphors for a suspended existence, threshold, or dream-state. "Waiting," he says, "is, in a sense, the lined interior of boredom" (2002[1939]b: 118). Lining, then, was boredom's secret: it embodied that state of concealment from and suspension of reality that Benjamin identified in his 1935 exposé on the nineteenth-century apartment as "the phantasmagorias of the interior."<sup>2</sup>

More recently, Jacques Derrida (1981), exploring the work of the late nineteenth-century Symbolist poet, Stéphane Mallarmé, has proposed "lining" both as a tangible covering and as a conceptual state of transition between the experience of *exteriority*, or actions, and *interiority*, or dreams. Derrida weaves his polysemic "lining" from Mallarmé's characterization of the "hymen" in the short text, *Mimique*: "... a hymen (out of which flows Dream), tainted with vice, yet sacred, between desire and fulfillment, perpetration and remembrance" (Derrida 1981: 175). Derrida envisions this hymen as "the fold in a lining by which it is ... between the outside and the inside, making the outside enter the inside" (1981: 229). For Derrida, the hymen is "lining" in its symbolic *betweenness*: lining is the filmy membrane "out of which flows Dream," it is boredom's *Other*—the lustrous medium between the stasis of languor

and the animation of dreams. If boredom is, as Benjamin suggests, “the external surface of unconscious events” (2002[1939]b: 106), then lining is not merely the covering of the domestic interior or *bourgeoise* body, but the threshold of interiority *itself*—that subterranean landscape of dreams and desires, concealed beneath the dull crust of daily life.

Fabric linings constituted boundaries between skin and “street clothes,” enveloped the hard contours of furniture and padded the walls of private chambers, protecting their occupants from the sharp angles of public life in nineteenth-century Paris. The experience of lining as a sheath or “second skin” was not primarily optical—“lustrous”—but *tactile*. For Benjamin it was not simply silk, but silk woven into velvet and plush (fabrics whose lustrous sheen and luxurious pile results from the cutting of tiny looped fibers) that lined the nineteenth-century interior.<sup>3</sup> Plush, for Benjamin, was the embodiment of the interior mode, as it served not only to protect, but also to stifle, or muffle. What follows is an attempt to take Benjamin at his word—to consider his preoccupation with the haptic phenomena of velvet linings not simply as isolated theory, but in intimate connection with late nineteenth-century domesticity (both as experienced in life and imagined in fiction) from the casing of the female body to the lining of the increasingly feminized domestic interior. Benjamin had emerged from the velvet folds of a *fin-de-siècle* childhood, but he regarded them in the 1930s through the stark transparency of steel-and-glass modernism. This particular perspective—determined both by the child’s visceral proximity and the man’s critical distance, and invoked here to analyze the parallels between furnishings and fashions within the domestic interior—describes an age in which sensuality was subsumed within the “warm gray fabric” of everyday life and palpably present in the “velvet touch” of sumptuous linings.<sup>4</sup> But curtains may be penetrated and folds of fabric lifted. It was the very liminality of its linings that threatened to undo the phantasmagorias of the interior.

Both the *fin-de-siècle* Parisian apartment and the *Parisienne* are infamous in art and literature for their drapery in lavish layers of plush pile. Of all the fabrics newly available to the middle classes owing to the industrialization of textile production in the late eighteenth century, velvet, and the more sumptuous plush with its even longer fibers, saw the most remarkable transformation from signifiers of opulence and power to domestic materials enlisted by the bourgeoisie in its campaign to soften and conceal. Velvets began to play a more significant role not only in women’s fashions during their crucial period of development during the Second Empire (1852–70) but also in new furnishings brought about by the feminine “invasion” of the domestic interior—a re-clothing of private spaces that was intimately connected with new trends in women’s dress. Indeed, historian Philippe Perrot has described the bourgeois woman as simultaneously withdrawing from and *mediating* the very experience of the world through her clothing. She accomplished this



specifically, Perrot argues, through the “enormous cone of fabric” with its multiple, voluminous petticoats that came by the early 1850s to constitute her skirt, which, just as an overstuffed sofa might be upholstered in plush, was increasingly draped in weighty wads of velvet (1994: 144). But while plush folds enabled a protective swaddling of objects and individuals, they presented a simultaneous restraint: a barrier that frustrated the direct contact of thing with thing, or body with body.

The latter half of the nineteenth century has been caricatured as a period in which rigid social conventions dictated the experience of daily life, especially where sexuality was concerned.<sup>5</sup> Benjamin’s description of the Parisian interior’s “stifled perspective” as “plush for the eyes,” in conjunction with historian Peter Gay’s more recent depiction of a Victorian sensuality “befogged by delicacy,” conjures a period atmosphere of soft suffocation (Benjamin 2002[1939]b: 121; Gay 1984: 286). It has even been proposed that “an obsession haunted the bourgeoisie as it took its place in the world ... the obsession of covering, enveloping, carpeting, padding, or burying at any cost a nudity that seemed, like emptiness, threatening” (P. Perrot 1994: 144). It was in this context that textiles, as second skins, played a crucial role in the mediation, sublimation, and commodification of desire. Existing between desired object and desiring consumer, the plush membrane became a surrogate for the thing it enveloped. Velvet dramatized this mimetic relationship in its seductive appeal to the touch as a kind of domesticated “fur.” It provided not only casings for bodies and objects, but also opportunities for tactile pleasure in a culture whose taboos against touching are legendary. Velvet absorbed and channeled the desire to touch into socially acceptable forms, its voluptuous surface becoming saturated with sensual significance in the period imagination.

### **Fashioning a Shell: The Bourgeois *Étui***

“[T]he interior is dying,” wrote the notorious aesthete Edmond de Goncourt in 1860, “life threatens to become public ... like these new boulevards, lacking in all curves, implacable axes of the straight line.”<sup>6</sup> If public life in the “new” Paris that evolved during the Second Empire—conducted upon the “implacable” boulevards of Napoléon III’s unrelenting city planner Baron Georges Eugène Haussmann—presented a threat to the intimacy of dwelling, then the defense of intimacy was mounted within the placable, literally *pliable*, enclosure of the domestic interior. From 1853 to 1870, precisely as the Parisian landscape crystallized into a cold, resistant matrix of iron, glass, and paving stones under the process of demolition and reconstruction now known as “Haussmannization,” the private bourgeois interior was transformed into a plush oasis where tactile desires, denied or repressed in public, could be gratified. Government Architect César Daly, in the first volume

of his three-part work on domestic architecture (dedicated to his colleague Baron Haussmann), *L'Architecture privée au XIXe siècle urbaine et suburbaine sous Napoléon III* of 1864, described how the modern home should be *molded* to the habits, tastes, and “fantasies” of its inhabitants, with this simple yet tantalizing image: “... it would not be an exaggeration to define the house as *the clothing of the family*. It is in effect destined to serve as an envelope for them, to shelter them and yield to all their movements.”<sup>7</sup>

Daly’s striking vision of the dwelling as domestic swaddling—an adaptable, flexible, yet structured garment that simultaneously shelters and *yields* to the body and its desires—is further schematized in Benjamin’s image of the apartment as the “*étui* of the private individual”: a kind of protective case or hard outer shell lined with a soft, impressionable inner skin. “The original form of all dwelling is existence not in the house but in the shell,” Benjamin remarks, “the shell bears the impression of its occupant. In the most extreme instance, the dwelling becomes a shell. The nineteenth century, like no other century, was addicted to dwelling. It conceived the residence as a receptacle for the person, and it encased him with all his appurtenances 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” (2002[1939]b: 220).

Benjamin associated this plush-lined case, which preserved the impressions of the objects it enveloped, with the habits of the collector, whom he defined as “the true resident of the interior” (2002[1935]: 9). The brothers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt looked to their collections of exquisite objects, arranged within refined interiors, as a means for soothing the sense of nervous exposure then thought to be symptomatic of public life, but also as catalysts to *stimulate* and *cultivate* sensual responses to *private* aesthetic experience (Silverman 1989: 37–8). According to Daly, everything in the home should be “soft and harmonious ... to caress the eye and satisfy the aesthetic sentiment” (Sidlauskas 2000: 163). But Benjamin literalizes and corporealizes this visual caress, by asserting that, “possession and having are allied with the tactile, and stand in certain opposition to the optical. Collectors are beings with tactile instincts” (2002[1939]b: 206–7). Arthur Henry Roberts’s combination still-life and portrait commemorating Paris Opera violinist Charles Sauvageot’s donation of his lavish collections to the Louvre in 1856, depicts the collector acting upon his native instincts: gazing upon his treasured objects while fondling the ornate woodwork of his dining room and clutching a small bronze statue (Figure 1). Sauvageot’s gestures of tactile possession distinguish the realm of the private collector from that of the public collection.

Whereas the Louvre’s glass vitrines would prohibit touching, within the collector’s private study it was the very experience of unmediated touching that defined the relationship of possessor to possession.



**Figure 1**

Arthur Henry Roberts, *Intérieur du cabinet de M. Sauvageot*, oil on canvas, 1856. Louvre, Paris, France. Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY.

Benjamin conveys the exhilaration of breaking tactile taboos in the act of possessing through a passage from his 1926 essay “One Way Street” entitled “Pilfering Child,” in which brash, childish desire penetrates all barriers to tactile sensuality, including that of vision: “Through the chink of the scarcely open larder door, his hand advances like a lover through the night. Once at home in the darkness, it gropes toward sugar or almonds, raisins or preserves. And just as the lover embraces his girl before kissing her, the child’s hand enjoys a tactile tryst with the comestibles before his mouth savors their sweetness. How flatteringly honey, heaps of currants, even rice yield to his hand! How passionate this meeting of two who have escaped the spoon!” (1996[1926]: 464) Like the child “pilfering” in the dark, then, the collector finds a kind of

naked joy in the “tactile tryst.” If the collector was the true resident of the interior, the interior was the locus of caress.

### **Weaving the Spider’s Web: Softening the Interior ‘Skin’**

“To live in these interiors,” Benjamin imagines, “was to have woven a dense fabric about oneself, to have secluded oneself within a spider’s web, in whose toils world events hang loosely suspended like so many bodies sucked dry” (2002[1939]b: 216). This web suspended public life and fostered the phantasmagorias of the interior—the illusions of the private individual. Benjamin’s conception of the web as a matrix for the suspension of objects, bodies, and events in a liminal state was elaborated by Derrida in the 1980s, through his etymology of the word *hymen* (borrowed from Mallarmé’s text) as related to the Latin *huphos*, meaning tissue, net, web, or textile. Defining the (feminine) hymen symbolically as the “medium” existing between “desire and fulfillment,” Derrida proposes it as a “sort of textile” akin in its *between-ness* to “all veils, gauzes, canvases, fabrics, moirés, wings, feathers, all the curtains that hold within their folds all” (1981: 213). The *portière* of an 1890s Paris salon, with its heavy, swagged draperies and diaphanous lace, enacts the between-ness of the interior web, its filmy folds existing, not merely as insulation, but to clothe the room’s naked contours and ease the passage from one bourgeois fantasy to the next (Figure 2).

But only the modern miracle of machine-made lace could bestow such an elaborate veil upon a middle-class salon (Schoeser 1991: 144). It was the new ubiquity of textiles in the nineteenth century that facilitated the weaving of the bourgeois web. Of all the fabrics that began to proliferate among the middle classes owing to the mechanization of textile production in the early nineteenth century, velvet was perhaps most dramatically affected by technological innovation. Before the advent of industrialization, velvet had been reserved for the wealthy and the privileged, and was produced only in certain centers by weavers who had mastered the special skills necessary for its fabrication. Sumptuary laws, which were for centuries applied to velvet’s use and display (especially in clothing), contributed to the fabric’s exclusive mystique. But during the eighteenth century, a union of creativity in design and technology allowed velvet and plush to become increasingly affordable to the middle classes. By the 1830s, the manufacture of “double velvet,” a revolutionary process by which two pieces of velvet could be woven simultaneously on Jacquard looms, doubled production and literally cut the price of the previously cost-prohibitive fabric in half.<sup>8</sup> By the 1860s, however, when the British had applied power to the Jacquard loom and dominated the mass production of utilitarian textiles on power looms, the French had risen to the forefront of modern velvet technology





**Figure 2**

Paris Salon with swagged portière and lace draperies, 1890s. Roger-Viollet (Harlingué-Viollet), Paris.

through intricate, innovative designs developed specifically for weaving on hand-operated Jacquard looms (Schoeser 1991: 107–8).

Benjamin identifies rich fabrics as the primary decoration for rooms at the dawn of the nineteenth century, citing a 1907 text on fashion history that recalls how “... for nearly a whole century afterward, interior decoration amounts, in theory, to providing instructions to upholsterers for the tasteful arrangement of draperies.”<sup>9</sup> From the early 1800s onward, beginning with the Empire style of Napoleon’s favored designers, Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine, sensuous textiles were increasingly employed as a unifying force in interior decoration, and by the 1850s, the popular press began to remark upon the assiduous lining and sealing of interiors from the outer world. An 1851 article in *L’Illustration*, the leading bourgeois magazine of the day, described a salon “... which was tightly sealed by excellent door curtains, silk pads, and double drapes ...

A profusion of fabrics graces the windows, covers the mantelpiece, and hides the woodwork. Dry wood and cold marble are concealed beneath velvet and plush” (M. Perrot 1990: 369). Philippe Perrot interprets the “weaving” of new, softened interiors at this moment as a distinctly feminine project—“never before had bourgeois women worked so hard at crocheting, knitting, embroidering, weaving ... aimed at covering everyday objects ...” (P. Perrot 1994: 144). For Perrot, this feminine clothing of the interior blended with and extended from the more intimate practice of lining, padding, and ultimately, concealing the female form in the fashionable toilette of the day: engineering the “cone of fabrics” constructed in the early 1850s from layered petticoats, some made from a stiff horsehair fabric called, in French, *crinoline* (Haugland 2005: 317). These early crinoline confections facilitated the development of a broad, bell-like skirt that served both to mask the contours of the female body from the waist down, and to provide the structural support for the rigid horsehair crinoline’s opposite (and the submerged skin’s soft surrogate): luxuriant folds of velvety drapery.

The Second Empire fascination with draping, padding, and concealing seemed to escalate, with the advent of the Third Republic, into an obsessive preoccupation. Textile historian Mary Schoeser has argued that the French, after their 1871 defeat by Germany in the Franco-Prussian War, employed textiles to contrive an “internal world”—a comforting refuge from public life (1991: 143). The desire for tactile reassurance manifested itself in what Katherine Grier has described as the “drapery craze” of the 1880s and 1890s, when the softening process, taking place in the bourgeois interior over the course of the century, reached its peak (1988: 171). Didactic texts were published on the subject, including Felix Lenoir’s 1890 *Practical and Theoretical Treatise on Decorative Hangings, or a Guide to Upholstery*. Such manuals reinforced the notion that drapery was not limited to walls, doors, and windows, but could claim a place of honor as fashionable clothing for furniture. Plentiful layers of damask, tapestry, velvet, and plush added to the experience of an “almost stifling abundance of furniture” in the bourgeois salon (Schoeser 1991: 143). In seeming protest of such stripped, modern skeletons as the Galerie des Machines and the Eiffel Tower at the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle, architects of the interior aspired to a new degree of physical comfort. In fact, so compelling was the desire for and attachment to the “softened” interior that, as historian Debora Silverman has shown, even Gustave Eiffel himself—progressive engineer but also “child of the Second Empire”—nestled a private, plush apartment within the rigid iron matrix of his thousand-foot tower. Silverman describes Eiffel’s private interior as “plush, ornate, and cluttered ... arranged with the materials of deep, rich wood and dark velvet. It contained a heavy wooden desk, an elaborate mahogany cabinet, and velvet couches” (1977: 89). “Against the armature of glass and iron,” Benjamin interjects, “upholstery offers resistance with its textiles” (2002[1939]b: 218).

However, the opposition enacted as the upholstery of Eiffel's plush apartment pressed against the armature of his iron tower had been prefigured more than thirty years earlier in the undoubtedly humbler, yet similarly private context of women's dress. In 1856, new flexible, relatively light, sprung-steel rings suspended from cloth tapes replaced stiff, heavy horsehair-crinolines as supports for the fashionably wide skirt (Haugland 2005: 317). While Eiffel at once externalized the "skeleton skirt" in the design of his 1889 tower and concealed his soft sanctuary from the public eye, it was, by inverted contrast, the steel "cage crinolines" that in the 1850s secretly thrust their rigid, artificial understructures against the exposed fabric of fashionable gowns.

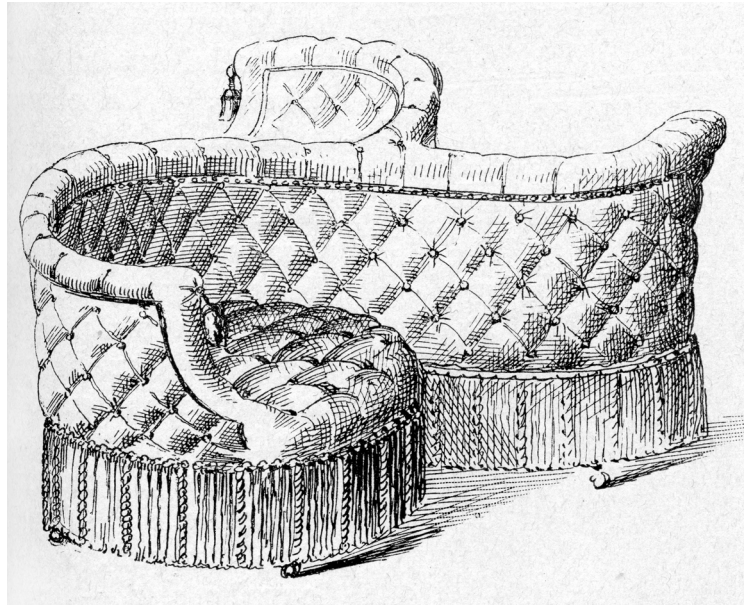
The impact of the "cage" as a major innovation of 1850s' fashion extended beyond the limits of women's clothing and into their surrounding environment. In her study of the development of upholstered furniture during the nineteenth century, Grier has noted that "the physical restraints of women's full formal dress made 'getting comfortable' a complicated proposition" (1997: 142). And Perrot has argued that the voluminous skirt effected by the cage crinoline (spanning more than three yards in its widest incarnations) "led to innovations in furniture ... that provided some comfort" by accommodating its girth (P. Perrot 1994: 108). In short, it was not simply a feminine impulse to "soften" the domestic interior, but the actual construction of feminine fashions themselves that prompted new approaches to furnishings, which, much like Benjamin's *étui*, both enveloped and yielded to the new fuller contours of their fashionable (female) occupants.

By the 1880s, a cornucopia of new upholstered seating furniture, the bulk of which had been developed during the crinoline fashion of the Second Empire, became available to the Parisian bourgeoisie. Henry Havard, in his 1887 *Dictionnaire de l'ameublement et de la décoration*, argued that all of these new forms sprang from a single source: a new understanding of *comfort*. Havard used the term *confortable* to refer both to a domestic concept and a type of furniture that included, among twenty or more seating forms, the "tête-à-tête," the "confident," and the three-seated "indiscret" (Figure 3). Their names alone testify to the intimate, even *indiscrete*, uses for which they were intended. Their generously proportioned and padded, coiled-spring, tufted seats and cushioned arms mimicked the ample appearance and pliant textures of women's dresses to create an experience of bodily comfort entirely unknown before the 1840s—and implying the possibility of prolonged private encounters. For Havard, the popularity of the *confortable* in the bourgeois home signified an "invasion of the feminine" in contemporary life.<sup>10</sup>

But it was the "velvet touch" of the new furniture that amplified its voluptuousness, implicating it in the conspiracy of feminized comfort. Velvet was durable and well-suited to upholstery, but it was also the embodiment of tactile *confort*. The word velvet derives from the Latin *villus* for "shaggy hair," implying that the short, dense pile appealed to

**Figure 3**

"Confident" in Henry Havard's *Dictionnaire de l'ameublement et de la décoration depuis le XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle jusqu'à nos jours*, 1887–1890, p. 951. Courtesy of Universitätsbibliothek der Universität der Künste Berlin.



the desire to touch in the same way that the soft fur of a domestic animal elicits a caress from a human hand (Felsher 1992: 5). Havard's entry on velvet in his *Dictionnaire* lists the pleasure of touching velvet as its primary appeal to the upholsterer. "Doux comme veloux," he reflects, is a time-honored proverb.<sup>11</sup> The new emphasis on tactile pleasure in the bourgeois apartment—exemplified by velvet upholstery—offered its occupants what Gay has termed "subtle erotic inducements." According to Gay, lush padding and plush surfaces could act as "insinuating aphrodisiacs" at a time when "the step from sensuous to sensual" was relatively short (1984: 439–41). Art historian Susan Sidlauskas traces a connection between this tactile, sensual, *bodily* experience of the softened interior and the *mental* state of interiority (the twin preconditions for Benjamin's phantasmagorias) in terms of *identity*: "upholstered surfaces doubled the sensation of touch and served as material evidence of the multiple acts of physical possession by which middle-class identity was constructed and represented. These tactile surfaces served as repositories for the inhabitants' visceral connection to their intimate surroundings, a liminal space where body actually verged into place" (Sidlauskas 2000: 25).

### **Feminine Upholstery: The Fabric of the Interior**

César Daly believed that the "feminine branch" of domestic architecture should embody "prettiness, picturesqueness, and fantasy," characteristics



that might also be applied to women's fashions of the period (Lipstadt 1977: 39). Silverman has referred to the *fin-de-siècle* interior as a sanctuary of the female form, where "women's dresses were made of the same cloth that draped the walls and the furniture" (1989: 30). And Benjamin locates this conflation of feminized furnishings with feminine fashion in the specific incarnation of the bustle (introduced in the early 1870s), through an *Arcades* passage recalling 1873, the initial peak of the bustle fashion, when "the giant skirts that stretched over cushions attached to the derrière, with their gathered draperies, their pleated frills, their embroidery, and their ribbons, seem to have issued less from the workshop of a tailor than from that of an upholsterer" (2002[1939]b: 68–9) (Figure 4). The characterization of an "upholstery style" in nineteenth-century women's fashions, while it inevitably evokes amusing images, is hardly an exaggeration. The padding and lining of hard understructures with seductively tactile fabrics occupied both nineteenth-century dressmakers and upholsters, who also frequently made use of similar materials in their crafts, such as velvet or plush, as well as an array of decorative trimmings produced especially for the purpose (Figure 5).<sup>12</sup> Rigid supports like the crinoline and later, the bustle, became armatures for many of the same textiles found on new spring-seated *confortable* furniture and literally laid the foundation for the development of the elaborately draped skirts, which commanded the focus of interest in women's fashions from the 1850s through the 1880s.

During the 1860s the crinoline began gradually to flatten in front and transfer its emphasis to the rear, where increasingly complex arrangements of over-draperies marked the transition; and by the early 1870s, this remaining half-crinoline was transformed into the bustle (Steele 1985: 59–62). The bustle structure itself might be padded with horsehair or gauze, or constructed from ultra-modern metal springs or practical, collapsible steel bands for ease of sitting. Fashion historian Kristina Haugland has noted that a fashionable woman "dressed in a horsehair or spring bustle, layers of undergarments, and rich, heavy fabrics trimmed with fringe, did present an upholstered effect, similar to an overstuffed sofa of the time ..." (2005: 204). When the bustle came again in vogue from 1882 to 1889, the fabrics that draped its even more dramatic, angular silhouette were closer to upholstery than ever—heavier than their 1870s' counterparts with more elaborate trimmings in beads, fringes, braids, and furs (Blum 1974: 149). But the pronounced—and ever-changing—silhouettes achieved throughout the evolution of bustle fashions were due in large part to the new longer *cuirasse* corset, which, in an inversion of Benjamin's velvet-lined *étui*, molded the malleable flesh of the female torso to "fit like wax" within the accentuated hourglass curves of a steel-ribbed sheath, frequently lined on the *outside*, with a soft, lustrous layer of velvet.<sup>13</sup>

Velvets, rare in women's dresses of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries owing to their expense, physical weight, and unwieldiness, had

**Figure 4**

F. Gonin (French, active late nineteenth century) after E. Cheffer (French, active late nineteenth century), Plate No. 153 in *Revue de la Mode, Gazette de la Famille*, Published by Moine et Falconier, Paris, 1874. Lithograph on cream wove paper, 14 1/8 x 9 5/8 in. (358 x 244 mm). Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Cooper Union Library, 1980-36-8551. Photograph: Matt Flynn.



made a triumphant return in Second Empire fashions. Capitalizing upon the new double-velvet technology, Lyon silk weavers specialized in large pieces of velvet to be worn over the crinoline during the 1850s, and in the 1870s produced the velvet “upholstery” appropriate for the bustled skirt. Paris couturier Charles Frederick Worth exploited velvet’s opulent history by featuring it in his evening gowns beginning in the 1870s, and eventually devoting an entire salon to velvets at Maison Worth in the 1880s (Buss 1996: 96; Coleman 1989: 16). By virtue of their weight and density, velvet and plush had long been thought more suitable for outer garments such as cloaks or *sorties*; Worth, however, employed

**Figure 5**

Constance Mary Palk, Baroness Haldon (née Barrington), 1847–1926, photograph by O. Schoefft, 1882, NPG x21711, © National Portrait Gallery, London.



modern French velvets in daring designs, such as a black silk-velvet evening gown appliquéd with pearl-and-gilt-beaded ivory-satin lilies and worn by Elisabeth Caraman-Chimay, comtesse Greffulhe—a woman who represented for Marcel Proust the epitome of Parisian elegance—in an 1895 portrait photograph by Paul Nadar (Figure 6).<sup>14</sup> New aniline dyes yielded a shockingly vibrant and often-criticized palette in which “risqué” color schemes, such as fuschia and black, dominated the trend in evening gowns of the 1880s and 1890s, set by the *demimonde*. Innovative texturing techniques lent velvet an optical intrigue and tactile allure previously unimagined, elevating it to the height of sensuality in the popular imagination (Buss 1996: 87) (Figure 7).

Enticing textures tended to encase and, perhaps, embody the *demi-mondaine*, the modern courtesan, or living, breathing fashion plate. Proust, reflecting upon *fin-de-siècle* culture in *Swann's Way*, describes in luxuriant detail how *demi-mondaine* Odette de Cr  cy had fabricated an alluring image of herself (and for Swann), by carefully clothing not only her own body but the objects in her apartment in supple, sensuous casings with intricate, exotic trimmings. Odette's darkly painted walls were hung with "Oriental cloths, strings of Turkish beads, and a large Japanese lantern," and she received Swann in her drawing room in a



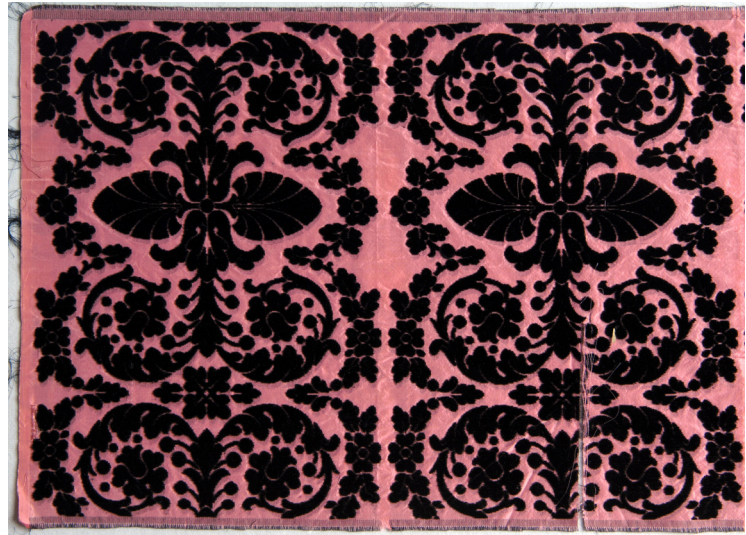
**Figure 6**

Paul Nadar, *Portrait of Elisabeth Caraman-Chimay, comtesse Greffulhe*, 1895. M  diath  que de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, Paris, France.    Minist  re de la Culture/ M  diath  que du Patrimoine, Dist. RMN/Art Resource, NY.



**Figure 7**

Pink-and-black voided silk-velvet,  
J. Béraud et CIE, Lyon, late 1870s.  
J. B. Martin Collection, Fashion  
Institute of Technology, New York.  
Photograph: Irving Solero.



morning gown of pink silk, surrounded by “screens festooned with photographs, bows of ribbon, and fans” (Proust 2003[1912]: 228). Odette’s silk morning gown (a garment more intimate and fluid than formal day- or eveningwear) that, most likely, required few if any rigid understructures; the translucence of a Japanese lantern and the diaphanous permeability of screens; and the imminent tinkling of beads and fluttering of ribbons; all add to the tantalizing liminality of her feminized—even eroticized—apartment, for which Derrida’s Ur-fabric (the hymen as veil, gauze, or feathers, occupying tentatively yet provocatively the space of unfulfilled desire) may serve as a sign.

Even Odette’s flower arrangements reflect her investment in the tactile sensuality of the interior: cattleya orchids delighted Odette, “because they had the great merit of not resembling flowers, but of being made of silk or satin. ‘This one looks as though it were cut from the lining of my coat,’ she said to Swann, showing him an orchid ...” The compulsion to stimulate both haptic and optic desires in her guest directs Odette’s movements, as she bolsters Swann with Japanese silk cushions and checks that her plush-draped portrait photograph is shown to its (and her) best advantage (Proust 2003[1912]: 228–9). In *The Bourgeois and the Bibelot*, Rémy Saisselin has argued that late nineteenth-century women, installed in sumptuous interiors and admired for their beauty as living *objets d’art*, began to be idealized as consummate *bibelots*—exotic trinkets, or art objects—which, like the prizes of the collector, existed to be touched, and so, possessed (1984: 53–74). So Odette, enrobed in silk and enveloped on every side by tactile tissues, seems to merge with her environment and all its enticements, to become its

crowning *bibelot*, just as her photograph is softened and eased into its context by artful folds of plush.

Fashion historian Valerie Steele has proposed that it was not simply her “amatory abilities” but her “sartorial splendor” that made the *demimondaine* a prominent feature of Parisian life in the second half of the nineteenth century (1988: 159). While her expertise as a courtesan could be fully demonstrated only within the confines of the interior, her sensuous casings could move with her from private to public spaces as signs for the tactile pleasure she represented—an aura, reified in plush and velvet, that clung to her skin. And Susan Buck-Morss’s reading of Benjamin’s critique of fashion in *The Arcades Project*, in which the biological attraction of (and to) the human body is transferred to the liminal layers of dress, so that “sex appeal emanates from the clothes that ones wears,” describes at once the allure and artifice of the *demi-mondaine* (1989: 100). “In fashion,” Buck-Morss remarks, “the phantasmagoria of commodities presses closest to the skin” (1989: 97). The provocative costumes of the *demimonde* simultaneously sublimated and commodified sex by acting as its advertisement.

Emile Zola’s sensuous descriptions of the brilliant colors and tempting textures beckoning to shoppers at the mammoth iron-and-glass fabric and fashion emporium, “The Ladies’ Paradise” (based in part on Zola’s observations at Le Bon Marché in Paris) convey a sense of period fantasies—about precisely those fabrics that “pressed closest to the skin”—in which acquisitive and sexual desires mingled. Under the modern glass roof of the “Paradise,” a torrent of rich materials cascades and pools around a cast-iron column: “... material was streaming down like a bubbling sheet of water, falling from above and spreading out on to the floor. First, pale satins and soft silks were gushing out: royal satins and renaissance satins, with the pearly shades of spring water; light silks as transparent and crystal—Nile green, turquoise, blossom pink, Danube blue. Next came the thicker fabrics, the marvelous satins and duchess silks, in warm shades, rolling in great waves. And at the bottom, as if in a fountain basin, the heavy materials, the damasks, the brocades, the silver and gold silks, were sleeping on a deep bed of velvets—velvets of all kinds, black, white, colored, embossed on a background of silk or satin, their shimmering flecks forming a still lake in which reflections of the sky and of the countryside seemed to dance. Women pale with desire were leaning over as if to look at themselves. Faced with this wild cataract, they all remained standing there, filled with the secret fear of being caught up in the overflow of all this luxury and with an irresistible desire to throw themselves in and be lost” (Zola 1995[1883]: 104). Caught in the transitional anxiety of industrialization, Haussmannization, and a burgeoning consumer economy, textiles functioned not only as *protection* from modernity—the plush padding of the private interior shielding its occupants from the public “nakedness” of iron-and-glass factories, exhibition halls, and department

stores—but also to *facilitate* the modern consumerist paradigm of suspended gratification.

The surrogate skin of the velvet gown (frequently conspiring together with “armored underwear”) at once postponed bodily contact and perpetuated possessive desire.<sup>15</sup> For Proust, textiles articulated this threshold, marking the diaphanous layers of flirtation that complete carnal possession would inevitably rend. Proust stages Swann’s first tactile encounter with Odette inside her private, and most likely plush-lined, coach. Here Swann prolongs his preliminary titillation through his attention to Odette’s black velvet evening gown adorned with her favorite cattleyas (Proust first admired these orchids in the hair of the fashionable comtesse Greffulhe in 1893 (Voss 2002: 59–60)). Swann had found Odette “holding a bunch of cattleyas in her hand and ... saw, under her lace scarf, that she had flowers of the same orchid in her hair, fastened to a plume of swan feathers. She was dressed, under her mantilla, in a flood of black velvet caught up on one side to reveal in a wide triangle the hem of a skirt of white faille and showing a yoke, also of white faille, at the opening of a low-necked bodice tucked with more cattleyas ...” (Proust 2003[1912]: 240). The cascading black folds of Odette’s gown can be read both as second skin and curtain, with the fissures of white faille acting as signs for the “real” (but inaccessible) skin beneath.<sup>16</sup> This curtain-membrane embodies the liminal state of Derrida’s metaphorical hymen: the velvet cover, while it continually induces sensual desire, can only gratify this desire through its own removal. For Derrida, Odette’s gown would occupy the “non-space” of the hymen: “what takes place [there] is only the *entre*,” the *between* (1981: 214).

Suspend, for a moment, Swann’s *between-ness* with Odette to recall Benjamin’s central image: the interior as plush-lined, close-fitting *étui* where the proprietor’s traces were crushed into the yielding fibers, preserved there like stains. Now reenter Odette’s close-fitting coach, where Swann fetishizes the imprint and the stain as he fondles Odette’s cattleyas, lingering provocatively in the *between*. “I think there’s some pollen sprinkled on you;” he worries, “will you let me wipe it off with my hand? I’m not doing it too quickly, I’m not being too rough? Am I tickling you a little, maybe? I don’t want to touch the velvet of your dress, I’m afraid I might crush it ...” (Proust 2003[1912]: 241). Bound up with his *desire* to possess through touch is Swann’s fear of *annihilating* that same desire by touching. But this desire—stimulated by Odette’s velvet folds and inscribed upon their “second skin” through the fine, yet insistent grains of pollen suspended in the fibrous fur—is already unraveling. The sprinkling of tiny traces by desiring upon desired prefigures the consummation of their intimacy. But it is the tactile tryst of powder and velvet that Swann savors far beyond his later sexual “possession” of Odette, an act in which, Proust explains, “one possesses nothing” (2003[1912]: 243).

### **“Where Art Takes Refuge”: The Waking Dream**

A new approach to domestic interiors in the late 1890s would attempt to upset the tactile theatrics of Swann and Odette, overturn the sexual politics of drapery, and reject the textile as mediator by fusing surface with substance. A set of decorative wall panels painted by Édouard Vuillard in 1896 and known collectively as *Figures in an Interior*, performs this collapse of mimetic sheath into internal structure, through its depiction of a library lined with patterned textiles (Figure 8). These panels, commissioned to line the walls of an *actual* private library, threaten to supplant the voluptuous folds of the “bourgeois *étui*” with the optical flatness of abstraction.

In his 1939 exposé on the bourgeois apartment in “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” Benjamin describes the interior as the “asylum where art takes refuge,” as if to say that art, like a delicate invalid, could not survive the harsh jostlings of public life (2002[1939]a: 19). To a greater degree, even, than furnishings or decorative objects, the fashionable, decorative wall paintings of the late nineteenth century seem to illustrate this characterization of the interior as art’s “refuge.” Vuillard’s paintings explore—perhaps more directly than the work of his fellow *Nabi* or “prophet” painters, Pierre Bonnard and Maurice Denis—the function of art within the softened interior, not only through their subject matter and painterly technique, but also through the artist’s conception of painting as a site-specific treatment or “lining” of the interior, designed to give private pleasure its occupants.

The world of Vuillard’s paintings unfolds within the feminized interior, a space which the artist actually inhabited with his sister and mother, who converted the family home into a dress-making atelier in 1884, after the death of Vuillard’s father (Jones 2003: 130). In his extensive study of Vuillard’s painting career, art historian Guy Cogeval has remarked that the artist’s first major decorative works, a cycle of wall paintings commissioned for the Paris home of the Desmarais family in 1892, manifests a confusion between “couture et peinture.”<sup>17</sup> Depicting dressmakers at work in the intimacy of their studio, *L’Atelier de couture I*, one of the six Desmarais panels, approximates the interweaving of female domesticity with feminine industry through the graphic qualities of oil paint, as it swaddles the viewer in a tissue of hushed voices and muffling surfaces. Vuillard envelops the viewer in pattern through the soft cacophony arising from a visual conjunction of dresses, fabrics, wallpaper, and floor tiles. As each pattern confronts the eye with abstract color and form, the depicted space compresses—women merge with textiles, yielding up even their gauzy hair and velvety skin to become themselves folds in the fabric of the interior. In his atelier, Vuillard domesticates the commercial seduction of Zola’s “Ladies’ Paradise” and chastens Proust’s tactile sensuality through an abstraction that renders



**Figure 8**

Édouard Vuillard, *Le Choix des Livres, Le Travail*, distemper on canvas, 1896. Musée du Petit Palais, Paris. Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY.  
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the corporeal optical and arrests the desire to touch before it reaches the pitch of eroticism.

In his four library panels, Vuillard transposes haptic to optic on a grand scale. Renowned cardiologist Henri Vaquez commissioned the paintings in 1896 to decorate the library of his Paris apartment at 27, rue du Général Foy. Though Vuillard himself left the works untitled, Vaquez referred to them, respectively, as: *Le Choix des Livres*, *Le Travail*, *L'Intimité*, and *La Musique* (not shown) (Jones 2003: 195). While each panel depicts a different interior activity or introspective mode, the insulated mood of the suite is not entirely a function of its soothing subject matter and somnolent palette. To achieve his desired visual effects, Vuillard resorted to the tactile qualities of *distemper*, a painting technique traditionally used in the fabrication of stage sets to create a non-reflective surface under the glare of theater lights. A heated mixture of dry pigment

**Figure 8**

Édouard Vuillard, *L'Intimité*  
 (La Musique not shown), distemper  
 on canvas, 1896. Musée du Petit  
 Palais, Paris. Réunion des Musées  
 Nationaux/Art Resource, NY.  
 © 2009 Artists Rights Society  
 (ARS), New York/ADAGP Paris.



and adhesive produced a paint that dried quickly, leaving the surface smooth and matte, or thick and scumbled in reworked or built-up areas (Jones 2003: 121). Distemper prohibited an experience of penetration into depth by suspending the viewer's gaze perpetually at the level of the painted surface. It insisted on the chalky materiality of caked paint, or, as Benjamin would have it, provided "plush for the eyes."

His preoccupation with textiles prompted Vuillard to collapse illusionistic space at the level of form as well as technique. Maurice Denis referred to Vuillard's panels as "sumptuous wall hangings reminiscent of antique tapestries" (Jones 2003: 195). Vuillard, as one might expect from his intimate interest in dress-making, was intrigued by fabrics as vehicles for abstract color and pattern. In 1894 he remarked that "for

a decoration for an apartment, a subject that's too objectively precise could easily become unbearable. One would grow less quickly tired of a textile ..."<sup>18</sup> In creating the Vaquez panels, Vuillard took inspiration from the Cluny tapestries, adapting the *mille fleurs* convention of medieval tapestry to line the walls of his imagined library with flowers (Jones 2003: 197). These broad expanses of densely flowered wallpaper constitute the paintings' largest areas of flat patterning; this buzzing meadow threatens to engulf the picture plane altogether, drawing the eye to further patterns humming in the carpets, cushions, and draperies. Rather than accommodating its occupants, this aggressive interior *absorbs* them. Vuillard replaces domestic draperies with flat, unyielding renditions of their formerly pliant selves. The allure of the textile as a surrogate skin is ironically negated by his depictions of covers and linings, in which the layers of fabric and skin fuse forever into one impenetrable, optical plane.

The *Nabis'* vision of painting as a flat, decorative surface to line the walls of the private apartment grew out of a broader culture of interior design reform expressed across Europe at the turn of the century (and including women's dress-reforms that rejected the armatures of corset and bustle, thus paring down the complex draperies that once upholstered them) and known in France as *Art Nouveau*. Although this "modern style" did not penetrate the plush lining of every bourgeois "*étui*," its general effect was to strip the lavish, eclectic interiors of the 1880s, orchestrating rooms, once unified by textiles, in formally coordinated harmonies. Maurice Denis envisioned the integration of modern painting and furniture into a new "simple and pleasant" interior, "neither a museum, nor a bazaar."<sup>19</sup> Julius Meier-Graefe, editor of the progressive journal *L'Art Décoratif* and proprietor of the Paris gallery La Maison Moderne (which promoted modern designers and sold furniture in the "new" style), described the domestic interior in 1896 with images antithetical to the *Intérieur du cabinet de M. Sauvageot* of forty years earlier: "today one has discovered that houses are spaces in which to live, not the subjects of catalogues or inventories ... The taste of the modern man hates all that resembles a knick-knack. He suffocates in the bric-a-brac logic of the Second-Empire Parisian ... He values space above all, not its contents; he demands light, air, and color."<sup>20</sup>

Swagged and wadded fabrics began to seem cloying to Meier-Graefe's "modern man," and design reformers, newly charged with the mission of hygiene, feared the unhealthy effects of dust and mold—the less desirable "traces" of the occupant, so easily preserved in the velvet folds of his private "case." Surfaces were uncovered and decoration melded with structure in exposed woodwork, wall-stenciling, mural paintings, and abstracted wallpaper (or flat, patterned fabric that served a similar purpose). Benjamin endows this late nineteenth-century spurning of "unsanitary" drapery with symbolic weight by citing the twentieth-century modernist architect, Siegfried Giedion, who writes with terse



significance: “the artistic draperies and wall-hangings of the previous century ... have come to seem musty” (Benjamin 2002[1939]b: 458).

Benjamin, raised at the turn of the century, looked back on it with the searing X-ray vision of a functionalist. Art Nouveau was suspect. While he believed that it “unsettled the world of the shell in a radical way” and *seemed* even to “shatter” the interior, his suspicions of the movement arose from the notion that, according to its *own* ideology, it achieved the “consummation of the interior.”<sup>21</sup> A bedroom suite, designed by Eugène Gaillard for Siegfried Bing’s “L’Art Nouveau Bing” pavilion at the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle, embodies this annihilating consummation through the striking sparseness of its arrangement, its emphasis on exposed surface and contour, and its translation of fabric from elaborate drapery into flat, patterned wall-covering (Figure 9).<sup>22</sup> Though in one sense Gaillard strips his bedroom of many of its conventional linings, he also preempts the *need* for elaborate drapery by designing furniture



**Figure 9**

Eugène Gaillard, *Bedroom*, 1900. *Album de references*, Bibliothèque des Arts décoratifs, Paris.

that seems to be draped *already*. The fluid cascades of wood grain and the deep, gathered folds of carved wood that articulate the transitions from one section of his bed to the next seem to mimic the swags of the softened interior, but with one exception: *these* covers can never be removed. Just as Gaillard uncovers the interior, revealing the hard, smooth contours of its structure, he also takes the final steps toward sealing it off altogether—of fusing the lining with the case, or collapsing the “second skin” into the thing it was meant to conceal. As Gaillard infuses furniture with fabric, pliable lining *ossifies* into implacable shell.

And this was Benjamin’s indictment of Art Nouveau: that while it claimed finally to dispel the illusions of the interior, it actually effected the *ultimate phantasmagoria*: the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art. In the antechamber of the Paris 1900 Art Nouveau pavilion, Gaillard’s settee relegated its figured velvet upholstery to second place, as a mere echo of the intricate network of built-in shelves framing a large mirror and housing the collector’s artistic *bibelots* (Figure 10). Perhaps it was not, as Meier-Graefe claimed, that the modern dweller had dispensed with “knick-knacks,” but that the new interior had swallowed and homogenized the eclectic clutter of the bourgeois *étui*, and was, by 1900, integrating its objects (often among them the *bourgeoise-bibelot* in her artistic reform dress) systematically into the structure of a predetermined fantasy. For Benjamin, the settee’s elaborate structure exemplified the dangers of Art Nouveau, at once reflecting the narcissism of the private individual and cementing his possessions into place around him, all within a rigid, artificial matrix of design. Art Nouveau transfigured the image of suspended animation in Benjamin’s phantasmagoric vision of the draped interior as a spider’s web into a nightmare of permanent petrification, in which “furniture is becoming untransportable, immovable; it clings to walls and corners, sticks fast to floors, as it were, takes root ... the occupant himself loses the power of moving freely about and becomes attached to the ground and property.”<sup>23</sup>

Benjamin finds a prefiguration of Art Nouveau in Charles Baudelaire’s description of “le chambre double” in *Le Spleen de Paris*. In a “room like a dream ... every piece of furniture is of an elongated form, languid and prostrate, and seems to be dreaming—endowed one might say, with a somnambular existence ...” (Benjamin 2002[1939]b: 553). “Boredom,” Benjamin reminds him, “is a warm gray fabric lined on the inside with the most lustrous and colorful of silks. In this fabric we *wrap* ourselves when we dream.” Art Nouveau, for Benjamin, was the anesthetic in boredom’s secret lining, a false liberation from the phantasmagorias of the interior and an attempt at the permanent suspension of the real, the public, the outer life of action. The unveiling of the bourgeois apartment was for him not an escape from the *étui*’s velvet folds, but a *reification* of its protective characteristics, a more desperate retreat from life into art. Art Nouveau was, in short, that most insidious of dreams, “the dream that one has come awake” (Benjamin 2002[1939]b: 392).



**Figure 10**

Eugène Gaillard, *Antechamber*, 1900. *Album de references*, Bibliothèque des Arts décoratifs, Paris.

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### Notes

1. Benjamin (2002[1939]b: 121) uses this phrase in *The Arcades Project* [*Das Passagenwerk*] to describe the “stifled perspective” of nineteenth-century Paris. Benjamin worked on *The Arcades Project* intermittently from roughly 1927 to 1939 at the Bibliothèque



Nationale in Paris, where he compiled material for each of its thematic “convolutes.” In a letter of 1930, he describes the project as “the theater of all my struggles and all my ideas.” For a discussion of the context and format of the project, see the translators’ foreword (Benjamin 2002[1939]b: ix–xiv) to the 2002 English edition, which includes the two versions of Benjamin’s “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century” (2002[1935] and 2002[1939]a).

2. This infamous designation originates in Benjamin’s “Louis Philippe, or the Interior,” the fourth section of his 1935 exposé, “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century.” Benjamin later revised and expanded this text to yield a second version in 1939. Both versions are translated and published consecutively in chronological order in the 2002 English edition of *The Arcades Project*, and are cited here as Benjamin (2002[1935]) and Benjamin (2002[1939]a).
3. Textile historian Lynn Felsher (1992: 3, 6) notes that nineteenth-century plushes and velvets were most commonly woven from silk, but could also be made of wool or cotton (velveteen). Both velvet and plush incorporate a supplementary set of warps to form the pile (this generates the protruding loops that are cut to produce the effect of tiny fibers), but differ in length of pile. Velvet is distinguished by its shorter pile, while plush has a pile length greater than 1/7 inch.
4. This article is an exploration of Benjamin’s writings on velvet within a nineteenth-century context, not a deconstruction of his views (though such an undertaking would be entirely legitimate). The reader will note that the primary sources cited here range widely in type, but were primarily written about women from the male perspective. This is not to imply that nineteenth-century women did not have opinions about velvet in furniture and fashions—on the contrary, a study on this topic could be most illuminating. However, the focus of my current project is to investigate velvet linings as metaphors within the nineteenth-century cultural imagination, using Benjamin’s twentieth-century ideas on the subject as points of departure. My use of fiction and artwork as supporting material (in lieu of, for example, fashion periodicals or women’s diaries and letters) stems from this primary interest in velvet and fabric linings as cultural *images* rather than historical facts.
5. This is the topic of Peter Gay’s *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud* (1984). Valerie Steele has explored the subject of Victorian women’s attitudes towards sexuality and the body in relation to fashion, challenging some of the subject’s most prevalent stereotypes, in her chapter on “Victorian Sexuality” in *Fashion and Eroticism* (1985: 85–101).
6. Debora Silverman discusses Jules and Edmond de Goncourt’s impact upon nineteenth-century interiors in her chapter on “The Brothers de Goncourt between History and the Psyche,” in *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (1989: 20).

7. César Daly writes (1864: 10) "... ce ne serait pas exagéré que de définir la Maison: *le vêtement de la famille*. Elle est en effet destinée à lui servir d'enveloppe, à l'abriter et à se prêter à tous ses mouvements. Elle la garantit du froid et du chaud, s'harmonise avec la rusticité ou le raffinement des ses habitudes, se plie à son goût, même un peu à ses fantasies." Susan Sidlauskas (2000) refers to Daly's writings in her discussion of domestic interiority, and Hélène Lipstadt performs a detailed analysis of *L'Architecture privée ...* in "Housing the Bourgeoisie" (1977).
8. "Double velvet" continues to be the primary method of velvet production today. Two pieces of velvet are created simultaneously by weaving them so that their "faces" are attached. The pieces are separated only after the loops of fiber are cut to create the pile on each piece. While the development of velvet technology is not the focus of this article, Lynn Felsher provides a useful account of this process in "Extravagant Lengths: Velvet, Plush, and Velveteen" (1992: 3–6).
9. This quotation is excerpted from Max von Boehn's *Die Mode im XIX. Jahrhundert* (1907) in *The Arcades Project* (Benjamin 2002[1939]b: 120).
10. Havard's entry on "Confort" in the *Dictionnaire* (1887–90: 951–2) reads as follows: "Confort; Confortable: Ce mot est de création essentiellement récente ... il coïncide avec l'invasion des influences féminines dans la politique et dans les mœurs ... Vingt espèces de sièges nouveaux sortent des mains du tapissier ... En notre temps, la qualification de CONFORTABLE s'est étendue dans le langage du tapissier à tous les sièges dont le bâti est rembourré, capitonné et recouvert d'étoffe."
11. Havard (1887–90: 1514) writes: "Le velours doux au toucher, chatoyant, riche de reflets ... Le velours a toujours été extrêmement estimé, non seulement à cause de ses qualités brillantes, mais aussi à cause de l'agrément de son contact ... 'doux comme velours' a été longtemps admis en proverbe."
12. While velvets and plushes were indeed employed both in women's dresses and upholstery, upholstery velvet was distinguished by its heavier weight, and could often be made of wool or cotton, in contrast to the opulent silk velvets used in fashionable gowns. Silverman's remark likening the fabrics of women's dresses to those that lined the interior must be taken as a general comparison, since women would not have worn fabrics intended for upholstery. For more on the history and profession of the *Passementier* and the production of trimmings for garments and furnishings, see René Heutte's *Le Livre de la Passementerie* (1972).
13. Although the history and sexual politics of the corset is not the focus of this article, significant scholarship has been devoted to the topic. For further discussion of the role of the corset in nineteenth-century fashions see Valerie Steele's chapter on "The Corset



Controversy” in *Fashion and Eroticism* (1985: 161–91) and her more recent book *The Corset: A Cultural History* (2001). See also Philippe Perrot’s discussion of the corset in *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie* (1994: 150–9).

14. Elizabeth Ann Coleman (1989: 101) names the comtesse Greffulhe as the inspiration for Proust’s Duchesse de Guermantes in her description of this gown. Ursula Voss (2002: 59–60) quotes a letter of Proust’s in which he describes the comtesse as the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.
15. Philippe Perrot cites a satirical period account of the crinoline as an “iron citadel” that presented a concrete obstacle to easy sexual contact, and notes later how the “armored underwear” or network of rigid undergarments worn by women in the latter half of the nineteenth century “complicated any advanced incursion” and acted as “screens against desire, which frustrated and exacerbated it simultaneously” (1994: 108 and 144–6). Although this essay is primarily concerned with the outer, tactile layer of women’s fashions, the interaction of these outer- and undergarments, which seem each to entice and resist simultaneously, certainly warrants further exploration. I would like to thank Charlotte Nicklas, PhD Candidate at the University of Brighton, for bringing this intriguing dynamic to my attention, and for her other helpful suggestions in regard to this essay.
16. Diana Festa-McCormick (1984: 17) performs a detailed analysis of Odette’s gown.
17. Cogeval (Salomon and Cogeval 2003: 359) writes of Vuillard’s first decorative masterpiece: “Il intensifie, dans ce premier chef-d’oeuvre décoratif, la confusion entre couture et peinture.”
18. Vuillard’s journal entry of August 28, 1894 is quoted in Nicholas Watkins (2001: 21, note 107).
19. Denis’s statement “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 ... avec des meubles de style neuf et des tentures de dessin imprévu; un intérieur clair, simple, et plaisant, ni un musée, ni un bazar,” from Julius Meier-Graefe’s article, “M. Maurice Denis,” *L’Art Décoratif* 5 (February 1899), 204–5, is quoted by Katherine Kuenzli (2002: 127).
20. Kuenzli (2002: 121) translates this passage from Meier-Graefe’s article “L’Art Nouveau. Das Prinzip,” *Das Atelier* (March 1, 1896): 3–4.
21. Benjamin discusses the social and aesthetic phenomena of Art Nouveau (or “Jugendstil” in his native German) on multiple occasions in his writings, even devoting an entire “convolute” in *The Arcades Project* to the subject. The passages cited here are found in his two versions of “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century” (Benjamin 2002[1939]a: 20; Benjamin 2002[1935]: 9).

22. For further discussion and lavish photographs of Bing's Art Nouveau Pavilion at the Paris 1900 World's Fair see Karine Lacquemant's chapter (2004: 189–222) in Gabriel Weisberg's sumptuous catalog, *The Origins of L'Art Nouveau: The Bing Empire*.
23. Benjamin (2002[1939]b: 449–50) quotes Dolf Sternberger's caricature of Art Nouveau in an article entitled "Jugendstil," in *Die neue Rundschau*, 45 (September 9, 1934).

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