

Aesthetic Time, Decadent Archives

Goldsmiths, University of London

18-19 July 2019

Keynote speaker: Joseph Bristow (UCLA), 'Decadent Historicism'

CALL FOR PAPERS

Aestheticism and Decadence are fundamentally preoccupied with time and archives, with medievalism, apocalypticism, fallen Classical civilizations, as well as with collections and connoisseurship. Aesthetes turn to the past as a locus of utopian renewal, and Decadents experience their historical moment in terms of exhaustion and decline. The Decadent literary tradition has come to be associated with a queer vision of temporality, an anti-progressive sensibility that rejects teleology and futurity, and scholarship on Aestheticism and Decadence has cast into question Modernist notions of literary history that stress novelty and rupture. Yet, even as Aesthetes and Decadents see themselves as living in a *fin-du-monde/fin-du-globe* moment, they are deeply preoccupied with history and with collecting and documenting. Indeed, Decadent literature often resembles archives or takes on a catalogue-like form. J.-K. Huymans's novel *À rebours*, for example, functions as an extensive catalogue of outré tastes and serves as both inspiration and reference resource for subsequent Decadent authors. The 'bibliophilic dandyism' of Des Esseintes, as Octave Uzanne described it, was a metaphor for a relentless egoism that finds satisfaction only in the archive. In addition, scholars of Aestheticism and Decadence studies have for many years been deeply engaged with archival work, with the disinterring of hidden histories and figures, and the construction of digital archives that allow for a new vision of literary history.

This two-day conference, co-organized by the British Association of Decadence Studies (BADs) and the Aestheticism and Decadence Network, will explore the 'archival turn' in Aestheticism and Decadence studies and investigate Aestheticist notions of history, temporality, and periodization. Our aim is to extend discussion of the Aestheticist and Decadent archive beyond the bounds of the *fin de siècle*, to foreground a long history of Aestheticism and Decadence that looks back to their roots in the ancient world and ahead to their continuing presence in Modernism, neo-Victorianism, Steampunk and other twentieth and twenty-first century literature and art.

Notions of 'archive' and 'archiving' are to be understood in the broadest sense, including libraries; special collections; museums, formal and informal private collections (both real and virtual); and digital and social media platforms. The conference will consider the archive as of interest not only as a research resource but as an object of study and theorization in itself. We are also interested in work that engages with the theorization of time and history in Decadent and Aestheticist literature and the manner in which ideas about temporality, literary history, and periodization have functioned in scholarship on these movements. We welcome proposals for papers or panels on any aspect of Aestheticism and Decadence in relation to archives, history, temporality and periodization. Individual papers should be about 20 mins in length.

Abstracts of 500 words plus brief biography should be sent to:
ATDA@gold.ac.uk by 1 February 2019.

For more information visit: bads.gold.ac.uk/atda

