The Sanitary Arts
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It should already be apparent that Victorian ecclesiastical painter Wyke Bayliss and I have a few things in common. When I began my research for this project on the nineteenth-century sanitation reform movement and its connections with Victorian aesthetic philosophy, my hybridized topic seemed explicitly contradictory. While I have always intended to argue that Sanitation and Art were thrown into philosophical opposition, controversy, and resolution in a wide variety of Victorian texts and settings, the two things, as Bayliss observes, share no semantic domain, no commonplace history of mutual development, no obvious field of discursive reciprocity and collusion. On the other hand, as I quickly realized, in the wake of Foucault the singular topic of sanitation reform had been so thoroughly mapped upon Victorian culture that potentially nothing seemed beyond the reach of Edwin

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**Foul Matter**

Edwin Chadwick, John Ruskin, and Mid-Victorian *Aesthesis*

In addressing you on the subject of the Fine Arts in relation to Sanitary Reform, I am met by two difficulties, a Scylla and Charybdis that might well appall one who had not set out with a determined purpose, or was not sure of his way. The first difficulty is that the work of the artist and of the sanitary engineer seem to stand so very far apart in our minds, that I may be challenged with the question, “What have they to do with each other? Speak about either of the two things, and we will listen. But let us have one thing at a time.” The second difficulty is that the two—Art and Sanitation—are so nearly identical, are so interwoven in their action and re-action, that it may be too hastily assumed that anything I may have to say regarding their relation to each other must necessarily be obvious and trite.

—Wyke Bayliss, “Sanitary Reform in Relation to the Fine Arts” (1889)
Chadwick’s invidious sanitary apparatus. In fact, to argue that Victorian aesthetic culture had shifted to accommodate the values and discourse of sanitation reform might very well seem “obvious and trite” under the methodological inevitability of Foucauldian New Historicism, where Chadwick’s infamous “Sanitary Idea” had already been discovered to have widespread economic, political, social and sexual effects. Mary Poovey’s groundbreaking work on British cultural formation, for example, contested standard Whig histories of Victorian reform by recasting Chadwick as a malevolent bureaucrat who “helped normalize what Michel Foucault has called disciplinary individualism, that paradoxical configuration of agency whereby freedom is constituted as “voluntary” compliance with a rationalized order, which is (not incidentally) as capable of producing irrationality as embodying rationality.” Following Poovey, scholars of Victorian culture came to recognize sanitation reform as encompassing a broad range of personal rituals and procedural regulations that allowed the modern state to gain control of both individual bodies and social bodies, disciplining through the dissemination of public health laws that discriminated, disproportionately, against the poor and against women.

Indeed, since the 1975 publication of Foucault’s Discipline and Punish, the rise of governmental agencies, the proliferation of bureaucratic spaces, and the viral spread of state “carceral archipelagos” have become familiar features of mid-Victorian cultural studies. Underwritten, most commonly, by Foucault’s concept of “panopticism,” much New Historical work on British reform movements has been methodologically dependent on a concept of vision and visibility that sometimes harnesses interest in Victorian cultural formation to the modes and metaphors provided by optical surveillance and the disciplinary gaze. In the case of Victorian sanitation reform, much has been made of Chadwick’s investment in discursively revealing the poor to his middle-class readers, exposing their filth and fragility to the view of a sympathetic and eagerly interventionist public who would enforce codes of morality, civility, and cleanliness through charity work and philanthropy, to be sure, but also by embodying and performing morality, civility and cleanliness themselves. Joseph Childers has argued that Foucault’s concept of panopticism was particularly instructive for understanding the observational techniques and habits that Chadwick’s sanitary inspections introduced to middle-class readers of his 1842 Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population: panopticism, Childers writes, “may indeed have been the means by which middle-class values such as ‘respectability’ or ‘duty’ became the disciplinary mechanism that helped to maintain dominant
middle-class representations of its particular interests as those of the whole and that established to norms against which all society could be evaluated.”

It seems plausible that the observational habits of looking that Childers describes would have aesthetic implications, especially given the specific training in visual appreciation and responsiveness Chadwick required of his readers, and the taste for realist detail over generalization he hoped to foster for the purposes of social discipline in middle-class spectators. Childers explains that Chadwick insisted “observers must not avert their eyes, nor be satisfied with generalizations that dilute the specifics of the problem at hand, for the effects of their observations will go on making the world of the lower classes knowable to readers . . . their observations will help to police that world.” But one limitation of Foucauldian methodology is its tendency to repress aesthetic development under the hegemony of scientific revolution: the realist vision so associated with Victorian aesthetic concepts and practices is primarily, under New Historicism, a sensory apparatus without sensibility, harnessed to clinical observation, classification, and ameliorist narratives of social perfectibility.

I am certainly not the first to observe this, nor any other limitation of Foucauldian methodology. The New Historicist elision of a whole set of critical conversations about Victorian aesthetic forms has been of great concern to Caroline Levine, for example, just as the dominance of scientific over aesthetic models of cultural interpretation has been recently criticized by Rachel Teukolsky. Furthermore, any assumption that optical surveillance in mid-Victorian Britain became a uniformly established and stable method of social control and identity formation has been variously thrown into doubt by art historians and literary critics like Jonathon Crary, Linda M. Shires, Janice Carlisle, Kate Flint and Meegan Kennedy, while the totalizing narrative of Victorian government centralization and Chadwickian bureaucratic discipline has been thoroughly challenged by Lauren Goodlad. All of these critics and many others I discuss below and throughout have helped me to shape my argument in The Sanitary Arts around the unevenness rather than the hegemony of sanitary discipline, and the places of philosophical overlap and ideological collision that are the most interesting sites of cultural study. They have enabled me to argue here for a more volatile vision of the Sanitary Idea than is usually circulated in Victorian histories or genealogies, one that allows us to see not just an invidious narrative of disciplinary bureaucratic reform unleashed in the 1840s by a charismatic and megalomaniacal Chadwick, but a longer and more dilatory, more contradictory, more contested story of sanitation reform that inevitably confronted, at its inception, not just
scientific technologies of vision but, as Wyke Bayliss implies, philosophical questions of taste.

Visual preferences, I will argue, were certainly sanitized by Chadwick’s style of observation, but I am also suggesting that the ongoing work of sanitation reform in the nineteenth century was less concerned with mobilizing sophisticated technologies of vision than with galvanizing the baser senses of the British public to be more “instinctively” repulsed by dirt. The nineteenth-century cleanliness campaigns, as I have termed the wider variety of movements and controversies arising from Chadwick’s mid-Victorian reforms, represent a crucial passage in the cultural history of taste that propelled a seemingly natural, seemingly instinctive sensitivity to filth into ideological and aesthetic coherence. Dominant models of sense perception and, indeed, dominant models of visual interpretation inherited from the eighteenth century, were actively displaced in order to make way for what I call the sanitary aesthetic: a more holistic understanding of beauty that submitted visual values to the smell test. Edwin Chadwick clearly understood and explained the more exalted stakes of sewerage and drainage, slum clearances and washhouses, in his writings and lectures, and represented the battle for cleanliness in Victorian London as a philosophical and intellectual choice between darkness and light, disease and health, and, perhaps surprisingly, dirt and art. In the middle of an 1862 address to the British Association for the Promotion of Science called “The Manual Labourer as an Investment of Capital,” Chadwick asserts,

We may, indeed, claim from professors of high art like Mr. Ruskin, that they have yet to take into account more of the economical being immersed in the physical and material in connection with the beautiful. I remember talking with him once on his search for works of art in Venice, on which he discourses so eloquently, and, describing to him my own feelings at the filth and squalor of the population, as suppressing any admiration for art amidst the foul and pestilential. I remember his admission that in that city the seats of ancient art were commonly centers of filth, so much so that his attendant in his explorations would sniff an ill odour, and when it was strong would say, ‘now we are coming to something old and fine,’ meaning in art. I would submit that the nose of the attendant gave a truer indication than the eye of the painter, for the right direction of labour, which must be for works of purification to produce the truly beautiful, which is always connected with the economical.7

This passage may certainly serve as further evidence of Chadwick’s megalomania and apparently boundless self-regard, even twenty years after the
publication of the *Sanitary Report*, but it also succinctly isolates an important aspect of my argument: the Victorian sanitation reform movement was a direct challenge to an established hierarchy of the senses, and a referendum on traditional philosophies of *aesthesis* that favored “the eye of the painter” over the more prosaic and more commonplace human sensitivities. “Abhorrence of smell produces its own kind of social power,” Alain Corbin has influentially observed, and in Chadwick’s case, that social power was opportunistically (and I may add, retrospectively) recast as a natural human desire for beauty over ugliness.⁸

Along with Corbin, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have been central to my thinking about sanitation and *aesthesis*, not because they specifically focus upon art objects or write about art history, but because they insist that the “discipline of policing and sanitation depended . . . upon a transformation of the senses” not limited to the “permanent visibility” embodied by the Panopticon.⁹ Visibility implies some distance, but the real source of pollution anxiety for the Victorian middle class was physical intimacy, and more anxiously focused upon the threat of both touch and smell. Smell was particularly worrisome for Chadwick and fellow sanitarians, Stallybrass and White explain, because it was transient but deadly, and could invade the middle-class body and the bourgeois home without warning: “It was, primarily, the sense of smell which engaged social reformers, since smell, whilst, like touch, encoding revulsion, had a pervasive and invisible presence difficult to regulate” (139). Corbin has likewise pointed out the centrality of smell over all other sensory experiences in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French sanitary reportage, and I would add that Chadwick’s original *Sanitary Report* is similarly occupied with the olfactory threat (Corbin 2). Featuring long, repetitive quotations from well-known physicians like Thomas Southwood Smith and Lyon Playfair that testify to people being killed instantly by unspecified putrid smells, the *Sanitary Report* crackles with anxiety about the foul vapors and noxious miasmata emanating from organic decay.¹° Crucially, Chadwick even warns that foul odors are so ubiquitous in urban slums and working-class neighborhoods that “the sense of smell in the majority of the inhabitants seems to be destroyed, and having no perception even of stenches which are insupportable to strangers, they must be unable to note the excessive escapes of miasma as antecedents to disease” (Chadwick 23). The olfactory quality of the original *Sanitary Report* has been noted in passing by many readers including Childers, and a variety of cultural critics have noted that “olfactory reform of the poor was . . . intimately linked with their moral reform.”¹¹ But smell is as difficult to theorize as it is to regulate, and remains an understandably neglected feature of sanitary history and experience. As
David Trotter explains, smell functions “consistently as a disintegrative and agonistic principle in the literature of sanitary reform” that works against narrative and against social meaning: “To understand the meanings and values attributed to it,” he writes, “one must be able to think the pure negativity of the nausea it provokes.”

Smell also works against the panoptical model of social development, and, according to Trotter, requires a more phenomenological approach than can be provided by New Historicism: “The New Historicism’s preoccupation with modernity’s dominant visual regimes have produced some brilliant analyses of the moment at which these regimes falter,” but they cannot adequately account for alternative models of sense perception so rooted in physiological disgust and cultural anxiety. While The Sanitary Arts, is not, in any way, a history of smell or even an alternative genealogy of sense perception, it recognizes smell as an oppositional aesthetic value that points to the more expansive capacities of sanitation as an imagined mechanism of social perfectibility in the long nineteenth century. As noted above, bad smells became a particularly disturbing category of social and bodily experience because sanitarians privileged smell as the most prophylactic and hygienic of the senses. Not only were the poor suffering under increasing pressures of abjection and dehumanization because they were losing the capacity to smell properly, even a highly trained art critic like John Ruskin, a master technician of vision and interpreter of visual codes, could be endangered, Chadwick warns, by a fundamental failure of aesthesis, a disregard of the lower senses in favor of dangerous visual pleasure. Predicated on a reverse hierarchy of sensitivities and underwritten by a fundamental distrust of outdated and “dirty” visual values, Victorian sanitation reform thus became part of an aesthetic conversation about beauty, culture, and shared social experience that predated the 1842 Sanitary Report and outlasted the 1870 discovery of the germ.

Interestingly, by ignoring baser forms of sense perception, panopticism extends the repressive work of a traditional strand of eighteenth-century aesthetic philosophy founded upon the devaluation of physical experience. Disinterest, that central tenet of what Linda Dowling and others have termed “Whig aesthetics,” presumes that taste is a universal category of experience that can be reasonably expected to govern men’s moral and social behavior. Beginning with Lord Shaftesbury’s 1711 Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times and continuing through Edmund Burke, and, crucially, Immanuel Kant, beauty is a social instinct that represses individual, baser sensitivities in favor of civic harmony and communal pleasure. The significance of aesthetic disinterest to Western philosophy in general and to Vic-
torian culture in particular has been emphasized by many contemporary critics like Dowling and Allison Pease, who notes that Kant’s detached, intellectualized aesthetic of “pure pleasure” protected art from the sciences, from commercial need, and even from the subjective bias of individual sense perception. For Terry Eagleton, moreover, the emergence of this particular strand of traditional eighteenth-century aesthetic philosophy is repressive not just because it represses the body and the body’s instincts in favor of “a community of sensibility with others,” but because it mobilizes *aesthesis* in the service of political hierarchy and aristocratic power. “If the aesthetic comes in the eighteenth century to assume the significance it does,” he reasons, “it is because the word is shorthand for a whole project of hegemony, the massive introjection of abstract reason by the life of the senses.”

He continues,

> What matters is not in the first place art, but this process of refashioning the human subject from the inside, informing its subtle affections and bodily responses with this law that is not law. It would thus ideally be as inconceivable for the subject to violate the injunctions of power as it would be to find a putrid odor enchanting. (Eagleton 43)

Eagleton’s argument here highlights a Kantian conundrum about the basest of human senses that the philosopher explored in his 1798 *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Kant explains that smell is not an aesthetic sense because it is “contrary to freedom and less sociable than taste, where among many dishes and bottles a guest can choose according to his liking, without others being forced to share the pleasure in it.” Smells, bad or good, are socially coercive, and at odds with the seemingly instinctive and natural pleasure generated by more detached forms of sense perception. Because it is socially disruptive rather than formative and a reminder of repressed animal instinct, smell is the most “ungrateful” and “dispensable” sense for Kant. Yet there might be, he admits grudgingly, necessary physiological reasons for the nausea and disgust caused by foul odors:

> It does not pay to cultivate it or refine it at all in order to enjoy it; for there are more disgusting objects than pleasant ones (especially in crowded places) and even when we come across something fragrant, the pleasure coming from the senses is always fleeting and transient. But, as a negative condition of wellbeing, the sense is not unimportant, in order not to breathe in bad air (oven fumes, the stench of swamps and animal carcases), or also not to need rotten things for nourishment. (Kant 60)
For Kant, bad smells register a radically individual regard for self-preservation and highlight the precarious quality of aesthetic disinterest; as Eagleton interprets, bad smells are a violation of the regular and harmonious motions and movements that produce social life as an aesthetic experience. “The mal-adroit or aesthetically disproportioned,” Eagleton elaborates, always “signals in its modest way a certain crisis in political power” (Eagleton 42). Revisiting Chadwick’s anecdote through Kant and through Eagleton, it becomes apparent that when Chadwick accuses John Ruskin of a penchant for putrescence he is reframing the insanitary hazards of urban filth as an ongoing aesthetic crisis, one that was enabled and institutionalized by the disinterested “eye of the painter” in eighteenth-century Whig philosophy, at the expense of the more common and self-preserving senses. Instead of ignoring bad smells, avoiding them, teaching the body to repress the baser instincts that actually protect individual health and the human species, Chadwick relocates smell to the very center of aesthetic activity and demands that the higher senses follow the nose.

It may seem that this line of argument threatens to replicate and even enhance the stories of sanitation reform that feature Chadwick as an malevolent disciplinarian who managed to dominate and restructure a variety of cultural discourses with his Sanitary Idea; as Goodlad has pointed out, Chadwick’s “success in portraying himself as the master agent of an all-embracing sanitary idea was one of the most remarkable feats of self-promotion in the nineteenth century” (Goodlad 92). However, Chadwick’s self-aggrandizement cannot be interpreted as complete bureaucratic authority or saturating ideological control. Chadwick eventually became “the most hated man in England” and lost his own position on the Board of Health in 1855; moreover, as Goodlad reminds us, the Sanitary Report merely consolidated (albeit thoroughly and well) ideas already in wide circulation in the Victorian period, thanks to the investigations of medical professionals like James Phillips Kay, Neil Arnott and Southwood Smith (Goodlad 94, 101, 93). Goodlad, along with critics like William A. Cohen and Michelle Allen, warns that the Foucauldian impulse to rewrite positivist histories of sanitation reform as a repressive and mechanistic genealogy of discipline too easily elides the real improvements wrought by the cleanliness campaigns, as well as the specific injustices and deprivations imposed by local sanitary “improvements.” Sanitation reform was slow, moreover, and not triumphantly imposed upon willing Victorians by the olfactory perspicacity of Chadwick’s 1842 Report. As Carlisle cogently explains in Common Scents: Comparative Encounters in High-Victorian Fiction, a central board of health was established in 1848, but “it was not until 1866 that local authorities were required to hire sanitary inspectors, and
not until 1871 that a new central department was created to oversee public health."

Given the sluggish pace and uncertain effects of sanitation reform in Victorian England, I am cautious of suggesting an alternative genealogy for the Sanitary Idea that would imply either a strong theory of cultural development or a rupture narrative of aesthetic change. While I am arguing that sanitation reform enters British intellectual life as a challenge to traditional models of *aesthesis*, Chadwick is not the sole instigator of sanitary philosophy in Victorian England, nor is he the solitary advocate of the sanitary aesthetic as it travels through nineteenth-century public discourse and cultural controversy. In fact, I argue in *The Sanitary Arts* that the aesthetic dimensions of the cleanliness campaigns over the long nineteenth century were often and ably managed by artists like Wyke Bayliss, by novelists like George Eliot, and by architects like Robert Edis, seemingly unconnected Victorian figures who nevertheless collaborated on the cultural project of redefining taste as a mechanism of public health and social justice. Such collaboration was enabled but not authorized by Chadwick, who may have been a strong and avidly opportunistic producer of sanitary discourse in the 1840s, but was in no sense an orchestrator of the spontaneous, decentralized, and adaptive alliance between sanitary protocols and aesthetic reforms that engendered a series of complex cultural developments by the end of the nineteenth century. The inadequacy of direct intention or causation as a model of cultural change is nowhere more apparent than in the spontaneous development of the sanitary aesthetic across discourses and disciplines in the mid-Victorian period, and is especially vivid in the work of Chadwick’s self-appointed nemesis, John Ruskin. Although Chadwick, in the above passage from 1862, positions Ruskin as someone who finds foul odors enchanting and thus represents all that is most threatening and antisocial about traditional aesthetics, Ruskin’s enthusiasm for moral cleanliness and purity are self-evident throughout his writings. Moreover, the art critic’s frank admiration for the less metaphoric, less spiritual aspects of hygiene have become infamous footnotes in the annals of sanitary history: “A good sewer is a far nobler and a far holier thing,” Ruskin once declared, “than the most admired Madonna ever painted.”

Ruskin, in fact, began to sanitize Victorian aesthetic preferences as early as his first volume of *Modern Painters* where he privileged the bright colors and cleanly details of J. M. W. Turner and the Pre-Raphaelite painters over the picturesque browns and pestilential yellows of the Renaissance Old Masters. While every chapter in *The Sanitary Arts* reflects upon this distinctly Ruskinian contribution to the cleanliness campaigns, my first chapter is specifically
concerned with a watershed moment in the production of what I’m calling the sanitary aesthetic, a confluence of events in the 1840s that first subjected fine art to hygienic scrutiny. In 1842, Edwin Chadwick published his Sanitary Report; the following year, John Ruskin published his first volume of Modern Painters. Seemingly oppositional, seeming incomparable, these texts nevertheless collaborated in challenging traditional models of aesthesis and imposing new standards of aesthetic sensitivity upon Victorian thought and experience. Under the bright clarity of sanitary science, an eighteenth-century artistic philosophy based on obscurity, darkness, and the metaphysical experience of sublimity came to be understood as a degraded obsession with filth. By the mid-fourties, moreover, these philosophical ideas yielded material effects when a public controversy erupted over the cleaning and restoration of dirty paintings in the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square. Members of the public who were initially outraged by the cleansing process were eventually converted to the more sanitary perspective that the embrowned tones and shadowy backgrounds of many famous, highly valued art treasures were actually caused by a range of filthy and offensive organic substances. The high aesthetic preferences of Shaftesbury, Burke, Hazlitt, and other famed collectors, connoisseurs, and philosophers were suddenly contaminated, diseased, and offensive to the commoner senses, and Ruskin’s more intellectual and abstract revulsion for the Old Masters was popularly and publicly affirmed. The sanitary aesthetic did, indeed, emerge as its own semantic field in the mid-Victorian period, challenging Whig darkness and disinterestedness as a dangerous threat to public health and individual wellbeing.

To reiterate, however, when I describe the connection between Edwin Chadwick and John Ruskin as collaborative, I am not implying that the sanitarian and the art critic together hatched a deliberate, intentional program for reinventing aesthetic culture as a mechanism of social perfectibility in the middle of the nineteenth century. Nor do I mean to suggest that the discourse of sanitation was so powerful and so totalizing that it redirected Ruskin’s foundational aesthetic interests into Chadwick’s grandiose pursuits. The limitation of a Foucauldian model of cultural change is more than apparent in the unstudied association between two domineering Victorian personalities who spoke to each other far less than they participated in a broad, spontaneous and adaptive conversation at the increasingly robust, increasingly porous interface between public health and aesthetics. Instead, my understanding of an interface rather than a border between sanitation and art has realized some help from Caroline Levine’s notion of “strategic formalism,” which challenges the structuralist idea of oppositional terms that “contaminate and destabilize each other,” and also the and/or discovery that irreconcilable concepts actu-
ally mean something so nearly identical (and identically repressive) that they are not worth discussing separately. According to Levine, strategic formalism considers the ways that social, cultural, political, and literary ordering principles rub up against one another, operating simultaneously but not in concert. This method shows that it is in the strange encounters among forms—even those forms that are deliberate outcomes of dominant ideologies—that unexpected, politically significant possibilities emerge. Thus social change comes not so much from active and intentional agency as from the openings that materialize in the collisions among social and cultural forms.” (Levine 633)

Similarly, I am arguing that Chadwick’s Sanitary Report and Ruskin’s Modern Painters were not intentionally, mutually coercive, but were simultaneously generative of significant cultural debate and aesthetic remapping at a crucial historical moment that produced new conventions and new preferences in not just visual art, but in architecture, interior decoration, and even literature.

On the other hand, I do not think it’s entirely productive to relinquish intention as a functional category for understanding the process of cultural change; intentionality, I would argue, is a much more complex and adaptive system than either Foucault or Levine allow. In fact, the model of causality I am describing in The Sanitary Arts more closely resembles what biologists and economists would refer to as “self-organization,” a term popularized by Paul Krugman, but best adapted for interdisciplinary use by bioethicist and philosopher Henri Atlan. In Atlan’s assessment, self-organization offers a model of intention “in which intentionality is not assumed from the beginning, but is an emerging property of local causal constraints.” For scientists, self-organization explains the apparent coordination and complex development that arises spontaneously from local, unrelated biological systems. Self-organization is the methodology economist Krugman adopts to compare economic slumps to hurricanes; in doing so, Krugman is looking for parallels between “seemingly disparate phenomena” to explain how it is that some systems that “start from an almost homogenous or even almost random state, spontaneously form large-scale patterns.” While Atlan and Krugman represent disciplines at some remove from both each other and the intellectual traditions of the Humanities, self-organization as they explain it relies on a notion of spontaneous but opportunistic collaboration that has significantly helped me understand both the features of multiple causality that are endemic to my interdisciplinary project, and the possibility that discourse is another system that functions adaptively, at times joining forces with diverse
and seemingly oppositional semantic fields. While one of the most important critiques of self-organization targets the assumption that altruism and progress must necessarily accompany any example of spontaneous emergence (the best example here may be Adam Smith’s infamous “invisible hand” of the free market), my own view is that the cultural collaborations I describe in this book are often robust and complex, but are fundamentally unpredictable and idiosyncratic over the long term. Unexpected consequences of intentional actions are not necessarily better or more inherently progressive than predicted or desired short-term outcomes, but they are inevitable and potentially widespread.

Most appealingly, self-organization offers a model of causality that deemphasizes the rupture narratives of cultural change that dominate our stories about both Victorian sanitation reform and aesthetic development; after all, the suddenness of Chadwick’s Sanitary Idea, the discovery of the germ, the rise of the Pre-Raphaelites, and the invention of Modernism have been long and well-known data points in the causal narrative of nineteenth-century cultural history. But when sanitation reform and aesthetic change are viewed as deeply collaborative, mutually constitutive discourses, each subject seems less revolutionary but more complex, and implicated in a far richer story of cultural development. In this way, the collisions among forms that Levine describes might be more robustly understood as productive and enabling collisions among functions that, in turn, make complex cultural developments possible. Cultural change emanates from the strength of certain discourses and eminent, charismatic producers of discourse like Chadwick and Ruskin, but also from dynamic, and unpredictable collaborations among discourses. Such collaborations are indirect and evolving, and need to be mapped over a much longer period of cultural history than singular stories of intellectual or aesthetic development are usually allotted. Thus, in the longer, slower view, Victorian sanitation reform can be seen as both a recognizable, coercive discourse and an open, idiosyncratic, mobile set of events that I reframe here as the cleanliness campaigns.

While my understanding of cultural development as collaboration is opposed to a structuralist understanding of collaboration as contamination or collapse, it still borrows usefully from structuralist methodology for an explanation of how contamination mythologies remain relevant, especially for anyone trying to tell a story about sanitation. For example, Mary Douglas’s groundbreaking interpretation of the anthropological meaning of dirt has explained that “pollution dangers strike when form has been attacked,” or when culturally dangerous ambiguities threaten pattern. This is, in itself, a powerful metatextual inscription of the effect of stucturalist critique, but
it is also, for my purposes, a fascinatingly antagonistic interpretation of the sanitary/aesthetic encounter at a particularly transformative moment in the nineteenth century. The formal conventions of painting and the metaphysical states associated with those conventions were challenged by the Sanitary Idea in the 1840s, and I argue in my first chapter that this cross-disciplinary collusion produced a set of pollution anxieties about old aesthetic forms, and replaced those forms with new, “healthful” aesthetic patterns and new experiences of aesthetics. The first three chapters of this volume, in fact, are specifically invested in the convergence of sanitary ideas with traditional aesthetic values in the mid-Victorian period, and the peculiar, even contradictory negotiations that developed a coterminous cultural discourse for artistic hygiene and sanitary beauty at the porous interface of two disciplines.

My second chapter identifies a specific subset of the nineteenth-century novel as “sanitary narratives”: novels that articulate the social drama of sanitary reform as an aesthetic transformation of Victorian culture. In the mid- to late-Victorian novel, moreover, this ideological transformation of dirt into art is often inscribed upon more dominant narratives of character growth and transformation, and the pollution anxiety Douglas theorizes becomes a driving mechanism of the plot. The sanitary narrative is, on the one hand, a formal commitment to social reconciliation and harmony as an aesthetic condition; thus I argue that canonical mid-Victorian reform novels like George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1870–71) and Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855) stage the ideological defeat of dirty, aristocratic visual preferences for picturesque landscapes and quaint people and put forward baser, sanitary sensitivities as realist vehicles for social reform and narrative closure. The marriage of art and sanitation in such fiction is often coterminous with the inexorable teleology of the Victorian marriage plot, and is even more visible in popular novels that explicitly assign ideological positions to their romantic leads. For example, George Halse’s 1889 *Graham Aspen, Painter* and George Gissing’s 1890 *The Emancipated* both conclude with a union between a formerly “dirty” artist to a woman who enforces hygiene and health through scientific knowledge or ethical principles. Moreover, in a variety of these lesser-known novels like Averil Beaumont’s *Magdalen Wynard, or The Provocations of a Pre-Raphaelite* (1872) and Charlotte Mary Yonge’s *The Pillars of the House* (1873), the revival of “true” art is imagined to be a process of purification that privileges the “healthy” gloss and bright “clean” colors of the Pre-Raphaelite painters over the degenerate tones and shadowy images of the Old Masters.

As we have seen, for Edwin Chadwick the connection between art and dirt was topographically obvious: art was dirty because its cherished environments were dirty. Venice, that revered paradise of aesthetic culture, was
“pestilential and foul” in Chadwick’s assessment, and the art it contained and inspired must necessarily be degraded and potentially contagious. But mapping the unsanitary status of distant European capitals was not the primary geographical effect of the Sanitary Idea; as Stallybrass and White have influ-
entially argued, Victorian reformers like Chadwick and Henry Mayhew were central in the ideological mapping of London “fever nests” for the Victo-
rian middle class. My third chapter argues that the slow development and uneven circulation of germ theories in the 1870s gradually forced sanitary geographies of the city inward, eventually producing analogous geographies of the over-decorated, architecturally busy Victorian interior. In these domes-
tic geographies, the decorative “dust trap” supplemented the fever nest as an internal locus of pollution anxiety. Advocates of domestic health not only eschewed the nooks, crannies, tunnels, dark rooms, narrow hallways, and turrets cherished by Gothic revivalists, they also dismissed the favored fea-
tures of Aesthetic decoration—dados, decorative carving, shelving, cornices, tapestries, curtains and carpets as “dust traps” or, in other words, “the forcing beds for disease germs.” By century’s end, the banishment of the dust trap from the Victorian home and the transition to a sleek, seamless Modernism in British art and architecture looks less like a rupture narrative of aesthetic revolution than the slow, collaborative work of the Victorian cleanliness campaigns.

While there is some temporal and ideological overlap between the first and second halves of this book, the last three chapters are more specifically focused on the impact of germ theory, laboratory science, and microbiology on the experience and understanding of aesthetic. Most studies of sanitation reform suggest a rather abrupt ending to the positivist, ameliorist notion that social perfectibility could be ensured for England through a serious, state-
enforced commitment to environmental cleanliness and individual hygiene. But in spite of various “germ theories of disease” that circulated fitfully and incompletely in the 1870s and 1880s, the familiar features and ideological meaning of the sanitary narrative lingered through the beginning of the twen-
tieth century: still reliant on the pollution anxiety inspired by the reeking vil-
lage and the picturesque landscape, sanitary fiction continued to promote the aesthetic promise of perfectibility, even when challenged by new and poten-
tially contradictory information about microorganisms, bacteria, and genetics. The work of historians of science like Alison Bashford, Nancy Tomes, and David Wootton helps to make sense of these apparently anachronistic novels and narratives. Insisting that rupture narratives of scientific change and revolution radically misrepresents the sluggish pace of scientific discov-
ery and adaptation, as well as the protracted resistance to germ theory that
 lingered until well into the twentieth century, these historians make a case for a longer, slower, more vacillating story of medical reform than positivist histories of science admit. In turn, this allow me to argue in the second half of *The Sanitary Arts* for the continued and continuing importance of Victorian sanitary philosophy to cultural forms and ideologies far beyond their conventional domain. For example, germ theory is often acknowledged in the design guides and domestic health manuals I discuss in Chapter Three, represented by the invocation of both germs and microscopic “seeds” of disease. But pollution anxiety in these texts still pivots upon smells and vapors, effluvia and miasma, spontaneous generation of illness, and a Gothic fear of organic decay. Germ theory doesn’t replace sanitary discourse simply and efficiently in the 1870s; germ theory supplements (and at times contradicts) the Victorian environmental hygiene program with a newly biological component, promising to deliver bodily health and social harmony one germ and gene at a time.

My fourth chapter thus explores the so-called revolution in medicine that occurred in the last decades of the nineteenth century as a protracted cultural dispute about the human body that pitted the proponents of sanitary science, or prevention, against the rising forces of laboratory and surgical science, or cure. Here, I discuss medical fictions as a generic offshoot of what I’ve already identified as the sanitary narrative; while, as I argue in my second chapter, the late-Victorian sanitary narrative privileges clean art over dirty art and thus forges a new social order based on aesthetic harmony, the medical narrative fundamentally challenges that social order by contesting the faith in mutual pleasures and collective pains that stabilized and sustained the sanitary aesthetic. In the medical narrative, Ruskin’s sanitary philosophy is thrown into opposition with Walter Pater’s more physiological, more impressionistic, and considerably less social theory of aesthetics: “A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life,” Pater famously mused in his 1873 *The Renaissance*. “How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses?”26 This decadent description of an aesthetic experience found in the local shifts and individual “pulses” of an atomized body, develops contiguously with the anatomical sciences in the 1870s and 1880s, when a new understanding of the human body as a potential site of surgical penetration and dissection threatened to overthrow a vitalist concept of the perfectible body defined by unity, beauty, and physical cleanliness. But medical fictions and surgical stories enter aesthetic controversy not through their mobilization of “decadence” as a coherent philosophical category, I argue, but through their perpetual inscription of “anesthesia” as the physiological and philosophical opposite of aesthetics.
Anesthesia, first discovered and utilized in the 1840s, was coined linguistically by Oliver Wendell Holmes to underscore the deliberate repression of the very senses awakened and enjoyed through aesthetic experience. Late-nineteenth-century medical fictions like Edward Berdoe’s *St. Bernard’s: The Romance of a Medical Student* (1887), Roy Tellet’s *A Draught of Lethe: The Romance of an Artist* (1891), and Grant Allen’s *Hilda Wade* (1900), collectively indulge a cultural fantasy about medical perversion as a threat to sanitary philosophy by inscribing the numb, insensate, surgically prepared body as the ultimate corruption of traditional models of *aesthesis*. Anesthesia, it was widely believed, destroyed the need for empathy on the part of surgeons and doctors, numbing the social dimension of traditional aesthetic experience while expanding the uncivilized taste for asocial and even sadistic pleasures. Pitting surgeons against sanitarians, vivisectionists against holistic healers, mad scientists against valiant artists, Ruskinian philosophers against Paterian aesthetes, medical fictions expose and exploit moral confusion about the rise of pathology, revealing the shared territory of aesthetics and human health to be not the utopian, evolutionary platform of sanitary perfectibility, but the dystopian, degenerate nightmare of surgical interventions.

In my fifth and sixth chapters, I continue to explore the development of sanitation reform as it shifted from an environmental to a biological phase in cultural history, and examine that shift through the persistence of the sanitary plot in British “New Woman” fiction written well-after the discovery and general acceptance of microorganisms. “New Woman” fiction reinvented sanitation as a specifically female responsibility, not just through the rituals of domestic cleanliness and hygienic design I discuss in my third chapter, but through a new commitment to reproductive control and sexual selection found to be necessary in a post-germ theory England. In the late nineteenth-century novels of Grant Allen and Charles Reade, for example, the task of the female sanitarian retains its mid-Victorian ideological meaning and urgency: sanitary knowledge must purify the community by remaking the aesthetic, teaching the perverse landowning class, in particular, to recognize and appreciate a form of beauty found in healthy environments and beautiful people rather than in the picturesque poison of the decayed village and the degenerated human body. But the sanitary narrative in the late nineteenth century demands biological as well as affective reconciliation, teaching heroines to choose husbands based on virility, heredity, and cleanliness, and transforming the Victorian marriage plot into a more prescriptive, more contentious, and, in some ways, more feminist social arrangement.

“New Woman” novels that emphasize eugenic mating have been notoriously difficult for feminist critics to address as a crucial component of both
women’s history and socialist history, but the feminist, socialist program of “judicious breeding” is a distinct outgrowth of the sanitary aesthetic. “New Woman” fiction, I argue in my fifth chapter, articulates the troubling statistical and genetic program of social hygiene as an aesthetic appeal to the conscience, to the senses, to the virtuous necessity for beauty in all aspects of human existence. Mrs. Humphry (Mary) Ward’s *The Mating of Lydia* is the text I discuss most thoroughly here as a very late sanitary fiction: published in 1913, Ward’s novel absorbs many of the most notable features of those mid-Victorian sanitary narratives I discussed in the second chapter, and it eventually uses the marriage plot as a vehicle to banish environmental degradation, and to inspire a philosophical conversion to a sanitized, socialized aesthetic. But inscribed within the very title of Ward’s novel is an acknowledgment of the somewhat refined responsibility carried by that closing tableau of affective reconciliation; if mid-century sanitary fictions cleanse and renew the social order through a harmonious reconciliation of opposites in marriage, late-Victorian and early-twentieth-century novels often emphasize not only marriage, but the biological and reproductive ritual of “mating” as a fundamental component of the new sanitary philosophy. The repudiation of the picturesque is a crucial ideological linchpin between sanitary and protoeugenic thinking, I argue, a trope that captures clearly an abiding effort to naturalize a set of specific social, political and economic problems as an aesthetic controversy.

The work of Pierre Bourdieu informs my thinking about aesthetic “naturalization,” and the way taste functions politically in the construction of a cultural aristocracy. While my fifth chapter investigates the beginnings of a distinctly genetic phase in sanitary thinking that circulated as advocacy for aesthetic culture, my sixth and final chapter more fully explores the fin de siècle use of aesthetic philosophy as a mechanism for naturalizing the most distasteful and antisocial aspects of genetic engineering. In a variety of eugenic writings published at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century I have discovered a common and artfully constructed genealogy of “race culture” in England, one that identifies the father and founder of British eugenic thinking to be not Francis Galton nor Herbert Spencer, nor even Edwin Chadwick, but, interestingly enough, John Ruskin. Ruskin’s ongoing advocacy of what I’ve been calling the sanitary aesthetic in the Victorian period, his abiding investment in “clean” environments and strong, healthy bodies, is imported by racialists at the turn of the century, in an effort, I argue, to make the ugliness and unpleasantness of statistical thinking seem like an instinctive and even moral preference for beauty.
Opposed to what eugenicists like Caleb Saleeby would identify as the harsher, “Nietzschean” trend in social engineering, the Ruskinian eugenic program was “positive,” emphasizing the preventive goals of hygienic breeding practices like healthy, state-approved “mating” rather than the more draconian methods of forced sterilization and infanticide. Of course, this insertion of Ruskin into eugenic philosophy is highly selective, and disregards, blatantly, Ruskin’s social advocacy for the working classes, his investment in realist detail, his distaste for the “low” picturesque, and, most importantly here, his original intentions when he articulated social reform as an aesthetic philosophy. But a wide variety of these materials by both British and American eugenicists like Saleeby, Robert Reid Rentoul, Anna Mary Galbraith, and Scott Nearing, are organized, even self-organized around a set of protocols that invoke Ruskin as a powerful touchstone of aesthetic socialism, where the communal aspects of graceful, harmonious, and essentially Shaftesburyan civil life seem to necessitate the sacrifice of dysgenic individuals and unhealthy types. What Saleeby calls “eugenic reconciliation” becomes a familiar feature of New Woman novels that explicitly advocate hygienic breeding as the ideological force of the marriage plot, and I argue in Chapter Six that Sarah Grand’s two-part, post-Victorian trilogy Adnam’s Orchard (1912) and Winged Victory (1916), advances eugenic reconciliation as a highly civilized, yet mysteriously natural aesthetic goal. Still channeling Ruskinian aesthetic revulsion through the stinking village and the picturesque landscape, Grand’s novels nevertheless recuperate and revitalize that aristocratic strand of aesthetic philosophy that represses bad smells and ugly bodies through a process of prevention that begins at birth, and most resembles genetic elimination. Direct causality can be a misleading indicator in strong theories of cultural change, and the inherent long-term unpredictability of the initial collaboration between sanitary and aesthetic philosophies I foreground in The Sanitary Arts is especially visible in this disturbing late-century resuscitation of Ruskin for the purpose of eugenic advocacy. Under a longer, slower, more complex understanding of cultural change, even the best intentions are necessarily severed from unpredictable and morally ambivalent effects.