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## Chapter 7: Designs for living rooms

Martin Dines

Of all the rooms in the British home, one alone has impelled an array of nominations. In every domestic arrangement in which I have found myself, though, I have called it the living room. I have done so while being aware of the commonly used alternatives (which would sometimes be voiced by my cohabitees): lounge, sitting room, den, front room (or, indeed, back room), TV room. From an early age nursery rhymes and books made familiar more old-fashioned terms – parlour, drawing room, morning room – which formed a kind of musty underlay to current nomenclature. Later, travel and further reading introduced me to other terms used elsewhere in the English-speaking world: family room, rec or rumpus room. These designations seem to me almost as awkward as the obsolete ones: if the likes of parlour and drawing room invoke time- and class-bound formal ritual, the terms more commonly used in North America and Australia articulate an expectation that certain rooms are to be used by particular members of the household for specific activities. And so ‘living room’ seems the greatly preferable term to me: on the one hand, for invoking ordinary, everyday life and, on the other, for avoiding being prescriptive and for gesturing toward universality.<sup>1</sup>

While hardly being entirely unregulated and free from rules, explicit or unspoken, I remember the living room of the house in which I spent the first eighteen years of my life – a 1950s semidetached council house on the Essex-Suffolk border – as a space which hosted all manner of activities, both social and solitary. Following the abolition of bedtime, it was rarely if ever out of bounds. It was also the place in which I first heard the word ‘homoerotic’ uttered by another person. My father had used this startling term to dismiss the significance of the films of Derek Jarman, several of which were to be shown in a TV retrospective late that evening. I remember very clearly watching the films back to back, my face inches from the screen, and being by turns mesmerised, perplexed and turned on. Above all, I was anxious that our TV’s least

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<sup>1</sup> The *OED* defines ‘living room’ as ‘a room set aside for ordinary social use’, and suggests its origins are American: the five earliest examples of its usage, running from 1857 to 1918, are all from American sources. In her study of the builders and buyers of post-war suburban housing in the US, Barbara Miller Lane (2015: 213) asserts that the precise origins ‘living room’ are unclear. She notes however that throughout the late nineteenth century the label was frequently used by American farm dwellers to designate an informal gathering space in their home; the term marked a rejection of the more formal parlour, which was deemed effete and citified.

audible volume setting might awaken slumbering family members upstairs. I view this still as something of a formative experience (and one I share with at least one gay friend who, years later, confirmed that he also surreptitiously watched those Jarman films that same night). It was characterised by feeling out of place in a situation where I normally felt right at home. Within the open-plan space of downstairs I was suddenly vulnerable, defenceless. It also felt as if I was an interloper, and that I was being commanded. My sense of exhilaration had something to do with the wrongness of this body of mine getting what it wanted – in the living room.

This recollection reminds me that ‘living room’ is in a sense an inapt designation: it corresponds to the part of the home not given over to biological functions, which take place behind the doors of other, more appropriately named rooms. The living room, in nearly all of its guises, is usually the most public-facing room in the home. Its role as a ‘reception room’, where typically much work is put into presenting the identity and status of the household to visitors and thereby the outside world, helps to explain the proliferation of terms for this space. The self-fashioning and assertions of social status facilitated by this room, which Erving Goffman (1990) has deemed a quintessential ‘front region’, must keep abreast of broader developments. Variant nominations may be seen as ways in which households emulate or differentiate themselves from others. Indeed, it is difficult not to interpret the reservation of one room in twentieth-century lower-class households for ‘best’ as a form of conspicuous consumption: the space is rendered ‘unproductive’ – that is, non-functional – in sharp contrast to other rooms of the house, in order to help assert a sense of the householders’ ‘respectability’, a notion largely inspired by social superiors better able to resource such spaces in their home.

It is true that technological developments and increased prosperity across the twentieth century have gradually eroded the divisions between public and private space within the home. As Alison Ravetz and Richard Turkington attest (1995: 167), the rise in the post-war years of open-plan kitchens, whole-house heating, the automation of much household work, and clean and stylish surfaces in both kitchen and bathroom meant ‘that there was no longer any part of the house too disgraceful to be seen. The whole house was available for pleasure and [...] was accessible to anyone.’ The twentieth century, particularly the latter half, has also seen an increase in rates of domestic single occupancy, and following the abolition of minimum space standards for

new builds in the 1980s, a diminution in the size of homes.<sup>2</sup> In smaller homes, the living room (if one exists) often has multiple functions. I am writing at my desk which is located in my living room, where I also eat, watch TV and (occasionally) entertain guests. Estate agents are liable to describe the single reception rooms of small houses and flats as 'lounge-diners'; descriptions of rooms which also contain a kitchen sometimes feature the much diminished designation 'living area'. Thus in the UK the living room has become less distinct over the last several decades. It has lost certain distinguishing characteristics following the transformation of other spaces in the house, while acquiring some of the functions associated with other rooms. Without doubt the living room is the most mutable of all rooms in the British home.

If the identity of the living room seems slippery, with its profusion of nominations, and shifting form and functions, for queer subjects this space may seem especially conflicted or ambiguous. While watching the Jarman films that night, I felt dislocated in wholly familiar surroundings, and wildly liberated yet highly constrained. For sure, these contradictions have much to do with my being in the shared space of the family home, and my relative lack of confidence and worldly experience. In much queer – or at least gay male – narrative fiction, the ambivalence of the living room may have to do with its associations with family life, but arguably more closely relates to changes to mid-twentieth-century domestic interiors, to the promise of transformation articulated by my family's modern, open-plan living room. Typically, these stories present several iterations of the living room, each furnishing an alternative model of queer life. Usually one, for better or worse, is more closely associated with modern approaches to architecture and interior design than the others. Even while some interiors, and therefore modes of life, are presented as contemptible, the mutability of the living room at the very least points to the possibility of diverse queer lives. Further, given how bound up the living room is with assertions of identity and social status, it is unsurprising that these narratives present a range of different interiors to help navigate

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<sup>2</sup> This trend, however, is in contradiction with the continually expanding size of new homes elsewhere in the English-speaking world. According to the National Association of Homebuilders (Barton and Collins 2012: 257), the average size of a new home in the US in 1950 was around 1,000 square feet. By 2004 this had more than doubled, reaching 2,334 square feet. Australia has seen similar increases (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008), and since 2009 the average area of Australian new homes has exceeded American figures; they are now the largest in the world – and nearly three times the size of British homes. Further, currently the UK builds the smallest new homes in Western Europe (Morgan and Cruickshank 2014).

complex class dynamics within queer relationships. The living room, this chapter argues, provided a crucial imaginary site – or more accurately, a plurality of sites – in which writers negotiated the possibilities and contradictions that characterised queer life in the mid-twentieth century. But as well as discussing the presence of the living room in queer novels, I will consider the frequently imagined presence of queer novels in living rooms. This self-reflexivity, I argue, is a measure of the desire to differentiate between various modes of queer life as well as the persistent difficulty in divorcing one mode from the other.

Such contrasting visions were most frequently drawn in the early post-war era, during which time a mode of homosexual citizenship centring on domesticated, companionate relationships, conservative deportment and libidinal restraint coalesced in the discourse of legal reform. In such rhetoric, the figure of the reserved, private homosexual was frequently distinguished from unruly, disreputable types – such as the effeminate quean and working-class ‘trade’ – who were associated with increasingly visible and vilified public queer milieus. Indeed, the domesticated homosexual had an important presence in the discussions of the Wolfenden Committee, which met between 1954 and 1957, whose final report recommended the legalization of sexual relations between men taking place in private. (Higgins 1996; Houlbrook 2005) As Richard Hornsey asserts this was also a period during which ‘the home emerged as one of the most contested sites in the concerted drive for social reconstruction and renewal’ (2010: 201), The desire to reform the moral and material conditions of the home – which took on an especial urgency in war-torn Britain – impinged however upon the bourgeois ideal of the sanctity of the domestic sphere, a realm in which public authorities were understood to have little or no legitimate business. Hornsey argues that this contradiction led to the promotion of interior design to the status of technology, which provided the means by which the domestic interior could be remotely programmed in order to foster desirable social behaviour. Public scepticism toward new trends in interior design, however, was marked. Christine Atha has documented how the perceived intransigence of the working-class consumer in particular ‘necessitated the production of considerable amounts of aesthetic and political propaganda around design and its consumption’ (2012: 207). Modern design principles, including the insistence upon clean lines, clutter-free spaces and the strict marrying of form and function, found repeated articulation in radio broadcasts, books

and exhibitions. The declared purpose of these interventions – to educate the public in matters of taste – frequently clashed with strongly held understandings of the domestic interior as a ritualised and organic space, with the living room providing the home's principal site for the accretion of artefacts communicating familial history. As well as being dismissed for being ugly and uncomfortable, model living rooms in the new mode were commonly deemed ostentatious and, worse, suspiciously effeminate.

As Hornsey has indicated, some homosexual-themed novels from the period closely accord with these sceptical attitudes toward modern interior design. For instance, in Mary Renault's 1953 novel *The Charioteer*, the rented rooms of two queer characters are contrasted. The living room of Ralph, who at the novel's conclusion takes up with the protagonist Laurie in what appears to be a harmonious, domesticated form of companionship, is marked by its simplicity and a cleanliness that suggests masculine rather than feminine attentiveness: 'the wood and brass polished as a seaman, not a landlady, does it' (Renault 2003: 19). Bunny's room, located in the same building as Ralph's, is a realm apart. Observes Laurie:

The room had been, one could say, interior-decorated. There was a single picture, which was vorticist of a kind and had patently been chosen to match the colour scheme. [...] The furniture was very low, with that overstated lounginess which rarely turns out to be physically comfortable. It was all very bright and sleek, and had the look of being kept under dust-sheets except when open to the public (Ibid.: 192-3).

On the one hand, such frippery is analogous to Bunny's evident (and contemptible) effeminacy. Beyond this though, the showiness and inauthenticity of these living quarters invites the reader to draw conclusions about the moral failings of its occupant. If these directions were somehow not sufficiently clear, Bunny proceeds to incapacitate Ralph – with whom he is still romantically involved – in order to make a pass at Laurie.

Moral distinctions about queer characters based on their preferences for interior décor are a frequent feature of post-war queer fiction, but rarely are they quite as clear cut as they are in Renault's novel. Rodney Garland's *The Heart in Exile*, also published in 1953, peruses the domestic interiors of Antony and Julian, who were briefly lovers before the War. Both their living spaces appear as respectable and austere masculine as Ralph's room in Renault's novel. Antony, a psychiatrist turned detective following the suicide of Julian, reports how the latter's bedsit flat 'gave a

masculine impression in negative good taste, extremely English and genteel, without the slightest suggestion of Julian's emotional life' (Garland 2014: 37). What gives away the dead man's irregular and uncontrollable desires is the presence of a cigarette box that was 'almost fascinating in its vulgarity': 'cheap, shoddy and with a jazzy design, the kind of thing one might find at a funfair' (ibid.). The room's carefully composed reticence is undermined by this inappropriate artefact, whose placing leads Antony to discover a photograph of a young working-class man hidden behind a framed picture of Julian's fiancée. This duplicity thus renders the room as inauthentic as Bunny's. Moreover, the photo is, Antony surmises, the sort of thing that would have been taken 'somewhere on the Charing Cross Road' (ibid.). Both the cigarette box and the photograph are indicative of the kind of unruly urban life and cross-class encounter that were anathema to the respectable, domesticated homosexual championed in post-war fiction.

In *The Heart in Exile*, this figure is represented by the protagonist-narrator Antony, and the novel concludes with his sudden though felicitous union with his housekeeper-secretary Terry. But the novel is beset by some troubling parallels between Julian's and Antony's manner of conducting themselves with other men. One of the most telling of these parallels finds expression within the two men's living rooms – albeit indirectly, through representative material objects. The novel's indisputably happy ending would certainly appear to underline the moral distance between two different ways of conducting homosexual relationships. Antony and Terry's domestic, companionate union constitutes the fictive future and so seems eminently viable. By contrast, Julian's chain of affairs with young, working-class men – facilitated in large part by the social upheavals of the War – would appear to be anachronistic: as other well-to-do queer characters in the novel complain, higher standards of living mean that working-class men are less in need of wealthy benefactors. Julian's death provides further confirmation that an erotic life organised around fleeting affairs which traverse class boundaries is without prospect. But then, Antony's and Terry's relationship is hardly a marriage of equals, and neither does it seem likely to be all that long-lasting. Terry evinces a 'touchingly' feminine love of housework (Garland 2014: 137); at the same time, Antony fixates on his masculine, labouring body. Watching Terry bent over mop and bucket, Antony declares 'one saw the servant's humility in the attitude. But one also saw the broad shoulders and the arched back' (ibid.). Thus Terry is safely distanced from the figure of the pansy, who haunts the disreputable spaces of the city, and whom

Antony finds repulsively effeminate. Terry's employer also notes 'the somewhat harsh, masculine dialect of his native city, which was still with him' (ibid.: 138). This compares with a former lover of Julian's, the similarly named Tyrell, whose upward mobility – and in particular the loss of his regional accent – results in Julian losing interest and calling off the affair. That Terry's accent is 'still with him' indicates Antony's awareness that it may not endure, and therefore the possibility that his own interest might wane – just as Terry's physique, currently so alluring, will likely cause him to look 'bloated' (ibid.: 137) within a decade. On the one hand, then, Terry's feminine qualities indicate the potential long-term domestic compatibility between the men; that is, they point towards a life together that follows the conventionally gendered scripts of heterosexual marriage. On the other, Terry's masculine and working-class credentials offer evidence of the relationship's erotic basis, but correspondingly suggest that, like Julian's affairs, it will be short lived. This contradiction stems from the need to present a convincing homosexual relationship, that is, one that is both convincingly sexual and convincingly domestic. These two requirements, which are necessary to demonstrate the near equivalence of respectable homosexual relationships to heterosexual marriages, obviously work against one another. It is then no wonder that the novel – like Renault's *The Charioteer* – is only able to point to a companionate domestic homosexual relationship flourishing beyond its final page: such a thing is effectively unrepresentable.

It is therefore understandable that the two men are never depicted together in the reception room of Antony's flat. It is in any case largely a place of (divided) labour, serving as Antony's consulting room, and kept spotless by Terry's ministrations. But the possibility of their relationship is expressed through a single object located in the room, an ornament in the form of a 'Chinese horse', one of only two 'worthwhile things' (Garland 2014: 12) in an otherwise spartan interior. Terry breaks the ornament while conducting his chores; Antony interprets the incident as a sublimated protest against his absence while he investigates Julian's death. The implication is clear enough: any chance of a relationship between the two men is threatened by Antony's venturing into another world, one far removed from the safe and respectable confines of the home. Once again, then, an object stands in for a homosexual relationship. That the one representing Antony's and Terry's potential union is antique, elegant and valuable, and the one alluding to Julian and his lover is modern, gaudy and cheap would seem to



speak volumes of the desire to distinguish the two kinds of affair. But the fact that both relationships have to be articulated through a prosthetic object bespeaks their discomfiting similarity.

The representative artefact in the living room seems to be a common trope. In Audrey Erskine Lindop's 1955 novel *The Details of Jeremy Stretton*, a modern ornament occupies centre stage in the living room of set designer Flick. It rather theatrically articulates the unlikelihood of its effeminate owner settling successfully into a long-lasting relationship; as Flick observes fondly, 'you can almost see life crushing it' (Lindop 1955: 191). The most frequently appearing prosthetic objects in post-war queer fiction, however, are novels, indicating a perhaps surprising self-consciousness, that is, an awareness of the problematics of representing respectable sexuality. Early on in *The Heart in Exile* Antony plucks a serious novel from his shelves of his living room and comments on it in such a way as to display his erudition; later he bemoans how 'there was a tendency for the younger, post-war generation of invert to be tougher in both mind and body. They know that tolerable biceps and a good pair of shoulders are better selling points today than an acquaintance with books by Sartre and Maugham.' (Garland 2014: 172) This emphasises how he feels himself to be as anachronistic as he thinks Julian is, and also – those nice shoulders again – the troubling difference between himself and Terry. Actually, Terry declares literary ambitious of a sort. If he ever could write a novel, he says, he would 'write about the majority [of homosexuals] for whom it isn't really tragic'. Antony knows this would not amount to much: 'Happiness – normal or abnormal – is uninteresting.' (Ibid.: 142) Appropriately enough, Antony feels that his exploration of London's seething queer underworld takes the form of a very different kind of fiction: a penny-dreadful. As an object the penny-dreadful is as cheap, showy and disreputable as the cigarette box found in Julian's room; both contain the promise of the sensuous pleasures of the disorderly city. Antony not only acknowledges the allure of this realm, he comprehends that the heightened sensuality of the penny-dreadful's fictional world renders it more real than real life: 'I didn't want to read a novel and I didn't want to write novels, I wanted to *live* novels. The fact that the novel I wanted to *live* at this particular moment was a penny-dreadful, mystery story, was significant, because I always felt the penny-dreadful was the *real* novel. As a species it was immortal.' (Ibid.: 144; italics in original.) Only when he has solved the case of Julian's death does Antony feel he is finally able to close this book. Enduring love and

responsibility replace the desire for excitement; the story ends so that real life may begin. Of course, this amounts to an acknowledgement that any attempt to represent respectable homosexual lives cannot avoid – indeed, will inevitably be dominated by – more pleasurable, less reputable narrative forms. Antony's sense of the penny-dreadful's immortality is then disturbingly apposite.

The impossibility of the respectable homosexual novel fully distinguishing itself from other, less reputable forms, and of fully dissociating itself from abject locales, is made even more explicit in Martyn Goff's 1961 novel *The Youngest Director*. Rather like Antony Page, the novel's bourgeois protagonist Leonard Bissel takes succour from owning novels by heavyweight writers such as Iris Murdoch and Angus Wilson – both establishment figures whose fiction featured homosexual characters. But the possession of these novels would appear not to guarantee the reproduction of orderly queer lives: a copy of Wilson's *Hemlock and After* lies on the living room coffee table of Leonard's amoral counterpart Dave, whose flat is, inevitably, located in one of 'the seedier districts of London' where 'disordered sexual lives spilled into even more disordered daily ones' (Goff 1967: 45). Presumably the novel's repositioning, its objectification – now a 'coffee table book' meant to be looked at rather than read – is supposed to mark a moral distinction between its superficial, effeminate owner and the more serious and moral protagonist. But if anything this transformation predicts the debasement of the homosexual novel, its becoming mere material to facilitate sexual interaction. On the one hand, even less showy book collections are typically still very much on display, and as such are liable to be 'read' by all manner of visitors seeking a better understanding about their owners.<sup>3</sup> On the other, many of these queer novels would metamorphose from first-edition hardbacks, whose restrained-looking covers promised the sensitive treatment of as serious an issue as homosexuality, to cheap and gaudy mass-market paperbacks. *The Charioteer*, *The Heart in Exile* and *The Youngest Director* all underwent this makeover. Most remarkably, Goff's novel was repackaged as a romance in a 1967

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<sup>3</sup> For this reason, of course, many queer men have been extremely cautious about the contents of their bookshelves lest anything communicate their queerness to unsuspecting visitors. Garland's Anthony Page, for instance, expresses relief that none of Julian's books suggest anything about the dead man's predilections. But in perusing Julian's library, Anthony is also re-enacting a more obviously sexual operation that was frequently employed by queer men. In an unpublished memoir photographer Carl Marshall recalls how, when living in London in the late 1950s and 1960s, he 'would scan through the bookshelves' of pick-ups when entering their homes. Marshall wrote: 'you can read so much into the a person's mind by the books they own'. (Cook 2014: 165)

British paperback edition by Mayflower Dell, replete with locket motif and the line 'His business success seemed assured ... but for his forbidden love.' Such ephemeral, disposable objects would have been plucked off shop carousels on street corners in the city centre. Hornsey goes as far as saying that 'firmly embedded within the ordinary spaces of metropolitan life [these paperbacks] existed to be looked at, to be cruised and picked up within [their] natural urban habitat' (2010: 194). Thus, by the time queer relationships in private were given legal sanction, these novels, which steadfastly argue for a retreat from urban queer milieus, had quite literally made a return to the disreputable city.

Even by the late 1950s, though, queer-themed fiction showed a noticeable re-orientation away from bourgeois domesticity and toward an urban scene that had been dynamised by London's commercial revival.<sup>4</sup> The diminution of the importance placed on domesticity is arguably reflected in the number of novels featuring urbane homosexual characters who are seemingly content with bedsit accommodation: Colin MacInnes's *Absolute Beginners* (1959), Kenneth Martin's *Waiting for the Sky to Fall* (1959), and Andrew Salkey's *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* (1960) (the latter suggests at least the possibility of queer relationships existing in such inauspicious spaces). James Courage's *A Way of Love* (1959), drawn both to bourgeois domesticity and to queer urbanity, is something of a pivotal text. Its protagonist, the architect Bruce Quantock, desires a settled, domestic life with his younger partner, the Cornishman Philip Dill. But Bruce also admits suffering a kind of 'homesickness for the company of [...] members of what I may call without exaggeration our immense league [...] who rejoiced in the anonymity of cities' (Courage 1959: 145). *A Way of Love* follows the likes of *The Charioteer* in distinguishing between the living rooms of different kinds of homosexual, though Courage inverts the associations between the modern interior and sexual morality established in Renault's novel. Predictably given his profession, Bruce's tastes in interior decoration depart from the traditional. The flat of his friend Wallace, whose preferences accord with Bruce's, features 'surfaces of pale wood', 'white carpets' and 'pictures by Braque and Hitchens' (ibid.: 36-7). This modern interior seems to promise a certain orderliness and stability: Wallace has lived there with his partner Martin for eight years. By contrast, the 'exuberant', 'indigestible' interior of the living

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<sup>4</sup> On the expansion of forms of sociability based on consumer culture in 1950s London, see Mort 2010.

room of another friend Victor Hallowes, which is stuffed with ‘plunder from several chateaux, not to mention a Venetian palace or two’ (ibid.: 15-16), corresponds to a much more louche lifestyle of frequent parties and a never-ending supply of boys fresh from the provinces and foreign countries. Yet, despite the clear distinction between the two interiors and the homosexual lifestyles they seem to articulate if not facilitate, Bruce refuses to denounce Victor’s tendencies. In fact, Bruce insists he respects his friend – and former lover – for, among other things, ‘his ability to enjoy a variegated love-life’ (ibid.: 15).

Victor’s determined eclecticism could very well be said to co-ordinate with a long tradition of queer collecting. Such a taste for bric-à-brac echoes the ‘amusing style’ of the interwar interior decorators Ronald Fleming and the Sitwell brothers (Cook 2014: 63-71) and the aestheticism of Wilde and his contemporary Lord Gower, whose domestic interiors were forested with ‘talismanic objects’ (Potvin 2014: 59) that served to heighten a sense of attachment to the past and affiliation with its luminaries. Equally, this lineage can be followed forward. In a recent interview with Neil Bartlett, Matt Cook notes ‘a self-conscious attention to queer genealogy’ (Cook 2014: 83) across the playwright’s collection of artworks and objects in his Brighton home (and especially in his living room). Moreover, there is something seemingly magical or alchemical about the practice of creating a queer cultural inheritance ‘from scraps’ (ibid.). Indeed, the power of enchantment inheres in such a collection: Bartlett quips that his living room is enough to ‘turn anyone gay’ (ibid.: 82). Perhaps the same promise of transformation and transportation explains Bruce’s continued sympathy for his friend in Courage’s novel. Victor’s bric-à-brac effectively stimulates a feeling of ‘homesickness’ in Bruce by articulating a much more expansive mode of queer affiliation than the one allowed by his domestic situation. If the single object in the living room typically embodies the difficulties in representing respectable homosexual relationships, objects in proliferation express the transformative possibilities of other kinds of connection.

In the decades following the flurry of homosexual novels published in the 1950s, British queer writers have continued to find dramatic potential in the living room. More often than not, though, this space – especially in the guise of the parlour or the sitting room – is associated with the hypocrisy and suffocating decorum of the ‘respectable’ classes. Joe Orton’s play *Entertaining Mr Sloane* (1964) famously lampoons its aspirational characters’ absurd claims to propriety while they try to manoeuvre each

other into a domestic arrangement that fulfils purely their own sensual needs. But the play's setting, the room Kath calls her parlour, is perhaps above all a feminine space in which men are, or feel themselves to be, trapped. This misogynist trope was already firmly established in British literature, running back through George Orwell's *Coming up for Air*, published in 1939, to the fin-de-siècle fictions of Arnold Bennet, George Gissing and others (Cunningham 2000; Giles 2004). These in turn drew on regularly voiced concerns in the late-Victorian and Edwardian period about the threat to patriarchal family life from the excessive and vulgar materiality of feminine taste that had come to dominate drawing rooms and parlours (Anderson 2013; Logan 2006). To be sure, this is a very different queer genealogy of the living room from the one outlined in the previous paragraph, though this feminine-phobic strand may also be traced forward in time. In Oscar Moore's 1991 roman-à-clef *A Matter of Life and Sex*, the young Hugo takes revenge on his stultifying suburban background and his implacable mother by bringing men back to her chintzy, over-furnished parlour for sex, an act he describes as 'desecration and blasphemy in the sitting-room' (Moore 1992: 116). Unfortunately for Hugo, even when he finally breaks out of his suburban nursery to explore the fleshpots of London's West End and foreign cities, he finds every interior to be as tacky and feminine as his mother's parlour. *A Matter of Life and Sex* presents a sequence of queer interiors, but unlike those of 1950s homosexual novels, which at least outlined a variety of possible queer worlds, Hugo's narrative evokes only futility; homosexuality is shown to be always both sexually and socially unfulfilling.

Jarman, a close friend of Moore, frequently expresses the same degree of hostility toward suburban domesticity in his diaries and memoirs. Jarman's ire, however, is focused on the deadening bourgeois spaces and habits that he considered anathema to queer ways of being. His own suburban upbringing, he declares, was 'designed to protect me from life'; his subsequent flitting between many and various domestic situations across London was, he observes, a way to 'establish my own idiosyncratic mode of living' (cited in Cook 2014: 229). There is an irony, though, in my having watched Jarman's films (an experience that was characterised, once again, by feelings of disorientation, liberation and constraint) in an open-plan living room whose form at the very least gestured toward the kinds of living spaces that Jarman was experimenting with in warehouse studios on London's South Bank in the late 1970s. To be sure, the living room need not be a site of estrangement, familial or otherwise. One of the most

abiding memories I have of the living room of the house in which I grew up relates to a moment of reconciliation. It happened a few years after the Jarman evening, and was probably one of the last times I was in the room. My father had given me a birthday present, which even then seemed to me remarkably appropriate. It was a copy of Alan Hollinghurst's *The Spell*, a novel which returns, though much more enthusiastically and generously, to the same themes and locations of those 1950s novels: queer domesticity, cross-class homosexual encounters, and the dissolution, but also the exhilaration, of the nocturnal city. My story then, along with the stories told in the many queer novels I have discussed, reminds us of the perhaps obvious yet easily overlooked point that novels are often domestic material objects as well as narratives, just as the living room constitutes physical, symbolic and indeed narrative space. The frequency with which novels and living rooms nest within each other in queer narrative attests to a desire to frame different modes of living. These spaces, and the material objects located within them, articulate connections between domestic lives and other queer locations and experiences, whether desired or disavowed, present, historical or imaginary.

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