William Morris and the Art of Everyday Life

William Morris and the Art of Everyday Life

Edited by

Wendy Parkins

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PUBLISHING

William Morris and the Art of Everyday Life, Edited by Wendy Parkins

This book first published 2010

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-1757-0, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-1757-8

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The inspiration for this volume was a conference called “William Morris and the Art of Everyday Life,” held at the Christchurch Art Gallery, New Zealand, in conjunction with the Gallery’s “Morris & Co.” exhibition in 2008. I am very grateful to Professor Florence Boos who travelled so far to give the keynote address at this conference and to Lana Coles, the Education Officer at Christchurch Art Gallery, whose unstinting enthusiasm made organizing the conference seem so easy. Some of the chapters in this book are based on presentations given at this conference, such as those by Pamela Gerrish Nunn, Angela Dunstan and myself; the other chapters were commissioned for this volume. I want to thank all the contributors for their support for this project and for writing such stimulating chapters from a range of disciplines which have reassured me of the relevance of William Morris to everyday life in the twenty-first century.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

WILLIAM MORRIS AND THE ART OF EVERYDAY LIFE

WENDY PARKINS

> Apart from the desire to produce beautiful things, the leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilization…. What shall I say concerning its … contempt for simple pleasures which everyone could enjoy but for its folly? ... Think of it! Was it all to end in a counting-house on the top of a cinder-heap…?[1]
>
> … the true secret of happiness *lies in the taking a genuine interest in all the details of daily life*.[2]

These two quotations, from 1887 and 1894, represent the spectrum of William Morris's responses to everyday life. On the one hand, Morris decried the banal, the shoddy, and the monotonous in Victorian modernity as seemingly inescapable aspects of an impoverished quotidian experience under industrial capitalism: art and work were driven by the profit motive, pleasure and beauty seemed the exclusive privilege of the rich. On the other, he endowed daily life with an utopian potential as the domain in which pleasure, beauty and happiness could be freely available to all. One might even go so far as to claim that it was Morris's insistence on the value of pleasure in daily life that formed the basis of his call for a radical transformation of society. In this introduction, I want to outline some of the ways in which Morris's sustained attention to "the details of daily life" in his writings on art and politics makes it possible to see him as a theorist of everyday life *avant la lettre*.

While philosophers such as Georg Simmel began to attend to the importance of everyday experience from the end of the nineteenth century, the study of everyday life came into its own in the twentieth century, with a particular concentration of writers and scholars in France who sought to "rescue the everyday from the neglect and oblivion to which it is

customarily consigned," as Michael Sheringham has argued.[3] Like these later theorists, Morris's emphasis on lived experience formed the basis of his critique of existing social formations. Morris examined art, work and domesticity as inextricably bound up with the practice of everyday life under the prevailing conditions of production and consumption. Long before Roland Barthes, for instance, Morris identified margarine as a telling instance of the ideological mystification that capitalist production required.[4]

As Morris's repeated fulminations against the abomination of oleomargarine implied, the "ordinary functions of life" underpinned his political vision of social transformation and were crucial to his understanding of everyday happiness.[5] Morris emphasized the daily experience of the body, or "animal life," which not only included the "sensuous pleasures of life" but also signalled a shared relation with all forms of life on earth: "the ordinary life of today, the animal life I mean and the goings on in field and flood and sky and the rest of it."[6] "We shall not be happy" Morris wrote,

> unless we live like good animals, unless we enjoy the exercise of the ordinary functions of life: eating sleeping loving walking running swimming riding sailing we must be free to enjoy all these exercises of the body without any sense of shame; without any suspicion that our mental powers are so remarkable and godlike that we are rather above such common things.[7]

That everyday life was the domain of embodied, sensory experience, Morris argued, was an inescapable fact that any proposal for social reorganization or political redress must acknowledge.

Placing such a significance on "common things" distanced Morris from the more ascetic forms of socialism of his time that he believed harboured a mis-placed faith in scientific progress as a means to ameliorate social inequities while masking a corresponding squeamishness about the needs and desires of the body. Perhaps with comrades like the teetotal, vegetarian George Bernard Shaw in mind, Morris used the example of the daily meal table as a necessity of life that should also be an experience of aesthetic, sensory and convivial pleasure:

> By the way, need I apologize for introducing so gross a subject as eating and drinking? Some of you will think I ought to, and are looking forward to the day when this function also will be civilized into the taking of some intensely concentrated pill once a year, or indeed once in a life-time, leaving us free for the rest of our time to the exercise of our intellect—if we chance to have any in those days. From this height of cultivated

> aspiration I respectfully beg to differ, and in all seriousness, and not in the least in the world as a joke, I say that the daily meeting of the house-mates in rest and kindness for this function of eating, this restoration of the waste of life, ought to be looked on as a kind of sacrament, and should be adorned by art to the best of our powers. [8]

Morris's unapologetic emphasis on happiness as a desirable aspect of everyday life was neither a call for individualistic hedonism nor a form of utilitarianism. It was a core value in his demand for social justice: "it is not revenge we want for poor people, but happiness," he wrote.[9] If such a statement sounds naïve to postmodern ears, Morris's writings nonetheless consistently work from the premise that any movement for social change, whether through reform or revolution, implicitly makes normative claims about what constitutes the good life. Responding to the social ills of his day, Morris always began from the assumption that, as Guy Debord would later express it, the everyday "is the measure of everything":

> Everyday life must be placed at the centre of everything. Every project starts out from it and every realization returns here for its true meaning. Everyday life is the measure of everything; of the fulfillment, or rather non-fulfillment of human relationships; of the way time is lived; of artistic researches; of revolutionary politics. [10]

Whereas for Debord, however, the malaise of everyday life in a capitalist society needed to be challenged by the de-familiarizing strategies of an enlightened avant-garde, for Morris, the value of the everyday was a means to re-assert the experience of ordinary people.[11] Morris's plea for the "happiness" of those disenfranchised by industrial capitalism was a plea to attend to the affective dimension of daily existence as well as its material conditions. By insisting on the importance of "ordinary life," then, Morris not only critiqued the cash nexus and instrumental rationality of industrial capitalism but also distinguished his views from those of his fellow-travellers whose demands for systemic change failed to acknowledge the needs and pleasures of daily experience.

But what exactly did Morris mean by "all the details of daily life" in which we should take an active interest if we wish to "make life happy"?[12] For Morris, one inescapable detail of daily life was work. In both "The Aims of Art" and "Useful Work Versus Useless Toil," Morris's discussion of the possibility of happiness arising from the details of daily life leads him inevitably to the question of work—and work leads back to the question of the most desirable arrangement of daily life. It is as if, for Morris, life is labour. As Carolyn Lesjak has noted, Morris's concept of

"useful work" implicates nothing less than "a structural transformation of the entire environment of daily living."[13] It was meaningless to consider revolutionary change in class relations, the means of production or the distribution of wealth without taking this vital aspect of everyday life into account. If work was not "part of the pleasure of our lives" then the revolution would remain incomplete:[14]

> As long as the work is repulsive it will still be a burden *which must be taken up daily*, and even so would mar our life, even though the hours of labour were short. What we want to do is to add to our wealth without diminishing our pleasure.[15]

The transformation of work after the revolution that Morris envisaged would not preclude the use of machinery to "releas[e] people from the more mechanical and repulsive part of necessary labour."[16] Morris pre-empted objections from "cultivated … people of the artistic turn of mind" that machinery was inherently distasteful on aesthetic grounds by arguing that "it is the allowing machines to be our masters and not our servants that so injures the beauty of life nowadays."[17] Similarly, in "The Aims of Art," Morris proposed that if we take an interest in daily "details," rather than "ignoring" them, we will then "either elevate them and make them interesting, or … lighten them by the use of machinery, so as to make the labour of them trifling."[18] Technology could provide the tools of a transformed everyday life, so long as it served to enhance work through more creative forms of labour rather than simply increasing leisure time. If Morris was dismissive of idleness as a pastime, however, he was not inured to the suffering that industrial production inflicted on workers, as his impatience with any critique of industrialization that refused to grapple with the "repulsive" aspect of labour—it is an adjective that he uses repeatedly—exemplified.

Abstract or even aesthetic considerations detached from social relations and material conditions did not, then, form part of Morris's vision of a post-revolutionary everyday life. At the same time, however, he delineated a direct relation between "the ornamental part of life" and the problem of repellent or arduous daily labour that threatens to "spoil our day's pleasure":[19]

> We must begin to build up the ornamental part of life–its pleasure, bodily and mental, scientific and artistic, social and individual–on the basis of work undertaken willingly and cheerfully, with the consciousness of benefiting ourselves and our neighbours by it. Such absolutely necessary work as we should have to do would in the first place take up but a small

> part of each day, and so far would not be burdensome; but it would be a task of daily recurrence, and therefore would spoil our day's pleasure unless it were made at least endurable while it lasted. In other words, all labour, even the commonest, must be made attractive.[20]

Besides the equal distribution of such "burdensome" tasks, Morris outlines further ways of resolving the problem of work, such as re-organizing the education system (to enable multi-skilling or re-skilling to accommodate a changed work culture), re-designing work environments, and de-centralizing communities to facilitate movement between occupations. Such a reconfiguration of work in everyday life would, Morris contended, make it "easy to live," a phrase he repeats in this essay.[21] Ease, like pleasure, is a vital element of an enhanced mode of life which Morris situates *within* work, rather than assuming that ease and pleasure can only be achieved through leisure.

As his consideration of the problem of work makes clear, taking an interest in the aspects of daily life that are often ignored involved at least three elements for Morris: not only turning an analytical eye to the way we currently think of such practices, but adopting a particular mode of attention and investing emotionally in such mundane actions. In "Useful Work Versus Useless Toil," Morris speaks of "pleasurable interest in all the details of life" as enabling happiness in the face of life's vicissitudes.[22] Morris's specificity here of *pleasurable* interest clearly implies that he does not simply mean a mode of detached critique or dry analysis. For Morris, interest is never merely an intellectual inclination or a hobby (such as having an 'interest' in model railways), nor a mode of apprehension detached from affect. Interest is embodied, a form of attention that involves both the senses and intellect and is necessarily connected to the bodily practices of work.

As Stephen Arata has argued, Morris's conceptualization of attention was sharply at odds with the customary modes of work in his society. For Morris, Arata contends, "In a properly ordered world, social and economic relations would be so arranged that the kind of attention required by modern factory or office workers would no longer serve any function."[23] Factory work of course requires attention—a worker's life may depend on it—but at the same time seems to stultify thought through repetition or sensory assault (such as noise or other forms of physical discomfort). Taking a "genuine interest" in these particular details of daily life for the factory worker seems incommensurate with everyday happiness. And this is precisely Morris's point. A call for a "genuine" or "pleasurable" interest in daily details implies the possibility of work that both absorbs attention

and stimulates the mind and senses, "benefiting ourselves and our neighbours."[24]

Beyond the realm of work, paying attention to, or taking a pleasurable interest in, the "details of daily life" also included an awareness of everyday objects and places, an aspect that Morris emphasized in his essays on design, architecture and interior decoration. Morris's insistence on the capacity of the decorative arts to "call people's attention and interest to the matters of every-day life in the present" was evident from his first lecture, "The Lesser Arts."[25] If pleasure in daily work is necessary to the good life, so too is the pleasure derived from what we see "all round about [us] daily and hourly."[26] Morris's famous call to "Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful" is not only a call to create a domestic space of beautiful utility in order to enhance daily life.[27] It is also a reiteration of the need to take a genuine interest in mundane details, to pay attention to the familiar, to look at everyday objects differently. Here, as elsewhere in his later lectures and essays, he sought to confront his readers or listeners with the "visible signs" of human intervention in the world—whether in the form of decorative arts or the means of production—and to ask: "are you satisfied?"[28] In challenging his readers in this way, Morris is as much emphasizing the importance of our perception and orientation towards our material surroundings as he is criticizing Victorian commodity culture. The capacity to be moved by objects, to sense and assent to them: these are the qualities that Morris implicitly opposes to the everyday inattentiveness responsible for the failings of interior design—whether luxurious or shoddy—in his day. Against the familiarity or routine of the domestic environment, Morris seems to impose a more demanding form of interest or attention that should be brought to bear on the minutiae of the home.

Unlike his reconceptualization of work, Morris's pronouncements on interior decoration seem at first glance exclusively addressed to a middle-class audience rather than encompassing a more socially-inclusive vision. While Morris's stated goal in "The Beauty of Life" is "Art made by the people and for the people, a joy to the maker and the user," his original audience for this address (the Birmingham Society of Arts and School of Design) was one for whom making the home the origin of art ("we want art to begin at home, as it must") was an economic as well as an aesthetic possibility.[29] In this context, Morris's sense of "interest" comes uncomfortably close to interest in the sense of a pecuniary stake in something and raises the question as to who has the time and the resources to invest the attention in the home that he called for? Morris is at pains to

connect the producer and the consumer through their shared pleasure in the work of art (by which he meant any product of creative labour) located within the home. In the process, however, he runs the risk of making the aestheticization of everyday life the domain of the privileged few.

Such an insistence on the aesthetic dimension of everyday life, moreover, risks opening Morris up to a similar charge that has been leveled at some twentieth-century theorists of everyday life; namely, that in their construction, "the everyday can only be redeemed by its aesthetic transfiguration."[30] A call to aestheticize the everyday implicitly posits it as a domain of experience that must be transcended because it is fundamentally associated with mind-numbing routine or the taken-for-granted that only the jolt of the aesthetic encounter can shake.[31] While Morris shared with twentieth-century theorists of the everyday an assumption that everyday life in modernity was too often characterized by "thoughtlessness, … hurry and blindness,"[32] he differed significantly from theorists like Lefebvre and Debord in stressing the importance and value of comfort in the domestic. The pleasures of comfort (and the comforts of pleasure) were not opposed to art; they did not require a form of heroic transcendence on the part of the artist. Nor were they fundamentally opposed to a revolutionary politics for Morris. Instead, they represented a legitimate social, rather than an individualistic, aspiration:

> To enjoy good houses and good books in self-respect and decent comfort, seems to me the pleasurable end towards which all societies of human beings ought now to struggle.[33]

This "struggle" for pleasure and comfort was for Morris inextricably linked to the need for "leisure from toil, and truce with anxiety" which lay at the heart of his critique of the exploitation and alienation of the majority of workers in Victorian modernity.[34] The right of all to gain the "time to brood over the longing for beauty" was the assumption that connected Morris's understanding of the aestheticization of everyday life with his reconceptualization of work.[35]

Morris's interest in domestic aesthetics, that is, not only derived from his privileging of architecture as the human context in which art is created and life is lived. It also reflected his desire for social inclusivity and his belief in the value of spaces in which social relationships of intimacy, fellowship and love could be enhanced, whether the home or other places in which people meet or dwell. His principle of beautiful utility may be understood broadly to include the creation, preservation and ornamentation of spaces that enable those within them to live pleasurably and in sympathy with each other. A "good building," wrote Morris, is "the

dwelling of some group of people, well-built, beautiful, suitable to its purpose, and duly ornamented and furnished so as to express the kind of life which the inmates live."[36] In one of his earliest essays, "The Churches of Northern France: Shadows of Amiens," Morris had characterized the reciprocal relationship that connected people through the beauty of architecture as one of love. The builders of the Gothic cathedral at Amiens, Morris rhapsodized, were

> still surely living, still real men and capable of receiving love, [who] I love no less than the great men, poets and painters and such like, who are on earth now; no less than my breathing friends whom I can see looking kindly on me now. Ah, do I not love them with just cause who certainly loved me, thinking of me sometimes between the strokes of their chisels?[37]

Despite their youthful intensity, Morris's feelings here are consistent with his later view that beautiful buildings or objects necessarily evoke strong feelings in those who use, observe, or inhabit them because these material artefacts are imbued with the human creativity that formed them. Whether as producers or consumers, our everyday encounters with material spaces and objects always have an affective potential for Morris: they have the power both to "express the kind of life which [we] live" and to spark a desire for a different kind of life. In either case, they demand an emotional response; humans, for Morris, are incapable—for good or ill—of inhabiting an environment that does not elicit a sensory reaction or an emotional cathexis, whether positive or negative. To do otherwise, Morris contends, is only possible through a process of willful forgetting, through which we must actively repress our sensory responses to our daily surroundings in order to carry on inhabiting a world of ugliness and destruction.[38]

Against such a deadening process of forgetting through deliberate immersion in everyday routine, Morris repeatedly calls for attention to the moment, whether he is discussing work or home decoration. Attending to the present, as Matthew Beaumont has noted, is a particularly acute phenomenological problem in modernity: the immediacy of lived experience seems to elude us in the context of acceleration, reification and alienation which is "endemic to the capitalist mode of production."[39] For Morris, however, attending to the significance of the everyday was not only a means to be present in the present, as it were. Everyday life in the present was indissolubly connected to everyday life in the past, the evidence for which Morris found in material objects, particularly in those objects that furnished our daily lives. Not only do the decorative arts call our attention to the present everyday, Morris contends, they also "call

attention at every step to that history of which … they are so great a part."[40] Such an inter-connection of past and present in material culture reflected Morris's belief that history is made not only in the "macrological events" of a civilization but in the "micrological processes of daily life," as Beaumont puts it.[41]

The historical dimension of everyday life was neither simply the domain of personal memory nor public memorials. For Morris, it was an essential aspect of a lived environment shared with others in the here and now. In "The Art of the People," Morris distinguishes between official histories and the record of the past as it is encoded in the enduring products of human labour:

> Not every day, you may be sure, was a day of slaughter and tumult, though the histories read almost as if it were so; but every day the hammer chinked on the anvil, and the chisel played about the oak beam, and never without some beauty and invention being born of it, and consequently some human happiness.[42]

Here, Morris's equation of productive, embodied labour with happiness inflects his view of history: history becomes the residue of human work which in turn bears the trace of human feeling or aspiration. Understood in this sense, history can be restored to the realm of ordinary experience as a record of ordinary lives, an inter-connected web of micro-histories rather than a monolithic account of exploitation and violence. As his literary works remind us, however, Morris was well aware of the prevalence of "slaughter and tumult" in the past; he did not cherish a naïve or nostalgic belief in the superiority of the past, or a desire to escape from the present. While Morris later observed that it was "the study of history and the love and practice of art [that] forced me into a hatred of [modern] civilization," they also, paradoxically, fuelled his passion to ensure that both art and history had a "serious relation to the life of the present."[43]

Living with objects from the past was for Morris a kind of "hermeneutic aid," a means of imaginatively recalling a different relation between work, art and daily life as an incentive to challenge current understandings and social demarcations and to envisage an alternative future.[44] The moment of perception in the present was always an encounter with multiple temporalities, connecting the perceiver with the past in which the object was produced and, through this, orienting the perceiving subject towards a desired future. The material object from the past, that is, signified not only what "were the aspirations of men passed away, but also what we may hope for in the time to come."[45] In "Art and Socialism," Morris called on

his audience to resist the cynicism that results from "our helplessness in the ugly world which surrounds and presses on us."[46] Instead, he urged:

> Let us call to mind that there yet remain monuments in the world which show us that all human labour was not always a grief and a burden to men…. Let us remember there was a time when men had pleasure in their daily work, but yet as to other matters hoped for light and freedom as they do now. [47]

Morris did not idealize the past—"light and freedom" were denied to most then as now—but saw it as providing a valuable resource that could re-frame our daily experience. What Morris called "the hope of the new" was an important quality that could be cultivated in the present through an interest in our everyday surroundings.[48] Hope is a word that occurs frequently in Morris's writings, reflecting the orientation towards the future of a utopian politics. Far from representing a sentimental longing, "hope for something better" is what results when one has first been "stimulated to discontent" by confronting the ugliness and degradation of the present.[49]

The capacity of material culture to connect us to the past, present and future can also connect us to the lives of others. In "Useful Work," Morris wrote:

> let me remind you … with what sordid, and even terrible, details [modern civilization] surrounds the life of the poor, what a mechanical and empty life she forces on the rich; and how rare a holiday it is for any of us to feel ourselves a part of Nature, and unhurriedly, thoughtfully, and happily to note the course of our lives amidst all the little links of events which connect them with the lives of others.[50]

The ethical dimension of everyday life—in which an awareness of the "little links" of connection and the time to respond to them is valued—has been effaced by "modern civilization." To live ethically in the present would involve a sensory awareness of the imbrication of places, objects and people, their connections to the past and each other. For a man known for his hyper-active capacity for multi-tasking, Morris's advocacy of unhurried thoughtfulness such as he outlines here may initially seem out of character.[51] It is, however, consistent with his depiction of "An Epoch of Rest" in *News from Nowhere* where the inhabitants live at a slower pace than their Victorian counterparts and, as a result, exhibit both a heightened awareness of, and a capacity to respond sensitively to, their social and natural environments.

An attentiveness to the natural world, such as the inhabitants of Nowhere demonstrate, is an important aspect of Morris's ethics of everyday life and one that recurs throughout his writings. In this regard, Morris has been seen as one of the first "ecosocialist" thinkers and his "view of the environment as a social dwelling" has found a new resonance in a twenty-first century context where climate change and the destruction of natural habitats not only threaten the ecological diversity and sustainability of the planet but increasingly affect our everyday lives.[52] In 1881, Morris reminded his audience that "'tis we ourselves, each one of us, who must keep watch and ward over the fairness of the earth," urging them not to leave the earth "a lesser treasure" than they had received.[53] Not surprisingly, Morris's attack on the environmental consequences of industrialization was also bound up with his critique of capitalist social relations. In a late essay, "Makeshift," Morris linked the beauty of the natural environment with larger issues of social justice, through the example of the impoverished homes of urban workers:

> Their homes are so devoid of all pleasure of the senses, that they may well long to have a look now and again at the green fields and the sun shining upon them or the wind and the rain sweeping over them. Yet to my mind to go from a weary ugly place to a beautiful one, and to have a look at it and then go back to the weariness and ugliness is but a poor makeshift after all. I want to see the beautiful face of the earth not once a month, or once a week, but every day…. I could no more agree to that other once a month business than I could to dining once a month.[54]

Here, again, the measure of the everyday becomes the touchstone by which Morris is able to articulate the limitations of middle-class reform by insisting that daily access to natural beauty is as essential as daily nutrition. If such a view seems to reflect a romantic view of nature, it was nonetheless a powerful rhetorical move by which Morris could challenge his middle-class audience to a greater accountability. In "The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization," for instance, Morris asked rhetorically:

> the earth which was beautiful before man lived on it, which for many ages grew in beauty as men grew in numbers and power, is now growing uglier day by day, and there the swiftest where civilization is the mightiest: this is quite certain; no on can deny it: are you contented that it should be so?[55]

By insisting that all inhabitants of a society were impoverished by a depleted natural environment, Morris again presented his case for the need for a radical transformation of society that would be grounded in a renewal of everyday life. As was the case in his reconceptualization of work, art

and the home, Morris's conviction that ecological sustainability should be an everyday concern was underpinned by his desire that pleasure and beauty become an intimate part of everyday life for all.[56]

Overview of the Book

If, as Sheringham concludes, "Everydayness lies in practices that weave contexts together; only practices make it visible," then in the totality of Morris's work—his poetry, prose romances, essays, politics, designs, tapestries, books and artwork—can be seen the visible manifestation of his compelling desire to re-make everyday life.[57] Some of the applications and wider implications of Morris's view of the ethics and aesthetics of everyday life have inspired the chapters of this book in which the contributors explore the imbrication of art and the everyday both within the work of Morris and beyond it.

Part One of this volume is devoted to everyday themes, objects and practices in the designs and literature of Morris. The opening essay by Imogen Hart, "Time and the Everyday in the Work of William Morris," examines the patterns of William Morris as a making-visible of everyday rhythms and temporalities. Hart begins with a pressing question, inflected through an engagement with everyday life theory: how should decorative art be regarded when it is by definition "part of the furniture" of everyday life? Following Morris, Hart argues that rather than being overlooked on these grounds, everyday objects are particularly engaging *because* they are subjected to sustained and repeated perception over an extended period of time. Hart proposes that we think of the viewer's engagement with Morris's patterns as "something akin to narrative," in the sense that the patterns communicate meaning over time, through their representation of organic growth mediated by the active interpretation of an embodied viewer. Similarly, the aesthetic arrangement of objects in a room requires the interpretation of a viewing subject: the juxtaposition and contiguity of objects experienced over time offer the possibility of a heightened awareness of the everyday rather than an unseeing experience of the familiar.

In the final section of her chapter, Hart attempts to connect the conception of time embodied in Morris's designs for fabrics and wallpapers with his radical vision of society in *News from Nowhere*. Patterns always arise from, and in a sense 'speak' back to, the context in which they are situated and in this dialogue may be seen an opportunity to re-evaluate the ordinary experiences and daily repetitions of life in a new way. Morris's awareness of the value of the present moment co-existed

with his belief in a progressive temporality derived from his utopian politics and Hart brings these two elements together in her discussion of the importance of the spiral in Morris's work. The spiral is both an image of the organic unfolding that characterized Morris's patterns and a symbol of hope that underpinned his theory of time and historical progression. As such, it represents the paradox of the familiarity and specificity of each moment that inspired Morris's vision for the transformation of everyday life.

In Chapter Two, Yuri Cowan continues the focus on material objects in the work of William Morris, examining everyday materiality in the context of Morris's poetry, specifically, *The Earthly Paradise.* All of the tales within *The Earthly Paradise* hinge on a material object of some kind to precipitate the plot, Cowan notes. Morris foregrounds the artefacts and practices of medieval everyday life as part of his lifelong exploration of the place of cultural memory and history in Victorian modernity. In a way not dissimilar to Hart, Cowan contends that Morris's poem sequence in *The Earthly Paradise* requires an active, self-reflexive reader who will be challenged in the present as a result of their imaginative engagement with the past. Morris assumed, that is, an interactivity between past and present, reader and poem, that offered to translate our daily experience into one characterized by creativity while also allowing us to become newly aware of the lacunae between past and present.

Citing Mackail's observation that Morris refused to draw any distinction between artistic production and 'common' occupations, Cowan argues that, for Morris, creativity was necessarily and inevitably integrated into everyday life. For this reason, Cowan sees *The Earthly Paradise* as an "experiment" in which Morris explored "the diversity and untidiness of history" in material culture and everyday life, especially through a persistent concern with the "unfinished artefact" which interrupts both our fantasies of harmonious unity and our desire for complete knowledge of the past. Against such futile if understandable aspirations towards perfection or immortality, Morris presents an early version of what Cowan sees as his "materialist aesthetic based on creativity, imperfection, and constant use," where hope is linked to material creativity. Cowan reads *The Earthly Paradise* as marking a significant shift in Morris's work from a focus on "inaccessible kings"—the phrase is Morris's in "The Beauty of Life"—to an emphasis on the everyday lives and human connections of medieval people, with implications for Morris's creative engagement with the material conditions of art and everyday life in his own day. Here, as in Morris's later prose, material culture becomes a site where history is negotiated on a personal and political level.

It is telling, Cowan notes, that in *The Earthly Paradise* Morris repeatedly refers to "making this book," where "book" is an emphatically materialist term in a way that "poem" or "tale" would not be, and it is the materiality of books that forms the subject of Chapter Three. In Florence Boos' study of the everyday practices at Kelmscott Press, one of her aims is to interrogate the assumption that Morris's role as founder and manager of the Kelmscott Press was at odds with his socialist principles. How could the intricate designs, expensive materials and limited publication that characterized the products of Kelmscott Press be consistent with Morris's commitment to "popular art"? In exploring this question, Boos points out that the work of the Press needs to be situated within Morris's *oeuvre* as a totality, which involved a range of practices of production, distribution and consumption. Morris's writings on art and politics, for instance, appeared in many print formats and were available at low cost while the Kelmscott Press relied on cooperative processes, involving not only authors and illustrators but font-makers, compositors, press-workers and engravers. After a detailed account of some of the books produced by the Press, Boos then moves on to consider the relevance of Morris's Kelmscott Press in the context of the twenty-first century where digital publication and the internet have radically changed both publishing and everyday reading practices. As the editor of the Morris Online Edition, Boos is uniquely placed to consider whether Morris's view that "a work of utility might be also a work of art"[58] is still relevant today. She weighs up the potential contradictions between Morris's sense of the "ideal book" and the loss of materiality that web reading and browsing can imply, versus the democratizing implications of the free access that the internet allows readers to rare Kelmscott Press editions. Refusing the glib utopianism that can sometimes feature in discussions of new media technologies and the digitization of literature, Boos nevertheless remains hopeful—in the best, Morrisian sense—of the possibilities that may arise for Morris's ideals to continue to speak to our own everyday through both the form and content of his books.

In Part Two of this volume, the contributors expand the scope of the study to look at the influence of Morris's work on those around him in his own day, as well as the impact of his life and work in the twentieth century. In Chapter Four, Ruth Kinna situates Morris's understanding of art's relationship to socialism in relation to two Victorian contemporaries: G. F. Watts and Oscar Wilde. As Kinna suggests, both these figures are "useful foils for Morris", allowing a clearer sense of both the radicalism and the limitations of Morris's understanding of the art of everyday life to emerge. From a similar concern with the ugliness and suffering generated

by commercial culture, Morris, Watts and Wilde developed very different responses. For Watts, part of the "ugliness" of his society was due to its moral decline and, in response, he called on artists to inspire only the noblest impulses in humanity. Involved in a number of social causes, Watts championed the moral potential of everyday life, perhaps best epitomized in his role in establishing the monument in Postman's Park, dedicated to "stories of heroism in every-day life" in the form of commemorative plaques recording acts of altruism by 'ordinary' people. While Watts's morally ameliorative understanding of art was at odds with Morris's commitment to revolutionary socialism, the artist's critique of consumption and commodification similarly contributed to Victorian debates about the imbrication of art and everyday life.

In contrast to Watts and in common with Morris, Oscar Wilde's critique of contemporary everyday life was framed through an engagement with socialism. Wilde drew a connection between socialism and his ideal realization of art, arguing for the necessity of social transformation if the artist was to flourish. Unlike Morris, however, Wilde's position was premised on a concept of "individualism" which he saw as inevitably compromised by the means of production and the class relations underpinning industrial capitalism but which could flourish under the idiosyncratic form of socialism he advocated. On the one hand committed to the democratization of art, Wilde simultaneously understood art as "a vehicle for creative self-expression" through which individuals could challenge social norms. In this way, Kinna argues, Wilde's position was fundamentally at odds with Morris's notion of community as inextricably connected to an "art of the people." Wilde's insistence on artistic autonomy and the value of social transgression points to a limitation in Morris's thinking concerning art and the everyday life of a community. Wilde's advocacy of the destabilizing potential of artistic experimentation in everyday life sharply contrasts with Morris's depiction in *News from Nowhere* where the resolution of conflicts between personal and common interests could be achieved through the privileging of community; the punitive exclusions that could be associated with some notions of community were of course made all too obvious by Wilde's fate.

In Chapter Five, Pamela Gerrish Nunn critically evaluates the significance of Morris's philosophy of "the beauty of life" by situating it within a context of an emerging discourse on "Art in Daily Life" from a wide range of cultural commentators in the late nineteenth century: from the cultural authority embodied by artists such as Whistler to the popular journalism of the *Girl's Own Paper*. What emerges is a far more complicated picture of competing ideas concerning art and the everyday in

this period than an exclusive focus on Morris might permit. Morris's emphasis on the value and significance of our everyday surroundings was open to a variety of interpretations, some of which were critical, others antithetical or misguided, just as the application of his design principles could be varied and piecemeal. Nunn particularly highlights the emergence of women as commentators on art, interior design and Aestheticism in this period. Women such as Lucy (Faulkner) Orrinsmith, the Garrett sisters, Eliza Haweis and Jane (Frith) Panton for instance, served an important role in popularizing ideas derived from Morris. Despite its emphasis on "manly" virtues, Nunn notes, Morris's vision nevertheless seemed to provide women as well as men with an opportunity to envisage themselves as agents of change, whether social or aesthetic. Morris's achievement, Nunn concludes, is not that he single-handedly transformed Victorian understandings of everyday life but that he inspired such a diversity of responses and encouraged a debate concerning the place of art in daily life to which an increasing number of voices felt entitled to contribute.

Nunn's attention to the complex gendering of Morris's ideas of art, design and decoration is continued in Chapter Five, where I examine the often-overlooked question of the everyday life of Jane Morris, William's wife. Aware of the opacity that so often surrounds the everyday lives of women in the past, I am interested in Jane Morris's role in the implementation of the Morrisian principles of simplicity, hospitality and "the beauty of life" at Kelmscott Manor. Kelmscott was, variously, an idyllic rural home beloved by each member of the Morris family, a site of warm hospitality for their innumerable friends and acquaintances, and also a location which figured significantly in the extra-marital affairs of Jane Morris. How then can we approach the question of Jane Morris's everyday life there, when it ran the spectrum from the relative humdrum of daily domestic labour associated with a middle-class household to the emotional intrigues and tensions resulting from the illicit intimacies that took place at Kelmscott? As an 'unfaithful' wife, Jane is too easily depicted as dis-engaged from both family relationships and the philosophy and work of her husband but her life at Kelmscott belies this simplification. Drawing particularly on evidence from the correspondence of Jane Morris's friends, especially Philip Webb, I suggest, firstly, that we think of Jane's emotional agency at Kelmscott as derived from an affinity with William's affection for the place and the couple's shared commitment to "the beauty of life." I then situate Jane's life at Kelmscott within a broader network of intimacies, beyond her illicit relationships with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, and show how Kelmscott was an important location in developing close friendships with other creative women, such as Marie

Spartali Stillman and Mary de Morgan, with whom Jane shared a commitment to various forms of aesthetic labour and the "lesser arts" that so often framed their everyday experience at Kelmscott. The art of everyday life for Jane Morris, no less than for William, was one in which creativity, fellowship, and the delights of the natural environment played a crucial part.

In Chapter Seven, Angela Dunstan also considers the importance of William Morris's life and work for the everyday life of a creative woman; in this case, the twentieth-century Imagist Poet, "H.D.," Hilda Doolittle. In a ground-breaking chapter, Dunstan presents a compelling analysis of Doolittle's unpublished novel, *White Rose and the Red*, written in 1947-8 and based on the lives of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, especially Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Elizabeth Siddal and William Morris. In contrast to many other modernist writers for whom the Victorians formed part of a constraining past, Doolittle saw the "Pre-Raffs" as a vital presence in her own daily life. In *White Rose and the Red*, Dunstan contends, Doolittle "invokes and re-imagines the everyday life of William Morris and his circle to make sense of her own." Particularly identifying with Elizabeth Siddal as a creative woman who was swept up into an artistic circle dominated by a charismatic man, Doolittle negotiated her own personal history (an early engagement to Ezra Pound, followed by a tempestuous marriage to the writer Richard Aldington) through a narrative in which William Morris operates as a kind of virtuous foil to the excesses and betrayals of Rossetti. As "plain" Morris, he embodies the everyday virtues and quiet productivity that draws Siddal's attention away from the volatile Rossetti and that also, Dunstan argues, reflected Doolittle's own desire for a stable and sustaining form of everyday intimacy. Dunstan's archival research in the H. D. Papers has revealed the extent to which Doolittle's interest in the lives of Morris and his circle influenced the Imagist writer's own everyday life. The correspondence between Doolittle and Aldington, for instance, demonstrates how their mutual admiration for the Pre-Raphaelites, and Morris in particular, allowed the estranged couple to renew their friendship in a way that sustained their daily lives and support each other's work even after the breakdown of their marriage.

Despite her admiration for Morris, however, Doolittle's sympathetic identification with Elizabeth Siddal—influenced by her "delight" with Violent Hunt's controversial 1932 biography, *The Wife of Rossetti*[59]—meant that *White Rose and the Red* also begins to outline a critical perspective on the Pre-Raphaelite artists' objectification of women that would be considerably developed in feminist art criticism in the later twentieth century. Doolittle's sense of how the "plain" and "manly"

Morris failed to fully understand or support a creative woman foreshadows a critique of Morris's perspective that is, arguably, still under-developed in Morris scholarship.[60] While Doolittle's research into the "Pre-Raffs" was mediated by her modernist techniques of unreliable narration and Imagist motifs in *White Rose and the Red* (which may perhaps account for why she was unable to find a publisher for her novel) her engagement with Morris and his circle attests to her belief in the relevance of Morris beyond the Victorian period. The extraordinary way in which the 'everydayness' of William Morris rendered him a figure of fascination for an experimental writer in the twentieth century—for whom art and the everyday were inevitably entwined—provides a fitting conclusion to Part Two of this collection.

Conclusion

H.D's belief in the creative possibilities which Morris's life and work made possible beyond his lifetime may seem overly optimistic if we consider the relentless process of commodification that has seen Morris's designs become ubiquitous on tea-towels, mugs and ties in the heritage industry of the early twenty-first century. As a visit to almost any gift shop in England makes clear, Morris may too easily be co-opted to a cosy and romanticized vision of the Arts and Crafts movement from which his radical politics have been excised. As H. D. also foreshadowed, the limitations of Morris's perspective on issues of gender may also temper somewhat the revolutionary potential of his ideas. If I have stressed in this introduction some of the more challenging implications of Morris's theories of art, work and everyday life it is not because I believe his political and social views are without contradiction or blind-spots but because I believe Morris still has much to contribute to our postmodern attempts to re-think the good life.

Thinking about the art of everyday life in relation to Morris, then, is not simply to think about the importance of Morris to domestic design in the Victorian period. Morris persistently linked art with domesticity, labour and pleasure and argued that each of these should be present in daily life. While later theorists like Lefebvre and de Certeau saw political possibilities in everyday practices, Morris's "imperative to beautify the familiar"[61] was linked to a more radical belief in a profound transformation of everyday life that would free work from alienation and institute equitable and pleasurable forms of social life. As David Latham has put it, Morris's vision of everyday life was premised on the "need to integrate the deeds and dreams of our daily lives."[62] If Morris's personal

associations of happiness—working at a loom, fishing on a river—are not necessarily ours, his broader claims for what constitutes the good life remain relevant today. In "How We Live and How We Might Live," Morris summarized his "claims for a decent life" as follows:

> First, a healthy body; second, an active mind in sympathy with the past, the present, and the future; thirdly, occupation fit for a healthy body and an active mind; and fourthly, a beautiful world to live in.[63]

The simple audacity of these claims continues to resonate today.

Notes

[1] William Morris, "How I Became a Socialist [1894]," *The Collected Works of William Morris*, ed. May Morris, Vol. XXIII (London: Longmans Green and Company, 1910-1915), 279-80.
[2] William Morris, "The Aims of Art [1887]," *Collected Works*, Vol. XXIII, 94, original emphasis.
[3] Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1-2. On Simmel's significance for the study of modern everyday life, see Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), 33-44.
[4] See Roland Barthes, "Operation Margarine," *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Paladin, 1973), 46-7. In "How I Became a Socialist," Morris exposes the hegemonic aims of liberal politicians through a similar analogy with margarine: Liberals would "[deal] out champagne to the rich and margarine to the poor in such convenient proportions as would make all men contented together" (277). In both "Useful Work Versus Useless Toil [1884]" (*Collected Works*, Vol. XXIII, 191) and "Arts and Crafts of To-day [1889]" (*Collected Works*, Vol. XXII, 237) margarine is also cited as an example of the consequence of the dominance of the profit-motive which drives the production of inferior and unwanted products: "nor would anybody waste his time over making oleo-margarine when no one was *compelled* to abstain from real butter."
[5] Morris, "How Shall We Live Then? [1889]," unpublished manuscript, http://www.iisg.nl/archives/morris/index.php, last accessed 5/11/09.
[6] Morris, "How Shall We Live Then?"
[7] Morris, "How Shall We Live Then?" (original punctuation).
[8] Morris, "The Arts and Crafts of To-day," 358.
[9] Morris, "How We Live and How We Might Live [1885]," *Collected Works*, Vol. XXIII, 3.
[10] Debord, quoted in Sheringham, *Everyday Life*, 171.
[11] I am influenced here by Rita Felski's discussion of Debord, Lefebvre and the Situationists in her "Introduction" to a special issue on everyday life in *New Literary History* 33.4 (2002), 608-610.

[12] In "Useful Work versus Useless Toil," Morris wrote: "thinking over the matter carefully, I can see that the one course which will certainly make life happy in the face of all accidents and troubles is to take a pleasurable interest in all the details of life" (108).
[13] Carolyn Lesjak, *Working Fictions: A Genealogy of the Victorian Novel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 151.
[14] Morris, "Useful Work Versus Useless Toil," 107.
[15] Morris, "Useful Work Versus Useless Toil," 107, emphasis added.
[16] Morris, "How We Live and How We Might Live," 24.
[17] Morris, "How Le Live and How We Might Live," 24.
[18] Morris, "The Aims of Art," 94.
[19]Morris, "Useful Work Versus Useless Toil," 111.
[20] Morris, "Useful Work Versus Useless Toil," 111.
[21] See, for example, Morris, "Useful Work Versus Useless Toil," 107, 108.
[22] Morris, "Useful Work Versus Useless Toil," 108.
[23] Arata, "On Not Paying Attention," *Victorian Studies* 46.2 (2004), 199-200.
[24] Morris, "Useful Work Versus Useless Toil," 111.
[25] Morris, "The Lesser Arts [1877]," *Collected Works*, Vol. XXII, 7.
[26] Morris, "The Arts and Crafts of To-day," 356.
[27] Morris, "The Beauty of Life [1880]," *Collected Works*, Vol. XXII, 76.
[28] Morris, "The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization [1881]," *Collected Works*, Vol. XXII, 130, 129.
[29] Morris, "The Beauty of Life," 76, 80.
[30] Felski, "Introduction," 608.
[31] Felski, "Introduction," 608.
[32] Morris, "The Beauty of Life," 65.
[33] Morris, "Some Thoughts on the Ornamented Manuscripts of the Middle Ages," *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book by William Morris*, ed. William S. Peterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 1.
[34] Morris, "The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization," 134.
[35] Morris, "The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization," 134.
[36] Morris, "The Arts and Crafts of To-day," 360.
[37] Morris, "The Churches of North France: Shadows of Amiens [1856]," *Collected Works*, Vol. I, 349.
[38] See, for example, "The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization," where Morris repeats the phrase "all you can do is to try to forget it" as an inadequate coping strategy that people employ when forced to confront the ugliness of their daily surroundings (128, 130). My allusions to the language of psychoanalysis here are deliberate. Morris's insistence on pleasure and satisfaction as the driving principle of his notion of the good life, as well as his emphasis on our libidinal investment (cathexis, in Freudian terms) in the material world as we daily encounter it, especially but not exclusively through practices of creativity, bring to mind Freud's theory of libido, in its broadest sense. See, for example, Sigmund Freud, "The Libido Theory," *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (Vintage: London, 1995), 285-6.