WILLIAM MORRIS'S UTOPIAN OPTICS

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Abstract

This article studies Morris's development and cultivation of an optical rhetoric in his political lectures and journalism, as well as his utopian fiction, of the 1880s and 1890s. I begin by tracing its discursive base in the social and aesthetic criticism of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin, and by contrasting the contradictory ideological inflections of visual rhetoric in the writing of Matthew Arnold and James McNeill Whistler. Through an examination of his political journalism and lectures on art and society, I show how Morris's inheritance and secularisation of Carlyle's discourse of spiritual optics sets him apart from other figures associated with the *fin de siècle* socialist movement, at the same time as it produced important ideological contradictions in Morris's socialist writing. I conclude with an examination of the extension and differentiation of Morris's optics in his utopian romance *News from Nowhere* (1890).

> the Eye altering alters all
> William Blake, 'The Mental Traveller'[1]

The language of vision occupies a central place in the utopian political imaginary. Utopian society, as Thomas More's foundational text intimates, is a place of constant vigilance; following the example of the medieval monastery, all citizens in More's Utopia are said to be 'in the present sight and under the eyes of every man'.[2] If this visual economy of close observation and surveillance immediately raises the spectre of dystopia, it must also be recognised that, during the nineteenth century, processes of material and technological change created conditions of possibility in which such fantasies of total transparency could be played out. In her study of Victorian glass culture, Isobel Armstrong points out that 'an environment of mass transparency, never before experienced, came rapidly into being', engendering a 'new glass consciousness and a language of transparency' in nineteenth-century Britain.[3]

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[1] *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, new and rev. edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 485.

[2] Thomas More, *Utopia,* in *Three Early Modern Utopias: Utopia; Atlantis; The Isle of Pines*, ed. by Susan Bruce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 68.

[3] Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1890* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 1. Armstrong suggests that the 'dominant period' of the new 'scopic culture' (p. 3) which she delineates fell between 1830 and 1890, roughly continuous with William Morris's dates: he was born in 1834 and died in 1896.

Jonathan Crary, meanwhile, has argued that a fundamental 'remaking of the visual field' took place in the early- to mid-nineteenth century, in concatenation with changing technologies of vision, giving a newfound priority to 'models of subjective vision, in contrast to the pervasive suppression of subjectivity in vision in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thought'.[4] He points out that there is a long tradition of criticism, oriented around the discussion of Romanticism, which privileges '[a] certain notion of "subjective vision"' – that which is claimed to be unique to artists and poets – over and above 'a vision shaped by empiricist or positivist ideas or practices'.[5] Crary's discussion thus ranges widely across art and literature, as well as philosophical, scientific and technological discourses. Morris's embroilment in this discourse, by contrast, was firmly embedded in the post-Romantic milieu and, as I show, was often explicitly set against empiricist or positivist practices. His inheritance of this tradition is amply borne out in E.P. Thompson's political biography, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (1955, 1976), which opens by noting that the young Morris was 'caught up in the last great eddies of that disturbance of the human spirit which [Byron, Shelley and Keats] had voiced – the Romantic Revolt'.[6] The purpose of this article is to clarify the political and ideological stakes of Morris's embeddedness in that tradition, particularly as it pertains to his visual rhetoric.

Visual metaphors and rhetorical devices which relate to sight are an integral aspect of Morris's political and utopian writings: those who bring about the revolutionary change in *News from Nowhere* (1890), for example, are said to be able to 'see further than other people', while injunctions to 'clear our eyes to the signs of the times' are a staple rhetorical device in his political lectures.[7] Morris's optics is grafted onto a discursive base which has deep roots in nineteenth-century traditions of social criticism.[8] One might think, for example, of Matthew Arnold's endeavour to 'see the object as in itself it really is', put forward in his essay 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' (1865).[9] Or one might think of Walter Pater's remark in his unsigned review of some 'Poems by William Morris' (1868) that it is 'only the roughness of the eye that makes any two things, persons, situations – seem alike',

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[4] Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 96, 9.

[5] Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 9.

[6] E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, rev. edn (London: Merlin Press, 1976), p. 1.

[7] *The Collected Works of William Morris*, ed. by May Morris, 24 vols. (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1992), XVI, p. 104; XXIII, p. 25. Further references will be given, in brackets, in the body of the text in the following form: CW, 16: 104.

[8] The most extensive recent study of Victorian visual culture is Kate Flint's *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[9] Matthew Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' [1865], in *Essays in Criticism* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1865), pp. 1-41 (p. 1).

asserting the irreducible singularity of the aesthetic object.[10] Pater's teaching was a formative influence on Oscar Wilde, who explicitly repudiated Arnold's objectivist assertion that the discipline of criticism ought necessarily to be undertaken in a spirit of disinterestedness and impartiality. For Wilde, all criticism is necessarily *partial*. As Gilbert put it in 'The True Function and Value of Criticism' (1890), later re-printed as 'The Critic as Artist' in *Intentions* (1891), '[i]t is only about things that do not interest one that one can give a really unbiased opinion, which is no doubt the reason why an unbiased opinion is always absolutely valueless. The man who sees both sides of the question [...] sees absolutely nothing'.[11] Earlier in the dialogue, Gilbert explicitly rejected Arnold's adage 'that the proper aim of Criticism is to see the object as in itself it really is' as a 'very serious error', identifying the 'essence' of criticism as 'purely subjective'.[12] The act of looking, Gilbert avers, is constitutive of the object, making the object itself necessarily chimerical. The opposing positions taken by Arnold and Wilde re-iterate the division delineated by Jonathan Crary between the classical, camera obscura model of vision set against post-Kantian valorisations of subjective vision.[13] The Hellenism advocated by Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), in which he repeatedly emphasises the ideal of seeing the rounded totality of 'things as they are' – rather than as they are constituted by the beholder – was continuous with a classical model of vision.[14]

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[10] [Walter Pater], 'Poems by William Morris', *Westminster Review*, 34 (October 1868), pp. 300-12 (p. 311). Sections of this review were re-printed in the 'Conclusion' to the first and third editions of Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873, 1888). The 'Conclusion' was removed from the second edition of 1877 because of the controversy it had generated after its first appearance four years earlier.

[11] Oscar Wilde, 'The True Function and Value of Criticism; with Some Remarks on the Importance of Doing Nothing: A Dialogue', *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review*, 28 (September 1890), pp. 435-59 (p. 449). In *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Arnold had invested culture with the task of teaching perfection, to which he counterposed what he perceived as a widespread 'inaptitude for seeing more than one side of a thing'. Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1869), p. 15.

[12] Wilde, 'The True Function and Value of Criticism', *The Nineteenth Century*, 28 (July 1890), pp. 123-47 (p. 143).

[13] For an elaboration of Kant's '"Copernican revolution" (*Drehung*) of the spectator' see Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, pp. 69-70.

[14] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, pp. xlviii, 7, 19, 165, 202. Needless to say, Arnold's commitment to the values of pluralism, disinterestedness, objectivity and impartiality went hand-in-hand with a readiness to rely on the coercive authority of state power in the face of popular rebellion or working-class insurgency. He quotes one of his father's unpublished letters, 'written more than forty years ago, when the political and social state of the country was gloomy and troubled, and there were riots in many places' with liberal approbation: '"As for rioting, the old Roman way of dealing with *that* is always the right one; flog the rank and file, and fling the ringleaders from the Tarpeian Rock!" And this opinion we can never forsake, however our Liberal friends may think a little rioting, and what they call popular demonstrations, useful sometimes to their own interests' (p. 258). His father's letter was written during the period of Chartist militancy, but Arnold seems

Pater, meanwhile, had drawn heavily on the aesthetic theories of John Ruskin, whose writings, along with those of Thomas Carlyle, are key determinants of Morris's own ocular fascinations, concerned as much with precipitating the power of insight in others as with attaining truthful perception of aesthetic objects or contemporary social conditions.[15] The act of looking thus became, by extension, an act of projection. Foresight, prescience, clairvoyance, prophecy, augury, insight, adumbration, vatication and fatidical fury: such words belong to a lexicon which articulates the impossible utopian task of seeing beyond the narrow horizons of the alienated present, reading the future's runes which belong to an unknowable realm of freedom awaiting actualisation in some post-revolutionary new dawn. The outlandish penultimate and final phrases in the above list – vatication and fatidical fury – are found in Carlyle's essay 'The Signs of the Times', which first appeared as an unsigned, untitled article in the *Edinburgh Review* in June 1829.[16] The essay begins with a dismissal, claiming that '[i]t is no very good symptom of nations or individuals, that they deal much in vatication'.[17] The outlandishness of the word signals the imputed outlandishness of the practice. Although Carlyle ostensibly disavows the 'frenzies and panics' induced by pseudo-prophetic utterance, he does so in the name of 'look[ing] deeper' into the truth of the 'Mechanical Age'; having looked, he feels confident to proclaim that 'men have lost their belief in the Invisible, and believe, and hope, and work only in the Visible; or, to speak it in other words: This is not a Religious age'.[18] Carlyle's essay heralded the later revolt against the materialism of Victorian political economy, a revolt epitomised in Ruskin's *Unto to this Last* (1860) and, albeit with a different optic, in Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*.[19]

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not to have considered the possibility that the popular demonstrations which he demurs may have been useful to the interests of those *attending* the demonstrations. Arnold was unequivocal: 'monster processions in the streets and forcible irruptions into the parks […] ought to be unflinchingly forbidden and repressed' (p. 259).

[15] John Holloway's formulation of this endeavour in his study of Victorian sage writing remains pertinent. Placing Carlyle alongside Arnold, John Henry Newman, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, Holloway wrote that 'these authors insist on how acquiring wisdom is somehow an opening of the eyes, making us see in our experience what we failed to see before. This unanimity suggests that conviction comes here essentially from modifying the reader's perceptiveness, from stimulating him to notice something to which he was previously blind. […] It is not some quite new reality; it is seeing old things in a new way'. John Holloway, *The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1953), p. 9.

[16] [Thomas Carlyle], 'Article VII [Signs of the Times]', *Edinburgh Review*, 49 (June 1829), pp. 439-59 (p. 439).

[17] [Carlyle], 'Article VII', p. 439.

[18] [Carlyle], 'Article VII', pp. 440, 452-3.

[19] Terry Eagleton has characterised this 'Culture and Society' tradition, which had 'constant resort to the Romantic humanist heritage', as a 'nebulous compound of Burkean conservatism and German idealism, transmitted by the later Coleridge to Carlyle, Disraeli, Arnold and Ruskin […]. It was a tradition which offered an idealist critique of social relations, coupled with a

        Carlyle's own attempt to find a vocabulary in which to articulate his prophetic, religious vision in a secular, sceptical and scientific age, is suggested by Anthony Froude's decision to incorporate sections of his teacher's unfinished 'Autograph Manuscript of Creeds' into his biography of Carlyle, under the title 'Spiritual Optics'.[20] According to Murray Baumgarten, Carlyle strives in this essay 'to be the spiritual Newton and psychological Galileo of his age', transforming the metaphor of spiritual optics into an epistemological principle.[21] Carlyle's discourse of 'spiritual optics' and the metaphor of inspired, or extra-mundane, vision are crucial elements in his polemic against nineteenth-century empiricist and utilitarian modes of thought, which he perceived to be both culturally dominant and socially deleterious. Ruskin echoes Carlyle's distinction between inward and outward kinds of vision in the first volume of *Modern Painters* (1843), where he distinguishes between impressions made on the 'outward parts' and that which is 'taken notice of within'.[22] In the third volume, published in 1856, he places a similar emphasis on the spiritual value of sight, explaining that '[t]he greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to *see* something, and tell what it *saw* in a plain way. […] To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion, – all in one'.[23] In assuming the role of the seer, Carlyle, in common with Ruskin, renounced the status of the bodily eye in favour of a more 'visionary' or prophetic kind of seeing, cultivating ways of looking which would allow the beholder to perceive the 'invisible' and 'unseen', because unseeable, aspects of human existence.

        The concern with spiritual optics had been elaborated by Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus* (1838), a deeply humorous text which purports to be compiled by an English editor who has set out to introduce the thought of a great German savant for the benefit of English-speaking readers. The narrative, insofar as there is one, follows the arc of a *bildungsroman*: the fictional Professor Teufelsdröckh's spiritual epiphanies culminate in his attainment of the status of a 'Seer', in chapter 8 of the third book, whereupon he 'attains to Transcendentalism' and 'looked fixedly on Existence, till one after the other, its earthly hulls and garnitures, have all melted away; and now to his rapt vision the interior, celestial Holy of Holies, lies disclosed'.[24] Teufelsdröckh's exclamations make frequent use of visual metaphors in

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consecation of the rights of capital'. Needless to say, it was this tradition from which Morris was only ever able partially to extricate himself. Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*, 3rd edn (London: Verso, 1982), p. 102.

[20] James Anthony Froude, ed., *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of His Life, 1795-1835*, 2 vols. (London, 1882), II, pp. 7-12. The essay is re-printed in its entirety in Murray Baumgarten, 'Carlyle and "Spiritual Optics"', *Victorian Studies*, 11 (June 1968), pp. 503-22.

[21] Baumgarten, 'Carlyle and "Spiritual Optics"', p. 506.

[22] John Ruskin, *Modern Painters, Volume 1* [1843], in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. by E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London: George Allen, 1903-12), III, pp. 141-2.

[23] Ruskin, *Works*, IV, p. 333.

[24] Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* [1833-4], in *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. by H.D. Traill,

order to evoke the spiritual blindness of his hapless peers. Readers are informed that '[t]he man who cannot wonder […] is but a Pair of Spectacles behind which there is no Eye'.[25] The Professor also diagnoses a general condition of 'sick opthalmia and hallucination' brought on by the same 'Motive-grinders, and Mechanical Profit-and-Loss Philosophies' which Carlyle had criticised in his early essay 'The Signs of the Times'.[26] The medical condition of opthalmia, the symptoms of which involve an inflammation of the eye, takes on a figurative significance for Carlyle, as a rhetorical means of undermining the professed social utility of bourgeois political economy.

Martin Jay has located Carlyle's cultivation of this new 'spiritual optics', intended to 'replenish the tired sight of mundane existence', in the tradition of British Romanticism's metaphorics of inspired vision.[27] Kate Flint similarly points out that '[n]ot to be able to see with the physical eye is to call into play the powerful forces of imagination and memory. Such an idea was one of the most powerful legacies of the early Romantic writers on Victorian sensibilities'.[28] Echoes of Carlyle's, post-Romantic, extra-mundane visual discourse are clearly detectable in Morris's writings as, for example, in his reference to 'the eyes of the body or the soul' (CW, 22: 176) in his lecture 'Some Hints on Pattern-designing' (1881). In his lectures on art and aesthetics, delivered in the late 1870s and early 1880s to workmen in the newly-formed schools of art and handicrafts, Morris secularises the metaphor of spiritual optics in order to formulate a rhetorical means of explicating the degradation of the lesser, or popular, arts. In 'The Art of the People', first delivered before the Birmingham Society of Arts and School of Design on 19 February 1879, Morris suggested that the 'great mass of civilised men, have been blinded by untoward circumstances' (CW, 22: 31). The motif is taken up in a later lecture on 'The Prospects of Architecture in Civilisation' (1881) in which Morris asks the question: '[h]ow shall we set about giving people without traditions of art eyes with which to see works of art?' (CW, 22: 135). The question signals Morris's debt to Ruskin's aesthetic theory, particularly the emphasis placed on visual training in *Modern Painters* – an emphasis which Robert Hewison has glossed as a call to 'abandon conventional perception, and study nature with our own eyes', thus drawing a link

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30 vols. (London: Chapman & Hall, 1896-99), I, pp. 202-3.

[25] Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, I, p. 54. William Guest claims to have been 'feeding [him]self with wonder' (CW, 16: 99) in Nowhere. Phillippa Bennett has also suggested that a rekindling of the sense of wonder is a key attribute of Morris's late romances. Phillippa Bennett, 'Rejuvenating Our Sense of Wonder: The Last Romances of William Morris', in *William Morris in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Phillippa Bennett and Rosie Miles (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 209-28.

[26] Carlyle, *Works*, I, pp. 131.

[27] See Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 109. Jay also notes that the metaphor of 'spiritual optics' 'continued to have a powerful secular effect well after its original religious sources lost much of their legitimacy' (p. 13).

[28] Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*, p. 23.

between the 'visual sense' and the 'moral sense'.[29] Moreover, Morris's posing of such a question, in the context of public lecture, offers a stark challenge to the elitist optic of Matthew Arnold, whose liberalism was undergirded by an assumption that '[t]he mass of mankind will never have any ardent zeal for seeing things as they are; very inadequate ideas will always satisfy them'.[30]

The popular character of Morris's visual rhetoric was linked to an historicist evocation of a supposedly lost period of universalised aesthetic beauty and appreciation – a period when 'everything that the hand of man touched was more or less beautiful: so that in those days all people who made anything shared in art, as well as the people who used the things so made' (CW, 22: 54) – which appears at various points in his lectures on art and society and in his political journalism.[31] The contrapuntal quality of this historicism is again indebted to the work of Carlyle, particularly *Past and Present* (1843), as well as to Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin's *Contrasts; or, A Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Middle Ages and Corresponding Buildings of the Present Day; Shewing the Present Decay of Taste* (1836, 1841) and Ruskin's chapter on 'The Nature of Gothic' in the second volume of *The Stones of Venice* (1851-3). Carlyle elaborates the simultaneously backward- and forward-looking nature of this philosophy of history at the beginning of the second book of *Past and Present*, in which he imaginatively reconstructs the social life of the twelfth-century monastery at St. Edmundsbury from the papers of one its monks, Jocelin of Brakelond. Carlyle describes his endeavour as an attempt to 'penetrate a little […] into a somewhat remote Century; and to look face to face on it, in hope perhaps of illustrating our own poor Century thereby'.[32] Carlyle proceeds to liken Jocelin's twelfth-century text to a 'magical speculum, much gone to rust indeed, yet in fragments still clear; wherein the marvellous image of his existence does still shadow itself […]! Will not the reader peep with us into this singular *camera lucida*, where an extinct species, though fitfully, can still be seen alive?'[33] The invitation to participate in an historical peep-show, as well as the reference to the camera lucida, suggest the way in which the new technologies of vision discussed by Crary acted, for Carlyle, as a metaphorical means of exploring and explicating the historical process, in which historical change itself is figured as the 'object' of vision.[34] Morris's debt to this aspect of Carlyle's historicism is indicated in *A Dream of John*

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[29] Robert Hewison, *John Ruskin: The Argument of the Eye* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), p. 42; see also, Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*, pp. 174-5.

[30] Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism', p. 25.

[31] For other instances, see Morris, CW, 22: 59, 122, 133, 158; William Morris, *Political Writings: Contributions to 'Justice' and 'Commonweal', 1883-1890*, ed. by Nicholas Salmon (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1994), pp. 276-7, 611-2; *The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris*, ed. by Eugene D. Lemire (Detroit, IL: Wayne State University Press, 1969), pp. 148-9.

[32] Carlyle, *Works*, X, p. 39.

[33] Carlyle, *Works*, X, p. 43.

[34] See Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, pp. 97-136.

Ball (1888), where the narrator's dream of fourteenth-century Kent is likened to an 'architectural peep-show' (CW, 16: 215), as well as *News from Nowhere*, in which Guest's fleeting hallucination of the 1887 'Bloody Sunday' demonstration in Trafalgar Square appears as a 'phantasmagoria of another day' (CW, 16: 41). Whilst the camera lucida primarily functioned as an artist's drawing aid, the peep-show and phantasmagoria were more commonly associated with popular entertainment. Morris's incorporation of these devices into his narrative dream-visions of the medieval past and a socialist future could thus be construed as an attempt to mediate forms of collective visual experience, pointing beyond the individualised perspective of the dreamer.[35]

The naivety of the empathetic historicist hermeneutic espoused by Carlyle, and adopted by Morris, which undoubtedly occludes the seamier side of medieval life, was criticised by James MacNeill Whistler, who poured scorn on the idea 'that certain periods were especially artistic, and that nations, readily named, were lovers of art'.[36] Whistler simply disagreed with Morris's claim that 'in the fifteen century Art was engrained in the multitude' and that this vision of 'Arcadian purity' could be contrasted with present conditions in which people 'call for the ungainly, and obtain the ugly'.[37] Kate Flint has pointed out that Whistler's primary aim was to disprove Ruskin's assertion of 'any valid relation subsisting between art and history' – a dispute which began with the libel case that Whistler had pursued against Ruskin in 1878 – but Flint also points to the lurking 'social elitism behind the aesthetic position-taking'.[38] Whistler's Burkean view of the multitude soon becomes clear, thus suggesting the ideological stakes of the dispute, as well as Whistler's affinity with an Arnoldian optic. In particular, Whistler asserted an individualistic model of aesthetic capability, parodically speculating that '[i]n the beginning, man went forth each day […] [u]ntil there was found among them one, differing from the rest, whose pursuits attracted him not, and so he stayed by the tents with the women, and traced strange devices with a burnt stick upon a gourd'.[39] This account of the origins of individual artistic 'genius' – the originary 'deviser of the beautiful' – contrasts sharply with Morris's affirmation of the collective nature of aesthetic production,

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[35] For further discussion of Morris's 'emphasis on this kind of visual immersion' and its relationship to the radical print culture of the period see Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, *Slow Print: Literary Radicalism and Late Victorian Print Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), p. 81.

[36] James MacNeill Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, 2nd edn (London: Heinemann, 1892), p. 138.

[37] Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 138.

[38] Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*, p. 172. Flint detects Whistler's reference to the 'little hamlets [which] grow near Hammersmith' as a piece of mockery aimed in Morris's direction; it is also likely that Whistler may have had in mind the artists' colony at nearby Bedford Park.

[39] Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 139.

most memorably articulated in 'The Art of the People' (1879), where he wrote that 'History (so called) has remembered the king and warriors, because they destroyed; Art has remembered the people, because they created' (CW, 22: 32). For Morris, 'it was the collective people who have produced all worthy, that is all genuine, art in the past'.[40] It is less important whether Morris (and Ruskin), as opposed to Whistler, produced the more 'accurate' interpretation of social life in an unrecoverable past than it is to recognise the way in which these competing speculative reconstructions valorised contrastive and antagonistic ideological positions in the present. Whilst Whistler's position is ultimately aligned with Arnold's elitist restriction on collective modalities of vision and a repudiation of mass culture, Morris's optic is resolutely popular, without being populist.

Morris's secularised inheritance of Carlyle and Ruskin's tradition of social criticism is also a constitutive factor in his decision to transgress against the orthodox Marxist prohibition on utopian speculation, by writing *News from Nowhere* (1890). The protagonist, William Guest, is informed at one point that he 'may see with [his] bodily eyes' the fruits of the 'great change' (CW, 16: 132) which the projected social revolution has brought about. For Morris, the difficulty of seeing into the projected post-capitalist future was regarded as both a political and a literary problem; the attempt to agitate for social revolution was intimately linked to an elaboration of particular kinds of visual subjectivity. Morris's journalistic writings for the socialist newspapers *Justice* and *Commonweal*, as well as his lectures on aesthetics, place repeated emphasis 'giving people back their eyes' (CW, 22: 135). His aesthetic revolt against the perceived ugliness of Victorian material culture is linked to a political diagnosis of a specifically bourgeois kind of myopia: the emphasis of the lectures and the journalism concerns the failure of others adequately to see the "real" nature of the Victorian society, which, for the later Morris at least, was regarded as being riven by class antagonism and social inequality. By contrast, in *News from Nowhere*, Morris is concerned with another kind of optic, one which involves an act of speculative projection and anticipation as a means of gaining a qualitatively different kind perspective on the present.

The desire to glimpse beyond the horizon of the alienated present, in an attempt to see what might be *genuinely* new in the society of the future, is forcefully expressed by the narrator in the opening chapter of *News from Nowhere*: '"If I could but see a day of it," he said to himself; "if I could but see it!"' (CW, 16: 4). The impossibility of this desire to experience the sensuous reality of post-capitalist society returns in the manifest content of the narrator's dream-vision, shot through as it is with mnemonic tokens which call to mind the nineteenth-century present left behind by the dreaming narrator. The utopian optic of William Guest's dream-vision constitutes a way of looking at the present, whilst simultaneously glimpsing, from the corner of one's eye, the suppressed utopian possibilities which were immanent within

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[40] Morris, *Political Writings*, p. 277.

that historical moment. Before returning to this problematic as it is figured in *News from Nowhere*, it is first necessary to examine the contours of the visual rhetoric of Morris's explicitly socialist journalism and lectures.

Morris's desire to see beyond the confines of the alienated present grew partly out of his frustrations with the narrowly empirical focus of the 'practical' socialists of the Fabian, or gradualist, variety. We might look for an example of such a 'practical' approach to Robert Blatchford's popular tract, *Merrie England* (1894). Blatchford offers a satirical portrait of John Smith, the 'typical' Englishman, to whom his letters were addressed. Those readers who would reject the text's socialist message on the grounds that it is 'unpractical' are immediately outflanked on their own terrain. Blatchford's rhetorical strategy is clear, constructing and interpellating his imagined reader as follows:

> You are a staunch Liberal, and you pride yourself upon being 'a shrewd, hard-headed, practical man'. […] Hence you have come to believe that you 'entertain a wholesome contempt for theories', and have contracted a habit of calling for 'Facts' in a peremptory manner, like a stage brigand calling for 'Wine'.
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> Now, Mr. Smith, if you really are a man of hard, shrewd sense, we shall get on very well. I am myself a plain, practical man. I base my beliefs upon what I know and see, and respect a 'fact' more than a Lord Mayor.
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> In these letters I shall stick to the hardest of hard facts, and the coldest of cold reason; and I shall appeal to that robust commonsense […] for which, I understand, you are more famous than for your ability to see beyond the end of your free and independent nose at election times.[41]

Blatchford unsubtly mocks the self-limiting, short-sighted quality of John Smith's positivistic valorisation of 'hard facts' at the same time as he reassures readers that the positivist method will be incorporated into the text's own mode of argument. Beliefs, readers are reminded, should be based upon that which can be seen and known. Unsurprisingly, Blatchford's tract contains a wealth of statistical information and 'accomplished facts', culled from the pages of the *Quarterly Review* and elsewhere.[42] The work of *proving* the case for socialism is over-determined in Blatchford's text by the speculative construction of the projected audience. The empirical trumps the ethical as a means of persuasion, situating Blatchford's text in proximity to the sociological research of Charles Booth and Henry Mayhew.

For Morris, by contrast, the domain of that which can be seen and known extended beyond 'hard facts' and 'cold reason'. Outlining the policy of abstention from Parliamentary elections in a *Commonweal* article entitled 'Anti-Parliamentary'

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[41] Robert Blatchford, *Merrie England* (London: Clarion Office, 1894), pp. 9-10.
[42] Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 29.

(7 June 1890), Morris posed an arresting series of unanswered rhetorical questions:

> if we cannot force Parliament to declare its function of safeguarding privilege
> as an end, when it is obviously in vigorous life; if we cannot jockey it into
> furthering the very thing which it hates most, and has most reason to hate –
> Socialism, to wit – what can we do? 'Nothing', say our parliamentary friends. I
> cannot see that. Is it nothing to keep alive and increase discontent with the vile
> slavery of today? Is it nothing to show the discontented that they can
> themselves destroy that slavery? Is it nothing to point out to them what lies
> beyond the period of struggle, and how workers can be happy when they are
> not robbed of all the pleasure of life by the idlers that live upon their labour?[43]

For Blatchford, John Smith's staunch liberalism and his identification of bourgeois
parliamentary elections as a legitimate, or sufficient, means of political representation
acts as barrier to his acceptance of socialist ideas. By contrast, Morris's rhetorical
questions are designed to press at the limits of that ideological self-identity, rather
than to accommodate it in the way that Blatchford does. Morris emphasises the
importance of finding a representational strategy capable of breaking the perceived
dominance of working-class identification with liberalism, and he suggests that this
will necessarily involve moving beyond the terrain of the immediate and the
empirical, with its slavish devotion to facts, by risking more speculative kinds of
enquiry into 'what lies beyond the period of struggle'. Morris's frustrations are again
in evidence in his article 'On Some "Practical" Socialists' (18 February 1888),
published in *Commonweal*, twenty-one months before *News from Nowhere* began to
be serialised in the pages of the same newspaper. Rebuking the narrow-mindedness of
the 'practical' socialists, Morris suggested that 'they do not see except through the
murky smoked glass of the present condition of life amongst us; and it seems
somewhat strange, not that they should have no vision of the future, but that they
should not be ready to admit that it is their own fault that they have not'.[44] That
Morris should fall back, at this point, on an ecologically-updated Biblical allusion –
likening the shortcomings of Fabian economism to the difficulty of seeing through a
glass darkly (1 Corinthians, 13: 12) – is a clear indication of his inheritance of
Carlyle's religiously-freighted discourse of 'spiritual optics', a discourse which
Morris sought to mobilise with reference to the strategic problems faced by the
emergent socialist movement.[45]

Further examples abound in his lectures. In his 1886 lecture delineating the

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[43] Morris, *Political Writings*, p. 483.
[44] Morris, *Political Writings*, p. 338.
[45] For an extended discussion of the socialist movement's appropriation of a religious structure of
feeling see Stephen Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896', *History
Workshop Journal*, 4 (Autumn 1977), pp. 5-56.

political differences between 'Whigs, Democrats and Socialists', for instance, Morris employs a tone of self-deprecating humility, describing the nascent socialist movement as a 'sect or party, or group of self-seekers, madmen, and poets', in order to carry the important political point that 'at least they are only set of people who have been able to see that there is and has been a great class-struggle going on' (CW, 23: 37). By contrast, the Fabians, or 'soft Socialists', are said to suffer with a kind of myopia because 'the barrier which they will not be able to pass, so long as they are in their present minds, [is] *the acknowledgement of the class war*. The "Socialists" of this kind are blind as to the essence of modern society'.[46] In an earlier lecture on 'The Hopes of Civilisation' (1885) this claim to exclusive insight had been set against the blindness of '[m]any among the middle classes who are sincerely grieved and shocked at the condition of the proletariat which civilisation has created [...] [but who] nevertheless shudder back from the idea of the class struggle, and strive to shut their eyes to the fact that it is going on' (CW, 23: 76-7). The rhetorical value of such a claim, made in the context of a public lecture delivered with the explicitly pedagogical aim of converting listeners to the cause, should not occlude the fact that it is empirically questionable.[47] It is hard to imagine that Messrs Bryant and May, for example, or the employers at the London Docks, were entirely blind to the reality of class struggle, given the match girls' strike of 1888 and the dockworkers' strike of 1889. Whilst it is hard to dispute the possibility that certain members of the bourgeoisie would rather avert their eyes from the social consequences of class antagonism, bourgeois class interests would hardly be well-served if the leading fractions of that class were continually to suffer debilitating lapses in vigilance or to pretend that industrial militancy on the part of the working class simply did not exist. Morris's ire, one assumes, is directed primarily against middle-class liberals and bourgeois philanthropists, whom he regarded as having a mistaken, or inflated, sense of their own progressive credentials.

In certain important respects, then, Morris's diagnosis of bourgeois myopia is

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[46] William Morris, *Journalism: Contributions to 'Commonweal' 1885-1890*, ed. by Nicholas Salmon (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1996), p. 613.

[47] Contrary to Morris's claim that socialists are the 'only set of people' in possession of the cognitive ability to 'see' the existence of class struggle, Marx had pointed out in a letter to J. Weydemeyer that 'no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them. Long before the bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes'. 'Marx to J. Weydemeyer', in *Selected Works of Marx and Engels* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968), p. 679. Marx went on to state that 'what I did that was new was to prove: (1) that the *existence of classes* is only bound up with *particular phases in the development of production*, (2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to *the dictatorship of the proletariat*, (3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society*' (p. 679).

clearly insufficient insofar as it posits socialist commitment to class struggle as a restricted, exclusive kind of insight. Morris's attempt to graft a socialist critique of class society onto the discursive base furnished by Carlyle and Ruskin was thus not entirely successful in political terms, insofar as the seer's privileged insight is frequently construed as the exclusive property of a select, or chosen, few. The discursive inheritance bequeathed to Morris by Carlyle and Ruskin bears structural parallels to one facet of Victorian glass culture described by Isobel Armstrong, who, in noting the 'pellucid transitivity' of glass, points out that it acted as 'both *medium and barrier*'.[48] Morris's secularisation of Carlyle and Ruskin's spiritual optic as an optic of class struggle had its own discursive limits, as I have tried to elucidate. His inheritance of the visual rhetoric of earlier generations of social criticism takes on a different character in his utopian writing. In *News from Nowhere*, Morris aims to see beyond the present, into an alterior, or radically different, future. William Guest's longing to 'see a day' of the utopian future is concomitant with the fact that those who are said to have brought this other world into being 'worked for the change because they could see further than other people' (CW, 16: 104). The motif of prescience and far-sightedness is the obverse of that bourgeois myopia which Morris condemned in his journalism. His utopian romance imagines the consequences of a full working through of the social contradictions and class antagonisms which he claimed that his political opponents failed to perceive. The transcendentalism of Carlyle's spiritual optics is resolved into the more mundane, or worldly, focus on the immanent possibilities latent *within* the present.

Morris's decision to produce a utopian romance was in itself a bold political move when one considers the force of the orthodox Marxist prohibition against speculative utopianism. The *locus classicus* is found in Friedrich Engels' *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880), a short text which was translated into English by Edward Aveling and Eleanor Marx in 1892, both of whom had been members of the Socialist League, along with Morris.[49] The orthodox position was reiterated by Ernest Belfort Bax in the Preface to *Outlooks from the New Standpoint* (published in December 1891) where he laments the 'current popularity of Utopian romances, hailed with such joy by some'.[50] Bax, here, offers a veiled riposte to *News from Nowhere*, which had been serialised in *Commonweal* during the previous year. Bax wrote that whilst it is feasible to

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[48] Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds*, p. 7.
[49] Apropos the utopian projections of Charles Fourier, Robert Owen and Henri de Saint-Simon, Engels wrote that '[t]hese new social systems were foredoomed as Utopian; the more completely they were worked out in detail, the more they could not avoid drifting off into pure phantasies'. Friedrich Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1892), p. 12.
[50] Ernest Belfort Bax, *Outlooks from the New Standpoint* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1891), p. viii.

lay down, in the abstract, the general principles on which the society of the future will be based, […] we cannot *describe*, that is, picture, in the concrete, any state of society of which the world has had no experience. […] Our logical faculty can, indeed, as it were, dissolve the present social reality for abstract thought, and show the lines on which the new principle growing up within it is going, but our imagination is quite incapable of envisaging the future social reality in its completed shape.[51]

The anti-utopianism of this statement had practical and political motivations, as evidenced in Bax's anxiety in his 'Address to Trades' Unions – Issued by the Council of the Socialist League' (1885) that workers might regard socialists as 'unpractical visionaries with foreign notions in their heads'.[52] Blatchford similarly dissociated socialism from whimsical reveries of the Land of Cokaygne, reassuring his readers that '[s]ocialism is not a wild dream of a happy land where the apples will drop off the trees into our open mouths, the fish come out of the rivers and fry themselves for dinner, and the looms turn out readymade suits of velvet with golden buttons without the trouble of coaling the engine'.[53] The force of this prohibition on utopian speculation helps to explain the confusion of narrative perspective in the opening chapter of *Nowhere*. The third-person narrative voice of the first chapter – which purports to report the experience of a 'friend' – is rejected as the narration of the dream-vision proper begins:

> Our friend says that from sleep he awoke once more, and afterwards went through such surprising adventures that he thinks that they should be told to our comrades and indeed the public in general, and therefore proposes to tell them now. But, says he, I think it would be better if I told them in the first person, as if it were myself who had gone through them; which, indeed, will be the easier and more natural to me, since I understand the feelings and desires of the comrade of whom I am telling better than any one else in the world does. (CW, 16: 5)

The confusion of the 'I' in this passage conflates the narrator of the first chapter and his 'friend' into a single, unitary narrative voice, whilst maintaining a measure of distance between the two. The dreamer is kept ever-so-subtly at arm's length from

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[51] Bax, *Outlooks*, pp. viii-ix.

[52] Ernest Belfort Bax, 'Address to Trades' Unions', in *The Religion of Socialism, Being Essays in Modern Socialist Criticism*, 3rd rev. edn (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1891), p. 154.

[53] Blatchford, *Merrie England*, p. 99. Hints of a guarded response to *News from Nowhere* are detectable in the ensuing sentence, where Blatchford wrote that '[n]either is it a dream of a nation of stained-glass angels, who never say damn, who always love their neighbours better than themselves, and who never need to work unless they wish to' (p. 99).

the narrator at the same time as his experiences are recorded 'in the first person'. This complicated and somewhat clumsy introduction to the narrative serves to remind readers that the communist future cannot be "eyed" directly, as Morris was at pains to acknowledge elsewhere.[54] Andrew Belsey has drawn attention to this 'multiple personality' and the 'elaborate structure of deception and disguise' which it produces, but he does not refer to the ideological taboo on utopian speculation as one of the potential motivations for this 'playful' aspect of the text.[55] The title-page of *Nowhere* describes the dream-vision which follows as 'being some chapters from a Utopian Romance' (CW, 16: 1) – a phrase which anticipates the romantic sub-plots in the narrative (between Dick and Clara, as well as between Guest and Ellen) at the same time as it invites readers to fall in love, quite literally, with the idea of a communist future. Belsey interprets the various narrative devices of the text in a similar manner, suggesting that its 'strategy is to intrigue the reader into becoming an agent of the text, and to provide the requisite motivation for political struggle'.[56]

A key moment in the unfolding of this strategy is the 'last mournful look' (CW, 16: 210) of Guest's utopian host, Ellen, a moment of pathos which Guest nevertheless interprets as a call to action. He reads Ellen's look as an injunction to '[g]o back again, now that you seen us, and your outward eyes have learned that in spite of all the infallible maxims of your day there is yet a time of rest in store for the world [...]. Go back and be the happier for having seen us, for having added a little hope to your struggle' (CW, 16: 210-11). It is possible to interpret these lines – and, by imputation, the functional political value of Morris's utopia – as little more than a consoling palliative, in line with Raymond Williams' suggestion that the heuristic utopia always stands in danger of '[settling] into isolated and in the end sentimental desire, a mode of living with alienation'.[57] However, Guest's interpretation of Ellen's last glance is soon followed by his own, more affirmative statement: 'Yes, surely! and if others can see it as I have seen it,

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[54] Morris frequently disclaims "bad" utopianism in his political journalism and lectures. For example, in 'Useful Work *versus* Useless Toil' (1884), he dilates upon 'the impossibility of constructing a scheme of a new society out of the materials of the old, before we knew which of those materials would disappear and which endure through the evolution which is leading to the great change' (CW, 23: 118). In 'True and False Society' (1887), Morris states that 'you may be disappointed when you find that I have no elaborate plan, no details of a new society to lay before you, that to my mind to attempt this would be putting before you a mere delusion' (CW, 23: 215). Similarly, in a short *Commonweal* article entitled 'Notes and Queries: Practical Socialism' (1886), he wrote that '[w]hen the plan is visible the new state of Society will be realised, it cannot be visible before'. Morris, *Political Writings*, p. 147.

[55] Andrew Belsey, 'Getting Somewhere: Rhetoric and Politics in *News from Nowhere*', *Textual Practice*, 5 (1991), pp. 337-51 (pp. 343-4).

[56] Belsey, 'Getting Somewhere', p. 348.

[57] Raymond Williams, 'Utopia and Science Fiction', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 196-212 (203).

then it may be called a vision rather than a dream' (CW, 16: 211). Guest's narration of his time in Nowhere is frequently described as a dream-vision, but, at the final moment of closure, the hyphen is suspended as the qualities of dream and of vision begin to point in contradictory directions, illustrating the difficulties of mediating between individual and collective modalities of seeing. The dreaming individual has the potential to act as both a harbinger and a bearer of collective vision, but the conditional phrasing reminds us that the process of mediation is always contingent and indeterminate, inextricably linked to real processes of social struggle in concrete situations. Others have the potential to see the vision as Guest has seen it – they *can* see it, insofar as it there for them literally to see or insofar as *News from Nowhere* is a text available for reading – but there is nothing inevitable about being able to "see" its system of values, in the more abstract and metaphorical sense of sight which is implicit in the final sentence. Any reader of the text will, in one sense, see, in her mind's eye, the society described therein, but, once again, there is an unwitting exclusivism at work: Guest implies that he has seen Nowhere in a particular way, which has made him understand the necessity of struggling to actualise a post-capitalist future; he further implies that others have yet to share in this way of seeing, thereby setting himself subtly apart from the unspecified 'others'. Matthew Beaumont identifies part of the problem in recognising that the text '[addressed] a tight circle of committed readers, at least in its first, serial form of publication', highlighting the fact the Socialist League, and its organ, *Commonweal*, functioned primarily as a propaganda sect, lacking any substantial link to a mass audience.[58] The implied and imagined audience, on this account, were *already* committed, thus partly negating the textual strategies of enticement and seduction recounted by Belsey.

The choice of phrase – 'dream-vision' – also returns us to Ruskin, particularly his comments on the painterly technique of J.W.M. Turner in the fourth volume of *Modern Painters*. There, Ruskin praises the instances of creative licence in Turner's paintings by equating them with the remembrance of previous details. Such instances, Ruskin suggests, are

> numerous enough to induce a doubt whether Turner's composition was not universally an arrangement of remembrances, summoned just as they were wanted, and set each in its fittest place. It is this very character which appears to me to mark it as so distinctly an act of dream-vision; for in a dream there is just this kind of confused remembrance of the forms of things which we have seen long ago, associated by new and strange laws.[59]

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[58] Matthew Beaumont, *Utopia Ltd.: Ideologies of Social Dreaming in England, 1870-1900*, 2nd edn (Chicago: Haymarket, 2009), p. 187.
[59] Ruskin, *Works*, VI, p. 41.

The contrapuntal quality of the relationship between remembered forms overlaid by 'new and strange laws' also animates Morris's utopian vision of Nowhere, which, like so many of Turner's paintings, evokes a landscape suffused with sunlight and structured around an itinerary of dreamt 'remembrances'. Jonathan Crary has specified the contradiction which animates Ruskin's aspiration for a 'purified subjective vision', likening it to a kind of vision

> achieved at great cost that claimed for the eye a vantage point uncluttered by the weight of historical codes and conventions of seeing, a position from which vision can function without the imperative of composing its contents into a reified 'real' world. It was a question of an eye that sought to avoid the repetitiveness of the formulaic and conventional, even as the effort time and again to see afresh and anew entailed its own pattern of repetition and conventions.[60]

The reaction against the habitual, the customary and the conventional, which is nonetheless contradictorily bound up with a reassertion and repetition of the same, similarly constitutes Guest's experience in Nowhere, suggesting Morris's own familiarity with the same contradiction.[61] Leaving behind the society of the nineteenth century, Guest enters a 'very new world' where he finds himself 'stripped bare of every habitual thought and way of acting' (CW, 16: 103). He soon learns, though, that in Nowhere 'a tradition or habit of life has been growing on us […] a habit of acting on the whole for the best' (CW, 16: 80). The tyrannies of habitual modes of perception identified by Ruskin are disavowed, only for habit to be re-imbued with the status of a redemptive category.[62] Despite the force of the orthodox

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[60] Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, pp. 95-96.

[61] In his lecture on 'Early England' (1886), Morris's opening statement that 'I am in the habit of looking at things that pass before my eyes; (which I think has now ceased to be a common habit) and connecting their present outward seeming with times gone by and times to come' is an implicit reassertion of Ruskin's influence and of his accrual of Ruskinian visual habits. Morris, *Unpublished Lectures*, p. 158.

[62] It is more than a mere digression to note that Vladimir Ilyich Lenin's discussion of the 'gradual and elemental nature' of the projected withering of the state contains a markedly similar treatment of the concept of habit. In the relevant section of *State and Revolution* (1917), concerned with 'The Withering of the State', Lenin asserts that '[o]nly habit can, and undoubtedly will, have such an effect; for we see around us millions of times how readily people get accustomed to observe the necessary rules of life in common, if there is no exploitation, if there is nothing that causes indignation, that calls forth protest and revolt and has to be *suppressed*'. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *State and Revolution* (New York: International Publishers, 1932), p. 74. This moment of apparent resonance, or congruence, between Morris's utopian text and Lenin's is further corroborated when one learns that Lenin possessed a copy of the Russian translation of *News from Nowhere*: 'Il n'est pas indifférent de mentionner que l'édition russe des *Nouvelles de Nulle Part* figurait dans la bibliothèque de Lénine'. Paul Meier, *La Pensée Utopique de William Morris* (Paris: Éditions

prohibition on utopian speculation – which sought to lock the socialist imagination into certain specific and delimited ways of seeing – Morris's utopian narrative attempts to picture, in the concrete, the sensuous reality and lived experience of a communist future. As A.L. Morton long ago pointed out, Morris's utopia is the first utopia which is not utopian, insofar as it has a history and, one might add, a recognizable geography.[63] Guest's waking in Hammersmith, his swim in the Thames, his trip through central London, passing Trafalgar Square and the Houses of Parliament, function as signifiers of continuity, situating the narrative in the known and familiar world, thus breaking with the generic conventions of foregoing narrative utopianism. The familiarity of Nowhere's terrain is simultaneously made strange by numerous indications of radical change: Trafalgar Square has been transfigured into an orchard; salmon swim in the Thames and the Houses of Parliament have been ingeniously re-purposed as a storage-place for manure. From the blossom on the fruit-trees in the re-planted Trafalgar Square to the pictures on the walls in the Hammersmith Guest House Morris's utopian optic is designed to estrange that which is familiar, in order to show the alterity, or otherness, which is latent within the present, could we but make the slightest shift in our way of apprehending that present in order that we might begin to perceive its true potentialities and horizons.

This, then, is the key to understanding the significance of Morris's utopian romance as a particular kind of political intervention. As the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci well knew, the 'attribute "utopian" does not apply to political will in general, but to specific wills which are incapable of relating means to end, and hence are not even wills, but idle whims, dreams, longings etc'.[64] For Morris, *Nowhere* was not simply a vision of the desired end, lacking any relation to the means of its actualisation; rather, it was an attempt to reconceptualise the nature of the means, thus providing one potential route through which particular individuals might begin to relate means to ends in the ebbs and flows of political struggle. The prophetic aptitude of the utopian imagination will be little more than an idle whim, in Gramsci's words, if no attempt is made to connect the vision of the desired end to concrete developments and currents in effective reality: the only true prophets, as James Connolly once put it, are those who carve out the future which they announce. Crucially, this involves an attempt to mediate between individual and collective modalities of vision, albeit that the different kinds of visual rhetoric mobilised by Morris, and which I have explored here, were not entirely successful in this regard.

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sociales, 1972), p. 832. Meier comments in a footnote that a catalogue of Lenin's library was published in Moscow in 1961.

[63] A.L. Morton, *The English Utopia* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1969), p. 213.

[64] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, repr. 1998), p. 175.

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