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William Morris in the Twenty-First Century

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William Morris 2.0:
Spreading Socialist Ideals via the Internet

Introduction

Since its creation in 1996, the William Morris Society website has served one of the chief aims of the Morris Society, namely, to harness new technologies in service of the principles of beauty, utility, openness, and community. It may at first seem strange to pair Morris's passions for medievalism, handicraft, and ecology with a medium often thought of as futuristic, technological, and artificial; however, Morris's own practices and works reveal several uses of what were in his day new media to further socialist aims. This chapter focuses on the ways in which the Morris Society website echoes and extends Morris's image, ideas, and practices for a global audience, especially now that social media, or 'Web 2.0' tools can be said to have created a new kind of digital socialism that meshes well with Morris's own ideals.

Although William Morris lamented the loss of craftsmanship inherent in the mechanization of labour, he was not always averse to using new methods. For example, in an article for *Justice* on 'Work in a Factory as It Might Be', Morris envisions the socialist factory as using mechanization to help to decrease individual toil, imagining that 'machines of the most ingenious and best approved kinds will be used when necessary, but will be used simply to save human labour'.[1] Of course, Morris was thinking of

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1   William Morris, 'Work in a Factory As It Might Be. II', *Justice: The Organ of the Social Democracy*, 1.21 (31 May 1884), p. 2.

steam-powered devices that would help turn out tangible products, but Morris used new technologies in order to achieve more aesthetic ends, as well. Three examples may help us to contextualize Morris's relationship to technological developments: font design at the Kelmscott Press, the use of technology to assist manual labour, and the use of mass media to broadcast the message of socialism.

Morris and Nineteenth-Century Technologies

Emery Walker (1851–1933) was a master printer, typographic designer, and engraver who perfected the process-engraving technique. In his career in the book arts, Walker accumulated an expert knowledge of printing history and various methods of graphic reproduction. Importantly for this example, he was also Morris's neighbour. In November of 1888, Walker delivered a series of lectures on the structure of medieval and Renaissance font design entitled 'Letterpress Printing and Illustration'.

During the 1996 centenary year of Morris's death, the University of Michigan Special Collections Library held an exhibition on 'The Life and Art of William Morris', and the catalogue to the exhibition notes the special pull that Walker's groundbreaking use of new technology had on Morris:

> Although Walker's lecture was never published, it was reviewed by Oscar Wilde in the *Pall Mall Gazette* of the following day. Wilde emphasized that the two dozen lantern slides containing illustrations of early printed books and manuscripts were the most striking and valuable feature of the talk. Walker used the slides to show comparisons between the horrors of Victorian typography and the most beautiful books of the past, especially those produced by printers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[2]

2   The University of Michigan Special Collections Library, 'The Kelmscott Press', *The Pursuit of the Ideal: The Life and Art of William Morris* exhibition, 9 September–

In particular, Walker had used microphotography to create magic-lantern slides to enlarge the words of Renaissance books in order better to study their letter-forms. Morris later asked Walker to help create microphotograph enlargements from some early books in Morris's own collection; these templates became the working models for the design of the type for the Kelmscott Press.

In addition to using existing new technologies to help further his own craft work, Morris also envisioned adaptations of new nineteenth-century technologies that would help reduce the burden of manual labour in a utopian socialist society. For example, in *News from Nowhere* (1890), Morris envisions a future world in which much of the industrialization of England has been allowed to subside. Communities are arranged on a socialist plan, with great value placed on handicraft work and artisan labour, but the use of technology is not wholly abandoned. Indeed, Morris's utopian society seems quietly to be supported by advances in technology, which Morris proposed as an alternative to what he would later call the Whig government's 'mastery of and its waste of mechanical power'.[3] As an example, Hammond refers to the 'great change in the use of mechanical force',[4] implying that technologies are used in Nowhere to lighten manual labour, not to increase productivity for a demand market. Morris also mentions the use of 'force-barges' that ferry goods and people up and down the Thames in the future England of the early twenty-first century:

> Both on this day as well as yesterday we had, as you may think, met and passed and been passed by many craft of one kind and another. The most part of these were being rowed like ourselves, or were sailing, in the sort of way that sailing is managed on the upper reaches of the river; but every now and then we came on barges, laden with hay or other country produce, or carrying bricks, lime, timber, and the

2 November 1996 <http://www.lib.umich.edu/pursuit-ideal-life-art-william-morris/kelms.html> accessed 6 September 2009.

3   William Morris, 'How I Became a Socialist', *Justice: The Organ of the Social Democracy*, 10.20 (16 June 1894), pp. 2–3.

4   William Morris, *News From Nowhere: Or An Epoch of Rest, Being Some Chapters from a Utopian Romance*. In *The Collected Works of William Morris*, ed. May Morris, 24 vols. (London: Longmans, Green &.Co., 1910–15), XVI, p. 242.

like, and these were going on their way without any means of propulsion visible to me – just a man at the tiller, with often a friend or two laughing and talking with him. Dick, seeing on one occasion this day that I was looking rather hard on one of these, said 'That is one of our force-barges; it is quite as easy to work vehicles by water as by land'.[5]

We can recognize these force-barges as the same kinds of engine-powered craft that move heavy loads on our waterways even today. Thus, Morris did not argue that technological advances were, of themselves, contrary to a socialist way of thinking and living; rather, he asserts that it is improper for one class of people to harness technological advances purely as a means of increasing productivity – and, subsequently, to increase profits – especially at the expense of the labouring classes. This leads to my third example of Morris's use of new technologies: as a proselytizing medium.

We often think of Morris's relation to the publishing world as that of a connoisseur and craftsman, painstakingly hand-creating books at the Kelmscott Press, one at a time, in very limited numbers. However, Morris edited the *Commonweal* (1885–90), which was mass-printed on modern equipment, in order to reach out to as wide an audience as possible. Prior to the founding of *Commonweal*, Morris had made several connections in the publishing industry, beginning when he was an undergraduate at Oxford. Along with William Fulford, a student at Cambridge, Morris convinced the London publishers Bell and Daldy to publish the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, which ran for twelve numbers during 1856. Morris financed the magazine, served as its inaugural editor, and contributed poetry, fiction, and essays to its pages – all good preparation for his later efforts to explain socialism to a wide audience. Morris saw the mass-distribution power of the nineteenth-century press as a means to communicate with an ever-widening audience, and perceived the medium, as Elizabeth Helsinger asserts, as a potential social-class leveller, a 'form of critical social intervention'.[6]

5   Ibid., pp. 349–50.
6   Elizabeth Helsinger, *Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts: Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 175.

Morris's relationship with Bell and Daldy continued with their publication of his first two books, *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* (1858) and *The Life and Death of Jason: A Poem* (1867). In the period between 1868 and the founding of *Commonweal* in 1885, Morris published books, articles, letters, and poems with (among many) F. S. Ellis (later Ellis and White), the *Fortnightly Review, Good Words*, the *Academy, Dark Blue*, the *Architect*, the *Athenæum*, the *Daily News, Justice*, the London *Times*, William Reeves, William Clowes, the Modern Press, *To-Day*, the Socialist League, and the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Morris's publications, especially in avowedly socialist periodicals of the day such as *Justice* and *To-Day*, along with his wide-ranging interests and connections throughout the publishing world of late nineteenth-century England, demonstrate not only that he was eminently suited to edit *Commonweal*, but that he was a savvy user of mass-communication technology as it then existed, bringing his thoughts and questions before a wide and diverse audience. Seen in this light, the productions of the Kelmscott Press take on comparatively less importance in the canon of Morris's written works: the deluxe editions produced at the Kelmscott Press were intended to preserve the dying art of book handicraft, but Morris was simultaneously publishing broad-sheets, songs, letters, and transcripts of his speeches for as wide an audience as possible. While it is a matter of some question whether Morris's work at the Kelmscott Press was intended in part to help finance his socialist proselytizing through a 'hidden taxation' of the wealthy patrons who purchased Kelmscott Press editions, it is plain that Morris adopted the best and most advanced technological means of sharing his views on socialist thinking with the widest audience, which meant, at first, letters to newspapers and journals, and, at last, the founding of his own periodical. To wit: Morris took to the 'social media' of his day in order to spread a socialist message and engage a diverse audience in discussion of socialist aims.

All of these examples of Morris's use of nineteenth-century technological advances demonstrate that Morris was unafraid to take advantage of his wealth, connections, and social prestige as an artist in order to advocate for the rights of the less fortunate. As he wrote in his address on 'Art and the Beauty of the Earth',

Look you, as I sit at my work at home, which is at Hammersmith, close to the river, I often hear go past the window some of that ruffianism of which a good deal has been said in the papers of late, and has been said before at recurring periods. As I hear the yells and shrieks and the degradation cast on the glorious tongue of Shakespeare and Milton, as I see the brutal reckless faces and figures go past me, it rouses the recklessness and brutality in me also, and fierce wrath takes possession of me, till I remember, as I hope I mostly do, that it was my good luck only of being born respectable and rich that has put me on this side of the window among delightful books and lovely works of art, and not on the other side, in the empty street, the drink-steeped liquor-shops, the foul and degraded lodgings.[7]

So, the William Morris with whom we are familiar was at once a lover of simplicity and craft, a dedicated fighter for social fellow-feeling, and a powerful poet and author. In all of these roles, Morris discovered or adapted methods to take advantage of the technologies most germane to his purposes.

The Early Morris Society Looks Forward

The William Morris Society, even at its founding, used the technologies of the day to advance a Morrisian ideal of collective discussion and action. Roger Coleman has stated that 'Morris was no Luddite, and no opponent of technology and design'.[8] As I have mentioned above, Morris's ideals were founded on beauty, quality, and craft, but they also included utility and appropriateness in the process of making. The William Morris Society was founded in 1955 in order to keep alive Morrisian ideas about art, design, craft, language, bookmaking, ecology, and socialism. The early Morris Society acted as a forum for members to share their ideas and their visions

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7   William Morris, 'Art and the Beauty of the Earth', Lecture to the Hammersmith Socialist League, 13 October 1881. In *Collected Works*, XXII, p. 171.

8   Roger Coleman, 'Design and Technology in Nowhere', *Journal of the William Morris Society*, 9.2 (Spring 1991), p. 29.

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for how Morris's ideas and ideals would be carried forward beyond his own time and place. Since it was – and still is – possible to be an admirer of many different William Morrises, so to speak, the Society acted as a single point of contact for Morris enthusiasts of several different stripes. Indeed, the statement on the aims of the Society that was printed inside the back cover of the earliest issues of the *Journal of the William Morris Society* makes explicit the desire for the Society not just to be a nexus for those interested in Morris, but for the Society to encourage our interest in each other: 'The Society provides a meeting place for the large number of people who believe that Morris's work and ideals are of value to the world of today ... It enables those interested in Morris to become known to one another and fosters the exchange of ideas about him'.[9] Many of the early projects of the Society – including exhibitions, collections of essays, and visits to sites of Morrisian interest – were undertaken in just such a spirit of fostering dialogue and collective inquiry about the many sides of Morris.

Catherine Moody, in a 1962 essay on the aims of the Society, implores her colleagues, 'As the direct personal influence of his life grows fainter and those who knew Morris become fewer, it behoves us to be alert and make certain that all he rediscovered does not again escape us'.[10] However, in the same year, Roberta Buchanan also cautioned the early Society to attain toward something better than mere hero-worship, asking, 'MUST we have this ostentatious licking of a dead man's boots with one eye cocked upon the living?'[11]

The tension between memorializing Morris and the continuation of his aims into areas (and using means) where Morris himself did not or could not go was not a new problem. For example, immediately following Morris's death, Emery Walker and the others involved in the Kelmscott Press decided that the Press should cease to publish once it had printed

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9   'The Aims of the William Morris Society', *Journal of the William Morris Society*, 1.3 (Summer 1963), p. 32, inside back cover.

10   Catherine Moody, 'Let Us Get Clear of the Fog', *Journal of the William Morris Society*, 1.3 (Summer 1963), p. 17.

11   Roberta Buchanan, 'Correspondence: What I Expect of the William Morris Society', *Journal of the William Morris Society*, 1.3 (Summer 1963), p. 30.

the works in which Morris had had a direct hand, rather than continue to publish after its flourishing, even though Morris had expressed a wish that the Press continue beyond his passing. Since 1955, the Morris Society has attempted to reach out to the same sorts of populations that Morris himself associated with: from book lovers to architecture preservationists to political socialists, all are welcomed into the Society – and the Society has made special efforts to connect to other organizations whose aims and practices harmonize with Morris's own, such as the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), which Morris helped found. Thus, the twin pulls of remembering Morris and acting in the present in a Morrisian way became a useful guide for the Society's many projects.

However, the 'opportunity cost' of reaching out to potential members was comparatively high in the early years of the Morris Society. The individually small but collectively challenging actions of creating publicity materials, sending them to potential members (or bringing them to gatherings of like-minded people), filling in membership forms, and posting them all but ensured that the Morris Society, at least early on, would be populated by a small network of people, typically already known to each other, and that the aims of the Society would largely be to knit together the existing network of Morris aficionados. Since 1996, however, the opportunity costs of proselytizing for Morrisian undertakings has been steadily decreasing. The ability of groups to form and grow, and especially the ability of seekers to 'self-select' and find others who share their ideals has become almost trivially easy, making social-networking projects possible on a scale unimaginable before. One of these projects, the Morris Society website, demonstrates how the Morris Society echoed Morris's own adoption of new technologies to bring a socialist message to a broad audience.

The Morris Society Website

The website for the Morris Society in the United States was begun as a sort of grassroots experiment and grew over time to include many elements designed to create a community where Morrisians could engage in dialogue and communal action. Paradoxically, with the recent introduction of new social media, or Web 2.0 applications, the World Wide Web has, as a whole, become more socialist in nature, and the Morris Society has expanded its web presence and tools to take advantage of that social(ist) movement. A brief history of the website demonstrates the ways in which the Morris Society site was a forerunner of many of the socialist developments now happening across the wider Internet.

In 1996, Mark Samuels Lasner inaugurated the 'William Morris Home Page', which was designed and hosted on the Internet by the Robinson Center for the Graphic Arts of the City College of New York. Mark described the site's original goals as to 'provide biographical and bibliographical information, reproductions of Morris's work, news of Morris and Victorian-related events world-wide, links to other resources, and not-very-subtle inducements to join the Morris Society'.[12] The early website circa 1996–8 was really an experiment, in the best Morrisian tradition, to employ a useful technology in order to bring Morris's ideas to a wider audience. It contained the text of the newsletter for the US branch of the Society and listed upcoming events. It functioned largely as a traditional 'push' medium, dispensing information (mostly in the form of text) to the membership, in a way much like *Commonweal* reached out to socialist readers in the nineteenth century. The site soon began to list news and information from the UK and Canadian branches of the Society as well. Mark Samuels Lasner asked me to take over the webmaster duties for the website in 1999, and one of my first tasks was to determine the trends in how our site was being used, and how we might use the new technology

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12 Mark Samuels Lasner, 'Mark Samuels Lasner Steps Down as President', *Newsletter of the William Morris Society in the United States* (Summer 2004), p. 7.

to further Morrisian ends, such as fostering two-way communication in order to set up a community of Morrisians throughout the world. Although I stepped down as webmaster in 2007 and Mark Lasner has resumed the role, the site (and its companion initiatives in Web 2.0 social media) continues to be an extension of the adoption of technology for social ends that Morris himself envisioned, and the internet has caught up to the original goals for the Society website.

A fiercely debated question nowadays is whether the entire Internet itself – especially new social media like weblogs (or simply 'blogs'), wikis, and real-time messaging – is a socialist endeavour writ large. Kevin Kelly, writing for *Wired* magazine in 2009, argues that

> When masses of people who own the means of production work toward a common goal and share their products in common, when they contribute labour without wages and enjoy the fruits free of charge, it's not unreasonable to call that Socialism ... It is not [, however,] an ideology. It demands no rigid creed. Rather, it is a spectrum of attitudes, techniques, and tools that promote collaboration, sharing, aggregation, coordination, ad hocracy, and a host of other newly enabled types of social cooperation.[13]

Kelly's definition of socialism is pointedly different from nineteenth- and twentieth-century socialist movements, in that he envisions the medium of communication to be the binding tie that produces a movement or a community, rather than political belief, social class, or other inherent characteristics. Anyone can take advantage of the power of the internet to progress along what the media theorist Clay Shirky demonstrates as a continuum of interconnectedness. Kelly summarizes Shirky's argument well: 'Groups of people start off simply sharing and then progress to co-operation, collaboration, and finally collectivism. At each step, the amount of co-ordination increases'.[14] In Morris's own day, and even during much of

the twentieth century, socialism was limited by the number of people able to be in the collective action at once. Hence we see in *News from Nowhere* that small agrarian communities of only a few dozen people are the norm, perhaps because communication methods among large numbers of people would be largely broadcasting, rather than conversation and dialogue. What makes Web 2.0 social media such a leap in bringing socialist practices to the electronic community is that Web 2.0 tools afford people the chance to be part of the conversation, and thus part of the collective voice, rather than passive receivers of information. Dan Gillmor asserts that such people are part of the 'former audience', those 'who take it to the next level. We're seeing the rise of the heavy-duty blogger, website creator, mailing list owner, or SMS [Short Message Service] gadfly – the medium is less important than the intent and talent'.[15]

The William Morris Society website prefigured Shirky's continuum of sharing, co-operation, collaboration, and collectivism. Two patterns emerged regarding the role and aims of the Society site. In the late 1990s, the site was primarily a means of sharing information, a way for Society members in the United States, Great Britain, and Canada to communicate with each other. It was a thing 'for us and by us'. However, we soon found out that we got a great deal of email from people who were not members of the Society, but who were interested in Morris for a variety of reasons – completing school projects, identifying antique furniture, locating poems and essays, finding like-minded enthusiasts. The inquiries we received were from an extremely wide range of people, as well, including fine-art printers in London, wallpaper admirers from New Zealand, political socialists in Manchester, academics from the United States, Victoriana buffs in Germany, and devotees of the Kelmscott Press in Japan, among others.[16]

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13   Kevin Kelly, 'The New Socialism: Global Collectivist Society Is Coming Online,' *Wired*, 17.6 (June 2009), p. 117 <http://www.wired.com/culture/culturereviews/magazine/17–06/nep_newsocialism?currentPage=all> accessed January 2010.

14   Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*, Chapter 9: 'Fitting Our Tools to a Small World' (New York: Penguin, 2008), pp. 212–32.

15   Dan Gillmor, *We The Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People* (New York: O'Reilly Media, 2006), p. 136 <http://www.authorama.com/we-the-media-8.html> accessed January 2010.

16   As an aside, some of the odder requests the Society received via email are quite entertaining. As the newly minted webmaster in 1997, one of my first contacts was from a poor fellow who emailed the Society twelve identical messages, in which he

Gillmor's 'former audience' certainly began to speak up! The vast majority of e-inquiries the Society received were from people interested in learning more about Morris's connection to their own lives: students writing term papers on Morris, people who owned houses with Morris papers on their walls, artists interested in Morris's dyes, craftspeople who wanted to share their wares, and scholars organizing exhibitions.

Thus, the Society's website quickly became something of a *de facto* clearinghouse for information on events and resources related to Morris and his larger circle. While the Society wasn't always able to assist with every inquiry (early on, we often had to refer folks to their local antiques appraisers, librarians, or auction houses), we soon established a reputation as being welcoming and helpful, and we began to gain more and more members who first came to know about the Society through the information on the website and through interacting with the governing committee by email. Between 1999 and 2009, the website rocketed from twenty visits (or 'hits') per day to over 3,400 per day, and we have been able to confirm 135 members world-wide who joined the Society after first experiencing it through the website.

A second shift in the website's aims had to do with its intended audience. In 1989, the political writer Michael Harrington looked to the future of socialism and asked if it were possible to return to a 'culture of participatory and social commitment'.[17] The Morris Society site answered that challenge, not by creating a new political call to action, but by removing barriers to communication and collaborative effort.

The early website was designed, as I've mentioned, to be a membersonly benefit, like the *Newsletter* and the *Journal* published by the Society. Even though the site was accessible to the general public, the news contained in it had primarily to do with members-only events, meant for scholars and aficionados with specific and narrow interests. It soon became apparent, however, that people beyond the Society's membership were turning to the William Morris Web Page as an authority on Morris.

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intimated that he wanted the Society 'officially' to change the name of the Hudson River art movement to the Eternal Kingdom School of Art.

17   Michael Harrington, *Socialism: Past and Future* (New York: Little, Brown, 1989), p. 276.

In order better to serve those who were looking for connections to Morris, the Society posted biographical material about Morris on the website, along with images of much of his book-art and craft work. The Society's site rapidly became a gathering place for Morrisians of many interests, and the governing committee of the US Branch of the Society were careful to grow it to include new materials that helped to bring Morris's life, ideas, and legacy to a wider audience. In 2001, we were fortunate to be able to move the website from the City University of New York's webspace to its own URL at http://www.morrissociety.org/. In the process of moving the site, we redesigned it to make it more accessible to disabled visitors. In 2004, the US and UK branches of the Society joined together to co-sponsor the website.

The Future of the Morris Society on the Web

When the Society celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, it was an appropriate time to think toward the future. Just a few of the new directions for the Morris Society on the Internet include outreach to non-English speakers, outreach to young people, creating collective action in the form of scholarly editions of Morris's work to share freely with the world, and positioning the website to support collaborative communication by adding new interaction channels such as discussion forums, blogs, and wikis.

In the 1960s, the Society had a strongly international bent, with articles published in the *Journal* in several languages. In order to revive that spirit, one of the online goals of the Society is to bring an appreciation of Morris to those who speak languages other than English. Many websites these days offer 'translation' tools, but such machine translations are often inadequate. What the Morris Society aims to do is to craft or translate materials in the native languages of Internet users. The Society currently has Morris pages and materials in Dutch, French, Spanish, German, Hungarian, Polish, Japanese, and Russian – all of which were written by or translated by native speakers. Wilhelmina Savenye posits that the 'social presence' of content

in one's own language and coming from one's own peer group increases 'online communication and interactivity ... developing a more informal type of learning community'.[18]

For example, one of the Russian-language pages contains an article by Anna Matyukhina, a curator at the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, on the Morris & Co. *Adoration* tapestry currently owned by the museum. Not only does this help to bring Morris to a Russian audience – the website also provides Morris's biography and the text of *News from Nowhere* in Russian – but it also helps to expose English speakers to the impact Morris had on Russian culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and showcases the collaboration that Matyukhina volunteered in order to create the content for the benefit of all site visitors. Kelly reminds us that 'there's nothing particularly socialistic about collaboration per se. But the tools of online collaboration support a communal style of production that ... keeps ownership in the hands of the workers, and to some extent those of the consuming masses'.[19]

Outreach to younger generations who are used to the collective nature of web resources is another way the Morris Society is bringing Morris himself into the twenty-first century. In France, Morris's *News from Nowhere* is one of the featured texts in the *Agrégation* project, a national examination for prospective teachers. When the Society learned that student candidates for the French teachers' examination would be studying *News* in a concentrated way, our response was to help them to understand the book (and Morris) in a wider context. Our webpage for French readers of *News from Nowhere* offers links to online texts, scholarly criticism, and resources related to Morris's socialism and artistry. The Society also added value to the French readers' webpage by republishing seven scholarly articles on *News From Nowhere* for free use by *Agrégation* students – and the public at large.

Too often, in order to research historical figures like Morris, people need access to fee-based library databases or pay-per-use online full-text resources, which goes against the collective nature of the endeavour to place as much information at the disposal of as many people as possible. Michael Gorman, the former president of the American Library Association, argues that the collective impulse amounts to a 'cult of the amateur' that values 'the wisdom of the hive-mind' over expertise. Gorman describes an encyclopædia, for example, as 'an assemblage of texts that have been written by people with credentials and expertise and that have been edited, verified, and supplied with a scholarly apparatus enabling the user to locate desired knowledge'.[20]

Gorman's complaint is that a collective approach seems to imply that standards and respect for expertise are subordinated to a simple mob rule, in which the loudest or most numerous majority holds sway. The Morris Society's efforts to reformat, create and share content freely helps to avoid such charges by relying on self-selecting experts. Academics, students, and other informed supporters have stepped forward to help ensure that the content and conversation about Morrisian practices is informed by authority and standards. For example, the portion of the Society's website devoted to the *Journal of William Morris Studies* is now a freely accessible repository of the content of the *Journal* over its forty-plus year history. Using the collection of a long-time member of the Society, I created the original bibliographic listings, which were then used as a basis for a digitization project at the University of Iowa spearheaded by Florence Boos and several graduate students. Although it is impractical to include the most recent issues of the *Journal* online gratis, the Society makes freely available the content of the Society's official record. The website's full, cumulative, and searchable index to the journal has already produced several inquiries from scholars and researchers both in and outside of academia who want to make more use of the contents of the *Journal*, now that its contents are available without needing to enter via a subscription service such as JSTOR or Project Muse.

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18 Wilhelmina C. Savenye, 'Interaction: The Power and Promise of Interactive Online Learning', in *Finding Your Online Voice: Stories Told by Experienced Online Educators*, ed. J. Michael Spector (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2007), p. 149.

19 Kelly, p. 119.

20 Michael Gorman, 'Web 2.0: The Sleep of Reason, Part II', *Encyclopædia Britannica Blog*, Web 2.0 Forum, 12 June 2007 <http://www.britannica.com/blogs/2007/06/web-20-the-sleep-of-reason-part-ii/> accessed January 2010.

The Society is also creating and sharing teaching materials that incorporate Morris into classroom lessons for students at all levels of education, from elementary grades to advanced college and university study, in order to make Morris's works and ideas more freely accessible. Keeping in mind the aim of the early Society that 'Morris's work and ideals are of value to the world of today', the Society asked leading academics to create scholarly editions of Morris's works to be published online and used freely. The *Morris Online Edition* at www.morrisedition.org presents full scholarly editions of Morris's works which take advantage of the possibilities of the online medium, including hypertext linking of terms to related documents, comparison of variant versions of passages, and the use throughout of images, sound, and text in order to offer a deeper understanding of the texts Morris wrote, the world in which Morris lived, and the relevance of Morris's aims to our own times.

William Morris 2.0

The Pew Internet and American Life Project surveyed more than two thousand internet users during 2004–5 and determined that the internet, especially social-media tools, is increasingly supporting some of the goals that socialism traditionally does:

> The traditional human orientation to neighborhood- and village-based groups is moving towards communities that are oriented around geographically dispersed social networks. People communicate and maneuver in these networks rather than being bound up in one solitary community.
>
> ... Disputing concerns that heavy use of the internet might diminish people's social relations, the report finds that the internet fits seamlessly with Americans' in-person and phone encounters. With the help of the internet, people are able to maintain active contact with sizable social networks, even though many of the people in those networks do not live close to them.[21]

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21   John Horrigan, Jeffrey Boase, Lee Rainie, and Barry Wellman, *The Strength of Internet Ties*, Pew Internet and American Family Life Project (25 January 2006). <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/205/the-strength-of-internet-ties>

The 'public at large' or 'former audience' becomes larger and larger as the internet expands into the lives of more and more people, either through home connections or public access at libraries, schools, and other institutions. As the William Morris Society moves forward into the twenty-first century, one of its principal aims is to act as an 'information commons', linking people not only to each other, but allowing them the freedom to explore and learn from the past and from each other. In addition to the projects mentioned above, the initiative most directly linked to the goals that Morris himself sought to implement is that of collective action through 'give and take':

> [E]xperience shows us that wherever a dozen thoughtful men shall meet together there will be twelve different opinions on any subject which is not a dry matter of fact (and often on that too); and if those twelve men want to act together, there must be give and take between them, and they must agree on some common rule of conduct to act as a bond between them, or leave their business undone.[22]

The 'give and take' that Morris envisions matches well to the collaborative and collective actions of online social networks such as wikis, where content is created and maintained by a wide and anonymous network of contributors, and blogs, specialized websites with regular public entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other content. In October 2007, Society member Tony Pinkney began his personal *William Morris Unbound* blog, and on 21 April 2008, the Morris Society initiated its own blog, *News from Anywhere*, to join the social-media conversation. These blogs have garnered, at the time of this writing in September 2009, over 850 comments, producing communities of discussion focused on how Morris's idea(l)s can be put into practice today.[23]

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22   William Morris, 'Socialism and Anarchism', *Commonweal* (5 May 1889). In *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*, ed. May Morris, 2 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1936), II, p. 316.

23   See Tony Pinkney, *William Morris Unbound*. <http://williammorrisunbound.blogspot.com/> and [Mark Samuels Lasner], *News from Anywhere: The Blog of the William Morris Society*. <http://morrissociety.blogspot.com/>

Conclusion

Recent studies by the American Library Association have shown that the free access to information online correlates to an increased use of and awareness of that information in the works of scholars, students, and the general public.[24] Ludwig Von Mises, writing in 1922, predicted that a forward-looking socialism posed a challenge:

> Early socialism is marked by its predilection for a return to the simpler modes of production of primitive times. Its ideal is the self-sufficing village, or, at most, the self-sufficing province – a town around which a number of villages are grouped. Thus emerges a problem peculiar to socialism. Can socialism exist within limited areas of the earth's surface? Or is it necessary that the entire inhabited world should constitute a unitary socialistic community?[25]

Given its programme of keeping alive Morris's goals of utility, beauty, and community, the William Morris Society might be seen as almost waiting since its inception for the internet to happen, especially Web 2.0 social-media tools like blogs and wikis that demonstrate that a socialist approach to the design and content of the Society's web presence can have lasting and profound effects.

In his day, Morris himself employed new technologies in order to spread his ideas and encourage discussion and action toward creating a socialist society. The Morris Society continues to use new technologies to spread and encourage Morrisian ideals. Making information about and by Morris freely available to everyone, encouraging communication among

24 American Library Association, 'Issues in Access to Information: A Bibliography' (RUSA [Reference and User Services Association] Access to Information Committee, July 2004) <http://archive.ala.org/rusa/access_biblio.html> accessed January 2010.

25 Ludvig von Mises, *Die Gemeinwirtschaft: Untersuchungen über den Sozialismus* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1922). Translated by J. Kahane as *Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951) <http://www.econlib.org/library/Mises/msS6.html> accessed January 2010.

admirers of Morris from all walks of life, and promoting Morris's vision of a just, equal, and beautiful society are all ways to keep Morris in the public eye and the public imagination.

The William Morris Society invites readers of this essay collection to visit the Society on the internet, at http://www.morrissociety.org/, http://www.morrisedition.org/, and http://morrissociety.blogspot.com/. Using these tools, you'll find much more than the specific initiatives described in this essay, including the Society's statement of purpose, bylaws, contact information, fellowship programme, links to associated organizations, and information on joining the Society. Further, the Morris Society website acts as a clearinghouse for information about Morris himself, including

- a brief biography of William Morris;
- designs by Morris, including textiles, wallpapers, book arts, and the Kelmscott Press;
- writings by Morris available on the internet;
- information on places associated with Morris and on collections holding his work;
- portraits of William Morris and his circle;
- books by and about William Morris, including publications of the William Morris Society; and
- a bibliography of William Morris's writings.

Of course, the Society website is not merely a 'push' medium serving information in one direction only. As part of our mission to bring together different people in a socialist community, we encourage both comments and help from our web-site visitors – the reason the Society's websites and blog have been so successful over the years is because their shape and direction came from those who have used them, both within and outside of the Society.

Alan Liu makes a good case that millennial movements would do well to study and learn from previous movements in literature, culture, and craft:

Orality, writing, print, and so on: these old 'information revolutions' recently reviewed in a postdigital light ... suggest that [people] can grasp the technologies and techniques of current knowledge work to best advantage only when they have the full resources – the craft, assumptions, context, and critical perspective – of past knowledge at their disposal.[26]

And Miljenko Williams, in musing on how the entire internet is becoming more socialist, sums up well the mission of the Morris Society's website and social-media initiatives as we celebrate, as of this writing in 2009, the 175th anniversary of Morris's birth:

Web 2.0, crowdsourcing, consumer-producers ... all these concepts sit nicely with the idea of supportive communities which are able to organize themselves. Using open source tools to redefine and remove costs from the equations that large corporations would otherwise burden us with is twenty-first century socialism at its best.

Let's have more of it.[27]

26   Alan Liu, *The Laws of Cool: Knowledge Work and the Culture of Information* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 312.
27   Miljenko Williams, 'Is Web 2.0 an example of 21st century Socialism?', *21stCenturyFix. org* (1 June 2009), <http://www.21stcenturyfix.org/2009/06/is-web-20-example-of-21st-century.html> accessed January 2010.

Postscript: The original presentation upon which this essay is based was slated to be a standard 'chalk-and-talk', in which support from multimedia would supplement an in-person lecture at the *William Morris in the Twenty-First Century* conference to celebrate the Society's fiftieth anniversary. It was perhaps appropriate that I was unable to attend the conference in person and had to deliver my talk on the 'Virtual Morris' by virtual means. Although I regretted that I couldn't be with my fellow conference-goers in person, the very projects that I was reporting on – indeed, all of the initiatives that appear in this expanded essay – give me hope that the William Morris Society will enter its next fifty years as a strong voice that reminds us all that William Morris's ideas and ideals have applications in today's society. The Society pledges to continue to develop our website as a socialist enterprise, and, on behalf of the William Morris Society, we welcome everyone's suggestions and involvement.