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Feeling at Home: Gender and Creative Agency at Red House

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Much has been written about Red House, the home of Jane and William Morris between 1859 and 1865, as an example of architectural innovation and a place of artistic fellowship. In accounts by Morris's contemporaries and subsequent scholars, Red House has also been represented as a site of conviviality, creativity and youthful idealism, where a utopian way of life proved unable to withstand the vagaries of mature responsibilities. This essay reconsiders the happy memories attached to Red House and explores how the affective investments that linked people, spaces and objects were created and enhanced by a shared process of creative improvisation there. Drawing on recent scholarly work on feelings, emotions and affect, this essay pays particular attention to the gendered experience of intimacy and creativity at Red House and seeks to redress a tendency to discount women's creative agency in the household. In the web of relationships at Red House, expressed and enacted through practices of creative labour and hospitality, Jane Morris and Georgiana Burne-Jones articulated an increased capacity for agency not merely as aesthetic objects but as creative subjects.

Keywords: Red House; Jane Morris; Georgiana Burne-Jones; gender; agency; creativity; affect; emotion

> One of the happiest chapters of our life was closed this year by the sale of Red House. But it had to go, for Morris, having decided in his unflinching way that he must come up and live at his business in London, could not bear to play landlord to the house he loved so well – it must be sold outright and he would never see it again. Nor did he; but some of us saw it in our dreams for years afterwards as one does a house known in childhood. (Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, 1904)

Georgiana Burne-Jones's association of Red House with dreams and childhood closes the account of this period in her *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones* on a note of loss.[1] Reflecting on the events of 1859–65, the years of the Morrises' residence at Red House, and writing in the light of her subsequent experiences of devastating personal losses – the death of a child (which she recounts in the *Memorials*), the rupture caused by her husband's infidelity (which she does not) – Georgiana Burne-Jones

1. Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, I, *1833–1867* (London: Macmillan, 1904), 294.

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invests these years with a utopian value and significance. Other accounts have similarly stressed the youthful idealism of art and life that prevailed at Red House. J.W. Mackail, Morris's first biographer and Georgiana Burne-Jones's son-in-law, wrote that 'it was a home of young people full of the high spirits of youth', while May Morris described Red House as being 'fitted out, room by room, by enthusiasm and vigorous youthful invention'.[2] In these accounts, Red House is seen as a setting for the kind of intense economies of desire that circulate in childhood and a place where play, creativity and happiness prevailed.

In this essay, I reconsider this familiar story in order to ask what is at stake in these happy memories, this memorialization of happiness, at Red House. I suggest that Georgiana Burne-Jones's emphasis on happiness at Red House is more than simply a nostalgic yearning for lost youth, a compensatory recollection distanced from the trials and losses of maturity. By drawing on recent scholarly work on feelings, emotions and affect, I explore how the affective investments that linked people, spaces and objects at Red House were both created and enhanced by a shared process of creative experimentation there.[3] I propose that the aesthetic improvisation that took place at Red House can be seen as an attempt to re-make habitus, in Pierre Bourdieu's terms – that is, as an attempt to re-imagine and re-configure embodied structures of seeing, thinking and feeling through social relationships which foregrounded creative practices. Specifically, I pay attention to the gendered experience of intimacy and creativity at Red House and redress a tendency to discount women's creative agency there.

A focus on the experience of women associated with Red House is somewhat at odds with much previous attention to the famous home of William Morris. As my epigraph makes clear, the house – its design and construction as well as its fate – was indissolubly linked with William Morris. In the literature surrounding Red House and in biographical studies of Morris, there is an emphasis on the house as a material manifestation of Morris's aesthetic vision and his philosophy of fellowship and artistic collaboration. Red House was purpose-built for Morris in collaboration with his friend and architect Philip Webb and it was largely decorated and furnished by Morris's circle of friends and artistic associates. Mackail describes Morris's career as a designer and craftsmen as having 'sprung directly out of the building and furnishing'

2. J.W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1899), I, 160; May Morris, *William Morris: Artist Writer Socialist* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1906), I, 11. More recent scholars have continued this representation: for Jan Marsh, 'youthful exuberance outran ability' at Red House while Fiona MacCarthy has described the house as 'childlike', consistent with her theme of Morris-as-perennial-child introduced on the first page of her biography. See Jan Marsh, *William Morris and Red House* (Great Britain: National Trust Books, 2005), p. 53; and Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), pp. 155, vii–viii.
3. Following Teresa Brennan, feelings should be understood as 'including more than sensory information': feelings are 'sensations that have found the right match in words'. Feelings are not, then, the same thing as affects. We can think of affect as a 'physiological shift accompanying a judgement' or, to put this another way, 'the things one feels are affects. The things one feels with are feelings'. Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 5, 23.

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of Red House.[4] Writing 20 years after Mackail, May Morris recounts a lengthy inventory of objects that filled Red House – such as embroideries, carpets, painted wardrobes and Sussex chairs – to show how the unifying vision of her father made these objects cohere into a unique domestic aesthetic.[5] Whether describing the house or its interior, writers since Mackail and Morris have similarly traced a circular process in relation to Morris and Red House: to understand the house is to understand the man, and vice versa.

The capacity of Red House to flesh out, as it were, William Morris's ideals, projects and principles was not confined to art and design. Scholars and biographers have also insisted on the importance of Red House for the development of Morris's social and political views. E.P. Thompson, for instance, interprets Red House as marking a watershed between Morris's two phases of revolt, as an 'attempt to build a world within a world' and also as an 'attempt to reform the outer world'.[6] More recently, Marcus Waithe has considered Red House as exemplifying forms of hospitality in its architecture and design consistent with Morris's elaboration of hospitality as an ethical imperative in his later writings. Although Waithe detects a tension between social reciprocity and a retreat from a threatening world in this ideal or idealized house, he nevertheless argues that Red House expressed a potential ethical sociality.[7] An emphasis on William Morris as host, however, tends to occlude the place of Jane Morris, both in the practice of hospitality and the decoration of Red House.[8] It is something of a paradox that despite the considerable scholarly attention given to Victorian women and the home – and the more recent trend in feminist scholarship to take women's domestic agency seriously[9] – the women in this particular home have tended to take second place to the men.

Red House has, of course, previously attracted criticism for the gap perceived between the high-minded principles of artistic community to which Morris and his friends aspired and the more conventional domestic arrangements that prevailed there. In earlier feminist considerations of gender at Red House, for instance, the women of Morris's circle are represented as marginalized from the outset. Notably, Jan Marsh has argued that the women's work as models and

4. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris*, p. 139.
5. Morris, *William Morris*, pp. 11–12.
6. E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (London: Merlin Press, 1955), p. 76.
7. Marcus Waithe, *William Morris's Utopia of Strangers: Victorian Medievalism and the Ideal of Hospitality* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), p. 34. On Morris's ethic of hospitality, see also Regenia Gagnier, 'Morris's Ethics, Cosmopolitanism and Globalisation', *Journal of William Morris Studies*, 16.2–3 (2005), 9–30 (pp. 12, 22–23).
8. Waithe, for instance, makes no mention of Jane's role in the hospitality of Red House.
9. See, for example, Elizabeth Langland, *Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); Judy Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity* (Oxford: Berg, 2004) and Stacy Gillis and Joanne Hollows, eds, *Feminism, Domesticity and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2009).

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embroiderers at Red House was proof of their limited inclusion in the aesthetic community there:

> With the womenfolk detailed either to sit for or to embroider these figures of other women, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the artists' preoccupation with illustrious but long-departed ladies, safely rendered into objects, reflects the process that was taking place in their own lives, as the men's careers, charged with new responsibilities, pushed ahead while the women dropped into domesticity, relinquishing their own ambition.[10]

More recently, Amy Bingaman has taken Marsh's critique further. Despite noting the 'unusual alliance between the sexes' at Red House, in which 'men and women occupied themselves with often similar tasks in identical spaces', Bingaman concludes that Red House was effectively a kind of 'doll's house' in which women such as Jane Morris and Elizabeth Siddall were the 'dolls', 'dressed up, propped up and posed in an ongoing attempt to create another world' and excluded from 'reaping any remuneration or self-satisfaction'.[11] Bingaman and Marsh chart a simple, if tragic, narrative of the women's inevitable decline into domesticity while their husbands incrementally achieve acclaim as artists, writers or designers.

If we turn to the accounts of this time offered by the women themselves, however, the story is not quite so straightforward. Georgiana Burne-Jones's account of her thwarted artistic ambitions over a period of years is complicated by her utopian depiction of her involvement at Red House and a fragment written by Jane Morris describes enthusiastic experimentation and achievement there. Without assuming an indissoluble or deterministic link between women, the body and emotions, I want to consider the extent to which Jane Morris and Georgiana Burne-Jones were able to feel at home at Red House precisely because they were not 'safely rendered into objects' but were emotionally invested in the networks and processes of artistic labour there and, through these, imbricated in structures of feeling in ways previously unavailable to them. In the following section, I offer an understanding of habitus, drawn from Pierre Bourdieu but re-inflected to emphasize the significance of feeling and emotion for embodied subjects, in order to provide a conceptual framework within which to consider these women's experience of creative agency at Red House.

I. Affective habitus

In her adaptation of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus', Elspeth Probyn has developed the idea of 'affective habitus' to describe the long-lasting structures of

10. Jan Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood* (London: Quartet Books, 1985), p. 192.
11. Amy Bingaman, 'The Business of Brotherhood: Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Company and the Pre-Raphaelite Culture of Youth', in *Artistic Brotherhoods in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Laura Morowitz and William Vaughan (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 82–104 (pp. 98–99, 101, 100). I am grateful to Rob Allen for first bringing Bingaman's essay to my attention. Bingaman is not alone in noting the limitations of the envisaged alternative social realm represented by Red House. Waithe, for instance, argues that the aspirations of Red House were not entirely removed from the bourgeois values of privacy and property; see *William Morris's Utopia of Strangers*, p. 49.

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acting, seeing, thinking and – especially – feeling that accrue around a person or a group of persons and that generate both predispositions and improvisations in everyday life.[12] For Bourdieu, habitus is always enacted in specific social and geographic space and is, in effect, 'embodied history ... the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product'.[13] The emphasis on embodiment here is crucial: habitus is produced and expressed through our movements, gestures, manners, and ways of looking at the world.[14] Foregrounding the significance of feeling, affect and emotion in habitus does not produce an essentialized, deterministic account of the subject but a historicized and dynamic one. What results from encounters between the 'sedimented histories' of habitus and specific spaces or objects is neither inevitable nor predetermined: past gestures, actions or feelings may be repeated or new and different responses improvised.

Bourdieu argued that it may be possible, although not easy, to 're-make' habitus through processes of awareness or intention, or through pedagogic devices, that he associated with the dynamic friction that may occur between art and the everyday.[15] Bourdieu's discussion of taste as an expression of 'lifestyle', however, also shows how the 'sedimented histories' of habitus could work to preserve 'the same expressive intention in the specific logic' of symbolic practices (such as furniture or clothing) either because they operate at a level that evades awareness or because they are consciously reinforced by subjects who assent, or aspire, to the values which these symbolic practices represent.[16] At Red House, the personal histories and predispositions of those who gathered there inevitably influenced their sense of what constituted comfort, creativity and intimacy in a domestic context. The intentional imbrication of aesthetic and domestic practices in the decoration of the house, then, would necessarily have foregrounded any tensions between deliberate attempts to re-make habitus and the more durable aspects of habitus (those derived from gender or class, for instance) in which residents and visitors were already embedded. Yet what emerges in the instances I discuss is not the depiction of an aesthetic lifestyle premised on a logic of sameness – the 'same expressive intention' – that Bourdieu associates with the perpetuation of class-based notions of taste and distinction.

12. Pierre Bourdieu, 'Habitus', in *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, ed. by Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 27–34 (pp. 27–28, 31); Elspeth Probyn, 'Shame in the Habitus', *Sociological Review*, 52.2 (2004), 224–48 (p. 235). I am more broadly influenced by a number of feminist scholars who have engaged critically with Bourdieu's work especially his concept of habitus. See for example: Lois McNay, 'Gender, Habitus and the Field: Pierre Bourdieu and the Limits of Reflexivity', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 16.1 (1999), 95–117; Lisa Adkins, 'Introduction: Feminism, Bourdieu and After', *Sociological Review*, 52.2 (2004), 3–18; and Toril Moi, *What is a Woman? And Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
13. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 56.
14. Moi, *What is a Woman?*, p. 282.
15. Bourdieu, 'Habitus', pp. 29, 32. See also Nick Crossley, 'The Phenomenological Habitus and its Construction', *Theory and Society*, 30.1 (2001), 81–120 (p. 96).
16. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 173. Bourdieu here defines life-styles as 'the systematic products of habitus'; see p. 172. See also McNay, 'Gender, Habitus and the Field', p. 102.

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Rather, a close attention to the language of feeling expressed in relation to Red House suggests that a mode of daily life characterized by improvisation and experimentation was linked to a new awareness of an enhanced sense of embodied agency. Georgiana Burne-Jones glowingly described a sense of comfort and intimacy at Red House co-existing with an excitement arising from new encounters with objects and spaces through aesthetic practices, creating an atmosphere where both relationships and creativity could flourish.

Feeling at home at Red House did not merely replicate the normative pleasures of Victorian domestic comfort but marked an ambitious attempt to re-shape social relationships through a re-orientation of domestic spaces and objects. The objects within Red House – especially those designed, made and decorated by members of the Morris circle, given as gifts from one to another, or incorporating depictions of friends – were a deliberate attempt to orient thoughts, feelings and aspirations in order to emphasize networks of relationship as much as aesthetic aims.[17] Such attempts at re-orientation thus linked a group of people who, for all their differences, shared a commitment to an aestheticization of everyday life that entwined intimacy and creativity.[18] Following the work of Teresa Brennan, I suggest that the conscious creation of aesthetic spaces at Red House was a means by which the group encouraged and endorsed less conventional forms of relationship – between spouses, between male friends, between female friends, and in friendships across lines of gender or marriage – through a shared enthusiasm for creative experimentation and play in a domestic setting. The transmission of affect, Brennan argues, 'is a profoundly social thing' that may arise from 'a *deliberate* creation of an atmosphere' or from more unconscious projections.[19] Not only does a person's response to environment shape their attitude, and vice versa, but a group can also actively constitute itself through a complex imbrication of environment, interactive dynamics, and emotional displays or performances.[20] Through these processes, the transmission of affect may effectively become 'a property of particular spaces soaked with one or a combination of affects to the point where space and affect are often coincident'.[21] In the following sections, I consider Red House and women's place within it in the light of these conceptualizations of feeling and space in order to

17. In her discussion of the concept of 'orientation', Sara Ahmed argues that when bodies are oriented towards specific physical objects they are also oriented towards particular objects of thought or feeling as well as objects in the sense of aims or aspirations; see Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2006), p. 56.
18. Names most commonly linked with Red House, besides the Morrises and Burne-Jones, include Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddall, Emma and Ford Madox Brown, Philip Webb, Charles Faulkner and Algernon Swinburne.
19. Brennan, *Transmission of Affect*, pp. 68, 16, 11, original emphasis.
20. Brennan, *Transmission of Affect*, p. 51. Brennan stresses that 'transmission does not mean that a person's particular emotional experience is irrelevant'; see *Transmission of Affect*, p. 6. In this way, Brennan's account is consistent with Bourdieu's exploration of the way that habitus may either enable or constrain our response to specific contexts.
21. Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory: Space Politics Affect* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 222. Thrift is explicitly discussing Brennan's work here.

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suggest how the house marked an attempt to unsettle familiar responses by stressing intimacy and creativity over domesticity.[22] By distinguishing between the domestic sphere as the domain of familial life, narrowly defined, and relations of intimacy that could include both familial and extra-familial, same-sex and opposite-sex bonds of connection, the inhabitants of Red House attempted to feel their way, as it were, towards alternative forms of sociality that may be foreclosed when the potentially distinct fields of domesticity and intimacy are conflated.

II. Sensing Red House

The visitor to Red House today confronts a very different interior from that of the time of the Morrises' residency, not simply because of the absence of the original furnishings.[23] What is now a space dominated by white-painted timber panelling in the main rooms was then given over to dark colours and profuse embellishment (walls of terracotta, blood reds and dark greens, ceilings painted in bold and diverse patterns). Nowhere is the difference more striking than in the upstairs drawing room, the primary space of social life in the Morrises' time, now largely empty of furniture and flooded with natural light from the undressed windows on two sides of the room which emphasize the white starkness of the space. Marsh has described the original colour scheme of this room in more detail:

> On the upper walls, where no murals were planned, were solid areas of purple, orange–green, orange–red and crimson. Much of the woodwork was scarlet: door, dado panels and north window. The oriel woodwork was green with some silvery leaf decoration. The north window-seat was painted in deep reds and greens, the door architrave in red and yellow-green. The skirting was also yellow-green.[24]

Added to this array of colour was a plenitude of pattern, picture and design. The drawing-room ceiling had a floral and geometric pattern on the panels between the roof-beams, the merest traces of which are still visible. Now concealed behind the ubiquitous white panelling is a mural by William Morris: small squares cut into the panelling reveal a medieval pattern of flowers and text in the same strong spectrum of colours Marsh describes. Above the dado, wall paintings by Edward Burne-Jones depict a (never completed) sequence of scenes relating the medieval story of Sir Degravaunt, featuring William as Degravaunt and Jane as Melidor. Dominating the room, although now white instead of ox-blood red, was the large settle to which Philip Webb had added a canopy and ladder (giving the impression of a small minstrels' gallery) and with scenes from Dante painted by Rossetti on its three doors. Along the mantle of the dominant red-brick fireplace (then of a piece with the colours of the room, now a distinctive contrast to the white) is the Latin motto: *Ars longa, vita brevis*.

22. McNay, 'Gender, Habitus and the Field', pp. 112–13.
23. The house was purchased by the National Trust in 2003 and is now open to the public.
24. Marsh, *William Morris and Red House*, p. 43.

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Where would the eye have been drawn first in such a room, filled of course not only with the pattern and design of the walls and ceiling but with furnishings, fabrics and floor coverings? Given the ongoing process of decoration, did the room – or indeed the house – always smell of drying paint? And, if so, was this an experience of sensory discomfort or a tangible reminder of the aesthetic priorities of the space and the temporalities of artistic creation (*Ars longa, vita brevis*)? The significance of texture and, by extension touch, in sensing this space and orienting oneself within it, as well as the acoustic dimensions of a room gradually undergoing decoration and furnishing, cannot be overestimated. The 'triangular bear fights' which took place during breaks from decorative work in the drawing room, for instance, suggest a soundscape far from the hushed tones more typically associated with bourgeois gentility or artistic production.[25] Despite the easy informality that such anecdotes implied, it is clear that this space could also be an overwhelming sensory experience, at odds with everyday domestic comfort. For one contemporary observer, William Bell Scott, the drawing room confounded his abilities of interpretation and classification, his description jumbling together elements of different rooms into one memory of Red House:

> This vast empty hall was painted coarsely in bands of wild foliage over both wall and ceiling, which was open-timber and lofty. The adornment had a novel, not to say startling, character, but if one had been told it was the South Sea Island style of thing one could have easily believed such to be the case, so bizarre was the execution.[26]

Scott's confusion about the room and his resort to exotic imagery to capture its strangeness suggests, in this case, a *dis*-orientation, a strong dissonance between what he expected of a domestic interior and what he encountered. For Scott, the *avant-garde* style precisely precluded him from feeling at home and reminds us just how far from the conventional domestic interior this house was.

It is all the more striking, then, that women like Georgiana Burne-Jones could respond so warmly to the house, suggesting, first, the difference of perspective between those whose labour had contributed to its decoration and those for whom the house represented merely a kind of artistic spectacle. Second, Georgiana's early experience played a part in the way she responded to the unusual spaces of Red House. As Georgiana Macdonald, her early life was not entirely typical of a middle-class upbringing in that her large family had moved frequently, due to her father's profession as a Methodist minister.[27] The domestic life of the Macdonald family was hence subject to periodic upheaval and financial constraints that were not dissimilar to the rather makeshift existence of the artistic milieu with which

25. Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, p. 210.
26. Scott's account of 'the only room I remember' is named as the dining room but in fact seems to refer to the upstairs drawing room (as he mentions the 'music gallery' added to the settle). William Bell Scott, *Autobiographical Notes of the Life of William Bell Scott: And Notices of his Artistic and Poetic Circle of Friends 1830 to 1882*, ed. by W. Minto (London: James R. Osgood, McIlvaine and Co., 1892), p. 61.
27. See Judith Flanders, *A Circle of Sisters: Alice Kipling, Georgiana Burne-Jones, Agnes Poynter and Louisa Baldwin* (London: Penguin, 2001), pp. 29–55.

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Georgiana Burne-Jones would become familiar through her husband. An early life shaped by domestic dislocation enabled Georgiana to accommodate to the straitened and somewhat *ad hoc* circumstances of her early marriage, with the added appeal of the social diversions and creative opportunities that it also provided. She may well have been more receptive to the flexible approach to the usage of time at Red House (stretched to accommodate artistic work or happily interrupted by games, meals or other diversions) that resulted from aesthetic, rather than domestic, priorities for both hosts and guests there. Red House, then, allowed a continuation of the lively social interactions that her relationship with Burne-Jones had opened up, while the hospitality of the Morrises ensured a level of comfort for guests that also allowed time and resources for creative experimentation. Her lingering attachment to the house, long after her own household had become more conventional, suggests that a perceived correspondence between the experiments of art and life was a compelling part of the appeal of Red House. What to some eyes looked like a jarring excess of colour and pattern could signify for others a commitment to do things otherwise, an openness to the contingency of art and the spontaneity of everyday life.

It is in this context that the decoration of the drawing room as a memorializing of creative community should be considered. The figures in the pictures decorating the drawing room depicted the community of friends consciously altered through historical dress, setting and literary allusion, presenting back to those who socialized at Red House an image of themselves, at once idealized and playful, in which the roles of hosts, guests, and artists were merged. Rather than seeing such themes and stories as an evasion of awkward everyday realities, such medievalism was an attempt to invoke an alternative to the Victorian everyday; it involved a 'reorienting' to the present through self-consciously aestheticizing social practices in which play, humour and a certain theatricality were valued.[28] At Red House, moreover, both men and women of the group modelled for the historical or fictional figures represented on walls or furniture, a fact that a critique of women's role as models tends to overlook.[29] The models, that is, were not simply chosen on aesthetic grounds but were linked by bonds of friendship and affection and their inclusion in the pictures corresponded to their inclusion within a social circle where the vagaries of everyday life could become creative opportunities.

Such painted images evoke *feelings* at home: relationships of intimacy provided both the impulse for their creation and the domestic context in which they were to be appreciated and understood. In contrast to, say, an oil painting, these pictures *belong* to Red House: artists worked on them *in situ*, with painting and modelling taking place in the same space. On completion, the pictures remained in the space where the creative activity had occurred, both informed by and materially linked to the context

28. Bradley J. Macdonald, *William Morris and the Aesthetic Constitution of Politics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books 1999), p. 82.
29. For example, the figures of William and Jane Morris, Edward and Georgiana Burne-Jones, Elizabeth Siddall and Charles Faulkner are among those identifiable on Red House works. See Ray Watkinson, 'Red House Decorated', *Journal of William Morris Studies*, 7.4 (1988), 10–15 (pp. 13–14); MacCarthy, *William Morris*, p. 159.

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of ongoing creative and social relationships. These images do not signify a profound alienation of women from creative agency but convey a sense of the women's inclusion, recognition, and emotional investment in a reciprocal relationship that linked producers and consumers of the images. In the case of Jane Morris in particular, one might ask what it was like to be surrounded by images of oneself on walls, furniture and ornaments of everyday life. Both the form and the context of these images suggest rather different connotations from those associated, for instance, with the myriad portraits of Jane that Rossetti's Cheyne Walk house would later display.[30] More like family photographs displayed in the home that construct and reinforce networks of affection and intimacy than an object of desire for a singular masculine observer, the Red House pictures were produced collectively and projected an aspirational community grounded in the pleasures and celebration of intimate friendships.

As an ambiguous space within the Victorian home, with a sort of semi-public status as the room where family visitors were received, the Victorian drawing room perhaps always sought to 'teach' the visitor something about the kind of home and family that inhabited it.[31] But at Red House a commitment to a particular aesthetic ethos went beyond a display of taste or status to become a statement about the nature of home life as a space where excess, exuberance and experimentation could be encouraged. The intensity of aspiration represented by such an excess of picture, pattern and design renders this room as a kind of pedagogic space which implied a pattern of living as much as a set of artistic principles. Such pedagogy of feeling was not, however, confined to the drawing room. Next door, in the Morrises' bedroom, there was a similar profusion of strong colour, pattern, design and pictures, the result again of the labour of various members of the group. The walls were hung with the daisy embroidery hangings, the collaboration of William Morris and Jane Morris (which I discuss further below). The wardrobe was made by Philip Webb and decorated by Edward Burne-Jones with scenes from Chaucer, and the jewel casket, jointly decorated by Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddall, remained in Jane Morris's bedroom throughout her life. Traces of an incomplete mural, attributed to Siddall, can also still be seen on one wall of the bedroom. Side by side, these two rooms speak of a continuity of vision as well as interior design, a refusal to demarcate between the display and decoration of space appropriate to public and private, and are similarly

30. Due to the limitations of space, I am deliberately leaving aside the question of the degree of intimacy between Jane and Gabriel that may or may not have existed between them during the Red House years, not because I want to discount the erotic potential of affective relationships but precisely because I think there has been a tendency to over-emphasize this form of attachment in discussions of this circle. That is, illicit and unexpressed feeling often takes precedence over the exploration of the more explicit bonds of intimacy and affection in subsequent scholarship. See, for example, Linda Parry, 'The Morris Family and Kelmscott', in *William Morris's Kelmscott: Landscape and History*, ed. by Alan Crossley, Tom Hassall and Peter Salway (Bollington: Windgather Press, 2007), p. 94.
31. On the display and performance of middle-class identity through the decoration of such domestic spaces, see for example Thad Logan, *The Victorian Parlour: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

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marked by the improvised and incomplete nature of the design projects which were the work of many hands.

The disregard for bourgeois Victorian spatial demarcations which these two rooms suggest is also evident in the anecdotes and recollections of social life at Red House, which emphasize the spontaneous conviviality of an 'open house' where practical jokes, raucous meals, boisterous games inside and out, and temporary beds in the drawing room prevailed.[32] In these stories, Red House positively overflows with people and with feeling and the dominant note is one of happiness. May Morris's association of Red House with a 'happy group of friends coming and going' gives a sense not only of pleasure but of social ease, informality and spontaneity, creating an atmosphere in which happiness constituted a 'form of sociability': a feeling of being moved by the proximity of others and the enjoyment that results from that proximity.[33] The prevalence of laughter provides a powerful image of Red House as a space of youthful unconventionality:

> Laughter sounded from the half-furnished rooms where the young people painted the walls ... laughter sounded from the fragrant garden ... laughter over the apple-gathering; laughter over every new experiment, every fantastic failure of the young housekeepers.[34]

Laughter is an embodied response that is here transmitted from person to person, space to space. There is an implicit temporality in this laughter; it is a sudden or spontaneous reaction which registers a pleasurable disruption of the expected in everyday life. The emotional excess signalled by laughter that spills out from one space to another, from one task to another, endorses the disruption of the ordinary at Red House as an opportunity – however ephemeral – to connect forms of labour and leisure in new ways and thus to forge new links of intimacy and creativity. Studio, garden, drawing room are alike spaces of playful experimentation, happy accidents, in this depiction.[35]

The relationships and creative collaborations at Red House are thus implicitly opposed to an alienated relationship between people, labour and things. The roles of producer and consumer, giver and recipient, artist and model, were fluid and the outcomes unpredictable. Considered in this way, the unfinished nature of many of the design projects may begin to look less like a failure of vision or a symbol of ruptured relationships and may instead indicate openness: an inventive improvisation that projected a future of collaborative relationships. For example, the method and design of the patterned ceilings at Red House suggest the importance of shared labour as a form of 'affective contact' between people and things.[36] As has often been

32. Mackail, *Life of William Morris*, p. 159.
33. Sara Ahmed, 'Sociable happiness', *Emotion, Space and Society*, 1.1 (2008), 10–13 (p. 10).
34. May Morris, 'Introduction', *The Collected Works of William Morris* (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1910), I, 71.
35. As Ahmed reminds us, the etymology of happiness relates to contingency; it is from the Middle English 'hap', suggesting chance; see 'Sociable Happiness', p. 10.
36. I am thinking here of Ahmed's 'model of affect as contact' in *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 2.

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described, holes were pricked in wet ceiling plaster in order to enable the easier application of patterns in paint, as well as providing a template for future re-painting. According to Georgiana Burne-Jones, the drawing-room ceiling was painted in this manner by a joint effort of William and Jane, a rather striking image of the couple engaged in practical and yet creative labour together.[37] This technique implied an ongoing relationship between people and the spaces they inhabited, a living-out of an emotional intentionality in which contact with surfaces could both create and renew associations with previous labour and those with whom it was shared.

As a locus of hospitality for a social network newly expanded by the marriages of Morris, Burne-Jones and Rossetti, and the birthplace of Jenny and May Morris, Red House was the site of an emerging and expanding social circle. In Georgiana Burne-Jones's account, based on her experience as a regular weekend visitor at Red House with her husband, the women were active in the banter, games and practical jokes, if not the more violent forms of horse-play in which the men engaged. Georgiana retained a strong memory, for instance, of a game of hide-and-seek (a common evening pastime at Red House) in which Jane Morris was 'the seeker': 'I see her tall figure and her beautiful face as she creeps slowly nearer and nearer to the room where she feels sure [Edward] must be, and at last I hear her startled cry and his peal of laughter as he bursts from his hiding-place'.[38] Negotiating the relationships and collaborations within this affective community, however, cannot have been child's play but would have required considerable emotional labour by hosts and guests alike. Elizabeth Siddall remains a rather shadowy figure in accounts of the Red House years and the relationships between the men of the circle were also shifting somewhat as their interests and their loyalties began to diverge. For example, Rossetti's mischievous alteration of Morris's motto 'If I can' on designs at Red House to 'As I can't' – and Morris's resulting rage – can be seen in this light as an ongoing struggle over masculine agency and creative autonomy between the two men.[39] Contained within May Morris's or Georgiana Burne-Jones's idyllic accounts, however, tensions and rivalries within the group are rendered as harmless high spirits, a continuation of the practical jokes at Morris's expense that had always characterized the male homosocial networks of the group. While the stories of games, horseplay and jokes testified to a refusal to conform to the strictures of adult decorum, such recollections effectively quarantined such affective intensities from the proper domain of adult life. As the following section will discuss, this separation between the Red House era and subsequent years had important implications for the representation of women's creative work there.

III. Women's work

Oh how happy we were, Janey and I. (Georgiana Burne-Jones)[40]

37. Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, p. 211.
38. Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, p. 212.
39. See Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, p. 209.
40. Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, p. 210.

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In marked contrast to Georgiana Burne-Jones's simple pronouncement, Mackail described life at Red House as 'realised felicity for the group of friends', the result of a scheme 'deliberately planned for happiness'.[41] Mackail's description conveys a sense of earnest prescription that sounds far from 'realised felicity' and more like a coercive insistence on happiness as a guarantee of the form of the good life practiced there (this *will* be a happy house; art *will* endure). The presence of painted mottoes in several rooms throughout the house further suggests a kind of exemplary intention informing both everyday life and interior design, or at least an ardent desire to live up to the wall paintings, to paraphrase Oscar Wilde.[42] As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has eloquently reminded us, however, many kinds of feeling may be bound up with pedagogy[43] and the conscious attempts to re-make habitus at Red House may be thought of as a pedagogy of feeling: a deliberate attention to sensory experience and structures of feeling in order to enable new expressions of intimacy and creativity. In returning to the question of women's work and agency in this final section, I consider what the interior design projects of Red House could 'teach' women such as Jane Morris and Georgiana Burne-Jones about their own creative agency and about creative collaboration as a form of intimacy. Here I want to pay attention to the language of feeling in their accounts, although the fragmentary nature of some of these requires a degree of speculation in gaining any sense of daily life at Red House. The evidence for the fact that the women experienced a greater potential for creative agency at Red House lies in these accounts of their emotional investment in the processes and products of aesthetic labour there.

As William's wife, Jane Morris must be the central figure in any consideration of women's agency at Red House. If Victorian middle-class women had an ornamental role in the home, Jane Morris was something of an exceptional case: at Red House, her daily life involved seeing, touching and using objects and spaces which she had either played a role in creating, received as gifts from her friends and collaborators, or observed undergoing the process of design and execution.[44] The inclusion of her image in these objects and spaces may have marked a daily reminder of a new sense of entitlement that differed significantly from what we may imagine to be the habitus of a woman raised in a working-class context.[45] Pictures of Jane in medieval or regal

41. Mackail, *Life of William Morris*, p. 158.
42. As an undergraduate, Oscar Wilde is reputed to have said 'I find it harder and harder every day to live up to my blue china'. See Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), p. 45. At Red House, mottoes appeared in a guest room and over the front door, as well as in the drawing room; see Marsh, *Red House*, p. 46.
43. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
44. As Logan suggests, middle-class wives were generally 'responsible for ornamenting the home ... and ... were themselves expected to be ornamental'; see *The Victorian Parlour*, pp. 89–90.
45. It has been widely assumed that Jane Burden was privately educated in the period between her engagement and wedding in April 1859. After this time, she was known to be proficient first in French and later Italian, and an accomplished pianist; see Frank C. Sharp, 'Morris [Burden], Jane (1839–1914)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.co/view/article/64273> [accessed 16 May 2008].

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mode could also have served a didactic purpose – reassuring Morris and others that his wife was qualified to reside in his 'palace of art' – but the coexistence of the playful alongside the pedagogic at Red House makes it difficult either to allocate a singular meaning to these images or to assume that all viewers would have interpreted them in the same way. While Marsh and Bingaman have associated such visibility in artistic representation with female objectification, it remains difficult to know if a Victorian working-class woman would have shared this perspective: social *in*visibility, in the form of a denial of social recognition or entitlement, may have been a more familiar form of objectification from Jane's early life of straitened circumstances.

As scholars such as Carolyn Steedman and Beverley Skeggs have pointed out in different contexts, the constraints of middle-class femininity may look rather different to working-class women.[46] If class, 'as a source of subjectivity and identity – as a lived, embodied story', is sometimes registered as a 'sense of not being at home in the world',[47] we may well ask where a woman such as Jane Morris experienced greater exclusion: within the strictures of (an initially unfamiliar) bourgeois domesticity, as inflected through an artistic community, or within her earlier life characterized, we may conjecture, by deprivation and drudgery? Did life at Red House represent for her a greater ease in the world, a liberating orientation toward creativity, or an uncomfortable sense of displacement? In thinking about what it means to be 'at home in the world', Sara Ahmed has speculated that 'we might only notice comfort as an affect when we lose it' but *gaining* comfort never before experienced may surely also bring it to attention in a new way?[48] As a (newly) middle-class wife, freed from the monotonies of domestic labour by the presence of servants, and as an artist's model, surrounded by images of herself in queenly mode, Jane Morris eludes easy understandings of the embodiment of class.[49] The residual weight of past experience must have registered in her daily encounters with people and things but the relative informality of Red House may also have distanced her from the more earnest aspects of bourgeois social life and perhaps buffered her from a disorienting response to such changed circumstances.

46. Carolyn Steedman, 'A Boiling Copper and Some Arsenic: Servants, Childcare, and Class Consciousness in Late Eighteenth-Century England', *Critical Inquiry*, 34.1 (2007), 36–77; Beverley Skeggs, 'Context and Background: Pierre Bourdieu's Analysis of Class, Gender and Sexuality', *Sociological Review*, 52.2 (2004), 19–33.
47. Steedman, 'A Boiling Copper', p. 38.
48. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 134.
49. Jane's relationship with the servants at Red House is not a 'representational priority', in Belsey's terms, in the reminiscences of contemporaries; see Catherine Belsey, 'Reading Cultural History', in *Reading the Past: Literature and History*, ed. Tamsin Spargo (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 103–17 (p. 107). In contrast to her silence on the domestic staff at Red House, however, Georgiana Burne-Jones approvingly notes the comradely relationship that William Morris developed with the extremely capable housekeeper of his bachelor days, Mary Nicholson, who was his first collaborator in embroidery projects, often worked alongside the men in the studio for ease of consultation with Morris, and described herself as Morris's '"man Friday"'; see *Memorials*, p. 171).

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One of the problems in reflecting on Jane Morris's experience at Red House is that the artefacts which remain may lead us to privilege the visual mode of sensory apprehension over all others. If we focus, that is, on the images of Jane Morris in the designs of Red House, we may over-emphasize the importance of the end product of aesthetic production rather than its processes. It may be just as important, for instance, to consider her embodied experience of modelling as it is to speculate on her response to the image produced. The duration and temporality of modelling could have been a monotonous imposition or an opportunity to apprehend one's body – its capacities, posture, or decoration – in ways which provided a new understanding of agency. Whether in connection with modelling or with needlework, it may be more suggestive to consider what Jane Morris *touched*, as well as what she *saw*, at Red House.[50] As Sedgwick reminds us,

> Even more immediately than other perceptual systems, it seems, the sense of touch makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity; to touch is always already to reach out, to fondle, to heft, to tap, or to enfold, and always also to understand other people or natural forces as having effectually done so before oneself, if only in the making of the textured object.[51]

The disparity between the sensory environment of Red House and that of her life before marriage may have led to a profoundly altered understanding of embodied agency for Jane Morris: the textures and materials to hand may have differed markedly, leading to a different sense of the relation between body and environment in the terms that Sedgwick outlines. At the same time, however, continuities of manual skills and dexterities (such as those associated with needlework or other domestic tasks) may have been evident, although dramatically re-configured in the decoration of her new home. Painting patterns, handling fabrics and fibres in the process of needlework, juxtaposing colours and designs across different media, may well have been instrumental in the formation of a new understanding of self and context that felt like an enhanced, rather than a constricting, mode of being in the world. As a result, 'feeling at home' at Red House was actively produced rather than merely passively registered.

Jane later described to her daughter May the embroidery projects of the Red House years in which her husband was her first collaborator:

> It is not easy now to imagine the great difficulty we had then in hunting up materials for starting anything. There were no lessons to be had, everything had to be laboured at for a time often unsuccessfully, often not – but the *failures* were amusing too. The first stuff I got to embroider on was a piece of indigo-dyed blue serge I found by chance in a London shop, such as can be bought now in any shop in any street. I took it home and

50. As her later correspondence with Rossetti makes clear, these activities were not unrelated as Jane took an active role in the design and construction of gowns she would wear while modelling. In May 1868, for instance, Rossetti refers to 'the embroidery that you propose to put at the back' of a dress for a portrait; see William E. Fredeman, ed., *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), IV, 68, 77.
51. Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 14.

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> he was delighted with it, and set to work at once designing flowers. These we worked in bright colour in a simple rough way – the work went quickly and when finished we covered the walls of the bedroom at Red House to our great joy . . . . Afterwards we studied old pieces and by unpicking etc. we learnt much but it was uphill work, fascinating but only carried through by his enormous energy and perseverance.[52]

Jane's recollection is significant in several ways. First, while Jane stresses the historical importance of William's role in the revival of traditional embroidery (her note to May began: 'I think you have not given quite enough prominence to the revival of old embroidery'), the account relates a far more collaborative process than this insistence would suggest. Writing almost 50 years after the events she is describing, Jane conveys a sense of immediacy in her account that testifies to the passion and enthusiasm of these first projects. Her husband's 'delight' with her serendipitous purchase not only inspires his design but also instigates an ongoing process of experimentation, study and collaboration for the couple. This is not an account of a dutiful wife assisting her husband's hobby, any more than the deliberately primitive, simple style of this piece resembled the embroidery designs typically worked by middle-class women at this time. Significantly, what is represented as serendipity could indicate an instance where habitus was instrumental in improvisation: blue serge, a rough and inexpensive fabric, was associated with working-class garb – and later would be often associated with William Morris the socialist. It was not the kind of fabric usually worked by middle-class embroiderers. The fact that Jane found this fabric 'by chance' suggests a capacity to recognize things in a new context that comes from seeing the familiar in an unexpected location, or vice versa. The daisy wall hangings were an audacious, almost *avant-garde* piece of design and Jane Morris's pleasure and pride in them is still evident in this account. Far from delineating an alienated form of labour, the process she describes is in fact very much in keeping with Morris's later characterization of 'useful work' (as opposed to 'useless toil'), a central Morrisian principle where the temporality of enjoyable creative labour is markedly different from the dragging time of drudgery ('the work went quickly') and the outcome – like the process – is a shared pleasure ('to our great joy').[53]

Apart from the note on the daisy embroidery written to her daughter, the single comment concerning Red House attributed to Jane – that the coal cellar was too small – comes from a letter from Webb, apparently quoting back Jane's own remark.[54] Taken at face value, this attribution has been read as an indication of Jane's practical, if not prosaic, response to the high ideals of Red House and perhaps as an implicit reminder of her working-class origins. While Jane's long and intimate

52. British Library Add. 45341, original emphasis.
53. William Morris, 'Useful Work versus Useless Toil', *The Collected Works of William Morris* (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1915), XXIII, 98–120.
54. British Library Add. 45343. Marsh, I think rightly, describes this comment as a 'joke'; see Jan Marsh, *Jane and May Morris: A Biographical Story 1839–1938* (first published 1986; Horsham: The Printed Word, 2000), p. 31. As I have argued elsewhere, Jane's sense of humour has often gone unremarked; see Wendy Parkins, '"That Venturesome Woman": The Italian Travels of Jane Morris', *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 16 (Fall 2007), 66–87.

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correspondence with Philip Webb was often marked by a lightness of tone on both sides, the extent to which class-based predispositions inflected the construction and understanding of comfort and intimacy at Red House should not be discounted. The sensory variety, novelty and excess that Red House offered a working-class woman could have potentially been overwhelming but may have been tempered by the fact that Jane did not acquire a 'ready-made' environment of privilege and comfort: she was instrumental in its production over time, actively collaborating with intimate others in an environment where play, failure and perseverance could happily co-exist.

While the opportunities for creative agency may have been particularly evident for a woman from impoverished origins, however, the experience of the middle-class Georgiana Burne-Jones at Red House was similarly expressed as a liberating opportunity. The easy intimacy that Georgiana describes quickly growing between the two wives at Red House suggests a bond of sympathetic recognition between the women, as well as a sharing of work and leisure. Despite their differences of class or demeanour, the two women may well have developed a similar capacity for improvisation in everyday life through their experiences of economic constraint and domestic upheaval in early life: neither Jane nor Georgiana had lived a settled life of privilege prior to their marriage. Georgiana Macdonald would clearly have had more opportunity for the acquisition of cultural capital than Jane Burden but the education of the Macdonald daughters was widely divergent from that of the sons and the domestic difficulties attributed to her mother, Hannah Macdonald, probably did not pass unobserved by the precocious Georgiana.[55] What is particularly striking in the *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones* is the clear distinction that Georgiana Burne-Jones draws between motherhood and marriage: it was specifically motherhood, not marriage, that she saw as curtailing both artistic labour and the more egalitarian, collaborative and spontaneous forms of social relations with men and women of the early Red House years. For her as a wife, marriage initially opened up social and creative opportunities: it represented an expanded realm of life reflected in the mobility and fluidity of her new social networks. Significantly, marriage was not initially equated with domestic management in the *Memorials*. In a chapter entitled 'Three Households', she juxtaposed home duties and art for the women in her circle and confesses not simply her own domestic ineptitude but her lack of interest or emotional investment in household matters:

> Light-hearted indifference ... to many things generally regarded as essential lent boldness to domestic arrangements, and I remember thinking it quite natural that in the middle of the morning I should ask our only maid – a pretty one – to stand for me that I might try to draw her; to which she, being good-tempered as well as pretty, cheerfully consented.[56]

In contrast to her 'indifference' to housework, Georgiana Burne-Jones's 'natural' inclination to artistic labour manifests itself within everyday contexts, even as she

55. See Flanders, *Circle of Sisters*, pp. 15–16.
56. Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, p. 217.

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effaces her own domestic authority in the class dynamics of the middle-class household (the maid consents to pose out of 'good humour').

The 'poor little drawing' that results from this exchange, it transpires, 'was to have been one of several illustrations that Mrs. Rossetti and I were to make for Fairy Tales written by ourselves ... but nothing came of it'.[57] This glimpse of a proposed literary–artistic partnership more typically associated with the men of this circle leads into a rare passage in which Georgiana Burne-Jones openly acknowledges her own desire for artistic achievement and creativity:

> It is pathetic to think how we women longed to keep pace with the men, and how gladly they kept us by them until their pace quickened and we had to fall behind .... I stopped, as so many women do, well on this side of tolerable skill, daunted by the path which has to be followed absolutely alone if the end is to be reached.[58]

While she presents this unfulfilled ambition as a personal failing – a lack of courage or will – and imputes no blame to the men, the juxtaposition of her story with that of other artists' wives effectively collectivizes their plight ('we women'). Soon after, she recounts another failed collaboration (that of engraving Edward's designs), despite Ruskin giving it his imprimatur.[59] She then confesses:

> The difference in our life made by the presence of a child was very great, for I had been used to be much with Edward – reading aloud to him while he worked, and in many ways sharing the life of the studio – and I remember the feeling of exile with which I now heard through its closed door the well-known voices of friends together with Edward's familiar laugh, while I sat with my little son on my knee and dropped selfish tears upon him as the 'separator of companions and the terminator of delights'.[60]

This poignant expression of exclusion and loss is an extraordinary declaration from an apparently exemplary and self-effacing Victorian wife and makes clear the kind of affective investment that she attributed to the practices and sociality of art.

Georgiana Burne-Jones's account of thwarted desire holds the key to why Red House was a place associated with feeling at home. At Red House, it had seemed possible to avoid conflating domesticity – and its associated duties of housewifery and motherhood – with the realm of intimacy in the form of enhanced social relationships, attachments and connections beyond the familial.[61] Intimate relations are, of course, often enacted and reproduced within the domestic sphere but, as she

57. Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, p. 217.
58. Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, pp. 217–18.
59. Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, p. 233. Georgiana quotes from Ruskin's letter to her: 'I can't imagine anything prettier or more wifely than cutting one's husband's drawings on the woodblock .... Only never work hard at it. Keep your rooms tidy, and baby happy.'
60. Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, pp. 235–36. The expression, 'separator of companions and the terminator of delights', a euphemism for death derived from the *Arabian Nights*, was widely used in the Victorian period. Georgiana records that William Morris had earlier given a copy of the *Arabian Nights* to her sister Agnes and 'it entranced her and all of us'; see *Memorials*, p. 142.
61. McNay, 'Gender, Habitus and the Field', pp. 112–13.

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makes clear, the overlap between these areas can easily foreclose the development of new or more unconventional forms of attachment given the strong association between femininity and a specific model of motherhood. The closed studio door and the baby on her lap were unwelcome reminders of the newly constricting boundaries of her world, demarcating artistic from maternal labour, and throwing into stark relief the earlier life of creativity and intimacy that Red House had initially offered, where the studio was not an exclusive space but was 'used for living in'.[62] What Georgiana Burne-Jones mourns, then, is not a memory of exclusion at Red House but the loss of inclusion. Her account of happy memories was an attempt to keep open a relationship with her past, which she associated with possibility and agency and that remained affectively charged long afterwards.[63]

In questioning earlier analyses of gender at Red House, I have argued that the position of women there cannot be fully captured in a simple narrative of exclusion or marginalization. If we attend to the strength of feeling expressed by Georgiana Burne-Jones, we can discern the depth of an emotional investment in creative processes that were shared with cherished others, even as the strength of these feelings are most fully articulated in the form of grief at the subsequent thwarting of possibilities and capacities. Similarly, the traces of Jane Morris's 'affective contact' with Red House – the material evidence of her embroidery and paintwork, her recorded 'delight' and 'joy' with the processes of decorating, the anecdotes of her participation in games and jokes – suggest that it may be a mistake to 'domesticate' Jane Morris, as some previous accounts have done, by discounting her creative agency. At Red House, she was confronted with a presumably dazzling array of things previously lacking in her life within an environment whose newness to some extent mirrored her own newly acquired social status and identity as a middle-class wife. Economic privilege or cultural capital alone, however, does not constitute 'feeling at home' and nor does it imply that one inhabits an environment entirely free of conflict or unmarked by disjunctures in embodied and habituated forms of perception. In the web of relationships at Red House, marked by varying degrees of intensity or love, and expressed through practices of creative labour and hospitality, Jane Morris nonetheless possessed an increased capacity for agency and recognition not merely as an aesthetic object but as a creative subject.

IV. Conclusion

The customary way of describing Red House has been as exemplifying a life-style based on its distinctive signs of taste, articulated through the aesthetic principles of William Morris. As in other Victorian middle-class homes, domestic decoration at Red House was a means by which an intimate environment was created and a family's social identity was constructed.[64] I have, however, sought to re-frame Red House within an understanding of affective habitus, with its emphasis on the feeling body

62. Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, p. 211.
63. See Sara Ahmed, 'The Happiness Turn', *New Formations*, 63 (Winter 2007–08), 7–14 (p. 12).
64. Thad Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*, p. 94.

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shaped by history in material contexts, in order to suggest how the spaces of the house could be a means of transmitting affect and re-orienting relations between people, objects and spaces. In the drawing room, for instance, the profusion of colour, pattern and pictures palpably testified to a desire that this space would orient bodies towards an intensity of feeling or aspiration that could be shared with others and that would signal a commitment to an enhanced mode of daily life. In the *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, the depth of feeling with which Georgiana Burne-Jones described the Red House years decisively demarcated this period of her life from what followed by stressing a fluid and evolving imbrication of creativity, intimacy, and experimentation in which men and women were equally swept along. She harks back to a time of child-like plenitude, a way of being in the world that would become incompatible with the fixed subject position of Lady Burne-Jones, from which she narrates the memorials of her husband.

If Red House was neither a revolutionary alternative to Victorian social roles nor the simple reproduction of these, it was in some ways still 'the House of Dreams':[65] a fleeting experience of living otherwise. Morris's letter to Edward Burne-Jones, following the news that the Burne-Jones' family had decided against moving permanently to Red House after the death of their second child, is often cited as marking the end of the dream. What is notable in this letter, however, is the persistence of the commitment to community and hospitality as a means of comforting the bereaved parents: 'there is plenty of room for everybody and everything', Morris wrote encouragingly to Burne-Jones. Pointedly, William emphasized Jane as an agent of hospitality at Red House: 'Janey is exceedingly anxious that you should come and it is in her opinion the best thing you could do'.[66] Too often read simply as an admission of a failed utopian dream at Red House, this letter is noteworthy for the depth of feeling with which Morris reiterates the value of friendship and community when faced with individual loss and grief. This is no longer the Red House of apple fights and hide-and-seek but what remains is the offer of a community of affection and creative work in the face of life's exigencies.

There is some truth in Waithe's conclusion that 'Red House, even in its unrealized, extended form, did not propose anything more than a bourgeois communality based around the lives of two nuclear families'.[67] On the one hand, a middle-class house in Upton could not keep at bay the inequities of class and gender because the inhabitants carried the histories of such inequities in their bodies – in their modes of touch and feeling, their intonation and accent, their deportment and gestures – in all their everyday interactions and predispositions towards people and things. On the other hand, the creative labour at Red House also encoded a belief in the capacities of the feeling body that generated a productive tension between conventional social relations and new forms of contact between things and people that, through an emphasis on spontaneity and improvisation, ran the risk of

65. Morris, *William Morris*, 72.
66. Norman Kelvin, *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, I, *1848–1880* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 39.
67. Waithe, *William Morris's Utopia of Strangers*, p. 48.

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ephemerality. The 'astonished pleasure' that one visitor described on arriving at Red House[68] conveys something of this sense of the disruption of the ordinary that in many ways the house represented and that it is important to try to describe without over-stating or idealizing. The Victorian assumption that a 'proper house is one in which rooms maintain social and spatial discretion' was undermined at Red House, where a more promiscuous use of space – filled with people, objects, designs, colours and patterns – in many ways eschewed containment or formulaic arrangements.[69] Against the 'proper' spaces of the Victorian home, Red House – at least fleetingly – offered 'plenty of room for everybody and everything', an implicit acknowledgement and acceptance of all the messy intimacies of love and labour in the re-making – the art – of everyday life.

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68. Aymer Vallance, *William Morris: His Art His Writings and His Public Life* (London: Studio Editions 1897), p. 49.
69. Victoria Rosner, *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 65.

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