SPECIAL ISSUE ON
WILLIAM MORRIS

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David Mabb. Rhythm 69, painting 32, (William Morris block printed pattern book, with Hans Richter storyboard, developed from Richter's 'Rhythmus 25' and Kazimir Malevich's film script 'Artistic and Scientific Film – Painting and Architectural Concerns – Approaching the New Plastic Architectural System'). Paint and wallpaper on canvas, each canvas 20" x 16", 2004-2007.

Front Matter
Special Issue on William Morris

It is with great pleasure that *Socialist Studies* is able to publish a Special Issue on William Morris under the guest editorship of Dr. Paul Leduc Browne. Paul Leduc Browne (D.Phil., Sussex) is Professor of social and political thought in the Social Sciences Department at the Université du Québec en Outaouais, in Gatineau, Québec. He has published in the fields of political philosophy, social theory, and social policy. He is the author and editor of nine books and special journal issues, including *To Build a Shadowy Isle of Bliss: William Morris's Radicalism and the Embodiment of Dreams* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015) with Michelle Weinroth. It has been a pleasure working with Paul on this Special Issue – not only because of the quality of submissions he has assembled, but also because he brings such a depth of knowledge about Morris and a passion for sharing Morris' insights and works with a new generation of socialist intellectuals.

For those who were influenced by Morris in the past, our hope is that this re-engages you with his radical contributions in the context of contemporary capitalist society – perhaps one that in many ways has not changed significantly from Morris' own time. For those who are new to Morris, our hope is that this encourages you to find out more and draw new insights from historical radicalism.

Article

INTRODUCTION

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Artist, writer, and socialist, William Morris (1834-1896) helped found a revolutionary organization (the *Socialist League*), wrote its manifesto, edited its newspaper, lectured widely on art and politics, delivered hundreds of political speeches, authored romances, a play, poetry, essays, and newspaper articles, as well as being one of 19th-century Britain's leading artists and a hugely influential innovator in design, decoration, book-making, and other arts. Morris fervently longed for a revolution that would abolish capitalism and lead to communism.

In the 120 years since his death, William Morris's work has been extensively discussed. He continues to fascinate many people. His influence on his contemporaries and on posterity has been considerable in his many fields of endeavour. Yet, the unity of his work has seldom been understood. Most of those who have even heard of him know only one aspect of what he did, such as his wallpapers, his tapestries, or some of his books. Many socialists are familiar with his best-known book, the utopian romance *News from Nowhere*; but it is only one example of a literary output that fills twenty-four volumes of Morris's collected writings.

That Morris's thought and work should still frequently be misconstrued is not only the result of simple ignorance, but also of decades of political and ideological struggle. He was a major English writer and artist of the 19th-century, as well as an important revolutionary thinker and activist. Some on the right tried to recuperate him as a great artist, while ignoring his communism or dismissing it as an 'eccentricity'; on the left, some hailed him as the source of a home-grown, English tradition of revolutionary communism, who also happened to be a great writer and artist. A constant struggle has been waged to this day to eclipse or discredit Morris's revolutionary politics and to strip his artistic work of its political dimensions; but those sympathetic to the latter have often failed to grasp the nature, scope, and import of the interpenetration of art and revolution in his work.

In an effort to stimulate new thinking on the unity of Morris's life's work, and more specifically on the unity of his political, literary, and artistic views and activities, Michelle Weinroth and Paul Leduc Browne convened two gatherings of William Morris

specialists, in 2010 at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences in Montreal and in 2011 at the University of Ottawa. The outcome of the discussions was a book, *To Build a Shadowy Isle of Bliss: William Morris's Radicalism and the Embodiment of Dreams*, published in 2015 by McGill-Queen's University Press.

      To Build a Shadowy Isle of Bliss builds on the work of those who have highlighted the interpenetration of Morris's aesthetics and politics. The book focuses on Morris's radicalism – his revolutionary communist theory and practice, to be sure, his imagining of a world freed of exploitation, waste, environmental destruction – but especially his exploration of new ways of seeing, feeling, thinking, writing, and sharing. William Morris invites us not only to criticize capitalism, but on a deeper level to rethink ourselves, to explore new epistemologies and sensibilities. In discussing William Morris, we can be seen as returning to a half-forgotten figure of the 19th century. However, in many respects, Morris was ahead of us and we have yet to catch up with him.

      In order to launch the book and encourage further debate, Paul Leduc Browne organized a round table in Ottawa at the conference of the Society for Socialist Studies in 2015. Those who made presentations at that event were asked to use *To Build a Shadowy Isle of Bliss* as a starting point for a discussion of some theme of interest to the members of the Society for Socialist Studies and to people who study William Morris. After the round table, several people were invited to submit papers along those lines for publication in *Socialist Studies*. The following articles by Jason Camlot, Nicholas Frankel, Colin Mooers, Leo Panitch, Michelle Weinroth and Paul Leduc Browne are contributions to that conversation and to future debates about William Morris. Jason Camlot, Colin Mooers, and Leo Panitch have written short pieces in the format proposed for the round table; Nicholas Frankel, Michelle Weinroth, and Paul Leduc Browne have proposed longer papers.

      These three longer papers all address in their respective ways the centrality of work in Morris's theory and practice. Paul Leduc Browne sets the table by revisiting Morris's *News from Nowhere* through the lens of his concept of work, while criticizing the accounts of two recent critics who see Morris through different lenses and associate him with fascism and Stalinism. Nick Frankel argues in his article that design, for Morris (who was one of the pioneers of modern design), "was a moral and political matter, both its production and its consumption intimately if not always clearly related to broader matters of civic and political justice." Morris's theory and practice of the "ornament" was not only a critique of contemporary forms of alienated labour, but a major vehicle of a revolutionary ethics and epistemology. Michelle Weinroth, for her part, addresses an age-old conundrum in Morris studies. In the last half-dozen years of his life, following a decade of intense involvement in political agitation and organization within the Socialist League (the communist party Morris co-founded), Morris scaled back his agitational activities and built a new enterprise, the Kelmscott Press, which published hand-made

books, each a work of art that soon also became a very expensive luxury item. Michelle Weinroth offers a new interpretation of the Kelmscott Press, arguing that it was not a turn away from revolutionary politics, as many have asserted, but in fact an experiment in a new form of socialist education.

Jason Camlot also addresses the theme of education, showing how we can find in Morris's writings the basis of a critique of neoliberal ideas on higher education. Colin Mooers takes up the theme of work in Morris's thought, showing its connection to Marx's theory of use-value and exchange value, and its importance as a basis for criticism of capitalism and thinking an alternative, along the way highlighting the problematic character of Fredric Jameson's "American Utopia." Finally, Leo Panitch celebrates *News from Nowhere* and raises the question of the "vehicles and agencies" of the transition from capitalism to socialism, expressing disappointment that *To Build a Shadowy Isle of Bliss* does not, in his view, address this question.

Article

WORK, FREEDOM, AND RECIPROCITY IN WILLIAM MORRIS'S 'NEWS FROM NOWHERE'

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Abstract
Some have held that William Morris's idea of socialist freedom is a Trojan Horse for repressive tolerance, others that a celebration of physical violence is hidden within it. Contrary to these Cold-War-style narratives, this article vindicates Morris's vision of a communal system of fellowship and reciprocity as the conditions of any true freedom; we cannot be free all alone, but only together. The very bounds of reciprocity and fellowship make work, development, and freedom possible. Only in such a communal system could work become the true source of satisfaction, contentment and fulfilment, rather than of pain and compulsion, and afford every individual the possibility of developing his or her capacities to the highest point.

William Morris strove for a communist revolution that would especially transform *work*, not only through the abolition of wage-labour, but more broadly through the elimination of the division of labour between head and hand, man and woman, and town and country.[1] More specifically, he hoped for the supersession of the distinction between art and labour: every individual would have the possibility of engaging in many forms of work and of developing his or her capacities to the highest point. Once transfigured, work would become the true source of satisfaction, contentment and fulfilment, rather than being an object of pain and compulsion. The ugly world of capitalism would be cast aside in favour of communism – a world of beauty and joy. The (capitalist) "production of wealth" would be replaced by the (communist) "wealth of production" (Mészáros 1995, 529).

Like any celebrated artist or writer, Morris has long been the object of contending interpretations. As a communist, too, his words, works, and deeds have been received with incomprehension, rejection, or selective appropriation. As Michelle Weinroth (1996) argued, the 1930s provided a paradigmatic illustration of the split in Morris's

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[1] To cite the three fundamental forms of the division of labour Marx and Engels identified in *The German Ideology*.

identity between his politics and his aesthetics, as the Conservative establishment appropriated him as a great English artist, while Communists hailed him as a great internationalist revolutionary. While such divisions have persisted (Weinroth 2015), the 21st century has seen the emergence of some new interpretations. Some reflect a trend to value originality above all else; in some cases, this has led to readings that not only break with established scholarship, but are poorly supported by evidence from Morris's work. Some new interpretations seek to discredit Morris's legacy as a revolutionary and a leading source of socialist renewal, by depicting him as a violent, irrationalist precursor of fascism or as a proto-Stalinist. A recurring feature in Morris criticism today as in the past is the tendency to reduce his thought to a set of paradoxes and antinomies. The following pages will illustrate this with reference to Morris's best-known book, *News from Nowhere*, by examining two recent critiques of Morris, those of Marcus Waithe (2006) and Ingrid Hanson (2013).

William Morris and News from Nowhere

Morris evoked a communist future in a number of speeches, essays, and articles, but most notably in *News from Nowhere*. The latter begins with a report by a "friend" about a meeting of the Socialist League at which the members discussed "what would happen on the Morrow of the Revolution," eventually expressing strong views about "the future of the fully-developed new society." As "there were six persons present," we are told, "consequently six sections of the party were represented, four of which had strong but divergent Anarchist opinions." One of the six eventually leaves the meeting in frustration and, sitting "in that vapour-bath of hurried and discontented humanity, a carriage of the underground railway," muses on the topic of the discussion and says to himself: "If I could but see a day of it […] if I could but see it" (Morris 1890, 3-4). He goes home, falls asleep and awakens the next morning to find himself in a future England in which communism has been fully realized. Everyone finds fulfilment in creative work and service to others. The 19th-century "guest" spends several days in this new world, meets many people, and has several noteworthy and enlightening conversations, before being returned to his own time.

The narrative unfolds in three parts. In chapters 2 through 8, the time traveller and narrator discovers that he has somehow been transported to another time; like a tourist, a detached observer, he meets and speaks with a number of people, and is taken on a journey through the communist London of the future, all the while being introduced to the latter's social relations, ways, and fashions. In Chapters 9 through 19, he has a long and intense conversation with "Old Hammond," who explains "how the change came" after the 19th century and "how matters are managed" under communism. In the third part, chapters 21 through 31, the narrator journeys up the Thames for a few days with his new acquaintances. In the two first parts of the book, the narrator remains very much a

man of his own time catching glimpses of a new world; in the last part, he begins to engage with this new world and involve himself in it.

News from Nowhere is often regarded as the antithesis of the socialist utopia portrayed in Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. The product of a peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism, Bellamy's utopia, in Morris's words, "may be described as State Communism, worked by the very extreme of national centralisation":

> though he *tells* us that every man is free to choose his occupation and that work is no burden to anyone, the *impression* which he produces is that of a huge standing army, tightly drilled, compelled by some mysterious fate to unceasing anxiety for the production of wares to satisfy every caprice, however wasteful and absurd, that may cast up amongst them (Morris 1889a).

For Morris, on the contrary, the common affairs of society must not be left to the state, but to the "conscious association" of the people: "the unit of administration to be small enough for every citizen to feel himself responsible for its details, and be interested in them" (Morris 1889a). In order to realize true freedom, communism must bring about not only "equality of condition," *but also "variety of life."* The indispensability of art as "the necessary expression and indispensable instrument of human happiness" must be recognized (Morris 1889a). Consequently, Morris's depiction of "Nowhere" emphasizes not only the absence of authority or private property, not only the complete equality of all, but especially the involvement of every individual in useful and creative work that transcends today's opposition between labour and fine art.

News from Nowhere may at a first reading come across as a utopian model of a communist society, but even then it is a rather odd account, much of it relating trips across London in a horse-drawn cart and up the Thames in a rowboat. Further readings reveal that it is less a visit to another world (after all, it is news from *nowhere*) than *a journey of and in political consciousness* and, as such, an invitation to the reader to join in moral and political struggle to change the world of Morris's age – and ours. *News from Nowhere* is really neither an essay nor a utopia, although it is frequently referred to as a utopia or a novel. Morris himself called it a *utopian romance*. Although it provides much food for thought about the outlines of an un-alienated existence, it does not say all that much about the economic and political "machinery" of communism. In commenting on Bellamy's book, Morris flags the danger of offering a reply to the question "How shall we live then?" noting that it is likely to put many readers off socialism. *News from Nowhere* does not so much offer a model of a future society as tell how it feels to him.[2]

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[2] That same year, in fact, Morris delivered a speech titled "How shall we live then?" (Morris 1889b).

News from Nowhere is a *dream vision*, as the first and last chapters quite clearly state: "If I could but see a day of it […] if I could but see it!"; "if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream" (Morris 1890, 4, 211). That it is a dream is made most clear by the way it is introduced, by the frequent hints that the narrator is soon going to wake up, by the way in which the processes and institutions underpinning the action are not spelled out, but remain vague. The dream character of the book is especially obvious from the fact that it begins at Morris's own house in Hammersmith and ends at his other house, Kelmscott Manor, in Oxfordshire, and that the places, the people's garb, the things they like and dislike, all refer to, and comment on, Morris's own tastes and interests. This is not just any vision of communism; it is communism very much in the image of William Morris himself.

Utopias are important for inspiring faith in change ("If I could but see it…"). In real life, however, walking makes the path, as the saying goes. One always ends up somewhere else than one originally expected. Some will inevitably stand on the sidelines, as supposedly "objective" spectators, and presume to judge whether the path and destination are correct. Morris, on the contrary, believed in the importance of doing and dreaming, in the unity of theory and practice in the struggle to change the world. This is reflected in the design of *News from Nowhere* and of Morris's late romances in general, in which the protagonist by way of involvement, engagement, and participation achieves an ever-deeper consciousness and understanding. Such a reading is predicated on the Morrisian (and Marxist) idea that humans make themselves and that work, as production and self-production, creation and self-creation, is the foundation of human existence and fulfilment.

Work is essentially a purposive activity (Lukács 1980), and may be surrounded by hopes and fears about what is to come. Yet, when we are immersed in it and truly focused on it, we are very much in the present moment, to the point that we can lose our sense of time passing. In this context, much has been made of the way in which some of the characters in *News from Nowhere* seem to live so much in the present, without giving much thought to the past or the future. The people of Nowhere live in the moment, finding fulfilment in the rhythms of their physical interaction with the world around them – rowing, mowing, growing things, cooking, building, sculpting, weaving – always in balance within themselves and with the world around them. As Stephen Arata puts it:

> During the journey [up the Thames] Guest finally gives himself over, not just intellectually but physically, emotionally, and spiritually, to the utopian world he has landed in. Rowing up the river, he momentarily succeeds in producing in himself the state of consciousness appropriate to that utopia. […] Guest learns to cultivate an emptiness that is not vacuity but instead a kind of balance or integration of body and psyche. His travelling companion […] counsels Guest not to confuse this condition

with "mere dreamy musing." She proposes a better definition: "repose amidst of energy" (Arata 2004, 194-195).

In contrast with "that vapour-bath of hurried and discontented humanity, a carriage of the underground railway," the journey in the rowboat is slow, unhurried, and especially convivial: strangers meet, have interesting conversations, share food and drink, offer each other shelter for the night. Everyone has a goal, everything is purposeful, yet no one is in a rush, everything is in balance, like an exquisite dance.

Marcus Waithe's Idea of Hospitality

Marcus Waithe begins *William Morris's Utopia of Strangers* with the interesting thought that one can tell a great deal about a society by the way it receives and treats strangers. He then goes on to suggest that utopias, in the "Western tradition," "are suspicious of strangers": "The stranger who arrives at the gates of utopia is seen as posing a threat to the harmony achieved therein" (Waithe 2006, ix). He agrees with Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* in holding that "the vast majority of […] utopias […] favour an ideal condition of stasis [that] implies successful exclusion of the outside world [and an emphasis] on perfectionism, on order, on social unity and splendid isolation" (Waithe 2006, ix-x). *News from Nowhere*, however, is among the exceptions; thus, "his legacy provides the scholar with an opportunity to analyse the particular without losing conceptual or historical breadth" (Waithe 2006, x). Waithe defines the aim of his book as "to explore the development and character of Morris's 'utopia of strangers,' to identify its roots and to determine the extent of its capacity for accommodating difference" (Waithe 2006, xi).

Much of *William Morris's Utopia of Strangers* is devoted to Morris's early writings and to romances such as *The House of the Wolflings*, *The Roots of the Mountain*, and *A Dream of John Ball*. Waithe has a number of interesting and worthwhile things to say about these works. For example, he discusses the connection between the presentation of ancient Germanic societies in Lewis Morgan's *Ancient Society* and Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, and Morris's portrayal of those societies in *The House of the Wolfings* and *The Roots of the Mountains*. Waithe skilfully deploys the concept of hospitality to bring to the fore Morris's dialectical grasp of how the development of those societies also brought about their transformation and evolution into class societies.

Waithe's project is not, however, merely to examine Morris's various writings in general, but to analyze Morris's 'utopia,' i.e., *News from Nowhere*. He reviews some of the secondary literature that identifies *News from Nowhere* as a "libertarian" utopia,

acknowledges that "much evidence exists to support such a reading" and claims not to dispute it; yet he emphasizes that "in certain respects, Nowhere remains typically utopian, that it constitutes a vision of happiness achieved by means of an act of exclusion" (Waithe 2006, 144). Alluding to "the crimes of fascism and communism," he suggests that "the subtitle of *News from Nowhere* – 'a utopian romance' – invokes a literary and political tradition now so controversial as to have an unavoidable bearing on the reception of Morris's vision." Allowing that *News from Nowhere* is not necessarily "a prototype for totalitarian politics," Waithe nonetheless insists that "consideration of these issues is essential if one is to appreciate the background against which claims for Morris's unique status as a utopist are made" (Waithe 2006, 145). This appears to mean that all utopian writings in the socialist tradition must be considered in the light of "the crimes of fascism and communism," presumably because some utopian dimensions are associated with those monstrous regimes. How, one may ask, is such guilt by association different from saying that while not all Catholics are pedophiles, yet each must be viewed in the light of the fact that some were; or again that while not all liberals are slave-owners, yet in considering the words and actions of each of them, we must bear in mind that some liberals were? Waithe states that socialism must, if it succeeds, turn into totalitarianism and that Morris only escaped being an "apologist" for totalitarianism, because he was politically defeated in the British socialist movement:

> It would now be hard to argue that [Herbert] Spencer was wrong in predicting that socialism would foster a dangerous aggregation of state power. In Soviet Russia, state socialism presided over class liquidation, forced collectivization, the gulag system of labour camps and a police state whose chief instruments were denunciation, deportation and terror. Morris defends socialism in the abstract, conflating his own suspicion of engineered solutions to social problems with the wider socialist project in the hope that policy discussions, then ongoing, would be decided his way. It is precisely because he misread the flow of events, and failed to win the argument, that he avoids acting as an apologist for totalitarian politics (Waithe 2006, 149).

Beyond asserting this arcane teleology, Waithe does not in fact delve into the political-theoretical issues of a revolutionary transition. Instead, he sets out to show that Morris's "utopia" in *News from Nowhere* is not as libertarian as some people claim.

To be sure, *News from* Nowhere forms part of an ongoing argument with the "libertarian" anarchists of the Socialist League, who did not seem to believe in the necessity of any form of social regulation over the individual (Morris 1889c). Morris by contrast imagined communism as a form of society in which major decisions that affected

the many would be reached *collectively*, but in which there would be the greatest possible freedom of the individual (Morris 1889c). Waithe himself appears to recognize this:

> "It would […] be a mistake to interpret the apparent openness of Nowhere, and Morris's enthusiasm for certain aspects of the anarchists' programme – such as communes, decentralization, regionalism – as an indication that he intended the freedom of his utopians to go entirely unrestricted. In Nowhere there is no government to enforce social behaviour, but it does not follow that the individual pursues life in a social vacuum devoid of necessity and responsibility" (Waithe 2006, 159).

Although Morris depicts Nowhere as a world in which the state, the market, religion, and marriage have all disappeared, individuals are still bound by obligations to each other. These take the form of a system of generalized reciprocity, a gift economy, in which each, as an individual, gives herself or himself completely to the whole community, but in which each, as a member of the latter, receives each individual, and in which each remains free and equal, while also being one with all the other members (Browne 2015).

Waithe, however, speaks of "the gift of freedom" in Morris's vision of communism as a "Trojan Horse" for "a different kind of regulation" (Waithe 2006, 156). Morris's characters "tolerate" those who are different, the dissenters, but it is a form of *repressive* tolerance according to Waithe. However, one may ask why this must be a matter of *tolerance*, let alone of a repressive sort. It would be no less reasonable to regard it as the acceptance and enjoyment of the other's gift – a gift of difference, diversity, individuality.

When "Guest" appears in Nowhere, he is almost like a newborn, like a stranger or a refugee thrown upon a new shore.[3] As such, he is completely vulnerable, dependent on the goodwill of his hosts for everything. His interaction with them is quite unlike that which prevailed at the League, as described at the beginning of the book, where no one listened to anyone else. Nowhere is no place of "tolerance" (i.e., of "putting up with"), as Waithe puts it; on the contrary, it is a world of "good manners" (Holzman 1984, 595), i.e., rules of interaction, but not of repression. Respecting the freedom of others to speak as they wish is the right thing to do, but it also serves each person's self-interest, because each person respects the freedom of others.

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[3] Guest's first act is to go for a swim in the Thames, stripping off all of his clothes. It is during this baptism that he becomes aware, on seeing the built landscape around him, that things are no longer as they were (in particular, and most symbolically, he glimpses a magnificent bridge that was not part of the London of his time). A boatman from this new world, Dick, helps him out of the water and looks after him – midwife, nurse, teacher, friend. Guest's passage back to his own reality at the end of the book only comes just after he has swum in the Thames again, appropriately enough with Dick.

In order to grasp what is really different about Nowhere, one needs to go beyond "hospitality," to focus on *what is given* in Nowhere generally, and not only on what is given to that very odd stranger, "Guest." To be sure, the inhabitants of "Nowhere" imagined by Morris are pleased to offer each other hospitality; they do not only share the resources of their society in a general way, they are happy to labour for each other in making and giving things to others singly and to the community at large. However, what distinguishes the communal system of Nowhere is the circulation of *opportunity* – opportunity to speak, to act, to create: each gives to others opportunities to work (Browne 2015, 201ff.). There are many examples of this in the book (for example, Dick gives such an opportunity to Bob, the weaver from Yorkshire, right in Chapter Two); Guest in turn gives the Nowherians all kinds of opportunities to do things for him, to explain things to him, and to reflect on their world and their ways, and how these came about. Because he imagines Nowhere as founded primarily on the exchange of *activities*, more than on goods, the key thing for Morris is not hospitality so much as *cooperation*, creative *work* more than consumption, *doing* more than having.[4]

Revolutionary communist thought does, to be sure, have a real aporia that Waithe might have explored, but did not: how to realize the withering away of the state, given the state's seemingly inevitable role in the transition from capitalism to socialism? How can the forces of revolution change society and maintain those gains in the face of external enemies (domestic classes and foreign states)? And how can socialist state power not remain an essential condition of the transition, since the people will not be able overnight to shed their *habitus* produced over many generations by the capitalist division of labour, and since the economic and political divisions of labour will not be overcome all at once either?

The young Lukács raised this question of state power in a 1919 essay, "The Role of Morality in Communist Production" (Lukács 1919; Mészáros 1978). In it, he evokes the imperative of developing the productive forces following the seizure of state power by the revolutionaries. He notes that the proletariat would need to have a very high level of political consciousness in order voluntarily to make the sacrifice of working very hard to develop the productive forces, given that it might not enjoy the fruits of its labour for a

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[4] For this reason, too, it is difficult to follow Waithe in regarding "Morris's Nowhere as a primitive economy of sorts" (Waithe 2006, 157). Earlier in his book, Waithe outlined Morris's excellent grasp of the historical dialectic of modes of production; why then, as here, conflate Morris's vision of fully developed post-capitalist communism with *primitive communism*? Apparently, Waithe does so because he observes that Nowhere has a gift economy, because he draws on Marcel Mauss's famous essay on the gift, which discusses ancient and so-called primitive gift economies, and because Morris not only had a deep knowledge of ancient societies and their social institutions, but also depicted such societies in some of his romances (which Waithe discusses in his book). However, there is nothing "primitive" about the communal system imagined by Morris in Nowhere, with its maximization of individual freedom and its radical equality (Mineo 1999).

time. Echoing Rousseau's notorious line in the *Social Contract* (1987, 101-102) that whosoever would refuse to obey the general will would be forced "to be free" by the whole of the political community, he warns that the state might have to step in and compel the proletariat to work in the absence of such a high level of political consciousness.

Clearly, the type of society imagined by Morris in *News from Nowhere* would require the highest level of communist morality. Unlike the young Lukács of "The Role of Morality in Communist Production," Morris does not, however, regard this morality as having to exist in an institutional vacuum, in which the only options would be autonomy founded on rational consciousness or heteronomy rooted in the latter's absence. As Morris imagines communism, putting those highest values of communist morality into practice would have to have become *habitual*, second nature; yet this morality is not reified, as almost every individual in *News from Nowhere*, when called upon to do so, seems to be able to explain the rational moral basis of Nowhere's habits and customs.

As Jayne Hidebrand has argued, *habit* is a crucial dimension of the communal system as Morris conceived it. She shows how Morris opposes habit to the liberal concept of the autonomous, rational individual. Habit provides "a commonly shared level of experience – a somatic guarantee of the 'condition of equality' that is the basis of a communist society" (Hildebrand 2011, 13). Hildebrand perceptively suggests that such habit does not reduce individual activity to some dull routine, but "opens up a field of variation that manifests itself in the diversity and beauty of the labourers' productions and, more subtly, in the pleasure they take in their labour" (Hildebrand 2011, 16). This transforms and enhances the worker's body and capacities no less than work under capitalism stunts them by confining them to specific forms and patterns. The habits developed in the communal system empower individuals to engage in "infinitely complex and varied kinds of labour," just as musicians' training can make possible "unthinkably complex and beautiful improvisations" (Hildebrand 2011, 17). Crucially, such a situation could only come into being after a lengthy historical transition period, during which the transformation of the *habitat* and *habitus* would occur, giving rise eventually to new habits, "spontaneous," but non-reified, forms of thought and action rooted in long years of a revolutionary people working upon itself.

As István Mészáros (1978, 1986) has pointed out, such new habits would not be possible immediately following a seizure of state power by revolutionary forces. A state would continue to exist for a long time. Hence the problem: how to prevent the existence of such a state not only from curtailing individual freedom, but also from generating new forms of class domination and exploitation – and thus blocking the transition to the higher form of communism of which Morris dreamed? To state the problem is not to admit that it cannot be solved, that oppressive state forms are universal and inescapable. It is not to reduce the possible range of post-revolutionary societies to the examples of the Soviet Union or the China of the Great Leap Forward or the Cultural Revolution,

although those cases must be assessed thoroughly. It is, however, to recognize the problematic and lengthy nature of any post-capitalist transition.

Had *News from Nowhere* been meant to be a utopia in the conventional sense, i.e., the sketch of an ideal society, one might well wish that it said more about such a transition and about "how matters are managed"[5] under communism. However, *News from Nowhere* is not such a utopia. It is utopian, in the sense that it expresses Morris's dream, and aims to awaken the reader to consciousness and action. In the light of this, it is scarcely surprising that the book dwells much more on criticism of the 19th century and projections of Morris's ideas about work, art, and beauty (that of people, landscape, architecture, and ornament). The politics in *News from Nowhere* is not so much in "Nowhere" as in Morris's intention to draw us deeper and deeper into his desire of a better world till, like Guest, we wish to see it and live it. As Hildebrand (2011, 13) puts it: "Hammond invites Guest to habituate himself to life in Nowhere by becoming a co-participant in this unconscious social fabric." In inviting the reader into his book, Morris is opening the door to a kind of habituation via participation in his dream of a place that does not, but ought to, exist.

It is important to bear in mind the *dialectical* unfolding of Morris's narrative. The discussion of coordination and regulation of society comes up in Chapter 14, i.e., in the second part of *News from Nowhere*, when "Guest" still has a *detached* relationship to Nowhere; he has not yet truly penetrated it, nor has it yet penetrated him. At that point in the book, such issues remain *theoretical*. In the final part of the book, however, Guest's relationship to the issue is no longer theoretical, but *practical*, because he has transcended his detachment and become *actively involved* in Nowhere. He has begun living in the moment, in that state of "repose amidst of energy" evoked earlier. Yet, despite embracing Nowhere and everything about it willingly and completely, he is never in that state of repose fully: he is constantly engaged in a "never-ending contrast between the past and the present." As Guest is the witness of Nowhere with which Morris has provided us, he cannot be wholly of Nowhere, but must always remain of the 19th-century. Symbolically, he cannot partake of the feast in the last chapter, but must return to our present reality and struggle to *effect* the real transition, as must we, rather than merely dream of it. And this, indeed, is surely one of the points here, in the spirit of the Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach: political theory can shed light on the difficulties and contradictions of revolutionary change, but only praxis can overcome them.

Ingrid Hanson and the Uses of Violence

In her *William Morris and the Uses of Violence*, Ingrid Hanson reads Morris's writings by focusing on his characters' physical immersion in and involvement with their

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[5] The title of Chapter 14 of *News from Nowhere*.

world. However, instead of emphasizing the theme of *work*, she claims that a spectre of excessive, brutal, and sexualized *violence* lurks beneath the veneer of beauty, peace, and harmony in William Morris's art and vision of communism (Hanson 2013). Morris, she states, was "committed" to violence as a necessary, purifying element in the development of a communist masculinity (Hanson 2013, 163). On this view, Morris emerges as a man with a "troubling preoccupation with violence as means of establishing and expressing identity" (Hanson 2013, xxi). Even the "epoch of rest" of Morris's future peaceful, egalitarian communist society in *News from Nowhere* turns out in Hanson's account to be a "phallocratic" society, marked by an undercurrent of sexual violence (Hanson 2013, 164). Overall, the book displays in her eyes a "commitment to morally malleable violence and the cleansing potential of absolute destruction," its dream of a utopian future only possible on the basis of "cataclysmic violence" (Hanson 2013, 165).

Hanson's starting point is the observation that depictions of hand-to-hand combat and medieval-style warfare are frequent in Morris's work, from his early poetry and stories to his late romances. She questions the reason for this and finds it in Morris's refusal of "advanced civilization," i.e., the modern liberal world in which violence has been repressed in the everyday life of its citizens and the state officially has the monopoly of its legitimate exercise: "The violence of combat [...] suggests the power of the body in battle to effect change and mediate meaning. It is this power that Morris explores, idealizes, interrogates and troublingly affirms..." (Hanson 2013, 30).

Hanson's interpretation of Morris is itself troubling, because her claims about his "idealization" of violent combat become a Procrustean bed in which she forces his various texts and utterances. Thus, she interprets all of Morris's references to struggle, fighting or force as expressions of physical violence, although the struggle of the workers by no means always involves the latter, except perhaps in bourgeois fears of striking workers. Indeed, the key aspect of the struggle is not physical, but intellectual and emotional: it is the struggle against the ideologies and ingrained habits of life under capitalism.

Hanson does not really allow for Morris's own transformation over the course of his life, from romantic anti-capitalist radical to revolutionary communist, a shift evident in the increasing maturity of his political judgement and the deepening sharpness of his strategic analyses. While scenes of men fighting with swords and spears do not disappear from his fictional writings even in his socialist phase (something of which Hanson makes much), they are not the truly important processes or moments of struggle. Instead, the later romances Hanson does not discuss[6] are tales in which the protagonists must solve

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[6] She reviews Morris's early short stories and poetry, his version of the saga of Sigurd the Volsung, his 'teutonic' romances *The House of the Wolfings* and *The Roots of the Mountains*, as well as *The Pilgrims of Hope*, *A Dream of John Ball*, and *News from Nowhere*. She does not discuss *The Story of the Glittering Plain*, *The Wood Beyond the World*, *The Well at the World's End*, *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* or *The Sundering Flood*.

problems, learn, and mature in situations in which only reason, speech, and moral judgement, not physical violence, lead to the correct course of action.[7]

Hanson reads violence into situations where there frankly is none. For example, she claims that Morris offers "the detailed presentation of cataclysmic 'change'" in *News from Nowhere* and that this "demonstrates his commitment to acts of war": "His focus on the process of battle as the bearer of change suggests that it forms part of the essential physical transformation of the people from dull and quiescent to active and capable of establishing a new world" (Hanson 2013, 158).

To be sure, *News from Nowhere* contains a reference to the transition from capitalism to communism as a process set in motion by a revolution described as "bitter war, till hope and pleasure put an end to it," a war involving "actual fighting with weapons," as well as "strikes and lockouts and starvation" (Morris 1890, 104). The trouble with Hanson's account is that William Morris *did not* offer any "detailed presentation of cataclysmic change" or of revolutionary violence in *News from Nowhere.* The *only* actual depictions of organized or collective violence in the entire book concern the *counter-revolutionary* violence of the state. There is a description of peaceful demonstrations repressed by the police, involving the usual brutalization of demonstrators and scuffles as the latter resist; in one case, though, a few policemen are "crushed to death in the throng" during a rally attended by huge masses of people (Morris 1890, 111). In another episode, armed troops machine-gun a virtually defenceless crowd of people in Trafalgar Square, killing "between one and two thousand" (Morris 1890, 117).[8] In Morris's account, this act of savagery is not followed by acts of violent revenge by the workers; instead, some days later, there is a general strike – an act of struggle, an exercise of force, but scarcely of physical violence. Finally, *News from Nowhere* suggests: "all historians are agreed that there never was a war in which there was so much destruction of wares, and instruments for making them as in this civil war" (Morris 1890, 130). In other words, Morris does imagine a revolution in which there is massive destruction of private property. As he was a communist, this is scarcely surprising, but it is hardly the same as attributing to him a belief in "cataclysmic violence" in the form of killing and maiming.[9] Morris also wrote:

> I do not believe that our end will be gained by open war; for the executive
> will be too strong for even an attempt at such a thing to be made until the

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[7] For a synoptic survey of Morris's views on violence throughout his life, see Boos 2015.

[8] This episode clearly hearkens back to the savage police attacks on workers in Trafalgar Square on Bloody Sunday (13 November 1887) – that Morris himself witnessed – and to the massacre of the Communards in 1871.

[9] Morris is also at pains to stress that the revolutionaries chose to preserve many of the buildings erected before the "Change" (Morris 1890, 32-33). The passage in question is a sly wink at the reader, because it mentions the role of a "queer antiquarian society," a reference to the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings of which Morris himself was a co-founder in 1877.

change has gone so far that it will be *too weak* to dare to attack the people by means of physical violence. What we have to do first is to make Socialists. That we shall always have to do till the change is come and could only do it by preaching (Morris n.d.).[10]

Along with other writings of the 1880s and 1890s, this passage speaks to Morris's strategic, rather than psychological, attitude toward violence, his understanding that the agents and forms of violence depend on the levels of class consciousness and the balance of class forces in the given conjuncture. It is not that he desires or is "committed" to violence, but that resistance and revolution are necessary to put an end to the destructive effects of capitalism on individuals and society as a whole – and that means opposing and ultimately abolishing the state. Hanson herself quotes Morris as declaring: "I have a religious hatred to all war and violence." She adds: "Violence is not something to be sought, but must be readily embraced when thrust upon the people by history or progress" (Hanson 2013, 98, 99). That history may force difficult choices on classes and individuals is indeed Morris's point.

Hanson disapproves of revolution, preferring peaceful, piecemeal reforms, perhaps especially ones that individuals can accomplish on their own:

> While socialists such as Edward Carpenter or George Bernard Shaw demonstrated their commitment to the healing of society through attention to the health of the body by taking up vegetarianism, clothing reform or meditation, Morris demonstrates his commitment to the transhistorical, despiritualized sacrificial body by his sensual evocation of battle and its effects on the body and the mind (Hanson 2013, 137).

Like Waithe, Hanson cites that paragon of Cold-War anti-communism, Karl Popper, and invokes "the failure of totalizing ideologies in the West":

> Yet for contemporary readers, no less than for those coming to *News from Nowhere* in the aftermath of the failure of totalizing ideologies in the West, and in the midst of an international political climate shaped by charged competing ideologies of sacrifice in the twenty-first century, this utopia fails to offer readers a compelling alternative to violence. It invites us to consider the political struggles of the present as negligible in the light of

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[10] Hanson (2013, 135) in fact quotes the following line from this passage: "I do not believe that our end will be gained by open war." However, she dismisses it in effect as something written toward the very end of Morris's life and does not let it deflect her from her insistence on Morris's attachment to the ideal of redemption through physical violence.

future rewards, but in doing so powerfully suggests the necessity of violence in engendering and enjoying peace and wholeness (Hanson 2013, 165).

On this view, Morris believed that the prospect of communism justified any suffering brought about by violence in the present; his vision of equality and freedom looks shabby in the light of this "commitment" to violence. The problem with this is that there is no evidence that Morris held such cavalier attitudes in regard to the sufferings caused by war.[11] It is important to add, however, that Morris believed that "Commercial War," i.e., capitalist competition and exploitation, caused colossal suffering, that the only morally defensible course of action was to try to overthrow it, and that any violence associated with revolution had to be seen in the light of the violence of life under capitalism. In Morris's eyes, only communism offered "a compelling alternative to violence" – the structural violence of capitalism, but also the physical violence the latter inflicts on human beings and their environment: sick and stunted minds and bodies, hunger, poverty, waste, ugliness.

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the core of Morris's entire thought and work is the project of transforming art and labour, of overcoming their opposition by realizing a higher synthesis in which each and everyone can achieve fulfilment in non-alienated labour that produces useful and beautiful objects, and fills the world with beauty. Hanson essentially dismisses this by associating Morris's concept of work with killing, indeed with genocide:

> By focusing on the physical, Morris transforms war into work or even play, making battle itself pleasurable […] Work and play go together in these texts; they are not opposites […] Rather, both are continuous aspects of the same thing: the application of physical labour and the use of skill for the accomplishment of an end, whose biproduct [sic] is physical pleasure (Hanson 2013, 120).

In such passages, Hanson accuses Morris of naturalizing and sanitizing violent combat, despite his criticism of Victorian mechanized warfare (Hanson 2013, 122ff.). Ultimately,

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[11] Hanson's book concludes with the claim that "the romance of [Morris's] tales of violence has also formed part of a different set of cultural influences, bolstering a language of mingled chivalry, sacrifice and manly violence […] even drawing some of the adherents of socialist ideals of beauty, health and historical Teutonic manhood into an admiration for fascism and giving others a rationale for war" (Hanson 2013, 168). By including Morris in a vague "set of cultural influences," Hanson finds him guilty by association with fascists – people with whom he never associated and whose ideas and actions would have been anathema to him.

she writes that Morris likens the "act of killing" to craft in the sense of "skilful, creative manual work." She adds: "Given Morris's extensive theorizing of work as an expression of both personhood and environment, this idea of work normalizes and indeed celebrates killing." She sees in this a chilling connection to the Holocaust or the 1994 Rwandan genocide: "it is an idea with the potential for a less benign interpretation, an idea that lurks behind the methodical work of the Nazi death camps, or the enthusiastic thoroughness of the Hutu *génocidaires* in Rwanda" (Hanson 2013, 125).

Given Morris's lifelong involvement in art and craft, his passionate interest in the making of things and the development of skill, how could he not have understood that fighting can also involve skill? How many men and women today learn martial arts in order to keep fit and to practice self-defence? It would also have been strange had Morris not understood the allure of scenes of hand-to-hand combat to the readers of fiction. In our time, mixed martial arts, kung fu and 'superhero' movies, video games, and a host of other media featuring such scenarios of combat are huge industries raking in billions of dollars and catering to hundreds of millions of consumers worldwide. The fact that so many people find such things thrilling in no way means that they are "committed" to violence or likely to inflict it on others, let alone participate in genocide. The scenes in Morris's fictions that so "trouble" Ingrid Hanson seem quaint and naïve in comparison with things that are a few clicks away in anyone's computer or television set. In short, linking Morris to Stalinism, the Holocaust, and the genocide in Rwanda, is farfetched and fanciful to say the least.

Conclusion

Marcus Waithe's study of Morris bears the hallmarks of a scholarly treatise: much careful analysis based on extensive research and consideration of divergent points of view. Even the criticism of *News from Nowhere* discussed here is presented as half of a balanced presentation that also makes the case for the more common "libertarian" reading of the book. Waithe's liberalism is thus not only apparent in his comments about socialism, but also in his seeming even-handedness. Having said this, one must also bear in mind that to assert: "on the one hand, there is this view, on the other hand there is that one," may appear even-handed, while actually being a failure to grasp the dialectic at the heart of the matter. Moreover, to pit against each other two opposing, but weak cases (Morris the libertarian vs Morris the proto-Stalinist), does not shed much light on Morris's work.

In focusing on how a community deals with a stranger, Waithe is certainly raising an issue of importance, and never more so than now as these lines are being written. But he is also framing in a particular way the question of what a society and freedom are. The *stranger* very much corresponds to classical liberalism's imagination of the individual: a

mature, fully developed, *free* man, possibly transported to a new environment, having to find non-violent, profitable ways to relate to other individuals, while remaining as unbounded as possible by them.

In Waithe's presentation, the alternatives in the interpretation of life in Nowhere appear to be *freedom*, understood as the complete absence of any external constraint, and *regulation*, defined as repression of the individual by community pressure. By opposing a "libertarian" reading of *News from Nowhere* to one that emphasizes "regulation," Waithe once again betrays his liberal position: either one is free or one is not – by contrast with Morris's position that only the bonds of collectivity make us free. For Morris, true freedom is unthinkable outside of fellowship (Browne 2015, 207-208): we cannot be free all alone, but only together. The very boundedness of living with others also makes action, development, and fulfilment possible.

As for Ingrid Hanson, whether it was her conscious objective or not, it is hard not to regard what she has done with Morris as yet another moment in a century-old struggle to beat down and discredit Morris's revolutionary project. In the process, she downplays "Commercial war," i.e., the structural violence of capitalism, and of course *state violence*, making it seem that those who aspire to collective emancipation by way of total social transformation are the real authors of violence – as though the 19th and 20th centuries had not shown that states typically and regularly respond to movements for liberation and reform with extraordinary and unfathomable brutality; as though all attempts to build socialist societies over the last 150 years have not been hindered or hampered by counter-revolutionary state violence. That, and not Morris's imagination, is the real barrier to a world of equality and freedom.

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Article

WILLIAM MORRIS AND THE "MORAL QUALITIES" OF ORNAMENT

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Abstract
Aesthetic transformation, for William Morris, leads to broader social and political transformation. The arts of design, in particular, ought properly to be in the forefront of social change. A brilliant designer in his own right, Morris spent much of the period 1877-1886 formulating principles (he called them "moral qualities") whereby design might be practiced so that it advances the greater social good. In this essay, I discuss those principles as Morris enunciated them in two of his most neglected essays, "Making The Best of It" and "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing," both originally written for and addressed to audiences of artisans and artworkers. When freed from the constraints that would enslave his mind and practice, Morris argues, the designer might create work that both promotes and incarnates the principle of radical transformation, whereby life might be made palatable for those living and working in intolerable conditions.

> Ornament shapes, straightens, and stabilizes the bare and arid field on which it is inscribed. Not only does it exist in and of itself, but it also shapes its own environment
> – Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art*

For much of the past century, ever since the Viennese architect Adolf Loos pronounced ornament to be a crime, a disease, and "a phenomenon either of backwardness or degeneration" (Loos 1910, 290-91), the propensity of Victorians to decorate the surfaces of the things they held dearest – civic and religious buildings, private homes, books, manuscripts, and commodities both luxurious and necessary – has been a matter for suspicion and misunderstanding. Along with other new thinkers on art and architecture, Clive Bell and Le Corbusier being perhaps the most obvious, Loos brought in a chaste and narrowly functionalist visual modernism that defined itself against the Victorians' propensity for excess and decoration. The outrageously ornamented surfaces of London's St. Pancras Hotel or the Albert Memorial stood (and to some extent, still stand) as the symbols of a misbegotten "Victorian" era, in which matters

of form, depth, structure, and significance were sacrificed to an almost childlike delight in the ornamentation of pure surface.

The modernists' disparagement of ornament and decoration has had a momentous effect upon understanding of the life and work of William Morris; for although Morris himself frequently railed against what he called "sham" ornament, or a widespread "love of luxury and show" (Morris 1877, 23), he dedicated much of his life and career not to ornament's eradication but rather to its practical improvement and a finer articulation of the principles on which it should be conducted. Many of the lectures published in his *Hopes and Fears for Art* (1882), along with such uncollected lectures as "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing" (1881), "The Lesser Arts of Life" (1882), and "The Origins of Ornamental Art" (1886), stand as vital testaments to his determination to correct strains in Victorian ornament that he perceived (with a moral vehemence that matched Loos's) to be corrupt, decadent, and inhumane. As importantly, his practical works in design – most famously, the furnishings, papers, and fabrics produced and marketed by Morris & Co. – stand as exemplifications of the new decorative spirit he envisaged and briefly ushered into being. For William Morris, decorative art was indeed "a serious thing," as he put it in the title of one of his lectures (Morris 1882).

Although Morris's pursuit of a finer decorative ideal was quickly simplified in the interests of the broader movement it inspired (the so-called Arts and Crafts Movement), it was far from a narrowly "artistic" matter, of concern purely to those employed in the manufacturing and graphical fields or to the lucky few able and willing to pay the often heavy costs associated with such fine decorative work.[1] Design was of moral and political importance, Morris argued, both its production and its consumption intimately if not always clearly related to broader matters of civic and political justice. Following the lead of John Ruskin in "The Nature of Gothic" and *Unto This Last*, Morris understood that the spirit in which art was produced and consumed went to the heart of the society it both expressed and helped to make up. Ornamental art in particular had become the servant of an uneasy alliance, all the more powerful after the Great Exhibition of 1851, between manufacturers, central government, and a newly mandated network of urban design schools in Britain's chief manufacturing cities. The dominant impulses driving Victorian ornament were both expressions and building blocks of an industrial capitalism that reduced the designer to a machine and the user to a de-sensitized consumer, motivated by considerations of cheapness and luxury rather than ones of practical or moral fitness.

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[1] Working in a capitalist economy that he despised, Morris knew that these costs placed his work beyond the reach of those whose lives were most in need of change, and he always lamented what he termed "ministering to the swinish luxury of the rich." As well as the rich and well-to-do, the first consumers of Morris's practical works of design included wealthy institutions such as the Church, Exeter College, and the South Kensington Museum; while the oft-imitated books of the Kelmscott Press quickly became collectors' objects, much to Morris's own disgust.

By contrast, from the late 1860s onwards Morris practiced and theorized design along more radical and original lines. When lecturing on design, he frequently spoke directly to artisans and art-labourers – to members of the Trades' Guild of Learning, for example, or to the Birmingham Society of Artists (long among England's most revolutionary artistic institutions) – expressing the discontent of those whose creative abilities had been shackled to and by the capitalist system. In "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing," he says that he can "never address […] the subject of art without speaking, as briefly, but also as plainly as I can, on the degradation of labour" (Morris 1881, 202). "The division of labour," he writes in "Making The Best of It," "which has played so great a part in furthering competitive commerce, till it has become a machine with powers both reproductive and destructive, which few dare to resist, […] has pressed especially hard on that part of the field of human culture in which I was born to labour." The field of artistic practice, "whose harvest should be the chief part of human joy, hope, and consolation," says Morris, "has been […] dealt hardly with by the division of labour, once the servant, and now the master of competitive commerce, itself once the servant, and now the master of civilization." As a result, "contented craftsmen" had begun turning quietly into "discontented agitators," their minds "not at rest, even when [talking] over workshop receipts and maxims." Although his subject seems narrow on the surface, when speaking on what he variously-called "the lesser arts," "popular art," "the arts of the people," "pattern-designing," or simply "ornamental art," Morris consciously expressed "a lurking hope to stir up both others and myself to discontent with and rebellion against things as they are" (Morris 1879, 82).

But Morris's radicalism did not consist merely in his expressions of discontent about the system that would turn artists into "slaves" and "machines," or his increasingly and explicitly political efforts to overthrow such a system. As Michelle Weinroth has recently written, "Morris's subversiveness resides as much *within* his creative patterns as it does externally" (Weinroth 2015a, 244). His radicalism consisted partly in his practices as a designer, and in his articulation of the principles governing those practices. For Morris, decorative work was "futile, and has fallen into at least the first stage of degradation, when it does not remind you of something beyond itself, of something of which it is but a visible symbol" (Morris 1881, 179). Good decorative work possessed what on more than one occasion Morris called innately "moral qualities" (Morris 1881, 179; Morris 1879, 106). And regardless of how the practice of such decorative work would liberate its producers from the shackles of capital, its production expressed or symbolized principles that went to the heart of the broader political world in which it could be made uneasily to exist.

Those principles are articulated in two of Morris's most neglected lectures, "Making The Best of It" (1879 or earlier) and "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing" (1881). Both lectures were originally written for and addressed to audiences of artisans and art-workers. But as with virtually all of his lectures, Morris's intentions for them could not

have been more ambitious. Although both lectures are ostensibly practical efforts to suggest changes in the ways in which design might be practiced (as the modestly-titled "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing" clearly acknowledges), Morris in fact had far broader ends in mind. "Making The Best of It" begins by lamenting the aforementioned division of labour and by expressing Morris's hopes that his remarks might stir others to discontent and rebellion. Interestingly, however, the lecture takes what appears to be an accommodationist turn when Morris acknowledges that "even rebels desire to live, and sometimes crave for rest and peace" and begins to consider how the discontented might "make the best of it" (Morris 1879, 82-83). The mass of houses in Britain, built without hope of beauty or care, are alienating structures, he says, "injurious to civilization, [and] so unjust to those that are to follow us" (Morris 1879, 85). But even "ignoble" dwelling-places might be transformed so as to make them not merely liveable but the very embodiments of hope, growth, and a broadly environmental consciousness. The question Morris addresses here is clearly one still pressing today, when urban alienation and environmental depredation are arguably more severe than in Morris's day. But far from agitating for top-down change and a revolutionary overthrow of the existing social order, Morris advocates change through more low-key and purely aesthetic means – through transformation, by a radically new decorative spirit, of the "house" in which both the consciously discontented and the unconsciously "heedless" must live. He wants to "shake people out of" their passivity, to "make them think about their homes, to take the trouble to turn them into dwellings fit for people free in mind and body" (Morris 1879, 86).

On the surface, Morris's concept of change here appears narrow and limited. But in a telling phrase, he hopes that "much might come" in the wake of ostensibly domestic transformation or what we would today call *interior design.* "My hope," he elaborates, "is that those who begin to consider carefully how to make the best of the chambers in which they eat and sleep and study, and hold converse with their friends, will breed in their minds a wholesome and fruitful discontent with the sordidness that even when they have done their best will surround their island of comfort, and that as they try to appease this discontent they will find that there is no way out of it but by insisting that all men's work shall be fit for free men and not for machines" (Morris 1879, 86). Aesthetic transformation leads to broader social and political transformations. The interior designer – who is to some extent also the consumer of his own designs – is in the forefront of social change.

Much of the first half of "Making The Best of It" consists of practical hints for how this transformation might be effected. Tellingly, Morris begins with the need for gardens, which to him are symbolic spaces embodying freedom and a cessation of life's struggle, as well as an obvious natural beauty. "Don't be swindled out of [any] wonder of beauty" (Morris 1879, 89), he exhorts urban dwellers who, if they presently have gardens at all, stock them with the profitable genetic mutations forced on them by hothouses and fashionable florists. In great towns, "gardens, both private and public, are positive

necessities," he insists, "if the citizens are to live reasonable and healthy lives in body and mind" (Morris 1879, 91). This is not to say that gardeners should be the slavish servants or imitators of nature. Rather the garden should in some respects be an extension of the urban environment to which it is simultaneously an adjunct: "both orderly and rich" as well as "well fenced from the outside world," it "should look like a thing never to be seen except near a house. It should in fact look like a part of the house" (Morris 1879, 91). And it follows that "no private pleasure-garden should be very big," just as "a public garden should be divided and made to look like so many flower-closes in a meadow, or a wood, or amidst the pavement" (Morris 1879, 91).

Morris next proceeds through a series of practical tips for how the exterior of the house might be painted and the interior better decorated. External fittings, especially window sashes and frames, should be white or whitish; windows should not be so big as to "let in a flood of light in a haphazard and ill-considered way" (Morris 1879, 92); floors should not be obscured by massive, artificial carpets and should be constructed from natural materials or mosaics made from tile, marble, and wood; walls should be divided or broken up horizontally, once at most, by a dado or frieze, or better still not at all; and Morris has a great deal to say about the best colours and shades whereby the room might be decorated. He is especially interested in how colour is to be employed in pattern-designing for wallpapers and furnishing fabrics. At the most basic level, some "relief" to the pattern is necessary, some "breaking the ground by putting on it a pattern of the same colour, but of a lighter or darker shade" (Morris 1879, 102). Excellent pattern-designing for domestic interiors involves "a clear but soft relief of the form, in colours each beautiful in itself, and harmonious with the other on ground whose colour is also beautiful, though unobtrusive" (Morris 1879, 103). The principle is one that drives Morris's own wallpaper designs, which, as Weinroth (2015a, 258) has written, frequently "draw the viewer's eye back to recessed and overlooked areas of the wallpaper" through the incorporation of "subdominant motifs," such as "lateral extensions of the foliage," that forestall the "forward-moving energy" of the paper's dominant motifs.

The real core of "Making The Best of It" comes roughly two-thirds of the way through, when Morris addresses himself to the "moral qualities" of pattern-designing, which he says are "finally reducible to two – order and meaning" (Morris 1879, 106). It is here that the larger political aspirations behind Morris's pursuit of pattern-designing are apparent. "Without order," he writes, the designer's work cannot even exist, while "without meaning, it were better not to exist" (Morris 1879, 106). By "order," Morris partly means the constraints and limitations imposed by the material with which the designer must work. "All material offers certain difficulties to be overcome," he writes, but far from being shackles upon the designer's imagination, such constraints represent possibilities or "facilities to be made the most of" (Morris 1879, 107), and "it is a mere sign of incompetence in either a school or an individual to refuse to accept such limitations, or even not to accept them joyfully or turn them to special account, much as

if a poet should complain of having to write in measure and rhyme" (Morris 1879, 106). The artist who would be free of formal and material constraints is like the architect who would be liberated from the properties of bricks, concrete, or the law of gravity. "Every material […] imposes certain limitations within which the craftsman must work," Morris explains elsewhere, but far from being "hindrances to beauty," these limitations are "incitements to its attainment." Delight in skill lies at the root of all art, and material constraints represent "the wall of order against vagueness, and the door of order for imagination" (Morris 1881, 181). But while Morris advocates a rigorous and self-conscious materialism in art, it is clear too that, for Morris, the designer's relation to his material is fraught with political symbolism: "Up to a certain point, you must be the master of your material, but you must never be so much the master of your material as to turn it surly, so to say. You must not make it your slave, or presently you will be a slave also" (Morris 1879, 107-8). Certainly designers should "master" their material to make it "express a meaning" and "serve" beauty, "but if you go beyond that merely to make people stare at your dexterity in dealing with a difficult thing, you have forgotten art along with the rights of your material" (Morris 1879, 108). Mastery, slavery, rights. Design-work is a microcosm of the co-operativeness and mutual respect without which no work of any value or meaning might be done in a stratified society.

The moral quality of "order" derives also from the form of the pattern that the designer creates. One of the chief reasons why Morris insists upon designs that incorporate "a recurring pattern […] constructed on a geometrical basis" is that such designs express a latent political symbolism: "every line should have its due growth, and be traceable to its beginning" (Morris 1879, 109). Moreover "no stem should be so far from its parent stock as to look weak or wavering. Mutual support and unceasing progress distinguish real and natural order from its mockery, pedantic tyranny" (Morris 1879, 110). As Weinroth has written (2015a, 250), design conducted along these lines is the "graphic index of an egalitarian social philosophy," an affirmation of non-hierarchical social arrangements "in which no central figure dominates the ground" and, even within Morris's beloved landscapes of flora and fauna "no one shape or representation, prevails." Equally the relation of stem to "parent stock" in the formation of floriated design patterns is a symbol of the "support" and "unceasing progress" without which life itself is impossible. Secondary forms, represented florally in Morris's wallpapers as new growths or offshoots (buds, blossoms, fully-formed flowers, fruits, and so forth), both depend upon and surpass the "parent" forms from which they derive. According to Weinroth (2015a, 255), "resisting static repetition, Morris's wallpaper patterns compel the viewer's layered perspective […] to confront hitherto unnoticed content, the sudden appearance of the 'wondrously' new." Weinroth is correct that, like the metrics of Morris's poetry, the patterns of Morris's wallpaper designs are a form of "graphic choreography," generating a "rhythm" that "brings the whirring perspectives of frenzied life to a halt, energizing the perceptual senses to crave more time, to linger with the unexpected, and to break down

perceptions" (Weinroth 2015a, 251). But Morris's pattern designs also emphasize the dynamics of forward-moving growth and change, built not on rupture and division but on "natural" and modest increments whereby the new both replicates and revises the old. As Morris himself puts it (Morris 1881, 199), "rational growth is necessary to all patterns, or at least the hint of such growth." All pattern-making involves repetition and recurring figures, but "the noblest are those where one thing grows visibly and necessarily from another." Moreover such growth should be "strong and crisp," never "thready or flabby," and even where a line of pattern ends "it should look as if it had plenty of capacity for more growth if so it would." Far from evolving from "fixed postulates," says the French theorist and aesthetician Henri Focillon, "ornament creates various new geometries even at the heart of geometry itself" (Focillon 1934, 94). It renews life through the ceaseless dialectic of repetition and variation.

This emphasis upon forward-moving growth and change effectively constitutes the second moral quality of design. To be sure, when he writes that "the second moral quality of design [is] meaning" and that "no pattern should be without some sort of meaning" (Morris 1879, 110-111), Morris describes this attribute in abstract and non-specific ways, perhaps deliberately highlighting the hermeneutic problem ("meaning") involved in the decipherment and valuation of any decorative design. It quickly becomes clear, however, that Morris means vital growth and change, which for him have "a body and a visible existence" only when "invention and imagination [submit] to the bonds of order." Far from displaying a reckless disregard for formal relationships among the elements of design, the work of the fertile imagination will "grow on and on, one thing leading to another, as it fares with a beautiful tree" (Morris 1879, 110). This is not to say that the designer must show a slavish devotion to those decorative forms that come down to us traditionally as a result of customs, milieux, or local and national traditions.[2] The designer will become merely the slave of tradition, says Morris, if the older forms he inherits are "servilely copied, without change, the token of life." All art is a "compact of effort, of failure and of hope," Morris writes, and "we cannot but think that somewhere perfection lies ahead, as we look anxiously for the better thing that is to come from the good" (Morris 1879, 111). Art without "hope of change" is not art at all, for it will weary its most steadfast admirers while failing to inspire future creators of art.

A hope of change also lies at the heart of "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing," first delivered two years after "Making The Best of It," which makes some subtle refinements to the earlier lecture. Design satisfies a physical necessity, Morris begins by saying. People have always craved what to some of them doubtless seems an absurd superfluity in life. The urge to beautify one's clothing, living-environment, or even the very surfaces of one's body for the sake of beauty and richness alone is an almost universal need, perceptible in

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[2] This was the dominant idea of the so-called "South Kensington" system, enshrined in Owen Jones's *Grammar of Ornament* (1856).

cultures otherwise widely different. The best art, Morris goes on to say more contentiously, consists of "the pictured representation of men's imaginings," of stories that "tell of men's aspirations for more than material life can give them, their struggles for the future welfare of their race, their unselfish love, their unrequired service." Yet pictorial and narrative art, while "stirring to men's passions and aspirations," hardly represents a basis for a theory of design. Its very greatness makes it "a thing to be handled carefully" (Morris 1881, 176). Its capacity to arouse emotion and desire eventually "wearies us body and soul," for we cannot be moved every hour of the day by "tragic emotions." It is "not so good to have the best art for ever under our eyes" (Morris 1881, 177), concludes Morris, like a weary PhD student, "though it is abundantly good that we should be able to get at it from time to time."

A more promising basis for design lies in a "lesser" art, one that is "suggestive rather than imitative." More fully integrated than the best art into the rhythms of our daily life, "lesser" art "surround[s] our common workaday or restful times," Morris says, while constantly reminding us "of the outward face of the earth […] or of man passing his days between work and rest." Moreover it "sets our minds and memories at work easily creating" the things of which it reminds us (Morris 1881, 177). Certainly it might not dispense with representation entirely. But what representation it possesses will not be scientific and will be imbued with soul "by the efforts of men forced by the limits of order and the necessities of art" (Morris 1881, 178). Its vitality will derive in part from its inbuilt consciousness and exploitation of its own material constraints. In the jargon of the Victorians, imitation or representation will be "conventionalized" and made subject to those conditions exerted both by the material and the purpose that the work must serve. While it imposes obvious limits on any direct imitation of nature, this "working in materials" – which is "the *raison d'être* of all pattern-work" adds Morris, in an important aside – is precisely what "drives it still more decidedly to appeal to the imagination" (Morris 1881, 182). Pattern-work may incorporate "certain beautiful and natural forms," drawn from the world around us, but to a reasonable and imaginative person, they "will remind him not only of the part of nature which, to his mind at least, they represent, but also of much that lies beyond that part" (Morris 1881, 181). We must be a "law to ourselves," Morris writes when speaking of pottery and tile-designs, creating decorative artworks that "will at once surprise and please people, which will take hold of their eyes as something new, and force them to look at it" (Morris 1881, 198). A look of "satisfying mystery […] is an essential in all patterned goods," he writes (Morris 1881, 191).

Once again, the core idea here is that art should express and sustain hope for change, and for this reason decoration is "futile […] when it does not remind you of something beyond itself." Nonetheless Morris is careful to circumscribe limits so that the imagination does not descend into meaningless extravagance. As well as being beautiful, the decorative ideal embodied in a given design should be "possible for us to get." Far from inspiring discontent and being a source of discouragement, it should instil hope and

should "not drive us either into unrest or into callousness." There should be nothing meretricious or self-consciously technical about the design: it should be rooted in a skill which is easily attainable and "which can be done by a great many people without too much difficulty and with pleasure" (Morris 1881, 179). And finally while it has the strong "impress of human imagination" upon it, there should appear nothing whimsical, excessive, or overly fanciful about it. Whatever skill it embodies should be "workmanlike" and "considerate," allowing neither the brain nor the hand to be "over-taxed." The designer won't spare his labour when necessary, but by the same token he won't waste it or make his work display any "commercial trickery sustained by laborious botching" (Morris 1881, 179).

Before I consider these elucidations of the moral properties of decoration in a broader light, a word is in order on the spirit in which Morris advances his ideas. In both of the lectures I have been discussing, Morris is conscious that he is speaking to audiences of artisans and workers, and he is correspondingly careful not to appear over-dogmatic. "Will you look upon me as a craftsman who shares certain impulses with many others?" he asks his audience in "Making The Best of It": "so looking on me, you may afford perhaps to be more indulgent to me if I seem to dogmatize over much" (Morris 1879, 81-82). Similarly in "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing," delivered at the Working Men's College, Morris is conscious of the danger of over-taxing the patience of his audience: before enumerating the moral qualities of art, he begs leave for "one last word on them before we deal with the material or technical part" (Morris 1881, 179); and he also asks leave to "say a little on the subject of the relief of patterns" before passing to the less theoretical question of "the use to which these forms of pattern may be put" (Morris 1881, 186). The importance of Morris's sympathy with his audiences' practical concerns can hardly be overstated, for Morris's discussion of ornament's moral properties goes hand and hand with a series of practical discussions of the applications to which his ideas might be put. Just as large parts of "Making The Best of It" constitute a detailed visual tour of the house that is to be decorated, large parts of "Some Hints on Pattern Designing" consist in a survey of the "chief crafts in which surface patterns (and chiefly recurring ones) are used," so as to note "some of the limitations which necessity and reason impose," while simultaneously showing "how those limitations may be made helps, and not hindrances" (Morris 1881, 189-190). Morris duly surveys the arts of wallpaper and fabric manufacture, carpet- and tapestry-design and weaving, embroidery, and pottery in order to show how his ideas might be applied. In wallpaper-making, colours should be "modest" and bounded by a "definite outline," while the "construction" of the pattern should be masked, so as "to prevent people from counting the repeats" (Morris 1881, 190-191). Brighter dyes might be used in cloths for furnishing, since the latter generally fall into folds or turns round furniture, and here designers need not be anxious about masking the pattern's structure. Carpet-designs should be "quite flat" and should give "no more at least than the merest hint of one plane behind another," while

"every little bit of surface must have its own individual beauty of material and colour" (Morris 1881, 195). And so on. These practical elements of Morris's design lectures are perhaps the least appealing to intellectuals, but it is easy to see how they inspired Morris's first audiences. Along with Morris's own practical efforts in design, they did much to bring about the foundation of Arts and Crafts guilds such as the Century Guild, the Art Workers Guild, and the Guild of Handicraft.

How radical are Morris's assertions and demonstrations of the moral qualities of design? In one sense, the question begs for an act of historical imagination of the kind that Morris was forever asking his own first audiences and readers to make. In our own time, industrial and interior design has been wholly commodified to a point at which it is virtually invisible or a mere "given" (although it is nonetheless a critical backdrop against which we live out our lives).[3] If we want to address Morris's radicalism, we need to recall a time when capitalists, liberals, and socialists alike attached the highest ideals to design, many of them believing that the imperatives of automation and the market could be successfully resisted through design. It is important to recall too that Morris himself expressed suspicion about the very concept of radicalism: a capitalist will call an artist a "radical of radicals," he writes, because in his insistence upon being treated as a workman, not an operative, the artist will be "mere grit and friction in the wheels of the money-grinding machine." Such a man "will stop the machine perhaps," Morris, goes on to say, "but it is only through him that you can have art, i.e., civilization unmaimed" (Morris 1879, 116). It is typical of Morris to insist on no separation between political principle, or effect, and artistic practice. The artist's radicalism consists finally in his adherence and fidelity to his art.

For Morris the term *radicalism* was a tool of the ruling class (a "radical of radicals" means "a troublesome fellow," he writes [Morris 1879, 116]; "what are you going to get by remaining mere radicals?," he pointedly asks the self-professed "radical" wing of the Liberal party [Morris 1884, 47); and even in disparaging the term, Morris uses it in its modern and widely-accepted adjectival sense of "advocating thorough or far-reaching political or social reform" or "characterized by independence of or departure from what is usual or traditional: progressive, unorthodox or traditional."[4] But as Weinroth (2015b, 18) has written, the term *radical* is "polysemic and highly contested" and there exists another, less well known definition that presses urgently on how we might value Morris's

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[3] "Good design is unobtrusive," says the contemporary designer Dieter Rams, one of the most acclaimed and influential designers living today: "products fulfilling a purpose are like tools. They are neither decorative objects nor works of art. Their design should therefore be both neutral and restrained" ("SFMOMA Presents Less and More: The Design Ethos of Dieter Rams," https://www.sfmoma.org/press/release/sfmoma-presents-less-and-more-the-design-ethos-of/).

[4] "Radical," *Oxford English Dictionary*. Towards the end of his life, Morris scorned his own "brief period of political radicalism" as a mere "transitional" period, in which he had seen his ideal clearly enough but had had no hope that it might be realized (Morris 1894). My thanks to Paul Leduc Browne for this reference.

theories about design. The first adjectival definition of *radical* listed in OED is "of or relating to a root or roots"; and OED also lists a subsidiary definition meaning "fundamental to or inherent in the natural processes of life, vital" (as in the medieval concept of *radical humours* or the *radical moistures* of an organic body). Although Morris cannot have intended it, both these definitions apply aptly to Morris's arguments about the moral properties of ornament. Like the fluids, gases, and minerals that make life possible, art is (or ought to be) the bedrock on which we live out our lives. Far from being a matter superfluous to larger debates about justice and politics, our immediate living environment is at once a symbolic expression of the values we hold dear and a repository of "affect" from which we (perhaps unconsciously) draw hope, disappointment, or encouragement as we "pass our days between work and rest." Interior design, after all, is not simply seen but *felt*. Whether misbegotten or inspired along Morris's own lines, design is fundamental to the processes of life. It is surely no accident that, at a time when designers such as Owen Jones and Christopher Dresser, associated with the South Kensington School, favoured the geometrical abstractions of Moorish ornament, or the "conventionalizing" of form to a point at which its basis in any imitation or representation of nature was impossible to discern, Morris emphasized pattern-making rooted in (though by no means enslaved to) the forms and colours of the natural world, which for him embody the principles of life and growth. As Caroline Arscott has convincingly shown, the depth of his designs "is not just deployed for the purpose of naturalistic expression but... is crucial for the activation of... meanings associated with the grand struggles of human existence" (Arscott 2008, 51). In the simplest and most literal sense, Morris is *radical* because his decorations foreground the growth of roots, buds, and the rising of sap – what Arscott calls "a unity of living substance" (Arscott 2008, 97) – thereby reminding us constantly of what it means to live. "To be radical is to grasp things by the root. But for man the root is man himself" (Marx 1843, 251).[5]

Nonetheless, Morris's decorative designs and theories do not allow us to accept them wholly on their own terms, as static representations of some pastoral, pre-industrial ideal. Rather Morris insists repeatedly that design exists in dialectical tension with life as it is presently constituted. He urges his fellow-Victorians to develop an art that is *decorative,* one which saturates the quotidian world of daily life, not in order that it might "content us" but rather "to make us long for more," while recognizing that this longing in turn "drives us into trying to spread art and the longing for art." The practice of decorative art, in other words, is a rebellion that gives "hope of victory." By propagating decorative art, Morris hopes that "a great many men will have enough of art to see how little they have, and how much they might better their lives if every man had his due share of art." Is this "too extravagant a hope?" Morris rhetorically asks, in the final paragraph of "Making The Best of It" (Morris 1879, 118). Without a doubt, it is a radical hope.

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[5] My thanks to Paul Leduc Browne for this reference.

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Article

REINVENTING SOCIALIST EDUCATION:
WILLIAM MORRIS'S KELMSCOTT PRESS

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Abstract

In 1889, following ideological tussles with his Anarchist comrades, William Morris was stripped of his role as editor of Commonweal, the Socialist League's propagandist paper. In 1891, having withdrawn from the League, he immersed himself in the production of decorative books at his newly formed workshop, the Kelmscott Press. This turn from "official" activism to intensive aesthetic activity has fascinated countless scholars, in particular those who have viewed Morris as a revolutionary socialist. To them, the Kelmscott venture has seemed inscrutable. How could his apparently aestheticist post-"militant" phase crown his years of unflagging activism?

In addressing this question, I read the Kelmscott project dialectically: both as Morris's rejection of Socialist-League-style propaganda and as the creative offspring of his intensifying discontent with the League's fractiousness. Discernible in this accruing disenchantment is Morris's source material for consummating a radically new form of socialist education, concretized in the praxis of the Kelmscott Press.

Some forty years have elapsed since E. P. Thompson published his second edition to *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*. With its powerful 1976 post-script, the magisterial work unfurled a richly documented biography and, through it, a critical portrait of Morris's gestating political radicalism. More than a telling of history, this weighty tome was governed by Thompson's desire to transcend a rift at the heart of Morris's contested legacy: a breach fostered by rivalling admirers – those who stressed the primacy of Morris's aesthetic oeuvre, with its pastoral motifs and utopian impulse, and those who, under the aegis of an Engelsian orthodoxy, underlined the pre-eminence of Morris's Marxist politics. In seeking to fuse these torn halves, Thompson narrated Morris's life saga as an arc: from the artist steeped in the choler of romantic rebellion to the energized revolutionary of the 1880s, immersed in militant activism. On this biographical ground, Thompson advanced his core thesis: that Morris's unorthodox socialism sprang from a dialectical coalescence of English romanticism and materialist

(Marxist) thought. In a field of debates severed by separatist thinking, this theoretical intervention marked a significant advance in restoring wholeness to Morris's otherwise frayed legacy (Thompson 1976, 763-816). And yet, for all its novelty and breadth, Thompson's paradigm stopped short of embracing Morris's post-'militant' (1890s) phase: the establishment of the Kelmscott Press.[1]

In 1889, following ideological tussles with his Anarchist comrades, Morris was stripped of his editorship of *Commonweal*, the propagandist paper of the Socialist League (1885-1890). In 1891, having left the League, he immersed himself in the production of decorative books at his newly formed typographical workshop. Though small in scale, the Kelmscott Press became highly influential in Victorian print culture (Peterson 1991). But with its ties to antiquarian bookmaking (Peter Harrington 2016), the artistic venture would fit uneasily in Thompson's concept of revolutionary action (Thompson 1976, 583). To be sure, for those who construed Morris's militant years (1883-90) as a flirtation with revolutionary socialism, the Kelmscott episode confirmed their view that Morris was quintessentially an artist, and his period of activism a sheer aberration (Peterson 1991, 65). But for those who viewed Morris pre-eminently as a revolutionary socialist, the Kelmscott venture was inscrutable. How could this apparently aestheticist post-'militant' phase crown his unflagging activism? And if it was not the culmination of his intense socialist praxis, what exactly was it?

Thompson addressed the question biographically: the Kelmscott episode was Morris's surrender to the ravages of old age, and "a [compensatory] source of delight and relaxation," detached from any politics of social reform (Thompson 1976, 582-3). Others, with different emphases, have since construed this phase as a moment of protean activity: i.e., Morris's attempt to revolutionize Victorian typography (Peterson 1991), his artisanal critique of industrialization (DeSpain 2004), his subversion of utilitarian reading habits, effected through a materialist hermeneutic of the "beautiful book" (Skoblow 2002), and his indictment of capitalist waste (Miller 2011), *inter alia*. Each of these readings, while suggestively political, has underscored the Kelmscott years as Morris's immersion in the book arts (Peterson 1991). None, however, has perceived them as an *extension* of his 1880s activist efforts to make socialists, as an *outgrowth* and *conversion* of Socialist League propaganda into a medium of *unprecedented* education, aimed not only at creating a socialist humanity, but at redefining the methods of that transformative process. Such is my central argument and I shall cast it as a four-part analytical narrative of Kelmscott's

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[1] Many examples of pages from Kelmscott Press books can be found on Google Images by searching under "Kelmscott Press" and then clicking on "William Morris Books." Several of the Kelmscott Press editions of Morris's own books can be found online at the William Morris Archive (http://morrisedition.lib.uiowa.edu/) – see for example: http://www.archive.org/stream/storyofglitterin00morr#page/n15/mode/2up.

genesis and culminating achievement: a gesture to revolutionize propaganda, as we know it.

Before embarking on this narrative, a lexical clarification is in order. For to treat the Kelmscott Press enterprise as a new model of socialist education entails relinquishing standard definitions of 19th-century and 20th-century propaganda (i.e., political discourse disseminated through newspapers, pamphlets, broadsheets, polemics, and heated public speeches). Morris's concept of socialist education, seen through the Kelmscott Press, will not be readily discerned in the conventional modalities of propaganda, those typical of *Commonweal* (i.e., journalistic prose, editorial commentaries, weekly news stories, and militant exhortations at open-air pitches). The Kelmscott Press was an attempt to concretize a utopian vision of social revolution *in the making*, but not in the standard idiom of radical political teachings. While its propagandist character may seem imperceptible, it was recognizably a medium of disseminating Morrisian values steeped in socialist knowledge. A site of creative textual production, it not only shared illuminating material for public consumption, it converted the power structures of conventional education into cooperative and co-productive social relations, these being the hallmarks of a Morrisian Communism.

As a utopian model of socialist education, the Kelmscott Press retained the instructive function of propaganda, but few of its surface trappings. It was an embodied extension of Morris's *News from Nowhere*, literally, a nameless and indeterminate form of socialist news. In both Morris's fiction and typographical workshop, socialist propaganda was reconstituted as an aesthetic (pastoral or decorative) idiom, estranged from its journalistic origins (i.e., *Commonweal*). Newspapers are thus nowhere in Nowhere as they are absent in the Kelmscott Press; in both cases, Morris rendered the established practice of propaganda obsolete, and turned socialist education into a somatic sampling, rather than a didactic exposition, of his projected commonweal.

My argument unfolds in four stages. I first identify the cornerstones of Morris's theory of communism, stressing in particular his principle of social cooperation; second, I establish the tension between Morris's efforts to apply this principle and the League's crucible of combative relations; third, I trace Kelmscott's gestation *within*, and against, *Commonweal*'s discursive content, highlighting Morris's resistance to the League's conventional journalism and the crystallization in his serialized fictions of an egalitarian rhetoric; and fourthly, I bring to a culminating pitch my core thesis: that the Kelmscott episode represented a radically new departure in socialist education.

1 Ideal Socialism: Equality, Variety of Life, and Cooperation

Building on the premise that man is a social being with material needs, Morris averred that ideal socialism is "an all-embracing theory of life" (Morris 1894, 167). It

harbours an ethic and a religion of its own, but also a materialist aesthetic (Weinroth 2008), a governing philosophy of creative praxis (i.e., the expression of joy in labour) buttressed by the following imperatives: 1) the gratifying practice and consumption of art by all members of society; 2) the creation of quality works based on cooperative and reciprocal social relations serving society's best interests; and 3) a ruling ethic of reciprocity, defined as a social awareness that society is comprised of equals, "of men who […] expect to be made use of by others, but only so far as the services they give are pleasing to themselves, […] necessary to their own well-being and happiness" (Morris 1891). These constitutive tenets underpin Morris's ontology of humanly satisfying creative activity, and they are intimately tied to a category of fellowship. For creative praxis (i.e., non-alienated labour), being both individual and collective, is contingent on "fraternal cooperation" and an inherent "resistance to absolutism" (Morris to Thomson in Kelvin 1987, 2. 369). Readily discernible in his correspondence and sundry negotiations with fellow activists, these mark the cornerstones of Morris's theory of Communism.

And yet, the application of these tenets was no simple matter. Morris's effort to sustain cooperative relations with his peers was complicated by the Socialist League's internal conflicts, disputes between anarchist and electoral-socialist factions. Against these tensions, he preserved amicable ties with comrades. Even when discouraged by the rougher-edged politics of the anarchist Leaguers, he felt compassion for those among them who suffered from squalor and deprivation (Morris to Joynes, Kelvin 1987, 2. 385). And while he assumed an executive task in the League – as editor and secretary treasurer of *Commonweal* –, he sought to serve, rather than dominate, the organization (Morris to *Daily News* in Kelvin 1987, 2. 382). A reluctant leader (Morris to Joynes, Kelvin 1987, 2. 385), he decried the abuse of political power and the rampant class contempt evident within the social-democratic intelligentsia (e.g., Shaw, the Fabians, and the arrogant leader of the Social Democratic Federation, H. M. Hyndman). By Victorian standards, then, Morris was exceptional; he advocated a political education in which "democratic self-emancipation by the workers for themselves […] was the only guarantee of a non-authoritarian outcome from a socialist revolution" (Coleman 1994, 50). Believing that "the mass of the people were indeed educable" (Coleman 1994, 53), he openly contested the class superiority exhibited by his Victorian peers, whether of socialist or non-socialist bent. By 1887, in a lecture titled "The Policy of Abstention," he not only encouraged working-class self-reliance, he exhorted his working-class public to develop its self-governance by refusing the parliamentary road to socialism (Morris to Glasse in Kelvin 1987, 2.693). Workers would not become "Socialist *men*" if they depended on the theoretical precepts of an elite vanguard of intellectuals and leaders, or relied on the institutions of parliament (Thompson 1976, 458-59). In 1881, well before he took to street politics, he advocated respect for the working class. "Never speak down to your audience, speak up to the dignity of your subject – that is the rule," he wrote to Thomas Coglan

Horsfall (Kelvin 1987, 2A. 37).

2 *Commonweal*: Fractures in Political Cooperation

If the principle of equality buttressed his view of practical politics so, too, did that of collaborative work: "the attempt to substitute arbitrary rule […] for fraternal cooperation" was anathema to socialism, he argued in 1885 (Kelvin 1987, 2. 366). It was a conviction to which he held steadfastly during his activist years. Caught between two wings of the Socialist League, he advocated on one side for extra-parliamentary politics in lieu of the ballot box, and thus resisted the strategy of his reformist (electoral-socialist) comrades; on the other side, he adamantly rejected the extreme militancy of the anarchists (their promotion of street confrontation and sanctification of individualist freedom) but, for reasons of principle, endorsed their anti-statism. In contending with the recalcitrance of the League's opposing wings – "parliamentarians" and anarchists – he advanced a position that superseded the sectarian character of both groups, but often at the cost of being misunderstood and enduring his fellow leaguers' scathing rebukes. Yet, throughout, cooperation was his guiding ethos. He remained composed, calmly deflecting their confrontational allegations.

On February 18, 1888, Morris explained his rejection of parliamentary socialism in a *Commonweal* article entitled "Practical Socialists." Challenging the utilitarianism of electoral socialists, their short-sightedness and absorption in merely tinkering with the economic system, he warned that an excessive preoccupation with such a myopic and narrowly economistic approach risked forestalling a wholesale transformation of society – the aim of which would be to eradicate slavery (i.e., the capital-labour relation), not make it more tolerable. No sooner was it published than the article was harshly rebuffed by Thomas Binning, an electoral socialist who resorted to stating his "views […] in the form of a counterblast rather than of a criticism." With caustic remarks, he caricatured Morris as a proponent of Micawber socialism – a socialism of inaction and endless deferral (Binning 1888, 61). Astonished, and stung as he might have been by this attack, Morris calmly defused a public altercation. "Comrade Binning having found some fault with my article, I asked him as Editor to put his animadversions in writing: I must say there is very little in his letter which I should quarrel with" (Morris 1888a, 61).

The Parliamentary faction of the League was suspended in 1888. Binning resigned. The electoral socialists were eventually eclipsed from Morris's foremost preoccupations. But he was soon faced with further opposition, this time from his anarchist comrades. In April 1889, he engaged in a debate with James Blackwell on the matter of Communist Anarchy. His statement "Socialism and Anarchism" (Morris 1889a) elicited the ripostes of several hard-hitting anarchists, reactions he was compelled to publish. Again, he was publicly targeted by his fellow-Leaguers, and still he remained

level-headed, clarifying his communism with care, if only to avert misapprehension and underscore the integrity of his intention: "I do so in no polemical spirit, but simply giving my own thoughts and hopes for the future for what they may be worth." Still, if this first clarification of May 1889 fell on deaf ears, Morris reaffirmed his position some weeks later, arguing that much of the debate revolved around misnomers and misunderstanding the label "communist": "I can only say that whatever will give us equality, with whatever drawbacks, will content me, […] this is the ideal of all Socialists […] the fewer party-names and distinctions we can have the better, leaving plenty of scope for the inevitable differences between persons of different temperaments, so that various opinions may not make serious quarrels" (Morris 1889, 261). Eager to cooperate, and this despite intensifying disputes, Morris addressed his comrades firmly but respectfully. Still, the League's internal rifts grew deeper. Throughout, he adhered to his convictions, but crafted his language prudently to disengage from the ensnaring tangles of polemic.

Given the Socialist League's internal divisions, it follows that its newspaper would be equally splintered. *Commonweal*'s mandate to proclaim the message of revolution in one voice faltered as diverging rhetorical strains competed within its pages – from the misogynistic Belfort Bax to the feminist Eleanor Marx, from the ballot-box-touting socialists to the "ranting" anarchists. The conflicts that ensued from these agonistic interventions rankled with Morris's inherent dislike of confrontation. In 1884, he had expressed the fear to Andreas Scheu that if he were to become too involved in "'politics', i.e., intrigue, he would be no use to the cause as a writer" (Thompson 1976, 512). By the summer of 1887, he confessed: "I am trying to get the League to make peace with each other and hold together for another year. It is a tough job; something like the worst kind of pig-driving I should think" (Mackail 1901, 1. 194-5).

Still, if *Commonweal* harboured a chorus of dissonant but equally polarized contributors, it was punctuated sporadically by its official narrative, a familiar trilogy of socialist protest: the story of tragic proletarian suffering; the cry against injustice; and the redemption of the beleaguered underclass by a projected socialist epic, the ultimate supersession of capitalism. Such a narrative, inclined to exude a triumphalist note, would most likely have served as the formula for speeches delivered at outdoor rallies, at London parks and Trafalgar Square, where rousing the crowd with fiery orations served to win applause and ideological adhesion. But it was not a tale, nor a style, to which Morris subscribed readily. For embedded in this epic narrative was an oracular voice of authority that conflicted with his egalitarian sensibility. The exalted stature of charismatic orators (masters of speechifying), contrasted with an enthralled (if not smitten) audience, conjured up a social hierarchy at odds with his educative ethos of dialogical exchange. Against *Commonweal*'s optimistic message, Morris introduced a subversive voice of disquiet and uncertainty. In the muted irony and troubling insinuations of his introspective literary and editorial discourse, he was effectively defining an alternative educative role, closing the gap between ideologues and their following, and levelling the

power relations that underpin triumphalist or declamatory discourse. His egalitarian impulse can be discerned in key patterns within his serialized fictions, which portend the collaborative spirit of the Kelmscott project. It is to these textual auguries that I now turn.

3 The Shift in Political Discourse: from Journalism to Fiction

Despite its eclectic array of contributions, *Commonweal* conveyed its central indictment of capitalism in a substantially confident tone, most strikingly between 1885 and 1886: e.g., in the League's Manifesto, and in a variety of compelling pieces by Belfort Bax, Edward Aveling, Eleanor Marx, G.B. Shaw, and Paul Lafargue, to name a few (Thompson 1976, 383). Morris compiled the paper's first issues with zeal. But beneath *Commonweal*'s public voice of optimism, his serialized 13-part poem *Pilgrims of Hope* (1885) discloses the strain of political proselytizing. With its fusion of wistful romantic pastoralism and grim realism, its narrative reflects the strenuous and often disheartening travails of socialist activists. *A Dream of John Ball* (1886-7) and *News from Nowhere* (1890) follow in this vein, each conveying the gargantuan effort required to mobilize support for the cause. The laborious attempt to make socialists is recounted with self-conscious musings, uplifted intermittently by glimpses of hope. Morris's lyrical and political romances are thus composed in the minor key, and as such they temper the confidence of *Commonweal*'s official voice, resisting the conventions of rhetorical bravado in which the zealous drive to conquer hearts and minds obscures an unpredictable and perilous reality ahead.

In sensibility, Morris was a realist. He shared his qualified political views more as confessionals than as bold, assertive claims germane to rousing propaganda. *Pilgrims of Hope* is tantamount to a long soliloquy, an unorthodox epic about the Paris Commune, delivered ponderously and without tragic panache. Contrary to iconic evocations of working-class martyrdom, *Pilgrims* is suffused with perspicacious lyricism, a dark interiority that is politically incisive. Unrequited love, candidly divulged hopes and fears about class warfare, and not least, the discouraging setbacks of activism quell the heightened speech that typically idealizes Communard martyrdom. The poetic speaker is a sensitive and self-consciously partial witness. Close to the events of the Commune, he nonetheless retains sufficient distance to offer an unsettling and probing perspective, absent from the canvas of history's public narratives. The introductory poem, *The Message of the March Wind*, announces hope, as all propaganda must, but the chill of winter's last storms is yet in the air. *Pilgrims'* lesson remains equivocal, subduing the forced optimism of *Commonweal*'s official propagandist appeals.

With its atypical socialist rhetoric, Morris's proletarian poem opens the way to a discourse of egalitarian exchange, the kind made explicit in his romance, *A Dream of John Ball* (1886-7). Set at the time of the Peasants' Revolt (1381), this medievalist dream vision

focuses unexpectedly on dialogue rather than on the bloodied drama of class conflict (Eisenman 2005, 92). Here, Morris underscores the mental agony required to grapple with the uncertainties and paradoxes of social change. Rather than portraying gory warfare, he elaborates on how distinct epistemic perspectives can meet. The dialogue is thus an interface of two spectres: a Victorian dreamer and a 14th-century hedge-priest converge in a fusion of retrospective and prospective visions, an oneiric communion governed by a shared desire for genuine liberty, equality, and Communist brotherhood. Embedded in this rhetoric of fellowship is a medievalist submission to the *unknown*, an acceptance of the *indefinite,* epitomized by the pilgrim who wanders darkly through life, resigned to the indecipherability of history. A dose of stoicism, combined with political insight and persistent hope, is the Victorian dreamer's lesson to John Ball; and it serves as a fictive version of Morris's lesson to his fellow socialists. Fully cognizant of the unforeseeable consequences of political agency and historical happenings, he gives warning while offering encouragement. He insists on reasoned hope, neither blind submission to overweening optimism, nor complacency in the face of injustice. Morris's persuasive strategy, be it in fiction or in League activism, resists dogma and prophecy; for him, historical progress is neither straightforward nor guaranteed to proffer redemption. The trajectory is recursive, reminiscent of the interlacing lines of Romanesque design, that so-called 'ribbon' ornament, which has "no beginning, no end, and above all no centre," and constitutes a seemingly impossible combination of *acentricity* and *cohesion* (Vinaver 1971, 77).

This acentric aesthetic recalls not only Morris's sense of history, but his Gothic-inspired para-textual work: e.g., the elaborate borders of the Kelmscott book, the ornate décor of his illuminated *Aeneid*, or the acanthus leaves that pervade his 1870s pattern designs. These forms are the decorative equivalents of a theory of complex temporal unfolding, suggestive of Morris's view of circuitous historical progress. But they are also aesthetic correlatives of an absent *central* or absolutist voice, typical of Morris's emergent political language. *News from Nowhere* provides a good illustration of this. In this celebrated utopian romance, where a 19th-century visitor, William Guest, is hosted in a new (Communist) world by a set of voluble 22nd-century 'Nowherians,' the portrayal of multiple characters, none of whom stand out to excess, offers a model that supersedes the figure and ground aesthetic of the Victorian novel (i.e., the protagonist against a subordinate backdrop), or the top-down rhetorical address that undergirds mainstream propaganda. Despite the constancy of a central protagonist (William Guest), there is no central mouthpiece in the work's fictive conversations.

News from Nowhere's polysemic character is arguably a sign of Morris's reluctance to deliver a predictive blueprint for a future Communist society. It is equally a sign of the work's embodiment of transition and, indeed, of transience. Being some chapters in an epoch of rest (or mental cogitation), the utopian romance constitutes a way station. There

is no veritable beginning or end to the story. As a continuous conversation that exceeds the plot's boundaries on two fronts, the work finds its prehistory in the fraught pages of *Commonweal,* in controversies between Morris and his anarchist peers. Indeed, a tail end of that exchange spills into the opening pages of the serialized story. For the very arguments of freedom and authority raised in *Commonweal* in 1889 are recycled and threaded into the utopian fiction, reconstituted over the course of the narrative into a new style of political exchange – free of vituperation and hostility, and converted into a salutary dialogue between Guest and the array of Nowherian hosts. Debate surfaces on the other side of the utopian romance in a new incarnation, losing its original character as either pontification or journalistic polemic, and crystallizing ever more emphatically in the narrator's refurbished persuasion: a political appeal couched in the poetics of a dream vision.

Purging his text of the verbiage of mainstream political speech, with its tangled web of semantics and slogans, the recounting of revolution in *News from Nowhere* ("How the Change Came") relies on invented and coded names. Historical references that might ensnare it in contestation are erased. The language of journalism and of "political science" (e.g., system, state, poverty, parliament) is muted and the narrative finds its most subversive political meaning in the idiom of *pastoral.* In his celebration of rural landscapes, Morris's picture writing resists the tensions of writhing political actors; in this, it anticipates the consuming pleasure and social harmony simulated by the ornamental aesthetics of Kelmscott books. The latter's floral motifs, acanthus leaves and grape vine tendrils, are already in germ in descriptions of Nowhere's country-city fusion, where the decorative landscape and the polity are essentially one. If Nowhere is a civil society founded on cooperation and shared joy in creative labour, it is precisely because it has fused the otherwise polarized categories of utility (necessary work) and beauty (aesthetic expression) into a dialectical whole. The Kelmscott Press takes this very coalescence of opposites (useful beauty) and brings it to a higher level, transforming the two-dimensionality of a purely textual narrative (the unadorned version of *News from Nowhere* serialized in *Commonweal*) into the three-dimensionality of the beautiful book. Not only does this new creation achieve physical volume, it also promises to embody social cohesion, the culmination of co-production.

This glimpse of *desirable and desire-driven discourse* must be grasped as Morris's polite but firm critique of the anarchist Leaguers who had stripped him of his editorship of *Commonweal* in 1889. The language of fellow feeling deployed in Nowhere is thus a model (albeit utopian) of ethical education, an instructive instance of how we might speak, educate, and cooperate with one another, even under duress. Morris's conduct in 1890 is thus a case in point. For, in paying *Commonweal*'s bills, and this after his expulsion from "office," he continued to publish the occasional article and serialize his utopian fiction in the weekly issues of 1890. In those last months, his interventions veered

away from polemical exchange. He had renounced fighting his anarchist peers in journalistic prose and turned to the language of fiction where his space for self-expression would be shielded from their barbs. The opening passages of *News from Nowhere* (being autobiographical) disclose his break with the other Leaguers' combative politics. Morris was not one to enjoy vituperative banter, nor would he suffer sordid political manoeuvres. Throughout his activist years, he was not only hankering after a socialist future, but seeking to forge a community of activists, who would work in concert against the formidable tide of commercial war (i.e., capitalism). His fictively projected visions of enhanced life were not solely glimpses into a Communist future; they were exhortations addressed to socialist actors, urging them to behave cooperatively in the present, to sacrifice their vanity for the larger cause (Morris 1890, 361-2). Morris's creative contributions to *Commonweal* (most notably *News from Nowhere*) would thus generate aesthetic spaces for deepening political thought, for making socialists self-critical and capable of sober exchange. These spheres of fictional creativity were the grounds on which Morris pursued an aesthetic education of humanity, one that would culminate in the socialist praxis of his "typographical adventure" (Kelvin 3. 252).

4.1 The Kelmscott Press Takes Shape

If the emergence of Morris's private press was the culmination of his two-pronged reaction to the collapse of the Socialist League (a discontent with *Commonweal*'s combative outcome and his dream of an alternative educative praxis), it was also the product of his longstanding interest in illuminated manuscripts, pattern designing, and early print culture (Peterson 1991). A celebrated magic-lantern slide show, delivered in 1888 by a Socialist League comrade, Emery Walker, spoke powerfully to Morris's printing interests. As the real fractures in the Socialist League became manifest that year, Morris found himself spurred on to new creativity by Walker's technological insights. The experience re-fuelled his life-long passion for the book arts, as well as his erudite critique of modern typography. As societies within the Arts and Crafts movement, notably the Art Workers Guild and the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, solicited his guidance in the late 1880s, welcoming him into their fold, the embryonic conception of the Kelmscott Press took shape in the cooperative spirit of the early 14th-century Guild tradition, before the latter yielded to class stratification.[2] Largely comprised of skilled artists (printers, book binders, typographers, artists, etc.), these organizations were engaged in a protest against the oligarchy of the fine art academy. In this, they echoed the 1880s groundswell of popular discontent, and organized opposition to monopoly capital. Protest against the "masters" – be they artists or capitalists – was thus occurring on two fronts in "an attempt […] to change the direction of English society, to redesign it in all its aspects" (Stansky

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[2] On the aborted nature of this cooperative ethos within the 14th-century guilds, see Cowan, 80-82.

1985, 148). But if the artisans' effort to gain recognition within the academy appeared to be exclusively a matter of status, and if "practical socialism" (i.e., reformism) was strictly about fighting for better wages and work, Morris conceived the apparent separateness of these struggles as one. Questions of economy and aesthetics were not polarized, but intertwined. For him, art, in its optimum state, rested on a principle of fair distribution of economic wealth and leisure, just as a socialist economy rested on the universal access to art, understood in its broadest and ontological sense as non-alienated labour. This Communist ideal of socio-economic equality depended on the "worker's fair share of art" (i.e., equal access to fulfilled existence) – and it was a concept that he introduced in his first contribution to *Commonweal* (Morris 1885). From the 1870s, throughout his Socialist League days, and beyond, Morris spread the word in multiple venues. Art, as non-alienated work, was intimately bound up with the economy of a society of equality and variety of life, he argued, and it embodied a dialectic of beauty and utility, evident as much in the micro-sphere of printing as in the macro-sphere of society as a whole. For on the scale of the page, Morris prescribed a coordinated layout of ornamental and epical (i.e., discursive) elements (Morris 1892) that was effectively analogous to the dialectical coordination of art and labour he proposed for a Communist political economy. Signs of this coalescence of beauty and utility are already evident in his attempts to combine in *Commonweal* an array of literary, lyrical and graphic material with news and editorial commentaries. Against an exclusively information-based approach to propaganda, Morris was underscoring the legitimacy and political *necessity* of creative expression, the kind that would crystallize ever more intensively at the Kelmscott Press.

Today, as then, this emphasis on the "ornamental" dimension of political discourse, as concretized in decorative books, is typically misapprehended, seen as the extravagant production of luxury items divorced from the struggles of Victorian socialists. Such a perspective eclipses the larger historical canvas, for the workshop was not an isolationist micro-enterprise, but an enclave of local artisanal activity intimately tied to Morris's extra-parliamentary politics of socialist education. The artists and artisans who contributed to the Press were veterans of socialist activism. Several of these were Morris's comrades from Socialist League days: Walter Crane, Emery Walker, Philip Webb, and (even) Thomas Binning. H. Hooper, the Kelmscott Press's engraver, and bookbinder T. J. Cobden-Sanderson were members of the close-knit circle of Hammersmith socialists of the 1890s. A few of these figures were the movers and shakers of the Arts and Crafts movement, where the merits of the lesser arts (as Morris articulated them in his 1870s lectures)[3] were deemed inspirational principles. These same men were political actors, involved in disseminating the values of a socialist humanity.

Admittedly, the Kelmscott Press was not a site of "agitation," but a hub of collaborative print production, governed by Morris's educative goals. It was situated at

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[3] On the merits of Morris's lectures on the "lesser arts," see Nicholas Frankel's article in this issue.

the heart of a socialist subculture, and framed by his ongoing persuasive interventions: public talks, press interviews, periodical publications and cheaply available pamphlets. Indeed his voluminous output, even during his ailing years, 1890-96 (Lemire 1969), can be understood, in its overall panoply, as the explanatory "annotations" to the less transparent Kelmscott books. These writings and public addresses formed a discursive framework through which the "typographical adventure" could be better understood, grasped as a novel approach to socialist education that rested as much on creative experimentation – in living out socialist ideals – as on theoretical representation. For beyond its creation of ornate books, the Kelmscott Press was also a pioneering enterprise in collaborative relations of production, a community effort between editor, engraver, compositor, and binder. By resurrecting an (albeit idealised) 14th-century cooperative ethic and by facilitating a co-production of quality wrought books (Peterson 1991) modelled on an artisanal tradition, Morris's typographical project stood as a double condemnation of capitalist modernity. It was at once a protest against industrialization's deleterious legacy of mass produced cheap print and an unmitigated critique of class division – the hydra of exploitative toil and privileged art (Morris 1887, 291).

Like *News from Nowhere*, the Kelmscott project was double-edged. Not merely an indictment of the corrosive capitalist system, it proposed a redemptive vision: that universal creative praxis become the inspiration and foundation of a new social world. In effect, the Kelmscott Press community, which "had its own life, with internal celebrations and outings" (MacCarthy 1994, 622), sought to exhibit this ideal, not only in works of bookish beauty, but equally through association and genuine fellowship. And if this was not the actualization of Communism *per se*, it was nonetheless a microcosm of aesthetic creativity and social interaction where the conditions of fulfilled human existence *could* be both imagined and figuratively sampled. Since the material circumstances most suited to overthrowing capitalism were not immediately present to accommodate wholesale change in 1890, the task of revolutionizing social relations would have to be broached within the interstices of capitalism itself, even if only partially and inadequately. As Morris, himself, noted: "one must use the best one can get: but one thing I won't do, wait forever till perfect means are made for very imperfect me to work with" (Mackail 1901, 2. 151). And since the most complex of achievements – the conversion of a social ethic of competition into one of cooperation and reciprocity – would not spontaneously occur on the morrow of a new world, it would require conscious and persistent efforts to *practice* the art of this ethical conduct well in advance of that future. The Kelmscott adventure would mark one moment in that long, incremental, and decidedly non-reformist revolution. The ornate page and its collective making would showcase figuratively what this wholesale change entailed.

4.2 Kelmscott and the Politics of Ornament

For all its aestheticist appearance as purely decorative printed matter, Kelmscott typography was governed by a socialist impulse, even as it relinquished purely didactic or expository information, offering the public an array of ornate books, ostensibly remote from everyday politics. But unlike *Commonweal*, the educative aim of the Kelmscott Press was less about making socialist activists and forging paths of popular resistance to monopoly capital than about teaching ways of non-competitive coexistence, and this by exhibiting miniature models of societal cohesion. These ameliorative models of enhanced human relations may be deemed idealist and utopian, unfeasible in the present, yet they were implicated in the actuality of Morris's socialist pedagogy, teachings relevant to his own peers and embedded in the sphere of typographical design. Comprising three intersecting axes, these models revolved around the question of (collective) creative labour: 1. equality and reciprocity in relations of production; 2. reciprocity in the creative design (aesthetics) and reception (hermeneutics) of the decorated page; and 3. equal distribution of ornamental and epical material in page layout.

Clearly, for Morris, the task of making socialists – of renewing humanity – involved transforming the perception and status of art under capitalist society, since the basis of this transformation of art was at once ethical and economic. (Paradoxically, what appears as an aesthetic turn away from economics is in fact a return to it.) To this end, Morris stressed the imperatives of visual enlightenment as a site of refurbished thinking and knowing. The estranged and arresting look of the Kelmscott works is a case in point. These tomes impose a hermeneutic at once disorientating and enriching. Through optical illusions, the viewer-reader is induced to think and see on multiple levels, to convert the flat surface of the page into the spatial depths of a literary chamber, into its receding interiors and layered backdrops. Not only does such an immersive experience sharpen the reader's critical faculties, it discloses the book's material three-dimensionality. With its illuminated initials and embossed linen paper, the textured text assumes the spatial depth of a veritable edifice, crafted in myriad ways as a beautiful house might be architecturally conceived and built. In this, the book bears witness to its "book masons" and their labour, builders of magnificent miniatures. Insofar as Morris conceives of architecture as the epitome of an ideal art (Peterson 1991, 45), as a "union of the arts, mutually helpful and harmoniously subordinated one to another" (Morris 1881, 119), the Kelmscott books' "architectural" aspect becomes the graphic symbol of that very cooperative praxis: artists, engravers, editors, and authors engaged in coordinated and convivial production. His concept of attractive labour, the lynchpin of a Communist political economy, surfaces in

this artisanal act of working in concert with others, a 14th-century ethic of communal labour[4], seized and re-appropriated for modernity's salvation.

The second axis concerns the dimension of reciprocal and mutually intertwined satisfaction experienced by society's producers and consumers. This reciprocity is figured symbolically in the production and reception of the beautiful book where graphic details excite the viewer's delight in discerning signs of the creator's joyous passion. Conversely, the work's glorious form reflects the maker's desire to foster aesthetic enjoyment in the viewer's gaze. Both parties in this mutual relation are thus equally sated, conscious that no exploitation or deprivation is experienced on either side of the exchange (Weinroth 2008). Here, the production and consumption of beauty avoids the extremes of luxury and slavery, heralding instead, on a microcosmic scale, the paradigm of fairly distributed and salutary wealth: i.e., wholesome and honourable human existence, rich in quality, yet free of riches (Morris 1883).

The third axis pertains to Morris's prescriptions for ideal page layouts, his insistence that each page balance the distribution of its ornamental and epical (narrative) components. Such emphasis on the proportionate relation of art to the discursive material appears purely technical, a matter exclusive to graphic design. In fact, the rule for organizing the page's two-dimensional plane mirrors Morris's conviction that art must play a central (rather than marginal) role in constituting a genuinely socialist economy; it is, as he puts it, a "Serious Thing" (Lemire 1969, 39-41), deserving equal legitimacy and weight in matters of public affairs. The Kelmscott Press thus represents a further vindication of the largely neglected aesthetic dimension of socialist education; yet it is a vindication often misapprehended by critics who deem the press output exorbitant and incompatible with Morris's mission to make socialists. This widely held view rests on three fallacies: 1. that genuine socialist education must address the working class exclusively, preach the strategies of class war, and proffer cheaply available printed matter on the political economy; 2. that, conversely, expensive decorated books are incapable of producing revolutionary knowledge; and 3. that if the Kelmscott Press cannot embody an unadulterated Communistic economic system within the global sphere of capitalism, it reflects Morris's political inconsistency, or worse still, his hypocrisy. I turn now to confronting these obdurate assumptions.

4.3 Audiences

Morris's most "militant" period occurred throughout his Socialist League years, and while it involved reaching out to the working class, it also entailed delivering the socialist gospel to other social groups. In 1883, in his Oxford talk "Art under Plutocracy," he clearly appealed to his middle-class audience, hoping to win them over to the cause of

[4] See footnote 2.

revolution.

"It is in the belief that this hope [for social change] is spreading to the middle classes that I stand before you now, pleading for its acceptance by you, in the certainty that in its fulfillment alone lies the other hope for the new birth of Art and the attainment by the middle classes of true refinement, the lack of which at present is so grievously betokened by the sordidness and baseness of all the external surroundings of our lives, even those of us who are rich."

In 1884, one of his central revolutionary lectures, "Useful Work versus Useless Toil," was addressed to the Liberal Club of Hampstead. His writings in the press (e.g., *Daily Chronicle* and *Pall Mall Gazette*) and in periodicals (e.g., *Fortnightly Review*) were pitched at an intellectual and decidedly non-working-class readership, just as his first forays into public talks – the politics of the lesser arts (1870s) – were delivered to skilled workers outside of trade unions at the Trades' Guild of Learning (McCann 2009, 34-40). These early interventions, addressed to a rainbow of publics, were powerful, but reasonably stated, exhortations for societal change, in no sense quietist perorations. Conversely, his 1887 diary jottings suggest that his socialist League preaching to the workingman was not only arduous, but frequently unsuccessful. The adverse conditions of these beleaguered men did not imply their automatic readiness to mobilize and enter actively into class struggle. Morris's strategy was to harvest widely. He spread the word at the open-air pitches where the rallying cry to the worker was most uplifting and energizing, but also beyond proletarian circles. Such a practice coincides with the view he propounded in *News from Nowhere*: that the aim of his socialist education was to secure the widest consent within Victorian society, hoping that if and when violent confrontation were unleashed by counter-revolutionary forces, it would be swift and not catastrophic, and that members of privileged society would defect from their ruling class and join forces with the revolutionary side. Kelmscott Press would thus fit into his program of educating society, enlarging the adherents to revolution, through a multitude of venues and educative practices. As if a Gramscian *avant la lettre*, Morris planted his roots in different soils, across the vast national landscape.

4.4 The Kelmscott Press: "Educating the Educators"

The Kelmscott Press resulted in the creation of beautiful books intended as gifts, products set against the competitive strains of the market. The silent eloquence of the gift, free of discursive impediments, was most suited to Morris, who had just disengaged from the tangled web of Socialist League polemics. The beautiful book offered him a new tongue, cleansed of political wilfulness and vanity, yet eliciting immediate recognition.

Straddling two spheres of discourse – how we speak and how we *might* speak – Morris's unique idiom introduced a counter-intuitive logic, a linguistic register estranged from everyday communication, barter, and exchange value. It was thus a utopian entity – since it required a new hermeneutic for decoding it and a proscription against realizing it within the matrix of capitalism. In sharing beautiful artefacts as gifts, Morris heralded his works as emblems of superior material quality against a Victorian economy awash in shoddy wares. Such a defiance of commercial war would have to eliminate price, and radically disengage from the sphere of profit and monetary exchange. At least for a time, the priceless Morrisian gift was an illumination of a moneyless world, free of capitalism's twin evils: luxury and dearth.

As they awakened the public's interest, however, Kelmscott books quickly became exclusive commodities, sold to affluent collectors. With this turn of events, posterity has judged Morris as politically inconsistent. And yet, the claim that the pricey Kelmscott publications served the exclusive pleasure of genteel antiquarians is neither completely accurate (others benefited from these tomes), nor a contradiction in Morris's socialist politics. The high cost of the books was not proof of Morris's hypocrisy or compromised radicalism, as has been argued by his contemporaries (Vaninskaya 2010, 46-47). Rather, it reflected the constraints imposed by a capitalist economy of which Morris was ruefully aware. In an ironic twist, it is the extravagant price of the Kelmscott books that marks their revolutionary message; for just as these works epitomize Morris's socialist ideals, so they also embody the impossible actualization of these ideals under capitalism – the impossibility of realizing quality-based, non-exploitative, and universally shareable beauty under a system of plutocracy. If Kelmscott books, with their material, aesthetic and ethical superiority, had been available to all Victorians at little or no cost, the revolutionary import of the typographical project would have been annulled, rendered moot. Their unaffordability is precisely the sign of their anomalous status within capitalism. Their failure to be concretized here and now underscores their potency and far-reaching radicalism. As Fredric Jameson notes, "the best Utopias are those that fail the most comprehensively" (2005, xiii). If judged by capitalist criteria, the Kelmscott Press may qualify as just that, a failure. But as a utopian model that prefigures what *could* be secured under propitious conditions – equality, cooperation, and universally gratifying creative praxis – the project also implicitly calls for such conditions of possibility *to be* realized: i.e., it is a tacit but insistent rhetorical appeal to posterity to abolish plutocracy and give rise to genuine socialism.

Much less a solipsistic and aestheticist protest against the historical conditions that incarcerated it in a cage of bookish glory, the Kelmscott project constitutes a speechless, but eloquent dialectic; for just as it proffers us a vision of socialist values in the form of the ornate volume, so it also claws back this typographical entity from our immediate use. Imposing a prohibition against easy appropriation, the ornate book's unaffordability (its virtual self-exclusion from the market) ensures that the distinction

between capitalist plutocracy and true communism is maintained, that the exemplary and illuminating function of the typographical enterprise is not obscured in the morass of capitalist simulacra – shoddy counterfeits of societal well-being.

But if the press's extravagant price range appears as a flagrant contradiction, it is also the source of deepened political knowledge, and notably for socialist educators themselves. It "can serve the negative purpose of making [socialists] more aware of [their] mental and ideological (and I would add *economic*) imprisonment" (Jameson 2005, xiii); in this it urges greater political striving and a consciousness more attuned to the tensions of dialectical thought. For like all utopian models, the Kelmscott Press demands a twofold reception of contrary yet simultaneous impulses. It insists that socialists acknowledge the merits of its surface appearance – its innovative experiment in typography, but that they also see beyond its immediacy, and capture its more far-reaching function as a catalyst of political enlightenment. They are invited to reap the physical and cognitive pleasure of its sensuous qualities, while seeing through their phenomenal aspect. More than revolutionizing Victorian typography, the Kelmscott Press confronts the residues of individualism within socialist praxis, reconceives political education, paces the practice of agitation, and attends to the most delicate and elusive question of propaganda: the interpersonal skill of co-production and co-operation.

To treat the typographical adventure as Morris's withdrawal into aestheticism is thus to overlook the socialist actors involved in the Kelmscott Press. Here, Morris's longstanding belief in rendering the art-labour relationship an integral part of revolutionary consciousness assumed a concrete form, albeit on a small but exemplary scale: fellow artisans engaged in communal work tested out an ethic of collaboration by practicing, negotiating and perfecting socialist ideals through the book arts. These men, who had belonged to the Socialist League's intellectual vanguard, were, in their new phase of activism, exhibiting to the public the central principles of a socialist future in beautiful guise. More significantly, they were involved in educating each other, rendering the idea of cooperation an ingrained habit – the governing "social conscience" (Morris 1889, 157) of sustainable and salutary social life. Throughout his Socialist League years, Morris sought to introduce collaborative conduct into his movement, but only in the Kelmscott workshop could he begin to find its veritable crystallization, even if only on a micro-scale. While he knew all too well that such an exemplary, though circumscribed, experiment could not be universalized in his Victorian present, he nonetheless believed in exercising within it the appropriate skills that would serve to cultivate a new humanity, however partially. In this respect alone, Kelmscott was a social and physical site of speculative "play," not, to be sure, of frivolous fancy, but of *thinking* and *acting* outside the strictures of agonistic commercial relations. Here was an aesthetic space that would serve to inspire activists – the educators themselves – to see beyond the dark walls of capitalist plutocracy and soar, between arduous acts of proselytizing, into realms of consciousness where

fantasy breeds critical insight and strengthens conviction in the seemingly impossible. As Marx said in his famous letter to Arnold Ruge in 1843: "The world has long dreamed of something of which it needs only to become conscious for it to possess it in reality" (Marx 1843).

To be sure, Morris did not effect a genuine revolution through the Kelmscott Press; but with its collectivist and egalitarian principles, the workshop generated a "revolutionary dream machine" that would convert political desire into an "all-embracing and aesthetically governed *theory* of life" (Morris 1894, 167), made visible, tangible, and graspable through the book arts. For Morris, such a materialist production of knowledge would be a significant advance in the making of genuine socialists, more illuminating (however slow) and more promising (however small) than his League experience, where economistic and militant ideologues had lost their bearings in the turgid chaos of political discord.

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Comment

MORRISIAN SPECTRES OF WORKING AND LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF "THE NEW DIVISION OF LABOUR"

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Abstract
        This essay considers conceptions of humanities and arts education as implicitly or explicitly articulated in the creative and expository prose of William Morris, in relation to Victorian conceptions of education, and as a means of gaining critical perspective upon recent instrumentalized and labour-oriented arguments about education in the 21st century. In particular it examines Morris's argument about learning and the development of "the field of culture" and his conception of "pleasure in labour" in relation to arguments of education-oriented predictive labour models such as that articulated recently by Frank Levy and Richard Murane in *The New Division of Labour*.

One of the many powerful arguments forwarded in Michelle Weinroth and Paul Leduc Browne's new collection of essays (2015) on the critical and aesthetic legacy of William Morris asserts that Morris's legacy persists as a powerfully disruptive spectre within our present structures of being and thinking. As Weinroth writes: "A revenant repeatedly returning to confront us, to unsettle the tranquility of home and the comfort zones of habit and routine, its value [the value of Morris's legacy] resides in its disruptive role, in skewing our quotidian perceptions, but also in deepening our self-knowledge and strengthening our moral responsibility" (Weinroth 2015, 6). I concur with their book's overarching thesis that one can fruitfully extract from Morris's sometimes obscured and certainly variegated legacy "the constitutive components of a theory of radicalism" (9) and, in this short essay, I will pursue an exercise in such expository extraction as it relates to Morris's conception of "education" and how it fits in with his better known positions on work, pleasure and society. What can Morris's dream of learning as an integral facet of individuated work-pleasure offer to contemporary debates about the relevance of arts and humanities education in the 21st century?

        "Education" is one of those terms that is not familiarly understood in the fictional dreamworld of Morris's Nowhere. As Dick (one host and tour-guide of Morris's socialist utopia) responds to the first use of the word by his Victorian visitor, William Guest: "Education?" said he, meditatively, "I know enough Latin to know that the word must

come from *educere*, to lead out; and I have heard it used; but I have never met anybody who could give me a clear explanation of what it means" (Morris, 1890, 28). As the discussion continues, Dick presents the picture of a natural process of learning among the inhabitants of Nowhere, each learning and developing knowledge according to his or her ability and individual interests. Learning results from the unforced pursuit of individual tastes and inclinations. It is largely developed through imitative mentorship, and, in the context of Nowhere, is mostly physical rather than "bookish" in orientation (although there is room for any kind of work one is inclined to pursue). Not quite a Rousseauian vision, but more of a spectral socialist naturalization of the institutionalized vision of Arts education as articulated by John Ruskin in *The Political Economy of Art*, the meaning of education in *News From Nowhere* (or, rather, its un-meaning) stands in contrast, by its reticence, to other well known models and ideas of education from the Victorian period, especially for its removal of learning from formal institutional structures, and for its assertion of an organic continuum of value and pleasure between manual and intellectual labour.

My contribution to this symposium will consider Morris's illustrations of learning and labour in relation to a few other Victorian models of education, with the ultimate aim of bringing them to bear upon recent discourses of pedagogy and labour that have come to inform debates about the future of our present institutions of higher education. For example, in recent lectures and articles on learning in the context of higher education, Randy Bass, the founding director of Georgetown's Centre for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship has raised a series of questions about "the future(s) of the university" (Bass 2012 and 2015). Bass prefaces his ideas about what the future of learning will look like with speculative observations about what the human labour market will consist of in the remaining chunk of the 21st century (Bass 2015). Drawing upon recent works by Frank Levy and Richard Murnane such as *The New Division of Labour: How Computers are Creating the Next Job Market* and *Dancing With Robots: Human Skills for Computerized Work*, Bass builds his idea of the New University around the assumption that the range of relevant work for humans will continue to shrink drastically and will ultimately be centred upon three kinds of activities: 1. Solving unstructured problems; 2. Working with new information (including engaging in complex communication) and, 3. Carrying out non-routine manual tasks (Bass 2015). As if fulfilling Oscar Wilde's idea that undignified and joyless forms of labour – like the relentless sweeping of a slushy sidewalk[1] – could be eliminated from a future under socialism through the use of

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[1] As the quote goes, from Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," :

The State is to be a voluntary association that will organise labour, and be the manufacturer and distributor of necessary commodities. The State is to make what is useful. The individual is to make what is beautiful. And as I have mentioned the word labour, I cannot help saying that a great deal of nonsense is being written and talked nowadays about the dignity of manual labour. There is nothing necessarily dignified about manual labour at all, and most of it is absolutely degrading. It is mentally and morally injurious to

machinery, Levy and Murnane's model assigns routine cognitive and manual tasks to computers and robots.

Insofar as this take on "the new division of labour" identifies the human with asymmetrical capacities of analytical, creative and physical work, it seems to fit (minus the pleasure, perhaps) into William Morris's own definition of what is constitutive of the human. As Weinroth remarks, "Morris prompts us to see reality in dialectical terms and to treat contradiction and asymmetry as the enriching facets of our human ontology" (Weinroth 2015, 9). My essay will explore the limits of this analogy with the ultimate aim of showing how Morris, as compared to other Victorians, can offer a uniquely disruptive intervention in contemporary debates about our present ideas of the future university. Where do we situate Morris within other Victorian discourses on education? I'll focus on one main example.

John Henry Newman's writings on education, including *The Idea of a University*, *The Office and Work of Universities*, and the many ongoing revisions of these texts published throughout his life, are the best known Victorian works that address the question of what a University should be. These works articulate a powerful argument for a Liberal education, defined as an education offering a broad array of subjects that deliver universal truths according to their own methods of seeking and demonstrating knowledge. Newman's first answer to the question "What is a University?" replies that it is a "School of Universal Learning"; "a school of knowledge of every kind, consisting of teachers and learners from every quarter"; a University that is in "essence, a place for the communication and circulation of thought, by means of personal intercourse" (Newman 1894, 6). He points out that the university "is but one specimen in a particular medium, out of many which might be adduced" in the delivery of education (Newman 1894, 6). And he alludes to the other information *media* available:

> [B]ooks, I need scarcely say, that is, the litera scripta, are one special instrument. It is true; and emphatically so in this age. Considering the prodigious powers of the press, and how they are developed at this time in the never - intermitting issue of periodicals, tracts, pamphlets, works in series, and light literature, we must allow there never was a time which promised fairer for dispensing with every other means of information and instruction. What can we want more, you will say, for the intellectual education of the whole man, and for every man, than so exuberant and

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man to do anything in which he does not find pleasure, and many forms of labour are quite pleasureless activities, and should be regarded as such. To sweep a slushy crossing for eight hours, on a day when the east wind is blowing is a disgusting occupation. To sweep it with mental, moral, or physical dignity seems to me to be impossible. To sweep it with joy would be appalling. Man is made for something better than disturbing dirt. All work of that kind should be done by a machine (Wilde 2001, 139-140).

diversified and persistent a promulgation of all kinds of knowledge? Why, you will ask, need we go up to knowledge, when knowledge comes down to us? …

I allow all this, and much more; such certainly is our popular education, and its effects are remarkable. Nevertheless, after all, even in this age, whenever men are really serious about getting what, in the language of trade, is called "a good article," when they aim at something precise, something refined, something really luminous, something really large, something choice, they go to another market; they avail themselves, in some shape or other, of the rival method, the ancient method, of oral instruction, of present communication between man and man, of teachers instead of learning, of the personal influence of a master, and the humble initiation of a disciple, and, in consequence, of great centres of pilgrimage and throng, which such a method of education necessarily involves. This, I think, will be found to hold good in all those departments or aspects of society, which possess an interest sufficient to bind men together, or to constitute what is called "a world." It holds in the political world, and in the high world, and in the religious world; and it holds also in the literary and scientific world. (Newman 1894, 7-8)

Newman, in 1852, is asking why one should bother attending a university any longer, what with the recent, significant proliferation of information in a great variety of convenient and affordable print forms. "Why need we go up to knowledge, when knowledge comes down to us?" (Why get a degree when there are MOOCS, so to speak?) It's a good question, and he feels he has a good answer: massive piles of information published in a variety of newfangled print formats are fine, but these piles of periodicals and pamphlets are not the same as teaching and learning. Teaching and learning happens with the communication and circulation of thought through personal encounter; it comes from the power of oral instruction, present communication between individuals, human teachers, personal influence, mentorship, discipleship. Newman's university, conceptualized in part as an anti-media theory of learning, represents a haven from the instrumentalized demands of the market. While not strictly positioned against a utilitarian ethos, it leaves room for the pursuit of truth as developed by a great variety of disciplines, and includes an understanding of the intrinsic value of aesthetic models. As we move further into the Victorian period, arguments for the need to resist and critique the forces of utilitarianism and an exclusively market-driven understanding of labour and value grow more aggressive, by necessity.

For example, Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*, while certainly a caricature of Benthamite utilitarianism in its most extreme form, ultimately plays out as an allegory

about the severe violence to the individual that will come from an insistence upon the supremacy of facts over experience, and, more metaphorically, of mechanized labour over humanity. It is a familiar Victorian allegory, one that is repeated in John Stuart Mill's account of his own education in his remarkable *Autobiography* (1873) that tells the account of his rescue from a utilitarian education by the affective power of Marmontel, Wordsworth, and Harriet Taylor (Mill 1960, 99, 103-4, 129-133). Gradgrindian hyper-facticity, Benthamite over-analysis; such Victorian examples can be read as warnings against the dangers of incomplete learning that, if pursued without the tincture of less logical, symmetrical experiences, without "fancy," "poetry," "art," "friendship" and "love," will lead to intellectual and emotional deformity, and an unproductive and unhappy life. Where does Morris fit into this quick survey of largely Liberal Victorian treatments of education?

Morris made few formal statements about education, as such. While not quite as alienated from the concept as Dick in *News From Nowhere*, Morris's many expository contributions expend energy on illustrating the need for a significant transformation of the world, not the restructuring of an existing school system, as was Ruskin's inclination. In the few works Morris wrote that deal explicitly with schools, the concern is usually the status of the school buildings themselves, and not the curriculum delivered therein. So his 1881 letter to the Editor of the *Athenaeum* about the High Wycombe Grammar school is about preventing further destruction to the Norman hall around which the Grammar School was built (Morris 1987, 86-87); his 1883 letter to the *Daily News* about the sale of Blundell's School (Tiverton) is a call to preserve the old building as a fine example of a grammar school of the early 17th Century, for the future (Morris 1987, 158-159); and his contributions in 1885 (*Daily News*) and 1890 (*Speaker*) on Oxford University call upon "the duty of the Universities" to appoint a commission "in order to put a stop to the orgy of destruction in which they have been indulging" (Morris 1996, 158). The "vulgarisation of Oxford" as manifest in the destruction of its "few specimens of ancient town architecture" is identified by Morris with the "present theory of the use to which Oxford should be put," namely, "that it should be used as a huge upper public school for fitting lads of the upper and middle class for their laborious future of living on other people's labour" (Morris 1987b, 493). Education in the manner it was being delivered was of less interest to Morris than the buildings that could function as historical illustration for a future in which structured educational institutions of this kind would have no place.

As can be expected, when Morris *did* address the question of what an institution of education should be, it was done with a larger socio-historical context in mind. So, in his "Address Delivered at the Distribution of Prizes to Students of the Birmingham Municipal School of Art on Feb. 21, 1894," he states: "I can only say, first, that, in order to have a living school of art the public in general must be interested in Art; it must be a part of their lives; something which they can no more do without than water" (Morris 2012,

421). A true school of art, a "living" one, in Morris's terms, cannot exist unless it emerges from within a society that supports and understands its purpose, intrinsically. Such a society did not exist in 1894, when Morris distributed these art prizes. It existed in his arguments and as an idea to be realized in his own art practice, in his efforts to make his definition of art understood "by the public in general." "That thing which I understand by real art," as Morris put it in his lecture "The Art of the People" that he delivered to the Birmingham Society of Arts and School of Design (1879), "is the expression by man of his pleasure in labour. I do not believe he can be happy in his labour without expressing that happiness; and especially is this so when he is at work at anything in which he specially excels" (Morris 1882, 58). Other, longer versions of this, in which Morris identifies the division of labour and competitive commerce as dominant forces destructive to "the field of human culture," are familiar to us.[2]

I would like to close, anachronistically, with a few words about Levy and Murane's "New Division of Labor" theory in relation contemporary pedagogy theory, and speculate upon where Morris might, possibly, fit into this mix. Labour theory of this kind hypothesizes about how computer technology has and will continue to influence the kinds of work (and accompanying wages) that will be available. Statistical analysis of the workforce read as representative of the demands of the labour market leads them to conclude that there will be growing demand for certain kinds of skills and aptitudes by employers, such as the ability to engage in "complex communication," which basically means the ability to address and respond to asymmetrical problems that cannot be dealt with by algorithm (Levy and Murane 2004, 76-81). Then, pedagogy experts like Randy Bass take this shrunken range of labour activities that will be relevant for future employment (solving unstructured problems, working with complex information and communication, and doing non-routine manual tasks), and work on developing new methods of pedagogical design that will deliver high impact learning practices to prepare students for this uniquely human niche of asymmetrical activities within the labour market. Changes in curriculum and teaching methods ensue.

The application of this framework for thinking about the future of education may

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[2] In case it is not, here is an example of one such passage, from his 1879 lecture "Making the Best of It":

The division of labour, which has played so great a part in furthering competitive commerce, till it has become a machine with powers both reproductive and destructive, which few dare to resist, and none can control or foresee the result of, has pressed specially hard on that part of the field of human culture in which I was born to labour. That field of the arts, whose harvest should be the chief part of human joy, hope, and consolation, has been, I say, dealt hardly with by the division of labour, once the servant, and now the master of competitive commerce, itself once the servant, and now the master of civilisation; nay, so searching has been this tyranny, that it has not passed by my own insignificant corner of labour, but as it has thwarted me in many ways, so chiefly perhaps in this, that it has so stood in the way of my getting the help from others which my art forces me to crave, that I have been compelled to learn many crafts, and belike, according to the proverb, forbidden to master any, so that I fear my lecture will seem to you both to run over too many things and not to go deep enough into any (Morris 1882, 116).

represent a fundamental transformation (and instrumentalization) of something we once knew as humanities education into something we will come to know as "*human* education." An application of Levy and Murnane's model of the new division of labour as the set of predictive conditions for imagining the idea of education for the future works to remove conceptions of intrinsic value, or what we refer to, colloquially, as our *values*, from the equation, and to focus all attention on the market value of human labour as compared to the work machines can do.

To state the obvious, the very principle informing this approach is antithetical to Morris's aesthetic philosophy, and, insofar as it can be gleaned from across his writings, from his pedagogical philosophy, as well, mainly because it is designed to serve the capitalist market. Education, in Morris, exists in two forms. Either it exists in the present (non-socialist) late Victorian reality, or it is imagined, and largely imagined out of existence as a concern, in the dream of a socialist future. I agree with Michelle's Weinroth's understanding of Morris's romances as having functioned on a continuum with his other political lectures and his articles published in *Comonweal.* All of Morris's productions –material, graphic, fictional, expository – can be understood as manifestations of propaganda in a diversity of generic and media forms. For Morris, in his time (before a true socialist society would be realized) argument and especially art would serve as a tangible illustration of social organicism. Art would incite the desire for beauty, and consequently for social change. Morris rejected the realist novel for the prose romance because the former – which focused on the unhappiness of bourgeois characters, what Ellen from Nowhere calls "sham troubles" (Morris 2003, 193) – lacked the kind of illustrative, aesthetic power to imagine change that romance had. Insofar as Art for Morris existed as Illustration (as opposed to what it would hopefully become, Work-Pleasure), it functioned as a mediated form of aesthetic pedagogy. Where Newman wished to separate the experience of education from the material manifestations of print developed in the nineteenth-century in order to formulate his idea of a university, Morris's equally media-aware idea of learning denies the possibility of such separation.

At the risk of sounding naively propagandistic (but, if not in a special issue on Morris in the journal of *Socialist Studies*, then where?), there may be no better time – at this moment when pedagogical curricula are being calibrated to match the niche that remains for humans on the labour market; at this moment when prospects for employability have been pinned in great part on our ability to process "complex communication" (Levy and Murnane 2004, 76-81) – there may be no better time to bring a work of art, a romance by William Morris, into the centre of the curriculum.

The student will find no straightforward message there. She will find, in the words of Michelle Weinroth, just the right "modicum of opacity and vagueness" upon which to sharpen her for the workplace, perhaps, but also, one might imagine, in confronting a late Victorian socialist romance she will learn "to read texts (political discourse) and contexts

(history) beyond the letter" (Weinroth 2015b, 193) – that is to say, to piece together a glimpse, a sense of the inherent pleasure of work that comes with building a "shadowy isle." I suppose this version of Morris as the source for a glimpse of the boundary between an ideal of aesthetic knowledge (without education, per se) and the social relations informed by advanced capitalism is akin to aligning Morris's art with the enchantment that Theodor Adorno identifies as one persistent aspect of the aesthetic. As Adorno writes:

> Art is motivated by a conflict: Its enchantment, a vestige of its magical phase, is constantly repudiated as unmediated sensual immediacy by the progressive disenchantment of the world, yet without its ever being possible finally to obliterate this magical element. Only in it is art's mimetic character preserved, and its truth is the critique that, by sheer existence, it levels at a rationality that has become absolute (Adorno 2013, 79).

The magic of *News From Nowhere* as a work of art, and as a lesson, a form of aesthetic propaganda for the present, lies in its combination of apparitional fantasy and prevalent, subdued sensuality. In writing an anti-novel that captures the sensual immediacy of an aesthetic existence, Morris has levelled a critique against the rationalization of labour, and against the ideas of education that seem best suited to it. The conflict between such a vision of sensual immediacy and the disenchantment of the world can only be effective if such conflict continues to be recognized as such and is not absorbed into the dark-tinged rational absolute that Adorno wrote and thought against. So long as dis-identification remains possible, a conceptual glimpse of the "shadowy isle of bliss" remains in view and in memory, however faintly. At the end of the romance, when Guest finds the world of Nowhere fading around him, the last moment of recognition between *that* world and his own occurs when he tries to catch Ellen's eye: "I turned to Ellen and she *did* seem to recognize me for an instant; but her bright face turned sad directly, and she shook her head with a mournful look, and the next moment all consciousness of my presence had faded from her face" (Morris 1890, 209). Morris's art has been strong enough to remain relevant in relation to new structures and theories of labour and the instrumentalized models of learning that accompany them in great part because he understood that the vision presented in pre-socialist art had to incite a visceral desire to be seen and recognized by our idealized figures. We might be recognized with expressions of joy, perplexity, or even sadness, so long as we were recognized. When Guest's presence fades from Ellen's consciousness, then all that remains is the vision of a lost, affective and sensual encounter with the ideal. The romance provides an immersive experience of the dialectic, and while only a vision, a spectre, the entire exercise of imagining, conversing with and desiring our imagined embodiments of pleasure in labour maintains a sense of

possibility and hope for the future.

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Comment

WILLIAM MORRIS, USE-VALUE AND "JOYFUL LABOUR"

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Midway through *News From Nowhere*, William Morris's visionary novel of an imaginary future socialist society, the time-travelling explorer Guest interrogates his host, Hammond, about his memories of how things were made in the bad old days of capitalism. Guest wonders: surely if things were produced for the world market, they must have been made very well? "Quality!" Hammond crustily replies, "how could they possibly attend to such trifles as the quality of the wares they sold? […] It was a current jest of the time that the wares were made to sell and not to use; a jest which you, as coming from another planet, may understand but which our folk could not" (Morris 1890, 95-96). Now, by contrast,

> The wares we make are made because they are needed: men make for their neighbours' use as if they were making for themselves […] Nothing *can* be made except for genuine use; therefore, no inferior goods are made. Moreover […] we have now found out what we want, so we make no more than we want; and, as we are not driven to make a vast quantity of useless things, we have time and resources enough to consider our pleasure in making them. All work which would be irksome to do by hand is done by immensely improved machinery; and in all work which it is a pleasure to do by hand machinery is done without (Morris 1890, 97).

"Pleasure in making" things and their usefulness in meeting human needs lies at the heart of Morris's vision of socialism and the central role which the "lesser arts" of the hand-made might play in such a radically reconstituted society. In a different idiom, we might say that for Morris the defeat of exchange value and the transcendence of alienated labour are the essential preconditions for any truly just and egalitarian society. The reassertion of use value serves as the foundation for the liberation of human creative energies. As Michelle Weinroth observes: "*Nowhere's* constitutive conditions of creative praxis [are] joyful labour, equality, and variety, elements starkly at odds with the status quo (Weinroth 2015, 182).

Morris's dream of socialism is a totalizing one: it entails a root and branch revolution in capitalism's perverse political economy and alienated social relations. The ascendancy of use value over exchange value is also the victory of concrete, embodied human activity over abstract, value-producing, labour. "Morris's construct of Nowherian economics favours qualitative, indeterminate measure over quantifying, determinate rationalizations of commodity-based society" (Weinroth 2015, 187). Ending the rule of exchange value thus demands the abolition of the separation of mental and manual labour – of head and hand – in which labouring activity regains its artistic dimensions. As Weinroth and Leduc Browne conclude:

> Inspired by the aesthetic practices of medieval times where art combines with everyday labour, the "minor arts" serve as the basis for Morris's revolutionary paradigm, generating a materialist aesthetic of beauty that portends the end of capitalism's class division. No longer the site of austerity and toil, work, reconceived, becomes satisfying and fruitful human effort, and aesthetic pleasure in labour. In positing that it must be attractive and desirable, rather than a mortification of the flesh, Morris allows work to regain its legitimacy in the company of art, and for the two to coalesce. Together they form a unique whole – a model of beauty suffused with the ethics of fellowship and equality (Weinroth & Leduc Browne 2015, 286).

Morris's impressive vision is at odds with many contemporary attempts to imagine a world beyond capitalism. A recent effort by Fredric Jameson disparages the very idea that work in any post-capitalist society might shed its most dehumanizing and alienating features. In Jameson's "American utopia," the best that we can hope for is a diminution in hours of work, but not its qualitative transformation.

> I envisage a utopia of the double life, in which social reproduction, albeit only involving a few hours a day, is performed in work clothes and in teams, a little like going for army reserve duty […] In the world of the superstructure, no such specifications hold; the individual is as free to be a recluse as a party person, to practice hobbies or to live out existence as a couch potato, to be a family man or professional mother, to volunteer for hospital work or to climb mountains […] or to live whatever underground life can be invented (Jameson 2016, 83).

What is striking here is the sharp demarcation drawn between the worlds of work and leisure. The former has the inevitable taint of unpleasantness, however limited its duration; only in leisure do we enter the true realm of freedom. Jameson seems to believe,

as in Fourier's *phalanstères* from which he draws inspiration, that we will still need armies of people (if not, as for Fourier, children,) willing to forego any immediate gratifications from their labour, so that the garbage gets collected.[1]

This diminished vision of labour's possible futures is not accidental, nor is it peculiar to Jameson; it is deeply coloured by labour's degraded present. Moreover, it is rooted in a widely-held misunderstanding of contemporary finance capitalism; one that greatly exaggerates the autonomy of capital while negating the role of labour power as the use value most essential for the production of capitalist value. Elsewhere, Jameson argues that the ascendency of finance capital achieves, "full autonomy … a dimension in its own right" being "a play of monetary entities which needs neither production (as capital does) nor consumption (as money does): which supremely … can live on its own internal metabolism and circulate without reference to an older content" (Jameson 1998, 160-161). As a consequence, "sensuous human labouring activity" comes to be seen no longer as the precondition of capital, but as a purely arbitrary adjunct to capital's autonomous power. As Gail Day (2011, 216-217) has perceptively argued:

> Marx takes economic forms to be the clearest indices of the historical changes to the organization of social relations. His concern is to establish where and how categories often assumed as transhistorical specifically operated within – or were determinate for – generalized commodity production. The historical specificity of exchange-value's dominance is widely accepted today, but use value's disappearance is often taken, mistakenly, to be the corollary […] However, when considered from the perspective of form – more precisely, when considered as a historically determinate social form – use value becomes critically important in the case of two highly significant commodities: the money commodity and labour power […] labour as a commodity, also has a specific use value, the capacity to create value […] the very heart of capital's social mystery; the role of use value as a determinate social form is decisive.

The detachment of exchange value from the use value of labour means that many theorists ultimately fall victim to the fetishism famously identified by Marx: the assumption that interest-bearing or "fictitious capital" is independent of the sphere of productive capital. Fictitious or finance capital, on this view, "is the consummate *automatic fetish* […] money making money, and in this form it no longer bears any trace of its origin" (Marx 1975, 455). With the denial of human labour as its ultimate

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[1] As for any association between art and beauty, Jameson (1998, 135) has already in other works labelled the very idea "meretricious."

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foundation, the seemingly autonomous world of finance capital "is transformed into a mere phantom of the imagination" (Marx in Harvey 1999, 269).

The rejection of the so-called "labour-metaphysic" – the idea that the secret of value lies in "precisely the use-value of the commodity purchased by the capitalist (i.e., labour-power)" (Marx in Rosdolsky 1977, 84) – has real consequences for the way in which we conceive of any post-capitalist future. For those, like Jameson, who both exaggerate the autonomy of capital and diminish the centrality of labour power, it should come as little surprise that the prospect of "joyful labour" of the sort proposed by Morris plays such a reduced role in his vision of a post-capitalist society.

For Marx, the possibility of socialism was immanent in the present. However, much labour had been debased and degraded by capitalism, the struggles and solidarities of today were always seen as a bridge to the future. Capitalism generates oppositional struggles and forms of consciousness immanently as the exploited and oppressed seek to improve their lives and conditions. Thus, while the use value of labour means one thing for capital, it means something entirely different for labour. As Michael Leibowitz (1992, 49) has observed, capital is incapable of producing living labour from within its own operations; therefore, "it is necessary to consider wage-labour as she exists outside capital." This suggests that the richly variegated range of human needs that Marx associated with our 'species being' can never be fully captured by capital. Struggles to assert these needs against the imperatives of capital reach all the way down to questions of discipline and control over the bodies of workers both within and without the workplace and all the way up to our affective and creative needs and desires.[2]

This returns us to the "joyful labour" of the "lesser arts" and their place in Morris's "dream vision" of socialism. Morris was no prelapsarian romantic spinning tales of rural idylls. In the tradition of Marx and Rousseau, Morris asserts that socialism "is a condition of society in which there should be neither rich nor poor, neither master not master's man, neither idle nor overworked, neither brain-sick workers nor heart-sick hand workers, in a word, in which all men would be living in equality of condition …" (Morris 1894, 277). His insistence on fusing the medieval and the modern is what "continues to give Morris's socialist radicalism its uniqueness and singular potency" (Weinroth 2015, 186). For Morris, the "lesser arts" which combine the useful with the beautiful are a way of (re)educating the senses and of accessing the true meaning of unalienated "joyful labour." In this, it is difficult to think of another revolutionary thinker whose vision of a world beyond capitalism is so thoroughly embedded in the needs of the

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[2] In the English-speaking world the importance of the concept of use-value in Marx's work has been largely neglected. However, in other parts of the Global South, notably Latin America, where the "antagonistic contradiction" between use value and exchange value displays different configurations than in the Global North, more attention has been paid to the concept by Marxist theorists. Notable among them is Bolivar Echeverria whose work on use-value in the context of what he calls the baroque cultures of the Latin world, is summarized in Gandler (2016).

body. The essays collected in *To Build a Shadowy Isle of Bliss* have done us all a great service in rescuing this vision of a better world from "the enormous condescension of posterity" (Thompson 1991, 12).

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Comment

BUILDING ON WILLIAM MORRIS'S NEWS FROM NOWHERE

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For much of the 20th century people looking to transcend capitalism where they lived turned to news from somewhere else to inspire and guide them. Old habits die hard, as already seen in this century with the widespread fascination, and now disappointment, with Venezuela's 21st century socialism. Nor has the beacon of news from somewhere been confined to the revolutionary left; social democrats to this day still point lamely to old news from Scandinavia to sustain the politics of ameliorating capitalism. Socialists before 1917 had no such news from somewhere else to listen to. They could try to draw inspiration from the Chartists, or the 48ers, or the Communards, but they had no extant revolutionary social order to point to. That great advances were nevertheless made in drawing millions of people to socialism by the turn of the twentieth century shows that socialist persuasion does not have to rely on news from somewhere else. Very often it was the utopian sensibility – what Ernst Bloch later termed "the dream of the matter" present in architecture and art, literature and music as well as in political philosophy and socio-economic theory – which inspired the making of socialists.

Of course, the utopian sensibility's impact was greatest when it accompanied socialist political organization. One of the reasons William Morris's *News from Nowhere* stands out in utopian literature is because of its strategic sensibility to the development of the capacities to build the roads that would lead to the actual realization of the utopian sensibility. Morris's concern was not only to kindle popular desire for a future "pure Communism" modelled on preserving the best elements of England's own past. It was also to offer a persuasive account of "How the Change Came," the longest chapter by far in *New from Nowhere* (well over twice of the length of any other). Morris imagines there that the key event that triggers the revolution takes place in 1952, as armed soldiers policing a state of siege in London turn on a large crowd of supporters of the Federation of the Combined Workingmen gathered in Trafalgar Square. Sixty-five years earlier, this was where Morris himself had actually spoken on London's infamous Bloody Sunday of November 13, 1887; and it was still very much on Morris's mind as he composed his great "utopian romance." The time-traveller of *News from Nowhere* relates this long forgotten historical event to his interlocutor in the communist society of the future as one where "there was no fighting, merely unarmed and peaceable people attacked by ruffians armed

with bludgeons." "And they put up with that?" he is asked. "We had to put up with it; we couldn't help it," he answers. To which, even more incredulity: "And is it really true that nothing came of it?" (Morris 1890, 42-43).

It is one the great virtues of Michelle Weinroth and Paul Leduc Browne's erudite and stimulating book, *To Build a Shadowy Isle of Bliss: William Morris's Radicalism and Embodiment of Dreams,* that it demonstrates so clearly that Morris was soberly averse to impatient revolutionary adventurisms. Morris, like Marx, refused to foster illusions that anything other than a long slow process of organization and education would be involved in making socialism possible. In her previous outstanding book, *Reclaiming William Morris*: *Englishness, Sublimity and the Rhetoric of Dissent*, Michelle Weinroth addressed this precisely in terms of the inability of English revolutionary socialists to adequately capture and incorporate in their appeal the "creative nationalist dimension" that constantly informed Morris's utopian and strategic sensibilities. This bears an especially poignant message now in the wake of Brexit, and more broadly amidst the widespread appeal of right-wing nationalism today amidst the contradictions of capitalist globalization. While Weinroth and Browne briefly reprise this argument in their conclusion to this new book, they are more concerned here with showcasing the originality of Morris's "radically different radicalism" for the second half of the 19th century, albeit always with an eye to the importance of incorporating his legacy in any attempt to reimagine and renew socialism in the 21st century.

All the contributions to this admirable collection of original essays sustain Weinroth's claim on the first page of the Introduction that "Morris's practical and conceptual ability to unify the polarized spheres of art and politics is, even now, both subversive and unique" (Weinroth 2015, 1). They show in rich detail how Morris concretely demonstrated that "art and labour, commonly perceived as irreconcilable opposites, can be grasped in unison" (Weinroth 2015, 15). This could be seen in his own "joyful work" in the ornamentation of the everyday objects of life, incorporating traditional forms in such original ways as could not be dismissed as antiquarian. And it could be seen as well in how Morris carried this over to incorporating the English cultural inheritance into revolutionary political expression. This applied not only in how his socialist pamphlets were printed but how the "politically charged prosody and lyrical time" of his socialist chants were sung, creating "the aesthetic framework in which fellow activists (be they fictive or real) can channel their deep disquiet into collective possibility" (Weinroth 2015, 25-6).

Morris's profound understanding of the importance of connecting what we do in the present to the retrieval of past expressions of collective possibility and their projection into the future was what allowed him to bring utopian and strategic sensibilities together so creatively in *News from Nowhere.* As Weinroth explains (2015, 29-30), Morris personally experienced anarchist tendencies to engage in "a facile but perilous

'propaganda of the deed' [which] ignored the veritable complexities of societal transformation"; this informed his attempt to dramatize in *News from Nowhere* "the strenuous labour of delivering socialist news." And insofar as the "bridge" to communism would be a process of revolutionary transformation consisting primarily for Morris in education, in "making socialists," the key question for him was who would be educating whom to socialism, and how. The answer he gives in the "How the Change Came" chapter of *News from Nowhere* is that this involved a slow process of working-class institution-building, stretching over half a century and culminating in the Federation of Combined Workmen. What made revolutionary transformation possible by 1952 was that the confrontation in Trafalgar Square was preceded by "a long series of years during which the workmen had learned to despise their rulers, had done away with their dependence on them." And this was "leavened […] by actual contact with declared Socialists, many or indeed most of whom, were members of those bodies of workmen above said" (Morris 1890, 125).

News from Nowhere's picture of what Morris called a "piecemeal State Socialism" which was "partly put in motion" by way of "ameliorating the capitalist system" while leaving "wage slavery in place" was astonishingly prescient for its close resemblance to what the 1945 Labour government actually effected in the years immediately before 1952. And it was no less prescient for foreseeing how "it did not work smoothly; it was, of course resisted at every turn by the capitalists, and no wonder for it tended more and more to upset the commercial system […] The result was growing confusion, great suffering among the working classes, and, as a consequence great discontent. For a long time matters went on like this" (Morris 1890, 105-106). Indeed, and 65 years after 1952 they still go on like this.

There is unfortunately little discussion in Weinroth's and Browne's book of what was done and what might yet be done along the lines that Morris envisaged by way of working-class institution-building and mass socialist political education. Browne's own chapter kindly quotes from something I wrote a few years ago, pointing to the enormous amount of writing that has continued to be produced about what a future socialism would look like, but also pointing to the failure of these writings to tell us "how the hell would we get there. What are the vehicles? What are the agencies? How are the vehicles connected to the agencies?" But apart from sustaining Morris's own view that this will involve "a long period of half-formed aspirations, abortive schemes, and half measures" (Morris 1888-1890, 57), Browne himself has very little to say in answer to these questions. And while Tony Pinkney's drawing on the science fiction of Ursula Le Guin and Kim Stanley Robinson to imagine what a sequel to *News from Nowhere* would consist of today is both inspired and insightful, he concentrates much more on the contradictions and cock-ups that would beset future communist societies than on what it would take to develop the vehicles and agencies that would get us beyond capitalism. After tantalizingly

insisting that "if the revolution is indeed renewed in another Trafalgar Square confrontation, we should not model this in Leninist terms, as with those epic scenes of crowds storming the Winter Palace" but rather on "political tents in Trafalgar Square, as the Occupy movement so admirably demonstrated in late 2011 in Zuccotti Park," he only leaves us with the observation that the subsequent dispersion of the Occupy movement shows "how difficult it is to sustain and generalize such non-conventional radical practices" (Pinkney 2015, 238).

Given the widespread turn by activists from protest to politics in recent years in the wake of Occupy, as seen in the rise of Syriza and Podemos as new parties, and the insurgencies represented by Corbyn and Saunders in old ones, which in some ways parallels Morris's disenchantment with the anarchist tendencies of his own time, one wishes that a more central concern of Weinroth's and Browne's new book on Morris's legacy would have been with what we can learn today from his own fraught experiences in actually building socialist political organizations. It is much to be hoped that it will provide the occasion for socialists not only to reflect on what happened to the revolution that was made in Russia in 1917, but also on why the revolution that Morris foresaw in England a half century ago was *not* made in 1952, and on what we might take from Morris to try to build the socialist political organizations necessary to still try to get such a revolution made. Say sixty-five years from now, around 2082?

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Comment

CODA

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Independent Scholar

As co-editors of *To Build a Shadowy Isle of Bliss*, Paul and I are grateful for the thoughtful commentaries on our book that Nicholas Frankel, Jason Camlot, Colin Mooers, and Leo Panitch have contributed to this in-print symposium, a follow-up to the Socialist Studies roundtable event held at the 2015 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences in Ottawa. The praise offered is much appreciated, as are the important insights that the discussants have added to our study of Morris's radicalism. The critical comment that our book does not elaborate on the vehicles and agencies of social change, as hinted at in Morris's oeuvre, is also a welcome prompt and an opportunity to bring the politically suggestive material of *Shadowy Isle* into its next phase – into yet another forum of exchange – in which Morris's radicalism can be pointedly tied to the struggles we face today.

But before taking up this challenge, it is necessary to underscore the specific reasons why *Shadowy Isle* does not attend in any immediate or summary way to the pressing question: "What are the vehicles and agencies of social change?" Such an approach was not our objective. We had a central task – to foreground the unorthodox nature of Morris's radicalism and to rescue his reputation from corrosive myths – a task that must precede any attempt to herald Morris as a beacon of inspiration for contemporary activists on the Left. Such a project, however worthy, cannot be carried out short of preliminary clearance work. For there are some striking misconceptions that need to be dispelled before we can bring Morris's legacy to today's socialists. Among these misconceptions – and there are many – is the notion that "How the Change Came" is the pre-eminent chapter in *News from Nowhere* and the key to grasping Morris's concept of revolution.

One of the claims of our volume is that we might look elsewhere for the vehicles and agencies of social change and that *News from Nowhere*'s famous chapter is the mirage, not the real oasis, of our quest. For the transformative episode as portrayed in the text is a fictive construct, a reworking of historical documents and real events, but not a paradigm for emulation or imitation. Cast as a dream vision, the utopian romance tacitly demands that we parse it with a hermeneutic suited to its literary form. We must thus be mindful that the oneiric world that Morris evokes forbids us to read the text literally and

appropriate it as a ready-made political program.

To be sure, it is tempting to look at the "How the Change Came" chapter as a launching pad for building our own socialist world; but the utopian romance discourages us from doing this. It urges us to rethink and rewrite the model of revolution as we have seen it in the past, or in fictional accounts, and adapt it to our epoch. For Morris, this process of adaptation involves *revolutionizing* political education itself, transforming the very idea of revolution. The latter needs to be reappraised and reconstituted to include objectives that are often eclipsed from received Socialist wisdoms. To achieve a society of cooperation, rather than one of competition, will involve securing a political economy of equal distribution, but it will also involve attending to questions that are frequently consigned to the margins of social "utility" and "necessity." For Morris, a radically new vision of work, combined with equal social recognition, is as pivotal as matters of fair distribution of wealth.

Whatever his principles, ethics, and strategies for achieving socialism, the proposals he bequeaths to us will require adaptation and reconfiguration. He imparts this cautionary word to us fictively in *News from Nowhere* when Ellen demands that Guest return to his 19th century and pursue the political struggle on his own turf, in the manner that accords with the demands of his epoch. So, by analogy, Morris suggests that revolution for posterity (for us, his 21st-century followers) will not resemble the old portraits, narratives, and paradigms of a 19th-century era, much as these have come to constitute an entrenched socialist imaginary. Revolution will come under another name, and will assume different configurations, yet it will be grounded in the fundamental socialist principles that Morris tirelessly sought to disseminate (and with the most egalitarian language) – be it in lecture halls, outdoor pitches, literary periodicals, the mainstream press, or through a community of Kelmscott Press artisans, the erstwhile members of the Socialist League, activists turned radical printers.

It is this dialectic of the vicissitudes of history that Paul's chapter in *To Build a Shadowy Isle of* Bliss makes so clear, and particularly as his analysis dwells on *A Dream of John Ball*, where the typically romanticized epic of class war is dispelled by a Victorian narrator who has come to see Bloody Sunday as a terrifying event. Morris learns from that episode that political consciousness may be a lesson or consequence of insurrection, but that it won't flourish there. Rather, its more sustainable life will feature in times and places where "men shall talk soberly." This line from *A Dream of John Ball,* which Paul deploys as a subtitle in his chapter, may seem paltry at first blush, but is in fact a significant disclosure of Morris's preoccupations with political praxis: for it encapsulates an ethic of social interaction guided by egalitarian principle and realism. It prescribes a form of education and self-education governed by mutual recognition, fellowship, and cooperation. That men should talk soberly suggests that they have liberated themselves from the spell of idealism – the gleam of moonlight (i.e., the romance of revolution

construed as heroic drama) – and are able to see in the cold light of dawn the limits, vagaries, and hopes of humanity. When openly confessed and candidly shared, these intimate but powerful exchanges constitute the stuff of genuine solidarity.

Before we can use Morris's legacy, we have to carry out some substantial preparatory work. We have to settle on a common ground of interpretation. I regard the arguments invested in *Shadowy Isle* as contributions towards that preliminary work, for the subject of Morris's politics is still highly contested. There are misconceptions that need to be jettisoned. The field has yet to be tilled before the crops can be seeded. In short, Morris's legacy cannot be usefully appropriated and rendered pertinent to today's Left struggles until that happens, and the type of unorthodox radicalism that we tried to articulate in *Shadowy Isle* sets the conditions for that task.

To be clear, it was not our objective to prescribe strategies for political action; nor did we intend to offer any quick answers to the current crisis. Morris has no easy recipes, no programmatic blueprint or compendium of theories that can be instantly applied for purposes of political praxis. The substance of his legacy cannot be readily grasped without patient hermeneutical labour. But it was precisely that charge of critical scrutiny that the contributors to *Shadowy Isle* assumed. They sought to rethink mainstream perceptions of Morris's oeuvre and dispel commonsense views that have obscured his poignant intellectual insights, not least his unique contribution to re-conceptualizing the idea of revolution against entrenched stereotypes.

To carry out this scholarly work of methodical deconstruction and reconstruction requires time and forbearance; but without this extended phase of reassessment, we cannot proceed to gauge Morris's relevance to our epoch. We require a thoroughgoing reappraisal of Morris's legacy before we can build on his ideas.

In November of 1887, following the Trafalgar Square massacre of innocent protesters, Morris realized there would be no easy road to revolution, only persistent education. And while he struggled to keep *Commonweal* and the Socialist League from vitiating into a mere debating society – "we must take part in all really popular movements when we can make our own views on them unmistakably clear; that is a most important part of the education in organization" (Morris, *Commonweal*, March 1886) – he also questioned the politics of "practical socialists" who strove for immediate economic reforms and fell prey to the illusions of the electoral system.

From 1887 till his death in 1896, Morris pursued a course of unflagging socialist education – of "making socialists" – through public speaking, engaged writing, but also through small-scale community projects: e.g., the establishment of a guild-like workshop (the Kelmscott Press), where socialist collaborative work and material production of quality goods could be sampled within capitalist society. In unassuming and often imperceptible ways, he reappraised and refurbished the outmoded shibboleths of social transformation, debunked the worship of insurrection as a triumphalist drama, and called

for a more far-reaching transformation of humanity in the interstices of everyday life.

It is that reappraisal of "radicalism" and "revolution" that *Shadowy Isle* sought to illuminate and cultivate among others. With no pretention to closure, our book has invited, and continues to invite, like-minded Morris admirers to go farther afield, to bring the debate to new political heights, and even to emancipatory possibilities. In Morris's words, "if others can see this as we do, we might call this a vision rather than a dream."

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