“Such strength as his I see nowhere.”

— Edward Burne-Jones on William Morris, qtd. in Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, 627.

University of Alberta

Leaves in the Garden: The Utopian Politics of the Kelmscott Press

Edition of *News from Nowhere*

by

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For the Students of Culture Class Economics Revolution:

…Until everything that belongs to everyone has been reclaimed

Abstract

In this study I examine William Morris's novel *News from Nowhere* in relation to his utopian-socialist politics. This examination is an attempt to explore the function of art within Morris's formulation of utopian socialism and the extent to which the elaborate edition of *News from Nowhere* printed by Morris at the Kelmscott Press represents an original and significant political embodiment of the text. The first chapter develops a theory of the dialectic and of dialectical criticism through a discussion of the philosophical thought of Frederick Engels, G. W. F. Hegel, Fredric Jameson, and William Morris. Throughout this thesis, the concept of the dialectic is deployed in the service of analyzing the relationships between aesthetics and politics, struggle and desire, and books and gardens as they are presented in the linguistic, bibliographic, and contextual codes of *News from Nowhere*, in both its serialized and Kelmscott Press editions.

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The last words, like the ones I whisper when falling to sleep, are always for Melanie: you are the beautiful I want the whole world to be.

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Introduction

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, the English author, designer, and political activist William Morris founded the Kelmscott Press, a private printing house dedicated to reviving the integrity and beauty of the book arts. At the press, Morris laboured to create stunning new limited editions of his previously published works in the elaborate style of the first master printers of the late fifteenth century. The primary object of this study is Morris's utopian novel *News from Nowhere, or An Epoch of Rest,* which was originally serialized in the socialist journal *Commonweal* in 1890 before undergoing significant transformation by Morris at the Kelmscott Press in 1892. While it is natural to assume that the serialized edition appearing in the explicitly radical *Commonweal* is the more actively political version of the novel, the goal of this study is to explore the ways Morris's re-presentation of *News from Nowhere* in the Kelmscott edition represents an original and significant political embodiment of the text.

In chapter one, I investigate the function of art within Morris's theory of utopian socialism, both in his political writings (post 1885) and as embodied in the text of *News from Nowhere*. I argue that Morris's utopian novel is animated by a dialectical theory of the role of art within the political movement of socialism. Drawing on theorizations of the dialectic by Frederick Engels, G. W. F. Hegel, Fredric Jameson, and Morris, I probe Morris's dialectical treatment of labour and hope. There is a tendency in the critical discourse on *News from Nowhere* to formulate static oppositions between all things utopian and their degraded, real-

world doubles, positing a fixed relationship that quickly reveals itself to be both paralyzed and deeply ahistorical. Against this conception, I argue that the novel's dialectical formulation of the key themes of labour and hope pushes beyond the binary opposition to articulate the necessity of a third, and revolutionary, mode of collective struggle. My purpose is to show that the full utopian imperative of the novel is to make history not only legible, but immanently possible. As such, in the last section of the chapter, I will argue that when considered in the context of its original publication in the journal of the Socialist League, *News from Nowhere* functions as a *direct engagement* in the politics of the moment.

In the second chapter I turn my attention to the Kelmscott Press edition of the novel, exploring the ways in which the novel's conception of the transformative power and possibility of gardens is emphasized by the material signification of the edition, producing original insights into the dialectics of Morris's utopian politics. I have been greatly aided in this investigation by Elizabeth Miller's 2008 essay, "William Morris, Print Culture, and the Politics of Aestheticism," which makes an important break away from the tradition of critical engagements with Morris's typographical experiments at the Kelmscott Press that have tended to isolate the Press from his practical socialism. By considering the Kelmscott Press in relation to Morris's print-work and writing in the Socialist League's periodical *The Commonweal*, Miller develops a political conception of the Kelmscott Press on the basis of Morris's utopianism. While I do not share Miller's view that Morris's utopian projects are characterized by "a complete disengagement with contemporary politics" (489), I follow her lead in attempting

to breathe new life into the critical understanding of Morris's later career by exploring the Kelmscott Press's function within Morris's utopian politics. I will argue that the very inner logic of the Kelmscott Press edition of *News from Nowhere* necessitates an elucidation of its politics and their connection with Morris's socialist commitment.

Miller theorizes Morris's utopian politics as a withdrawal from practical socialism by thinking through the Kelmscott Press and *News from Nowhere* in terms of Fredric Jameson's category of the utopian project, which in *Archaeologies of the Future* he defines in opposition to the political.[1] Rather than reading *News from Nowhere* in the strict terms of the utopian project and the enclave as they are laid out by Jameson and applied by Miller, I read it dialectically, as a work rooted in, vivified by, and seeking to mobilize the utopian impulse. The proceeding chapters will, I hope, demonstrate that such an approach usefully destabilizes the too-long entrenched antagonism between utopianism and politics, reform and revolution, and between the reified opposition of Morris's famous vision of utopian labour as work-become-art and alienated labour subsumed under the conditions of industrial capitalism.

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[1] Jameson writes, "I want us to understand Utopianism not as some unlocking of the political, … but rather as a whole distinct process in its own right" (10). While my theoretical conceptions are in no small part derived from Jameson's works on utopia and dialectics, I seek to muddy the waters between utopian and political processes in my reading of *News from Nowhere*.

Chapter One

The Utopian Dialectics of *News from Nowhere*

News from Nowhere is a profoundly dialectical text. While critics have often read Morris's utopian politics through his utopian novel, this chapter attempts to focus on and provide insight into the dialectical movements that form the basis of Morris's theory of utopian socialism. The chapter consists of four sections. First, drawing on theorizations of the dialectic by Engels, Jameson, and Hegel, I define what I mean in this study by the terms dialectic and dialectical and sketch out the broad shape of the dialectic as it functions in Morris's conception of utopia. Second, I engage with several critics working on the theme of labour in *News from Nowhere* and argue that their focus on the binary of alienated and non-alienated labour in Morris's thought fails to fully register the dialectic of the novel. Third, I explore the utopic function of art in Morris's political theory and demonstrate the ways in which it is expressed in and by *News from Nowhere*. Finally, I consider the dialectics of *News from Nowhere* in relation to its original publication in *Commonweal*, the journal of the Socialist League, attempting to bring further insight into the utopian politics of the novel and setting up a point of contrast for the consideration of the Kelmscott edition in the second chapter.

1. Dialectics: Theory and Strategy

Following Fredric Jameson's imperative in *Marxism and Form* to maintain Hegelian categories of immanent critique, I attempt to employ dialectical

strategies within my investigation of *News from Nowhere* and Morris's utopian politics.[2] In this paper, the term "dialectic" signifies two analytical movements: the first is the attempt to grasp the network of relationships in which a given object has its being (the move toward the Hegelian concept of totality or the movement from the notion of an object's abstractness to that of its concreteness); the second is the destabilization of binary oppositions through the introduction of a third term that reveals further contradiction rather than offering resolution. The first of these movements is drawn from Frederick Engels's description of the dialectics of historical materialism in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. The second is derived from Jameson's work on dialectical thought in *Valences of the Dialectic*.

Engels defines the dialectical mode of thought as a process of moving from an abstracted, unknowable totality characterized by "an endless entanglement of relations and reactions, permutations and combinations" to a consideration of "the details"—the things in themselves that are in relation—and back again to the totality (299). While Engels grants that "the analysis of Nature into its individual parts" constitutes "the fundamental conditions for the gigantic strides in our knowledge," he suggests that these very conditions of possibility have, in practice, imposed their own limit:

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[2] Jameson writes: "… the great themes of Hegel's philosophy—the relationship of part to whole, the opposition between abstract and concrete, the concept of totality, the dialectic of appearance and essence, the interaction between subject and object—are once again the order of the day" (xix). Jameson's imperative—"It is therefore time… to learn to think dialectically, to acquire the rudiments of a dialectical culture and the essential critical weapons which it provides" (xi)—is a response to a perceived epistemological crisis: "thought asphyxiates in our culture, with its absolute inability to imagine anything other than what is" (416). Forty years later, the problem persists and a reinvigoration of dialectical criticism is, I argue, again necessary.

> [T]his method of work has also left us as legacy the habit of observing natural objects and processes in isolation apart from their connection with the vast whole; of observing them in repose, not in motion; as constants, not as essentially variables; in their death, not in their life. (299)

In Engels's formulation, dialectics names a form of engagement with the relational binary of totality and particularity, one defined by a commitment to always seek to understand the variable and relational qualities of an object. Put another way, dialectics seeks to demystify the object, to test its inner workings, and to develop an understanding of it through its concrete details, rather than through some generally accepted abstract principles.

This conception of the dialectic is usefully supplemented by Jameson's description of dialectical method as a process of unlocking the binary stasis of oppositions. Like Engels, he describes the dialectic as motion, characterizing it in *Valences* as, among other things, the work of mobilizing binary oppositions:

> [T]he antinomy...[is] a logical impasse in which thought is paralyzed and can move neither forward nor back, in which an absolute structural limit is reached, in either thought or reality. Th[e] deconcealment of the antinomies at the root of practical or theoretical dilemmas can serve as a powerful instrument of ideological analysis...but it should not be confused with that more dynamic and productive act of setting the antinomy itself in motion, that is to say, revealing it to have in reality been the

> form of a contradiction; for it is the unmasking of antinomy as contradiction which constitutes truly dialectical thinking as such. (*Valences* 43)

If Engels's explication of the dialectic emphasizes the necessity of thought to explore the relational aspects of objects, then what Jameson provides here is a more subtle description of the processes thought must engage in toward that end. The primary point I want to take away from the above passage is that the movement of dialectical thinking is comprised of two moments of activity, of deconcealing and unmasking, which together combine to move thought and action beyond a structural limit.[3] Jameson describes the activity of deconcealing as the process of revealing binary oppositions and the work of unmasking as destabilizing—through analysis—the terms of their opposition.

Following Jameson, I aim to set in motion the late-Victorian antinomies of the utopian and the real and to reveal how Morris's utopian thought exhibits the dialectical work of deconcealing and unmasking binary oppositions. For example, I discuss below in part three how Morris's utopian socialism is characterized by a constant anxiety that the tactics of the socialist movement in Britain during the 1880s and 90s—tactics such as the social democratic demands of workers, including the struggles over the minimum wage, the length of the working day,

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[3] The dialectical literary criticism I am attempting to theorize and practice in this study is—true to the impulses of revealing relational networks and contradiction attributed here to Engels and Jameson—always concerned with undermining the autonomy and passivity of fields of language and knowledge such as philosophy, literature, and culture. My criticism, in other words, aspires to action. Literary expression and critical analysis are, as such, conceived as activities that, though not reducible to politics (defined here broadly as a mode where language and knowledge consciously aspire to concrete action), are never unrelated to it.

etc.—will be considered as ends in themselves. Such demands effectively and necessarily reveal the primary opposition between capital and labour, or between the bourgeoisie and the working class. But Morris was ever wary that the single-minded pursuit of ameliorations for the working class would cause the movement of socialism to stop too soon at the stage of deconcealing and working within—rather than seeking to intensify and overcome—the class antagonisms of industrial capitalism. He feared thus that socialism would become unhinged, both in theory and practice, from the end goal of communism.

Likewise, Morris's thought is also characterized by a concern that politics and the problems of social organization and the well-being it addresses are too often incorrectly treated as autonomous from other domains of life. His thought is critical, in other words, of a politics divorced from the idea of and movement toward totality. As such, in his works, Morris insists, by example, that politics and aesthetics be thought of together. When he considered the endless expansion of machine work in industrial production, Morris lamented that man "has made a bargain between art and labour, and got a makeshift as a consequence" (The Aims of Art" 87). Indeed, whenever Morris thought of the "degrading labour which oppresses so large a part of our people" in the system of "competitive commerce," the effects of that system on "the way of working in all matters that can be considered as art" was never far from his mind ("Art Wealth and Riches" 150). If Morris rarely ever spoke about labour without also talking about art, and vice versa, it was in part because he considered the autonomous, compartmentalized conceptions of those activities—work as wage labour and art as the thing done at

an easel or writing desk—as reductions symptomatic of a world gone wrong. For Morris, working *and* making—labour *and* art—are alienated forms of material production in capitalist society. He felt strongly that the "Art of the people" that is the "natural solace" of labour is destroyed by the drive for profit ("Art and Socialism" 193). But more importantly, that is, beyond mere critique, Morris rarely broached a discussion on labour conditions or politics without discussing the problems, function, or future of art because he believed in a society when work and art would be united: "one day we will win back Art, that is to say the pleasure of life; win back Art again to our daily labour" ("Art and Socialism" 203).

In posing and thinking through the oppositions of communism and socialism, aesthetics and politics, and utopian and alienated labour in *News from Nowhere* and his essays and lectures on socialism, Morris reconfigures the tension between the terms of the opposition in such a way as to move past the conceptual limits they suggest. In section three of this chapter, I will explore how Morris works through these oppositions to kick-start the dialectic engine of history and to "demand" the "emancipation of labour" ("Dawn of a New Epoch" 140). In this dialectical movement toward emancipation and the society of equality, which constitutes the essential structure of Morris's utopian socialism, the ideal of communism comes to animate, through the mediating function of art, the politics of socialism with a revolutionary mode of labour in the form of collective struggle.

In naming the dialectical movements of *News from Nowhere* as expressions of Morris's utopian socialism, I utilize the dialectical strategy of

deconcealment and unmasking. In section two of this chapter, this strategy takes the form of challenging the established interpretations of the novel's supposedly dichotomous presentation of utopian and alienated labour to argue for the crucial emergence of a third form of revolutionary labour. It is vital to insist and remember that this third term is not introduced from outside of the text, but rather is generated from within. Revolutionary labour is the spectre of collective struggle that lurks in the noumenal-phenomenal gap between the utopian essence of Nowhere and Guest's always only partial and fragile experience of it. As such, it is the deep, unconscious desire that "for a moment" interrupts Guest's experience of "this fair abode of gardens" with a "phantasmagoria" of the events of Bloody Sunday (58).[4] In part three of this chapter I explore in detail how this desire for collective struggle erupts into full view at the end of *News from Nowhere*. The opposition between alienated and non-alienated labour is thus mobilized across the time/space of the novel in such a way as to express a desire to have the utopian image itself negated by what Marx called the "real movement which abolishes the present state of things" ("The German Ideology" 49). In an analogous attempt to break apart the binaries of reified criticism, in chapter two, I explore the two dominant and opposed conceptions of the political import of the Kelmscott Press—one identifying it as a political project in the mode of Ruskin and the other arguing that it is essentially a post-political, narcissistic enterprise. I claim that a political reading of the Kelmscott Press edition of *News from Nowhere* is effectively impossible from within this critical binary, which is

[4] November 13, 1887, Morris was in attendance at a demonstration at Trafalgar square that was violently put down by police. In *News from Nowhere*, a similar event set in 1952 is the spark that sets-off the revolution.

constituted by a common denial of any connection between the Kelmscott Press and Morris's concurrent socialist politics. As such, arguing for a political reading of the Kelmscott press edition of *News from Nowhere* also incites a re-evaluation of the dominant perspectives on the politics of the Kelmscott Press in general. In both of these arguments I attempt to break the conceptual hold of binary formulations by shifting the focus to the third term, revolutionary labour, and thereby moving the critical discussion into new territory.

In the context of a passage from Jacque Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris's *A Taste for the Secret*, Jameson theorizes the third term of the dialectic as a sort of medial caesura—an intensifying pause in the development of contradiction. What is significant for Jameson is the way that Derrida and Ferraris postulate the function of the third term as a gate or door, as both an opening and closing, a place of both participation between opposing terms and of non-participation. In Derrida and Ferraris's articulation,

> [The] function [of the third term] is not limited to the form it has taken in the Hegelian dialectic, and the third of neither-this-nor-that and this-and-that can indeed also be interpreted as that whose absolute heterogeneity resists all integration, participation and system, thus designating the point where the system does not close. It is, at the same time, the place where the system constitutes itself, and where this constitution is threatened by the heterogeneous, and by a fiction no longer in the service of truth. (qtd. in *Valences* 25-26)

What Jameson emphasizes in his reading of this passage is that the third term,

operating as both the locus of identity and difference, relation and incommensurability, is the means by which binary oppositions are intensified to the level of contradiction, which is revealed here as the constitutive moment of a system that doubles as the open ended threat to its existence. For Jameson, the dialectic never truly resolves but only "pauses, waiting for the new 'dialectical' solution to freeze over in its turn and become an idea or an ideology to which the dialectic can again be 'applied'" (27). In this way, the dialectic is characterized by its fundamental instability, its unfinished work, which is a key element in coming to a proper understanding of the dialectic in Morris's utopian politics.

In *News from Nowhere*, the utopian mode of production contains an internal contradiction yet to be worked out, a contradiction comprised of the increasing threat of "a possible scarcity in work" (140), a looming unemployment crisis that imparts the idea that the work of establishing a society of equality can never be fully finished.[5] Or, thought from the other side, the idea of a fully finished utopia is, in some important sense, no utopia at all. There is, accordingly, an acknowledgement in the text of the possibility of an "unhappy" period in the future (147). Utopia remains an unfinished work in *News from Nowhere* in a political sense in addition to the economic one just described. The dialectic of the novel opens onto, in its final moments, the difficult path of labour and pain that it would inspire its readers to tread, a path described elsewhere in the novel as the "phases of suffering" and which includes a passage through "knowledge,

[5] Old Hammond, it should be noted, exhibits a great deal of self-assured optimism that there will be no "work-famine" (140), but his presumption that Guest will have already caught-wind of the intensifying anxiety regarding its possibility betrays the depth of the contradiction.

discontent, treachery, disappointment, ruin, misery, [and] despair" (149). *News from Nowhere* is, after all, presented only as *An Epoch of Rest*.

Configured thus as rest, Morris conceives of utopia not as the end of history, but as what we might call a Jamesonian pause; and it is in the context of this configuration that we can begin to see how the dialectic of Morris's utopian novel works to undermine the notion of the autonomy of art. Just as rest, or the cessation of labour, implies its own end in the resumption of work, so *News from Nowhere*, the utopian negative of industrial England, desires its own negation in the political sequence of collective struggle it opens onto. Thus, rather than embodying the superficiality of mere fantasy or the constraints of a positive program, Morris's utopia bears what Hegel, in the famous "Preface" to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, describes as "the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labour of the negative" (19). In the preceding paragraph of the "Preface," Hegel differentiates between the "simple negativity" that constitutes the "bifurcation of the simple"—i.e. the structure of binary opposition—and the full movement of the negation of (this simple) negation that establishes "the True" (18): "[The True] is the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal, having its end also as its beginning; and only by being worked out to its end, is it actual" (18). This Hegelian *negation of negation* is another way of seeing the full movement of the utopian dialectic in *News from Nowhere*. The simple negation of the opposition between the utopian and the real, epitomized by the binary of non-alienated and alienated labour, is itself negated in the third term of revolutionary collective struggle: the True always lying beyond the utopian

image itself, calling out from the page to be actualized in history.

2. A Critical Review of Approaches to the Utopian Labour in (and of) *News from Nowhere*:

Critics of *News from Nowhere* have, with relative frequency, worked-over its representation of utopian labour.[6] One point on which many critics seem to agree is that the text works through the labour-question by presenting the binary pair of alienated labour and utopian work. For John Stirling, Morris presents an inspiring contrast between the subjugated labour of capitalism, which is productive of alienation and surplus value, and work reunited with art that is productive of pleasure and the redemption of use-value through socialist reorganization. For Christopher Shaw, the opposition is cast in terms of the capitalist division of labour and Morris's unique politicization of an older Romantic ideal. For Rob Breton it is a matter of Morris severing—where Ruskin and Carlyle before him failed to do so—the Victorian "Gospel of Work" from the current mode of production so as to unequivocally condemn the degraded, and degrading, working conditions of Victorian England. The analysis of these critics working through the labour question congeal around the following tasks:[7]

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[6] In what follows I engage with, and attempt to juxtapose my own approach from, three recent essays that embody what I argue is a half-way analysis of labour in their treatment of *News from Nowhere*: John Stirling, "William Morris and work as it is and as it might be"; Christopher Shaw, "William Morris and the Division of Labour: The Idea of Work in *News from Nowhere*"; and Rob Breton, "WorkPerfect: William Morris and the Gospel of Work."

[7] Of course, not all analyses of Morris's theory of labour exhibit the general tendencies I outline here. A recent example of a more innovative approach to the topic is Daniel Shea's "Abortions of the Market: Production and Reproduction in *News from Nowhere*." Though he begins by outlining the opposition between degraded and natural labour in

1) to emphasize and expound upon one term or other of the opposition—that is, to define, with lateral references to Morris's reserve of complementary texts and other historically relevant materials, either the particular horrors of actually existing Victorian working conditions or the specific character and pleasures of Morris's utopian idea of work;
2) to work a specific theoretical flourish over how exactly one term of the opposition relates to the other; and
3) to provide a genealogy of Morris's thoughts on the subject, accurately emphasizing the names of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Schiller, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Marx.

Despite the informative narratives produced by such analysis, the disciplined rehearsals of static oppositions – fixed in history, form, and conceptual space – contribute merely to the sharpening of our insight into historical ephemera, and here I mean "historical" in only the weakest sense of distant and dead. My aim here is not simply to say that these critics miss the mark with Morris, but rather that critical study itself imposes many conventional and disciplinary barriers. Surely, in confrontation with a utopian text—that is, with a text that so conspicuously confronts the problematic of thinking otherwise—our task as critical readers is to open, rather than close, its horizon of meaning. Or, to

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Morris's thought, Shea argues that the founding principle of this opposition—that people are products of their labour—is ultimately mired in "essentializing notions of gendered biological limitations" that "[threaten] to undermine the very freedoms" upon which Morris's utopia conceptions are built. I will further discuss Shea's essay, especially his reading of the politicization of desire in *News from Nowhere,* as well as a notable contribution by Ruth Livesay, below.

rephrase the imperative, the task of the critical reader is to challenge the closures that have been handed to us, testing every lock with the keys at our disposal.

Morris provides us an important key for unlocking the stasis of the alienated – utopian labour opposition in his essay, "Useful Work versus Useless Toil." Morris makes four important and sequentially intensifying moves in his probing of the labour question in this essay. First, he employs the binary opposition named in the title to deconstruct that gospel of work, the hypocritical "creed of modern morality that all labour is good in itself" (98). Second, he describes the essential threefold hope of "rest," "product," and "pleasure" that delineates useful work from useless toil (99). Third, he mobilizes the intensified opposition between alienated and non-alienated labour in the form of a utopian demand. He thus reveals the incapacity of the "system of Capital" to meet the demands of useful work and outlines the social arrangement necessary to support a system characterized by useful work. Finally—and without grasping this last point we will miss the whole point of revealing the binary in the first place—he invokes a third category of work, revolutionary struggle: "It is Peace, therefore, which we need in order that we may live and work in hope and with pleasure…. *But for us, let us set our hearts on it and win it at whatever cost*" (my emphasis 119). Revolutionary work is characterized as a violent and protracted struggle leading to open warfare:

> It may be that the best we can hope to see is that struggle getting sharper and bitterer day by day, until it breaks out openly at last into the slaughter of men by actual warfare instead of by the slower and crueller methods of

"peaceful" commerce. (119)

Revolutionary work is characterized by neither the immediate pleasures of useful work nor the futility of useless toil. It involves no small amount of "turmoil and trouble" that will be survived only by aiming "steadily and with singleness of heart" at the "Peace" collectively fought for (120).

Critical work on Morris and *News from Nowhere* that narrates the opposition between alienated and non-alienated labour as fixed and absolute effectively imposes a conceptual stasis on the work. Delimiting the two modes of labour so concretely has the paradoxical effect of elevating the utopian conception of labour to a purely transcendent space, where, like a god peering down from some unreachable perch, it can serve only to offer condemnation of its negative. The blockage produced by this critical practice has the effect of turning what I argue is still a politically radical text into a 'historical' document. Even Stirling, whose stated intention is to interject Morris's formulation of utopian labour into the "[c]ontemporary discussion of work" (127), fails to capitalize on the full force of Morris's dialectical engagement with labour, relying solely on the strength of Morris's utopian vision.[8] More conservatively, the condemnation of industrial labour is the heart of the utopian function for Breton, who celebrates the way Morris "removes the vision of perfect work from industrial working conditions...withdraw[ing] from economic reality, further than...Carlyle and

[8] Stirling writes: "My argument here is that contemporary labour process debate lacks the vision of a socialist alternative that is the central theme of Morris's argument" (129). Though Stirling acknowledges—in his essay's concluding sentence—that Morris would balk at the thought of his ideas on work being used to promote palliative strategies for redeeming work within the capitalist system, it is precisely with tracing Morris's resonance with such palliative efforts that Stirling engages himself.

Ruskin" and far enough away to gain the perspective necessary to establish an effective critique of industrial labour conditions (49-50). Breton recognizes that Morris is committed to the idea of revolution, but this commitment is tantamount (for Breton) to a rejection of politics and serves primarily to emphasize the "difference between perfect Work and rationalized labor" (55). Likewise, Matthew Beaumont, in "To Live in the Present: *News From Nowhere* and the Representation of the Present in Late Victorian Utopian Fiction," sees Morris and *News* as conforming to a mode of representation operative more generally in utopian fiction at the fin de siècle, which attempts to "grasp the fragmentary parts of the present as a singular totality by glimpsing it from an imaginary future" (120). These arguments claim, when at their best,[9] that the aim of *News from Nowhere* is knowledge or condemnation of the Victorian present (or of the industrial mode of production more generally), and the movement of the dialectic that they emphasize is the movement toward totality, which I identify above as constituting one half the dialectic of *News from Nowhere*. So far so good. However, the problem with stopping here is that our binary pair—our conceptual framework—is still stagnated: the utopian dialectic is conceived essentially as revealing a problem through and of conceptual distance rather than as productive of an immanent solution.

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[9] At its worst, this commitment to historicize the labour binary in Morris's thought concludes—as Shaw's essay does—by championing the utopian ideal as presented in *News from Nowhere* as "a programme" for the new society, rather than a call to struggle (29). Shaw suggests (again, in the last line of the essay) that it is because the program of *News from Nowhere* can't abide in capitalist society that "the change must come" (29). Such a formulation is blind to the dialectics at work: that the change might come, Morris writes his novel. The novel isn't, in other words, a blue-print for a world after capital, but a catalyst for change.

Daniel Shea offers a view of just such an immanent product in his essay's detailed and critical analysis of Morris's politicization of sexual desire and reproduction in *News from Nowhere*. Shea argues that a "[b]elief in the political potential of reproduction thoroughly informs Morris's thinking" (160), demonstrating the influence of Victorian ideas of eugenics on Morris's political formulations and deftly drawing attention to a host of reproductive metaphors and sexual innuendo imbedded in the novel's dialogue. If in the course of emphasizing Morris's belief in generational evolution Shea sometimes makes *News from Nowhere* appear as *Being Some Chapters From a Utopian Romance of Lust*, he also insightfully identifies Morris's intent "to inspire his readers' dormant revolutionary powers" (161). Shea usefully gestures to Ernst Bloch's idea of the "Not Yet" of the utopian impulse to describe the "spark of hope" Morris aims to ignite through his work (qtd. in Shea 161); but his attention to the work of desire in Morris's novel is too sharply focused on the idea of coupling to admit less sexualized forms of collective struggle.

If Shea draws attention to *News from Nowhere*'s more bawdy elements, Ruth Livesay, in her essay, "Morris, Carpenter, Wilde, and the Political Aesthetics of Labor," brings into focus the central place of the "politicized [and somatic] aesthetics of communal labour" in Morris's thought. In reference to Morris's socialist poetry, Livesay keenly describes how "here, art is producing that hopeful pilgrimage towards the communal utopia, producing that desire which E. P. Thompson argues is indivisible from the necessity of class-conflict in Morris's vision of the coming socialist revolution" (602). Art and desire are

clearly formulated here as working immanently to political struggle. Livesay's astute analysis, however, is somewhat stifled by her tendency, as the essay moves forward, to oppose the categories of art and revolution, even as she attests that Morris was a leading proponent of the tendency of late-Victorian thought to flexibly and creatively interpenetrate the realms of aesthetics and politics. Morris, Livesay rightly claims towards the end of her essay, "developed his somatic aesthetics of the pleasure of labor as a means of re-signifying artists as the productive laborers in the present" (610). However, what is lacking in this articulation is a corresponding acknowledgement that the inverse—that Morris re-signifies laborers as creative forces *in the present*—is equally true and that these two reconfigurations combine to create Morris's unique dialectic of revolutionary change. I would argue that this omission is not merely incidental but symptomatic of the opposition between Carpenter and Morris that it is her primary objective to convey.[10] The opposition between Carpenter and Morris suggested by Livesay—the former espousing the transformative power and function of artistically generated desire; the latter ardent in his belief in revolution, rather than idealist evolution, as the primary agent of social change—ultimately alienates Morris's thought from a position that is internal to it. In the following section I seek to demonstrate that the desire produced by art and the political sequence of socialist

[10] "This article" writes Livesay, "contrasts Morris response to these questions [of the relationship of aesthetics and politics] with those of… Edward Carpenter" (602). Livesay later formulates the opposition thus: "The poet in Carpenter's Lamarkian aesthetic was nothing less than a catalyst of evolutionary change, arousing desire in his readers who modified themselves and the coming generations as a result. Poetic identity was the force of creation and progress in microcosm. But for Morris, historical materialism and revolution, rather than idealist aesthetics and evolution, were the narratives of social change" (611).

revolution are, perhaps as Livesay means to articulate, the mutually operative terms of the dialectic of Morris's utopian politics. Inflected through Shea and Livesay's attunement to the late-Victorian discourses of eugenics and somatic amelioration, Morris's theory of historical transformation might be captured in the slogan: "No evolution without revolution; no determination without desire."

3. The Utopic Function of Art in the Politics of William Morris

The dialectic of Morris's utopian politics in *News from Nowhere* cannot, without distorting it, be severed from the dialectic *of* the novel, that is, Morris's conception of the immanent, utopic function of art within the movement of socialism. In order to understand Morris's view of the utopic function of art, we have to consider it in the context of the historical dialectics of his Socialist political thought and not merely his pre-political hopes and fears for art. Properly distinguishing between his pre- and pro- socialist political thought is essential for accurately exploring the relationship between art and politics in his work.

In 1879, for example, Morris still thought of the task of improving the lived conditions of modern life as "a moral affair" ("The Art of the People" 47). In response to the "commercial war" stripping society of its positive virtues, Morris could say, at this earlier stage in his political development, that society "needs regulating and reforming" that can only be accomplished by art, whose task it is to instruct men in the virtues of "honesty" and "simplicity of life" (47). Looking back at this time in his life and thought, Morris wrote, "the immediate future seemed to me likely to intensify all the present evils by sweeping away the

last survivals of the days before the dull squalor of civilization had settled down on the world" ("How I" 280).

But over the course of the 1880s Morris came to devote himself to socialism, which he understood as the political movement toward a communist condition, a society of equality in which all wealth is "owned…by the whole community for the benefit of the whole" ("Communism" 271). For Morris the socialist, art and politics are intimately bound to one another and form together the constituent elements of the dialectic of struggle toward a communist society.

Morris was not interested in socialism as a means of organizing a political force capable only of "regulating and reforming." As he ardently professed in 1893, "any other state of society but communism is grievous and disgraceful to all" and he remained committed to Socialism because he believed a communist society "possible of realization" (275). As such, Morris was concerned about the potential for the "Social-democratic measures" taken by the political movement of Socialism to be "looked upon as ends in themselves" (270). Thus, political action must be "supplemented by instilling into the minds of the people a knowledge of… communism" (270). Communism, in other words, doubles as both the realizable goal of Socialism and the ideal that animates the struggle against capitalism and orients its practical politics. Within the historical dialectic of his later thought, Morris claimed, "it is the province of art to set the true ideal of a full and reasonable life before [the workman]" ("How I" 281). Art is no longer called upon to qualitatively improve people as a pre-condition for reforming society, but rather art guides and gives birth to the desire that will drive the collective struggle

to radically reform social relations.

As evidenced in *News from Nowhere*, the utopic function of art can be thought of as the mediation of the ideal of communism in the present moment in the form of collective desire, where this mediating function of art produces a third term, a moment of intensification that enables the emergence of revolutionary labour. Returning to Hegel's formulation, this dialectical sequence can be understood in terms of the negation of negation described earlier. Art mediates the "simple negation" of the ideal, producing desire, which in turn motivates a revolutionary struggle that negates the negation (the desire), actualizing communism. Because the concept of communism is imbedded in this way, it cannot be posited solely as a telos for socialism, but must also be understood as the animating force of its politics of struggle. Furthermore, we can see more clearly why the work of the dialectic cannot be said to be completed but is rather, as I will demonstrate directly, unmasked in *News from Nowhere*, pointing in a direction beyond the text.

News from Nowhere is framed by passages that testify to the utopic function of art within the socialist movement. In other words, the novel foregrounds a theory of its own political and dialectical utopianism. There are two key movements to this dialectic in *News from Nowhere*, one outlined at the beginning of the novel and the other at the end. The first movement is an attempt to open the historical present to analysis by a liberated intellect sharpened by a pleasurable hope in the mutability of social conditions. The second is a call to collective struggle for the realization of a communist society in spite of the pain

and difficulty of revolutionary labour.

The opening sequence of *News from Nowhere* provides an example to the reader of the first movement of Morris's utopian dialectic. The narrative begins with a third-hand account of a discussion regarding "the future of the fully developed society" that took place at the headquarters of the Socialist League, the political organization to which Morris belonged at the time he wrote the novel (1). We are informed that the discussion of the fully developed, post-revolutionary society left the man who becomes the protagonist of the novel—William Guest—"discontented and unhappy" (3). However, by the time Guest arrives home, "all remembrance of that brilliant logic and foresight which had so illuminated the recent discussion" had "disappeared," the discussion itself being replaced with "a vague hope, that was now become a pleasure, for days of peace and rest and cleanness and smiling goodwill" (4). Guest attempts to sleep but promptly wakes up, his intellect sharpened and attuned to analyzing the "miserable muddles… [and] disgraces and losses" of life. Thus, in its first few pages, the novel takes the reader through a crash-course on how to read the subsequent narrative. Suggesting that one is not to cling to details and differences of opinion, the novel advises the reader instead to let the speculative image fade into a more general hope for radical equality, one that will animate and direct the critical intellect toward a penetrating analysis of the present state of things.

Critics have already insightfully engaged this initial movement of the utopian dialectic of *News from Nowhere*. For example, drawing on the political theory of Georg Lukacs, Mathew Beaumont describes the utopian dialectic of the

novel as an intervention in the temporal paradox of modernity, which both "naturalizes the present" and "alienates it from human understanding" (123). Beaumont argues that the novel is not really about the future but the return journey home and the attempt to open up a space for critique within the present from a "distance internal to it" (125). Clive Wilmer makes a similar if less complex claim by arguing that Morris did not intend *News from Nowhere* "as either blueprint or prediction" and that it is primarily an "expression of discontent" and an assertion of "the possibility of a better world" (xxxv). However, the utopian dialectic of *News from Nowhere* does not aim only to open up the present to critique, and the critical heritage has not been as attuned to the utopian politics of the novel's call to revolutionary struggle.

The ending of the novel extends the dialectic movement of the text to include the work of revolutionary struggle, attempting to shift the reader's focus from critiquing the present to changing it. With the moment of utopian fulfillment—the Harvest feast—spread before him, William Guest is suddenly rendered invisible as he fades from Nowhere back to the Victorian present. As Guest lies on his bed, considering the nature of his experience, the reader is confronted with a concise formulation of the utopian imperative:

> Go back again, then, & while you live you will see all round you people engaged in making others live lives which are not their own, while they themselves care nothing for their own real lives—men who hate life though they fear death. Go back and be the happier for

> having seen us, for having added hope to your struggle.
> Go on living while you may, striving, with whatsoever
> pain & labour needs must be, to build up little by little
> the new day of fellowship, and rest and happiness. (305)

The first sentence in this passage reviews the dialectical movement introduced at the beginning of the book. Emerging from utopian exploration, the reader is told to observe clearly the exploitation and alienation that structure social relations in capitalist society. This view of the true character of the present is enabled and encouraged by the lingering pleasure of having glimpsed a better world. But the above passage extends the dialectic from knowledge to action with an imperative to strive and struggle through the painful labour that constitutes the political movement toward the realization of the communist condition. Here, Morris's insistence resonates again with the dialectical importance of the negative for both Jameson and Hegel as they struggle to avoid the fall of thought into the abstract.

If the "vague hope" that animates the first movement of the utopian dialectic is immediate and personal, formulated as a pleasure in response to an ideal, then the hope of the second movement, that which is added to political struggle, is both collective and negative, constituted in part by a desire that will not be fulfilled. The narratological construction of the opening and closing sequences of the novel illuminates the dialectic movement from personal pleasure to a desire for collectivity as such. In the introductory sequence, the reader is three degrees removed from the events, with the narrator recounting the protagonist's conversation "[up] at the League" via the words of "a friend" (1). However by the

close of the first chapter, on the very threshold of utopia, the reader is informed that such a story is best told in the first person. This movement from three degrees of separation from the action to one degree in the form of Guest's own first person narration parallels the movement of Guest from the anxious and fractious gathering at the League to the peace of solitude within his own private abode. But Guest complicates this movement at the end of the novel, expressing a longing for collectivity, concluding that the politicization of the utopian ideal requires a collective "vision" (305), a seeing together that will "vivify"—to use Morris's term from the lecture on "Communism"—the collective labour of building toward "the new day of fellowship and happiness" (305). Hope, in this revolutionary call, is not an immediate pleasure, the promise of its pleasure is as yet out of reach and undecidable.

Most of the critical attention given to this passage focuses on the hope imported—to use Beaumont's strangely mercantile term—by Guest. It is worth pausing over the agency Beaumont attributes to Guest as the importer of this hope, for it is an interpretation that contradicts the surface of the passage. The hope, "added" by Ellen and her fellow Nowhereians, is figured as a supplement to a "struggle," as the lone gift Guest is able to carry back to "dingy Hammersmith" (304-5). But reading the text more closely still, we see that the formulation of this hope is more ambiguous than this, as Ellen does not speak her parting words to Guest, nor communicate them in any direct way. Ellen's words are in fact an interpretive assumption, if not presumption, on the part of Guest, who reads the words out of his fading memory of Ellen's "last mournful look" (305), which is

described more fully two pages previous:

> A pang shot through me, as of some disaster long expected and I suddenly realised...I turned to Ellen, and she did seem to recognise me for an instant; but her bright face turned sad directly, & she shook her head with a mournful look, and the next moment all consciousness of my presence had faded from her face. I felt lonely & sick at heart past the powers of words to describe. (303)

It is not in any way straightforward how Guest manages to read a message of hope out of this moment of non-recognition characterized as a painful and isolating "disaster," the "instant" of "recognition" having already passed them by (303). Furthermore, Guest himself decries, just before taking on the task of interpreting Ellen's mournful look and shaking head (concerning which, it would appear there is a good chance she isn't even looking at him—i.e. "look" here meaning "expression of the face" and not "a direction of the eyes"), that he had only been able to see "all that new life from the outside"—through a glass discoloured by the "prejudices, the anxieties, the distrust, of this time of doubt and struggle" (304). Perhaps we can ascribe a certain kind of agency to Guest in this passage, though it may be more appropriate to say that Guest invents this hope, or "sense of the possibility of [the] redemptive present [of utopia]" rather than "imports" it (Beaumont 51).[11]

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[11] However, I suspect that Beaumont gleans his conception of Guest's agency from a different source than the hazy recollections of Guest's narration that mark the book's final pages. Beaumont's very likely innocent turn of phrase is probably a symptom of a different source of contradiction, that is, the conflation of Guest with Morris which is

Hope here is clearly operating as a negative and its promise comes in the midst of what amounts to a socialist sermon on the necessity of suffering, loss, crisis, confusion, contradiction, pain and labour. This is why the difference between the two ideas, that Guest "imports" the possibility for redemption or that he "invents" it, is so important. The first conception suggests that we receive hope in a purely immediate way through the utopian function—and it is because of this notion that utopian projects like *News from Nowhere* so readily invoke disgust on the part of otherwise intelligent readers. The second conception (invention) is a war cry that we must struggle through pangs of doubt and tears of despair to bellow.

Which brings us back to the utopian imperative inferred by Guest, and given to us in the guise of Ellen's voice: "Go on living while you may, striving, with whatsoever pain & labour needs must be, to build up little by little the new day of fellowship, and rest and happiness" (305). This is no simple hope, that which is followed hard upon by the ideas of death, work, birth and construction given in this command. In its radical otherness from the utopian ideal it is a purely negative term, in the Hegelian sense, and more closely akin to what we would normally call desire. The labour of resistance and revolution produced, or called forth, by this desire is neither completely subsumable by either of the two poles of the alienated-utopian labour opposition: it is instead a third category, animated by a hope presented in the form of contradiction, a dialectical hope *without hope* that begets pain, sacrifice, and hard labour.

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almost irresistible, especially in these last paragraphs of narrative, which figure Guest somewhat restlessly reflecting on his dream or vision in his room at Kelmscott House in Hammersmith, his head on Morris's pillow, so to speak.

4: *News from Nowhere* in its *Commonweal* Context

When viewed within the political context in which it was conceived and originally published, we can see how the utopian dialectic of *News from Nowhere* serves as a direct engagement, in the form of an intervention, in the politics of the moment. Morris's relationship to the socialist movement in England was complicated. He arrived on the scene as a recognized public figure with a reputation as a man of many talents. By the early 1880s, Morris's interest in politics had begun to eclipse his artistic obsessions and business affairs. But if at this time Morris became set on furthering his direct involvement in the politics of the day, likewise his interest with Liberals and Radicals withered away. He told his long-time friend F.S. Ellis, to whom he was later to give copies of all fifty-two Kelmscott Press books, "I'm going in for socialism: I have given up these radicals" (qtd. in MacCarthy 463). In 1883, Morris's desire to "[join] any party which seemed likely to push forward matters" led him to the Democratic Federation (later to be renamed the Social Democratic Federation, or SDF). Only some eighteen months later, Morris led a breakaway group from the SDF to form the Socialist League.

Morris's utopian novel was first serialized in *Commonweal*, the one-penny mouthpiece of the Socialist League, from January to October, 1890. Though Morris was initially a leading figure in the League—a founding and executive member and editor of *Commonweal*—by the time *News from Nowhere* was being

written and serialized, internal conflicts within the League had significantly marginalized him. Morris was forced to resign as editor of *Commonweal* in May 1890 and eventually left the organization all together in November the same year shortly after the last chapters of *News from Nowhere* appeared in print.

Morris's place within the League grew ever more tenuous after 1887. There were three main political factions within the Socialist League: Anarchists, who aimed to dismantle the state via revolutionary uprising and replace it with a free society of producers, and two opposed groups of Socialists, one faction desiring to gain control of the state through the electoral system and the other, by far the smallest group, shunning parliamentary reformism and choosing instead to labour toward the revolutionary uprising of the people led by the working class. It was to this latter, isolated group that Morris belonged, politically marginalized within an already marginal movement as the Anarchists squeezed the Socialists out of the League and the State Socialists rejoined the SDF. In December 1889, a month before *News from Nowhere* first appeared in *Commonweal*, Morris confessed to a friend that he was "discouraged" with the fractured state of the League and was eager to find "some common bond between all Socialists" (Kelvin 137).[12]

In the context of the increasingly fractious condition in the League, *News from Nowhere* argues for a utopian mode of dialectical struggle wherein political action and strategizing are vivified by the desire for conditions of absolute

[12] All recent accounts of Morris's involvement with the SDF and the Socialist League, including this one, are in large part indebted to E. P. Thompson's political biography *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (pages 277-589). I also consulted Greg Wilmot's "Introduction" to the penguin edition of *News from Nowhere* (especially pages xviii-xxi).

equality. Its wager is that a common desire for the society of equality is what in the face of political differences must unite the Socialist movement. That he presents this call in the form of a novel is not insignificant or arbitrary; rather, it is an expression and example of the crucial, utopic function he assigns to art in the dialectic of collective struggle.

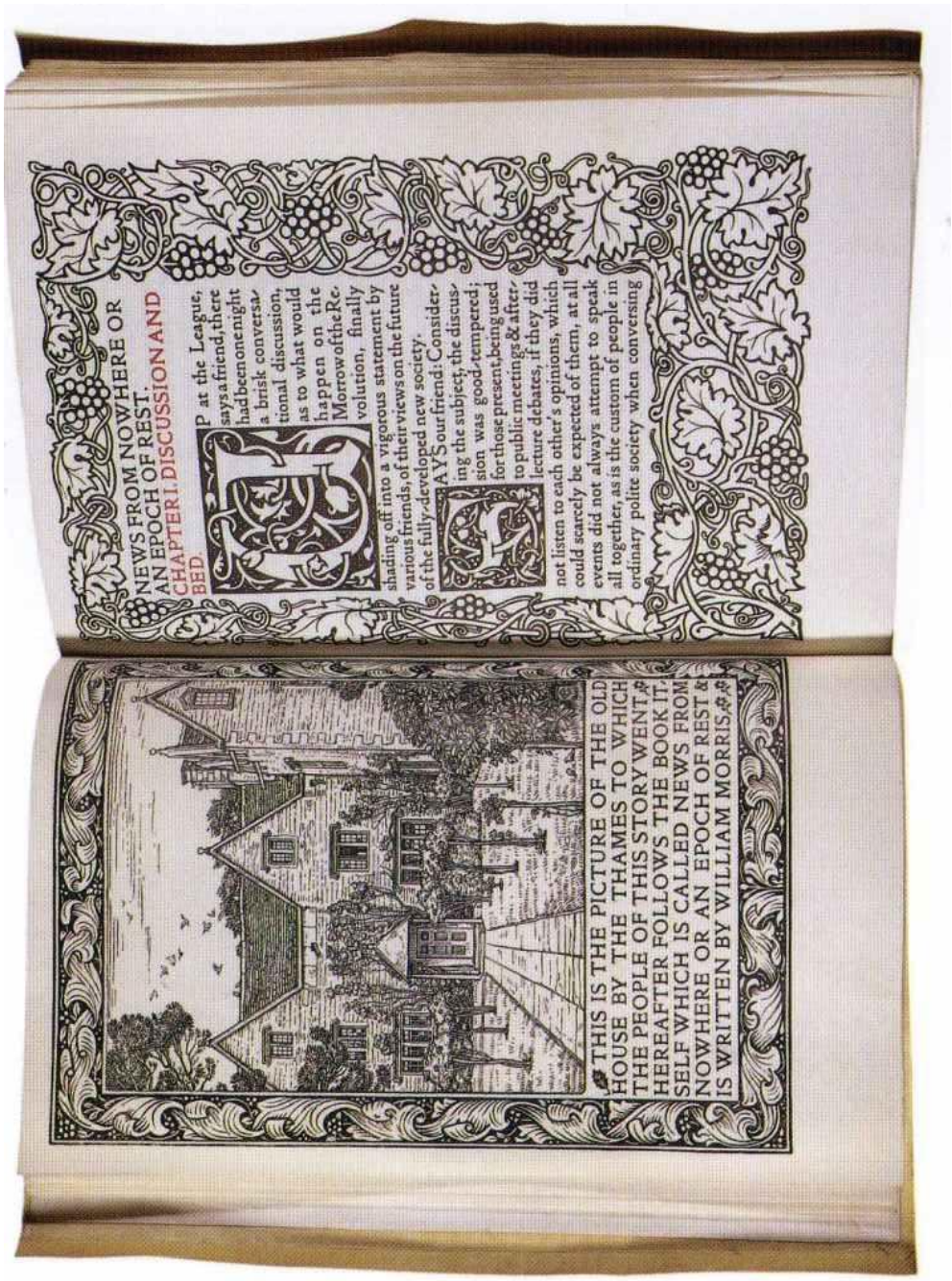

Figure 1: Frontispiece and first page of the Kelmscott Press edition of *News from Nowhere*

Chapter Two

The Kelmscott *News from Nowhere* and the Moment of Communism

William Morris's Kelmscott Press edition of *News from Nowhere* is remarkable for rooting the imaginative project of utopian politics in a weighty materiality. Critics of Morris have tended to think of his idealist artworks and projects as falling outside the political machinations of socialist politics, when in fact, as we have already seen, after the collapse of the Socialist League, Morris persisted in his belief that the employment of a utopian mode of art was crucial to the strategy of the socialist movement. This chapter has three primary aims. First, it attempts to present the Kelmscott Press edition of *News from Nowhere* as a unique and significant political embodiment of the utopian politics of the novel. Second, it seeks to leverage this presentation in an effort to reconsider the political import of the Kelmscott Press project as a whole. Finally, via Jameson's theorization of utopia, it strives to flip the terms in which *News from Nowhere* has been situated, from utopian project to utopian impulse, rearticulating the novel in light of the Kelmscott edition as a powerful instantiation of the moment of communism.

If it appears a relatively straightforward task to establish the political function of the serialized *Commonweal* edition of *News from Nowhere*, which addresses a socialist readership through the League's primary organ of communication, then ascribing a political and socialist function to the Kelmscott Press edition is a decidedly more complicated affair. Unlike *Commonweal*, the

Kelmscott Press did not serve a direct organizational function, nor did it, with its limited print runs of very expensive books, address a working-class or predominantly socialist audience. Traditionally, critical-scholarship has narrated Morris's Kelmscott Press as either a form of Ruskinian protest against the degradation of the book-arts or an exercise in aesthetic escapism and nostalgic indulgence. This latter view is epitomized by E. P. Thomson's biographical study, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, which characterizes the Kelmscott Press as the apolitical efforts of a too-tired idealist who had lost any hope of "reforming the world through his art" (583). Likewise, critics of *News from Nowhere* have not considered the Kelmscott Press edition a politically engaged presentation of the novel. In his comparison of the *Commonweal* and Kelmscott Press editions of *News from Nowhere*, Michael Liberman dismisses the difference in bibliographic codes as "minor" (349), and Trevor Lloyd, in his analysis of "The Politics of *News from Nowhere*," declares the earlier *Commonweal* version the most "revolutionary" (287) while suggesting that "by 1891 Morris was too old, too worn by the struggle, and too interested in prose romances and in printing to take [an] active…part in politics" (286).

It is perhaps not surprising that it has proven difficult for book-historians and other commentators to conceive of the Kelmscott Press as a socialist project. In the nineteenth century, Marx and Engels forcibly critiqued the role of idealism in politics from within the socialist movement, attacking the notion that "Socialism is the expression of absolute truth, reason, and justice, and has only to be discovered to conquer all the world by virtue of its own power" (Engels 297).

Though the Socialist movement in Britain never embodied the orthodoxies of Marx and Engel's scientific socialism, historical memory has preserved their ideas as the foundation of Leftist thought while those of Morris have largely faded from view. More importantly, the less than ideal history of actually existing communism and its subsequent defeat make Morris's insistence on making political usage of the communist ideal appear incredibly naive. As such, it is no wonder that those wishing to expound the brilliance and beauty of the Kelmscott Press books have not explored with any vigor their place within Morris's utopian socialism.

1. The Utopian Politics of the Kelmscott Press edition of *News from Nowhere*

The following reading of the Kelmscott edition of *News from Nowhere* engages in a mode of textual criticism instigated by Jerome McGann's terminological distinction between the "linguistic" and "bibliographic" codes of a text ("Socialization" 70). According to McGann, the linguistic code of a text is made up of the words we read, while the bibliographic codes of a text are the material location and features in which those words are inscribed, and include things like typography, size, page format, title pages, and other material elements of book design. McGann's formulation of the relationship between these two sets of codes comes in the form of a provocative visual metaphor: "Every literary work that descends to us operates through the deployment of a double helix of perceptual codes: the linguistic codes, on one hand, and the bibliographical codes on the other" ("Socialization" 70). Through the invocation of the double helix

metaphor, which is borrowed from the conceptual model used to describe the constituent parts and structure of DNA molecules, McGann agues that a book is a structural unity forged by the coming together of two independent strands, and that our interpretations of literary works benefit from applying our critical analyses to the full spectrum of textual signification.

Importantly, McGann refers directly to the Kelmscott Press books in his theorization of textual signification, arguing they belong to a special class of literary artifacts wherein the bibliographic elements of the book have been designed to signify the conceptual message of the "work" as much as the linguistic code:

> [With the Kelmscott books] the physique of the 'document' has been forced to play an aesthetic function, has been made part of the 'literary work'... the distinction between physical medium and conceptual message breaks down completely.... The physical presentation of these printed texts has been made to serve aesthetic ends. (70)

Thus, while changes in physical presentation between editions of any literary work should have an effect on our conceptions of them, in the case of works re-printed at the Kelmscott Press the differences in signification are especially pronounced. McGann broaches this issue of the intensity of the material signification of the Kelmscott Press books at the end of his essay "'A Thing To Mind': The Material Aesthetic of William Morris," remarking that every Kelmscott Press book presents us with a "new world," adding that the aesthetic signification of the Kelmscott books "is a story" that "has yet to be properly told"

(70). Therefore, by exploring the ways in which the bibliographic codes combine with the linguistic code of the Kelmscott Press edition of *News from Nowhere*, I seek to demonstrate how the Kelmscott edition intensifies the utopian-political signification of the novel and deepens our understanding of the political-aesthetic register of the Kelmscott Project as a whole.

The Kelmscott Press edition of *News from Nowhere* is most notable for its stunning opening spread, which features an elaborate and thickly designed frontispiece on the left and the beginning of the first chapter on the right (Fig. 1). For Morris, "the two pages making an opening" are the basic unit of typographical design ("The Ideal Book" 70). The conceptual significance of the "opening" containing the frontispiece and first page is suggested by the spaciously set front matter, in which no more than one page of any of the initial five openings contains a typographical element. It is as if the reader is intentionally underwhelmed throughout the commencing pages in preparation for the shock of the frontispiece opening. The full force of the book's bibliographic signification appears in an intense and condensed form in these two pages. The frontispiece exhibits a wood-cut illustration of Morris's Oxfordshire home, Kelmscott Manor, which features prominently in the narrative of *News from Nowhere* as the final destination of Guest's journey through utopia. The caption underneath the illustration foregrounds the house's place at the end of the utopian road: "THIS IS THE PICTURE OF THE OF OLD HOUSE BY THE THAMES TO WHICH THE PEOPLE OF THIS STORY WENT" (fig. 1). It is at this old house by the Thames, on the verge of partaking in the harvest feast, that Guest fades from

utopian Nowhere. The illustration seems to foreshadow this event, positioning the house, or perhaps some interior part of it, as the vanishing point at the end of a long stone-path lined with rosebushes. The house and caption are framed by a thin border of white leaves and flowers that seem to swirl around the illustration, the negative space of the frame rendered imposingly in black ink.

The two pages of this opening are conceptually linked by both linguistic and bibliographic codes. The caption to the illustration follows on its identification of the house by calling attention to the opposing page of the opening, "HEREAFTER FOLLOWS THE BOOK IT-SELF" (fig. 1). By making a distinction between "the picture" and "the book itself" the frontispiece establishes its conceptual proximity with its other half while also asserting an internal tension. The locus of this tension is the conflict between the graphic and the textual, dramatized on the first page of the novel in the two large blocks containing the decorative initial capitals. The large initials, printed with the same intense, black negative space as the opposing frame, display the "U" of "Up" and the "S" of "Says" in the midst of a violent embrace with spreading vines. Morris put a good deal of emphasis in his theory of book-design on the relationship between illustration and type, declaring that "the essential point" is that "picture or pattern work" should form *part of the page*, should be a part of the whole scheme of the book" ("Printing" 65). However, within the square frame of the large initials, it is as if the relationship between ornament, text, and page is still being worked out, still caught in a moment of becoming. The vines penetrate the face of the letters,

tangling around their stems in a visual struggle for dominance.[13] The text-block of the first page is surrounded by a border of grape vines, rich with foliage and fruit, which appears more static, lighter and less menacing than the border of the frontispiece and the drama unfolding within the ornamental initials.[14]

The effect of this visually dense opening is one of transportation to the utopian space of Nowhere—the transportation not only of the would be reader, still figured here largely as viewer, but of the book itself. The literary narrative is conceptualized here as unfolding within the garden space of the old house. Likewise, the book itself is reconceived as a garden, where the conceptual metaphor of the "leaves" of the book is extended down to the level of the letter, the most basic unit of linguistic code. As such, the frontispiece will not, perhaps cannot, separate the story or the literary artwork of the novel and its materiality. The conceptual metaphor of the book as a garden is maintained throughout the edition by the reappearance on nearly every opening of at least one ornamental initial either six or ten lines high. The effect of all this asserts that what "hereafter follows" the frontispiece is not merely a narrative; it is a book, a thing heavy in the hand that wills, via the transfiguration of letter into leaf, to root the utopian

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[13] In "Beyond Reading," Jeffrey Skoblow describes a similar scene in his account of the large ornamental capitals on the title page of the Kelmscott Press edition of *The Story of the Glittering Plain*: "[The ornamental capitals] are themselves white, shadowed by an irregular box of black filled with a bramble of white curving growth that ensnares and pierces the letters themselves: the effect is to make these capital letters seem to disappear in plain sight" (247).

[14] The ornamental initials that appear throughout the Kelmscott *News from Nowhere*, as well as the garden-themed border that surrounds the first page of the novel, are from designs used regularly at the Press. For a thorough account of the ornamental designs Morris produced for the Kelmscott Press, see Chapter 5 of Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of the Typographical Adventure of William Morris*.

imagination in the soil of the material world and their tend to the ongoing work of history.[15]

The leaves leading up to the opening featuring the frontispiece/first page are not divorced from its conceptual force, but condition the reader for the explosion of signification to be found there. The book slowly increases in density, moving through three blank leaves, a sparse title page and table of contents, leading the reader down a path toward the garden opening. The blank leaves, whose texture and thickness resist being called empty, foreground the utopian negative of Nowhere. On the title page, a small leaf appears directly before the title, anticipating the confrontation between leaf and letter, garden and book, which constitutes the utopian encoding of the work as a whole. A few leaves further into the book, the dark imprint of the frontispiece casts a shadow through a "blank" page, which in its semi-transparency serves as a window into a new world. Turning the page we cross the same threshold Guest does, seeing what he sees, a he walks through the "door in the wall" leading up to the old house:

> [W]e stood presently on a stone path which led up to the old house to which fate … had so strangely brought me in this new world of men. My companion gave a sigh of pleased surprise & enjoyment; nor did I wonder, for the garden between the wall and the house was redolent of the June flowers, and the roses were rolling over one another with that delicious

[15] The heavy effect of their ornamentation has lead the Kelmscott Books to be described elsewhere as "so overburdened with ornament that they suggest heavily laden ships likely to be capsized by the gentlest breeze" (Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press* 133). Though no doubt articulated in a different spirit than my own interpretation, the idea of the Kelmscott Books as vessels weighed down by their materiality resonates with my conception (formulated below) of the Kelmscott books as material embodiments of transition.

> super-abundance of small well-tended gardens which at first sight takes away all thought from the beholder save that of beauty. The blackbirds were singing their loudest…and the swifts wheeled whining about the gables. And the house itself was a fit guardian for all the beauty of this heart of summer. (291)

That is, we almost see what Guest does. The transporting beauty that he attributes to the garden is displaced from the picture itself to the whole page, thrusting the book itself into a utopian space.

Let us step back for a moment from appearance to production. If starting from McGann's idea of the design of the Kelmscott Press books as attempts to create "a complete marriage of bibliographical and linguistic elements" ("'A Thing" 70), we would expect this visually remarkable opening of the Kelmscott *News from Nowhere* to be the expression and execution of Morris's singular vision. But as textual scholar D. F. McKenzie warns, projecting ideal conceptions of production onto the printed page will conjure up only "printers of the mind" who "please the imagination" but do not "advance our knowledge" (*Making Meaning* 14). Unsurprisingly then, the story behind the frontispiece of the Kelmscott *News from Nowhere* reveals elements of disruption, after-thought and dissatisfaction that can usefully complicate our interpretation of its elements.

Printing of the Kelmscott *News* began in June of 1892, but the book was not issued until March of 1893 due to a decision in late October to include a frontispiece. A note in the diary of Morris's private secretary Sydney Cockerell from October 17, 1892, claims that it was he who suggested to Morris the idea

that "a picture of a house should be given as a frontispiece" to *News from Nowhere* (Kelvin 463n). By early November Morris was communicating with the illustrator Charles March Gere about going to Kelmscott Manor to "make drawings (sketches) of the house from any points that you think would do for an *ornamental* drawing for… (News from Nowhere) now in press—to be cut in wood" (Kelvin 463). Morris received at least three sets of drawings from Gere, including the one finally used for the frontispiece. In a letter responding to Gere's second attempt at the drawing eventually used for the frontispiece, Morris expresses his desire for several alterations, including a rather harsh remark about the foliage on the front of the house: "Again the plants against the house wall are *vines* and should have some indication of the habit of vines" (Kelvin 482).

Most of Morris's problems with the second drawing of the house were not resolved in the one finally used for the frontispiece, not least the rather wooden vines that remain virtually unchanged. Norman Kelvin, editor of Morris's *Collected Letters*, surmises it is conceivable that "Morris was never quite satisfied with any version of Gere's drawing but used the one he did because … it was not possible to delay any longer" (482n). Such may be the case, but Morris, unlike many of the mythologizers of the Kelmscott Press, did not see book production as the simple working-out of one man's vision.[16] Rather, he asserted that "the only possible way to make beautiful books" is to have "the designer of the picture-blocks, the designer of the ornamental blocks, the wood engraver and the printer, all of them thoughtful, painstaking artists, and all working in harmonious

[16] The issue of the Kelmscott Press mythology is addressed in detail in section two of this chapter.

cooperation for the production of a work of art" ("Woodcuts" 40). This commitment to collectivity and the sublation of private desires into collective and cooperative ones resonates, as I will explore directly, in the narrative of the novel.

The Kelmscott Press *News From Nowhere*, cooperatively constructed from the finest materials and laden with utopian signifiers connecting the words of the novel with the garden spaces of Nowhere, embodies Morris's utopian novel in an ideal version of the book. *What* then are we to make of this utopian transformation of the book? Is the ideal book here being asserted as a value in itself along with the goal of one day having all books be comparable to Kelmscott in beauty and material wealth? What functions do the ideal versions of the garden, house and book play in the Kelmscott Press *News from Nowhere*? Morris had long considered these three cultural forms as among the most crucial and powerful in human society. In "Making the Best of It," a lecture delivered in 1879, Morris says that gardens are "absolute necessities" and that they should be conceived as "part of the house" (91). Morris's biographer, Fiona MacCarthy, writes of the centrality of the garden to Morris's utopian imagination:

> [He] had deep appreciation of a garden's possibilities … the gardens he created were a strange and lovely mixture of formality and wildness…. In so much of his writing … a garden is set right at the emotional centre, the place of discovery, the end of the long journey. (8-9)

Morris also made no secret of his love of houses and books. In an unfinished essay on medieval ornamented manuscripts composed in 1892, Morris states that the products of art "most to be longed for" are first "a beautiful house" and second

"a beautiful book": "To enjoy good houses and good books in self-respect and decent comfort, seems to me to be the pleasurable end towards which all societies of human beings ought now to struggle" ("Some Thoughts" 1). However, if we can infer from the above quotations that to read a book in the garden of a good house can be seen as Morris's own idiosyncratic conception of the utopian ideal, then the Kelmscott *News from Nowhere* complicates the status of that ideal as an end point in the contradiction between its material striving to embody the ideal of the garden-book and the sublated status of those cultural forms in the utopian world of the novel.

For in the utopian future of Nowhere books and gardens (and houses too, to a certain extent) lose their particular significance: only a few eccentrics read or write books or cultivate *private* gardens (or live in a particular house very long). This is not because the forms themselves have been abandoned, but rather because they have been realized in new, universalized forms: England itself has become "a garden" and the people who live there have themselves been transformed into living "books" (103; 217). Guest clearly arrives in Nowhere a lover of both books and gardens, but more often than not his inquiries into their utopian significance lead to awkward or intense exchanges regarding their status in the new society.

As Guest sets out on his tour of Nowhere with Dick, he is mesmerized by the gardens he sees all around him, repeatedly pointing them out to the reader as he travels. On "the main road that runs through Hammersmith," Guest informs us, "[t]here were houses about… each surrounded by a teeming garden" (32). A little while later, Guest "busy looking about," he again points out how "[e]ach house

stood in a garden carefully-cultivated and running over with flowers," remarking how the landscape was unrecognizable "[a]midst all these gardens" (57). Apparently overwhelmed, Guest has to "shut [his] eyes to keep out the sight of the sun glittering on this fair abode of gardens" (58). It is at this moment that Guest experiences the flashback to Bloody Sunday, a rupture that grounds the phenomenal link between the old world and the new in the mediating power of the garden that surrounds him. Guest's fixation continues, again drawing our attention to "some beautiful rose-gardens" (69), until at last Old Hammond solves the riddle for him: "England was once… a country of huge and foul workshops…. It is now a garden" (103). If, in Nowhere, England has been transformed into a garden, then Old Hammond suggests—in another point of rupture between the utopian future and Victorian past, that its growth is linked to the utopian seed Guest is to bring home with him: "For perhaps our guest may some day go back to the people he has come from, and may take a message from us which may bear fruit for them, and consequently for us" (195). Hammond's Edenic metaphor turns the biblical myth on its head: the garden and the utopian fruit of the tree growing in its midst holds the power to redeem—rather than condemn—mankind.

If Guest has an interest that can compete with his love of gardens, it is surely his obsession with books. Guest draws several Nowhereians into discussions about books—his appearance of having walked out of a history book surely partly the cause—but the topic of books almost always ends in some sort of contention. Books are no longer a central medium in Nowhere. For the most part, only a few oddballs, like the awkward and gruff Bob the Weaver and the eccentric

historian Old Hammond, busy themselves with books. The Nowherian view of books is perhaps best captured in Dick's good-natured scolding of Bob: "you have so muddled your head… with grubbing into those idiotic old books… that you scarcely know how to behave. Really, it is about time for you to take to some open-air work… [to] clear the cobwebs from your brain" (24). Even Bob, who confesses to printing books as a hobby, admits that "machine printing is beginning to die out, along with the waning of the plague of book-making, so I have had to turn to other things" (26-27). Books indeed still circulate and are produced in Nowhere, but one gets the sense that their role in the new society is gradually being minimalized. The great archive tended by Old Hammond would, for instance, certainly be left to spoil were it not for his peculiar fascination with them. Ellen, furthermore, representing a younger generation, cannot abide her grandfather's grumblings about literature: "Books, books! Always books, grandfather! When will you understand that after all it is the world we live in which interests us, the world of which we are a part" (217). Ellen continues her rant, explicitly pointing out the "moonlit garden" and her companions, declaring, "look! These are our books in these days!" (217). Guest seems to grasp the point entirely, remarking to himself, "if she were a book, the pictures in her were most lovely" (218). In fact, we hear nothing more of books from this point on in the novel, as Guest busies himself with his budding friendships.

Guest thus learns, if somewhat slowly, to shift his attention and desire from the particular to the social, seeing the whole of England as a garden and the people around him as living books. Though Guest clearly articulates at the end of

the novel that he hasn't overcome his alienated subjectivity through the course of his sojourn in Nowhere, he nonetheless goes through a crucial transformation.[17] Appearing in the novel's opening pages as a disgruntled political subject who takes pleasure from isolating himself behind the locked door of his house, he increasingly derives pleasures from the company of others in his journey through Nowhere—and this desire for collectivity stays with him on the return journey home. Alone in his bedroom, Guess expresses the desire to be able to share his experience with "others" (305). No longer contented with the consolations of private pleasures, he stakes the legitimacy of his "dream"—the possibility of its becoming a "vision"—on its collective resonance (305).

The central signifier for the power and possibility of utopian transformation in the Kelmscott *News from Nowhere* is the garden. From the garden foliage that entangles the initial letters and frames the frontispiece and first page, to the gardens that define the utopian landscape and constitute the link between the fallen Victorian present and its redeemed future, gardens name the possibility of transition. We get a hint of Morris's conception of the transitional function of the garden when in "Making the Best of It" he says, by way of an aside, "in a very beautiful country … we can do without [gardens] well enough" (91). His transformation of the book form into a garden space for the transmission of a utopian vision raises the question of the relation of aesthetics to politics. In other words, what is ultimately posited through this link between the ideal book and the reconstruction of the social as such? In the material form of the Kelmscott

[17] In the closing passage Guest describes how throughout his experience he was "still wrapped up in the prejudices, the anxieties, the distrust, of this time of doubt and struggle" (304-5).

News From Nowhere, Morris is not doing something wholly new; rather, he is referencing the aesthetic of an earlier form of the book in the midst of transition between manuscript and print. However, he does not use this historical form to nostalgically reference an idealized past, but to project a vision of the future wherein the form of the book is itself transcended.

At a time when advancements in machine-printing and the pursuit of a mass audience in the rapidly rising literacy of the working class was putting ever downward pressure on the price and forms of printed material, Morris's decision to re-imagine the incunabular book demands to be seen as political as well as aesthetic. On the face of it, the decision is certainly full of contradiction. As one disgruntled contemporary wrote in a full page advertisment taken out in *The Books of Tomorrow*:

> Dear William Morris
>
> I presume that the Kelmscott Books are published for your own amusement, because I have enquired extensively and find that they do not amuse anyone else…. You ignore the masters of printing…[who all] printed books in readable type and of a convenient size at a moderate price. If you were consistent your Printing Press would exist for the sake of spreading knowledge. As it is your publications appeal to capitalists and others of the wealthy classes…. Your books are *bric-a-brac* and they appeal only to a class which I am told you are continually condemning. (qtd. in Clair 246)

The point is well made: how could a socialist commit such a sin against the working people? But this is where our understanding of Morris's utopian politics and his commitment to revolutionary communism will—if not dispel the contradiction—at least mobilize it. Morris did not believe that producing mass quantities of cheaply and poorly made goods was a way to defend or support the working class. Nor did he believe they needed a middle class education in book-learning to become worthy of a better lot. In reaching back to the incunabular moment for inspiration he is testifying to his deep political belief that commercial democratization is not a road to equality and that the entire mode of production needs to be re-imagined and re-built. He is, in this gesture, and despite the complaints of the above quoted critic, stubbornly consistent with his political commitments.

On the side of aesthetics, the Kelmscott *News from Nowhere* is an innovative re-inscription of the two basic principles that for Morris characterized Gothic art and which he saw as defining the aesthetic of the early printed book: the epic and the ornamental. For Morris, the epic side of the incunabular book was comprised of "the telling of a story with the interest of incident… simple and true" and the ornamental side "the expression of the beautiful" ("Early Illustration" 20). Rooted in this way in a reformulation of the Gothic book, the utopian aesthetics of the Kelmscott Press enable and encode a dialogue between past and future. Thus Morris could declare, in the preface of another Kelmscott book, that history teaches "that the past is not dead, but is living in us, and will be alive in the future which we are now helping to make" ("Preface" 288). The garden form of the

book, as evidenced in the Kelmscott *News From Nowhere*, functions as a material embodiment of political and technological transition through its material reference to the transition from manuscript to print and its narrative or linguistic reference to a reformed social world where the book is again transformed. Its testifies to the political commitment that the revolutionary movement of society towards communism necessarily involves the rupture and transformation of the mode of production.

2. The Utopic Function of the Kelmscott Press in Morris's Socialist Politics

My conception of the political register and function of the Kelmscott Press is informed by the utopian politics of the Kelmscott edition of *News from Nowhere*, which testifies through its material signification to the necessity of a revolutionary transition. In this section I explore the dominant conceptualization of the Kelmscott Press and argue that, despite the appearance of irreconcilable contradictions between the Press and Morris's socialist politics, the Kelmscott books demand to be placed in dialogue with the ideal of communism and the utopian politics it animates.

The import of William Morris's printing efforts at the Kelmscott Press has been well glossed by critics and scholars working in a variety of fields in the century or so since Morris's death in 1896. It has been referenced as a touchstone moment in the history of printing since its conception. But if narratives of and references to the Kelmscott Press and its influence within the realm of book production and design abound, so do the contradictions of those accounts, both

within and between narratives. The Kelmscott Press is presented as hobby[18] and business,[19] money pit[20] and profit maker,[21] narcissistic[22] and combative critique of industrialism,[23] a forebear of modernist aesthetics,[24] a cultural dead end[25] and a sound investment opportunity.[26] The multiple and contradictory versions of the Kelmscott Press that exist in the literature about it are to some extent a consequence of the variety of perspectives from which it has been considered, including book history, art history, design theory, poetics, politics and others. However, the range of qualities and characteristics attributed to Morris's printing

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[18] Thomas Tobin describes Morris as an "energetic fellow who… dabbled in printing as a lark" (49).

[19] Charles Harvey and John Press argue that Morris approached the Kelmscott Presss as a "business" enterprise, just as he had done with Morris and Co (62).

[20] William Peterson, in his *Bibliography of the Kelmscott Press*, suggests that the press was "in effect an amusing diversion for Morris… and he seems to have been astonished it did not cost him any more than it did" (xl).

[21] Harvey and Press, pushing the sound business angle, argue that Morris's managerial acumen allowed him to make a reasonable "profit" (63), arguing further that there was nothing "impractical about its strategy with regard to marketing, pricing, and employees' pay and conditions" (65).

[22] E. P. Thompson writes, "the Kelmscott Press was no part of the earlier 'warfare against the age' of the Firm but was a source of unashamed enjoyment to the designer" (679).

[23] In *The Ideal Book*, Peterson suggests, "Morris, like Ruskin, was struggling against more than a poisonous industrialism. He had also to combat a spurious revival of medivalism in bookmaking" (xii-xiii).

[24] For Jerome McGann, "[a]ll the texts issued at the Kelmscott Press put us on the brink of a new world of poetry. They are forebears not merely of early modernist procedures like Imagism, Vorticism, and Objectivism, but of important later developments in visual and concrete poetry" ("A Thing" 70).

[25] Paul Thompson argues, "the Kelmscott Press books have been somewhat overrated, since they are not as readable as Morris claimed them to be, their technique was archaic, and the real sources of modern printing come from other designers" (44). For Colin Franklin, the Kelmscott Press books belong to an enclave within their historical present. The Press "had slender influence upon the twentieth-century book" and its "position" is such "that our view of it does not much matter" (35).

[26] Tobin goes into some detail regarding the investment buzz surrounding the Kelmscott books in the years immediately following their publication, quoting a contemporary critic who, after stating his personal distaste for the books, suggests: "that is a manner of opinion, and those who paid their 20 [pounds] for the Chaucer made from a mere commercial point of view a very good investment" (qtd. in Tobin 104).

endeavor is somewhat deceptive in the appearance of a certain exhaustiveness of perception. In fact, most analyses or investigations that frame the Kelmscott Press within the life and work of William Morris divide into a binary pair of characterizations: political and post-political.

The full range of perspectives contained within this binary construction—political/post-political—amount to what I call Kelmscott Press gospel, a term that is meant to register not only its predominance but also its quasi-sacral and mythical characteristics. Framed as political, the Press is interpreted as a Ruskinian, anti-industrial protest inspired by pre-industrial gothic art, which stands-in as shorthand for a pre-capitalist mode of production. Seen thus as a serious, socially-oriented project, the Kelmscott Press is also often framed as an enterprise meant to revolutionize the book industry by providing a model for ethical and aesthetically non-compromising production within capitalism. Framed as post-political, the Press is presented as a narcissistic escape from political failure, a return to the aesthetic concerns of days of yore out of frustration and contempt for the political present. The post-political Kelmscott Press is understood as a hobby that produced, for good or ill, nothing more than a few beautiful though backward looking books.

Jessica DeSpain neatly summarizes the main political narrative of the Kelmscott Press when she asserts, "[l]ike John Ruskin, whose attention to craftsmanship and originality in art and architecture was renowned, Morris was concerned that mass-produced publications were destroying...printing" and that "[h]e founded the Kelmscott Press with the aim of overhauling book production to

reinsert the role of the craftsman inside the covers, typography, and printing of the book" (74). The Kelmscott Press is figured here as the extension of Ruskinian moral and aesthetic principles into the specific field of book production. As such, the issue of medievalism becomes a central concern in this framing, for the ideological notion of the superiority of all things "Gothic" over the cultural forms of industrialization is what links, most profoundly, the Kelmscott Press to Ruskin. In this vein, Hugh Kenner describes the Kelmscott Press as a "protest...against the dominance of England by the machine" and describes its production methods in terms that invoke a pre-industrial world: "[T]hey set their type by hand, enclosed it in wood-engraved borders that had never trafficked with the new photographic processes, and in hand-worked presses brought it into contact sheet by sheet with hand-made papers" (595). Kenner here pushes this pre-industrial rhetoric of the hand to a point where the historical Kelmscott Press, which utilized advanced photographic processes and machines from its earliest stages of conception, becomes lost in its gospel image.[27] Further mythologizing this image, William Peterson, perhaps the twentieth century's most devoted scholar of the Kelmscott Press, describes Morris in a language that suggests we should see Morris as a kind of Ruskinian warrior-priest:

> The founding of the Kelmscott Press by Morris in 1891 can be usefully seen, in fact, as the final phase of the Victorian Gothic revival. The ideas that lay behind the Press (such as distrust of the machine and the

[27] Emery Walker, who helped Morris a great deal in setting up the Press, provided him with large photographic reproductions of Jenson's typeface so that he could study it in detail and helped him electrotype the ornaments of the Press; Edward Prince engraved and cast Morris's type at the state of the art Fann street Foundry of Sir Charles Reed and Sons (see Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press*, chapter three, "Founding the Press").

> association of the Gothic style with a certain set of moral values) were drawn directly from Ruskin...But Morris, like Ruskin, was struggling against more than a poisonous industrialism. He had also to combat a spurious revival of medievalism in bookmaking... each Kelmscott Press book was intended to be not a Victorian railway hotel "done in the Gothic style," but a miniature cathedral, or at least a parish church, constructed of sound materials and inspired by the Ruskinian vision of craftsmanship as an act of worship[.] (Peterson, Introduction xii-xiv)

Peterson's claim, echoed in essence by DeSpain above, that the Kelmscott Press is the culminating event in the Ruskin-led "Victorian Gothic revival"—a claim that is laden with religious and spiritual language—suggests that we are to view Morris's printing experiments as a sort of pseudo-secular, faith-fueled crusade against the immoralities of his age.

Part and parcel with descriptions of Morris's heroic quest are the mythic overtures to his individual greatness. The repetition of Ruskin's name beside Morris's itself has the tendency to give the impression that Morris was a member of some special spiritual-aesthetic elect, the one man who could bring a sense of order and meaning to the "messy scene of Victorian commercial printing" (Peterson, Introduction xvi). Probably the most extreme statement on the subject of Morris's elect status is attributed to Daniel Updike and quoted, with apparent sincerity, by Philip Duschnes: "William Morris was a great printer because he was a great man who printed greatly" (48). If such eulogizing sounds a bit callow to more cynical ears than Duschnes's, such sentimentality has been given a fair bit

of license in the realm of Morris studies, with much of the discourse being formed by unabashed admirers.

Thomas Tobin attributes the origins of "the idea of The Great Man Morris" to the memorializing agenda of the Kelmscott Press after Morris's death in 1896—the Press continued to operate for two more years—and the self-interested publicizing campaign of book collectors in the periodical press (94). By Tobin's count, a modest 13 of the 45 volumes issued prior to his death were texts written by Morris, compared to 11 of 16 after his death. For Tobin, this increasing ratio, taken together with evidence that the Press's executors "abandoned" plans to publish several works by other authors, clearly signals that "the intent of the Kelmscott Press changed radically after Morris's death from helping to revive the art of fine printing to helping preserve Morris's memory" (99).

But the Press also had help from a community of print enthusiasts and book collectors for whom the pages of the Kelmscott books had "something of the clean, crisp quality of a new bank note" (Horn 439). As expensive as the Kelmscott books were at original sale, the more remarkable fact is that they continued to appreciate in value, most notably in the years following Morris's death. Tobin demonstrates in his essay that, along with the buzz about the Kelmscott books being a "very good investment" (104), there arose an accompanying discourse mythologizing Morris's super-involvement in their conception and production. In 1898, a critic writing in *Poet-Lore* about the Kelmscott Press edition of *The Story of the Glittering Plain* is able to report:

Of this book it is said that Mr. Morris not only designed the type, the title

> pages, and the cover, but that he cast the type for the book, set it up, did the press-work with his own hands, bound it and actually made the paper on which the volume was printed. (qtd. in Tobin 104)

Conceptions of the Kelmscott Press such as this, which herald it as the expression of a unifying vision executed by a single hand, feed a misleading view of the Kelmscott Press books as aesthetic objects that stand apart from, rather than engage, the social contradictions of the historical moment in which they were made.

Peterson provides a clear example of how the Ruskinian-political narrative of the Kelmscott Press is constituted on an avoidance of Morris's revolutionary communism. After suggesting that the Kelmscott Press is about more than a "wish to improve the printing of books" and that it is part of a larger desire "to alter the course of Western History," he avoids the quagmire of late nineteenth century socialism and communism and circles back to assert, "again, in this respect he resembles Ruskin" (Introduction xxiii). Peterson goes on to say that as readers and critics of the Kelmscott Press project it "is not necessary...to be attentive to" its "political resonances" but that we will get only "half" the story if "we ever forget that lending order to the printed page is, for Morris, ultimately one way of lending meaning to human existence" (xxiii). Peterson's characterization of Morris's politics as driven by a desire to lend "meaning to human existence" is an articulation only possible by ignoring the later Morris whose politics were "vivified" by "the conscious desire for the society of equality" (Morris, "Communism" 270).

If the argument for understanding the Kelmscott Press as political enterprise can formulate an active relation between politics and aesthetics only by avoiding Morris's political development, then the post-political narrative, most prominently put forward by the socialist historian E. P. Thompson, is its inverted twin. In *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, Thompson describes the Kelmscott Press as an effort by Morris to distract himself from the political failure he experienced in the collapse of the Socialist League. Thus, Thompson situates the Kelmscott Press in the context of "defeat," "disappointment," "a new mood of resignation," Morris's collapsing health and a growing consciousness of death (581-582). In stark contrast to the Ruskinian mode and political register attributed to the Kelmscott Press by Peterson and company, Thompson argues that the inspiration for and import of Morris's experiments in print begin and end with narcissistic self-fulfillment:

> The Kelmscott Press… was founded in a different spirit from that in which the original Firm had been launched thirty years before. Morris now had no thought of reforming the world through his art, and little thought of reforming contemporary printing and book production. Indeed, he did not seek to justify his pleasure in any way. The Press was simply a source of delight and relaxation, in which his craft as designer and his craft as a writer both found expression. (583)

It is difficult to conceive of how one could more successfully depoliticize the Kelmscott Press than E. P. Thompson does in the above passage. Not only does it deny any possibility of identifying a meaningful political aesthetic to the

Kelmscott Books, it conceives of them as radically divorced from the social as such, cancelling in its emphasis on the pursuit of personal pleasure the major claims of the "political" reading addressed above. However, the seeming incommensurability of these two modes – the political and the post-political – is false, as both interpretations betray a formal stagnation through their denial of Morris's radical conception of the interwoven categories of art and politics.

Despite the contradiction that delineates the primary political and post-political conceptions of the Kelmscott Press, these positions are symptomatic of a shared refusal to consider Morris's material and aesthetic commitments to the more general political project he elsewhere named communism. The unity of this gospel story, in other words, is comprised of a common refusal to see any significant relationship between the Kelmscott Press and the development of Morris's political thought and practice over the course of the 1880s. From the perspective of the Kelmscott Press as political enterprise, Morris's engagement with socialism and the evolution of his politics from Ruskinian anti-industrialism to revolutionary communism are cut out of history. In place of the rich dynamics and tensions produced by a diachronic view of Morris's life and work, such criticism presents us with a Kelmscott Press roughly synchronic with the political-aesthetic conceptions and practices of Morris's design firm, with which Morris was most actively involved in the 1870s. The post-political narrative essentially produces the same maneuver, except the reduction is performed here on Morris himself, who emerges from his turbulent experiences within the Socialist League as a pitiable and historically detached pleasure seeker who amuses himself and us

with a few impressive but meaningless artworks. The inability or unwillingness of the vast majority of the critics and commentators on Morris's Kelmscott Press project to explore, in any satisfactory way, the revolutionary communism that animated Morris's thought during the last decade of his life in connection with his material and aesthetic obsessions as embodied in its books is perhaps the largest failure of Morris studies, and constitutes its major blind spot.

The central problem of relating Morris's socialist politics and Kelmscott Press aesthetics is efficiently articulated by Elizabeth Miller in her essay "Collections and Collectivity":

> How… could Morris edit and print the *Commonweal* – the Socialist League's one-penny newspaper, which advocated the eradication of class, wealth, and private property – while dreaming up the Kelmscott Press, which would produce some of the rarest and most expensive books of all time? (73)

It is a sticky question, no doubt—and if we attempt to address it by seeking a direct resolution within practical politics we will surely be covered in it. However, the problem of reconciling the high cost, limited availability and circulation of the Kelmscott books with a revolutionary, utopian socialist politics is in part an unnecessary and artificial trap. For one, Morris's utopian politics necessitate the mediation of this question through the ideal of communism, where it surely loses some of its tack. Secondly, what says the contradiction is not itself the beating heart of the connection? For the Kelmscott Press *reveals* (rather than creates) an essential contradiction in the capitalist mode of production that neither did Morris

ignore nor assert could be immediately overcome. Nor did Morris conceive of his utopian politics as a way around such problems: "The World's roughness, falseness, and injustice will bring about their natural consequences, and we and our lives are part of those consequences" ("The Aims of Art" 96-97). In other words, the paradox of "Kelmscott for All" is a contradiction that Morris well knew was a consequence of production within Capitalism.

To accede to the logic of working through contradictions is not a form of disengagement from a problem but an intensification of it. The Kelmscott Press books, even when seen as an extension of a utopian politics, cannot be construed as formalizing a direct engagement in a political moment. Nevertheless, we lose sight of their utopian significance if we fail to conceive of their engagement in a political problem, namely, the problem of political transition itself. If the Kelmscott books are not rooted in a proletarian subjectivity but a utopian one, and if by doing so they propose to assert themselves as a revolutionary medium, then Morris's utopian socialism anticipates the dialectic of art and revolution set out by Herbert Marcuse over half a century later:

> Art can indeed become a weapon in the class struggle by promoting changes in the prevailing consciousness…. By virtue of its own subversive quality, art is associated with revolutionary consciousness, but to the degree to which the prevailing consciousness of a class is affirmative, integrated, blunted, revolutionary art will be opposed to it. Where the proletariat is nonrevolutionary, revolutionary literature will not be proletarian literature. Nor can it be "anchored" in the prevailing

> ("nonrevolutionary") consciousness: only the rupture, the leap, can prevent the resurrection of the "false" consciousness in a socialist society. (*Art and Liberation* 176)

By "anchoring" the Kelmscott Press in the utopian dialectic that embeds the book not in the reified, nonrevolutionary consciousness of the lived moment but at the dynamic heart of productive contradiction, Morris, if not fulfilling our clichéd expectations of political propaganda, nonetheless connects the practice of art to the pursuit of its aims. We do not have to triumph Morris's utopian socialism, nor overstate its successes in the service of situating the Kelmscott Press project within the full-movement of his socialist politics: indeed, the world around us is proof enough they have not taken root. But we do neither Morris nor ourselves any service in separating out his aesthetics and politics from one another. The political aesthetic of the Kelmscott books does not register the possibilities of the future, but rather encodes the impossibilities of the here-and-now of capitalism. What they encode, then, is the moment of communism, a further discussion to which I will now turn.

3. Naming a Utopian Political Economy of Desire: Morris after Jameson

The utopic function of art within Morris's socialist politics that I have been reading through the Kelmscott *News from Nowhere,* and which I have attempted to leverage in a reconsideration of the political import of the Kelmscott Press, can be usefully situated within Fredric Jameson's theorization of utopia, even as it provokes a reconsideration of Jameson's categories. Jameson's

theorization of utopia, in his influential book *Archaeologies of the Future*, insists on distinguishing between the utopian project and the utopian impulse. Recent work on utopian studies has been keen to mobilize Jameson's inflection of this oppositional pairing, including Miller's excellent essay. However, the task of exploring Morris's utopianism in the context of Jameson's theorization has been somewhat complicated by the latter's recent reidentification of the two categories (project and impulse) in the context of his work on Marx's *Capital* and unemployment. What I want to do here is 1) challenge Miller's identification of Morris's utopianism within the strict terms of the utopian project as outlined in Jameson's earlier theorization; and 2) argue that the Kelmscott *News from Nowhere* contradicts Jameson's binary formulation of project and impulse—identified in the later conclusions as fundamentally political and economic respectively—and insists on the theorization of a utopian political economy. However, the first task is to look at Jameson's initial theorization of the key terms.

In *Archaeologies*, Jameson posits "two distinct lines of dependency" in the utopian tradition after More, the utopian project, "intent on the realization of the Utopian program," and the utopian impulse, the conception of which he derives from Ernst Bloch's *The Principles of Hope* and defines as an "omnipresent" desire "finding its way to the surface in a variety of covert expressions and practices" (3). The utopian project is "systematic, and will include revolutionary political practice… alongside written exercises in the literary genre" (3). The utopian impulse is "obscure and more various" in its formations, but which can be seen to be operative in all manifestations of political

reformism and wherever "Utopia [in the form of hope] serves as the mere lure and bait for ideology" (3). At the heart of the distinction between the terms, then, is an opposition between revolutionary practice and political reformism. The essential qualities of the utopian project are more fully developed by Jameson in the conceptual formation of the "Utopian enclave"—and since it is within the framework of this latter concept that Miller situates the structure of Morris's utopianism, an examination of its key features and functions is necessary for parsing her argument.

With the concept of the utopian enclave Jameson attempts to outline the limits, or conditions of possibility, which enable the fantasy production unique to utopian projects. Beginning from the observation that, unlike the ubiquity of the utopian impulse, utopian projects, or "attempts to realize" utopia, are "historically... intermittent" (10)—materializing, as he goes on to describe, in intense periods of "transition" (15)—Jameson presents the eccentricities and peculiarities of the utopian function under the banners of utopian vocation and utopian space, which he theorizes together in the form of the enclave. The enclave is, first and foremost, an "imaginary" space "within real social space" (15). While the opposition between "imaginary" and the "real" in this formulation is not strictly reducible to an opposition between immateriality and materiality, the enclave nevertheless constitutes a "mental space" set against the "raw materials" of a complex "social situation" (16; 14).

The complexity of the social, characterized by a "general differentiation process and its seemingly irreversible forward momentum" (15), is what enables,

almost necessitates, the "momentary formation of a kind of eddy or self-contained backwater...[a] pocket of stasis within the ferment and rushing forces of social change" (15). The enclave is equal parts time and space: it forms in the interstices of the ongoing social process of entropic differentiation. What is the work accomplished via the utopian enclave? Jameson identifies four primary functions:

1) it "registers the agitation" of social transition (15);
2) it "suggests" a "distance from practical politics" (15);
3) it "reflects the non-revolutionary blindness" of its contemporary moment, mobilizing this blindness as a means of leaping over "the revolutionary moment itself and posit[ing] a radically different 'post-revolutionary' society" (16); and,
4) it testifies to the "political powerlessness" of the social as such (16).

Leaning heavily on this theory of the enclave, Elizabeth Miller attempts to construct "[a] theory of Morris's place within Aestheticism, and, more broadly, of the place of the political within Aestheticism" through an analysis of the utopian aspects "of Morris's two major experiments in socialist print: the Commonweal newspaper and the Kelmscott Press" (477). Doing so, Miller advances an opposition between reformist and revolutionary politics. Suggesting that Morris's utopian projects are characterized by a withdrawal from present political realities—"a complete disengagement with contemporary politics" (489)—Miller argues that these projects conceptually "[skip] over the present altogether" in order to express a politics of disruption explored through a post-revolutionary imaginary.

Miller's attention to the political and utopian aspects of Morris's print projects is unparalleled in the large and, as already demonstrated, repetitious body of criticism on Morris. Her essay marks a major breakthrough in terms of its attempt to read *Commonweal*, the Kelmscott Press, and *News from Nowhere* in relation to Morris's other political and aesthetic activities as well as the intellectual milieu of fin de siècle politics and art. However, in turning to the broader currents of aestheticism in her attempt to push beyond the static conceptual oppositions between Morris's artistic projects and political activities, Miller appears to be all too eager to use Jameson's theorizations as a means to define Morris's utopianism as a movement away from, rather than into the heart of, the debates and contradictions of the socialist movement. In other words, drawing on Jameson's conception of the utopian enclave, Miller works to reclaim Morris's utopianism as politically productive by appealing to its relationship with intellectual currents outside the political terrain of socialism proper.

In Morris, Miller finds a socialism clean enough to attach the politics of aestheticism:

> I would suggest, finally, that comparing the utopianism of Morris's print to the utopianism of Aestheticism reveals the significant late-nineteenth-century tension between revolutionary and reformist politics that informs them both. Likewise, such a comparison demonstrates Aestheticism's engagement with a peculiarly utopian strain of British socialism. Utopianism shares with Morris's print work and with Aestheticism a revolutionary impulse to create a new social system whole cloth, skipping

> over process, eschewing piecemeal reform, and calling into question progressive models of history. (497)

But Miller's attempt here to think Morris's utopianism outside the political field of socialism into which, as we have seen, Morris's utopian politics were conceived as an intervention, obscures the true movement of Morris's utopian dialectics. Morris, in Miller's hands, is conjured up as an aesthete who mined socialism for political raw materials in order to clean them up and bring them back to civilization by way of a detour through utopia. Furthermore, I would argue that she bends Jameson's theory to the task of supporting this division through a misreading of the utopian enclave based on a false identification of the "moment of revolution" (*Archaeologies* 16), which Jameson suggests utopians "overleap" (16), with the political moment of the late 1880s. This misreading is a function of Miller's undialectical application of Jameson's theory—in short, she figures Jameson's image of the eddy or enclave as a formula into which she is able to substitute the specific terms of the fin de siècle. The result is the reclamation of aestheticism as a political project superior in quality and ultimately more enduring than the crude aspirations of British socialism in the 1880s and 90s.

In her application of Jameson's enclave to Morris's print projects, Miller focuses her attention on the task of opposing Morris's utopianism to reformist (i.e. socialist) politics and emphasizing the utopian leap over the revolutionary moment. But, as stated earlier, Miller conflates the "revolutionary moment" with the Victorian present, or more precisely, the period from the 1885-1895 (which is inclusive of the time frame of the utopian projects—*Commonweal* and Kelmscott

Press—which she discusses), describing again and again how Morris's utopianism constitutes a leaping over the present. For example, she describes "the print space of *Commonweal* as a utopian space detached from the present" (486). While she never formulates the distinction, it is clear from the language Miller uses here to describe the temporality of utopian space, that what she is describing as the "present" is the ideological representation of an endless present, without past or future, what Matthew Beaumont describes as "the darkness of the lived moment" subsumed under the conditions of industrial capitalism (121), or what Jameson figures as a present determined by "non-revolutionary blindness" (*Archaeologies* 16). In other words, the "present" Miller insists is being skipped over in the pages of *Commonweal* and elsewhere in Morris's utopian work is better described as a false image of the present that, despite the normative illusions of capitalism, always has an unnatural history and a future it cannot comprehend.

Contra Miller, and transitioning into a direct engagement with Jameson, I argue that, in Morris's utopian work, this present-less present is displaced by a deeply rooted and conscious desire that seeks to establish a *dialectical present*—a present historicized as the point of relation between past and future, a present that in this awareness opens up onto, rather than leaps over, a revolutionary horizon.

In a recent article published in the journal *Mediations*, Jameson revisits his work on utopia in *Archaeologies* and offers a revised set of conclusions. Jameson's correction to his previous work is both insightful and somewhat overstated, amounting to an inversion that posits the utopian impulse as the positive term in the dialectic that he describes in his earlier work:

> I there posited two kinds of oppositions: the first one was the opposition between Utopian models or projects and the Utopian impulse. I now want to reidentify these two rather different manifestations of Utopia in a new and clearer way: for I have come to realize that the Utopian texts (and also the revolutions) are all essentially political in nature…In that case, I am led to affirm that the Utopian impulse, on the other hand, is profoundly economic, and that everything in it, from the transformation of personal relations to that of production, of possession, of life itself, constitutes the attempt to imagine the life of a different mode of production, that is to say, of a different economic system. (13)

Here, Jameson unsettles the horizon of stasis that threatens all dialectical work, which, as he outlines in detail in *Valences of the Dialectic*, differs from the feverish destabilizing movement characteristic of deconstruction precisely in that dialectic thought pauses to allow new oppositions to settle out of the chaos of contradiction (26). Thus, the phenomenon that in *Archaeologies* is defined in part in its distance from practical politics (the utopian project) is reformulated, in "A New Reading of Capital," as the very ground of practical politics as such.

In fact, in his alternative set of conclusions, Jameson goes even farther than this, undermining the revolutionary aspect of the utopian project that Miller uses to structure her discussion of the utopian function in Morris's work:

> [T]his distinction between politics and economics, between the achievable Utopia of the Utopian planners and the deep unconscious absolute Utopian impulse, is one between the social-democratic moment and the moment of

> communism. Communism can only be posited as a radical, even unimaginable break; socialism is an essentially political process within our present, within our system, which is to say within capitalism itself. Socialism is capitalism's dream of a perfected system. Communism is that unimaginable fulfillment of a radical alternative that cannot even be dreamt. (13)

The radical break with the present system that constitutes the revolutionary mode of the utopian project is re-narrated by Jameson as its opposite—the unclean realm of socialist reformism from which Miller wishes to distance Morris. But the point of acknowledging Jameson's addendum is not to privilege the later conclusions over the earlier as a way of dismissing Miller's application of Jameson's theory by characterizing it as irrelevant or out-of-date. Such a move would be equally reductive. Rather, what Jameson's work offers is the identification of a series of oppositions at play in utopia, oppositions that I argue, when read through the Kelmscott *News from Nowhere*, already produce a temporality that disrupts the always too neatly articulated opposition between reformist and revolutionary political forms.

Let us consider the opposition between the social democratic moment of the utopian project and the moment of communism essential to the utopian impulse by returning to Morris's lecture on "Communism" (given by Morris in 1893, the same year the Kelmscott *News from Nowhere* left the print-shop for the public sphere). We will recall that in this lecture Morris expresses his anxiety over social democratic programs of reform, which he names "the machinery of

Socialism" (264), explicitly distinguishing the politics of socialism from its "essence" and its end—namely communism (264). The primary point Morris conveys is that any political action or program that is not grounded in and propelled by a conscious desire for communism will fail to lead to the "realization of the society of equality" (270): "I look to this spirit [the conscious desire for the society of equality] to vivify the striving for the mere machinery of Socialism" (270). Morris's articulation of the opposition between the politics of socialism and its essence, communism, is strikingly similar to Jameson's formulation, but the important point of departure between the two is between Jameson's "deep unconscious absolute Utopian impulse" and Morris's insistence on raising the utopian impulse to the level of general consciousness. The difference here is not one of strict opposition; rather, the thrust of Morris's point is, inflected in Jameson's terms, to hold the two opposing moments of socialism and communism in dialectical relation, to insist on their coexistence and interdependency, perhaps not unlike what Jameson might be suggesting when, in final summation, he offers the slogan "Cynicism of the Intellect, Utopianism of the Will" (13).

What I want to propose here is this: instead of reading *News from Nowhere* in the strict terms of the utopian project and the enclave as they are laid out by Jameson, we ought to read it dialectically, as a work grounded in, vivified by, and seeking to *mobilize* the utopian impulse. For me, Morris's work stands in for the possibility of utopia to dialectically assert itself, for history itself to flash before us not as the demarcated categories of the actual and the out-there-somewhere possible ideal, but as the immanent possibility of a new actual, a

utopian moment of communism that takes root in the historical present even as it shapes our conception of the future. To ground the Kelmscott *News from Nowhere* in the utopian impulse would be to reject a reified version of Jameson's opposition between the political moment of socialism and the economic moment of communism. It would be, in short, to assert, as a parallel to the revolutionary political aesthetic of the Kelmscott *News from Nowhere,* a utopian political economy of desire at the heart of Morris's socialism.

To think of *News from Nowhere* as a utopian project is to fashion it—against its own deepest impulses—as a blueprint for political action or, what is an even greater distortion, economic restructuring. The text of *News from Nowhere* makes it clear that the dialectic of Morris's utopianism overruns his conception of the utopic function of art. *News from Nowhere* does not map out the ideal; rather it cultivates utopian desire. Guest's desire to share his vision and embark upon the laborious, collective work of "building up little by little the new day of fellowship" is not a call to recreate the utopian daydream presented in the novel, but a call emanating from the depths of the utopian dialectic to negate the dream with the real movement of communism (305). The goal is not to realize the utopian image, but to actualize the utopian essence that has, as yet, only been glimpsed through a darkened glass.

The Kelmscott edition makes the utopian project designation even less tenable through its material signification of the necessity of restructuring the mode of production. The physical testimony of the garden-book is not, could never be, the desire of "Kelmscott for all": it is the desire for the cultivation of a

new "all"—a new world of subjects—that would have no use for Kelmscott books. The proper designation of the Kelmscott *News from Nowhere* is as impulse rather than project, desire rather than program. But the dialectic of Morris's utopianism refuses to abide in Jameson's simple negation of utopia, his binary pair of the political and economic moment. The full movement of the utopian dialectic—testified to but not completed in the Kelmscott *News from Nowhere*—calls for the negation of the opposition through the politicization of desire. It is the Kelmscott edition's anticipation of this negation of negation, its presentation of the becoming conscious of the desire to move from impulse to action, that constitutes the text's political economy of desire.

In other words, insofar as Morris's socialism could, in the 1890s, only count as a political project delimited and marginalized by particular conditions characteristic of the more general socialist project of nineteenth century industrial England, the aesthetic project of the Kelmscott *News from Nowhere* recasts a set of political and tactical protocols *onto the register of desire*. To be sure, Morris's moment is not without its political utopias (literary and social): Owens, Fourier, Bellamy, Kropotkin and a host of others certainly inform, but do not constitute the limits of, Morris's project. Mapping out and mobilizing the utopian impulse are two very different aesthetic projects. The former has its fair share of nineteenth century actors and limits; the latter had, and continues to have, very few. My point here is that Morris's instantiation of what we now call the utopian impulse cannot be reduced to the mere impulse itself; indeed, its utopian desire must be drawn upon time and time again, until the idea of communism grows from a moment of

desire into an epoch of rest.

Conclusion

I have attempted to explore the political-aesthetic significance of Morris's utopian novel *News from Nowhere* in the contexts of both its serialization in *Commonweal* and the material signification of the Kelmscott Press edition. I have pursued this investigation of the politics and aesthetics of *News from Nowhere* within the dialectical framework of Morris's later utopian politics, seeking to demonstrate that the novel, in both its *Commonweal* and Kelmscott contexts, indexes his understanding of the proper function of art within socialist politics. Morris was very active as a lecturer and essayist on the subjects of art and socialism. His public lectures and essays from the period of 1885-1895 provide insight into his utopian inflection of socialist theory. For Morris, socialism must be guided and inspired by the communist ideal or else the means of socialism are likely to be mistaken for its end. In the dialectic of Morris's utopian socialism, the ideal of communism, or the society of equality produced by the completed movement of socialism, is not just an end point or goal, but also an animating and vivifying force within the movement of socialism as such.

I have suggested that art plays two key roles in the dialectic of Morris's utopian politics. First, the ideal of communism is, for Morris, not characterized merely by the establishment of a political-economic arrangement of social relations on the basis of the abolition of private property but rather is also a deeply aesthetic vision. The ideal of communism names a world in which the creative and beautifying impulses and pleasures are immanent to production or labour in a

universal sense: the degeneration and alienation of labour and labourers in Industrial capitalist society as a consequence of the profit motive is replaced with a mode of work that promotes and expresses the health and pleasure of the people. Thus, for Morris, the aims of art—"to make man's work happy and his rest fruitful"—are the same as the aims of socialism ("The Aims" 85). Second, art plays an important role in representing the ideal of communism to the people. In Morris's conception of socialist politics, art mediates the opposition between ideal and capitalist social conditions by cultivating a conscious desire for a society of equality that serves to inspire and vivify collective, political struggle.

1. Chapter One Findings

In my effort to read *News from Nowhere* in the context of Morris's theorization of utopian socialism, I found that two key dialectical movements emerge and combine to constitute the full dialectical movement of the novel. The first movement of the utopian dialectic is outlined at the beginning of the novel and the second is outlined at the end. I argued that through this frame the novel foregrounds a theory of its own political and dialectical utopianism that, while emerging from the text itself, nevertheless resonates with Morris's theorization of utopian socialism in his lectures and essays. Both movements formulate the intended and possible effects of the reader's engagement with the utopia of Nowhere.

The first movement models an engagement with utopian speculation on the society of equality that opens the historical present to analysis through the

liberation and sharpening of the intellect by providing a pleasurable hope in the mutability of social conditions. This movement is modeled by William Guest's experience in the opening of the novel. Guest engages in a frustrating discussion of the new society at a Socialist League meeting that leaves him somewhat flustered. However, as the ideas of the new society raised in the discussion lose their particularity and fade into a general idea of the possibility of a new world, Guest is comforted and energized by a renewed hope in this possibility, which leads him to the task of critically analyzing the present state of things.

The second movement is outlined at the end of the novel through Guest's return to the Victorian present. Where the first movement opens up to a critical analysis of the present, the second movement is comprised of a call to collective struggle for the realization of a communist society in spite of the pain and difficulty of revolutionary labour. I argued that the call to collective revolutionary struggle complicates any simple identification of the utopian dialectic of *News from Nowhere* with hope. The full dialectic of the novel is a movement through an engagement with utopia to a critique of the present that extends to a commitment and invitation to revolutionary struggle. The hope that Guest invents upon the conclusion of his journey is ultimately an inverted hope without hope, a productive negation that marks the birth of a desire for collectivity. I suggested that the two movements of the dialectic in *News from Nowhere* can be viewed as sequential moments indicative of a Hegelian negation of negation, the first essentially individual and the second constituting a sacrifice of self-interest that would enable a desire for collectivity to manifest as collective desire. The

threshold of this movement from the first moment to the second is what demarcates the dream or vision opposition invoked by Guest at the novel's end. Only by giving birth to a collective desire for the society of equality can *News from Nowhere* constitute a vision.

Further, I suggested that in context of its original serialization in *Commonweal*, the one-penny weekly of the Socialist League, *News from Nowhere* can be interpreted as a direct intervention in the politics of the moment. Leading up to and during the course of the serialization of *News from Nowhere*, the Socialist League was imploding due to internal division. I suggested that *News from Nowhere* seeks to intervene in the break up of the League by arguing for a utopian mode of dialectical struggle wherein political differences are mediated and political action and strategizing are vivified by a collective desire for the society of equality.

2. Chapter Two Findings

In chapter two I extended my effort to read *News from Nowhere* in the context of Morris's theorization of utopian socialism to the Kelmscott Press edition of the novel. In reading the Kelmscott Press edition I drew upon Jerome McGann's distinction between the bibliographic and linguistic codes of a book and his theorization of how these two sets of codes combine to produce the full spectrum of textual signification. The two-page opening featuring the frontispiece and the first page of the novel present the full force of the books textual signification in an intensified and condensed form. I argued that the ornamental

and typographical elements of the frontispiece and first page combine to conceptualize the book as a garden that transports the reader to the utopian space of Nowhere. The material signification of the garden-book combines with the treatment of gardens and books in the novel to signify that the actualization of the communist ideal involves the process of sublating individual desires into collective ones. The cultivation and growth signified by the gardens in both the material and linguistic code of the Kelmscott edition are the central element of its utopian signification. In the material form of the Kelmscott *News From Nowhere*, Morris is not doing something wholly new, rather, as he is referencing the aesthetic of an earlier form of the book in the midst of transition between manuscript and print. However, he does not use this historical form to nostalgically reference an idealized past, but to project a vision of the future wherein the form of the book is itself transcended.

In the final section of chapter two, I suggested that the utopian dialectic of *News from Nowhere*, and its extension in the Kelmscott Press edition of the novel, can be usefully situated within Fredric Jameson's theorization of utopia even as it provokes a reconsideration of the dynamic between his key terms. Much of Jameson's recent work on utopia employs an opposition between the utopian project and the utopian impulse, though engagement with Jameson's conception of these categories has been made somewhat complicated by his re-visioning of his earlier theorization in *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005) in his more recent article "A New Reading of Capital" (2010). In both inflections, the project is comprised of both revolutionary political practice and literary attempts to envision

utopian society, while the impulse names a desire for the unimaginable. In *Archaeologies*, Jameson characterizes the utopian project as a revolutionary utopian mode essentially removed from practical politics while suggesting that the utopian impulse, as unconscious desire, is often employed in the service of all sorts of political reformism. In his later revisioning, Jameson in some ways inverts his initial conclusions by identifying the utopian project with the reformist, political movement of socialism and the utopian impulse with the desire for communism. Within the framework of Jameson's later conclusions, I argued that *News from Nowhere* should not be read in the strict terms of the utopian project but as a work grounded in, vivified by, and seeking to mobilize the utopian impulse. This is to suggest that, in reference to Morris's utopian politics, Jameson's oppositional terms must be thought dialectically.

3. Challenges Made to Previous Critical Scholarship

This study has attempted to engage with and challenge several approaches to and conceptions of Morris's political and aesthetic ideas and activities. I find Morris's thought to be instinctually dialectical—that is, to be characterized by an impulse to generate and inspire movement and a desire to understand and build dynamic relationships between ideas, materials, and concepts. As such, I have attempted remobilize aspects of his thought and practice that have unhelpfully frozen over in existing critical scholarship, as well as identify and move beyond oppositions between critical approaches that create a kind of conceptual stasis in their fixed polarity.

In chapter one, my primary intervention into the existing scholarship on Morris came in the way of a challenge to attempts to elucidate Morris's conception and deployment of utopian or non-alienated labour that formulate a strict and static opposition between non-alienated and alienated labour in *News from Nowhere*. My intention is not to suggest that this opposition does not figure prominently in Morris's political thought, nor is it to deemphasize its important function in *News from Nowhere*. Quite to the contrary, the opposition between alienated and non-alienated labour is a crucial element in the hermeneutic of Morris's utopian novel and political thought more generally. I suggest, however, that to reduce, with whatever nuance, the representation and function of labour in Morris's thought to the level of critique by way of contrast with the degraded nature of labour within industrial capitalism is to obscure the full movement of Morris's dialectical utopianism. I demonstrated how in Morris's most thorough exposition on labour in "Useful Work Versus Useless Toil" he systematically mobilizes the binary of alienated and non-alienated labour to a) theorize the social arrangement necessary to realize a non-alienating mode of production and b) use the description of a reformed society to call for revolutionary struggle, which comprises a third term of labour that does not belong wholly to either of the binary pair of alienated and non-alienated labour. Like useful work, revolutionary struggle is productive of a kind of hope. However, unlike useful work, which is productive of a threefold hope or expectation in rewards or pleasures immanent to the work itself, revolutionary labour is endured at great cost. Thus, I argued that to invoke the binary pair of alienated and non-alienated labour and to theorize their

function in Morris's utopian thought without acknowledging how Morris uses them to open up a conceptual space for revolutionary struggle is to undermine the basis of his utopian politics.

In chapter two I attempted to make two interventions into the existing scholarship, one into dominant twentieth-century conceptions of the political significance of the Kelmscott Press and the other challenging Elizabeth Miller's recent work and her theorization of Morris's utopianism as a withdrawal from present political realities. In the first case, I demonstrated that there are two dominant and apparently polarized characterizations of the political import of the Press: the one, most influentially articulated in the work of Kelmscott Press scholar William Peterson, conceptualizes Morris's printing project as a Ruskinian protest against the political-aesthetic injustices of the industrial age; the other, most forcefully articulated by E. P. Thompson, who, in the midst of his attempt to reevaluate Morris's place within the Socialist movement, characterizes the Kelmscott Press as an apolitical and narcissistic aesthetic project conducted in the wake of political failure and in the face of impending death. In response to this binary pair of critical positions, I suggested that what they both have in common—i.e. a denial of any significant connection between Morris's utopian socialism and the Kelmscott Press project—points to the direction necessary to explore in order to move beyond the conceptual stasis imposed by their polarity. I argued that, given the importance of art to Morris's political thought, the political significance of the Kelmscott Press project should be evaluated within the dialectic framework of his utopian socialism. Even if in light of the limited

circulation and high cost of the Kelmscott books it is a stretch to see the Press as a direct aesthetic engagement in a political moment, I have suggested that the Press is nonetheless an engagement in and an index of the political-aesthetic problem at the heart of socialism: i.e. the problem of transition. I argued that the material signification of the Kelmscott books is rooted in a utopian subjectivity that registers the contradictions of collective struggle for revolutionary change within the capitalist mode of production.

The second intervention of chapter two is made in the context of my reconsideration of Jameson's theorization of the opposition between the utopian project and the utopian impulse. I challenged Elizabeth Miller's characterization of Morris's utopianism as a withdrawal from contemporary politics, a conclusion that is in part the result of her reading of Morris's utopianism through Jameson's theorization of the utopian project. I suggested that, based on the crucial function of desire in Morris's utopianism, that in drawing on Jameson's theory we cannot ignore the import of the utopian impulse in either *News from Nowhere* or the Kelmscott Press. As such, I argued that, contra Miller, Morris's utopianism constitutes a movement into the heart of – rather than away from – the debates and contradictions of the socialist movement.

4. Contribution and Areas for Further Study

This study has attempted to probe the dialectical movements of Morris's thought and, by highlighting the dialectical function that art plays in Morris's theorization of utopian socialism, to open up new pathways for analyzing the

intersections of aesthetics and politics in his later work. In my analysis of the dialectical movements of *News from Nowhere* both in terms of its linguistic code and the bibliographic signification of the Kelmscott Press edition, I have demonstrated that Morris's aesthetic practice is driven by a strong utopian impulse that communicates a desire for collective political struggle. In this way, both *News from Nowhere* and the Kelmscott Press project manifest a desire for their own negation in the dialectic of political struggle. In other words, the dialectical movements in the novel and the material encoding of the Kelmscott books seek always to extend beyond the works themselves and into the social. It is my hope that this study has demonstrated that the contradictions at the heart of Morris's later political and aesthetic practice need not be resolved or avoided by either asserting the autonomy of each activity or by seeking, anachronistically, to read his later aesthetic projects through his pre-socialist political-aesthetic commitments.

If this study has focused somewhat narrowly on the formal aspects of Morris's utopianism – on dialectical trajectories, frames, and structural patterns of thought and signification – then it necessarily lays the groundwork for a more thorough analysis of content. The analysis of the dialectics of *News from Nowhere* certainly demands to be extended more fully to the utopian vision of Nowhere itself. Also, my speculative arguments about the Kelmscott Press insist on being extended and re-worked through a wider selection of Kelmscott Press books and a more rigorous examination of both their aesthetic reference to medieval manuscripts and the incunabular arts of the book.

However, my emphasis on the formal aspects of Morris's utopianism also gestures toward two interrelated contemporary debates about the future direction of Leftist (or post-Leftist) political thought. The first of these debates centers around the question of what function, if any, does the idea of communism have to play in anti-capitalist theory and practice?[28] In response to the current global economic crisis and the political malaise that has largely accompanied it, Slavoj Zizek suggests, "the idea of communism has the potential to revitalize theoretical thinking and reverse the de-politicizing tendency of late capitalism" (ix). Alain Badiou also argues for a revitalization of the idea of communism, while cautioning, "'communist' can no longer be the adjective qualifying a politics" (5). I would argue that Morris's intellectual commitment to the *ideal* of communism warrants consideration with this contemporary theoretical conversation. For there is a tension within the dialectic of Morris's utopian socialism between what at times appears to be the instrumentalization of the ideal of communism in the service of a revolutionary political sequence and at others an immanent desire for and, at least in theory, productive of new forms of collectivity.

This latter inflection of Morris's thought emphasizes the ideal of communism not as the carrot at the end of the stick of a political sequence, but as the idea immanent to a lived moment in the form of a collective and collectivizing desire. The immanent movement of communism is the terrain of the second contemporary theoretical discourse that I believe could benefit from a consideration of Morris's thought, namely, communization theory.

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[28] See Costas, Douzinas, and Slavoj Zizek, eds. *The Idea of Communism*. London: Verso, 2010.

Communization is another name for the problem of the idea of communism within post-Leftist radical projects. At issue in the questions and debates around which communization theory coheres is how what has historically registered as the end-point or goal of communism can be inscribed as an immanent force in the various moments of negation, resistance, and struggle that animate the problem of political transition.[29] To what extent does *News from Nowhere* index, at or near the front-end of the historical development of Leftist theory, the anxieties of communization theory in the twenty-first century? What do the dialectics of Morris's utopian socialism have to add to these contemporary discussions that register both a desire for and an anxiety over the immanent movement of the idea of communism in radical politics today? These are questions I hope will be explored in future work on Morris and *News from Nowhere*.

[29] See Benjamin Noys, ed. *Communization and its Discontents: Contestation, Critique, and Contemporary Struggles*. Brooklyn: Minor compositions, 2011.

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