

## William Morris and the Form and Politics of Replication

*Elizabeth Carolyn Miller*

Replication is a key feature across William Morris's work and thought in the decorative arts and the art of the book. Patterns of rhythmic, repeating structures, mostly botanical in form, populate the surfaces of his designs, and while Morris and his subsequent critics have frequently discussed the affective quality of this formal emphasis on replication, there has been less discussion of its politics.<sup>1</sup> In Morris's 1888 essay "Textiles," he invites his readers to

go to the South Kensington Museum and study the invaluable fragments of the stuffs of the 13th and 14th centuries of Syrian and Sicilian manufacture, or the almost equally beautiful webs of Persian design, which are later in date, but instinct with the purest and best Eastern feeling. (1888b: 1134)

What kind of "feeling" was woven into these centuries-old textile patterns? Morris describes it as a pleasing sense of geometrical fitness that comes from reflection upon a well-conceived structure: "it is just this logical sequence of form, this growth which looks as if, under the circumstances, it could not have been otherwise, which prevents the eye wearying of the repetition of the pattern" (1135). Elsewhere, in an 1884 essay titled "Textile Fabrics," he similarly explains the affective appeal of such patterns in terms of the agreeable contemplation of sound structure: "the beauty of the drawing and the ingenuity of the pattern combined give us that satisfying sense of ease and mystery which does not force us to keep following for ever the repetition of the pattern" (45). Critics and admirers of Morris's work today continue to express such feelings about the patterns that Morris himself designed. A. S. Byatt, for example, in her 2016 volume *Peacock*

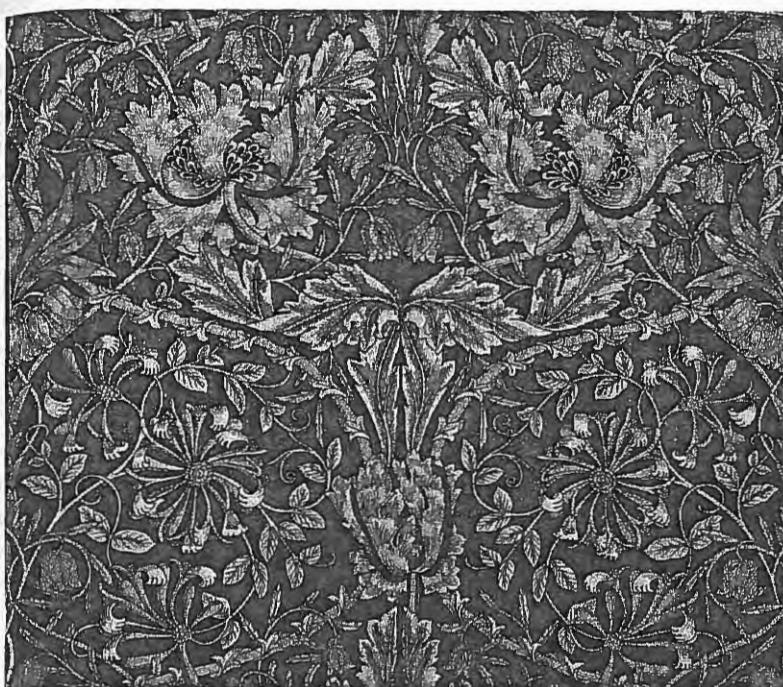


Figure 8.1 William Morris, *Honeysuckle*, 1876, block-printed fabric.

& Vine: On William Morris and Mariano Fortuny, describes the specific kind of enjoyment found in the contemplation of Morris's patterns *Honeysuckle* (fabric, 1876; see Figure 8.1) and *Willow Bough* (wallpaper, 1887):

I remember being overcome with delight when I first realised how rigorously the geometry of plants worked among the apparently accidental forms of particular flowers or leaves. There are plants which grow according to the Fibonacci spiral – 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, etc. – which always seemed to me a peculiarly human construction – each number being the sum of the previous two numbers – and not a growth pattern at all. In the Honeysuckle and the Willow Boughs the feeling of free growth is contained in the geometrical repetitions. (107)

If patterned, structured replications can evoke such a feeling, can they not also evoke a politics? For this sense of ease and fulfillment generated by a satisfyingly corporate structure, one that achieves a well-designed balance between the part and the whole, may be extended to Morris's vision of socialism, too: a vision of a well-organized social

structure that produces pleasure and ease for the humans that live in it. In "The Manifesto of the Socialist League," which ran in the first issue of the *Commonweal* (the socialist journal edited by Morris) in February 1885, Morris defines socialism as a "change in the method of production and distribution [that] would enable every one to live decently, and free from the sordid anxieties for daily livelihood which at present weigh so heavily on the greatest part of mankind" (1). In a socialist society, each individual member would thrive under the overarching social arrangement, in the same way that in a well-structured pattern each iteration of the replicated image would fit in a satisfying way into the overarching structure.

My argument here is influenced by the politico-formalist methodology that Caroline Levine advances in her book *Forms*, according to which "we can use our understanding of the affordances of aesthetic rhythms . . . to understand social rhythms" (53). Morris, I argue, made just such a connection between the rhythms of labor and life in a socialist arrangement of society and the rhythms and patterns of his replicated designs. By interpreting his patterns in this way, my reading of Morris's repeated designs departs from those of many critics; Nicholas Frankel, for example, in an insightful article on the ecology of Morris's decorative work, argues that in Morris's "designs for textiles and wallpapers," a "preoccupation with form and pattern" and an "increased emphasis upon structure and the repeat at the expense of naturalism" represent a disavowal of politics (75). I will argue here, in contrast, that in a range of Morris's work – from wallpaper and textiles to the pages of the Kelmscott Press – a politics of non-singularity and non-mimesis inheres in his aesthetic of replication. This politics is simultaneously collectivist, revolutionary, and anti-progressive: collectivist in that it emphasizes the group and the common rather than the exceptional; revolutionary in that it rejects a mimetic recreation of present reality; and anti-progressive in that it draws on the past as an aesthetic resource, replicating older aesthetic forms for modern audiences. While Morris's patterns alone may not articulate this political argument about replication, in conjunction with his surrounding writings and lectures about art, craft, and aesthetics, they do. We might even say, indeed, that in a sense replication undergirds Morris's entire critique of capitalist modernity, a critique that he articulated most fully after converting to socialism in the early 1880s, but which was evident from his earliest work as a student at Oxford.<sup>2</sup> Rebelling against the privileging of the new that was central to capitalist modernity, and championing instead the older forms and techniques of pre-modern societies, Morris employed replication

not only as a visual trope and a craft method but also as an aesthetic, historical, and political philosophy.

Replication, as the editors and authors in this study all suggest, connects in complex ways to nineteenth-century culture, values, and politics. If *replication* denotes an original that is also a copy, or perhaps a copy that is also an original, it also suggests repetition and the repeated instances of a pattern, which is the primary sense in which I will be using the term in this essay. Still, it is important to recall at the outset that *replication* is also suggestive of the replica, the duplication that calls into question the very nature and value of originality.<sup>3</sup> The significance of the copy or the imitation has been a central preoccupation of aesthetics at least since Plato, but as this volume illustrates, debates about replication took on new dimensions in the nineteenth century. Morris's aesthetic interventions, I want to suggest, played a crucial part in this shift. Robert Macfarlane has argued that "From the late 1850s onwards, received notions of originality (as the pre-eminent literary virtue) and plagiarism (as the pre-eminent literary sin) came under increasingly skeptical scrutiny. Victorian writers and thinkers began to speak out against the overvaluation of originality." At the same time, emerging aesthetic models that were less grounded in originality "envisaged creativity as a function of the selection and recombination of pre-existing words and concepts" (8). Although Macfarlane is focusing here on literary culture, he extends his observations to other fields of Victorian aesthetics, too, which, he says, saw a general shift from a "hallowed vision of creation as generation" in the Romantic period to an "account of creation as rearrangement" in the latter half of the century. While "the former conventionally connotes some brief, noumenal moment of afflatus or inspiration," "the latter has the tang of the atelier about it" (6). Macfarlane's use of the term "atelier," or workshop, implies the significance of Morris's place in this aesthetic shift toward a more collaborative and labor-based – and less individuated and inspirational – conception of the work of art.

Morris is perhaps best remembered as a leader of the nineteenth-century Arts and Crafts movement, and in this role he advocated for the elevation of craft to the status of art, which was also, of course, a transformation in ideas about art itself. *Craft* is a term that denotes process as much as product, suggests repetitive movement, and invokes an activity or labor of replication rather than the mere singular act of invention or origination. Morris and his decorative arts firm Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., which was founded in 1861 and later changed to Morris & Co., were responsible for reviving

a number of nearly forgotten craft methods from the pre-industrial past, and Morris learned and mastered these craft methods himself, subscribing to the notion that the replicative physical labor involved in such methods was as much worthy of revival as the objects that the labor produced. As E. P. Thompson describes in his biography of Morris, the rhythmic practice of older forms of craft production was an established part of Morris's aesthetic method and was crucial to Morris's labor- and materials-based theory of craft:

From the foundation of the Firm until the end of his life, Morris was continually busy with close study, experiments, and practical engagements with the materials of his craft. Glass-firing, the glazing of tiles, embroidery, woodcutting and engraving, pottery and book-binding, weaving and tapestry-work, illuminating – all these were among the skills he mastered to a greater or lesser degree . . . Study and practice he regarded as inseparable. (101–2)

Morris valued the kinetic knowledge that came from physical repetition and muscle memory, as well as the more historical and theoretical forms of aesthetic knowledge available through study, and indeed he saw the hand piece as inseparable from the brain piece. His non-dualistic conception of theory and practice was a cornerstone of his socialist politics since it lent itself to a broad respect for the expertise of hand-workers and laborers, as we see, for example, in his 1882 lecture "The Lesser Arts of Life," which was given around the time of his conversion to socialism:

Men whose hands were skilled in fashioning things could not help thinking the while, and soon found out that their deft fingers could express some part of the tangle of their thoughts, and that this new pleasure hindered not their daily work, for in the very labour that they lived by lay the material in which their thought could be embodied; and thus, though they laboured, they laboured somewhat for their pleasure and uncom-pelled, and had conquered the curse of toil, and were men. (1914a: 236)

As a leading voice of the nineteenth-century craft revival, Morris advocated for an aesthetic grounded in the practiced rhythms of pre-industrial labor of the past. The centrality of replication as action or process within his aesthetic philosophy can be gleaned from his reorienting of ornamentation toward the maker, not just the user, as in an 1877 lecture titled "The Lesser Arts": "To give people pleasure in the things they must perform *use*, that is one great office of decoration; to give people pleasure in the things they must perform

make, that is the other use of it" (1973: 33). Replication of forms, as opposed to mere repetition of tasks, makes for pleasurable labor, and for Morris this was a fundamental difference between pre-industrial craft labor and the repetitive processes of industrial labor.

To identify the significance of replication in Morris's theory of production, we can look across the continuum of his work, from wallpapers and textiles to the art of printing, for Morris's interest in the replicative, reproducible processes of printing is apparent not only in his contributions to print literature and the art of the book, but also in his wallpaper and fabric designs as well. In his 1888 essay "Textiles," Morris lists the several traditional means "of ornamenting a woven cloth: (1) real tapestry, (2) carpet-weaving, (3) mechanical weaving, (4) printing or painting, and (5) embroidery" (1888b: 1133). The presence of "printing" in this list provides a clue to how Morris's interest in fine printing emerged from his earlier interests in the textile arts. Such craft processes were ripe for reinvention, given that, in Morris's view, "no textile ornament has suffered so much as cloth-printing from . . . commercial inventions" (1134). The making of books was another craft, Morris felt, which had fared exceptionally poorly under commercialism: in an unpublished essay titled "Some Thoughts on the Ornamented Manuscripts of the Middle Ages," he argues that "the utilitarian production of makeshifts, which is the especial curse of modern times, has swept away the book producer in its current" (1982: 1).

Hand-printing, by contrast, whether of wallpaper, textiles, or books, strikes a vital balance between repetition and non-reproducibility, and I would suggest that such a balance establishes a clear through-line from the firm's wallpapers of the 1860s and 1870s, such as *Acanthus* (1875) (Figure 8.2), to block-printed fabrics such as *Strawberry Thief* (1883) (Figure 8.3), to the Kelmscott Press books in the 1890s, such as John Ruskin's *The Nature of Gothic* (1892) (Figure 8.4). In keeping with his craft method, Morris's wallpapers were hand-printed, and the Kelmscott Press books were printed using the Albion hand-press rather than the newer, faster, steam-powered presses that were dominant by the end of the century. Both the firm and the press, then, engaged in craft operations premised on the production of replicated design over a flat material surface. Since the designs were printed, they were reproducible, but – and here lies the difference – they were printed in a slow, hand-worked fashion which lent individuality and distinction to each printed iteration. In Morris's championing of such methods, we can see how his vision of socialism and non-alienated labor helped produce a design aesthetic that privileged collectivity as well as individual difference in the context



Figure 8.2 William Morris, *Acanthus*, 1875, block-printed wallpaper.

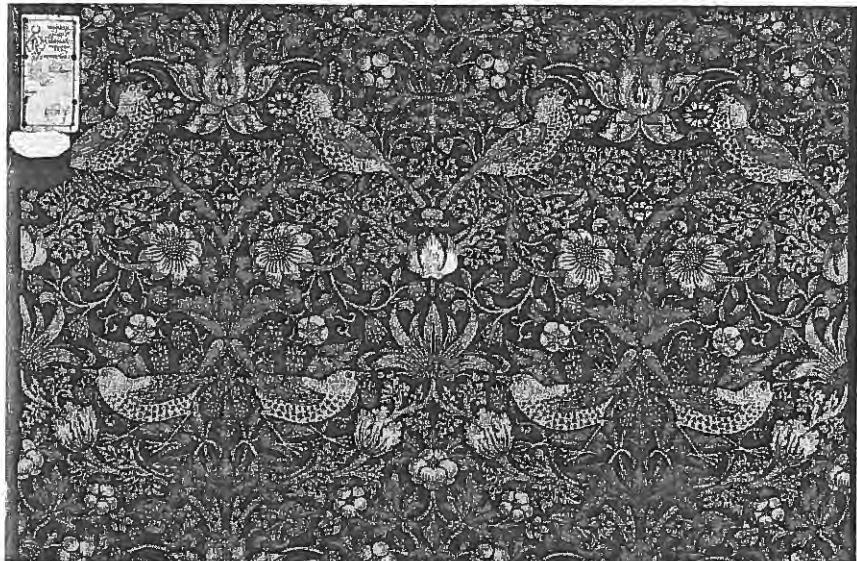


Figure 8.3 William Morris, *Strawberry Thief*, 1883, block-printed fabric.

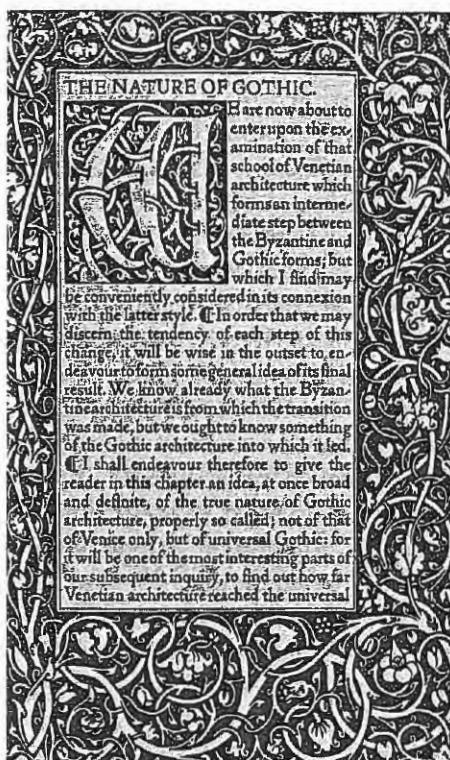


Figure 8.4 William Morris, Kelmscott Press edition of John Ruskin, *The Nature of Gothic*, 1892.

of collectivity. Each printing bore the trace of the worker and the process in its distinct reception of the ink, design, or color, and yet no wallpaper, fabric, or book was produced singly, in the same way that every Morrisian pattern replicated multiple versions (each alive with subtle distinctions) of the same design. The patterns themselves are replicated through printing, but each instance of each pattern is distinct in minor ways. The Ruskinian trace of the worker's hand, the individuality of each iteration, was key to the work's appeal, as Caroline Arscott notes of Morris's wallpapers:

The surface of the hand-printed [wallpaper] retains evidence of the viscosity of the ink and the firm downward pressure exerted onto the printing block. The ink can be seen to have been squeezed towards the sharp edge of the block where it sometimes dries into a slight hump or ridge. (2008: 29)

At the firm, Morris initially attempted to print his own wallpapers from etched zinc blocks, but after he was unable to produce satisfactory results

with his first wallpaper design, *Trellis*, he began contracting out the work to a specialist firm, Jeffrey & Co., for his next wallpapers, *Daisy* and *Fruit*. Jeffrey & Co. printed the wallpapers using woodblocks cut with Morris's designs to Morris's specifications by a block-cutting firm called Barrett's.<sup>4</sup> Although machine printing was standard by this time and was much less expensive, "Morris preferred," as Arscott notes, "the dense colour, and the deliberate placement of the elements that could be achieved with hand printing" (2008: 29). Morris's printed textiles, on the other hand, were eventually block-printed in house, under Morris's control, but in the early days of the firm they were initially hand-printed by a firm called Bannister Hall Print Works near Preston, and then, after 1875, by Thomas Wardle's works in Leek. These firms used, as Linda Parry writes, the "ancient technique of block-printing . . . in preference to engraved rollers which, by the mid-nineteenth century, had been adopted by most of the leading commercial textile manufacturers" (36). After moving the firm to Merton Abbey in 1881, Morris was finally able to undertake his own block-printing and dye-making in house; Merton Abbey was a seven-acre site on the River Wandle with its own dye-room, and the entire upper floor of the largest workshed on site was dedicated to the block-printing of fabrics.<sup>5</sup> Here, the "thump-thump of the printers' blocks" became "one of the most characteristic noises of the works" (Parry 51). In moving the firm to Merton Abbey, Morris intended to evoke guild-like conditions of labor for the workers and to maximize the firm's self-sufficiency in terms of craft labor, including the block-printing of fabrics.

Critics have discussed the various concessions to nineteenth-century social arrangements that the firm made even after the move to Merton Abbey, but none denies that Morris's workers were paid well, for the time, and that many visitors described the Abbey as delightfully situated and a pleasant place to work.<sup>6</sup> While acknowledging that the "general environment" at Merton was "far and away more pleasant than the norm," that there was a "geniality about the enterprise" and "a sense of the skills of the workmen being valued," Fiona MacCarthy nonetheless wonders why "there was no serious attempt to bring out the latent creative talent of each workman." She quotes one of the block printers as saying that "Mr. Morris believes in us men using our brains as well as our hands and does not want to turn us into machines," and yet, she notes, their work was always done to Morris's specifications, which surely made their craft labor less creative and more monotonous (453). This contradiction has led Linda Dowling to suggest that

the social and moral benefits that both Ruskin and Morris identified in handwork are nowhere to be found in Morris's actual procedures: hand printing . . . did not provide his workmen with opportunities for greater freedom, delicacy, or initiative. Its advantage was wholly technical and aesthetic. (58)

The counter-argument, from Morris's point of view, would be that, given what he saw as the death of the decorative arts in the industrial era and the alienation of the workman from production, a more democratic distribution of creativity could not be achieved until art was reborn. That rebirth of art became, for Morris, one of his central themes after his conversion to socialism: in his 1888 lecture "Art and Its Producers," for example, he wrote that, "craftsmanship is now all but extinct" among the working classes, and described his commitment to "keeping alive the spark of life in these [crafts] for a better day," lest they be "wholly extinguished by commercial production" (1888a: 232).

While the firm did take on the hand-printing of fabrics, as part of its effort toward keeping alive that spark of life, it never printed its own wallpapers, and even after the move to Merton Abbey the cutting of designs was not done in house but was sent out to Alfred and James Barrett. This was in contrast to the Kelmscott Press, where Morris maintained greater control of the means of print production by keeping more of it in house. Certainly, on the one hand, there is an uneasy balance between Morris's socialist politics and his role at the firm, but, on the other hand, no critic believes that if Morris had single-handedly run his firm on communist lines it would have made a dent in Victorian capitalism; Fiona MacCarthy writes, indeed, that such a move would have likely run the firm into the ground, given the context of capitalist competition in which Morris was forced to operate.

I would suggest that Morris's patterns are themselves a reminder of the inseparability of the firm from its context: Morris was as embedded in nineteenth-century social conditions as a leaf in his *Acanthus* pattern was twined around its neighbors, and his patterns themselves embody the case for a comprehensive collective approach to redesigning social arrangements. Moreover, if we conceive of his career in printing as a through-line from the woodblock-printed wallpapers and fabrics of the firm forward to the Albion press-printed books at Kelmscott Press, we can imagine Kelmscott as Morris's cumulative effort, in his socialist phase, to maximize his responsibility for the labor conditions that figured in all aspects of his craft production.<sup>7</sup>

For the Kelmscott workers were unionized and the head Kelmscott printer was Thomas Binning, a stalwart trade unionist and a member of the Socialist League. In establishing the configuration of labor at the press, Morris drew on his experience of moving the firm to Merton Abbey, but now he would print books instead of fabrics.

In the Kelmscott books, the borders and frames that Morris employed to contain illustrations and initial pages mirrored the replicated botanical patterns that characterize Morris's designs for the wallpapers and fabrics of the firm – another mark of the continuity between the two projects. Such patterns have the effect of integrating the text within Morris's dense and interwoven botanical patterning. Morris often spoke of each of these various print-based craft endeavors – wallpapers, fabrics, books – in terms of living bodies and organisms. As he put it in his 1881 lecture "Some Hints on Pattern Designing," "it will be enough for us to clothe our daily and domestic walls with ornament that reminds us of the outward face of the earth" (1914b: 177). Likewise, in "Some Thoughts on the Ornamented Manuscripts of the Middle Ages," Morris reflects on the medieval book as "a comely body fit for the habitation of the dead man who was speaking to them: the craftsman, scribe, limner, printer, who had produced it had worked on it directly as an artist, not turned it out as the machine of a tradesman" (1982: 2). Morris's patterns likewise modeled and embodied holistic interrelation by way of the interwoven botanical organisms depicted on their surface, which reflected Morris's concern for the well-being of the individual within the wider social organization of which the individual is a part. If physical well-being and vigor are embedded in these patterns, then the patterns reflect the key principle of socialism that was at the heart of Morris's idea of craft.

The living vividness of the leaf and floral arrangements in the Kelmscott borders has led some critics to read them in terms of replication in the biological sense of expansion and generation. The spectacle of botanical reproduction portrayed in the floral patterns, with the close attention to the sex organs of plants that we see in *The Nature of Gothic* border, for example, sharpens this sense of the ongoing, flourishing propagation of life. Holbrook Jackson, an important early critic of Morris, commented in 1913 on the Kelmscott aesthetic of botanical replication and what he saw as its seeming potential for endless replication: "The Kelmscott books look not only as if letter and decoration had grown one out of the other; they look as if they could go on growing" (qtd. in Peterson 133). If the decorative borders, as I am suggesting, help us perceive the underlying connection between robust

individual life and the healthy arrangement of society and labor, we can see how other aspects of Kelmscott's methods also made a case against social forms of production that diminish the human worker. This is evident, for example, in the press's revival – or preservation – of the art of hand-engraved wood-block illustrations as superior to the new mechanical–chemical process of zincography that emerged in the 1880s. As William S. Peterson has described, zincography

bypassed the human engraver entirely, since the artists' design was transferred photographically on to a zinc plate, which was then engraved by immersion in a chemical bath. An illustration that previously had been engraved by hand over several days could now be prepared for the press in a few hours. By the time the Kelmscott Press came into existence, wood-engraving had disappeared almost overnight.

Morris, unsurprisingly, "held zincography in contempt," and preferred illustrations engraved in wood block by hand (21). His chief engraver at Kelmscott, William Harcourt Hooper, was a master of facsimile engraving in wood as well as a committed socialist; the two men were, however, prone to disagreement over the Kelmscott illustrations, which is itself a mark of Morris's effort to produce humane labor arrangements at the press, for such inconvenient differences of personality were one of the liabilities of human workers that mechanization and industrialization sought to overcome.

Printing is, of course, itself an art of replication, but more than that, the texts Morris chose to print at Kelmscott were often works from the past that he considered significant, such as *The Golden Legend*, *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, *The Order of Chivalry*, *Utopia*, *The Tale of Beowulf*, and, most famously, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. Here, as with his elevation of older craft methods at the firm, replication emerges as a historical as well as an aesthetic strategy. As a writer and an artist, Morris's use of the past as an aesthetic resource was a form of historical replication: rather than attempting to create wholly new aesthetic forms, Morris was interested in reviving older aesthetic forms and making them relevant and powerful for modern audiences. His books, like his textiles and wallpapers, enact a refusal of a modernist aesthetic of newness in favor of an aesthetic of replication. This was an argument against the capitalist ideology of progress and its presumption of a supposedly endless trajectory of improvement through the expansion of markets. It was also characteristic of what E. P. Thompson has called Morris's "powerful historical imagination,"

which "was perhaps his greatest single intellectual strength. In his youth, this faculty was quickened to intensity by his growing hatred of his own civilization" (28).

In hearkening back to the past, Morris's forms of historical replication can also be read as a revolutionary rejection of the present, a claiming of earlier aesthetic models to eschew the kind of mimesis that would reflect the nineteenth-century present and its post-industrial conditions of life. Literary critics have long discussed Morris's rejection of realism, and such a rejection is evident in his typical choices for subject matter in his writings: poetry volumes such as *The Defence of Guenevere* or *The Earthly Paradise* that take place in a legendary or mythic past; utopian works such as *News from Nowhere* or *The Tables Turned; Or, Nupkins Awakened* that are set in the future; or a medieval alternative history such as *A Dream of John Ball*.<sup>8</sup> But Morris's work in the decorative arts is, perhaps, even more decidedly anti-realistic because it enacts by way of Morris's heavy reliance on pattern an aesthetic of internal replication over and above mimesis.<sup>9</sup> The art copies itself, in other words, rather than copying nature. In a lecture titled "Some Hints on Pattern Designing" given at the Working Men's College on December 10, 1881, Morris defined pattern specifically in terms of its non-mimetic quality: "By the word pattern-design, of which I have to speak to you to-night, I mean the ornamentation of a surface by work that is not imitative or historical at any rate not principally or essentially so" (1914b). Morris's conception of pattern is thus grounded in its rejection of mimesis more than in any aspect of its material form. Pattern design can, he says, be worked in many different materials, but is never mimetic:

such work is often not literally flat, for it may be carving or moulded work in plaster or pottery, but whatever material relief it may have is given to it for the sake of the beauty and richness, and not for the sake of imitation, or to tell a fact directly. (175)

Morris went further in "Some Hints on Pattern Designing" to make a more general statement against realism, or rather against its possibility: "Of course you understand that it is impossible to imitate nature literally; the utmost realism of the most realistic painter falls a long way short of that" (178).

That Morris described his work in the replication of patterns in terms of its non-mimetic, non-imitative essence is key, for it suggests the revolutionary quality of his rejection of the present day as a basis for artistic representation. Morris developed such a critique,

in some sense, from his early association with Pre-Raphaelitism; it is well known that Dante Gabriel Rossetti, for example, rejected modern life as a subject unfit for artistic representation, and his paintings could be said to anticipate Morris's non-mimetic direction with patterns, although the comparison is a partial one from a political point of view. E. P. Thompson, for one, has represented the Pre-Raphaelites as strikingly democratic in their aesthetic sensibility, and quotes this recollection of a conversation between Holman Hunt and Millais in the early days of the Brotherhood: "It is simply fuller Nature that we want. . . . Why should the highest light be always on the principal figure?" (50–1). Although this might seem at odds with Rossetti's painterly emphasis on "stunners" – the handpicked models, including Morris's wife Jane, who were chosen for their singularity – Henry James saw something in these paintings that conveyed broad pattern rather than individuated subjects. His famous account of Jane Morris in a March 1869 letter follows up a discussion of William Morris's pattern design (which Morris works, James reports, "stitch by stitch with his own fingers") with a discussion of Morris's wife: "It's hard to say [whether] she's a grand synthesis of all the pre-Raphaelite pictures ever made – or they a 'keen analysis' of her – whether she's an original or a copy" (23).

The point I wish to make, here, is that while both Morris and Rossetti can be said to have elaborated an anti-mimetic aesthetic that made a pointed rejection of nineteenth-century modernity and raised a host of questions about originality, replication, artistic influence, and the relation of the past and the present, the fact that Morris combined his anti-present, anti-mimetic aesthetic with a critique of capitalism gave his pattern work an added political force. His rejection of realism and his internal replication of repeated forms take on a revolutionary quality in their disavowal of present society and their comprehensive reimaging of arrangements and experiments in balancing the part with the whole.

Formally, replication might seem in some sense to privilege continuity over revolutionary rupture, which would conflict with Morris's revolutionary, anti-reformist beliefs after his conversion to socialism in the early 1880s. The anti-mimesis of Morris's decorative patterns, however, makes a case against the replication of the present, a utopian argument for something *better* than the present, for the present is not worth being represented in art. Morris's famous conversion to socialism might be read, similarly, as a rupture rather than a replication, a break rather than a repetition, but we must remember that he considered the primary work of socialism to be the business of "making

socialists.”<sup>10</sup> He sought to replicate conversion to craft socialists in the way that one might craft a decorative object. In this way, his conversion was a submersion of the self into a larger historical pattern; his conversion was one iteration of the making of socialists, the great political project that he hoped would facilitate the creation of a healthier, better-structured social arrangement.

Read in this light, replicated form takes on a socialist politics that it has not always been understood to inhabit, and indeed form itself emerges as a central term for early Marxist aesthetics. Caroline Arscott, in a volume on Marxism and the history of art, notes the “marked focus in much twentieth-century Marxist art history and literary history on iconography and the identification of ideological positions,” but suggests that

by turning afresh to Morris as one of the first Marxist commentators on the making and the study of art we can see that there was, from a very early stage, the articulation of another way of approaching art and its history, one where the primary emphasis was on aesthetics and form. (2006: 27)

If Morris traveled a seemingly unlikely journey from wallpapers to the Second International, there are indications in his pattern work and in his writings about pattern work of his developing point of view. Decoration for Morris, as Nicholas Frankel writes, “embodies a mode of perceptual experience, with the potential to transform the perceiver’s relation to the world and to other human beings” (64). Replicated aesthetic form and the rhythmic repetitions of craft labor provide a way of seeing the world anew, of rearranging the world in miniature, of experimenting with new forms of distribution, new rhythms of labor, and new forms of balance between the part and the whole.

## Notes

1. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick alludes, for example, to “the characteristic Morris pattern of equidistant, unforegrounded, unbroken, and perspectiveless ornamentation drawn ‘from nature’” in her study of affect, *Touching Feeling* (16).
2. For evidence of this early commitment, see, for example, Florence Boos, *History and Poetics in the Early Writings of William Morris, 1855–1870*.
3. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists “repetition” as the oldest meaning of the term, dating to at least the fifteenth century, followed by the sense of “copy” or “replica” emerging in the seventeenth century (“Replicate, v.”).

4. See Charles Harvey and Jon Press, *William Morris: Design and Enterprise in Victorian Britain* (46) and Arscott, *William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones* (2008: 29).
5. See MacCarthy 433.
6. See Parry 52–3.
7. Of course, even at Kelmscott, Morris did not produce his own paper or ink, but instead had it made to his specifications by specialty producers; there were limits to the lengths he could go to control all aspects of production.
8. See, for example, Brantlinger; Miller; Sypher; or Vaninskaya.
9. This rejection of realism in crafts, of course, preceded Morris and can be understood as an outcome of the 1851 Great Exhibition and, more broadly, of Eastern influence on British design; such a craft aesthetic was articulated, for example, by Owen Jones in *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856). Morris's contribution was to extend the meanings of non-realist craft into the political and social domains.
10. The phrase is Morris's, and has recently been repurposed for the title of Mark Bevir's *The Making of British Socialism*. (Bevir discusses Morris's well-known use of "making socialists" on p. 101.) Despite the fact that many critics have found much to discuss in Morris's use of the phrase, the connections back to Morris's craft work and the culture of making that he engendered have been insufficiently remarked upon.

## Works Cited

- Arscott, Caroline. "William Morris: Decoration and Materialism." *Marxism and the History of Art: From William Morris to the New Left*. Ed. Andrew Hemingway. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006: 9–27.
- . *William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones: Interlacings*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Bevir, Mark. *The Making of British Socialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.
- Boos, Florence. *History and Poetics in the Early Writings of William Morris, 1855–1870*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2015.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. "'News from Nowhere': Morris's Socialist Anti-Novel." *Victorian Studies* 19.1 (1975): 35–49.
- Byatt, A. S. *Peacock & Vine: On William Morris and Mariano Fortuny*. New York: Knopf, 2016.
- Dowling, Linda. *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996.
- Frankel, Nicholas. "The Ecology of Decoration: Design and Environment in the Writings of William Morris." *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 12 (Fall 2003): 58–85.

- Harvey, Charles, and Jon Press. *William Morris: Design and Enterprise in Victorian Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991.
- James, Henry. *Henry James: Selected Letters*. Ed. Leon Edel. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1987.
- Levine, Caroline. *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.
- MacCarthy, Fiona. *William Morris: A Life for Our Time*. London: Faber and Faber, 1994.
- Macfarlane, Robert. *Original Copy: Plagiarism and Originality in Nineteenth-Century Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- "The Manifesto of the Socialist League." *Commonweal* 1.1 (February 1885): 1.
- Miller, Elizabeth Carolyn. *Slow Print: Literary Radicalism and Late Victorian Print Culture*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013.
- Morris, William. "Textile Fabrics." Lecture delivered at the International Health Exhibition July 1884. *The Architect* (19 July 1884): 43–5, (26 July 1884): 50–3.
- . "Art and Its Producers." *Transactions of the National Association for the Advancement of Art and Its Application to Industry, Liverpool Meeting*. London: 1888a: 228–36.
- . "Textiles." Originally printed in Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society: Catalogue of the First Exhibition (1888b); rpt in *Journal of the Society of Arts* (19 October 1888): 1133–5.
- . "The Lesser Arts of Life." Lecture originally presented January 21, 1882 to the Birmingham and Midlands Institute under the title "Some of the Minor Arts of Life." *The Collected Works of William Morris*. Vol. 22: *Hopes and Fears for Art; Lectures on Art and Industry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914a: 235–69.
- . "Some Hints on Pattern Designing." Lecture originally presented December 10, 1881 at the Working Men's College, London. *The Collected Works of William Morris*. Vol. 22: *Hopes and Fears for Art; Lectures on Art and Industry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914b: 175–205.
- . "The Lesser Arts." Lecture originally presented April 12, 1877 to the Trades Guild of Learning in the Co-operative Hall of London under the title "The Decorative Arts." Printed in *The Political Writings of William Morris*. Ed. A. L. Morton. New York: International Publishers, 1973: 31–56.
- . "Some Thoughts on the Ornamented Manuscripts of the Middle Ages." *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book*. Ed. William S. Peterson. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982: 1–6.
- Parry, Linda. *William Morris Textiles*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983.
- Peterson, William S. *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1991.

- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Sypher, Eileen. *Wisps of Violence: Producing Public and Private Politics in the Turn-of-the-Century British Novel*. London: Verso, 1993.
- Thompson, E. P. *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*. 2nd edn. New York: Pantheon, 1976.
- Vaninskaya, Anna. *William Morris and the Idea of Community: Romance, History and Propaganda, 1880–1914*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.