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William Morris, Cultural Leadership, and the Dynamics of Taste

This examination of the social processes that inform cultural production asks how tastes are formed, transmitted, embedded, and reproduced across generations. These questions are explored through a study of William Morris, his working methods and products, and their impact on the decorative arts in Victorian Britain and beyond. Through the exercise of cultural leadership, Morris gave physical expression to the ideals and sentiments of Romanticism, and this in turn gave rise to a community of taste reaching across class boundaries and generations. Morrisian products and designs, through the agency of his disciples, became institutionally embedded, emblematic of refinement and good taste. A process model of taste formation is deployed to explore the economic and social dynamics at work in the Morris case and more generally.

This article explores four important questions at the juncture of cultural and business history. The first concerns the cultural dynamics of taste formation: how do fundamental movements in society—ideological, social, and cultural—manifest themselves in the production and consumption of goods and services endowed with distinctive qualities and attributes? The second concerns the mechanisms through which culturally significant goods and services become fashionable: how do producers, consumers, and critics interact to inspire cultural movements and the establishment of communities of taste? The third concerns the generalization of tastes: how do tastes spread beyond a small circle of leading-edge consumers to gain acceptance across a broad swath of society? The fourth concerns the ways in which tastes become

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socially embedded to endure over long periods: how are tastes transmitted across generations, consecrated as classical, ingrained in the national consciousness, and elevated to iconic status?

Straightforward answers to these questions are not to be found in the existing literature. This is not for any lack of interest or academic endeavor. Ever since Emmanuel Kant formulated his views on aesthetics in *Critique of Judgment* (1790), postulating that taste, or judgment power, is private yet universal, both subjective and objective, there has been intense debate among philosophers, sociologists, and consumer researchers regarding matters of taste, fashion, and style.[1] Enduring debates have focused on the meaning and definition of what constitutes good taste; the relations between status, tastes, and social classes; the importance within highly stratified societies of status symbols, conspicuous consumption, and conspicuous leisure; the significance of Zeitgeist to fashion and the remorseless quest for novelty; and the symbolic reductionism implicit in the mass production of kitsch.[2] More recently, these themes have been amplified and challenged in relation to debates concerning mass consumption and postindustrial society. In particular, the top-down or trickle-down model of taste formation has been challenged as street culture has been observed to defy conventional class boundaries, giving rise to more egalitarian views of mass fashion and the pursuit of pleasure.[3] Likewise, a more fine-grained appreciation of fashionableness within distinct communities of taste, cutting across class boundaries, has gained credence relative to notions of domination and cultural leadership of the upper classes.[4]

In all this, empirically well-founded historical studies of taste formation are few and far between, despite a recent spate of interest in the history of consumers and consumption.[5] This lacuna is regrettable: it is history, and particularly business history, in focusing on the production

[1] Jukka Gronow, "Taste and Fashion: The Social Function of Fashion and Style," *Acta Sociologica* 36 (1993): 89–100.

[2] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford, 1994); Douglas B. Holt, "Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption?" *Journal of Consumer Research* 25 (1998): 1–25; Thorstein *Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (London, 1970; originally published in 1899); Jukka Gronow, *The Sociology of Taste* (London, 1997), 31–48.

[3] Heinz–Dieter Mayer, "Taste Formation in Pluralistic Societies: The Role of Rhetorics and Institutions," *International Sociology* 15 (2000): 33–56.

[4] Albert M. Muniz and Thomas C. O'Guinn, "Brand Community," *Journal of Consumer Research* 27 (2001): 412–32.

[5] Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and John H. Plumb, *The Birth of Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1982); Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851–1914* (Stanford, 1991); Maxine Berg, *A Nation of Shoppers: How Georgian Britain Discovered the Delights of Luxury* (Oxford, 2005); John Brewer and Frank Trentmann eds., *Consuming Cultures, Global Perspectives: Historical Trajectories, Transnational Exchanges* (Oxford, 2006).

side of the ongoing dialogue between consumers and producers that might help in unraveling some of the deeper mysteries of consumer research. This applies especially to the study of continuous, rather than discontinuous, phenomena. We are attuned in postindustrial society to think of change as ubiquitous and all pervasive, deflecting attention from the power of cultural reproduction to lend both stability and distinctiveness to nations and communities. In many spheres of cultural endeavor—cooking, clothing, architecture, the decorative arts, gardening, music, and religious worship are examples—tastes are bounded within communities, and fashion is constrained by adherence to culturally embedded principles and historical preferences.[6] It is far from being the case, even in the most open societies, that everything is "up for grabs" and subject to the exigencies of the moment. Taste formation, in this light, might best be thought of as clustered and paradigmatic within overlapping communities of taste. Historical analysis, in embracing notions of both continuity and change, is of particular value in explaining how such communities are formed and sustained across generations, serving to link the past with the present.

In this article, we contribute to the literature on taste formation and transmission through a theoretically informed historical study of William Morris and the decorative arts in Victorian Britain and beyond, building upon earlier research by Charles Harvey and Jon Press.[7] The business launched by Morris in 1861 was a powerhouse for the production of original designs and decorative-art products, especially stained glass, furniture, printed and woven fabrics, embroidery, carpets, wallpapers, tapestries, and decorative schemes for large houses and public buildings.[8] It was a long-lived enterprise (trading until 1940) that had a profound influence within the decorative arts that extends down to the present. Few businesses could lay claim to comparable cultural significance. Morris inspired the Arts and Crafts Movement, and through his

[6] Frank Trentmann, ed., *The Making of the Consumer: Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World* (Oxford, 2006), 1–27; Frank Trentmann, "The Modern Genealogy of the Consumer: Meanings, Identities and Political Synapses," in *Consuming Cultures, Global Perspectives: Historical Trajectories, Transnational Exchanges*, ed. John Brewer and Frank Trentmann (Oxford, 2006), 19–69.

[7] Charles Harvey and Jon Press, "The Marketing of Art," *Business History* 28 (1986): 36–54; Charles Harvey and Jon Press, *William Morris: Design and Enterprise in Victorian Britain* (Manchester, 1991); Charles Harvey and Jon Press, "John Ruskin and the Ethical Foundations of Morris & Company," *Journal of Business Ethics* 14 (1995): 181–94; Charles Harvey and Jon Press, *Art, Enterprise and Ethics: Essays on the Life and Work of William Morris* (London, 1996).

[8] Charlotte Gere and Michael Whiteway, *Nineteenth Century Design: From Pugin to Mackintosh* (London, 1993); Kathleen A. Lochnan, Douglas E. Schoenherr, and Carole Silver, eds., *The Earthly Paradise* (Toronto, 1993); Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (London, 1994); Victorian & Albert Museum, *William Morris, 1834–1896* (London, 1996).

writings and example as craftsman-designer par excellence he helped lay the intellectual foundations for design education in Britain and beyond.[9] Successive generations of designers have recognized his genius and selectively assimilated his practices within their own. Museums and universities have kept his memory alive, and in doing so have elevated Morris's designs and products to classic status. Likewise, in applying Morris & Co. designs to all manner of products, from greeting cards and book jackets to soft coverings and wall hangings, design companies have made Morrisian designs recognizable across the world, identified by their flowing lines and naturalistic inspiration as the quintessence of Englishness.

The argument unfolds in stages. In the following section, we build upon the ideas of Georg Simmel, Thorstein Veblen, Pierre Bourdieu, and others to develop a process model of taste formation.[10] The model is suggestive rather than definitive. It establishes a conceptual framework for the historical analysis presented in subsequent sections, which consider in turn the research questions posed earlier with specific reference to the Morris case. The aim is to expose the economic, social, and cultural dynamics underlying Morris's rise to prominence and his enduring influence on tastes within the decorative arts. We demonstrate that Morris, through the exercise of cultural leadership, gave physical expression to the ideals and sentiments of Romanticism, and that in turn this gave rise to a community of taste reaching across class boundaries, nations, and generations.[11] The evidence supports the view that tastes are objectified, legitimized, transmitted, and institutionalized though socially constructed processes involving contestation between actors and ideas. Our analysis is generally supportive of Ben Fine's argument that consumer cultures invariably are "contextual, construed, chaotic, constructed, contradictory and conflictual."[12] In the final section, we consider the implications of the research presented.

[9] Gillian Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A Study of Its Sources, Ideals and Influence on Design Theory* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980); Peter Stansky, *Redesigning the World: William Morris, the 1880s and the Arts and Crafts* (Princeton, N.J., 1985); Elizabeth Cumming and Wendy Kaplan, *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London, 1991).

[10] Kurt Wolff, ed., *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York, 1950); Veblen, *Leisure Class*; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London, 1984).

[11] On the relation of Romanticism to consumption, see Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford, 1987); Morris B. Holbrook, "Romanticism and Sentimentality in Consumer Behavior: A Literary Approach to the Joys and Sorrows of Consumption," *Research in Consumer Behavior* 5 (1991): 105–80; "Romanticism, Introspection and the Roots of Experiential Consumption: Morris the Epicurean," in *Consumption and Marketing: Macro Dimensions*, ed. Russell W. Belk, Nikhilesh Dholakia, and Alladi Venkatest (Cincinnati, Oh., 1995), 20–82.

[12] Ben Fine, "Addressing the Consumer," in *The Making of the Consumer: Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World*, ed. Frank Trentmann (Oxford, 2006), 291–311.

Cultural Theory and the Dynamics of Taste

No writer on the theory and practices of taste formation has been more influential than Pierre Bourdieu. In his masterful book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, first published in French in 1979, and in a plethora of later works, Bourdieu argues that tastes, the manifest cultural preferences of individuals, groups, and social classes, cannot be understood in isolation, independent of class relations and social hierarchies.[13] In his view, societies are divided both by class (into strata) and field (into competitive arenas). The precise social location of individuals and families within the matrix of society is determined by the amounts and types of capital they possess.[14] Economic capital is the most important differentiator, because conventional wealth can ultimately be converted into other forms of capital —cultural, social, and symbolic. Cultural capital, for example, which embraces knowledge of the arts, music, literature, and other forms of social distinction, is acquired through both education and informal assimilation, and is more readily accessible to children from the upper and upper-middle classes.[15] Likewise, the offspring of the well-to-do have access through family and friends to social capital, relationships and reciprocal obligations that are often crucial to professional and social advancement.[16] In all fields, legitimacy, the acceptance of domination by the subordinated, is signified by possession of a fourth kind of capital, symbolic capital, in the form of desirable possessions, privileged pursuits, honors, and titles.[17]

In Bourdieu's world, where capital is deployed to reinforce social distinctions, social processes are driven by the struggle waged implicitly between the classes.[18] This struggle is concealed by the fact that much human behavior is unconscious, the product of what Bourdieu calls "habitus": the ingrained dispositions that lead actors to make choices and decisions that reproduce existing social structures and status distinctions. Habitus equips individuals with a guidance system,

[13] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 97–256; David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago, 1997), 117–88.

[14] Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* (Oxford, 1996), 261–339; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Oxford, 1996), 47–112.

[15] Bonnie H. Erickson, "What Is Good Taste Good For?" *Canadian Review of Anthropology and Sociology* 28 (1991): 256.

[16] Margaret M. Bubolz, "Family as Source, User and Builder of Social Capital," *Journal of Socio-Economics* 30 (2001): 129–31.

[17] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Oxford, 1993), 74–141.

[18] Douglas E. Allen and Paul F. Anderson, "Consumption and Social Stratification: Bourdieu's Distinction," *Advances in Consumer Research* 21 (1994): 70–74.

with a sense of how to act and respond in society, orienting their actions and inclinations according to what is appropriate in the present circumstances. It is the means by which life chances are internalized, "necessity internalized and converted into a disposition"; it is thus "one of the mediations through which social destiny is accomplished."[19] Habitus serves as a binding force between various factions within a class, leading to common, though not orchestrated, action on the basis of categories of "perception and appreciation" that are themselves produced by an observable social condition.[20] The preservation of social order, of the continued acceptance of domination by the subordinated, does not require members of the ruling elite to think alike or act alike. It is sufficient that there are homologies between fields that lead dominant actors to share similar dispositions across domains.[21]

Culture and taste are central to Bourdieu's understanding of habitus, domination, and the exercise of power. Cultural practices are, in essence, reflective of underlying class distinctions, serving as subtle yet powerful forms of social distinction. Lifestyles give practical expression to the symbolic dimension of class identity.[22] Tastes stem not from internally generated aesthetic preferences, but from the conditioning effect of habitus and the availability of economic and cultural capital.[23] Each social class or fraction of a class has its own habitus and correlative set of cultural practices. This leads Bourdieu to conclude that relative "distance from necessity" is the main determinant of habitus and the formation of tastes and preferences.[24] Those in the uppermost strata of society, free from material constraints, develop an aesthetic disposition characterized by "the stylization of life," the primacy of form over function and manner over matter.[25] In contrast, the working classes are seen to privilege substance over form, the informal over the formal, the sensual over the intellectual, and the immediate over the deferred. By way of a myriad of cultural practices, dominant factions thereby distance themselves from the subordinated, affecting a sense of casual superiority and social distinction. The exercise of taste thus serves to reinforce the right to rule.

Bourdieu was not the first cultural theorist to observe that tastes and shifts in tastes are instrumental in social competition. Simmel, Vance Packard, and Veblen before him had defined luxury goods and

[19] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 170; Pierre Bourdieu, "On the Family as a Realized Category," *Theory, Culture and Society* 13 (1996): 26.
[20] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 171.
[21] Ibid., 232–44.
[22] David Chaney, *Lifestyles* (London, 1996), 56–70.
[23] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 1–8, 257–396.
[24] Ibid., 53–96.
[25] Ibid., 55.

high fashion as status symbols that conferred distinction upon their owners, equating good taste with membership in the upper classes.[26] In this conception, those lower down on the social scale pursue emulative strategies for the acquisition of symbolic capital and social advancement, causing tastes to "trickle down" from the upper to the lower reaches of society. Veblen offers the most extreme version of the theory, holding that accepted standards of good taste are set for each class by the one immediately above, making the super wealthy at the apex of society the ultimate arbiters of good taste. Social domination extends beyond tastes in material goods to encompass lifestyles and etiquette. This is because good taste is contingent not only on the acquisition of things, but also upon having the knowledge and time needed to appreciate or consume them properly. In other words, conspicuous leisure is the other side of the coin to conspicuous consumption, and by virtue of its wealth the leisure class is able to stay ahead by continuously reinventing what constitutes good taste. Within hierarchical social structures based on wealth, taste formation is an exclusively top-down process that condemns the lower orders perennially to be out of fashion. This chimes with Simmel's conclusion that "the fashions of the upper stratum of society are never identical with those of the lower, in fact, they are abandoned by the former as soon as the latter prepare to appropriate them."[27]

Bourdieu may have built on theoretical foundations laid by others, but his analysis transcends earlier accounts by demonstrating how tastes are formed, embedded, and expressed through the operation of habitus and social competition. A further important theoretical innovation arises from his application of the concept of homology to identify interactions between the fields of production (the economic world) and consumption (the social world). Each field is depicted as having a bearing upon the other with the following results:

> The tastes actually realized depend on the state of the system of goods offered; every change in the system of goods induces a change in tastes. But conversely, every change in tastes resulting from a transformation in the conditions of existence and of the corresponding dispositions will tend to induce, directly or indirectly, a transformation in the field of production, by favouring the success, within the struggle constituting the field, of the producers best able to [meet] the needs corresponding to the new disposition.[28]

[26] Wolff, ed., *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*; Vance Packard, *The Status Seekers: An Exploration of Class Behaviour in America* (London, 1960); Veblen, *Leisure Class*.

[27] Georg Simmel, "Fashion," *International Quarterly* 10 (1904): 137.

[28] Brian S. Turner and June Edmunds, "The Distaste of Taste: Bourdieu, Cultural Capital and the Australian Postwar Elite," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 2 (2002): 231.

Table 1
Four Processes of Taste Formation

	Structural and Functional Homologies		
Process	*Field of Production*		*Field of Consumption*
Objectification	Translation of abstract ideas into cultural artifacts	↔	Formation of cultural dispositions through homologous movements in society
Legitimization	Production, marketing, and endorsement of a new genre of cultural products	↔	Establishment through symbolic appropriation of a leading-edge community of taste
Transmission	Range of products extended to include lesser emblems of distinction	↔	Community of taste extended across different sections of society
Institutionalization	Original models exploited in the production of sentimentally evocative goods	↔	Community of taste renewed across generations through cultural reproduction

In this way, Bourdieu transcends two naïve arguments—either that products are supplied in response to sovereign tastes or that taste is a function of production—to account for "the quasi-miraculous correspondence prevailing at every moment between the products offered by a field of production and the field of socially produced tastes."[29]

In Table 1, we present a process model of taste formation that builds upon and extends Bourdieu's analysis as presented most cogently in *Distinction* and *The Rules of Art*.[30] Each of the four processes involves a series of interactions between the fields of production and consumption, the corresponding developments referred to by Bourdieu as functional and structural homologies. *Objectification* defines the translation of ideas into artifacts—new products in tune with the spirit of the times. The proposition is that consumers become open to fresh possibilities through the impact of broader changes in society, and that producers respond to these changes by conceiving products that match their ideals and aspirations. *Legitimization* stems from acceptance by the cultural elite that a new class of goods satisfies prevailing standards of good taste. This follows from the interplay between producers seeking to create a market and leading-edge consumers with the cultural

[29] Ibid., 232.
[30] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 226–56; Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, 141–73.

authority needed to form a community of taste.[31] *Transmission* involves the progressive widening of a community of taste while preserving status distinctions between consumers. This is achieved through the production of what we refer to here as *lesser emblems of distinction*, imitations or derivatives, copies of copies as Gilles Deleuze would have it, that are eagerly purchased by consumers lacking the purchasing power to acquire more original and distinctive items.[32] In the final process, *institutionalization*, the cultural elite elevates products to classic status, the very embodiment of good taste, while simultaneously consumers cherish these items as part of their cultural heritage, kept alive through the purchase of *sentimentally evocative goods*. It is through the ongoing dialogue between the cultural elite and consumers that tastes become embedded and thereby assume exceptional historical and cultural significance.

Morris, Romanticism, and Taste Formation

All cultural products—in fields as diverse as poetry, literature, religion, music, architecture, and the fine and decorative arts—are expressive of thoughts, values, and aesthetic sensibilities. Cultural production requires *objectification*, the translation of the abstract into the particular, and it follows that any account of the cultural dynamics of taste must begin with an appreciation of the intellectual and social milieu of the producer.[33] In this regard, William Morris's personal history serves to make the point. He was born into a well-off upper-middle-class family, and from an early stage in life he had the opportunity to accumulate cultural capital through both formal education and habitus. He read prodigiously as a child, as a teenager at Marlborough, and later at Exeter College, Oxford. Morris was steeped in literature, factual and fictional, that one way or another questioned the values, assumptions, tastes, and cultural practices of his own age, often elevating those of earlier times, especially medieval England. His love of authors as diverse as Walter Scott, Thomas Carlyle, William Wordsworth, Charles Kingsley, and John Ruskin is symptomatic of his identification with struggle and contestation within the world of ideas—hence, the common perception of Morris as a man waging war against his age.[34]

[31] Bourdieu, *Cultural Production*, 259–66.

[32] Ibid., 318–23; Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et Répétition* (Paris, 1969, 2nd ed. 1972), 7.

[33] Grant McCracken, "Culture and Consumption: A Theoretical Account of the Structure and Movement of the Cultural Meaning of Goods," *Journal of Consumer Research* 13 (1986): 71–84; Robert Batchelor, "On the Movement of Porcelains: Rethinking the Birth of Consumer Society as Interactions of Exchange Networks, 1600–1750," in *Consuming Cultures, Global Perspectives: Historical Trajectories, Transnational Exchanges*, ed. John Brewer and Frank Trentmann (Oxford, 2006), 95–121.

[34] Peter Faulkner, *Against the Age: An Introduction to William Morris* (London, 1980).

Many of Morris's contemporaries shared his sensibilities. The essence of the Victorian age, in socioeconomic terms, was a product of industrialization and its impact on ordinary people. In the literary and philosophical world, the influence of the Romantic movement was still predominant.[35] Industrialization, whatever its benefits as a generator of wealth, was seen to depend on mechanization, and mass production. Its all-too-evident byproducts were filth and squalor, which were quite at odds with Romanticism's love of nature, its sublime individualism, and its quest for beauty. One consequence of this disharmony was the rehabilitation of medieval art, which previous generations had come to regard as primitive and even barbaric. To many, its mysticism and spirituality were now seen as artistically more profound than anything that more cerebral ages—especially the eighteenth century—could offer. This comprehensive change in aesthetic perception was homologous to developments taking place elsewhere. In this sense, Morris's personal journey from would-be priest to apprentice architect, aspiring painter and poet, before fixing on a career in the decorative arts, was linked by a common thread, itself woven into the fabric of contemporary intellectual discourse.

Intellectual movements are rarely monolithic and, more typically, consist of affiliations between actors within more or less distantly related fields. The Gothic revival in architecture, for example, was supported by fellow travelers in proximate fields, such as the fine and decorative arts, and in somewhat more distantly related fields, like theology and literature. Morris, in his practice as decorative artist, drew routinely on his knowledge of theology, literature, painting, and architecture. His partners in Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. (MMF & Co.), founded in 1861 and renamed Morris & Co. in 1875 when Morris became sole owner, likewise drew inspiration from a range of sources. Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Ford Madox Brown were leaders of the artistic movement known as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and they brought to the business their knowledge of poetry, history, mythology, theology, architecture, design and the decorative arts. They were joined by Edward Burne-Jones, aspiring artist and close friend of Morris, the budding architect Philip Webb, the engineer Peter Marshall, and the mathematician Charles Faulkner. What united the partners was the conviction that the decorative arts had become debased and were in need of an aesthetic revolution.

The prospectus drawn up to launch MMF & Co. is a remarkable document when considered in this light. It boldly claimed that the partners "having been for many years deeply attached to the study of the

[35] Campbell, *Romantic Ethic*, 173–201.

Decorative Arts" but unable to "obtain or get produced work of a genuine and beautiful character" had determined to supply the market. They reasoned that the time had come for "Artists of reputation" to enter the field, serving to complement the achievements of architects who recognized the potential of the decorative arts to enrich life.[36] Their aim was to win commissions by deriding the efforts of other decorative artists as "crude and fragmentary," an appropriately subversive market-entry strategy designed to curry favor with Gothic Revival architects like George Gilbert Scott, William Butterfield, and George Edmund Street. These men had gained in power and influence consequent upon the dramatic increase in church building to cater to the rapidly growing population. Their quest for historical and symbolical accuracy meant that churches had become more elaborate and costly, requiring a wide range of decorative work, including wall painting, stained glass, carving in wood and stone, brass- and ironwork, church-plate design, and embroidery.[37]

This development had its counterpart in the domestic arena. Sustained economic growth went hand-in-hand with urbanization and the rise of the middle classes—professional, industrial, and administrative. Rising living standards in turn created new markets and new possibilities for the formation of specialist fields of economic activity.[38] The Victorian upper and upper-middle classes attached enormous importance to the symbols and trappings of prosperity. Houses and the decorative arts were an important concern and a focal point for conspicuous consumption.[39] Even among those of relatively modest means, the maintenance of a respectable household in the third quarter of the nineteenth

[36] Harvey and Press, *William Morris*, 38–42.

[37] The Church of England alone spent more than £25 million between 1840 and 1874. U.K. Parliament, House of Commons Papers, *Return Showing the Number of Churches (including Cathedrals) in Every Diocese in England, which had been Built or Restored at a Cost Exceeding £500 since the Year 1840* (London, 1876, vol. 58), 553–658; F. Warre Cornish, *The English Church in the Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols. (London, 1910), 1: 110–17; Basil Fulford Lowther Clarke, *Church Builders of the Nineteenth Century: A Study of the Gothic Revival in England* (London, 1939), 24–30; Christopher Brooks and Andrew Saint, eds., *The Victorian Church: Architecture and Society* (Manchester, 1995). Nonconformists also invested extensively in building and restoration, and so did the Roman Catholic Church as it moved from emancipation to the reestablishment of an episcopal hierarchy: James Cubitt, *A Popular Handbook of Nonconformist Church Building* (London, 1892); Brian D. Little, *Catholic Churches since 1623: A Study of Roman Catholic Churches in England and Wales from Penal Times to the Present Day* (London, 1966); Edward R. Norman, *The English Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1984).

[38] In all, the number of residential properties in England and Wales almost doubled between 1851 and 1901, from 3,432,000 to 6,710,000. Brian Mitchell and Phyllis Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, U.K., 1971), 6, 239; Christopher G. Powell, *An Economic History of the British Building Industry, 1815–1979* (London, 1980); Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain, 1851–75* (London, 1971); F. Michael L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830–1900* (London, 1988), 166–96; Roderick Floud, *The People and the British Economy, 1830–1914* (Oxford, 1997), 59–61.

[39] Richards, *Commodity Culture*, 17–72.

century required expenditure on a broad range of items: furniture, wall coverings, carpets and rugs, paintings, and musical instruments, to name but a few. However, while much of the demand for original decorative artwork was metropolitan or centered on the major provincial cities, it is noteworthy that close to two thousand country houses were built, or completely rebuilt, between 1835 and 1914. Until mid-century, members of the old landed classes built most, but this proportion declined sharply as the century progressed and the patronage of "new money" became more important.[40]

When examined against this background, a number of factors emerge as contributing to the successful launch and subsequent progress of MMF & Co. Morris and his associates, far from being against their age, as they are still often portrayed, were instrumental in shaping it. They were rich in cultural capital, redolent of a particular class habitus, and in possession of the necessary skills and contacts to identify emerging market opportunities. Romanticism, combined with a deep familiarity with ecclesiology, medieval architecture, history, writings, myths, and legends, infused the look, feel, and subject matter of their work. Distinctiveness in style and artistic substance gave the firm a powerful advantage over its rivals, calling forth Morris's observation that "beauty is a marketable quality."[41] The goods produced and marketed by the firm had the further attraction, consequent upon the existence of field homologies, of reflecting qualities and values similar to those expressed in other fields of cultural production. Architecture and the decorative arts were of increasing importance to the affluent sectors of Victorian society, and the way was clear for MMF & Co. to make its mark.

The Establishment of a Morrisian Community of Taste

The Morris case presents a rare opportunity to analyze the processes through which culturally significant goods become accepted as expressive of good taste within a section of the ruling class, forming the kernel of a new community of taste. By reconstructing the social networks

[40] We estimate that by the 1870s there were between 4,000 and 5,000 country houses associated with large estates: Richard G. Wilson and Alan L. Mackley, "How Much did the English Country House Cost to Build, 1660–1880?" *Economic History Review* 52 (1999): 436–68; Richard G. Wilson and Alan L. Mackley, *Creating Paradise: The Building of the English Country House, 1160–1880* (London, 2000); Thompson, *Respectable Society*, 152–63; Jill Franklin, *The Gentleman's Country House and its Plan, 1835–1914* (London, 1981), 1, 24–38.

[41] This statement was made when giving evidence before the British Royal Commission on Technical Instruction, which reported in 1884. In answer to a question on the commercial importance of design, Morris replied that "beauty is a marketable quality, and . . . the better the work is all round, both as a work of art and in its technique, the more likely it is to find favour with the public." Parliamentary Papers, c3981, *Second Report of the Royal Commissioners on Technical Instruction*, Q1580 (London, 1884, vol. 3).

through which the Morris business extended its influence between the 1860s and 1890s, it is possible to open up a window on the habitus and processes of taste *legitimization* of the upper and upper-middle classes of Victorian Britain. In this regard, it is fortunate that a plethora of primary sources exists, which, albeit fragmentary, yield close-to-life insights into the exercise of cultural leadership in Victorian high society.

There is no doubt that Morris, as a private individual, preferred to spend his recreational hours with friends from the same social milieu, broadly speaking artists, writers, creative professionals, and intellectuals rich in cultural capital, including heavyweight social critics like John Ruskin. But Morris's social interactions were far from being confined to this circle. Like other cultural actors, he needed wealthy patrons in order to become established and build his reputation. From its very beginning in 1861, the firm's commercial success was predicated upon the formation of an influential network of clients and champions.[42] In this, Rossetti was the prime mover, using his extensive personal network to recommend the Morris business as the rising force in the decorative arts. It was Rossetti, for example, who secured the commission to redecorate the Armoury and Tapestry Room at St. James's Palace in 1866.[43] The commissioner of works at that time was William Cowper. He and his wife, Georgiana, were close friends of Ruskin, who introduced them to Rossetti early in 1865. Georgiana's account of her husband's life, published in 1890, describes an early meeting with Rossetti. When she asked Rossetti if he could suggest any improvements to her home, he replied that he would "begin by burning everything you have got." Morris & Co. was duly employed to redecorate the Cowpers' Curzon Street house, and Georgiana became a long-standing champion of the firm. In the book, she observed that "nearly all people confess that they owe a deep debt to the firm, for having saved them from trampling roses underfoot, and sitting on shepherdesses, or birds and butterflies, from vulgar ornaments and other atrocities in taste, and for having their homes homely and beautiful."[44]

Following Rossetti's example, the other partners in Morris & Co.—especially Morris and Burne-Jones—became adept proselytizers, moving

[42] On family and social networking and its importance in American business history, see Pamela Walker Laird, *Pull: Networking and Success since Benjamin Franklin* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006), 44–48 and 81–85.

[43] Papers relating to the redecoration of St. James's Palace, 1866, WORK 19/129, U.K. Public Record Office; James Edgar Sheppard, *Memorials of St. James's Palace* (London, 1894), 126, 370; Charles Mitchell, "William Morris at St. James's Palace," *Architectural Review* 42 (1947): 37–39; John Y. Le Bourgeois, "Morris & Company at St. James's Palace: A Sequel," *Journal of the William Morris Society* 3 (1974): 8.

[44] Georgiana Mount-Temple, *Memorials* [of William Francis Cowper–Temple, Baron Mount–Temple] (London, 1890), 64–65.

confidently in high society in London and at the country retreats of wealthy landowners, industrialists, and financiers. They were accomplished relationship builders, confirming Bonnie Erickson's observation that cultural variety and social-network variety are potentially valuable business resources.[45] A typical example of network formation stems from the firm's dealings with George Howard, later ninth Earl of Carlisle. Howard and his wife, Rosalind, first visited the firm's workshops in 1866 and became regular customers for the next twenty years, furnishing their homes at Castle Howard and at Naworth Castle in Cumbria. Their London house, 1 Palace Green, was built by Philip Webb between 1868 and 1872, and was decorated throughout with Morris wallpapers and fabrics. It served as a showcase for Morris & Co. One of the Howards' first guests at their new home was Princess Louise, who had married Howard's cousin, the Marquis of Lorne. She was so taken with the wallpapers that she personally visited the firm's showrooms to select papers for her rooms at Kensington Palace.[46]

The Howards' close friendship with Percy and Madeleine Wyndham further extended Morris's sphere of influence. Percy Wyndham was the younger son of George Wyndham, first Baron Leconfield. He and his wife were members of the intellectual and aesthetically minded aristocratic set known as "the Souls."[47] Their admiration for 1 Palace Green led them to draw up ambitious plans for their country house, Clouds, in Wiltshire. Work started in 1876, though it was nine years before the house was ready for occupation. It was an important commission for Morris & Co. As Mark Girouard observes, Clouds set the style for country-house life: "political entertaining combined with artistic discrimination. The style, sensibility and relative informality with which the two were pursued made Clouds one of the most famous country houses of its era." Morris fabrics were used throughout the house as curtains, chair covers, tablecloths, and screens. Two large hand-woven carpets were specially designed. The one made for the drawing room, renowned as the "Clouds carpet," featured an arabesque floral design on a blue ground with a gray border and was the largest carpet Morris & Co. ever manufactured.[48]

[45] Erickson, "What Is Good Taste Good For?" 255–78.

[46] Diary of Rosalind Howard, J23/102/12, Castle Howard Archives, Yorkshire; Morris & Co. business papers, box 15a/15b, William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, London; Richard William Lethaby, *Philip Webb and His Work* (London, 1935), 88–89; May Morris, *William Morris: Artist, Designer, Socialist* (Oxford, 1936), 57; Linda Parry, *William Morris Textiles* (London, 1983), 137; Victoria Surtees, *The Artist and the Autocrat: George and Rosalind Howard, Earl and Countess of Carlisle* (Wilton, 1988), 89; Caroline Dakers, *Clouds: The Biography of a House* (New Haven, Conn., 1993), 43–44.

[47] Jane Abdy and Christine Gere, *The Souls* (London, 1984), 82–101.

[48] Mark Girouard, *The Victorian Country House* (New Haven, Conn., 1979), 80–81; Dakers, *Clouds*, 63–64.

It is possible through close scrutiny of surviving diaries, memorials, social reports, and other sources to trace further the Morris client network stemming from the Howards. This is not necessary for present purposes. What matters is that the Howards were just one node within a complex web of social interaction, and this web was not confined to the aristocracy but included elite individuals from many walks of life. Morris clients included the iron-and-steel magnate Sir Isaac Lowthian Bell (Rounton Grange in Yorkshire), the illustrator Myles Birket Foster (The Hill in Surrey), the financier Edward Charles Baring (Membland Hall in Devon), and the shipping magnate Frederick Leyland (Speke Hall in Liverpool).[49] In the majority of cases down to 1890, Morris himself took charge of major decorative schemes, working closely with collaborators like Webb as architect, Burne-Jones as figure designer, and William De Morgan as tile maker. Many of the products used—fabrics, wallpapers, carpets, tapestries, and stained glass—were manufactured in Morris & Co.'s own workshops. The firm proactively marketed on-site consultations with Morris, its principal designer, as one of the most unique and desirable features of the business. It was a service greatly valued by clients: Walter Bagehot, the lawyer and constitutionalist, proudly remarked in 1875 that "the great man himself, William Morris, is composing [my] drawing room, as he would an ode."[50]

In seizing the moment and exercising cultural leadership, Morris and his associates were able, through social networking, to establish their products as exemplars of legitimate good taste among the more intellectual and artistically minded sections of the upper classes. The firm was, to use Bourdieu's terminology, instrumental in orchestrating the market.[51] Morris products never became ubiquitous, universally accepted, or appreciated, but, for leading-edge consumers within the ruling class, they spoke of distinction and were read as symbolic of high status and refined good taste. It is only through the blessing of market makers, functioning as trendsetters, that decorative art products can be consecrated as entirely legitimate, whose possession is seen as an unimpeachable mark of distinction, what Bourdieu calls "the production of belief."[52] The key thematic of the story told by Morris was that his products were defined by "the luxury of taste," not "the luxury of

[49] Morris & Co. business papers, box 15a/15b, William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, London; Lethaby, *Philip Webb*, 93–95; Morris, *William Morris*, 58–59; Diana Hopkinson, "A Passion for Building: The Barings at Membland," *Country Life* 29 (1982): 1736–40; Parry, *William Morris Textiles*, 137–38; Jan Reynolds, *Birket Foster* (London, 1984), 84–96; Richard and Hilary Myers, *William Morris Tiles: Tile Designs of Morris and his Fellow-Workers* (Shepton Beauchamp, U.K., 1996), 27–32.

[50] Mrs. Russell Barrington, *Life of Walter Bagehot* (London, 1914), 412.

[51] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 230–32.

[52] Bourdieu, *Cultural Production*, 74–111; Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, 166–73.

The drawing room, Holland Park, 1883–84. Morris's Flower Garden design on the walls was woven in silk, and the Holland Park carpet was hand woven. The broadwood piano case was designed by Sir Edward Burne-Jones and W. A. S. Benson and decorated by Kate Faulkner. (Reprinted by permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum/National Art Library collection, London.)

costliness." This was achieved through the application of correct principles of design, the subject matter inspiring his designs (Nature and Myth), the choice of only the best materials, the alignment of product form and function, and the use of appropriate craft methods in manufacture. His products in consequence were said to be beautiful, durable,

and pleasing to the mind as well as to the eye. The attributes and implicit values that helped build reputation and brand identity were those of authenticity, integrity, boldness, originality, naturalness, and lack of pretension. Morris offered a package of satisfactions, real and perceived, that appealed to a particular group of connoisseurs, a nascent community of taste, and in this lay the single most important key to his immediate success in the marketplace.[53]

Morris & Co., in cultivating the rich and powerful, can be seen to have traded cultural capital (in which it was rich) for social capital (prospective clients) and economic capital (commissions). From the client perspective, identification with cultural leaders like Morris offered a number of powerful yet subtle advantages. Within the Morrisian community of taste, appreciation of the decorative arts was a signifier of belonging; as Bourdieu remarks, "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier."[54] It was a neutral topic of conversation, shared by men and women, industrialists and bankers, landowners and city dwellers, metropolitans and provincials. When, for example, Walter Bagehot visited the earl of Carnarvon at his country house, Highclere in Berkshire, he noted, "They are doing a heap of improvements, and among others have gone into Morrisianism . . . They are much amused here at *my* knowing anything about it."[55] This snippet, unimportant in itself, is revealing once it is known that Highclere was a pioneering venue for weekend house parties, which became a distinctive feature of upper-class life in the late Victorian period.[56] Conversation about art, architecture, and literature, as expressions of common cultural dispositions, served as a mechanism for elite cohesion, reinforcing its legitimacy and separation from the lower orders.[57] It did not matter whether members actually liked what they saw. What mattered was whether they knew about what they saw, as Erickson confirms in her study of cultural capital and taste in Toronto.[58] As Craig Calhoun and Loïc Wacquant put it, It is knowledge that determines all forms of judgment and "buttresses the hierarchies

[53] On social identity and consumption, see Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford, 1987). On emotional satisfactions, see Morris B. Holbrook and Elizabeth C. Hirschman, "The Experiential Aspects of Consumption: Consumer Fantasies, Feelings and Fun," *Journal of Consumer Research* 9 (1982): 132–40.

[54] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 6.

[55] Walter Bagehot to Eliza Bagehot, 20 Nov. 1872, in *The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot*, vol. 13: *Letters*, ed. Norman St. John Stevas (London, 1986), 640. For an original discussion of consuming as play, see Douglas B. Holt, "How Consumers Consume: A Typology of Consumption Practices," *Journal of Consumer Research* 22 (1995): 1–16.

[56] Sir Arthur H. Hardinge, *The Life of Henry Howard Molyneux Herbert, Fourth Earl of Carnarvon, 1831–1890*, vol. 2 (London, 1925), 323–24.

[57] Paul J. DiMaggio, "Classification in Art," *American Sociological Review* 52 (1987): 443–46.

[58] Erickson, "What is Good Taste Good For?" 275–76.

of the social world."[59] In the same way, the selection and purchase of Morris products was a mark of distinction, involving the forgoing of economic capital in exchange for socially necessary symbolic capital, confirming Bourdieu's depiction of the intricacies of capital exchange.[60] Just as the Victorian nouveaux riches opted in large numbers to purchase country estates, so too many of them chose to patronize Morris & Co.

Cultural Leadership and the Transmission of Taste

By 1875, when Morris became sole owner of Morris & Co., he was firmly established as the foremost authority in the decorative arts in Britain and beyond. He was a cultural leader—a designer-craftsman-manufacturer who was the dominant force in several specialist fields, most notably stained glass, printed fabrics, woven fabrics, wallpapers, and embroidery. He produced some of his finest flat-pattern designs during the late 1870s and early 1880s, and he became one of the world's most admired designers of hand-woven carpets and high-warp tapestries. In 1890 he launched the Kelmscott Press, whose illustrated and decorated books, printed on vellum and fine paper, using his own fonts and borders and figure designs by Burne-Jones, commanded high prices and immediately became collectors' items.

It was from this commanding position that Morris was able progressively to extend the Morrisian community of taste beyond the reaches of the upper class to encompass a much broader swath of society. He showcased an expanded range of products at a fashionable shop in Oxford Street from 1877, and in 1881 he began to manufacture directly on a larger scale at Merton Abbey in Surrey, in premises that were described as idyllic by many visitors.[61] He relentlessly pursued his interests to create new product lines, such as magnificent carpets and tapestries. But, above all, the security of an unrivaled reputation enabled him to pursue a dual commercial strategy, with important consequences for taste formation outside the confines of Britain's ruling elite. On the one hand, Morris continued to supply elite clients with exclusive goods and services at the conjuncture of the fine and decorative arts. On the other hand, he actively sought to promote sales of less exclusive products, lesser emblems of distinction—wallpapers, printed fabrics, less elaborate woven fabrics, serially produced furniture, painted tiles,

[59] Craig Calhoun and Loïc Wacquant, "Social Science with a Conscience: Remembering Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002)," *Thesis Eleven* 70 (2002): 7.

[60] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge, U.K., 1990), 208.

[61] Emma Lazarus, "A Day in Surrey with William Morris," *Century Magazine* 32 (1886): 390–94; Henry Demarest Lloyd, "A Day with William Morris," in *Mazzini and Other Essays*, ed. Henry Demarest Lloyd (New York, 1910), 42–70.

Morris's popular Strawberry Thief fabric design of 1883. The hand-printed fabric using the indigo discharge method became very popular with clients, despite being one of the firm's most expensive fabrics. (Reprinted by permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum/ National Art Library collection, London.)

machine-made carpets and embroidery sets, for example—to aspiring members of the middle class. These were families headed by salaried professionals, company executives, public servants, and the owners of smaller enterprises in Britain, Europe, North America, and the better-off parts of the Empire. Market segmentation along these lines made both financial and reputational sense. In expanding the reach of the business, at home and abroad, he could extend production runs for standard items, increasing cash flow while containing costs. This made the business less vulnerable to the peaks and troughs of cyclical markets (for example, stained glass) and large-commission elite markets. At the same time, no compromise was required with respect to product or service quality, and therefore Morris's reputation never came under threat. He thus resisted all inducements to engage in mass production, even though he knew it would have made him "a positively rich man."[62]

In effect, Morris chose not to exploit his dominant market position by maximizing sales and income growth as an out-and-out capitalist might have done, preferring instead to balance financial rewards against the less tangible rewards of status, legitimacy, integrity, and personal distinction. This did not mean that he was commercially passive. The middle class was growing, and by investing in tasteful home decoration, albeit on a much lesser scale than the wealthy were doing, its members might legitimize and consolidate their hard-won social position. Morris took full advantage by writing evocative brochures describing his products, methods of manufacture, and principles of design.[63] The firm continued to emphasize the "luxury of taste" rather than the "luxury of costliness." It followed that to own a little Morris was better than to own no Morris at all. The sought-after qualities of originality, beautiful design and coloring, hand manufacture, and the use of natural, high-quality materials attached themselves to all Morris products, whatever the cost. Hence the enduring attraction of Morris wallpapers and fabrics. The ways in which these could be combined with simple furniture to create a harmonious decorative scheme was a theme to which Morris turned time and time again. He sought to educate rather than simply to promote his wares, thereby inspiring customer confidence and loyalty. The following extract from his brochure for the Boston Foreign Fair of 1883 is illustrative:

> In the Decorative Arts, nothing is finally successful which does not satisfy the mind as well as the eye. A pattern may have beautiful parts and be good in certain relations; but, unless it be suitable for

[62] Norman Kelvin, *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, vol. 2: *1881–1884* (Princeton, N.J., 1987), 229.

[63] Victoria & Albert Museum, Morris & Company brochure (London, 1882).

> the purpose assigned, it will not be a decoration. Unfitness is so far a want of naturalness; and with that defect, ornamentation can never satisfy the craving which is part of nature.[64]

The educational nature of Morris's brochures and displays at exhibitions, in conveying the impression of disinterestedness, of altruistic rather than selfish motives, made them all the more potent as a marketing device.

In a variety of ways, the rising fame and reputation of Morris within the decorative arts resembled the spreading of a cult, even though the leader of the movement was utterly sincere and its adherents judicious and unfanatical. Morris certainly had many of the qualities of a prophet. He was a visionary admired across a wide section of society for his literary works, especially *The Earthly Paradise*, which was reprinted five times between 1868 and 1872 alone. He was a gifted teacher and interpreter of complex ideas, as his later writings on socialism confirm.[65] In the decorative arts, he employed the same skills to communicate his personal gospel of design and craftsmanship. Morris's principles and beliefs informed his brochures and public lectures, many of which were printed and widely circulated. His first lecture, "The Decorative Arts," given before the Trades Guild of Learning in 1877, was reprinted in the *Architect* and as a pamphlet with a print run of two thousand copies in 1878. Other early lectures, such as "Making the Best of It" (c.1879), were collected and published as a book in 1882 under the title *Hopes and Fears for Art*.[66]

Morris's disciples were not slow in spreading further his vision, beliefs, and artistic principles. Numerous writers took up the theme of excellence in interior design, frequently citing Morris as a model to follow. Longman first published Sir Charles Eastlake's *Hints on Household Taste* in 1868: it became a long-running best-seller on both sides of the Atlantic. Rhoda and Agnes Garrett's *Suggestions for Home Decoration in Painting, Woodwork and Furniture* followed in 1876. Both books offered advice along Morrisian lines and targeted "the cultivated middle class, able to enjoy leisure, refinement and luxury in moderation."[67] The

[64] George Wardle, *The Morris Exhibit at the Foreign Fair* (Boston, Mass., 1883), 20–21; Harvey and Press, *Art, Enterprise and Ethics*, 132.

[65] Edward P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (London, 1977).

[66] William Morris, *Hopes and Fears for Art* (London, 1882). The volume has been reprinted on numerous occasions down to the present. It contains five essays: "The Lesser Arts," "The Art of the People," "The Beauty of Life," "Making the Best of It," and "The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization." Each contributes to Morris's internationally and enduringly influential philosophy of the decorative arts.

[67] Rhoda and Agnes Garrett, *Suggestions for Home Decoration in Painting, Woodwork and Furniture* (London, 1876), 7–8.

Garretts emphasized simplicity and the avoidance of cheap imitations, as did Lucy Faulkner Orrinsmith, who castigated the solid comfort of the early Victorian period as "the very headquarters of commonplace, with its strict symmetry of ornament and its pretentious uselessness."[68] The trend was away from ostentation and display in favor of "art furnishing," which sought to make rooms less oppressive by having less and lighter furniture, lighter colors, and a general air of casualness in the choice of patterns and objects.[69] The theme was taken up by the likes of Robert Edis, in *The Decoration and Furnishing of Town Houses* (1881), and Moncure Conway, in *Travels in South Kensington* (1882). It was Conway who first noted that possession of something from Morris & Co. was de rigueur for every "artistic" middle-class household in London.[70] Articles about Morris & Co. in the *Art Journal*, the *Studio*, the *Spectator*, the *Architectural Review*, and other fashionable publications, often featuring photographs by the celebrated photographer Bedford Lemere, vividly reinforced the notion of what constituted decorative art at its very best.[71]

The habitus of the Victorian middle class was very different from that of the ruling elite, due to the relatively limited funds available to foray into the decorative arts. It is for this reason that Morris elevated taste over costliness as the mark of refinement. This appealed to increasing numbers of people who perceived that by educating themselves in the decorative arts, by investing in cultural capital, they could pursue cultural practices that would otherwise have been out of their reach, confirming the argument made by Andrew Trigg that "lifestyles can vary horizontally, cutting across the social hierarchy."[72] Their aspirations to betterment were thus satisfied, not in the slavish manner of emulation, but in the adoption of a lifestyle that gave practical and symbolic expression to the exercise of discernment.

[68] Lucy F. Orrinsmith, *The Drawing Room* (London, 1877), 1.

[69] Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society, 1750–1980* (London, 1986), 111–12.

[70] Moncure Conway, *Travels in South Kensington* (London, 1882), 199–210.

[71] Charles Harvey and Jon Press, "The Ionides Family and 1 Holland Park," *Journal of the Decorative Arts Society* 18 (1994): 2–14. Lemere's photographs can be found in London in the collections of the National Monuments Record and the Victoria & Albert Museum. References to the Morris business were by no means confined to treatises on interior design, or to British publications. George du Maurier and Linley Sambourne satirized Morris interiors in *Punch*, but were themselves clients of the firm. The "Morris look" was entering into contemporary novels: one of the earliest was a sentimental American novel of 1872, Annie Hall Thomas's *Maud Mahon*, in which one of the characters advised a friend to "make your walls artistic without the aid of pictures" by turning to "Morris Papers." Faulkner, *Against the Age*, 73. Enthusiastic endorsements also appeared in more serious American works like Harriet Prescott Spofford's *Art Decoration Applied to Furniture* (New York, 1877), 147.

[72] Andrew B. Trigg, "Veblen, Bourdieu, and Conspicuous Consumption," *Journal of Economic Issues* 35 (2001): 113.

Institutionalization and Cultural Reproduction

For Morris to have become established as a great decorative artist within his own lifetime, and to have had a pronounced influence on taste down to the present, required the operation of the fourth process of taste formation, that of *institutionalization*. When any cultural entity—custom, practice, object, or legend—becomes institutionalized, it becomes embedded within the social structure of an organization, community, or nation and generally recognized as an enduring feature of the social order, as Paul J. DiMaggio demonstrates in his study of high culture in Boston.[73] In the case of Morris, one mark of his status as a cultural icon is that he remains institutionally significant to many organizations and communities within and beyond Britain.[74] He is widely acclaimed as one of the greatest of all Victorians, a national treasure of true distinction, and a cultural reference point for present and future generations.

Morris's elevation to the status of cultural icon began in the 1880s, when his ideas were taken up by a broad cross-section of architects, designers, and craftsmen. These were the agents behind the numerous loosely associated groups and societies that collectively came to be known as the Arts and Crafts Movement. Among the most important were the Century Guild, the Art Workers' Guild, the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, and the Guild of Handicraft. Each of these, in their different ways, elevated Morris to the status of prophet, seeking in particular to propagate his educational beliefs and working methods.[75] One of the staunchest advocates of Morrisian principles was the architect and designer W. R. Lethaby, who became head of the London Central School of Arts and Crafts in 1894, infusing the curriculum with Morris's beliefs and working methods, and in turn influencing the thinking of future generations of designers.[76] Lethaby's influence on design education spread throughout Britain and to mainland Europe, where the Central School provided "if not the model, certainly the inspiration of much continental teaching and training in design and the crafts."[77]

[73] Paul J. DiMaggio, "Cultural Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth Century Boston, Part 1: The Creation of an Organizational Base for High Culture in America," *Media, Culture and Society* 4 (1982): 33–50; Paul J. DiMaggio, "Cultural Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth Century Boston, Part 2: The Classification and Framing of American Art," *Media, Culture and Society* 4 (1982): 303–22.

[74] Wendy Kaplan and Alan Crawford, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Europe and America: Design for the Modern World, 1880–1920* (London, 2004).

[75] Naylor, *Arts and Crafts Movement*; Stansky, *Redesigning the World*; Cumming and Kaplan, *Arts and Crafts Movement*.

[76] Stuart MacDonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (London, 1970), 292–93; Godfrey Rubens, *William Richard Lethaby: His Life and Work, 1857–1931* (London, 1986), 173–198.

[77] Ray Watkinson, *William Morris as Designer* (London, 1967), 75.

This process was not one that Morris controlled. It depended crucially upon the agency of cultural actors like Lethaby, for whom he satisfied a continuing need. Each of these actors was in one way or another involved in codifying and simplifying, deriving "historical categories of artistic perception," either with respect to Morris himself or with respect to the movements he is seen to have represented.[78] At the extreme, the institutionalized Morris can be reduced to a series of simple equations of the type "Morris = Greatest Ever Flat Pattern Designer" or "Morris = Reinventor of Natural Dyeing Methods." Such equations do little justice to historical fact. Numerous other actors and their achievements are quickly lost to history, eradicated from the collective memory, only to be recalled in specialist texts as characters of substance. This is structuration in action within the cultural field, a process through which a natural order emerges, with its own mythology kept fresh by cultural authorities, such as museum curators, designers and architects, media-arts gurus, and historians.[79] Morris thus found his place in history as the inspiration and leading figure of the Arts and Crafts Movement, remaining the first to come to mind when addressing the subject, an essential reference point in any conversation about the decorative arts in Victorian Britain: "Morris = Arts and Crafts."[80]

Through the processes of cultural reproduction, the Morrisian community of taste has been able to extend its reach across the generations and down to the present. Biographers and historians of art and design have revered his memory from the moment of his death in 1896. Television and radio broadcasters have joined in more recently. Others in the heritage industry have projected Morris as a cultural giant, most notably the keepers of Morris collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum and elsewhere. There is a William Morris Society for the true cognoscenti. Meanwhile, at the purely commercial level, it is a remarkable fact that many of Morris's best-loved designs for wallpapers and fabrics have remained in almost continuous production down to the present. These designs are now used regularly, not only for their original purpose, but also as images for the decoration of diaries, address books, and all manner of paraphernalia—the sentimentally evocative goods often found in museum shops and other cultural venues. In keeping his designs in the public eye, educators, cultural professionals and businessmen have together maintained widespread appreciation, in Britain at least, of

[78] Bourdieu, "On the Family," 285–312.

[79] Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Cambridge, U.K., 1984), 16–28; Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields," *American Sociological Review* 48 (1983): 47–60; DiMaggio, "Classification in Art."

[80] Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius*, revised ed. (London, 2005), 12–57.

the essential character of Morrisian design.[81] Institutionalization has thus served to identify one aspect of British taste: the linking of a love of the flowing lines and patterns inspired by nature with the designs of Morris.

Conclusion

The findings of our research, though limited by stemming from a single historical case study, lend support to the propositions outlined in the process model of taste formation presented in Table 1, at the same time suggesting provisional answers to the questions posed at the start of this article. First, we have shown how Romanticism—through its identification with medievalism, mythology, and the natural world—infused the products of the Morris business with distinctive qualities and attributes. We confirm that homology is the key to understanding the impact of social movements on the design, manufacture, and marketing of cultural artifacts. Second, we have shown how Morris and his partners applied their cultural and social capital in forming a Morrisian community of taste. Initially, this was composed of individuals and families rich in economic, social, and cultural capital, and included distinguished people from different occupations within the upper strata of society. We confirm that cooperation between innovative producers and leading-edge consumers is critical in bringing to market prestigious cultural products that serve as status symbols and markers of social distinction. Third, we have shown how the Morrisian community of taste was expanded through the production and consumption of a wide range of goods targeting different segments of the market. This required cultural leadership by Morris and the spreading of his message by his disciples. We confirm that the transmission of tastes across social strata depends upon both cultural literacy and the supply of lesser emblems of distinction at affordable prices. Fourth, we have shown how the Morrisian community of taste reached across generations through the agency of various stakeholders in the Morris legacy. We confirm that the intergenerational transmission of tastes depends on the agency of elite cultural actors and institutions that serve to consecrate products and designs as emblematic of enduring good taste. Culturally knowledgeable firms exploit these classic models in the production and marketing of sentimentally evocative goods. These findings together provide a coherent and empirically satisfying explanation of Morris's enduring impact on taste formation in the decorative arts from 1861 down to the present.

[81] David Chaney, *Lifestyles* (London, 1996): 155–57.

The Morris case, however, does not in all aspects conform to the simplifications of theory. In particular, the top-down, class-based representation of taste formation championed by Simmel, Veblen, and Bourdieu, while superficially fitting the facts, does not stand up to closer scrutiny. It is true that Morris's products initially found favor with upper- and upper-middle-class consumers, and that ownership signified distinction, but they cannot be portrayed as instruments of class division. The Morrisian community of taste, at first very small, was never preeminent among the upper classes. It grew both by including more wealthy clients and by expanding to include members of the middling classes, who typically purchased lesser emblems of distinction. Emulation and trickle-down were not the mechanisms at work. Romanticism impacted directly to shape tastes within certain sections of the middle class, just as it impacted on certain sections of the upper and upper-middle classes.[82] The brilliance of Morris's market-segmentation strategy was that he could simultaneously attract consumers from across the social classes without compromising the quality or authenticity of his products. In other words, members of the Morrisian community of taste were united by common aesthetic preferences, bound together not as leaders and followers but as equals in their appreciation of the designs and products of Morris & Co. From this perspective, taste formation may be portrayed as a force for social cohesion, rather than one of social domination.[83]

Finally, on the basis of the evidence presented, we argue that cultural leadership is a crucial factor in the objectification, legitimization, transmission, and institutionalization of tastes.[84] Morris may have responded, alongside others, to the creative possibilities inherent in Romanticism, but he was far more than a gifted reader of the runes. Through his genius as a flat-pattern designer and his command of materials and processes, he created a unique range of products that defined an entire decorative art style. It is hard to imagine that Morrisianism could have existed without Morris, or that without his energy and business acumen his firm could have won such widespread acclaim for its products. What really sets Morris apart, however, is his commanding

[82] Our argument is consistent with that of Colin Campbell, "Conspicuous Confusion? A Critique of Veblen's Theory of Conspicuous Consumption," *Sociological Theory* 13 (1995): 37–47.

[83] This echoes the observations made with respect to Parisian fashion by Herbert Blumer, "Fashion: From Class Differentiation to Collective Selection," *Sociological Quarterly* 10 (1969): 275–91.

[84] The erosion of personal agency in cultural theory is held by some to be at its most pronounced in the work of Pierre Bourdieu; see David Gartman, "Culture as Class Symbolization or Mass Reification? A Critique of Bourdieu's *Distinction*," *American Journal of Sociology* 97 (1991): 421–27.

presence within the decorative arts. In his writings and speeches he articulated his principles of design and manufacture in a way that has spoken directly to successive generations of craftsmen, designers, architects, and manufacturers.[85] The true measure of his cultural leadership lies in the number and influence of his followers over successive generations. The dynamics of taste, it is concluded, while directed through the interaction of economic and social processes, are driven through the exercise of cultural leadership.

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[85] Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design*, 12–33.