
Reclaiming the Commune, Reclaiming William Morris ... Again

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Few books today engage seriously with the political astuteness and revolutionary precocity of Morris's lectures on the lesser arts. Fewer still bear Morris's floral designs on their dust jacket in any purposeful relation to Morris himself or indeed to the theoretical underpinnings of his artisanal oeuvre. His wallpaper patterns feature most often as alluring décor and little else. Kristin Ross's *Communal Luxury*, an evocation of the political imaginary of the Paris Commune, breaks with this instrumental practice. The book's cover is a reworking of Morris's celebrated 1876 *Pimpernel* pattern. Digitally modified and prised from its original chromatic scheme of vegetable hues, the motif, in its new incarnation, sits awash in turquoise blue against a scarcely perceptible black canvas. Seen up close, the design is strangely suggestive of the book's goal: to conjure and animate the Paris Commune's *dream* of an egalitarian social order.

Remarkably, Ross grants Morris's 1870s and early 1880s reflections on art and labour more than a bit part in this re-enactment of the Communards' utopia. Sporadic references to his political philosophy of craft might thus be said to justify the use of his wallpaper aesthetic as a graphic overture to a text that gives Commune artisans pride of place: shoemakers, box-makers, fabric designers, potters, etc. But there are more compelling reasons for this aesthetic appropriation, discernible in the non-naturalistic and otherworldly tint invested in the jacket's illustrative image – an image that offers the reader a first glimpse into *Communal Luxury*'s libidinal depths.

Steeped in a bluish light, the book's reproduction of Morris's wallpaper design evokes a nocturnal fantasia, a site of unbridled dream work where the spatio-temporal markers of quotidian life are abolished, and memories of the past enter 'vividly into the figurability of the present' (p. 2).¹ A sense of genuine déjà-vu characterises the origins of *Communal Luxury*. For in 2011, as the Occupy movement spread across the

world, the embers of the Paris Commune were re-ignited in Ross's mind. Despite decades of controversy and suppression, the meteoric episode of 1871 re-entered her vision as a hope-filled illumination of anarchist collectivism, embodied in the iconic image and 'phenomenology of the encampment' (p. 2).

Ross's memories are clearly the fount of her 2015 book. But they are more than inspirational impulses. Crystallising into a rhizomatic pattern, and reflecting her perception of time's passage (p. 3), they also define her narrative method – one closer, it would seem, to the fictive operations of Morris's political and medievalist romances than to any standard chronicling of an historical event. As such, one must ask whether Verso's classification of *Communal Luxury* as history is truly accurate; or whether this book, which deliberately eludes easy generic classification, belongs in some liminal zone of critical and creative discourse. Ross's work straddles two distinct epistemological universes and thus forecloses any swift engagement with its arguments, particularly with those that touch on Morris's thought. No discussion of Ross's claims can materialise effectively without some preliminary hermeneutical effort. I feel, therefore, compelled to grasp her book first for what it is, and only then to trace the political and conceptual filiations that link it both truly and falsely to Morris's revolutionary vision. Such is the aim of my intervention.

Communal Luxury, I suggest, is a utopian romance, dressed in the apparel of an unorthodox history of ideas, and sutured with a series of conceptual categories drawn from the works of Arthur Rimbaud, Karl Marx, William Morris, Henri Lefebvre and an array of nineteenth-century anarchists. The book dons an air of spontaneous 'bricolage', reminiscent of the Paris barricades – a cobbling together of sundry materials (in this case, diverse discourses and disciplines) – and emblematic of the Communards' inventive insurgency and spontaneous political praxis. Yet, Ross's evocative eclecticism is a surface look; beneath it lies a consciously wrought design, governed by her celebration of the Commune's principal achievements in feminism, progressive education, the lesser arts and internationalism. These are the constitutive elements of her utopian romance, and, as Morris writes of all utopias, they reflect their author's temper.²

Communal Luxury is also a multi-dimensional *spatial history* that contests the imperialist politics of space enshrined in Paris's nineteenth-century cityscape, as well as the colonising power of official political narratives that have reconstructed the 1871 moment with ideological intent. If it is inexorably caught in the interstices of the Commune's legacy, the book nonetheless seeks a discursive space apart. Ross wrests the Commune's narrative from the grip of (what she deems to be) two dominant historiographical institutions, redrawing its political cartography, and shifting attention away from spatial symbols of the state, such as the Hôtel de Ville, to sites of

Communard self-affirmation, such as the Place de la Corderie (p. 20). On autonomous discursive ground, she affirms the Commune's 'working existence' (p. 12) against prevailing legacies that either swept its merits under the wave of a Third Empire nationalism, or, by her account, assimilated it, through Marxist readings, to a story of tragic defeat.

Ross's disengagement from mainstream retrospectives – for example, 'official state communist history' and 'national French republican history' (p. 4) – is of a piece with her refusal to address the Commune's military conjuncture, the prematurity of the Communard occupation, its ensuing fate and the emerging lessons for posterity. She thus directs the reader's gaze away from the massacre and circumvents the controversy over an historical event that buttressed the ideological foundations of two contrasting monuments of history-making. Thus, while Third Empire Republican writings excoriated the Commune, maligning its advocates as heinous insurgents, certain socialist retrospectives invoked the atrocities of 1871 as a cautionary tale, a heuristic commentary on the Commune's failings and aborted efforts.³ Ross, however, not only disengages from these readings, but devises a new approach to telling the tale. The event, she writes, 'belongs to another kind of history', described by Arlette Farge as 'untimely, ironic, irregular, disruptive' (p. 37). In deploying a literary style that explicitly unsettles the literary conventions in which these histories are held intact, Ross seeks to dismantle (at least rhetorically) both the institution of history writing as well as the academy of *belles lettres*, and not least the use of Aristotelian tragedy in framing the Commune's legacy (p. 91).

The book's five chapters both conjure and flout Aristotle's poetics of classical drama. *Communal Luxury* is thus a five-act tragedy turned on its head (a composite romance, replete with *mise-en-abîmes*, self-mirroring episodes of utopian possibility, parables for our times) with unities of time, place and action dissolved, and tragic dimensions expelled. The Commune's drama is staged here as a 'grand refus', as resistance to the institutions of high art (literary and visual) and as a release reminiscent of Arthur Rimbaud's poem, 'The Drunken Boat'. Like the Communard poet, who unshackled his verse from the fetters of Parnassian poetry, Ross unmoors her writing from the authority of certain historiographies and their centripetal (i.e. hegemonic) power.

And yet, *Communal Luxury* is not a discourse of unbridled passions, but an elaborate manifesto conceived with a deliberate political aesthetic. Indeed, Ross suppresses the tragic dimensions of 1871 lest these thwart her project of recasting the Commune's narrative as a 'triumph of political and social imagination'.⁴ In this, she affirms the Commune's intensity and, out of its brevity, extracts its afterlife (its *survie*), prolonging its duration, its temporal but also political magnitude. With this strategy, she extols the Commune's

singular merits, casting her subject – a confluence of political actors and affiliated supporters – in a romantic light, and editing out the narrative’s blood-soaked ending.

This cinematically crafted narration is of a piece with Ross’s objective, not merely to enliven the story of the Commune, but to mobilise it across time and space, and thus to magnify the Communards’ achievements. With a series of vignettes, she propels us centrifugally out of 1871 Paris, to London, Switzerland and the farther reaches of Iceland, Finland and Russia. Yet what appears on this book’s discursive screen is in fact a projection of Ross’s own vision, a phantom of her desire, lit up by an external subject: the Communards themselves and their fellow travellers. Seen thus, *Communal Luxury* turns out to be the *political imaginary of Kristin Ross*, saturated with the aspirations of her unsung heroes: the anarchists, geographers, lyrical and decorative artists of nineteenth-century Europe. As her preferred poet, Rimbaud, might say: ‘je est un autre’.⁵

Communal Luxury, then, is not only a utopian romance, the delineation of a political imaginary, but a self-reflexive one, whose cinematic character is revealed through the eye of a *camera obscura* as an optical inversion. Ross’s intense identification with the Paris revolutionaries and their international affiliates is central to this phenomenological reversal. She discloses this empathy in her opening claim that both she and the Communards ‘have given the name “communal luxury” to the Commune’ (p. 1).⁶ Implicit, here, is a gesture of solidarity, a synchronic collaboration with her nineteenth-century subjects. Implicit here, too, is a Morrisian-like journey through time in which a narrating hero steps into a remote past, yet (as Ross would have it) one strangely closer to our times than our parents’ generation ever was to us. Like the Victorian Dreamer of Morris’s *A Dream of John Ball*, who joins the fourteenth-century peasant revolt with visceral fraternity and political fellowship, so Ross’s empathy with the Communards and their self-affirming spirit, her choice, along with theirs, to ascribe the expression ‘communal luxury’ to the Commune, simulates a convergence of disparate epochs, in which she and her fellow rebels meet on the imaginary turf of a utopian fiction.

To be sure, Ross’s book reads as intellectual history; but its deeper workings are those of an artful documentary, ruled by a subversive aesthetic logic. And it is this discrepancy between surface form (an historical treatise predicated on a ‘rational’ hermeneutic) and creative content (an historical portrait predicated on a symbolic or analogical mode of reasoning) that raises concerns about her work’s truth-value, or, at least, how we might fully understand it. For Ross’s critical discourse involves what Terry Eagleton has described elsewhere as an ‘alchemical reading of arcane connections’, an analytical method that rather weakens her more factually documented and plausibly argued claims.⁷ Indeed if her kaleidoscopic style of

narration appeals at first, it loses its lustre as the reader encounters problems of cogency, imperceptible at first blush.

The French use the expression ‘faux-amis’ to signify an arresting but *illusory* resemblance between two objects or ideas. Such a seductive but loose affinity is central to Ross’s persuasive syntax. Threading together a series of bold interpretations, she sutures fragments of Morris’s epistolary remarks and editorial comments to her book’s overall tapestry. Doubtless, Morris and the rebels of 1871 share an ensemble of political ideals (pp. 60-62): their vindication of the lesser arts, their views on a non-authoritarian pedagogy, their diversely expressed rejection of the capitalist division of labour and their resistance to the bourgeois state, etc. But Morris’s revolutionary thought cannot be readily stitched into the Communard cloth short of creating conceptual tangles. I shall attempt to unravel three of these knots, enmeshed as they are in Ross’s utopian paradigm: ‘communal luxury’.

Coined by Eugène Pottier, the expression ‘communal luxury’ is drawn from the last line of the Federation of Artists’ Manifesto of April 1871: ‘[w]e will work cooperatively toward our regeneration, the birth of communal luxury, future splendours and the Universal Republic’ (p. 39). Ross reads it as the starting point of a utopian ideal: a collective reorganisation of public space, one of the communal activities achieved through a transformation of ‘the aesthetic coordinates of the entire community’ so that beauty might flourish in public spaces, not just in privatised spheres (p. 58). This would lead to the integration of art into everyday life and ultimately achieve ‘equality in abundance’ (p. 63), where the earth’s resources would be shared and managed cooperatively. These, on the surface, are precisely the achievements of Morris’s Nowhere, a fictive remapping of nineteenth-century London, designed to embrace the art of a future people. Here, social and natural environments are sites of humanly crafted and cultivated public beauty, but also of communalism and egalitarian distribution of aesthetic wealth – art made public, quotidian, democratic and, indeed, participatory. The Nowherian topos, we might say, is the literary expression of Morris’s political desire just as ‘communal luxury’ is the utopia set forth by the Federation of Artists’ Manifesto.

But the affinity is deceptive. For where Ross depicts the Communard artists’ *inauguration* of their utopia, the *start* of a process of social revolution effected through a clearing of imperialist urban space – specifically the renowned destruction of the Vendôme Column that occurred on 16 May 1871 – and this in default of any economic change (the Bank of France was left intact), Morris’s Nowhere reflects the *mature stage* of a highly elaborate and extensive social revolution involving the elimination of private property and exchange value.⁸ There the ground is cleared of its capitalist matrix as an *a priori* condition of social transformation; for only a

universally extended political economy of cooperative and unalienated labour can yield a terrain conducive to communalism. It is not an *aesthetic of space* (for example, imperialist architecture), but a *condition of work* that must first be altered; and with that alteration, a reconstituted environment of shared wealth and universally enjoyed creativity ensues, following a lengthy period of revitalised sensibility.

Despite these differences, Ross tethers Morris's views to her own perspective, arguing in the spirit of geographer Élisée Reclus that the demolition of the Vendôme Column was an imposing and unsurpassed sign of the times (p. 60) and that Morris's 1887 comments in 'Socialism from the Root Up' echo this sentiment. True, for him, the spectacular event harboured more than paltry significance; it was an important gesture of anti-imperialist defiance and revealed the Communards' determination 'to hold no parley with the old jingo legends'.⁹ But it is doubtful that he would have construed it as anything more than one episode in a larger spectrum of struggle where the final goal would be habitation (*how we might live*), not occupation (*how we might resist*) or how we might destroy all traces of the imperial past in a 'fire of joy' (p. 59). If pressed, Morris would have read the redesigning of Paris as a purely *affective* and cathartic dimension of social change, largely ineffectual if dissociated from the military and economic conjuncture of 1871.¹⁰ Seen thus, the act of toppling the Vendôme Column pales beside a thoroughgoing Morrisian programme of revolution – at once libidinal, political and economic. Ross's literary hermeneutic, however, obscures this crucial difference, as in the following passage:

No one could appreciate more how the dead furniture of imperialism weighs on the minds of the living than that champion of the lesser arts and 'poet-upholsterer' [...], William Morris. He was to prove it in his 1890 novel, *News from Nowhere*. There the Communards' symbolic act of spectacular demolition is revisioned speculatively by transforming Trafalgar Square, cleansed of its own imperialist monumentality, the statue to Admiral Nelson, into an apricot orchard. In this symbolic revisioning both the Place Vendôme and Trafalgar Square, replete with their aesthetics of nationalistic and timeless monumentality, become supra-national space, as the imperialist organization of abstract space is transformed into an orchard. Morris, in effect, is tearing down the Vendôme Column once again, several years after it had been painstakingly rebuilt in Paris.

(p. 60)

Fusing a version of Marx's celebrated lines from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* with her phrase 'the dead furniture of imperialism' – a phrase that recalls

the artisanal Morris and his depiction of the Vendôme Column as a ‘base piece of Napoleonic upholstery’ – Ross combines two conceptual strands in one: a Marxian refusal of encrusted tradition, with its damaging psychic burden, together with Morris’s politics of the lesser arts.¹¹ The entwined threads are suggestive of the Commune’s principal features: its political break with an imperial past and indictment of a state-supported elite culture. But this dexterous intertwining of Morris, Marx and the Communards results in a misleading conclusion that the Marxian Morris fully identifies with the Communards’ unilateral clearance of state architecture and that this purging process is a pivotal catalyst in the creation of communal wealth, or, if you like, of Nowherian bounty.

The misconception arises from a semantic but politically crucial ambiguity. Ross’s expression ‘the dead furniture of imperialism’ is figurative; it refers to the state’s outmoded apparatuses and institutions, its bureaucratic *infrastructure* and ‘systemic’ character. Indeed, it is in this vein that Morris would grasp the phrase. But Ross’s ensuing discussion – a comparison of the destruction of the Vendôme Column to the evacuation of the Nelson statue from Trafalgar Square in *News from Nowhere* – is governed by the idea of ‘imperialist furniture’, understood as bricks and mortar, ‘furnishings’ of an imperialistic metropolis, statues and monuments to be torn down, and burned in pyrrhic ecstasy – not the state’s administrative bodies (p. 59). Clearly, Morris’s *Nowhere* and Ross’s vision of communal luxury diverge on the matter of revolution: the first uproots a *system* wholesale, the second jettisons some of that system’s dead wood, but not the system itself.

If semantic ambiguities blur this distinction, Ross’s equation of the demolished Vendôme Column with the disappearance in *Nowhere* of the Nelson statue from what was once Trafalgar Square obscures the difference even more. Here, Ross conflates the historic significance of the demolition of the Vendôme Column with the fate of the Nelson statue, as if these events were both suggestive of the same *type* and *extent* of social change. The toppling of the Napoleonic statue acquires the comprehensive magnitude of a wholesale Morrisian revolution, thanks to a forced analogy with the Nelson monument. Morris, by Ross’s account, ‘revised the spectacular demolition of the Vendôme Column within the pages of *News from Nowhere* by transforming Trafalgar Square, cleansed of its own imperialist monumentality, the statue to Admiral Nelson, into an apricot orchard’ (p. 60).

To be sure, Morris’s utopian romance reconceives Trafalgar Square as a site of organic bounty. But nowhere is the fictive societal transformation described as a symbolic flattening of monuments. Clearances are effected judiciously with sustained reverence for the architecture of past epochs: a part of Westminster Abbey is preserved for its interior beauty as are the pre-commercial edifices of Oxford.¹² Nor

is there any suggestion that the disappearance of the Nelson statue is an explicit echo of the Communards' deconstructive act. The imperialist monument remains unnamed and referred to *parenthetically* as one of several unprepossessing bronze statues. Indeed, there is no evidence that Morris actively chose to 'revision' the Communards' architectural blow to the Parisian column. The abolition of Trafalgar Square, involving the inevitable (though un-narrated) tearing down of the Nelson statue, and the square's conversion into an orchard is but one *unspecified* moment in society's wholesale reconstitution. For Morris's projected revolution entails not only a surface alteration of the cityscape, a felling of imperialist monuments, but *successive stages of economic* and political change aimed at shattering the cornerstones of *capitalist thinking* and the *institutions of capitalism* itself.

According to Ross, however, the Commune's virtue resides in its break with such economism. She rejects the view that the Communards' failure to seize the Bank of France was an egregious error. That 'failure', she writes, was 'balanced by their accomplishments in [...] the realm of political desire rather than need'.¹³ However, as Eagleton has it, if the Commune's libidinal economy was an 'enduring triumph', it was 'also its downfall. For no political revolution, whatever libidinal attractions it offers to contemporary Western critics, will ever succeed unless it manages to penetrate the heart of capital, and overthrow its long superseded sway.'¹⁴ Ross's insistence that we perceive the fate of the Commune exclusively through the prism of the political *imaginary*, rather than through the political *economy*, explains why her appropriated title 'communal luxury' can scarcely be entwined with Morrisian thought. This is the second of three strands that begs unravelling.

In his lecture, 'Art and Socialism', Morris makes reference to the term 'luxury' no fewer than six times and, this, invariably to mean the excessive waste generated by a system of commerce, driven by ceaselessly rising rates of human toil, a frantic pursuit of profit and the degradation of civilization to a sham and inequitably divided prosperity. To Morris, luxury, being the plague bred by commercial war, is exhibited in 'dull adjuncts to unmeaning pomp', as he put it in 'The Lesser Arts'; but it also secures a whole regime of degrading social practices under the aegis of competition: 'men and women making Nothing with terrible and inhuman toil which deadens the soul and shortens mere animal life itself. All these are the slaves of what is called luxury, which in the modern sense of the word comprises a mass of sham wealth [...] and enslaves not only the poor people who are compelled to work at its production, but also the foolish and not over happy people who buy it to harass themselves with encumbrance.'¹⁵

Against this, Morris urges 'association', communalism against competitive individualism, creative labour against wasteful drudgery. Luxury is the name he assigns extravagance, with its simulacra of beauty and material hoarding, the dark

side of which is dearth. In short, it reflects a deleterious condition of asymmetry, emerging as theft (private property), on one side, and slavery (privation), on the other; and within or betwixt these two extremes, communal wealth finds no home. Ross, by contrast, conflates communal wealth with ‘communal luxury’, defining the latter as ‘equality in abundance’; in this, she seeks to rescue Pottier’s coinage from being construed as ‘senseless luxury’ (p. 63), from what Morris called ‘the swinish luxury of the rich’. Yet, the categories of ‘abundance’ and ‘luxury’ are not synonymous, and unless the reference is to an elite of equals, ‘equality in luxury’ is aporetic. At best, ‘communal luxury’ is a premature revolutionary slogan, and the sign of a political imaginary yet to be nuanced and enriched by posterity’s self-critical strivings.

In the context of nineteenth-century Parisian culture, where both architecture and the production of fineries defined a world of opulence and elegant fashion, the Federation of Artists’ use of the term ‘luxury’ would seem to reveal a residual attachment to, or emulation of, affluent beauty. The expression ‘communal luxury’ suggests an internalised (albeit modified) capitalist utopia, not an abolition of economic disparity. By contrast, Morris’s call for the complete eradication of luxury reflects the depth and breadth of his radical agenda: to transcend not only the chasm between elitist art and artisanal craft, but the egregious inequity of the capital-labour relation as such – one affecting the entire human race. On his logic, the seizure of wealth must coincide with the debunking of privilege; conditions of *excess* (i.e. profit and accumulation) must be supplanted by a *universal access* to society’s resources, for equality, not luxury, guarantees abundance; and abundance, in its myriad forms, is both the basis and goal of a salutary commonweal.

None of these distinctions between a Morrisian politics of the future and the Commune’s political imaginary, however, should discount Morris’s reverence for, and appreciation of, the Communards’ efforts. In his 1887 *Commonweal* article, ‘Why we Celebrate the Commune’, Morris seeks to rescue the significant import of the Commune venture from a torrent of bourgeois lies, ‘hypocritical concealments, and false deductions’.¹⁶ Like Ross, he elevates the merits of the Paris rebels above a cacophony of carping commentaries and heralds their uprising as a parable for future political actors. Yet, Morris and Ross differ in their rhetoric and interpretative approach, most notably in respect to the question of tragic defeat, the dark side of ‘communal luxury’. This is the third of three knots that begs disentangling.

Unlike Ross, who refuses to frame the Commune as tragedy, Morris confronts it squarely, yet without damaging the Communards’ legacy. Rather than eschew the reality of the massacre and generate a triumphal portrait of the Commune’s working existence, he evokes the event with enthusiasm and intelligence, with reasoned hope.¹⁷ Neither does he succumb to the wilful suppression of the Commune’s vitality by the

bourgeois press, nor does he exaggerate the Communards' accomplishments. If he declares that the Commune was 'the greatest tragedy of modern times', he also insists that it does not portend apocalypse.¹⁸ It is a '*temporarily* unsuccessful cause' (my italics), the ground upon which socialists should refuse to admit the possibility of *ultimate defeat*.¹⁹ 'I have heard it said, and by good Socialists too, that it is a mistake to commemorate defeat; but it seems to me that this means looking not at this event only, but at all history in too narrow a way. The Commune is but one link in the struggle which has gone through all history of the oppressed against the oppressors; and without all the defeats of past times we should now have no hope of the final victory.'²⁰

As an editor of a socialist newspaper, Morris's rhetorical style was clearly shaped by the imperative to inspire and boost morale; but, significantly, the tone of his *Commonweal* editorials contrasts, often markedly, with that of his serialised fictions. His long poem, *The Pilgrims of Hope*, is a far more ambiguous and wistful rendering of the Commune than his commemorative tribute of March 1887, and often prefigures the tenor of his later, more nuanced, public statements. Indeed, if, early that year, Morris invoked Commune heroism to embolden his fellow socialists, by November of 1887, the devastating massacre of Bloody Sunday dampened the rousing pitch of his rhetoric. The human cost of insurgency, unorganised in the face of law and order, was too great to countenance let alone justify. *The Pilgrims of Hope* already foreshadows this sentiment in 1885. Between 1886 and 1887, Morris's urgings to his comrades (fictively expressed in *A Dream of John Ball*) would be further tempered; the path of revolution, he announced, would be daunting, strewn with pitfalls. Such was the lesson imparted by the Victorian Dreamer to John Ball. Liberation from serfdom would yield slavery in new guise; dreams would be dashed, and new struggles would resume. Still, Morris mined redemptive possibility in the depths of every defeat, and this because he allowed for time, however convoluted in its unfolding, however fitful in its human dramas, to foster the necessary maturation of social consciousness and historical opportunity for veritable social change.

Ross does not share this subtle and non-linear, but nonetheless processual view of history. She sees the diachronic approach to time as 'the privileged category of the dialectician'.²¹ Hers is a combative response to traditional Marxist theorists who, she argues, neglected the politics of space. But the latter (spatial) paradigm and source of her critical method comes with a price; it casts her book as both a synchronic and non-synchronic history, bereft of a sharply delineated historical panorama in default of which distinct moments in time are telescoped, and different political vantage points are sewn into an insufficiently differentiated weave of intellectual filiations.²² This, we might say, is admissible in the realm of dreaming, where the mind allows for unlikely but seemingly congruent materials to merge into one another, unhindered

by scepticism or refutation. This, too, is the stuff of Morris's utopian romance, where the governing rules of realism are eclipsed. But whereas *News from Nowhere* announces its literary code explicitly, underscoring its *oneiric* frame, *Communal Luxury* avoids full self-disclosure. It leaves us in a bluish subaqueous world, unable to discern between the real and the imagined, between the facticity of history and an artful tale of revolution, forever caught in the crosshairs of political controversy.

NOTES

1. All page references to *Communal Luxury* will appear in parentheses in the body of the article.
2. William Morris, *Political Writings: Contributions to 'Justice' and 'Commonweal', 1883-1890*, ed. by Nicholas Salmon (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994), p. 420. (Afterwards Morris, *Political Writings*).
3. Robert A. Saint-Clair, 'L'Enfant-Peuple: Rimbaud, Vallès, Literary Politics, and the Legacy of the Commune', Ph.D. thesis, University of Minnesota, June 2011, p. 411; for discussion of the Commune's failings, see also, 'Contre-courant: le débat Alain Badiou-Kristin Ross' (32:22 – 35:29), *Contre-courant (Médiapart)*, 16 March 2015, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VpTi6L3IMSo>> [last accessed 15 February 2016].
4. Francis Mulhern, 'Afterlives of the Commune,' *New Left Review*, 96 (November-December 2015), 129-137 (129).
5. Arthur Rimbaud to Georges Izambard, 13 May 1871, in *Lettres du voyant*, ed. by Gérald Schaeffer (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1975), p. 113.
6. The expression 'communal luxury' was used by the Federation of Artists as a motto. But according to Gonzalo J. Sanchez, '[t]he Fédération was an initiative under the Commune, not of the Commune. This difference [...] has led to much historical misinformation.' See *Organizing Independence: The Artists' Federation of the Paris Commune and its Legacy 1871-1889* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 49. Indeed, the Commune's political imaginary was not monolithic and cannot, therefore, be subsumed under the expression 'communal luxury', as Ross's book would have us believe.
7. Terry Eagleton, 'Foreword', in Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune*, 2nd edn (London: Verso, 2008), p. xi. (Hereafter, Ross, *Emergence*).
8. The destruction of this Napoleonic edifice was regarded as a symbol of Communard internationalism.
9. William Morris and E. Belfort Bax, 'The Paris Commune of 1871 and the Continental Movement Following it', in Morris, *Political Writings*, p. 560.
10. John Merriman, *Massacre: The Life and Death of the Paris Commune of 1871* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), p. 119.
11. Morris, *Political Writings*, p. 560.
12. See *The Collected Works of William Morris*, ed. by May Morris, 24 vols (London: Longman Green & Co., 1910-1915), XVI, pp. 88, 32, 69-70. (Hereafter, CW).
13. Ross, *Emergence*, p. 39.
14. *Ibid.*, p. xiv.
15. CW, XXII, p. 4; *ibid.*, XXIII, p. 195.
16. Morris, *Political Writings*, p. 232.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 232-333.
21. Ross, *Emergence*, p. 8.
22. On Ross's neglect of diachronic time, see John-Patrick Shultz, 'Remembering a Revolutionary Luxury: Review of Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune*,' *Radical Philosophy Review*, 18:2 (2015), 347-51.