
This *Is* A Pipe: The Aesthetic Object in Morris's *Nowhere*

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Gorges Bataille, the twentieth-century philosopher, is primarily known for an oeuvre that extends across many media and genres (from philosophy to poetics, fiction and anthropology) and for the bizarre aesthetic of his dark eroticism and his celebration of useless expenditure. He promotes unbridled consumption of luxuries, fineries and even superficialities as not only fundamentally human, but as a framework for more thoroughly understanding our economies by turning away from production-based analyses to a consumption-based framework. He loudly and full-throatedly declared himself the inheritor of Friedrich Nietzsche, not necessarily the Nietzsche of the *übermensch*, but rather the gleeful, Dionysian celebrant of life's excesses.¹ What, then, could this French theorist of eroticism and excess have in common with William Morris, aside from a passing coincidence of a vaguely similar bourgeois education? Why open an essay on the utopian objects of Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890) with this later thinker who never so much as glances at Morris (and rarely discusses utopianism at all), and who seems to promote categorically different priorities and values? For one, in slightly different terms (and for different reasons), Bataille, like Morris, positions art as the most fundamentally human production. He points to the earliest known cave paintings, for instance, as a way to analyse the representational aspect of the visual. This particular representational quality, Bataille argues, reveals a higher form of consciousness than that possessed by beasts. Bataille also uses art, as the exclusive domain of humans, to open discussions of freedom and self-creation under the category of what he calls 'the sovereign'.² As we shall see, Bataille's category of the sovereign is also a lens through which we can analyse and problematise Morris's objects of beauty – particularly the memorable pipe that William Guest procures in *Nowhere* – and it can help us to interrogate the valiance or continuing political efficacy of aestheticised labour in our contemporary moment of economic and

ecological crisis.

So much of Morris suggests that he had a declared preference for a simple, perhaps minimalist, but certainly an agrarian aesthetic. This is visible in his fiction (most especially in the agrarian aesthetic of *News from Nowhere*) and in his lectures, the aesthetic of his own visual art and the work that he did to preserve ancient buildings whose aesthetic he did not want to see ‘cockneyfied’ or ‘commercialised’. He openly admits in his review of Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888) that the ‘only safe way of reading a utopia is to consider it as the expression of the temperament of its author’.³ Given this admission, readers of Morris’s own utopian romance might scarcely be surprised at what they discover in *Nowhere*, as the aesthetic seems consistent with much of Morris’s stated and actualised aesthetic proclivities.

Yet, despite the array of evidence in *News from Nowhere* that suggests a simple, agrarian lifestyle, Morris also includes in this supposedly minimalist utopia numerous moments of what we might call ‘luxury’. Morris has not stinted in his inclusion of luxuries such as fine wine, plentiful and nutritious food and fashionable attire for the residents of his imagined future. And, of course, sexuality appears to be relatively liberated, the institution of marriage has become irrelevant and somatic pleasure not a cause for Christian guilt, but rather unabashed enjoyment.⁴ Bataille, too, finds an important role for expressions of pleasure, especially in excess. Sovereignty is, for Bataille, an expression that connotes freedom from labour and the ability for useless consumption (for example, useless consumption can take various forms, such as sacrifice, eroticism, idleness or alcohol).⁵ In other words, the sovereign is one who consumes without producing.⁶ This could be either the richest or the poorest in a given society, for the definition of sovereignty relies only on excessive consumption or consumption without production (taking without giving). Another such sovereign who consumes without producing could be the stranger or the guest.

In the absolute expression of desire and useless consumption and the complete attention to the present moment (rather than possible futurities or the horror and spectre of death), the symbol that Bataille presents as representative of sovereignty is the festival.⁷ What must be understood, however, is that even in the festival – that which is closest to sovereignty – full sovereignty is but an ideal. Indeed, sovereignty is ‘the impossible’ ideal toward which Bataille strives, and ‘the impossible thus revealed is not an equivocal position; it is the sovereign self-consciousness that, precisely, no longer turns away from itself’.⁸ This ‘sovereign self-consciousness’ that faces itself encapsulates the ideal of a never fully realised, impossible authenticity. In other words, not only is the accursed share excessive, but it is categorically opposed to all possible (and hitherto realised) modes of labour and use value (those fundamental features of capitalism). Such is the framework that Bataille suggests we incorporate into a

consumption-based analysis (as opposed to the more typically Marxian production-based one).

Productive work is clearly useful, and in Morris's calculation all humanely created goods can be both useful and beautiful (or useful *in* their very beauty, provided the work is '*worth doing, and [...] of itself pleasant to do*').⁹ Though he emphasises consumption, Bataille never denies the labour that goes into the accursed share, for example, the labour that is invested in preserving cheese (the accursed share of milk) or fermenting wine (the accursed share of grapes). Yet this labour is not performed by the sovereign who enjoys the excess, but by the workers who do not. The sovereign enjoys in luxury what the workers who produce the surplus are denied. Luxury, for Bataille, is but one of two options for expenditure of surplus, that excess of energy in the economic ecosystem, the other being war.

In fact, any such expenditure must be a squandered, useless investment, for any use value will not in fact be an expenditure of excess but a cyclical reinvestment of the productive system. However, in imagining a future in which class division and exploitative labour will have been abolished, Morris outlines the ways in which finery can be produced and consumed by workers, such that the workers are not excluded from sovereignty, but, in contradistinction to Bataille, claim it through their practices of pleasurable labour. On the reading offered here, then, the figure of the guest is to Morris akin to Bataille's sovereign, because in the utopian epoch of hospitality imagined in *News from Nowhere* the guest (specifically William Guest) is welcomed and provided for, without the necessary expectation of reciprocity, payment or labour. But how does this selfless hospitality unfold?

In Chapter 6 of *News from Nowhere*, 'A Little Shopping', we witness William Guest in what initially appears as a strikingly ordinary and mundane set of errands at a market. The brilliance of this short chapter is that it concisely encapsulates the kernel of Morris's politico-aesthetic theory. The encounter with the aesthetic object, the tobacco pipe, affords Morris's utopian protagonist the opportunity not only to reflect on the value of beauty, but also the pleasure within labour processes in Nowhere. We ought to be especially attuned to such 'pretty' objects and enjoyment in this narrative, for Morris himself places an important emphasis on them. At least part of this emphasis continues his critique of the cold, urban, mechanised and ugly utopia of Bellamy's Boston in *Looking Backward* (1887). Clearly, however, providing an alternate vision of a post-revolutionary society is not the only motivator for giving such objects seemingly disproportionate attention. As John Helmer illustrates, Guest stops in his tracks, 'interrupting conversation and delaying his narrative' in order to give detailed accounts of said objects.¹⁰ Guest seems to relish these opportunities to describe the aesthetic objects he encounters, indicating that they express some deeper truth of

Nowhere than even its inhabitants could fully explain. In other words, the aesthetic object is the literal materialisation of pleasurable – and hence non-alienated – labour. The point is not that the pipe is some unique object in Nowhere, but rather that it is positioned as an exemplar that represents the average produced object.¹¹ Every object in Nowhere is similarly thought out and well made, yet few other objects described in the text are given the same amount of attention or praise as the pipe. This seemingly insignificant foray into a ‘market’ underlines the radical potentiality of a Morrisian reimagining of both labour and exchange. Indeed, one could consider among Morris’s prime motivations for composing *News from Nowhere* the desire to ‘diagnose and analyse’ the de-aestheticised labour of his time, in an attempt to better understand and adequately counter the vast ‘alienation between creativity and labour’ that characterise his (and our) society.¹² This reimagining of labour as pleasurable and exchange as equitable is materialised in the aesthetic object of the pipe that Guest acquires in Nowhere. Such a reimagining bears even greater social relevance in our own historical moment, as globalised capital has increasingly prioritised so-called ‘creative labour’ in new yet increasingly hegemonic ways.¹³

In ‘A Little Shopping’, the time-travelling Victorian William Guest appears perplexed by the fact that no one is engaged in commerce, strictly speaking, even though the buildings and interactions of the London market seem and feel familiar. However, Guest does witness many goods, though no currency, changing hands. This is neither a credit-based system, nor a barter system, but one in which goods are recognised as belonging collectively to all Nowhereans. This arrangement is not against private ownership of individual goods (or personal property), but rather recognises that individual members of this society have a legitimate claim to the goods they need *and* the goods they desire. Of course, one should not overemphasise the rights-based discourse here, as this may carry undue consumerist overtones. Indeed, the ‘right’ to fulfilment of desires in Nowhere is entirely dependent on the communal, gift-based economy (as well as recognising that the claim to goods and services is understood and interpreted variously as based in ‘rights’ or ‘entitlements’ or even in positive participation).

The short and seemingly unimportant interaction at the tobacconist’s shop actually pulls together the most crucial aspects of Morris’s interrelated aesthetic and economic arguments. Not only is this the moment that Guest begins truly to understand his new temporal surroundings, but it is also the reader’s first real glimpse into the relational functioning of a post-capitalist economy of exchange. It is significant that Guest’s primary desire is to procure an unessential, yet very much desired good, for his necessities are met immediately with nearly no expenditure of effort on his part.

In a reversal of Dickensian London, Morris's utopian iteration of London envisages a society in which wants are met and abundance is keenly felt. Guest is accompanied to Piccadilly, which he learns is 'a very good market for pretty things, and is mostly kept for the handsomer goods, as the Houses-of-Parliament market, where they sell cabbages and turnips and such like things, along with beer and the rougher kind of wine, is so near'.¹⁴ The space of the Houses of Parliament has been converted to the sale of necessary goods, means of subsistence and baser goods. But, and this is the crucial point of this chapter, these necessities are not the limit of productivity or consumption. Indeed, there are 'pretty things' for enjoyment nearly everywhere Guest turns.

The object of beauty plays an important role in the interactions, movements and desires that feature in Morris's *Nowhere-England*. In being an aesthetic object, the tobacco pipe acts as both a materialisation of beauty (brought about not simply in the end product of the object, but in its very productive and consumptive processes) and an example of Morriscan handicraft. The aesthetic object in *Nowhere* represents a multi-faceted critique of the mechanisation and alienation of the worker under capitalism, both from her work and from the other members of her community. To elaborate, what we find in *Nowhere* is not just the reorganisation of the modes of production, but also the introduction of a categorically different aesthetic regime. The revolution that occurred in the interim between Morris's late nineteenth century and the early twenty first century in which the utopian romance is set was clearly and evidently fought with reference to simultaneously social and aesthetic registers.

The most remarkable example of desire invested into an object is the aforementioned tobacco pipe that Guest procures early in the novel.¹⁵ Guest enters the shop with no money or goods for barter, and leaves with a beautiful pipe and a full pouch of tobacco. His interactions with the adolescents working there is a pleasure in itself, as they view *him* as having done *them* a service, simply by sharing part of the day with them, enjoying their company and partaking of their goods. His presence and patronage are appreciated as compliments to their non-alienated labour, as hospitality has become reciprocal and mutually beneficial in this utopian society. After requesting tobacco, and producing a tired and tattered piece of cloth that Guest embarrassingly uses as a pouch, the girl at the counter insists that she be allowed to give him a proper pouch to use:

The girl held up in her finger and thumb a red morocco bag, gaily embroidered, and said, 'There, I have chosen one for you, and you are to have it: it is pretty, and will hold a lot.'

Therewith she fell to cramming it with the tobacco, and laid it down by

me and said, 'Now for the pipe: that also you must let me choose for you; there are three pretty ones just come in.'

She disappeared again, and came back with a big-bowled pipe in her hand, carved out of some hard wood very elaborately, and mounted in gold sprinkled with little gems. It was, in short, as pretty and gay a toy as I had ever seen; something like the best Japanese work, but better.

'Dear me!' said I, when I set eyes on it, 'this is altogether too grand for me, or for anybody but the Emperor of the World. Besides, I shall lose it: I always lose my pipes.'

The child seemed rather dashed, and said, 'Don't you like it, neighbour?'

'O yes,' I said, 'of course I like it.'

'Well, then, take it,' said she, 'and don't trouble about losing it. What will it matter if you do? Somebody is sure to find it, and he will use it, and you can get another.'¹⁶

This scene from *Nowhere* demonstrates several key points about the aesthetic object and its liberation from exploitative processes. The material beauty (or, more quaintly, the 'prettiness') of the object is of course important, and Morris describes the 'gold sprinkled with little gems' to show the sparkling splendour and extravagance of the pipe. Yet this gold- and gem-encrusted pipe also demonstrates the way in which these materials that were once considered so precious, and hence were the exclusive property of wealthy elites and the cause of much bloodshed, have now been broadly democratised. The value of gold and gemstones are purely aesthetic here, for exchange is of no concern, and the commodity form has passed out of existence.

For these imagined citizens of *Nowhere*, the pipe is pretty and has aesthetic value, but exchange and commodity value is not even within their consciousness. There is no typical separation between the useful and the beautiful in this object, for it fulfils both aesthetic and ostensibly utilitarian purposes and the beauty of the pipe is its use. An avid clay pipe smoker himself, Morris was undoubtedly aware of the unnecessary excess in the design and crafting of the pipe (not to mention the fashioning of it, which may negatively affect the evenness, smoothness and pleasure of the pipe while actually smoking). Why, then, present a pipe made of gold and encrusted with gemstones? The most straightforward interpretation is that the pipe is demonstrative of the total disregard for previous tokens of wealth, embodied here in gold and gems.¹⁷

Another possible interpretation of Guest's tobacco pipe is that the extravagance of its design indicates the pleasure of the maker. In Morris's politico-aesthetic theorisation, work itself (or 'useful labour') is a source of pleasure when it is chosen freely and perfected by the producer (or, at least, when perfection is the goal).

Handicraft labour, for Morris, both in his own artistic practice and in his utopian vision of Nowhere, is a source of great pride and pleasure. The pipe-maker, for instance, would have no need to churn out large numbers of ugly or flawed pipes once she escapes from the capital-exchange economy. The productivity of the pipe-maker, like that of any craftsman or craftswoman in Nowhere, is only limited by time and skill. Of these, only the latter is a true limitation, for though there would be training and education available, the social functioning of Nowhere acknowledges the heterogeneous nature of talents and skills, encouraging *but not demanding* that people pursue those activities most suited to their aptitudes, sympathies and skills *as well as* desires. Time would therefore only be a limitation on the labour of a certain craft (pipe making, for example) insofar as the labourer may wish to spend time outside one particular craft in order to pursue different and divergent tasks.

The other particularly striking thing about this scene is the evident pleasure the young girl has in the older man's consumption of her wares. So, the pipe is not only pleasurable to its maker in its making, and to the consumer in his consumption, but also to the maker (and in the case of these children, distributor) in its consumption. The young girl seems unduly anxious at the suggestion that Guest may not accept the pipe, initially thinking that the only possible explanation is that he is unhappy with it. Luckily, he alleviates this concern by stating that it is too grand a piece for him to possibly accept. To assuage his guilt about possessing, and possibly even losing, this splendiferous pipe, the girl assures him that he is not only entitled to such a pipe, but also gives the distinct impression that he may be hard pressed to find a pipe that is not similarly adorned. If no one is forced to make ugly commodities, then their existence in the world will largely fade away. In Nowhere, Morris envisages a society in which only beautiful objects (or aborted attempts at beautiful objects, as practice or learning and experience-based objects may still be put to use) are produced at all.¹⁸ Guest then graciously accepts the grand pipe, which he will put to good use later in the narrative. This consumption of the beautiful takes heart from Morris's great teacher John Ruskin, who wrote in *Unto This Last* (1860) that '[w]ise consumption is a far more difficult art than wise production [...]. The vital question, for individual and for nation, is, never "how much do they make?" but "to what purpose do they spend?"'¹⁹ The pleasure in the shopkeepers' labour also has an especial resonance in increasingly service-based economies.

In keeping with some of the ideas that Morris explores in his lectures, it is possible to view the tobacco pipe in Nowhere as a materialisation of the kind of beauty that Morris defines as radical. Morris argues that his aesthetic goal of perfecting beauty has a two-fold political agenda. In 'The Aims of Art' (1886), Morris tells us that his goal (achievable through art and art alone) is to soothe and mitigate suffering, and in

short to increase the pleasure and happiness of humanity.²⁰ This goal is only universalised when capitalism, most especially the mechanisation and industrialism so prevalent in capitalist modes of production, is negated. The second, and more radical, of Morris's goals in pursuing aesthetic beauty is to instil discontent in the working classes by demonstrating the possibilities for beauty that are denied to them. In other words, the aesthetic experience of beauty can be politically mobilising when it teaches the working classes about the limits of their experience under capitalism. Of course, in this future context, the beauty of the object is no longer considered radical, but rather ordinary, because *beauty is the norm in a post-capitalist world*. The elimination of commerce also eliminates a good deal of ugliness in Morris's thought, for once the useful is linked to the beautiful, 'trade finish' is forever done away with, yielding to 'artistic finish'.²¹ But beyond being the ontological other to ugliness, or the counter to utilitarian limitations, beauty is for Morris a *necessary* feature of economies that both *precede* and *postdate* capitalism. Art is the necessary norm in such an economy for it 'adds beauty to the results of the work of man', which has the multiple effects hitherto discussed (for example, alleviating suffering, adding to the potentiality for happiness and so on), but art also, and perhaps more importantly, 'adds pleasure to the work itself, which would otherwise be painful and disgusting'.²² The medieval past and utopian future underline Morris's playfulness with temporality.

Guest's response to being given the gilded pipe gives an incredible account of the subject position of a nineteenth-century consumer. He complains that the object is so beautiful that it should rightfully belong to a monarch. He wonders: why do *I*, of all people, *deserve* this? To borrow a phrase from Peter Kropotkin, anyone and everyone in Nowhere should have a claim to such objects of beauty, for this is truly a site of 'well-being for all'.²³ Guest's reaction to the beauty of the pipe demonstrates how culturally embedded definitions of beauty are, in striking contrast to Morris's usual, more universalist understandings of beauty. His Victorian definition of excess and his view of the pipe as elaborate demonstrate well the value of gold and jewels in Victorian England, but also the status these aesthetics goods have in imparting value to their owner. The definition of the pipe as beautiful has a lessened meaning in Nowhere, for beauty is normative, while such a pipe would clearly have been considered exceptional (except in the hands of a monarch) in Victorian England.

Guest's very sensory perception (in the case of the pipe, sight and texture, but in other cases he is astounded by the sounds, smells and tastes of Nowhere) has been conditioned and dulled by his Victorian experience. He is categorically unable to accept the evidence of his senses at first, and even believes that his compatriots must be deceiving him or that he must be dreaming. We witness an instance where the regime of the sensible is incompatible with the observer because his perception was

trained by a different (and opposed) regime. His repeated use of the phrase ‘very fine’ to describe his meals, tobacco, buildings and clothing indicates almost an excess of finery, and Guest’s inability fully to enjoy all that his surroundings can offer him.²⁴

What he comes to learn in Nowhere, however, is that such needless but beautiful excess is precisely the expression of the freedom that humanity enjoys after escaping capitalist alienation. Such objects of beauty are examples of the excess that Georges Bataille celebrates, as they are neither necessary nor connected to the reproduction of productive cycles nor the reproduction of cycles of life. Such consumables, despite their capacity for being usable, are not utilitarian in that the labour, materials and energy expended in the production of such aesthetic objects are useless expenditures, precisely insofar as they do not contribute to further circulation of energy. With tobacco, for example, energy is expended by going up in smoke. Indeed, Bataille even identifies tobacco smoking specifically as a ‘purely glorious expenditure, having for its goal to procure for the smoker an atmosphere detached from the general mechanics of things’.²⁵ How is it that Morris, then, can come to have such seemingly Dionysian excess and pleasure in Nowhere? Pleasure is indeed a crucial aspect of Morris’s vision, as the subtitle even indicates that this is the tale of *An Epoch of Rest*. In other words, Morris is not so interested in describing the economic efficiencies of full employment and non-alienated labour. Rather, he focuses on the improved pleasures of a more leisurely, non-capitalist countryside. The purpose-driven labour of Nowhere-England is importantly not useless toil; work itself is a source of pleasure, because of its usefulness, voluntary nature, vigour in pursuit and the creative possibilities it affords. This can be a powerful tactic connecting revelation with revolution, in terms of revealing attractive improvements in lifestyle that could appeal to oppressed classes on an affective level that the cold economic arguments of Marxist orthodoxy often cannot reach.

We witness a similar excessive expenditure as Chapter 6 continues and the children request that Guest toast a glass of wine with them. The ugliness and distaste of inferior goods is gone now, as the end of commercial competition has removed mechanistic efficiency from producers’ concerns. The absence of inferior goods also perplexes Guest, and he comments that he ‘made a mental note to ask Dick how they managed to make fine wine when there were no longer labourers compelled to drink rot-gut instead of the fine wine which they themselves made’.²⁶ Under capitalism, finery is reserved for the leisure class, as the ‘public needs are subordinated to the interest of capitalist masters’ who can indeed ‘force the public to put up with the less desirable article’ while the workers producing said finery are explicitly excluded via scarcity and price.²⁷ In this forcing of the inferior, Morris even declares that under such exploitative power relations, the ‘gross luxury’ of the rich coupled with the

‘useless toil’ and suffering of the exploited classes, results in a degradation of humanity, a state in which ‘our boasted individuality is a sham’.²⁸

Yet, in Nowhere, *everyone* labours (that is, all who are able), though they engage in activities that are both productive and pleasurable, and voluntary labour is pursued by each. No one lives off inherited wealth, derived from trust funds and private estates, but rather all live off the collective wealth of the community’s past and present accumulation of ‘wealth’ more broadly defined than capital could ever allow. Wealth here is collectively shared knowledge, resources and pleasure. Something as banal as pipe-making ability, for instance, can be the result of collectively shared practices and techniques of smelting, carpentry, design and aesthetics, as well as the practical demands of a smoking instrument. So, although the folks of Nowhere are engaged in labour, they themselves benefit from this labour on multiple registers; they enjoy the fruits of their labour, and find pleasure in freely choosing which talents to hone and hence what labour to participate in, and they enjoy the benefits of leisure without the past attachment of leisure to class position. Scarcity does not exist in Nowhere, but an excess of the very finest goods. In addition, the happenstance of this scene also demonstrates the lack of distribution and consumption regulation. Guest simply walks into the tobacconist, and there is no suggestion that an individual figure of authority or any institutional structure mandates his access to either this class of goods or these specific goods. In fact, there are no ruling institutions at all in Nowhere, but rather an intricately connected form of cooperation among residents. Indeed, as Ruth Levitas comments, Morris abolishes

calculus and rationing, and imagines a society in which ‘the free development of each is the free development of all’. The absence of a social machinery of rationed distribution in *News from Nowhere* then appears as a deliberate act of negation, not of social institutions per se, but of those specific processes.²⁹

There is no need for such an apparatus of distribution, for abundance in subsistence exists, and mutual cooperation makes it discourteous to take more than what one will rightfully use. Such communal abundance only occurs at the expense of individual miserliness, and also demonstrates the shift in morality that occurs with this equitable utopia, a shift that accompanies parallel shifts in labour, exchange and aesthetics. If there is no need to supervise distribution, there is truly no need for the state in Morris’s vision, for the organic organisation among the people in Nowhere means that their labour processes, consumption habits, travel, discourse and everyday practices require no regulatory or controlling institutions of governance. There is no sovereign state, but rather a more complex understanding of sovereignty at work in this text.

But people in Nowhere do not fit neatly into either of Bataille's categories of the sovereign non-labourer, for they are neither king nor queens nor the homeless.³⁰ On the one hand, *everyone* that Guest encounters is engaged in some sort of productive, agricultural, artistic or hospitable labour. On the other hand, *everyone* also seems completely free to indulge in luxurious goods and activities. These expenditures are not excessive in Bataille's sense, but they are sovereign in terms of free expenditure – or consumption without the expectation of reciprocity or payment. Objects such as tobacco pipes, especially those as magnificent as the one which Guest comes to possess, are not part of an accursed share, but rather they are the necessary and inevitable outcome of totally liberated labour, of a society comprised *entirely* of self-creating, self-ruling sovereigns.

The pipe itself is well crafted, showing the agreeableness of its production to the maker. There is nothing *necessary* in the pipe, insofar as necessity relates to subsistence and survival, but rather there is something necessarily human, and perhaps even sovereign, in the enjoyment of this object on the parts of both producer and consumer. It is also at this point that we can turn to Kropotkin on the social *necessity* of luxury goods. The tobacco pipe is a materialisation of the very needs that Kropotkin outlines as luxurious under capitalism, but simply human (as humans possess artistic needs and aspirations) under anarcho-communism.³¹ Of course, Kropotkin differs from Morris on the definitions and exact social roles of luxury (not to mention other more foundational differences between the two), but nonetheless it seems they reach agreement on luxurious *qualities* and how they fulfil some basic human desires (both in the labour to create and the enjoyment of consumption). The very existence of the pipe in Nowhere, within an open and free market for 'pretty things', assumes that the basic needs of food, shelter and clothing have already been met. Indeed, bread has been conquered – as Kropotkin might have put it – so luxury may now follow, as another important human need.

The splendour of the pipe also represents an inter-temporal rupture for Guest, as it is reminiscent for him of the luxurious goods of the former elite. In other words, the pipe is not so much out of place as it is out of time. Luxurious goods owned by elites in Guest's native nineteenth-century London seem fundamentally incompatible with the agrarian simplicity of Nowhere. Yet, the exuberance of the pipe demonstrates that such artisanal processes from the pre-modern era produce precisely the most beautiful objects, surpassing the supposed efficiency and invisible hand of the modern era. The rupture represented by the pipe also indicates a coming together of aesthetic and utilitarian goals, goals that were only falsely separated under capitalism, but 'the two elements of use and beauty' can very much be adjoined.³² In Nowhere, then, we find in the pipe a radically inter-temporal object, anachronistically

presenting the ‘finest work’ of the past in the context of the future.

The existence of the tobacco pipe, as it is described, is also of such importance because elsewhere Morris takes such pains to discount bourgeois luxury as not only unnecessary but as directly harmful through the exploitation of the working classes. It is again helpful to consider Kropotkin, for the kind of luxury he describes is qualitatively different from the bourgeois kind, and the features of his account that are connected to Guest’s tobacco pipe in *Nowhere* mean that it is not ‘luxurious’ in the strictly bourgeois sense. The nuanced shift in definition is also a product of the fact that alienated, exploitative labour no longer exists in Morris’s future England, and all goods are therefore made freely, as a result of pleasure rather than suffering. In his own time, Morris was an outspoken critic of bourgeois luxury, on both political and aesthetic grounds. As a critic of capitalism, he wrote and lectured on what he refers to as the ‘foppish frivolity’ of luxury, a concept which is categorically opposed to art in his thought.³³ Elaborating on the frivolous nature of bourgeois luxury, he claims that not only are these products not necessary but they are the direct cause of working-class exploitation, as wage labour serves to fulfil the desires of the rich few rather than the needs of the many.

Beyond this political economic critique, however, he also critiques bourgeois taste for its aesthetic ugliness. ‘Frivolous luxury’ is concerned with show, displaying the wealth and means of its owner, while ‘art’ is concerned only with beauty (and all that Morris believes beauty can accomplish in one’s life). Such bourgeois luxury is thus yet another form of exclusion with regard to the working classes. Morris established his design company in an effort to combat the ugly aesthetics not only of industrialism, but also the callous display of wealth in Victorian Britain. Wealth too is ugly to Morris, as he writes in ‘Making the Best of It’ (1879) that ‘[a]rt was not born in the palace; rather, she fell sick there, and it will take more than the bracing air of rich men’s houses to heal her again’.³⁴ So, in Morris’s formulation, luxury is the ugly, garish display of a bourgeois misunderstanding of the beautiful and the societal role of art. Hence, in *Nowhere*, Morris is able to describe *seemingly* excessive, beautiful products without referring to them as luxuries, not only due to the absence of wage slavery but also due to the inherent functionality of the *useful* art-object. These objects are all goods but not ‘luxuries’, for the latter descriptor relies upon a class separation that no longer exists.

The other key component in redefining such goods as pleasurable rather than bourgeois luxuries is that the excellence seen in the pipe is not exceptional after all. Goods in *Nowhere* are crafted, not machined, and according to Morris’s sympathies this *always* yields superior products.³⁵ From a different angle, the commonplace excellence found in *Nowhere* also confirms the supersession of class exploitation, as

there is no group or body of people in Morris's utopian society that is forced to consume lesser quality goods or services. It is not as if the existence of the exuberant décor of the pipe Guest is given only exists as an exception. Indeed, there is no mention of the use of the small, cheap, clay pipes that were once so common among the working classes. To consume in Nowhere means to consume only the very best, for with the abolition of the class system comes the abolition of inferior and shoddy goods.

In his lectures, Morris is clear that the beautiful and the useful are categorically *not* luxurious in the bourgeois sense. In describing the adornment of tapestries, for instance, he claims in 'The Beauty of Life' (1880) that 'this is not luxury, if it be done for beauty's sake, and not for show: it does not break our golden rule: *Have nothing in your houses which you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful*'.³⁶ Among the many historical events that informed the position that Morris takes on the utility of beauty, or more precisely the interactions between the beautiful and the useful, is the Paris Commune of 1871. As Kristin Ross demonstrates, the art of the Commune was multifaceted, and not limited to so-called finery. Ross writes that:

[the Commune] did not presume to act as judge or evaluator from an artistic point of view, acting rather as the driving force of a mechanism capable of assuring the liberty of all. This is particularly important since it shifts value away from market evaluation, and even from the art object itself, *onto the process of making* and onto the artist, whose labor generates value. *All art, in their view, was artisanal and skilled in its production and in the socialization of its makers*.³⁷

In this imagining, the post-capitalist world would see more efficient labour, in that only the useful and the beautiful would be produced. In other words, though the move away from capitalism may decrease the efficient production of quantity, Morris argues that in the post-capitalist world where handicraft thrives, a demonstrable amelioration of the quality of goods shall take place. No more shall anyone labour at a task they do not choose, and no longer will artificial needs hold a central economic function. In fact, the entire labour force will be employed in tasks of their choosing 'in making nothing but useful things; among which, of course, I include works of art of various kinds'.³⁸

Morris elaborates on this point that items of beauty and utility are *not* luxurious (most especially when they are produced in the absence of any form of exploitation) when Guest and Dick are invited to share a glass of wine at the tobacconists' shop. The children that give Guest his pipe and tobacco do not imbibe, not because it is forbidden, but simply because it is not to their taste. Yet, upon their recognition of

the special status and features of Guest, noticeable in their claim that ‘we do not have guests like this everyday’, they insist that *he* try the wine of which they are clearly proud.³⁹ And while Guest enjoys his delicious glass, partly due to propriety and partly due to his thirst on a hot day, he makes a ‘mental note’ to ask how this could be made when workers themselves also had access to it, he indicates that it is not only honoured visitors that receive the fineries of the community, but everyone within it.⁴⁰ Social status is negated all the way down the line, including the very ability to enjoy all the fruits of the community’s many varied labours.

Additionally, we have the somewhat awkward excuse that Guest gives to the child for why he is especially unworthy of such a magnificent pipe; that is that he is bound to lose it. If the pipe is lost, someone else will find it, so there is no loss to the community. Not only does this indicate the unimportance of property in Nowhere, but also that the disposability of capitalism has been replaced by an impulse to reuse, or put to use that which has been discarded. We may continue to dwell on the pipe, for it is not only a ‘glorious expenditure’, but perhaps also paradoxically an example of idyllic *imperfection* (or the sovereign accursed share). We must ask why of all possible products for Guest to look for, find and enjoy, it had to be a tobacco pipe.

Tobacco is not a crop usually sown and grown in England, having only been introduced to the European continent through imperialistic exploitation of the New World, so its presence may suggest prolonged global commerce, if not outright imperialism. Yet, would not such international trade depend upon alienated labour, if not at home then certainly abroad? Certainly, this is the case in our globalised world in which so-called ‘post-industrial’ economies exploit so-called ‘developing’ ones through relocation of production to regions where labour and environmental abuse is rife. Or are we to believe that in the future Nowhere, the English have cultivated a tobacco strain that can be produced domestically? This is a remote possibility, further undermined by the fact that Guest requests and receives Latakia, a tobacco grown and cured almost exclusively in Syria, Cyprus and Turkey. What are we to make of the ease with which Guest can procure and enjoy this particular type and blend of tobacco? The most probable explanation is that this future Nowhere-England is still engaged in international commerce, suggesting either the perpetuation of national borders, trade and something that serves as currency in such transactions, or a universalisation and globalisation of the communistic social relations that Morris envisages in England. This begs the question: need we demand of such utopias as Morris’s that they take a more internationalist perspective in explaining their visions of communism? If we do not, and are content to imagine utopias limited to a domestic context, how might this cause problems in a world in which global elites really do live exuberantly as a consequence of their vicious exploitation of the

international working class? Without a clear picture of the international context in which Nowhere exists, it is more than conceivable that an imperialistic mechanism is at work, and what props up the idyllic communal living of the metropole is the labour of people of colour in the global south.⁴¹

On the other hand, the attending girl encourages Guest to fill his (new) pouch, for he may not have access to Latakia for some time. Is it a rare commodity after all? Do we find in Latakia an example of scarcity? If scarcity does exist in this future, then we must account for the deprivation that some will experience. Such deprivation is clearly a source of inequality, for some will gain access to rare goods while others will not, though importantly this deprivation is not a source of oppression. Here again we witness Morris playing with uncertainty, tension and imperfection. We may read this detail of the pipe scene as indicative of the uncertainty in the procurement of certain pleasurable, but unnecessary, goods. This could demonstrate that other more essential goods are of greater priority, for though a particular blend of tobacco may be in greater or lesser supply, we never encounter a moment in Nowhere with an analogous shortage of food, shelter, clothing, hospitality, aesthetics or the other necessities of life. Additionally, we may read the projected shortage of Latakia as the recognition of seasonal limitations on crops in an economic mode of production that does not ruthlessly exploit the globe to provide uniform supply in the metropole.

What, then, does Guest's pipe demonstrate about Morris's theory of the uniqueness of the aesthetic object? The uniqueness that Morris sees in the aesthetic object has a bearing not only on the enjoyment of the consumption, appreciation or use of the object, but also on its unique qualities of production. All objects made in pleasurable circumstances contain elements of art for Morris, and the pleasure in production exponentially increases the pleasure in consumption. Beyond this, however, the interactions with the pipe suggest something deeper at stake in the luxurious, freely and pleasurably produced object. This deeper, embedded claim is that *only* such art objects are authentic goods, for in a classless society a lesser pipe would not only be considered inadequate, but indeed not a pipe in actuality but only in simulacra. It is therefore only by eschewing the efficiency models of modern industrial capitalism that genuine aesthetic objects can be made.⁴² Such a pipe, in other words, could only be available for Guest in a post-capitalist world.

Luxuriously beautiful objects are, in this sense, anachronistic, for the pipe Guest holds in enamouring attention would only materialise beyond the strictures of mass, mechanised production. Yet, and this is similarly important, the luxurious pipe is *not* a commodity. The art object cannot be a commodity, for commerce (and hence exchange value) has come to an end. Owing to the end of exchange value, the emphasis on authenticity often encountered in the modern, liberal Enlightenment

and in Romanticism is undermined through its very fulfilment. Whereas it was once the case that ‘commodities are vehicles of individual expression, even the self-definition of identity’ through consumer manipulation, fashion in Nowhere is most often the expression of the individual’s desire (and often the product of their own hands).⁴³ Charles Taylor’s critique of the ‘[c]ulture of “authenticity”’ is particularly pertinent here. Taylor expands on this concept as follows:

I mean the understanding of life which emerges with the Romantic expressivism of the late-eighteenth century, that each of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one’s own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from the outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority.⁴⁴

This Romantic-liberal conception of the authentic individual, Taylor argues, is manipulated by a cultural industry selling fashions as ‘lifestyles’. Even Romanticism itself is attached to a particular market emphasising the autonomy of the individual, and a concept of beauty that reveals truth through its *individual* representations, perceptions and authentic experiences. However, in the chapter of Morris’s *News from Nowhere* that has been read here, we have encountered a paradoxical development of fulfilment of authentic life in its individual complexities, absent of the manipulation of consumer culture. Must we, in abandoning the liberal-capitalist couplet, finally also abandon this language of authenticity? If so, what could we replace it with? Species being? Potentiality? Or, on a deeper level, could it be that such terms would be fundamentally problematic in a post-capitalist world in which human freedom has been actualised? In other words, would claims to authenticity even be necessary if all humans were truly free to pursue whatever tasks they wished, and goods were no longer made simply as commodities to maximise profit?

Of course, we must acknowledge the ambiguity contained in the fact that the pipe is a fictional object that Morris imagines, not an actually existing aesthetic object in the world. Yet, in this future, we see the pipe as one among many examples of public, freely enjoyed beauty. Again we see an influence and overlap with the Paris Communards, for whom ‘beauty [must] flourish in spaces shared in common and not just in special privatized preserves’, with the implication that this entails ‘reconfiguring art to be fully integrated into everyday life and not just the endpoint of special excursions’.⁴⁵ Morris consistently calls for an art for all, a goal that shifts Morris’s relationship to his own artistic production, and leads him in at least some capacity to a politics of socialist liberation. In other words, Morris concludes that art

must be liberated from the rich, and this is part and parcel of the liberation of workers from capitalist exploitation. According to Ross:

Despair for art fueled [Morris's] desire for a full systemic socialist transformation and his decision to work for the end of class society [...]. Senseless luxury, which Morris knew cannot exist without slavery of some kind, would be replaced by communal luxury, or equality in abundance [...]. Where his critics see a nostalgic entrancement on his part with art objects from the past, Morris saw an art that was not external to the everyday or, as is supposed, elevated above it and trying vainly to enter it. Morris saw a *style* of life [...].⁴⁶

Such a publicly experienced art would paradoxically liberate beauty from the domain of the rich while sheltering the experience of the beautiful from its potentially shocking elements. Further, Morris refuses to see his utopia – and the shared enjoyment of such niceties as the splendid pipe – as an imagined impossibility, for the changes that he describes, including the entry of the beautiful into all areas of social life, he sees as concretely achievable. Many readers of Morris, from his contemporaries like G.K. Chesterton and H.G. Wells, to later critics like E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams, have been sceptical of the agrarian simplicity, naïve faith in human goodness and other predictive and reflective aspects of Morris's utopia. We may find great value in such critiques and in broadly discussing the socio-political role of utopian thinking as critique. Regardless of the different critical views on the efficacy of Nowhere as an ideal (or even more shortsightedly, as some sort of model for emulation), it can perhaps be agreed that some value is attached to the act of imagining a future in which everyone may in fact partake in a share of the beauty in the world, even if only in so insignificant an object as a smoking pipe. Perhaps if we start there, with democratising singularly beautiful objects, then we can form the basis for more broad-scale actions or demands for change in the aesthetics and functionality of our communities, forms of labour and even social interactions. Morris put it as follows: '[a]s to its being impossible, I do not believe it. The men of this generation even have accomplished matters that but a very little while ago would have been thought impossible.'⁴⁷

NOTES

1. Bataille's life also intersected with other, more high profile occultists, scholars and avant-gardists of the early- to mid-twentieth-century European bourgeois intelligentsia, including most notably Alexander Kojève and Jacques Lacan. It is also arguable that Bataille was among the most significant influences on the thought of Michel Foucault.
2. For fuller discussion, see Georges Bataille, *The Cradle of Humanity: Prehistoric Art and Culture*, trans. by Michelle Kendall and Stuart Kendall (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2005).

3. William Morris, *Political Writings: Contributions to 'Justice' and 'Commonweal', 1883-1890*, ed. by Nicholas Salmon (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994), p. 420.
4. For a sympathetic discussion of the gender politics of Morris's utopian romance along these lines, see Ady Mineo, 'Beyond the Law of the Father: The "New Woman" in *News from Nowhere*', in *William Morris: Centenary Essays*, ed. by Peter Faulkner and Peter Preston (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), pp. 200-6. For a countervailing and more critical view, see Jan Marsh, 'Concerning Love: *News from Nowhere* and Gender', in *William Morris & News from Nowhere: A Vision for Our Time*, ed. by Stephen Coleman and Patrick O'Sullivan (Hartland: Green Books, 1990), pp. 107-25.
5. Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, trans. by Robert Hurley, 3 vols (New York: Zone Books, 1991), I, p. 119. (Afterwards Bataille, *The Accursed Share*).
6. *Ibid.*, II-III, pp. 198-99, 226.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 231, 241, 245. Note the consistency with Nietzsche's discussion of the festival of punishment. See also Bataille's discussion of letting oneself lose time in Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1992), p. 103. (Afterwards Bataille, *Theory of Religion*).
8. Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, p. 111.
9. *The Collected Works of William Morris*, ed. by May Morris, 24 vols (London: Longmans Green and Company, 1910-1915), XXIII, p. 194. (Afterwards CW).
10. John Helmer, 'The Prettiness of Utopia', *JWMS*, 4: 1 (Winter 1979), 4-19 (4). (Afterwards Helmer).
11. Of course, there is an extensive body of scholarly work focusing on objects and concepts of beauty in Morris's thought. See, for example, Jeffrey Petts, 'Good Work and Aesthetic Education: William Morris, the Arts and Crafts Movement, and Beyond', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 42: 1 (Spring 2008), 30-45; and Pamela Gerrish Nunn, 'Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered by the Beauty of Life', in *William Morris and the Art of Everyday Life*, ed. by Wendy Perkins (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), pp. 109-32.
12. Helmer, p. 13.
13. For further discussion on this more recent phenomenon, see Nato Thompson, *Culture as Weapon: The Art of Influence in Everyday Life* (Brooklyn: Melville House Publishing, 2017); Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2011); and Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapelle, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 2005).
14. CW, XVI, p. 34.
15. This is also the only aesthetic object that Morris compares to the 'finest Japanese' work. When so many of the other cultural references in *Nowhere* are Gothic or Italian, this allusion to Japan stands out prominently. For further discussion, see Tony Pinkney, 'Japanising Morris's Utopia' [in Japanese, trans. by Yasuo Kawabata], *Eigo Seinen/Rising Generation*, 154: 3 (March 2009), 682-86.
16. CW, XVI, p. 37.
17. It is also worth noting that (mostly cheap, clay) pipes were ubiquitous in Morris's time. Given what we now know about tobacco's links to cancer and other health concerns, we could certainly imagine a different example that is perhaps more germane today. It is anachronistic to impose our own knowledge upon Morris's century, but the idea here is that he likely describes the pipe not only because he was a smoker himself, but because so many of his contemporaries were smokers as well (especially among the working classes). We could imagine an equally (or more) common commodity now, and perhaps imagine a twenty-first-century description along the lines of a particularly beautiful cell phone or other such handheld device.
18. For example, Dick presents his handcrafted belt-buckle as an 'early' attempt (and one that he is not particularly proud of) that is still utilised and is indeed still beautiful, CW, XVI, pp. 6-8. In fact, part of the beauty of this object has to do with its imperfection. Aside from the obvious Ruskinian resonances here, Morris presents a respect for the handcrafted object strikingly similar to the sixth-century BCE Chinese sage Lao-Tzu's connection between achievement (and so-called *high* perfection) and minor imperfections elaborated upon in the Tao Te Ching.

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19. John Ruskin, *Unto This Last* (1860), quoted in E.P.Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, rev. edn (London: Merlin Press, 1977), p. 199.
 20. *CW*, XXIII, pp. 81-97. See also Morris's discussion in 'How We Live and How We Might Live', *CW*, XXIII, p. 21.
 21. *Ibid.*, XXII, p. 365.
 22. *Ibid.*, p. 356.
 23. Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings*, ed. by Marshall S. Shatz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 20. (Afterwards Kropotkin).
 24. *CW*, XVI, pp. 14, 37, 38, 45, 97.
 25. Georges Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Non-Knowledge*, trans. by Michelle Kendall and Stuart Kendall (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 6.
 26. *CW*, XVI, p. 34.
 27. *CW*, XXII, pp. 332-33.
 28. *Ibid.*, pp. 341, 333.
 29. Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 201.
 30. Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, I, pp. 76, 119.
 31. Kropotkin, pp. 94-106.
 32. *CW*, XXII, p. 155.
 33. *Ibid.*, p. 165. See also Morris's opposition between 'luxury' and 'art' in *ibid.*, p. 148.
 34. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
 35. In this way, Morris anticipates the luxury and maker cultures that followed during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that often put a premium on the hand-crafted, the tool marks of the crafts worker and notions of authenticity in both production and consumption practices.
 36. *CW*, XXII, p. 77.
 37. Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (London: Verso, 2015), pp. 57-58. Emphasis added. (Afterwards Ross).
 38. *CW*, XXII, p. 350.
 39. *Ibid.*, XVI, p. 38.
 40. *Ibid.*
 41. For further discussion of the 'problematic valorisation of a colonial structure of feeling' in *News from Nowhere*, see Owen Holland, *William Morris's Utopianism: Propaganda, Politics and Prefiguration* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 229-30.
 42. *CW*, XXIII, pp. 192-214.
 43. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 483.
 44. *Ibid.*, p. 475.
 45. Ross, p. 58.
 46. *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.
 47. *CW*, XXII, p. 173.