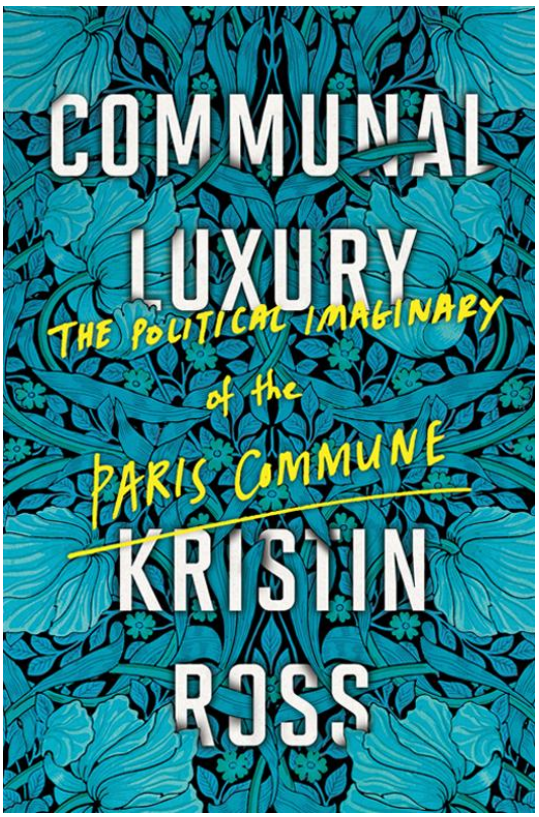
# Communal Luxury

## The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune

Kristin Ross

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# Contents

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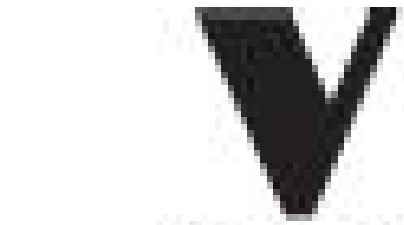

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# Introduction

In this book I have tried to piece together the elements of an imaginary that fueled and outlived the event known as the Paris Commune of 1871—an imaginary to which the Communards and I have given the name "communal luxury." For seventy-two days in the spring of 1871, a worker-led insurrection transformed the city of Paris into an autonomous Commune and set about improvising the free organization of its social life according to principles of association and cooperation. Since then, everything that occurred in Paris that spring—from the shock of ordinary people in a major European capital exercising powers and capacities normally reserved for a ruling elite to the savagery of the state's retaliation against them—has generated controversy and analysis. The historical landscape of the Commune I sketch here is at once lived and conceptual. By "lived," I mean that the materials I have used to compose it are the actual words spoken, attitudes adopted, and physical actions performed by the insurgents and some of their fellow travelers and contemporary supporters nearby. Conceptual, in the sense that these words and actions are themselves productive of a number of logics I have felt compelled to follow through in the pages that follow. I have taken as my starting point the idea that it is only by abiding insistently with the particular nature and context of the actors' words and inventions that we can arrive at the Commune's more centrifugal effects. It is a striking fact that, amidst the voluminous quantity of political analysis the Commune has inspired, Communard *thought* has historically received little attention, even from writers and scholars politically sympathetic to the event's memory. And yet, much of that thought—what the insurrectionists did, what they

thought and said about what they did, the significance they gave to their actions, the names and words they embraced, imported or disputed—has been readily available, reissued, for example, in France by leftist editor François Maspero during the last period of high visibility of the Commune, the 1960s and '70s. I have preferred to linger with those voices and actions, rather than with the long chorus of political commentary or analysis—whether celebratory or critical—that followed. I have not been concerned with weighing the Commune's successes or failures, nor with ascertaining in any direct way the lessons it might have provided or might continue to provide for the movements, insurrections, and revolutions that have come in its wake. It is not at all clear to me that the past actually *gives* lessons. Like Walter Benjamin, though, I believe that there are moments when a particular event or struggle enters vividly into the figurability of the present, and this seems to me to be the case with the Commune today.

The world political scene of 2011 was dominated by the figure and phenomenology of the encampment or occupation, and it was the return of an occupational form of protest that compelled me, in turn, to go back to the political culture of the Paris Commune with a different set of questions than those that animated the historical poetics of the Commune I wrote in the 1980s.[1] The concerns that dominate today's political agenda—the problem of how to refashion an internationalist conjuncture, the future of education, labor, and the status of art, the commune-form and its relationship to ecological theory and practice—these preoccupations undoubtedly played a role in guiding the way I look now at Commune culture for they form the structuring themes of the book. For the most part, I have not felt the need to make explicit the Commune's resonances with the politics of today, although I believe those resonances do indeed exist—some of them quite humorous, as when the *New York Times* reported unknowingly the name of the young activist they were interviewing in the streets of Oakland, California in November 2011 as Louise Michel.[2] There is little need to spell out in detail how the way people live now under the contemporary form of capitalism—with the collapse of the labor market, the growth of the informal economy, and the undermining of systems of social solidarity throughout the overdeveloped world—bears more than a passing resemblance to the working conditions of the laborers and artisans of the nineteenth century who made the Commune, most of whom spent most of their time not working but *looking for work*. It has become increasingly apparent, particularly after the unraveling of societies like Greece and Spain, that we are not all destined to be immaterial laborers inhabiting a post-modern creative capitalist techno-utopia the way some futurologists told us we were ten years ago—and continue desperately to try to tell us even today. The way people live now—working part-time, studying and working at the same time, straddling those two worlds or the gap between the work they were trained to do and the work they find themselves doing in order to get

[1] See Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988; London and New York: Verso, 2008).

[2] Malia Wollan, "Occupy Oakland Regroups, Calling for a Strike," *New York Times*, November 1, 2011.

by, or negotiating the huge distances they must commute or migrate across in order to find work—all this suggests to me, and to others as well, that the world of the Communards is in fact much closer to us than is the world of our parents. It seems utterly reasonable to me that younger people today, put off by a career trajectory in video-game design, hedge-fund management, or smart-phone bureaucracy, trying to carve out spaces and ways to live on the edges of various informal economies, testing the possibilities and limitations of *living differently now* within a thriving—if crisis-ridden—global capitalist economy, might well find interesting the debates that took place among Communard refugees and fellow travelers in the Juras in the 1870s that led to the theorizing of something called "anarchist communism"—debates, that is, about decentralized communities, how they might come into being and flourish, and the way they might become "federated" with each other in relations of solidarity.

If I refrain from harnessing the Commune's reverberations in any more explicit way to the events and political culture of the present, it is in part because what intrigues me most about the event now is the way it has become unmoored—liberated, like Rimbaud's *Drunken Boat* perhaps, especially after 1989—from the two dominant historiographies that had anchored the way it could be represented and understood: official state-communist history, on the one hand, and national French republican history on the other. Having been liberated from these two imposing lineages and narrative structures, I feel no hurry to corral it into another. The end of state-communism freed the Commune from the role it had played in official communist historiography; after 1989 it was untethered from Lenin's apocryphal dance in the snow in front of the Winter Palace on the seventy-third day of the Russian Revolution—the day, that is, that the Revolution had lasted one day longer than the Commune and in so doing turned the latter into the failed revolution of which the new one would be the corrective. And much of my argument in what follows is directed at clarifying the way the Commune never really quite belonged to the French national fiction, to the heroic radical sequence of French republicanism, of which it was purported to be the last nineteenth-century spasm. If we take seriously the statement of one of its better-known participants, Gustave Courbet, to the effect that during the Commune "Paris has renounced being the capital of France,"[3] it becomes difficult to maintain with any great conviction the notion that it was the insurgents who fought and died in great numbers in Paris who somehow "saved the Republic."

The imaginary the Paris Commune leaves to us is thus neither that of a national republican middle class nor that of a state-managed collectivism. Communal luxury is neither the (French) bourgeois luxury that surrounds it nor the utilitarian state collectivist experiments that succeeded it and dominated the first half of the twentieth century. Perhaps this is why another of its participants, many years later and in the midst of a highly critical evaluation of its political structure, concluded that

[3] Gustave Courbet, letter to his parents, April 30, 1871, in Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu, ed., *Correspondance de Courbet* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996), p. 366.

> the Commune ... set up for the future, not through its governors but through its defenders, a more superior ideal to all the revolutions that preceded it ... a new society in which there are no masters by birth, title or wealth, and no slaves by origin, caste or salary. Everywhere the word "commune" was understood in the largest sense, as referring to a new humanity, made up of free and equal companions, oblivious to the existence of old boundaries, helping each other in peace from one end of the world to the other.[4]

In their capacity to think together domains of the social formation that the bourgeoisie devotes itself to keeping apart—city and country, notably, but also theory and practice, mental and manual labor—the Communards tried to restart French history on another basis entirely. That basis and that history, though, could no longer be thought of as exactly "French" or national in its contours. It was at once smaller and far more expansive than that. The Communal imagination operated on the preferred scale of the local autonomous unit within an internationalist horizon. It had little room for the nation, or, for that matter, for the market or the state. This proved to be an extremely potent set of desires in the context in which it was generated—for what better moment to launch such an expansive project than when the French state, and the repressive bourgeois society it supported, had been so roundly defeated?

At the beginning of this introduction, I referred to the Commune as a worker-led insurrection that lasted seventy-two days and transformed Paris into an autonomous Commune whose social life was recalibrated according to principles of cooperation and association. Yet even a simple representation like this one of the facts of the event can become part of the problem. To explore what is meant by "communal luxury" I have had to expand the chronological and geographical frame of the event beyond the seventy-two Parisian days—from the March 18 attempted seizure of the cannons to the final bloody days of the massacre at the end of May—by which it is usually circumscribed. Following Alain Dalotel and others, I begin the event within the fever that erupted in working-class reunions and clubs in the final years of the Empire. And I end it with an extensive examination of the thought that was produced in the 1870s and 1880s when Communard refugees and exiles in England and Switzerland like Elisée Reclus, André Léo, Paul Lafargue, and Gustave Lefrançais, among others, met up with and collaborated with a number of their supporters and fellow travelers—people like Marx, Kropotkin, and William Morris. Though geographically distant from the spring insurrection, these last three of its contemporaries—like another, Arthur Rimbaud, about whom I have written elsewhere—were among the many for whom what had transpired in Paris during those few weeks had become a turning point in their lives and in their thinking.

[4] Elisée Reclus, in *La Revue blanche, 1871: Enquête sur la Commune* [1897] (Paris: Editions de l'amateur, 2011), pp. 81–2. Here and elsewhere, translations from the French are mine.

I have altered the customary temporal and spatial limits of the Commune to include the way it spilled out into these adjacent scenes for two very precise reasons. The expanded temporality allows me to show that the civil war was not, as is usually stated, an outgrowth of the patriotism and circumstantial hardships brought on by the foreign war. It allows me, in fact, to show something like the reverse: the foreign war as a momentary aspect of an ongoing civil war. Secondly, foregrounding the theoretical production that followed and was produced by the movement in exile outside of France (rather than, say, the thinkers that preceded it, the Proudhons or the Blanquis) allows me to trace, in the displacements, intersections, and writings of the survivors, a kind of afterlife that does not exactly *come after* but in my view is part and parcel of the event itself. The French word *survie* evokes this nicely: a life beyond life. Not the memory of the event or its legacy, although some form of these are surely already in the making, but its *prolongation*, every bit as vital to the event's logic as the initial acts of insurrection in the streets of the city. It is a continuation of the combat by other means. In the dialectic of the lived and the conceived—the phrase is Henri Lefebvre's—the thought of a movement is generated only with and after it: unleashed by the creative energies and excess of the movement itself. Actions produce dreams and ideas, and not the reverse.

Thought so intimately tied to the excess of an event does not have the finesse and fine tuning of theory produced at a safe distance, whether geographical or chronological. It bears the traces of its moment—or better, it views itself as *still a part of* the actual building of that moment, and so it is a rough-hewn, constructive kind of thought. It bears little resemblance to "high theory" in the usual sense of the term. *The Civil War in France* is not the same kind of book as *Capital*. And if Reclus and Morris, for example, are sometimes thought of as wooly or unsystematic thinkers, it is because they insisted on looking upon thinking as creating and building a context where ideas might be both productive and immediately effective in their moment.

When I first wrote about Communard Elisée Reclus twenty-five years ago, his work was virtually unknown outside of studies by a few pioneering anti-colonial geographers like Béatrice Giblin and Yves Lacoste. Now he is at the center of an enormous amount of international attention directed at rethinking his work as a kind of ecologism *avant la lettre*. His writings on anarchism, like those of Kropotkin, have also been the subject of renewed interest. And, at the same time, William Morris has emerged in the minds of many as a founding voice in the discourse of "socialist ecology." But the focus of current scholarship, as helpful as it has been for my own thinking, refrains from grounding, except in passing, any of the political thinking of Morris, Kropotkin, or Reclus in its historical relationship with what Morris called "the attempt to establish society on the basis of the freedom of labour, which we call the Commune of Paris of 1871."[5] Establishing that connection is part of the work of the last sections of the book. Another

[5] William Morris, "The Hopes of Civilization," in A. L. Morton, ed., *The Political Writings of William Morris* (London: Wishart, 1973), p. 175.

focus is a comparison of the profound and interrelated rethinking, in the work of these three writers, of what Reclus called solidarity, Morris called "fellowship," and Kropotkin "mutual aid," not as a moral or ethical sensibility, but as political strategy.

As I have attempted to trace the immediate *survie* of the movement—what occurred in the lifetime of its participants—I have been reminded of an image borrowed from Reclus's favorite book among the many that he authored, *L'Histoire d'un ruisseau*. In that little book, written for schoolchildren and often given out as a school prize, he evokes the serpentine form of the "tiny system of rivulets that appear on the sand after the ocean's wave has retreated."[6] If, for our purposes, the wave is both the enormity of the Commune's aspiration and accomplishments and the violence of the massacre that crushed it, then in the wake of *and in the midst of* these two counter-movements of gargantuan force, a tiny system of airholes, the evidence of an unseen world, appears—already—in the sand. That system of rapid exchanges, intersections, and collaborations, of symbolic forms of solidarity and scattered, often ephemeral encounters, may well be momentary but it is also a momentum—and this is what I have tried to convey in the latter part of the book. *L'Histoire d'un ruisseau* is also useful to us here in another way, for it suggests how we might understand the disproportionate historical power of the Commune as event in relation to its relatively small scale. The book was part of a series commissioned by Pierre-Jules Hetzel, publisher of Jules Verne, Proudhon, and Turgenev, who designed the series with a typically mid-nineteenth-century encyclopedic ambition: to provide for adolescents a "literature of histories"—the history of things and elements not usually considered to have a history. Thus, a well-known astronomer was asked to write a history of the sky, and Viollet-le-Duc authored a history of an hôtel-de-ville and a cathedral. Reclus's choice, to write a history of a brook or stream, reflected his predilection for a kind of non-pathological geographic scale that favored the field, for example, or the village, or the *quartier*. The Commune, we might say, is perhaps best figured as having the qualities Reclus attributes in his book to the mountain stream. Its scale and geography are livable, not sublime. The stream, in his view, was superior to the river because of the unpredictability of its course. The river's torrents of water barrel down a deep furrow pre-carved by the thousands of gallons that have preceded it; the stream, on the other hand, makes its own way. But for that very reason, the relative strength of the waters of any mountain brook is proportionately greater than that of the Amazon.

[6] Elisée Reclus, *Histoire d'un ruisseau* (Paris: Actes Sud, 1995), p. 93.

# 1. Beyond the "Cellular Regime of Nationality"

Our Flag Is the Flag of the Universal Republic

When Marx wrote that what mattered most about the Paris Commune of 1871 was not any ideals it sought to realize but rather its own "working existence," he underlined the extent to which the insurgents shared no blueprint of the society to come. The Commune, in this sense, was a working laboratory of political inventions, improvised on the spot or hobbled together out of past scenarios and phrases, reconfigured as need be, and fed by desires awakened in the popular reunions at the end of the Empire. An insurrection in the capital fought under the flag of the Universal Republic, the Commune as event and as political culture has always proved resistant to any seamless integration into the national narrative. As one of its former members recalled years later, it was, above all else, "an audacious act of internationalism."[1] Under the Commune Paris wanted to be not the capital of France but an autonomous collective in a universal federation of peoples. It did not wish to be a state but rather an element, a unit in a federation of communes that was ultimately international in scale. Yet aside from a regular nod from historians to the number and prominence of some of its foreign members, the non-nationalist originality of the Commune has not been central to the way it has been remembered. And the traces of the way that this aspect of its distinct political imaginary was produced and practiced are not easily perceptible in standard histories of the event, preoccupied for the most part by military maneuvers and the legislative quarrels and accomplishments at the Hôtel de Ville.

For such traces we must turn instead to a passage like this one from the memoirs of Louise Michel. It is April 1871. She has already described, in her words, "a black man as black as jet, with pointed teeth like those of a wild animal; he is very good, very intelligent, and very brave, a former *zouave pontifical* converted to the Commune":

> One very night, I don't know how, it happened that we two were alone in the trench in front of the station; the former *zouave pontifical* and me, with two loaded rifles ... we were incredibly lucky that the station was not attacked that night. As we were performing our sentry duty, coming and going in the trench, he said to me when we met up:
>
> – What effect does the life we are leading have on you?

[1] M. Chauvière, cited in *La Revue blanche, 1871: Enquête sur la Commune*, p. 51.

– Well, I said, the effect of seeing before us a shore that we have to reach.

– For me, he replied, the effect is one of reading a book with pictures.

We continued walking back and forth in the trench under the silence of the Versaillais at Clamart.[2]

Here we can begin to make out the improbable and unscheduled makeup of Commune activities, practices that could draw together an African from the Papal Guards and former school-teacher Louise Michel, her old army trooper's *godillots* under her dress, the two alone performing sentry duty late at night. The Papal Army had fought on the side of the French in the Franco-Prussian War but disbanded when the Prussians entered Paris; this fact helps explain the African's presence in the area at the time but it does not explain his conversion to the Commune. But beyond the striking visual distribution of these particular individuals in a narrative and in a trench, there is also the way the two can be heard reflecting upon how to understand their own presence in history and its workings *as it is occurring.* These are enigmatic and elliptical reflections to be sure, but we might interpret them something like this: Are we going somewhere new, or are we reading an old, illustrated book, an adventure story, perhaps, or a story of the French Revolution? Are we to reach a new world, or are we figures speaking from our ready-made place in a narrative? Are we new men, new women, or are we repositioned characters in the vividly tinted imagery of an old story? The experiences expressed by the two Communards are different and show how differently one's relationship to one's own political subjectivization might come to be lived. But they are not contradictory, and they give us a glimpse into the transformation of the experience of time under the Commune and its relation to the social, a relation that has everything to do with forms of historical memory taking on new shapes and figures or mobilizing old shapes and figures in a new context.

The prehistory to this scene can be found in the waves of dust and enthusiasm, the fever that took hold inside the popular reunions and club meetings across Paris during the final two years of the Empire. Commune veteran as well as its first and most influential historian, Prosper Olivier Lissagaray, never placed much stock in the popular reunions, viewing them as dens of Jacobin posturing and rhetoric, big talk and little action—the scene of words, not deeds. Perhaps for this reason all major historical accounts of the Commune have followed Lissagaray's lead in beginning and anchoring the story of the Commune on March 18, 1871 with a deed (or rather a failed one): with what Marx called Thiers' "burglarious" attempt to confiscate the cannons of Montmartre, cannons that belonged to the National Guard, and that had been paid for by local, neighborhood subscription. Working-class women fraternized with the soldiers, who refused the order to fire into the crowd. Frank Jellinek, Stewart Edwards, Henri Lefebvre, most recently Alain Badiou—virtually all histories or analyses of the Commune are built on the edifice of a prominent chapter entitled "The 18th of March."

[2] Louise Michel, *La Commune: Histoire et souvenirs* [1898] (Paris: La Découverte, 2005), p. 170.

Thus the Commune begins with bungling overreach on the part of the state and the reaction it provokes; its origins are spontaneous and circumstantial, growing out of the particular circumstances of the Franco-Prussian War, and they are motivated by strong sentiments of national defense on the part of Parisians. With this last point even Thiers, who would refer to the Commune as "misguided patriotism," or "patriotism gone awry," would agree.[3]

But if we begin with the state, we end with the state. Let us begin instead with the popular reunions at the end of the Empire, the various associations and committees they spawned, and the "buzzing hives" that were the revolutionary clubs of the Siege. Then we see a different picture. For it was the reunions and the clubs that created and instilled the idea—well before the fact—of a social commune. What developed in the meetings was the desire to substitute a communal organization, which is to say a direct cooperation of all energies and intelligences, for a government composed of traitors and incompetents. The police at the time, numerous Communards, as well as a minority strain among subsequent historians of the Commune, knew this well. "It is the clubs and the associations that have done all the harm ... I attribute all of the events which have just come to pass in Paris to the clubs and the reunions ... to the desire of those people to live better than their condition allows."[4] In his dictionary of the Commune, anti-Communard Chevalier d'Alix defines "clubs" and public reunions as "the Collège de France of insurrection."[5] Historian Robert Wolfe writes, "If one had to trace the origins of the Commune back to a single starting point, one could do worse than to choose June 19, 1868, the date of the first unauthorized public meeting in Paris under the Second Empire."[6]

But I would choose a different starting point, a few months later. The scene is the same: the evening meeting in the Vaux-Hall ballroom at Château-d'eau. By then Parisians had already taken possession of their right to gather and associate and had been meeting together for a few months. In the first reunions veterans of 1848, old and experienced orators, met together with young workers from the Paris section of the International Workers' Association and with refugees from London, Brussels, and Geneva. Those who spoke did so "with decorum, tact, often with some talent, and

[3] Adolphe Thiers speaking before the Assemblée Nationale, cited in *La Revue blanche, 1871: Enquête sur la Commune*, p. 43.

[4] A police official of the Government of National Defense in 1872, cited in Robert Wolfe, "The Origins of the Paris Commune: The Popular Organizations of 1868–71," PhD diss., Harvard University, July 1965, p. 162.

[5] Chevalier d'Alix, *Dictionnaire de la Commune et des communeux* (La Rochelle: A. Thoreux, [May] 1871), p. 16.

[6] Wolfe, "The Origins of the Paris Commune," p. 41. Other historians who have emphasized the importance of the popular reunions and committees include Alain Dalotel, Alain Faure, and Jean-Claude Freiermuth, *Aux origines de la Commune* (Paris: Maspero, 1980); Jean Dautry and Lucien Scheler, *Le Comité Central Républicain des vingt arrondissements de Paris* (Paris: Editions sociales, 1960); and Martin Philip Johnson, *The Paradise of Association* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

showed real knowledge of the questions they addressed."[7] The topic, for several weeks, had been women's labor and ways of getting their salaries increased. Two months of such meetings had ensued: they were orderly, statistical exposés on women's salaries to which the press paid little attention and to which the government sometimes forgot to send its police spies. But one evening in the autumn a certain Louis Alfred Briosne, forty-six years old and a *feuillagiste* (artificial flower and leaf maker) by trade, took the podium amidst an atmosphere of fairly generalized boredom. Neither his less-than-average stature nor the fact that his body was ridden with the tuberculosis he would soon thereafter succumb to, prevented him from dropping a bomb into the room:

> There arrived at the dais a short man leaning on the podium, as several people observed, as though he were about to swim out into the audience.

Up until then, orators had begun to speak with the sacramental formula: "Mesdames et Messieurs..." This speaker, in a clear and sufficiently vibrant voice cried out an appellation that had been deeply forgotten for a quarter century: "Citoyennes et citoyens!"

The room erupted in applause. The man who had been welcomed in this fashion did not, perhaps, go on to say anything more interesting than any of the others had—what does it matter? By throwing out his "citoyens," he had evoked—whether purposely or not, who knows?—a whole world of memories and hopes. Each person present gave a start, shivered ... the effect was immense and its reverberation spread outdoors.[8]

Communard Gustave Lefrançais, whose account this is, links the resonance of the words immediately to their last moment of common usage a quarter of a century earlier—sacred words of the revolutionary vocabulary widespread in 1789 and again in 1848. "Citoyens" was among the appellations that date back to 1789 and that were kept alive thanks to secret societies and revolutionary traditions—"patriots," another such word, had, for example, gone out of fashion with young socialists and was nowhere to be found in 1871. But the particular force of its use by Briosne in the Vaux-Hall meeting has less to do with a hearkening back to the past than it does with the way that "citoyen," in this instance, does not connote membership in a national body but rather a cleavage therein, a social gap or division affirmed in the heart of the national citizenry, a separation of the *citoyen* from what at that precise moment becomes its antonym, the now ghostly departed *mesdames* and *messieurs*—the bourgeoisie, *les honnêtes gens.* And "connote" is the wrong word to use, for the words perform a forcible inscription of social division, an active, self-authorizing assertion of disidentification—from the state, from the nation, from all of the customs and phatic *politesses* that make up middle-class French society. The words *citoyen, citoyenne* no longer indicate national belonging—they are addressed to people who have separated themselves

[7] Gustave Lefrançais, *Etude sur le movement communaliste à Paris en 1871* (Neuchâtel: G. Guillaume Fils, 1871), p. 46.

[8] Gustave Lefrançais, *Souvenirs d'un révolutionnaire* [1902] (Paris: La Fabrique, 2013), pp. 266–7.

from the national collectivity. And because the words are an interpellation, a direct second-person address, they create that gap or division in a *now*, in the contemporary moment constituted by the speech act; they create a new temporality in the present and, essentially, an agenda—something that all the speeches presenting well-meaning statistical data about women's labor could not have begun to create. They allow an understanding of the present, in its unfolding, as historical, as changing. Paradoxically, perhaps, in this instance, it is the unspoken words "Mesdames, messieurs" which, when they are spoken and repeated, create the space/time of the nation and not *citoyen*. For the repetitive temporality created by the "sacramental formula" "Mesdames, messieurs" is the saturated time of the nation—a spatialized time, in fact, in keeping with Ernst Bloch's observation that there is no time in national history, only space. "Thus, nationhood," he writes, "drives time, indeed history *out of history*: it is space and organic fare, nothing else; it is that 'true collective' whose underground elements are supposed to swallow the uncomfortable class struggle of the present..."[9] The name "citoyen," on the other hand, may well be old and originate in another moment of the political past, but its iteration in this instance creates the now of a shared political subjectivization, "the uncomfortable class struggle of the present." It interpellates listeners to be part of that present. *Citoyen, citoyenne* summons, then, a subject predicated on any number of disidentifications—from the state, the Empire, the police, and the world of the so-called "honnêtes gens." The words are not addressed to the French national citizen. They conjure up an ideal of *la femme libre, l'homme libre*, a non-nationally circumscribed being, and are addressed to and responded to by such listeners accordingly.

What went on in the reunions and the clubs verged on a quasi-Brechtian merging of pedagogy and entertainment. An entry fee of a few centimes to pay for the lighting was charged. Club meetings provided instruction, though to what pedagogical end was open to debate. They were "schools for the people,"[10] frequented, according to Communard Elie Reclus, by "citizens, who, for the most part, had never talked to each other until then";[11] they were "schools of demoralization, disturbance and depravity," in the words of another contemporary observer.[12] At the same time the nightly evening meetings had, in effect, replaced the theaters that had been shut down by the government since before the Siege, and some regular orators were known for their flamboyant theatricality. Shoemaker Napoléon Gaillard, according to Maxime du Camp, gave as many as forty-seven speeches between November 1868 and November 1869, often wearing a red Phrygian bonnet.[13] Before September 4, certain topics were policed and subject

[9] Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 90.

[10] Sébille, Club Folies-Belleville, January 30, 1869, cited in Dalotel et al., *Aux origines de la Commune*, p. 13.

[11] Elie Reclus, *La Commune de Paris, au jour le jour, 1871, 19 mars–28 mai* (Paris: Schleicher frères, 1908), p. 46.

[12] Ernest Merson, *Fermez les clubs!* (Paris, 1871), cited in Wolfe, "The Origins of the Paris Commune," p. 163.

[13] Dalotel et al., *Aux origines de la Commune*, p. 96.

to censor, and considerable suspense was generated by speakers who at any moment might venture into forbidden territory and cause the proceedings to be shut down amidst the din of roared opposition.

Often, though, government censorship of topics related to politics and religion had the paradoxical effect of enabling vaster, more imaginative speculation to take place. It was forbidden, for example, to denounce particular government hacks but discussions about how to bring about an end to all inheritance could proceed unchecked. Skirting the narrow parameters of what the Empire deemed political allowed a more thoroughgoing vision of social transformation to come into view. One could not speak against the emperor or his various functionaries but one could advocate for an end to private property, or as one speaker put it: "Individual ownership of land is incompatible with the new society."[14] Hatred of capitalism, along with denunciation of bourgeois "vampires" or "cannibals," was a regular topic, and a particular favorite of speakers like Gaillard père. "The big question [in the clubs] is that of bread, which is to say, property: whatever subject appears to be addressed, it's really about that."[15] In the public meetings, where anyone was free to speak but the public shouted down those they had had enough of, no one political faction or generation could dominate. After September 4, as the reunions transformed themselves into clubs with more distinct ideological positions, certain speakers became "regulars" associated with certain clubs. But there were always "orateurs de hasard," amateurs speaking for the first time, as well as "orateurs ambulants" like Gaillard fils, performing a kind of *colportage* of different discourses and working to disseminate strategies from club to club. The entire club presided over by Blanqui, the *Club de la Patrie en danger*, was *itself* ambulatory, meeting from week to week in different hastily scheduled venues scattered across the city.

From the first months of 1869, demands for the Commune could be heard in all of the reunions, and "vive la Commune" was the cry that opened and closed sessions in the more revolutionary clubs in the north of Paris: Batignolles, Charonne, Belleville, Villette.[16] Accounts of club proceedings, which by now clubists were publishing themselves in order to combat bourgeois misrepresentation of their doings, reveal a kind of crescendo of feverish anticipation around "the burning question of the Commune."[17] As a slogan, the Commune melted divergences between left factions, enabling solidarity, alliance, and a shared project:

[14] es Orateurs des reunions publiques de Paris en 1869. Compte rendu des séances publiques* (Paris: Imprimerie Town et Vossen, 1869), p. 38.

[15] Elisée Reclus, letter to Pierre Faure, undated from 1869, *Correspondances*, vol. 3 (Paris: Librairie Schleicher, 1914), p. 63.

[16] Dalotel et al., *Aux origines de la Commune*, pp. 255–6. Meetings in 1869, for example, were devoted to the theme of "The Organization of the Social Commune," and "The Social Commune: Ways and Means of Execution."

[17] Gustave de Molinari, *Les Clubs rouges pendant le siège de Paris* (Paris: Garnier, 1871), p. 217.

> We will have it, surely, our Commune, our grand democratic and social Commune ... the light will descend from the heights of Belleville and Ménilmontant, to dissipate the dark shadows of the Hôtel de Ville. We will sweep away the reaction like the janitor sweeps the apartment on Saturdays [prolonged laughter and applause. A great tumult at the back of the room as a citizen who was found dishonoring the inlaid parquet floor of the hall is violently thrown out].[18]

Ambulatory orators helped revolutionary clubs to federate with each other, in the now familiar structure shared by all of the embryonic organizations that preceded the Commune but which were in many ways indistinguishable from it. That structure, a kind of decentralized federation of local, independent worker-based committees organized by *arrondissement*, had been adopted by the Paris section of the International, some 50,000 members strong in the spring of 1870. It was also the structure of the National Guard, which had, by that point, in effect "federated itself." Members of the International organized the early Vigilance Committees out of people chosen in the public reunions; these then chose their delegates to the Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements, installed in a room on the Place de la Corderie lent to them by the International. All these embryos or x-rays of the Commune testify to the presence of a strong decentralized revolutionary structure, organized by *arrondissement* and tied to popular concerns like food and hatred of the clergy, with its "luxe oriental" and its exemption from fighting. "Let's strip them [priests and seminarians] to their chemises and march them to the ramparts!"[19]

By shifting our attention away from the Hôtel de Ville, both before March 26 and after, when the Commune government had more or less established its residency there, I am trying to make visible another social and political geography in the city which included the clubs that met throughout the city, as well as the Place de la Corderie, with its triumvirate of the International, the Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements, and, after early March, the Central Committee of the National Guard. It was here, for example, at the Place de la Corderie, that the furniture-maker Jean-Louis Pindy came when he was released from prison on September 4, homeless, knowing he could find a bed. And it was here that Elisabeth Dmitrieff came directly when she landed from London on March 28, a special correspondent sent by Marx to report back about the Commune for the International. At the Place de la Corderie, more than at the Hôtel de Ville, the questions in the early months of 1871 are not national questions, properly speaking. There is just the larger struggle of the Revolution, in the form of the free union of autonomous collectives, against the state.

The Commune was both rallying cry and the thing itself. Attempting to differentiate the two or establish the moment when the one was transformed into the other may be

[18] Ibid., p. 68.
[19] Ibid., pp. 113, 70.

beside the point. For Communard Arthur Arnould, this is because the Commune was less an uprising than the advent or affirmation of a politics:

> [After January 1871] Paris had no government—gone to Bordeaux, the army in disesteem and poorly armed, generals universally held in contempt, no police on the streets ... We had nothing but an anonymous power, representation by Monsieur Tout le Monde. At that moment, and this is a point on which I can't insist too much, because it's so important and it seems to have gone unnoticed, *the Commune already in fact existed.*[20]

Arnould, who after the Commune's demise would try to survive his exile in Switzerland by selling chickens, wrote a theoretical analysis of the Commune with the same title Lenin would choose a few decades later: *The State and the Revolution.* He continues:

> Paris had been left to itself, separated from the government in Bordeaux, in terms of physical distance as well as emotional distance. Paris was living its own life, following its own will ... It had learned absolute contempt for the only two governmental forms that had existed up until then in our country: the monarchy and the bourgeois, oligarchical Republic...

The Paris Commune was something MORE and something OTHER than an uprising. It was the advent of a principle, the affirmation of a politics. In a word, it was not only one more revolution, it was a new revolution, carrying in the folds of its flag a wholly original and characteristic program.[21]

And its flag was the flag of the Universal Republic.

How does republicanism change when one's republic is conceived as a universal one? On the second day after the Commune was proclaimed, all foreigners were admitted into its ranks, because "our flag is the flag of the Universal Republic."[22] Leo Frankel, elected as member of the Commune, writes to Marx on March 30:

> I was elected with several other members of the International to the Commission of Labor and Exchange and this fact compels me to send you this note. My election was validated in today's meeting and it's unnecessary for me to add how overjoyed I was by this action, and that I appreciate it not from a personal point of view but uniquely and exclusively for its *international* character.[23]

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[20] Arthur Arnould, *Histoire populaire et parlementaire de la Commune de Paris* (Brussels: Librairie socialiste de Henri Kistemaeckers, 1878), p. 80. Arnould's emphasis.

[21] Ibid., pp. 80, 92, 163.

[22] *ournal Officiel de la république française sous la commune* [1871] (Paris: Editions Ressouvenances, 1995), p. 103.

[23] Frankel to Marx, March 30, 1871. Cited in Sylvie Braibant, *Elisabeth Dmitrieff, aristocrate et pétroleuse* (Paris: Editions Belfond, 1993), p. 122.

The phrase "universal republic" gained prominence during the Siege in the clubs, in the committee movements, and among members of the International, who used it interchangeably with *République des travailleurs*.[24] The phrase alluded to a set of desires, identifications and practices that could not be contained or defined by the territory of the state or circumscribed by the nation, and vividly differentiated its users in this way from parliamentary or liberal republicans who believed in the preservation of a strong, centralized state authority as guarantor of social order. The Universal Republic meant the dismantling of the Imperial bureaucracy, and first and foremost its standing army and its police. "It is not enough to emancipate each nation in particular from under the thumb of the king," wrote Elisée Reclus. "It must be liberated from the supremacy of other nations, its boundaries must be abolished, those limits and frontiers that make enemies out of sympathetic peoples ... Our rallying cry is no longer 'Long live the Republic' but 'Long live the Universal Republic'."[25]

But the term did not originate with the Commune. Reiterated throughout the insurrection and the years preceding it, *universal republic* in fact owed its existence to a brief moment of internationalism during the 1789 revolution.[26] Its creator, Prussian-born Anacharsis Cloots, supported the French Revolution along with Tom Paine on internationalist grounds; this did not, however, save Cloots from the guillotine. Yet far from implying a return to the principles of the bourgeois 1789 revolution, the slogan *universal republic*, when spoken by Communards, marks their break from the legacy of the French Revolution in the direction of a real working-class internationalism. They were to show the extent to which they had reworked the slogan for their own purposes in three important acts: with the burning of the guillotine on the Place Voltaire on April 10; with the May 16 destruction of the Vendôme Column, built to glorify Napoleonic imperialist conquests; and with the establishment on April 11 of the Women's Union.

When a group of mostly women hauled a guillotine under the statue of Voltaire and lit it ablaze, they were trying, it seems, to break down any equivalence or equation between revolution and the gallows. The destruction of the Vendôme Column, according to Communard Benoît Malon, was conducted as an indictment of wars between peoples and as a promotion of international fraternity. In part because the Column was to plague the remainder of the life of Gustave Courbet, who was held responsible for its destruction, its toppling is one of the Communards' most well-known acts, and will not concern us here. (What is less well-known, however, is the re-baptism they performed after they tore the column down. "The Place Vendôme is called from this

[24] The Club de la Révolution, for example, meeting in Montmartre in December 1870, determined its membership according to commitment to three principles: "1. Political goal: establish the universal republic. 2. Social and economic goals: equivalence in function and collectivism. 3. Means: revolution and the Commune." De Molinari, *Les Clubs rouges pendant le siege de Paris*, p. 166.

[25] Elisée Reclus [1851], cited in *Le Libertaire*, August 28–October 1, 1925.

[26] See Sophie Wahnich, *L'Impossible citoyen* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997); see also Bilal Hashmi, "Worlding the Universal" (unpublished paper).

moment onwards: Place Internationale."[27]) Let us turn instead to the Union of Women and its founder, the twenty-year-old Russian Elisabeth Dmitrieff.

In an astoundingly compressed span of time, Elisabeth Dmitrieff went about establishing a kind of transversal or conduit between the two most significant political thinkers of the time, Marx and Chernyshevsky, and this in two ways: theoretically and in act. Dmitrieff spent the three months before the Commune in London, in near daily discussions with Marx in his study, on the topic of the traditional Russian rural organizations, the *obshina* and the *artel*, and the way these were being theorized by Russian populists, and especially Chernyshevsky. Marx's study of the Russian language was at that point far enough along that he could get by in the original; he could read copies of the journal Dmitrieff co-edited, *La Cause du peuple* (Narodnoe Delo), copies that Dmitrieff had been sent from Geneva by the newly formed Russian section of the International to make sure that he knew about.

The trajectory that took Dmitrieff from Saint Petersburg to Geneva to her meeting with Marx to her activities in the Commune was almost single-handedly fueled by her reading as a young teenager of a novel by Chernyshevsky that had been written in four months while its author was incarcerated for crimes against the state in the Petropavlosk fortress. The novel or anti-novel, *What Is to Be Done?* (1863)—another title Lenin would borrow—gave Dmitrieff a script to follow. It inspired the white marriage that freed her from her family, gave her access to the inheritance she would use to fund *La Cause du peuple*, and enabled her journey to Geneva where her signature appears on the document listing the founding members of the Russian section of the International.

To return to our opening discussion of Louise Michel's memory about sentry duty, we might say that in her own way Elisabeth Dmitrieff was at once reading a book with pictures *and* trying to reach a new shore. Chernyshevsky's novel, read and re-read by Dmitrieff's generation of educated young Russians, recounts such a break for freedom on the part of Vera Pavlovna, who uses her emancipation to live communally and work with other like-minded young people transforming society through production cooperatives. The fictional Vera founds a women's sewing collective, transforming private enterprise into a production cooperative, and then a cooperative at the level of consumption as well, encompassing all aspects of daily life. Individual freedom defines one's participation in the collective, and Vera Pavlovna herself refuses to embody any kind of authority role: "She conformed to her own rules: never ordering, but counseling, explaining, offering her help, contributing to the implementation of the group's decisions."[28] Chernyshevsky's fictional sewing collective, a kind of urban *obshina*, went on to serve as a real-life model for countless similar initiatives throughout Russia. *What*

[27] Georges Jeanneret, *Paris pendant la commune révolutionnaire de* '71 [1872] (Paris: Editions d'histoire sociale, 1968), p. 140.

[28] Nikolay Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1986), p. 178. For a sense of the effects of Chernyshevsky's novel on readers at that time, see Sonia Werner, "The Reality Effect and Real Effects of Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?*," in *Novel* 47:3 (2014).

*Is to Be Done?* swept through Russia like wildfire. Its major accomplishment was to provide a path to socialism that drew readers away from distant dreams to a direct encounter with everyday reality. Its message—and it was very much a book with a message—is that actions create dreams and not the reverse.

Marx's writings, virtually unknown in Russia at the time, were already familiar to Dmitrieff when she arrived in Geneva in 1869, intent on finding a way of bringing about a theoretical convergence between Marx's economic theories and Chernyshevsky's belief in the emancipatory potential of the traditional peasant commune. Geneva, where Bakunin was also in residence, and where numerous Commune survivors would later spend their years of exile, thus became the scene of the Russian revolutionaries' first contact with the international socialist movement; there Dmitrieff met other future Communards like Eugène Varlin and Benoît Malon, with whom she would work two years later in the streets of Paris. For Russians like Dmitrieff, Nicholas and Natalie Utin, and the others who wrote for *La Cause du peuple*, the fact that it was the Russian suppression of the Polish rebellion of 1863 that had helped bring the International to life was a major reason to support the organization: "The overwhelming significance of the International ... consists in this, that it serves as the expression of the movement that embraces all European countries and the United States in the name of the solidarity of all workers of all lands."[29]

The theoretical project of the small and short-lived Russian section of the International in Geneva aimed to show that while the form of the struggle in Russia—the peasantry versus tsarism—was different than what Marx had addressed, it was nonetheless the same struggle. While embracing Marx, the writers for *La Cause* were oriented toward peasant issues; they wanted to show that just as the International was committed to the collectivization of the land so the workings of the peasant commune were not theoretically or practically incompatible with Marx and the west. The journal's program statement, later to be echoed in the text Benoît Malon and André Léo addressed to the French peasantry from inside a besieged Commune, reads as follows: "As the foundation of economic justice, we advance two fundamental theses: the land belongs to those who work it with their own hands: to the agricultural communes. Capital and all the tools of labor [belong to] the workers: to the workers' associations."[30]

The result of this theoretical cross-fertilization was a kind of "revitalized commune." It is important to remember that Chernyshevsky, when compared to other populists in Russia, had already taken to a higher theoretical degree the possible conjunctures between traditional and modern structures. His theory of the pretermission in Russia of the capitalist stage of development—the idea, that is, that Russia may well go directly to socialism from its existing semi-feudalism—was predicated on the ancient communal structures, the *obshina*, being untethered from any notion of the "Russian

[29] *arodnoe Delo*, nos. 4–6 (May 1869), cited in Woodford McClellan, *Revolutionary Exiles: The Russians in the First International and the Paris Commune* (London: Frank Cass, 1979), p. 58.

[30] *Narodnoe Delo*, no. 1 (September 1, 1868), cited in McClellan, *Revolutionary Exiles*, p. 15.

national soul" or "Slavic spirit" dear to Slavophiles. "This communal spirit we are not at all disposed to consider some kind of secret quality possessed exclusively by the Slavic or Great Russian nature."[31] Nor could these antique artisanal guilds be allowed to continue in the strict corporatism they had operated under since the Middle Ages. Most importantly, they must be stripped of their oppressive and patriarchal ways. Their revitalization and future potential lay in their being reworked through socialist designs like Fourier's *phalanstère*; only though a merger of sorts with such imaginings could the old structures serve as instruments for peasant emancipation.

For Marx, the meetings with Dmitrieff and his immersion in the writings of Chernyshevsky on the agricultural commune would have far-reaching effects that I discuss at some length in Chapter 3. His thinking turns toward the possibility of multiple paths to socialism—a turn that would only come to full fruition several years later in the form of his correspondence with another young Russian woman, Vera Zasulich.

Woodford McClellan, whose book on Russian revolutionaries in exile I have relied on for my account of Dmitrieff in Geneva, remarks in passing that the members of the Russian section of the International were never to achieve any practical realization of their theoretical endeavors. And yet Dmitrieff's organizational achievement during the Commune, the Women's Union, was nothing if not that: the convergence in action of the theories of Marx and Chernyshevsky. Engels may later have called Dmitrieff the "spiritual daughter of the International," and Dmitrieff may have seen herself as organizing for the International.[32] Indeed, the Women's Union has come to be understood, in effect, as the first women's section of the International. But Dmitrieff had not yet stopped reading *What Is to Be Done?* Already in St. Petersburg at the age of sixteen, aware of the exorbitant rates property owners charged to peasants to grind their wheat, she had attempted to design and instigate a cooperative community mill on the principle of the *artel*. It was only in Paris, however, and under the Commune, that the fictional Vera Pavlovna's *atelier-phalanstère* achieved a real working existence in the form of the Women's Union.

Founded on April 11 at the height of the Commune, the *Women's Union for the Defense of Paris and Aid to the Wounded* grew rapidly, installing committees that met daily in almost all the *arrondissements* of Paris. It became the Commune's largest and most effective organization. Its provisionary council was composed of Dmitrieff and seven women workers; its membership, though varied, was dominated by women in the garment trades: seamstresses, laundresses, dressmakers, drapery makers. In some ways, the Women's Union can be seen as the practical response to many of the questions and problems regarding women's labor that had been the discussion topic at the earliest popular reunions of 1868. And just as the reunion discussions veered back

[31] Chernyshevsky, cited in *Narodnoe Delo*, nos. 7–10 (November 1869), p. 137.

[32] Dmitrieff, letter to Hermann Jung as conduit to Marx on April 24: "In general, the internationalist propagandizing I am doing here, in order to show that all countries, including Germany, find themselves on the eve of the social revolution, is a very pleasing proposition to women." Cited in Yvonne Singer-Lecocq, *Rouge Elisabeth* (Paris: Pascal Galodé, 2011), p. 130.

and forth between far-reaching theoretical goals like the end of private property and more immediate concerns like finding coal or firewood, so the Union envisioned a full reorganization of women's labor and the end of gender-based economic inequality at the same time that, as its full name implies, it was geared toward the immediate combat situation and the need to serve ambulances, to make sandbags for—and to serve on—barricades. "We want work, but in order to keep the product. No more exploiters, no more masters. Work and well-being for all."[33]

The Union showed no trace of interest in parliamentary or rights-based demands. In this its members were, like Louise Michel, Paule Minck and other women in the Commune, indifferent to the vote (a major goal in 1848) and to traditional forms of republican politics in general. Participation in public life, in other words, was for them in no way tied to the franchise. Of much greater concern was finding immediate paid labor for women.[34] The Union proposed to Frankel and the Labor Commission that they form sewing workshops, free productive associations in each *arrondissement* devoted to clothing the National Guard; the Commission, they advised, should encourage "the growth of genuine and homogenous groupings by presiding over their formation and developing them in the federal spirit, all the time leaving them free and autonomous."[35] These producer-owned cooperatives were intended, had there been time, to be taken beyond the city walls, "put in contact with similar associations in France and other countries, in order to facilitate the export and exchange of products."[36] Ultimately they were to function like an extension of the Commune itself, as part of an international federation of independent cooperatives.

The scale of the Commune as an "audacious act of internationalism" can thus be measured not just by the number of Poles or Italians under its flag but by the conduits it enabled of theory and practice across national borders: the *obshina*, unmoored from its Slavophile roots, brought into the present and flourishing in a large European capital in the form of the Commune's *Union des Femmes*. The Commune's working existence that so impressed Marx was in this sense nothing more than a concerted practice of *importation*: of models and ideas, phrases and slogans, from distant lands and from distant times, to be reworked in the feverish atmosphere of the clubs and the Commune. It was a mode of being intensely in the present made possible by mobilizing figures and phrases from the past—first and foremost that of *commune* itself, its affective charge overwhelming any precise semantic content, a powerful mix of pre-capitalist and pre- or extra-national desires, equal part social revolution, local autonomy, and the memory of the insurrectional Commune that had made Paris the capital of revolution in 1792. *Commune*, at that point, was a name that exceeded

[33] Elisabeth Dmitrieff, "Appel aux citoyennes de Paris," *Journal Officiel*, April 11, 1871, p. 225.

[34] See Kathleen Jones and Françoise Vergès, "'Aux citoyennes!': Women, Politics and the Paris Commune of 1871," *History of European Ideas*, 13:6 (1991), pp. 711–32; Carolyn Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2004).

[35] Cited in Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune: 1871* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1971), p. 266.

[36] General Statutes of the Women's Union, cited in Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades*, p. 86.

everything it was supposed to designate. Like the *obshina*, the terms *citoyen, universal republic*, and *commune*, though borrowed from the national past, could be distilled through the internationalist aims and culture of the communal laboratory, and put to immediate use dissolving state bureaucracy.

The Universal Republic Versus Republican Universalism

On April 15, the Union of Women's General Assembly met and, "considering that Mme Elisabeth Dmitrieff has worked with a zeal and energy beyond her age," conferred upon her the title of "citizen of Paris, while waiting for the Universal Republic to give her the letters of naturalization necessary to make her a citizen of humanity."[37] The Women's Union had come into being with a call to *citoyennes* that began with a reminder to women of who the real enemy was: "Is it the foreigner who has come back to invade France? ... No, these enemies, these assassins of the people and of liberty are French!"[38] That enemy, the Versaillais, was for its part aware of, and indeed obsessed by, the foreigners in the midst of the Commune.

The image of a Commune made up of Poles, Prussians, and Italians was a regular slur in anti-Communard discourse, in part generated by the recurrent assimilation of the Commune with the International. And, as is usually the case in the counting of immigrants, outsiders, or foreigners, their numbers were vastly inflated. "The Commune's flag," wrote P. de Saint-Victor, "has recruited the mercenaries and marauders of all of Europe."[39] The Chevalier d'Alix, whose anti-Communard dictionary I've already cited, defines *étranger* as "that which makes up the majority of the Parisian insurgents. They are counted at 30,000, all nationalities mixed together."[40] Similarly Hippolyte Taine, in a letter written in May 1871, refers to "100,000 insurgents at present, of which 50,000 are foreigners."[41] At issue, of course, for these observers, is not Paris in its customary role as cosmopolitan center for visitors from all over the world; the problem lay, rather, with exactly what sort of visitors could now be found on its streets. As Marx put it quite vividly: "No longer was Paris the rendezvous of British landlords, Irish absentees, American ex-slaveholders and shoddy men, Russian ex-serfowners and Wallachian boyards."[42]

Is this excessive foreign element in Versaillais discourse a symptom or a tactic? Do the Versaillais actually perceive the Communards as foreigners, or are they rhetorically situating the evil outside the national boundaries by transforming the Communards into the familiar trope of the "outside agitator"? Any attempt to answer this question is complicated by the intricacies of conservative paranoia—in general, and at a

[37] Women's Union General Assembly, cited in Braibant, *Elisabeth Dmitrieff*, p. 108.

[38] Dmitrieff, "Appel aux Citoyennes de Paris," *Journal Officiel*, p. 225.

[39] P. de Saint-Victor, "L'Orgie rouge," cited in Paul Lidsky, *Les Ecrivains contre la Commune* (Paris: Maspero, 1982), p. 66.

[40] Chevalier d'Alix, *Dictionnaire de la Commune et des Communeux*, Paris, May 1871, p. 25.

[41] Hippolyte Taine, letter of 20 May, 1871, cited in Lidsky, *Les Ecrivains contre la Commune*, p. 68.

[42] Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), p. 67.

moment when the International loomed large in conservative imagination and was regularly accused of playing into the hands of the Prussians. And foreigners like Dmitrieff, Dombrowski, Frankel, and Wroblewski did play a highly visible role in the leadership of the Commune and particularly its military. It is also important to remember the broader context: in 1870 the French nation was less an established entity than it was a work-in-progress. In 1870, for example, only one out of two people in France had mastered the French language, and language is of course a major criterion in determining who is more French or less French than anyone else. Indeed, it was the massacre of the Communards that would serve to inaugurate not just the Third Republic but help to consolidate the French nation itself. "Othering" on the part of the Versaillais, their perception of or need to perceive the Communards as "less French" (and thus easier to kill) was in this sense part of the historical tendency of the dominant classes to exhibit class racism, considering workers *as*, in fact, foreign to the nation: "At the end of the 19th century and even at the beginning of the 20th, entire sectors of the population, beginning with the peasantry, and then essentially the mass of industrial workers, were excluded by the leading classes of the bourgeoisie and the nobility from the identity of we national citizens."[43]

The Versaillais' attribution of occult foreign power to the International was made easier by the way in which that organization could be inserted into the already existing mythology surrounding another internationalist organization, the Free Masons—an organization that also strongly supported the Commune. Early gestures on the part of Communards and future Communards toward internationalism did in fact come for the most part from figures like Frankel who were members of the International. In February 1871, when it was decided to hang black flags and stay indoors when the Prussians entered Paris, Frankel proposed mixing red flags with the black, on which would be inscribed the names of German Internationals like Liebneck and Jacobi, all under the banner of the Universal Republic. On the eve of the war, Eugène Pottier, author of the *Internationale*, had just founded a syndicate of 500 members of decorative artists that adhered to the International, signing the manifesto of the Parisian International, along with brothers from Germany and Spain, against, as Pottier called it in a poem, "the cellular regime of nationality."[44] When war was declared against Prussia in July 1870 members of the International had in fact, for the first time in a socialist milieu, adopted an anti-chauvinist position, addressing a message to workers everywhere: "Once more under the pretext of European equilibrium and national honor, the peace of the world is threatened by political ambitions; French, German and Spanish workers, we speak in one voice reproaching the war ... a war that is in the eyes of workers a criminal absurdity."[45] Members of the International organized many of the initial meetings of the clubs and reunions, where internationalism of a pronounced anti-colonialist flavor was

[43] Norbert Elias, *La Société des individus* (Paris: Fayard, 1991), p. 269.
[44] Eugène Pottier, "La Guerre," in *Chants révolutionnaires* (Paris: Comité Pottier, 1908), p. 35.
[45] Manifesto of the Parisian Section of the International, published in *Le Reveil*, July 12, 1870.

frequently on the agenda for discussion. Isak Dinesen's father Wilhelm, a sympathetic observer in Paris in the spring of 1871, who reports finding himself as a foreigner exceedingly well and courteously treated, recounts a speech from one such meeting: "We complain today of being invaded and pillaged by Prussians, and we're right ... but we shouldn't forget that what is being done against us we did to others. We went into Crimea, China, Rome, Mexico, and we fought with people who asked for nothing but to live in peace with us."[46] An almost total absence of national chauvinism characterized discussions in the clubs. Colonial repressions were particularly condemned. Tolain, a member of the International and a jewelry worker, regularly addressed the question of Algeria: "The French have brought to this country not civilization but misery and servitude." Another speaker: "Africa will flourish only when it administers itself."[47] The socialism sanctioned by speakers had nothing national about it; there could be no confusing it with bourgeois parliamentarianism: "Socialism is the redemption of all peoples, the salvation for all."[48] The war between France and Prussia was viewed by Eugène Varlin, for example, as "a ruinous game between princes."[49]

For Benoît Malon, the Commune figured less as an event in French national history than as part of a vast, worldwide tableau that includes the Indian revolt against British capitalism, the North American freeing of the slaves, revolts in Ireland, Hungary, Poland, and the rise of liberal opinion in Russia signaling the glimmer of freedom for the serfs. The ferocity of the Commune's repression was, by the same token, in his view, a lesson the army had learned while abroad:

> French military leaders have for forty years developed in French soldiers the ferocity needed to accomplish what the peoples' executioners call the reestablishment of order, which destines the beautiful and unhappy Arab race to the most repellent persecution and the most odious extermination. In fact, when they have been burning down Algerian villages for years, and massacring tribes, soldiers are apt to bloody the streets of our cities ... All the Versaillais generals went to that school.[50]

Communards deported to New Caledonia were to experience directly the imperial context evoked by Malon; it was only then and there that many of them came to realize that Thiers and the Versaillais had in fact been fighting on two fronts in the spring of 1871: the Commune in the capital (and, briefly, in a few other French cities), and the extensive Kabylie uprising in eastern Algeria. It was in part because of the Algerian

[46] Wilhelm Dinesen, *Paris sous la Commune*, trans. Denise Bernard-Folliot (Paris: Editions Michel de Maule, 2003), p. 106.

[47] Tolain and Paulet, cited in Dalotel et al., *Aux origines de la Commune*, p. 253.

[48] Vertut, October 1869, cited in Dalotel et al., *Aux origines de la Commune*, p. 254.

[49] Eugène Varlin, *Pratique militante et écrits d'un ouvrier communard* (Paris: Maspero, 1977), p. 127.

[50] Benoît Malon, *La Troisième Defaite du prolétariat français* (Neuchâtel: G. Guillaume Fils, 1871), pp. 485–6.

insurrection and in part because North Africa was considered too close for comfort that deported Communards were sent to New Caledonia, as far away as possible, rather than to Algeria as the deported insurgents of 1848 had been. In the memoir he wrote of his years of incarceration in New Caledonia, Communard Jean Allemane recalls the arrival one evening of a convoy of Algerian prisoners: "The night approached; somber and silent, the defeated of Algeria and the defeated of the Commune sat side by side, thinking of those they loved, of the unraveling of their existence and the destruction of their dream of liberty."[51]

The Commune was not, as Engels was later to claim, synonymous with the International. But a thick strand of internationalism runs through the insurrection, colors the culture that preceded it and continues in the experience of the survivors, who variously lived through the Kanuck rebellion in New Caledonia, or struggled to survive in Geneva, Lausanne, London, or, like Eugène Pottier, in more unlikely exiles in Boston, Massachusetts, and New York City. "The thousands of exiles that the fall of the Commune dispersed across all the points of the civilized world," wrote one such exile in 1882, "were so many rings destined to link France to the great international socialist movement."[52] The extent to which the forces of reaction after the Commune saw the International as synonymous with the Commune can be measured by the tenacity with which they sought to outlaw the organization and hunt down and extradite surviving Communards. As Jules Favre proclaimed in June 1871: "Like a vast Freemasonry, their society [the International] embraces all of Europe ... to hate them ... punish them is not enough. One must seek out the germ and destroy it."[53] The common assumption that what ruined the First International was the conflict between Marxists and anarchists is, in McClellan's opinion, only partly true: the real cause of the death of the International was the reaction that followed the Commune. This was nothing short of a continent-wide counterrevolution, one that extended at least into the 1880s and 1890s. Throughout Europe nations joined in colonial competition—an enterprise crucial to the continuing consolidation of the "cellular regime of nationality." And yet as early as the amnesty, texts like the following one, by a "republican socialist," can be found attempting to harness the memory of the Commune, and even the idea of the Universal Republic, to the plow of the civilizing mission:

> Only the colonies can save French genius ... If monarchists want to conquer so as to extinguish in the virgin, uncivilized races any aspiration to liberty ... we socialists also want colonies in order to save the races from the tyranny and Jesuitism in which they have been immersed ... Instead of catechism we will give them the alphabet of the rights of man. It is a grave task

[51] Jean Allemane, *Mémoires d'un communard* (Paris: Maspero, 1981), pp. 218–19.

[52] M. Melliet, in *La Revue blanche, 1871: Enquête sur la Commune*, p. 119.

[53] Jules Favre, June 6, 1871, cited in McClellan, *Revolutionary Exiles*, p. 180. The text of Favre's circular is reproduced in Georges Bourgin, "La lutte du gouvernement français contre la première Internationale," *International Review for Social History*, 4 (1939), pp. 50–56.

> incumbent upon us to spread the republic across the earth. If we continue the disastrous abandonment of the colonies, we will destroy the first step of the ladder that leads to the Universal Republic. The Commune with its 50,000 deaths saved the Republic: Tonkin, Madagascar, Tunisia, Algeria made it larger ... France escorts a treasure across the world: the Republic.[54]

Nothing could be further from the Universal Republic envisioned as a "voluntary association of all local initiative,"[55] "a free union of autonomous collectives," or a "confederation of free peoples" (Reclus) than the Republican universalism that was to triumph. The political development of a figure like Communard and geographer Elisée Reclus tracks the distance separating the Universal Republic from republican universalism. Reclus met Malon in June of 1868 and joined his Batignolles chapter of the International at that point. During the Franco-Prussian War he saw himself as working to consolidate the newly established Third Republic and thereby create an atmosphere conducive to the development of the universal social republic. He appeared then to be thinking almost modularly—of the republic as a transportable form a bit like the way Benedict Anderson has described the nation-form in *Imagined Communities*. We might describe his political goal during the war as the defense not so much of France, Frenchness, or the French soil but of the republican *form*.

But the experience of the Commune brought a striking change in Reclus's politics that, perhaps not surprisingly, led to a violent rejection of the Third Republic he had initially struggled to defend. The republic appeared to him while in exile and for the rest of his life as purely opportunistic, a hopeless mirage, an assembly made up of "Messieurs the gunmen."[56] For Reclus, who would later refer to himself as an anarchist communist, all this resulted in a substantial renunciation of French nationalism and a dis-identification from states generally, as well as a concerted attempt to formulate a theory that would somehow get around the necessity of working through existing states even if it be in order to destroy them. Whereas a certain nationalism or national identification had been conceivable to him in the 1860s as a force of liberation, after the Commune he viewed national identification as nothing more than an artificial fiction used to rally people against their neighbors: a fiction of service to kings and to capital only. His deep anti-militarism, in other words, did not in any way conflict with his thirst for war against the state. Anarchist Jean Grave once remarked that Reclus held a kind of hatred for the people of Paris, and it is striking that having been granted amnesty in 1879, he did not return to France from Switzerland until 1890, and even then did not stay for very long. "I love Paris very much," he wrote in 1882, "and it

[54] Louis Riel, "Socialisme et colonies" (1886), cited in Philippe Venault, ed., *Souvenirs amers: mémoires de François Camille Cron (1836–1902), déporté de la Commune en Nouvelle Calédonie* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1989), p. 349.

[55] *Déclaration au peuple français*, April 19, 1871, in Stewart Edwards, ed., *The Communards of Paris, 1871* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), p. 83.

[56] Elisée Reclus, letter to Mme Elie Reclus, June 1872, in *Correspondances*, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie Schleicher, 1914), p. 109.

is precisely because I love it so much that I would like to find myself there again in conditions similar to those which I have known [in the early days of the Commune]."[57]

Many other examples could be marshaled to show that a horror of the bourgeois, opportunistic republic marked the generation of survivors of the Commune. This is in fact what Lucien Descaves, the novelist who befriended Gustave Lefrançais and many others after they returned from exile or deportation, often alone and invariably poor, was to document in the prefaces he wrote to their works. It was from their stories that he would fashion his 1913 novel, *Philémon, vieux de la vieille*. The Universal Republic envisioned and to a certain extent lived during the Commune was not only very different from the Republic that came to be, it was conceived in opposition to the French Republic timidly birthed in 1870, and even more to the one that was stabilized on the dead bodies of the Communards. For it was the massacre of the Commune—the extraordinary attempt to eliminate, one by one and en bloc, one's class enemy—that in fact founded the Third Republic. Today, there is a certain fashionability, desperate in nature, in trying to resurrect the Commune and insert it into the national republican history by pointing to some of its social accomplishments—the *crèches*, for example, or the instituting of free, secular, mandatory public education—accomplishments later picked up and embraced in some form by the Third Republic, as a bid for integrating ("saving") the Commune for the national history and the national fiction. The Commune is thus assimilated into either a patriotic movement or a struggle for republican freedoms, and can then be seen as, in effect, "saving" the Republic. The attempt to reintegrate the event into national history has been aided by the unmooring of the Commune after 1989 from the starring role it played in the long successive chain of events, moving magically from one point to the next, that makes up official state-communist historiography. Freed from its role in that historiography, it has become available once more to play a part in the liberal Republican national story.

But surely it belongs to neither fiction exactly and instead to some other kind of history—one that Arlette Farge, in another context, has described as "untimely, ironic, irregular, disruptive."[58] It is important to recall the vehemence with which many Commune survivors combated the view that they had acted to "save the Republic." "The republic of our dreams was surely not the one we have. We wanted it democratic, social and universal and not plutocratic."[59] As for Lefrançais, he is characteristically blunt: "The proletariat will never be truly emancipated unless it gets rid of the Republic—the last form, and not the least malevolent—of authoritarian governments."[60]

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[57] Elisée Reclus, letter to Richard Heath, February 1882, in *Correspondances*, vol. 2, p. 242. See Marie Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1988), for the best account of Reclus's intellectual and political trajectory.

[58] Arlette Farge, cited in Eric Fournier, *La Commune n'est pas morte* (Paris: Libertalia, 1913), p. 142. Fournier's book offers a valuable study of the way the Commune's memory has been put to use in France.

[59] Grousset, in *La Revue blanche, 1871: Enquête sur la Commune*, p. 123.

[60] Lefrançais, in *La Revue blanche, 1871: Enquête sur la Commune*, p. 105.

# 2. Communal Luxury

> We will work cooperatively toward our regeneration, the birth of communal luxury, future splendors and the Universal Republic.

Federation of Artists Manifesto, April 1871

A lived experience of "equality in action," the Commune was primarily a set of dismantling acts directed at the state bureaucracy and performed by ordinary men and women. Many of these dismantling acts were focused, not surprisingly, on that central bureaucracy: the schools. At the same time, artists and art workers undertook the liberation of artistic production from its control by the state. In this chapter I will consider the ideas that circulated in the Commune about education and art and the actions Communards performed in these two realms. I first consider their call for a "polytechnic" or "integral" education. Long a part of a wider working-class set of demands, the idea of an "integral" education that would overcome the division between head and hand lived on after the Commune and would have a forceful resurgence, as we will see, in the thinking of Communard survivors and fellow travelers like Elisée Reclus and Peter Kropotkin. I then turn specifically to the upheavals in the status of the artist under the Commune. In both areas of transformative endeavor Eugène Pottier, who at various points in his life was both a schoolteacher and an artist, played a key role.

Primary education since the 1850s, when the Falloux laws were passed imposing religious education in all the schools, had consisted of nothing, in the opinion of Auguste Blanqui, but catechism, taught by "the black army."[1] The first step taken by Communards engaged in transforming education was to dismantle the stranglehold that the Catholic Church held over schooling in a city where one-third of the students went to religious schools and one-third went to no school at all. For the brief duration of the Commune, free, compulsory, secular public education was instigated for all children. This was essentially the same policy that would be re-embraced ten years after the massacre of the Communards and modeled into the backbone of Third Republic education. It is important to remember, however, that though the free, public education associated in most peoples' minds with the Third Republic had in fact been invented ten years earlier during the Commune, the Communards' own ideas about schooling were considerably more unusual than those instigated under the Republic that came to be—beginning with their internationalist character. How does education change, for

[1] Auguste Blanqui, *Critique sociale*, vol. 1 (Paris: 1885), pp. 181–2.

example, if the community one is being educated for is not the nation but rather the Universal Republic or the Republic of Workers?

Early in April, a commission headed by Edouard Vaillant, and consisting of songwriter Jean-Baptiste Clément, composer of "Le Temps des cerises," novelist Jules Vallès, painter Gustave Courbet and schoolteacher Auguste Verdure, set about closing down all of the Church schools and removing all crosses, statues, and religious icons from the premises. Already in 1867 the International, at their Lausanne Congress, had called for secular education and it was the members of the International who played the principal role during the Commune in organizing public instruction in each section of the city. A frenetic and unchecked flurry of activity in all of the *arrondissements* accompanied the Commune's attempt to reorganize public instruction "on the largest of possible bases."[2] Benoît Malon helped organize in his *arrondissement* an asylum for orphans and runaways where they could receive the rudiments of schooling. In Saint-Pierre de Montmartre Paule Minck opened one of the first new schools for girls. On May 6 the walls of the city were plastered with the announcement that an establishment in the fifth *arrondissement*, until then occupied by Jesuits, would become the first professional school for boys over the age of twelve. (Jesuit institutions were preferred targets of appropriation and occupation because of their good laboratories and astronomical instruments). Edouard Vaillant proclaimed the creation of a professional school of industrial art for girls on May 12 in a requisitioned and reoccupied Ecole des Beaux Arts. Having completed their literary and scientific instruction, students would then turn to drawing, sculpture in wood, clay and ivory, and general courses in the application of art and drawing to industry. A striking detail regarding this particular school was the composition of its professors: the job call that went out was made to professors but also to any skilled worker older than the age of forty who wished to apply to become a teacher. On May 15, a "Society for the Friends of Education"—consisting of exactly two women, Marie Verdure and Elie Decoudray—presented their project for the organization of *crèches* (nurseries)—an initial inspiration that became the model for the institution of daycare still in operation in France today. Beyond simple daycare, under the Commune at least, the *crèches* were guided by principles taken over from Fourier's *phalanstères:* care-givers, whose clothing should never be black or dark in color, were shifted around so that they avoided growing bored or tired with one task for too long, "it being important that children should be looked after only by cheerful and young women, whenever possible."[3] Nurseries were to be scattered throughout working-class districts, near factories; everything having to do with religion would be removed and replaced instead with pictures and sculptures of real objects such as animals and trees, and even "an aviary full of birds" to combat boredom, "the greatest malady" of young children. Public libraries, which had been regularly plundered by the elite during the Empire, who availed themselves whenever they wanted of volumes that they never re-

[2] *Journal Officiel*, May 12, 1871, p. 536.

[3] *Journal Officiel*, May 15, 17, 1871, cited in Edwards, *The Paris Commune: 1871*, p. 271.

turned, were reorganized to bring an end to all lending privileges. Equality of salaries was established on May 21 for male and female schoolteachers.

The most general formulation of the goals of Communal education can be found in a poster pasted on walls in the fourth *arrondissement* and signed by Gustave Lefrançais and Arthur Arnould among others. "To teach the child to love and respect others; to inspire in him the love of justice; to teach him as well that his instruction is undertaken in view of the interests of everyone: these are the moral principles on which henceforth communal education will be based."[4] But underlying much of the Commune's ideas about schooling at a more pragmatic as well as a more theoretical level was the notion of "integral education"—professional schools where the child, girl or boy, would become capable of both working intellectually and earning a livelihood. Education, in the words of Fourier, should be "unitaire et intégrale-composée" (unitary and integrally composed), with "composed" indicating the simultaneous development of mind and body, and "integral" emphasizing anything that enriched the relationship of mind and body to promote the harmonious development of the individual.[5] The call for such a harmonious development, as well as the claim to a right to intellectual life, can be found throughout the documents of the First International. A kind of *polytechnic* formation designed to overcome the division between manual and intellectual labor was envisioned for all children, regardless of class or gender. In the course of such training, practical work would alternate with the study of scientific theories and industrial art as well as physical education—a mixed or integral education long called for by working-class journals like *L'Atelier*, to which Eugène Pottier had been a contributor. One such journal demanded that "beginning at a young age, the child should pass back and forth between the school and the workshop ... He who wields a tool should be able to write a book, write it with passion and talent ... The artisan must be able to take a break from his daily work through artistic, literary or scientific culture, without ceasing for all that to be a producer."[6] The idea was to develop all of the aptitudes of children at once, in order that they become "complete men, that is to say, capable of using their faculties to produce not only with their hands but with the intelligence."[7]

"Integral" or polytechnic education answered the desire to learn a useful trade and at one and the same time escape the enforced specialization caused by the division of labor that resulted in separating educated from uneducated. In this sense it was directed against the harnessing of a child or adolescent prematurely and fatally to a particular trade. But beyond that it was less about integrating a specialization or a *métier* with general studies than it was about integrating general study *for all children regardless of class*, with a professional orientation. One of the foremost partisans of

[4] *Journal Officiel*, May 12, 1871, p. 537.

[5] Charles Fourier, *Oeuvres complètes*, tome V (Paris, 1845), p. 2.

[6] Henri Bellenger, in *Le Vengeur*, 10, April 8, 1871, pp. 1–2.

[7] *Le Père Duchène*, on the opening of the first professional school under the Commune, cited in Solomon Froumov, *La Commune de Paris et la democratization de l'*école (Moscow: Editions de Progrès, 1958), p. 194.

polytechnic education was Eugène Pottier, a follower of Fourier's notion of "attractive work," fabric designer, member of the International, and poet, who in 1885 composed an ode to a kind of schooling inspired by Fourier:

> Fourier qui voulait tout en fête
> Sur l'école absurde et baîllant
> Sema, de sa main de Prophète
> Le grain de Travail attrayant.
> L'institutrice intelligente
> Associe étude et plaisir:
> Venez à l'école attrayante,
> Venez, enfants de l'avenir.[8]

Pottier's name appeared affixed at the head of a poster hanging on the walls of the second *arrondissement* in early May:

> That each child of either sex, having completed the cycle of primary studies, may leave school possessing the serious elements of one or two manual professions: this is our goal. All of our efforts tend toward attaining this result because the last word in human progress is entirely summed up by the simple phrase: *Work by everyone, for everyone*. Humanity must arrive at the strict realization of this precept, which is old as primitive societies, and is the basis of all equality.[9]

The son of a box-maker who apprenticed in his father's workshop, Eugène Pottier is best remembered today as the author of the *Internationale*, written in June 1871 in the midst of the ongoing savage executions of the defeated Communards. The song, which he dedicated to his friend and comrade in the Commune, Gustave Lefrançais, was not to reach any widespread diffusion until it was set to music in 1888 by Pierre De Geyter, sometime after its author returned from exile in the United States. Pottier's activities in the Commune were not limited to his efforts in transforming primary education. He was also a founding member of the Artists' Federation and the principal author of its manifesto.

Pottier's activities and perspectives on the question of art and art education in the context of the Artists' Federation have been overshadowed in most of the literature about the Commune by a scholarly fixation on the Federation's much better

[8] Eugène Pottier, "L'Ecole Professionelle" (also called "L'Ecole attrayante"), *Oeuvres complètes*, tome 3 (Paris: Maspero, 1966), pp. 158–9.

[9] Poster reproduced in Jean Bruhat, Jean Dautry, and Emile Tersen, *La Commune de 1871* (Paris: Editions sociales, 1960), p. 202.

known President, Gustave Courbet. Elected to the Federation along with other well-known painters—Corot, Manet, Daumier—Courbet was the only one of this group to serve in what was in fact a general headlong flight from Paris by well-known painters like Cézanne, Pissarro, and Degas in the course of the Prussian Siege preceding the Commune and the Commune itself. Courbet's drama as the President of the Artists' Federation, which consisted mostly in his having been held financially responsible for the destruction of the Vendôme Tower, followed by his exile in Switzerland, has been well documented. During the Commune Courbet had become an artist in the sense that Marx gave to being an artist in *The German Ideology*—someone who, amongst other things, paints. As such, the man to whom Alexandre Dumas referred as "that thing we call M. Gustave Courbet" was considered by many bourgeois artists and writers to have usurped public functions and stepped outside of his supposed sphere of competence by participating in the political debates and public discussions of the Commune.[10] A statement like this by Emile Zola is fairly typical:

> Certainly this is no time to laugh, but really there are certain spectacles that can't help but make you laugh ... Courbet, the great Courbet is a member of the Paris Commune! He is going to legislate! He has answered his charge as president of the artists! And, God help us, he has been named a delegate to the commission on Public Instruction! One hundred years from now, the workshops and studios will still be laughing.[11]

We need now to reframe our view of the Artists' Federation in such a way that Courbet recedes and Pottier comes into focus. If we do so, I believe that a sharper sense of the precise emancipation envisioned and enacted by the federation, to which Pottier gave the name "communal luxury," will be allowed to emerge.

On the eve of the Commune, Pottier ran a large workshop producing "toutes productions artistiques"—fabric designs, wall paper, lace, painted ceramics, painting on fabric. The internationalism *avant la lettre* of a workshop like Pottier's, where skilled artisan-designers from different origins, often different nationalities, worked together at complementary tasks, derived in part from the mobility of that set of *métiers*—art workers moved freely from workshop to workshop, from city to city and even country to country. Pottier's own itinerary, polytechnic in nature unlike that of Courbet, might well have figured in the pages of Jacques Rancière's study of the worker poets, *La Nuit des prolétaires*. In an 1884 letter addressed to fellow Communard Paul Lafargue, he recounts his early years as the tale of an autodidact, apprenticed at the age of thirteen to his father to train to become a box-maker: "A l'établi d'un emballeur/Lourd, en-

[10] Alexandre Dumas fils, *Lettre sur les choses du jour*, cited in Georges Coulonges, *La Commune en chantant* (Paris: Les Editeurs français réunis, 1970), p. 159.

[11] Emile Zola, May 28, 1871, cited in Rodolphe Walter, "Un Dossier delicat: Courbet et la colonne Vendôme," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, March 1973, p. 176.

dormi, rêveur et gauche/Comme un bras brut et sans valeur."[12] The point of departure for emancipation in his case may well have been an old grammar book he discovered in the back of an abandoned armoire he was refinishing and a Béranger poem that he copied out and recited over and over until he had learned it by heart. The adolescent Pottier began writing poetry of his own late at night—a strenuous and tiring affair since even though his father was his boss, he was still expected to be in the workshop at 5:00 a.m. He sent his first poem to the high priest of the worker-poets, Pierre-Jean de Béranger, who sends back this reply:

> I thank you for the lovely song you sent me. If you are only fifteen, it is a completely remarkable work and I am very grateful that you chose to honor me with it. You do well to use the free time that your apprenticeship grants you in such a pursuit, as long as the verses don't cause you to forget that the most modest artisan is more useful to his country than are most makers of verse.[13]

The resemblance between Pottier's initiation into the world of letters and the itineraries of intellectual emancipation Rancière traces in *La Nuit des prolétaires* is not limited to his (perhaps apocryphal) autodidactic childhood, his appropriation of the language of poets, and the obligatory epistolary approval he seeks as an adolescent from the established writer. (The young Louise Michel sent her poems to Victor Hugo.) Pottier, who was fifty-five years old at the time of the Commune, was of a generation much closer to the artisans of the 1830s and 1840s Rancière studied—for a younger worker-artist like Gaillard fils, for example, already a skilled draftsman, the role played by aesthetic capacity in emancipation would perhaps have been less dramatic. Like so many of the artisans Rancière describes in his study, Pottier was of an age to have encountered early on the pedagogical methods of the great *illuminé*, Joseph Jacotot, and in an unpublished text Pottier in fact recounts using Jacotot's methods for forty years to teach his own children and "little French children raised in the United States" how to read.[14] "A book of Jacotot's universal teaching method filled me with a vague synthesis," he wrote in 1856. "'Everything is in everything' became my motto. It was the first truth for which I took up the cudgel."[15]

Pottier's own trajectory was to bear a curious resemblance to that of Jacotot's: both men underwent the contingency and upheaval of political exile in the wake of revolution—Pottier to Boston after the Commune and Jacotot to Louvain after the return of the Bourbons. And both survived their exiles by teaching French language.

[12] Letter to Paul Lafargue, in Lucien Descaves, preface, Alexandre Zévaès, ed. *Eugène Pottier. Chants Révolutionnaires* (Paris: Editions Sociales Internationales, 1937).

[13] Béranger, letter to Eugène Pottier, November 1, 1831, cited in Maurice Dommanget, *Eugène Pottier, membre de la commune et chanteur de l'Internationale* (Paris: EDI, 1971), p. 18.

[14] Pottier, "Les crimes de l'alphabet," cited in Pierre Brochon, *Eugène Pottier, Naissance de l'Internationale* (St. Cyr-sur-Loire: Christian Pirot, 1997), p. 22.

[15] Pottier, letter to Adrien Lelioux, 1856, cited in Brochon, *Eugène Pottier*, p. 22.

It was in Louvain that Jacotot conceived of Universal Education and, in so doing, introduced a sharper problematic into the question of popular education. The whole of Jacotot's "method" derives from a few simple precepts, of which the simplest is the one Pottier made into his guiding maxim: "Everything is in everything." Other Jacotot precepts derive—naturally—from the first: "Everyone is capable of connecting the knowledge they already have to new knowledge." "Everyone is of an equal intelligence." "The sexes are perfectly equal in terms of intelligence." "Learn something and relate everything else to it."[16] Thought, for Jacotot, is not divided into specific competences and domains for specialists—it is similar in all of its exercises and can be shared by all. The some*thing* that one learns and to which one relates everything else can very well be a literal thing. Presumably, this "leçon de choses" resonated profoundly in the minds of the skilled workers and artisans like Pottier to whom Jacotot spoke. The thing, the point of departure, does not matter; it may be a letter, a poem, a carved bit of wood, a mother's song. Anything that can be laid hold of can become the starting point for emancipation. You can start anywhere—you do not have to start at the beginning. For floor-layer Gabriel Gauny, it was the torn fragments of lentil sacks that could be arranged into peculiar encyclopedias. The only model Jacotot gives is the one provided by maternal language and the child's capacity to learn it without any explanations. By referring to the mother tongue he is not privileging orality—the thing, the starting point, the "something" that is learned is anything that can be constituted as *a writing*, a thing raised to the level of writing, a thing that can be translated. Emancipation occurs when the universe of daily experience becomes translatable into writing, and a material thing becomes the bridge of translation between two minds.

To better understand the eccentricity of Jacotot's methods and their appeal to someone like Pottier, it is important to situate them in the context of the form taken generally by the nineteenth-century preoccupation with the education of the masses. For the mid-nineteenth century, when Jacotot conceived of Universal Education, was the dawning of the great crusades to educate the masses, the protracted programs of "interior" cultural colonization designed in France to harness every last peasant in Brittany, every itinerant artisan, every wayward vagabond, to the national project. It was at this time that the ruling elites began to think that the barbarians—whether at the gates, in the workshops, or out plowing the fields—must be given a little instruction, if only to reduce social tensions. Instruction might serve to both enlighten the people *and* keep them in their place. Barbarians, peasants, and laborers, enclosed in their *terroirs* and operating within their distinct regional and cultural *habitus*, must be brought into a shared knowledge, a common culture. But that common culture must in turn be divided up according to an economic model so that each child is taught his or her own set of specific knowledges and skills: all these separate skills added together

[16] See Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991). See also his *The Nights of Labor*, trans. John Drury, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981).

may create a harmony of different interests, but only to the extent that each interest and competence is carefully delineated. It was against this powerful institutional reiteration of the division of labor that Jacotot's methods were directed.

His methods attacked the underlying principles of French republicanism as it was being consolidated at the time. A *pedagogical vision of politics* underwrites all of French republicanism, from the end of the eighteenth century through its consolidation after the demise of the Commune in the Third Republic, all the way up to its panicked reiterations in recent years in the face of schoolgirls in scary head-scarves. The pedagogical vision of politics works, broadly speaking, in two ways: first, it conceives of teaching as forming the society of the future. And second, it conceives of politics as the way to instruct the world (parts of which, as we are repeatedly told, "are not ready for democracy"). The right to education is thought throughout to be the *condition* for the formation of political judgment. One *learns* to become a citizen. A system of education must be established whose task is essentially one of uplift and integration through knowledge: the worker or peasant is raised to the status of a sovereign citizen—raised, that is, to a dignity he or she possesses by right but not in fact. The peasant must be uprooted from his provincial soil just as in our own time the new arrivals, the immigrants or the newly poor, must be separated from their social or cultural difference by offering them the keys to the country: *political access through education.* Modern society demands that inequalities be a little reduced, and that there be a minimum of community between those at the top and those at the bottom. Education puts everyone in their place while assuring that some minimal community of shared knowledge exists. Inequality is a slow, lagging start from which, with a little effort and the right instruction, one can certainly catch up.

For Jacotot, though, equality was not abstract, or a topic of discussion, or a reward for good performance in the classroom. Jacotot's great accomplishment, as Rancière makes clear, was to separate the logic of emancipation from the logic of the institution. Emancipating oneself was an individual affair; there could be no mass institutional application of his "method." The logic of emancipation concerned concrete relations between individuals. The logic of the institution, on the other hand, is always nothing more than the indefinite reproduction of itself. Emancipation is not the result but the *condition* for instruction.

In one of his earliest essays, Rancière suggests that the poetry written by workers like Pottier, stealing time in the late night hours their schedules allowed them, was not a means of revindication—neither the form nor the thematic content of the poetry were what mattered. "It is not through its descriptive content nor its revindications that worker poetry becomes a *social* oeuvre, but rather through its pure act of existing."[17] The poetry illustrates neither the misery of the worker's conditions nor the heroism of his struggle—what it says, rather, is aesthetic capacity, the transgression of the

[17] Jacques Rancière, "Ronds de fumé (Les poètes ouvriers dans la France de Louis-Philippe)," *Revue des sciences humaines*, 41:190 (April–June 1983), p. 46. His emphasis.

division that assigns to some manual work and to others the activity of thinking. It is the proof that one participates in another life. When Marx says that the greatest accomplishment of the Paris Commune was "its own working existence" he is saying much the same thing. More important than any laws the Communards were able to enact was simply the way in which their daily workings inverted entrenched hierarchies and divisions—first and foremost among these the division between manual and artistic or intellectual labor. The world is divided between those who can and those who cannot afford the luxury of playing with words or images. When that division is overcome, as it was under the Commune, or as it is conveyed in the phrase "communal luxury," what matters more than any images conveyed, laws passed, or institutions founded are the capacities set in motion. You do not have to start at the beginning—you can start anywhere.

It was Courbet who started things off by issuing on April 6 an open "Call to Artists" to come to a political meeting the following week. There, in the Sorbonne's Medical School Amphitheater—the faculty of the medical school having all fled to Versailles—Eugène Pottier read aloud the Manifesto for an Artists' Federation developed by a preparatory committee and written by Pottier. Courbet's contribution to the manifesto seems to have been the essentially corporatist insistence that artists be allowed to administer the arts themselves—that they assume control of the museums and art collections. Artists must be entrusted to manage their own interests. The first basis for the Federation's existence was "the free expression of art, released from all government supervision and all privilege."[18] The Federation envisaged liberty for the arts as the autonomy of art and artists vis-à-vis state power: it instituted total freedom from state subsidy, which had been used throughout the Second Empire as a means of promoting a particular artist or a particular theater over another. Any subsidy was understood by the Commune as a form of enslavement, a means of restricting that "freedom of the individual" the bourgeoisie claimed to promote but instead undermined. Abolition of the subsidy—essentially a kind of state bribery of artists—brought an end to the idea of an "official" style, or of the state's approval of academic or "safe" painters. In the place of state subsidies, the Federation looked to cooperation among the artists themselves as a way forward, rather like a trade union whereby each artist's dignity was protected by all the others: "Equality between members of the Federation that all artists adhering to the communal Republic constitute ... the independence and dignity of each artist is placed under the safeguard of all." Association meant a reconfiguration of alliances: artists were linked to each other and to their self-management in complete independence from the state. And all would share equally among themselves the ordinary tasks and requisitions commissioned by the Commune. Traces of Fourier can be detected in the educational mission the federation undertook for itself. To "regenerate the future through education," members of the committee would found and oversee the

[18] Manifesto of the Artists' Federation of Paris, April 15, 1871, in *Journal Officiel*, tome 2, pp. 273–4.

teaching of drawing in the schools, "favoring instruction according to attractive and logical methods." The federation also established a tribune, *L'Officiel des Arts*, open to everyone, where anyone who desired could discuss aesthetic questions, or issues concerning the relation between the artist and the public: "The Committee invites any citizen to communicate any proposition, project, thesis or opinion whose aim is artistic progress, the moral or intellectual emancipation of artists, or the material amelioration of their condition."

Liberty for the arts was thus in part a demand for artists' control over museum administrations, curators, and the organization of the local, national, and international exhibits taking place in Paris—events in which, the Federation's manifesto stipulated, no awards would be given. But it was also a reaction to the fiercely repressive conditions of cultural production generally under the Second Empire, when laws covering the censorship and sale of literature, and affecting every sphere of culture production and distribution were soldered into place, executed under a complex system of surveillance and repression, and performed by layered tiers of state commissions, ministries, police, and police spies. Yet within the system of state censorship blanketing the arts under the Empire, Adrian Rifkin notes this important distinction pertaining to the status of the painter and sculptor:

> While every type of printed matter was subject to censorship, painting and sculpture enjoyed a more privileged position. A painter or sculptor did not have to establish any copyright through the system of the "dépôt légal," but was automatically assured full ownership of his or her work. It might be difficult for an artist to get a political or "immoral" work into the salon, and, in an exceptional case, such as Manet's "Execution of the Emperor Maximilian" he might be forced to remove the lithograph from circulation. However, the principal problem thus imposed on him was one of access to the market, not one of absolute loss of control over the distribution of his work. That Manet's "Olympia" was abused when it was shown in the 1865 salon did not result in its prosecution for immorality nor put an end to his career. An artist's relative immunity from censorship was enjoyed neither by the print-maker, the songwriter nor the performer.[19]

The legal determination of who counted as an artist meant not merely a difference in status—it had economic repercussions as well. "Whereas 'sculptors' had a legal right to sign, reproduce, and dispose of their work (and pocket the profits), a designer of sculptures for one of the bronze or iron foundries employing more than ten workers had no similar privilege."[20]

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[19] Adrian Rifkin, "Cultural Movement and the Paris Commune," *Art History*, 2 (1979), p. 206.

[20] Gonzalo J. Sanchez, *Organizing Independence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 64. Sanchez's book offers the most thorough analysis of the Artists' Manifesto in the context of a study of subsequent Artists' Associations in France.

Over 400 people—a full house, according to the *Official Journal of the Commune*—answered the "Call for Artists" and attended the April 14 meeting where they listened to the manifesto Pottier read aloud. They were not just painters and sculptors. The gathering was instead, as the manifesto proclaimed, a "rallying of all artistic intelligences"—"toutes les intelligences artistiques," all the different kinds of artistic intelligence together thought of as one. Among those attending and electing their forty-seven representatives were all the plastic arts from painters and sculptors to architects, lithographers, and industrial designers, as well as peripheral actors in the world of art, especially critics. The *Official Journal of the Commune* reports the presence of "many architects and ornamentalists." The name designating this last group—ornamentalists, designers, industrial artists—was a matter of some contention, as the text read aloud by Pottier underscores: "forty-seven representative members were elected [revocable, like all Commune representatives], including ten from the decorative arts, improperly called industrial arts." Here Pottier corrects Courbet's usage of the term "industrial arts" with a pointed clarification, enhancing the importance ascribed to this group and to the presence of its members under the name of "artist," under the name, that is, if we return to the distinction made by Rifkin, of someone, like a painter or sculptor, who is able to sign his or her work. In fact, the vocabulary of the manifesto exhibits a strong concern with the question of artistic proprietorship, undoubtedly a major preoccupation of those members in the group previously excluded from the right to sign their works and thus control its distribution, who are now claiming the name of artist.

> [The Federation] will admit only works signed by their authors, either original works or translations of one art into another, such as an engraved rendering of a painting. It will absolutely reject any mercenary exhibition that tends to substitute the name of a publisher or manufacturer for that of a true creator.

The mid-nineteenth century and the years preceding the Commune was a moment not unlike our own, when artists feared increasingly for their livelihood. Admissions to the Ecole des Beaux Arts had remained constant from 1800 to 1860, but more than two-thirds of its graduates were unsuccessful at making a career; it was that overflow, in part, that went to fueling the growing decorative arts industries.[21] Other decorative artists had, like Pottier, emerged from the ranks of skilled artisans. Many cabinetmakers and other artisans were as much concerned with their position as artists as they were with their position as skilled workers.[22] The realm of skilled artisan-designers was thus occupied by a decidedly "mixed" population made up of the proletarianization of

[21] Ibid., p. 65.

[22] See Lee Shai Weissbach, "Artisanal Responses to Artistic Decline: The Cabinetmakers of Paris in the Era of Industrialization," *Journal of Social History*, 16:2 (Winter 1982): "by the second half of the nineteenth century, large numbers of workers in cabinetmaking had lost their status as artist-craftsmen" (p. 72).

"failed" artists and the aspiration of artisans. Fallen artists became the new workers for the arts industries. "Form" and "design" acted to bridge or merge fine and decorative arts, art and industry. At a moment when artists, menaced by the precariousness of their situation, might well have attempted to protect their status, the Federation instead chooses to address the issue directly and subvert the hierarchical relation between art and industry, welcoming Pottier and his colleagues into their ranks from which they proceeded to make demands in the name of all artists, "toutes les intelligences artistiques" grouped together, in complete independence from the state. As one sculptor who participated in the federation would recall twenty years later, "The results of the manifesto's propositions were enormous, not because they elevated the artistic level ... but because they spread art everywhere."[23]

To be recognized as an artist or as someone in fact "signing" his creation seems to be what shoemaker Napoléon Gaillard, as Adrian Rifkin once suggested, had in mind when he had himself photographed standing in front of the barricade he designed on the Place de la Concorde, in effect "signing" his creation, appropriating for himself the status of author or artist. Here is how one anti-Communard recalled the director of barricade construction under the Commune:

> Gaillard père, the head of barricade construction, appeared so proud of his creation that on the morning of May 20, we saw him in full commandant's Uniform, four gold braids on the sleeve and cap, red lapels on his tunic, great riding boots, long, flowing hair, a steady gaze. While national guards prevented the public from walking about on one side of the square, the barricade maker posed proudly some twenty feet in front of his creation, and with his hand on his hip, had himself photographed.[24]

The barricade Gaillard constructed barring access to the rue de Rivoli, nicknamed by many the "Château Gaillard," reached a height of two stories and was complete with bastions, gable steps, and a façade flanked with pavilions. His claim to the status of artist was recalled with some ridicule by another anti-Communard, who refers contemptuously to Gaillard as a "vain shoemaker" and the "père des barricades": "He considers the enormous barricades that he had constructed on the Place Vendôme, the place de la Concorde, etc., etc., as both works of art and luxury; he only speaks of them with a love and admiration that he transfers back, obviously, onto his own person."[25] Member of the International, author of a philosophical treatise on the foot, inventor of rubber galoshes and a famous shoemaker, Gaillard, unlike many of his fellow tradesmen, survived the Commune, and resurfaced along with his son, worker-

[23] M. Marquet de Vasselot, cited in *La Revue blanche, 1871: Enquête sur la Commune*, p. 144.

[24] Le Comte d'Hérisson, *Nouveau journal d'un officier d'ordonnance: La Commune* (Paris: Ollendorff, 1889), pp. 295–6. See my *Emergence of Social Space*, pp. 17–19.

[25] Anonymous, *Sous la Commune: Récits et souvenirs d'un Parisien* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1873), p. 60.

painter Gaillard fils, running a tavern for exiled Communards in Geneva.[26] "The Art of the Shoe," he wrote from exile, "is, no matter what one says, of all the arts the most difficult, the most useful, and above all the least understood."[27] Already, in letters to the editor written before the Commune, Gaillard had made it clear that social rehabilitation is first of all a battle over names and that the name Gaillard wanted for himself, in addition to that of "worker," was that of "artist-shoemaker": "I believe myself to be a worker, an 'artist-shoemaker,' and though making shoes, I have the right to as much respect from men as those who think themselves workers while wielding a pen."[28] At issue, of course, was the familiar opposition between the useful and the beautiful. Gaillard's "Art of the Shoe" sets out to make the case that the profession of shoemaker transcended any such opposition, and in so doing should be accorded the dignity and remuneration it deserved. Inspired by the ancient statuary that he used to illustrate his text, Gaillard envisioned resurrecting the beauty of the "well-proportioned" foot of classical representations, long lost due to having been imprisoned in a narrow, pointed, deforming instrument of torture—the modern shoe. The public, he urged, should take the initiative of demanding a shoe made at last "not for the foot as it is, but for the foot as it should be." In an earlier pamphlet he advised shoemakers to adopt his methods for making boots out of latex or *gutta-percha*; by so doing they would avoid the mental and physical fatigue of the usual shoe-making methods, develop their intelligence, and "achieve the status of a sculptor."[29] In addition, he noted, latex has the advantage of being recyclable—unlike leather shoes, which wear out, latex shoes can be melted down and remade into new pairs. In Lucien Descaves's 1913 historical novel about Communard exiles, *Philémon, vieux de la vieille*, Gaillard père is fondly recalled by the main character, Colome, a jewelry worker who, some twenty years later, still refuses to wear any but the shoes designed according to Gaillard's philosophy of the foot:

> My companion extended to shoes his repugnance for any form of constraint. He did not allow his feet to be constrained any more than he would his head or body...I had never before seen the likes of the extraordinary barges in which he launched his feet. Colome would not tolerate the ends of the shoes being rounded off, even a little—they had to be cut straight across,

[26] Workers who suffered the highest number of deportations after the defeat were "of course, as always, the shoemakers." Jacques Rougerie, *Paris libre 1871* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), p. 263. Noting the high proportion of shoemakers among the Commune's dead, deported and exiled, Frank Jellinek notes, "it was curiously a cobbler's revolution." Frank Jellinek, *The Paris Commune of 1871* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 381.

[27] Gaillard père (Napoléon Gaillaid), *L'Art de la Chaussure ou Moyen Pratique de chausser le pied humain d'après les règles de l'hygiène et de l'anatomie* (Geneva: Imprimerie Ziegler et Compagnie, 1876).

[28] Gaillard, letter to Vermorel, *Le Réveil*, January 20, 1869.

[29] Gaillard père, *Mémoire descriptive de la chaussure française en guttapercha* (Neuilly: A. Poilleux, 1858), p. 57.

> so much so that they looked less like shoes than like the box they come in ... "I have them made," he responded, "by a shoemaker to whom I gave the models designed for me by the père Gaillard ... conservative and classic in his métier, a skilled cobbler, or rather, 'artist-shoemaker' as he insisted on being called, rightly considered himself as having brought his noble métier back to the anatomical principles and rules of hygiene it had drifted away from. He wanted the shoe to be rational, which is to say, made for the foot, as opposed to the barbarian fashion of adjusting the foot to the shoe..."[30]

The Commune's overcoming of the division between fine and decorative artists—the principal dimension of its revolutionary arts program—proved to be as short-lived as the insurrection itself. Professional artists and crafts workers were to draw apart once again after this period. But, during the Commune, the objective basis in social and economic life for their rapprochement is understood, and their equality is seen not as a goal to attain but rather posited from the outset and reposited again and again in the course of the Commune's brief existence. It is worth noting that the Federation's members exhibited no concern whatsoever over what was to be counted as a work of art, nor over any aesthetic criteria for judging the worthiness of an artisanal product. They 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 any market evaluation, and even from the art object itself, and 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. The making of art, in this sense, was like Jacotot's version of thinking: it was a set of gestures, similar in all of its exercises. The Federation was largely indifferent to what had been the primary duty of previous art commissions, namely the preservation of artistic patrimony—its members were more focused, as they put it, on "bringing to life and into the light all the elements of the present." Nor did they advocate any particular aesthetic direction, breakthrough, or movement as we might expect on the basis of any number of subsequent avant-gardist art manifestoes, though they saw themselves as a source of artistic regeneration. They simply went about increasing the number of those who counted as an artist.

The manifesto concludes with the sentence that serves as an epigraph to this chapter and that gives us this book's title: "We will work cooperatively toward our regeneration, the birth of communal luxury, future splendors and the Universal Republic." At its most expansive level, the "communal luxury" whose inauguration the committee worked to ensure entails transforming the aesthetic coordinates of the entire community. More literally, though, Pottier and the Federation members were calling for something like "public art" at the municipal level: the decoration and artistic enhancement of public buildings in all of the *mairies* across France. But to understand this

[30] Lucien Descaves, *Philémon, vieux de la vieille* (Paris: Editions G. Cres et Compagnie, 1922), p. 45.

project as expressing only a limited or secondary demand is to miss the profoundly democratizing and expansive reach of its scope. The demand that beauty flourish in spaces shared in common and not just in special privatized preserves means reconfiguring art to be fully integrated into everyday life and not just the endpoint of special excursions to what Elisée Reclus called "the habitual museum where there is shut up temporarily that which is called the 'beaux arts'."[31] It means an art that will no longer live "this poor thin life among a few exceptional men."[32] Some of the exhilaration of the project of making art *lived*—not superfluous or trivial, but vital and indispensable to the community—is captured in Reclus's short text entitled "Art and the People":

> Ah, if the painters and sculptors were free, there would be no need for them to shut themselves up in Salons. They would have but to reconstruct our cities, first demolishing these ignoble cubes of stone where human beings are piled up, rich and poor, the beggar and the pompous millionaire, starvelings and satiated, victims and hangmen. They would burn all the old barracks of the time of misery in an immense fire of joy, and I imagine that in the museums of works to be preserved, they would not leave very much of the pretended artistic work of our time.[33]

Reclus's immense fire of joy cannot help but recall the destruction of the Vendôme Column at the height of the Commune and the powerful emotions this act elicited—equal parts Communard joy and panic among the elites. For both the demolition of the column and the manifesto's call for public, communal art that would transfer creative initiative from an isolated elite to the people as a whole succeed in bypassing national space. By creating lived art at the level of autonomous municipalities, communal luxury works against the centralizing organization of monumental (nationalist) space, and against the creation of monumental space generally. Bypassing the nation, though, does not in their terms imply hugging the narrow contours of the municipality: the Federation, as the final words of its manifesto reiterate, saw itself as working at the same time for both communal luxury *and* the Universal Republic.

Indeed, we might think of the demolition of the column as an initial clearing of the terrain for communal luxury. In an earlier work, I discussed the way in which the Communards' willingness to destroy the monument built to glorify Napoleon and his imperialistic conquests is regularly compared by commentators to the hesitation and reserve the insurgents showed toward breaching that other imposing edifice: the Bank of France.[34] The disparaging implication, of course, is that time was wasted in a playful or symbolic act while the "real stakes"—the money lying waiting to be

[31] Elisée Reclus, "Art and the People," in Joseph Ishill, ed., *Elisée and Elie Reclus: In Memoriam* (Berkeley Heights, New Jersey: Oriole Press, 1927), p. 325. Translation modified.

[32] William Morris, "The Lesser Arts," in Morton, ed., *Political Writings*, p. 54.

[33] Reclus, "Art and the People," pp. 326–7.

[34] See Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space*, pp. 5–8, 38–9.

expropriated—were ignored. But to make that comparison is already to ignore the significance Communards themselves attached to the demolition of a monument so enshrined in the national imagination that even Victor Hugo had written a glorifying hymn to it and to the exploits it commemorated. Reclus's assessment of the demolition is worth remembering: "In this century there has not been a sign of the times that has a more imposing meaning than the collapse of the imperial Column onto a pile of rubble."[35]

Reclus's assessment would not have appeared exaggerated to William Morris:

> Though in itself the destruction of the Vendôme Column may seem but a small matter, yet considering the importance attached generally, and in France particularly, to such symbols, the dismounting of that base piece of Napoleonic upholstery was another mark of the determination to hold no parley with the old jingoistic legends.[36]

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" (as he was called by his enemies after he became a socialist), 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 is, in effect, tearing down the Vendôme Column once again, several years after it had been painstakingly rebuilt in Paris. But beyond merely reiterating the empty space of potentiality achieved by the Communards, he goes one step further and creates a new space/time of seasonal rhythms and luxurious bounty. The orchard is the future, but it is one that hearkens back to the chronotope of a society of simple reproduction and the cyclical nature of its processes, whose rhythms come from nature. This is at once an arresting presiding figure for the practices and thought of the period to which the Communards gave the name "communal luxury," a prefiguration of the ecological direction of Morris's own thought, and the proof, as Owen Holland has argued, that without these "merely symbolic" gestures of relationality and correspondence the possibility of solidarity or of refashioning an internationalist conjuncture at any moment in the near future is increasingly remote.[37]

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[35] Elisée Reclus, epigraph to Lucien Descaves, *La Colonne* (Paris: Stock, 1901).

[36] Ernest Belfort Bax and William Morris, "Socialism from the Root Up," *Commonweal*, October 2, 1886, p. 210.

[37] Building on my discussion of social space in my first book, Owen Holland developed this very suggestive internationalist transversal between Morris and the Commune in a talk given in London in 2011.

Today, Morris is perhaps best known for his wallpaper designs, designs whose incorporation into the National Heritage industry in Britain have had the effect of making their designer appear a "Little Englander" par excellence. In the 1880s, however, as we will discuss in the next chapter, Morris emerged as one of the foremost British supporters of the memory of the Paris Commune. This should not, perhaps, surprise us—the Commune, after all, as Lissagaray remarked in passing many years after its demise, was an insurrection that counted such a vast quantity of arts and crafts workers in its ranks.[38] The radical orientation of that community of worker/artists did not originate with the Commune. Over a third of the signatories of the *Manifeste des soixante*, for example, the 1864 charter that was the founding text of the Parisian section of the International, were workers in the arts industries: bronze workers, engravers, lace-makers, wood-workers. And if the Commune was, as Jellinek put it, "a cobbler's revolution," it was also one where skilled artisans and design workers, some ten thousand of whom were among the convicted, played a significant role.[39] Like the Communards Morris was less interested in art than in creating and expanding the conditions for art. And like Napoléon Gaillard, he valued highly the ability, as he put it, of knowing how to "make a good-fitting boot."[40] But such a crucial skill was in his view being rendered impossible not by industrialism per se but by capitalism's creation of a society based on cash and self-interest. What Morris called "this so-called society" was not a society at all in his opinion but a state of war: the war of commerce.

Like Pottier, Morris was preoccupied by the question of the "lesser" arts—both their quality and their status in society. The late nineteenth-century system of commercialism and profit-mongering had laid waste, in his view, to the decorative arts. This may seem to be a very minor woe in the long list of horrors besetting Victorian society. Yet from deep within his perception of the causes and effects of that degradation on the possibility of fellowship, creativity, and human happiness, Morris would derive the entirety of his political analysis. Despair for art fueled his desire for a full systemic socialist transformation and his decision to work for the end of class society. Everything is in everything, as Jacotot would say: from his own artistic practices Morris had learned something, and he would now relate everything else to it. Only recently, he wrote in one of the many lectures he devoted to the topic of the status of decorative art in the late 1870s, had the lesser arts been divided off from their higher counterparts, impoverishing both irrevocably, rendering the decorative arts "trivial, mechanical, and unintelligent" and the higher ones "dull adjuncts to unmeaning pomp, or ingenious toys for a few idle and rich men."[41] The divided state of art mirrored the division, driven by a system based on the overproduction of goods for profit, between useless luxury

[38] Lissagaray, *La Revue blanche, 1871: Enquête sur la Commune*, p. 67.

[39] Jellinek, *Paris Commune*, p. 381.

[40] Morris, cited in E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (Oakland: PM Press, 2011), p. 251.

[41] Morris, "The Lesser Arts," Morton, ed., *Political Writings*, p. 32. Reclus's analysis starts from the same division: "Society being divided into enemy classes, art has become, of necessity, false ... With

articles for the rich and "the mass of things which no sane man could desire"—the shoddy, cheap, makeshift utilitarian goods overproduced for the rest of us. Abundance under the current system could only mean the useless luxury of the wealthy, on the one hand, and what Communard Paul Lafargue, writing at roughly the same time, called "the mountains of products heaped up higher and more enormous than the pyramids of Egypt," on the other.[42] Were we to rid ourselves of the "tax of waste" financing the current class system, we would bring an end to poverty amidst overproduction and an end to all the false dichotomies between the practical and the beautiful, the utilitarian and the poetic, what is used and what is treasured, at the same time. Senseless luxury, which Morris knew cannot exist without slavery of some kind, would be replaced by communal luxury, or equality in abundance.

In the cooperative social framework surrounding the production of medieval crafts, Morris saw a world where not only were the "lesser arts" part and parcel of the higher ones, but everyday life itself was not separate from what was "highest" or most elaborated in culture and ideas, and where "works" were understood in the broadest possible sense: cathedrals and festivals, permanent and transitory productions alike. Those who continue today to accuse Morris of a musty or romanticized medievalism view both the art of pre-modern times and Morris's relationship to that art very differently than he himself did. 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 into it. Morris saw a *style* of life in the sense that Henri Lefebvre was later to give the word when discussing everyday life in pre-capitalist societies. Ending class-based luxury opens up on an entirely new vista of social wealth:

> First I must ask you to extend the word art beyond those matters which are conscious works of art, to take in not only painting and sculpture, and architecture, but the shapes and colours of all household goods, nay, even the arrangement of the fields for tillage and pasture, the management of towns and of our highways of all kinds; in a word, to extend it to the aspect of all the externals of our life.[43]

Extending the aesthetic dimension into everyday life as the Artists' Federation under the Commune demanded not only makes art common to all people but it also makes it an integral part of the *process* of making. It brings a transformed and sensuous relationship to the materials—their texture, density, pliability, and resistance—and to one's own processes and labor, to the steps taken in making itself and to the remaking,

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the rich it is changed into ostentation. With the poor it can be nothing but imitation." "Art and the People," p. 327.

[42] Paul Lafargue, *The Right to Laziness* [1880], in *The Right to Be Lazy and Other Studies* (Chicago: Charles Kerr, 1907), p. 42.

[43] Morris, "Art Under Plutocracy," in Morton, ed., *Political Writings*, p. 58.

in turn, of one's own capacities. Morris and Reclus had both learned from John Ruskin that Art is man's expression of his joy in labor. "As soon as labor impassions, as soon as it gives joy, the toiler becomes an artist."[44]

The apricot orchard flourishing in the middle of "that preposterous piece of folly once called London,"[45] is one figure—at once from the past and from the future—of the kind of transvaluation of the very idea of art and of abundance Morris and the members of the Artists' Federation under the Commune had in mind. Finding criteria for wealth that was distinct from the quantitative race toward growth and overproduction was the key to imagining and bringing about social transformation. We can see that understanding already manifest in the strategy governing Pottier's choice of the words "communal luxury" in his text. At the moment in mid-April when the manifesto was composed, the phrase served to expressly counteract and defy the abject "misérabilisme" of Versaillais depictions of Parisian life under the Commune. Versaillais propaganda, directed against those whom they called the "partageux" who had seized Paris, and projected out onto provincial France, was mobilized to convince peasants in the countryside that the Commune, were it not defeated, would seize their land and divide it up among themselves. But it also had a second, no less important, goal: that of creating, more generally, the certainty that sharing could only mean the sharing of misery. "Communal luxury" countered any notion of the sharing of misery with a distinctly different kind of world: one where everyone, instead, would have his or her share of the best.

[44] Reclus, "Art and the People," p. 328. Ruskin was initially very supportive of the Commune and of the "glistering and freshly minted idea ... the Parisian notion of Communism." John Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera* (New York: Wiley, 1872), p. 2. His support wavered when he received the false information that the Louvre had been set afire.

[45] William Morris, "The Society of the Future," in May Morris, ed., *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist* (New York: Russel and Russel, 1966), p. 462.

# 3. The Literature of the North

In the autumn of 1871, Peter Kropotkin decided to abandon the scientific and geographic studies that had preoccupied him until that point and devote himself instead to political militancy. He did not come to his decision because of any waning interest in scientific pursuits—if anything his curiosity and joy in science had never been more fully awakened than during the summer he had just spent exploring the ridges of glacial drifts in Sweden and Finland. But his attention had become divided: "I also thought a great deal during this journey about social matters, and these thoughts had a decisive influence upon my subsequent development."[1] Among the "social matters" preoccupying his thoughts was the insurrection in Paris a few months earlier, about which only biased and censored accounts, extremely frustrating to Kropotkin, were available in St. Petersburg. Now, a telegram has just reached him in Finland offering him the position he coveted of Secretary of the Imperial Geographic Society of St. Petersburg. This post would allow him the free time he would need to undertake the project, recounted in his memoirs, that arises like a vision before his eyes as he thinks of his future while gazing out over the Finnish lakes and glaciers:

> Even now, as I was looking on the lakes and hillocks of Finland, new and beautiful [scientific] generalizations arose before my eyes. I saw in a remote past, at the very dawn of mankind, the ice accumulating from year to year in the northern archipelagos, over Scandinavia and Finland. An immense growth of ice invaded the north of Europe and slowly spread as far as its middle portions. Life dwindled ... wretchedly poor, uncertain, it fled further and further south before the icy breath which came from that immense frozen mass ... Ages passed away, till the melting of the ice began ... an extremely slow process of drying up set in, and vegetation began its slow invasion from the south. And now we are fully in the period of a rapid desiccation ... to which central Asia already has fallen a victim, and which menaces Southeastern Europe.[2]

As if in fast motion, he watches as vast geological eras succeed each other, as all the strata of an immense expanse of Russia and Europe open themselves up to reveal the history of glacial movement, climate change, and the development over centuries of the drought-prone regions of the south. He sees arrayed before him the new horizons of

[1] Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), p. 235.
[2] Ibid., p. 239.

physical geography he wants to explore, and imagines how the new discoveries he would make could be put in the service of determining the kinds of economic life, agricultural activities, and food production that might flourish, for example, in the newly desiccated areas toward the south. And then his perspective shifts. He begins to compare his vision of the lakes and hillsides with what he imagines a Finnish peasant from the region might see when contemplating the same sights. Where Kropotkin looks at the landscape and sees theory—"new and beautiful generalizations"—manifesting itself before his eyes, the peasant, plunged in the same contemplation, sees beautiful lakes, but lacks any leisure by which to either widen his knowledge of or enjoy them. What good would it do to work to impart theoretical knowledge about improved farming methods to peasants who are so poor and hungry that they could never make any use of it? Until a complete social transformation gives peasants the leisure to think and develop their own mental life, the social contradiction between his own situation and theirs, Kropotkin decides, is too great. He declines the position at the Geographical Society.

It is worth noting the striking resemblance of Kropotkin's experience in Finland in the summer of 1871 with that of his future friend and comrade, William Morris, traversing Iceland those same months on the back of a donkey. Walking in Snæfellsnes, Iceland in mid-July 1871, Morris is reminded by the loose stones on the edges of the lava fields, of "a half-ruined Paris barricade."[3] Morris, who during the 1880s would become Britain's most vigorous and creative supporter of the memory of the Paris Commune, did not appear to register the event as it was occurring that spring nor note any immediate personal reactions beyond this hallucinatory vision of the vestiges of struggle inscribed in the natural landscape of a country of interest to him mostly because it was "a country of no account whatever commercially."[4] For both travelers, the stark beauty and terrifying austerity of the northern reaches highlight or complement, in some way, the after-effects of the extraordinary news of what had just occurred in Paris. The north is of anthropological and not just aesthetic interest to the voyagers as well. It has often been noted that the Icelandic journeys for Morris were a kind of pivotal prelude to his entry into active political life in the late 1870s. It was among the fishermen and crofters of Iceland, he later wrote, that "I learned one lesson there, thoroughly I hope, that the most grinding poverty is a trifling evil compared with the inequality of classes."[5] He returns to England after his first Icelandic voyage newly hopeful and energized by the inhospitable environment of a place whose "awful looking ... wastes ... [were] perhaps on the whole the healthiest spot in the world."[6] In a similar vein Kropotkin finds Finland—"this tangled skein of lake, and sea, and shore, so full

[3] William Morris, letter to Jane Morris, August 11, 1871, in Philip Henderson, ed., *Letters to His Family and Friends* (London: Longmans, 1950), p. 45.

[4] William Morris, "The Early Literature of the North—Iceland," in Eugene Lemire, ed., *The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), p. 180.

[5] William Morris, letter to Andreas Scheu, September 5, 1883, in N. Kelvin, ed., *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 229.

[6] Morris, "The Early Literature of the North—Iceland," p. 180.

of contrasts and yet forming an inseparable and enchanting whole,"[7]—compelling not merely aesthetically but for historical and social reasons. Just as the eventfulness of the Commune offered a welcome contrast to the political stasis of St. Petersburg, where the progressives were all in prison and the oppressed continuing on passively, so Finland showed a refreshing absence of the corruption endemic to Moscow. The fact that feudalism had never extended to Finland made Finns less servile, in his view, than, say, Russians. The lesson Finland imparts to Kropotkin is a great deal like the lesson Morris learned in Iceland: in spite of great poverty, Finns practiced a simplicity of life premised, in the words of Kropotkin's biographers, on the "absence of unhealthy habits of luxury [that] were universal in all ranks of society."[8] They practiced, we might say, a form of communal luxury.

Kropotkin's decision on a Finnish hillside to abandon science and geography in the service of the people was not, in the end, as dramatic a conversion as it might have seemed. He would manage, in time, to make use of the geographical research he had conducted in Siberia and Scandinavia, when Elisée Reclus called upon him a few years later to collaborate on the writing of major portions of the sixth volume of the *Géographie universelle* dealing with Siberia and Central Asia. The months he spent in the glacial deposits of the Scandinavian north, along with the five preceding years he had spent in Siberia as a Cossack officer and budding geographer, gave him the empirical basis in natural observation he needed for the evolutionary theory of cooperation he would develop in *Mutual Aid*. In fact, forms of animal/human association and an interest in methods of food production and agricultural yield remained at the center of his political and ecological thought throughout his life. In *The Conquest of Bread*, for example, written as a series of articles for the journal he co-founded, *Le Révolté*, in the 1880s, Kropotkin's most detailed description of anarchist society emerges as a rewriting of the 1871 Paris Commune from the point of view of agricultural self-sufficiency as revolutionary strategy. "To what should the two million citizens of Paris turn their attention when they would no longer be catering to the luxurious fads and amusements of Russian princes, Romanian grandees, and the wives of Berlin financiers?" asks the Russian prince.[9] His answer is an elaborate imagining of Paris solving its own supply problems by using intensive horticultural methods throughout the Departments of the Seine and the Seine-et-Oise. The 1871 insurrection is refigured by Kropotkin in the light of the experimental gardening he had undertaken while incarcerated in Russia, and filtered through his readings of the zoologist Karl Kessler's theories about the cooperative instincts in nature. All of Paris's extensive parks, but especially the gentry's estates, the great hunting preserves of Rambouillet and beyond, the forests

[7] Peter Kropotkin, "Finland, A Rising Nationality," *The Nineteenth Century, 97* (March 1885), p. 531.

[8] George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Anarchist Prince* (New York: Schocken, 1971), p. 85.

[9] Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 73.

and grounds of aristocratic chateaux, are in his schema expropriated and given over to become high-yield vegetable gardens.

In an article entitled "Kropotkin Was No Crackpot," biologist Stephen Jay Gould recounts the history of his relationship with Kropotkin's ideas, and particularly with the latter's major text, *Mutual Aid*.[10] Kropotkin wrote his book as a direct response to the "gladiatorial" and Malthusian worldview T. H. Huxley had put forward based on his reading of Darwin:[11] a cutthroat world of unmitigated competition, as species after species in an overcrowded terrain seeks to wedge its way into (and wedge others out of) the existing available space. In his own reading of Darwin, Kropotkin located the traces of another, more subtle and underemphasized strain of thought in addition to that played by competitive struggle: one that acknowledged the role played in evolutionary survival by forms of cooperation among the species. Gould recounts how he is drawn to Kropotkin's reading of Darwin but finds it overly idiosyncratic—too homemade, so to speak, too artisanal, or too isolated a response on which to build scholarly consensus. His view of Kropotkin's isolation was, however, as Gould realizes over time, a product of Gould's own self-acknowledged parochialism, a narrowness of perspective that eventually came to an end when he was able to contextualize Kropotkin within a larger field of Russian scientific research. Gould's difficulty with Kropotkin is not surprising. The content of an act, a set of ideas, even a gesture can often be grasped only in relation to its situation and context. One of my own aims in this book is to provide Kropotkin and Morris with a context—the Commune and its after-math—in which they are not generally situated. Gould managed to find a different context. Once he could read Kropotkin's ideas in relation to (or side by side with) the mainstream of Russian evolutionary theory, most of it still untranslated, Kropotkin no longer appeared to Gould as a peculiarity. Russian scientists and the view from the north uniformly rejected Malthusian competition. They saw it as a theoretical expression that could only have emerged from the experience of a small, crowded, hyper-industrial country whose economic ideal was the open competition of the "free market," and from research conducted, as was Darwin's, in the teeming, environmentally rich, and varied flora and fauna of the tropics. Marx, too, had come to the conclusion that Darwin was, to all extents and purposes, a little Englander:

> It is remarkable how Darwin rediscovers, among the beasts and the plants, the society of England with its division of labour, competition, opening up of new markets, "inventions," and Malthusian "struggle for existence." It is Hobbes' *bellum omnium contra omnes* [or war of each against all].[12]

[10] See Stephen Jay Gould, "Kropotkin Was No Crackpot," *Natural History* 97 (July 1988), pp. 12–21.

[11] Ibid, p. 12.

[12] Karl Marx, letter to Friedrich Engels, June 18, 1862, in *Collected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels*, vol. XLI (London: Victor Gollancz, 1985), p. 381.

A theory derived instead from Russia's long history of communal social forms, and from an immediate experience of Russia's land and natural history, with its sparse population and harsh environment, would foreground, not surprisingly, the struggle that pits organisms against a challenging, often brutal environment and the forms of cooperation they develop for their survival, over the gladiatorial combat of the survival of the fittest. Years spent in the bleak polar world of the Siberian wasteland, it seems, may have helped Kropotkin see in the Paris Commune what would later become his privileged example of cooperative effort under conditions of utmost duress.

As for Morris, his attachment to Icelandic literature and the tribal cultures of the North continued to his death. In our own time, Iceland has played a dramatic role in fueling an anticapitalist imaginary: unique among European countries, it responded to the economic crisis of October 2008 by forcing its political leaders responsible for the aggressive neoliberal program to resign. In the 1870s, for someone of Morris's sensibilities, Iceland was a kind of time-capsule, the remnants of its then quite remote communitarian and democratic ways still traceable in the internal self-regulation and daily rhythms of its present-day social relations, in the cadence of its language and in the stockpile of its heroic, ancient literature still, at that time, commonly read and recited. Elisée Reclus, too, viewed medieval Iceland as an *example*, a milestone in the history of human liberty. Peopled by exiles who preferred local chieftains to a despotic king, isolated and buffeted in the middle of the ocean, but protected for three and a half centuries from the development of western Europe, Iceland, despite extreme difficulties, had reached, in their view, by virtue of its critical regionalism, one of the highest intellectual and moral levels in the world's history—if not, in Reclus's opinion, the very highest. Its people, bound to each other as in other pre-capitalist societies, through kinship, proximity, and even through hatred and enmity, were not bound to each other through cash; social and economic rank was very little differentiated, and material bounty and deprivations more or less evenly shared. Developing in isolation from Europe, Iceland had become exempt from many of its social hierarchies and suffered, in Morris's words, "no class degradation."[13] Reclus emphasized the strong democratic tradition and spirit of independence among Icelanders at a moment when Europe was dominated by despotism, monarchy, and feudal hierarchy. They "succeeded completely in maintaining their dignity as Free men" without kings, feudal princes, hierarchy, and without participating in warfare.[14] Their extremely high literacy level was also distinctive; each of their ships, on long voyages, carried on board a sailor whose task it was to recite poetry to the crew. Decisions were made according to "common interest discussed in open air by all inhabitants," with judicial processes subject to the same popular supervision. Most importantly, perhaps, he writes that they managed to

[13] Morris, "The Early Literature of the North—Iceland," p. 198.

[14] Elisée Reclus, *L'Homme et la terre*, tome 2 [1931] (Antony: Editions TOPS/H. Trinquier, 2007), pp. 307–308.

maintain the principle of "land to the peasants" in a quite equitable manner over the course of many centuries.

It is easy to quarrel with the empirical accuracy of nineteenth-century ethnographic history. And not everyone might share Morris's conclusion that "our artificial poverty of civilization," a product of the waste inherent to a society of inequality, is "so much bitterer for those that suffer under it than the natural poverty of the rudest barbarism."[15] What is important is to recognize in Morris's and Reclus's fascination with medieval Iceland their way of going about decentralizing the flow of history. It is a way of breaking through the modernizing consciousness of an Edward Bellamy, castigated by Morris in his review of his work as "unmixed modern, ... unhistoric and unartistic ... perfectly satisfied with modern civilization."[16] It is a way of allowing other paths taken through historical time, including the time to come, to become visible. The persistence of non-growth-driven cultures in the present builds confidence in the possibility of anachronism by allowing encounters in one's own moment with actually embodied aspects of the past, stranded or land-locked, as it were, but still sporadically perceptible. Evoking communitarian or tribal societies of the past may provide clues to the free forms of a whole new economic life in the future. By granting pre-capitalist societies an exemplary status or by investing them with uncommon significance they may in turn offer ideas that can be *appropriated*, in the strong sense of the word favored by Henri Lefebvre. They become "anticipatory designs," "novae," in the words of Ernst Bloch, or "exemplary suggestions" to borrow a phrase from Peter Linebaugh.[17] The fact that in Iceland after the twelfth century, wealth and power did accumulate in the hands of a few as the edifice of a state came into being is of as little importance to Morris as the "failure" of the Commune—in both cases, for those who lived it, a type of liberty and a network of solidarity were realized, and out of local defeat there may well come a prototype for future social revolutions. This is why Morris tended to call his references to ancient Iceland or to the ancient Teutons a "parable": "To those that have the hearts to understand, this tale of the past is a parable of the days to come."[18] A listener to one of Morris's lectures used the same term to describe what he had heard that evening: "something more than a lecture, a kind of parable or prediction, in which art and labor were held forth, not as mere circumstances or incidents of life,

[15] William Morris, "The Promise of May," *Justice*, May 1, 1896, cited in May Morris, *Artist, Writer, Socialist*, vol. 2, p. 361.

[16] William Morris, "Looking Backward: A Review of Edward Bellamy," in *News from Nowhere and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 354.

[17] Quoted in Florence Boos, "Morris's German Romances as Socialist History," *Victorian Studies* (Spring 1984), p. 321. Peter Linebaugh, preface to E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revoltuionary*, p. xxvi.

[18] Morris, "Art and Socialism" [1884], in Morton, ed., *The Political Writings*, p. 122. Elsewhere Morris writes, "I must of necessity turn back to past times, and even times a very long while passed; and you must believe I do so with the distinct purpose of showing you where lies the hope for the future, and not in mere empty regret for the days which can never come again." (Morris, Art and Labour," in *Unpublished Lectures*, p. 96).

but as life or the act of living itself."[19] Parable, from the Greek meaning "beside," plus "casting, putting, turning": a "putting beside" or "putting side by side." A parable is not about going backwards or reversing time but about opening it up—opening up the web of possibilities. In this case a vision of non-alienated labor and pre-class society is placed next to contemporary times—"the artificial poverty of civilization"—as a way of recruiting past hopes to serve present needs. A parable presumes in its listener not so much the heart as the mental faculty (or perhaps it is the heart) that allows the mind to integrate two conceptual narratives into an emergent meaning, a third story. That third story may very well be the one Florence Boos sees forecast by Morris in his poetry and his essays alike, the story in which "we shall be our own Goths, and at whatever cost break up again the new tyrannous Empire of Capitalism."[20]

Morris's 1885 poem about the Paris Commune, "Pilgrims of Hope," is, in this sense, every bit as much of a parable as his other romances, *House of the Wolfings, A Dream of John Ball*, or *The Roots of the Mountains*. But where these latter recount, respectively, a struggle by Germanic tribes against their autocratic oppressor, a peasant uprising in the fourteenth century, and the early struggles of ancient tribal society to establish a working communal order, "Pilgrims of Hope" is set in the present, with ordinary British workers as characters, and written in the plain diction of the realist mode and not in the language of a dream.[21] Nor is its reader transported to a dream-world with its own laws and cultures, its own logic and consistency. The poem, in fact, is situated firmly in the present of a British reader of *Commonweal* in 1885 to the extent that Morris incorporates material from British struggles of the 1880s and from his recent experiences among London workers and yet makes the poem's events lead up, chronologically, to the Commune. In his use of realist diction in "Pilgrims of Hope" we might say that Morris managed to register both the exemplary status that the Commune shared with medieval Iceland and its other, more shocking characteristic: it happened in the present.

In London during the Commune, Marx, like Kropotkin and Morris was, as we have seen, beginning his own immersion in the "literature of the North": reading Chernyshevsky and the journal issues conveyed to him by Elisabeth Dmitrieff from the Russian populists and members of the International in Switzerland. But unlike Kropotkin and Morris, he was highly aware of what was transpiring in Paris. He was as well-informed as one could hope to be about an event kept intentionally isolated by systems of propaganda and censorship. The shock of the Commune's unfolding, and the presence of so many of his friends in the fighting, had an immediate effect on Marx, bringing

[19] Bruce Glasier, cited in Thompson, *William Morris*, p. 355.

[20] William Morris, "The Development of Modern Society," *Commonweal*, August 16, 1890, p. 261.

[21] Indeed, an early Morris biographer maintains that "The Pilgrims of Hope" is the very first piece of English literature to truly break through class barriers, and likens it to a kind of Gorky-like socialist realism, well before the fact. He also judges it to be "the most important poem of contemporary narrative in England during the nineteenth century." See Jack Lindsay, *William Morris, His Life and Work* (London: Constable, 1975), p. 308.

him face to face with the *present* human forces of emancipation and demanding that he think alongside them. By bringing him to a frontal confrontation with the actual existence of alternative social forms, the Commune for Marx proved to be—if we may adopt a Rancièrian idiom—something of a full "redistribution of the sensible."[22] For Marx as it was for Kropotkin and Reclus, the circumstance of the Commune proved enormously generative: creating ways of framing or reading or taking part in the moment of its intervention that then alter the frame of perception and open up the field of the possible.

Raya Dunayevskaya and David Harvey have each highlighted in different ways the pivotal role played by the Commune in Marx's trajectory. Harvey points out that Marx himself experienced the full weight of an "either-or" dialectic at the moment when the Paris Commune was proclaimed. An "either-or" dialectic, as opposed to a "both-and" transcendental or Hegelian dialectic, is one that is bound to a particular space and that as such demands a political or existential choice. Its logic is that of the geographical dimension and grounding for class struggle: those demands, concerns and aspirations that are place-specific in kind. When the Commune erupted, Marx, who was theoretically supportive of any working-class uprising, was nevertheless initially critical of what he took to be the lack of preparation on the part of the Communards. But the very existence of the struggle led him to recognize the serious repercussions that would accompany his either rejecting or supporting it, and in the end he opted strongly for the latter, producing, in the voice of the International, a supportive—even a "transfigurative" as Jacques Rougerie has called it[23]—interpretation of the event that in effect functioned equally as a kind of manifesto or speech act magnifying and continuing what the Communards were accomplishing. Harvey argues that it is indeed not a minor matter whether one decides to support or criticize the Commune at a moment when the event's historical contingencies are unfolding in full force, and Marx, who was fully cognizant of what was at stake, acted accordingly.[24]

But we need to take the argument further by tracing in more detail the effect of the Commune's "own working existence" on Marx's thinking: on the issues he addressed or left behind, the connections he made, the new possibilities for comparison awakened by contingency—in short, his path. Harvey points to the direction Marx takes after the Commune when he comments that Marx's historical writings and his writings from the last decade of his life—the ethnological works, the letter to Vera Zasulich—show a predilection for an "either-or," place-specific dialectic over a transcendental, Hegelian one. The new sentence Marx felt obliged to add to the new preface to the *Communist Manifesto* he wrote in 1872—"the working class cannot simply lay hold

[22] See Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004).

[23] Rougerie refers to Marx's "superb transfiguration (and not disfiguration) of the Commune." Jacques Rougerie, *La Commune* (Paris: PUF, 1988), p. 77.

[24] See David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 174–5. Thanks to Erag Ramizi for alerting me to this discussion.

of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for their own purpose"—indicates clearly the distance that the Commune made him take toward his earlier thoughts about state centralization.[25] What he now understood was that under the Second Empire, the state's formal independence from civil society, its growth as "a parasitic excrescence" grafted onto civil society, was itself the *form* through which the bourgeoisie ruled.[26] Attacking the separation between the state and civil society was not one of communism's remote objectives but was instead the practical means for its attainment, the very medium for class struggle. The form of the Commune, in turn, was less a form than a set of dismantling acts, the critique-in-act of the bureaucratic state, a critique that, in Marx's words, amounted to the state's abolishment. The Communards had not *decreed* or proclaimed the abolishment of the state. Rather, they had set about, step by step, dismantling, in the short time they had, all of its bureaucratic underpinnings. An acting, not a parliamentary body, the Commune was both executive and legislative at once. The army was eliminated; all foreigners were admitted into the Commune; state functionaries were eliminated (certain of their tasks still existed, but they were performed by anyone—at a worker's salary, and subject to immediate recall); priests were sent off to "the recesses of private life."[27] The Commune, Engels reminds us, had no ideals to realize. Yet it produced a greater philosophy of freedom than either the Declaration of Independence or the Declaration of the Rights of Man because it was *concrete*. This is why, for Marx, the greatest social measure taken by the Commune was nothing more and nothing less than "its own working existence,"—the simple fact of it, in other words, its limits and contradictions included.

In the years immediately following the demise of the Commune, Marx was primarily engaged in two tasks: preparing what some now count as the definitive edition of *Capital*—the French edition, the only one he personally supervised into publication—and continuing his study of Chernyshevsky, including his *Essays on Communal Ownership of Land*, and Russian communal forms. Raya Dunayevskaya points out that one of the principal changes Marx made in the French edition of C*apital* was an expansion and strengthening of the section on commodity fetishism to emphasize not just the exchange of commodities but also the dual nature inherent in labor.[28] What Marx saw enacted in the Commune's working existence was the actual dissolution of commodity fetishism and the establishment instead of its opposite: social relations as "freely associated labor." Better than any theorist could have, the creative activity of the Communards disclosed the fetishism of commodities inherent in the very *form* of the product of labor as commodity—including, especially, labor itself as commodity. What the Communards had made manifest was the opposite of reification in the form of their

[25] Marx, preface to the 1872 German edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. D. Ryazanoff (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), p. 260.

[26] Marx, *The Civil War in France*, p. 58.

[27] Ibid., p. 57.

[28] See Raya Dunayevskaya, *Philosophy and Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), pp. 80–94.

own "freely associated labor." Work, of course, remained under the Commune. But it had disappeared in the sense of being forced or constrained wage labor under an asymmetrical contract. Productive labor no longer carried the meaning of salaried labor exchanged against capital. It had taken on the larger meaning of an activity useful to the needs of society as a whole. Or, as Marx put it, "With labor emancipated, every man becomes a working man, and productive labor ceases to be a class attribute."[29]

After seeing in the actions of the Communards what freely associated labor might actually look like, Marx was better able to theorize its opposite, the commodity form. But Dunayevskaya takes her argument one step further. The strengthening of his theory was at one and the same time Marx's break with the very *concept* of theory. This break, she argues, had its initial beginnings at an earlier moment, when Marx, very late in the various drafts and revisions that went into the writing of *Capital*, made the decision to include in Volume One the chapter on the working day. What is important about that decision was that Marx was introducing directly into theory the workers' struggle for shortening the working day. He was in effect (and very materially) saying that in order to understand what is taking place in the market you have to leave the market behind and enter the factory—it is there that relations between men get reified and turned into things. "When does my day begin and when does it end?"—with this question the subject is about neither economics nor philosophy precisely, but about human beings and their daily life, their path. And what is at stake is "history and its process." The Commune made it all the more clear that the masses shape history and in so doing reshape not just actuality but theory itself. By following the process of actual material struggle, Marx discovers a new world *in cognition*. His discussions are no longer with Smith and Ricardo, with theorists, be they bourgeois or socialist. His shift from the history of theory to the history of the class struggles at the point of production *becomes the theory*. He thus moves away from a concept of theory as a debate between theorists, and away from the idea that it is *that* history that matters, to a concept of theory as the history of production relations.

In the light of Dunayevskaya's argument, it is worth remarking that Marx gave to the struggle for the working day the same name that he would later give to the 1871 insurrection in Paris: he called both a "civil war." The struggle to shorten the working day, he wrote, was a "protracted and more or less concealed civil war between the capitalist class and the working class."[30] How inflammatory the term "civil war" might have been at that time can be gauged by the behavior of Marx's own reformist son-in-law and former Communard, Charles Longuet, who, when editing in 1900 a translation of *The Civil War in France* into French, deliberately changed Marx's title from *La Guerre Civile* to *La Commune de Paris*. What "civil war" indicated, and what the Commune had made all too clear, was that for the bourgeoisie the proletariat is

[29] Marx, *The Civil War in France*, p. 61. This description of the nature of work under the Commune is based on Daniel Bensaid, "Politiques de Marx," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Inventer l'incommu: Textes et correspondence autour de la Commune* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2008), p. 43.

[30] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (London: Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 412–13.

not a simple, ordinary enemy as in a classical war (the war, say, between the French and the Prussians), but a barbarian, an incarnation of absolute evil. As Engels put it, "The bourgeoisie proclaims that the workers are not ordinary enemies they must overcome, but enemies of society that must be exterminated."[31] Civil wars have the pitiless logic of holy wars, in a civil war the dominant class arrogates to itself the monopoly on humanity. Because the Commune struck at the very heart of the state, social and economic system, the European middle class rallied against the insurrection in a movement resembling a religious crusade, a crusade that culminated with the class massacre that occurred in the heart of "civilized" Europe: the mass shootings of tens of thousands of Communards in May 1871. The attempt on the part of the bourgeois-republican government to physically exterminate its class enemy bears every resemblance to mass exterminations motivated by religion or race. Yet for Marx, the same class antagonism, the same stakes, the same civil war—if "protracted, more or less concealed"—marked the long struggle throughout the nineteenth century to shorten the working day. To analyze this struggle it was not enough to provide pathetic descriptions of monstrous labor conditions. Description, as Georg Lukács would argue in his study of naturalist composition, is tantamount to reification;[32] description naturalizes conditions and marks the absence of the relational. Instead, in his chapter on the working day, Marx narrates the self-constitution of the working class as revolutionary subject, thinking *along with* or beside the human forces newly pushing forth: "Suddenly, however, there arises the voice of the worker, which had previously been stifled in the sound and fury of the production process."[33]

But the most significant and direct effect that the Commune's alternative ways of organizing social and economic life had on Marx was to make the actual existence of alternative, non-capitalist societies outside Europe more visible. His interest during the last decade of his life in primitive agrarian communalism was determined by the impact of the Russian Populist Revolutionary Movement and the central place that movement ascribed to the *obshina*. Populists believed in the capacity of the *obshina*, with its grounding in communal land property as the pillar of primitive communism, to provide the basis for a modern communal economy without passing through a necessary destruction by capitalist market economy. Marx looks to Russia and sees rural, non-capitalist societies, based not on kinship but on locality, enmeshed in a capitalist world. But he sees them now through the filter of the Parisian insurrection. In the form of the Russian peasant commune he sees the traces of the primary communism he had observed in the Paris Commune: "individuals [who] behave not as laborers but as owners—as members of a community which also labors."[34] The Paris Communards' relentless reduction of the cost, scale, and power of any central, bureaucratic authority

[31] Friedrich Engels, *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, June 28, 1848.

[32] See Georg Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?" in *Writer and Critic and Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1970).

[33] Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 342.

[34] Karl Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1964), p. 68.

allow him to see that the enemy of the Russian communes was not some form of stagist, historical inevitability, but rather the state itself: "What threatens the life of the Russian Commune is neither a historical inevitability nor a theory; it is state oppression, and exploitation by capitalist intruders whom the state has made powerful at the peasants' expense."[35] Russian populists—an alliance of peasants, workers, and working intelligentsia—were engaged like the Parisian Communards in a class war with the state.

The question posed in a letter to Marx by Vera Zasulich—a friend of Kropotkin's with whom the latter enjoyed excursions to the mountains near Zurich in 1878—was the question of the future of the Russian Commune as it was then being debated between populists and those who considered themselves Marxists. It was, in her words, a question of life or death. "Marxists" in Russia held to an evolutionary point of view, a modernization theory according to which peasants were nothing more than a reactionary mass, a vestige sentenced to be wiped out by the inexorable course of history toward capitalist centralization. For populists, on the other hand, the survival of primary or "naturally arisen" communism and residual remnants of pre-class society was a positive force in the present and for the future.

Zasulich's unsettling question causes Marx to, as Shanin quotes Marx, "descend from pure theory to Russian reality," and "not be frightened of the word 'archaic'."[36] It causes him to commit to the detail of known experience and accelerate his extensive study of Russian communal forms. Much of this study recalls the way in which he worked systematically through the intensive accumulation of empirical data he had assembled on the Paris Commune, as it was happening. Marx responds to Vera Zasulich that non-capitalist societies might indeed move directly to socialism on the basis of indigenous communal forms. But, he adds, "Everything depends on the historical context in which it is located."[37] At this level, he concludes, "it is a question no longer of a problem to be solved, but simply of an enemy to be beaten. Thus it is no longer a theoretical problem ... it is quite simply an enemy to be beaten."[38] In David Harvey's terms, evoked earlier, this is then a prime example of an "either-or" dialectic, and not a Hegelian transcendental one.

Russia, it seems, could be perceived at that moment in all its particularity: as an independent nucleus of dialectical development and not as a mere preparatory "stage" in the necessary development of capitalist culture. In the global cast of national characters, Russia becomes visible as a kind of Lukácsian "type"—neither stereotype nor exception, neither generalizable nor eccentric. For there was nothing exceptional or even identitarian in the Russian situation, nothing that could ground it in any mysti-

[35] "Marx-Zasulich Correspondence: Letters and Drafts," in Teodor Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and 'The Peripheries of Capitalism'* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), pp. 104–5.

[36] Ibid., p. 107.

[37] Ibid., pp. 120–1.

[38] Ibid., p. 116.

cal Russian nature or authentic cultural endowment. Pre-capitalist and tribal societies existed elsewhere in the world, and identities can never be torn from circumstances. For Chernyshevsky the Russian situation was by no means a "certain mysterious feature peculiar only to the Great Russian nature", but was a result instead of what he called "the unfavorable circumstances of historical development in Russia,"[39] circumstances that in his mind had served, favorably in fact, the making manifest of what his comrade Peter Tkachev termed "the relative advantages of backwardness."[40] Yet there was nothing average about the Russian situation either—it is in no sense statistically "representative" of its historical moment. As "type" I mean simply that the Russian situation at that moment concentrates in their most vivid form all of the growing contradictions and all the forces, potential and existing, that are moving to social change. This in part explains the persistence of the figure of the *obshina* not only for Marx, but for Reclus, Kropotkin, and other western socialists as well.

In the case of the Russian communes, Marx saw their isolation from each other as their primary weakness, an isolation, he suggested, that might be overcome by insurrection, followed by "a peasant assembly chosen by the communes themselves,"—in other words, by an economic and administrative body serving their own interests, a kind of federation.[41] Peasants, in other words, would run their own affairs. But there was a further proviso. Their success depended on their ability to link up with and ally with working-class revolutionary forces in the industrial west. To regain control over their history they must enter the collectivity of history. The communes might well constitute their own dialectical nuclei, but their survival depended on a *relational* mediation: here, well before Antonio Gramsci and José-Carlos Mariátegui, and in a perspective quite akin to the one each of these thinkers would develop forty years later, we see the necessity invoked of an alliance between agricultural and industrial workers, and here on a global scale.

Perhaps anyone who had contemplated the end of the Paris Commune during the Bloody Week of May 25, 1871 would be convinced of the central importance of thinking the relation between countryside and city—not accidentally, the great subject matter of the classical realist novel. Rural boys from the countryside complied with the order to gun down thousands of their own countrymen in a carnage never before seen in French history—"those soldiers blinded by an inflexible law / Rendered passive instruments and barbarous hired assassins / Those monstrous supporters of monarchical wars," was how Communard worker-painter and sometime poet, Gaillard fils immortalized them.[42] Benoît Malon, as I noted earlier, attributed such ferocity to the lessons learned by the French army in the colonial subjugation of North Africa. In his drafts for *The Civil*

[39] Quoted in Haruki Wada, "Marx and Revolutionary Russia," *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, p. 47.

[40] Quoted in Shanin, *Late Marx*, p. 23.

[41] Marx, *Late Marx*, p. 111.

[42] "Ces soldats aveuglés qu'une inflexible loi / Rend instruments passifs et barbares sicaires / Ces monstrueux soutiens des monarchiques guerres." Gaillard fils, *Poésies de l'exil* (Carouge, 1872), p. 10.

*War in France*, Marx goes into considerable detail not so much about the rural boys as assassins but about the problems confronting the Paris Communards in what was an equally severe isolation as that of the rural *obshina*, but in their case, an *urban* one. Their isolation was literal: correspondence between insurrectionary Paris and the countryside could only occur by balloon, carrier pigeon, or by secret courier, and passports were reintroduced for traveling from one place to another. And it was an isolation at once inflicted and, to a certain extent, desired. Writing about the early days of April, Communard Georges Jeanneret notes: "Communication is interrupted between Paris and France ... The insurgent city is delivered over to itself. Blocked, forsaken, besieged, bombarded, it will have its own history; it is an isolated world, as much because of the circle of fire that surrounds it as because of the spirit that animates it."[43]

What could rural people see of Paris, and what was allowed to be said about what was occurring within the city walls? In Paris Communards were not unaware of Versaillais maneuvering, as a song sung on the streets at the time makes clear: "*Leur plan c'est d'mettr' comme chats et chiens / Le provincial et l'parisien / ... En faisant croire aux campagnards / Qu'Paris n'est qu'n amas d'pillards.*"[44] A "wall of lies," Marx writes in the five dense pages he devotes to the countryside's relation to Paris at the moment of the Commune, separated the two: "The Provinces are only allowed to look at Paris through the Versailles *camera obscura*."[45] What Marx's study of the press during the Commune revealed was that only the Versaillais and the German press was available outside Paris; any news communications that made their way out of the insurgent city were ordered to be seized and burned in the public square. "It is evident that it is only the Versailles army, government and a Chinese wall of lies that stand between Paris and the Provinces. If that wall falls, they will unite with it." Making the wall fall would have necessitated a crash course in Gramscian-style political education which, of course, never happened. The task was to make peasants see—in a situation where they were prevented from seeing anything—that it was the Commune, and not the rule of the great landed rural proprietors, that was founded on what Marx called their "living interests" and "real wants."[46] Despite the everyday fact of his degradation into a rural proletarian, the French peasant clung to "the delusion," "the pretext," of proprietorship. The Commune would convert the peasant's nominal proprietorship of the land into "real proprietorship of the fruits of his labor." The Commune offered cheap government and no war indemnity to peasants who were heavily blood-taxed to pay both for the war and the costly state machinery. The whole parasitical judiciary body—embodied in small rural towns by that great Balzacian social type, the notary—

[43] Jeanneret, *Paris pendant la Commune*, p. 82.

[44] *a Carmagnole*, in Coulonges, *La Commune en chantant*, p. 71.

[45] See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Writings on the Paris Commune*, ed. Hal Draper (New York: Monthly Review, 1971), pp. 133–6 and 155–9 for the draft sections on the peasantry and city/province relations.

[46] Marx, cited in ibid., p. 157.

which enriched itself from the peasants' works, would be replaced by Communal agents employed at workers' salaries. "[The Commune] will break down this whole judiciary cobweb which entangles the French peasant and that gives abodes to the judiciary and mayors of the bourgeois spiders that suck its blood."[47] If the Empire was founded on artificially nourished delusions and traditional prejudices, an alliance with the workers in Paris would be founded on the peasant's "living interests."

The Communards themselves seem clearly to have realized by early April that the provinces were in fact the Commune's only hope of victory. Sympathetic uprisings in Toulouse, Marseilles, Lyons and elsewhere, though quickly suppressed, had initially held out the possibility of aid from outside the capital. In municipal elections in April surprisingly strong republican gains occurred in many rural regions. "To the Workers of the Countryside," a manifesto co-authored by Communards Benoît Malon, himself of peasant origins, and André Léo, a feminist novelist, was written to reach out to peasants who did not own the land, that large mass of farmers, sharecroppers, and agricultural laborers. Printed in 100,000 copies and destined for distribution in the provinces, it emphasized the Commune's recognition of the identity of interests soldering urban and rural workers together:

> Brother, you are being deceived. Our interests are the same. What I ask for you wish as well; the emancipation I demand is yours ... Paris demands that the deputies, senators, and Bonapartists who authored the war be the ones to pay the 5 milliards to Prussia, that their properties be sold to that end, along with what is called the crown goods, of which there is no more need in France ... when all is said and done, what Paris wants is *the land for the peasants, the tool for the workers, and work by and for everyone.*[48]

In its "Declaration to the French People" of April 19—the most official of the documents outlining the Commune's goals and processes—the Commune emphasized its intention of guaranteeing the "absolute autonomy" of every local commune, and called on the farmers and peasants to be their "ally" in the struggle for this "communal idea."[49]

Concluding his discussion of the Paris Commune's relation to the provinces, Marx comments that what Thiers and company fear most, even more than they fear the emancipation of the urban proletariat, is the emancipation of the peasants. A few years later, Marx would return to the narrative of Thiers and company again, and recount their activities in a new setting. In remarks made in the French National Assembly in 1875, the same characters who suppressed the Paris Commune so violently four years

[47] Marx, cited in ibid., p. 156.

[48] André Léo and Benoît Malon, "Au Travailleur des campagnes," in Malon, *La Troisième Défaite*, pp. 169–72. Malon claims 100,000 copies were circulated in the countryside. His book, the first serious attempt to write the history of the Commune from the point of view of the Paris revolutionaries, was also the first to emphasize the political isolation of Paris vis-à-vis the countryside.

[49] See the "Déclaration au peuple français," April 19, 1871, in Rougerie, *Paris libre 1871*, pp. 153–6.

earlier are heard denouncing communal property in colonized Algeria as a danger, since it is "a form which supports communist tendencies in the [people's] minds." French colonial policy in Algeria, it seems, is governed by the same impetus that drove the brutal suppression of the Commune. Thiers, after all, was the author of a philosophical treatise entitled *De la propriété*; these representatives of the French bourgeoisie, Marx observes, "are unanimous on the goal: [the] destruction of collective property."[50]

In Marx's work from the Paris Commune on, there is a renewed interest in the peasantry, and especially the peasantry outside Europe, as well as in the persistence in the present of pre-capitalist and non-Western forms of communal property and communal labor, particularly in India, Algeria, and Latin America. As Teodor Shanin and others have made clear, Marx after 1871 distances himself from a revolutionary perspective that depends on capitalist "progress," whether technical or social-structural.[51] The Commune brings the insight that the urban working class needs an alliance with the peasantry that is based on "living interests" and "real needs." That is, if the "living interests" and "real needs" of rural and non-European people had become more visible to Marx, it is important to recall that they were visible for him in a *relational*, "non-essentialist," we might say, way—they are perceived only in their relation with urban working-class life under capitalism. For Marx, the Paris Commune entailed a "practical learning of extending relations"—the phrase is Raymond Williams's—from the city to the French countryside, and to the countryside and the world outside Europe.[52] The lived reality of the Russian countryside could now be perceived in its particularity not as lagging, in a (Darwinian) evolutionary schema, but as part of a global interdependence of interlocking social transformations: town and country on a worldwide scale.

[50] Marx, cited in Lawrence Krader, *The Asiatic Mode of Production: Sources, Development and Critique in the Writings of Karl Marx* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), p. 405, p. 410.

[51] See in particular Shanin, *Late Marx*. Bastiaan Wielenga, for example, cites Marx's interest in "a revival of the archaic societal type in a superior form," (p. 913) and in a revolutionary practice that unleashes the forces directed toward the "further development of the village community" (p. 913). See his "Indische Frage," in *Historisch-kristisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus*, vol. 6:2 (Hamburg: Argument Verlag), pp. 904–17. See also Kevin Anderson, *Marx at the Margins* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

[52] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 285.

# 4. The Seeds Beneath the Snow

There are few tragedies, wrote Claude Roy about the Commune, in which the unity of place, time, and action are so rigorously observed. Circumscribed and sited within the city walls and severely compressed in duration, the Commune looks to be an urban story, a local event, just seventy-two days long, but one whose extravagant death-count alone might well justify a term like "tragic proportions." But we can turn Roy's remark on its head.[1] It is only by framing our perception of the event according to the laws of tragedy that the insurrection fulfills generic expectations. If we attend instead to the particularity of its unfolding and to the political culture that traversed it and that grew out of it, isolation and tragic affect are rapidly dispelled. In the decade following the massacre, as Paris under the victors and in the service of *their* memory regained its former aesthetics of imperial monumentality, traces of the Commune could be detected everywhere, it seems, except within the city of Paris proper. Thus William Morris, as we discussed in the last chapter, could perceive the traces of Parisian barricades hidden in the lava fields of Iceland. The filter through which he views the Icelandic terrain, the unconscious superimposition of ancient, petrified lava and recent urban conflagration, gives us—along with the apricot orchard in what had once been Trafalgar Square—another presiding image through which to try to refract the practices and thought of a number of militants in the wake of the Commune, for whom the experience of what had transpired in those few weeks in Paris, whether lived directly or not, had become a turning point.

While countries like Spain and Italy rushed to honor Favre's circular and deliver up any Communards who had managed to flee to their countries back to the Parisian courts to be judged by those whom they had fought against, and while Belgian security police banned dozens of refugees, England and Switzerland refused to extradite political exiles and, in so doing, became the primary sites for refugees and fellow travelers to gather, to continue the political work of the Commune, and to elaborate together its thought. As Henri Lefebvre once remarked, a movement's theory has to emerge from the movement itself, "for it is the movement that has revealed, unleashed, and liberated theoretical capacities."[2] Lefebvre's remark is in keeping with his own conviction about the inseparability of revolutionary thinking and experience, the dialectic of *vécu* and

[1] See Claude Roy, "Preface," Maxime Vuillaume, *Mes Cahiers rouges au temps de la Commune* (Paris: Récits, vol. 7, 1953). I should point out that Roy, too, argues against the tragic "localism" of the Commune.

[2] Henri Lefebvre, *The Explosion: Marxism and the French Upheaval* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969), p. 103.

*conçu*: his sense, that is, that while thinking and action are not the same, they must continuously return to each other for renewal. From this perspective, any time spent counting the number of Proudhonistes versus Blanquistes in Paris in the spring of 1871, or parsing the exact weight to give to Jacobin influence, or any of the other related attempts to determine the proper proportion of ideological ingredients that resulted in the uprising, can be of only minimal consequence. Lefebvre's remark was made in the context of a discussion of May '68, but it was the Commune that made clear well before the 1960s that political struggle itself produces new conditions, modifies social relations, changes the participants in the event, and the way they think and speak—the struggle itself creates new political forms, ways of being, and new theoretical understanding of those ways and forms. The dialectic of lived and conceived—what a number of future Communards, in a text written early in 1871, called "this reciprocal penetration of action and idea"—is a real dialectic, in which something actually can't be thought until something else has come into being.[3] For this reason I find it more productive to continue delineating the force fields of the movement and tracing its centrifugal effects by following the displacement of its participants, and considering carefully what developed in London and Geneva when Communards like Reclus, Lefrançais, Pindy, Victorine B., André Léo, and Paul Lafargue encountered like-minded supporters such as Marx, Kropotkin, and Morris. The mix these groups of political refugees and individuals made belongs to the political praxis of the Commune; their voices and creativity—now at the center of the thinking of so much of contemporary environmental theory and activism—make up the relational web the event produced. The intersections in thought and sociability these groups spent their energy making ranged from direct encounters and friendships between writers and thinkers to mutual engagement and participation in the elaboration of the Commune's memory, to the generation of new political projects and debates in the 1870s and 1880s that grew out of the experience of the Commune. They took the form of journals, theoretical elaborations, debates, and shared meals. The paths taken—or better, constructed—during and after the Commune are both trajectories and the vectors of an analysis; they constitute a kind of "globalization from below" at the precise moment that in France, at least, a deeply conservative integralist sequence retrenching around national identity in the wake of the Commune had begun, and that would extend at least through Vichy. The Third Republic, re-founded and re-stabilized on the corpses of the Communards, was now in place, as members of the industrial bourgeoisie and prominent provincial growers entered into their historic alliance, soldering together, for the first time, capitalist society and the Republican state. I should add that in the accounts of refugee society in London and Geneva, for those who lived it, tragedy did not provide the governing rubric by which to sort through the recent past. Of course, those who left behind written accounts—the literate—can be presumed to have encountered a less onerous set of

[3] André Léo, Benoît Malon, Elie Reclus, Elisée Reclus et al., "Programme," *La République des Travailleurs*, January 10, 1871.

challenges adjusting to a new life than did those who fought and survived in relative obscurity. More *querelles de proscrits* and a heavier degree of isolation are recorded among Communards in London coping with language differences than among those in Switzerland. But the difficult, often excruciating struggle to find work, the confusion surrounding the question of who, among the comrades, had managed to survive (and the joy when one who had been thought gone unexpectedly turned up), the petty quarrels and rivalries of exiles: these day-to-day preoccupations and feelings predominate in both groups.

London

In E. P. Thompson's rendering of the revival of the socialist movement in the United Kingdom during the 1880s, two factors play a decisive role: the recent events in Paris on the one hand, and the question of land—its nationalization, in Ireland, for example, and the dwindling agrarian commons—on the other. As in Morris's vision in the Icelandic lava fields, the two were not kept apart analytically but were thought together as the realm of possibility inherent in the vestiges—Parisian ruins or shared pasture lands—that still lingered from the expropriation of the commons. In Switzerland a related and no less significant revitalized attention to the form of the commune, the commune as form or chronotope, preoccupied socialists. Both groups were engaged, in other words, in *thinking together* the Paris Commune's recent realization of non-alienated labor in a modern European capital on the one hand, and its agricultural remainder on the other: the insurrectionary Commune with the woodland commons.

In London where numerous Communards—Verlaine, Vermersch, Rimbaud, Vaillant, and Lafargue among them—had taken refuge, the Commune above all provided an occasion for meeting, a means of sociability and organizing. Socialists gathered at clubs like the Blue Post on Newman Street, where Leo Frankel could regularly be found conversing with English trade-unionists, or the Rose Street Club, or the Marylebone Radical Association, whose 1879 "Address to the Heroes and Martyrs of the Commune" was a focal point uniting, or "federating," we might say, the various other clubs in existence. Previously, when the Commune was at its height in April 1871, some 7,000 London workers had mounted a striking display of solidarity with their comrades in Paris, marching from what the bourgeois press anxiously called "our own Belleville,"—Clerkenwell Green—to Hyde Park in atrocious weather, accompanied by a brass band and carrying banners inscribed with "Vive la Commune" and "Long Live the Universal Republic!" The address they sent to the Communards, which quite interestingly placed an emphasis on land appropriation in the context of a general internationalism, greeted them in the name of the Universal Republic:

> We salute your proclamation of the Commune or local self-government ... We quite approve your project for liquidating the heavy war indemnity by selling the palaces and appropriating the Crown lands to national purposes; and we can only regret that our fellow citizens are not yet sufficiently educated to imitate your noble example ... we, the people of London, believe

> you to be fighting for the liberty of the world, and the regeneration of mankind, hereby express our profound admiration ... and tender you the honest, uncompromising hand of friendship and fellowship.[4]

For William Morris, the Commune—and the first anniversary of the death of Karl Marx—was the occasion of his very first participation in a similar public procession through the streets of London, along with two or three thousand others, in March 1884: "I trudged all the way from Tottenham Court Road up to Highgate Cemetery (with a red ribbon in my buttonhole) at the tail of various banners and a very bad band to do honor to the memory of Karl Marx *and* the Commune."[5] By the following March, when Morris had begun his yearly custom of delivering speeches on the anniversary of the Commune (most of them now lost), the Commune was not just an occasion but also, as he put it in one such address, a duty: the recurring duty of all socialists to celebrate "both enthusiastically and intelligently" against "the dull gulf of lies, hypocritical concealments and false deductions which is called bourgeois history."[6] It is entirely characteristic of Morris that pleasure or celebration on the one hand and duty on the other should be made inseparable in this manner. The Commune as example, as occasion for celebration, and as duty: these three together provide an apt approximation of what was felt then as solidarity—a set of practices that exceed the conditions, motivations, and reasons of an event and that grow out of and define political experience as such. But there is also an astute decision being taken here to celebrate—rather than, say, to commemorate or memorialize—an event so laid open and vulnerable to not only the dull lies of bourgeois history but also to the "wisdom" of the sympathetic, but after-the-fact, observer/theorist. "In celebrating ... one does not feel inclined to talk of their tactical mistakes or look upon their words and deeds from the standpoint of a 'superior person.'" What was actively being celebrated was the "first conscious attack on class domination ... the right of the people to control their own lives, to administer the land on which they laboured, and the means of labour whereby they lived."[7] Comrade Morris, as an article reporting the various speeches at the 1888 London celebration noted, "declined to call the Commune a failure."[8]

Morris's long poem, "Pilgrims of Hope," set in large part in Paris during the street-fighting at the end of the Commune, was published in serial form in the journal he began editing in 1885, *Commonweal*. The poem's subject-matter in the pages of the British journal was not at all anomalous—in fact, its segments are flanked by a steady rhythm of reference to an event now some fifteen years passed: personal recollections of the fighting and the final days; a cartoon, to be sold to help fund the celebrations, "Vive

[4] Reynolds newspaper, April 23, 1871, cited in Royden Harrison, ed., *The English Defence of the Commune* (London: Merlin Press, 1971), pp. 153–5.

[5] Morris, his emphasis, cited in Thompson, *William Morris*, p. 314.

[6] William Morris, "Why We Celebrate the Commune of Paris," *Commonweal*, March 19, 1887, p. 89.

[7] Editorial, unsigned but likely by Morris, *Commonweal*, March 17, 1888.

[8] Ibid.

la Commune," by decorative artist and first president of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, Walter Crane;[9] a review of Eleanor Marx Aveling's English translation of Lissagaray's *Histoire de la Commune de Paris de 1871*; an article about the Commune by Edouard Vaillant, who had edited the *Journal Officiel* and been a member of the Commune's Education Committee and was since aligned with Marx; articles by Paul Lafargue about the Parisian police; translations of Eugène Pottier's poetry by Laura Lafargue. In Eleanor Marx Aveling's regular column, "Record of the Revolutionary International Movement," readers learned about the funeral in Paris of Louise Michel's mother, attended by thousands but not by her daughter, proscribed by the government from attending, and of recurring police attacks on the offices of *Le Cri du peuple*. March issues each year were dominated by announcements and reports of the "celebrations" held in Dundee, Edinburgh, Dublin, Norwich, Birmingham, Nottingham, London, and elsewhere. In Nottingham in March 1885, for example, the celebration consisted of a tea, an unspecified "entertainment," speeches in French and English, and dancing that carried on until 1:00 a.m. In Dublin the same year, the celebration was attended by English, Welsh, Scots, Irish, French, Danish, Russians, and Americans, and a telegram received from London comrades was read aloud to applause. At the London 1886 celebration, we can sense the conscious and concerted attempt to continue and build on an internationalist conjuncture when a resolution in support of the Commune is read aloud in English, and then again in French, German, and Italian. Once again, the internationalist élan can be detected not merely in the attention paid to the multilinguistic origins of attendees, but also in the attempt made by speakers to create a meaningful *comparative* frame by which to bring Versaillais violence into relation with recent state violence in London and Ireland—particularly after Bloody Sunday in Trafalgar Square. These were also clearly occasions where sectarianism, incipient or otherwise, was set aside: the London celebrations particularly, filled to overflowing, gathered together "socialists of all shades and opinions and nationalities"; anarchist Charlotte Wilson and Eleanor Marx Aveling speaking one after the other.[10]

It was at one such March celebration, held at South Place in 1886, that Morris made the acquaintance of Peter Kropotkin. Kropotkin, who like Morris would go on to become a regular speaker at the yearly London celebrations, already had a rich and long experience with Commune commemorations and the war over its memory. He had been on hand in Geneva on the first anniversary of the Commune in 1872—his first visit to the west—and had witnessed the arrival of the Commune refugees who would later become his friends and associates, stigmatized across Europe by Favre's circular as common thieves and vandals. (Attempting to prevent the possibility of their gaining the status of political refugees, Favre declared Communards to be guilty of common crimes: larceny, pillaging, robbery.) "Did they live in luxury on all the money they

[9] French anarchist Félix Fénéon would include several of Crane's engravings in the *Enquête sur la Commune* published by his press, *La Revue blanche*, in 1897.

[10] *Commonweal*, March 24, 1888.

had stolen? No, they were looking for work."[11] Imprisoned in Russia four years later, Kropotkin was ecstatic to be moved to a new prison where he could tap on the walls all day long undisturbed; in this way he devised a means for relating to a young neighbor in the adjoining cell the history of the Commune from beginning to end. It took, however, a whole week's tapping.[12] Two years later in 1878, having escaped from prison, he was in Paris on the occasion of the first commemoration Parisians themselves dared to stage. Only 200 people attended, Kropotkin notes in his memoirs—two years later, after the amnesty, thousands more showed up.

Kropotkin's speech at the London celebration, delivered in French, was summarized in *Commonweal* as follows:

> The Commune did but little, but the little it did sufficed to throw out to the world a grand idea, and that idea was the working classes governing through the intermediary of a Commune—the idea that the state should rise from below and not emanate from above ... that there was no such thing in nature as the rights of private property.[13]

We might question the accuracy of a translation that renders Kropotkin in favor of any kind of state—even one "emanating from below." Or perhaps a state that emanates from below cannot exactly be counted as a state. Can workers governing "through the intermediary of a commune," a form that was itself the dismantling of the State, be called a state? This was precisely the problem that the Paris Commune, through its own political practices, its own working existence, was thought to have decisively overcome.[14] Yet the question of the kind of administrative structure the commune, or better, any *federation of communes*, might have in the transition to a post-revolutionary society had continued to preoccupy and fuel the debates between Kropotkin and the other political refugees in Geneva where he spent four years from 1877 to 1881.

Switzerland

A sizable number of refugees from the Bloody Week had made their way to Lausanne and Geneva, drawn by the shared language and by the Swiss reputation for being open to providing political asylum. But it was soon made clear to many members of that "assortment of socialist vagabonds, without cash or luggage"[15] that the Swiss did not

[11] "The Celebration of the Commune," *Commonweal*, April 1, 1886, p. 31.

[12] Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 364.

[13] "The Celebration of the Commune," *Commonweal*, April 1, 1886, p. 31.

[14] Engels, in a letter to August Bebel in March of 1875, seems to be of that opinion. To designate the political form the transition from capitalism to communism will take he proposes replacing the word "state" with the "excellent old German word *Gemeinwesen*," which he sees as the equivalent to the French "commune." (*Gemeinschaft* would translate as "communauté" and *Gemeinde* as municipality—only the old word *Gemeinwesen* approximates what the event of the Commune had brought into being in the present: that state that is not, properly speaking, a state, but is "what exists in common").

[15] Gustave Lefrançais, "Dix années de proscription en Suisse (1871–1880)," in Lefrançais and Arthur Arnould, *Souvenirs de deux Communards refugiés à Genève* 1871–1873 (Geneva: Edition Collège du Travail, 1987), p. 53.

feel as welcoming in their regard as they had to refugees of the past, the latter often bourgeois, even wealthy, and republicans advocating at the most a purely political (and national) transformation with no repercussions for social relations and no repercussions, really, for the Swiss. Instead, this new lot were for the most part workers, impoverished and competing for the little existing labor, and worse: advocates of a revolution that attacked private property and the very foundations of capitalism—a revolution not limited by national borders and thus quite capable of disrupting Swiss affairs. As in France, the word "Commune" provoked fear: just as insurgents who died in France of natural causes later, during the 1870s, were forbidden by the government to have the word "Commune" inscribed on their gravestones, so the Genevan authorities required Gustave Lefrançais to remove the title *La Commune* from the journal he began editing in favor of its milder subtitle, *Revue Socialiste*. Napoléon Gaillard opened a "Buvette de la Commune" in Carouge, a café that doubled as a gallery exhibiting paintings and drawings related to the Commune, many of which, like "Les derniers jours de la Commune," had been painted by his son. When horrified articles about the café appeared in the French press, Gaillard, to calm Swiss hostility to the enormous red flag hanging over the entryway, sewed a tiny white federal cross to the middle of the flag. This did not help business, however, and the café soon shut down, with Gaillard taking up his shoemaking again and opening a shop down the road. A newspaper profile from 1880 describes in detail various eccentricities Gaillard had become known for in Geneva, including his beautiful bed decorated with hand-carved sculptures of the heads of Marat and Danton. Known for his Phrygian bonnet in the days when he was a popular orator in the clubs and reunions of the last years of the Empire, he was now known for appearing, along with his son, bare-headed outdoors, even in the cold. While some observers concluded that the two had lost their hats to the Rhône too frequently on the windy bridges of Geneva, Gaillard maintained that they had taken a pledge: to go bare-headed until the day came when there could be a reckoning, a settling of scores regarding the Commune. In the window of his shoe store

> one can see, next to the most rich and unusual pairs of shoes, a brochure on the perfected rational shoe, signed *Gaillard père, artiste chaussurier*. And he actually is an artist, someone who would prefer to stand with folded arms rather than make a shoe against his own principles. If he had wanted to, he could have made a great deal of money in Geneva, but with his system of disdaining people's taste and forcing them to wear shoes that followed his ideas, he ended up losing all his serious clientele...[16]

[16] L'Homme-sans-masque, "Profils de l'exil," *L'Estafette*, July 14, 1880. The anonymous author of this portrait of Gaillard does not seem to share Gaillard's high esteem for his son's artistic talent: "His son, who has done charcoal sketches, illustration, and oil painting is a simple incompetent dabbler (*barbouilleur*) like so many of the others—something that doesn't prevent his father from announcing perfectly seriously that he will be the second Raphael. At an exposition at the Société des Beaux-Arts in Geneva he exhibited a portrait of Rochefort, which was far from giving the most pleasure to its model."

The comfort of the French language was offset for many refugees by Geneva being too limited commercially and industrially to absorb the extra, foreign workers. Jean-Louis Pindy, whom everyone had believed dead, showed amazing dexterity and versatility in the face of strained circumstances. He had managed to hide out in Paris for over a year; the Versaillais shot at least three men, in different parts of the city, mistaking them for Pindy. In Lausanne, he married the courageous young seamstress who had sheltered him and facilitated his escape. During his year in hiding he had already transformed himself from a furniture-maker to a jeweler, and had become quite skilled at intricate design. But in Lausanne there was no need for jewelers, and for a while he was better off resorting to carpentry. When this work dried up, the couple moved to Neuchâtel, where he took up, again quite ably, yet a new trade, that of *guillocheur*, or watch ornamentation, "spending his days by the side of his red-hot stove, and at night devoting himself passionately to propaganda work."[17] Benoît Malon earned his living in Switzerland by basket-weaving. "He had rented for a few coppers a month a small, open shed, out of town, on the slope of a hill, from which he enjoyed, while at work, an extensive view of the lake of Neuchâtel. At night he wrote letters, a book on the Commune, short articles for the labor papers, and thus he became a writer."[18] Arthur Arnould, already a writer and working away at night on his two studies of the Commune, began selling chickens with his wife in the marketplace by day; he writes to Jules Vallès in England that the advantage of this trade is that one can quite literally eat the principal if business does not go well. Gustave Lefrançais, who while in Switzerland also wrote the works about the Commune from which we have cited frequently, was still preoccupied, months into his exile, by the unknown fate of his "old companion from the public reunion days," Louis-Alfred Briosne, whom he had lost sight of in the street-fighting in May:

> Poor Briosne! What became of him in the terrible, bloody fighting? I hadn't seen him any more after the April elections, when he was spitting up throatfuls of blood. Did he die of his frightful illness or did he fall under the bullets of the gunmen? No one here knows any more than I do, and I can't ask for news in Paris for fear of drawing some misfortune upon him if, by some miracle, he is still alive and has escaped our common enemies...[19]

The necessity all these refugees apparently felt, in the midst of their struggle to simply find work and sustenance and to try to arrange to have their families with them, to write their personal experiences and analyses of what had occurred in Paris, shows their acute awareness of the battle over the Commune's memory that had begun to rage even as the Bloody Week was ending. In her study of the afterlife of the Paris Commune

[17] Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 393.

[18] Ibid., p. 284.

[19] Lefrançais, *Souvenirs de deux communards*, pp. 67–8. Briosne had in fact survived the Versaillais repression only to die two years later of tuberculosis.

in America's cultural memory, Michelle Coghlan analyzes the dominant anecdote by which the massacre of the Communards as it was occurring was conveyed, for example, in the American press. Hundreds of newspapers, and magazines like *Harper's Weekly*, all chose to open their articles with a story copied verbatim from *Le Figaro*, June 3, 1871, of "the boy who was spared." A boy Communard, about to be shot, asks permission of the army officer to return a watch to a friend, promising to return. Permission is granted, the boy runs off, and ten minutes later comes back to take his stand before the firing squad with his face to the wall. The captain cannot bring himself to fire, and shoos the boy away. Coghlan argues that the story creates for the American public a "counter-memory" of the summary executions and carnage of the Commune's final days. What Morris called "a riot of blood and cruelty on the part of the conquerors as quite literally has no parallel in modern times"[20] is presented in the American press as a tale of reconciliation and forgiveness, fabricated out of ingredients pleasing to its readers like the boy's respect for property and the captain's inability to shoot in the face of the child's innate nobility.[21] Kropotkin's memoirs reveal that in the Jura, at the same time, the story of the boy with the watch was also being told, identical in all regards—except for the ending: "A quarter of an hour later the boy came back, and, taking his place amidst the corpses at the wall, said 'I am ready.' Twelve bullets put an end to his young life."[22]

Upon hearing such accounts of the horrors committed by the Versaillais army, Kropotkin describes being seized with despair:

> I should have retained that despair, had I not seen afterward, in those of the defeated party who had lived through all these horrors, that absence of hatred, that confidence in the final triumph of their ideas, that calm though sad gaze directed toward the future, and that readiness to forget the nightmare of the past, which struck one in Malon, and, in fact, in nearly all the refugees of the Commune whom I met at Geneva,—and which I still see in Louise Michel, Lefrançais, Elisée Reclus, and other friends.[23]

Kropotkin's moving assessment is echoed a few years later by novelist Lucien Descaves. I cite it here because Descaves befriended Lefrançais and many of the same refugees upon their return to Paris after the amnesty; he would write the story of their lives in Switzerland in his novel, *Philémon, vieux de la vieille.* (The novel was to have had as its cover a painting of Gaillard's "Buvette de la Commune" by his son, Gaillard fils):

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[20] Morris, "Why We Celebrate the Commune of Paris," p. 90.

[21] See J. Michelle Coghlan, "Revolution's Afterlife: The Paris Commune in American Cultural Memory, 1871–1933," Princeton University doctoral dissertation, November 2011, pp. 34–7.

[22] Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 285.

[23] Ibid., p. 285.

> I have often been asked with curiosity, if not surprise, not to excuse but to explain my constant attachment to the men who, from March 18 to May 28, 1871 had participated, armed, in the insurrectional movement baptized the Commune ... I've already said that I defended and "amnestied" them because all of the ones I knew in their elderly days, in their disinherited old age, were honest people, sincere, disinterested and without remorse. I came to the same opinion about the insurgents shot down summarily, the dead killed at the barricades, the deported and the banished whose revolt, a revolt exempt from envy or personal ambition, had led to ten years of exile.[24]

Anarchist Communism

It was at the commemoration of the Commune held in Lausanne in March 1876 that a discussion took place that proved decisive in the debate about the form revolutionary government should take. The participants in the discussion were the two exiled Communards, geographer Elisée Reclus and the elderly Gustave Lefrançais. Lefrançais had been working as a freight handler in the Lausanne railways; a few years later he was taken on as secretary to Reclus, becoming part of the growing network of cartographers, informants, typesetters, and geographic researchers Reclus assembled to work on his enormous multi-volume *Nouvelle Géographie universelle*. The topic at hand was the nature of post-revolutionary society or, more precisely, the transition to such a society. Lefrançais maintained that a certain degree of administrative structure would have to be imposed in order to organize and keep running large-scale public services such as transportation or communication—whether at the level of the local commune or, more pressingly, at the level of the federation of communes. Reclus argued that the imposition of any kind of structure on a society in the process of emancipating itself was contradictory and would prove to be in essence an incipient new state formation. While both agreed that local communes should federate, Reclus held that any association between communes should be freely chosen and not imposed. (The positions taken by the two Communards may, incidentally, have reflected the roles each played in the insurrection. Reclus later described his role in the Commune as "officially nonexistent," with the emphasis on "officially": a simple member of the National Guard, he held no elected office but rather found himself among "the anonymous crowd of combatants and vanquished."[25] Lefrançais, on the other hand, as an elected member of the Commune spent much of his time at the Hôtel de Ville.) What is of interest in their exchange, for our purposes, is the initial delineations of a political position that came to be called "anarchist communism" and that would be developed and polished collectively by the group of militants in Geneva—Reclus, Kropotkin, Cafiero, Malatesta, and Lefrançais, among them—in the late 1870s and early 1880s.

[24] Lucien Descaves, *Souvenirs d'un ours* (Paris: Les Editions de Paris, 1946), p. 178.

[25] Reclus, *La Revue blanche, 1871: Enquête sur la Commune*, p. 78. "In the Paris Commune he simply took a rifle and stood in the ranks." Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 392.

In his biography of Kropotkin, George Woodcock makes it clear that the emergence of "anarchist communism" in Switzerland in the late 1870s was nothing if not a collective invention—an invention he attributes, in large part, "to the arrival in Switzerland of the refugees of the Paris Commune, many of whom had been associated with various communist and Utopian groups during and after 1848."[26] Indeed, the term "anarchist communism" was first used by François Dumartheray, a French worker and political refugee in flight from the events of 1871 as well, but in his case those of Lyons, not Paris. Born to one of the poorest peasant families in the Savoy, and only rudimentarily educated, Dumartheray was, in Kropotkin's words, "one of the finest critics of the current socialist literature ... and never taken in by the mere display of fine words or would-be science."[27] Together with another friend, and with the eventual financial support of Reclus, Kropotkin and Dumartheray started up and ran the most widely circulated of the Jura anarchist papers, *Le Révolté*—a journal that corresponded in many ways to Morris's *Commonweal*. But Kropotkin had not yet arrived in Switzerland when Dumartheray produced his pamphlet in support of anarchist communism, *Aux Travailleurs manuels, partisans de l'action politique*. Written in a direct, often humorous voice, the pamphlet encouraged workers to abstain from all elections, political parties, or participation of any kind in parliamentary politics, for "what was proven in May 1871 was that society is divided into two camps: full stomachs and empty ones, robbers and robbed." The pamphlet called for the full suppression of wage labor and that everyone instead work for the needs of everyone. "As long as there is private property and paternal authority, there will be no liberty." The Commune had led Dumartheray, as it had Marx, to conclude that the ready-made state machinery could not be put to any possible use in the service of its own dismantling: "It's often said that to suppress the state one has to be part of it, as if to suppress the Church one would have to become a priest or a bishop."[28]

The principal distinction between the anarchist communism publicly adopted by Reclus, Kropotkin, and others at the 1880 Congress of the Jura Federation on the one hand, and the "collectivist" anarchism associated with Proudhon and Bakunin on the other, was that anarchist communism made the complete extinction of exchange value the central motor of the revolutionary process. In collectivist anarchism an exchange economy still operates within a network of worker-owned, self-managed "collectivities" that hold legal ownership of the instruments and resources of production. Collectivist anarchism retained, in other words, both the market and money. Additionally—and this was the point of greatest fracture between the two groups—collectivist anarchism retained the wage system by making the distribution of food and other goods dependent on the labor contribution each individual made. Access to the collective fruits of labor was proportionate to the amount of labor performed—a continuation, to all extents and

[26] Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Anarchist Prince*, p. 316.

[27] Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 419.

[28] François Dumartheray, *Aux travailleurs manuels, partisans de l'action politique* (Geneva : 1876), 16 pages, available at `http://cediasbibli.org/opac/index.php?lvl=notice_display&id=14219`.

purposes, of the wage system. Anarchist communism, by contrast, made the immediate end to all buying and selling—the complete abolition of commerce—the very content of its revolutionary process. Once the local communes had carried out all the necessary expropriations, an immediate free distribution of goods would follow—to everyone, even those who had not yet found (and presumably may not ever find) attractive work. Any threat of scarcity would be resolved when production was no longer organized in terms of trade and private property. The revolution not only transformed society in political terms by organizing independent communes federated loosely into a close network, it transformed society in terms of production, exchange, and consumption as well: not merely communalist, as Kropotkin would say, but communist.

It is easy to see how these ideas might resonate favorably with the Morris who saw the world market as an archaic device for providing useless items to the wealthy classes and shoddy items to the rest, and in whose *News from Nowhere* shopkeepers have been transformed into lovely children who delight in giving things away. In London Morris had launched a similar, if more scathing attack on collectivism in the form of a review of Edward Bellamy's collectivist utopia, *Looking Backward*. Bellamy's state socialism, in Morris's view, represented the impossible attempt to cleanse middle-class corporatist professionalism of any residues of class inequality and to then project it into a standard of well-being for all—as though middle-class corporatist professionalism, its consciousness and its culture, were not itself the product of class inequality. What Bellamy's state-managed utopia and that of the collectivist anarchists shared was the perceived need for a centralized control of both resources and the distribution of consumer goods.

The development of something called "anarchist communism" and the thinkers associated with it—however loosely and without, in some cases, their embracing that particular label per se—are of interest to me because they form part of a deeply productive theoretical mix with direct resonance for us today. The intricacies and drama of the Marx/Bakunin split have dominated our perception of the politics of the period immediately after the Commune and led to an often reductive and overdrawn opposition—still bitterly and tiresomely rehearsed today—between an anarchist focus on political domination on the one hand and a Marxist focus on economic exploitation on the other. It is interesting to note that Elisée Reclus, to take one example, showed no interest whatsoever in the Marx/Bakunin split, despite being close to Bakunin and delivering one of the eulogies at his funeral. Indeed, it was Reclus who was responsible for seeing into print Bakunin's short essay about the Paris Commune after his death. By following Reclus's lead and shifting our attention away from that rivalry, we can begin to perceive what the people on its fringes, all of whom were in the midst of living through the looting and excessive centralization of the bourgeois state that had triumphed in 1871, held in common. What they shared was a view of human living that left little or no place for either the state or party politics, the nation or the market. From the Commune they retained the idea and experience that equality enables—rather than detracts from—individualism. Also shared was an unwillingness

to subordinate hope to economic determinism. My interest, then, has less to do with refining theoretical arguments or correcting theoretical error than with something like its opposite. The post-Commune period was, I think, like our own, not a period of great theoretical purity. And William Morris was not alone in thinking that an obsession with such purity frequently gets in the way of the task of making socialists.

Consider the following array of attempts at political self-definition by the people that will concern us in this chapter and the next—the contemporaries George Bernard Shaw referred to as "a very mixed lot at that time."[29] Marx, who sometimes referred to himself as "not a Marxist," was, as many people have remarked, at his most *anarchisant* or communalistic when writing about the Commune. The battle against what he called in one of the drafts of *The Civil War in France* "the centralized state machinery, which, with its ubiquitous and complicated military, bureaucratic, clerical and judicial organs, entoils (inmeshes) the living civil society like a boa constrictor" is, for Marx, the all-consuming struggle and accomplishment of 1871.[30] The Commune reawakened and re-enforced his critique of the state to such an extent that he felt called upon, as we noted earlier, to revise the preface to the *Communist Manifesto*, writing now against the "revolutionary measures" that had, in the 1848 version, hinged on "centralization ... in the hands of the state":

> In view of the practical knowledge acquired during the two months' existence of the Paris Commune when the proletariat held power for the first time ... the program has, to a certain extent, become out of date. Above all the Commune of Paris has taught us that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes."[31]

William Morris, who according to George Bernard Shaw, was "on the side of Karl Marx *contra mundum*,"[32] began at a certain point to abandon the term "socialist" in favor of an unadorned "communist": "I will begin by saying that I call myself a Communist, and have no wish to qualify that word by joining any other to it."[33] "He knew," writes Shaw about Morris, "that the essential term, etymologically, historically, artistically, was Communist; and it was the only word he was comfortable with."[34] Yet Morris's maverick kind of communism meant maintaining extremely close relations with anarchists. It is not clear whether he had much actual contact or discussions with Elisée Reclus, but we know they met at least once; May Morris records the geographer's presence, along with Kropotkin, at one of the five or six performances of Morris's

[29] George Bernard Shaw, "Morris As I Knew Him," in May Morris, ed., *William Morris*, p. xi.

[30] Karl Marx, "The First Draft," in Marx and Engels, *Writings on the Paris Commune*, p. 148.

[31] Karl Marx, Preface to the 1872 German edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. D. Ryzanoff (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), p. 260.

[32] Shaw, "Morris As I Knew Him," p. ix.

[33] William Morris, "Socialism and Anarchism," in May Morris, ed., *William Morris*, p. 313.

[34] Shaw, "Morris As I Knew Him," p. ix.

socialist play "The Tables Turned or Nupkins Awakened" in September of 1887: "the great geographer delighting in my father's *bonhomie* and simplicity of manner."[35] But Morris certainly counted Kropotkin as one of his dearest friends and comrades after the latter chose London in which to spend his exile after 1886. Shaw, again, makes a good approximation of the effect his relations with Kropotkin and other anarchists may have had on what would become Morris's own special and quite superb kind of libertarian communism: "though he would not countenance Anarchism on any terms, [he] was genuinely anxious to discover how its appetite for freedom could be reconciled with the positive side of Communism."[36] Morris may not have countenanced anarchism on any terms, but Kropotkin, for one, thought that Morris's *News from Nowhere* was "the most thoroughly and deeply Anarchist conception of future society that has ever been written."[37] As for Reclus, his experience of the Commune was, as I mentioned earlier, forceful enough to transform a socialist republican into a self-proclaimed anarchist; it was at the 1876 Lausanne commemoration of the Commune that Reclus first publicly embraced that label, which would then evolve into the name he, Kropotkin, and others took up after 1880, that of "anarchist communist." But it is crucial to remember that whether as anarchists or as "anarchist communists," neither Kropotkin nor Reclus ever neglected to point out the real hegemony of economic power. In fact, in the hierarchy of factors that contribute to making up the scandal of modern civilization, Reclus—one of the most articulate opponents of nationalism in his time and a steadfast abstainer from participation in any form of parliamentary politics—consistently ranked capitalism at the top: "the power of kings and emperors has limits, but that of wealth has none at all. The dollar is the master of masters."[38] In fact it is difficult to distinguish Reclus's conviction about the ultimately determining weight of the economic from that of any number of his contemporaries "on the side of Marx *contra mundum*": "One overriding fact dominates all of modern civilization, the fact that the property of a single person can increase indefinitely, and even, by virtue of almost universal consent, encompass the entire world."[39]

But perhaps the most endearing and subtle attempt at political self-definition is that of Gustave Lefrançais, described by Reclus's nephew as someone whose ideas were very close to those of Reclus, though Lefrançais always denied being an anarchist. Kropotkin recounts how Lefrançais characterized his own political leanings: "'Pardon me—I am a communalist, not an anarchist, please,' he would say. 'I cannot work with

[35] May Morris, Introduction to William Morris, *The Complete Works of William Morris*, vol. XX (London: Longmans, 1913), p. xxx.

[36] Shaw, "Morris As I Knew Him," p. xvi.

[37] Peter Kropotkin, in *Freedom*, 10 (November 1896), pp. 109–10.

[38] Reclus, *L'Homme et la terre*, tome 3, [1931], (Antony: Editions TOPS/H. Trinquier, 2007), p. 531.

[39] Ibid.

such fools as you are;' and he worked with none but us, 'because you fools,' as he said, 'are still the men whom I love best. With you one can work and remain oneself.'"[40]

Shaw is no doubt correct on one level when he says about himself, Morris and their political comrades that "We had not sorted ourselves out."[41] Yet on another level what looks to be theoretical confusion may well be an astute and well-thought-out political strategy. A strategic position based on non-alignment, one that implies a slavish commitment to neither anarchism nor Marxism, and on association over sectarianism, may be well worth reconsidering today, and there are many indications that this has indeed become the case.

What unites and cross-pollinates thinkers like Morris, Marx, Reclus, Kropotkin, and others in the wake of the Commune, regardless of the political labels each might have chosen for himself, is a vision of social transformation predicated on a large voluntary federation of free associations existing at the local level. In this sense we can speak of the development, in the wake of the Paris Commune's freeing itself from the power and authority of the State, of a new vision of revolution based on communal autonomy and the loose federation or association of these autonomous units. After 1871, Kropotkin writes, workers regardless of nation realized that "the free commune would be henceforth the medium in which the ideas of modern socialism may come to realization."[42] What the commune as political and social medium offered that the factory did not was a broader social scope—one that included women, children, the peasantry, the aged, the unemployed. It comprised not merely the realm of production but both production and consumption. Differences in emphasis can be detected in different thinkers, but what the free commune entails for each is the simultaneous dissolution of Capital, State, and Nation: "the abolition of individual property, communism; and the abolition of the State, its replacement by the free commune, and the international union of working peoples."[43] Morris, writing in 1888: "Nations, as political entities, would cease to exist; civilization would mean the federalization of a variety of communities great and small..."[44] Federalized loosely into a close network, "free and growing in solidarity because of its freedom,"[45] independent communes were both the context and the content of the revolutionary process; they configured a landscape or chronotope at once conceptual and lived: "the communes ... alone can give us the necessary setting for a revolution and the means of accomplishing it."[46] They offered a "unit of management" that was small, local, and self-sufficient enough to, in Morris's view, manage its own affairs directly: "The only way to avoid the tyranny and waste of

[40] Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 393.

[41] Shaw, "Morris As I Knew Him," p. xi.

[42] Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, p. 8.

[43] Peter Kropotkin, *Words of A Rebel* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1992), p. 20.

[44] William Morris, letter to Reverend George Bainton, April 10, 1888, in Henderson, ed., *Letters to His Family and Friends*, p. 287.

[45] Kropotkin, *Words of A Rebel*, p. 88.

[46] Ibid., p. 81.

bureaucracy is by the Federation of Independent Communities."[47] This last point was Morris's chief concern—that the scale of life be such that one "can take pleasure in all the details of life."[48] "Every citizen," he writes, "[should] feel himself responsible for its details and be interested in them"; the emphasis was not so much on smallness per se as on a scale appropriate to allow bureaucracy to give way to full participation.[49] By "full participation," Morris here echoes words taken from the only official "program" of the Commune, the *Déclaration au peuple français* of April 19: "The permanent intervention of the citizens in Communal affairs by the free manifestation of their ideas and the free defence of their interests."[50] For it was the abiding interest and responsibility taken in the material details of everyday life—its labor, materials, and processes—that for Morris constituted happiness. Rebuilding society on the model of the commune means rediscovering that "the true secret of happiness lies in the taking of interest in all the details of daily life, in elevating them by art instead of handing the performance of them over to unregarded drudges."[51]

The spectacle of the excessively centralized State, triumphant again in the wake of the Commune, no doubt played a considerable role in the sweeping way that visions of decentralized, communalistic democracy took hold among socialists in the 1870s and 1880s in Europe. Consider three speculative essays, all variations on the theme of decentralization—the term that Morris considered to be "almost the watchword of the Commune"[52]—written within months of each other in London in the late 1880s: Paul Lafargue's "The Morrow of the Revolution," which Morris arranged to have published in *Commonweal* in July 1887, Kropotkin's "The Industrial Village of the Future" (1888), and Morris's lecture "The Society of the Future," also from 1888. For Lafargue, achieving a revolution that is not merely political but truly economic in nature is a matter of a decentered revolutionary movement breaking out not just in Paris but in "all the industrial centers"—it is as though he were imagining the short-lived 1871 Communes in Marseilles, Lyons, and elsewhere having managed to endure and prosper. Lafargue makes no mention of the countryside proper or of the peasantry; instead, each "industrial center" having constituted its own local revolutionary government would, in effect, federate: organize delegates to meet with corresponding delegates from other centers.

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[47] William Morris, "The Dawn of a New Epoch," in *The Collected Works of William Morris*, vol. XXIII (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 139.

[48] Morris, "The Society of the Future," p. 459.

[49] Morris, "Looking Backward," p. 358. "People would manage their own affairs in communities not too large to prevent citizens from taking part in the administration necessary for the conduct of life." "Statement of Principles," *Commonweal*, May 4, 1889, p. 137.

[50] *éclaration au peuple français*, April 19, 1871, in Edwards, ed., *The Communards of Paris, 1871*, p. 82.

[51] William Morris, "The Aims of Art," in *Signs of Change* (London: Longmans, 1903), p. 137.

[52] Ernest Belfort Bax and William Morris, "Socialism from the Root Up," *Commonweal*, October 2, 1886, p. 210.

Morris, too, envisions the break-up of the huge manufacturing districts. Afterwards, once nature has begun to heal the scars left by a rapacious capitalist civilization, "a few pleasant villages on the side of the Thames might mark the place of that preposterous piece of folly once called London."[53] Morris begins with the embodied individual and his or her pleasures and keeps those motivations clearly in view. Socialism, quite simply, is the key to happiness. Similarly, the revolution for Lafargue, must *begin* by putting "months of comfort at the disposal of the workers."[54] Housing, clothing, and above all, food, must be immediately expropriated from the capitalist property-owners and made instantly available in plenty to the workers (Lafargue evokes meals eaten in common on the streets during the Commune). For Morris, a "free and unfettered animal life" premised on the elimination of all asceticism would also bring about the extinction of asceticism's necessary partner, luxury, leading to a "simple and natural life" for all, neither wasteful nor deprived. Bodily activities like swimming and riding are high on his list to become the backbone for a new education, as are carpentry, plowing, and cooking—well before reading and writing but not before "that art not at present taught in any school or university—the art of thinking."

While Lafargue and Morris delve immediately into the sensuous detail of a transformed everyday life, Kropotkin is at once more abstract and more empirical in his approach. Buttressed by a wealth of data about contemporary England, France, Russia, and elsewhere, Kropotkin takes the flight from the countryside and the immiseration of the masses of urban workers under the new factory system to be the central problem to be overcome in the society of the future. If Lafargue was primarily concerned with political decentralization and the (Jacobin) power of the capital, Kropotkin, like Morris, wants above all to bring about the decentralization of industry. The question is how best to combine—or recombine—industry with agriculture, and to this, the great nineteenth-century problem of the city/country division, Kropotkin gives an interesting answer: let us consider the persistence of the *petits métiers*. Of special interest are those trades that operate between rural and urban situations—in effect weaving together the two temporalities. Already in Russia, Kropotkin had shown a deep interest in the itinerant, seasonal workers whose labor pattern took them regularly between the fields and the city:

> My sympathies went especially to the weavers and the workers in the cotton factories. There are many thousands of them in St. Petersburg, who work there during the winter, and return for the three summer months to their native villages to cultivate the land. Half peasants and half town workers, they had generally retained the social spirit of the Russian village ... Most of them lived in small associations, or *artels*, ten or twelve people hiring a

[53] Morris, "The Society of the Future," pp. 461–2.

[54] Paul Lafargue, "The Morrow of the Revolution," Part 1, *Commonweal*, July 9, 1887, p. 220.

> common apartment and taking their meals together, each one paying every month his share of the general expenses.[55]

Through a detailed survey of small-scale industries, petty trades, rural industries, domestic manufacturing, and seasonal workers whose trajectory involved living in two different worlds at once, Kropotkin evokes both the residual energies and the emergent creative potential of small-scale economies. Such practices, he insists, are not obsolete. In fact they are only obsolete if considered from the point of view or sensibility Morris ascribed to Edward Bellamy, "an unmixed modern one, unhistoric and unartistic ... perfectly satisfied with modern civilization."[56] Overcoming the division of labor that deprives factory workers of their connection to the land depends ultimately on transforming educational practices along the lines of the "integral" education long advocated in workers' circles and partially put into place, as we discussed in the second chapter, during the Commune. Only then, Kropotkin writes, can we hope to attain "a society composed of men and women each of whom is able to work with his or her hands, as well as with his or her brain, and to do so in more directions than one."[57] Hyper-specialization was a deficit; instead, one person may be called upon to take on successive, different tasks—an echo of the "varied life" that Morris saw to be as important an element as equality to how he envisioned life after capitalism: "variety of life is as much an aim of true Communism as equality of condition, and nothing but the union of these two will bring about real freedom."[58] Integral education, which worked to overcome any separation between knowledge and practice, would aid in that formation—in fact, the new creativity needed for the future is dependent on the interaction of head and hand. The new, for Kropotkin as for Morris, could only be modeled on anachronisms land-locked in the present. Being attentive to the energies of the outmoded was one way to think oneself into the future.

[55] Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 326.

[56] Morris, "Looking Backward," p. 354.

[57] Peter Kropotkin, "The Industrial Village of the Future," *The Nineteenth Century*, 24:140 (October 1888), p. 530.

[58] Morris, "Looking Backward," p. 358.

# 5. Solidarity

For all their revisiting of ancient communist and communal forms and traditions, and all their attention to the persistence of older forms in their own time, Morris, Reclus, and Kropotkin were nothing if not anchored in the present and the demands of the present: they were aware of what separated their moment from earlier social experiments. They were not "communalists." Kropotkin, particularly, went to great lengths to distinguish his vision of the commune as the revolutionary form of the future—"an absolutely new fact, emerging in new conditions, and leading inevitably to absolutely different consequences"[1]—from the bourgeois communes of the Middle Ages. These he saw as victims of their localist chauvinisms that had then passed definitively under the yoke of the State. He isolated three major differences. The twelfth-century commune rose up against the lords, whereas the enemy in modern times is the State. Secondly, while the medieval commune took a stand against the lords, it did not take a stand against the bourgeois merchants in its midst, busy squirreling away the wealth of the city for themselves. The modern commune, on the other hand, would make revolutionary changes in production and consumption the priority—it would be, as he insists, communist, not communalist. But the difference that most captured the imagination of Kropotkin, as well as that of Morris and Reclus, had to do with what we might call the isolation or autarchy of the medieval commune—a relatively successful isolation, in some ways, but a life built nevertheless on and within walled enclosures, and thus predicated on a clear and mostly hostile separation from others by means of frontiers. The modern commune defined itself against such isolation. Taking its direction from the imaginary of the Paris Commune, it seeks, in Kropotkin's words, "to extend itself, to universalize itself ... In place of communal privileges it has put human solidarity."[2]

It was on this point—the danger of isolation—that Kropotkin and Reclus reached the most agreement. Both deemed the overwhelming problem the medieval free city confronted to be identical to the problem Marx saw confronting the Russian rural commune: its susceptibility to destruction due to isolation. The very same danger held true for present-day attempts to create "intentional communities"—on this, Morris, Reclus, and Kropotkin all concurred. Thus Morris's principal quarrel with the anarchists in London centered on what he saw to be their conviction that an isolated, rural, communitarian life founded on egalitarian principles constituted a panacea. "You could

[1] Peter Kropotkin, "The Commune," in *Words of a Rebel*, p. 81.

[2] Ibid., p. 85.

not live communalistically," he wrote to them in 1889, "until the present society of capitalism or contract is at an end ... and it is because I *know* that this cannot be brought about as long as private property exists, that I desire the abolition of private property, and am a Communist."[3] Reclus and Kropotkin shared Morris's skepticism—even hostility—to the idea of intentional micro-societies, or isolated anarchist retreats. In a pair of essays, tellingly entitled "Anarchist Colonies" (Reclus), and "The Causes of the Failure of Small Communist Communes" (Kropotkin), the two anarchists echoed each other's critique of the desire to build an autonomous, closed-off egalitarian world made up of only the chosen.

> In the midst of this wretched society, so bizarrely incoherent, will we manage to group together the good people into separate micro-societies and create the harmonious *phalanstères* that Fourier wished for? Will we know how to get the satisfaction of all of these people's self-interests to coincide with the common interest, and harmonize their passions into an ensemble that is both powerful and peaceful, without any single member of the community suffering from it? In a word, will anarchists create for themselves Icaries on the outskirts of the bourgeois world? ... I don't think so and I don't want it ... In our plan for existence and struggle, it isn't a little *côterie* of companions that interests us. It's the whole world."[4]

But a closer examination of Reclus's writings on the question of the desirability or effectiveness of small-scale attempts to live differently under the constraints of actually-existing capitalism reveals a considerable amount of what we might call "strategic ambivalence" on his part. The passage quoted above was taken from an article published in an anarchist journal, *Les Temps nouveaux:* when addressing fellow anarchists Reclus counsels against communalist isolation in favor of a more systemic, widely based struggle. But when he argues with other socialists critical of the anarchist position, as he does here in a reply to a professor in Lausanne, Reclus can be quite eloquent in defense of the small anarchist enclave:

> In the city I'm talking about live several intelligent and studious workers who were lucky enough to have been thrown into prison as revolutionaries, and to have spent several years inside. Re-entering life outside, after having spent their time in captivity studying and having serious discussions, they were fortunate again to find work that was paid well enough that they were

[3] William Morris, "Communism and Anarchism," in May Morris, *William Morris*, p. 317–18. The same division of opinion occurred among Russian populists at the time, with Chernyshevsky advocating the founding of "communities" like Vera Pavlovna's sewing collective—communities that were a place to both produce and to live collectively—in the heart of bourgeois society, while Tkatchev dismissed such efforts in the absence of a more systemic change. See Eric Aunoble, "*Le Communisme, tout de suite!": Le movement des communes en Ukraine Soviétique, 1919–1920* (Paris: Les Nuits rouges, 2008), p. 57.

[4] Elisée Reclus, "Les Colonies anarchistes," *Les Temps nouveaux*, July 7, 1900.

> assured of sufficient food and leisure to be able to continue intellectual work. Industry is prosperous in that town; moreover, it's organized in such a way as to let the worker be master of his own workshop; the brutalizing factory with its ferocious discipline and its inept division of labor doesn't yet have a place there. All the happy conditions are thus present to give a very high value to this group of friends: intelligence, study, a regular back and forth between work and leisure, personal liberty. It's impossible to see and listen to these apostles without understanding that a new world is being prepared, conforming to a new ideal![5]

Even in the course of his argument against anarchist colonies, Reclus allows for the possibility of forms of temporary small group formations of "mutual respect and complete equality," groups that have been brought into being by the contingency of struggle—somewhat in the way that prison functions in the example above, acting to unite the inmates into a kind of lived solidarity that they choose to continue in their life outside. The necessities of the struggle, in other words, may force certain kinds of retreats and small community formations. But formalized attempts to found isolated societies have all failed, Reclus cautions, in part due to the contamination of outside institutions like private property or the subjugation of women penetrating the colony "like bad seeds in a wheat field":

> One does not isolate oneself with impunity: the tree one transplants and puts under glass risks losing its sap, and humans are more sensitive than plants. The enclosure formed by the limits of the colony can only constitute a mortal danger. One becomes accustomed to one's narrow milieu, and from the world citizen one once was, one retracts gradually back into the simple dimensions of a property owner.

He concludes with a resounding plea to stay and fight in the vast, complex world: withdrawal is abandoning the struggle.

Reclus's own personal experience had included experiments early on with his brother Elie, helping to establish several cooperative initiatives in Paris. Elie, who during the Commune served briefly as the Director of the Bibliothèque Nationale, had worked especially hard with friends and over the course of several years to put in place a form of credit union to serve in the creation of workers' cooperatives. They were then forced to watch their efforts dissolve, in part due to financial mismanagement, and in part due to the fascination that business affairs and the possibility of making a big profit exerted on some of the cooperative's members. This failure was a cause of deep and abiding disappointment for Elie; Elisée, on the other hand, had quickly given up on the cooperatives, seeing them as a diversion from more crucial struggles against capitalism

[5] Elisée Reclus, cited in Paul Reclus, *Les Frères Elie et Elisée Reclus* (Paris: Les Amis d'Elisée Reclus, 1964), p. 121.

and the State. "Never will we separate ourselves from the world to build a little chapel hidden off in some vast darkness."[6] The problem with cooperatives, once again, is that of self-isolation or self-limitation: walling oneself up in an enclosed world. Pin-prick operations content to eddy in the pool of their own marginalization, such initiatives run the risk of becoming a stabilizing force for the dominant power structure, whose authority they never really challenge. In a vivid formulation undoubtedly inspired by his brother's disillusionment watching the cooperatives he had helped organize transform themselves into "simple 'boutiques,'"[7] Reclus describes the experience of setting out to change the world, then rapidly losing sight of the revolutionary cause "in all of its magnitude," and ending up with the horizons, the worldview, and the daily activities of a grocer:

> It is easy to confine oneself to one's "good work," thrusting aside the concerns and dangers that arise from devotion to the revolutionary cause in its full scope. One tells oneself that it is especially important to succeed in an undertaking that involves the collective honor of a number of friends, and one gradually allows oneself to be drawn into the petty practices of conventional business. The person who had resolved to change the world has been transformed into nothing more than a simple grocer.[8]

In the last chapter, we saw how thinking of the Paris Commune in terms of the classic unities of tragedy risked isolating it from its conceptual and political after-lives. In the same fashion, Reclus and others eschew the utopian commune insofar as it risks creating enclaves of isolation within a larger exploitative society that remains unchanged. Kropotkin draws many of the same conclusions as Reclus regarding small "intentional communities," using different examples. Surveying all the previous attempts to found communist communes, he pronounces them unequivocal failures. In his view failure can be attributed to three factors: a quasi-religious enthusiasm governing their foundation; an overly intimate structure modeled on the family; and isolation from intellectual centers, contact with larger society, and with the inspiration of art and science. If several communes were to federate, he thought, this would potentially solve many of the problems brought on by enforced closeness and intimacy among too few people, as well as the ever-present risk of the authoritarian domination of founder-figures. When bourgeois people tell anarchists they will give them an island so that they can go off and found a communist society, anarchists should reply yes, he counsels, but we want the Île-de-France; we want, in other words, social revolution on a large scale. The Paris Commune, once again, is evoked by Kropotkin as an example of revolution on an appropriate scale: "Paris in 1871 wasn't very far from that ... and ideas have progressed

[6] Elisée Reclus, "Anarchy: By an Anarchist," *The Contemporary Review*, 45 (January–June 1884), p. 637.

[7] Paul Reclus, *Les Frères*, p. 180.

[8] Elisée Reclus, "Evolution, Revolution and the Anarchist Ideal," in John Clark and Camille Martin, eds., *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), p. 168.

since then."[9] The most advantageous scale now, in his view, is that of the territory—an area that includes both city *and* country. One of the western states in the United States, he concludes ... Idaho, perhaps.

Geographers like Reclus and Kropotkin are no doubt well positioned to see the spatial ravages that capitalism wreaks on human society and the environment: the economic concentration of capital in megapoles is only one example. But they may also be among the first to recognize that spatial modifications, as Philippe Pelletier points out, cannot substitute for social revolution. Questions of scale are certainly crucial in the imagined society of the future, and much imaginative energy during and after the Paris Commune was spent keeping those questions at the forefront and attempting to answer them. From Morris's communities small enough for all inhabitants to be absorbed in their inner workings, to Kropotkin's belief in the efficiency and creativity of informal planning in small-scale industries, a compelling case can be made that to arrive at a world where basic decisions about production and consumption are made by associations of free laborers means the inevitable dismantling of large-scale bureaucracies and corporate monoliths. But it would be wrong to view this dismantling as a fetishism of the small scale—it is rather an acute attention to calibrating production and community life at an appropriate scale. "Equally, of course, the living in small communities is not in theory an essential of this great change," writes Morris, "though I have little doubt it would bring about such a way of living and abolish big cities, which ... I think much to be desired."[10] Reclus, on the other hand, was not at all convinced of the desirability, let alone the necessity, of abolishing big cities.[11] In the thought that emerged from the experience of the Commune, reworking the scale and texture of how we live is the principal goal. But this is in no way synonymous with a retreat within medieval walls, or a reluctance to maintain relations with the outside world. "It is by free groupings that the social Commune will be organized, and these groupings will overthrow walls and frontiers."[12]

Against any such tendencies toward the paranoia of the self-enclosed micro-society, Kropotkin went so far as to unhinge the notion of the commune from any spatial or territorial dimension whatsoever: "For us, 'Commune' no longer means a territorial agglomeration; it is rather a generic name, a synonym for the grouping of equals which knows neither frontiers nor walls. The social Commune will soon cease to be a clearly defined entity."[13] In the move away from the territorial commune in favor of a broad, non-circumscribed communal organization we can sense the influence of Reclus's insistence on association. For it was Reclus who went the furthest in thinking the necessity of federation and forms of cooperation and alliance *between* communities.

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[9] Peter Kropotkin, *La Science moderne et l'anarchisme* (Paris: P. V. Stock, 1913), p. 156.

[10] Morris, "Communism and Anarchism," pp. 317–18.

[11] See Philippe Pelletier, *Elisée Reclus: géographie et anarchie* (Paris: Les Editions du monde libertaire, 2009), pp. 66–74.

[12] Kropotkin, "The Commune," p. 89.

[13] Ibid., p. 88.

We can trace this preoccupation in the unusual theoretical and strategic importance he gives to the practice of association and to the development of solidarity.

To understand the importance and scope Reclus gives to solidarity we need to return to the debate he had with Gustave Lefrançais, the dispute with collective anarchism and the formation of something called "anarchist communism" in the late 1870s in Geneva. In the debate with Lefrançais, you will recall, Reclus wanted the way in which communes "federated" with each other to be entirely voluntary—not compelled or structured by some central authority or imperative such as the need to keep the transportation system in operation. In an earlier intervention in 1868 when "the federalist question" was being debated at the *Ligue pour la Paix et la Liberté* in Berne, and everyone had agreed on federalism on principle, Reclus again insisted on more precision, in his own speech calling for "a federative republic of the entire world." "I showed," he wrote to his brother,

> and I believe quite logically, that after having destroyed the old nation of the chauvinists, the feudal province, the department and the *arrondissement*—machines for creating despotism—the existing cantons and communes—inventions of extreme centralizers, there remains only the individual and that it is up to him to associate as he understands it. This is ideal justice. So instead of communes and provinces, I proposed: associations of production and groups formed of these associations.[14]

Reclus maintained a distinctly anti-naturalist position in his distrust of actually-existing communes, which he saw as nothing more than potential or already-formed mini-states, as liable as are states to produce and reproduce vested forms of authority. There is no smalltown functionary who does not take himself for a little emperor. "The groupings of revolutionary forces will be made freely," he insisted elsewhere, "outside any communal organization."[15] Instead of association based on the autonomy of existing communes or provinces, Reclus begins with the individual as starting point. What is crucial here is the idea that only an association begotten in liberty, one that is freely chosen, can be productive of solidarity—in other words, it is the very liberty by which associations are formed that *produces* solidarity. Solidarity grows through increasing liberty, not through constraint or obligation. Personal autonomy and social solidarity do not oppose each other but instead reinforce each other.

Recall that the second major step taken by anarchist communism in its break with "collectivist" anarchism was to eliminate the wage system by making access to resources and goods no longer dependent on labor performed. The products of work cannot be

[14] Elisée Reclus, letter to Elie Reclus, undated 1868, in *Correspondances*, vol. 1, (Paris: Librairie Schleicher frères, 1911), p. 285.

[15] Elisée Reclus, contribution to "Le congrès de la Fédération jurassienne de 1880," in Daniel Guérin, *Ni Dieu ni Maître*, vol. 1 (Paris: La Découverte, 1999), p. 342.

strictly proportionate to work performed because they result from everyone's labor—even and especially, Reclus adds, the labor of previous generations. It was thus impossible, pragmatically or theoretically, to measure the exact value of an individual's labor: "The tools or knowledges that allow us to accomplish our activities necessarily derive from other workers, from preceding generations ... and the evaluation of the recompense that should be attributed to each is necessarily arbitrary."[16] In this passage Reclus is discussing the way that scientific and scholarly advancement is dependent on the store of previous labor, but his remarks pertain to other kinds of labor as well. Kropotkin, too, insisted on the "common inheritance" made up of past creative labor:

> The Italians who died of cholera while making the Suez Canal, or of anchylosis in the St Gothard Tunnel, and the Americans mowed down by shot and shell while fighting for the abolition of slavery, have helped to develop the cotton industry in France and England, as well as the work-girls who languish in the factories of Manchester and Rouen, and the inventor who, following the suggestion of some worker, succeeds in improving the looms.

How, then, shall we estimate the share of each in the riches which all contribute to amass?[17]

How indeed? If individual labor cannot be measured, and distribution is thus no longer dependent on labor performed, how might distribution be organized? The logical conclusion that springs immediately to mind is the time-worn phrase, "to each according to his or her need." But in Reclus's thinking this idea did not go far enough. The distribution of goods and resources could no more be made according to individual need than individual labor could be isolated from the labor that preceded it. It was not possible to isolate one's individual needs from the needs of others. Individual need can, in fact, only be measured by taking the needs of others into account. One then partakes in the common stock according to one principle only: the solidarity of interests and the mutual respect of associates:

> If the great factory, that is to say, the earth, and all the secondary factories which are found there, are shared in common, if work is done by all and the quantity and quality of what is produced result precisely from the solidarity of effort, to whom must it legitimately belong if not to the whole indivisible workforce? What rule could guide the accountants who work out the shares and enable them to recognize what should be assigned to each individual from the *manna* produced by the labor of the whole of humanity, including previous generations? ... What is true and just is that the products resulting from the labor of all belong to all, and that each should freely take his share

[16] Elisée Reclus, cited in Ariane Miéville, "Elisée Reclus en Suisse. Le Travailleur et le Révolté," in *Elisée Reclus: Ecrire la terre en libertaire* (Orthez: Editions du temps perdu, 2005), p. 112.

[17] Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, p. 32.

> to consume as he pleases, without any other rule than that arising from the solidarity of interests and the mutual respect of associates. It would be absurd, moreover, to fear scarcity, since the enormous loss of products caused by the current wastefulness of commerce and private appropriation will have finally come to an end ... Fear is always a bad advisor. Let us not be afraid to call ourselves communists, because that is what we are in reality.[18]

The world's resources, like the rich endowment of past creative labor, are common property and should be cooperatively managed rather than owned within particular territorial groupings. Everyone is free to take what he or she desires of the fruit of the common labor, with no other stipulation than to consider the interests of others and to act in mutual solidarity with associates. And since those associates include the members of previous generations of laborers, solidarity, in this sense, extends not only to one's living associates but to the dead as well—it exists "between those who travel through the conscious arena and those who are no longer here."[19] The supposition here is that a particular economic structure—common ownership—working within a particular political organization—a decentralized one—will foster a new level of fellowship, reciprocity, and solidarity of interests among associates. But there is a third crucial ingredient that informs all of the thought of Morris, Kropotkin, and Reclus: the end of the scarcity capitalism produces through waste, hoarding, and privatization. The market-industrial system institutes scarcity, or "artificial famine,"[20] by arranging production and distribution through the behavior of prices and making livelihoods dependent on acquisition and spending. Insufficiency of material means is not "natural"—it is just the necessary starting point of economic activity under capitalism. Fiercely anti-Malthusian, both Reclus and Kropotkin insisted that scientific data showed material plenty to be available for all, were capitalism to come to an end. The solidarity of all people could be positively affirmed on the basis of statistics and geographical data that showed, conclusively in their view, that the earth's resources were ample and sufficient to feed everyone. "The great factory of the earth," managed cooperatively, means a world of equality in abundance, or communal luxury.

It would be mistaken to draw from these deliberations a merely—or even a primarily—moral character to Reclus's notion of solidarity. Solidarity in his thinking and his way of living was neither an ethics nor a sentiment—it was at once buttressed by his version of science, and it was a revolutionary strategy, perhaps the most important one. We can establish its strategic dimension most clearly by looking closely at his 1892 pamphlet, "A mon frère, le paysan."

Especially after the Paris Commune Reclus had become convinced that by ignoring the countryside, revolutionaries risked playing into the hands of the dominant classes,

[18] Reclus, contribution to "Le congrès de la Fédération jurassienne de 1880," pp. 341–2.
[19] Elisée Reclus, *L'Homme et la terre*, vol. 1 (Paris: Librairie universelle, 1905), pp. 318–19.
[20] Morris, "The Aims of Art," in *The Collected Works of William Morris*, vol. 23, p. 96.

whose power, as the Commune had shown better than any other event, relied on fomenting hostility between urban workers and peasants. "The association of workers of the land," wrote Reclus in 1873, "is perhaps the greatest development of the century."[21] And yet, he complained, not a word was devoted to the peasantry or to the question of agriculture in the revolutionary meetings he attended. "A mon frère, le paysan" was designed in part to combat the ignorance of city-based revolutionaries, but it was primarily concerned with combating the fear and hostility of the peasantry, as well as the propaganda that fostered it.

That fear was the same as the terror propagated by the Versaillais during the Commune: the fear that the "partageux" in the city would make off with peasant land and divide it up amongst themselves. Using informal, second-person address, Reclus speaks to that fear directly by contrasting those to whom he speaks—those who work the land—with those who own title to it: the wealthy who inherit it and the investors who profit from it. From the outset it is the opposition between those who work the land and those who derive wealth from it that takes the place of any opposition between city worker and peasant. Being assured that the land belongs to those who work it, though, is only the first step in solving the individual peasant's isolation. Reclus evokes the Russian *mir*, or "group of friends" as the rural commune was known in Slavic countries, as an initial first grouping peasants and farmers have formed in the face of the common enemies of capitalism and the state. The commune offers not only a shared alliance—it also has the advantage of creating a notary-free existence, for "the commune is the property of each and all." But the commune itself is no abiding solution to isolation, for in the end it finds itself weakened in its inevitable land battles with the lord, who has arrayed behind him a veritable "black army," as Blanqui might say, of magistrates, judges, priests, government officials, police, and, ultimately, even the actual army itself. Against such a numerous and powerful enemy, there is no choice except further and broader alliances and federation: "If you do not know how to join together, not only individual to individual, and commune to commune, but also country with country, in a vast International of workers, you will share the lot of millions of men who have already been stripped of their right to sow and harvest and who live in the slavery of wage labor."[22] Building on his initial rhetorical strategy of situating city worker and peasant on the same side vis-à-vis those who own the land, Reclus shows how today's city worker is just yesterday's peasant—the two have become interchangeable.

Twenty years after the demise of the First International, Reclus invokes again the organization that had provided the context for all of his early political activism. The International remained for him the most forceful example for future efforts at global

[21] Elisée Reclus, "Sur la propriété," cited in Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom*, p. 146.

[22] Elisée Reclus, *A mon frère, le paysan* (Paris: Bureaux des Temps Nouveaux, 1899), p. 6. An English translation exists in Clark and Martin, eds., *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity*, but my own translation is more complete—in this passage, for example, their translation eliminates any reference to the International.

solidarity; its working existence, as he wrote on another occasion, was an advance of historic proportions in uniting humanity:

> Since the discovery of America, the circumnavigation of the earth, no achievement was more important for the history of man ... The future normative unity that the philosophers desired only began to be realized when the English, French and German workers, forgetting their different origins and understanding one another in spite of their diversity of languages, joined together to form a single nation, in defiance of all their respective governments.[23]

Reclus saves the most horrible outcome of the failure to associate for last, concluding the pamphlet with a prescient and terrifying snapshot of agribusiness in the western United States. He describes fields the size of provinces and "grain factories" regimented under a system of persistent surveillance, where machines, horses and men are broken down into calculable energy integers and where families and children are forbidden on the premises. Here, in a world so organized, worker and peasant have become entirely indistinguishable—but so have peasant and horse! All this scientific exploitation of the earth would be fine, he notes wryly, if our desire were to make a few millionaires. But for those who know "the mystery of the wheat shaft breaking through the hard crust of earth," the American way is not something that can accurately be called agriculture. Capitalism, it follows, is a thought disorder, and utterly pathological to human society. If allowed to proceed on the course it has taken up until now, he concludes, all human achievement will be destroyed and the vast majority of people reduced to slaves.

Readers today, cognizant of the dangers of genetically modified agriculture, of chemical mono-cultures, Monsanto, and the rapid loss of species diversity may not be surprised by the turn Reclus's pamphlet takes. But the prescience of Reclus's vision of the effects of capitalism on agriculture and the non-urban environment at the time he was writing was highly unusual—even singular. Few Europeans had traveled, as he had, widely in the western Americas, and fewer still could address or even imagine the peasant as a political subject or ally. In many ways Reclus's perspective would not be seen again until the publication in the 1970s of Bernard Lambert's *Paysans et la lutte de classe*, a work which undertook an analysis of the exploitation by agribusiness of farmers a great deal more modernized that the ones Reclus addressed in the 1890s. Lambert's slogan, message, and rhetorical procedure—"workers, farmers, *même combat*"—could almost have been borrowed from Reclus.

Reclus's awareness of peasants as political subjects was longstanding, dating back to at least 1866, when he worked with feminist André Léo to found a Sunday newspaper, *L'Agriculteur*, designed to be distributed in the countryside. It was the politics spelled out in that early project that may well have inspired Léo's own brochure "L'appel

[23] Elisée Reclus, "Evolution, Revolution and the Anarchist Ideal," in Clark and Martin, eds., *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity*, p. 164.

au travailleur des campagnes," written at the height of the Commune. The pamphlet, co-authored with her partner Benoît Malon, was, as we have discussed, an attempt—too little, too late in Elisabeth Dmitrieff's opinion—to overcome Versaillais anti-Paris propaganda by addressing country people directly in terms of the interests they shared with urban workers. How many copies actually reached their designated readers at the height of the Commune is impossible to gauge—Louise Michel, for one, reports that all copies were seized by the Versaillais and "carefully destroyed."[24] Reclus's friendship with Léo and Malon—whose Batignolles chapter of the International he had first joined in 1866—continued unabated after the Commune, for both of them were part of the refugee society in the Jura.

Those reading "A mon frère, le paysan" today in, say, a translated anthology of Reclus's writings, will miss the bold format of the pamphlet's cover, its author's name less prominent than the large-print directives "Brochure to be Distributed" and "Read and Circulate." The cover clearly states its participation in a program of anarchist-communist propaganda—and tens of thousands of copies of the pamphlet were printed in several editions. The strategic choice of the brochure format is explained inside the cover: newspapers, it seems, are too circumstantial and lectures forgotten too quickly. Only one solution to the challenge of reaching a mass audience can be found: a free brochure that can be passed around; comrades are asked to forward to the publisher addresses of "the isolated" so that a copy might be sent to them by post.

Reclus's attention to the problem of mass distribution in this instance is entirely characteristic of the way he, Morris, Kropotkin, and the others in their network of associates viewed their methods of working as political practice. The brochure's intent, certainly, was propagandistic, but even the way Reclus went about his work as a geographer—organizing his network of collaborators, most of them anarchists and/or former Communards, publishing in mass-market venues to reach the largest possible audience, overseeing all of the phases of the production of the text, from drafting, map-making, printing, to binding—was inseparable from what he saw to be an anarchist political practice. To build a collective movement, a considerable amount of public translation is necessary—without it, all of the aspirations and non-conformist, non-consensual desires individuals might have risk remaining purely individual, unarticulated. In his memoirs, Kropotkin describes the work atmosphere in Reclus's communal study: "If he invites a contributor to work with him upon a volume of his world-famed Geography, and the contributor timidly asks, 'What have I to do?' he replies: 'Here are the books, here is a table. Do as you like.'"[25] Federico Ferretti has argued that the way Reclus and Kropotkin went about producing geographic scholarship in Clarens, and particularly the attention they paid to questions of publication and education, revealed an anarchist commitment to the principle of "geography for all." Two large collaborative efforts took up most of their time: the *Géographie universelle* and the po-

[24] Michel, *La Commune: Histoire et souvenirs*, p. 197.
[25] Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 392.

litical journal *Le Révolté*. Kropotkin's contributions to *Le Révolté* were written during the period when the two geographers were in close daily contact, and in the company of Dumartheray, Malatesta, and Lefrançais. In fact it was Reclus who came up with all of the French titles of Kropotkin's books, corrected the proofs and saw them into print. Of particular interest among the group engaged in the composition of the *Géographie universelle* was another Russian anarchist geographer, Léon Metchnikoff. Metchnikoff replaced Lefrançais as Reclus's secretary and was a principal contributor to the volume of the *Géographie universelle* on Japan. In his own research Metchnikoff was intent on finding the principle of association in groups of animals—even unicellular ones; like Kropotkin, he argued that cooperation rather than competition was the main factor in the evolution of human societies. Given Metchnikoff's scientific interests, as well as the growing importance Reclus began to give at this time to solidarity as political strategy, it seems certain that a kind of cross-fertilization favored the development of Kropotkin's theory of mutual aid. In Metchnikoff's major work, *La Civilisation et les grandes fleuves historiques* (1889), for example, he develops the idea quite similar to Reclus's that the highest form of civilization is one where cooperation is not imposed but emerges simultaneously in all aspects of social life. Elsewhere he argued against Comte's position that sociology should disregard social facts that humans share with animals and even plants in order that it be an exclusively human science. "Natural science teaches us that association," writes Metchnikoff, "is the law of every existence."[26] Beings are never absolute or indivisible but essentially "comparative and multiple." By emphasizing that the point where the individual ends and society begins has never been fixed with any accuracy, Metchnikoff echoes Reclus's assertion that the value of an individual's labor, like the degree of an individual's need, can never be measured with exactitude. As Ferretti remarks, Kropotkin's theory of mutual aid was itself a collaborative project.[27]

When Kropotkin finds support in Darwin for an associative as well as a competitive instinct, he is showing that mutual aid is an objective factor in human sociability. A social organization based on solidarity is a viable alternative to the economic hierarchy of an atomized society, and "the feeling of solidarity is the leading characteristic of all animals living in society."[28] Communism, in other words, is possible because mutual aid exists. Social Darwinism, or the survival of the fittest, is merely an ideological support legitimating the rich and powerful. It was Darwin's loyalty to Malthus that led him to emphasize the competition between organisms for limited resources over the cooperation they exhibited when struggling together against the harshness of the physical environment. In this context it is important to note that in "A mon frère,

[26] See Léon Metchnikoff, "Revolution and Evolution," *Contemporary Review*, 50 (1886), pp. 412–30; 415.

[27] See Federico Ferretti, "The Correspondence between Elisée Reclus and Pëtr Kropotkin as a Source for the History of Geography," *The Journal of Historical Geography*, 37:2 (April 2011), pp. 216–22.

[28] Peter Kropotkin, "Anarchist Morality," in *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets*, ed., Roger Baldwin (New York: Dover, 1970), p. 95.

le paysan" Reclus evokes twin dangers, equally perilous to the farmer, brought on by isolation: exploitation by the lords and harsh environmental conditions. Solidarity or mutual aid is the solution to both threats.

Kropotkin's work on mutual aid has the advantage of clarifying something that may remain ambiguous in Reclus's notion of solidarity. Solidarity is not love. Where older theories—and now new ones in our own time!—focus on love as a motivating factor for association and cooperation, Kropotkin disagreed:

> It is not love for my neighbor—whom I often do not know at all—that induces me to seize a pail of water and to rush towards his house when I see it on fire; it is a far wider, even though more vague feeling or instinct of human solidarity and sociability which moves me. So it is also with animals.[29]

Reclus's solidarity and Kropotkin's mutual aid are not grounded in a distinctly human sociality or moral sentiment but in a larger conception of animal existence that emphasizes continuities between the human and natural world. Thus, egalitarian forms of cooperation and interdependence found within nature's economy are not alien to human society but continuous with it, and survival is not dependent on the counter-productive aggression of pitting oneself against nature. "National and religious hatreds cannot separate us, for *the study of nature is our only religion* and the world is our country."[30] The study of nature was from the outset internationalist—not only in the way science provides a common tongue, a common language, but because national perceptions can only create obstacles to a study of the natural environment which spills, necessarily, across national, even continental borders. Geography, in its recognition of "natural" over artificial or state boundaries, leads to world citizenship.

The kinds of political—and ultimately, ecological—understanding Reclus and Kropotkin reached through science and the study of natural history Morris reached through his excavation of the impossibility of art under capitalism. If mutual aid derives from the study of nature, "fellowship"—the equivalent to mutual aid or to solidarity in William Morris's lexicon—derives not from science but from the creative capacity associated with art. "Fellowship" was the name Morris gave to that aspect of social life denied by the capitalist system, for which his model remained something like the collective endeavor of craftsmen working together as equals. Fellowship was what would pertain when creative labor was freed from capitalism, and all work had become art—the expression by man of his pleasure in labor.

Whether one proceeds through natural science or through art and aesthetics matters little, for each of the three in the end constructed for himself a path that led to the conviction that capitalism and commerce were the principal cause not just of

[29] Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (London: Heinemann, 1903), p. 21.

[30] Elisée Reclus, "Pourquoi sommes-nous anarchistes?," in l'Institut des Hautes Etudes de Belgique, *Elisée Reclus: Colloque organisé à Bruxelles les 1 et 2 février 1985*, p. 137.

humanity's degradation but of nature's as well. This should not, in and of itself, surprise us: the perception available to a geographer/scientist, on the one hand, and to an artist on the other bears a significant overlap: for both, the physical environment can never be reduced to mere background or abstract space. The world for both can never be a warehouse of inert things piled up for later use. And interaction with the world, in all of its natural and cultural variety, was vital to the way each of these men organized his life: none of the three was particularly "bookish" or scholarly, preferring instead the challenges and pleasures of world travel: Morris in Iceland, Metchnikoff in Japan, Kropotkin in China, Siberia and Central Asia, and Reclus all over the world in a staggering series of voyages: to the Americas, Ireland, Africa, and just about everywhere else. Reclus, in fact, began his career editing popular travelogues (the predecessors to the *Guides Bleues*); by the end of his life he had traveled extensively in all but two continents, Oceania and Antarctica, gathering data for his geographical writing. Ronald Creagh makes an interesting point about the protoecological dimension inherent in geographical work. Geographers, he notes, like historians, are concerned with the inscription of time in space, but their emphasis, in the end, is on space. Time or temporality is a human, social construction, and as such is tainted by the contemporary biases and dominant prejudices of the moment—such as the idea that dominates our own time that one should accumulate the most capital one can, hoard it to oneself, and then die. Space, on the other hand, is more complex, since it introduces non-human differences and agendas into the mix: the geological makeup of the earth, climate, the existence of other species.[31] Space forces a confrontation with—or accommodation to—the non-human world. In Morris's case, his desire for variety of life, which he considered on a par with equality for creating socialist life, and for work that is satisfying in lovely and sustainable surroundings, moved him inexorably toward an ecological analysis; for Kropotkin and Reclus, their confidence in the "common language" of science led them, too, to try to ascertain and to value the practices that would lead to a sustainable interaction with the natural world.

It is also no doubt significant that all three men were socialized outside of the university, with its already hardening conception of disciplinary divides and quarrels pitting the competence of geographers against that of economists, or the competence of historians against that of sociologists. Reclus, who earned no diplomas in his lifetime, remained outside the university entirely except for his participation, late in life, in the non-degree-granting Free University of Brussels. The extreme do-it-yourself-ism of Morris, the propensity he showed to learn every aspect of the skills and techniques used from the Middle Ages to the present in the art of fabric dying, for example, is itself a reaction against the kind of siloizing of skills and knowledges then getting underway in the universities of the era. It is impossible to detect a will to specialization in their work. Instead, each of the three manifests an almost Balzacian ability to hold together multiple levels of a complex reality in such a tightly knit system of interconnection that

[31] See Ronald Creagh, cited in Pelletier, *Elisée Reclus*, pp. 165–6.

failure in one sphere—say, the built environment, or education—is inevitably related to failure in another. It follows, then, that we might find in the geographer Reclus an ecological argument entirely akin to that of Morris, constructed not in a primarily geographical idiom but in view of the need for aesthetic pleasure:

> It is not only the restoration and embellishment of our cities that we expect from the man who becomes an artist. Because he will be free, we also count upon him to renew the beauty of the fields, in adapting all his works to their proper milieu in nature, in such a way that there should be born between earth and man a harmony kind to the eye and comforting to the spirit. Even great buildings can be of admirable beauty when the architects understand the character of the environing site, and when the work of man harmonizes with the geological work of the centuries in a harmonious ensemble.[32]

In one dialectical movement the communal luxury of public art extends naturally from the built environment—the lived beauty of urban spaces—to fuel the renewal of the fields and of agriculture, and thus human interaction with the natural environment, whereby, renewed, it flows back to the architectural design of great buildings, all in a harmonious continuity between the geological and the human. To this continuity or set of interdependencies between humans and nature Reclus gave the word "milieu" rather than environment—"environment" connoting a natural world conceived as something overly external or exterior to man. "Milieu," on the other hand, evokes the environment as a system or a developmental niche from which humans could not be abstracted—the milieu is co-produced by humans and nature, and Reclus uses the term frequently. (The narrowness and impoverishment of milieu, as we saw, is what Reclus criticizes in isolated anarchist micro-societies.) Physical phenomena and human phenomena are seen as intricately intertwined in a dialectic of dependencies and reciprocities that are optimally geared toward maintaining the earth as commons, the common home of all men and women. Reclus's tendency to think together aspects of human life and aspects of the natural world customarily understood in separation reaches its culmination in his epigraph to his most important work, his multi-volume world history *L'Homme et la terre*. There we learn that humanity is nothing more—and nothing less—than "nature becoming conscious of itself" ("l'homme est la nature prenant conscience d'elle-même").

World history, then, is the ever-changing and ever-developing process of men and women coming to understand their identity as the self-consciousness of the earth. Reclus's fascination with the changing dynamic of humans and nature reveals an optimism on his part about change itself, or about the human capacity to change. Humans must come to understand their interests as being the earth's interests, and solidarity, or the consideration of one's own needs in relation to others, must extend to other species, and to the natural world as inseparable from the human world. Assuming responsibility for the beauty of nature will cause both nature *and* humanity to flourish.

[32] Reclus, "Art and the People," p. 329.

Here, as elsewhere, solidarity for Reclus is less a spiritualized notion than it is predicated on political strategy and survival: "A secret harmony exists between the earth and the people whom it nourishes, and when reckless societies violate this harmony, they always end up regretting it."[33] Pillaging and exploitation of the earth's riches are counter-productive aggressions that will only render the human milieu uninhabitable. "The truly civilized man understands that his interest is bound up with the interest of everyone and with that of nature."[34]

Ecological theorists and activists today intent on recognizing in Reclus a significant precursor to contemporary developments in eco-socialism have located within his massive written *oeuvre* the prescient warnings he gave regarding the problems caused by unsustainable industrialization.[35] Reclus was eloquent about the dangers of the loss of biodiversity, for example, or of the introduction of non-native species, or of the scale of deforestation then occurring in the Americas and which he had personally observed. He regularly emphasized the need for respect and care in the treatment of other species, and was a lifelong vegetarian, subsisting on a simple diet of bread and fruit. Reclus, Béatrice Giblin notes, "had a global ecological sensibility that dies with him for almost a full half-century."[36] At the same time Morris, too, has emerged in recent scholarship as what one critic calls "one of the first proponents of eco-socialism," with contemporary readers locating in his "critical notion of beauty" the key to ending environmental degradation.[37] The demand that art and beauty flourish in everyday life, they argue, was in itself a nascent ecological program. As for Kropotkin, he has been long viewed, by anarchists and non-anarchists alike, as having sketched the elements of an ecologically viable human society.

Yet absent from most of the effort to explore the ecological sensibility of a Reclus or a Morris is anything more than a token bow taken to the role played in the development of that sensibility by the political experience and culture of the Commune. Were we to speculate, though, on why activists and theorists today have gravitated to this body of thought, we would have to locate its appeal to contemporary readers not just in its prescient understanding of the anti-ecological nature of capitalism, but in the refreshingly *uncompromising* nature of that understanding. And this, as I see it, is where we can point to another major effect on the thinkers in question—call it a form

[33] Elisée Reclus, "Du Sentiment de la nature dans les societies modernes," *Revue des deux mondes*, 63 (1866), p. 379.

[34] Elisée Reclus, "De l'action humaine sur la géographie physique," *Revue des deux mondes*, December 1, 1864, p. 763.

[35] Early discussions of the ecological dimension of Reclus's thought include Béatrice Giblin, "Reclus: un écologiste avant l'heure?," *Herodote*, 22 (1981). For more recent developments in this line of reflection, see Clark and Martin, eds., *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity*, pp. 19–42 and Pelletier, *Elisée Reclus*, pp. 107–30.

[36] Giblin, "Reclus: un écologiste avant l'heure?," p. 110.

[37] See, especially, Ruth Kinna, *William Morris: The Art of Socialism* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 32–60; and Bradley MacDonald, *Performing Marx* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), pp. 47–66.

of solidarity—of having lived through the recent event of the Commune, the scope of its aspirations and the savagery of its annihilation alike. There was no question for any of them of reform or of a piecemeal solution. Nature's repair could only come about through the complete dismantling of international commerce and the capitalist system. A systemic problem demanded a systemic solution.

The "state of perpetual war" Morris called commerce was at the root of the ruin of the landscape. Industry's accelerated surge in producing "what on the one hand is called 'employment' and on the other what is called 'money-making'" had flooded the market with banal goods and transformed the built environment into what anthropologist Marc Augé would later call "non-spaces": nondescript constructions with no bearing on or relationship to the local site on which they are built. Kropotkin describes the huge factories producing quantities of inferior or, in a word dear to Morris, "shoddy" goods: "an immense bulk of the world's trade," he writes, "consists of 'shoddy,' *patraque*, 'Red Indians' blankets' and the like, shipped to distant lands. Whole cities ... produce nothing but 'shoddy.'"[38] At the same time that the inferior goods undercut the specificity of local products, commercial centers like Paris and London expand into megapoles for no reason other than the accumulation of profit. A worker in the polluted centers is destined to a certain kind of life "which energetic, aggressive cheapness determines for him." But the rich with their "swinish luxury" are no better off: the "tax of waste" renders rich and poor alike impoverished, in that both are deprived of a sensory apparatus capable of even perceiving, let alone appreciating beauty. Luxury, which makes a rich man's life empty and degraded, alienates people from nature just as much as "shoddy," or "makeshift" does. An economy organized in terms of profit defaces the landscape—which in turn impoverishes the imagination: "Where the land has been defaced," writes Reclus, "where all poetry has disappeared from the countryside, the imagination is extinguished, the mind becomes impoverished, and routine and servility seize the soul, inclining it toward torpor and death."[39] But the sensory medium that serves the imagination is itself historical and capable of change: were the "artificial famine" caused by capitalism to be abolished, we would not be "so pinched and poor that we cannot afford ourselves the pleasure of a beautiful landscape ... or of a beautiful building."[40] Until then, civilization remains a divided condition: the human subject is divided against itself because of the division of labor, and that division divides it from nature as well.

The political culture of the Commune suggests the two far-reaching transformations necessary to bring an end to this state of affairs. The first is collective ownership of the land: the great factory that is the earth must be put into social ownership. All arable land, wrote Reclus, must be held in common, as it was by many "so-called savage

[38] Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow*, ed. Colin Ward (London: Freedom Press, 1998), p. 149. Or Morris: "It is a shoddy age. Shoddy is king. From the statesman to the shoemaker, all is shoddy..." Cited in Thompson, *William Morris*, p. viii.

[39] Reclus, "Du Sentiment de la nature," p. 379.

[40] Morris, in *Commonweal*, February 26, 1887.

societies" where want was unknown. He again evokes the Russian *mir* and similar peasant organizations as a model, just as American agribusiness in "A mon frère, le paysan" served as the nightmare vision of the far-reaching effects of monopoly of the soil. Morris, too, believed that the first step—from which everything else would follow—was for the land to be held in common: "The resources of nature, mainly the land and those other things which can only be used for the reproduction of wealth and which are the effect of social work, should not be owned in severalty, but by the whole community for the benefit of the whole."[41] For Kropotkin though, seizing the land, whether alone, or even as a first step, is not sufficient. Expropriation of both agricultural land *and* industrial property must occur simultaneously: "All is interdependent in a civilized society; it is impossible to alter any one thing without altering the whole. Therefore, on the day that a nation will strike at private property, under any one of its forms, territorial or industrial, it will be obliged to attack them all."[42]

The second transformation, which follows from the first, is an emphasis on the kind of regional self-sufficiency that was the watchword of the Commune. A world of smaller, regional productive units and intensive but preservationist land use, a decentralized world where small-scale industry was dispersed and combined with agriculture: this was the vision. Self-sufficiency at the regional level would diminish if not bring an end to the need for international trade. Production for a local market was desirable and rational, as these remarks by Reclus illustrate:

> At present, in every country, the number of commercial transactions is taken as an index of prosperity. The opposite point of view would be more logical: the better the land is utilized by its inhabitants, the less becomes the necessity of moving goods over great distances, the more sensible the work of their factories, the less becomes the exchange of products.[43]

What counts as prosperity? What is wealth? For solidarity with nature to exist, rather than purely mercantile interests, a transformation of values must occur that is itself predicated on a complete transformation of the social order: the abolition of private property and of the state. Nature would then be not just a productive force or stockpile of resources but valued as an end in itself. Environmental sustainability is not a technical problem but a question of what a society values, what it considers wealth.

> Wealth is what Nature gives us and what a reasonable man can make out of the gifts of Nature for his reasonable use. The sunlight, the fresh air, the unspoiled face of the earth, food, raiment and housing necessary and decent; the storing up of knowledge of all kinds, and the power of disseminating it; means of free communication between man and man; works of

[41] Morris, cited in Thompson, *William Morris*, p. xxx.
[42] Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, p. 50.
[43] Reclus, *L'Homme et la terre*, tome 3 [1931], p. 595.

> art, the beauty which man creates when he is most a man, most aspiring and thoughtful—all things which serve the pleasure of people, free, manly and uncorrupted. This is wealth.[44]

When labor time ceases to be the measure of work and work the measure of wealth, then wealth will no longer be measurable in terms of exchange value. Just as for each of these thinkers true individualism was only possible under communism, which needs and values the contribution of each individual to the common good, so true luxury could only be communal luxury.

[44] Morris, "Useful Work Versus Useless Toil," in Morton, ed., *Political Writings*, pp. 91–2.

# Index

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