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A Postindustrial Prelude to Postcolonialism: John Ruskin, William Morris, and Gandhism

Patrick Brantlinger

It is machinery that has impoverished India.

—GANDHI, *Hind Swaraj* (1909)

We can realise truth and non-violence only in the simplicity of village life.

—GANDHI, letter to Jawaharlal Nehru (1945)

According to Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity, imperialisms—indeed, all master/slave relations—are always two-way streets and more.¹ Kipling's hybrid, Kim, a sort of Anglo-Irish-Indian Huckleberry Finn, is emblematic of the countless racial and cultural mixings that characterize Britain's four centuries of contact with India. Any tourist who sees the government buildings in New Delhi, or journeys on Indian—really, Anglo-Indian—railroads, or talks to waiters or shopkeepers in English gets a glimpse, at least, of Britain's influence on the subcontinent. Except for numerous tandoori restaurants, a tourist in London may not see many overt signs of India's influence on Britain, but they are there nonetheless, from the Jamme Masjid Mosque in Brick Lane to such Anglo-Indian words as *pajamas*, *thug*, *bungalow*, *pundit*, *curry*, and *loot*.²

The origin of this essay was an MLA paper on Morris and imperialism; I wish to thank Florence Boos for inviting me to take up that topic and Purnima Bose for prompting me to expand it.

1. See Homi K. Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985): 144–65; rpt. in Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York, 1994), pp. 102–22.

2. For these and many other Anglo-Indianisms, see Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell,

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Here I explore the interchange between late-Victorian socialism and the arts and crafts movement on the one hand, and emergent Indian nationalism on the other. I begin by asking how two prominent British intellectuals, John Ruskin and William Morris, both important for aesthetic theory and for British socialism, responded to Indian politics and Indian traditional arts and crafts. I also explore how two prominent Indian intellectuals, Mahatma Gandhi and Ananda Coomaraswamy, responded to Ruskin and Morris. This cultural interchange involved a creative hybridity that challenged or at least destabilized Western Orientalism and alleged Eastern mimicry. Furthermore, from this conjuncture emerged the concept and term *postindustrial*, together with the idea of an “inverted Marxism,” some thirty years before Indian independence in 1947. I conclude by considering the significance the Anglo-Indian genealogy of *postindustrial* might have for current work on postcolonial cultures and politics.

1

Reading Ruskin's *Unto This Last* on the train from Johannesburg to Durban in 1904, Gandhi experienced a conversion. In his autobiography, Gandhi says “I determined to change my life in accordance with [Ruskin's] ideals.” Of all the books that he had read, “the one that brought about an instantaneous and practical transformation in my life was *Unto This Last*. I translated it later into Gujarati, entitling it *Sarvodaya* (the welfare of all).” Gandhi summarizes Ruskin's anti-industrial utopianism in three main lessons:

1. That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
2. That a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
3. That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is the life worth living.³

Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical, and Discursive, ed. William Crooke (1886; London, 1985).

3. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Gandhi's Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, trans. Mahadev Desai (Washington, D.C., 1960), pp. 364, 365.

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Gandhi reframes Ruskin for the Indian context, but other Ruskinians, notably Morris and his followers in the arts and crafts movement, were applying these and similar lessons to the European context. What Gandhi and Morris both most valued in Ruskin was his anti-industrial, precapitalist communalism—the sort of communalism that Gandhi identified with traditional Indian village life and that informs Morris’s dream-vision utopia, *News from Nowhere* (1890).⁴

Gandhi would probably have arrived at the three main lessons he draws from *Unto This Last* even if he had never read it. He says that he had already pondered versions of the first two lessons. Also, all three lessons can be found in India’s religions. Rather than Ruskin’s influence on Gandhi and hence on modern India, I wish to stress the ironies of Gandhi’s attraction to Ruskin and also of Morris’s Ruskin-inflected Marxism, as the latter influenced both the European-led arts and crafts movement in India and the work of the Anglo-Sinhalese philosopher and art historian, Coomaraswamy.

One irony arises because Ruskin was as much a Tory imperialist as a precursor of late-Victorian socialism; his views on India were thoroughly Orientalist. Also, while Morris’s evolution from Pre-Raphaelite to Marxist made him critical of imperialism and far more sympathetic to India than was Ruskin, he never advocated Indian independence or escaped from some version of Orientalism. Gandhi, on the other hand, seems not to have read Morris, though that hasn’t prevented some of his biographers from finding a Morrisian influence in his advocacy of *khaddar*, or home-spun cloth, and of *swadeshi*, which involved his rejection of British manufactures. But Morris’s chief Indian disciple, Coomaraswamy, explicitly applied Morris’s aesthetic and political ideas to the Indian context in ways that clarify Morris.

Unto This Last is a monologic sermon by an eccentrically brilliant art critic who never ceased being a Tory imperialist. In this sermon on true wealth or value, Ruskin doesn’t say much about imperialism or India, but one passage might have taught Gandhi that its author was at best a fallible guru. Ruskin repeats a favorite theme, that among the “national manufactures” of a virtuous nation-state “souls of a good quality” ought to be the leading product. Ruskin continues, with direct reference to India,

Nay, in some far-away and yet undreamt-of hour, I can even imagine that England may cast all thoughts of possessive wealth back to the barbaric nations among whom they first arose; and that, while

4. *Communalism* often carries a utopian meaning, but in Indian discourse it is also often used as a synonym for sectarian strife, violence between Hindus and Muslims, and so on. For examples of this latter, negative usage, see Prabha Dixit, *Communalism: A Struggle for Power* (New Delhi, 1974), and Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India* (New Delhi, 1984). The best alternative word, *communitarianism*, I reserve to identify a self-conscious politics aiming at communalism in the utopian sense.

the sands of the Indus and adamant of Golconda may yet stiffen the housings of the charger, and flash from the turban of the slave, she, as a Christian mother, may at last attain to the virtues and the treasures of a Heathen one [Christ], and be able to lead forth her Sons, saying,—“These are MY Jewels.”⁵

According to this complexly ironic passage, Britain, as a “Christian mother,” may one day grow Christlike enough to part with its empire in all but an ideal sense. Worldly power and glory are for mere “barbarians” and “slaves” like Indians. As Thorstein Veblen would do in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), Ruskin identifies “possessive wealth” with a “barbaric” stage of social development; Britain is or should be outgrowing this stage.

In this passage as elsewhere from 1857 forward, Ruskin is reacting to the “Great Mutiny” or, as Marx and various Indian nationalists have viewed it, India’s “first war of independence.”⁶ In contrast to Marx, Ruskin defends imperialism not because the path to utopia for non-Western societies lies through capitalism and industrialization but because those societies consist of inferior races who need to be ruled for their own good. Like many other partial critics of imperialism, Ruskin sometimes criticizes what the British are doing in, say, India largely by upholding an ideal model of what they should be doing, of the right way to discipline barbarians. Ruskin can declare that “every mutiny . . . every terror, and every crime, occurring under . . . our Indian legislation, arises directly out of our national desire to live on the loot of India.”⁷ This sounds like a call to Britain not just to quit looting India but to quit India altogether. But, as the passage from *Unto This Last* demonstrates, Ruskin hardly means so much. Ruskin dissociates the desire for “loot” (he does not quite say empire) from an ideal Britain and associates it instead with “barbaric” India. This displacement, a form of blaming the victim, of course rationalizes the continued imperialist domination of the subcontinent.

Ruskin often advocates an idealized, chivalric imperialism, as he sometimes also—while damning modern, industrialized, democratic, or mass warfare—advocates war in chivalric terms. This is the gist of Ruskin’s monograph *A Knight’s Faith: Passages in the Life of Sir Herbert Edwardes*

5. John Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, in “*Unto This Last*” and *Other Writings*, ed. Clive Wilmer (Harmondsworth, 1985), p. 189.

6. As Marx noted, Benjamin Disraeli first posed the question of whether the Indian mutiny was a mere *sepoy* uprising or a “national revolt.” He and Engels agreed with Disraeli that it was much more than a military insurrection; on the part of its leaders, at least, it was an attempt to oust the British and gain “national independence” (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The First Indian War of Independence, 1857–1859* [Moscow, 1959], pp. 48, 135). The title of this anthology seems to come from Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence 1857* (1909; New Delhi, 1986).

7. Quoted in James Clark Sherburne, *John Ruskin, or the Ambiguities of Abundance* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), p. 205.

(1885). Along with *The Two Paths*, *A Knight's Faith* is Ruskin's most sustained commentary on both imperialism and India. Ruskin says that his purpose in commenting upon Edwardes's own memoir of his military exploits in the Punjab in the late 1840s is to show "how a decisive soldier and benevolent governor can win the affection of the wildest races, subdue the treachery of the basest, and bind the anarchy of dissolute nations,—not with walls of fort or prison, but with the living roots of Justice and Love."⁸ So *A Knight's Faith* is an exercise in Carlylean hero worship illustrating the right instead of the wrong way to go about wars of conquest and to extend imperial domination over "dissolute nations."

The contrast between artless Scotland and artistic India in *The Two Paths* further demonstrates Ruskin's belief in an ideal imperialism that it was imperative Britain exercise over a "dissolute nation" like India. First published in 1859, the year before *Unto This Last*, *The Two Paths* clearly expresses the racist hysteria aroused by the mutiny. "Since the race of man began its course of sin on this earth," Ruskin declares, "nothing has ever been done by it so significative of all bestial, and lower than bestial degradation, as the acts of the Indian race" in 1857. These "acts of the Indian mutineer" equal "cruelty stretched to its fiercest against the gentle and unoffending, and corruption festered to its loathsome."⁹ The paradox is, however, that Indians are also "lovers of art," in contrast to the dour Scots, whose only art—so Ruskin claims—is their tartan kilts. The Scots are too puritanically virtuous to produce any art; the Indians produce much "subtle" and seemingly beautiful art, but it is, Ruskin believes, degraded and unnatural. "Out of the peat cottage come faith, courage, self-sacrifice, purity, and piety, and whatever else is fruitful in the work of Heaven; out of the ivory palace come treachery, cruelty, cowardice, idolatry, bestiality,—whatever else is fruitful in the work of Hell."¹⁰

Ruskin originally presented the first section of *The Two Paths*, "The Deteriorative Power of Conventional Art over Nations," as a lecture on

8. Ruskin, *A Knight's Faith: Passages in the Life of Sir Herbert Edwardes*, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London, 1903–12), 31:384. See also Ruskin's lecture "War," *The Crown of Wild Olive*, vol. 18 of *The Works of John Ruskin* and his idealization of the soldier as the model for all the professions (and hence, for value) in "Ad Valorem," *Unto This Last*, pp. 204–28.

9. Ruskin, *The Two Paths*, in "Sesame and Lilies," "The Two Paths," "The King of the Golden River" (London, 1965), pp. 89, 90.

10. Ibid., p. 90. In his 1870 Slade inaugural lecture, Ruskin explains that Britain's ineptness at "design" is due to its advanced civilization; in contrast, "the partly savage races . . . excel in decorative art" (Ruskin, "Lecture I: Inaugural," *Lectures on Art*, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, 20:28). Earlier, in *Modern Painters*, Ruskin had mused upon the artlessness of peasants in the Swiss Alps. Surrounded by sublime beauty, the peasants nevertheless did not reflect that beauty in their daily lives. In contrast to the puritanism of the Scots, the Swiss peasants, Ruskin thought, were merely brutish. See Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, 6:385–417. I owe both of these points to Elizabeth Helsinger.

the Indian exhibits at the South Kensington Museum in 1858. These artworks had been displayed by the East India Company in the Great Exhibition of 1851, and until the mutiny they were a source of much British admiration for Indian artefacts. Among the admirers were participants in the British arts and crafts movement, including both Morris and John Lockwood Kipling, Rudyard's father, who "was among the first to advocate the revival of Indian handicrafts based on training in native techniques."¹¹ The mutiny, which rendered Ruskin's attitudes toward Indian art thoroughly schizophrenic, had no such effect on either Morris or John Lockwood Kipling.

Ruskin's racist discourse in *The Two Paths* is an extreme expression of his Tory chauvinism, inflected by his early evangelicalism. But beyond that, Ruskin expresses a version of the defining contradiction that Edward Said and others find in *Kim*: Rudyard Kipling's childhood fascination with and love for India, which led him to associate it with color, beauty, and art but also with irrational energy and barbarism; versus his adult belief in "the white man's burden" and the progress of civilization, which, he obscurely felt, would eventually eradicate both barbarism and art.¹² Ruskin, like Kipling, rhetorically entraps himself (as he does, though usually less violently, in *The Stones of Venice* and elsewhere) by simultaneously valorizing civilization (or England) and nostalgically identifying art or beauty with medieval barbarism and, in this case, with a diabolical "race" (Indians). In damning Indians because of the mutiny, Ruskin sides with the industrial, imperial civilization that he often elsewhere damns as barbaric, deceitful, exploitive, and unremittingly ugly.

This is not to suggest that in *The Two Paths* Ruskin identifies Scotland as the vanguard of the civilizing process; that role belongs to England. But he goes on to note that the artless, virtuous Scots played valiant roles in reconquering artful but mutinous India. He does not say that the renewed subjugation of India will rescue the world's most diabolical race from damnation—or, in less hysterical terms, will civilize Indians. But

11. Mahrukh Tarapor, "John Lockwood Kipling and British Art Education in India," *Victorian Studies* 24 (Autumn 1980): 78. Given Rudyard Kipling's reputation as "the laureate of empire," his father's ties to Pre-Raphaelitism, to Edward Burne-Jones (Rudyard's uncle), and to the anti-imperialist, anti-industrial arts and crafts movement are, to say the least, ironic. See the opening of *Kim* for an evocation of the Lahore Museum, or "Wonder House," where John Lockwood Kipling was curator (Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* [New York, 1901], p. 1), and chap. 1 of Kipling, "Something of Myself" and *Other Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Thomas Pinney (Cambridge, 1990) for childhood memories of Uncle Edward and "Uncle Topsy"—that is, Morris.

12. See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1993), pp. 132–62. In the nostalgic *Kim*, India's art and color are, sadly, giving way to Britain's industry and science, represented by Colonel Creighton's "Ethnological Survey" (Kipling, *Kim*, p. 173). The survey is a front, of course, for the imperial government's espionage—the surveillance through which Kim/Kipling discovers India's art and color.

insofar as Indians *are* diabolical, Ruskin believes that “artful” though they are (or *because* they are “artful”?), they must be conquered and ruled for the world’s as well as for India’s good.

2

Gandhi could not have guessed what Ruskin thought about India just from reading *Unto This Last*. However, Ruskin’s greatest British disciple, William Morris, must have had difficulty reconciling the utopian, quasi-socialist, and at times anti-imperialist Ruskin with the authoritarian, imperialist, racist Ruskin. From his earliest political activism for the Eastern Question Association in 1877, Morris battled valiantly against British “jingoism” and warmongering. E. P. Thompson declares that opposition to imperialism led Morris to socialism.¹³ And Said names Morris along with Wilfred Scawen Blunt as two late-Victorian intellectuals “who were totally opposed to imperialism,” although “far from influential.”¹⁴ Said is right about Blunt’s lack of influence, but it is not clear that Morris was “far from influential.” Morris had a major impact on an anti-industrial side of British socialism, also exemplified in the 1890s by Robert Blatchford’s bestselling *Merrie England* (1894). This anti-industrial socialism, including the guild socialism advocated by Alfred Orage, Arthur J. Penty, G. D. H. Cole, and others from about 1906 into the 1920s, influenced Labour politicians including Ramsay Macdonald, Clement Attlee, and Aneurin Bevin.¹⁵

It is also not clear that Morris was “totally opposed to imperialism,” as Said claims. As in every matter of ideology, there are shades and degrees of anti-imperialism. Morris advocated home rule for Ireland and vehemently opposed *new* European incursions in Africa and elsewhere, but he said little or nothing about what Britain should do with India. This vagueness contrasts sharply with Henry Mayers Hyndman’s many articles and books on India. Drawing on Marx and also on Dadabhai Naoroji and other early Indian nationalists, Hyndman argued that the British were “draining” India of its wealth and thereby causing unprecedented poverty and famines. From the 1870s onward, he preached the immediate dismantling of the British Raj in favor of home rule under Indian administrators. Similarly, Charles Bradlaugh took up the cause of

13. See E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (New York, 1977), p. 631.

14. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 241.

15. Of course Morris was a major influence—the major influence—upon the arts and crafts movement, and thence upon modern art and architecture. But Said is talking about whether or not his socialism and anti-imperialism were influential. For Morris’s impact on Labour politicians, see Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850–1980* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 118–26.

Indian home rule from his election to Parliament in 1886 until his death in 1891—a championing that influenced Annie Besant, who in one of her later avatars, after metamorphosing through Theosophy, presided over the Indian National Congress. Meanwhile the Fabian socialists adopted the liberal imperialism (that phrase isn't an oxymoron) expressed by Shaw in *Fabianism and the Empire*.¹⁶

I am not suggesting that Morris waffled vaguely between Hyndman's anti-imperialism and the Fabians' imperialism. It seems likely that Morris agreed with his quondam comrade Hyndman; there are a few brief articles in Morris's Socialist League journal *Commonweal* that come close to Hyndman's position. The most notable is "British Rule in India" by the old Chartist turned socialist John Sketchley, who damns the Raj as nothing more than "the suppression of liberty, to facilitate the work of wholesale plunder."¹⁷ But Sketchley fails to say—and this is true of the few other articles on India in *Commonweal*—what Britain should do next about India. He also ignores the stirrings of Indian nationalism that were contemporaneous with the rise of British socialism, stirrings that by the late 1880s were at least as well publicized in Britain as in India and that had the goal of Indian home rule (*Hind Swaraj*, or Indian self-rule, as Gandhi called it) paralleling Irish home rule. But while *Commonweal* has much to say about Ireland, much of it by Morris, it has little or nothing to say about Indian independence.¹⁸ Morris apparently believed that India was so steeped in poverty and superstition, albeit as a result of British "force and fraud," that he could not imagine it achieving immediate home rule, as he did for Ireland. And home rule in either case did not necessarily mean full independence from Britain. Besides, wouldn't inde-

16. On British support for Indian nationalism and "home rule," see Harish P. Kaushik, *The Indian National Congress in England, 1885–1920* (New Delhi, 1972), and Briton Martin, *New India, 1885: British Official Policy and the Emergence of the Indian National Congress* (Berkeley, 1969), pp. 197–240. Chushichi Tsuzuki, *H. M. Hyndman and British Socialism* (Oxford, 1961), sees Hyndman as only gradually giving up a Tory-Radical imperialism for support of full Indian independence. But as early as his *The Bankruptcy of India* (1878), Hyndman advocated "genuine Indian rule throughout Hindustan," albeit "under light English leadership" and within the emerging British Commonwealth framework (Henry Mayers Hyndman, *The Record of an Adventurous Life* [New York, 1911], p. 161). For Shaw and the Fabians on empire, see Gareth Griffith, *Socialism and Superior Brains: The Political Thought of Bernard Shaw* (New York, 1993), pp. 65–70.

17. John Sketchley, "British Rule in India," *Commonweal*, 21 Apr. 1888, p. 124.

18. In one of his "Notes on News," Morris writes, "we are a hated garrison in India, and hold it by means of force and fraud for the advantage of the robber class in England." British rule is "British tyranny" (William Morris, "Notes on News," *Commonweal*, 8 June 1889, p. 177). But he does not say that Britain should quit India. And in other "Notes on News" he focuses on European incursions in Africa. Moreover, "Socialism from the Root Up," coauthored by Belfort Bax, which appeared as a series in *Commonweal* in 1886–87, is thoroughly Eurocentric. Brief mention is made of British competition with the French and Dutch in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for America and India, but that is about all except for an allusion to Marx's comments on colonization at the end of vol. 1 of *Capital*.

pendence speed the industrial development—that is, degradation—of India? Perhaps Morris preferred an India left undisturbed in what he saw as barbarian innocence, just as he explicitly preferred an Africa left in a state of pristine barbarism.

Morris wrote and spoke extensively about the *general* economic forces that resulted in jingoism and territorial aggrandizement. Imperialism was the result of “commercial war,” based on a continuum between class war at home and warfare among rival nations for new markets abroad and leading to the imperialist cannibalization of weaker societies by stronger ones. “Competitive Commerce,” Morris says, “is distinctly a system of war,” extending from rivalry among individuals to rivalry among businesses and classes and ultimately to “the wars bred by Commerce in search of new markets.” It is on this global level that imperialism produces its destructive effects; it has “ruined India, starved and gagged Ireland, and tortured Egypt.”¹⁹ Morris’s analysis of “commercial war” foreshadows J. A. Hobson’s *Imperialism: A Study*, the 1902 book often cited as the starting point for modern, economic theories of imperialism.²⁰ In “How We Live and How We Might Live,” Morris declares that the destruction of weaker societies by imperialism is

what commercial war comes to when it has to do with foreign nations. . . . That is how we live now with foreign nations, prepared to ruin them without war if possible, with it if necessary, let alone meantime the disgraceful exploiting of savage tribes and barbarous peoples on whom we force at once our shoddy wares and our hypocrisy at the cannon’s mouth.²¹

These and many similar passages Marx himself might have written. Yet there are aspects of Marx’s theory of imperialism that Morris probably couldn’t accept. A clue lies in Morris’s condemnation of “shoddy wares,” entailing the aesthetic qualities of the products of human labor and of entire social systems. For Marx, by contrast, after the 1844 manuscripts, aesthetic concerns move to the background; they are implicit in everything that he wrote but they aren’t a dominant feature of the *Grundrisse* or of *Capital*.

Aesthetic concerns were of course dominant for Morris because he was an artist, but also because, besides Marx, Ruskin was a major influence on his social theories. Yet, as we have seen, Ruskin is highly contradictory about imperialism, and his differences from Marx are many and acute. The key difference is that Marx on one level is as thoroughgoing

19. Morris, “Art and Socialism,” *Stories in Prose, Stories in Verse, Shorter Poems, Lectures and Essays*, ed. G. D. H. Cole (1934; New York, 1978), pp. 636, 637, 645.

20. See J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (1902; London, 1965).

21. Morris, “How We Live and How We Might Live,” *Stories in Prose, Stories in Verse, Shorter Poems, Lectures and Essays*, pp. 568, 569.

an advocate of industrial modernization as, say, Thomas Macaulay; Ruskin is just as thoroughgoing an antimodernizer. But Marx is also an anti-imperialist, whereas Ruskin expresses a Tory paternalism that, extended to India, equals imperialism. For Marx, imperialism, which he condemns on the level of practical politics as horrendously unjust and destructive, is on the world-historical level part of the juggernaut of progress leading through capitalism to communism. Thus both Marx and Ruskin, though for opposite reasons, rationalize imperialism in ways that Morris must have found repugnant.

In his writings on India, Marx argues that though imperialism is ruthlessly destructive of Oriental despotism and its corollary, the "idiocy" of Indian "rural life," it is only through that destruction that the path of Indian salvation lies.²² This is one version of thinking progress and disaster together, dialectically, as Marx insists is necessary, and there are versions of such thinking in Morris. *Revolution* is a term that expresses this thought: progress, liberation, or utopian realization can only come about through violence, especially coups d'état like the American and French Revolutions or the short-lived Paris Commune of 1871 that Morris elegizes in his 1885 narrative poem, *The Pilgrims of Hope*.²³ In *News from Nowhere*, such a revolution initiates the utopian society of the future. But Marx also writes about the "fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia" that British imperialism is stupidly, viciously, but necessarily producing—a revolution synonymous with what is nowadays called economic development or modernization. It is precisely revolution in this second, economic and industrial sense that Morris, with his "hatred of modern civilisation," hated at least as passionately as did Ruskin.²⁴ And this is also why, in *News from Nowhere*, the political and social revolution is not identified with a modernizing revolution in the economic mode of production.

Most of what Morris has to say about India is contained in a few

22. Marx writes,

England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindustan, was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution. [Marx and Engels, *The First Indian War of Independence, 1857–1859*, p. 20]

For Marx on the "idiocy" of Indian "rural life," see Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1989), p. 238. Adas offers a succinct account of the views of the Victorian British on the role of industrialization in "civilizing" India; see pp. 223–28. See also Aijaz Ahmad, "Marx on India: A Clarification," *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London, 1992), pp. 221–42.

23. See Morris, *The Pilgrims of Hope*, in *Stories in Prose, Stories in Verse, Shorter Poems, Lectures and Essays*, pp. 355–408.

24. Morris, "How I Became a Socialist," *Stories in Prose, Stories in Verse, Shorter Poems, Lectures and Essays*, p. 657.

passages of his lectures and essays condemning the destruction of Indian arts and crafts by industrial capitalism. This includes what he says about forcing “shoddy wares” on barbarian peoples; the mechanically produced items flood the markets and undersell artistically superior ones hand-made by indigenous craftspeople. In contrast to Ruskin, Morris clearly does not regard Indian artworks as evil or dissolute; he regards them as beautiful, worthy of imitation, and superior to most Western equivalents. But while Morris condemns the destruction of Indian arts and crafts by civilization (that is, by imperialism and industrialism), he does not spell out an alternative. The two main irreconcilable alternatives presented by his two chief precursors, Marx and Ruskin, were deeply problematic. Morris could not accept Marx’s view that the “social revolution” in Asia had necessarily to forge its violent road into the future *through* capitalist industrialization. Neither did he accept Ruskin’s racist authoritarianism, according to which good Christian soldiers like Sir Herbert Edwardes had a positive duty to imperialize dissolute “races” such as the Indians.²⁵ So Morris was left with inconsistent or unsettled ideas about India, which weakened his otherwise forthright but general anti-imperialism.

3

According to Thomas Metcalf, the British-inspired arts and crafts movement in turn-of-the-century India was patronizingly imperialistic. Perhaps it was so in a Ruskinian direction, but not clearly in a Morrisian one. Metcalf writes, “in the place of the liberal vision of an empire based on English education, social reform, and individual enterprise, the arts and crafts movement [supported a] . . . conception of empire . . . [based on] England’s mission [to preserve] India’s ‘traditional’ society.” Metcalf adds that because of Morris’s “preservationist” sympathies with India’s preindustrial arts and crafts, such a patronizing imperialism must have seemed more acceptable to him than Thompson allows.²⁶ But I see no evidence in Morris’s writings of his “preservationism” attached to any version of imperialism.

25. In the case of General Gordon, supposed “martyr” of Khartoum, Morris damned “that most dangerous tool of capitalist oppression, the ‘God-fearing soldier’” (quoted in Thompson, *William Morris*, p. 718).

26. Thomas R. Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain’s Raj* (Berkeley, 1989), p. 154. Metcalf adds,

Although, as a socialist, Morris opposed the aggressive and militarist aspects of imperial expansion, which he saw as an element in the destructive growth of capitalism and commerce, where empire already existed, as in India, it could advance his “preservationist” objectives. Historians have generally failed to notice this latter, more sympathetic side in Morris’s views of empire. [P 271 n. 29]

Nevertheless, Morris drew much of his knowledge of Indian arts and crafts from the museum work and writings of Sir George Birdwood, who also influenced John Lockwood Kipling. "To Morris's vision of a 'decorative, noble, popular' order of things in life and art, Birdwood brought the reality of India's preindustrial culture, threatened by British commercialism but not yet destroyed."²⁷ Birdwood authored the official *Handbook to the British Indian Section* for the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1878, which served as the basis for his 1880 *The Industrial Arts of India*. The latter became something of a bible for the arts and crafts movement and helped inspire Coomaraswamy's work.²⁸ Like Morris, Birdwood is Ruskinian with at least one major exception: he doesn't express Ruskin's racist animosity toward India. Though the Anglo-Indian Birdwood isn't anti-imperialist, he is anti-industrialist in two ways: by declaring that "machinery should be the servant and never the master of men" and by condemning the destructive impact of mechanical production on Indian village life (*I*, p. 136). The textile mills of both Lancashire and Bombay have, Birdwood argues, caused Indian "hand-weaving" to "languish" (*I*, p. 135). If machinery were

gradually introduced into India for the manufacture of its great traditional handicrafts, there would ensue an industrial revolution which, if not directed by an intelligent and instructed public opinion and the general prevalence of refined taste, would inevitably throw the traditional arts of the country into the same confusion . . . which has for three generations been the destruction of decorative art and of middle-class taste in England, . . . Europe, and the United States of America. [*I*, pp. 134–35]

Birdwood declares that "in India everything is hand wrought, and everything, down to the cheapest toy or earthen vessel, is therefore more or less a work of art" (*I*, p. 131). Although Indian "decorative" art is not to be ranked with European "fine" art, India is nonetheless the consummate conservative society, "the only Aryan country which has maintained the continuity of its marvellous social, religious, and economical life, from the earliest antiquity to the present day" (*I*, p. 45). Its nonprogressive

27. Tarapor, "John Lockwood Kipling and British Art Education in India," p. 72.

28. See George C. M. Birdwood, *The Industrial Arts of India* (London, 1880); hereafter abbreviated *I*. That Morris was familiar with Birdwood's work is evident in the letter that he and other artists cosigned and published in the Birdwood-inspired *Journal of Indian Art* (later entitled *Journal of Indian Art and Industry*). Dated 1 May 1879, the letter encourages Birdwood to continue defending Indian arts and crafts against the inroads of British commercialism and mechanization. Among the other cosigners were Burne-Jones, Walter Crane, John Everett Millais, and Richard Redgrave. John Lockwood Kipling often contributed to the lavishly illustrated *Journal of Indian Art and Industry* and according to Tarapor may have edited it for awhile.

perfection in decorative art, moreover, derives from its system of hereditary craft guilds, supported by its village economy.

Each community is a little republic, and manages its own affairs . . . [through] rude municipal institutions perfectly effectual for the purposes of self-government. . . . Its relations with the central Government are conducted by a headman, and its internal administration by a staff of hereditary officers, consisting of an accountant, watchman, money-changer, smith, potter, carpenter, barber, shoemaker, astrologer, and other functionaries, including, in some villages, a dancing girl, and a poet or genealogist. [*I*, p. 44]

When they can't supply their own needs, the villages are supplied by craftspeople from "the trade guilds of the great polytechnical cities of India" (*I*, p. 138). Members of a guild may be of different castes; the governance of each guild, by hereditary officers who maintain quality and provide for the welfare of their subordinates, is similar to that of the villages.

Birdwood's guild-oriented anti-industrialism is perhaps mild compared to Morris's, but in quasi-socialist fashion he contends that once "the force of cultivated taste" has relegated machinery to its proper place in Britain, so that industrialism is

no longer allowed to intrude into the domain of art manufactures . . . [then] wealth will become more equally diffused throughout society; and the working classes, through the elevating influence of their daily work . . . will rise at once in social, civil, and political position, raising the whole country . . . with them; and Europe will learn to taste some of that content and happiness in life which is to be still found in the pagan East. [*I*, pp. 136, 137]

Here Birdwood offers a virtually utopian description of contented and happy preindustrial Indian village life—a description reminiscent of Ruskin's medievalism in "The Nature of Gothic" and elsewhere, but even closer to the aesthetic communitarianism of *News from Nowhere*. After describing the work of "the hereditary potter," of the jewellers and "brass and copper smiths," and of the weavers with their "two or three looms at work in blue and scarlet and gold, the frames hanging between the acacia trees, the yellow flowers of which drop fast on the webs as they are being woven," Birdwood goes on to list the communal activities of the evening, "the feasting and the music . . . and . . . the songs . . . sung from the Ramayana or Mahabharata." He then describes sunrise and the next morning, with its

simple ablutions and adorations performed in the open air before the houses. . . . This is the daily life going on all over Western India

in the village communities of the Dakhan, among a people happy in their simple manners and frugal way of life, and in the culture derived from the grand epics of a religion in which they live and move and have their daily being. [*I*, pp. 135, 136]

Birdwood's portrayal of preindustrial Indian village culture with its craft guilds producing beautiful works of (decorative) art must have appealed to Morris, who perhaps inferred that, if "nowhere" (that is, utopia) existed anywhere in the present instead of in the medieval past or the communist future, then that place might well be the villages of India that were as yet undamaged by capitalist industrialization. Besides Morris's mention of "the Persian poet," *News from Nowhere* contains a number of traces, at least, of the influence of Birdwood and of Indian arts and crafts.²⁹ The most important of these concern what Morris's dreamer-protagonist, Guest, learns about "banded-workshops" and about the prerevolutionary destruction of village culture by industrialization and urbanization. Guest visits a craft shop where the workers make pottery and glass. This is a "banded-workshop," his guide explains (*N*, p. 38), similar to the craft guilds that had regulated many trades in medieval Europe and, as Birdwood made clear, still did so in India.³⁰ Just as capitalism, industrialization, and urbanization had destroyed the European guilds and were doing the same to Indian guilds, so they were destroying village culture in both Europe and Asia. As old Hammond tells Guest, before the revolution "all the small country arts of life which once added to the little pleasures of country people were lost" (*N*, p. 60). But after the revolution, people began to flock back to the countryside, repopulating the villages and resuming traditional handicrafts.

The restoration and reform of village culture, based on guilds and handicrafts, were to be main themes for Gandhi throughout his career. For Gandhi as for Morris, "industrialism is . . . a curse" entailing imperialism, class exploitation, and the destruction of local autonomy.³¹ The solution to India's problems could not come from imitating the industrialized, imperialist West but rather from restoring what was sound in the traditions of India's "seven hundred thousand villages" (*EG*, p. 295). Gandhi wanted independent India to become a democracy whose basic

29. Morris, *News from Nowhere*, ed. James Redmond (London, 1970), p. 180; hereafter abbreviated *N*. The "Persian poet" is Omar Khayyám.

30. Apart from Ruskin's quixotic Guild of St. George, which was not primarily a craft organization, arts and crafts guilds included Morris, Marshall, Faulkner, and Co.; William Lethaby's Art Worker's Guild; and Charles Ashbee's Guild of Handicraft. After coming to England in 1907, Coomaraswamy was closely associated with Ashbee and the Guild of Handicraft. For guild socialism, see Cole, *A Short History of the British Working Class Movement, 1789–1947*, rev. ed. (London, 1952), pp. 321–27, 405–8, and Niles Carpenter, *Guild Socialism: An Historical and Critical Analysis* (New York, 1922).

31. Gandhi, *The Essential Gandhi: His Life, Work, and Ideas*, ed. Louis Fischer (New York, 1983), p. 287; hereafter abbreviated *EG*.

units were villages. The obvious place to begin, moreover, was to “reinstate the ancient cottage industry of handspinning” while rejecting all foreign and factory-made cloth (*EG*, p. 288). Through *khaddar*, other dyeing village arts and crafts would revive (see *EG*, p. 225). Mass production meant less work and less wealth for the masses; the urgent need was to restore meaningful, nonalienated forms of labor to the masses. “When we have become village-minded, we will not want imitations of the West or machine-made products, but we will develop a truly national taste in keeping with the vision of a new India, in which pauperism, starvation and idleness will be unknown” (*EG*, pp. 299–300). Gandhi’s stress on “national taste” again sounds a Ruskinian note; in his lecture “Traffic,” Ruskin famously declared that “taste . . . is the ONLY morality.”³²

4

Because Morris had little to say about India, it can’t be proved that he had Birdwood or even Indian village life in mind when he wrote his utopian romance. But contextualized with Ruskin and Birdwood in one direction and with Gandhi and Coomaraswamy in another, *News from Nowhere* acquires a resonance that can be called postindustrial. This term, one of the growing list of *post* words dating from the 1960s (*postmodernism*, *poststructuralism*, *postcolonialism*, and so on) was coined by Coomaraswamy.³³ In his 1922 book *Post-Industrialism*, guild-socialist Penty writes,

From one point of view, Post Industrialism connotes Medievalism, from another it could be defined as “inverted Marxism.” But in any case it means the state of society that will follow the break-up of Industrialism, and might therefore be used to cover the speculations of all who recognize Industrialism is doomed. The need of some such term sufficiently inclusive to cover the ideas of those who, while sympathizing with the . . . Socialists, yet differed with them in their attitude towards Industrialism has long been felt.³⁴

Penty adds that he owes the term “Post-Industrialism . . . to Dr. A. K. Coomaraswamy.”³⁵ What Penty and Coomaraswamy both mean by “Post-Industrialism” and “inverted Marxism” echoes Morris in ways that should problematize the standard, rather dismissive readings of *News from Nowhere* as just another instance of Victorian romantic nostalgia for

32. Ruskin, “Traffic,” *Unto This Last*, p. 234.

33. For various *post* terms in relation to *postcolonialism*, see Anne McClintock, “The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term ‘Post-Colonialism,’” *Social Text* 10 (Spring 1992): 84–98.

34. Arthur J. Penty, *Post-Industrialism* (New York, 1922), p. 14. Penty had used the term earlier in *Old Worlds for New: A Study of the Post-Industrial State* (London, 1917).

35. Penty, *Post-Industrialism*, p. 14.

the Middle Ages. The Anglo-Indian hybridity of the idea of postindustrialism also suggests that the antimachinery attitudes shared by Ruskin and Gandhi, Morris and Coomaraswamy affected not only what Martin Wiener calls "the decline of the industrial spirit" in Britain but the decline of British imperialism in India and elsewhere.

Yet, as more recent commentaries on postindustrialism make clear, the global hegemony of industrialism is increasing, not declining. For the West, postindustrialism perhaps means "post-Fordism" and the relative decline of the traditional heavy industries, but it also means computerization, robotics, transnational corporations, and "the regime of flexible accumulation" that some economists now call the "third industrial revolution."³⁶ Meanwhile "modernization" and "development"—euphemisms for the continued economic exploitation that, as early as 1965, Kwame Nkrumah called "neo-colonialism"—are the order of the day in India and apparently everywhere else around the globe.³⁷

As Terry Eagleton remarks in regard to postmodernism, "the term 'post,' if it has any meaning at all, means business as usual, *only more so*."³⁸ Currently postindustrialism is industrialism by other means, and more so than ever. This is not exactly the case with postcolonialism, because the formal European empires have disintegrated since World War II, starting with Indian independence in 1947. But as critics of the ideology of development point out, the recently decolonized nation-states of the world remain economically dependent on the West in part because their centralized governments and *comprador* bourgeoisies have relentlessly pursued industrial development.³⁹ In most non-Western countries, the syndrome of borrowing to raise the capital to industrialize has accelerated national debts and new cycles of poverty rather than prosperity. But after the dissolution of the eastern European and Soviet socialist regimes, what

36. See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 141–72. As early as 1970, Japanese scholars were interpreting Daniel Bell's theses about postindustrialism optimistically, in terms of a "third industrial revolution." Needless to say, *pace* both Bell and Francis Fukuyama, neither history nor ideology, much less industrialism, has ended.

37. See Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (New York, 1965).

38. Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford, 1990), p. 381.

39. In *The Debt Trap: The IMF and the Third World* (New York, 1974), Cheryl Payer writes,

In the 1950s it was hoped that countries like India, Yugoslavia, and Indonesia would lead a genuine "Third World" whose development would avoid both the evils of capitalist exploitation and the hard labour and bitter shortages of socialist autarchy. Today that dream is dead, and all of these nations are more deeply dependent than they were at the time they gained their political independence. [P. xii]

See also her chapter, "The Transformation of 'Socialist' India," pp. 166–83. David Ludden has shown how independent India's "development regime" mirrors the cultural and economic logic of modernization basic to British imperialism from the eighteenth century forward. See David Ludden, "India's Development Regime," in *Colonialism and Culture*, ed. Nicholas B. Dirks (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1992), pp. 247–87.

alternatives do the so-called underdeveloped nations have except so-called late capitalism—"late" perhaps only in the sense that it is the latest, last chance for the recently decolonized places of the earth to gain economic independence and prosperity? Besides, to repeat, Marx and Marxism were never anti-industrialist, just anticapitalist.

Was Gandhian anti-industrialism—or postindustrialism—ever a realistic alternative to more and bigger industrialization, with its attendant scourges of economic exploitation and environmental degradation? Was there ever a moment during the emergence of postcolonial India when a renewal of traditional village life was a viable option? Even after his assassination in 1948, Gandhi's vision of a new India based on nonviolent, decentered communitarianism rather than on centralized, violent, state socialism or capitalism has continued to motivate the *Sarvodaya* movement associated with Vinoba Bhave's *Bhoodan*, or land-redistribution program, and with the work of A. T. Ariyaratna in Sri Lanka. Gandhian communitarianism also informs the environmentalist movement and "Greens" both within and beyond India.⁴⁰ Despite Gandhi and Gandhism, however, from Jawaharlal Nehru forward the Congress Party leadership has favored centralization and big technology—Tata Steel, Air India, nuclear power. But the 1984 Union Carbide disaster at Bhopal, like the Chernobyl meltdown two years later, dramatizes the downside that all industrial so-called progress seems to entail. "To change to industrialism," Gandhi warned, "is to court disaster" (*EG*, p. 287).⁴¹

Nevertheless, the *Subaltern Studies* collective and some other recent Indian theorists including Aijaz Ahmad take what can only be called a skeptical stance toward Gandhism. Thus Partha Chatterjee views Gan-

40. E. F. Schumacher's alternative economics in *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as If People Mattered* (New York, 1973) is as much Gandhian as Buddhist. See also the last paragraph of Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (London, 1993), and Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston, 1994), pp. 159–68. On Gandhi's continuing influence both in India and elsewhere, see *Gandhi's Significance for Today*, ed. John Hick and Lamont C. Hempel (New York, 1989). The essays by Sugata Dasgupta, "The Core of Gandhi's Social and Economic Thought" (pp. 189–202), and Geoffrey Ostergaard, "The Gandhian Movement in India Since the Death of Gandhi" (pp. 203–25) are especially relevant to my argument.

41. Nehru portrays Gandhi as growing more amenable to the idea that some large-scale industries are necessary and desirable as long as they are state-owned. Nehru also insists that the Indian National Congress "has . . . always been in favor of the industrialization of India, and at the same time has emphasized the development of cottage industries and worked for this" (Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, ed. Robert I. Crane [Garden City, N.Y., 1960], p. 325). But, while agreeing that machinery could sometimes be useful, Gandhi consistently opposed large-scale industrialization and state centralization. He can be considered an advocate of appropriate technology for a sustainable economy and environment and would have agreed with Penty and Coomaraswamy that, insofar as possible, workers exercising local, democratic autonomy should decide what machinery (if any) should be used for specific tasks.

dhi's anti-industrial communitarianism as a moral essentialism antithetical to historicism, "the dominant thematic of post-Enlightenment thought."⁴² Also, Gandhi was instrumental in consolidating "the 'national' by decrying the 'modern,'" and, Chatterjee claims, Gandhi's anti-industrial critique of capitalism was merely the antithesis that has helped to promote the thesis, industrial capitalism (*NT*, p. 51). For Chatterjee, in other words, Gandhism has helped to spawn precisely that which Gandhi most abhorred. And Ahmad treats Gandhi's anti-industrialism as little more than a Ruskinian "Romantic Orientalism."⁴³ But by viewing Gandhian utopianism as naive, essentialist, and romantic, Chatterjee and Ahmad seem implicitly to affirm the course of industrialization that postcolonial India has pursued. Do they mean also to affirm the Enlightenment "project of modernity"? A "subalternist" perspective, emphasizing peasant and working-class historical agency, might instead be expected to echo Gandhi, and also Birdwood and Coomaraswamy, by valuing aspects of Indian village culture with its arts-and-crafts "cottage industries" that remain preferable to life in modernizing Bombay or New Delhi.⁴⁴

No doubt the utopian imagination has limitations; perhaps it is always romantic, nostalgic, backward-looking. But, as André Gorz contends, "those who propose a fundamentally different society can no longer be condemned in the name of realism. On the contrary, realism now consists of acknowledging that 'industrialism' has reached a stage where it can go no further, blocked by obstacles of its own making."⁴⁵ Another perspective on Gandhian anti-industrialism (less dismissive of it than are Chatterjee and Ahmad) might ask whether a renewal of pre- or postindustrial village culture may not be a viable economic alternative, and not just for India—an alternative that modernizing nation-states around the globe have buried in the ruins of their relentless pursuit of "the mirage of modernization."⁴⁶ The idea of such an alternative path—

42. Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (1986; Minneapolis, 1993), p. 97; hereafter abbreviated *NT*. Chatterjee repeats these points about Gandhism in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, N.J., 1993).

43. See Ahmad, *In Theory*, p. 237.

44. For a sampling of the *Subaltern Studies* group's interpretation of Gandhism in relation to their dominant theme of peasant or "subaltern" agency, see the essays by Gyanendra Pandey and Shahid Amin under the general heading of "Nationalism: Gandhi as Signifier," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Oxford, 1988), pp. 233–348. Chatterjee goes so far as to make Gandhism, if not Gandhi himself, responsible for the "appropriation of the subaltern classes" into the new hegemony established by the post-1947 industrializing bourgeoisie (*NT*, p. 100). Ahmad is not part of the *Subaltern Studies* collective and is critical of its work, but his position on Gandhism is similar to Chatterjee's.

45. André Gorz, *Paths to Paradise: On the Liberation from Work*, trans. Malcolm Imrie (Boston, 1985), p. 1.

46. See Boris Kagarlitsky, *The Mirage of Modernization* (New York, 1995).

the nonindustrial, nonviolent, decentralized, democratic, communitarian, and economically and ecologically sustainable path that Morris imagined and that Gandhi wanted India to follow—may turn out to be the only rational blueprint for survival. In any event, Gandhi was surely more insightful about the crisis of modernity than Chatterjee and Ahmad acknowledge. “If the village perishes,” Gandhi declared, “India will perish too” (*EG*, p. 291). For a land of “seven hundred thousand villages,” such a prognosis seems self-evident.

If the West has entered a critical period that can be called, however inadequately, postindustrial, postcolonial, and postmodern, for the “Third World” the Sky’s statement at the end of *A Passage to India* may be apt: “No, not yet . . . no, not there.”⁴⁷ In *Ecofeminism*, Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva argue that “catching up development” for India and the rest of the “underdeveloped” world is a mirage, in part because continued economic and industrial expansion for the “developed” world is a mirage.⁴⁸ While governments in India, Africa, Latin America, and elsewhere struggle to industrialize, much current discourse in Britain—once in the vanguard of both empire building and industrialism—is now glumly focused on “the decline of the industrial spirit” and “de-industrialization.” The first modern nation-state to industrialize, Britain may also be the first postmodern nation-state “to return across the watershed of industrialisation.”⁴⁹ Postindustrialism in the postmodern British context is hardly a hopeful, utopian prospect—it is instead usually treated in terms of a dystopian regression to anarchy and barbarism, as in Derek Jarman’s apocalyptic film *The Last of England* (1987).

Given the gloom of Britain’s current decline-and-fall discourse, the utopian promise of postindustrialism for Coomaraswamy and Pentty seems very remote. But whether the West or the Rest is entering or can enter a postindustrial, postcapitalist, finally postcolonial orbit, the task of imagining alternatives to (post?)contemporary history seems more urgent than ever. We still need Gandhi; we still need Morris and Ruskin; we still need Marx, only more so. We also need the radical hope—Ernst Bloch’s “principle of hope”—that utopian thinking expresses, and we need to take such thinking seriously.⁵⁰ Coomaraswamy identifies the utopian tradition in Western literature with what he calls the “inspired tradition” of

47. E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (New York, 1952), p. 322.

48. See Mies and Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, pp. 55–90.

49. Andrew Gamble, *Britain in Decline: Economic Policy, Political Strategy, and the British State* (London, 1985), p. 37. See Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850–1980*, and *De-Industrialisation: Papers and Report of a Conference Organized by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research*, ed. Frank Blackaby (London, 1979).

50. See Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Nevill Plaiice, Stephen Plaiice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge, Mass., 1986).

the world's great religions, including Hinduism. Citing Plato's *Republic*, he writes,

Thus the ideal society is . . . a kind of co-operative work-shop in which production is . . . for use and not for profit. . . . The arts are not directed to the advantage of anything but their object . . . , and that is. . . to satisfy a human need . . . [thus serving humanity] in a way that is impossible where goods are made for sale rather than for use, and in quantity rather than quality.⁵¹

Coomaraswamy might be writing about *News from Nowhere* as well as *The Republic*. In "What Is Civilisation?" he seems to sum up both Morris's and Gandhi's utopianism, and also what he and Penty meant by "Post-Industrialism" and "inverted Marxism" (or a Marxism that no longer valorizes machine production or insists that every society must be force-marched through the needle's eye of capitalist "development"):

The inspired tradition rejects ambition, competition and quantitative standards; [but] our modern "civilisation" is based on the notions of social advancement, free enterprise (devil take the hindmost) and production in quantity. The one considers man's needs, which are "but little here below"; the other considers his wants, to which no limit can be set, and of which the number is artificially multiplied by advertisement. The manufacturer for profits must . . . create an ever-expanding world market for his surplus produced by those whom Dr. [Albert] Schweitzer calls "over-occupied men." It is . . . the incubus of world trade that makes of industrial "civilisations" a "curse to humanity," and from the industrial concept of progress . . . that modern wars have arisen and will arise; it is on the same impoverished soil that empires have grown.⁵²

Coomaraswamy concludes, as do Ruskin, Morris, Penty, and Gandhi, that the most important product of industrialism isn't progress, but the destruction of civilization—that is, the destruction of the very possibility of a social formation in which both justice and beauty prevail.

51. Ananda Coomaraswamy, "What Is Civilisation?" *What Is Civilisation? and Other Essays*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New Delhi, 1989), p. 6. See also Roger Lipsey, *His Life and Work*, vol. 3 of *Coomaraswamy* (Princeton, N.J., 1977).

52. Coomaraswamy, "What Is Civilisation?" p. 7.