UC Berkeley
UC Berkeley Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title
Modernist Taste

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2vn8f697

ISBN
9798173787583

Author
Taylor, Bradford Alden

Publication Date
2026-07-10

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

Modernist Taste

By

Bradford Alden Taylor

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor C.D. Blanton, Chair

Professor Kent Puckett

Professor Ramsey McGlazer

Summer 2026

Abstract

Modernist Taste

By

Bradford Alden Taylor

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Berkeley

Professor C.D. Blanton, Chair

Modernist Taste offers a philosophical account of taste in early-twentieth-century Anglo-American modernism. Against readings that treat taste as either a catalog of cultural preferences or a vehicle for subjective mnemonic recovery, this dissertation argues that a small group of modernist authors—Ford Madox Ford, Wyndham Lewis, and Rebecca West—subject taste to a rigorous reformulation, transforming it from an inherited faculty of disinterested aesthetic judgment into a dialectically unstable mode of historical registration. Drawing on Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Hegel's aesthetics, Marx's materialist account of the senses, Simmel, Freud, Adorno, and Gadamer, this project seeks to construct the formal logic of modernist taste.

This dissertation is organized into three sections. GOOD TASTE reads Ford Madox Ford as the elegist of traditional aesthetic taste, whose melancholic attachment to the codes of a receding public sphere yields, in *The Good Soldier* and his critical writings, a reconceptualization of taste as what this project calls the "historic sense": a materialist attunement to the persistence of contradiction that vision can register only as error. The section concludes with a reading of Cézanne's still life and landscape paintings through the discourse of Roger Fry and Clive Bell, arguing that impressionism's most rigorous achievement is the registration of material resistance to the will to pure form. BAD TASTE turns to Wyndham Lewis's early fiction and criticism, where taste is activated as an aggressive, digestive aesthetic force. Lewis negates the "dilettante" form of taste while refashioning it into a faculty of violent assimilation—an aesthetics of nastiness in which the object overtakes its own representation. AFTER TASTE reads Lewis's *Tarr* and Rebecca West's "Indissoluble Matrimony" against each other, arguing that West's portrait of Evadne Silverton constitutes an immanent critique of Vorticism's chauvinist aesthetics and relocates taste's universality from Kantian transcendental subjectivity to the concrete, collective universality Hegel identifies with objective spirit. This transition inaugurates a movement beyond taste—toward an ontological account of aesthetic freedom that modernist form can register only as a foreclosed possibility.

Throughout, *Modernist Taste* contends that the dominant visual aesthetics of modernism, with its drive toward purified perception and immediate presence, tends to occlude the historical conditions of its own emergence. Taste—marginalized and minor—retains a different sensitivity: it registers what vision, fixed on the surface, cannot detect.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Deborah Jo Taylor, who taught me, and continues to teach me, that taste can transform the world.

Table of Contents

Dedication i
Table of Contents ii
List of Figures iii
Acknowledgements iv

INTRODUCTION. Taste: The Historical Sense 1

SECTION 1. GOOD TASTE: Ford Madox Ford and the End of Taste 31
Chapter 1. The Limits of Impressionism and the Materiality of Taste in Ford Madox Ford 33
Chapter 2. The Historic Sense: *Pommes* and *Pommes de Terre* in Ford, Hegel, and Cézanne 48

SECTION 2. BAD TASTE: Wyndham Lewis and the Forms of Disgust 64
Chapter 3. An Immoveable Feast 66
Chapter 4. The Good, The Bad, and The Tasteful 84

SECTION 3. AFTER TASTE: Wyndham Lewis, Rebecca West, and the Universality of Taste 98
Chapter 5. The Primitive Sense: Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr* 99
Chapter 6. Beyond Taste: Objective Universality and the Politics of Aesthetic Form in Rebecca West's "Indissoluble Matrimony" 119

Works Cited 139

List of Figures

Figure 1 Paul Cézanne, *Still Life with Apples* (1894) 56
Figure 2 Paul Cézanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire seen from Bibémus Quarry* (1897).....58
Figure 3 Paul Cézanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire seen from the forest of Château Noir* (1904) 60
Figure 4 Paul Cézanne, Detail of *Still Life with Apples* (1894).....63

Acknowledgements

This dissertation was written over fourteen years, but it really began when I traveled to France in 1999 and was served *Lapin à la provençale* at an auberge on the outskirts of Arles. Since then, I have depended on the intellectual and emotional generosity of many people across many different social worlds. This brief note of gratitude tells a part of that story.

As a freshman at Covenant College, I was first pushed to think critically, "with contraries," by Joseph Partain and Charles Foreman. At Swarthmore College, Betsy Bolton taught me how to construct a topic sentence, and Philip Weinstein gave me the confidence to think and write with freedom and ambition. He also took me to lunch at Le Pré Vert, a meal that changed the course of my life. At Berkeley, I was fortunate to sustain a years-long conversation about Phenomenology and Marxism with Sanders Creasy, Christopher Miller, and Ryan Perry. I also leaned on the friendship of Alex Dumont, Terry Lafrazia, Alek Jeziorek, and Jonathan Larner-Lewis. The dinners we had together would eventually inspire Ordinaire, a project that both distracted me from my academic pursuits and deepened my sense that taste is a contradictory material force with the power to shape the world around us. While working in natural wine, I have been inspired by many farmers and winemakers, who practice taste in ways that have interrupted and expanded my concept of the aesthetic mode and its relationship to material praxis. Instead of listing them all, I will thank Josh Eubank for being the introduction to so many of them. Over the last decade, my meals and conversations with Josh and Lara have been as formative as any seminar. When I moved to Chicago in 2016, I was lucky to spend many days and nights with Tony and Elise. Their intentional kindness gave me strength during tough times. I would also like to thank all of the current and former staff members of Ordinaire and Diversey Wine. The utopian ambition of such projects is only possible because of idealistic humans who work hard and give beyond their means. Thanks, in particular, to Quentin Jeanroy, who has made Ordinaire one of the greatest bars on earth.

To Kent Puckett and Dan Blanton. Kent has been unwaveringly generous and kind over the past seventeen years. Dan has been a constant source of encouragement and intellectual stimulation. I am continually surprised by his capacity for good-willed, philosophically strenuous conversation. I can't say how much it has meant to me. And, Ramsey, thanks for stepping up at the last minute. You are a lifesaver.

To my parents, John and Debbie, who have encouraged me to follow my own path even when it has diverged from their expectations and desires. At least we have the same taste. You are a source of stability and inspiration.

To my three children, Francisco, Guadalupe, and Juana Inés, for their patience and love. You guys are crazy.

And, finally, to Nicole. I would never have finished this if it were not for you. Thanks for putting up with me, for encouraging me, for inspiring me. You are truly amazing. I am so lucky.

I don't like parsley. Life is bitter enough.

—Deborah Jo Taylor

INTRODUCTION

Taste: The Historical Sense

> The cultivation of the five senses is the work of all previous history.
> —Karl Marx

When discussing taste in literary modernism, there is no more canonical scene than the madeleine sequence in Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. By most accounts, the sense of taste is important insofar as it enables the narrator's capacious, perfectly etched memory, providing a route to significance and retrospective wisdom that the more distal and rational senses of vision and hearing do not. Thus, countless undergraduate seminars and YouTube videos depict fans of Proust eating madeleines, drinking tea, and reading the famous passage to reenact the magical resurrection of the past. But a careful reading of the mechanics of taste in the famous scene reveals a more complicated story, in which literal taste does not supplement or replace the aesthetic mode but rather frustrates and complicates the processes of figuration that the narrator so earnestly desires, even as it offers an alternative and unexpected type of knowledge. (That merely repeating the ingestion of a madeleine does not result in twenty undergraduate students re-experiencing their forgotten childhoods should count as some kind of supporting evidence.) This project will not deal extensively with Proust, nor will it address at length the other canonical moments of eating and dining in modernist texts: Bloom's kidney, Lawrence's figs, Mrs. Ramsay's *boeuf en daube*, Prufrock's peach, etc. Nevertheless, I wish to open with the madeleine in large part to demonstrate what this project is *not* doing—namely, cataloging moments of literal tasting and claiming that they constitute a specifically modernist form of aesthetic experience.[1] In the process, I intend to offer a different kind of reading, which I hope will serve as a portable hermeneutic paradigm for canonical and non-canonical representations of literal and figurative taste.

Since this will involve close reading, my brief discussion of Proust also illustrates what this project *is* doing, in terms of its scope and approach. While my title, "Modernist Taste," might suggest a historical overview of various cultural and artistic preferences from the early twentieth century, I am actually offering a philosophical argument about how the concept of taste—considered as an aesthetic faculty—is critiqued, reformed, and redeployed by a small group of modernist authors. Thus, my title is not "The Taste of Modernism," nor, especially, "The Taste of Modernity," which would entail a detailed periodization of emergent cultural norms linked to an array of concrete historical factors. Such a project is closer to what I had initially planned to accomplish: to trace the evolution of taste from the late Victorians (Arnold, George Eliot, Pater, and Wilde) to the late Modernists (Kafka and Beckett), focusing mostly on

---

[1] In her wonderful book, *Taste*, Denise Gigante makes just such an argument about literal eating in the context of British Romanticism. Her readings of Milton, Wordsworth, Hazlitt, and Keats persuasively demonstrate how the ingestion and digestion of food are mobilized as powerful metaphors for aesthetic experience. Her argument, however, is historically specific and cannot be easily grafted onto a modernist context, in which artists and authors are more suspicious of the aesthetic faculty itself. So, for example, while Wordsworth sought in his "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* to ameliorate the taste of the reading public, which had grown dangerously torpid by overexposure to "gross and violent stimulants," the modernist authors I cover in this project seek to reformulate the concept of taste itself, rather than merely rehabilitating and democratizing it. Indeed, in a modernist context, taste itself becomes the very problem.

early- and high-Modernism (Ford, Hulme, Lewis, Joyce, West, Eliot, Loy, Mansfield, and Woolf). However, over fourteen years, as the project developed, the historical scope narrowed, and the mode of analysis shifted from a broad overview to detailed close readings intertwined with idiosyncratic interpretations of Kant, Hegel, Simmel, Freud, Adorno, and Gadamer. I gradually realized that this project centered on constructing the *form* of taste rather than simply cataloging its content, which proved too diverse to understand without a clear formal framework. Indeed, I came to understand the tension between form and content as inherent to philosophies of taste. And as I shifted from the empirical observation of manners, preferences, and objects to a more formal analysis of how subjects employ taste, I found myself repeating the foundational shift initiated by Kant's critical philosophy as a response to Hume—from a collation of the myriad "tastes of modernism" to the internally fractured and dialectically vibrant form of "modernist taste" itself. But this is to jump ahead. Let us turn to the madeleine, the amuse-bouche of this introduction.

The Madeleine, or the problem of taste

> To bite on bread is the very meaning of taste.
> —Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*

When the depressed, aging Marcel tastes the madeleine at the end of the "Overture" to *Swann's Way,* it unlocks "the vast structure of recollection" (65) that constitutes the novel's plot. It enables a transition from a clearly defined but tightly limited visual memory, "this sort of luminous panel, sharply defined against a vague and shadowy background" (60), to a more fully populated and sensual memory that exceeds the dimensions of a single subject and seeks something recognizable as History. "What an abyss of uncertainty whenever the mind feels that some part of it has strayed beyond its own borders." Faced with this new historical dimension beyond the borders of the mind, the narrator ponders the extent to which seeking has transformed into creating: "Seek? More than that: create" (63). Thus taste, a receptive faculty attuned to the appearance of the pleasurable, is conscripted into the processes of aesthetic creation. Quite simply, the taste of the madeleine is *not* about appreciating with disinterest the universal appeal of the pastry, but about enabling the creation of the novel. The transformation of taste into a productive faculty inaugurates its "modernist" form. However, the transition from the sensation of taste to the vision of memory, which occurs in and through this transformation of taste into a productive faculty, is complicated and incomplete. My brief reading of the passage will demonstrate how this canonical moment of eating enacts a tension between taste and vision, emblematizing an unresolved "dialectic of taste" that pervades modernism more generally.

In Proust, the passage from taste to memory does not happen immediately or unproblematically. Between the first taste of tea and the appearance of "the vast structure of recollection," the narrator struggles to assign a clear and distinct meaning to the unexpected sensation of pleasure. "Mechanically, weary after a dull day with the prospect of a depressing morrow," the grown narrator of *Swann's Way* is stuck in a narrative of linear, "homogenous" time, just one thing following another. Despite his melancholy, perhaps because of it, he is capable of expressing images with exquisite detail: the *petite madeleine* is "moulded in the fluted scallop of a pilgrim's shell…so richly sensual under its severe, religious folds." Observed from a distance, the pastry is a thing of beauty, pure form. But tasting the crumbs soaked in tea inaugurates a novel experience that the narrator struggles to classify, as the space of memory

irrupts into the banal linear sequence of the "mechanical" narrative. "No sooner had the warm liquid, and the crumbs with it, touched my palate than a shudder ran through my whole body…an exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses…And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory." It is, quite literally, a sensational moment, replete with the pleasure of the aesthetic but devoid of any clear signification. He struggles to understand the origin and meaning of this feeling: "Whence did it come? What did it signify? How could I seize upon and define it?" (62).

The search for origin, meaning, and definition takes places over the following pages, as the narrator struggles to connect the sensation of pleasure elicited by taste and a visual image that remains frustratingly beyond cognitive reach. Upon drinking a second mouthful, the narrator, disappointed with the effect, surmises, in a strictly Kantian mode, "It is plain that the truth of my quest, the truth, lies not in the cup but in myself" (62). But is he right? The specific power of taste inheres in its capacity to force the subject beyond its own borders, into an uncertain region that exceeds the realm of visuality. Modernist taste inhabits this zone of uncertainty between taste and vision; indeed, it repeatedly produces this uncertainty. "Undoubtedly, what is thus palpitating in the depths of my being must be the image, the visual memory which, being linked to that taste, has tried to follow it into my conscious mind." After the memory of Aunt Léonie returns, he realizes, "The sight of the little madeleine had recalled nothing to my mind before I tasted it." Taste, simply put, provides a different kind of knowledge. More specifically, it sets in motion a relationship to knowledge that incorporates both clarity and obscurity, signification and sensation, as components of the narrative process. Thus, taste does not replace vision, nor does it merely supplement it; rather, taste both marks out the limits of vision and expands the scope of narrative possibility beyond those limits.

One could frame this activity in Kantian terms as literal taste impinging on the role of aesthetic taste, insofar as it collapses the distance between subject and object, thereby reorienting experience away from a detached object of beauty ("moulded in the fluted scallop of a pilgrim's shell" (60)) and towards a phenomenologically rich, embodied structure of remembrance that is rooted in the present ("the warm liquid…and the crumbs with it" (62)). In "The Image of Proust," Walter Benjamin distinguishes these two modes of experience as a "dialectic of happiness":

> There is a dual will to happiness, a dialectics of happiness: a hymnic and an elegiac form. The one is the unheard-of, the unprecedented, the height of bliss; the other, the eternal repetition, the eternal restoration of the original, the first happiness. It is this elegiac idea of happiness—it could also be called Eleatic—which for Proust transforms existence into a preserve of memory. (204)

Benjamin does not further explain this cryptic formulation, but the essay implies that hymnic happiness, insofar as it is oriented toward a goal that cannot be attained, binds experience to linear time and leverages its fulfillment on a future point that remains always out of reach. The promise of hymnic happiness, what Stendhal characterized as beauty's fundamental function, *la promesse du bonheur,* depends on the preservation of distance, disinterestedness, and the mechanics of visuality that allow for the clean and lasting separation of subject and object. Elegiac happiness, on the other hand, is both messier in practice and more limited in ambition. And yet, for Benjamin, it promises a happiness that moves laterally to disinterest and the hygienic back-and-forth of Kant's ideal subject. While literal taste inaugurates this shift to an elegiac mode, it is important to emphasize that literal taste's "impingement" on aesthetic taste does not constitute a substitution. Like Benjamin's dual will to happiness, taste preserves its

opposite as constitutive of its own dialectic. Thus, while it contravenes the injunction to maintain aesthetic distance, it does not capitulate to the disappearance, destruction, or complete sublimation of the aesthetic object. Rather, it seeks to secure its own pathway to happiness by constructing a new relationship to beauty, characterized by a less clear but more embodied concept of happiness.

The result, according to Benjamin, is Proust's distinctive style: "It is never isolated, rhetorical, or visionary; carefully heralded and securely supported, it bears a fragile, precious reality: the image" (205). Fragile, provisionary and fleeting: the image is not the product of genius, but a construction of and by taste in its newly productive capacity. The concluding paragraphs of the "Overture" demonstrate just how fragile the image is. Once eaten, the severe folds of the madeleine are reduced to moist, disintegrating crumbs. The lime-flower tea becomes "a porcelain bowl with water," and the "taste of the crumb" turns into "little crumbs of paper" that unfold into flowers. Those flowers, in turn, become "the flowers in our garden and in M. Swann's park" (66). Paul de Man has rigorously diagnosed these metonymic moments in Proust, highlighting how they tend to emerge when the processes of metaphor and conventional symbol-making are most fully at play.[2] If we thought the madeleine was going to become a symbol of something—for example, hymnic happiness itself—we are quickly shown that it is a piece of food that serves as a literary device, unlocking "a structure of recollection," producing very little in the way of meaning or definition. But the point here is that the fragility of the image becomes generative under the metonymic pressure exerted by time, narrative, and history itself. Across all three sections of this project, the readings will demonstrate how literal taste instigates a diachronic, metonymic "line of flight" that both subsists within and departs from a synchronic, metaphoric instance of figural taste.

Indeed, while the search for signification first compelled the narrator to take another sip of tea, by the time Combray emerges from the cup, meaning and definition seem almost beside the point, as the sensorium itself grows in importance. Note how the string of adjectives strains the boundaries of coherence, as taste is tasked with compensating for the withdrawal of pleasure and the "ruin" of plot itself:

> But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, still, alone, more fragile, but with more vitality, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and taste of things remain poised a long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest. (65)

The passage is as emotionally stirring as it is confusing. The smell and taste of things are described with a multitude of adjectives that verge on the contradictory: vital *and* fragile, unsubstantial *and* persistent. In reading the passage, we are inside the toolbox of description, witnessing the provisional, careful construction of the Proustian image, which, while "securely supported," nevertheless "bears a fragile, precious reality." This is what Gilles Deleuze calls "the apprenticeship to signs" (132), insofar as we are being taught, alongside Marcel, an alternative hermeneutics, a "search for truth" (131) that is not reducible to "the exposition of memory," but is rather "*oriented* to the future" (132). Thus, in reading the above "image" or "sign," it is just as important to recognize what "the smell and taste of things" are *not*. Despite their central role as cathected nodes of memory, "like souls," they do not, in fact, remind us of anything in particular. Indeed, the strange pathos of Proust's sentence derives from the deferral of the prepositional

[2] *S*ee "Semiology and Rhetoric" (3-20) and "Reading" (57-79) in *Allegories of Reading: Figurative Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*.

object: the smell and taste of things remind us…*of what*? The absence of a prepositional object is felt more acutely in the original. *Se rappeler* takes the preposition *de* when functioning in ordinary language. *The taste reminds one of something* would typically be translated *La saveur se rappele de quelque chose*. But the passage omits the genitive *de* (of) and substitutes the ablative *à* (to), effectively deferring the object of memory and orienting the passage's conclusion around waiting and hoping, extending the work of memory beyond its assignment to or subsumption by a particular object. Here is the full sentence in the original: "Mais, quand d'un passé ancien rien ne subsiste, après la mort des êtres, après la destruction des choses, seules, plus frêles mais plus vivaces, plus immatérielles, plus persistantes, plus fidèles, l'odeur et la saveur restent encore longtemps, comme des âmes, à se rappeler, à attendre, à espérer, sur la ruine de tout le reste, à porter sans fléchir, sur leur gouttelette presque impalpable, l'édifice immense du souvenir" (73). The repetition of *à* further equates the acts of reminding (*à se rappeler*), waiting (*à attendre*), and hoping (*à espérer*). In the Moncrieff translation, breaking the list and granting *à se rappeler* a longer clause implies a hierarchy of action that is not present in the original, which lumps the act of memory into a list with the other, less active, less rational, less productive activities of waiting and hoping.

Thus, the sentence feels poised to grant the possibility of full compensation, but the awkward lack of a prepositional object—what we might call, in a different language, "the object-cause of desire"—allows it to function, to "remain poised," to "persist," without the territorializing effects of conceptual, symbolic or mnemonic closure. In other words, literal taste does *not* facilitate or give way to the aesthetic mode once reserved for figurative taste. Some have argued, for example, that "Proust merges the aesthetic, the gustatory and the sexual" (Finch 215). Others have claimed that Proust offers a "gustatory semantics," the taste of the cake "calling up the past so vividly that the original is lived again" (Korsmeyer 221). Others have called him "the ultimate philosopher-gourmand" (Litvak 110). However, these characterizations, which seek to collapse literal taste and figurative taste, miss the deeper point. In Proust and in modernism more generally, literal taste consistently problematizes the aesthetic mode, placing a strain on the central aesthetic ideologies of the text. Or, perhaps more accurately, it reveals what was always already problematic in the aesthetic mode, namely the tendency towards dematerialization for the sake of conceptual closure, the empowerment of the subject, and the effacement of history. Indeed, by drawing attention to the materiality of the aesthetic object, taste tends to retrench and reveal the very contradictions that originally prompted the solution offered by Kantian taste and the mechanics of reflective judgment. Thus, modernist taste does not move forward towards a new conception of the beautiful; rather, it tends to move backward, refocusing our attention on the historical conditions that make the beautiful both necessary and possible. The readings that follow will track this tension from three directions. Simmel will show how, under the pressure of modernity, taste's Kantian function is displaced onto fashion, leaving taste itself to register what fashion cannot absorb. Gadamer and Adorno, read against each other, will clarify what is at stake in that residue — and why bad taste, rather than being excluded from aesthetic experience, is constitutive of it. Across these detours, a single claim will be taking shape: modernist taste does not resolve the contradictions the concept was originally meant to mediate. It reproduces and intensifies them.

Georg Simmel: Transcendental Fashion and the Supersensible Substratum of Taste

> After [Kant and Hegel] came the sensitive connoisseurs, who occupied the mediocre middle ground between the thing-itself as postulated by Hegel and the concept. They combined a culinary relation to art with an incapacity for philosophical construction. Georg Simmel was typical of such sensitivity, despite his decisive predilection for the aesthetically individual.
>
> —T.W. Adorno

In *The Remembrance of Things Past*, the rich and "problematic" dynamic between literal and figurative taste happens within a context of characters, settings, and plots tightly constricted by the social norms of "good taste"—that is, the conventional social forms and the hollowed-out mannerisms of the fin-de-siècle bourgeoisie. It is against this cultural backdrop, replete with "the jaded palates of refined voluptuaries" (452), that the narrator's own modernist taste stands out. Unconstrained by the inherited mannerisms of his contemporaries, the narrator resists "the compulsion to adapt," as Adorno frames it, "which prohibits one from listening to reality with precision, from taking in its surroundings." To guard against "the renunciation of responsiveness" and succumbing to the prevailing tastes of the day—the knowing sarcasm of the Guermantes' way, for example—Proust "developed a technique to resist the automatization and mechanization of his own thought," which entailed "[striving] indefatigably for immediacy" (*Notes* 315-16).[3] Proust's style is the effect of a method that persistently refuses to adapt to good taste, and instead remains responsive to his own singular experiences. In turn, a split emerges between *good taste* conceived of as "fashion" dictated by society "out there," and *taste* conceived of as preferences vigilantly cultivated from within the subject.

In this way, Proust's novel emblematizes a more general suspicion of taste at the turn of the century, as the invocation of "taste" came to connote "mere taste," a veiled indictment of a sensibility lacking authenticity, power, and endurance—precisely the opposite of the ideal of taste conceived by thinkers as diverse as Kant, Burke, Hume, and Shaftesbury. Associating "good taste" with the "dilettante" rather than the true artist or connoisseur became increasingly common. Consequently, taste became associated with fashion's whims rather than beauty's enduring ideals, and therefore faded as a concept adequate to the shifting terrain of modernity's many upheavals. In this way, taste in the context of modernity could be classed alongside the "train of venerable ideas and opinions" that "melts into air" with the dissolution of "all fixed, fast-frozen relationships," as Marx and Engels memorably proclaimed. Here is the full passage from *The Communist Manifesto*:

> Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social relations, everlasting uncertainty and agitation, distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier times. All fixed, fast-frozen relationships, with their train of venerable ideas and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become obsolete before they can ossify.

---

[3] As Joseph Litvak has noted, Adorno's insight makes Proust's technique "readable as a gay strategy for surviving…the ruthless project of universal heterosexualization," which Litvak summarizes as "shutting down, tuning out, closing off various receptivities that make it possible to find the world interesting" (79). In its deviation from the standards of good taste, modernist taste can be classed as a kind of queer phenomenology with a utopian orientation. In my opening chapter on Ford, I argue that the materiality of potatoes comes to represent a "queerness" that frustrates, first, the mechanics of signification and sublimation that characterize visual impressionism and, second, a narrative mode that subsumes all particulars into the clean, backward glance of historical knowledge under the sign of progressive, productive, heteronormative futurity.

> All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and men at last are forced to face with sober senses the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men. (223)

As in much of his early writing, Marx is attentive to how broad historical movements and changes condition our sensual experience of the world. In his reading of the passage, Marshall Berman points out that Marx, unlike the modernists who will follow, still holds "a belief that 'modern life' is whole." The insight might seem counterintuitive, given that Marx describes a world of fragmentation, change, and "uninterrupted disturbance." But what does not melt into air is the subjective capacity to experience a totality of relationships. Moreover, the passage implies that the dissolution of the older order is, in fact, what precipitates a more direct and "sober" sensual experience of our "real conditions," unencumbered by institutions, such as the church, that once served to mystify exploitation. What is lost in structural stability is gained in a direct and sober sensual encounter between the individual subject and reality itself.

Marx's description of the existential confrontation of our "sober senses" with the naked mechanics of capitalist exploitation contrasts with another canonical description of modern experience. In *La Nouvelle Héloïse,* Rousseau envisioned an experience of the fragmented urban world that was far from sober. The frantic quality of modern life—"the perpetual clash of groups and cabals, a continual flux and reflux of prejudices and conflicting opinions"—results in a subjective experience that resembles the objective environment. In his letter to Julie, Saint-Preux is overwhelmed by an environment that threatens to dissolve his rational faculties: "I'm beginning to feel the drunkenness that this agitated, tumultuous life plunges you into. With such a multitude of objects passing before my eyes. I'm getting dizzy. Of all things that strike me, there is none that holds my heart, yet all of them together disturb my feelings, so that I forget what I am and who I belong to" (qtd. Berman 18). Any number of other examples could be used to highlight the "fragmentary" quality of modernity, what Baudelaire called "*le transitoire, le fugitif, le contigent.*"[4] The divergent ways in which Rousseau (writing in 1761) and Marx (writing in 1848) deploy the metaphor of sobriety helpfully illustrate the two poles of subjective response to this fragmentation, itself a result of the dissolution of an older, stabler order and the rapid emergence of something new. The drunkenness of Saint-Preux's disturbing encounter with urban life sharply contrasts with the sober assessment of exploitation envisioned by Marx. For Marx, modernity engenders a clarification of subjectivity, even in its alienated form, and the structures, however repulsive, that govern social relations. For Rousseau, modernity entails a loss of subjective boundaries, a confusion of the senses, and an inability to relate rationally to larger social and historical realities.

These two canonical descriptions of modernity—one sober and rational, the other drunk and mimetic—succinctly represent two poles of modern experience as they converge in the early twentieth century, not as conflicting or contradictory descriptions but as mutually reinforcing poles that structure the emergence of modernist taste itself. To the extent that taste is tasked with managing this tension—between a rational assessment of our shared world and a sensible experience that reflects shifting objective conditions—it is in keeping with a long tradition of assigning taste the role of resolving foundational epistemological contradictions. Recall that *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, in which taste is the central concept, was intended to bridge the gap between the first and second *Critiques*, enabling modern subjects to harmonize necessity

---

[4] See David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity*, David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity (Chapter 2, "Modernity and modernism"* pp. 10-38); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self (Chapter 24* "Epiphanies of Modernism" pp 495-523); Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air.*

and freedom as well as our cognitive and practical faculties. No small burden. From a modernist perspective suspicious of Kant's airtight construction of the transcendental subject, the notion that taste can play such an outsized role in synthesizing the apparent contradictions of modern life seems absurd. However, despite taste's reduction to *mere* taste—or, as I will argue, *because* of that reduction—modernist taste proves capable of absorbing the contradictions of judgment, even as it plays a key role in generating them. Rather than "solving" these contradictions, "mere taste" becomes increasingly adept at registering them as such. Thus, restoring taste as a *strong* concept risks missing the point, since taste's most common function tends to operate in a negative register, as a container for modernism's many negations, rather than as a positive term that should be rehabilitated alongside, say, vision and touch, as a way of understanding the perceptual priorities of modernist artists.

Perhaps the strongest case for the *irrelevance* of taste as a concept to be preserved in its strong Kantian dimension is made by Georg Simmel, who examines how fashion supplants taste in modern society.[5] To make his argument, Simmel adopts Kant's aesthetic framework, but updates it to account for modernity's increased pace of change and social fragmentation. In essays published during the first decade of the twentieth century, Simmel highlights the "emergence" of taste as a process that is immanent to its very concept. Taste is not a fixed idea to be discovered, or a set of principles managed by professionals; rather, it is descriptive of a historical process characterized by "imitation" and "the deviation from imitation," by which modern subjects manage the flux of modern society. The following passage from his 1904 essay, "Fashion," recalls Marx's description of modernity in the *Manifesto*, but it concludes with a turn towards fashion and taste seen as the means by which individuals negotiate their relationships with society at large.

> We can discover one of the reasons why in these latter days fashion exercises such a powerful influence on our consciousness in the circumstance that the great, permanent, unquestionable convictions are continually losing strength, as a consequence of which the transitory and vacillating elements of life acquire more room for the display of their activity. The break with the past, which, for more than a century, civilized mankind has been laboring unceasingly to bring about, makes the consciousness turn more and more to the present. This accentuation of the present evidently at the same time emphasizes the element of change, and a class will turn to fashion in all fields, by no means only in that of apparel, in proportion to the degree in which it supports the given civilizing tendency. It may almost be considered a sign of the increased power of fashion, that it has overstepped the bounds of its original domain, which comprised only personal externals, and has acquired an increasing influence over taste, over theoretical convictions, and even over the moral foundations of life. (225)

Simmel reads the objective iterations of fashion as a structure of experience in its own right, effectively replacing Marx's naive postulation of a "sober" confrontation with our "real

---

[5] Placing Simmel in the context of Marx helps situate Simmel's sociology within the canonical discourse of modernity's social effects; more specifically, Simmel's work on fashion dovetails with the analyses of Marx (in *Capital*) and Engels (in *The Condition of the English Working Class*) as they pertained to the textile mills of northern England. They both make clear links between the demands for fashionable clothes by the ascendant bourgeoisie and the modes of exploitation occurring at the point of production. It is not within this project's scope to trace that history. Still, it is worth noting the tonal difference between Marx's indignant critique of fashion as the cultural cause-and-effect of exploitation and Simmel's more balanced assessment of fashion's supposed capacity to ameliorate social alienation.

conditions." On the other hand, he does not reduce subjectivity to mere imitation, as in the subjective dissolution in the "mimetic" moment in Rousseau—that is, fashion does not merely "imitate" societal conditions. For Simmel, the temporality of fashion allows it to govern both responses. And as the chaos and flux of modernity intensify, the role of fashion deepens and expands, becoming a culturally ubiquitous manifestation of psychical and sensuous responses.

Reading Simmel alongside Marx clarifies their divergent conclusions, which are nevertheless mutually constitutive. Marx's sober analysis leads him to lament the reduction of "freedom" to "free trade" through exchange-value. He states, "The bourgeoisie has resolved all personal honor and dignity into exchange-value; and in place of all the freedoms that men have fought for, it has put one unprincipled freedom—free trade." In contrast, Simmel, expanding on Marx's analysis, describes how fashion compensates for the loss of freedom as it was once realized in the arenas of "taste" (*Critique of the Power of Judgment*), "theoretical convictions" (*Critique of Pure Reason*), and "the moral foundations of life" (*Critique of Practical Reason*). In other words, exchange-value may have liquefied the regions of human freedom defined by Kant, but for Simmel this results in a more complex and shifting social response—namely, "fashion"—that fills the void left by freedom's decline into simple "free trade." Consequently, the "Fashion" essays can be seen as an extension of Simmel's argument in *The Philosophy of Money*, where he challenges the Marxian notion that subjective expressions of freedom and social bonds can be reduced to the autonomous realm of circulation and exchange. Simmel's interpretation of Marx might be criticized as underdeveloped; however, it demonstrates the extent to which Simmel aims to explain the peculiarity of social life by analyzing the subjective capacities of the modern individual, despite the harmful effects of industrial capitalism.

For this reason, Jukka Gronow reads Simmel's "Fashion"[6] essay as an ironic revision of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. "According to [Kant], fashion has nothing to do with genuine judgments of taste, but is a case of unreflected and 'blind' imitation," which renders it "the opposite of 'good taste.'" But for Simmel, Gronow argues, fashion effectively takes over the role of Kantian taste: "Fashion is a living antinomy: it does not have to make up its mind whether to be or not to be, because it can both be and not be at the same time" (90). Characterizing "fashion" as a "living antinomy" is helpful because of the way it casts Simmel's essay as a way of reinstating ambiguity and vitality into the contradictions that Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* carefully lays out and then systematically forecloses in its turn to a moral teleology, which gives purpose to the "purposiveness without a purpose" that had been championed in the opening sections. Kant's solution to the problem of taste is the idea of a *sensus communis*, common sense, or a community of shared tastes. Every time we make a judgment of taste, we simultaneously assume that the community of taste exists and that they would likewise agree with our judgment. However, Kant never provides empirical characteristics to this community, as doing so would infringe on the transcendental universality necessary for aesthetic judgments. Thus Kant formulates his idea of a judgment that is not based on a concept, which is necessarily universal, but only because of its basis in an abstract (rather than concrete and empirical) conception of humanity:

> But now all contradiction vanishes if I say that the judgment of taste is based on a concept (of a general ground for the subjective purposiveness of nature for the power of

[6] According to Gronow, "Simmel wrote three different essays on taste (1895, 1905 and 1911), which, however, do not markedly differ from each other" (90). My references to Simmel's essay are from the translated version published in *International Quarterly* in 1904, reprinted in *On Individuality and Social Forms*.

> judgment), from which, however, nothing can be cognized and proved with regard to the object, because it is in itself indeterminable and unfit for cognition; yet at the same time by means of this very concept it acquires validity for everyone (in each case, to be sure, as a singular judgment immediately accompanying the intuition), because its determining ground may lie in the concept of that which can be regarded as the supersensible substratum of humanity. (216)

Kant's careful hedging of the connection between universality and that which "*may* lie in the concept which *can be* regarded" as the hazy postulation of a transcendental "supersensible substratum of humanity" indicates the degree to which his project can feel at once tentative in its argumentation but wildly ambitious in its potential claims.[7] Paul Guyer regards the inclusion of this vague concept as seemingly "unmotivated." He speculates that the entire section under the heading "Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment: 'Dialectic'" is "an arbitrary imposition…of the form of *The Critique of Pure Reason*." For Guyer, the "free play of the imagination and the understanding" could just as easily act as the "indeterminate concept" that allows for Kant's resolution of the antinomy of taste (xxxv).

Leaving aside the veracity of Guyer's claim, his disappointment with Kant's system suggests that he underestimates Kant's desire for taste to bridge the divide between subject and object that his critical philosophy had inaugurated. Further, his discomfort with Kant's proposal of "a thing in itself lying behind the appearance of our difference from each other and from the rest of nature" is revealing, insofar as taste itself is the point at which humans and nature are thoroughly interpenetrated, an intimacy that both fascinates Kant and motivates the processes of disinterest and distancing that are foundational to the aesthetic mode. This leads Jean-François Lyotard to argue for the absolute importance of the "supersensible substratum" as "the horizon of [the] horizons" animating Kant's entire critical philosophy and unifying the "theoretical, practical, and aesthetic" faculties: "Each faculty is seized with the impossibility of thinking its limit with the means it has at its disposal, but that it must try to think this limit is the sign of the supersensible" (215). According to Lyotard, "aesthetic feeling" is unique "in that it gives virtually direct access to the Idea of this substrate" (217). And it is for this reason that taste, and the aesthetic feeling of pleasure or displeasure that it engenders, becomes the crucial "link" between other realms of philosophy. He writes, "If the third Critique fulfills its mission of unifying the field of philosophy, it does so, not primarily by introducing the theme of the

---

[7] Elsewhere, Kant isolates this tentative term as the unsolvable riddle to the faculty of judgment: "The subjective principle, namely the indeterminate idea of the supersensible in us, can only be indicated as the sole key to demystifying this faculty which is hidden to us even in its sources, but there is nothing by which it can be made more comprehensible" (217). He employs a similar tactic in *Critique of Practical Reason*, which compels us to "look beyond the horizon of the sensible, and to seek in the supersensible the point of union of all our faculties a priori" which brings "reason into harmony with itself" (140). For Lyotard, Kant's inability to firmly define the binding characteristics of an empirical "sensus communis" is not a weakness, but rather a bold admission of that community's persistent imaginary status: "The esthetic community, therefore, remains, as Kant puts it, only an idea, or as I would say, a horizon for an expected consensus…The community's concern with what is beautiful has no chance of being actualized. But every judgment carries with it the promise of its universalization as a constitutive feature of its singularity" (207). Simmel'' assessment is altogether more concrete and empirical, but it entails a firm and clear-eyed bracketing of the "universality" prized by both Kant and Lyotard—in his view, universality is reduced to the imaginary sense of belonging to a collective, not the abstract "super-sensible substratum," which orients Kant's system as well as Lyotard's extrapolation of it.

regulative Idea of an objective finality of nature, but by making manifest, in the name of the aesthetic, the reflexive manner of thinking that is at work in the critical text as a whole" (8). Insofar as taste, according to Lyotard, is inherently reflective, it facilitates a modality of thought that conditions not just aesthetic judgment, but likewise the faculties of understanding and reason. While Guyer and Lyotard clearly differ in their appraisal of the "supersensible substratum"—the former is dismissive (in line with his more general dismissal of Kant's idealism as "incoherent and irrelevant"), and the latter understands it as *the* core concept of Kant's critical philosophy—both would agree that it remains indeterminate and ambiguous. Indeed, it must remain vague, insofar as it figures a vanishing point of convergence between subject and object that both grounds Kant's system and remains necessarily elusive so as to avoid the pitfalls of empiricism or rationalism.[8]

We can regard Simmel's adaptation of Kant's critical philosophy for his sociology as residing in this ambiguous zone. Simmel's concept of fashion locates the "supersensible substratum" in cultural outputs arising from subjective reactions to the flux of modernity. While taste remains fixed and idealistic, fashion is fluid and quotidian—structurally, it is better understood as a mimetic response to modernity than a defense against it. For Simmel, fashion describes how society responds to modernity, while taste and its claims to universality are relegated to the "train of venerable ideas" that modernity "melts." Still, it is hard not to interpret Simmel's essay on fashion as more of an empirical fleshing out of his abstract, formal ideas than a critique or revision of Kant. Although Simmel may have disagreed with Kant's ultimate

---

[8] As these divergent takes on the ontological status of Kant's theoretical philosophy imply, determining the function of taste requires a more general reappraisal of the structure of his transcendental philosophy. Somewhere between Guyer and Lyotard, Henry E. Allison has argued in *Idealism and Freedom* that we should "[deontologize] the transcendental distinction," which, simply put, posits a difference between the appearance of things in space and time and the existence of things outside of those coordinates. This would entail approaching "things" with a "dual aspect": "Things can be considered either as they appear, that is, as they are in relation to the subjective conditions of human cognition, or as they are in themselves, independently of these conditions" (3). This epistemological approach to Kant's theoretical philosophy insists that the dual aspects of things are "a function of different modes of representing rather than of the nature of the things represented" (15), an approach that centers Kant's famous claim that the concept of noumena is "a merely limiting concept, the function of which is to curb the pretensions of sensibility" (find in Kant). For Allison (similar to Lyotard and contra Guyer) these transcendental conditions do not function "like guardians of the mind," but "more like enabling conditions." He explains, "As forms or modes of representing things, they make it possible to represent to itself not only a public objective world, but even its own inner states" (25). Thus, Allison's robust defense of Kant's idealism emphasizes the subject's capacity to experience things in a polyvalent way, but always, in line with the transcendental method, in terms of their conditions of possibility. Far from deontologizing Kant, Allison wants to clearly distinguish Kant's ontology from a dualistic metaphysics that would claim an isomorphic (if inscrutable) relationship between the exalted thing-in-itself and the degraded "mere" appearance of that thing in the humdrum realm of space and time. For Allison, Kant's transcendental idealism provides a generative epistemological structure that informs the divergent ways in which all things are experienced, simultaneously in relation to the subjective conditions of human cognition and "in themselves," independently of those conditions. I have laid out some of the more standard approaches to Kant's transcendental aesthetic because a theme that runs throughout this project is the tendency for taste, in its modernist form, not to solve the problems that generated the need for the concept in the first place, but rather to retrench those very problems posed by aesthetic experience as updated forms of Kant's ontological "contradictions."

solution to the antinomy of taste, this did not lessen his respect for Kant's aesthetic project or his feeling that his sociological work continued what Kant had started—a way to bridge individual expression and collective belonging. "In any case, it is one of the first and one of the most profound attempts of reconciliation in the aesthetic sphere between the indispensable individual subjectivity of the modern man and the equally necessary over-individual community" (300).

Simmel's ideas of "individual" and "over-individual" echo Kant's "*super*-sensible *sub*stratum," a formal, spatialized concept oddly devoid of content. Kant's spatial framing—the stratum being both below (*sub*) and above (*super*) sense—provides a vivid metaphor from which Simmel uses to develop an empirical understanding of a vertical society. In "The Transcendent Character of Life," Simmel writes, "We are constantly orienting ourselves, even when we do not employ abstract concepts, to an 'over us' and an 'under us" (355). In "Fashion," this empirical verticality is exemplified by class and gender inequalities. For example: "In a certain sense fashion gives woman compensation for her lack of position in a class based on a calling or profession" (308). In these moments, despite his tone of scientific neutrality, it is hard not to hear a repressed dismissal of fashion as merely a weak substitution for true freedom and genuine collective belonging. While his stated thesis suggests that fashion is a key means by which individuals express their freedom, his historical examples highlight class disparities and the real conditions of gender inequality. Thus, despite his interest in fashion's cultural products, Simmel sees fashion not as the outcome of authentic individuality and a vibrant society—the ideal Kant imagined in the *sensus communis*—but as the symptomatic byproduct of its ongoing absence. Practically speaking, then, we can understand fashion as inversely related to freedom: the hollowing out of traditional structures thought to enable human autonomy is precisely why fashion becomes a necessary, compensating force. Therefore, it is more accurate to see Simmel not as transforming taste into fashion but as recognizing that, under modern conditions, taste has become exhausted, paving the way for fashion's rise.

Taste in its older guise, as a means of describing authentic aesthetic experience, does not simply disappear as a result. On the contrary, the diminution of taste to fashion, to "mere taste," creates the conditions for the emergence of a mode of aesthetic experience that does not orient itself towards the universal, but rather towards a quasi-monadic particularity which Simmel calls "aesthetic pantheism."

> Even the lowest, intrinsically ugly phenomenon can be dissolved into contexts of color and form, of feeling and experience, which provide it with exciting significance. To involve ourselves deeply and lovingly with even the most common product, which would be banal and repulsive in its isolated appearance, enables us to conceive of it, too, as a ray and image of the final unity of all things from which beauty and meaning flow…If we pursue this possibility of aesthetic appreciation to its final point, we find that there are no essential differences among things. Our worldview turns into aesthetic pantheism. *Every point contains within itself the potential of being redeemed to absolute aesthetic importance.* (226)

This emotional passage highlights the utopian aspect of Simmel's work, which aims to "redeem" the lowest, intrinsically ugly phenomena to achieve "absolute aesthetic importance." Fashion serves a healing social role, aligning personal expression with collective belonging. However, "aesthetic contemplation" involves recognizing a deeper, more powerful "final unity" that encompasses "beauty and meaning," ideas absent from Simmel's analysis of fashion. Therefore, while fashion overshadows the social function of taste, it does not eliminate the potential for aesthetic experience. Instead, as fashion adopts the role of connecting human needs for

expression and belonging, it creates a new, surprising aesthetic dimension liberated from mass appeal and fleeting trends. "Beauty and meaning" can now be found in "ugly phenomena," the "common product," the "banal and repulsive." This is the new landscape of taste. While fashion functions as a social shortcut satisfying the human need for expression and belonging, taste addresses what remains after fashion's internal development. No longer a mental faculty bridging the individual and the collective, taste instead becomes a way to more tangibly sense the persistent gap between the two. Borrowing from Hegel, we might see taste as fashion's determinate negation, dirempting the sense of completeness promised by fashion's mediation of the individual and society. As Simmel notes, "As soon as an example has been universally adopted, that is, as soon as anything that was originally done only by a few has really come to be practiced by all—as is the case in certain portions of our apparel and in various forms of social conduct—we no longer speak of fashion. As fashion spreads, it gradually goes to its doom." For Kant, universality, however qualified by the *as if*, was the goal of taste; Simmel redefines universality as a stage in historical progress. Taste thus comes to serve a negative role, prompting the emergence of contradictory particulars that go beyond the universally accepted norms of fashion.

Before moving on, it is worth marking precisely what kind of universality Kant's solution secures, because the entire arc of this project turns on its transformation. Kantian universality is *subjective*: the judgment of taste claims universal validity not because it corresponds to any property of the object, nor because any actual community has assented, but because it is grounded in the structure of the judging subject—universal because any subject, judging disinterestedly, *would* concur. The universality is real, but it is postulated, lodged in the "as if," forever deferred into the imaginary community of the *sensus communis*. It is against exactly this construction that the Hegelian and Marxian tradition presses. For Hegel, universality that remains merely subjective—a demand made from within the individual, however lawfully—is universality that has not yet become actual; genuine universality is *objective*, realized in the shared, material, historical life of a collective rather than secured in the architecture of any single consciousness. This is not a refinement of Kant but a relocation of the problem: from the question of how a subject can legitimately demand that others agree, to the question of what material conditions would allow a universality to be lived rather than postulated.

I introduce this distinction here, schematically, because it names the movement the following chapters trace. Modernist taste does not stay within Kant's subjective universality; under the pressure of its own contradictions, it is driven toward the objective universality it cannot, on Kantian terms, attain. But "attain" is precisely the wrong verb for what the texts achieve. The objective universality toward which modernist taste strains never arrives as positive content—never becomes a universality actually lived—because the historical conditions that would allow it to be lived do not obtain. It is available, within these works, only in negated form: legible as the strain it places on the existing order, as the disturbance it introduces into a subject that cannot accommodate it, as a possibility registered through its own foreclosure. In West, where the movement reaches its limit, taste becomes the site of a universality at once aesthetic and political—but one that the bourgeois subject, and the realist frame his consciousness governs, can register only as a threat, and that the text itself can hold only as what it is structurally prevented from realizing.

Hans-Georg Gadamer: Taste, No Taste; Good Taste, Bad Taste

> Taste is defined precisely by the fact that it is offended by what is tasteless and thus avoids it, like anything else that threatens injury. Thus, the contrary of "good taste" actually is not "bad taste." Its opposite is rather to have "no taste."
>
> —Hans-Georg Gadamer

Conceptualizing taste as a faculty of negation poses a curious theoretical puzzle, given the habit among artists and philosophers of defining taste by contrasting it with its opposite, whether in terms of "no taste" or "bad taste." Such accounts tend to insist that the "tasteless" or "distasteful" aspects of aesthetic experience can be eliminated through cultural or moral education, leaving behind a purified "taste" or a highly-refined "good taste." My contention is that modernist taste proceeds differently, not by avoiding or eliminating bad taste, but by integrating bad taste into its very concept. To unpack this claim and make it more generally applicable to this project, it is helpful to briefly contrast the divergent approaches to taste in the aesthetic philosophies of Hans-Georg Gadamer and T.W. Adorno. My goal is not to argue for one approach over the other, though it will become clear that Adorno's negative dialectics is more apposite to the modernist works I address in this project. Instead, I want to keep both approaches in play, because they helpfully describe the divergent takes on taste that we will discover in modernism proper. To repeat, modernist taste is not one thing; rather, it is a faculty of judgment that tends to produce myriad, contradictory concepts of pleasure, the beautiful, and the function of the work of art as a bearer of historical content.

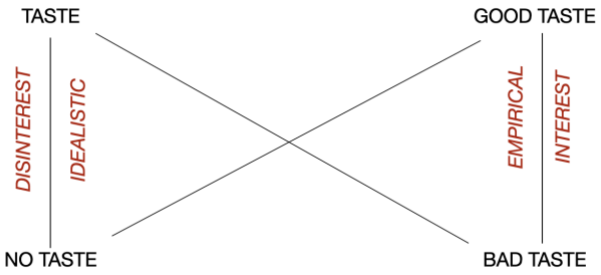
In *Truth and Method*, Hans-Georg Gadamer lays out a theory of taste best summarized as an attempt to retool Kantian reflective judgment for hermeneutical ends, shifting the universalizing mechanism located in the transcendental subject onto a social world defined by dialogue and open-ended interpretation. Part I begins with a section titled "Transcending the aesthetic dimension," wherein he reviews the "subjectivization of aesthetics through Kantian critique," and slowly builds to an argument for art's ontological character, the experience of which stands as the exemplary mode of all hermeneutical experience, which, for Gadamer, defines experience tout court. The impetus for this project is what he sees as the denigration of the human sciences by the empirical sciences, and the consequent withering of philosophy as a rigorous practice integral to the maintenance and improvement of society. Gadamer's critique of Kantian "subjectivization" begins by examining the building blocks of Kant's aesthetics, including sensus communis, judgment, and taste. But the crucial term for Gadamer's project is beauty, which will return at the conclusion of his work as the fundamental concept that enables "the universal aspect of hermeneutics." Though Gadamer's theory of taste, like Gadamer's philosophy more generally, might feel stodgy, out of date, and, to put it bluntly, conservative, I hope to show how its fundamental impulses can point to a theory of aesthetic pleasure that explains what modernist artists (Wyndham Lewis, in particular) were trying to accomplish and the various ways in which they failed.

Reviewing Kant's intervention into the history of aesthetics and the human sciences more generally, he notes the "paradoxical formulation" of taste in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*: whereas eighteenth-century philosophers such as Shaftesbury and Hume highlighted the diversity of human taste, Kant reversed that trend by arguing for the "subjective universality" of taste, which makes it the "true sense of community." According to Gadamer, Kant accomplishes this shift in emphasis from idiosyncratic preferences to a common set of shared experiences by "narrowing the concept of the sense of community" to subjects capable of making judgments of taste about beautiful objects, and by "narrowing the concept of taste itself"

to be negatively regulative, so that "the mark of good taste is being able to stand back from ourselves and our private preferences." These two "narrowings" render taste "a social phenomenon of the first order." And yet despite the social determinations of taste, it nevertheless does not abide by a fixed set of social rules, leading Gadamer to awkwardly claim, "taste is therefore something like a sense," because "in its operations it has no knowledge of its reasons." It is worth pausing to hear the strangeness of this formulation, which can be more fully felt by substituting any of the other five senses—for example, "smell is therefore something like a sense," which is grammatically correct, but otherwise contradictory. Taste, however, can be defined as both a sense and "something like a sense"—that is, strictly speaking, not a sense—because of its socially constructed nature. That is, taste can be simultaneously personal and impersonal, irrational and rational, private and public, physical and immaterial, a sense and not a sense, depending on the context in which the word is deployed.

The malleability of taste, derived from this reading of Kant (if twisted against Kant's own narrower meaning), renders it a useful concept for Gadamer's larger argument about the necessity of intersubjective communication for the creation of meaning, as he can toggle almost seamlessly between deeply personal experiences and a larger shared understanding, starting with his exposition of Bildung, framed as the cultivation of individual taste, and culminating in the potential for a "fusion of horizons" built out of the myriad unique traits of each individual's "historically effected consciousness." Gadamer's rehabilitation of taste for less narrow use also has a democratic appeal—made more politically explicit by thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas and Hannah Arendt—but it depends on maintaining Kant's reduction of taste to the practice of making judgments (or, in the stricter sense, not making judgments) and then freeing that practice from the restricted realm of aesthetics. Put another way, Gadamer depends on Kant's narrowing of the concept of taste, but then attempts to reverse Kant's "narrowing" of the concept of community, thereby expanding the capacity of the aesthetic sense to make judgments in the realms of morality and law and "shifting" the more general concept of taste back to the "center of philosophy." Thus in the epigraph that opens this section, Gadamer defines taste negatively as the avoidance of that which is tasteless, because doing so allows taste to encompass the broadest range of human activity.

In framing the poles of taste between taste and no taste, Gadamer explicitly excludes "bad taste" from his description of judgment, but refrains from explaining what distinguishes "no taste" from "bad taste." Can we not assume that someone acting "without taste" would be roughly equivalent to acting in "bad taste?" Why does Gadamer feel the need to draw the difference at all? Before pursuing that question, it is important to note how Gadamer, [like Nietzsche], casually slides into the language of "good taste," and in so doing blurs the outline drawn by Kant's Analytic. Kant's (idealistic) "taste" becomes (empirical) "good taste," before being contrasted with (idealistic) "no taste," which in turn depends on the exclusion of (empirical) "bad taste." To clarify this jumble of terms, it is helpful to draw the following diagram:



In the context of Gadamer's larger project, which seeks to reintegrate the aesthetic into "the center of philosophy," collapsing "Taste" and "Good Taste" makes perfect sense: the aesthetic ultimately serves a moral purpose that "transcends" the aesthetic dimension. In this way, taste is no longer merely formal, but takes on an objective, "ontological character" that manifests in society as a fusion of horizons. However, in making "no taste" the opposite of "good taste," Gadamer effectively tries to compress an idealistic and empirical framework, but without any terms of mediation. In other words, Gadamer wants it both ways: on the one hand, a positive form of empirical "good taste," paired with an idealistic, content-free form of "no taste."

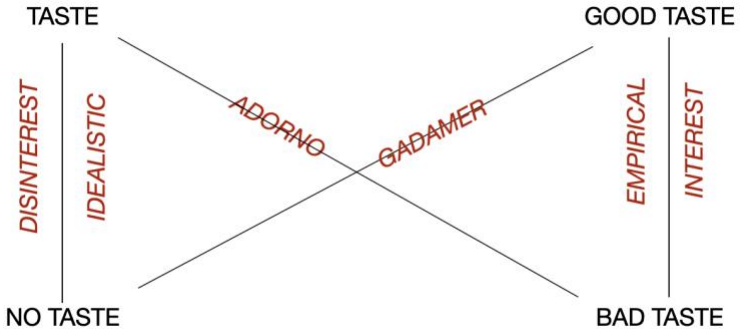
A clue to Gadamer's reasoning appears a few pages later, when he discusses Kant's doctrine of the Ideal of Beauty, a section in the third *Critique* that revises and complicates the strict divisions constructed in the Analytic of the Beautiful by locating an objective "ideal" in the form of the human body. Quoting Kant, Gadamer explains that beauty is a normative concept, "an expression of the moral," "without which it could not be universally pleasing." Gadamer then paraphrases, "Judgment according to an ideal of beauty is then, as Kant says, not a mere judgment of taste. The important consequence of this doctrine will prove to be that something must be more than merely tastefully pleasant in order to please as a work of art." In the second revised edition, Gadamer chooses this moment to add a brief footnote which reads, "Unfortunately, Kant's analysis of the judgment of taste has again been misapplied in aesthetic theory by T.W. Adorno, *Äesthetisch Theorie*." And yet, as with the terse exclusion of bad taste from his description of aesthetic experience, Gadamer does not specify how Adorno "misapplies" Kant. But the positioning of the footnote is telling, because the claim that an artwork must press beyond the merely tasteful would be right at home in Adorno's work; indeed, Gadamer's dismissive nod to his countryman seems triggered by his fleeting proximity to Adorno à propos Kant's contention (in Gadamer's account) that the concept of beauty exceeds what is merely tasteful. In lectures delivered in 1958-9, a year before the publication of Truth and Method, Adorno was developing his own critique of subjectivist aesthetics. Despite the proximity of Heidelberg and Frankfurt, there was little or no formal engagement between these two thinkers: the footnote cited above is the only direct reference I have found in either of their published works. And yet the overlap in their philosophical interests—in the deleterious effects of empirical rationality, the critique of metaphysics, and the rehabilitation of Hegel's speculative philosophy, just to name a few—makes for a compelling narrative of ideas. Contrasting their divergent appropriations of Kant, by way of Plato and Hegel, will allow us to sharpen our sense of the "tasteful" and more clearly determine how "bad taste" is integral to the aesthetics of modernism.

To put it mildly, Adorno was even more critical of the "merely tasteful" than Gadamer, reserving some of his most caustic writing for the "culinary" sensibility, which he confines to a "pre-aesthetic" comportment only able to appreciate "the sensual side of the work" (103). "Significant works of art," he writes, "transcend the category of taste and can thus scarcely be assessed according to the standards of taste" (171). Adorno's critique of taste is derived from Hegel, whom he would label in *Aesthetic Theory*, "the enemy of taste," a moniker one can imagine Wyndham Lewis adopting for himself. Quoting from Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Art*, Adorno emphasizes Hegel's contention that the "development of taste only touched on what was external and meagre" and was therefore "incapable of grasping the inner meaning and truth of art and sharpening the eye for detecting these things" (168). Adorno considers this to be the "central factor of aesthetics," before going on to lambast "human beings, for whom, in the world of today, the concept of taste is central in aesthetic matters." He writes,

> These are generally people who essentially experience education—what one calls education—in terms of property, for whom education amounts to an accumulation of possessions, for whom the bourgeois concept of property continues into matters of the spirit, and who accordingly survey the realm of beauty like a bourgeois apartment, going from the salon to the kitchen to see what they can find piled up there and then somehow consume it. (169-70)

Adorno's relentless vilification of bourgeois dilettantism makes for great reading, but at times the bravado of these florid condemnations can read like a self-justifying conclusion, rather than a link in a complex dialectical argument about what constitutes beauty and the possibility of pleasure. If the token bourgeois desire to "touch," "taste," and "consume" an artwork is equivalent to only experiencing, in Hegel's terms, what is "external and meagre," does a more authentic engagement with the "inner meaning" require a formalizing distance similar to Kantian disinterest? Would not this merely reproduce the same subjectivization that Adorno identified as the source of taste's shallow allegiance to effects? Tendentious straw-man takedowns aside, what is implied by Adorno's persistent jibes at "bourgeois philistinism" is that taste reduces artworks to a collection of effects that can be transformed by the culture industry into fungible pieces of private property, irrespective of the objective substance of the artworks themselves.

Yet rather than dismiss the effects of the work of art as irrelevant, Adorno instead locates this tension—between the subjective dimension of experience and the objective substance of the work—as a foundational determination of beauty in, of all places, Plato's *Phaedrus*, the same work to which Gadamer turns in his attempt to center the "normative" concept of beauty's ideal. However, in Adorno's reading, Plato does not offer a static ontological account of the form of Beauty, but instead elaborates "a dialectical conception of beauty," explained in terms of its effect on the viewer, yet at the same time as "nothing but the imitation of the idea of beauty" (94). For Plato, beauty is experienced as a sort of "divine madness" which prefigures the way in which the aesthetic is a suspension of the reality principle. And yet this suspension of immediate interest is paradoxically registered as pain because, in Adorno's words, "in the face of beauty, namely in the experience of the possibility of something unconditional, humans become aware of their own conditionality, their own fallibility. This pain and suffering is, in a sense, the only form in which we, as conditional creatures, can think, feel or experience utopia at all" (91-2). In this way, Adorno can argue "that suffering, pain and dissonance are fundamental parts of beauty, not simply accidental" (92). This, in other words, is the inner meaning that taste is incapable of accessing—that feeling of painful longing for the unconditional that lodges in every artwork as mere semblance.



Unlike Gadamer, Adorno never explicitly distinguishes between taste, good taste, bad taste, and no taste. However, we can usefully chart his aesthetics in contrast to Gadamer's by placing him on the transverse axis, where "bad taste" represents history itself in the form of its non-identical materiality, which, for Adorno, is constitutive of the beautiful as such. If the first diagram clarifies the conceptual terrain, this second diagram lets us locate Adorno and Gadamer within it. Read in this way, Adorno, like Gadamer, seeks to compress the idealistic and empirical frameworks, but he does so by actively mediating the opposing terms rather than eliding them. Gadamer's excitement about the intersubjective possibilities of a "tasteful" hermeneutics does not entail a concept of negation that is immanent to subjective experience; it can only ever be displaced into the public sphere of competing notions of the beautiful and the good. The diagonal here represents not a position but a movement; Adorno's dialectic refuses to settle in either quadrant, mediating the idealistic moment of disinterest with the empirical pressure of historical materiality. Gadamer's diagonal, by contrast, represents an attempted fusion of good taste with the formal emptiness of no taste, eliding the mediating moment that bad taste would supply.

Thus, Gadamer's somewhat random footnote about Adorno's "unfortunate" analysis of "the judgment of taste" belies an anxiety about "bad taste," because of the way its empirical quality—the very stuff of history that cannot be fully stripped from the artwork, from beauty and "taste" itself—threatens to fill out the empty form of no taste and thereby disrupt the forward-moving narrative of Bildung and the *merely* "effected" historical consciousness. For now, we can propose that bad taste names the residue of history as such, constitutive of art's truth-content as that which eludes the artwork's concept. While Gadamer reads Kant back onto Plato to derive an ideal beauty consonant with an ideal morality, Adorno reads Kant back onto Plato to locate the mediation of history as the construction of beauty itself.

We can now begin to see how the theoretical detours of this introduction converge. Proust's madeleine demonstrated how literal taste impinges on figurative taste, opening a zone of uncertainty in which the aesthetic mode is forced to reckon with the embodied, the metonymic, and the historical. Simmel diagnosed how, under the pressure of modernity's accelerating flux, taste's older Kantian function—mediating individual judgment and universal community—is displaced onto fashion, leaving taste itself to register what fashion cannot absorb. And Gadamer and Adorno, read against each other, clarified what is at stake in that residue: for Gadamer, the empirical materiality of "bad taste" must be excluded so that taste can be reabsorbed into a hermeneutic project of intersubjective meaning; for Adorno, that same materiality is constitutive of beauty itself, the non-identical remainder through which the artwork bears its historical

content. Adorno's truth-content names what the artwork bears of a history it has buried while also naming what it bears of a future not yet arrived; both are ways of describing the work's capacity to hold what is not present in it. That capacity to hold the absent—whether buried or refused—is what taste, in its modernist form, is uniquely equipped to register. Whether inflected towards the past or future, across these various readings, a single claim has been taking shape: modernist taste does not resolve the contradictions that Kant's concept of taste was meant to mediate. It intensifies them and, in doing so, registers something that the more dominant visual aesthetic of modernism tends to occlude.

But to say that bad taste names "the residue of history" is to leave open what history means here. The historical pressures Simmel diagnosed—the dissolution of traditional structures, the rise of fashion, the fragmentation of subjective experience—are real and proximate, the conditions under which the modernist authors I read were writing. Yet the residue Adorno locates in the artwork operates at a different scale: it is not merely the sediment of recent social transformation but something more archaic, a materiality that the aesthetic mode has been working to repress since long before the early twentieth century. To understand why literal taste persistently disturbs figurative taste—why the eating, drinking, and digesting that populate modernist texts cannot be fully metabolized into aesthetic meaning—we need an account of how the split between literal and figurative taste was instituted in the first place. That account, surprisingly, is most fully developed not in the tradition of philosophical aesthetics but in Freud, whose writings on infant sexuality, totem, and negation construct a deep history of the human sensorium in which taste is consigned, from the start, to the primitive. The following section excavates that history, not to ground modernist taste in a stable psychoanalytic origin, but to show how the "primitive" dimension of taste persists as a structural feature of aesthetic experience—a feature that modernist art, far from suppressing, reactivates and exploits.

The Primitive Sense

> The eye is really the objectifying one, the organ that most enables us to assure ourselves of objects in their objectivity, in their materiality, such that the eye has, in a certain sense, been most closely associated with rationality, with illumination, with the principle of controlling nature—unlike the ear, which does not clearly know any such concrete relationship; and all the more unlike senses such as taste and smell, which are really far more archaic, far more mimetic senses, and presumably wither away in the development of civilization.
>
> —T.W. Adorno

> We have said above that man is regressing to the cave dwelling, etc. – but he is regressing to it in an estranged, malignant form. The savage in his cave—a natural element which freely offers itself for his use and protection —feels himself no more a stranger, or rather feels as much at home as a fish in water.
>
> —Karl Marx

> The artist goes back to the fish.
>
> —Wyndham Lewis

In *Making Sense of Taste*, Carolyn Korsmeyer tracks how taste and smell are routinely relegated to the lowest tiers within the sense hierarchy, while vision and hearing are typically

elevated to the top. In her telling, there is a clear continuity of thought that stretches from Plato to the present, which associates the distal senses of vision and hearing with knowledge, rationality, and the growth of civilization, and the so-called "chemical senses" of taste and smell with the regressive, primitive and recondite aspects of the human (84-86). Her work criticizes this traditional "hierarchy of the senses," and tries to elevate literal taste to a position alongside vision and hearing that is worthy of philosophy, which she believes has been wrongly denied it for centuries. While her account attends to a few moments in modernist fiction as examples of how *literal* taste is elevated to a status that is worthy of philosophical inquiry beyond its role as a metaphor for aesthetic experience (Woolf's dinner table and Proust's madeleine efficiently if predictably provide the evidence), her account of the *philosophy* of taste skips from Hegel all the way to Bourdieu, leaving a 150-year lacuna that does less to undercut her general argument than to reinforce the degree to which taste as an aesthetic concept fell out of favor for one-and-a-half centuries. It is not within the scope of this argument to explain why taste largely disappeared from philosophical discourse during these years; rather, this section sets itself the precarious task of arguing for the importance of taste as a sense, faculty, and concept that is routinely represented as unimportant, negated or "minor," felt more often through its absence than through any kind of overt invocation.

From Kant to Adorno, eating is associated with survival, desire, and assimilation, while taste is associated with relative disinterestedness, restraint, and the possibility of pleasure beyond the demands of self-preservation. Only rarely do philosophers investigate how taste, the sense that mediates these primitive, animalistic processes, splits off from its quotidian referent and persists as a metaphor for exactly the opposite activity. If such work is done, as it is in Korsmeyer, the argument realigns taste with its material referent rather than lingering on the reasons why taste so persistently requires dematerialization before entering philosophical discourse. Merely recombining taste with eating, I contend, follows a logic of assimilation that obscures how taste is not reducible to eating. My argument addresses the tension that arises from this irreducible quality of taste—how it resists collapse into mere appetite even as it ceases to function as a disembodied metaphor for aesthetic pleasure. I also argue that modernism, in particular, constructs and exploits the tension between literal and figurative taste as a source of creative energy and critical thought. As taste recedes into the philosophical and aesthetic background—whether through repression, sublimation or outright rejection—it simultaneously becomes more pervasive and powerful as an organizing concept for understanding social, cultural, and economic phenomena outside of the narrow field of aesthetics. In other words, it is because taste is banished from the realms of beauty, universality, and the loftiest yearnings of philosophy that it is able to exert its force in a more historically forceful way.

The claim that modernist taste registers a "primitive" residue of history requires an account of how that residue was produced—of how, in other words, the human sensorium came to experience taste as primitive in the first place. Freud provides such an account, though not under the heading of aesthetics. Korsmeyer, whose interest in taste is largely phenomenological, mentions him only in passing. But for a project concerned with how figurative taste is shadowed by its literal counterpart, Freud's account of the founding split between tasting and eating is indispensable—as is the mytho-historical narrative of civilization into which his later writings expand it. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud locates the emergence of personhood as a direct consequence of the split between sexual satisfaction and the nutritive function of eating, two activities that converge in the scene of breastfeeding: "At a time at which the first beginnings of sexual satisfaction are still linked with the taking of nourishment, the

sexual instinct has a sexual object outside the infant's body in the shape of the mother's breast. It is only later that the instinct loses its object, just at that time, perhaps, when the child is able to form a whole idea of the person to whom the organ that is giving him satisfaction belongs." Freud's "discovery" of this founding moment of separation leads him to the famous characterization of the object of desire: "The finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it." Thus all desire becomes a substitute for the original desire for the breast, which represents a moment when pleasure and nutrition are coterminous.

In *The Hunger* Artists, Maud Ellmann argues from this passage that "[Freud's] vast encyclopedia of sexual malaise was constructed to evade the everyday catastrophe of eating" (36). She cites Freud's famous description of the satiated infant, also from *Three Essays*, as the foundational moment of a split, not merely between pleasure and nourishment, but also between the symbolic and the real. Here is Freud: "No one who has seen a baby sinking back satiated from the breast and falling asleep with flushed cheeks and blissful smile can escape the reflection that this picture persists as a prototype of the expression of sexual satisfaction later in life" (263). As already noted, eating and sexuality, the two fundamental instincts of self-preservation, are fully aligned at this early stage of infancy. Yet in Freud's story, Ellmann perceptively notes, there is a subtle disjunction between the "picture" of the scene of pleasure and the pleasure itself, a split which, as the child matures, eventually leads to "the visionary pleasures of the image ultimately [taking] the place of the original somatic satisfaction" (37). Thus, the moment of separation not only marks the split between pleasure and eating, but it also initiates the formation of the symbolic realm as it splits from the real. In so doing, the pleasure afforded by taste is rescued from eating in order to preserve pleasure by way of repressing the troubling primordial link between eating and sex.

Decades later, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud returns to the notion that vision displaces the lower senses as the subject matures, but transposes this hierarchy of the senses onto a psychoanalytic narrative of human evolution, drawing a parallel between the expansive scale of Darwinian time and the time of an individual human life. Once again, Ellmann's reading is helpful. In a short essay, "Psychoanalytic Animal," Ellmann focuses on two footnotes in *Civilization*, arguing, "Freud, adopting Darwin's view that the cultural dominance of vision stems from 'man's adoption of an upright posture,' argues that the erect male forfeited the sexual stimulus of scent, which is best appreciated on all fours, in favor of the vertical stimulus of vision" (343). This evolutionary hypothesis is a continuation of Freud's argument from the earlier *Totem and Taboo*, in which he argues that children, like "savages," show "no trace of the arrogance which urges civilized men to draw a hard-and-fast line between their own nature and that of all other animals": "Children have no scruples over allowing animals to rank as their full equals. Uninhibited as they are in their avowal of their bodily needs, they no doubt feel themselves more akin to animals than to their elders, who may well be a puzzle to them" (491). In this way, Freud's early identification of eating-taste-pleasure with the breastfeeding infant is extrapolated to describe a civilizational maturation which, in its movement away from primitive animalism and "savagery," requires the splitting of the pleasure derived from the aesthetic realm and the satisfaction of needs required by the demands of self-preservation. Thus, literal taste, because of its association with *eating*, is consigned to the realm of the primitive insofar as it is indelibly linked with the realm of necessity rather than with the fulfillment of *pleasure*, which is further displaced into a socially-acceptable visual register. Thus a dualism begins to emerge for which we could use the shorthand: real-eating-desire-necessity-primitive vs. symbolic-tasting-pleasure-freedom-civilized.

If *Totem* sometimes seems to consign this graduation from primitive taste to civilized vision as a historical stage that has been overcome, Freud's 1923 essay "Negation" returns to the leitmotif of pleasure and eating in order to frame the fundamental opposition of the human psyche as it navigates everyday life. According to Freud, "the primary instinctual impulses" involved in the graduation from "pleasure" to "reality" both constrain and make possible the activities of judgment and reality-testing. Though he is discussing ordinary judgments and not the analytical work of healing trauma, Freud argues for the centrality of the originary scene of separation from the breast as a way to understand the *formal* qualities of consciousness. Thus the description of reality-testing is strikingly similar to his earlier description of how the object of desire is never found, but always *re-found*: "The first and immediate aim, therefore, of reality testing is, not to *find* an object in real perception which corresponds to the one presented, but to *refind* such an object, to convince oneself that it is still there" (668). If we accept that a split between tasting and eating points to the original loss of the object of desire, the implication of the "Negation" essay would be that this split continues to inform a huge range of judgments, not merely those that we typically categorize as "aesthetic."

Indeed, once the language of taste is excavated from *Three Essays*, it is hard not to read Freud's dualistic account of the ego as a psychological instantiation of the primal split between tasting and eating. According to Freud, the ego engages in two distinct modalities of judgment. On the one hand, there is "an experimental action, a motor palpating, with small expenditure of discharge" (669). In this mode, the ego is portrayed as a dilettante sampling the wears of reality but not consuming them: "The ego periodically sends out small amounts of cathexis into the perceptual system, by means of which it samples the external stimuli, and then after every such tentative advance it draws back again" (669). This process of sampling "interplays" with its opposite; for, on the other hand, "Judging is a continuation, along the lines of expediency, of the original process by which the ego took things into itself or expelled them from itself, according to the pleasure principle" (669). Thus Freud reinscribes his earliest findings from *Three Essays* onto a more general "ontology" of human experience. The processes of ingestion and repulsion are the forms by which the ego develops the mechanisms of enjoyment and repression; but in order to soften the trauma of this engagement in our day-to-day lives, there is a process of sampling by which we can taste reality without risking an act that would continually compromise the boundaries of the ego.

Freud never mentions taste, either in its literal or figurative guise. Given Freud's familiarity with Kant, and the ways in which the "Negation" essay draws on the distinction between determinate and reflective judgment, the word "taste" feels conspicuously absent, even as it is conceptually at play in two simultaneous registers: as a way of sampling reality, and in its connection to the ingestion of reality. Then again, the essay is about negation as such. Could it be that taste's absence is necessary for Freud to maintain the distinction between pleasure and reality, which in turn correspond, according to Freud, to "the two groups of instincts which we have supposed to exist?" He draws the following schema: "Affirmation—as a substitute for uniting—belongs to Eros; negation—the successor to expulsion—belongs to the instinct of destruction" (669). This dualistic schematic is an obvious precursor to the foreboding conclusion of *Civilization and its Discontents*; but in this less grand context, we can see the way in which it forecloses the possibility of taste as a way of mediating the psychological fissure between affirmation and negation and thereby establishes a clean dualism in place of the more troubling prospect of their dialectical mediation. This is reinforced by the surprising (and comforting) claim that there is indeed a real moment of satisfaction that can be satisfactorily recalled: "But it

is evident that a precondition for the setting up of reality-testing is that objects shall have been lost which once brought real satisfaction." One might see in this passage Freud struggling to come to terms with the radicalism of the position he has been constructing—namely that negation, destruction and exclusion, those primitive impulses that were meant to be banished along with literal taste in the human's progress towards the rational pleasures associated with visuality and the symbolic register, remain foundational and indeed primary throughout one's life. Despite building to this argument in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, "Negation" can be understood as reverting to the more comfortable dualism outlined above, which in turn allows for a cleaner narrative of displacement, repression, and the potential for progress beyond our primitive instincts.

This somewhat tendentious and "conservative" reading of Freud's "Negation" is helpful insofar as it lays out a heuristic template that is followed by Korsmeyer and others when they play out their desire to realign taste with its literal referent, retrojecting a nostalgic fantasy of unity, which in turn splits taste along developmental lines; in so doing, the teleological goal of analysis (and much literary criticism focused on "recovering" the importance of eating and literal taste) becomes the realignment of literal and figurative taste at the scene of consumption, wherein refinding the object of desire amounts to forcing back together taste and eating, pleasure and nourishment, the figurative and the literal. This critical move characterizes "food studies" more generally, which sets itself the task, in the vein of well-intentioned historicism, of reversing the processes of metaphor in order to lay bare a crude material base, rather than investigating the libidinal investments that both catalyze the split and compel us to undo it. The unreflective quality of this desire is worth pausing on. In its eagerness to restore taste to its material referent — to collapse the distance between the figurative and the literal, the aesthetic and the digestive — food studies reproduces, at the level of critical method, the same logic of forced assimilation that the modernist texts it reads are staging as a problem. The drive to reunify what the split has separated, to "refind" the object by eliminating the tension that keeps literal and figurative taste apart, is not a neutral critical gesture. It is, structurally, the same gesture that in these texts tips into coercion — the insistence that the aesthetic object submit to consumption, that the distance between subject and object be closed by force rather than held open as the condition of possibility for a different kind of knowledge.

It is this coercive logic — the insistence that distance be closed by force — that the modernist texts this project addresses refuse to leave at the level of metaphor. If the literalization of taste consistently produces epistemological disturbance, it also, across many of the texts this project addresses, produces something more troubling: scenes of sexual violence. I did not anticipate this aspect of my argument. That this pattern recurs across works as formally and temperamentally distinct as those gathered here suggests it is not incidental but structural — one of the things that taste, in its modernist form, reliably generates when its sublimations begin to fail. When the repressed primitive dimension of taste resurfaces, what returns is not only the archaic pleasure of the oral stage but the violence that civilization's narrative of progress claimed to have overcome. Taste, in its modernist form, does not merely register this violence from a critical distance. It is, at times, its vehicle.

What Freud's account makes available to this project, then, is not a developmental story to be applied to modernist texts, nor a primal scene to be recovered beneath their aesthetic surfaces. It is a structural insight: that taste, as a concept, is constituted by the very split it appears, in Kant, to mediate. Literal taste and figurative taste are not opposed terms that modernism reunifies, nor stages of a process that modernism reverses. They are the two poles of

a tension that taste itself names. The modernist authors I read in the following chapters do not resolve this tension; they inhabit it, exploit it, and at times weaponize it. Their texts dramatize moments in which figurative taste is interrupted by its literal counterpart — the potato that will not become symbol, the meal that refuses the artifices of metaphor, the act of eating that breaks the aesthetic frame. These interruptions are not failures of figuration but its condition of possibility. To read them, we need a critical vocabulary attuned to the productive disturbance that literal taste exerts on the figurative, rather than to the recovery of one by the other. If taste names this constitutive tension between the literal and the figurative, the question that remains is what taste, so understood, allows us to register. The answer this project gives is: history.

The Historical Sense

> Taste is the most accurate seismograph of historical experience. Unlike almost all other faculties, it is even able to register its own behavior. Reacting against itself, it recognizes its own lack of taste.
>
> —T.W. Adorno

This project argues that within modernist aesthetics, taste undergoes a fundamental reorientation: from a faculty of perception attuned to beauty to one attuned to history. While these orientations are not mutually exclusive, each tends to occlude the other: a too-narrow focus on the beautiful requires turning away from the ugly materiality of history, and a too-wide focus on history renders the emergence of the finely wrought aesthetic object impossible. I use the term "occlude" because the *history-beauty* binary repeatedly emerges in modernist texts as a tug-of-war within a visual register characterized by the dynamics of the sublime. The task, "before all, to make you *see,*" takes place within historical circumstances that disrupt, elude, cloud, overwhelm, or disappear, depending on the subject's ability to carefully dilate the scope of perception to an asymptotic point of absolute immediacy. Taste, by contrast, deploys an alternative vocabulary for historical experience in line with Kant's articulation of the beautiful as a concept intertwined with *sensus communis*, pleasure, and the yearning for universality. This project will explore the ongoing project of taste and its correlate, the beautiful, as they come under pressure from the intense cultural, technological, and economic forces that characterize modernity.

To put this in a slightly different way: in modernism, the more dominant mode of visuality, in both the plastic and literary arts, overtly constructed an antagonism between the phenomenological immediacy of perception and the deep temporality of historical consciousness. Martin Jay has compellingly demonstrated how our critical vernacular is itself structured by metaphors of visuality, and how twentieth-century French philosophy has called this ocularcentrism into question.[9] This project accepts Jay's critique, but argues that taste emerges as a "minor" language running lateral to the dynamics of the sublime that characterize the power and limits of vision. In this context, taste became an increasingly marginalized faculty, conveniently agglomerating the motley flotsam and jetsam of negations that modernism produces in its journey towards an increasingly purified present moment. As a dependable container for everything boring, stultifying, regressive, ephemeral, trendy, middle-class, outdated, soft, lowbrow, humanist, and weak, modernist taste can verge on the oxymoronic, since being modernist often seems to depend on rejecting taste in all of its forms. According to

[9] See the opening paragraph of *Downcast Eyes*.

Kant, taste performs the task of "clipping [genius's] wings and making it well-behaved or polished." Framed in this manner, to be modernist is to be unconstrained by taste, to fly by those nets. Yet if this is the case, taste also exerts a negative pull on the aesthetic ideologies that produced some of modernism's greatest works. The ways in which taste persists, and indeed thrives, as a faculty of perception despite the overt attempts to attack taste as an outdated concept is the story this project seeks to tell.

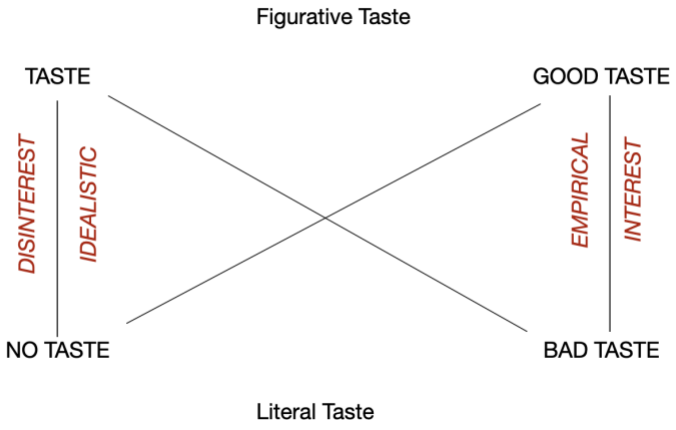
Insofar as taste never goes away, but also does not assert itself as a faculty that would displace vision as a dominant mode for characterizing modernist aesthetic practice, this project will resist the tendency to overstate the centrality of taste to modernism. This would not only amount to a factual error—visuality is indeed the major "sense" of modernism—but would also mischaracterize the unique potency that the faculty of taste retains in this particular historical moment. Indeed, despite my honest attempts to position taste as a clear concept with a distinct form that is consistent across disparate contexts, I conclude that modernist taste is many different things. Thus, I will not be offering any positive arguments along the lines of "Modernists had a taste for the fragmentary, the exotic, the ugly, the shocking, etc." Rather than isolating and defining the myriad predicates of taste, I will instead attend to taste itself as the unstable faculty of experience that enables a profound disruption and negation of aesthetic standards. While this proved difficult from an argumentative standpoint, it nevertheless provides a novel approach to understanding how modernism produces its more salient aesthetic statements through negation. Exploring modernist taste entails attending to the *processes* of negation as they play out symbolically and physiologically—eating, after all, is a primal process of negation—while resisting the temptation to collate and "digest" those negatives into a homogenized conception of taste.

Indeed, it must be said that academic publications on food and philosophy often overstate their claims, which can generate embarrassment or discomfort in readers (myself included) who, not without reason, perceive that the carnal acts of eating and drinking have no straightforward place in the realm of rationality, a domain reserved for the distal senses since at least Plato. And yet I understand the impulse to make strong philosophical claims about activities central to our physical survival, if only because, by an inverse logic, I want philosophy to be relevant to these foundational parts of our humanity. This project, then, often finds itself explaining or at least articulating the force-field of that tension—between the relevance and irrelevance of taste. For taste, while it is undoubtedly connected to eating, is in some ways the least important aspect of the digestive process: we can sustain ourselves on tasteless mush in a pinch, but we cannot live on sweetness and light. Thus, taste itself contains this tension between relevance and irrelevance, much as it contains the tension between literal and figural.

The original hypothesis of this project was that in literary modernism, literal taste and figurative taste collapse into a single faculty, as taste in its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century guise denatured into its material referent. The effect would be that the physical processes of tasting and eating become elevated to the realm of the aesthetic; and conversely, the aesthetic process can be understood as an extension of the processes of self-preservation and physical assimilation. Arguments for the relevance of taste often cite the many moments in the modernist canon in which moments of tasting, eating, cooking, drinking, and shitting ascend to the representational field in ways that blithely elude negation, as tropes that populate the plots of novels, the lines of poems, and the fantasy worlds of myriad narrators and characters. Indeed, the somewhat recent recognition that food exists in the poems and novels of modernism (not just madeleines, boeuf en daube, and kidneys) has given rise to a genre of criticism that meticulously

tracks the moments in which cheese rinds, gurgling stomachs, and fruit bowls take the literary stage. This work, which falls under the loose heading of "food studies," is a welcome corrective to the dematerializing tendencies of much literary criticism. Nicola Humble's The Literature of Food is representative. Arguing that food in modernist texts "plays a considerably more central and more significant role in the form and aesthetics of modernism" than its iconic moments suggest, Humble proceeds to read food across Cézanne, Picasso, Matisse, Stein, Mansfield, Lehmann, Woolf, H.D., Joyce, Lawrence, and Eliot, treating it variously as "an index of modernity, an irreducible image, a despised facet of popular culture, an incarnation of sexual pleasure, a form of religious iconography and a sign of ethnic and national identity." The result is a compelling demonstration that food matters. But the rigorous collation of tropic evidence tends to obscure the deeper question of how food, eating, and literal taste affect the forms of modernism—the question this project takes up. To pursue it requires a different methodological orientation: not the collection of moments in which food appears, but the analysis of how literal taste exerts pressure on figurative taste, generating the formal disturbances that the close readings of subsequent chapters will trace.

More straightforwardly: this is not a dissertation about food and modernism. It is a dissertation about *taste* and modernism, and much of the theoretical work that follows aims to distinguish taste from eating, even as it tries to register the pressure that the materiality of taste, eating, and digestion exerts on the more idealized tradition of aesthetic taste. Central to my argument is that the concept of taste, a metaphor for aesthetic experience, faces increasing pressure from its material referent, literal taste—the actual object of food—and the wide range of social and cultural functions related to its preparation, serving, and consumption. Therefore, many of my readings start with moments of eating, not because eating symbolizes a new form of modernist taste, but because the presence of literal taste places a strain on traditional aesthetic experience. Recognizing that tension in poetry and fiction prompts modernists to reevaluate taste as an aesthetic idea. This is very different from claiming that figurative and literal taste become identical. Instead, as moments of eating intensify that tension, they trigger a deeper reflection on the relationship between the literal and the figurative in modernist aesthetics more broadly. To return a final time to the structural rectangle above, we can plot literal and figurative taste in the following manner:



This project could thus be characterized as "a genealogy of taste," in the sense that Michael Levenson uses the term—"a genealogy, then, whose aim is not to establish pedigree, but to redeem certain lines of development which have been obscured or neglected, and which, once traced, may help restore modernity to history" (xi)—and, more specifically, to help restore taste to history. Approaching taste in this way allows us to hear Adorno's maxim ("Taste is the most accurate seismograph of historical experience") in at least three ways. First, taste can be read as a set of historically specific aesthetic preferences that grant access to the deeper categories of experience that characterize life in early twentieth-century Europe. This would imply a historicist or ideological approach that reads taste, in both its popular and refined instantiations, as symptomatic of something deeper, more material, and more temporally durable—say, class struggle or the rise of communism and fascism as dueling alternatives to the sclerotic liberal state. In this reading, taste proves to be ideologically produced, an illusion of freedom that crystallizes as subjective preference, yet is in fact representative of historical currents that are uncritically manifested by human subjects, often in contradiction to the pretensions of the individual will. This is an enduring way of characterizing taste—especially middlebrow taste, bad taste, fashion, or the "merely tasteful"—dating back almost to the concept's inception. As discussed above, at the turn of the century, Georg Simmel was the most prominent thinker diagnosing the "heuristic" functions of taste and its ideological functions: his concept of fashion attempted to transpose Kant's transcendental aesthetic into modernity through a consideration of taste's conditions of possibility.

However, approaching taste as a "historic sense" enables a secondary inflection in Adorno's phrase, one more central to this project, which posits taste as a faculty for encountering and processing historical experience itself—that is, as a paradigm for critical practice with a materialist orientation. As Adorno's remark makes clear, taste itself is self-reflective, hyper-sensitive to the ways in which it can reverse into its opposite, and can therefore be structurally aligned with the practice of dialectics itself. Modernist artists and philosophers were acutely aware of taste's irreducibly split nature—not only the way good taste can revert into bad taste, but also the way in which literal taste can problematize the invocation of taste as a metaphor for aesthetic judgment. Thus the very thing that makes taste problematic can become the thing that renders it an effective way of encountering modernity. Inflected in this manner, taste is singled out as a faculty that is more sensitive to the particulars of history as they are embedded in cultural phenomena. It is not so much that understanding the "tastes" of a particular community or time period grants access to history through some unexpected portal that was too obvious to notice: for example, mass culture or other forms of popular "tastes." Rather, taste as a mode of perception allows us to encounter a full range of objects, including poems and novels central to the modernist canon, in such a way that their historical nature is made manifest. No longer an unqualified good which might grant access to universal ideas of beauty via a legible *sensus communis*, taste transforms into a faculty attuned to the very processes of sublimation that would attempt to generate the universal from the particular. Rather than mediate those contradictions, as taste does in Kant, I will argue that modernist taste intensifies them. Put another way: taste becomes a problem rather than a solution.

These two ways of reading Adorno's maxim are not mutually exclusive. They are, in fact, related by considering a third way in which Adorno's maxim positions the unique qualities of taste as a faculty of experience. Taste is a "seismograph," attuned to subterranean rupture, uniquely able to register upheaval and change. The instrument's most obvious vocation is

retrospective: it records the tremor after the fault has slipped, the aftershock by which a rupture already accomplished continues to disturb the surface. Much of what follows reads taste in exactly this register, contrasting how vision remains strenuously attuned to the surface and the immediate present while taste registers the tectonic shifts beneath it (formally speaking, narrative as such) and the persistence of the past as it disturbs the present. But a seismograph also registers the foreshock—the tremor that is not the rupture itself but the sign of one accumulating, legible only as disturbance and never as the event it portends. In this forward-facing capacity, taste registers not the archaic remainder that the present has repressed but the suppressed possibility that the present cannot yet accommodate: a future that makes itself felt only as the strain it places on the existing order, available to perception solely as what that order forecloses. This is the same negativity working in the opposite direction. Whether it faces the no-longer or the not-yet, taste registers what is not present in the visual field—what has been buried or what has been refused—and in neither case does it deliver that content positively. The final section will follow the needle as it swings forward, toward a possibility that can appear, within the world of the text, only as its own foreclosure.

The three sections of this project are organized to track this dual movement of limit and catalyst. Each section locates taste at a different point in its decomposition: as the residual aesthetic norm whose collapse Ford diagnoses; as the visceral material Lewis attempts to weaponize against the very tradition that produced it; and as the site from which West stages an immanent critique of modernist aesthetics altogether. Taste does not develop progressively across these sections, nor does it culminate in a stable concept. It registers, in each case, a different inflection of the strain it places on modernism itself. That the three sections nevertheless converge on a single document was not by design. The first edition of *Blast*, published in London in June of 1914, includes work by all three of the authors I take up: Ford Madox Ford, the focus of GOOD TASTE; Wyndham Lewis, the central figure of BAD TASTE; and Rebecca West, the primary focus of AFTER TASTE. In retrospect, I have come to understand *Blast* as the crucial document of taste in early modernism—a single issue of a short-lived magazine that registers, in compressed form, the contradictions this project tracks across a decade and a half of writing. I address it directly in Chapter 4.

GOOD TASTE comprises two chapters. In Chapter 1, "Queer Potatoes and Goodly Apples," I read Ford Madox Ford as the figure who diagnoses the disintegration of traditional aesthetic taste into the hollowed-out norms of bourgeois manners. Focusing on Ford's early poetry, his most important critical essay, "On Impressionism," a late collaborative novel with Conrad, *The Inheritors*, and *The Good Soldier,* I argue that taste takes the form of a melancholic longing for a receding public sphere and the concomitant social norms by which it was once underwritten, even while it is rehabilitated as a materialist orientation that both grounds the possibility of visual impressionism and marks out its limits. Taking Ford's obsession with potatoes and apples as a pretext, Chapter 2, "The Historic Sense," makes broader claims about the relationship between impressionism (both literary and visual) and history more generally. Analyzing a series of Cézanne still-lifes and landscapes through the lens of modernist "tastemakers," Roger Fry and Clive Bell, I conclude GOOD TASTE by arguing for a reconceptualization of taste as a "historic sense," finely attuned to the uncomfortable persistence of material contradictions, which vision can only register as "queer effects" and epistemological errors.

BAD TASTE comprises two chapters about the early work of Wyndham Lewis. While Ford represented and dramatized the deterioration of nineteenth-century formal codes of "good

taste," even as taste persisted in a more sensible affective dimension, Wyndham Lewis activates taste as part of his aggressive aesthetic agenda. No longer confined to a faculty of apprehension, taste becomes mobilized as a visceral metaphor for the production of art itself, which, for Lewis, is an act of violent and messy creation. Chapter 3, "An Immoveable Feast," reads Hemingway's portrait of Lewis alongside Lewis's own early fiction in order to expound an aesthetics of "nastiness." Taking Hemingway's failed attempt to render Lewis as a "nasty" object as a point of entry, I argue that nastiness names a mode of the disgusting in which the object overtakes its own representation, collapsing the distance on which Kantian taste depends—a dynamic Lewis stages, in the early *Wild Body* stories, as a contest between the seeing eye and a recalcitrant reality that refuses to be digested. What looks like mere shock or stylistic failure thus turns out to be a deliberate technique, one that conscripts the reader into the very processes of assimilation and indigestion the stories depict. Chapter 4, "The Good, The Bad and The Tasteful," which focuses on *Blast 1*, *Blast 2*, and *The Caliph's Design*, explores Lewis's elaborate but incoherent critique of "tastefulness," and his concomitant attempt to forge a new aesthetic of disgust based on "the taste," a mode of creation that engages the object in an attempt to assimilate it and shape it to the artistic will. Tracking Lewis's polemics against Roger Fry's connoisseurship and the "tasteful" arrangements of Cubist still life, I argue that he does not abandon taste so much as split it—negating its weak, receptive form (the "dilettante or taster") while refashioning it into an active, digestive faculty constitutive of creation itself. This double movement, at once a revolution and a reformation in taste, both structures Lewis's contradictory aesthetic program and sets the terms for the violent, indigestible mode of creation that culminates in *Tarr*.

AFTER TASTE comprises two chapters, which focus, respectively, on Wyndham Lewis's first novel, *Tarr,* and Rebecca West's first published short story, "Indissoluble Matrimony." Read together, *and* against each other, these two works offer a comprehensive approach to taste in its productive modernist formulation. As the section title indicates, however, this modernist approach ultimately entails leaving taste behind, even as the texts continue to register its presence—and, in West's case, register it at its most attenuated, as a freedom legible only through the foreclosure that prevents its arrival. In this way, "afterness" becomes integral to taste's concept, though Lewis and West will sharply differ in their management of this temporality. Chapter 5, "The Primitive Sense," opens by contextualizing Lewis's sense of taste within a broader philosophical discussion of its relationship to the "primitive," in particular, Freud's notion of "civilization" and Adorno's idea of the primitive as it relates to the concepts of taste, mimesis, and beauty. In *Tarr*, I read Lewis's representations of violence, typified in the brutal rape of the character Bertha, as a modality of "disgusting mimesis," a form that demonstrates the threat of violence inherent to the literalization of taste. Lewis, I argue, presents us with the most distinct and complete form of modernist taste, culminating in an aggressive, violent, digestive aesthetic creation that, in turn, produces a novel that remains indigestible to this day. In Chapter 6, "Beyond Taste," I return to the publication of *Blast 1*, but focus on Rebecca West's short story "Indissoluble Matrimony," reading it as an immanent critique of Lewis's digestive aesthetics as they culminate in *Tarr*. Although it is traditionally read as a "Vorticist" text, I understand West's portrait of Evadne Silverton as a critique, from within, of the chauvinist underpinnings of Vorticist aesthetics, most notably in its management of narrative, time and depth as forces that cannot be sublimated into the abstract surfaces fantasized by Vorticism. These arguments are hashed out over the middle-class dining table but spill over into larger debates about racism, sexism, and the possibility of socialist revolution as *objective*, *material* universality—as opposed to Kant's subjective, transcendental universality. This

transition to taste as the site of material universality inaugurates a shift beyond taste, insofar as it no longer functions merely as an epistemological faculty, but rather as an ontological feature embedded within the objective framework of art itself.

It is worth returning, in closing, to the madeleine. Read in light of what has followed, the scene no longer looks like the canonical demonstration of taste's mnemonic power, in which the sensual triggers the symbolic and the past is recovered through the body. It looks instead like a sustained dramatization of the constitutive instability this introduction has been tracking. The narrator's taste of the tea-soaked crumb does not unify literal and figurative taste; it activates the tension between them, deferring the object of memory, frustrating the work of figuration, and opening a zone in which sensation and signification refuse to align. What Proust gives us, in other words, is not a recovery but a registration—the seismograph at work. The chapters that follow will track this same registration across a small group of authors whose names are rarely attached to the project of theorizing taste: Ford Madox Ford, who watches the codes of good taste decompose and finds in their residue a materialist orientation toward history; Wyndham Lewis, who tries to weaponize taste as an aesthetic of disgust and, in the attempt, produces a body of work that cannot be metabolized; and Rebecca West, who turns the dining table into the site of an immanent critique of Vorticism's most chauvinist fantasies. Across these readings, modernist taste will not consolidate into a single concept. It will instead remain what it has been throughout this introduction: a faculty whose value lies in its refusal to resolve the contradictions it registers. That refusal, I want to suggest, is precisely what makes taste indispensable to a critical practice attuned to history. The dominant visual aesthetics of modernism, with its drive toward purified perception and immediate presence, can render the new but tends to occlude the historical conditions of its own emergence. Taste, marginalized and "minor," retains a different sensitivity. It registers the tremors that vision, fixed on the surface, cannot detect.

SECTION 1

GOOD TASTE: FORD MADOX FORD AND THE END OF TASTE

It might seem unfair to align a single figure with the end of taste, especially someone as technically sophisticated and self-consciously formal as Ford Madox Ford. In the following chapters, I will argue that Ford does not so much *cause* the end of taste as register its historical exhaustion as a faculty for experiencing beauty. In my reading, "Impressionism" is not a literary technique merely enthralled by the precision of visuality, the possibility of immediacy, and the priority of the perceiving subject, but is instead a mode of representation structured by a dialectic between the promises of visuality and the material and historical factors that limit its capacity to narrate shared human experience. Thus Ford writes, "Impressionism can get its strongest effects by using beforehand a great deal of what one may call non-Impressionism." The first chapter of this section, therefore, will attend to the patterns of "non-Impressionism"—in particular, quotidian moments involving food and eating—which subtend one of the most important literary movements of early modernism. This argument culminates in *The Good Soldier*, where the narrator John Dowell's allegiance to vision—his inability to taste the "rottenness" beneath the "goodly" surface of his social world—negatively traces modernist taste as the faculty that indexes the truth-content of what a strictly visual Impressionism can only register as queer.

Chapter Two digresses from the litany of concrete instances of food and eating in order to elaborate a more general hermeneutics of taste, which my larger argument proposes to be a latent but persistent alternative to the modes of signification that tend to dominate readings of modernist texts. I will argue that the moments of tasting and eating under discussion offer a model for better understanding what Ford described as his "one unflinching aim—to register my own times in terms of my own time." Whereas vision proves to be a powerful sense for registering the fleeting present moment, taste emerges as a sense that registers what vision cannot—namely, history itself, and the mechanics of (tragic) memory through which we experience it.

The chapter begins with Hegel's notion of historical progress as a "bitter draught" that nations must consume—knowledge that arrives too late to benefit those who cultivated it. With this metaphor of taste as a form of belated or incomplete historical knowledge as a conceptual frame, I argue that Ford's *The Inheritors* dramatizes the tension between visual Impressionism's focus on the fleeting present and its inability to capture historical depth. Ford "solves" this tension through the science fiction device of the Fourth Dimension. But this solution is as unsatisfactory as it is illuminating for the way it crudely compresses the spatial and temporal components of representation by way of recourse to the supernatural. I return to *The Good Soldier* here under a different aspect: where Chapter 1 reads Dowell's narration for the limits of vision, Chapter 2 reads the novel's obsessive repetition of August 4th as Ford's attempt to register historical time itself—the war and the lost common culture it severs—through a technique that taste, rather than vision, is equipped to perceive.

To complete my exploration of how taste excavates the tension between space and time, surface and depth, I turn to a series of Cézanne's still life paintings, particularly those featuring apples, through interpretations by Clive Bell, Roger Fry, and T.J. Clark. All three critics recognize a metaphysical dimension in Cézanne's "imperfections," which index historical determinations that persist unseen in the present moment. Thus my central argument is that modernist taste differs from Kant's aesthetic judgment: rather than aspiring to universal beauty,

it becomes a faculty for recognizing the pressure of history on the present of narration and the surface of the canvas. Taste, unlike vision, takes time. I propose a "hermeneutics of taste" as an alternative mode of signification in modernist texts, one attuned to quotidian details and material contradictions rather than the stark metaphysics of the sublime. This modernist sensibility registers history through sensual particulars that resist incorporation into universalizing frameworks, all the while intimating the emergence of a new kind of beauty.

CHAPTER 1

The Limits of Impressionism and the Materiality of Taste in Ford Madox Ford

Queer Potatoes and Goodly Apples

> I have, I suppose, myself thought more queer thoughts when digging potatoes than at any other time during my existence.
>
> —Ford Madox Ford

In September 1920, recovering from the psychological effects of the war alongside the social fallout of his failed marriage with Violet Hunt, Ford Madox Ford retreated with Stella Bowen to Red Ford, the idyllic "green nook" of which he dreamed during the war. While there he began writing essays that would eventually be collected in *No Enemy,* a book which deals with the enduring presence of wartime trauma through visions of ruptured pastoral landscapes. He also found time to write *A House*, "a long poem […] of a Fairy Tale type." Ford's poetry is now almost uniformly ignored. Compared to his contemporaries Pound and Eliot, his verse can feel outdated, plodding, and aloof. But in 1921 *A House* won *Poetry* magazine's prize for best poem of the year (*Dual Life* 87). It anticipates the themes of post-war cultural fracture and psychological fragmentation more famously described in *The Waste Land.* The primary structural conceit is a country house emptied of its prewar vibrancy, suffering the effects of time and taxes, and now populated by a host of things and people all awkwardly coming to terms with their postwar world. To emphasize the absence of a single organizing subjectivity, the poem is voiced by the house itself, its generic occupants "Himself" and "Herself," the cat, the dog, the rooster, the milch-goat, the tree and the nightingale. Here's the cat:

> Over the hearth with my 'minishing eyes I muse; until after
> the last coal dies.
> Every tunnel of the mouse,
> every channel of the cricket,
> I have smelt,
> I have felt
> the secret shifting of the mouldered rafter,
> and heard
> every bird in the thicket.
> I see
> you
> Nightingale up in the tree!
> …
> I, born of a race of strange things,
> of deserts, great temples, great kings,
> in the hot sands where the nightingale never sings! (*Collected Poems* 292)

In a landscape insistently bereft of both sensorial interest and a robust phenomenological subjectivity, it is striking to find a list of the senses: smelt, felt, heard, see. It is also striking that the speaker of the poem actually sees the Nightingale, since this particular bird is conventionally kept out of sight in order to make way for a flight of fancy. But in this instance it is taste rather

than vision that is absent from the list of the senses, and its absence exerts a negative pull on the stanza, structuring the plot and marking its representational limit. Cats eat birds, and the action driving the stanza is the cat's search for food. Had the Nightingale been "tasted," the cat would not have been navigating hidden passageways, but likely curled up for an afternoon nap. In this sense, taste's receding possibility is responsible for the phenomenological bravado of the opening lines. And yet, the reader also shares in the cat's disappointment upon realizing that the nightingale is out of reach, as the poem shifts, just a few lines down, from the irregular particularity of sensorial prowess to the clumsily rhymed and metrically stagnant revelry provoked by competing generic symbols. So long as the bird can only be seen rather than tasted, a metaphor rather than dinner, taste stands in as the receding possibility of a phenomenologically rich engagement with the world, here traded for conventional symbols and bad verse.[10]

This reading might be making too much of taste's mere absence, if it were not that Ford at the time had become obsessed with food, assiduously maintaining a kitchen garden and spending long hours in his kitchen preparing his dinner. At a minimum, these tasks provided Ford with a welcome distraction from the hectic pace of urban life: a way for him to pass the time while becoming a writer once again. Yet Gringoire, the Fordian protagonist of *No Enemy*, assigns them a surprisingly grand social purpose, "[proposing] to save the world by intensive kitchen gardening and exquisite but economical cookery" (8). The claim is meant only partly in jest. He argues that the war was in fact "merely a matter of food" (48), the result of a relatively barren Prussia not being able to produce enough food for its own population of "prolific breeders," and Germany, addicted to low-cost labor and subsidies to manufacturers, being unable to match wages to an unexpected rise in food costs. Thus Gringoire warns "that what danger there is to the world and us is a food danger" (48-9). And he proposes a solution:

> Humanity would be saved - if it was to be saved - by good cooking, intensive horti-, as opposed to agri-culture. And of course by the abstract thinking and the arts. And the avoidance of waste. Above all by the avoidance of waste. (51)

One would assume, like the prevailing contemporary discourse on food scarcity, that the solution to world hunger would be best solved through agricultural reform. Yet Ford's proposal is decidedly small scale: a plea for gardening, less a shift in the objective conditions of production than in subjective comportment.[11] Efficacy aside, the shift is interesting for the way that it links itself to an aesthetic solution through their shared economies—namely, the avoidance of waste. Horticulture avoids waste in a very straightforward, physical manner: there are no animals. But there is also no economic waste: no market, no system of exchange, no commodification. In Ford's pastoral idyll, horticulture represents both a subjective connection to the rhythms of earth, as well as an objective disjunction from a market that would appropriate its products under the logic of commodification and supply and demand.

In contrast to this enthusiastic endorsement of gardening, Ford's invocation of his own trade feels surprisingly terse: "And of course by the abstract thinking and the arts." But the

---

[10] In 1934, Ford published *It was the Nightingale*, a memoir fully absorbed by nostalgia for his life as a writer before the war. The auspicious past tense of the title implies that Nightingales are no longer possible in a post-war world, after learning "that beneath Ordered Life Itself was stretched, the merest film with, beneath it, the abysses of Chaos."

[11] Gringoire's small-scale approach is similar to ideas proposed by Peter Kropotkin in *The Conquest of Bread* and *Mutual Aid*. In chapter 2, I will return to Kropotkin's influence on Ford's notion of the "historical sense."

offhand brevity feels appropriate when directly followed by a demand to avoid waste. Perhaps the careless invocation of abstraction and the arts is meant to compensate for the tight economy of material consumption, offering a minor relief from a system that seems to offer no outlet beyond its own perpetuation. Or, perhaps Ford is claiming that the arts participate in a form of abstraction that does not produce waste in the same ways as agricultural commodities. The ways in which *No Enemy* refuses its generic category of war memoir imply that it is some combination of both: it avoids representational "waste" by not indulging in the stock clichés of tragic heroism, while also carving out a space of subjectivity that feels fully humanized. As Gringoire puts it after being pressed to provide graphic memories of battle scenes: "But the stuff of war-reminiscences concerns itself almost as much with what war has made of a man as with the pictures that he saw." This evasion, while primarily a rebuke of the audience for such memoirs, also evokes Ford's persistent difficulty in recalling those years, as the effects of war, in both his novels and non-fiction, find expression through silence and absence, rather than through loud shouts of victory or scenes of tragedy. Instead, these immediate postwar pieces emphasize, on the one hand, a refusal of hyperbolic tragedy that would redeem the war as heroic, and on the other hand, a commitment to rebuilding the subject through an attention to quotidian practices that do very little signifying whatsoever. What does a two-page recipe for *noisettes de mutton* and *Fritto Misto* mean? In the context of *No Enemy*, such a practice appears valuable in so far as it eludes and resists the economy of signification altogether.

In his 1914 essay "On Impressionism," Ford condemns the "dangerous" slide from concrete experiences that signify in no particular direction to a conventional symbolic realm that fails to account for the myriad potentialities inherent in mundane activity.

> I have, I suppose, myself thought more queer thoughts when digging potatoes than at any other time during my existence. It is, for instance, very queer if you are digging potatoes in the late evening, when it has grown cool after a very hot day, to thrust your hand into the earth after a potato and to find that the earth is quite warm—is about flesh-heat. Of course, the clods would be warm because the sun would have been shining on them all day, and the air gives up its heat much quicker than the earth. But it is none the less a queer sensation.
>
> Now, if the person experiencing the sensation have what I call a peasant intelligence, he will just say that it is a queer thing and will store it away in his mind along with his other experiences. It will go along with the remembrance of hard frost, of fantastic icicles, the death of rabbits pursued by stoats, the singularly quick ripening of corn in a certain year, the fact that such and such man was overlooked by a wise woman and so died because, his wife, being tired of him, had paid the wise woman five sixpences which she had laid upon the table in the form of a crown; or along with the other fact that a certain man murdered his wife by the use of a packet of sheep dip which he had stolen from a field where the farmer was employed at lamb washing. All the remembrances he will have in his mind, not classified under any headings of social reformers, or generalized so as to fulfill any fancied moral law.
>
> But the really dangerous person for the artist will be the gentleman who, chancing to put his hand into the ground and to find it about as warm as the breast of a woman, if you could thrust your hand between her chest and her stays, will not accept the experience as an experience, but will start talking about the breast of mother-nature. (272-3)

Like the cat in *A House,* the gentleman misses out on a more authentic "experience" of the

material world by indulging in the stock Romantic trope of "mother-nature." Ford attributes this to a mental "preoccupation" with what is "good form, of what is good feeling, of what is even good fellowship" (271). The repetition of "good," of course, calls to mind *The Good Solider*, on which Ford was contemporaneously putting the finishing touches. This above vignette condenses the character of Edward Ashburnham into a few paragraphs, revealing how his rigid adherence to accepted forms is in fact a masquerade hiding his sexual motives: the startling sexual aggression that precedes the gentleman's metaphoric leap indicates that such abstraction is not *just* empty form, but is in fact buttressed by the easy assertion of social and sexual power. And the collusion of the violated woman and mother-nature implies that the material world exists merely for his physical, and representational, consumption. Put another way, his mode of reading is as aggressive as his sexual appetite.

In contrast, the metonymic wandering of the peasant intelligence forgoes representational clarity, "generalization" and "classification," and "[accepts] the experience as experience." Rather than digging up universal symbols from the soil, the peasant remains immersed in the everyday accumulation of queer facts and sensations, much like the Impressionist, who "exists to render those queer effects of real life" (263).[12] Indeed, his mode of reading seems to reflect the object of its attention: like potatoes sprouting other potatoes, ripening under the soil and hidden from the human gaze, the warmth of the soil against his hand sprouts a cluster of fragmentary stories that are just barely scrutable. Recalling Gringoire's argument that small-scale horticulture is consonant with an aesthetic mode that avoids waste, we could read these diffuse stories as extrinsic to a symbolic economy that proceeds by way of the production and expropriation of symbolic surplus. As Gallagher and Greenblatt have argued, earlier in the century the potato proved uniquely resistant to "the transformative wonders of the economy," and thereby remained extrinsic to "a social totality or an economic system, mired instead in the boglike ground" (134-35). Ford claims the potato's economic and social eccentricity as an aesthetic effect in its own right, thereby unearthing the potato's "queerness" in the most contemporary sense of the term. For not only does the potato stake out an alternative to the heteronormative aggression imposed by the gentleman, it also establishes its own value through its obduracy vis-à-vis a general sense of the social good as determined by the dominant political economy. In this regard, Lee Edelman's contemporary account of queerness is particularly apposite because of the way it aligns the deviance of queer "identity" with a truth that runs contrary to all forms of generalization—in particular a generalized concept of political society strictly aligned with the reproduction of the heterosexual family.

> Truth, like queerness, irreducibly linked to the 'aberrant or atypical,' to what chafes against 'normalization,' finds its value not in a good susceptible to generalization, but only in the stubborn particularity that voids every notion of a general good….its value, instead, resides in its challenge to value as defined by the social, and thus in its radical challenge to the very value of the social itself. (6)

I want to keep this stronger theoretical elaboration of queerness resonating throughout this

---

[12] This aspect of queerness also resonates with Eve Sedgwick's claim that queerness is not merely reducible to "same-sex sexual object choice," but is broadly applicable to a range of transgressive activities, perspectives, comportments and modes of signification: "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically." Tendencies, 8.

argument in order to highlight the ways in which the representational strategies of Impressionism enables possible (but not always realized) alternatives to the dominant social order. In this particular instance, the peasant is able to experience an unclassifiable queerness free from aesthetic and moral coding, whereas the gentleman, constricted by social norms, immediately sublimates his experience as a form of aesthetic and social—not to mention, heteronormative—aggression.

This is a surprising contrast given that the peasant is the one whose relationship to the potato field is largely determined by his material existence, while the gentleman's "chance" encounter with the warm earth has little to do with its agricultural function. Ford effectively inverts the pastoral mode that he seemed to be indulging in, by accusing the urban gentleman of a thoughtless *representational* voracity, while imbuing the peasant with an aesthetic intelligence seemingly unmoored from the pressing demands of self-preservation. That is, the peasant is not consumed by the anticipation of eating the potatoes he has just dug, but is instead given an imaginary freedom that sprouts an abundance of potential stories that imply a depth and complexity of character which sharply contrasts with the shallow formality and aesthetic predictability of the English gentleman. Among other reasons, this is a "queer" thought because it reverses the conventional understanding of taste, rooted in Kantian aesthetics, which divorces the capacity for aesthetic pleasure from the realm of necessity. As Kant famously writes in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, "Only when the need is satisfied can one distinguish who among the many has taste or does not." This is because "all interest presupposes a need or produces one; and as a determining ground of approval it no longer leaves the judgment of the object free" (94). But Ford's peasant is able to engage the world aesthetically—*freely*—not despite, but *because* his mind is occupied by the repetitive task of digging potatoes, rather than "preoccupied" by the social formalities that have predetermined the gentleman's consciousness.[13] Thus in registering the historical strain on the Kantian pose—the "as if" that allows the urban gentleman's smooth passage to symbolism—and acknowledging its limit, its formal vacuity, Ford seems primed to reclaim it as a material comportment, thereby inverting the Kantian definition of taste and with it all of reflective judgment.

But Ford also seems to shrink from the "as if," because even when invoked in this materialist guise, it draws attention to our inability to link concrete experiences to aesthetic effects that have a universal appeal—a process that is as "dangerous" as it is alluring. Eight years before publishing the Impressionism essay, Ford evokes this allure by representing himself indulging in the same lazy abstractions practiced by the gentleman. The passage from *The Heart of the Country* is strikingly similar to the passage from "On Impressionism":

> The air having grown cool after the sun had set, I have thrust my hand into the earth to feel for potatoes, and have found it flesh-warm. After the heat seemed to have departed from the world it was like suddenly coming into contact with a living being. I am, perhaps, over fanciful, but to me it has always seemed like finding the breast of a woman—*as if* Nature herself had taken a body and the heat of life. (85 my emphasis)

The younger Ford seems to laud this experience of digging potatoes as much as the later passage

[13] For a theorist like Pierre Bourdieu, this is pointing out the obvious: Kant's "universal subject," capable of reflective judgment, is actually a social construct built on a series of material exclusions. But my reading runs slightly askew to Bourdieu, since the peasant is not merely excluded from the aesthetic; he is, rather, actively involved in constructing an alternative form of aesthetic experience irreducible to mere necessity. See "Postscript: Towards a 'Vulgar' Critique of 'Pure' Critiques" in *Distinction*.

condemns it. Part of this might just entail Ford's desire to distance himself from a pose that, now, eight years later, he finds problematic. Yet if so, the mode of coming-clean is too subtle to not draw scrutiny. Why not just apologize? The later passage is thus not so much a reneging of a previous position, but a complicated revision which ricochets in many different directions. For while we may see a positive evolution in Ford's ability to think critically about the conditions of his aesthetic gaze—for example, metaphors about mother-nature contain a history of violence against women—layering the earlier passage onto the latter also unearths a melancholic longing for an experiential mode that unproblematically aligns real experience with aesthetic figuration, thereby highlighting how the later passage's critical self-awareness depends on a shift away from the first person and the exclusion of the *as if*. Instead, we get Ford's cool scientific explanation—"the clods would be warm because the sun would have been shining on them all day"—which marks out a correct if rather limited representational endgame: "But it is none the less a queer sensation."

The smallness of this claim is significant for the way it displays Ford's careful management of what is left for art to do: *to render those queer effects of real life*. Thus Ford's revision positions Impressionism not as a solution to the problem posed by the historical strain on Kantian reflective judgment; rather, Impressionism seems to merely reinscribe the epistemological limits of Kant's categorical antinomies as contradictions in real life. That is, the disjoint between subjective experience and a larger totality is just *how it is*. Potatoes, tasteless and boring pieces of matter that they are, thereby transform this canonical description of Impressionist technique into a statement about the ontological contradiction that both necessitates Impressionism as a representational practice and marks out its epistemological limit. Which is to say, queer effects can be squared with reality because potatoes are already queer: the queer potato resembles Kant's thing-in-itself as it appears to the subject, now fully embedded in phenomenal reality.[14] Which, in its contradictory rendering of Kant's philosophical paradigm, does not elevate the potato to a well-scrubbed metaphysical status, but rather indicates that "things"—and here, the potato is functioning as an archetypal thing—operate within the phenomenal realm with a powerful but receding presence that was once reserved for the noumenal "thing-in-itself." It turns out, therefore, that digging for potatoes unearths Kant's theory of taste, not as a solution that would bridge the realms of sensation and signification, but rather as an updated description of the categorical antinomy that gave rise to reflective judgment in the first place.[15] No longer offering access to the universal, "taste" in this modernist guise

[14] It is also useful to spin this out in a Marxist vernacular, connecting the queerness of the potato to the "unnatural" self-division cause by forces of commodification. By 1900, the potato had largely shed its eccentric status and had become integrated into the urban economy—particularly in London, where fish and chips became Britain's first fast-food, and a foundational staple of the working-class diet. The so-called "lazy root" enabled increased social mobility for people once tied to the rural farm: a mobility that was feared by the Edwardian upper class, but also conducive to a rapidly urbanizing system of capitalism, as political economy comfortably diverged from the moral economy it once claimed as its foundation. Thus both encounters with the potato are slightly out of joint, in large part because the potato itself is no longer a stable signifier for a rural materiality, but is, rather, fully penetrated by the abstractions of exchange-value in urban London.

[15] Given his reputation as a feudalist, it is perhaps surprising that Ford's appraisal of "peasant intelligence" finds its closest theoretical match in Georg Lukács's exposition of the proletariat in the "Reification" essay as the subject-object of history: "The only effective superiority of the proletariat, its

instead draws attention to the stubborn particularity of experience and, in turn, the heightened difficulty of that aesthetic act.

Similarly queer thoughts crop up throughout Ford's poetry, whenever digging is involved. In "From the Soil," The Small Farmer contemplates the futility of labor that merely sustains life and cannot reify into products that outlast the repetitive cycles of consumption—what Hannah Arendt calls "the work of our hands [*homo faber*] as distinguished from the labor of our bodies [*animal laborans*]" (36):

> I wonder why we toiled upon the earth
> From sunrise until sunset, dug and delved,
> Crook-backed, cramp-fingered, making little marks
> On the unmoving bosoms of the hills,
> And nothing came of it. And the men
> In the same places dug and delved and ended
> As we have done; and other men just there
> Shall do the self-same things until the end.
> I wonder why we did it… underneath
> The grass that fed my sheep, I often thought
> Something lay hidden, some sinister thing
> Lay looking up at us as if it looked
> upwards thro' quiet waters; that it saw
> us futile toilers scratching lines
> And doing nothing. And maybe it smiled
> because it knew that we must come to this… (187)

As in the Impressionism essay, where the rhizomatic character of the potatoes produces a metonymic sprouting of storylines, here the repetitive process of tilling the earth produces two opening quatrains which very nearly repeat one another: a series of men digging and delving, making little marks, and going nowhere. The irregular triple rhyme in the second quatrain—men, ended, end (the only "rhyme" in the Farmer's thirty-four line soliloquy)—compounds this sense of repetitive stagnation, until an ellipsis near the end of line nine announces the "queer" thought. One of those "other men" has migrated "underneath" the opening quatrains and reappeared as a sentient corpse, now a part of the earth that feeds the sheep: a queer twist on the marxian ideal of recognizing one's self in one's labor, yet also consonant with the marxist critique of reification, as the corpse becomes merely "something," "some sinister thing," and finally "that Thing." Perhaps the "thing-in-itself?"

The worry here isn't that the Farmer will become a thing in the future; rather, it's that the Farmer is already that Thing, as the "we" in the last line implies. He is locked in a repetition, a

---

one decisive weapon is its ability to see the social totality as a concrete historical totality; to see the reified forms as processes between men to see the immanent meaning of history that only appears negatively in the contradictions of abstract forms, to raise its positive side to consciousness and to put it into practice" (197). I bring in Lukács not to claim Ford as a Marxist, but to highlight his shared sensitivity to the persistence of Kant's antinomies in the early twentieth century. Lukács' argument turns on the way reification configures Kant's Thing-In-Itself as the unknowable totality of the capitalist system. Ford registers this unknowability as it refracts our experience of everyday phenomena. Unlike Lukács's proletariat, Ford's "peasant" is not a solution to the contradictions of capitalism; but is instead a figure for a mode of experience that is no longer possible.

return of the same, which collapses subject and object, as well as the future and the past into the present: seeing his death in the face of a corpse that has risen to the surface of his field, like a potato. It is a situation predicted by the Field Labourer earlier in the poem:

> We'll lie
> In this same goodly 'Arth, an' things goo on around us
> Much as they used to goo. (187)

In the laborer's marked speech, even that progressive verb "go" gets stuck with a nagging bit of non-progressive repetition, the "oo" commencing an empty seriality that visually resonates with "00"—the numerical equivalent of a repetition without change. And "Goo," besides being an accented version of "go," was also at the time slang for oatmeal gruel eaten by sailors and the working class. For the farmer and field laborer, things no longer go, they *goo*, they stick like oatmeal in the throat. This is repetition that turns in on itself, consuming itself, much in the same way that Arendt describes life itself, "where no beginning and no end exist and where all natural things swing in changeless, deathless repetition" (96).

However, both the starkness of the material landscape and the overwhelming sense of non-progressive, repetitive closure only set in greater relief the queer power of the farmer's vision, which proves powerful enough to see a corpse, that he cannot really see, looking back at him "thro' quiet waters."[16] And the conclusion of the poem goes even further:

> And down below that Thing lay there and smiled;
> Or no, it did not smile; it was as if
> One might have caught it smiling, but one saw
> The earth immovable, the unmoved sheep
> And senseless hedges run like little strings
> All over hill and dale…(187)

The tortured conditional phrasing that stretches over lines 2 and 3 of this excerpt illustrates the difficulty of squaring such "queer effects" with "real life," as the farmer struggles to find a causal chain that would justify his non-visual vision of a smiling corpse with the routine activity of tending sheep. Failing that, the aesthetically laden "as if" tries to shift from the merely subjective phenomenal impression to something shareable with a generic "one," but the rhetorical gesture attempt founders on "the earth immovable"—that is, the obdurate materiality of real existence, the sheep which seem not to notice, and the hedgerows which have lost whatever sense Wordsworth may have given them (not least because Wordsworth so insistently imbued them with sense!). As in *A House* and "On Impressionism," the presence of food opens a rift between two representational regimes; in this instance, between a phenomenalistic sensibility that cannot justify itself as more than mere appearance, and a brute materiality that remains impervious to such phenomenalism. This structural pattern implies that food does not merely draw attention to antinomies that would traditionally call for aesthetic solutions, but is instrumental in producing and sustaining those antinomies.

---

[16] This hyper-reflective epistemological confusion is an early example of what would later be reformulated as Impressionism's primary mode of representation. "Indeed, I suppose that Impressionism exists to render those queer effects of real life that are like so many views seen through bright glass—through glass so bright that whilst you perceive through it a landscape or a backyard, you are aware that, on its surface, it reflects a face of a person behind you. For the whole life is really like that; we are almost always in one place with our minds somewhere quite other." ("On Impressionism" 263)

The Goodly Soldier: The Time of Modernist Taste

> The queer odd jumble of negatives that forms our miserable and hopeless life.
> —Ford Madox Ford

> "For I may say that before August, 1914, I lived more through my eyes than any other sense."
> —Ford Madox Ford

I want to open my discussion of *The Good Soldier* by analyzing a typical piece of narration from John Dowell, which demonstrates how taste no longer functions as a shared set of conventional manners, nor as an aesthetic faculty that leads unproblematically to universality; rather, taste as an experiential faculty highlights the limits of Impressionism's ability to adequately represent history—in this first instance, the intimate history shared by the Dowell, Florence, Leonora and Ashburnham:

> For, if for me we were four people with the same tastes, with the same desires, acting—or no not acting—sitting here and there unanimously, isn't that the truth? If for nine years I have possessed a goodly apple that is rotten at the core and discover its rottenness only in nine years and six months less four days, isn't it true to say that for nine years I possessed a goodly apple? (34)

John Dowell's choice of the archaic "goodly" draws attention to itself as a description of mere appearance: the apple is seemingly good, but also seemingly, perhaps, not good, otherwise the apple would just be "good." Thus, though we are dealing with an apple, a piece of food after all, we can assume the "goodly" judgment has nothing to do with taste in a literal sense, since biting into an apple would immediately reveal its hidden rottenness. "This apple tastes goodly" is non-sensical: when eating is involved, it is a rotten apple, or not. However, to take John Dowell's question seriously—to sink into this parody of an epistemological quandary— is to accept the premise of an apple retaining a "goodly" appearance for almost a decade. Indeed, the overt symbolism of a deceptive apple is so strong—Garden of Eden, anyone?[17]—that it is easy to let its material and historical dimensions slip away to make room for Dowell's flurry of metaphors ("a minuet," "one of those tall ships," etc.), all of which struggle to adequate the incomprehensible dissolution of his "four-square coterie." The goodly apple metaphor seems to be struggling against itself, functioning only if we take for granted the non-sensical idea that a

---

[17] The closer reference is Antonio's speech in *The Merchant of Venice:*

> The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.
> An evil soul producing holy witness
> Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,
> A goodly apple rotten at the heart.
> O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath! (I.3.45-49)

In this referential context, it is clear that Dowell chooses *goodly* instead of *good* precisely because the apple is always already compromised by an inherent rottenness—here doubled in an anisotropic moment of signifying possibility, depending on which way the metaphor is pushed. Indeed, the overt referentiality of the metaphor renders its descriptive mark quasi-aleatory: is it referring to Dowell's social group or just to other goodly metaphors?

decade of history can leave any physical apple still looking "goodly."[18]

The metaphor's nonsensical quality is interesting for two reasons. First, it demonstrates how Dowell's protocol of judgment is predicated on a mode of experience that trades sensibility for signification, privileges distance, and is limited to vision. It is, in short, Kantian judgment. Or as Adorno helpfully summarizes Kant's notion of "disinterested pleasure": "as soon as we have the intention to eat a tasty apple, we no longer act aesthetically but rather animally or naturally, thus violating Kant's definition of the aesthetic" (*Aesthetics* 2). Yet in this passage from Ford, the insistence on vision as an organizing sense seems to overshoot its mark, both foregrounding its own limitations and implying that working within those limits is necessary for the processes of traditional figuration (metaphor) to function. If instead we insist on the materiality of the apple—something that rots, that one eats, that one can taste—the metaphor "fails" because the vehicle is logically flawed. And yet paradoxically its logical failure insures its descriptive success: the vehicle and tenor align insofar as they are both internally fractured. Put otherwise, both tenor and vehicle are "goodly." In a Kantian register, we can read Dowell's metaphor as yet another instance of Impressionism's tendency to read ontological contradictions as mistaken epistemological perceptions, prioritizing the shaping force of human cognition over and against a Real which eludes the human attempt to grasp it—both conceptually and with our mouths. Thus rather than reading Dowell's persistent "errors" as the result of perceptual mistakes, I want to suggest that they are better understood as category confusions: instances of ontological problems being registered as merely epistemological mistakes.[19] So when Dowell says, "I don't know," it indicates that he does in fact know, but just doesn't know it.

Second, the metaphor's nonsensical quality cannily reflects the novel's representational procedures more generally. Rather than working from underlying causes and tracking their effects, the structure of *The Good Soldier* is built on a series of impressions which meticulously chronicle "the sort of odd vibration that scenes in life really have," leaving their causes vague and sometimes altogether absent ("Joseph Conrad" 72). Thus, for example, on the last page of the novel, Dowell, unable to decode Nancy's catatonic behavior at the dinner table, reverts to a painterly Impressionist description: "It is very extraordinary to see the perfect flush of health on her cheeks, to see the lustre of her coiled black hair, the poise of her head upon the neck, the grace of the white hands," before adding, "that it all means nothing—that it is a picture without a meaning. Yes, it is *queer*" (161). Though Dowell has already meticulously detailed the circumstances of Nancy's disturbing mental breakdown, he refuses, in the end, to link her phenomenal behavior to a causal chain.[20] Instead, Nancy's character becomes buttressed, on the

---

[18] Insofar as it must be tasted to confirm its apparent goodness, Ford's apple is uncannily similar to Schrodinger's cat, an analogy that proposes quite another way of approaching the congealing of time and space into permanent objects. Apples, after all, are famously related to questions of physics. Is this a quantum apple?

[19] Slavoj Zizek has described this process as Hegel's deontologization of Kant. "It is not that Hegel ontologizes Kant; on the contrary, it is Kant who, insofar as he conceives the gaps as merely epistemological, continues to presuppose a fully constituted noumenal realm existing out there, and it is Hegel who deontologizes Kant, introducing a gap into the very texture of reality" (267).

[20] As Ford's biographer, Max Saunders has argued, Ashburnham's treatment of Nancy is perhaps the dark center around which the novel turns, suggesting the possibility that Nancy is in fact Ashburnham's daughter, and that incest is as unspeakable as the war.

one hand, by the empty formalities of painterly description and on the other, by the stiff adherence to conventional bourgeois manners—as Dowell harrowingly notes, she is still "utterly well-behaved as far as her knife and fork go." As with the potato in the "On Impressionism" essay, Dowell's allegiance to visual impressionism finds its limit at a queerness that cannot be squared with a coherent notion of a generally accepted reality explicitly construed in the preceding paragraph as a system of heteronormative social conventions. He writes, "Society must go on, I suppose, and society can only exist if the normal, if the virtuous, and the slightly deceitful flourish, and if the passionate, the headstrong, and the too-truthful are condemned to suicide and madness" (160-1). Dowell counts himself as belonging to this latter category, admitting: "I can't conceal from myself the fact that I loved Edward Ashburnham," a love that is thwarted by his resigned realization that, "Yes, society must go on; it must breed, like rabbits. That is what we are here for" (161). This melancholic appraisal of society's oppressive drive to reproduce itself is once again consonant with Lee Edelman's alignment of queerness with "the refusal of the coercive belief in the paramount value of futurity," by which "the queer dispossesses the social order of the ground on which it rests" (6). For Edelman, queerness does not only describe objects, but has its own phenomenological power, which "exposes the obliquity of our relation to what we experience in and as social reality, alerting us to fantasies structurally necessary to sustain it" (6-7). This comes close to describing the story's overall ironic effect, as Dowell discovers that he has mistaken the conventions of social behavior for reality. Dowell's narration is adept at cataloging queer effects and naming them as such—what Ford calls *progression d'effet*—but it consistently stops short of connecting such queerness to the world that produces them, as doing so amounts to a condemnation of the norms and activities that sustain the narrator's social position. Modernist taste could be provisionally described, in this particular context, as the aesthetic faculty that perceives the truth content of what vision can only register as queer. Or put a little differently: taste more aptly adequates the queerness of that truth.

Edelman's account is also helpful in the way that it temporalizes queerness, revealing how oppressive norms and social conventions are built on a future-oriented process of deferred pleasure and societal reproduction. In the case of *The Good Soldier*, though Dowell never successfully unburdens himself from society's oppressive modes of normalization—the panoply of mores and tastes that construct the fragile *sensus communis* of "good people"—Ford develops techniques which sublate and diffuse those norms by embedding the future into the very form of representation. In trying to create an Impressionistic effect, Ford writes, "You will observe also that you will have produced something that is very like a Futurist picture—not a Cubist picture" ("Impressionism" 264), because of the ways in which the narration compresses the temporalities of the original experience and the memory of that experience. As Nicholas Brown has noted, this distinguishes Ford's Impressionism from Conrad's, in that Ford does not merely attempt to catalog immediate sensory impressions—what the Marlowe of *Lord Jim* calls "jumbled bits of color like a damaged kaleidoscope"—but instead "shifted from the instantaneous moment of sensory perception to the diachronic space of memory" (87). Brown's analysis deftly connects this mnemonic turn to the unique affective quality of the novel as a whole: "The tug of narrative tension is provided not by anxiety over what happens next, but by the desire not to lose track of the threads one already has in hand" (90). In this sense, Ford constructs a readerly effect which prefigures modernism's more overt formal experiments with memory as an organizing paradigm for narrative development. And like Proust, Joyce, Woolf and others, Ford persistently turns to food to make it work. As a concrete example, Ford describes a lunch at a club where he

overhears a disgruntled member making "a long speech about a fish." He explains that Impressionist technique would not provide the original speech in full, but would instead translate the impression the speech left on the listener: "what you will remember is that he said that the sole was not a sole, but a blank, blank, blank plaice" ("No Enemy" 185). This blank plaice (and we must hear the pun) is then filled in with the myriad other subjective memories that crowd in on the moment, allowing the moment to resonate in multiple subjective directions.

But this is not Proustian involuntary memory, nor Joycean interior monologue, nor the fuzzy halo of Woolf's Impressionism. It is, rather, a jaggedly transparent and discordant form of memory that highlights the constructed nature of all remembered experience. For this reason, we should not follow the traditional critical routine of reducing Ford's invocation of futurism to a mere bid for relevance in a rapidly evolving avant-garde: it is commonplace to lump Ford's reference to futurism with his contemporary review of "Les Jeunes" and the inclusion of *The Good Soldier's* opening chapters in Wyndham Lewis's *Blast*, in order to position Ford as an asynchronous, even regressive, figure in 1914 London. (It must also be said that Ford relished positioning himself in just such a manner.) But taking his claim to futurist technique seriously provides a novel reading of *The Good Soldier,* one in which the infamous repetition of August 4th is not reduced to merely traumatic iterations of a future catastrophe that cannot be named—that is, August 4th, 1914, the day England entered the First World War—but is instead read as an avant-garde technique that offsets the inevitability of historical progress produced by relying on the totalizing gaze of retrospection. Brown's argument follows this latter trajectory, condemning Ford's withdrawal from the perspective of totality as absolute nostalgia, "completely independent of content." Brown continues, "Dowell doesn't want to go back to the moment when he possessed a goodly apple; he wants to return to the condition where he could regard the rotten apple as goodly. Having woken up into history, Dowell wants to go back to sleep" (91). In such moments Brown's desire for totality—ostensibly made available through the retrospective standpoint of August 4th, 1914—blinds him to Ford's subtler argument about the possibility of narrating such a historical totality at all, as well as to the myriad technical solutions that emerge in the failed attempts to do so.

Brown's argument, and many others like it, also ignore that August 4th, 1914, does not just orient *The Good Soldier* from a pre-determined future point: it is also cuts Ford's most important theoretical essay in half, and as such becomes a crucial turning point in how Ford understands, limits and justifies the representational claims of Impressionism. "On Impressionism" was published in two parts in Harold Monro's *Poetry and Drama:* the first installment in No. 6, published June 1914, and the second installment in No. 8, published December 1914. The second installment was originally planned for the No. 7 issue in September, but was delayed, ostensibly so that Ford could revise an essay which had been largely completed before the June publication.[21] In the context of both the September and December issues, Ford's essay sticks out as one of the few bits of verse or commentary that does not directly address the war, despite Monro's editorial complaint that "war monopolizes the brain" (296). This dissonance is compounded by the second installment's positioning directly after the announcement that publication of *Poetry and Drama* would be suspended for one year, as it became "increasingly evident that the attention of the public must inevitably remain fixed on

[21] An editorial note in the September issue reads: "NOTE. The continuation of Mr Ford Madox Hueffer's article, the first part of which appeared in POETRY AND DRAMA, No. 6, is held over until the December issue." (271)

issue only—the preservation of National Liberty" (322). In this context, one might have expected Ford to argue for Impressionism's relevance in the time of war. And indeed, his opening sentence could be read as such: "I have been trying to think what are the objections to Impressionism as I understand it—or rather what alternative method could be found" (323). While couched in Ford's typical understatement, this claim feels almost like an announcement of necessity when compared to the opening of the first installment, which begins: "These are merely some notes towards a working guide to Impressionism as a literary method" (171). Contrasting the two installments, one finds the subtle refinement and broader application of his theory, from a collection of writerly techniques intent on achieving a literary effect, to a method which is able to address a pan-European audience: "in Russia, in Germany, in France, in the United States" (323). In the context of O*n Impressionism,* August 4th 1914 poses an internal challenge to the stylistic protocols Ford had been developing for almost two decades, forcing him to question the value of an artistic practice intent on producing "an illusion of reality" in the context of the disintegration of Europe. Indeed, if we are to trust Ford's retrospective account of this time period, recounted in his thinly veiled 1919 memoir *No Enemy,*[22] he points to August 1914 as the month in which his dependence on vision as an organizing sense faltered for good: "For I may say that before August, 1914, I lived more through my eyes than any other sense." We are left asking which sensory organ replaces Ford's eyes?[23]

Ford does not provide a clear answer, and I am not going to argue that taste becomes dominant in any hegemonic way; rather, the foundering of vision under the pressure of world historical events seems to cannily align with the persistence of taste as a material "queerness"—often reduced to a mere example—which provides Ford the opportunity to dramatize the insufficiency of vision as a singular organizer of human experience. But of course it must be stated that there is something queer about arguing for the importance of taste in the work of a writer who so frequently insisted on the centrality of visuality to his aesthetic goals. As a literary movement, Impressionism was adamant that vision was its organizing sense. Thus Conrad pronounces, famously, "My task, which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*! That—and no more: and it is everything!" (148). Why does Conrad find it necessary to include hearing and touch when vision is so emphatically the only thing that matters? Why not also include smell and taste in the list of senses that are not all that important?[24] And why does he seem to be angrily

---

[22] Ford described *No Enemy* as "my reminiscences of active service under a thinly disguised veil of fiction" (*Letters* 204).

[23] Ford also explicitly addresses the limits of visuality in his contemporary journalism. "It is, I think, because of the hazy remoteness of the war-grounds; the impossibility of visualising anything, because of a total incapacity to believe any single thing that I read in the daily papers. […] [T]he roots of poetry draw their nourishment from seeing and from beliefs. Here I see nothing. […] This present war is just a cloud – a hideous and relieved pall of doom […] that is how I see poetry about war or about anything else. I want something to stir my emotions and something sharply visual to symbolise them. I want a gesture, a tone of the voice, a turn of the eye. I don't think I could make a poem out of fine words like avenging slaughtered saints or unsheathing freedom's sword. I cannot see things in that way." ("Literary Portraits – LIII", 335)

[24] In a similar manner, Michael Levenson notes how the forcefulness of this claim overshadows the essay's emphasis on consciousness as the necessary counterpart to Impressionism's commitment to

shouting? As usual, taste is conspicuous because of its absence, and the jumbled awkwardness of the dashes, followed shortly by a colon and a brace of exclamation points, belies an anxiety about what Impressionism must exclude if the primacy of visuality is to be sustained.[25] And yet the persistence of food makes it seem less like an exclusion, and more like a very unsuccessful act of repression, or a particularly careless dialectical negation. Indeed, for all its claims of visual immediacy, Ford concedes that at the level of technique, "Impressionism can get its strongest effects by using beforehand a great deal of what one may call non-Impressionism" ("Impressionism" 267), turning to Mr. Jones' dislike of rabbit-pies—food again!—as an example of the materialistic, non-impressionistic detritus that must be included, and then excluded, if the artist is to pull off an impressionistic effect. Or, as Dowell puts it, referring to the "sex instinct" of Edward Ashburnham, "It is a thing, with all its accidents, that must be taken for granted, as, in a novel, or a biography you take it for granted that the characters have their meals with some regularity" (79). Indeed, the degree to which Dowell was wrong to take the "sex instinct" for granted measures the importance of characters having their meals.

Dowell goes on to contrast this unremarkable "sex instinct" with "the real fierceness of desire," which closely parallels Conrad's stylistic pronouncement: "the real heat of passion long continued and withering up the soul of man is the craving for identity with the woman he loves. He desires to see with the same eyes, to touch with the same sense of touch, to hear with the same ears" (79). Like Conrad, Ford excludes taste and smell from this list of the senses; however, the list is underwritten by a "craving" that drives the entire system of desire.[26] And it is this brute, everyday craving that takes place in the "non-Impressionistic" moment of lived experience which both catalyzes the Impressionistic act, and marks out the limit of its scope. The ubiquity of such minor moments suggests that while Ford does not offer a robust phenomenology of taste that would replace or supersede that provided by vision, taste and the object of its attention, food, persist as kernels of materiality that visual impressionism and the modes of signification that it enables both depend on for their emergence and persistently exclude for their maintenance. This dialectical relationship requires a conceptual shift away from the entrenched

---

"physical, especially, visual immediacy." "On the one hand, Conrad makes a rousing rhetorical call for sensory apprehension of life's surfaces; on the other, he demands inwardness and depth — thus his return to notions such as the 'fundamental,' the 'essential,' the 'permanently enduring.'" Levenson insists, "this is a tension, not a contradiction" (1). I agree with Levenson that the relationship between depth and surface, subject and object, plays out as a stylistic tension. But my argument also makes a stronger claim: that taste compels us to confront the persistence of material contradictions that, in turn, necessitate the sort of stylistic tensions that Levenson reads in Conrad's and Ford's modernist styles. In other words, the stylistic tension signifies a *real* contradiction.

[25] This "symptomatic" reading of Conrad's "Preface" aligns with Fredric Jameson's appraisal of Conrad's Impressionism as an "aestheticizing strategy" for containing subversive historical possibilities straining to crest the surface of the text (*Political* 230). See Chapter 5, "Romance and Reification: Plot Construction and Ideological Closure in Joseph Conrad."

[26] A similar craving appears in Ford's contemporary review of "Les Jeunes and Des Imagistes" in *The Outlook*, where he praises Pound, HD and others for their brash violations of both social and poetic decorum: "One wants it desperately; it is a hunger; it is a thirst. One is too safe, in one's views, in one's house, in one's pantaloons" (*Critical* 151). But Ford cannot bring himself to quench his thirst—"I have not the courage" (151)—resigning himself, perhaps disingenuously, to pose as the anachronistic observer of literary evolution.

Kantian antinomies previously described, and into a Hegelian register, wherein taste and vision enter into a relationship of determinate negation that preconditions the representational possibilities of Impressionism as such. In this regard, taste is most often articulated, or disarticulated, in its negative form, as the site of material conditions that subtends the larger formal logic of *The Good Soldier* as a whole, as the novel strains to name a grounding historical materiality that persistently eludes its representational grasp. For the narrator Dowell, as I have shown, this plays out as an inability to narrate the "rottenness" of his immediate social circle because of his pathological commitment to vision as an organizing paradigm. Likewise, the novel as a whole strains to name the historical trauma on the horizon—the First World War, which England officially joined on August 4th, 1914—which seems an overdetermined telos, but stands only as its absent cause, as it compulsively positions every important plot point on the single unseen date, turning away from and circling around a Real that can only be approached asymptotically, leaving behind "the queer odd jumble of negatives that forms our miserable and hopeless life."

CHAPTER 2

The Historic Sense: *Pommes* and *Pommes de Terre* in Ford, Hegel, and Cézanne

> The general public, however, still likes what they know as gravity, less because they understand it as a universal world force, as simply one and constant, the conception of Kepler and other philosophers, rather as a common or garden force by which stones fall to the earth, and now by which the heavenly bodies move in their orbits. The common people are now thoroughly well-informed about all that from the pathetic tale of the apple falling before Newton's eyes. The people prefer security to heaven, forgetting that an apple was there at the origin of the misfortune of the entire human race, and again at Troy's—a bad omen for the philosophical sciences.
>
> —G.W.F. Hegel, *De Orbitis Planetarum*

> The life of the nation brings a fruit to maturity, for its activity is directed towards the fulfillment of its principle. This fruit does not, however, fall back into the womb from which it emerged; the nation itself is not permitted to enjoy it, but must taste it instead in the form of a bitter draught. It cannot refuse to drink it, for it has an infinite thirst for it, but the price of its satisfaction is its own annihilation (although it also heralds the birth of a new principle).
>
> —G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*

Like Ford, Hegel could not resist a deliciously paradoxical fruit metaphor when it came to describing the taste of historical experience. In *The Philosophy of History,* Hegel's version of a "goodly apple" provides a disturbing twist on the typical exuberance of his organic metaphors in both the *Philosophy of Nature* and the *Phenomenology*, in which the plant's recurrent evolution from seed to plant to flower to fruit and back again becomes a model of dialectical thought itself.[27] When transposed onto the trans-generational progression of history, the accomplishments of the past no longer fit into the plot of self-identical return, but instead become dangerously eccentric; they become a poisonous addiction, and historical progress is rewritten as series of incomplete tasks inherited by the future, wherein "the commencement and the result are disjoined from each other" (*World History* 95). Rather than marking out a skeletal parallel between Hegel and Ford, I merely want to keep Hegel resonant, so as to inflect the vocabulary of sense and history throughout the rest of this chapter. And while I will not belabor these symbolic coincidences between Ford and Hegel, I do want to suggest that Hegel's description of historical experience enacts modes of sensuality and narrative desires which cannily resonate with *The*

[27] Most famously, in section 2 of the "Preface" to *Phenomenology of Spirit*: "The bud disappears when the blossom breaks through, and one might say that the former is refuted by the latter. Likewise, through the fruit, the blossom itself may be declared to be a false existence of the plant, since the fruit emerges as the blossom's truth as it comes to replace the blossom itself. These forms are not only distinguished from each other, but, as incompatible with each other, they also supplant each other. However, at the same time their fluid nature makes them into moments of an organic unity in which they are not only not in conflict with each other, but rather, one is equally as necessary as the other, and it is this equal necessity which alone constitutes the life of the whole" (4).

Good Soldier's approach to narrating history, and in turn highlights how, in Ford's work, taste begins to emerge from its Kantian trappings and into an objective, materialistic framework, as a sensuous phenomenology that opens the subject up to the myriad material contradictions of contemporary history.

Ford had already started to theorize such a "sense" as early as 1903, in a short essay titled "Creative History and the Historic Sense." Taking aim at popular histories written in the Whiggish tradition, Ford complains about the public demand for "ethical points of view…[which] reduce history to a battlefield, rejoinder following rejoinder, so that the course of historic study remains perpetually in the same groove until it vanishes registers it at its most attenuated in mere meticulousness or personal abuse" (10). At the same time, Ford acknowledges that a purely impersonal history is impossible, since "the suppression of the self is difficult" (10). Nevertheless, certain precautions can be taken. He critiques a certain Professor Smith for using evidence to conclude that Henry VIII's aesthetic sense was not "very keen" (12). Ford complains, "This advertises Prof. Smith's taste at the expense of Henry's, leaving quite out of account the fact that the aesthetic sense is a matter of associations & that ideals of beauty can never be fixed. It is in fact an attempt to force the writer's personality & standards upon the world" (12). Ford argues that the historic sense leaves no room for this sort of imposition. Instead, "it implies an immense tolerance, an immense understanding, possibly an immense pity or possibly an immense contempt for one's kind" (12).

Ford's recommendations for how to write history would not be that surprising or original if he did not connect this suspension of backward-looking judgment with a critique of a narrative sequencing that reduces the chaos and ambiguity of historical activity to the clean mechanisms of plotting cause and effect, "rejoinder following rejoinder." This traditional form of novelistic story-telling, oriented towards our own present as its conclusion, blots out the nuances of lived historical experience while also sapping energy from the narration. For Ford, this holds true for the writing of fiction as much as it does for history, and he concludes by clearly stating the point which drives the essay: "For in their really higher manifestations History & Fiction are one: they are documented, tolerant, vivid; their characters live & answer & react one upon another each after his own sort. Fiction indeed, so long as it is not written with a purpose, is Contemporary History" (14). Ford's nod to Kantian reflective judgment—in which objects are not subsumed under a determinate concept and remain purposive without a purpose—introduces taste in its more traditional form as a faculty of aesthetic judgment, but only to immediately compress this aesthetic mode with the work of historical memory. As such, it pushes against the strictly negative regulatory function which Kant assigns the noumenal realm—merely specifying the limits of a sensible phenomenal world by detailing what is not available for us—and transposes the aesthetic realm onto the landscape of history: "the type of creative realism attempting to apply poetic interpretation to history," as Ford wrote in his 1901 study of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Around the same time, Ford was completing his first collaborative novella with Conrad, *The Inheritors*, which anticipates the theme of collapsing civilization in *The Good Soldier* and, similarly, portrays a ruling-class elite caught unawares by a modernity hollowing out its foundations. For our purposes, the novella offers a slightly less condensed version of taste's historical determinations because Ford's Impressionism has not yet been refined into Dowell's byzantine unreliability. What would later be banished beyond the epistemological range of Impressionism's reach is here dramatized as the emergence of genuine historical insight accessible through the promise of a different kind of seeing—in this case, a seeing enabled by the popular science fiction trope of the Fourth Dimension. The protagonist and narrator, Arthur

Etchingham Granger, must decide whether to side with "all the old order of things" or a mysterious race of hyper-modern humanoids called "Dimensionists," who seek to "inherit the earth." Granger begins the novel as a failed artist but soon finds himself promoted in the world of journalism through his willingness to write hagiographic pieces on the "Great Men" of the British Empire, a type recognizable in both the country gentleman out for a walk (the novel opens with such a scene) and Ed Ashburnham. At the height of his success, Granger is faced with a choice to publish an article, orchestrated by the chief Dimensionist, that exposes the grim details of an Imperial scheme to open up the interior of Greenland to international development under the auspices of "[rooting] out barbarism." Granger is repulsed by the revelations about the gentlemen he had spent the last year praising, and immediately understands how this violence enables a notion of history—"the passage between the past and the future"—that grounds the social order:

> There were revolting details of cruelty to the miserable, helpless, and defenseless; there were greed, and self-seeking, stripped naked; but more revolting to see without a mask was that falsehood which had been hiding under the words that for ages had spurred men to noble deeds, to self-sacrifice, to heroism. What was appalling was the sudden perception that all the traditional ideals of honour, glory, conscience, had been committed to the upholding of a gigantic and atrocious fraud. The falsehood had spread stealthily, had eaten into the very heart of creeds and convictions that we lean upon on our passage between the past and the future. The old order of things had to live or perish with a lie. I saw all this with the intensity and clearness of a revelation; I saw it as though I had been asleep through a year of work and dreams, and had awakened to the truth. I saw it all; I saw her intention. What was I to do? (98)

What follows is a jerky, recognizably Conradian moment of internal struggle, narrated through a tortuous scene of dialogue (contemporary critics called it "asthmatic"), in which Granger's companion Soane slowly opens and drinks two bottles of Champagne, sharing a few glasses with Granger as well. The scene recalls the novella's epigraph, a fabricated quotation referencing Lord Byron's 1821 play—"Sardanapalus builded seven cities in a day. Let us eat, drink and sleep, for to-morrow we die" (1)—which draws an obvious contrast between the high-minded but ruthlessly technocratic Dimensionists and the squalid decadence of an empire teetering on collapse.[28] When Granger capitulates to the Dimensionist plot to expose the treachery of their political rivals and lets the article go to press, his clarity of mind quickens and his vision—note the repetition of "I saw" in the passage above—becomes emphatically powerful, in contrast to Soane, who succumbs to the physical effects of the alcohol, begins slurring his words, and sinks into a stupor. As Granger's vision dilates, the past and future as he knew them seem to fall away, along with the veneer of honor that upheld the Imperial project: "swept out of my sight together with the past they had known and with the future they had waited for" (101). But as the novella winds down to its conclusion—the Dimensionists seizing power and the old order of things rapidly disintegrating—Granger's euphoria turns to melancholy and regret. He reflects in the final pages, "It is permitted to no man to break with his past, with the past of his kind, and to

[28] Ten years earlier, in 1892, Ford had used a similar line as an epigraph to a satirical magazine poking fun at his friends the Garnetts and the Rossettis, who published an anarchist paper called *The Torch*, which they sold in Hyde Park on Sunday afternoons. Ford proposed to publish *The Extinguisher: A Journal of International Pessimism*, including a "Statement of Principles: Let us eat, drink & sleep, for tomorrow WE DIE" (*Dual Life* 45-6).

throw away the treasure of his future" (106). A commitment to the present forecloses a relationship to the past and the possibility of a future.

What we could frame as Granger's "historical dilemma" suggests a number of formal problems that become both more densely compacted and elaborately deployed in *The Good Soldier*.[29] In *The Inheritors,* the promises of visual Impressionism come at the expense of those forms of history that confirm the social order's legitimacy. Yet at the same time, a clear-eyed, materialist vision of history only becomes available by displacing vision into the realm of science fiction: "I heard the nature of the Fourth Dimension…heard that it was invisible to our eyes, but omnipresent." When this historical knowledge is abruptly forced into the realist frame of the novel, and onto the very human Granger, both text and character fracture into an unmoored present completely cut off from temporal progression. This allegorizes the trade-off in Ford's early Impressionism, wherein the power of vision to capture the fleeting present is inversely proportional to its ability to recognize the historical dimension inherent in each moment. The Fourth Dimension awkwardly squares the circle, compressing the diachronic temporality of historical materialism with a mode of visual description strictly aligned with the present tense. Indeed, at the level of technique, Impressionism always risks sundering description from the ordering principles of plot more generally, and is therefore in constant tension with the forms of development and progress upon which the novel relies. Robbed of a future, what Peter Brooks has described as the "forward-looking movement" of the novel, considered most broadly, is undermined, along with its ambition to be "inherently totalizing, figuring the self's tendency to appropriation and aggrandizement, moving forward through the encompassment of more, striving to have, to do, and be more" (39). *The Inheritors* frenetically jumps backs and forth between these two narrative models, marking out the political and ethical stakes of both: on the one hand, a Whiggish allegiance to historical development which subsumes and excuses the slaughter-bench of history in order to neatly justify the British Empire, and on the other hand, a ruthlessly technocratic allegiance to the present moment which transmogrifies tradition into a meaningless assortment of antinomian acts of violence.

In this context, the Great War provided Ford with an "objective correlative," as it literally robs the British Empire of its future and, likewise, cuts it off from its feudal past. And yet by metonymically reducing it to August 4th, Ford affectively directs the reader away from a mode of reading that would reduce *The Good Soldier* to a narrative that fatalistically moves towards one great goal, and asks that we recognize the pressure of history while simultaneously registering the sensual force of the characters independent of the imminent "abysses of Chaos." Ford would later recall experiencing this very dissonance, writing a few decades after the war (but only a year before the Second World War broke out), "The gayest season that this writer can

---

[29] Max Saunders makes the more general claim that "*The Inheritors* can be seen as prefiguring so much of his later Edwardian work." He argues that the novel "offers a series of anticipations about [the] new world emerging from the chasm of the crisis of the old world," with particular focus on Ford's sense that the Second Boer War was "a chasm separating the new world from the old" ("Inheritors" 126). More specifically, he notes, "Formally, [*The Good Soldier*] owes most to *The Inheritors*, in both first-person form, and in its tone of resigned sad retrospection. But it also owes its sense of characters being controlled and manipulated by forces they can't grasp or don't fully understand; to that extent, the fourth dimension, for Ford, is passion" (136-7). This argumentative leap allows Saunders to draw a curious connection between the dimensionists and *les jeunes*, as Ford would describe the set of younger modernist writers, "the merciless young who are always alien and without remorse" (*Joseph Conrad*, 134). See Saunders, "Empire of the Future."

remember was that of London in the summer before the war…of the chafing-dish parties, that always at dawn, or toward it, finished the day" ("Four in the Morning Cookery" 82). He goes on to offer nine recipes for oysters, welsh rarebit, *soupe a l'oignon* and others. This occasional reminiscence is consonant with Ford's tendency to force together trivial activities with world-historical moments. In *The Good Soldier*, Dowell equates the sack of Rome with the death of a mouse before adding, "and I swear to you that the breaking-up of our little four-square coterie was such another unthinkable event" (11). In the context of *The Good Soldier*, the awkward compression of scale can be read as symptomatic of Dowell's delusional solipsism, but in the context of Ford's attempt to write contemporary history, it indicates an attention to the quotidian as the source of genuine historical knowledge—even if that knowledge does not add up to a totalizing understanding, nor, especially, a transmissible meaning. In Dowell's words, the events remain "unthinkable." Kant's aesthetics offer a resource for such a situation—namely, the sublime realm of the inexpressible and nonrepresentable—but Ford persistently refuses a mechanics of signification which would confirm a mental faculty that, according to the third *Critique*, "surpasses the measure of the senses" (134), and instead repeatedly traces the contours of what taste, in its Kantian form, once provided. In this regard, the novel does not merely circle around the unspeakable absence of war; it also circles around the absence of a *sensus communis* that could ground a common culture that would both sustain the universalizing potentialities of the *as if* and prevent the otherwise inevitable outbreak of international hostilities.

Building on *Untimely Meditations*, Friedrich Nietzsche diagnosed this situation as the origin of what he calls in *Beyond Good and Evil* "the historical sense," which he links directly to the denigration of good taste and the decline of the noble cultures of the past. According to Nietzsche, "this historical sense" is the result of the mad and fascinating *semi-barbarism* into which Europe has been plunged through the democratic mingling of classes and races (152).[30] Thus the "modern souls" of nineteenth-century Europe have "the sense and instinct for everything, the taste and tongue for everything: which at once proves it to be an ignoble sense" (153). What Ford praises as "an immense tolerance" and "understanding," Nietzsche takes as a sign of bad taste, in contrast to "the men of a noble culture…the very definite Yes and No of their palate, their easily aroused disgust, their hesitant reserve with regard to everything strange, their horror of the tastelessness even of a lively curiosity" (153). In contrast, he sarcastically lists the "virtues" of "men of the 'historical sense'": "we are unpretentious, selfless, modest, brave, full of self-restraint, full of devotion, very grateful, very patient, very accomodating—with all that, we are not very tasteful" (154). He wonders, "Perhaps our great virtue of the historical sense necessarily stands opposed to *good* taste, or to the very best taste at any rate," before going on to praise "actual nobility," who have the more substantial capacity "to grasp, to feel, taste, love" (154). Nietzsche's nostalgia for a more confident, robust, and homogeneous culture butts up against historical trends of incipient "globalization," democratic heterogeneity, and the rise of the liberal order. He is thus one of the first thinkers to diagnose the decline of taste as it becomes stretched and diluted by contemporary sensibility unmoored from shared traditions and standards of beauty—the symptom is the decline of taste, and the underlying disease is democracy.

Unlike Nietzsche, Ford values the positive aspects of the historical sense—Nietzsche's epithets are integral to Ford's narrative style—nevertheless, Ford shares Nietzsche's nostalgia for an older, more stable order. He sees the deterioration of common sense as connected to the

[30] In his short work *The Soul of London,* Ford embraces and praises the ability of the city to assimilate a huge range of different cultures and peoples.

broader failure of the liberal state and the disappearance of a feudal system that once provided a more desirable way to organize European society, by guaranteeing "the greatest possible liberty in and scope for individual freedom" (*March* 467). While it is clear that August 4th references the outbreak of war in 1914, we also know that Ford chose the date before war was declared and then revisited his drafts to emphasize the repetition. Ford was an avid reader of European history, with an exceptional ability to recall specific events and dates, meaning he also knew that August 4th was a significant date in the decline of feudalism. One of Ford's early heroes was the anarchist historian Peter Kropotkin, who in 1909 published *The Great French Revolution, 1789-1793,* with a chapter titled, "August 4th and its consequences," that details the day in 1789 when the Assemblée Nationale abolished feudalism. While Kropotkin is best known for his theory of mutual aid, his history of the French Revolution was an attempt to interpret the revolution critically through what we now call a historical materialist lens. For example, whereas a classical historian like Michelet described the events of August 4th, 1789 as a heroic abnegation of feudal rights by a group of altruistic barons, Kropotkin interprets it as a royalist concession to the rising bourgeoisie to join forces against the rebellious peasant class that threatened the very foundations of any state system. Through his youthful associations with the Rossettis and Garnetts (for whom Kropotkin was something of a spiritual guide), Ford absorbed and sympathized with a wide range of socialist and anarchist ideas, writing in 1907 about "the true Toryism which is Socialism."

Ford's politics are complicated and often contradictory, and they certainly do not square neatly with Kropotkin's anarchism; rather, his influence can be most felt in literary terms. In several published works and letters, Ford recalls a 1904 conversation with Kropotkin after a heated dinner party in London. In *Return to Yesterday*, Ford recounts sharing with him that he had been writing fairy tales, and that Kropotkin tactfully advised "that he hoped the fairy tale was not about Princes and Princesses—or at least that I would write one that would be about simple and ordinary people." Ford recalls thinking, "I must begin now to proclaim the beauty of the humble and of the impotent," before adding, "I have been trying to do so ever since" (107-08). The encounter was an early turning point for Ford, who soon began working on his impressionistic sketches of ordinary people in London and the surrounding countryside. These sketches would make Ford increasingly skeptical of the liberal Asquith government and preoccupied with a receding feudal ideal.[31] A decade later, the decaying legacy of feudalism is portrayed both comically and tragically in the figure of Edward Ashburnham, who bores his series of paramours with his ardent belief that "salvation can only be found in the true and the feudal system," and arguing with the tautologous logic of privilege, "that the duties of a feudal gentleman were feudal." Eventually Leonora, to whom this logic "was entirely foreign," takes over the insolvent Branshaw Estate, and through a series of rental agreements, a liberalization of the wage system for the workers, and the cancelation of myriad subscriptions and donations, saves the ancestral home—but only so that the American businessman John Dowell can eventually take its seat, "the birth of a new principle."

When the feudal resonance of August 4th is inflected and made also to refer back to the

[31] Ford also blamed the Liberal government for declaring war. Wyndham Lewis recalled Ford arguing with Mary Borden, who declared just weeks before August 1914, "'England has a Liberal Government. A Liberal Government cannot declare war.'" "'I don't agree,' Ford answered, in his faintest voice, with consummate indifference, 'because it has always been the Liberals who have gone to war. It is *because* it is a Liberal Government that it *will* declare war'" (*Blasting* 57-59).

French Revolution, the overall temporality of the novel becomes less fatalistically oriented toward an inevitable (but unrepresentable) future event; it turns instead into a backward-looking narrative, in the mode of Benjamin's reading of *Angelus Novus*, attempting to piece together a social order that has long been broken. Indeed, August 4th has performed similar work before, in, of all places, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where August 4th, 1789, functions as the absent Real around which the dialectic of human experience raises its "queer odd jumble of negatives," culminating in absolute knowing. As Rebecca Comay has argued, Hegel's sense of loss at missing the proximal revolution gives the *Phenomenology* a "strictly traumatic" structure: "History no longer reveals itself as the progressive actualization of potentials within the causal continuum of time; it presents a minefield of counterfactual possibilities that become clear only after the fact in light of their repeated non-realization" (5). Thus, absolute knowing does not provide retrospective clarity to historical witnessing but instead exposes the anachronistic nature of all experience, where "each moment is the difference between knowing and Truth." Comay concludes that for Hegel, "the task of thinking is to mark the fragile moment where the unforeseeable meets the immemorial" (147). For our purposes, this brief summary of Hegel's historical "optics" is useful because it undermines the visual clarity offered by the extra-textual knowledge of the events of August 4th, 1914, and, in turn, asks us to read the repetition of August 4th not merely as a series of compensatory moments approximating a sublime historical Real but rather as an aesthetic device functioning within a historical moment that no longer allows it to generate a universal meaning.

In his 1924 work, *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance*, Ford continues to use "August 1914" to illustrate his difficult but liberatory technique of narrating history—even with the benefit of retrospection. He offhandedly invokes the date to facilitate an example about "the general effect" of Impressionist technique:

> We agreed that the general effect of a novel must be the general effect that life makes on mankind. A novel must therefore not be a narration, a report. Life does not say to you: in 1914, my next door neighbor, Mr. Slack, erected a greenhouse and painted it with Cox's green aluminum paint…If you think about the matter you will remember, in various unordered pictures, how one day Mr. Slack appeared in his garden and contemplated the wall of his house. You then try to remember the year of that occurrence, and you will fix it as August 1914 because of having had the foresight to bear the municipal stock of Liège, you were able to afford a first-class season ticket for the first time in your life. You will remember… (192-93)

The passage goes on to narrate a loose bundling of stories that never quite connect, but instead loosely stitch together a web of quotidian "impressions" linking a daughter, a vicar, a fishing business, and a proclivity for cheap Burgundy with the narrator's charming recollection of risking some capital on municipal bonds in Liège. Like the peasant's reaction to the potato, here Ford's response to his neighbor does everything *but* connect the trivial event of building a greenhouse with some grander event or symbol, even while the German invasion of Liège on August 5th, 1914, the inaugural battle of the First World War, seems to press in unconsciously on the recollected memories. This recurrence of "August 1914" as a narrative technique a decade after the outbreak of war illustrates the way in which Ford attempts to dislocate the unitary signifying role of momentous dates by imbuing them with persistent uncertainty, not in spite of their historical distance from us, but because of it. Here, there can be no squabble about composition dates: Ford *knows* Liège was invaded on August 5th, 1914. But his commitment to the visual techniques of Impressionism compels him not to limit the epistemological outlines of

historical remembrance—as if the war sublimely exceeds our capacities of representation—but rather to radically expand that outline to allow for vicars, municipal bonds, and cheap Burgundy. Indeed, reading Ford's various critiques of what we might call "aggressive historical narrative" allows us to see how forcing August 1914 into a regime of signification over-determined by the fantasy of a transparent retrospective gaze aligns with the "dangerous" country gentleman with whom this chapter opened, who "will not accept experience as experience," but instead compulsively converts sensation into significance and potatoes into breasts that one can touch by "[thrusting] your hand between her chest and her stays."

The-Thing-In-Itself: Cézanne's Apples and the Metaphysics of Modernist Taste

> Art critics are accustomed to say that the history of the art of painting divides itself sharply into two parts. There was painting before Cézanne and there has been painting after Cézanne, but the objectives of the two modes of painting have scarcely any connection. A similar caesura is observable in the aesthetics of creative writing.
>
> —Ford Madox Ford, *The March of Literature*

> In Cézanne as well, though more latently, and concealed somewhat under the more powerful, purely painterly façade that makes Cézanne the last great modern stylist, but perhaps even more deeply than in van Gogh, the Expressionist revolution is evident: for this is no longer fruit, nor is it fruit modeled in paint; instead all imaginable life is in them, and if they were to fall, a universal conflagration would ensue, to such an extent are these still lifes already heroic landscapes, so loaded are these paintings with mystical gravity and a yet unknown, nameless mythology.
>
> —Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*

If These Apples Should Fall, T.J. Clark's 2022 monograph on Paul Cézanne, takes its title from Ernst Bloch's 1918 work *The Spirit of Utopia*. Clark excerpts a portion of the passage for his epigraph and provides his own translation, as follows: "The apples of Cézanne are not fruit any longer, nor fruit made into paint; instead all imaginable life is in them, and if they should fall, a universal conflagration would ensue."[32] When Clark comes around to address the Bloch passage in the context of an extended reading of *Still Life with Apples* he is careful to qualify Bloch's mythological intensity as symptomatic of a world to which we no longer have access. "This world of writing—this world of belief—is remote from us. (I use the sentence from Bloch as the book's epigraph, but this does not mean I endorse it)" (66). And yet, Clark's adoration of Cézanne—borne out in meticulous close-readings of individual brushstrokes—belies a desire, explicit at times, to reconstruct the possibility of "[letting] slip" (66), in a moment of rapture, the dangerous conflation of art and history. "So loaded are these paintings with mystical gravity and a yet unknown, nameless mythology" (31). Clark might claim that "Roger Fry's affectless anti-metaphysical drawl is wonderful for [Cézanne]" (69), but he did not choose a passage from Fry as his epigraph. The allure of mythology is as powerful, at least, as our attempts to distance ourselves from it. And yet Clark's intricate interpretations make for compulsive reading, because they keep alive the possibility that the apples might indeed fall. He writes with an urgency that wants to save the power of art to make a difference. He denies the possibility of the apple's

[32] Quoted in Clark, *If These Apples Should Fall*, 6. In the Stanford translation, 31.

"reality" while reveling in that very possibility. "But I do still think that *Still Life*'s grand balances and felicities of arrangement look, from the start, like order imposed on insubordinate stuff" (71). Clark's recognition of the persistence of insubordination repackages Bloch's "heroic…nameless" utopianism as a negative mythology.

Let's return to Hegel's fruit-as-tragic-historical-knowledge metaphor. Note the way Hegel frames historical experience in terms of pleasure, taste, thirst and knowledge. When Hegel uses a fruit metaphor, he never forgets that it is a food metaphor.

> The life of the nation brings a fruit to maturity, for its activity is directed towards the fulfillment of its principle. This fruit does not, however, fall back into the womb from which it emerged; the nation itself is not permitted to enjoy it, but must taste it instead in the form of a bitter draught. It cannot refuse to drink it, for it has an infinite thirst for it, but the price of its satisfaction is its own annihilation (although it also heralds the birth of a new principle).

Apples can fall—indeed, they will fall—but we cannot enjoy them, and we keep on consuming them. We *have* to consume them, even though the lessons they teach come too late for those who have cultivated the orchard. "Each moment is the difference between knowing and Truth." Clark



Figure 1: *Still Life with Apples*

registers Bloch's "slip" as a lapse in dialectical thought, a moment of passing over the gap between truth and knowing, enjoyment and taste. For Hegel, taste is decoupled from pleasure and redirected to the bitterness of historical knowledge. It is bitter because it always comes too late. Bloch's statement on Cézanne, written, as Clark reminds us, "as the first Battle of the

Somme was in full swing," tries to have the apple and eat it too. Thus Bloch also writes, many pages later, "We humans alone have become free, therefore of course selfish as well and easy to mislead. Thus we pushed upward too early, unready to enjoy the apple, the apple itself unripe as well" (223).

Bloch's worry that Cézanne's apples might precipitate the fall of civilization works rhetorically because, as many have noted, the fruits really do seem to be rolling off the table and out of the picture frame. Cézanne's cubist admirers, influenced by the work of Esprit Jousset and the non-Euclidean geometry of Jules Poincaré, would come to see this as an instance of "the fourth dimension," described by Morton Schamberg as "a consideration of weight, pressure, resistance, movement, as distinguished from motion…or the harmonic use of what may arbitrarily be called volume." He continues, "It is only at this point that we can appreciate the masterly productions of such a man as Cézanne" (28). I will not linger here, except to draw a connection to Ford's use of "the fourth dimension" as a novel way to align "the diachronic temporality of historical materialism with a mode of visual description strictly aligned with the present tense." Clark attempts a similar alignment. While the salient thesis of *If These Apples Should Fall* is that Cézanne teaches us a modernist way of seeing, conditioned on immediacy, contingency and Weber's "disenchantment of the world," the thrust of the readings tends to move in an almost opposite direction, imbuing the presence of oddities ("queer effects")—for example, the way a shadow of an apple becomes a pattern in a tablecloth—with an almost metaphysical presence. Their ambiguous status—most famously in *The Bathers*, where it is impossible to know if one particular figure is seen from the front or the back—cloaks them in a mystery that exceeds a form of knowledge derived from empirical observation, even while it does not collapse into Romantic projections of the artist's imagination. It is a vivid materialism that exceeds our grasp the more we try to delineate its empirical details.

Writing about a series of landscapes, Clark observes, "Cézanne's kind of vividness is inseparable from not-knowing—the vividness seems to be what produces the not-knowing" (220). This is vivid, modernist contingency. Elsewhere, Clark writes, following Baudelaire, "Modernity is contingency" (*Farewell* 32). However, writing about *Mont Sainte-Victoire seen from Bibémus Quarry,* he encourages the viewer: "Look at the mountain's whole shape. 'Vision' is the wrong word for it. It is the thing itself" (223). One can imagine these sentences appearing in *Spirit of Utopia*—a pre-critical "slip" that both undermines and gives external direction to the incessant mode of critique. He anticipates the objection: "You began with history—or you promised us history—but end with metaphysics." His response: "Just so. I end with an all-or-nothing argument, carried on, interminably, by the work of art itself" (222). Just so. The contradictions of perception are displaced into the thing itself, and the limits of vision are paradoxically outlined by a strictly visual medium, which seems to be firmly in the present while hinting at a past (for Bloch, also a future) which is unknowable. Thus, Clark does not "endorse" Bloch because Bloch too neatly reduces the artwork to what should remain in the realm of "not-knowing"—put otherwise, he does not maintain adequate (visual) distance from an artwork that contains its own dialectics of knowing and not-knowing. The surface of the painting becomes a field of tension between the static of the present (vivid, beautiful impressions) and the dynamics of historical time (obscure, not-knowing, ominous, sublime).

Though he goes unmentioned in Clark's monograph, this recourse to "the thing in itself" to explain Cézanne was first proposed by Clive Bell, Roger Fry's close friend and interlocutor. His 1914 work, simply titled *Art*, claims to "develop a complete theory of visual art," against which "all aesthetic judgments can be tested" (v). Despite the pretense to objectivity, Bell's

argument ends up being neatly circular: artworks produce "a peculiar emotion" experienced "by anyone capable of feeling it" (6-7)—a formula, by the way, which tidily summarizes the 18th century's understanding of taste without Kant's critical intervention. Distinguishing "beauty"—a term no longer useful because of its association with sensual beauty, the feminine form, and "the



Figure 2: *Mont Sainte-Victoire seen from Bibémus Quarry* (1897)

sexual flavor of the word" (15)—from "significant form," Bell tries to outline a theory of art that doesn't depend on mimetic representation. Cézanne is the key figure who shepherds significant form into the modernist era, dissolving with his brushstrokes the petty "quarrels of Romantics and Realists" (212): "To a Cézanne one account would appear as irrelevant as the other, since both omit the thing that matters—what philosophers used to call 'the thing in itself,' what now, I imagine, that call 'essential reality'" (213). In the context of *Art*, which feels conservative even while Bell argues for the relevance of contemporary work, this statement comes off as a concession or polemical shortcut, a recourse to unassailable scripture that speaks for itself. But the coarseness of the metaphysical invocation—as if Kant's relegation of taste to the realm of subjective pleasure simply does not apply here and as such does not need to be mediated or addressed in another way—implies a sense of representational limitation, which Clark still seems to be working through a century later, though expressed in an idiom of Adornian aesthetics.

Roger Fry's book on Cézanne, published in 1927, is similarly oriented toward a receding metaphysical promise in Cézanne's paintings, but Fry more carefully articulates the "asymptotic" quality of such promises. "[Cézanne] gave himself up entirely to this desperate search for the

reality hidden beneath the veil of appearance, this reality which he had to draw forth and render apparent." But Fry, in his "anti-metaphysical drawl," as Clark describes it, locates what exceeds the painting in its "unfinished" quality, partly due to "an exceptional want of even ordinary competence in the representation of those images which his feverish imagination engendered" (4) and his "incapacity to give sufficient verisimilitude to the personae of his drama" (10). According to Fry, "there is always something still lurking behind the expression, something he would grasp if he could" (2). The novelty of Fry's reading lies in his ability to recast Cézanne's technical limitations as part of a grander tension borne out by his efforts to translate his inner visions into an imperfect world of appearances. "For him, the synthesis was an asymptote toward which he was forever approaching without ever quite reaching it," Fry writes. "It was reality, incapable of realization" (3). In effect, Fry's reading of Cézanne restores the thing-in-itself to the noumenal realm—where it belongs—but in doing so, it gives art a unique ability to trace the negative contours of its effects, which become visible as technical flaws and incomplete attempts at mimesis.

All three readings of Cézanne—Bell's, Fry's, and Clark's—share a sense that the paintings have a metaphysical orientation that paradoxically inheres in the canvas while also exceeding the sum of the painting's constituent parts. But they diverge on the exact coordinates of this relationship. Bell most straightforwardly invokes metaphysics as a polemical shortcut, a recourse to an old-fashioned, pre-critical sense of taste that aligns good judgment and the object of judgment with a clarity that obviates the petty squabbles between "realists" and "romantics." Fry transforms Bell's argument into a negative register, invoking the metaphysical, but banishing it beyond the realm of appearance and experience. Clark has it both ways, the artwork itself playing out an "interminable argument" between history and metaphysics. Taken together, these three approaches initiate an alternative to vision that aligns more precisely with a notion of taste as a faculty of negation, attuned to imperfections and incomplete syntheses as artifacts of history presenting itself on the surface of the canvas. This reorientation can also be helpfully elaborated in terms of the universal and the particular. If, for Kant, taste held out the promise of universality, however qualified by the *as if*, then this modernist notion of taste is more deliberately fascinated by the particulars that resist incorporation into universalizing frameworks. However, it is not the case that "particularity" somehow usurps "universality"; rather, the crucial thing to notice is how the particulars that become the primary object of taste are always in tension with a larger framework—conceptual, visual, symbolic, social, political—that defines both the objective construction of the artwork as well as the subjective experience of the viewer.

These metaphysical approaches to Cézanne strain to articulate a mode of perception that exceeds the visual register within a strictly visual medium, in ways that are similar to the literary Impressionism of Conrad and Ford. In literary Impressionism, this played out as an obsessive, at times histrionic, insistence on vision as the only sense that mattered, even as it was glaringly unequipped to capture the full range of historical data pressing in on the surface narrative. Thus, in *The Good Soldier,* Dowell's failures to connect the visual effects on the surface with the underlying causes become charged with a significance requiring a faculty that operates adjacent to vision. Similarly, Cézanne's technical "failures" become charged with significance to the degree that they cannot be integrated into a clean plane of verisimilitude, much like the "queer effects" that literary Impressionism sought to register and loosely collate into a narrative form. In both cases, what looks like a technical failure or the limit of a certain representational technique becomes the site of a different kind of knowledge, which is nevertheless insistently *not* classifiable as sublime; there is no moment of sublimation to facilitate the transition to a more

exalted cognitive realm. Instead, the stubborn particularity of these queer effects precipitates a recoiling into a particularity that denatures into a close reading of technical features on the one hand and the receding but still powerful presence of the thing-in-itself, on the other: a hermeneutical circle tracing "the interminable argument" between history and metaphysics.

When I look at "the mountain's whole shape" (Figure 2)—what Clark calls "the thing itself" and what Bell calls "the thing in itself"—I see a face in profile, a human head lying on the ground, lips to the sky, the green verdure at far left a flowing head of hair softening the rockface's emergence from the umber hills. On the mountain's face, the dark blue "L" mark outlines a jaw. The gray-blue splotch on the right-hand slope is where we should find an eye, perhaps closed, but at the very least not open. It is unseeing. There is a mouth, open, sucking for air, or maybe kissing the sky. Is this a funeral pyre? If such physiognomic impositions seem improbable, put them in the context of *Mont Sainte-Victoire seen from Château Noir* (Figure 3), completed in 1904. Clark describes the mid-ground as follows: "There are limbs, buttocks, thighs, maybe breasts, a mons venris with dark pubic hair. A languid body enjoying the sun,



Figure 3: *Mont Sainte-Victoire seen from the forest of Château Noir* (1904)

prone and glistening, under a plumped-up patter coverlet" (108). Like a magic eye, once you see it, you cannot unsee it. But here the rock-"face" is less obvious, just as the buttocks are less obvious in the *Bibémus* painting; the "mons venris" is where we might find an ear. If the view from *Château* transforms the mountain into a woman splayed out for our gaze, the view from *Bibémus* presents us with a figure both less sexualized and less *alive.* Clark cannily juxtaposes the *Bibémus* painting with the atypical *Pyramid of Skulls*: "The view from Bibémus is at one level a view from the tomb" he contends. "And the skulls intend, by the simple act of

pyramiding, to give form to death and therefore survive it" (134).[33] I invoke Clark's reading, his authority, to grant license to my own readings, which strain for narrative, meaning, perhaps even symbolism, where there might be none—indeed, that there *might be none* must be sustained as a possibility for these readings to be interesting at all! Clark practices a method of provisionality that is convincing to the same degree that it doesn't demand universal assent, *as if* his readings were undeniable or even supererogatory. Indeed, as readings, they encourage speculation in the form of aesthetic experience, but without the universalizing coda. In Kantian terms, we could say that Clark attempts to import the protocols of sensibility and phenomenality elaborated in the first *Critique* into a context that Kant reserved for the third.

It is at this point that we can recall, once again, Ford's country gentleman in "On Impressionism," who confidently strides through the countryside, harvesting symbols and putting his hand on the warm breast of wild mother nature, turning potatoes into breasts and apples into fruit plucked from Eden's Tree of Knowledge. Which is to say: whether or not my reading of Cézanne is correct or not, insofar as it extracts the symbolic features of a portrait from a landscape and reduces it to a supine woman, it is in "good taste," a term which by now should ring with the ironic twang of condescension at play in Ford's "good soldier" and "good people." "[Taste] reacts against itself and recognizes itself as tasteless," Adorno quips, because while ignoring standards of taste might signal having no taste, adhering too strictly to those very protocols is to act in poor taste, even bad taste, where *bad* connotes an ethical problematic at work in the aesthetic act of appreciation (a dilemma that Wyndham Lewis will expand into a full blown aesthetic ideology, as I will argue in the following chapter) (*Moralia* 145). But insofar as my reading strives to make sense of particular features that hint at mimesis without consolidating those particulars into a unified matrix of signification, this modality of interpretation is more in line with the "peasant intelligence," which, rather than restricting the queerness of the potato's warmth to stock images of mother nature, generates a host of untethered, aleatory narrative possibilities. Modernist taste thus does not consolidate—or, for that matter, even intimate or render generally accessible—a fixed notion of beauty that aspires to universality (however qualified by Kant's *as if*), but rather catalyzes a mode of reading that generates provisional effects that remain unclassifiable and hermeneutically vibrant. Yet this is hardly equivalent to stating that modernism is somehow "after the beautiful," or devoted to a "cult of ugliness," as some have argued. Instead, the beautiful forcefully and unavoidably persists as a problematically

---

[33] Clark's "tomb" thesis is a stirring suggestion born out of an unlikely montage of paintings. But it needs to be further specified. The view seems to suggest a spectator emerging from a tomb (the quarry), surrounded by the dense overgrowth of the forest, suddenly surprised by a monolith that had always been there, above ground, too obvious to be noticed. The totemic figure might be dead, or just barely alive, but the canvas, in comparison to the muted blue greens of Chateau Noir, is teeming with vivid life. Trees crowd the view. The boulders glow with elemental light. Clark sees skulls, but I see glowing apples. The color-matching is hard to miss. Fry called it "the orange cube of the Chateau noir, which gleams through an inextricable tangle of fir trees and scrub," a geometrical form straining against its material trappings. According to Fry, Cézanne was the first "of the moderns" to "[conceive] this method of organizing the infinite complexity of appearance by referring it to a geometrical scaffolding." The orange is "exasperatedly intense" largely because the color seems to overflow its cubist trappings. At the same time, that geometrical scaffolding renders the scene portable by reducing it to a network of lines and points that can be traced in other canvases, similar to "color-matching," but bruised deep in the architecture of the painting. These "subterranean" frameworks allow for connections between canvases as disparate as *Saint-Citoire*, *Three Skulls*, and *Still Life with Apples*.

constructed idea, encrusted by the earthy materiality of its natural element. And insofar as the beautiful persists as a more legibly constructed concept, taste likewise cannily evolves as the faculty best equipped for sensing the beautiful in its more historical articulations. Which is to say, in modernism, the *pomme* is always already a *pomme de terre*.

Cézanne's Apples, Ford's Apples, Hegel's Apples: I am trying to construct an idea of visual and literary Impressionism that corroborates Hegel's notion of taste as a historical sense, attuned to what subsists as negation in a visual field that is obsessed with the present. My argument is that these negations index the historical determinations of the apple. The apple is not a Kantian apple, ideally shaped and free from the phenomenal dross of its surroundings; rather, it is a fruit that just might roll off the table after all. It is not so much that Cézanne is the Ur-modernist painter (Bloch called him "the last modernist painter"); instead, it is that one's capacity to *read* Cézanne can be understood as central to what it means to have modernist taste, insofar as modernist taste manages to redeem imperfection from the realm of non-art and incorporate it as tension into a form that strains to represent reality in all of its four dimensions. *The Inheritors* coarsely attempted this in textual form through the trope of science fiction, and the story is of formal interest, I argued, to the extent that that literary device manifests an awkward technical mishap on the part of Ford. *The Good Soldier* internalized that awkwardness as a narrative technique in its own right, Dowell's byzantine, error-ridden narration dramatizing the outer limits of representing historical trauma according to the visual protocols of literary Impressionism. We can propose, tentatively then, that this is what it means to be a modernist artist, and having modernist taste is the ability to recognize it, not merely as a "queer effect," but as an index of history that persists unseen, and always tasted too late. Taste, unlike vision, takes time.[34]

Looking again at *Still Life With Apples,* I wonder about the shape and color of the light inside the upper rim of the large green jar (Figure 4). What does it resemble, if not the mountain? "The-thing-itself," as our three Cézanne critics suggested, here appears, but it is displaced into a liminal zone of light and shadows, the landscape of Mont Saint-Victoire glowing in miniature, between the mouth and lip of a jar. The paintings triple over in a curious intra-canvas *mise-en-abyme* ("placed in the abyss"): a landscape resembling a mouth with lips to the sky appears on the mouth and lip of a jar, content becoming form becoming content. ("Beneath Ordered Life Itself was stretched, the merest film with, beneath it, the abysses of Chaos.") As if to accommodate the awkward imposition of the landscape, Cézanne unnaturally stretches the back lip of the jar upward, like a potter removing the clay from the wheel and working it by hand, imperfection be damned. A cured jar is rendered pliable; it seems to be coming at us, just as the apples seem to fall. The fourth dimension strains the spatial coordinates—not just that, the processes of artistic craft are being reversed, history is being undone. Something, some Thing, pushes from the back of the canvas. The mountain's glow, its auratic iridescence, sets in relief the empty openness of the jar, *l'abyme*, into which we pour our projections, our fantasies, our readings, the rich pressings of apple juice as it slowly ferments, the lake of our shared history, waiting to be shared, tasted, and drunk. Modernist Impressionism does not offer a transcendent vision of the thing-in-itself, but rather a startlingly incomplete vision that modernist taste registers as the remainder of history itself.

---

[34] "We shall hardly have time," Walter Pater writes, "to make theories about the things we see and touch" (223).



Figure 4. Detail of *Still Life with Apples* (1894)

SECTION 2

BAD TASTE: WYNDHAM LEWIS AND THE FORMS OF DISGUST

> VORTEX IS ENERGY! and it gave forth SOLID EXCREMENTS in the quattro é cinque centro, LIQUID until the seventeenth century, GASES whistle till now. THIS is the history of form value in the WEST until the FALL OF IMPRESSIONISM.
>
> —Gaudier-Brzeska, "VORTEX," *Blast 1*

While Ford Madox Ford represented and dramatized the deterioration of nineteenth-century formal codes of "good taste," even as taste persisted in a more sensible affective dimension, Wyndham Lewis activates taste as part of his aggressive aesthetic agenda. No longer confined to a faculty of apprehension, taste becomes mobilized as a visceral metaphor for the production of art itself, which, for Lewis, is an act of violent and messy creation. In the following three chapters, I will have ample occasion to address moments of tasting, eating, and digesting, as well as "nastier" moments of indigestion, shitting, and vomiting; yet this chapter will not primarily be a catalog of tropes mustered to prove that Lewis was out to shock his bourgeois audience with lewd and at-times offensive content—though he did that too, and, indeed, continues to do so a century later. Instead, I will argue that Lewis systematically, though often incoherently, mobilizes his unique sense of taste as a formal technique that shapes his revolutionary aesthetic sensibility and, in turn, lays the groundwork for how others are forced to address the persistence of taste as an organizing aesthetic and cultural concept.

Along the way, this section will be partially motivated by the underlying question of why Lewis remains persistently repugnant to contemporary readers. Many of his contemporaries were sexist and racist, but Lewis has remained the most avoided of the bunch ("The Men of 1914" and their associates), purportedly on moral or ethical grounds. Despite his penchant for self-reflection and ideological evolution (his writings are full of admissions of guilt and error), his fiction and critical works remain stubbornly indigestible. My argument will be that Lewis, in addition to and in conjunction with his reprehensible cultural politics—most notably his virulent homophobia, his denigration of women, and his somewhat haphazard and confusing racism—presents the reader with the *forms* of disgust: a set of visual and literary techniques that seek to destroy and replace the protocols of taste inherited by modernism. Thus, while his offensive politics and social views are reprehensible in their own right, what remains effectively off-putting is that his short stories and novels refuse the interpretive models and assimilationist frameworks that would neatly classify them within the canon of successful modernist art.

This should not be construed as a convoluted glossing over or excuse of Lewis's politics. On the contrary, the following chapters seek to investigate and lay out the formal structure of a reactionary politics as it informs a more general modernist aesthetic, which in turn confronts us with the more troubling prospect of a generalized mode of disgust, irreducible to the dispersed and relatively easy-to-dismiss cultural commentary of Lewis. It is not difficult to dismiss and condemn the red-blooded xenophobia of *Count Your Dead: They Are Alive!* Or just not read books entitled *Hitler* or *The Jews, Are They Human?* But what if these troubling works are symptomatic of a more general "modernism?" Indeed, I will argue that Lewis's demolition of Victorian taste and construction of an aggressive, digestive, and disgusting modality of taste is central to modernist aesthetics. While this produces a lurid and unavoidable ugliness in a range of instances, it is also responsible for the vibrancy, utopianism, and, yes, *beauty* that

characterizes early modernist experimentation. Recovering the dialectic of disgust in its entirety through the figure of Wyndham Lewis is the task of this section.

CHAPTER 3

An Immoveable Feast

> It is difficult for taste to come to grips with what is not there. That is partly why many tastes have difficulty in coming to grips with Wyndham Lewis.
>
> —Hugh Kenner

A Moveable Feast

> Lewis did not show evil. He just looked nasty.
>
> —Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*

The title of Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast* purportedly came from a conversation Hemingway had with "a friend" in 1950. The full sentence is excerpted as the memoir's epigraph:

> If you are lucky enough to have lived
> in Paris as a young man, then wherever you
> go for the rest of your life, it stays with
> you, for Paris is a moveable feast.

The friend was A.E. Hotchner, who would also act, along with Hemingway's last wife Mary, as an editor for the memoir, and then go on to publish one of his first biographies. According to Hotchner, a drunk and depressed Hemingway had been recounting his "penurious" days in Paris, after he had "shucked off the journalism" and "was finally doing the good writing." Growing more maudlin, Hemingway recalled the trials of receiving rejection slips "on an empty stomach," and then relayed the above sentence to Hotchner, who wrote it down upon returning to his hotel room that night. He later shared it with Mary when she "was searching for a title for Ernest's posthumously published Paris memoirs, which he had left untitled" (57). In an act of editorial whimsy, the sentence is broken up into four lines of blank verse—three pentameter and one hexameter—which highlights the poetic quality of Hemingway's sparse prose. By leaving out the context of the original phrase—it merely says "to a friend"—the epigraph occludes the spoken nature of the sentence, leaving the reader to assume it was originally written in verse. It thus also has the effect of highlighting the artificially constructed nature of the memoir more generally—the way in which the prosaic events of eating, drinking and trying to find a publisher are sublimated into Hemingway's distinctly smooth and nostalgic prosody. Paris proves to be a moveable feast, not just in the sense that it is highly portable, but also because, when conveyed in Hemingway's limpid style, it is highly digestible.[35]

This chapter will not indulge in an account of Hemingway's representations of food; rather I will attend briefly to two moments—his encounters with Ford Madox Ford and

---

[35] Which is another way of describing why this memoir is so moveable—it continues to be a hugely popular bestseller. The techniques of abstraction that Hemingway employs render his experiences almost universally relatable. As a young man, I was lucky enough to have lived in Paris. I worked as a cashier at the current iteration of Shakespeare & Company bookstore, under the ownership of George Whitman and his daughter Sylvia. I sold thousands of copies of *A Moveable Feast*, anecdotal proof that I am not the only reader who finds Hemingway's Paris easily digestible.

Wyndham Lewis—in which the feast of Paris is frustratingly immoveable, when the journalistic reportage gets stuck, and the processes of sublimation are stalled. Diagnosing the difficulties encountered by Hemingway will act as an entrée to the main course, Wyndham Lewis, whose idiosyncratic and often offensive work can be more generally described as an "immoveable feast"—in Lewis's own words, a product of "the habitual indigestion of reality."

Ernest Hemingway recalls Ford Madox Ford surprising him one evening at the Closerie des Lilas, a quiet, off-the-beaten-track café frequented by local poets and military veterans. Sparsely populated by patrons "all interested in each other and their drinks," the café is contrasted to the trendier Dôme and La Rotonde, where people went "to be seen publicly." At Lilas, "no one was on exhibition," except, of course, everyone upon whom Hemingway's gaze alights. The scene is tranquil, and Hemingway is unbothered at his secluded table on the terrace, observing the light on the trees and the characters that populate the bar. His prose is humming. Just before Ford's arrival, Hemingway describes a soldier whose face had been wounded in the war: "There was always an almost iridescent shiny cast about the considerably reconstructed face, rather like that of a well-packed ski run" (82). Both shocking and precise, the simile displays Hemingway's ability to connect disparate objects through his keen sense of vision. The unexpected virtuosity of the observation—connecting the sheen of snow packed by repeated ski runs with the processes and effects of rudimentary plastic surgery—almost occludes the violent history of the object being observed. Yet the extremity of the terms also calls attention to the simile's own "reconstructed" status, even as Hemingway's blithe vernacular confidence ("always an almost," "rather like") naturalizes the aesthetic figuration and gives it a "shiny cast." Somehow the simile is both unlikely and perfectly natural. Thus a simile focused on surfaces ("face," "cast," "ski run") is able to imply a depth of historical brutality that is nevertheless withheld from the surface narrative, and the act of figuration cannily contains the violence of the soldier's wound within the violence of the representational act itself.

It is this type of sentence that would compel Ford to claim in 1923 that Hemingway was producing "perhaps the most delicate prose that is today being written." In his foreword to *A Farewell to Arms*, Ford specifically praises the visual quality of his writing: "Some of his pages have the effect of a brook-bottom into which you look down through flowing water. The words form a tessellation, each in order beside the other" (*Critical* 133). Ford's praise beautifully describes the transparent quality of Hemingway's prose at its best—the way its surfaces imply structure, order, and depth without belaboring the psychological, political, or historical nexuses of cause and effect. It also indulges in the lexicon that Hemingway himself elaborated when discussing his own technique and style, one that privileges bracing images of the natural world moving in ways that are indifferent to human activity. Most famously: "If a writer of prose knows enough of what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water." The brook-bottom and iceberg metaphors privilege different aspects of literary form and expression: Ford highlights the transparency of well-ordered units naturally cohering into a beautiful whole; Hemingway highlights the technical management of revealing and withholding information. Ford focuses on the effects; Hemingway focuses on how to achieve those effects. But taken together, they indicate an untroubled unity between surface and depth, part and whole, as they exist in motion—that is, as the work of narrative itself. And both metaphors tellingly avoid any description of how surface and depth might be mediated. The iceberg moves through the water, but what lies beneath is obscured from vision. The brook flows

over the rocks, which rest unperturbed—the reader can see the patterns without getting their feet wet.

However, Ford's intrusion into the scene at Lilas poses an obstacle to Hemingway's untroubled naturalism, his ability to cleanly sublimate his surroundings into the reconstructed surface of reportage. Despite having a table on the terrace on a breezy evening, Ford's physical presence renders the scene palpably claustrophobic, as Hemingway struggles to describe and distance Ford's imposing physicality. The description begins to stutter—"he was breathing heavily through a heavy, stained mustache" (83)—and a stilted dialogue quickly replaces the smooth, clearly flowing surface of the description. After a page of Ford unsuccessfully ordering a drink, Hemingway withdraws to comment: "I had always avoided looking at Ford when I could and I always held my breath when I was near him in a closed room" (83). Hemingway's aversion to Ford is both visual and olfactory, the latter obtruding on and rendering the former impossible. "But this was the open air and the fallen leaves blew from my side of the table past his, so I took a good look at him, repented, and looked across the boulevard" (84). In other words, having calculated that the wind was blowing Ford's stench in the other direction, Hemingway risks returning to his observational mode, but the "heavy, wheezing, ignoble presence of Ford, only touching-distance away, made it difficult" (86). Ford's proximal physicality gets in the way of Hemingway's ability to engage him as an object of representation. Not only can he not visually process Ford as an aesthetic object, but Ford's very presence also disrupts the possibility of aesthetic experience more generally. Hemingway recounts his disappointment: "The light was changed again and I had missed the change" (84).

This moment of disgust starkly contrasts with the memoir's typically detached and neutral portrayals of the less savory aspects of early-twentieth-century Paris. In the memorable opening scene, Hemingway describes his neighborhood's rudimentary septic system with an appreciative technical precision: "The squat toilets of the old apartment houses…with two cleated cement shoe-shaped elevations on each side of the aperture…emptied into cess-pools which were emptied into horse drawn wagons" (3). The odor of the open-air sewage wafting into his windows during a hot summer day is merely "very strong" (4). Thus Hemingway does not close his windows to keep out the smell of sewage—indeed, he seems to appreciate the whole apparatus as if it were ship tackle or a well-bridled horse—but he must hold his breath if the windows are closed and Ford Madox Ford is nearby. Indeed, as we have seen from the passage above, even a breezy terrace is not sufficient to disperse or distance the imposition of Ford's overwhelming corporeality. In an act of self-assurance, Hemingway returns to his brandy: "I took a drink to see if his coming had fouled it, but it still tasted good" (84). Thus, despite the intrusion, Hemingway is able to return to a stable observational mode, tasting his brandy and marking out a small but significant space of subjectivity, the physical taste of the brandy substituting and at least partially compensating for the obstructed act of aesthetic taste.

Michel Delville and Andrew Norris have characterized this encounter with Ford as a moment when Hemingway is unable to "to carry off the heroic sublimation of disgust necessary to shore up his sense of forthright masculinity" (141), classing it alongside another "famously discordant passage" involving Wyndham Lewis. But whereas Ford exists as a representational obstacle that is ultimately overcome—Hemingway's retrospective portrait successfully confines the blundering figure of Ford to the realm of the comic and pitiful—the encounter with Lewis proves more enduringly disturbing. While Ford's presence is very clearly registered as disgusting, Hemingway's reaction to Lewis is more ambiguous, as he cannot quite identify the objective qualities in Lewis which cause him the intense displeasure. Indeed, his struggle to

justify and describe his reaction produces some of the most recondite and unsettling passages in the memoir. The plot of the episode is harmless enough: Lewis does nothing obviously offensive as he enters a room where Ezra Pound and Hemingway are sparring, watches them train for a while, and then shares a drink and talks shop with Pound. And yet, returning home, Hemingway tells Hattie, "I met the nastiest man I've ever seen today" (109). Hemingway's phrasing stresses the visual nature of Lewis' nastiness, even as the exact coordinates of disgust never really come into focus. As in the encounter with Ford, Hemingway only furtively glances at Lewis, but it takes the form of an aggressive encounter—less the position of a disinterested spectator, but rather as a fighter backed into a corner:

> I watched Lewis carefully without seeming to look at him, as you do when you are boxing, and I do not think I had ever seen a nastier-looking man. Some people show evil as a great race horse shows breeding. They have the dignity of a hard *chancre*. Lewis did not show evil; he just looked nasty.
>
> Walking home I tried to think what he reminded me of and there were various things. There were all medical except toe-jam and that was a slang word. I tried to break his face down and describe it but I could only get the eyes. Under the black hat, when I had first seen them, the eyes had been those of an unsuccessful rapist. (109)

The passage dramatizes Hemingway's struggle to convert Lewis's nastiness into an apt metaphor and ultimately settles on an uncharacteristically ambiguous and awkward flourish that associates Lewis with a failed rapist. The final sentence departs from Hemingway's typically cool declarative prose because of the jarring image and the awkward doubling of past perfect tenses and bungled analogies, which I will discuss in more detail below. Indeed, Hemingway's tortuous route to describing Lewis begins to resemble the very object he is trying to describe, as if Lewis's nasty presence is enough to infect the journalistic reportage with the sort of associational metonymic slippage more typical of Lewis's own prose, the similes and their referents splintering irrationally over the course of just a few phrases. Unlike the Ford episode, in which Hemingway is ultimately able to confine the older writer to the clearly delineated realm of the disgusting, the encounter with Lewis is altogether messier and uncontainable. So while Lewis would have surely chafed at Hemingway's insult, one can also imagine that he would have appreciated, or at least recognized, its mode of expression: as his *own*.[36]

It is worth tracking in more detail how Lewis's presence disrupts Hemingway's text; ironically, it will provide a loose template for reading Lewis's own more characteristic and persistent disruptions, more difficult to read if only because they are more difficult to isolate. The effect can already be seen most simply in the passage's multiple attempts at figuration. From the start, aligning *people-showing-evil* with *horses-showing-breeding* is confusing in the way it mismatches a negative tenor with a positive vehicle: the reader must awkwardly balance accepting the visual analogy between evil people and well-bred horses manifesting their inner essences in similar ways, while simultaneously questioning whether Hemingway means to imply that good-breeding and evil are equivalent in a moral register. But instead of elaborating the unexpected analogy, Hemingway transitions to a second analogy: "They have the dignity of a

---

[36] Fredric Jameson mentions this scene in the Prologue to *Fables of Aggression* as an example of Lewis's surprisingly enduring offensiveness: "But there is no point denying the oppressiveness with which such impulses gradually become dominant, are generalized and projected outwards as a global hostility, not merely to his own characters, but also to the quasi-totality of his contemporaries as well, not excluding his own contemporaries. The latter may therefore be forgiven occasional reactions like that of Hemingway to the real-life Lewis" (4).

hard *chancre*." Consolidating evil people and well-bred horses into the pronoun "They" makes it difficult to pinpoint what kind of descriptive work the French "*chancre*" is doing in the passage: is it an ulcer, an infection of the horse's foot, or perhaps more strangely, a reference to the symptomatic scab resulting from syphilis? The point here is not so much to straighten out the metaphor and discover its referent, but rather to highlight how rare it is to get lost in an extended metaphor when reading Hemingway. In its dual reference to both horses and sexually-transmitted infections, the word *chancre* consolidates the sprawling lexical fields of race horses and rape, but does little to clarify how the two sets of imagery relate to their original referent: Lewis himself.

Indeed, it is hard not to register Hemingway's insult as turning around on itself, as the description of evil and well-bred horses begins to overshoot its mark, and the original referent, Lewis, drops out of the metaphor except as an almost forgotten negation. The attempt at figuration becomes more convoluted still, as the passage turns again, denying Lewis this highly questionable "dignity of a hard *chancre*" and insisting, instead, that he does not "show evil," but merely "looks nasty." The insult turns on the double distinction—first, between a dignified expression of evil and a more vulgar nastiness; second, between the more active "showing" and the more passive "looking." Hemingway's subtle distinction is meant to withhold from Lewis the self-possession implied by the purposeful act of showing one's evil, consigning Lewis to the passivity of merely looking nasty, and thereby emphasizing his own role as a detached, observant spectator—a typical move in this autobiographical re-fabrication. But it also has the unintended effect of glorifying the person who, in full control of his evil, is able to follow through on the repugnant act of rape, and proudly bare his *chancre* as proof of his conquest, which is a rather nasty outcome after all. However, as a "failed rapist," Lewis is denied the "dignified" power to will of the self, and is simultaneously exonerated from the act of sexual violence which was meant to sustain the metaphor in the first place. Thus Hemingway's attempt to describe Lewis's nastiness renders the passage itself nasty, a mimetic boomerang that aligns the Hemingway passage with the very Lewisian aesthetic from which he is attempting to distance himself.

Insofar as nastiness sets in motion a troubling confusion between the perceiving subject (Hemingway) and the object of representation (Lewis), it can be closely correlated, but not conflated, with the disgusting, which Kant underlines in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* as the only exception to art's otherwise unlimited capacity to beautify real life events or objects which are displeasing, including "The Furies, diseases, [and] the devastations of war." For Kant, disgust is categorically distinct because the disgusting object refuses to yield to the representational mechanics imposed by the subject. This dynamic could be understood as an unwanted mimesis, in which the object being described resists representational sublimation and instead imposes its content on the forms through which it is being conveyed—in this case, just to repeat, the nastiness of Lewis redoubling as the nastiness of Hemingway's attempts at figuration. Kant notes,

> There is only one kind of ugliness which cannot be represented in accordance with nature without destroying all aesthetical satisfaction, and consequently artificial beauty, viz. that which excites disgust. For in this singular sensation, which rests on mere imagination, the object is represented as if it were obtruding itself for our enjoyment while we strive against it with all our might. And the artistic representation of the object is no longer distinguished from the nature of the object itself in our sensation, and thus it is impossible that it can be regarded as beautiful. (155)

In the same way that he avoids listing the objective qualities of beauty, Kant is careful not to list the objective qualities that would qualify an object as disgusting; rather, he displaces the disgusting onto the "singular sensation" it produces in the subject. This sensation is characterized by a contradictory push-and-pull between the subject and the object, with the object threatening to take over the representation of that object and thereby abolish the distance necessary for disinterested appreciation. (In this very peculiar context, Kant's theory of disgust also seems disturbingly "rape-y.") For Kant, it is not the disgusting that is disgusting, but the mimetic function itself, since it collapses the distance necessary for reflective judgment, troubles the boundaries of individuation and grants the object a disconcerting degree of power.[37] But Hemingway's portrait of Lewis does not quite qualify as disgusting, insofar as the sensations of disgust are never able to clearly link up with an object through a clear chain of signification, however negated. Rather, the nastiness that Lewis seems to exude might be said to hover just inside that threshold of disgust, borrowing the affective reactivity which disgust solicits but never sufficiently stabilizing as a concept that achieves representational clarity, which would in turn establish a safe distance between subject and object.

Returning again to the passage in *A Moveable Feast*, we find Hemingway caught up in this mimetic bind, teetering on the threshold of disgust, while the disgusting object never quite coalesces into a clear idea or representation—into anything beyond something vaguely nasty. But not for want of trying: "I tried to think what he reminded me of and there were various things." In the encounter with Ford, he is able to narrativize his disgust into a larger exposé of Ford's anachronistic sensibility, his Edwardian aloofness and general snobbery. But with Lewis, he resorts to a brute pictorial method, mixing the methods of cubism and boxing as if taking an aggressive shortcut to the iridescent "shiny cast" of the surface narrative: "I tried to break his face down and describe it, but I could only get the eyes." This attention to surfaces yields the awkward crescendo: "Under the black hat, when I had first seen them, the eyes had been those of an unsuccessful rapist" (109). Typically, a past perfect tense is paired with the past simple or past continuous in order to stress that one event precedes the other—for example, "Under the black hat, when I had first seen them, the eyes were those of an unsuccessful rapist." One assumes that Hemingway means to say that the eyes still bear the residue of the unsuccessful rape, otherwise how would he have recognized it at all? Regularizing the passage in the opposite direction is perhaps more telling: "Under the black hat, when I first saw them, the eyes had been those of an unsuccessful rapist." In this version, Hemingway would be recalling his first impression, which makes narrative sense, as this moment of description comes directly after his first encounter. But the doubling of past perfect tenses suggests that the temporality of the object—Lewis's eyes—takes over the temporality of both clauses, in effect ceding to the temporality of the object, rather than employing a grammatically progressive narrative with a clear temporal antecedent that would contain the descriptive clause as a result of Hemingway's detached observation. In Kantian terms, we could say that the artistic representation of the object's temporality is no longer distinguished from the nature of the object's temporality itself.

For Hemingway, Lewis's nastiness remains frustratingly vague but ineluctable, a symptom of an intense affective response that is unmoored from its objective origin, made worse

---

[37] Insofar as it does not allow the aesthetic to function at all, disgust becomes what Derrida calls "the absolute excluded" (21). In the Kantian system. Similarly, in the afterward to *Ugly Feelings*, Sianne Ngai argues that disgust functions as an "outer limit or threshold," marking the boundary between "the aesthetics of minor affects" and the "more instrumental or politically efficacious emotions" (354).

by the degree to which the object effectively overtakes the attempt to describe it. Nastiness thus accurately describes the processes of the disgusting by inscribing the difficulty of objectifying it as such, a process that would in turn neutralize disgust by reestablishing the distance necessary for the aesthetic to resume its cycles of sublimation.[38] If, as Deliville and Norris contend, Hemingway's prose works through "the heroic sublimation of disgust," then this is an exceptional moment of failure. No such sublimation occurs. Thus, we could diagnose Hemingway's failure to "get" Lewis as a failure of narrative itself, insofar as Lewis—in particular, Lewis' eyes—refuse to be narrativized. The passage does not exemplify the "dignity" of an iceberg—that word has been sullied by its association with rape and *chancres*, while the line dividing surface and depth has become blurry. Wisely, Hattie cuts her husband short, as if anticipating his inability to successfully convey his feelings: "Please don't tell me about him. We're just going to have dinner" (109), yet another moment in Hemingway's memoir when physical eating is forced to compensate for the failure of aesthetic taste.

"Bestre"

Hemingway's attempt to *get* Lewis's eyes feels particularly risky given Lewis's insistence that his eyes were his most powerful and important sense. "With as much definiteness as that, whatever I, for my part, say, can be traced back to an organ; but in my case it is the eye," Lewis writes in *Time and Western Man*. "It is in the service of the things of my vision that my ideas are mobilized." Though this pronouncement comes in 1926, Lewis's obsession with "the eye" is dramatized in his very earliest fiction. In *Rude Assignment,* Lewis recalls his early literary and artistic experimentation leading up to the publication of *Blast;* he claims that he was trying to construct a new way of seeing: "It was more than just picture-making: one was manufacturing fresh eyes for people, and fresh souls to go with those eyes" (125).

First published in 1909 in *The English Review* under the editorship of Ford Madox Ford, the short story "Bestre" describes an ocular battle that uncannily resembles the dynamic in Hemingway's retrospective attempt to render Lewis. As critics have noted, the narrator Kerr-Orr and the central character Bestre constitute an early example of a "structural agon."[39] Kerr-Orr is a traveling tourist modeled on the young Lewis, who traveled to Brittany in 1906 and produced a series of sketches for various little magazines, most of which were then collected, revised and published as *The Wild Body* in 1927. Recollecting his travels in *Rude Assignment,* Lewis frames his travel with a digestive metaphor:

> Long vague periods of an indolence now charged with some creative purpose were spent in digesting what I saw, smelt and heard. For indolent I remained. The Atlantic air, the raw rich visual food of the barbaric environment, the squealing of the pipes, the crashing of the ocean, induced a creative torpor. Mine was now a drowsy sun-baked ferment, watching with delight the great comic effigies which erupted beneath my rather saturnine but astonished gaze: Brotcotnaz, Bestre, and the rest. (125)

---

[38] The relationship between nastiness and disgust has a close parallel to Lacan's reformulation of the classical distinction between anxiety and fear: whereas fear is directed to a certain object, anxiety cannot adequately determine its cause. Whereas Freud locates anxiety in the trauma of separation from the mother, Lacan's formation explains it in exactly opposite terms: it is the inability to separate that generates anxiety. See *Seminar 10*.

[39] The structuring principle of the agon is most systematically explored by Fredric Jameson in *Fables of Aggression,* in particular the chapter "Agons of the Pseudo-Couple" (35-61).

Lewis provides us with yet another list of the senses that excludes taste, which is instead displaced onto the digestive "faculty" that mediates the other senses of sight, smell and hearing. Once shifted into this metaphoric register, taste is appropriately matched to its object of perception: "the raw, rich food of the barbaric environment." As an epicurean of the material world, the young Lewis resembles Kerr-Orr, who finds gustatory pleasure by boarding at Bestre's hotel. "The situation of his boarding house would allow of unlimited pococurantism, idling and eating, sunning myself in one of his windows, with Berkeley or Cudworth in my hand, and a staring eye that lost itself in reveries that suddenly took on flesh and acted some obstinate little part or other."[40] Over the course of the story, however, Kerr-Orr's position as a detached observer sampling the delicacies of the French countryside will come under threat, as Bestre's character asserts his power and eventually reconfigures the story in his own image, much in the same way as Lewis himself managed to overtake Hemingway's memoir.

The story opens with the narrator Kerr-Orr strolling through the fictional Breton town of Kermanac. "I glided swiftly along on my centipedal boots, dragging my eye upon the rough walls of the houses to my right like a listless cane. Low houses faced the small vasey port. It was there I saw Bestre." Lewis's painterly sensitivity to visual detail is evident, even as he diverges from a naturalistic rendering of the scene through a trademark metonymic slide: centipedal boots implies that feet are dragging along the ground, which is transposed onto an eye dragging along a rough wall like a cane—under the weight of a metonymic chain that never quite coheres, the sentence transforms from gliding swiftly to listlessly dragging in a syntactic register that undercuts the semantic description. This early metonymic slippage is the first indication of Kerr-Orr's weak narrative power, an inability to move from keen, detailed and at times shocking observations to a figurative register that would cohere into more abstract symbols and closed significations.

In the following paragraph, this metonymic slippage becomes a larger plot device that disorients the story's structural coordinates. The passage above is immediately followed by a short, one-sentence paragraph—"This is how I became aware of Bestre"—which, in its near repetition of the preceding sentence—"It was there I saw Bestre"—intimates the troubled division between vision and experience that will play out throughout the rest of the story. A new

---

[40] Lewis's memoir does not include the seemingly random references to Ralph Cudworth (1618-1688), George Berkeley (1685-1753), and Voltaire (1694-1778), an unlikely constellation of Enlightenment thinkers that tempts the reader to the footnotes. To some degree, it might be an instance of what Kenner labels "the very irrelevance of sharply noted detail" from which Lewisian characters seem to emerge, or what Jameson calls "sheerly additive sentence production" (31). On the other hand, they bear out a subterranean logic that gives deeper philosophical resonance to Lewis's satire, and adumbrates the figure of "the taster," which will come under intense criticism in the two issues of *Blast*. By way of review, Signor Pococurante, a Venetian nobleman who hosts a short lunch and tour of his property, is praised by Candide for being "a great genius" who is "above everything he possesses." Yet Candide's pessimistic companion Martin warns, "But do you not see…that he is disgusted with all he possesses? Plato observed a long while ago that those stomachs are not the best that reject all sorts of food." The Plato reference is enough to justify the aside to Cudworth, but what of Berkeley? For Voltaire, Pococurantism is a symptom of an overly cultivated sensibility that becomes reified into perpetual disengagement with the world. It could be construed then as a caricature of Berkeleyean idealism, a reduction of the material world, "the barbaric environment" to mere "visual food" of colors, planes and lines. Thus "Bestre" leaves us with two poles of taste. On the one hand, a violent assimilation that leads to indigestion and on the other hand, a detached dilettantism that is perpetually aloof and disengaged from the outside world.

paragraph finds our narrator "at work in [his] untidy hive," but he is then suddenly displaced back onto the street:

> Now, what seemed to happen was that, as I bent over my work, an odiously grinning face peered in at my window. The impression of an intrusion was so strong, that I did not even realize at first that it was I who was the intruder. That the window was not my window, and that the face was not peering in but out: that, in fact, it was I myself who was guilty of peering into somebody else's window: this was hidden from me in the first moment of consciousness about the odious brown person of Bestre. (77)

If eyes are associated with the controlling power of the gaze, then it is hard to figure out, in this passage, who is wielding that power and to what effect. Though Kerr-Orr is narrating the scene, and turns out to be the one peering into Bestre's window (rather than the one being watched), he nevertheless seems to have lost the ability to control the setting and plot of the story that he is attempting to tell. While at one moment he seems to be innocently writing in his study, the next moment he is interpellated into a scene that rewrites him as a guilty subject invading the privacy of a stranger's domestic space. This lack of narrative control expands the opening paragraph's centrifugal metonymic energies to the coordinates of the story's larger structure.[41] Thus Kerr-Orr becomes a vehicle for elaborating the power of visuality insofar as he demonstrates Lewis' ability to paint a static scene with extraordinary detail, but at the expense of plotting those visual details into a narrative that proceeds from a consciousness that can confidently order events in a temporal sequence. In the absence of an ordering consciousness, the paratactic visual details take on the burden of structuring the story according to their own spatial logic, independent from an internalizing narration in time.

Contrast this scene with the ocular contest in *A Moveable Feast*. Whereas Hemingway is caught unaware by the power of the eyes he attempts to describe, Lewis's narrator dramatizes this contest of specular intrusion in order to demonstrate how the objects of perception can overtake the narrating subject with hallucinatory power. Indeed, reconstructing the first encounter between Kerr-Orr and Bestre uncannily replicates, in less compacted form, the temporal contradictions that dictated the doubling past-perfect tenses in Hemingway's encounter with Lewis. Does Bestre stare into Kerr-Orr's "untidy hive" or does Kerr-Orr stare into Bestre's kitchen? The text does not offer a clean way to fit these narrated events into a conventional time-space continuum (a "harmonious tessellation"), and yet both occur, and the text does not draw attention to their seeming contradiction. Thus while Hemingway's phrasing might not make sense according to the terms of his naturalist presuppositions—it registers as an error or an unsuccessful sublimation of material—Lewis's rendition seems to fully submit to the psychological drama as the organizing frame for the story's ontological coordinates.

And yet, reducing Lewis's narrative logic to a contest of egos engaged in competing projections of the self is complicated by the externalizing impulses of the overtly physical

---

[41] Or, to use a familiar critical trope from Lewis criticism, this expansion from syntax to setting could be summarized as molar containment of a molecular fragment, but with the caveat that the larger "container" does not diffuse but rather amplifies the original molecular energy at a higher order. At least in this instance, then, "Bestre" would be a counter-example to Jameson's contention that "Lewis's molar forms, the macrologic of his narratives, prove to have a very different dynamic from the momentum of the sentences themselves" (*Fables* 8)

description of the dueling visions.[42] This is most vividly seen in Lewis descriptions of the eyes themselves: not merely windows through which the world is registered, they are, rather, part of its violent and messy creation. Or, to put it more strongly, eyes are not privileged because of the distance they hold from a world they seek to objectify; rather, they are privileged to the degree that they facilitate the collapse of that distance, become encrusted with the world's detritus, and gain power through that very agglomeration:

> The Eye was really Bestre's weapon: the ammunition with which he loaded it was drawn from all the most skunk-like provender, the most ugly mucins, fungoid glands, of his physique. Excrement as well as sputum would be shot from this luminous hole, with the same certainty in its unsavoury appulsion. Every resource of metonymy, bloody mind transfusion or irony were also his. What he selected as an arm in his duels, then, was the Eye. (83)

Insofar as Bestre's eye is intertwined with the visible world it perceives, it recursively embodies the intersubjective tension that was previously played out between Kerr-Orr and Bestre: the battle between subjects and objects turns out to be immanent to the seeing eye itself. Instead of functioning as an organ of perception, receiving stimuli that can then be processed and organized, the eye's role (no pun intended) becomes overtly aggressive and productive, eating food fit for skunks, subsuming fungal secretions, shooting out excrement.[43] The image is spectacularly disgusting. Mucins, fungoid, sputum, appulsion: it feels overly simplistic to just list words and say, "That's nasty," yet reading Lewis seems to persistently put the reader into such a position, as if the point of the text is to simultaneously evoke a strong aversion while withholding the cause of that aversion.[44] We can take a modicum of comfort in knowing that

---

[42] It is an example of what Lewis would call an "expressionist universe," more fully realized in his play *Enemy of the Stars*, but all the more interesting in the context of a fictional story because of how the abstract expressionism has to manage the demands of narrative, plot and traditional characterization.

[43] T.E. Hulme similarly forces together the eye and excrement, in notes and aphorisms collected and published after his death as *Cinders.* The following aphorism distills Hamlet's soliloquy to its crude core. "The eyes, the beauty of the world, have been organised out of the faeces. Man returns to dust. So does the face of the world to primeval cinders" (*Selected* 24). Along the same lines, but with imagery possibly pulled from his time in the trenches: "Hence we can see the world as pure geometry, and can make out its dividing lines. But the eye is in the mud, the eye *is* mud" (32). Lewis extends the idea of the eye's "implication" in the materiality of the world in his essay "Prevalent Design," published in 1919 and 1920. With overt sarcasm, he criticizes the Impressionist allegiance to "objective" visuality: "The eyes are supposed to have been vacuum-cleaned of every speck of matter not germane to their functioning of pure, direct, unmetamorphosed sight. The mind is masked behind them" (*Creatures* 55).

[44] By some accounts, the very word "nasty" inspires this feeling. In *The American Language*, in a section called "International Exchanges," H.L. Mencken notes how the figurative use of "nasty" as a synonym for "disagreeable" had been imported from English to American speech. He cites *White's Words and their Use* (1876) as warning against this conflation. White was keen to distinguish "dirty, filthy, and nasty; of which the last expresses the greatest offense to all the senses—the quality and condition of moist and generally ill-smelling filth." He continues, "This slangy misuse of the word is rarely or never heard in the United States" (322). It is pertinent then that Hemingway, an American, chooses just this word to describe Lewis, not least because, in his own missive against Hemingway, Lewis would accuse him of violating the very rules of usage that Mencken highlighted. Hemingway's country-bumpkin Americanisms are the springboard for Lewis critique of the "Dumb-Ox," where he disparages Hemingway's unreflective

Hemingway felt the same way: "He just looked nasty." His portrait of Lewis in *A Moveable Feast* is revealing to the extent that it accurately figures the affective experience of reading Lewis's work more generally: a feeling that something nasty is happening, while the text seems to frustrate attempts to clearly designate any nasty object as such, precisely because it so forcefully imposes itself on the reader, interpolating us into its world to the extent that we cannot analyze it from the outside. In Lewis's apt, disturbing phrase: "a bloody mind transfusion" has occurred.

At this point, I want to suggest an emergent pattern of "nastiness" in Lewis's style, which plays out in Lewis's use of metaphor and metonymy. In the passage above, the metafigural reference to "every source of metonymy" is Kerr-Orr's way of describing Bestre's aggressive exchanges with his guests and other passers-by. But it is also an early instance of Lewis using his narrator to explain and justify his own aesthetic paradigm. Kerr-Orr muses, "Has Bestre discovered the only type of action compatible with artistic creation, assuring security and calm to him that holds the key of the situation, in a certain degree compelling others to accept your rules?" One can imagine this question as a twisted coda to Paul de Man's "Semiology and Rhetoric," insofar as the grammatical nature of the question itself proleptically asserts the truth of its rhetorical assumption; by accepting the nature of the question as rhetorical, we cede the generation of our reaction to the rules laid out by the speaker. Put otherwise, the question answers itself insofar it has already interpellated us into its rhetorical framework. The awkwardness of the possessive pronoun—"accept *your* rules"—seems to drive home the point, inscribing the reader into the story through this direct address to the second person. In de Man's reading of Bunker, Yeats and Proust, he distinguishes between a "rhetorization of grammar," in which readings "end up in indetermination, in a suspended uncertainty that [is] unable to choose between two modes of reading," and the "grammatization of rhetoric," which "seems to reach a truth, albeit by the negative road of exposing an error, a false pretense." In both instances, the paradigmatic nature of metaphor turns out to rely on a "syntagmatic structure based on contingent association such as metonymy," and the work of criticism involves revealing the "semiotic network that structures the entire narrative and that remained invisible to a reader caught in naïve metaphorical mystification" (16). Thus Proust is singled out because of his metafigural celebration of metaphor in passages that metonymically undermine the seemingly privileged mode of metaphorical figuration. In de Man's analysis, metonymy is routinely classified as inimical to the traditional forms of figuration which sustain conventional symbolic readings, which in turn distinguishes metonymy as a privileged "site" of deconstruction, an opening that can be exploited for demystification.[45]

But what happens when the metafigural celebration is not directed at metaphor, but at "all the resources of metonymy," as it is in Lewis? One outcome is that the two modes of de Man's

---

commitment to "the surface," a critique that borders on self-contradiction given Lewis's insistence that art should be "an art of the surface" (44).

[45] Writing in 1973, the same year that de Man published "Semiology and Rhetoric," Fredric Jameson reads Lewis's use of metaphor and metonymy as an anticipation of the very deconstruction that de Man would pioneer: "In Lewis," he writes, "metonymy is read against metaphor, as its determinate negation: it thus becomes a sign of the devaluation of inspiration itself and of the art-sentence as a composed, subjectively ripe melodic unit in its own right. We have already suggested in our Prologue that in this respect the aggressive deconstruction of metaphor and the organic in Lewis can be seen as an anticipation of the poststructuralist assault on the Romantic valorization of organic form and symbol" (*Fables* 30). First published in *Hudson Review* (1973), then as a book in 1979.

deconstruction—a rhetorization of grammar leading to uncertainty, and a grammatization of rhetoric leading to a negated version of truth—are executed simultaneously, leaving the reader with a truth that is nothing less (or more) than indetermination itself.[46] The best readers of Lewis, from Kenner to Jameson, highlight the odd power of syntactical ambiguity in a Lewisian sentence, not in the sense that the meaning is difficult to determine, but rather, in its allegiance to translating the brute surfaces of an indigestible reality, it seems to vomit forth, as it were, a certain ambiguity—that is, an ambiguity that is certain, fixed, and undeniable, not at the level of language or perception, but somehow in the fabric of reality itself.[47] It is in reaction to this recalcitrant and intractable reality that Lewis' characters try to violently assert their subjective wills. Kerr-Orr's final comment on Bestre has a tragicomic pathos: "Then he has the common impulse to avenge that self that has been perishing under the famine and knout of a bad reality, by glorifying and surfeiting it on its return to the imagination" (CWB 87). Kenner takes this as "the key to the bewildering energy of the prose," insofar as it diagnoses the mismatch between the "cramped and meagre" (CWB) actions that constitute the plot and the grandiose procession of images used to describe them. It should be noted, too, that the image is quite literally *disgusting*, insofar as it equates the transition from reality to the imagination as an act of expulsion. But it is also *nasty,* for in disentangling the knotty (knuotty?) metaphor—how can reality be a famine and a knout?—it interpolates the reader into a process of interpretative labor that redoubles the activity of Bestre himself, famine turning into surfeit as we move from recalcitrant textual units to ever greater possibilities of meaning, possibilities that are sustained because they evade actualization.

"Unlucky for Pringle"

---

[46] It is for this reason that "Bestre," a quite minor work in the context of Lewis' prodigious oeuvre, becomes a recurring touchstone in Hugh Kenner's book on Lewis."[Bestre] is one of the most curious documents in the Lewis canon," he observes. "More contradictions come to the surface than anywhere else." But in his reading, "the result wasn't a triumph but an artistic disaster" (88).

[47] Thus Kenner observes, referring to an excerpt from "Bestre": "By unhooking each of these words from its appointed object and joining them instead to each other, Lewis, in setting his signature on the combination, releases magnetisms that make its elements, once so joined, inseparable. The phrases thus arrived at are so condensed that their rightness grows wonderfully persuasive. Assonance and rhythm—not meaning—cause this particular ordering of the terms to snap together like a clock spring; any other arrangement, once we have seen this one, would hang open in flaccid incompetence" (17). Putting aside the way in which Lewis's critics routinely adopt Lewisian modes to describe his work (yet another iteration of nastiness as I have so far described it), Kenner's description is interesting, in the context of this chapter, for the way in which it accurately describes the passage in Hemingway—Lewis as a "failed rapist" has proven "wonderfully persuasive" even as the words that were meant to attach to Lewis have been "unhooked" from its "appointed object." But Lewis will provide us with myriad examples himself, in which the shocking and surprising congeal into the inevitable without ever being forced through the expected mediating processes of signification. "A thick uneven pigment of words is dashed onto the page," Kenner writes. "What is happening is that Lewis is elevating his vices into style" (92). Jameson, expanding on Kenner, puts it this way: "Their very function is to interfere with each other, to clash visibly within the sentence itself in such a way that no surface homogeneity has time to reform: the words, unable to go together properly, end up projecting the warring planes and angles of a cubist painting. The sentence is thus an amalgam of heterogeneous forces which must not be allowed to congeal" (*Fables* 33).

My reading of "Bestre" suggests that the interpretive process that the story requires of the reader is configured within the story as the relationship between Bestre and his narrator. Kerr-Orr may try to narrate or "read" Bestre from the comfortable distance of a disinterested spectator—merely tasting him—but Bestre's aggressive and digestive interactions eventually overtake that mode of detached "pococurantism" and implicate Kerr-Orr into Bestre's orbit of assimilation. Such is Lewis's description of how art is meant to function more generally, as he describes it in his 1922 essay, "The Credentials of the Painter": "The work of art, in the end, has to impose itself on men like a living individual" (73). Lewis's prospective "definition" of art's ability to overtake the subject constellates the moments of interpellation we have tracked so far in both Hemingway and Lewis: in Hemingway, as an exception to the distancing impulse of his journalistic mode; in Lewis, as a more generalized rule of how subjects, both readers and characters, are conscripted into a larger structure of narrative power dynamics. Viewing art as an imposition on the subject, rather than as the means by which one achieves disinterested pleasure and reasserts the boundaries of the subject, aligns art with the mode of the disgusting, which Kant had specifically excluded from the realm of taste. But Lewis does not simply reverse a Kantian aesthetic, substituting disgust for taste; rather, he argues for a reformulation of the very concept of taste, such that it is equipped to handle this new model of "imposition."

> Instead of appealing to their intelligence only, supplying them with a mechanical formula of universal efficacy, it must appeal to their whole make-up, or to their taste. The taste is a sort of higher, more complex intelligence. Every faculty serves it, and is found represented in its composition. Very few people possess this personal arbiter, or synthesis of the ego. The system of mutually contradictory compartments obtains usually: a man passes from one room to another. In one he performs actions that would be found repugnant to the self that he has left in the last, and vice versa. It is taste alone that can make him a dependable and ordered being. (73)

The taste. It is like Lewis to make so much hinge on a discordant article, at once delimiting and defamiliarizing a term that had been comfortably naturalized by centuries of metaphorical use. As the passage makes clear, "the taste" is highly constructed, a subjective faculty built up in relationship with the demands made by the artworks themselves.[48] Art must appeal to taste—it must impose itself on the individual. But taste, for its part, must also be sufficiently cultivated in order to handle this imposition. A paragraph that begins by defining art concludes by defining taste; the artwork and the observer are mutually constitutive.

Thus the "raw rich, visual food of the barbaric environment" requires a "digestive" faculty which, as Lewis writes, is served by all the other faculties: sight, hearing, smell and the rest. It is therefore a "more complex intelligence," bringing order to the ego which otherwise is fragmented into "contradictory compartments," an image that is extended into a metaphor of

---

[48] Lewis's equation of "taste" with the subject's "whole make-up" recalls a 1912 essay by Gleizes and Metzinger, in which they argue that the Cubist's relationship to space is not confined to scientific observation, but includes all of the faculties. "It is our whole personality which, contracting and expanding, transforms the plane of the picture. As it reacts, this plane reflects the personality back upon the understanding of the spectator, and thus pictorial space is defined—a sensitive passage between two subjective spaces" (qtd in Kern, *The Culture of Time & Space* 152*).* Kern reads this description in the context of Nietzschean perspectivism and Einsteinian relativity, arguing that modernist authors such as Joyce and Proust employ this perspectivism in their novels by depicting scenes from multiple, sometimes conflicting perspectives. He contends that it "provided a corrective to the epistemological and aesthetic egocentrism that had dominated Western culture for so long" (152).

moving through a series of different rooms. One can imagine this metaphor obtaining in a purely psychical register—but in Lewis, rooms, particularly domestic rooms, play a vital structural role in determining the actions and thoughts of characters, as in "Unlucky for Pringle," published two years after "Bestre."[49] Like Kerr-Orr indolently eating and drinking in the raw, visual food of Bestre's culinary offerings, the eponymous protagonist of "Unlucky for Pringle" grazes the London landscape for human curiosities by serially renting different apartments. In his tightly circumscribed travels, "he would savor the particular domestic taste of each new household he entered in the course of his search with the interest of a gourmet" (299). "His is like the passion of the book collector or amateur of furniture and practical arts. Only his taste is for the accidental—just whatever life brings" (301). But despite sharing many of the themes of the other early stories—innkeepers, intruders, kitchens, etc—Lewis did not reprint the story in the 1927 edition of *The Wild Body*. One obvious reason is the change in setting, from rural Brittany to the center of London, as well as the absence of Kerr-Orr as narratorial consciousness. In his editorial notes to *The Complete Wild Body*, Bernard Lafourcade argues that it is because "the voyeuristic structure of 'Unlucky for Pringle' was too complex to be compatible with the linear picaresque of *The Wild Body* encounters." Pringle is "both subject and object," whereas Kerr-Orr, according to Lafourcade, "not being subjected to the further attentions of an external observer, remained relatively immune" (298).

My reading of Bestre contended, on the contrary, that Kerr-Orr was not so immune, but Lafourcade's insight holds insofar as Pringle is never granted narratorial privilege; rather, he resembles a traditional character narrativized in the third person by an unnamed friend, whose ostentatiously sutured account seems to redouble the issues of control that we noted in Kerr-Orr's attempts to narrate Bestre. "But I could not transcribe his words on this, or any other occasion, because frankly I have not the vaguest recollection of them; and although his bulging eyes and easy gestures are familiar to me, lacking invention, I could not reconstruct our interview, memory having deserted me" (299). Nevertheless, he claims the ability "to see the intimate Pringle, the soul of Pringle,"[50] and proceeds to tell us his story:

> Pringle sent for some of his furniture the same afternoon, to supplement his new room's exiguous contents. On driving up with the boxes, he felt the customary rank depression—the indigestion of Reality. The reality always overwhelmed him at first; then came an Homeric struggle with it, usually ending in its assimilation. He was very fond of reality; but he was like a man very fond of what did not agree with him. (304)

In "Bestre," Kerr-Orr is not able to achieve an outside perspective that would neatly summarize his struggles to represent the character of Bestre, which results in a metonymic fragmentation that is, in turn, sublimated as the story's latent structure. But because James Pringle is made available to the reader via the overtly capricious and invasive narrator, the nature of his

---

[49] Thus in 1910 he describes the hospitality he experienced in Brittany as a "hospitality of the body—making another at home in one's body, so to speak, courteously throwing open the fleshy doors that lead to apartments usually regarded as private." "In early Lewis," Jameson writes, "the obsession with rooms and buildings stands as a kind of 'return of the repressed' of contingent and material content, which now tends to reinsert itself in anthropomorphic form into the place of one of the subject poles of the agon." This most literally occurs in the scene between Tarr and Bertha, discussed below. (*Fables* 86)

[50] In his essay "Prevalent Design," published in four parts in 1919-1920, Lewis seems to directly undermine the narrator's assertion of power in a more general sense when he writes that eyes are not able to see the soul: "For we do not see souls with our eyes; and the function of the soul is, a good deal, to interfere with the senses" (55)

confrontation with reality is made discursively legible. Indigestion in turn becomes a generalized theme of the story, as the surrounding elements of the material world refuse to be sublimated into Pringle's personal narrative. His furniture and other belongings amount to "a sullen revolt of inanimate things against the importunities of man, which would not leave them alone" (300). "These inanimate objects" harbor an "unwearied optimism" which is "appalling." What was first represented as a dilettantish taste is now reconfigured from the object's perspective as a resistance to the subject's advances. And in turn, Pringle is figured as a subject too weak to transform his environment to his own ends. Eventually, he becomes the indigestible object: "this house would vomit him forth; it could not assimilate him." Like the other wild bodies in Lewis's early oeuvre, Pringle becomes one of "these intricately moving bobbins…subject to a set of objects" that assert their power over and against a subject that attempts to "digest" them ("Inferior" 149). If, as Lewis later defines it, taste is the faculty that brings stability to the multiple dimensions of one's personality, as they move from one room to another, then Pringle can be read as an early figure of someone lacking "the taste," precisely because he is exercising taste in its older form, merely tasting, but not digesting.

But insofar as this failure of digestion is narrativized as the plot of the story itself, "Unlucky for Pringle" dramatizes "the taste" as it crudely emerges from the so-called "system of mutually contradictory compartments" that characterizes "our chaotic life"—human experience itself.[51] It is this "contradictory" character of modern life that renders former theories of taste insufficient, according to Lewis. He takes aim at philosophers who have "decorated the imposing architecture of their systems with aesthetics as a building is embellished with wall-painting," before making a dismissive jab at Hegel: "[His] taste in painting would probably be Böcklin."[52] David Hume's empiricist approach is treated more generously, but Lewis criticizes the notion that "argument and reflection" are sufficient means by which to achieve correct taste. "Argument and reflection are certainly very necessary…But, in the interest of this dialectic, no laws can be adduced of universal application" (73). The Hume reference comes from an early section of *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, wherein he argues that all moral judgments "[depend] on some internal sense or feeling, which nature has made universal in the whole species," before suggesting that, in the realm of the finer arts, "a false relish may frequently be corrected by argument and reflection" (5). Perhaps it is enough to point out that Lewis does not reference Hume's more explicit exposition of taste in "Of the Standard of Taste," but instead focuses on *An Enquiry*, where the stakes of defining and understanding taste are not limited to food preferences or questions of beauty, but rather extend to all areas of judgment. Here is Lewis: "Taste, as I have described it above, is what would occur in the sphere of morals if David Hume's 'argument and reflection' became a habit, something that accompanied a man into

---

[51] "Pringle" is set in urban London rather than in rural Brittany. In the latter, psychological battles are waged in "primitive" settings unimpinged by the intrusions of the modern city. Whereas the chaos of Pringle's world seems to require a narratorial presence to order its chaotic failures. A new dimension of friction is at play. From *Tyro*: "We are the creatures of a new state of human life, as different from Nineteenth Century England, say, as the Renaissance was from the Middle Ages" (24).

[52] Lewis is referring to Arnold Böcklin's hugely popular "Isle of the Dead," painted in a series from 1880 to 1886, which were then reproduced on a mass scale for use in private living rooms. In his novel *Despair*, Vladimir Nabokov commented that the painting could be "found in every Berlin home" (66). More pertinent to this chapter is that, in the novel, *Tarr* Bertha hangs a reproduction of this painting in her apartment alongside a portrait of Beethoven, which Tarr reads as an indicator of her debased, middle-class kitsch.

whatever compartment of his existence he might be passing at the moment" (75). For Hume, "habit" describes a universal psychological inclination that desensitizes us to the constructed nature of causality and allows us to make irrational but heuristic inferences about how the world works. It is, in other words, just the opposite of argument and reflection. But Lewis wants to compress these opposing terms—a rational faculty of the mind and an unconscious intuition—into a single faculty, a more complex intelligence, *the* taste.

Lewis's revision of Hume implies that taste is not confined to the aesthetic realm—mediating between subjective feelings and the universal laws of beauty—but is instead integral to how humans navigate the chaos of everyday life. By way of example, Lewis suggests, "we can usefully allow ourselves to be reminded of the figure brought forward in the last article to typify the painter: Goethe" (73). Lewis is unperturbed by the awkward polemical decision to choose a *writer* in order to make an argument about the credentials of the *painter*. We might ask how both of the following sentences can be true: on the one hand, "the painter is a different sort of artist than any other" (66), while on the other, "Goethe, as an artist, was the sort of artist a painter is" (71). The example seems to undercut itself before the analogy is even elaborated.[53] In order to square the circle, Lewis displaces the contradiction onto another contradiction: "the painter participates more in life itself in one way more than any other artist; but in another sense he is the most removed from it" (71). The mode of argumentation is far from convincing *qua* argument; but it accomplishes its goal, as it were, by conscripting the reader into its dizzying logic of displacement, contradictions begetting contradictions, not as a resolution to a logical problem, but as a projection of the fundamental molecular problematics onto increasingly unwieldy realms of philosophy and culture. This series of contradictory terms—habit/argument, writer/painter, in life/removed from life—leads up to the conclusion of the essay, which burdens taste with mediating a whole slew of unresolved polarities, up to and including a cryptic reformulation of Kant's third antinomy, which is, it should be noted, the more canonical response to Hume's reduction of causality to mere habit. I quote the final two paragraphs in full:

> If we cannot get, at the top, a fully human world, then art, and everything that we have so far identified with civilization, must perish. If our values become the values of stones or matter generally, we perish, too. So long as you do not envisage the immediate likelihood of this, you have to deal with art, which, as tragedy or comedy, speech or adornment, is bound up with human life.
>
> If, however, without identifying ourselves with matter entirely, we yet evolved into a total material asceticism, how would it be with art then? One is bound to admit that art has so far been dependent on religion, a luxurious life, or superstitious fancy for its existence. But for any life that we could evolve into, short of identification with matter, or the other extreme of dissociation from it, there would be an art, or "expression." It is a half-way house, the speech, life, and adornment of a half-way house. Or it is a coin that is used on a frontier, but in neither of the adjoining countries. As we know nothing about these or any other countries, it is impossible for us to say. Art is a coin, if you like, that has no aesthetic value, only an historic one. But it must be composed of a certain metal, and it must ring true. To recognize this ring you depend entirely on your ear. Your eyes, and even your teeth, can also be brought into play. And you can speculate on the

[53] This is similar to the moments in Lewis' fiction, wherein an activity doesn't make sense at first, but then *makes itself make sense* by taking hold of the larger structural order of the story, rendering the fabric of the larger reality contradictory in order to give logical space for otherwise impossible moments.

> character of the stranger who is tendering you the coin. These, taken together, make up your "taste." (76)

Like the more compressed definition of taste which appears earlier in the essay, this one begins by defining *art* and concludes by defining *taste*—an attempt to describe the objective properties of art seems to require a description of the subjective faculties needed to experience it. However, the context of this concluding definition has expanded and taken on significant civilizational implications. Lewis draws a contrast between "a fully human world" and one reduced to mere "stones or matter." Art is positioned as a byproduct of the tension between these two possible futures, and so long as we remain somewhere in between these two stark outcomes, art and "expression" are something that we must "deal with," as Lewis puts it.

The passage goes on to offer a third way, "a total material asceticism," as a distinctly modern alternative to the possibility of aesthetic creation. The traditional milieus of religion, patronage, and romanticism are no longer sustainable sources of artistic inspiration—it is life itself, unmoored from cultural institutions, a pre-war economy, and aesthetic tradition. A "total material asceticism" would unfold on a new terrain born of historical necessity. But rather than carefully elaborating this materialism, Lewis spirals into a characteristic string of disconnected images—halfway houses, coins, frontiers—each one picking up where the previous analogy has faltered. These successive images play out various metonymic strains just long enough for the reader to feel cheated by figurative language altogether. Expression becomes halfway house becomes frontier—coins—ringing—teeth—taste. What's being enacted is the dynamic of metaphorization itself as it tries and fails to sublimate its content—in this instance, art itself. Viewed this way, art is rendered "nasty," in much the same way that we saw enacted in the early short stories. And as the definition of art grows ever more convoluted and elusive, more "contradictory," more "nasty," the invocation of taste as an apposite term, a "more complex, higher intelligence," becomes all the more necessary in order to comprehend it.

But if taste is necessary, it is also unsatisfying as a solution to the problems it aims to address. For this reason, "taste" appears in scare quotes, signaling Lewis's acknowledgment that the term is being stretched to signify beyond its means, even as it remains the only term available. If the passage as a whole can be construed as a rewriting of the classical antinomy between necessity and freedom—between "identification with matter, or the other extreme of disassociation from it"—then taste is simply out of place, a term from the third *Critique* attempting to address the problems of the first. The scare quotes might then be better understood as quotation marks in a more conventional sense, functioning, as Frege argued, to render the quoted speech a "sign of a sign," displacing the word from its direct referential sense into a signifying regime that encapsulates the long and varied figurative coding attached to the term, rendering it irreducibly metaphorical when invoked in an aesthetic or cultural context. Insofar as taste is always already metaphorical, then, rendering it "figurative" accomplishes the somewhat implausible process of re-materializing it as a genuine sensual faculty alongside eyes and ears.

Thus taste is pulled between its metaphorical role, as a synthesizing faculty that binds together the other senses, and its literal role, as one more sense in a list of senses—eyes, ears, teeth—all grappling with a reality that seems to outstrip our sensual capacities. After promising to be a more complex intelligence, taste in the end turns out to be a provisional, tentative and incomplete solution to problems that prove intractable. And yet is through its provisional capacity that taste proves to be a particularly useful faculty for revealing the intractable nature of a "nasty" reality that persistently poses an obstacle to Lewis' visual aesthetic. It is not so much that Lewis retreats from the "universal efficacy" promised by a Kantian aesthetic to the more

limited potentialities of a Humean empiricism—rather, *the taste* entails grasping the universalizing aspirations of "taste" as they confront the limitations imposed on that faculty by the peculiar material demands of modernity itself. Taste thus serves as a negative corrective to vision's more forthright pretenses to capture the truth of surfaces, even as it evolves into a capaciousness that can withstand and maintain the absences generated by its peculiar mode of perception.

CHAPTER 4

The Good, The Bad, and The Tasteful

> I wonder do yu remember yr/ first cheery invitation, to provide yu with "something nasty for BLAST".
>
> —Ezra Pound, Letter to Wyndham Lewis

With the publication of *Blast 1* in 1914, Wyndham Lewis set himself the dual task of shocking the general public with "something nasty" while also distancing Vorticism from contemporary avant-garde movements on the Continent. The journal tries to balance these two distinct targets of attack: the general public, the "abysmal inexcusable middle-class" aligned with the stifling artistic tastes and norms of "the years 1837 to 1900" (13), and the cadre of intellectuals and artists associated with the post-impressionist movements of Cubism, Futurism, and Expressionism. "To make the rich of the community shed their education skin, to destroy politeness, standardization and academic, that is civilized, vision, is the task we have set ourselves" (7). In Lewis's view, both the general "middle-class" and the "rich of the community" are subject to fashion and the whims of "tastefulness," a disposition that is open, polite and curious, but lacking rigor and discernment. In *Blast 2 "The War Number,"* published in 1915, Lewis attempts to institutionalize the revolutionary break with Victorian taste into a "world-wide *reformation* of taste." In so doing, he softens his stance toward the general public, but sharpens his critique of contemporary artistic movements, accusing them of indulging in an effete "tastefulness" that is indistinguishable from fashion's ephemeral trends and is embodied by the ignominious "dilettante or taster" (82). Finally, in *The Caliph's Design*, published in 1919 and conceived of by Lewis as a third installment in the *Blast* sequence, Lewis expands his critique of the "tasteful" as a pervasive cultural ideology that is opposed to creativity and the free expression of individuality—ideas that Lewis returns to with greater vitriol in *The Art of Being Ruled* and *Time and Western Man*.

Lewis's sharp critique of a weak and ephemeral "tastefulness" is accompanied by the emergence of his own idiosyncratic sense of taste as an active and aggressive mode of aesthetic creation, not just an outdated form of disinterested aesthetic reception or, worse, an anemic and indiscriminate curiosity in cultural ephemera. By granting taste a creative function, Lewis overturns the notion that taste is simply a receptive faculty. "Taste is merely a faculty for judging, not a productive faculty," according to Kant, who consigned the creative power of the imagination to the faculty of genius, which he defines as "the inborn predisposition of the mind through which nature gives the rule to art." While genius is the channel through which creativity is manifested in art, Kant argued that taste plays a mere regulatory role.

> Taste…is the discipline (or corrective) of genius, clipping its wings and making it well-behaved or polished…and by introducing clarity and order into the abundance of thoughts, it makes the ideas tenable, capable of an enduring and universal approval, enjoying a posterity among others and in an ever-progressing culture. (45)

Thus, the artist must combine the creative "abundance" of genius with the cultivation of taste so that the finished artwork can appeal universally. Insofar as Lewis sought to shock the public with the publication of *Blast*, he is unconcerned with taste in its capacity to make art more universally appealing. Indeed, it is precisely those limiting or repressive aspects of taste that Lewis sought to "blast" in the brash manifestos that open the journal.

However, when Lewis positively describes what art should be, he does not celebrate the unrestricted exercise of genius, by which "nature gives the rule to art," free from the constraints of taste. Instead, he criticizes those who fetishize "nature" and "life" as the sources of artistic creativity, "bowing the knee to mother nature" (19). "'Nature' and 'natural art' [are] synonymous with 'Life'" (129); in Lewis's characteristic vernacular, "The Vorticist does not suck up to Life" (148).[54] Instead, Lewis's description of Vorticism employs the language of clarity, order, and restraint that Kant had relegated to the realm of taste and judgment. In this way, the Kantian dialectic between genius and taste becomes absorbed by the concept of taste itself, which is pulled between "tastefulness," the disinterested interpretation of the dilettante, and "*the* taste," a mode of creation that engages the object in an attempt to assimilate it and shape it to the artistic will. Thus, despite his ceaseless opposition to the prevailing tastes of the day—whether the taste of the middle-class bourgeois subject manipulated by mass culture's leveling off of individuality, or the tastes of his colleagues and critical contemporaries that practice or praised any art that was not sufficiently "Vorticist"—Lewis does not eliminate taste as a concept; instead, he attempts to negate and uphold it, refashioning the term to fit his evolving aesthetics. "We discharge ourselves on both sides" (30), Lewis proclaims. In this chapter, then, I will track this double move (*both sides*) in Lewis: first, his social and aesthetic critique of "tastefulness" and "fashion," and, second, his construction of "the taste" as a concept that evolves from the "nasty" vignettes of *The Wild Body* to his mature aesthetic of disgust.

The forms of fashion

> Fashion is of the nature of an aperient.
> —Wyndham Lewis

In the foreword to the 1948 reprint of *Abstraction and Empathy* (originally published in 1908), Wilhelm Worringer fondly recalls his encounter with Georg Simmel shortly before submitting his doctoral thesis. He describes this chance meeting—"Then…an interruption!"—as a pivotal moment that motivated his work, giving direction to his extensive study of "the rendering of drapery" and other seemingly minor aspects of art history. Instead of focusing on modernity or modernist art, Worringer's dissertation sought to uncover broad historical trends that linked artistic expression with cultural norms. His effort to connect seemingly trivial details, like "the rendering of drapery," to major shifts in human civilization mirrors Simmel's analytical approach. Worringer argues that cultures characterized by high levels of anxiety and spirituality tend to produce artwork that is abstract, flat, and angular, whereas cultures that prioritize science

---

[54] One could frame Lewis's contempt for "nature" and "life" as an example of what Charles Taylor identifies in modernism as "a shift in the sense of nature as a force, which came to be less and less captured by Romantic notions of spiritual reality, and more and more matched a vision like Schopenhauer's: nature as a great reservoir of amoral power." Taylor argues, "Changes in society, scientific theory, and the images articulating sensibility came together to make the old Romantic outlook virtually untenable" (457).

and the tangible world tend to produce more mimetic, naturalistic works. Although these critical paths have been frequently explored, briefly revisiting them will highlight how Simmel's Kantian framing of fashion's social function is intertwined with the emerging "genealogy" of modernist aesthetics, particularly through the adoption of Worringer's historical analysis of art by T.E. Hulme and his close associates, including Lewis. My goal is not to argue for influence, but rather to plot Simmel (discussed extensively in the Introduction) amongst a constellation of thinkers who prioritized the trivial, ephemeral and fragmentary as the nuts and bolts out of which larger structural claims about contemporary cultural forms could be built. As such, their diverse arguments about art, history and culture are subtended by a tension between the fleeting particular that is available to our senses as the inscrutable tectonic structure of culture itself.

In "Modern Art and Its Philosophy," T.E. Hulme refers to the "soft and vital" naturalism of the Greeks and Renaissance, in contrast to the "Egyptian, Indian and Byzantine, where everything tends to be angular, where curves tend to be hard and geometrical, where the representation of the human body, for example, is often entirely non-vital, and distorted to fit into stiff lines and cubical shapes of various kinds." But, according to Michael Levenson, "Hulme was not interested in the historical details of *Abstraction and Empathy*, only in the theoretical insights which provided him with a new polemical apparatus" (96). Thus Hulme argues that the techniques of "abstraction" associated with "primitive art" are not the result of underdeveloped technique, but are aesthetic responses to "some specific mental need" (98) which is transhistorical. Hulme hypothesizes that modern art, like "the case of more primitive people" is the result of "spiritual 'space-shyness' in face of the varied confusion and arbitrariness of existence," which "results in a desire to create a certain abstract geometrical shape, which, being durable and permanent shall be a refuge from the flux and impermanence of outside nature" (100). The parallels with Simmel's analysis of modernity are clear—both acknowledge the primacy of flux and fragmentation as defining characteristics of modern life—but Hulme develops his own distinct concerns and preferences. Worringer's historical schematism triangulates their mutual concern with how individuals cope with the fragmentation of modern society, but whereas Simmel conceives of fashion as an ameliorative response, allowing humans to balance individual expression and collective belonging in the context of historical chaos, Hulme is interested in the ways that abstraction brings structure and order to that chaos, not through imitation but through an active resistance that establishes a "refuge" for the individual subject. Read together, the sociology of Simmel and the aesthetics of Hulme outline a fundamental tension between the realms of fashion and art. Fashion is mimetic of society, reflecting the rapid changes in taste and the shifting relations between classes. Art is fundamentally opposed to society, offering a refuge from the chaos and flux of life.

Lewis, like Hulme, is critical of fashion. *Blast 1* is an unrelenting indictment of contemporary "fashion" as it presents in every arena of British society, from hairdressing to post-Impressionism. Given the bombastic nature of the journal, it is surprising that he approaches fashion within the intricate neo-Kantian framework adopted by Simmel and Hulme. In a section devoted to criticizing Futurism and its simplistic celebration of "Life," Lewis frames the poles of abstraction and mimesis in the "digestive" terms he had begun formulating in the *Wild Body* period. The section opens: "It is a matter of the most delicate adjustment between the voracity of Art and the digestive quality of Life. The finest Art is not pure Abstraction, nor is it unorganized life." The language is indebted to Hulme, who in turn borrowed it from Worringer, but Lewis's sense is that Hulme's unreserved celebration of the "geometric" abstraction occurs in tension with the active resistance of its material. The artist may be aggressively opposed to "unorganized

life," but insofar as it attempts to "digest" the chaos and flux, it aligns itself with "the digestive quality of Life." Through opposing life, the artist participates in life's processes. In *Enemy of the Stars*, the artist Arghol groans, "I have smashed it against me, but it still writhes, turbulent mess." For Lewis, the artistic process is messy work, requiring engagement "with nothing but 'ugly' trivial and terrible materials" in just the same way "as any classic artist did with only 'beautiful' and pleasant means" (45). We will return to Lewis's obsession with the "ugly" and "trivial"—his character Tarr proclaims,"The conditions of creation and of life disgust me. The birth of a work of art is as dirty as that of a baby"—but for now, I want to highlight it as the context within which fashion is introduced. In Lewis's view, "Actuality or 'fashionableness' is the desire to be spick and span, and be a man remade and burnished half-an-hour ago" (134). It thus represents disengagement, mere mimesis, an avoidance of messiness. As such, it is not merely criticized because of its mass appeal and the homogenizing effects it has on the general public; instead, it is part of his philosophical critique of a mode of representation that avoids the digestive processes of abstraction. He writes, disparagingly, "Realism is the cleanliness of the mind" (134).

BLAST 2: From Revolution to Reformation

> Taste should become deeper and more exclusive: definitely a stronghold—a point, not a line.
>
> —Wyndham Lewis

If *Blast 1* represents a revolutionary break with the norms and tastes of Victorian England, then *Blast 2* seeks to transform that break into a *reformation* of taste. For Lewis, this entails softening his rigid stance to the public and more clearly defining his own aesthetic in contradistinction to rival art movements. "The War Number" was published in July 1915, nine months behind schedule. It opens with an explanation for its tardiness, which doubles as a justification for its continued existence. "BLAST finds itself surrounded by a multitude of other Blasts of all sizes and descriptions," Lewis writes, referring to the outbreak of war just three months after the first edition of *Blast* had been published. Admitting that the importance of art may recede while war is raging, Lewis nevertheless insists that "art should be fresher for the period of restraint," a prescriptive tenet that neatly aligns with the ascetic ideals of the pre-war manifestos. Having gestured to the alignment of his aesthetic program and current events, Lewis's opening editorial elaborates a recognizable modernist ideology couched in nationalistic terms: "Germany has stood for the old Poetry," while Vorticism, representing England, "wishes to stand rigidly opposed, from start to finish, to every form that the Poetry of a former condition of life, no longer existing, has foisted upon us."

But while *Blast* is meant to represent an art engaged with the present rather than the past, Lewis struggles to define Vorticism without resorting to reactionary formations: Vorticism is not Romance, not Futurism, not Cubism, not Impressionism. Rather than a set of principles, *Blast* represents "an apposite insistence," a certain modality or activity in relationship to the other movements and current events swirling around it. With double negatives piling up, Lewis writes, "It seeks to oppose to this inapposite poetry, the intensest aroma of a different humanity (that is Romance) the Poetry which is the as yet unexpressed spirit of the present time, and of new conditions and possibilities of life." Lewis's formulation is tellingly ambiguous. Is it that the following pages of the journal—the paintings, poems and essays—will express the spirit of the

present time? Or is it, rather, that Vorticism's activity involves a relationship to the present that is always future-oriented, in which case, the content of such works would be just the opposite, more literally, the "unexpressed spirit of the present?" One way to address this question is to acknowledge the awkwardness of publishing a second iteration of a journal that was intended to mark a singular break with the past. Is *Blast 2* a new break, or merely a continuation of the initial break? Insofar as Vorticism contains breaking with the past and orienting itself towards the future as a constitutive element of its aesthetic practice, the answer might be: both.

The tension between break and continuity is illustrated in "Notice to the Public," which directly follows the opening editorial but is not listed in the table of contents, making it conspicuously anomalous within the journal's overall structure. The style is similarly eccentric, prioritizing the relay of bureaucratic information over the turgid hyperbole that characterizes most of Lewis's editorial matter. He fills the single page with a seven-point list of practical information: an explanation for the delay ("due to the War, chiefly"), a preview of the third number's contents, an announcement that "The Saddest Story" will cease serialization ("for some months now it has been out in book form"), details about an upcoming exhibition, and so on. This section is also distinct in that its content could exist only within the pages of a second issue—its referent is the inaugural journal and the various bureaucratic changes that have occurred over the preceding thirteen months—and in its straightforward, professional form. The purpose of the section is to establish continuity and build stability into a radically unconventional journal. Yet tucked in at number five is a discordant claim about the international reach of his subscriber base, which feels imported from one of the many manifestos, editorials, and "notes" that comprise much of both issues: "5. We have subscribers in the Khyber Pass, and subscribers in Santa Fe. The first stone in the structure of the world-wide reformation of taste has been securely laid." The positioning of the claim is intriguing for how it borrows from its bureaucratic context, even as it diverges from the conventions of bureaucratic discourse. If it were to appear in one of Lewis's many manifestos, the reader would not be concerned about its questionable veracity. However, as a claim that aspires to factual truth, we are compelled to question the degree to which the Khyber Pass and Santa Fe are actual locations of real subscribers or, more likely, convenient synecdoches for Lewis' globalist ambitions.

It is telling, then, that the language of taste is invoked at just the moment the journal is working through its status as, on the one hand, a revolutionary document, and on the other, an organ of reform. Lewis explicitly links taste to the imagery of reformation and institution building, but the institutions he seeks to build are characterized by an intrinsically revolutionary sensibility, which "aims at nothing short of the physical reconstruction and reordering of the visible part of the world." Lewis's multiple and contradictory invocations of taste reveal one of the central contradictions in his aesthetic and cultural program: between a revolution in taste, which seeks to break with established conventions and blast the status quo, and a reformation in taste, which seeks to transform the energies of that aesthetic impulse into an institutional framework that can establish, in Lewis's words, "new conditions and possibilities of life." After all, Lewis was not merely interested in creating new art; he was equally invested in creating a new world. Writing of the 1914 period in *Rude Assignment*, he characterizes Vorticism as "a new civilization that I — and a few other people — were making the blueprints for" (125). It offered a "rough design for a way of seeing for me who as yet were not there" (125). Lewis would also concede, however, that they were "the first men of a Future that had not materialized," because they had "moved too quickly for the world" (*Blasting* 256). But long before Lewis was able to retrospectively access the failure of his ambitions, he was contemplating ways to sustain the

avant-garde qualities of the pre-war days, calling for "a new, and if necessary shattering criticism of 'modernity as it stands at present.'" With proleptic melancholia, he pleads to his fellow artists, "having got so far…we must sustain our revolutionary impulse" (*Paleface* 106).

But this is to jump ahead. In *Blast 2*, Lewis's more immediate task was to distinguish his movement from the rival strands of the avant-garde. The most prominent target is Cubism, and Picasso in particular. Like the individual striving for fashionableness, Cubism does not sufficiently engage "Life," but prefers the "cleanliness" of a simplistic "realism." In the sprawling "Review of Contemporary Art," Lewis claims, "[t]he Cubist's paintings have a large tincture of deadness (as well as the weightiness) of Cézanne; they are static and representative, not swarming, exploding or burgeoning with life." Counterintuitively, it is because they approach life with too much reverence, "bowing the knee to wild mother nature," that they are "dead." Like the impressionists before them, the cubists seek to merely imitate life. But according to Lewis, "Imitation, and inherently unselective registering of impressions, is an absurdity," because it can never "give you the weight of the object" (45). Thus Picasso's work falls under the category of the merely tasteful, the fashionable, insofar as Cubism strives to merely observe "an unorganized and microscopic jumble, too profuse and too distributed to be significant." Lewis becomes increasingly exercised in his specific critique of the Cubist technique. "The posed Nature-Morte" is "[repudiated] as an absurdity and sign of relaxed initiative" (41). "The placid empty planes of Picasso's later 'nature-mortes'…tastefully arranged, wonderfully tastefully arranged, is a dead and unfruitful tendency." He continues: "These tours-de-force of taste, and DEAD ARRANGEMENTS BY THE TASTEFUL HAND WITHOUT, not instinctive organisations by the living will within, are too inactive and uninventive" (41). A tension begins to build between, on the one hand, the deadness of taste, associated with nature-morte ("dead nature") and mere imitation, and on the other hand, life, associated with a participation in the creative processes of life itself, characterized as digestion, sublation and Lewis's own breed of painterly abstraction.

Lewis's alternative vision involves a more engaged form of abstraction that aligns with the aggressive digestive aesthetic, transformative rather than merely imitative, which he began developing in his early fiction. "We must constantly strive to ENRICH abstraction till it is almost plain life, or rather to get deeply enough immersed in material life to experience the shaping power amongst its vibrations, and to accentuate and perpetuate these" (40). Simmering beneath these abstract pronouncements is Lewis's sense that his contemporaries had been led astray by the notions of "Life"—"the sententious pronouncement one so often hears: 'LIFE is the important thing!" (129)—as it had become popularized by the vitalist philosophy of Nietzsche and Bergson, a sentiment that would evolve into a full-blown obsession in *Time and Western Man,* a symptom of a pervasive "time cult." At this stage, however, Lewis diagnoses the detached fetishization of "Life" as a symptom of the pervasive influence of effete "tastefulness," an attitude or comportment that reifies and distances rather than engages the object of representation. His "Art Note" towards the close of the "War Number" offers a bracing if confusing corrective:

LIFE HAS NO TASTE

The best artist is the imperfect artist.

> The PERFECT artist, in the sense of "artist" par excellence, and nothing else, is the dilettante or taster.
>
> "Pure art, in the same way, is dilettante art : it cannot be anything else.
>
> It is, in fact, rather the same thing to admire EVERYTHING in Nature around—match-boxes, print dresses, ginger-beer bottles, lamp-posts, as to admire every aesthetic manifestation—examples of all schools of art.
>
> Taste is dead emotion, or mentally—treated and preserved emotion. Taste is also a stronghold against barbarism of soul.
>
> You should be emotional about everything, rather than sensitive.
>
> You should be human about EVERYTHING : inhuman about only a few things.
>
> Taste should become deeper and exclusive : definitely a STRONGHOLD—a point and not a line.

I have quoted the section in full because its convoluted progression exemplifies the crude mechanics of Lewis's dialectical polemics. Instead of trying to clarify or straighten out Lewis's argument, it is more useful to elaborate the vortex of impacted terms. Doing so will reveal a lexicon—taste, life, nature, art, human, inhuman, and so on—which Lewis will explore across various contexts in his fiction, non-fiction, and visual art. Like much of Lewis's non-fiction, the most revealing moments are found in the intricate details of the logic rather than its stated purpose. He describes his method in the first edition of *Blast*: "We fight first on one side, then on the other, but always for the SAME cause, which is neither side or both sides and ours" (30). Or, more bluntly, "we discharge ourselves on both sides." To start, we could pose the question in Lewisian terms: is taste being blasted or blessed? We can tentatively state that he does both, and that the two "sides" roughly correspond to the first "quatrain" and second "quatrain." Though unrhymed and lacking a clear metrical pattern, the "note" still visually resembles a poem, even as it reads like a series of prosaic statements or proclamations in a manifesto. The tension between poetry and prose runs through the note as its defining formal feature, culminating in the final line, which transfers that tension into a geometrical register: a point and not a line, itself a reinscription of the tension between static poetry and dynamic narrative.

It is frustrating to track Lewis's oppositional-but-inclusive method ("neither…both…and") in strictly logical terms, since it harbors unresolved contradiction as a constitutive element of its success. The confusion begins with the declarative title—"Life has no taste"—where the terms of opposition are too ambiguous to provide any clear idea of their exact relation. Is taste the problem, or life itself? Or does he mean to imply that our phenomenological experience of life, filtered through a prosaic consciousness, lacks an aesthetic dimension? Or does he mean that life is unfit for aesthetic enjoyment—that is, not beautiful? Or does he mean,

more literally, that life, the brute material of everyday existence, is tasteless? Rather than defining life and elaborating its tastelessness, he instead derides the aesthetic sensibilities of the "perfect" artist, who lacks the artistic power of discernment and exclusivity. Indeed, the body of the note does not seem to logically follow from the title at all. Instead of justifying the bombastic declaration that life has no taste, whatever that means, Lewis seems to argue exactly the opposite point: that the matter out of which our everyday life is composed is merely tasteful, and readily available to the debased sensibility of the dilettante. Perhaps it is that the imperfect artist, the "best" artist, recognizes the authentic tastelessness of those things the "perfect" artist mistakes for tasteful?

It becomes clear that reading the "note" as a chain of sentences that link in a linear, logical progression leads to a confusion familiar from the "nasty" passages in Lewis's short fiction: submitting to the text's apparent logic produces a deeper confusion that subverts the presuppositions from which any conventional interpretation would originate. Interpretive pressure leads almost immediately to the disintegration of the sensible contract that structures readerly expectations, as "all resources of metonymy" are unleashed against the procedures of metaphor and the potential consolidation of signification. Yes, the hazy outlines of a polemic roughly in accord with his critique of Cubism's "perfect," "tasteful," and "dead" arrangements begin to cohere in the opening four sentences: he derides the choice of quotidian subject matter (ginger-beer bottles, apples, etc.) as a crudely mimetic reflex and therefore subservient to nature, in contrast to the forms of abstraction that Lewis championed. However, as soon as this reading begins to solidify, the note abruptly turns, as Lewis shifts from description to prescription, and the operative verb shifts from "is" to "should." This dualistic, or "agonistic," approach structures the form of the note, which is pulled between its status as a collection of prosaic sentences that build on one another in a temporal, logical fashion and its status as a poem, composed of two unrhymed quatrains that exist in static opposition. Read as a poem, the first quatrain critiques the so-called "perfect" artist or "taster," a "dilettante" who composes "dead arrangements" of everyday objects—a dig at the Omega Workshop's attempts at collage, Braque and Picasso's Cubist *bricolages*, and, more generally, anyone associated with the legacy of Impressionism and Roger Fry's collation of artists for the 1910 Post-Impressionism exhibition. These are the "perfect artists" criticized in the note. I will return to that controversy below, but it is worth noting the strangeness of Lewis's form of attack before proceeding to summarize the implied referent. The first four lines employ the same verb, "is," to make identity claims that slowly grow in complexity, each one intensifying the contradictions inherent to "perfect" art. As such, "is" does not act merely as a copula connecting subject and predicate; it sets in motion a logic of contradiction that becomes "rational" only when read in conjunction with the series of prescriptive statements that constitute the second quatrain of lines, as "should" displaces "is" as the operative verb. Thus, the note poses the task of reading "taste is" and "taste should" in contradictory simultaneity without letting the descriptive or prescriptive approaches cancel each other out. Merely pushing the "is" and the "ought" into a dialectical register risks obscuring the degree to which Lewis prioritizes the *real* nature of ideological conflict over any potential resolution. Lewis wants us to *feel* the unresolved nature of the contradiction—in this case, the contradictory nature of taste itself, which contains the weak "tastefulness" of the dilettante as well as the "stronghold against barbarism of the soul."

The note concludes in a cryptic formulation that assimilates the tension between temporal prose and spatial poetry into the abstract geometrical terms of draughtsmanship. "Taste should become deeper and exclusive : definitely a STRONGHOLD—a point and not a line." The

language recalls Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (published 1910, translated into English in 1914, and reviewed by Edward Wadsworth in *Blast 1*) and anticipates *Point, Line, and Plane*, published in 1926. In the later work, Kandinsky defines the relationship between points and lines as essentially temporal. "The element of time in the point is almost completely eliminated" (34). Yet like Lewis's vortex, the lack of temporality does not render the point merely static; rather, it vibrates with tension from within and without. "The concentric tension of the point is thereby immediately destroyed and, as a result, it perishes and a new being arises out of it which leads a new, independent life in accordance with its own laws. This is the Line" (54).[55] Thus, the line, which is described as "the greatest antithesis to the pictorial proto-element—the point," is at the same time derived by forcing the point into a temporal register to contain a tension that overflows its static rigidity. The line can therefore be thought of simultaneously as the opposite of a point, but also composed of many points: a "contradiction" that nevertheless obtains in the objective dimensions of Kandinsky's *BP*.

More apposite to my reading, the concluding line (note the affinity between a line of verse and a line on a canvas) compels us to recursively frame the "note" as embodying the tension between point and line, space and time, taste and life, perfect and imperfect, poetry and prose, as a series of agonistic terms that resist any straightforward mediation. Rather, the pictorial tension between point and line is resolved by displacing the "point" into a line of prose, a microcosmic instance of Lewis's broader preoccupation with the ways in which a literary medium allows for (and indeed requires) temporality as a constitutive feature, in contrast to the visual plane of painting. The poem effectively denatures space into time, producing the hermeneutic equivalent of a Heisenberg matrix that correlates with a zone of uncertainty: we can either fix taste in space or in time, but the two operations exclude each other.

Insisting that taste must be a "point" rather than a "line" classifies it as a fundamentally spatial faculty, opposed to the flow of time, to flux, and to Bergsonian "life." Yet Kandinsky's discourse on abstraction helps elucidate how space is constantly under pressure from time: taste, we could say, "holds the line" against time. If such a reading feels overly minute or insufficiently connected to the broader themes of fashion and taste that this chapter has sought to lay out, it is because, in its method, it accedes to the requirements for taste that Lewis sought to enforce. In a polemical register, "a point and not a line" implies a mode of discernment that is paratactic rather than syllogistic, direct and forceful rather than carefully plotted. My reading of "Life has no taste" has tried to follow the twists and turns of Lewis's convoluted logic, point by point, rather than digesting them as a line that flattens out their awkward imperfections. Sorry if it was hard to swallow.

The Dilettante, The Bawdy Critic and the Vulgarization of Taste

> Certainly, if you do not want to be turned into a tasting-machine, you will not have any truck with the studio-game into which the general movement in painting to-day has been sidetracked.
>
> —Wyndham Lewis

[55] Recall Pound's description of the Vortex: "The vortex is the point of maximum energy." He makes a similar point in "The Serious Artist" (1913): "We might come to believe that the thing that matters in art is a sort of energy, something more or less like electricity or radioactivity, a force transfusing, welding, and unifying" (49).

And yet, it is also useful to draw a more traditional line, if only to see how various points resist assimilation. The simplest line to draw is to Roger Fry and the Omega Workshop, with whom Lewis publicly severed ties in October 1913. Lewis complained that in Fry's group, "Idol is still prettiness, with its mid-Victorian languish of the neck, and its skin is still 'greenery-yallery.'" A few months later, Hulme similarly claimed that Fry and his followers "are nothing but a kind of backwater." He further argues that Fry himself "accomplishes the extraordinary feat of adapting the austere Cézanne into something quite fitted for chocolate boxes." The insult dismisses Fry's work as mere confectionery; it also cheekily pokes fun at the source of Fry's inheritance, which came from the sale of J.S. Fry & Sons, a chocolate company that created the first mass-produced chocolate bar. Indeed, Fry himself was reluctant to consider himself a great artist. Writing to his friend Marie Mauron in 1919, he considered himself "only a serious artist with some sensibility and taste," exemplifying a degree of humility unthinkable in Lewis or Hulme. Fry's disposition enabled him to see the value in a broad array of artistic styles, which is exactly the trait that frustrated Lewis so much. Kenneth Clark's assessment of Fry's influence just after his sudden death in 1934 would have rankled Lewis even more; he labels him "incomparably the greatest influence on taste since Ruskin… In so far as taste can be changed by one man, it was changed by Roger Fry" (xi).

No doubt Lewis felt overshadowed by Fry's greater influence, but his method of attack does less to argue with such assessments than to accept Fry's view of art as culturally dominant and, in turn, position his own view as radically insurgent. Though initially Lewis's critique of Fry may have been driven by vindictiveness and petty competition, it evolves into an understanding of Fry as the originator of a widespread "tastefulness" that was negatively impacting even the most modern art movements—not least because Fry was largely responsible for introducing contemporary continental art to the educated British public. In *The Caliph's Design*, Lewis draws a connection between "the color-matching, match-box-making, dressmaking, chair-painting game" of the Omega workshops and "the burst of abstract nature-mortism which has marked the last phase of the Cubist, or Braquish, movement in Paris."

> These assemblings of newspaper, cloth, paint, buttons, tin, and other debris, stuck on a plank, are more "amusing" than were the rather jaded and amateur tastefulness of the Omega workshops. But as regards the Nature-mortists and Fitzroy tinkerers and tasters, one or other have recognized the affinity. Both equally are the opposite pole to the credence or intensity of creative art. (63-64)

By aligning Fry with the Cubists under the heading of mere "tastefulness," as opposed to the more aggressive "creative" art, Lewis is able to elaborate his dual attack under the heading of taste, consigning both the inheritors of Victorian Impressionism and the practitioners of Cubism to the realm of fashion. "The artist can interpret or create. There is for him…the Receptive attitude or the Active and Changing one" (63). Lewis classifies himself in the latter category, and virtually everyone else in the former.

Throughout *The Caliph's Design,* Lewis returns to his critique of tastefulness and applies it to a range of contemporary fashions. In doing so, he formulates a modernist dialectic of taste that absorbs the whims of fashion and the digestive aesthetic that emerges in his first full-length novel, *Tarr*. Most critical appraisals of *Caliph* focus on the opening parable of the Caliph, who forcefully restructures a confusing urban landscape as a Vorticist fantasy of clean lines. But the work as a whole ranges more freely across a host of artistic and cultural debates and aggressively argues for artists' role as builders of a new world grounded in modernist aesthetic principles.

Rather than reduce the work to a prelude to a fascist aestheticization of politics, it is perhaps more helpful to read the pamphlet as a continuation of the reformation of taste first announced in *Blast 2*. With hindsight, the two projects can be difficult to separate. Fitting Lewis's passionate early polemics into a neat teleology ending in a paean to Hitler risks foreclosing on the contradictory utopianism driving his aesthetic and political interventions: a point, not a line.

Like Simmel, Lewis conceives of fashion as a substitute for taste. For Lewis, however, it is a weak substitute masquerading as more aggressive and permanent artistic interventions:

> Fashion is of the nature of an aperient. It is a patent stimulus of use only to the constipated and the sluggish. It is the specific for the fifth rate, to correct the stagnations that are perpetually gathering where life is poor and inactive. The Victorian age produced a morass of sugary comfort and amiableness, indulged men so much that they became guys of sentiment. Against this "sentimentality" people of course reacted. So the brutal tap was turned on, and for fifty years it will be the thing to be brutal, "unemotional." Against the absurdities that this "inhuman" fashion does inevitably breed, you will need some powerful corrective in due course. And so your fashions go, a matter of the cold or hot tap, simply. (*Caliph* 41)

If the artistic process is characterized as the work of digestion, often ending in the object's indigestion, then fashion bypasses the difficulties of sublation by allowing objects to too easily pass through one's system, producing so much diarrhea. "The Victorian age" is the easy target. But Lewis understands the "brutal" modernist response to the "sugary comfort" as similarly fashionable. "The nature of an aperient"—literally "an opening"—is transposed into the image of cold and hot taps, turning off and on to achieve a tepid medium. In this way, Lewis continues to use the concept of taste to negotiate his dual targets: the stuffy Victorian past as well as the competing contemporary responses to it. Lewis contends, in ways that recall Simmel's more neutral analysis, "Fashion is the sort of useful substitute for conviction. At present it is the substitute for religion" (47). While Simmel highlights the ameliorative effects of fashion's rise, Lewis laments the ways it has supplanted a more substantial, creative engagement with the world.

Roger Fry's catholic tastes—"this universal tasting and appreciation"—made him a prime target for Lewis's outrage. Lewis called him a "bawdy critic," the regrettable effect of a "scholarly, receptive and tasteful trend, rather than a creative one." Lewis detects "a desire to accept and enjoy: to accept what is already in the world, rather than to put something new there" (65). In critiquing Fry, Lewis is also critiquing Picasso, "wonderful artist as he is," because of his indiscriminate curiosity in everyday objects that feature in his "nature-mortism," a curiosity that encouraged "amateurish art." Participating in these fashionable artistic trends threatened to turn the appraiser "into a tasting-machine." Though such an attitude towards the world might seem admirable—a check on the subjective will to assimilate and digest the object—Lewis suspects that beneath the dilettante's "desire to accept" is a hidden narcissism. "Such a critic, at the same time a dilettante, is not curious about the object that his mind approaches, but is entirely engrossed with himself and his own sensations" (68). In other words, the *performance* of liberal taste is in fact a glorification of the subject's receptive capacities, not a desire to truly grasp "the weight of the object." Lewis does not consider this a benign development. It is the result of "unsatisfied sex," which is transmuted into a mode of appreciation that is perversely sexual. He parodies Fry and similar critics: "'Connoisseurs in pleasures—of whom I count myself one—know that nothing is more intensely delightful than the aesthetic thrill,' etc. croons one" (66). Lewis draws out the image to a disturbing extreme: "The bawdy connoisseurs should really be

kept out of the galleries. I can see a fine Renoir, some day, being mutilated: or an Augustus John being raped!" (66). The bizarre insult recalls Hemingway's awkward portrait of Lewis as a "failed rapist," and, likewise, initiates a logic of nastiness that can be difficult to parse logically: How does one square Lewis's *point* about Fry possessing "a desire to accept and enjoy: to accept what is already in the world" with the scene of violent aggression in a public art gallery? Lewis's jarring (but unsurprising) animosity is not caused by Fry's lack of approval for his artwork; on the contrary, it seems that Lewis is most incensed by Fry's *approval*. Fry's wide tolerance underpins his capacious taste: a taste capacious enough to appreciate even Lewis, in all of his nastiness.[56]

Fry's wide tolerance underpins his capacious taste: a taste capacious enough to appreciate even Lewis, in all of his nastiness. It is worth naming what Lewis is in fact attacking here, because it is more than a rival's condescension. Fry's openness—his readiness to accept and enjoy, to fuse his horizon with whatever the object offers—is a domesticated, English version of the hermeneutic ideal that Gadamer would later raise to a philosophy: taste as the medium of a shared world, the faculty by which an interpreter meets an artwork halfway and folds it into a common sense, as discussed in the introduction. This is the operation Lewis's aesthetic is built to sabotage. The nasty, indigestible work does not invite the fusion of horizons; it refuses assimilation, imposes itself, and leaves the connoisseur's tolerant openness with nothing to fold

---

[56] Lewis's extreme aversion to Fry's eclectic connoisseurship resembles Zarathustra's outburst in "The Spirit of Gravity": "All-satisfiedness, which knoweth how to taste everything,—that is not the best taste! I honour the refractory, fastidious tongues and stomachs, which have learned to say 'I' and 'Yea' and 'Nay.'" In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche refines this into a sharper critique of the "historical sense." Lewis was skeptical of the fashionable "Neeches," as he called them in *Blast 2*, but the philosopher of appetite and instinct still offers a rich, if incomplete, philosophical framework for understanding Lewis's confusing dismissal and embrace of taste as an aggressive creative force. As I briefly mentioned in Chapter 2, Nietzsche claims,' "the 'historical sense' implies almost the sense and instinct for everything, the taste and tongue for everything: whereby it immediately proves an ignoble sense" (148-9). This "sixth sense" emerged during the nineteenth century, a direct result of the "democratic mingling of classes and races," which has given "us 'modern souls'…secret access everywhere…to the labyrinth of imperfect civilizations" (148). He is attentive to both the positive and negative aspects of this increased access, including himself in his critique. "That as men of the 'historical sense' we have our virtues, is not to be disputed:—we are unpretentious, unselfish, modest, brave, habituated to self-control and self-renunciation, very grateful, very patient, very complaisant—but with all this we are not very 'tasteful." In his view, the extent to which our taste broadens in its capacity to appreciate "imperfection" diminishes its ability to "grasp, feel, taste and love…the perfection and ultimate maturity in every culture and art, the essentially novel in works and men" (150). He thus initiates a split in taste that Lewis later exploits: "Perhaps our great virtue of the historical sense is in necessary contrast to good taste, at least to the very bad taste." (150). If the historical sense is not capable of good taste, it is at least capable of avoiding bad taste. Less an oscillation between cold tap and hot tap, then a steady stream of lukewarmness: the historical sense does not seek to change the material, but only observe it from a safe and pitiful distance. The historical sense is thus the mirror image of Zarathustra's aesthetics of will to power: "Neither a good nor a bad taste, but MY taste, of which I have no longer either shame or secrecy." More broadly speaking, *Beyond Good and Evil* questions the validity of Kant's strict division between appearance and reality. If, according to Nietzsche, those divisions no longer hold, then we can question why taste is necessary at all, since its Kantian role depends on the need to mediate the split between freedom and necessity, and all the rest. Another way to put this: the third *Critique* is moot if the critical philosophy built in the first and second critiques is rejected, which is what I take Nietzsche's critique to be. So in Nietzsche, instead of taste, we get appetite, and the creative function becomes coterminous with self-preservation.

in. What enrages Lewis about Fry, then, is not that Fry rejects him but that Fry can *accept* him—that catholic taste is wide enough to metabolize even an art designed to be unmetabolizable.

However, despite their differences in temperament, Fry and Lewis are more similar than different in their appreciation of art that is discordant and difficult to digest. In *Vision and Design*, Fry describes two kinds of taste: "Now taste is of two kinds, the first consisting in the negative avoidance of all that is ill-considered and discordant, the other positive and a by-product; it is that harmony which always results from the expression of intense and disinterested emotion." At first, the contrast between negative and positive seems straightforward, but the structure of the sentence belies the difficulty of clearly expressing what a "positive" taste might entail, even for a "masterly" essayist such as Fry.[57] Negative taste avoids discord. Positive taste is "a by-product." A by-product of what? The semicolon that joins the two clauses—"the first consisting in the negative avoidance of all that is ill-considered and discordant; the other positive and a by-product"—verges on a syntactical error, straining to hold together two things that do not quite belong to the same grammatical order: a practice (avoidance) and a residue (by-product). It is precisely at this strained join, I want to suggest, that bad taste surfaces. For what is the "discord" that negative taste exists to avoid, and what is the "intense and disinterested emotion" whose by-product is positive taste, if not the same historical materiality—the nasty, indigestible stuff of creation—approached from two directions, once as the thing fled and as the thing refined away? The semicolon is doing the work of an exclusion. It is the punctuation of an elision, the seam at which bad taste is at once admitted (as the discord that must be avoided) and expelled (as that which positive taste has already left behind as residue). Fry needs the semicolon to verge on error because the relation it names cannot be stated cleanly: bad taste is the term his account both depends on and cannot afford to hold.

This is the same elision diagnosed in the introduction, now surfacing in a single mark of punctuation. If we returned to the diagram with which this project began, Fry would occupy Gadamer's diagonal precisely: good taste fused with the empty form of "no taste," with bad taste—the discordant, the historical, the swamp of creation—excluded as the condition of that fusion. Like Gadamer, Fry can name good taste and gesture beyond it toward something "positive" and "productive"; like Gadamer, he cannot name bad taste, because to name it would be to admit into the concept of taste the very materiality that his hermeneutic openness exists to smooth over. This is why Fry's catholic tolerance, for all its generosity, finally cannot describe what positive taste is. His openness can fuse with any horizon, accept and enjoy any object—but only on the condition that the object's historical recalcitrance, its capacity to disgust, has already been bracketed.

And here the two figures of the introduction's transverse axis return, embodied as warring critics. If Fry occupies Gadamer's diagonal—good taste eliding bad taste—then Lewis occupies the axis Adorno marks, where bad taste is not excluded but constitutive, the non-identical materiality of history through which alone the beautiful can be constructed. Where Fry's positive taste recoils from the swamp of creation, Lewis wades in; where Fry's semicolon expels the discordant as residue, Lewis's whole aesthetic is the residue made into a method—"the taste" as the faculty that does not avoid discord but produces it, that does not refine the historical away but ingests, fails to digest, and renders it back as form. The difference between them is not that one has good taste and the other bad. It is that Fry, like Gadamer, requires bad

[57] Thus, Virginia Woolf writes, "He went on…to analyze those sensations with an erudition that years of 'seeing pictures' had made considerable, and with an honesty and acuteness that his training among the philosophers had made habitual" (161).

taste to remain unnamed, while Lewis names it, inhabits it, and builds an art that cannot be appreciated without it. This is what Fry's catholic taste, capacious enough to accept even Lewis fundamentally fails to grasp: that Lewis's art is not one more object for the connoisseur to fold into a shared horizon, but a refusal of the very ground on which such folding takes place.

SECTION 3

AFTER TASTE: WYNDHAM LEWIS, REBECCA WEST, AND THE UNIVERSALITY OF TASTE

In this final section, I track the "objectification" of taste as it emerges from the degraded forms of Kant's subjective universality. The section title carries two senses. "After Taste" implies that we have entered a terrain that is in some way *after* taste—after the faculty that once described how we make judgments concerning the beautiful, and after the subject whose self-possession that faculty secured. But it also implies *aftertaste*: the phenomenon in which the object of taste persists even after its disappearance, lingering on the palate as sensuous remainder. My contention is that taste never really goes away. It inheres in the modernist artwork in negated form, as part of what Adorno calls its "truth-content"—present not as positive content but as the trace of what the work has refused or cannot hold.

This is a historical process. The objectification of taste registers the conditions under which these works were made: the exhaustion of the shared aesthetic norms Ford mourned, the violent attempt to forge a new aesthetic from their ruins that Lewis undertook, and the pressure of an emergent politics that neither could accommodate. If the previous sections tracked taste as it registered a vanishing past and the persistence of an archaic "primitive" remainder, this section follows it as it strains toward a universality it cannot, on the terms available to it, achieve. The "objectivity" at stake here is therefore double: taste becomes objectified in the artwork as materialized form, and it points—negatively, through its own foreclosure—toward an objective universality that would exceed the bourgeois subject altogether.

To complete this argument, I read Wyndham Lewis's first novel, *Tarr*, alongside Rebecca West's short story "Indissoluble Matrimony." Both first appeared in close proximity—West's story in *Blast 1*, Lewis's novel begun in the same period—and both stage the collision of literal and figurative taste as a crisis of form. My reading of Tarr acts as an endpoint to the previous section, tracing the formal logic of nastiness and the critique of fashion as they crystallize into structure—what I call "disgusting mimesis." In Lewis, taste becomes objectified as failed digestion: a materialized aesthetic comportment that both participates in and comments on the dangerous compression of the literal and the figurative, culminating in a novel that remains, by design, indigestible.

Chapter Six positions West's "Indissoluble Matrimony" as an immanent critique of Lewis's digestive aesthetics, and of modernist taste more generally as it was constructed by the key figures of the Men of 1914. But West's critique is not merely negative. Through it, she points toward a different objectification of taste: one no longer anchored in the bourgeois subject whose self-possession good taste was designed to secure, but rather taste as intimation of a new kind of collective politics. It would be wrong to say that taste here becomes political praxis; that would redeem taste by its usefulness and reinstate the very logic of sacrifice the chapter indicts. The claim is rather that socialism, in West's account, names the conditions under which a taste unbound from that subject becomes thinkable—a taste available, within the world of the story,

only in negated form: as the speech Evadne is never permitted to give, the freedom her survival obscurely figures, the universality that George can register only as a threat.

CHAPTER 5

The Primitive Sense: Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr*

"The Anomalies of Taste"

> There is no more absolute value in stupidity and formlessness than there is in dung. But they are just as necessary. The conditions of creation and life disgust me. The birth of a work of art is as dirty as that of a baby.
>
> —*Tarr*

Tarr, Lewis's first novel, explicitly addresses the tension between the abstract visuality of painting and the more sensual modes of mimesis that characterize the novel as a genre. This is primarily accomplished in chapters wherein the character Tarr is given ample narrative space to lay out his philosophy of art; the plot is reduced to two people sitting at a café table, and the monologue, with few interruptions, unfolds. In her review of the novel for *The Nation*, Rebecca West notes this as a flaw. "Mr. Lewis quite reasonably fearing that the public which accepted the violent and senseless cliché of line which was his contribution to pictorial art may fail to understand his excellent novel, has provided a preface to explain what it is all about: and from this one discovered that he intended the artist Tarr and his spiritual adventures to be the main subject of the book." West's not-so-subtle dismissal of Lewis's "contribution to pictorial art" archly frames the entirety of her review, which could be summarized as follows: Lewis, worried that the public will not understand the way in which his novel expands on his interventions as a painter, goes to great pains to set up Tarr as the protagonist, granting his aesthetic pontifications priority over the other aspects of the novel. West, however, insists that there is a "wide difference between the actual book and the book which Mr. Lewis evidently intended to write," arguing that the novel's "excellence" lies in the ways in which the novel runs against Lewis's stated intentions. "That part of the story which concerns Tarr is very definitely a failure," she states. "The real achievement of the book…is Kreisler" (508). West's characterization of the novel's tenuous "success" positions Lewis alongside his earlier protagonists, such as Kerr-Orr and Pringle, as a frustrated artist unable to execute his vision; instead, he finds himself overwhelmed by the very objects and characters he is attempting to narrativize and digest, in this case, Kreisler. According to West, it is because Tarr's spiritual adventures fail to sublimate the energies of Kreisler that Lewis's novel should be considered a success. In this way, the conflict between Tarr and Kreisler within the plot is metaleptically reconfigured as a tension between Lewis and Kreisler, which is in turn configured as a struggle between "pictorial art" and "his excellent novel." The novel is "excellent" insofar as it manages to subvert Lewis's attempts to make it about painting.

In the "Preface"[58] referred to by West, Lewis proleptically anticipates and, indeed, seems to agree with West's assessment of his "failure." Having started the novel eight years prior, Lewis claims that the outbreak of war inspired him to complete it and get it published. "The myriads of Prussian germs, gases, and gangrenes released into the air and for the past year obsessing everything, revived my quiescent creation. I was moved to vomit Kreisler forth. It is one big germ more." The emetic analogy for artistic creation is by now familiar from the descriptions of "indigestible reality" that characterized Lewis's early short stories, though here it is configured as the intrusion of history itself in the form of poison gas that causes him to "choke" on Kreisler. What West identifies as Kreisler's ability to subvert Lewis's intention to write a novel about Tarr's "spiritual adventures" turns out to be an apt description of how Lewis goes about producing art more generally. Contrary to what West's review implies, Lewis does not mention his "pictorial art" in the preface; but he does use a few paragraphs to justify and "explain" the character of Tarr, aligning himself with Tarr's theories of Art and Humour, and reducing Kreisler to what Forster calls a "flat" character: "Kreisler in this book is a German and nothing else. Tarr is the individual in the book, and is at the same time one of the showmen of the author." Lewis may have felt the need to defend Tarr even before West's review because of Harriet Shaw Weaver's concern that Tarr was merely acting as a "mouthpiece" for Lewis.[59] Lewis does not deny Tarr's likeness to his real-life persona, but instead tries to position him as a novelistic tool through which the other characters can be critically focalized.

> Tarr, in his analysis of the anomalies of taste, gives the key to a crowd of other variants and twists to which most of the misunderstandings and stupidities in the deciphering of men are due. He exaggerates his own departure from perfect sense and taste into an unnecessary image of Shame and Disgust, before which he publicly castigates himself. He is a primitive figure, coupled with a modern type of flabby sophistication: that is Bertha Lunkin. (vii)

What does Lewis mean by "the anomalies of taste?" The ambiguity of the genitive allows for two readings. On the one hand, "anomalies" could refer to deviations from a standard of taste, of which there are many examples throughout the novel, most of them centered on Kreisler's antics in the "Bourgeois-Bohemians" chapters, and his more extreme departures from taste later in the novel, leading to rape, attempted murder, and suicide. On the other hand, it could be the case that anomalies are simply the very things that taste produces; in other words, taste's social function entails the production of anomalies, and these are the object of Tarr's analysis. Such anomalies are characterized by the "modern type of flabby sophistication" exemplified by Bertha Lunken, Fräulein Lipmann's salons, and the set of artists, socialites and wealthy expatriates inhabiting the Knackfus Quarter.

This dual nature of taste—serving both as a generator of anomalies and as a backdrop against which anomalies can be recognized—reflects Lewis's own position within modernist circles. Lewis was a relentless critic of his contemporaries. He skewered the stultifying excesses

---

[58] The "Preface" was largely written in 1915 as an "Epilogue" to the serialized version in the *Egoist*. It was revised and expanded as a "Prologue" for the 1918 Egoist edition, which is the subject of West's review.

[59] Weaver's criticism of the opening chapters prompted Lewis to reply in a letter: "The criticism you made I made myself to a friend of mine about those first chapters. I made Tarr too much my mouthpiece in his analysis of Humour etc…In the rest of the book the 'opinions' of the principal English character do not exceed the proportion that not only may be allowed, but, to be real, is necessary in describing a person like Frederick Tarr." (*Letters* 76)

of bourgeois taste (exemplified by figures such as Roger Fry, Clive Bell, A.R. Orage, and anyone else who reviewed his work negatively), but also actively sought to build an alternative system of taste that was "more primitive and energetic than the civilized mode of life implies." However, despite the similarities between Tarr and Lewis, my analysis depends on mapping their distinctive personalities and more precisely defining their relationship. Merely equating the eponymous character with the author risks missing how the novel ironizes Tarr's theories. As the passage above shows, Lewis maintains enough distance to label Tarr's "departure from perfect sense and taste" as an "*unnecessary* image of Shame and Disgust." While this may be true at the level of character—Tarr's histrionic (and misogynist) aesthetic theories do seem exaggerated and unmotivated—I will argue that it is structurally necessary, because it establishes a link between his arid aesthetic philosophy, in which shame and disgust are merely figurative, and the literal shame and disgust enacted by his foil, Otto Kreisler. Indeed, Lewis tells us directly, "[Tarr] is a primitive figure." Rather than read Kreisler as a representative of "the primitive" aspect of "Life" pulsating with Id-energy, and Tarr as a detached and refined artist enclosed in the cold shell of his ego, this chapter will argue for their intimate, dialectical alignment.

"Energy of the Cave-Man"

> 6. To believe that it is necessary for or conducive to art, to "Improve" life, for instance—make architecture, dress, ornament, in "better taste," is absurd.
> 7. The Art-instinct is permanently primitive.
>
> \- Wyndham Lewis

In his 1918 review of *Tarr*, Eliot equates Lewis's unique status as both a painter and writer with his combination of the "modern" and the "primitive." His admiration of the primitive quality in Lewis is the first instance of what would become commonplace in Lewis studies:

> The artist, I believe, is more primitive, as well as more civilized, than his contemporaries, his experience is deeper than civilization, and he only uses the phenomena of civilization in expressing it. Primitive instincts and the acquired habits of ages are confounded in the ordinary man. In the work of Mr. Lewis we recognize the thought of the modern and the energy of the cave-man. (106).

Eliot's statement constructs an opposition between primitive instincts and civilized thought.[60] In his view, "the ordinary man" contains these opposing forces, but in a "confounding" way; whereas Lewis is able to combine them in a clear and productive manner. His *energy* is primitive and his *thought* is modern; the *content* of his experience is deeper than civilization, but civilization offers the *form* through which this experience can be mediated. For Eliot, this is evidenced by his "dual creative personality" as both a writer and a painter; he insists that "his prose must be judged quite independently of his painting." In Eliot's view, "to treat his writing as an outlet for his superabundant vitality" so that he can keep his painting "healthy," "cannot lead to accurate criticism." In other words, it would be wrong to treat his writing as mere primitive content and his painting as a civilized form: they must be treated separately and not subordinated

[60] Eliot's insight has been repeated by Lewis's best critics. For example, Bernard Lafourcade likens the "Wild Body" stories to "a population of Easter Island monoliths lying face down, half buried in the dust." He refers to the 1982 Black Sparrow collection as "one of the great exhumations of modernism." Their motley collection of characters constitutes an "uncouth tribe" of "active paralytics" that "project a primitive tottering shadow for the benefit of an ambiguous observer" (380).

to each other. In this way, Eliot anticipates Adorno's more generalized formulation of the dialectic of the senses as it plays out in a formal register. However, as soon as he draws this clear opposition, Eliot appears to immediately "confound" it:

> It would be quite another thing, of course, to find in his writing the evidences of a draughtsman's training—the training to respond to an ocular impression with the motion of a line on paper; the special reaction to vision and especially the development of the tactile sense, recognition of emotion by the physical strains and movements which are its basis. (108)

For Eliot, the process of draughtsmanship blurs the clear line dividing painting and prose because it blurs the line between vision and the "tactile sense," offering a direct, provisional medium for isolating and tracing the dynamic movements of the human form unencumbered by the layers of color that characterize his more fully abstracted paintings. In this way, it serves as an apt metaphor for how Lewis translates his artistic training into literary representation. The point Eliot's review is trying to make is that this technique is itself symptomatic of the relationship between the primitive and the civilized as it plays out in a sensual register: the primitive depths of human vitality straining to incipiently break through the civilized surface of the draughtsman's paper.

Though Eliot's review is scant on examples, the language of draughtsmanship functions in the novel as a metaphor for acute but provisional observation of the human organism, stripped down to its mechanical lineaments. In an early scene, a surly, pathetic Tarr watches his fiancée, Bertha, nervously move about her apartment.

> A great believer in tepid "air-baths," she would remain, for hours together, in a state of nudity about her rooms. She was wearing a pale green striped affair, tight at the waist. It looked as though meant for a smaller woman. It may have belonged to her sister. As a result, her ample form had left the fullness of a score of attitudes all over it, in flat creasing and pencilings—like the sanguine of an Italian master in which the leg is drawn in several positions, one on top of the other. (50)

The description exemplifies Tarr's painterly gaze: precise in its assignment of color and line but provisional and tentative in its invocation of meaning or backstory.[61] In representing Bertha's outfit, Tarr observes that it "looked *as though* meant for a smaller woman." As a stand-alone observation, this could function as a straightforward simile, a unit of figurative language that could be utilized in various contexts, like the more obviously figurative phrase, "the apartment looked as though built for a smaller woman." However, the next line retroactively solidifies that simile as a piece of potential plot development by specifying Bertha's sister as the particular "smaller woman" to whom the outfit "*may have* belonged." The close proximity of "may have" to "as though" renders the latter syntactically ambiguous, caught between its role as portable figurative language and its function as a temporal plot device, thereby creating a specific, non-transferable relationship between Bertha and her sister. This tension is internalized in the draughtsmanship metaphor that immediately follows. The opening clause, "As a result," indicates a shift back to the logic of static figuration and away from plot development— the

---

[61] This alignment of draughtsmanship with Italian masters is repeated when Lewis recalled his training at Slade. "The model of draughtsmanship insisted upon by [Henry] Tonks was cinquecento: but the painting that of an academic, inexact, impressionism" (*Rude Assignment,* 111). The implication here is that exactitude in painting comes by through sharp observation, the tracing of lines, and the tactile mode, rather than strictly merely observing nature. Lewis expands on this contrast in his essay "Prevalent Design."

ensuing image does not arise "as a result" of her borrowing the dress from her smaller sister, but rather "as a result" of the more generalizable simile that preceded the potential containment by the plot. However, if a two-dimensional pictoriality seems to take priority, it is, in turn, complicated by the image itself, which shows how a flat spatial mode of painting generates depth and motion through mechanical tracings. In this way, the literal "fullness" of the leg is attained by layering different positions—moments in time—achieving a depth effect through the repetition of multiple flat pencilings.

As "evidences of his draughtsman's training," this minor interaction between Tarr and Bertha illustrates how Lewis manages to transmute the spatial properties of painting into the medium of literary representation—not by "confounding" painting and writing, but by dramatizing the tension between the two media at the molecular level of syntactical creation. Reflecting on the writing of *Tarr* in his post-war memoir, *Rude Assignment*, Lewis states: "Words and syntax were not susceptible to transformation into abstract terms, to which process the visual arts lent themselves quite readily. The coming of war and the writing – at top speed – of a full-length novel ('Tarr') was the turning point. Writing – literature – dragged me out of the abstractist cul-de-sac" (139). The description of his reluctant exit from the abstractist cul-de-sac recalls his earlier description of his vomiting out of Kreisler—both are instigated by the onset of war. In the same way that he tries (and fails) to contain Kreisler, to "keep him down," within the framework established by Tarr's theories of art, so does he also try to reduce the work of fiction to the bare bones of abstract expressionism. He frames this stylistic struggle in terms of flesh and bone. "The writing of Tarr was approached with austerity. I clipped the text to the bone of all fleshy verbiage. Rhetoric was under an interdict. Even so, it soon became obvious that in order to show the reader character in action, with its attendant passion, there was no way of reducing your text to anything more skeletal than that produced by an otherwise normal statement, even if abnormally abrupt and harsh." Thus, according to Lewis, *Tarr's* peculiar style consists in a process of visual abstraction that actively attempts to overcome the fleshy norms of literary representation. Lewis can be read as a reluctant practitioner of mimesis, struggling to fit the conventions of fiction into the two-dimensional trappings of his abstract vision.

Returning to the novel's opening, we can observe how the dense, molecular construction of syntax gradually expands into a broader context that incorporates the processes of figuration as a "fleshed out" dimension of the novel's plot. The first three chapters, each consisting of a conversation between Tarr and a casual acquaintance—Hobson, Butcher, then Lowndes—all focus on Tarr's intention to forsake sexual relationships altogether for the sake of his art. When Hobson asks about his engagement to Bertha, Tarr is at pains to distinguish his artistic identity from his sexual desire. "First, I am an artist.=With most people, all the finer part of their vitality goes into sex." Acting as Lewis's "mouthpiece,"[62] Tarr elaborates on this tension, which he frames as a binary opposition between "art" and "life." He tells Hobson that his art is "ascetic rather than sensuous, and divorced from immediate life." He insists, "There is no slop of sex in that." Rather, "Sex is a monstrosity" that must be completely cut off from the realm of the aesthetic. This strict division between pure ascetic "art" and a hyper-sexualized "life" leads Tarr to comic hyperbole. While sitting over breakfast with Hobson, he shouts, "'I bury my face in it!

[62] Defending the opening to Harriet Shaw Weaver, Lewis wrote in 1916, "The criticism you made I made myself to a friend of mine about these first chapters. I make Tarr too much my mouthpiece in his analysis of Humour etc:=Only what you say does not apply to the fourth chapter, of Part. I., in which there are, I think, no options, only an analysis of character and action." The fourth chapter is the scene of the failed "break-up" between Bertha and Tarr, the first real "chapter" in terms of plot development (*Letters* 76).

(He buried his face in it!!) I laugh hoarsely through its thickness, choking and spitting; coughing, sneezing, blowing." He continues, "=People will begin to think I am an alligator if they see me always swimming around in their daily ooze. As far as sex is concerned, I am that" (9). As Tarr works himself into a polemical frenzy, he becomes increasingly frustrated with Hobson's Cambridge aloofness, his affected bohemian mannerisms, and his ability to remain unfazed by the escalating hysterics. His ensuing anger is figured as a bizarre combination of eating, regurgitation, and force-feeding. "=A bitter feast was steaming hot, and a mouth must be found to eat it…He must get his words into it. They must not be swallowed at a gulp. They must *taste*, sting, and benefit by the meaning of an appetite.=He had something to say" (30-31). Parsing this metaphor interpellates one into yet another scene of Lewis's "nastiness," insofar as our willingness to engage the figurative language *as* figurative feels like the text *imposing* on us its own inscrutable but ineluctable logic, much in the same way that Tarr wishes to force-feed his interlocutor. So while the lexical field "just looks nasty," it is, at the same time, virtually impossible to identify a discrete object of disgust. The reader is left helpless to discern the "meaning of an appetite" that must "taste" and "sting." In such moments, the text works itself into a semantic "cul-de-sac," to borrow Lewis's term, from which the reader can try to back out; or, within which the reader can continuously spin in circles, like Hobson "[watching] Tarr looping the loop above him" (9).

While the *Wild Body* stories mediated this nastiness as a fissured ontology that determined the outlines of their rudimentary plots, the novel's larger fictional space allows these indigestible units to be expelled outward into broader economies of meaning. It is useful, then, to think of Tarr's conversational mode not merely within the bodily economics of ingestion and expulsion, as he himself frames it, but rather in terms of a "supply-side" macroeconomics, in which goods—in this case, language itself—are produced without consideration for the needs of the consumer—in this case, Hobson, and by extension, the reader. The production of language thus becomes a surplus that requires no justification apart from its own excrescence on the page. To avoid the risk of devaluation, demand must be manufactured: "a mouth must be found to eat it." This macroeconomic framing is useful insofar as it enables us to configure multiple centrifugal levels of containment, much as capitalism produces new markets to manage the ever-expanding horizons of supply. In *Tarr*, the *nastiness* that characterized the comic set pieces of the *Wild Body* stories can be more fully leveraged as textual units that resist indigestion locally but are otherwise digestible within the novel's expanding market. This quite literally occurs when Lewis incorporates these memorable lines from "Unlucky for Pringle" into his description of Tarr:

> In the neighbourhood of the Place de Clichy, in an old convent, he found a room big enough for four people. There, on the day of the second of the letters, he arrived in a state of characteristic misgiving. It was the habitual indigestion of Reality. He was very fond of reality. But he was like a man very fond of what did not agree with him. It usually ended, however, by his assimilating it. (185)

The description of Tarr's idiosyncratic "appetite" for reality is quoted almost verbatim from the earlier story. Like Pringle, Tarr is fond of what does not agree with him, but usually ends up "assimilating it," though not without a struggle. Indeed, to the degree that Tarr struggles to make good on his titular privilege (as both Rebecca West and Fredric Jameson have noted), one could argue that while Tarr manages certain localized "assimilations" of his immediate environment, within the context of the novel as a whole, his character, and along with him, the elaborate theories roughly simulating Lewis's own critical voice, are ultimately unsuccessful in their

digestive conquests. Such a reading would undermine any straightforward alignment between Tarr and Lewis and provide a broader interpretive context for Tarr's lectures as fictional elements rather than as interpretive "keys" that offer extrinsic insight into the novel's logic as a whole. In other words, West's insight that Tarr's sections of the novel are failures will prove to be true, but the very idea of failure will be incorporated into a larger system of assimilation that rewrites those failures as integral to the processes of creation that constitute the novel itself.

Bracketing the rest of the novel, it is possible to read the opening series of conversations culminating in Tarr's tête-à-tête with Bertha as another one of Kerr-Orr's comic misadventures, in which the protagonist's psychical and physical mobility are gradually hindered by objects and people that prove "indigestible." For Tarr, this is framed in terms of gender and taste. Speaking to Hobson, Tarr characterizes women as lumps of flesh that need to be excluded from the realm of artistic creation.

> How foul and wrong this haunting of women is!=They are everywhere!=Confusing, blurring, labelling, with their half-baked, gushing, tawdry presences! It is like a slop of children and the bawling machinery of the inside of life, always and all over our palaces. Their silly flood of cheap illusion comes in between friendships, stagnates complacently around a softened mind. (27)

Tarr's sexist outburst, one of many throughout the novel, is both a chauvinist proclamation of male superiority and an indictment of feminine bad taste: women pose a threat to his masculinist aesthetic not just because of their unwieldy fleshiness, but also because of their tawdry sentimentality and weak "tastefulness." Thus, Tarr struggles to overcome the maudlin claustrophobia of Bertha's "Bourgeois-Bohemian interior": "The cold, repulsive shades of Islands of the Dead…the plaster cast of Beethoven…a photograph of Mona Lisa (Tarr hated the Mona Lisa)." The kitsch assortment of tasteful decor ("the unwearied optimism of these inanimate objects") competes with Tarr's attempts to establish his forthright masculinist agenda.

Despite his best efforts, however, it is Tarr who turns out to be digestible, comically transformed into a sweet dessert by Bertha's pet name: "Sorbet, or in English, Sherbert…a perversion of his strange second name, Sorbert" (51). Bertha's love language is saturated in metaphors of sweetness and taste: "Vous êtes à mon gout, Sorbet. Du bist nach meinem Geschmack." (56). Being on the receiving end of assimilation prompts an uncommon moment of self-reflection in Tarr: "And he could not help reflecting whether to be 'her taste' was very flattering. There *must* be something the matter with him" (56). He wonders, "Why has she never tried to modify herself in the direction of my 'taste'?" The ensuing self-doubt from this upending of the relational power dynamic compels Tarr to displace and condense his desire to sublimate his surroundings into the more immediate act of sublimating the strawberries he brought for lunch. "He had become a devouring-machine, restless if any of the little red balls still remained in front of him" (70). He does not simply consume them; he also performs a rudimentary abstraction of their physical attributes into pure form and color in a comical diminution of his artistic powers. It is finally Bertha who must tell Tarr to leave: "Why don't you go? I thought you'd gone. It seems so funny to see you standing there" (71). Tarr eventually concedes defeat and promises to return tomorrow, but fails to follow through. On the street, he struggles to comprehend what has happened: "Something raw and uncertain he seemed to have built up in the room he had left" (74). Raw, unmediated, unassimilated, indigestible: Tarr butts up against reality and finds himself on the receiving end of the digestive "aesthetic" he claims to practice. The closing sentence's stuttering, quasi-incompletion formally communicates the "rawness" of

Tarr's thought, subordinating the weak nominative pronoun to the "raw" predicate which precedes it. He has not assimilated reality—it has assimilated him.

Disgusting Mimesis and the Failure of Figuration

> The artist goes back to the fish. The few centuries that separate him from the savage are a mere flea-bite to the distance his memory must stretch if it is to strike the fundamental slime of creation. And it is this condition, the very first gusto of creation in this scale of life in which we are set, that he must reach before he, in his turn, can create.
>
> —Wyndham Lewis, *The Caliph's Design*

> I refer to the opposition between the methods of those painters who devoured nature to feed a restless Monster of Design within them; and those who, on the other hand, offered their talents upon the latter of the Monster of Nature; which talents, after absorption into the body of this mechanism, refused to be digested, and led a precarious and sometimes glorious existence in its depths.
>
> —Wyndham Lewis, "Prevalent Design"

Bertha's tasteful sentimentality faces a crisis in the novel's expanding plot as the cycles of digestion extend outward. Using Kreisler and Bertha's secret kiss as an excuse to (nearly) jump ship, Tarr coolly breaks off his engagement by letter, but cannot quite bring himself to leave for London—he only manages about five kilometers north to Montmartre. In Tarr's absence, Kreisler rapes Bertha. The scene, unfolding over Chapter 9 of Part IV, "A Jest Too Deep for Laughter," is the violent core around which the rest of the novel revolves. Plot-wise, it quilts together the previously separate paths of Tarr and Kreisler. The brutal violence also starkly reveals, in a crude way, the airy aesthetic discourse and petty social posturing that had so far defined the novel's main drama. Possibly because of its disturbing content, the scene rarely receives direct critical attention. If mentioned at all, it is read as an absent yet organizing element around which other interpretations are built. In this way, these interpretations mirror the chapter itself, as the act of rape is never described directly; instead, the chapter deliberately fragments the encounter by jumbling the temporal sequencing and splintering the violent act into a strictly spatial structure, formally representing the indigestible content of Bertha's traumatic experience.[63]

This structural fragmentation is the formal expression of what I understand to be the novel's "indigestion"—and Lewis represents it by staging a tension between the spatializing visuality of painting and the temporalizing "digestion" of fictional representation, already discussed in the context of his contemporary non-fiction. The chapter opens with an ekphrastic description of Kreisler's studio, where, we later learn, Bertha has come to sit for a portrait: "Kreisler's windows had been incandescent with steady saffron rays, coming over the roofs of

---

[63] Bonnie Kime Scott describes Lewis's method as follows: "Lewis adjusts the point of view so that we experience the whirlpool off-center, in a violent, chaotic juxtaposition of images that denies connections in time, personal identity, or male responsibility" (106). I find Scott's reading compelling, but I do not follow the connection made with excusing male responsibility. On the contrary, the novel seems to go out of its way to humiliate and punish Kreisler for his actions. Her point could be extended, however, by noting the ways in which the plotting of Kreisler's demise seems to exonerate the merely figurative violence of Tarr's aesthetics.

the Quarter…Men once more were invited to be the motes in the sunbeam, to play in the sleepy surf on the edge of remoteness" (204). The picturesque description is abruptly interrupted by the intrusion of time—"The clock was striking eight"—which in turn leads to the sudden rush of what has just transpired, as Bertha awakes to the realization that she has been raped: "Like eight metallic glittering waves dashing discordantly together in a cavern, its strokes rushed up and down in Bertha's head." This temporal rupture is not merely a plot device; it is a formal argument. Not unlike the tolling of Big Ben in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the bells of Notre-Dame harshly constrain the characters' psychological wanderings, forcing them to an unavoidable reckoning with their shared history. For Bertha, it portends a shocking demolition of her sentimentalism, the trappings of "taste" that had thus far buoyed her social position amongst the bourgeois-bohemians of Paris.

> "Oh Schwein! Schwein! Ich hass es—ich hass dich! Schwein! Schurke! Hässlicher Mensch!"
>
> All the hatred and repulsion of her being, in a raw, indecent heat, seemed turned into this tearful sonority, gushing up like blood. An exasperated falling, deepening sing-song in the "hässlicher Mensch!", something of the disgusting sound of the brutal relishing and gobbling of food. Hatred expresses itself like satisfaction of an appetite. The outrage was spat out of her body at him. As she stood there she looked like someone on whom a practical joke had been played, of the primitive and physical order, such as drenching, in some amusing manner, with dirty water. She had been decoyed into swallowing something disgusting. Her attitude was reminiscent of the way people are seen to stand bent awkwardly forward, neck craned out, slowly wiping the dirt off their clothes, or spitting the remains of their polluted drink, cursing the joker. (205)

The reader begins to expect that a violent assault has occurred from this emetic outburst of disgust, but the rape has not yet been narrated; indeed, it will never be narrated, and the attempt to do so results in a series of (unsuccessful) efforts at figuration—here saliently conveyed in a double sense, first as literary metaphorization, and then as painterly figuration. The first attempt to describe her emotions yields a confusing, contradictory combination of bodily functions, not unlike the "push-pull" that characterizes the mechanism of Kantian disgust itself. "The outrage was spat out of her body," but it also resembles "the disgusting sound of the brutal relishing and gobbling of food." "Hatred expresses itself"—from the Latin, literally, it squeezes itself out—but it does so "like satisfaction of an appetite." The strained compression of ingestion and expulsion demonstrates an inability to digest what has just occurred. Crucially, however, this incapacity is not merely a limitation of Bertha's subjective processing; rather, the text itself, in this moment, cannot adequately render through figurative language the intensity of her emotion. This is not merely a question of a limited epistemology, but rather a dramatization of language's own incapacity to convey its content. The series of tasteless similes that follow—explicit attempts to reduce the moment to a practical joke—sets the text against itself. We have been told this is a "jest too deep for laughter," but Lewis is trying to shift the moment into a comic register: the point of these rudimentary figurations is to be inadequate.

If the text's figurative machinery breaks down at the level of narration, this failure is mirrored at the level of plot: the chapter's action centers on a failed attempt at figuration, as Kreisler cannot successfully draft his model; failing to mediate Bertha symbolically, he resorts to physical assault. Bertha is keenly aware of the threat: the thin line that separates the violent, sexist modes of figuration espoused by Tarr and the threat of physical violence embodied by Kreisler. When he asks to draw her shoulders, she senses danger but "had immediately

condemned this feeling." She thinks, "He was an artist, too, of course." But then Kreisler's outburst heightens the tension: "'Your arms are like bananas!' A shiver of warning had penetrated her at this. But still he was an artist: it was natural,—even inevitable!—that he should compare her arms to bananas" (193). The reader shares in Bertha's confusion.[64] Is Kreisler referring to how he has painted her arms, or is he referring to how her arms appear to him in real life? If the former, then his comment can either be dismissed as a question of style—perhaps a predilection for certain Cubist trends that denature the human form and fragment it into still-lifes populated by fruits and household objects. If the latter, then his comment could be construed as a crude assertion of desire unmoored from aesthetic containment. The more disturbing conclusion is that the two possibilities are not so different, as Kreisler puts down his brush and proceeds to physically grab Bertha by the arms that are "like bananas," in effect, literalizing the simile and confirming Bertha's suspicion that Kreisler is unable to separate the domains of art and life. As Adorno tersely summarizes the problematic: "The literal is barbaric."

Kreisler's violent conflation of the literal and figural continues to infect the scene more generally, as Bertha's reaction is configured as disgusting at both the levels of form and content—a second-order mimetic contamination that recapitulates the scene's central crisis. "She had been decoyed into swallowing something disgusting." As a result, "[Bertha's] outrage was spat out of her body at him." Most straightforwardly, Lewis describes the activity of disgust as Bertha spits up the thing she was forced to swallow. But it is not clear to what degree the scene is literal or figural, an ambiguity that instills a second order of disgust, as the reader is left to puzzle over the degree to which we are witnessing literal disgust, or something more formally distanced—what Kant theorizes, in the Third Critique, as "loathing," that peculiar push-pull dynamic in which "the object is represented as if it were obtruding itself for our enjoyment while we strive against it with all our might." According to Kant, this "formal" disgust results in "the nature of the object itself in our sensation" being "no longer distinguished from the artistic representation of the object" (*Judgment* 155). In the rape scene and the following chapters, then, Lewis does not merely render the event through Bertha's compromised epistemological framing—rather, "the disgusting event" (197) renders the text itself disgusting, indigestible insofar as its molecular properties refuse assimilation into a neat logic of trauma. In this way, the scene of rape figures as an allegory for the collision of two opposing forms of taste—on the one hand, Bertha's tasteful dilettantism, soaked in a dusty romanticism, in which taste is completely divorced from its material element, and on the other, the violent digestive tendency of Kreisler, in which aesthetic taste and digestion are forcefully conflated. Thus, the arms are "like" bananas insofar as they are rendered figurative; but contemporaneously, the arms just are bananas, as the simile proves too weak to sustain the aesthetic distance between subject and predicate.

The collapse of figural distance that the (failed) simile enacts at a granular semantic level triggers a larger structural response, as it is reproduced, in the scenes that follow, as a collapse of temporal continuity—a connection that requires some theoretical elaboration. Bertha continues to try to make sense of the "loathsome, senseless event," engaging in a series of abstractions, detemporalizing her character into two dimensions, as if the plot transpired as a series of paintings rather than in the uninterrupted flow of the plot's action: "She saw side by side and unconnected, the silent figure drawing her and the other one full of blindness and violence. Then

---

[64] Analysis aside, Kreisler's outburst is irreducibly comic in its ridiculousness, recalling to mind Adorno's observation: "Ridiculousness is the residue of the mimetic in art, the price of its self-enclosure" (*Aesthetic Theory* 119). For an excellent analysis of this scene, see Rachel Murray's "'Unexpected fruit': The ingredients of *Tarr*."

there were two other figures, one getting up from the chair, yawning, and the present lazy one at the window—four in all, that she could not bring together somehow, each in a complete compartment of time of its own" (194). To describe this as mere "detemporalization" would not quite capture what is happening. More precisely, we can characterize this traumatic mode of time as a fracturing of what Bergson theorizes as durée—the continuous, heterogeneous flow of lived experience in which past and present are not discrete units but interpenetrate one another in an indivisible stream of consciousness. For Bergson, durée is the condition of genuine memory and authentic selfhood; its degradation into a spatialized, clock-time sequence does not produce experience, but its dissociated simulacrum. What Bertha undergoes here is precisely this degradation: the continuous flow of her experience, shattered by trauma, denatures into a series of static, discontinuous images, "each in a complete compartment of time of its own." Rather than the fluid interpenetration of moments that durée affords, she is left with something more like a strip of film: discrete frames, spatially juxtaposed but temporally inert. In a scene that is so overtly visual, these moments highlight the limits of that sensible regime, as it comes under pressure from the traumatic encounter. Vision does not offer clarity; rather, by strictly avoiding time and depth, it brackets and represses the violent event.

This painterly, spatializing logic carries directly into the following chapter, which continues to figure Bertha's experience as an abstract spatialization that cannot fully represent what has occurred. "The half hour of senseless outrage still took up all the canvas." "It took up too much space." "Kreisler seemed to have brought confusion everywhere. There was nothing that would quite fit in with that ridiculous, disgusting event" (197). If Bertha's fragmented recollections in the previous chapter registered the Bergsonian dissolution of durée into static images, here the spatial metaphor of "canvas" and "space" reveals the compensatory fantasy of painting: the wish to hold the event at aesthetic arm's length, to render the unassimilable manageable by translating it into a bounded visual field. In this way, Kreisler's rape of Bertha figures as a crude allegory for how narrative—as the medium for historical retelling—itself threatens and inhibits the activity of abstraction. Failing to satisfactorily paint her, he resorts to the crudest form of literary figuration: a simile comparing a body to food. In this way, "Your arms are like bananas" recalls the conclusion to the preceding chapter, in which Bertha, resigning herself to life without Tarr, thinks to herself: "Kreisler of course was the central, irreducible element in this mental pie. He was the egg-cup that kept up the crust" (190). Bertha's metaphor "works" to the extent that we recognize it as jejune, clumsy, and incoherent; it tells us less about Kreisler than it does about Bertha's increasingly desperate attempts to make sense of her situation. Likewise, Kreisler's crude simile—as if pulled from a primer on basic literary techniques—tells us nothing about Bertha's arms, but rather about his dangerous failure of imagination. Ultimately, the fragile preposition "like" cannot sustain the distance between tenor and vehicle, and the aesthetic enterprise collapses into the literal action of the plot. Thus, "Your arms are like bananas" is disturbing not because it is absurd, but because it belies a mimetic collapse that closes the distance between subject and object, literalizing the realm of taste, and thereby initiating an aesthetic of disgust that undermines the distancing procedures that subtend the possibilities of abstraction and the visual realm.

Despite Bertha's attempts at sublimation—which follow in strict accordance with Tarr's bombastic aesthetic theories in the opening chapters—Kreisler and the force of chaotic mimetic violence that he represents refuse to be abstracted and detemporalized. On the contrary, "His ominous and sudden appearance…seemed to swallow up the space and time between them." These scenes of frustrated figuration and competing modes of assimilation invite us to read the

novel's plot as an allegory of the creation of art itself. For Lewis, this entails a return to the "fundamental slime of creation," a realm of messiness and violence, wherein the satisfaction of need, the assimilation of the other, and the desire to create something new are conflated into a single activity in the present moment.[65] In so doing, Kreisler instantiates a formal crisis within the plot that reverberates as a technique generalized into what we could simply call Lewis's style, and what critics from Eliot to Jameson have called "primitive." Eliot's early commentary on *Tarr* once again proves prescient. Reacting to the *New Age*'s rebuke of Joyce and Lewis, Eliot is utterly unsurprised: "That is quite intelligible. *Ulysses* is volatile and heady, *Tarr* is thick and suety, clogging the weak intestine." Eliot's comment is first and foremost a formal claim, a commentary on style rather than content: if you have a weak stomach, Lewis's prose will get stuck in your bowels. He dismisses A.R. Orage's *New Age* as out of date, resting on expectations for art that are no longer pertinent: "they seek the sense of ease which the sensitive man avoids, and only when they find it do they call anything 'beautiful'" (132).

Eliot's dismissal of the "beautiful" points toward a broader aesthetic reorientation that critics have tended to describe in terms of "ugliness," but that Adorno's dialectical account allows us to theorize with greater precision.[66] In *The Modernist Cult of Ugliness*, Lesley Higgins concludes that the central figures of masculinist modernism, the Men of 1914, dismiss the beautiful as an organizing aesthetic concept altogether and replace it with its opposite, a "cult of ugliness," which prioritizes the representation of "truth" over the production of pleasure. "Ugliness," she argues, is a "totalizing, compensatory schema," which "partakes of the Absolute so desperately sought, in disparate ways, by Hulme, Pound, Lewis and Eliot" (150). To make her point, she cites "the rape fetish of male modernists" and focuses on the Kreisler scene as a central example, arguing that the scene presents the violence as Bertha's "just desserts" for

---

[65] Julia Kristeva binds together a similar lexical field of disgust, subject/object confusion, and the regression to primitive instinct: "In a world in which the other has collapsed, the aesthetic task—a descent into the foundations of the symbolic—amounts to retracing the fragile limits or the speaking being, closest to its dawn, to the bottomless 'primacy' constituted by primal repression. Through that experience, which is nevertheless managed by the Other, 'subject' and 'object' push each other away, confront each other, collapse, and start again—inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: abject" (18).

Lewis and Kristeva presage more contemporary and "empirical" approaches to explain the concept and role of disgust as related to the primal scene of creation, particularly the way in which death and life become threateningly intermixed. Ian Miller argues, "What disgusts, startlingly, is the capacity for life, and just because life implies its correlative death and decay: for it is decay that seems to engender life. Images of decay imperceptibly slide into an image of fertility and out again. Death thus horrifies and disgusts not just because it smells revoltingly bad, but because it is not an end to the process of living but part of a cycle of eternal recurrence… The gooey mud, the scummy pond are life soup, fecundity itself: slimy, slippery, wiggling, teeming animal life generating spontaneously from putrefying vegetation." *The Anatomy of Disgust*. Harvard University Press, 1997. 40-41. Drawing from Aurel Kolnai's work, *On Disgust* (1929), Colin McGinn frames his exhaustive catalog of disgusting objects and states as instances of "life *in death*." Unfortunately, "The Ancient Mariner" goes unmentioned: "The astonishing force of life impresses us, but the terrible inevitability of death dampens and depresses. Putrefaction, as disgust paradigm, transparently combines both: the vital and the nullifying…this structural antinomy repeats itself with regard to other disgust objects" (93).

[66] "To say that art is not identical with the concept of beauty, but requires for its realization the concept of the ugly as its negation, is a platitude" (*Aesthetic* 45). Adorno's terse dismissal of criticism that merely inverts the terms of value could also apply to Robert Pippin's recent book on Cézanne, *After the Beautiful*.

distracting the artist. Given the pathetic demise of Kreisler, I do not agree with Higgins's moral assessment of the scene. Nor do I agree with her more general claim that male modernists prefer the "ugliness of truth" to the "beauty of art." Rather, my reading of *Tarr* suggests that Lewis is keenly aware of the violence inherent to abstraction and deliberately foregrounds those mechanics of figuration at the level of plot. Where Higgins's model treats ugliness as a replacement for beauty—a simple inversion of aesthetic values—Adorno's account in "The Ugly, the Beautiful, and Technique" insists on a more complex, dialectical relationship. For Adorno, the ugly does not simply displace beauty in modernist art but is rather a constitutive feature of art's temporality, the trace of a historical repression that the artwork can never fully expunge:

> What appears ugly is, in the first place, what is historically older, what art rejected on its path toward autonomy, and is therefore mediated in itself. The concept of the ugly may well have originated in the separation of art from its archaic phase: It marks the permanent return of the archaic, intertwined with the dialectic of enlightenment in which art participates…Beauty is not the platonically pure beginning but rather something that originated in the renunciation of what was once feared, which only as a result of this renunciation—retrospectively, so to speak, according to its telos—became the ugly. (47)

What Adorno articulates here as a historical and dialectical process maps, with striking fidelity, onto the formal logic of the rape scene: the "permanent return of the archaic" that beauty requires as its repressed condition of possibility is precisely what Kreisler embodies. He is not simply an ugly character in a moralistic sense; he is the figure of the archaic remainder that aesthetic abstraction—Bertha's tasteful sentimentalism, Tarr's theory of "deadness"—requires as its enabling negation. The Bergsonian resonance of this formulation is not incidental. If *durée* names the continuous temporal flow through which experience achieves integration and meaning, then Kreisler's violence names the moment at which that flow is shattered—and at which the archaic, repressed stratum of experience surges back into the spatializing, static images of Bertha's traumatic aftermath.

It is in this light that we should read the novel's closing movement on Kreisler, where Adorno's dialectic of the archaic is rendered, almost literally, as a figure of indigestion. When Kreisler unexpectedly shows up at Bertha's apartment the evening after he rapes her, he forces himself out of the (synchronic) visual plane of Bertha's recollections and back into the (diachronic) plot—a re-entry that recapitulates, at the narrative level, the Adornian "return of the archaic" that beauty must perpetually negotiate. Bertha can only make sense of him within the shadowy realm of amorphous animality and primitive violence: "Kreisler! It was as though the world were made up of various animals, each of a different kind and physique, even, and this was the animal Kreisler, whose name alone conjured up certain peculiar, dangerous habits. A wild world, not of uniform men and women, but of divergent and strangely-living animals." His presence forces this violent and confusing existence into the world of Paris's bourgeois salons: "he was not an apparition from any remote Past, but from a Past almost a Present." This temporal confusion—the abruption of the past into the present, the refusal of Bergson's durée to resolve into a legible, forward-moving narrative—results in his indigestibility, bringing together both his aesthetic and social threat: "He had the too raw and too new colors of an image hardly digested." The archaic does not come from a distant past; it comes from a past that is almost present, a temporal proximity that no aesthetic procedure can safely neutralize. To digest Kreisler would be to resolve the novel's central formal tension—to absorb the ugly back into the beautiful, the violent into the aesthetic, the archaic into the autonomous artwork. That he remains "hardly

digested" is Lewis's answer to that temptation: the formal indigestion of the text as a brutal and brutalizing honesty.

The Necessity of Taste

> "Well, I have a cave! I've got all that, too.=I promise you."
>
> —Anastasya to Tarr

> "Heavens!=I only believe in one thing, the pleasure of taste. In that you get back, though, with me, to mathematics and Paleozoic times, and the coloured powders of the earth."
>
> —Tarr to Anastasya

> One can greet "Tarr"—but how much more heartily one would greet it if it were not for that highly emetic scene between Tarr and Anastasya—as a work of art of power and distinction.
>
> —Rebecca West

Read through Adorno's concept of ugliness as part of the dialectic of enlightenment, Kreisler's chaotic temporality becomes laden with the full weight of negativity that underpins the abstract, spatialized regime of visuality so energetically sought by Lewis. Adorno calls this "the dialectic of rationality and mimesis immanent to art." In the context of *Tarr*, this manifests as the unresolved tension between the "skeletal" "austerity" of Tarr's coldly rational aesthetic theories ("the cold hide of a rhinoceros") and Kreisler's unrestrained mimetic violence, culminating in a collapse of the literal and the figural. "The aporia of art, pulled between regression to literal magic or surrender of the mimetic impulse to thinglike rationality, dictates its law of motion; the aporia cannot be eliminated" (54). My interpretation of the rape scene suggests that Lewis intended Kreisler's violence to allegorize one possible result of the very modes of aesthetic creation he used in writing *Tarr*. If we follow Weaver and West in seeing Tarr as Lewis's "mouthpiece," then the implication is that Tarr and Kreisler are not strictly antagonistic, but are, using one of Lewis's favored phrases, "two sides of the same coin." This final section will argue that the extended tête-à-tête between Tarr and Anastasya near the end of the novel—a scene West described as "emetic"—demonstrates this "formal" disgust, but also reveals its ultimate conceptual failure when it encounters a female character who rejects its representational strategies and reappropriates them on her own terms.[67]

The notorious scene takes place after Kreisler has accidentally shot someone in a poorly organized duel and subsequently hanged himself in a prison somewhere in the countryside. In light of the general feeling that Kreisler had been the source of energy propelling the novel as a whole, one might expect that his untimely exit would result in a triumphant return to Tarr's arid aesthetic pontifications. Indeed, in many ways, the extended scene between Tarr and Anastasya repeats the picaresque qualities of the novel's opening: Tarr is comfortably settled in a café banquette, impatient to rattle off platitudes ("Life is art's rival and vice versa") and take Anastasya to bed. In this sense, his blending of aesthetics and sexual conquest can also be read as a more sophisticated foil to the brute conflation of art and sex in the figure of Kreisler. The scene

[67] In this way, Anastasya adumbrates the more fully realized character of Evadne Silverton in Rebecca West's short story, "Indissoluble Matrimony," the central text of chapter 6.

opens with Tarr aggressively embracing Anastasya, and trying to kiss her, only to be rebuffed. "He put his arms around her waist, and planting his lips fully on hers, began kissing her." He thinks,

> Was she in the unfortunate position of an unawakened mass; and had she so rationalized her intimate possessions that there was no precocious fancy left until mature animal ardour was set up? He felt as though he were embracing a tiger, who was not unsympathetic, but rather surprised. Perhaps he had been too sudden. He ran his hand upwards along her body. All was statuesquely genuine. She took his hand away. (323)

Stylistically, the passage does not "clip all fleshy verbiage to the bone," as Lewis set out to do in the novel as a whole. "Unawakened mass…mature animal ardour…intimate possession… precocious fancy"—there is plenty of unwieldy and confusing "flesh" in this prose. Instead, Lewis performs this clipping over the course of the passage, dramatizing the movement away from a first-person, mimetic registration of impressions toward a tightly clipped third-person narration. In miniature, the passage illustrates the formal way in which the artist "goes back to fish," performing the rudimentary work of mimesis as it grows wings and takes aesthetic flight out of the "slime of creation."

Looking more closely, the passage opens with a knotty rhetorical question focalized through Tarr, who is coming to grips with the fact that Anastasya is rebuffing him. The sentence does not so much convey a meaning as forge an intimate bond between the reader and Tarr, instantiating, once again, a formal logic of "nastiness," in which the difficulty of isolating and defining a disturbing *object* accounts for the affective frisson of the passage. We are carried along in his confusion, sharing in the raw, unmediated impressions of the moment. As the passage continues, the narrative cedes authority to the third person, Tarr moving from centering consciousness with whom the reader is mimetically intimate, to an objectified body part: hand. Meanwhile, Anastasya is undergoing her own transformation from an unawakened mass of overtly sexualized particulars to something statuesquely genuine. It is as if the text itself compensates in the aesthetic realm for what Tarr, the character, fails to accomplish in the biological realm—in effect reversing the way that Kreisler compensated for his failed aesthetic figuration by raping his sitting subject. The resemblance of these two scenes of sexual aggression, though different in degree, emphasizes the fragility of the figurative mediation enabling the aesthetic consolidation of sexual violence into the formal qualities of the text. And yet, "statuesquely genuine" is not the same thing as "genuinely statuesque." The latter implies an authentic, finely wrought, *object-ified* piece of art. The former does just the opposite. It implies that Anastasya's supposed genuine-ness is itself mimetic, a mere imitation, which neither Tarr nor the novel itself can quite wrap its hands around, so to speak. Eventually, Anastasya will leave the novel altogether, a female figure too disconcerting for this world of male artists to sublimate.

Tarr is full of these condensed moments of artistic creation, in which a moment full of the flurry of sensorial experience is quickly followed by an external perspective that tries, and fails, to condense and displace that experience into a static piece of art at the level of the sentence. This is the formal rationale behind the equal signs: it is an attempt to connect the various parts of the sentence together without syntactical conjunctions that would imply temporal movement. The result is a tension between part and whole, space and time, at the level of the sentence itself. In Fredric Jameson's view: "The words, unable to go together properly, end up projecting the warring planes and angles of a cubist painting. The sentence is thus an amalgam of heterogeneous forces which must not be allowed to congeal" (33). "Statuesquely genuine" thus

describes Anastasya herself, as well as the very most that a Lewisian sentence can aspire to: an art object whose unity is negated as mere semblance. In their failure to satisfactorily *figure* the object of representation, these moments paradoxically grant a power to the object by tracking the ways in which it rebuffs the artist's advances—another example of "indigestible reality." The result is the dialectical indexing of the object's persistence, which can only be achieved, according to Lewis, by going beyond mere mimesis and attempting to assimilate it. "Imitation, and inherently unselective registering of impressions, is an absurdity," Lewis writes, for the result can never "give you the weight of the object, and certainly not the meaning…which is its spiritual weight."

Failing to objectify Anastasya, Tarr tries a more aggressive track, converting her into a piece of meat, in ways that anticipate the celebrated (but rarely condemned) butcher shop scene in the "Calypso" episode.[68] Gazing at the flesh of her leg after she crosses them under her tight skirt, "[Tarr's] butcher's sensibility pressed his fancy into professional details." The sight makes him *literally* hungry: "'Come let's have dinner. I'm hungry. We can discuss the problem after a beefsteak!' A porterhouse would have fitted, Tarr thought." As they walk to the restaurant, Tarr's interior monologue elaborates the analogy:

> He was a butcher in his spare moments. This immensely intellectual ox, covered with prizes and pedigrees, overwhelmed him. You required not a butcher, but an artist, for that! He was not an artist in anything but oil paint. Oil-paint and meat were singularly alike. They had reciprocal potentialities. But he was afraid of being definitely distracted… He felt immensely pleased with himself as he walked down the Boulevard Clichy with this perfect article rolling and sweeping beside him. No bourgeoisie this time!=He could be proud of this anywhere! Absolute perfection! Highest quality attainable…Perfect meat, perfect sense. (296-97)

Tarr's gleeful sense of triumph is as comic as it is disturbing; only a tendentiously ungenerous reading could miss the degree to which Lewis is skewering Tarr in this passage. And yet, beneath the comedy, there is a more disturbing through-line linking artistic expression to the literal consumption of women, whether configured as bananas or as meat. The comedy is sustained by figurative language that we have been trained to recognize as a fragile bulwark against the literalization of merely metaphorical consumption. For all of Tarr's talk about the irreducible binary between art and life—"life is art's rival and vice versa"—his interior monologue belies their fearful symmetry. "They had reciprocal potentialities."

However, despite Tarr's feeling of triumph, Anastasya is very much his equal, and their battle takes place on the grounds of taste. "You are like a youngster who hasn't gotten used to the taste of liquor; you don't like it. You haven't grown up yet." Anastasya teases him, "I want to make you drunk and see what happens." This quite literally happens at the level of plot, resulting in what we would now classify as inappropriate "public displays of affection," the sloppy kissing and petting that solicited Rebecca West's arch censure. But this physical back-and-forth is mirrored by an aesthetic debate that addresses the formal stakes of the novel: the ethics of Lewis's "primitive" style, the relationship between literal and figural sublimation, and the extent to which Lewis's allegiance to space can withstand the violent return of temporality.

As in the work of Ford Madox Ford, the central tensions of Lewis's aesthetic program come to the surface when the characters are *literally* eating. Just to repeat, this does not mean that Lewis's sense of aesthetic taste can merely be derived from deciphering his representations

[68] As I discuss in Chapter 6, this scene also recalls how Evadne Silverton is reduced to meat in the eyes of her disgruntled husband in Rebecca West's "Indissoluble Matrimony," published in *Blast*.

of literal taste: as if "oil-paint and meat were," in fact, "singularly alike." Rather, the presence of literal taste places a strain on the central ideologies of the text, which in turn reveals the contradictions that both animate the production of Lewis's style and mark out its formal limits.

> They discussed eating for some time. He discovered he knew nothing about it.
> "Why, man, you never think!"
> Tarr considered. "No, I'm not very observant in many things. But I have a defence."
> "Well?"
> "I am an artist. Artists only see what is necessary to their eye.=I specialize in necessities."
> "Don't you call food—?"
> "Not in the way you've been considering it. Listen. Life is art's rival and vice versa."
> "I don't see the opposition." (299)

Here, the central aesthetic tension between art and life is restaged within a debate about the nature of eating and its relationship to biological necessity. The disagreement centers on whether necessity is understood literally or figuratively. For Tarr's theory to work, necessity must be rendered strictly figurative and visual. But Anastasya refuses the presupposition, thereby forcing Tarr to account for the demands of literal self-preservation in his conception of artistic production. Thus, the paragraphs that follow entail Tarr drunkenly defending his familiar misogynist understanding of how art gets made: separate art from life, remove sex from the process of production, get rid of messy femininity, etc. Anastasya continues to pick and pull at his argument until Tarr eventually throws his hands in the air: "Heavens!=I only believe in one thing, the pleasure of taste. In that you get back, though, with me, to mathematics and Paleozoic times, and the coloured powders of the earth" (300). Immediately after, as if in triumph, Anastasya orders a "Gâteau Reine de Samothrace" (300).

Tarr's admission that the "pleasure of taste" is his "only" belief comes as a surprise, an acknowledgment of human feeling within a system built on its repression. It effectively concludes the argument, and Anastasya's order confirms her polemical victory. But what might at first seem like the rhetorical vanquishing of an opponent is in fact more complicated. When Tarr, in the end, falls back on the pleasure of taste as the grounding belief of his aesthetic theory, it is less a retraction of a previous position than a realization that Anastasya has revealed a latent theory of taste grounding his overly simplistic binaries of art and life, thought and sex, the figurative and the literal. Taste, it turns out, is the crucial mediating term that facilitates Tarr's crude dialectics. It is not so much that Anastasya is right and Tarr is wrong; rather, Anastasya's petulant diatribe deconstructs Tarr's theory of "art and life" in order to reveal the presuppositions that ground and limit it, namely, the centrality of taste and the irreducibly physical nature of pleasure.[69] Put a little differently: Anastasya converts Tarr's oppositional aesthetics into a

[69] That Anastasya's "victory" is not completely straightforward is implied by her nonsensical order. She most likely meant to order a Gâteau Reine de Saba—a chocolate cake infused with rum—but drunkenly confuses the Queen of Sheba with Nike of Samothrace, the famous "Winged Victory" at the Musée du Louvre. So far as I can tell, Gâteau Reine de Samothrace does not exist. Tarr mutters, "Donnez-moi une omelette au Rhum," indicating, perhaps, that he recognizes her error, or is at least in on the joke. In either reading, the minor detail, substituting a Greek personification of victory for a real cake, itself named after a mythological African queen, recalls the earlier moment in which Anastasya is characterized as "statuesquely genuine." In this way, her "victory" is merely "statuesque," like a statue, which is to say, it isn't real: it is built from layers of imaginary pastry. The explanatory note in the Black Sparrow printing of *Tarr: The 1918 Version* allows for an alternative reading, of sorts, but only because it constructs an

negative dialectics. And it is *taste* that surfaces, formally, as the temporal remainder—a return of the repressed—that had enabled the cycles of sublimation. It is for this reason that Tarr connects the pleasures of taste with the prehistoric: "mathematics and Paleozoic times, and the coloured powders of the earth." In *Tarr*, taste is not a sign of civilized refinement. On the contrary, it grows out of the same material realities that determine the most primitive aspects of human life.

In "The Credentials of the Painter," Lewis makes a similar point, accompanied by a similar qualification: "*Pleasure*, in some form, is certainly the object of most art. But is it not also the object of any other activity higher than pure bread winning?" Lewis's point is not so much that art *must* be designed to deliver pleasure; rather, insofar as art is not completely reduced to the coordinates of self-preservation, pleasure is a welcome byproduct. "You have to deal with art, which…is bound up with our human life" (75). In *Tarr*, this pleasure proves exceedingly elusive. When it does surface, it is shadowed by a violent literalness that readers must "deal" with, which is far from an ecstatic pronouncement of pleasure, and closer to a reluctant encounter with something we would rather avoid. It thus comes close to articulating what Adorno identified in Kant as the unresolved tension between pleasure and desire.[70]

> Indeed, the taboo on art—and so far as art is defined it obeys a taboo, for definitions are rational taboos—forbids that one take an animalistic stance toward the object, that is, that one dominate it by physically devouring it. But the power of the taboo corresponds to the power that it prohibits. There is no art that does not contain in itself as an element, negated, of what it repulses. If it is more than mere indifference, the Kantian "without interest" must be shadowed by the wildest interest, and there is much to be said for the idea that the dignity of artworks depends on the intensity of the interest from which they are wrested. (*Aesthetic Theory* 11)

The temptation is to map Adorno's reading of Kant onto a characterological schematic: Tarr representing disinterested pleasure "without interest" and Kreisler representing "the wildest interest," climaxing in the "animalistic stance toward the object." But the scene between Tarr and Anastasya complicates that formula, as Tarr's strict division between art and life dissolves under the pressure of taste's re-emergence. Signaling a regression to the primitive, the drunken lovers smother each other "in a little cave of intoxicated affection" (302). "Their second bottle of wine

---

impressive metonymic chain circling the historical absence of any clear signified: "A confection presumably named after the headless, winged female statue in the Louvre referred to by Marinetti in 'The Founding and Manifest of Futurism' (1909): '…a roaring car that seems to ride on grapeshot is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace' (351). To clarify: Marinetti does not refer to any such pastry, but only to "The Winged Victory." So why mention Marinetti at all, given that Lewis was surely familiar with the statue on its own terms, rather than through Marinetti's offhand dismissal of it? In short, the note has the form of an explanation, but none of the content, and the fact that no such cake exists is lost in the distracting allusion to Futurism, an art movement that was important to Lewis but not pertinent to the passage at hand. I note this not in order to (primarily) critique the editor; rather, it is simply another moment when commentary on Lewis reproduces Lewis's own modes of expression, making recourse to "all the sources of metonymy." When you start to look for it, there is nastiness everywhere.

[70] "There is no liking without a living person who would enjoy it," Adorno writes. "Thus, what was planned as a bridge between theoretical and practical pure reason is vis-à-vis both an ἄλλο γένος." Adorno's invocation of the Greek, a reference to Aristotle's physics, positions Kant's notion of pleasure as a "non sequitur"—literally "another genus," the result of an illegitimate gap in the natural order of things. Thus, Adorno is in line with Lyotard and Allison in his understanding of the third *Critique* as an ingenious solution to the wrong problem, which all the same gives us a different way of reading the problem it was meant to solve.

had put many things to flight. He lay back in his chair in prolonged bursts of laughter.=She, in German fashion, clapped her hand over his mouth, and he seized it with his teeth and made pale shell shapes in its brown fat" (303). The image is disturbing and strangely beautiful, playing with the line between literal and figurative taste, the act of biting quickly contained and distanced by the formal beauty of the alliterative "pale shell shapes." What makes it so singularly Lewis is the way in which it compels the reader to try it out: is that really the effect of biting the palm of one's hand? That Tarr does not actually eat her flesh is important, but note how the tone of the sentence does not register the threat, even as the danger is clearly on display: Tarr is biting the hand of the woman he just extensively compared to meat, making this a just barely condensed and displaced outcome of Tarr's "butcher sensibility."

In the love scene that concludes the evening, Anastasya takes full command of her role as the artistic and sexual object, asserting her resistance equally on both fronts. The ekphrastic description of Tarr's studio closely parallels the description of Kreisler's studio when Bertha sat as his model. But in this scenario, Anastasya orchestrates her own sitting with unchallenged authority. "The moonlight came heavily through the windows. In a part of the room where it did not strike, he became aware of an apparition of solid white. It was solid white, flowed round by Naples Yellow. It crossed into the moonlight and faced him, its hands placed like a modest statue's" (306). Whereas the evening began with Tarr's confused impressions of her "statuesquely genuine" body, it concludes with Anastasya performing that role, but strictly on her own terms: "Will you engage me as your model? Je fais de la réclame pour les grecs." Her authority renders Tarr's "butcher sensibility" a moot point. What follows can be read as a repetition of the encounter between Bertha and Kreisler; except in this scene, the play between literal and figural "consumption" is self-consciously staged by the characters themselves.

In portraying Tarr not as Kreisler's foil, but as his double, functioning in a register that moves in close parallel to Kreisler's downward trajectory, Lewis forces us to confront Tarr's detached aesthetic posture not as an alternative to or containment of Kreisler's primitive energy, but rather as another instance of that energy—what Adorno would call "the taboo on art." Thus, to read Kreisler as "successful" and Tarr as "unsuccessful" is to miss the point, since Tarr's role is to demonstrate the unsuccessful quality of an aesthetics that represses the physical, literal aspects of taste, rather than recognizing them as dialectically necessary for the production of aesthetic pleasure. Indeed, with Tarr married to Bertha but still meeting up with Anastasya as his lover, the novel seems poised to conclude as an allegory for successful integration of taste as both a vehicle for acceptable bourgeois sentimentality on the one hand (Bertha), and a more aggressive digestive aesthetic on the other (Anastasya). But Lewis refuses the tidy ending and transforms what would have been a weird but satisfying modernist marriage plot into a disappointing coda that introduces several new characters in the final sentences:

> Tarr, however, had three children by a lady of the name of Rose Fawcett, who consoled him eventually for the splendours of his "perfect woman." = But yet beyond the dim though solid figure of Rose Fawcett, another rises. This one represents the swing back to the swagger side. The cheerless and stodgy absurdity of Rose Fawcett required the painted, fine and inquiring face of Prism Dirkes. (353)

The conclusion is as unsuccessful as the title. We are left grasping for allegories or turning back through the novel to see if we missed a prior mention of Rose and Prism. Alas, the dangling coda proves indigestible: a nagging, annoying, dare I say "nasty" remainder that manages to escape the novel's expanding economy of sublimation, leaving readers, to this day, unsatisfied.

CHAPTER 6

Beyond Taste: Objective Universality and the Politics of Aesthetic Form in Rebecca West's "Indissoluble Matrimony"

> Universality exhibited itself at first in the relationship of *communication* as present only through *positing;* but as *objective* universality it is the pervading immanent essence of the objects.
>
> —G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*

"Indissoluble Matrimony," Rebecca West's first published work of fiction, appeared in *Blast 1* just after an installment of Ford Madox Ford's "The Saddest Story," which would later be published in book form as *The Good Soldier*.[71] As was noted almost immediately, the two works of fiction fit awkwardly into a pamphlet composed of aggressive manifestos, an experimental play, black-and-white renditions of Vorticist paintings, some poems by Ezra Pound, and a string of non-fiction "Vortices and Notes" by Wyndham Lewis. Tellingly, West and Ford did not sign the manifesto, and they were uneasy about identifying themselves as Vorticists. Ford expressed confusion over his inclusion in the magazine, but went along with it anyway, happy as always to be included amongst *les jeunes*. As for West, her inclusion is typically understood within a framework determined by gender relations: it is either read as a mistake on the part of Lewis to have allowed it to appear, or as a successful insurgency on the part of West, intended to subtly subvert the masculine aesthetic overtly expounded by Pound and Lewis.

Yet a more obvious explanation for their inclusion might be simply that Lewis was publishing a new pamphlet, the generic conventions of which required short pieces of fiction, and there was, at this point, no proper "Vorticist" fiction to be had. The opening chapters of *Tarr* would not be published until 1916, and Lewis would later admit that *Tarr* was only possible to write after conceding some core Vorticist principles to the narrative conventions of time and interiority, two terms more easily subdued in painting, theater and manifestos. So, yes, the works of Ford and West might feel out of place, but one must wonder if there is any short story that would not have felt similarly. So while it is tempting to relegate the contributions of Ford and West to the backwaters of Edwardian realism, as contemporary reviewers were inclined to do, it is perhaps better to read their awkwardness through the lens of genre. As Ford noted in his review of the Imagists in May 1914, synecdochally referring to the avant-garde zeitgeist as "Futurism": "Whilst all the literary, all the verbal manifestations of Futurism are representational, and representational, and again representational, all the plastic-aesthetic products of the new movements are becoming more and more geometric, mystic, non-material, or what you will." Narrative fiction, as Lewis discovered while writing *Tarr*, requires a collection of syntagmatic features that intrinsically resist the paradigmatic spatiotemporal demands of an avant-garde program derived from a pictorial framework. The preceding chapter

[71] Citations of "Indissoluble Matrimony" refer to its original appearance in *Blast*.

on *Tarr* attempted to demonstrate the formal and ethical ramifications of attempting to translate into narrative fiction an aesthetic program committed to "a hard, unromantic external presentation of kinetic energies, an arrangement of surfaces." West's story is occupied with similar formal questions, but more explicitly confronts the ethical and political stakes of those innovations.

Casting "Matrimony" as a generic anomaly within a pamphlet that is otherwise consistent in its implementation of avant-garde principles—an argument that is hard to defend on its own terms—also risks reducing the work to a reactionary response to her editor and his aesthetic and cultural vision, rather than viewing it as a semi-autonomous piece engaged with the same cultural environment that produced the other contributions. Kathryn Laing's detailed "bibliographic" reading of the story aims to do exactly this "by highlighting the numerous intersections between the story, its avant-garde setting, and various cultural, political, and social contexts" (47), much in the way that scholars have approached *Blast* itself, as "the material trace of a process, not an entity as such" (Edwards 211). For Laing, the most significant sources for West were her engagement with Dora Marsden's radical feminist journals *The Freewoman* and *The New Freewoman*, the cultural prominence of vitalism popularized by Nietzsche and Bergson, and the lively debate among Bloomsbury, Lewis, Hulme, and others about the future of Post-Impressionist painting. But the comprehensive (and very helpful) list of sources ultimately dissolves into an open-ended argument that does not go beyond tracing the many ideologies and movements that could potentially claim it is a cultural symptom.

While this historical work is crucial, it does not highlight the specificity of West's aesthetic strategy, which, I argue, ironizes Vorticism as yet another version of a male-centered Romanticism that Lewis, following T.E. Hulme, sought to reject. West pursues this strategy by analyzing how the domestic sphere creates competing visions of taste—on one hand, her husband George, who views taste as conventionally divided between art and nutrition, and Evadne, who embodies a mode of taste that is phenomenologically rich because it sidesteps the protocols of signification that dominate George's narration. For now, this will seem like a polemical leap, but I want to argue that the ramifications of this divide play out in the story's political subplot. The political dimension of the text is occluded when the story is reduced to a psychosexual struggle between George and Evadne. Indeed, insofar as the story is interpreted as a competition between George's stale and rigid bourgeois manners and Evadne's uncontainable vitality, it repeats George's own interpretative failure, which is not merely personal but aesthetic and ideological. While George is committed to a petit-bourgeois individualism—in his words, an "Orthodox Radicalism"—Evadne's radical socialism figures a mode of political engagement that seeks to render the promises of taste objectively universal, ultimately pushing beyond Kant's empty formalism and into a terrain of taste as truth-content. In what follows, I delineate the formal quality of this "argument" as it plays out in the competing aesthetic ideologies of George and Evadne Silverton.

Domesticated Vorticism

"Indissoluble Matrimony" tells the story of Evadne Silverton, a mixed-race singer and socialist activist, as narrated by her depressed and bitter husband George Silverton, a white solicitor's clerk whose middle-class allegiance to conventional gender roles, regressive racial stereotypes, and stale bourgeois formalities becomes the subject of West's nuanced yet sharp satire. In a tense dinner-table scene, George learns that Evadne is slated to speak at a socialist

gathering later in the week, which infuriates him. After some verbal sparring, Evadne leaves the house to get some fresh air, but George, growing increasingly hysterical, believes she is going to meet a lover. He follows her to an old quarry, where it turns out she is just going for a swim. Nevertheless, George attacks her and, after nearly dying himself, holds her underwater until she goes limp. Exhausted, he falls asleep, wakes at dawn, and stumbles home lost in tragic-heroic thoughts, planning to asphyxiate himself with the dining room gas valve. But upon entering the house, he realizes that Evadne has already returned home, slipped into bed, and turned off the gas at the main.

According to West's friend, Violet Hunt, the story was "Good Spoof," which the public misread as a "tragic experiment." In her 1929 memoir, she recalls, "Rebecca West in her teens, with her tongue in her cheek, taking up the whole problem of man's life and making a delectable joke of it!" (217). The delectable joke begins with a tongue on a plate, in a dining room where Evadne has laid out supper for George.

> 'Let's have supper now!' she said rather greedily.
>
> He looked at the table and saw she had set it before she went out. As usual she had been in an improvident hurry: it was carelessly done. Besides what an absurd supper to set before a hungry solicitor's clerk! In the centre, obviously intended as the principal dish, was a bowl of plums, softly red, soaked with the sun, glowing like jewels in the downward stream of the incandescent light. Besides them was a great yellow melon, its sleek sides fluted with rich growth, and a honeycomb glistening on a willow-pattern dish. The only sensible food to be seen was a plate of tongue laid at his place.
>
> 'I can't sit down to supper without washing my hands!' (268)

Evadne's declaration and George's reply are the first dialogue in the story, following two long paragraphs which focalize the interior of the dining area through George's embittered consciousness. The dialogue's temporal subordination to the description it frames indicates that George's narrative perspective will prioritize the static visual scene as the container for the story's drama, even as the plot and dialogue threaten to overflow it. For example, the space (perhaps more properly, the time) between Evadne's announcement and George's bizarre and aggressive reply—why not say, "Let me wash my hands first"?—measures the degree to which his rigid gaze reduces the traditional fictional constituencies of plot and character to ancillary pieces in his inflated psychological drama. Much of the story's drama will derive from the tension that builds between the plot's temporal action and George's failed attempts to fix it within a static, spatializing framework.

That he is not entirely successful is intimated even at this very early stage, in the strange error that occurs when the adverb "besides" awkwardly repeats in its adverbial form just a few lines down; it should more properly function as a preposition, grammatically organizing the spatial coordinates of the plate. The phrase, "Besides them was a great yellow melon," invites the reader, Stein-like, to awkwardly balance the adverbial progression of the plate's logic ("Besides them, there was a great yellow melon") with the visual description of its spatial form ("Beside them was a great yellow melon"). This chapter will highlight a few such "errors" as they occur at strained moments in George's attempt to convert the temporal qualities of the plot into a rigid, spatialized framing. The goal is not to flatten out these moments into a clean reading, but rather to register them "seismographically" as textual ruptures, signs that some deeper fracture is troubling the surface narrative.

The gap between Evadne's question and George's reply also serves to heighten West's ironic skewering of George's ego: "A hungry solicitor's clerk!" George's inflated sense of his

role as a hardworking husband returning to his domestic nest presents him as a pathetic figure, as if pushing papers in a solicitor's office in suburban London were equivalent to toiling in the mines of Yorkshire. It also belies his awkward class position. At the turn of the century, an afternoon dinner was the main meal of the day, while supper, typically lighter fare, was observed by the wealthier classes. In a working-class household, supper simply was not a thing, while in a wealthy household, supper was meant to be a light, pleasurable, and often nutritionally superfluous snack. George's disappointment with his "absurd supper," then, amounts to a social faux pas. But it also points to the structural challenges of an emerging suburban middle class that seeks to imitate their wealthier neighbors while still functioning within a labor economy that requires long hours, even if not underground or in a factory. One of the key drivers of "wasteful" over-consumption was the desire of the lower classes to emulate the eating habits of the rich, which prioritized large quantities of meat, exemplified by the Victorian "joint." Thus, while it is true, as Violet Hunt noted, that George's fragile ego and his exaggerated sense of "the whole problem of man's life" are central motifs of the story, it is equally true that West was alert to the structural dynamics that condition George's fantastical projections.

The scene also stages the domestic sphere—and the dinner table in particular—as the habitus in which George and Evadne engage in their initial conflicts, culminating in the violent physical confrontation at the story's climax. Having sparred with anti-suffragists in the pages of *The Freewoman* since 1911, West was keenly aware of the anxieties of the "household gods and goddesses," who would reliably react to her inflammatory reviews. She was a frank critic of those trying to confine women to the domestic sphere, calling work in the home "domestic slavery, to be shunned like rat-poison."[72] Given West's disdain for domestic work, "the most elementary form of labor…suitable for those with the intelligence of rabbits" (39), as she described it in *The Freewoman*, it is easy to read Evadne's simple meal of tongue and fruit as a stark refusal of domestic duties. Such a reading would contrast George's conventional expectations that his wife cook mutton and potatoes in the degraded space of a middle-class kitchen with Evadne's uncontainable vitality, which threatens and ultimately overcomes the stultifying restrictions of her marriage. Yet this manner of reading risks replicating the rigid gaze of her husband George, who cannot process the table setting outside of a binary that, to this day, continues to structure critical assessments of literary representations of food—namely, between mere sustenance ("sensible food") and an abstract aesthetic beyond the realm of self-preservation ("a bowl of plums, softly red, soaked with sun, glowing like jewels"). Evadne's relationship to food and taste fits awkwardly into this critical paradigm, and my contention is that tracing her contradictory consumption practices, as focalized through George's sclerotic narration, is the means by which West cracks open the broader aesthetic and social presuppositions that characterize the Vorticist movement with which she was uneasily but vitally associated.

The Modernist Dinner Table

Commentators seeking to read "Matrimony" as a Vorticist text latch onto Evadne's "vitalist" qualities as a force that exceeds the old-fashioned parameters of George's Edwardian sensibility. Indeed, Evadne is routinely coded as primal, vital, animalistic—but only insofar as she is focalized through George's narration. Rather than accept that framing, I suggest that we read West's characterization of George as the Vorticist character, as his conservative aesthetics and politics—not to mention his unabashed misogyny—depend on an anxious othering of

[72] This and other references to West's journalism are to *The Young Rebecca*, except as noted. 38.

Evadne and her black community. His first encounter with Evadne occurs while he is visiting an old widow, whose estate he has been tasked with sorting. He recalls confronting a "jungle of shiny mahogany furniture" in order to "talk to a mass of darkness." In a strikingly Conradian mode, the narrator states, "This horror obsessed him." Despite his attraction to Evadne in this moment, especially to her voice, he is nevertheless overcome by disgust:

> This disgust of women revealed to him that the world is a place of subtle perils. He began to fear marriage as he feared death. The thought of intimacy with some lovely, desirable and necessary wife turned him sick as he sat at his lunch. The secret obscenity of women! He talked darkly to his friends. He wondered why the Church did not provide a service for the absolution of men after marriage. Wife desertion seemed to him a beautiful return of the tainted body to cleanliness. (100)

In this flashback, we can recognize the ideological misogyny that subtends his hysterical reactions to Evadne's table setting and food choices. We can also recognize in his aversion to female "contamination" an intimation of the character Tarr.

Most straightforwardly, George's frustration upon seeing the dinner table arises from his expectation that Evadne conform to a set of conventional table manners. As he sanitizes his hands in the bathroom upstairs, he anticipates with annoyance how the meal will proceed: "There was no ritual about it. While he was eating the tongue she would be crushing honey on new bread, or stripping a plum of its purple skin and holding the golden globe up to the gas to see the light filter through" (268). An analysis derived from Bourdieu's interpretation of class and taste might neatly categorize these two characters in a structural agon, with Evadne representing an uninhibited lower-class relationship to pleasure and George representing the overly restrictive and distanced formality more characteristic of the bourgeoisie. Yet these neat categories are complicated by what they actually consume: George is controlled by an allegiance to bourgeois ritual, but he wants sensible food; Evadne is free from conventional manners, but seems to live solely on fructose and light.

Furthermore, for all of George's regressive philistinism, one must concede that he has a keen sense for recognizing moments of beauty, and is enabled by West's free indirect discourse to evoke exquisite descriptions of Evadne's careless pleasures. From George's perspective, the table itself is offensive for aesthetic reasons: the bowl of fruit inhabits too central a position, while the tongue is marginalized, a reversal that undermines the sensibleness he craves. This could be read as a symbol of George's discomfort with a form of taste that has become unmoored from nutrition; yet at the same time, it indicates that George's consciousness, far from being dull or torpid, is in fact alive to the aesthetics of everyday life and the larger social and ideological consequences inherent to them. His capacity for the aesthetic (for what Rancière would describe as *le partage du sensible*) effectively displaces the violence of his carnivorous fantasy onto the way in which Evadne "crushes" the honey and "strips" her fruit. It is not the case that there is no ritual at play, as he believes; rather, Evadne enacts a series of vatic gestures that draw attention to the stale formality that would typically determine the conventions of a middle-class dinner table. In other words, George is not stupid; he is conservative.

Insofar as George's sense of pleasure is not merely dependent on flavors or the correct combination of carbohydrates and protein, but rather on "the relations between certain abstract forms"—the way a plate of tongue relates to a bowl of plums—one could even call him "classical," in the sense that T.E. Hulme was theorizing around the time West was writing "Matrimony" and Lewis was preparing *Blast 1* for publication. In "Romanticism and Classicism," Hulme uses a dinner table image in order to express his disdain for the Romantic

worldview: “The concepts that are right and proper in their own sphere are spread over, and so mess up, falsify, and blur the clear outlines of human experience. It is like pouring a pot of treacle over the dinner table” (115). In contrast, Hulme, prefers “small, dry things” (131), verse that is “dry, hard, classical” (131), a “dry sense” (138), and “the particular note” of a “dry hardness” (127), just to name a few of the moments he invokes “dryness” to describe an ideal classical mode in his famous essay. Treacle is not only repugnant because of its sweetness, but because of its unbounded liquid form, the way it overflows the geometric order of a classical sensibility.

Hulme’s treacle metaphor intersects with a long history of sugar production and consumption, and with the formation of British colonial identity at the intersection of class and race. In *Sweetness and Power*, Sidney Mintz suggests,

> The idea that the finest and purest sucrose would also be the whitest is probably a symbolically potent aspect of sugar’s early European history; but the fact that sucrose can be prepared in many usable forms, one of which resembles honey, is also significant. The honeylike ‘treacle’ or ‘golden syrup,’ so important in the making of the modern English diet, gradually won out over the ancient competitor, honey, which it mimicked. (22)

I am not suggesting overlaying a reductive racializing discourse onto Hulme’s aversion to treacle; rather, Mintz’s insight points to a discourse of refinement that pits the universality of treacle against the (literally) refined particularity of the sugar cube, which had become the standard way to sweeten tea in middle- and upper-class households. Treacle, by contrast, is coded as working-class. Mrs. Reeves, writing in 1913, noted how poorer households sought to imitate richer households. “Treacle, or—as the shop round the corner calls it—‘golden syrup,’ will probably be eaten with the suet pudding, and the two together will form a midday meal for the mother and children in a working man’s family” (qtd. in Mintz 145). Treacle, in other words, was a staple product, making up for a “caloric gap” in poor households. It also served as a substitute for the more expensive sugar cube, a luxury product widely preferred by the upper classes. In Mintz’s telling, the lower classes imitated the ritual of tea time, but often had to use “twice-used tea, or even hot water poured over bread crusts, sweetened with treacle” (182). Thus, Hulme’s invocation of treacle harbors a class anxiety underlying his aesthetic aversion to the sticky confusion of the spilled sweetener. The metaphor is not straightforwardly racist or classist, but its effectiveness as figurative language depends on its intersection with these latent discursive structures.

What is treacle? Sugar is the crystallized form of a liquid, produced not through a “manufacturing process,” but through a series of liquid-solid operations to isolate the sucrose made naturally by plants. Treacle is the liquid by-product of this refining process, obtained through a literal “sublimation” of raw plant material into progressively finer essences, ultimately resulting in a white sugar cube. In a strictly aesthetic context, one can see why Hulme would want treacle out of the picture. For centuries, it was regarded as a waste product. In 1885, Abram Lyle, experimenting with his family’s sugar factory, discovered a way to refine “blackstrap” into a “golden syrup” that could serve as an alternative to crystallized sugar. In 1904, he trademarked “Lyle’s Golden Syrup,” which quickly grew in popularity and has remained a staple in British pantries today, largely because of its liquidity. To put it simply: treacle has both a golden color and a golden form, its culinary versatility matched by its figurative golden “liquidity.” For Hulme, deliberately pouring a pot of “Golden Syrup” over the bourgeois dinner table thus signals a broader worry that the faculties of human cognition—the “clear outlines of human experience”—are being overwhelmed by a marketplace that threatens to make all values equal

under the banner of liquid capital. All that is solid melts into air. Or, in this instance, all that is solid becomes soluble in water.

Evadne's affinity for excessive sweetness provokes similar anxieties in George, which he links with her excessive, uncontrolled self-expression (an aesthetic aversion), which in turn is bound up with a mix of class, race, and gender anxieties. "She ate with an appalling catholicity of taste," George thinks, "with a nice child's love of sweet foods, and occasionally she broke into that hoarse beautiful croon" (99). This in turn recalls Hulme's indictments of vulgar taste in "A Lecture on Modern Poetry," delivered just a few years earlier. "People with any guts in them do not have catholic tastes" he writes. "I have not a catholic taste but a violently personal and prejudiced one." As Michael Levenson has carefully detailed, this lecture represents an early stage in Hulme's evolution as thinker, "his early subjectivist poetic," influenced heavily by the individualistic philosophy of Bergson. But Hulme's disdain for a "catholicity of taste" persisted even as he evolved into what Levenson has characterized as his "classical" phase. By the time of "Romanticism and Classicism," the notion of "catholic tastes" is not merely disparaged, but is excluded altogether. Indeed, its exclusion is necessary a priori, as it were, as a precondition for approaching foundational definitional clarity:

> The best way of gliding into a proper definition of my terms would be to start with a set of people who are prepared to fight about it—for in them you will have no vagueness. (Other people take the infamous attitude of the person with catholic tastes who says he likes both). (114)

Here, the aggression inherent in Hulme's "violently personal and prejudiced" sense of taste is projected and shifted onto a broader social stage, where people fight over how they define the terms of their debate. "Catholic tastes" are dismissed into a parenthetical remark not only because they are undisciplined or insufficiently personal, but because they suggest a pacifist retreat from the battle of ideas. Therefore, for Hulme, the idea of taste as impersonal and disinterested is rejected from the realm of serious aesthetics. In other words, his critique of catholic taste "glides" into a critique of taste in general, at least as it has been widely understood since the eighteenth century—as a faculty of judgment that involves setting aside personal opinions and desires to approach questions of beauty with disinterest. The word "catholic" thus becomes a meaningful point of convergence, as its pejorative connotation not only signals a disdain for a mode of taste perceived as lacking discernment but also implies a prohibition on the possibility of universality itself. Universality is the golden syrup that ruins the pristine dinner table.

The point here is not to transform "Indissoluble Matrimony" into a roman à clef featuring T.E. Hulme as George Silverton, but rather to show how West dramatizes contemporary aesthetic ideologies within her narrative to chart their limitations and potential consequences. While Hulme uses metaphors of violence to characterize his ideal classical sensibility, West's story tracks those metaphors as they materialize, shockingly, into an actualized violence that is highly racialized and sexualized. The violence is disturbing in its own right. What is perhaps more disturbing—in ways similar to the preceding discussions of Ford and Lewis— is the blurry line between discussions of taste and the uglier dimensions of racism, sexism and outright violence. Thus, in the opening page, we witness George observing his wife: "Under her curious dress, designed in some pitifully cheap and worthless stuff by a successful mood of her indiscreet taste—she had black blood in her—her long body seemed pulsing with some exaltation" (132). What is the status of the racist insult? Is it simply an indictment of George, or does it speak more broadly to forms of exclusion that are required to produce refinement, the way a sugar cube is

gradually cleansed of its treacle through a series of literal sublimations that cleanse the final, etched object of all traces of its production?

Race, Class, Gender, Taste

> "…Socialist!" he muttered.
> —George Silverton

Brooding under George's aesthetic aversions to his wife's dinner table setting is a deeper anxiety about her involvement in the local socialist chapter. So far, we have focused on the symbolic threat of Evadne's "appalling catholicity of taste" and the image of golden treacle with its historical ties to racist discourses of purification. The first step in the argument has been to establish George as the "Vorticist" character, insofar as his conservative aesthetics depend on an anxious othering of Evadne as a quasi-hysterical, primitive beast lacking in taste—that is, as having "catholic tastes" with a predilection for frivolous sweetness. But this aesthetic and culinary discourse is subtended by a threat that just barely surfaces in the plot, since George is intent on blocking it out: namely, class politics and the threat of working-class socialism. In what follows, I want to excavate the class politics of this story as they intersect with the more salient questions of gender and race, keeping in mind the threat of aesthetic universality—represented by the threat of treacle spilling over the lower-middle-class dinner table—as it relates to the threat of universality in its more objective dimension, as the combined political forces of socialist organizing and universal enfranchisement.

The language of class politics most explicitly enters the short story through Evadne's involvement with the local socialist chapter, which has invited her to speak at an upcoming rally. When George finds out, he is furious. He vents his anger by implying that the invitation was sexually motivated. "'A pair of you! You and Longton—!' he snarled scornfully." Rather than recognizing her achievement, "he mistrusted this phase of her activity as a caper of a sensualist." And he configures her political activism as yet another threat to his masculinity: "His eyes blazed on her and found the depraved, over-sexed creature, looking milder than a gazeller [sic], holding out a handbill to him." The absurdity of interpreting Evadne's desire to speak at a local rally as a symptom of her "over-sexed" character has been lost on critics who seek to claim her vitality as a bold expression of sexual power. Evadne is, indeed, a compelling and powerful figure of femininity, but her own sense of self, so far as we are allowed to glimpse it, is more directly derived from her political ambitions. George cannot process it as such: "That was a side of Evadne he considered as little as possible. He had never been able to assimilate the fact that Evadne had, two years after their marriage, passed from his own Orthodox Radicalism to a passionate Socialism, and that, after reading extensively in economics, she had begun to write for the Socialist press and to speak successfully at meetings" (102).

It is telling, then, that most critical accounts of the story follow George's insistence that Evadne is a threatening, animalistic, primal, oversexed creature rather than a gifted and intelligent communicator regarding working-class politics. She can, of course, be both, but distinguishing Evadne's sense of self from her husband's overdetermined perception is crucial for understanding the organizing aesthetic strategy of the text—namely, the ironic difference drawn between George's inflated Romantic projections and the ways in which the text strains against those representational containers. For example, when George recalls the first days of his

courtship ten years prior, he performs a series of projections that almost trick the reader into thinking we have direct access to Evadne's thoughts:

> Now he could imagine with what silent rapture Evadne had watched his agitation. Almost from the first she had meant to marry him. He was physically attractive, though not strong. His intellect was gently stimulating like a mild white wine. And it was time she married. She was ripe for adult things. This was the real wound in his soul. He had tasted of a divine thing created in his time for dreams out of her rich beauty, her loneliness, her romantic poverty, her immaculate youth. He had known love. (101)

At one level, we can draw a neat contrast between Evadne's divine, ripe, adult, romantic, immaculate youth and George's gently stimulating but anemic mildness. But the contrast is implicitly constructed by George ("Now he could imagine"), leaving us unsure of the degree to which it is objectively valid or compromised by his epistemological framing, a typical effect of West's free indirect discourse. But as with the awkward compression of "besides" and "beside" in the description of the fruit plate, George loses control of the narrative framing when it tries to project too aggressively. He recalls his first sight of Evadne ten years prior, "She stood by the piano against the light, so that he saw her washed in darkness. Amazed, of tropical fruit" (100). The odd non-sentence—"Amazed, of tropical fruit."—teeters on the edge of a typo (similar to the repetition of "besides"), signaling how George must strain to make sense of his wife according to his specific ideological gaze. Having just been served a plate of amazing fruit, "glowing like jewels," he retroactively converts his first encounter with Evadne into an extension of his present experience at supper. But it does not say: "*He was* amazed, *as* of tropical fruit." Instead, the glitch in narration—the way it omits a subject, verb, and preposition that would produce a proper simile—also registers the pressure Evadne exerts on the narrative framing. Converting her into an exotic symbol of racial and sexual otherness does not happen easily, and the awkwardness of the non-sentence seems to register the "indigestible" quality of Evadne's character. (Here is taste functioning in its "seismographic" capacity.) To clarify: this is not a moment in which Evadne is actively resisting George's framing. Rather, the text itself seems to formally balk and fracture when George attempts to figure her as an exotic, tropical fruit. It is worth pausing to compare this moment with the scene in *Tarr*, when Kreisler converts Bertha's arms into tropical fruit with the paltriest of figurative language: "Your arms are like bananas!" My reading of that scene argued that the crude simile failed to maintain the aesthetic distance required by older forms of taste. This scene in "Matrimony," then, stages the problem from the other side, dramatizing the failure to construct a simile in the first place.

The tension between George's ideologically constructed narration and the text's resistance becomes blatantly political when Evadne shows her husband the socialist handbill announcing her speech at an upcoming meeting. The moment is notable for its idiosyncratic formal quality: how it looks on the page and how George experiences its graphic quality.

> He saw her name—his name—
>
> MRS. EVADNE SILVERTON.
>
> It was at first the blaze of stout scarlet letters on the dazzling white ground that made him blink. Then he was convulsed with rage. (102)

It is important to remember that "Matrimony" originally appeared in a journal that resembled a handbill, with intentionally brash formatting: varied fonts, chaotic margins, and heavy capitalization. When leafing through *Blast*, the entries from Ford and West stand out first and foremost for their relatively homogeneous prosody. "The Saddest Story" appeared in standard paragraphs, formatted as uniform double columns, similar to those of other literary journals such as *The Egoist* and *The New Age*. "Matrimony" was printed in a single column and therefore most resembles a conventional piece of standalone fiction, yet here printed inside a journal. In other words, the story's normalcy, in the context of *Blast*, accounts for its graphic idiosyncrasy. However, this specific typographical moment stands out for its similarity to the other published pieces in the journal; consequently, we are led to believe that, as readers, we are not merely witnessing George reading the handbill, but are actually seeing Evadne's name on it. As such, it is the first moment in which the narration, heretofore filtered through George, is punctured by an external, metaleptic, "objective" reality. "The blaze of stout scarlet letters on the dazzling white ground," the familiar formatting of socialist party propaganda, triggers George in the same way that the unconventional dinner table setting had, but here the aesthetics of the printing have a direct link to a more troubling material threat in the form of socialist organizing.

It is at this point that George most forcefully reasserts his racial and sexual othering of Evadne, in effect projecting his psychosexual drama as a containment strategy for the irruption of her objective intrusion into the text, and with her, the potent threat of socialism. She is configured as disgusting, her mere presence an overwhelming threat to his autonomy: "Spiritual nausea made him determined to be a better man than her" (102). He leaves the kitchen to relax in the drawing room. "For a very short time he was free of her voluptuous presence." When she reappears, he focalizes her aggression in a similar way to Lewis's early short stories, a psychological battle of wills manifesting as blazing eyes and gnashing teeth: "Evadne's lips lifted over her strong teeth. With clever cruelty, she fixed his eyes with hers" (103). She sits down and begins to rub his head. But George can hardly stand the tender gesture.

> Silverton, a little disgusted by their contact, sat quite motionless and passed into a doze….It was then he became conscious that the rhythm of Evadne's movement was not regular. It was broken as though she rocked to music…. "The present system of wage-slavery…"
>
> "Evadne!" He sprang to his feet. "You're preparing your speech!" (104)

George is obviously upset that Evadne has not submitted to him and agreed not to speak at the meeting. But the passage links this cognitive anger to the more visceral, elemental disgust caused by their physical proximity and the irregularity of Evadne's "rhythm," which has been racially coded throughout the opening sequence: She "[hums] in that uncanny, negro way of hers" (99); she sings with a "smouldering contralto that such as only those of black blood can possess" (100). And it is here that George's figurative coding of Evadne as a threatening animal in a dark jungle begins to literalize into potential violence.

> "Evadne, you shan't speak! If you do I swear to God above I'll turn you out into the streets—." She rose and came towards him. She looked black and dangerous. She trod softly like a cat with her head down. In spite of himself, his tongue licked his lips in fear and he cowered a moment before he picked up a knife from the table. For a space she looked down on him and the sharp blade.
>
> "You idiot, can't you hear the kettle's boiling over?"
>
> He shrank back, letting the knife fall to the floor. (104)

Again, West explicitly deflates George's hysterical perspective, which is by now almost comically saturated with primitive stereotypes. He is not a hunter cornered by a wild panther; rather, he is a disempowered, petit-bourgeois clerk painfully jealous of his wife's solidarity with the socialist cause. But George's aggressive psychosexual framing refuses to elaborate on this subplot; instead, he persists in reducing her politics to an expression of her uncontrolled (racialized) sexuality.

Note the explicit spatio-temporal framing of the action. The encounter is carefully plotted in time—Evadne's movements (*she rose…she trod*) and George's reaction (*he cowered a moment before*)—up until George literalizes his fantasy and picks up the knife: "For a *space* she looked down on him and the sharp blade." The odd spatialization of action freezes the pictorial moment for the reader—she looked down on him—only to be deflated seconds later by the resumption of plot in the form of a kettle boiling over, a synecdochal expression of time passing if there ever was one.[73] This first intimation of literal violence, therefore, crystallizes a formal tension that will play out in more extreme form as the story progresses, between George's violent spatialization of the action, which seeks to reduce Evadne to a racialized, hyper-sexed, unfaithful wife, and Evadne's alternative plot, the dim outlines of which are repressed, deferred or distorted by the aggressive framing of George's free indirect discourse. This brief moment, or "space," in the text, thus sets the stage for the dramatic scene on the moor, which can be characterized as a series of attempts by George to repress temporality at multiple levels, culminating in his violent assault on Evadne, the ensuing struggle, and finally the act of drowning her.

Within the tight confines of the short story form, the rapid shift from an awkward weekend evening at the dining table to the shocking scene of domestic violence and murder feels under-motivated and, indeed, invites an allegorical reading similar to what I have so far provided, wherein the tension between George and Evadne stands in for the formal tension between space and time. However, the violence of the story has a more direct material and historical reference: the brutal repression of the suffragettes in Manchester and London, which West commented on extensively in her contributions to *The Clarion* and chronicled in her unfinished and unpublished novel, *The Sentinel,* composed between 1909 and 1912.[74] A *roman à clef* about the Pankhursts and the militant tactics of the WSPU, *The Sentinel* culminates in a violent clash between the police and a group of young women, leading to imprisonment, a hunger strike, and a harrowing scene of force-feeding. Kathryn Laing has shown how the characters, settings, and themes of this early unpublished novel were transformed and redeployed in both *Adela* and *The Judge*. The relationship between *The Sentinel* and "Matrimony" is less salient, and indeed all the more interesting for the ways in which the historical events recounted in the earlier novel are transformed and relocated within the confines of the domestic sphere.

---

[73] Curiously, the first five entries for "space" in the *OED* are under the heading "Denoting time or duration." Each of the temporal definitions denotes how space encloses or binds discrete amounts of time. West's usage falls under entry I.5.a. "A period or interval of time; a spell. Chiefly with indefinite article. (When used without an adjective, often implying a period of short duration.)" Despite its grammatical correctness, the word pokes out as a rhetorical hinge that converts Evadne's quotidian activities within the domestic sphere into fixed pictorial confrontations ostentatiously coded by George's sclerotic ideology.

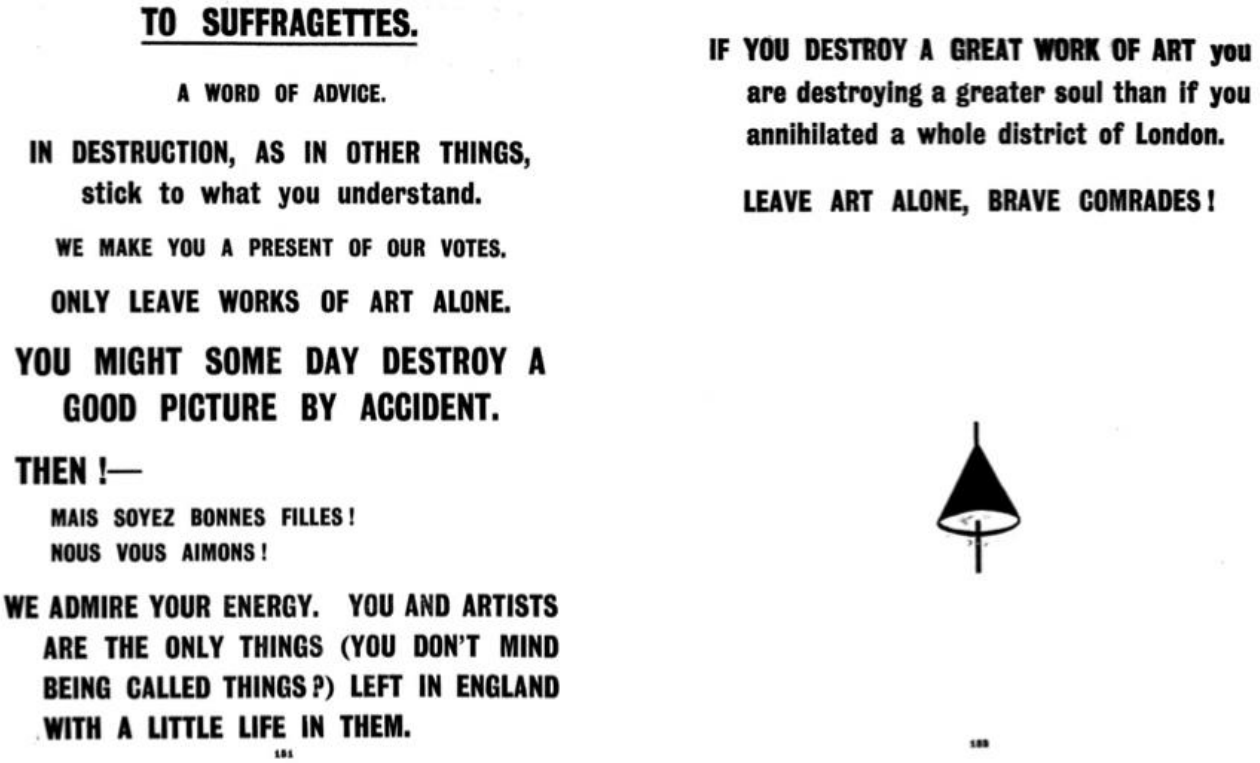
[74] *The Sentinel* was abandoned, then reworked as *Adela* (1912), also unpublished, before resurfacing as *The Judge* (1922). For a full account of the publication history, see Kathryn Laing's "Introduction" to *The Sentinel: An Incomplete Early Novel of Rebecca West*. Also see Laing's "Versions and Palimpsests: Rebecca West's *The Sentinel, Adela,* and *The Judge*."

Thus, the reading that follows will attempt to ground the formal and allegorical claims in the real material history of suffragette oppression and West's complicated evolution as a feminist and socialist.

The crucial transition from the interior domestic squabble to the violent encounter on the moor is facilitated by a device that explicitly recalls the political activity of the suffragettes, but is here displaced into a domestic setting: "She dashed out of the front door and banged it with such passion that a glass pane shivered to fragments behind her" (105). Window-breaking was the WSPU's preferred method of political disturbance, practiced most spectacularly in March of 1912, when Emmeline Pankhurst and 150 other women were imprisoned for smashing windows on Bond Street, Regent Street, and 10 Downing Street, leading to a wave of hunger strikes and force-feeding. That following October, Pankhurst remained defiant, encouraging her followers in a speech at the Royal Albert Hall, "Be militant each in your own way…Those of you who can break windows—break them." Evadne's window-smashing sends George into paroxysms of fantastical jealousy. "He perceived with an insane certainty that she was going to meet some unknown lover. 'I'll come and tell him what a slut you are!' He shouted after her and stumbled to the door" (105). As the story moves outside under "the yellow moonshine of midsummer," which "seemed to drip from the lacquered leaves of the shrubs," the entire landscape transforms from a suburban housing development called "Sumatra Crescent" into a Romantic projection of George's ego. Evadne is dehumanized as a "grotesquely patterned animal," and her supposed lover is pulled from the pages of a Gothic Romance: "[George] knew that she was going to the young man who had just bought the Georgian Manor, whose elm trees crowned the hill." The detail is important for the way in which it signals George's dogged commitment to a narrative of infidelity: if Evadne is not having an affair with the local socialist candidate, as he first suspected, then it *must* be some other stock character—a feudal Lord, perhaps?—pulled from the dusty bin of his conservative imagination.

In the end, however, Evadne's only infidelity is her refusal to fit into George's narrative of adultery. "He had imagined his wife's adultery so strongly that it had come to be." But instead of finding her in a lover's embrace, Evadne is simply swimming. "So this seemed to be the last crime of the adulteress. She had dragged him over those squelching fields and these rough moors and changed him from a man of irritations, but no passion, into a cold designer of murderous treacheries, so that he might witness a swimming exhibition." (106). Despite realizing that his narrative was incorrect ("His heart sank…he knew that this was the truth"), George pursues his murderous plans anyway. "He had no instinct for honourable attack, so he found himself striking her in the stomach." The mode of attack recalls the eruption of violence in *The Sentinel*. "The first thing that Adela clearly realized was a blow in the stomach" (203). After the fight, Adela tells one of her comrades, "A kick in the stomach. It's very unpleasant. I—ah. I never was so conscious of possessing a stomach before." (209) George's attack not only resembles the attack on the suffragettes; it likewise formally registers the disjointed temporality lodged within the

aggressively spatialized commitment to surfaces. It thus stands as an example of how West



translates the *form* of historical violence into a work of fiction, thereby rendering the otherwise distant prospect of political oppression as a matter of quotidian concern—what we might now call a "kitchen table" issue.

The tussle on the bridge causes the couple to fall into the rushing waters. "Swallowed by a brawling blackness in which whirled a vortex that flung him again and again on a sharp thing that burned his shoulder," this most "Vorticist" of scenes registers the threat of Evadne's feminine and racial power as bursting the seams of a painterly canvas: "So great was his pain that his consciousness was strained to apprehend it, as a too tightly stretched canvas splits and rips." Here, again, the canvas image functions both allegorically and historically—in particular, it refers to Mary Richardson, who slashed *The Rokeby Venus* on March 10, 1914, at the National Gallery, using a meat cleaver. In the same issue of *Blast* in which "Matrimony" was published, Lewis urged the suffragettes to "LEAVE WORKS OF ART ALONE." The passage is both

conciliatory and patronizing. Lewis's snide aside—"You don't mind being called things?"—connotes his dismissal of a movement that refuses a logic of dematerialization and aesthetic abstraction. Slashing a reified image of femininity with a butcher's knife cuts in two ways: it seeks to destroy the product of the (violent) objectification of women; at the same time, it enacts that violence in a literal register.

In "Matrimony," this violence is literalized as George's drowning of Evadne, a gruesome act of egotistical rage that becomes allegorized within the story itself as a suppression of matter for the sake of George's spiritual freedom. "He saw his wife as the curtain of flesh between him and celibacy, and solitude and all those delicate abstentions from life" (112). He watches "her wet seal-smooth head bobbing nearer on the waters," before forcing her underwater:

> As her strong arms, covered with little dark points where her thick hairs were clotted with moisture, stretched out towards safety he bent forward and laid his hands on her head. He held her face under water. Scornfully he noticed the bubbles that rose to the surface from her protesting mouth and nostrils, and the foam raised by her arms and her thick ankles. To the end the creature persisted in turmoil, in movement, in action….
>
> She dropped like a stone. (113)

The murder is represented as a cathartic act of sublimation: "For the world became nothingness, and nothingness which is free from the yeasty nuisance of matter and the ugliness of generation was the law of his being…He saw God and lived" (113). But like the broken window, the blow to the stomach and the ripping of the canvas, this final act of violence functions as both an allegory for aesthetic form and as a historical reference. And it is here that my reading returns to taste.

Literal Disgust

> The literal is barbaric.
>
> —T.W. Adorno

The Sentinel's most dramatic scene comes when the main character, Adela, is force-fed by a hospital physician. In its focus on forced ingestion, choking, regurgitation, and sexual assault, the scene disturbingly consolidates a lexical field that has been accumulating over the course of this project, from Kant's definition of disgust all the way to George's vicious murder of Evadne. I will focus at length on the passage, not because it represents some kind of representational end game for modernist taste—as if, in Adornian terms, "taste is not possible after force-feeding"— but because of the way its repulsive intensity triggers a formal response in West's short piece of fiction, written a few years later. The conclusion of this chapter will track that response as it critiques the "digestive" aesthetics of Lewis and imagines a phenomenology of taste beyond the restrictive boundaries of the subject as conceived by a masculinist modernist aesthetic.

Contemplating his wife's untimely death, George considers, "If she had married a butcher or a veterinary surgeon she might have been happier," suggesting that he did not have the ability to treat her like the animal she was. To state the obvious, here West represents George turning a woman into meat, similar to the scenes in *Tarr* and *Ulysses*. When Adela sees the room where she will be force-fed, she notes, "A wooden pillow lay like the cylinder block on which the butcher sharpens his knives." Upon entering the room, "her civilized qualities left her," and "the primitive kernel of her being was left stripped and quiveringly alone." The temporal coordinates

of "past and future" recede "from the unbearable present." As in Lewis, the traumatic scene of violent aggression is staged by a transformation (objectification) of the female subject into a piece of food and by the overt dilation of time to the present moment. Here is the full passage, with my italics.

> At one o'clock four wardresses burst in and without a word frogmarched her along the same grey labyrinth of corridors and galleries: they pitched her into a large cell and she was set upon by about eight people. When she recovered the sense of her surroundings she was tied down with a towel on to a plank bed, a wardress sitting on her knees and two others holding her arms. *The doctor, gripping her head tightly between his knees, was sawing away at her gums with the edge of a steel gag to get her to open her mouth.* She resisted quite coolly and the doctor signed to a wardress to hold the girl's nose, pressing the *nostrils* together and throwing her whole weight on the face. Even then she withstood, so at last he took the top of her head and the wardress her chin, and by both pulling they managed to insert the gag. The doctor proceeded to force into her mouth and down her throat a large India rubber tube. *She felt as if he was killing her.* The tube seemed to go down forever. She could not breathe. It irritated her throat and lacerated the mucous membrane. The drums of her ears seemed to be bursting, the top of her head coming off. Beyond the breastbone she could not feel it, *till it began to press down her stomach*. There it stopped. Then the doctor raised the funnel at the end of the tube and poured in a tumblerful of milk. *Again she choked.* With her set and glassy eyes she saw her body begin to writhe and resist: of itself it began to twist from side to side about the transfixing tube and try to expel it. Almost immediately she became violently sick. But the doctor poured in three more tumblerfuls till, alarmed by an excessive vomiting, he withdrew the tube. *She felt as if the upper part of her chest and the back of her throat were being dragged out with it*. *Her eyes followed it fascinated: small particles of blood and phlegm still adhered to it.* With a sigh of achievement, the doctor passed it carelessly through a basin of warm water and flung it into an open wicker basket on the floor. Before the towel was untied, her hands were handcuffed behind her. (236)

What is striking about this passage is the almost total lack of figurative language. In its direct, journalistic mode, it refuses an allegorical framework and forces us to confront the mechanics of disgust as a material reality, enacted as a state-sponsored technology of female oppression. Offering a close reading, as I have done throughout this project, is beside the point, because "the artistic representation of the object is no longer distinguished from the nature of the object itself in our sensation."

What the force-feeding scene in *The Sentinel* makes available to "Indissoluble Matrimony" is not a parallel image of female suffering but a method: the translation of Kant's definition of disgust from a transcendental category into a material historical reality. Recall the structure of Kant's formulation:

> For in this singular sensation, which rests on mere imagination, the object obtrudes itself for our enjoyment while we strive against it with all our might, and the artistic representation of the object becomes no longer disintguishable from the nature of the object in our sensation, and thus it is impossible that it can be regarded as beautiful. (155)

Read in the abstract, this is the formal aporia that Lewis dramatizes in Bertha's rape—the failure of figuration to maintain the distance between tenor and vehicle, the collapse of "like" into "is." Read through *The Sentinel*, it becomes something else: an institutional procedure, applied by men to the bodies of women, in which the object(s)—milk (*love and hunger meet at the breast*),

tube, hands gripping a face, a steel gag—quite literally obtrude against the subject's resistance. Kant's "as if" becomes a description of state practice. The collapse of artistic representation and sensation, which Lewis stages as a formal crisis of the novel, is abhorrently condensed into the doctor's "sigh of achievement." His repulsive simile trumps Kreisler's: "'This is like stuffing a turkey for Christmas,' remarked the doctor pleasantly, ramming the tube into her body" (238).

Furthermore, Kant is careful to displace the sensation of disgust onto the *imagination*, the faculty that mediates between sensibility and understanding. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, the imagination primarily functions as the harmonious enabler of "free play," unbound by determinate concepts. But as we have seen throughout this project, modernist taste tends to regress, as it were, to the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In that earlier work, the imagination functions as the transcendental, spontaneous capacity to synthesize the manifold of intuition—that is, to bring temporal experience into a unified, ordered form, thus making cognition possible at all. It is "a blind but indispensable function of the soul." In the passage above, Adela is represented as losing the capacity for imagination in this stricter, "pre-aesthetic," Kantian mode.[75] It is not just that she cannot experience the moment as beautiful; instead, time itself fragments incoherently, as her capacity for cognition fails. What if we read her reaction in a strictly Kantian mode? "Her body revolted from this: she went to fling herself on the floor and beat her senses out against the stone." Within a Kantian framework, such an experience of disgust renders the beautiful impossible and, even more profoundly, confounds the imagination's spontaneous capacity *tout court*.

However, in the context of *The Sentinel* and "Matrimony," this moment of literary disgust is the very thing that enables the construction of the beautiful. With Evadne dead, George can return to his absurd, sublime Romanticism, explicitly invoking the language of Blake and Wordsworth. "He saw her as the invisible worm destroying the rose of the world with her dark secret love" is a jumbled plagiarism of Blake's "The Sick Rose." Later, as he approaches his home through the winding streets of his suburban subdivision, he performs an act of Wordsworthian imagination in language pulled from "Tintern Abbey." Turning away from the "squalid walls and squalid homes where mean men and mean women enlaced their unwholesome lives," he instead "walked in romance to his very door." As if dreaming "Of sportive wood run wild" and "pastoral farms, / Green to the very door," he sees, "The unmarred grass sloped to a stone-hedge of towers of loose brick, trenches and mounds of shining clay, and the fine intentful spires of the scaffolding round the last unfinished house" (115). A construction site is transformed into a Gothic ruin. "Everything was beautiful, beautiful, beautiful." In his revelry, "he had missed the stile…and had to go back to hunt for it in the hedge," hardly a hedge, little lines "on the knife edge of town and country."

What is at stake in George's pathetic Romanticism is a deeper critique of the technique Vorticism itself deploys to generate its fantasy of beautiful surfaces, cleansed of the gooey dross of time and Life. Recall Lewis's bizarre proclamation: "Life has no taste!" Lewis, following Hulme, was vociferously opposed to Romanticism, as West was well aware, and the force of her satire lands directly on the chauvinist blind spot underpinning his celebration of "Classicism." As I argued in the previous chapters, Lewis sought to actively integrate "bad taste" as a constitutive aspect of aesthetic production. In her portrayal of force-feeding and the murder of Evadne, West excavates the historical flesh of bad taste, which is not merely an abstract category, a conception

[75] In *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics,* Heidegger argues for the superiority of the first edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which the productive imagination is the root of both sensibility and understanding, making it the deepest ground of Kantian transcendental philosophy.

of the primitive that we can return to at will before returning to the arid realm of surfaces; it is, rather, a political reality with real physical effects on the women trying to realize a material universality through suffrage. In the context of *The Sentinel*, this is precisely the dichotomy at work: between a form of conservative taste intent on shoring up the threatened boundaries of the male subject on the one hand, and the violent reaction to those forms of oppression on the other.

But Evadne does not go on a hunger strike, and her forms of resistance cannot be reduced to a merely reactionary formation. Rather, I want to suggest that Evadne embodies an alternative mode of taste, only dimly visible, first in her unconventional yet graceful setting of the dinner table, and later in the political possibilities of socialism. As I have shown, neither of these aspects of Evadne is allowed full expression within the confines of "Matrimony," since it is constrained by George's aggressive narrative framing. Nevertheless, it is incumbent on a project catalyzed by the notion that "taste is the most accurate seismograph of history" to trace the line connecting the pleasure of Evadne's relationship to food, eating, and taste to a larger political vision offered by an emergent class politics. We will start with the latter and move back towards the former.

In the years following her close engagement with the suffragettes of Manchester, West's politics evolved beyond a singular focus on the vote toward a broader socialism. Despite her admiration for the WSPU and its leaders, West was convinced that their "middle-class" tactics would not ultimately result in the liberation of women; and, further, she increasingly criticized the "one-eyed" focus on "the vote" as ultimately limited in its ambition. "The real objection to the control of the women's movement by the middle class is the extreme danger of a disassociation between the emancipation of women and the emancipation of workers. Otherwise, the emancipation of women may only mean their exploitation" (93). Between 1912 and 1913, West's articles for *The Clarion* elaborated on this theme, claiming that the freedom offered by participation in electoral politics was shortsighted if it did not also build solidarity with a more general workers' movement. "It is true," West implored, "that the feminist movement will not reach victory until it is more of a working-class movement" (108).

West was aware that she was treading a fine line between rejecting the WSPU's mission and offering a constructive critique of its tactics and goals. This is perhaps most clearly evident in her short article "On Mentioning the Unmentionable: An Exhortation to Miss Pankhurst," in which she expresses her concern with the suffragette's obsession with "asceticism" and an incipient puritanism: "The strange uses to which we put our newfound liberty!" West complains, "That this power should be used to express views that would be old-fashioned and uncharitable in the pastor of a Little Bethel is a matter for scalding tears" (206). While West revered the courageous hunger strikers, she also worried that their political vision intimated a future of enfranchisement confined to a logic of self-denial and sacrifice. As such, a commitment to ascetic self-discipline in the name of "the cause" risked limiting the potential of women's liberation to a patriarchal imaginary, devoid of the pleasure that *more* freedom was meant to enable. West clearly discerns the ideological link: "The highest form of virtue men can imagine is asceticism" (133). Her critique is manifold: feminism will not succeed without aligning with working-class politics, both because it will not address deeper economic and cultural inequalities, and because the logic of self-sacrifice participates in a patriarchal logic that denies the modes of freedom that feminism was working to attain.

By contrast, West argued for an expanded notion of feminism consonant with the universal ideals of socialism, leading to a more generalized sense of creative well-being. "When men and women, free from the pressure of poverty, really express themselves in their actions,

there will be possible a new art, a new philosophy." That, West contends, is "the magic of socialism" (147). I want to suggest, then, that the focus on the domestic sphere and its relationship to the socialist cause represents her mature relationship to feminism. That *The Sentinel* remained unpublished suggests West's sense that the WSPU's political tactics did not offer a conclusion within the scope of a realistic plot focused on window-breaking and hunger strikes. Indeed, the fact that "Matrimony" must skirt realism to plot Evadne's survival suggests that such a figure is not yet possible in a world governed by a patriarchal political reality that cannot recognize her autonomy or understand her alternative modes of pleasure and freedom. Read in this light, "middle-class" not only becomes a critique of a feminist movement that ignores class politics but also critiques a notion of pleasure strictly bound by the outlines of the bourgeois subject. Taste—more properly, "good taste,"—was and is a middle-class project. West begins to ask what comes after.

After Taste, or Aftertaste

> Taste is the muscle of the tongue, the neutrality which connects itself with the mouth i.e. with the skin which is beginning to become internal, or with the retraction of the vegetative universality of the whole surface.
>
> —G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Nature*

With this larger political context in place, we can return to the kitchen table, where the story and this chapter began:

> He looked at the table and saw she had set it before she went out. As usual she had been in an improvident hurry: it was carelessly done. Besides what an absurd supper to set before a hungry solicitor's clerk! In the centre, obviously intended as the principal dish, was a bowl of plums, softly red, soaked with the sun, glowing like jewels in the downward stream of the incandescent light. Besides them was a great yellow melon, its sleek sides fluted with rich growth, and a honeycomb glistening on a willow-pattern dish. The only sensible food to be seen was a plate of tongue laid at his place.

Throughout this project, starting with Proust's madeleine, I have resisted the tendency to convert food into a symbol, to dematerialize the literal and make it function within a signifying regime cleansed of its historical and material referents. Instead, I have argued for taste as a faculty of perception that registers the unresolved tension between the literal and the figural. And yet, here, in conclusion, it is hard to resist letting "a plate of tongue" do some old-fashioned figurative work, if only because the tongue is the organ that inhabits the threshold this project has been seeking to describe; pressing it into a symbolic register enacts the very process of the literal as it inheres in the figurative.

From George's perspective, the tongue is "sensible" because it contains the correct caloric content. In some more precise sense, however, the tongue is sensible insofar as it is both an object "that can be perceived by the senses," and, being a tongue after all, an organ of sense with "the faculty of sensation or sense perception." Thus, beyond being a piece of food that will satisfy George's appetite—unlike the glowing plums—the tongue also figures a dynamic confusion between subject and object, internal and external, the spirit and the given. Except that here the tongue has been cut out of a dead animal, boiled, and unceremoniously put on a plate—its bland objectivity stands in stark contrast to the fruits pulsing with light and life. In *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel locates this confusion in the tongue itself. Taste, he writes, is "the muscle of the

tongue, the neutrality which connects itself with the mouth, i.e. with the skin which is beginning to become internal" (203). The tongue is where the body's outer surface folds inward, where exterior becomes interior—the literal threshold between the world and the organism, object and subject, that George's plate has rendered as dead meat. What the tongue performs at that threshold is what Hegel calls "neutrality": the retraction of the universal into the particularity of the tongue. Taste is the sense in which the object's standalone independence is broken down and assimilated, the world taken into the body and made one with it. The plate of tongue is thus doubly ironic. It is the organ of dissolution served up to be dissolved—the faculty by which the subject assimilates the world, reduced to one more object for George's "sensible" appetite to consume. The confusion of subject and object that the tongue figures is precisely what George cannot abide; he wants it boiled, plated, and safely eaten.

The tongue dissolves—that is its activity—and yet the story is titled "*Indissoluble* Matrimony." The word names what George's economy of consumption cannot break down—and it is worth hearing what it carries beneath its legal sense. *Matrimony—matri-* plus *-monium—* names not only the marriage bond but, etymologically, the condition of the mother: the institution by which a maternal, generative principle is bound into a patrimonial order of name and property and line. George's violence targets both levels of this bond. He cannot dissolve the marriage; but what he is really trying to dissolve is the *matri-* itself—matter, generation, "the yeasty nuisance of matter and the ugliness of generation" from which his murderous sublimation longs to be free. It is not that Evadne represents some kind of foundational material and maternal principle—rather, Evadne comes to represent that principle *for* George. Her mother is figured as "that weird half-black woman from the back of beyond," a phrase that renders explicit the gendered and racialized aspects of the perceived threat to his fantasy of neutralizing purity. The title tells us, in advance, that the matrimonial principle is *in*-dissoluble. And the table has staged the opposition all along: against the plate of tongue—sensible, dead, the clerk's patrimonial portion—Evadne sets the food of generation, plums "soaked with the sun," the melon "fluted with rich growth," the honeycomb glistening, a vegetative profusion that George can register only as an affront to sense. What his dissolving appetite cannot break down is precisely this generative remainder, pulsing with the light and life his "sensible" tongue lacks.

Here, the literal and the figural change places one last time. I have insisted throughout that taste registers the tension between them rather than collapsing it—and the tongue, pressed into figuration, does not resolve that tension but holds it open. For the maternal-material principle the story works to dissolve does not, in being figured, become a clean symbol; it persists as exactly what figuration cannot fully sublimate, the literal remainder lodged in the figure. This is what *after taste* finally names, and it is not anyone's possession—which is to say, it is not the case that George *has* bad taste, and Evadne *has* good taste. Rather, taste itself as a structural principle describes the dynamics of figuration as they work out within the confines of the text. If "good taste," from Kant to Bourdieu, was the faculty by which the bourgeois subject secured itself by dissolving the world into clean judgment, then socialism comes *after* taste because it promises something beyond that subject. But to come after taste is not to be without it. *Aftertaste* is taste's persistence in negated form: the generative-material remainder that no sublimation clears away, inhering in the text as what the text has tried to dissolve. It is not Evadne's experience, nor George's; it is the work's own situatedness in the wake of what it has repressed. As Gerhard Richter writes, "to experience afterness is to open up a certain situatedness in the wake of what has come to pass, while remaining without a predetermined concept of a futurity to come" (145). The *matri-* has been murdered, and yet it persists, legible in

the text as the supper that goes uneaten, the speech never given, the bond that cannot be severed, and the promise of a political universality that George can know only as a threat. Aftertaste is the taste of this persistence: a material and collective life the bourgeois subject has dissolved and cannot dissolve, held open toward a future the text cannot yet name.

This is where the project's frame closes, and where the difference from its opening comes into focus. We began not with taste as the bourgeois subject's possession but with taste as the thing that troubled it: Proust's madeleine names the moment the willing, sovereign self is ambushed by a sensuous memory it can neither summon nor master, dispossessed of its own continuity by the faculty that seems to restore it. But that dispossession remains the singular interior's own event—involuntary, private, narrated from inside one consciousness, turned toward a past that, even as it slipped the will, was nonetheless his to lose. The subject is unsettled but never vacated; the trouble taste makes there is the bourgeois subject's own, the deepest drama of an interiority that problematization only enriches. West relocates that trouble: no longer the crisis of a singular self but the index of a political universality seated outside it.

Works Cited

Adorno, T.W. *Aesthetics*. Polity, 2018.

—. *Aesthetic Theory*. Translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor. University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

—. *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*. Verso, 2005.

—. *Notes to Literature*. Columbia, 1991.

Agamben, Giorgio. *Taste*. Translated by Cooper Francis. Seagull Books, 2017.

Allison, Henry E. *Idealism and Freedom: Essays on Kant's Theoretical and Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Bell, Clive. *Art*. Chatto and Windus, 1914.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Image of Proust." *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn. Schocken Books, 1969.

Berman, Marshall. *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. Penguin, 1986.

Bloch, Ernst. *The Spirit of Utopia*. Translated by Anthony A. Nassar. Stanford University Press, 2000.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction*. Harvard University Press, 1984.

Bradbury, Malcolm, and James McFarlane. *Modernism: 1890–1930*. Penguin, 1976.

Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. Harvard University Press, 1984.

Clark, Kenneth. "Introduction." *Last Lectures* by Roger Fry. Cambridge University Press, 1939, pp. ix-xxix.

Clark, T.J. *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*. Yale University Press, 1992.

—. *If These Apples Should Fall: Cézanne and the Present*. Thames and Hudson, 2022.

Comay, Rebecca. *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution*. Stanford University Press, 2011.

Conrad, Joseph. "Preface." *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*. 1897. Norton, 1979.

Cuddy-Keane, Melba. "July 4 to August 4: Paradigmatic and Palimpsestic Plots in The Good Soldier." *Ford Madox Ford's The Good Soldier: Centenary Essays*, edited by Max Saunders and Sara Haslam. Brill Rodopi, 2015.

De Man, Paul. *Allegories of Reading: Figurative Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. Yale University Press, 1979.

—. *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. University of Minnesota Press, 1983.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Proust and Signs: The Complete Text*. Translated by Richard Howard. University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

Delville, Michel. *Food, Poetry and the Aesthetic of Consumption: Eating the Avant-Garde*. Routledge, 2008.

Delville, Michel and Andrew Norris. "Objects of Disgust: A Moveable Feast and the Modernist Anti-Vomitive." *Gastro-Modernism: Food, Literature, Culture*. Derek Gladwin, editor. Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 135-152.

Derrida, Jacques. "Economimesis." Trans. Richard Klein. *Diacritics* 11.2, 1981, pp. 3–25.

Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Duke University Press, 2004.

Edwards, Paul. "*BLAST* and the Revolutionary Mood of Wyndham Lewis's Vorticism," *Vorticism: New Perspectives*. Mark Antliff and S.W. Klein, editors. Oxford University Press, 2013.
Eliot, T.S. "Tarr." *The Egoist* (1918).
Ellmann, Maud. *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing and Imprisonment*. Harvard University Press, 1993.
Ellmann, Maud. "Psychoanalytic Animal." *A Concise Companion to Psychoanalysis, Literature, and Culture*, Eds. Laura Marcus and Ankhi Mukherjee. Wiley Blackwell, 2014. pp. 457-461.
Eysteinsson, Astradur. *The Concept of Modernism*. Cornell University Press, 1990.
Finch, Alison. "Aesthetic Form and Social 'Form.'" *What Forms Can Do*, Ed. Patrick Crowley and Shirley Jordan. Liverpool University Press, 2020. pp. 215-230.
Ford, Ford Madox. "A House." *Poetry,* Vol. 17, March 1921. pp. 291–310.
—. *Critical Writings of Ford Madox Ford*. University of Nebraska Press, 1964.
—. "Four in the Morning Cookery." *Harper's Bazaar.* London: December 1938, 82, 103-106.
—. *The Good Soldier*. Norton, 1995.
—. *The Heart of the Country: A Survey of a Modern Land*. Alston Rivers, 1906.
—. *It Was the Nightingale*. William Heinemann, 1934.
—. *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance*. Little, Brown, and Company, 1925.
—. "Joseph Conrad." *Critical Writings*. Carcanet, 2013.
—. *No Enemy: A Tale of Reconstruction*. Carcanet, 2002.
—. "On Impressionism." *The Good Soldier*. Norton, 1995.
—. *Selected Poems*. Carcanet, 1997.
—. *The March of Literature: From Confucius' Day to Our Own*. Allen and Unwin, 1939.
Frank, Joseph. *The Idea of Spatial Form*. Rutgers University Press, 1991.
Freud, Sigmund. *The Freud Reader*. Peter Gay, editor. Norton, 1995.
Frisby, David. *Fragments of Modernity*. MIT Press, 1989.
Fry, Roger. *Vision and Design*. Chatto and Windus, 1920.
Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. 2nd rev. ed. Continuum, 2004.
Gallagher, Catherine, and Stephen Greenblatt. *Practicing New Historicism*. University of Chicago Press, 2000.
Gigante, Denise. *Taste: A Literary History*. Yale University Press, 1999.
Gronow, Jukka. "Taste and Fashion: The Social Function of Fashion and Style." *Acta Sociologica* 36.2, 1993. 89–100.
Guyer, Paul. "Introduction." *Critique of the Power of Judgment* by Immanuel Kant. Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 59-86.
Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Blackwell, 1989.
Hegel, G.W.F. *De Orbitis Planetarum*. 1801. In Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, translated by A.V. Miller. Oxford University Press, 1970.
—. *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History.* Translated by H.B. Nisbet. Cambridge University Press, 1975.
—. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A.V. Miller. Oxford University Press, 1977.
—. *Philosophy of Nature*. Translated and Edited by M.J. Petry. Routledge, 1970.
Heidegger, Martin. *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. Translated by Richard Taft. Indiana University Press, 1997.
Hemingway, Ernest. *A Moveable Feast*. Scribner, 1964.

Higgins, Lesley. *The Modernist Cult of Ugliness: Aesthetic and Gender Politics*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
Hotchner, A.E. *Papa Hemingway*. Carroll and Graf, 1955.
Hulme, T.E. *Selected Writings*. Edited by Patrick McGuinness. Routledge, 2003.
—. *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art*. Ed. Herbert Read. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1924.
Humble, Nicola. *The Literature of Food: An Introduction from 1830 to Present*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2020.
Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Open Court: Chicago, 1912.
Hunt, Violet. *I Have This To Say: The Story of My Flurried Years*. Boni and Lveright. 1926.
Jameson, Fredric. *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*. University of California Press, 1979.
—. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act.* Cornell University Press, 1981.
Jay, Martin. *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. University of California Press, 1993.
—. *The Dialectical Imagination*. University of California Press, 1973.
Kandinsky, Wassily. *Point and Line to Plane*. 1926. Trans. Howard Dearstyne and Hilla Rebay. Dover, 1979.
Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. Cambridge University Press, 2000.
—. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. Cambridge University Press, 1998.
—. *Critique of Practical Reason*. Translated by Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge University Press, 2015.
Kenner, Hugh. "The Visual World of Wyndham Lewis." *Wyndham Lewis: Paintings and Drawings*, Ed. Walter Michel. University of California Press, 1971.
—. *Wyndham Lewis*. New Directions, 1954.
Kern, Stephen. *The Culture of Time and Space*. Harvard University Press, 1983.
Kolnai, Aurel. *On Disgust*. 1929. Edited by Barry Smith and Carolyn Korsmeyer. Open Court, 2004.
Korsmeyer, Carolyn. *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy*. Cornell University Press, 1999.
Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. Columbia University Press, 1982.
Kropotkin, Peter. *The Conquest of Bread*. 1892. Dover, 2016.
—. *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*. McClure, Phillips & Co., 1902.
—. *The Great French Revolution, 1789–1793*. Putnam, 1909.
Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by A. R. Price, Polity Press, 2014.
Laing, Kathryn. "Versions and Palimpsests: Rebecca West's The *Sentinel*, *Adela*, and *The Judge.*" *Rebecca West Today: Contemporary and Critical Approaches*. Bernard Schweizer, editor. University of Delaware Press, 2006, pp. 170-85.
Levenson, Michael. *A Genealogy of Modernism*. University of Virginia Press, 1984.
Levinas, Emmanuel. *Otherwise Than Being, or Beyond Essence*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Duquesne University Press, 1998.

Lewis, Wyndham. *The Art of Being Ruled*. Black Sparrow Press, 1989.
—. *Blast 1*. 1914.
—. *Blast 2*. 1915.
—. *Blasting and Bombardiering*. University of California Press, 1967.
—. *The Caliph's Design*. Black Sparrow Press, 1986.
—. *The Complete Wild Body*. Black Sparrow Press, 1982.
—. *Creatures of Habit & Creatures of Change: Essays on Art, Literature & Society 1914–1956*. Black Sparrow Press, 1989.
—. *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*. Edited by W.K. Rose. New Directions, 1963.
—. *Men Without Art*. 1934. Black Sparrow Press, 1991.
—. *Paleface: The Philosophy of the Melting Pot*. Chatto & Windus, 1923.
—. *Rude Assignment*. Black Sparrow Press, 1984.
—. *Tarr: The 1918 Version*. Edited by Paul O'Keeffe. Black Sparrow Press, 2001.
—. *Time and Western Man*. Black Sparrow Press, 1993.
Litvak, Joseph. *Strange Gourmets: Sophistication, Theory and the Novel*. Duke University Press, 1997.
Lukács, Georg. *History and Class Consciousness*. MIT Press, 1971.
Lyotard, Jean-François. *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*. Stanford University Press, 1994.
—. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
Marx, Karl. *Early Writings*. Penguin, 1962.
Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Penguin, 1967.
Materer, Timothy. *Vortex: Pound, Eliot, and Lewis*. Cornell University Press, 1979.
McGinn, Colin. *The Meaning of Disgust.* Oxford University Press, 2011.
Mencken, H.L. *The American Language*. 1919. Knopf, 1949.
Menninghaus, Winfried. *Disgust: The Theory and History of a Strong Sensation.* Translated by Howard Eiland and Joel Golb. State University of New York Press, 2003.
Miller, William Ian. *The Anatomy of Disgust*. Harvard University Press, 1997.
Mintz, Sydney. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. Viking, 1985.
Murray, Rachel. "'Unexpected fruit': The ingredients of *Tarr*." *Moveable Type*. Vol. 8 "Dissidence," 2016. 34-41.
Nabokov, Vladimir. *Despair.* Vintage, 1965.
Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Harvard University Press, 2005.
Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Vintage, 1966.
—. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Penguin, 1978.
Pater, Walter. *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*. World Publishing, 1961.
Pound, Ezra. *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*. Edited by T.S. Eliot. New Directions, 1954.
Proust, Marcel. *Du côté de chez Swann*. Gallimard, 1913.
—. *Remembrance of Things Past*. Translated by C.K. Scott Moncrieff. Vintage, 1982.
Richter, Gerhard. *Afterness: Figures of following in modern thought and aesthetics*. Columbia University Press, 2011.
Saunders, Max. "Empire of the Future: 'The Inheritors,' Ford, Liberalism, and Imperialism." *Ford Madox Ford Studies*. 2013, vol. 12. The Edwardian Ford, pp. 125-140.
—. *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*. 2 vols. Oxford University Press, 1996.
Schamberg, Morton. "Post-Impressionism Exhibit Awaited." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 19, 1913, pp. 26-28.

Scott, Bonnie Kime, editor. *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*. Indiana University Press, 1990.
Shahani, Gitanjali, ed. *Food and Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2018.
Simmel, Georg. "Fashion." *The American Journal of Sociology.* 1957.
—. *On Individuality and Social Forms*. Edited by Donald Levine. University of Chicago Press, 1971.
"Space, N." *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, June 2026, oed.com.
Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Harvard University Press, 1989.
West, Rebecca. "Indissoluble Matrimony." *Blast 1*. 1914.
—. *The Sentinel: An Incomplete Early Novel by Rebecca West*. Edited by Kathryn Laing. European Humanities Research Center, 2002.
—. *The Young Rebecca: Writings of Rebecca West, 1911-1917.* Edited by Jane Marcus, Viking, 1982.
—. "TARR." *The Nation*, 10 August 1918.
Woolf, Virginia. *Roger Fry: A Biography*. Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1940.
Wordsworth, William. *Lyrical Ballads*. Edited by R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones. Routledge, 1991.
Zizek, Slavoj. *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. Verso, 2014.