SCHWEIZER ANGLISTISCHE ARBEITEN
SWISS STUDIES IN ENGLISH

Thomas Keller

Wyndham Lewis and British Art Rock

A Practicological Modernism

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Schweizer Anglistische Arbeiten
Swiss Studies in English

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Cover illustration: Left: George Charles Beresford. Wyndham Lewis. 1929. Half-plate glass negative. 15.6 x 11.9cm. © National Portrait Gallery, London. Right: Lord Snowdon. David Bowie. 1978. Photograph. © Armstrong Jones / Trunk Archive.

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“Infantile extremist sensationalism (as a by-product of self-seeking) is the curse of the pundit. What every artist should try to prevent is the car, in which is our civilized life, plunging over the side of the precipice — the exhibitionist extremist promoter driving the whole bag of tricks into a nihilistic nothingness or zero.”

Wyndham Lewis, *The Demon of Progress in the Arts*, 1955.

“I favour the clever con artist who remains intact to the committed Fine Artist who ends up with his arms cut off or even worse (in the case of that Austrian blockhead — he would be Austrian, wouldn’t he? — with his dick cut off). I mean this is so romantic, it’s ridiculous… “the artist must suffer for his art.””

Brian Eno, “Internet conversation with David Bowie”, January 1995.

Introduction: Modernism as an Ethos

I would like to preface this study with an example taken from what could perhaps be termed the "Great Global Vortex" of the twenty-first century: the internet. On *YouTube,* we can find two short clips, each starring an imposing and controversial figure in the history of British art and literature. The first is a less than minute long newsreel clip from 1938 in which British modernist painter, writer, critic, essayist, cultural theorist, self-appointed leader of the Vorticist movement and self-described "'Personal-Appearance' Artist" (Lewis, *Men Without Art* 95) Wyndham Lewis is interviewed about his portrait of T. S. Eliot (Fig. 1) (Lucas). The second clip was published online by the Tate in 2010 and consists of excerpts from an interview with Mark E. Smith, leader and only constant member of Mancunian post punk band The Fall, in which he talks about various British visual artists that influenced his own work as a rock (or post-punk) performer (Tate).

The context and the content of the 1938 newsreel clip can be quickly summarized: Wyndham Lewis had submitted his portrait of T. S. Eliot for the annual exhibition of the Royal Academy, but it was rejected by the latter's selection committee. This was highly unusual. Though an outsider figure, Lewis was still a decidedly professional painter and artist. The rejection of the select committee, for which it was not obliged to offer any specific reasons, was thus an affront. It prompted, among other things, the resignation of Augustus John, one of Lewis's mentors, from the Academy (O'Keeffe 382-3). The newsreel interview thus presented Lewis with an outlet to voice his contempt for the Royal Academy. After a few close ups of the portrait itself, Wyndham Lewis is asked by an off-screen interviewer whether the picture in question was a very "unorthodox piece of work", which Lewis vehemently denies: "No, it is not unorthodox. Naturally, it does not conform to the standards of atrocious silliness of the Royal Academy." A follow-up question about whether he believed that its rejection would affect the value of the portrait in the eye of the public is met with a resolute "I. Think. Not." However, the incident did not result in the full-blown scandal that Lewis was hoping to mine in the wake of the select committee's decision (O'Keeffe 384-6). The newsreel clip itself thus does not offer any valuable new information on this already well-documented episode of Wyndham Lewis's career.

More interesting than the clip itself, however, is the context of its reappearance more than 70 years later on *YouTube*. The clip was posted in 2011 by

American virtuoso rock guitarist Gary Lucas. It was filed under the category "Music" and, in the description, the uploader characterized Wyndham Lewis as "the protean English painter/writer/polemicist, founder of the Vorticists and *godfather of Punk* [author's emphasis]". This last attribute is, to say the least, a bit odd. On a subliminal level, one might be inclined to agree with this characterization, as there are certain aspects to Wyndham Lewis's life and work that, in retrospect, seem in line with what today is commonly associated with a punk attitude. There is, for example, his self-styling as a perpetual outsider, his polemical diatribes against the establishment, or his quasi-Nietzschean pursuit of the artist as a purely self-shaped, self-driven, and self-contained artistic unit, which almost seems like a precursor to the do-it-yourself ethos of punk. At the same time, it is safe to say that Lewis himself would have balked at such a trivializing comparison. After all, he was also a staunch representative of learned high modernism and would, as such, have recoiled at punk's blatant amateurism and its disregard for artistic complexity. Lewis's sharply intellectualist approach to both his writing and his painting as well as his outspoken conviction that a proper artist needed to be a highly skilled professional (as opposed to a dabbling amateur or dilettante) certainly puts him at odds with a punk ethos and with popular (music) culture in general.

Still, this juxtaposition seems worth looking at in more detail, as Lewis makes another appearance in a punk or at least punk-related context in the aforementioned second clip. Mark E. Smith is, of course, another highly idiosyncratic and similarly self-contained outsider figure of British cultural history. The *AllMusic* encyclopedia describes his primary creative outlet, The Fall, as "harsh, jagged experimentalists", noting how Smith's "snarling, nearly incomprehensible vocals and consuming, bitter cynicism" made him a "cult legend in indie and alternative rock" circles (Erlewine). It is thus perhaps not that much of a surprise to hear Smith speaking very appreciatively of Lewis, mentioning, among other aspects, that he liked him mainly "because he [Lewis] doesn't seem to like any of his subjects". Maybe even more Lewisian in its blatant display of an outsider's disdain for the insiders of the cultural and art industries is the story he recounts immediately afterwards. According to Smith, one of the regular members of the audience at The Fall concerts in the 1980s was Damien Hirst, who usually placed himself directly in front of the stage. During one of these concerts, contemporary dance artist Michael Clark, who was performing with The Fall at the time, threw an implement into the audience and managed to hit Hirst straight on the forehead. Not hiding his disdain for Hirst, Smith mirthfully notes that he probably stopped being a fan after that

incident, suggesting that it might have been that particular smack on the head which “made him [Hirst, ed.] more creative”.

My point of this short introductory episode is twofold. First, to take two *YouTube* clips as our present-day starting point seems strangely appropriate for an artist such as Wyndham Lewis. From his early works as a Vorticist to his final publications in the 1950s, Lewis’s work was informed in part by a constant interest in and an ambivalent fascination for the palpable external realities of modernity: for how the ever-accelerating technological progress of modernity left its concrete and visible marks on society, politics, culture, and the arts. Far from the austere and idea-oriented ivory-tower seclusion and detachment normally associated with learned high modernism, Lewis directly engaged with these outside developments and phenomena. It is certainly no coincidence that it was, of all people, (mass-)media philosopher Marshall McLuhan who counted Lewis among his most important inspirations and influences.[1] In that regard, it seems more befitting to see Lewis popping up on the most advanced, the most accelerated and aggressive — or, in other words, the most *modern* — media delivery network currently in existence (and being name-dropped there by, of all people, a rock musician), instead of encountering him in comparatively quaint places such as the walls of a museum or the bookshelves of a library. The half-joking reference at the beginning to Lewis’s 1914 proclamation of the “Great English Vortex” (Lewis, *Blast 1* 1) is thus precisely that: half-joking yet also half-serious.

More importantly, I am arguing that this re-imagination of Wyndham Lewis as a “godfather of punk” is neither a coincidence nor a case of empty name-dropping. My claim — which is also the central claim of this thesis — is that this supposed connection between, on the one hand, an exponent of early twentieth century British high modernism and, on the other hand, a segment of late twentieth century popular culture is to be understood as a genuine case of a *cultural afterlife* and is deserving of a more detailed investigation. What I would like to suggest is that a comparative analysis of selected texts from both fields will provide us with new insights into the logic of both a particular strand of high modernism and its popular offspring in a segment of British popular music culture. These parallels and similarities can be observed on a broader spectrum

1 Lewis and McLuhan met during the former’s self-imposed exile in Canada during World War Two (O’Keeffe, 486). The most notable product of Lewis’s influence on McLuhan was the latter’s 1954 publication *Counterblast*, both a response and an homage to Lewis’s 1914 Vorticist literary magazine *Blast*. In a 1967 interview, McLuhan himself openly acknowledged the great influence Lewis had had on him (McLuhan, “Marshall McLuhan recalls Lewis”).

that ranges from relatively concrete and specific questions of form and formal aesthetics to less tangible matters of cultural politics and ideology. The overall gesture of my argument is thus one of pointing towards continuities instead of breaks. What I am arguing is that there is a tradition — or, to express it in less lofty terms, a particular way of approaching and practicing art — in modernity and in modernism that reaches beyond the narrow historical and social boundaries of high modernism and well into the late twentieth century and beyond.

It seems therefore appropriate to stress that when I am using the term *modernism* I am referring to what could best be described as an *ethos.* I am not referring to it in a limited sense as a stylistic term, that is as a category that denotes a specific range of aesthetic styles in literature and/or the visual arts. Although the works discussed in this study will, as it is to be expected, share certain formal and stylistic similarities, it is not my intent to write a history of style. Rather, I would argue that such similarities should be read symptomatically as the product of an underlying shared modernist ethos or attitude expressed in these works. In addition, I am not deploying the term modernism as a historical term that delineates a specific period in literary, cultural, and/or art history. As my introductory example should have already made clear, this is not a study exclusively focused on selected works belonging to a specific field within literature or the visual and the performing arts during a period that roughly covers the time from the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth century. Rather, I am primarily interested in the opposite, namely, how certain stances, ideas as well as approaches to writing texts or making art are disseminated into fields beyond the established (historical, cultural, national, etc.) boundaries of literary, cultural, and art historiography. My main interest lies, in other words, in the questions of *how* and especially *why* certain aesthetic modes manage to lead a kind of *cultural afterlife* at different times and in different cultural spheres, which are normally not juxtaposed in this manner.

The notion of a common *modernist ethos* informing the works to be discussed here acts as our point of departure. Instead of the term *ethos* we could also say that these works are informed by similar attitudes and practices: they share a particular way of looking at the world and of doing things both in art and in life (two terms that cannot be separated as neatly as they might suggest in any case). The attribute *modernist*, however, is appropriate because these attitudes and practices are in turn informed by concerns and anxieties about what the authors and artists in question recognize as their present reality, as their present conditions of life, or, in other words, as modernity. If I were thus asked to give the clearest and most concise definition of what I mean by the term *modernist*

ethos, I would do so as follows: A modernist ethos is a way of both looking at and doing things that is primarily informed by two questions: “What are our current, that is, our modern conditions of life?” and “What is or what are the appropriate ways of dealing with and of living within these modern conditions of life?”. However, it is obvious that this attempt at providing a seemingly clear and concise definition only raises a plethora of additional questions. What, precisely, is meant by modern conditions of life? Are we, for example, referring to purely material conditions or do we refer to spiritual issues questions of epistemology? Are we thinking of politics, society, culture, or all of the above? Moreover, the question regarding the appropriate ways of living within these supposed conditions is even more difficult. For one, the second question is fully dependent on the answer to the first question. Furthermore, it is a normative (that is, a political) question and, thus, any answer to it will definitely be up for debate. It is therefore clearly necessary to provide a more precise outline of what I mean by a modernist ethos and what specific kind of ethos I am focusing on in this thesis. As the title of this thesis already suggests, I have chosen the term *practicological* to describe the kind of modernism that is at stake here. It will become clear in the course of this introduction what I mean specifically with that term. However, before elaborating on that concept it is first necessary to outline the scope of this thesis and to provide an outline of its main theoretical points of departure.

First of all, this thesis takes a long-term view of modernism, roughly corresponding with what Eric Hobsbawm has termed the *Age of Extremes*: the period from the outbreak of World War 1 in 1914 to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. It will of course be necessary to refer to works and developments from before and after this period, but the core texts and artworks discussed fall within this time frame. Second, as already stated above, the geographical focus is on Great Britain. This is not to imply that the aim of this thesis is to define a modernism or a modernist ethos that is specifically British. Modernism, after all, is characterized by strong trans- and internationalist perspectives. Rather, it is simply to say that the majority of the primary texts and works discussed was produced by people that were either British and/or working predominantly in Great Britain. Third and most importantly, the central premise behind this entire study is that modernity as a condition of life is still relevant today. This thesis presupposes that the core concerns and anxieties of modernity, which, in turn, informed most modernist cultural production, have not disappeared or been supplanted by a post-modern or even post-post-modern condition. Rather, they are by and large still in effect — hence, the aforementioned long-term view and an overall perspective that looks for continuities instead of breaks.

This third point also informs the non-originalist view taken in this thesis. It has to be stressed that this argument is not concerned with questions of origins but rather oriented towards the present moment. Of course, trying to pinpoint origins and lines of influence is inevitable to a certain degree whenever one is doing the kind of analyses that is, at the very least in part, informed by an interest in historical contexts and historical developments over an extended period of time. However, this thesis presupposes that any notion of a point of origin or a line of influence is always a belated textual construct within a respective historical narrative. My methodological perspective is thus non-essentialist in the sense that, because the very notion of an origin — a beginning — is itself not a natural but a fundamentally narrative category, it does not assume the existence of origins outside of the frameworks of concrete historical narratives. In addition, it is non-deterministic in the sense that such points of origins are not regarded as the hidden locus of an indisputable truth. Origins are not posited as self-evident grounds or explanations for whatever came afterwards. In other words, I am adopting a view of history without inherent necessity: a view that regards the unfolding of history as a fundamentally contingent process.

Thus, when I am invoking, as above, the notion of a *cultural afterlife*, I am not referring to the term in its "strict" Warburgian sense, where specific instances of cultural after-living refer back to an originary lynchpin in classical antiquity (Becker 1-2). Rather, I am referring to the term in its poststructuralist rethinking as posited by scholars such as Georges Didi-Huberman and Elisabeth Bronfen. It is the latter's concept of *crossmapping* in particular that is useful to describe my methodolocial approach. Drawing on the Warburgian terminology, as well as on Mieke Bal's notion of *preposterous history* and Stephen Greenblatt's concept of the circulation of *social energies*, Bronfen posits crossmapping as a practice of productive reading that allows one to juxtapose "figures of thought and image formulas for which no simple or unequivocal intertextual relation can be determined" as a means "to draw our critical attention to similarities between aesthetic formalizations that have remained overlooked or uncharted" (Bronfen 4-5). As a practice of productive comparative reading, crossmapping strongly relies on the Warburgian method in its interest in the cultural afterlife or the *surival* of specific aesthetic forms as *pathos formulas* — an after-living that transcends historical, geographical, and cultural boundaries. As Didi-Huberman writes,

> the term *Nachleben* refers to the survival (the continuity or afterlife and metamorphosis) of images and motifs — as opposed to their renascence after extinction, or, conversely, their replacement by innovations in image and motif. (273)

In the sense that, as Bronfen argues, "each artistic act thus attests to the affective effects (*Nachwirken*) of past image formulas" (1), these processes of after-living constitute what we could call the repository or memory of a collective cultural imaginary or unconscious. The task set by the Warburgian method is thus to "capture the spirit of past times in the way it came to inform notions of style, and to do so by offering an explicitly subjective comparison of one and the same object at different historical times and in different cultural arenas" (1). The practice of crossmapping takes up this task in the way it is similarly interested in "a comparative reading of the repeated return of cultural intensities at different historical moments and in different aesthetic media" (1).

It would be misleading, however, to mistake crossmapping for a straightforward history of styles or motifs. As Bronfen argues, crossmapping presents an approach "less interested in uncovering established influences between certain moments in different texts than in finding a similarity in the concerns they revolve around" (2). When I am thus saying that crossmapping presents a poststructuralist rethinking of the Warburgian method, I am pointing out that it rejects the notion of history as a process that unfolds in a relatively orderly and rational manner and can thus be fully grasped by the equally rationalistic terms and categories of historiography practiced as a (quasi-)exact science. Rather, Bronfen argues that concrete instances of a cultural afterlife are as much informed by an empathic and affective dimension as they are by rationalistic aspects of form, style, and direct influence. They emerge out of "the tension between being subjectively moved by the formal aesthetization of an emotion and grasping this affect conceptually" (1) — a tension that crossmapping as a practice of analytical reading should very much attempt to sustain. Bronfen thus essentially shifts the focus towards those affective aspects of history and life itself that appear to elude the grasp of a purely rationalistic explanation. Her theoretical claim thus shares a certain similarity with that of Didi-Huberman, who, with regard to his notion *impure time*, attempts to draw our attention to those blind spots ignored or repressed by straightforward and rationalistic retellings of history as well:

> *Nachleben* is impure in much the way *Leben* itself is. Both are messy, cluttered, muddled, various, haphazard, retentive, protean, liquid, oceanic in scope and complexity, impervious to analytical organization. (282)

In other words, both the notions of affective history and of impure time present a criticism of history or "time conceived as a succession of direct relationships ("influences") or conceived in the positivist way as a succession of facts" (275); the positivist fantasy of a purely objective or factual historiography being up to

the task of accounting for the entire scope of history must remain precisely that: a fantasy. However, the aim of this shift of perspective away from a positivist view of history and towards a dialectical approach oscillating between the affective and the rational, is not to denounce all attempts at historical research and writing as a fallacious and pointless undertaking. Crossmapping is decidedly not an invitation to a kind of postmodernist free-for-all that aims to replace thorough and clear analysis with reckless and arbitrary free association. In fact, Bronfen stresses that she regards it as a fundamentally ethical undertaking when she notes how she has "come to understand pathos gestures, whose intensities continue to reverberate in our contemporary culture, as both an inheritance and a responsibility" (1). This ethical dimension of crossmapping becomes even more clear in a later passage where she notes how

> precisely because they inevitably have an afterlife, these image formulas and thought figures represent our ineluctable cultural heritage; an inheritance which obliges us in one way or another to engage with the images and stories that define us. An intervention in the cultural imaginary thus entails oscillating between a playful re-imagination and a critical deconstruction of pathos gestures of the past. (5)

In short, to openly acknowledge and address the affective, irrational, or illegitimate elements within history does not mean to fall prey to them. Rather, it means to question the tendencies within historiographies of styles, influences, or ideas to come up with overly deterministic narratives and to try to locate an essential moment of historical truth at a singular, all-explaining point in the far past. Instead, it stresses the fundamentally *overdetermined* nature of most cultural products and utterances.

More importantly, to deploy the concept of a cultural afterlife that does not hinge on a notion of a definite origin also means to draw our attention away from these mythical points of origin and towards the actual occurrences of after-living. The focus, in other words, shifts to a comparative reading of the actual, observable cultural material instead of an attempt to make that material fit into an abstract, linear, and deterministic overarching narrative, which purports to retrace every single line of influence, every stylistic trope, and every idea down to the smallest detail. Thus, the aim of this thesis is, first and foremost, simply to *describe* the works in question and, in the process, *note* how certain forms of expression, certain approaches to making art and writing texts seem to unexpectedly pop up in different places and different times again, as if they were constantly lingering within a larger collective cultural unconscious.

To thus come back to my initial example, I would argue that we should see both Wyndham Lewis's unexpected twenty-first century reappearance on

Youtube as a "godfather of Punk" and Mark E. Smith's mentioning of Lewis as a role model as examples of after-living characterized to a significant part by affective connections. In the case of Gary Lucas, his own interest in Lewis goes back to the 1970s and led, among other things, to introducing Lewis's works to Don Van Vliet, better known as rock performer Captain Beefheart, who, then became another prominent fan of Lewis from the field of popular music culture (Stoker 11-2). However, these purely factual connections do not tell us anything about why an American rock guitarist would show an interest in one of the lesser known figures of British high modernism. Rather, it is the affective connection that seems to tell a more interesting story: Lucas's off-the-cuff and markedly unacademic labeling of Lewis as a "godfather of Punk" points to an imagined kinship between, on the one hand, the modernist painter and writer and, on the other hand, the rock guitarist. It is a kinship that crosses the boundaries between social and cultural spheres, historical periods, and, above all, artistic media. It is a connection that is based more on affective or emotional investment than on direct formal aesthetic or intellectual influence: There is, on one side, Lewis as the recalcitrant outsider of British high modernism and, on the other side, the punk ethos with its own valorization of fiercely antagonistic outsiderdom. It is the same affective kinship that we can also see with Mark E. Smith, a notoriously difficult and headstrong figure in British alternative music circles, infamous for a similarly antagonistic relationship with his peers and the wider public.

In both cases, however, a traditional narrative in the history of style or of influence would either not register connections of these kinds at all, or not deem them relevant, because any direct intertextual relationships between the works of these artists would be tenuous at best. It is at this point where the aforementioned poststructuralist re-thinkings of the Warburgian method would offer a different approach. Whether we refer to Didi-Huberman's notion of impure time or to Bronfen's concept of crossmapping, the argument would be the same: Although these connections might appear trivial and mundane in the sense that they are largely motivated by an impure and affective investment instead of a puristic and rationalistic one, they do matter nevertheless, because they, too, represent an actual and genuine engagement with a cultural heritage. Even in their own unorthodox and illegitimate way, they thus provide a means for these pathos formulas of the past to survive and resonate in the present. For a crossmapping approach, the question of whether these particular types of resonance manage to pass a certain purity test is largely irrelevant. After all, the normative categories of pure and impure are usually the product of belated analytical conventions and, thus, do not account for the haphazard ways in which cultural practices, motifs and ideas often circulate and survive over time.

Notions such as crossmapping, impure time, and the (affective) cultural afterlife of aesthetic forms or pathos formulae thus provide a useful set of terms to describe how certain forms of aesthetic expression survive through different historical periods and how this survival is often an impure and haphazard process — one which does not respect the boundaries between different types of aesthetic genres and media, as well as between different cultural fields, social units, and intellectual strata. It will thus act as my point of departure for my argument that there is indeed a productive connection between the high modernism of Wyndham Lewis and the *popular modernisms* of late twentieth century British popular music culture, which I will subsume under the umbrella term of *art rock.*[2] Furthermore, these specific parallels or connections are themselves indicative of the survival or cultural afterlife of a common modernist ethos that informs them. To cross-map these formal, ideological, and affective parallels and similarities allows us to argue for the ongoing relevance of the material at hand while avoiding the questionable suggestion that these connections are the result of an underlying historical necessity.

There is, however, another reason why I am stressing the haphazard or affective aspects of these connections, namely the fundamental inconsistency of the materials themselves that are to be discussed here. If my core thesis is that these texts are informed by a shared modernist ethos, which I would describe as a *practicological* modernism, in how they represent a specific way of responding, aesthetically, to the modern conditions of life, then the lowest common denominator of these responses would be that they are all permeated — consciously so — by inherent contradictions and inconsistencies. Lewis is, of course, an inconsistent figure par excellence: an early figure of British avant-gardism who nevertheless remained highly skeptical of the revolutionary zeal of early twentieth century avant-garde movements; an ivory tower elitist whose writings nevertheless betray a deep fascination for mass cultural phenomena; a modernist, though one who came to identify himself as a classicist; an intellectualist advocate of a detached, analytical, and sober rationalism who still, for a period in the 1930s, let himself by duped by the irrational lures of German fascism; an artist who self-styled himself as a heroic outsider, yet nevertheless realized that this role seemed strangely anachronistic in the burgeoning mass

2 Regarding the term *popular modernism*, I am indebted to the late Mark Fisher who deployed the term in order to refer to that productive period of late twentieth-century UK popular culture, which, in his view, represented an attempt to vindicate the elitist project of modernism in a decidedly non-populist way as a collective aesthetic project to continue the "modernist task of producing forms which were adequate for the present moment" (22-23).

societies of the twentieth century. The list of contradictions that permeate Lewis's life and work could go on, but what is arguably the most glaring and, at least from the reader's point of view, often most frustrating inconsistency is how his body of work is so fraught with contradictions, yet, at the same time, speaks with a voice so thoroughly assertive and so lacking in self-criticism that it sometimes beggars belief.

I would argue that we can recognize, in late twentieth century popular music culture, particularly in the more intellectually-minded field of art rock, a relationship with the modern condition that is conflicted and contradictory in many similar ways. The persona of the modern rock star is normally that of an assertive and heroic outsider as well, but his role as a focal point of celebrity culture (and also *her* role, of course, though it must be noted that, at least traditionally, rock stardom has been a mostly male-dominated cultural field) places him right at the center of mass culture and mass entertainment. This valorization of outsiderdom is usually tied to a vague notion of intrinsic psychological authenticity: the desire for expressing some true inner essence in opposition to the profane externality of modern life. This, however, contrasts with the fact that these expressions are themselves wholly dependent on an external system of modern (cultural) industrial mass production and distribution. Thus, these ostentatious gestures of critiquing or rejecting the vulgar realities of modern consumer culture, which are so prevalent in rock culture, often barely manage to conceal a deep fascination if not an outright infatuation for that very same object of loathing. If much of popular music culture thus acts as an outlet to give voice to what are arguably two of the central promises of modernity, those of individual autonomy and authenticity, its very nature of being a mass phenomenon simultaneously represents a breach of that promise. We are essentially dealing with the paradox or problem already identified in the 1940s by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in their seminal essay on the fundamentally totalitarian logic of the cultural industry (Horkheimer 128-76).

Far from chiming in with Horkheimer and Adorno's crushing verdict, however, my overall point behind sketching these inconsistencies is to say that we should not read them as weaknesses or signs of artistic failure, but as a productive point of departure. We should, in other words, not expect from the texts to be discussed a coherent set of proposals or even a grand plan in how to deal with the challenges and anxieties of the modern condition. Rather, we should read this lack of a definite and universally applicable solution as a symptom. Instead of expecting these texts to constitute, as Frederic Jameson put it, "a symbolic act, whereby real social contradictions, insurmountable in their own terms, find a purely formal resolution in the aesthetic realm" (Jameson,

The Political Unconscious 64), I propose to read their inherent contradictions and inconsistencies as symptomatic of those real and insurmountable antagonisms themselves. I am, in other words, less interested in ascribing to these texts some modernist "utopian gesture" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 7) that offers some compensatory symbolic space in the puristic spheres of the aesthetic realm. Rather, my argument is that the aim of these texts is in general more grounded and immediate. They are akin to improvised, situational, or affective survival strategies against an external reality that cannot be sufficiently denied or pushed back to make room for that symbolic or utopian space to establish itself.

We could also say that the approach of these texts more strongly veer towards the empirical than the idealistic. They proceed from a general acceptance of what in German one would call *Gegebenheiten*: general conditions and facts of life that are either taken as absolute givens or as so thoroughly ingrained in society that any quick and decisive change is all but unimaginable. As a result of this comparatively sober perspective, the role of the imaginary space of the literary, visual, or aural text is not to provide an outright alternative or a symbolic resolution to those stubborn real conditions of existence by imagining some utopian vanishing point. Instead, the less lofty and more practical approach is to come up with appropriate strategies of coping with and of surviving within these immovable external conditions of life. To put it in other words, the core question of the modernist ethos I am interested in is not *how to solve* the issues and antagonisms that lie at the heart of modernity. Rather, it is driven by a *practicological* concern about *how to endure and survive* in them: how to come up, in an often impromptu manner, with concrete artistic practices that do not point to some ideal or better world beyond the boundaries of the given conditions of life, but that at least allow one, for the time being, to survive in these conditions. It is obvious that, if measured against the view that literature or the arts have to provide some sort of transcendental utopian impulse, the resulting texts will necessarily disappoint and come across as flawed, muddled, and inconsistent. Yet that is because — to refer back to Didi-Huberman — the practice of survival is, as life itself, muddled, messy, and haphazard.

One of the major challenges in dealing with these texts is thus to negotiate the inherent discrepancy between style and content. As I have pointed out, the tone of the texts in question is usually one that is highly assertive, even aggressively so, in a way that appears to allow no room for any ambiguity at all. However, looking past that characteristic style often reveals an underlying skepticism and a deliberately muddled and impure way of thinking, which, in its commitment to messy survivalism over puristic utopianism, seems unexpectedly anti-radical, anti-avant-gardistic, and perhaps even ideologically moderate and restrained.

To get a better grasp of this ambivalent and hard to pin down nature of the texts to be discussed, a second main theoretical point of reference is therefore needed. If I am claiming that one of the defining features of the texts to be discussed is that they either explicitly or implicitly have a practicological stance, then I mean that they constantly reflect their own inextricable embroilment in a messy external and, as such, practical social reality. They are, in other words, aware that, as cultural utterances performed as part of a concrete external reality, they cannot hope to effectively represent or even realize a puristic space beyond or outside this altogether messy field of practical reality. It thus makes sense to introduce, in a manner complementary to the concept of crossmapping outlined above, a theoretical perspective that is itself practicological in how it describes the modern condition not primarily as an idea or a set of values, but as concrete ways of doing things. In a manner not unlike the texts to be discussed, this perspective regards the everyday social, political, cultural etc. realities of modern life not as mere manifestations of an abstract theoretical a priori, but, on the contrary, sees modernity as something constituted — that is, *realized* — daily through and as a set of messy, impure, and often contradictory practices. Consequently, its belated theorizations are themselves merely one part of a much wider ensemble of concrete practices that constitute the entire scope of human activity.

In his 1993 book *We Have Never Been Modern,* Bruno Latour makes a convincing effort to describe modernity or the modern condition from a practicological point of view. Furthermore, he also offers a neat set of terms to understand the paradoxical nature of modernity as being simultaneously clear-cut and muddled. Latour proposes to see modernity as driven by two contradictory processes that are nevertheless mutually dependent. On the one side, there are processes of *purification*: various *ensembles of practices* dedicated to separating and organizing the world into distinct and (semi-)autonomous spheres (10-1). As a sociologist of science, Latour's main focus lies on how the emergence and the ever increasing differentiation of the various fields of scientific knowledge embodies this modernizing process of purification. He puts at its heart the fundamental distinction between the subject and the object (or, with regard to the scientific method, that between the observing scientist and the observed object), from which all the distinct areas of modern science are ultimately derived. However, it is clear that this model can be extrapolated from the field of the sciences to modern society at large — how the latter is organized into discrete, professionalized spheres such as politics, the economy, culture (and its counterpart, nature), media, the public and the personal spheres, and so forth. In fact, it is reasonable to expect some significant overlap in the

way the sphere of the sciences and society at large draw these distinctions. Following Latour's model, a dogmatic or radical modernist would be someone who equates those processes of purification with civilizational progress per se and who puts an unwavering belief into the validity and eventual success of the modern project as a gradual purification of the world itself (11).

However, these processes of purification are simultaneously counteracted, accompanied, and determined by incessant processes of *translation* or *hybridization* (10). Latour points out that despite modernity's drive — especially within the spheres of the modern sciences — towards ever more specialized and compartmentalized fields of knowledge, modern daily life does tend to show little regard for the artificial boundaries erected by those processes of purification. Rather, there are different *ensembles of practices* promoting the constant spreading of *hybrids* through the everyday reality of modern life: formations of knowledge where the various fields of scientific knowledge delineated by the aforementioned purification processes bleed into each other or, as Latour puts it, are *translated* from one field into the other. Paradoxically, these hybrids fulfill a strange double role: On the one hand, they represent a syncretic type of knowledge that, in several productive ways, complements the purified types of knowledge with their neatly separated ontological fields. On the other hand, the mere presence of these alternative syncretic formations of knowledge also amount to a countermovement that always threatens to infringe on, disrupt, and besmirch those carefully cleansed ontological fields. It is thus important not to see the process of hybridization as a regressive moment outside of modernity, but as an integral part of its structural logic; it is, however, an integral part which nevertheless constantly acts as a regressive counterpart to purification as that other integral part of modernity. Conversely, we can say that the opposite holds true as well: purification as the other integral part of modernity constantly acts as a regressive counterpart to hybridization.

Latour uses the vivid example of an ordinary newspaper to illustrate this precarious relationship between purification and hybridization as the two complementary-yet-opposed main driving forces of modernity. His description of the daily act of reading the newspaper as "modern man's form of prayer" (2) equates it, not without irony, with that of a religious cleansing ritual — an act normally associated with pre-enlightenment superstitions. On the surface, to read the daily newspaper means to receive the world in a form that has been purified of its inherent hybridity. The newspaper presents us with a world that has been separated into individual stories along the lines of the conventional categories of journalistic reporting: The economy, politics, science, culture, sports etc. As Latour notes, however, this daily act of purification is tainted from

the very beginning, as most articles seem, in fact, to move seamlessly from one sphere into the other, creating a network of interlinked and very much impure hybrid knowledge:

> […] hybrid articles that sketch out imbroglios of science, politics, economy, law, religion, technology, fiction. If reading the daily paper is modern man's form of prayer, then it is a very strange man indeed. […] All of culture and all of nature get churned up again ever day. […] The smallest AIDS virus takes you from sex to the unconscious, then to Africa, tissue cultures, DNA and San Francisco […] Press the most innocent aerosol button and you'll be heading for the Antarctic, and from there to Lyon, the chemistry of inert gases, and then maybe to the United Nations. (2)

The purifying impulse of modernity is thus constantly accompanied or undercut by an incessant growth of impure hybrids. As his newspaper example shows, even individual acts of purification appear to be, on closer examination, a strange fusion of purifying and hybridizing acts. In a puzzling interplay, purification simultaneously begets the formation of hybrids, which, in turn, asks for ever-renewed efforts of purification. Yet Latour also notes that this spreading of hybridity right at the center of the newspaper — one of modernity's fundamental institutions devoted to purifying the world — is either conveniently ignored or repressed:

> Yet no one seems to find this troubling. Headings like Economy, Politics, Science, Books, Culture, Religion and Local Events remain in place as if there were nothing odd going on. […] By all means, they seem to say, let us not mix up knowledge, interest, justice and power. Let us not mix up heaven and earth, the global stage and the local scene, the human and the nonhuman. 'But these imbroglios do the mixing,' you'll say, 'they weave our world together!' 'Act as if they didn't exist,' the analysts reply. They have cut the Gordian knot with a well-honed sword. The shaft is broken: on the left, they have put knowledge of things; on the right, power and human politics. (2-3)

Latour's theoretical model of modernity as driven by two conflicting yet complementary impulses locked in an irresolvable dialectical struggle thus exposes the aforementioned promise of the dogmatic or pure modernist as a myth. The latter would like to repress this co-dependency of hybridization and purification and see the logic of modernity as one that must solely be driven by a purifying impulse ("let us not mix up knowledge, interest, justice and power"). However, this grand, idealistic vision of modernity as an ever progressing project of purifying the world is at odds with the fact that, as Latour notes, hybridity is constantly spreading all around us and constitutes

our modern reality as much as purification does ("But these imbroglios do the mixing, [...] they weave our world together!").

It should be made clear, however, that Latour is neither an anti-modernist, nor a deconstructionist or a postmodernist. The aim of his critical intervention is not to contribute another denouncement of modernity's core values as arbitrary, socially and/or discursively constructed conventions. On the contrary, Latour positively highlights the innovative forces generated by the interplay of purifying and hybridizing impulses within modernity. It is, as he argues, what gave modernity its competitive edge over pre-modern modes of knowledge (12). The tremendous civilizatory force of modernity must not be frivolously dismissed — if only for the reason that it led to an overall increase of survivability. In that sense, Latour's position is perhaps closer to that of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in their *Dialectics of Enlightenment.* They, in a similar way, argue that there can be no alternative to enlightened (that is, modern) thinking despite it also being the foundation of modern totalitarian forms of oppression (3). Where Latour differs, however, is how he appears to resist Horkheimer and Adorno's apocalyptic gesture of locating a regressive, self-destructive tendency at the very core of the Enlightenment — a kind of modernity's very own death drive. Coming from a background of the sociology of science, Latour is less fixated by the analysis of abstract theoretical paradigms and more in search of a practicological response to the issues of modernity. His main criticism lies with a sacralized and puristic view of modernity: the dogmatic view that only acknowledges the purifying impulse of modernity but represses that necessary aspect of hybridization. Latour's claim that *We Have Never Been Modern* is thus to be understood only in the sense that we have never been modern in the way proclaimed by the dogmatic prophets of modernity. His alternative proposal is a view that openly acknowledges hybridization as an equally indispensable part of modernity. Yet this plea for hybridity — and this is where he so strongly deviates from postmodernist positions — does not come with a denouncement of those practices falling on the side of purification. Rather, his argument is for an acknowledgement of both on equal terms — not despite, but rather because of their mutually exclusive nature:

> As soon as we direct our attention simultaneously to the work of purification and the work of hybridization, we immediately stop being wholly modern, and our future begins to change. At the same time we stop having been modern, because we become retrospectively aware that the two sets of practices have always already been at work in the historical period that is ending. Our past begins to change. Finally, if we have never been modern — at least in the way criticism tells the story — the tortuous relations that we have maintained with the other nature-cultures would also

> be transformed. Relativism, domination, imperialism, false consciousness, syncretism — all the problems that anthropologists summarize under the loose expression of 'Great Divide' — would be explained differently, thereby modifying comparative anthropology. (11-12)

Latour's argument is thus one that is not against the modern project, but for a concerted readjustment of it. The result should be a reaffirmed modernity — not the puristic and sacralized modernity of old, but one that is aware and accepting of its own fundamental impurity, which Latour describes as a complementary-yet-contradictory interplay between forces of purification and hybridization. As a matter of fact, Latour's text is not only a theoretical proposal. By resorting to an idiosyncratic style of writing that merges the puristic of scientific discourses with the more loose and essayistic style of argument from the humanities, Latour simultaneously realizes his hybrid view of modernity on a performative level.

It should be fairly clear how this notion of an *impure modernity* provides a productive theoretical point of reference for the texts to be discussed in this thesis. Latour's theory of the modern is useful, because it manages to account for the two opposite ensembles of practices within modernity without falling on either side. Furthermore, despite placing an irresolvable dialectical antagonism at the heart of his theory of modernity, he does not paint it in an overly dramatic way. In contrast to, for example, Sigmund Freud's portrayal of civilization as an eternal battle between Eros and Thanatos (Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* 108) or Horkheimer and Adorno's view of the precarious relationship between enlightenment and its toxic underbelly, there is a certain prosaic pragmatism to Latour's dialectics of modernity. It is these points in particular, I would argue, that connect with the aforementioned modernist ethos that I am interested in. If I am saying that this ethos veers towards the empirical instead of the idealist or that is more about survival strategies than utopian plans, I am claiming that it expresses similar view of modernity as an impure matter of external fact(s) constantly oscillating between practices of purification and hybridization.

If we want to imagine these two modes as representing the two ends of a scale on where to put the various aesthetic genres and styles generally collected under the umbrella term of modernism, it would look roughly as follows: On one end we would find a modern mode entirely devoted to purifying and tidying up the world. It is modernism interpreted as a giant cleanup operation and we can observe it, for example, in the stern rationalism of the international style of modern architecture. With its functionalist formal language based on clear shapes, a limited and utilitarian choice of materials, and an overall lack of ornamentation, the concrete housing units of Le Corbusier and the

glass and steel skyscrapers and pavilions of Mies van der Rohe have, over time, become universal signifiers for this decidedly rationalist response to the modern condition. They remain as the physical manifestation of the myth of the modern architect-as-artist: a heroic, masculine *Übermensch* whose grand architectural designs were aimed at no less than resolving, in one fell swoop, the various social tensions and issues that had emerged from the new realities of modern urban life (Miller, Ross 87). On the other end we find those approaches where the accents firmly falls on the side of the hybridizing aspects within modernity: the revolutionary impulses bent on questioning established systems of knowledge, social structures, cultural practices, and power relations. These forms of aesthetic interventions can take both the form of a critical counter reaction to and an open embrace of modernity. We can thus find on this side, for example, both the Primitivism's fascination for the syncretic formal languages of pre-modern cultures and Futurism's radical affirmation of industrial modernity as a violent maelstrom where man and machine, as well as matter and movement (time) ultimately become one.

The caveat to this illustration is that, ultimately, the idea of placing the various ensembles of modernist practices on a linear spectrum that ranges from maximum purification to maximum hybridization is inadequate. After all, those hybrid aesthetics such as Primitivism or Futurism likewise express a purifying thrust in how they put forth and establish a set of new or alternative values and ideas. In the same way, the puristic ideology of the *Neues Bauen* simultaneously represents a syncretic or hybrid form of knowledge in its questioning or outright rejection of architectural classicism, as well as its liberal appropriation of aspects of pre-modern architecture and city planning (Le Corbusier taking inspiration from forms and the layout of the Algerian desert city of Ghardaïa comes to mind, for [Gerber 372-5]). As actual practice thus always comes as an impure compound of both purifying and hybridizing elements, the spectrum metaphor only works insofar as we use it to determine the *ideological accent* of a particular modernist practice. We can, in other words, use it to at least determine the inclination of the stated or manifested intent behind a particular aesthetic practice, regardless of whether this statement of intent withstands a close scrutiny of the actual texts or not. With regard to the aforementioned examples, we can then safely say that the inclination of Futurism veers towards hybridization whereas that of modern architecture towards purification.

I would now argue that in the case of the practicological modernist ethos that is the topic of this thesis, this inclination is constantly shifting between the two poles, which makes it so difficult, if not impossible to pin down for good. One could say, of course, that this inherent ideological inconsistency

or indeterminateness, the muddled and impure approaches that characterize these texts, would place them firmly on the side of hybridity. We would then read them in a similar way as we could read Dadaism as a rebellion against logic and language: a critical and contrarian intervention against the prevalent and dogmatic view of a "pure" modernity. This claim, however, does not withstand close scrutiny, because the very same texts also express, either explicitly or implicitly, a valorization of a strict aesthetic order that favors clear lines, direct language, and distinct formal structures. Also, there is the aforementioned matter of the assertive voice. It is difficult to argue that these texts represent a revolt against the authoritarian nature of the puristic mode of modernity, if they express themselves in an equally authoritarian and, thus, puristic voice. For these reasons, a Latourian perspective provides a useful way of approaching them. His impure notion of modernity — impure not in the sense that it is characterized by hybridity, but that it is driven by the contradictory-yet-complementary impulses of purification and hybridization — can account for the fact that these texts seem to approach modernity with a similarly impure perspective. Furthermore, his point that the modern ultimately emerges from what he calls ensembles of practices (and not as mere manifestations of preexisting ideas or ideals) coincides with the practicological approach that characterizes the modernist ethos in question. Consequently, an impure and practicological view of modernity also changes our view of what it means to be modern: It means not to strive to resolve some fundamental antagonism; it means simply to survive.[3]

In that sense, we could argue that the texts in question express an ethos that, at least according to the Latourian terminology, is "properly modern" by proceeding from the notion that we have, in fact, never been modern. If some of these texts might then come across as strangely muddled and lacking a consistent ideology (which can make for a vaguely unsatisfying or downright frustrating reading), we should at least partly read this symptomatically as very palpable acts of surviving within the impure realities of modern life. Survival strategies are, after all, not supposed to be graceful and flawless; they are supposed to work. At their best, however, they manage to turn that rough-hewn

3 The notion of survival occurs more prominently in Latour's 2012 book *Enquête sur les modes d'existences.* Using the example of climate change and climate skepticism as his starting point, the book presents an altogether more urgent appeal for renewing the fundamental trust in the institutions of modernity (Latour, *Existenzweisen* 32-38). Considering the different historical context (with *We Have Never Been Modern* having been published in the far more optimistic aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall), the more urgent and survivalist tone of Latour's more recent writing is not surprising in the least.

struggle into a productive and vibrant engagement with modern life that nevertheless corresponds with a Latourian view of modernity by resisting finality and choosing to aesthetically not resolve but uphold its inherent and uncomfortable tensions and impurities.

Before addressing a few necessary methodological points and providing an outline of the individual chapters, it seems reasonable to quickly sum up, at this stage, the core points made so far in this introduction. I have outlined two theoretical perspectives that will constitute the two cornerstones of the actual analyses in the following chapters. The first reference is to Elisabeth Bronfen's notion of crossmapping as a rethinking of the Warburgian notion of the cultural afterlife of pathos formulae and to Didi-Huberman's concept of impure time or history. Crossmapping is my primary methodological reference. It provides me with a method of juxtaposing texts from different and sometimes disparate cultural fields and historical periods even when conventional wisdom does not suggest there to be a strong and verifiable link between the two (that is on the levels of biography, direct cultural or stylistic influence and/or relation, etc.). However, crossmapping is more than a mere methodological tool. Its underlying notion of affective or impure history also provides it with an ethical trust: If cultural history as the ongoing survival of aesthetic forms of expression is as much driven by affective as it is by cognitive or rational impulses, then it becomes our task devote our attention to *both* instead of only the latter. Therefore, tracing these connections requires us to move beyond a pure fact-oriented or objectivist idiom and towards a more proactive and g productive strategy of reading. Crossmapping offers a model to do exactly that. This dialectic of affect and cognition is where crossmapping coincides with our second main theoretical reference, the Latourian view of modernity as a fundamentally impure condition driven by a contradictory yet complementary interplay of (affective) hybridizing and (rationalist) purifying ensembles of practices. If crossmapping thus provides us with a methodological foundation, Latour's notion of the modern supplements it with a clear theoretical vantage point on the material itself.

There are, however, several methodological concerns and challenges that come with such an approach to analyzing cultural artifacts and these need to be addressed now. The first of these questions pertains to my choice of texts. Bluntly put, why should one do a crossmapping of, on the one hand, a (still) marginalized figure of British high modernism and, on the other hand, artists belonging to a seemingly unrelated field of popular music culture of the 1970s and beyond? If Lewis stood for a practicological modernism in how his aesthetic approaches were very much informed by a view of modernity

as a messy and haphazard imbroglio of palpable, external social practices, would it not seem more appropriate to connect him, for example, to the field of experimental, postmodernist, or dystopian fiction of the post-war era? Considering the aforementioned Lewis-McLuhan connection, would it not make more sense to cross-read Lewis with writers such as William S. Burroughs or J. G. Ballard as the more logical and immediate literary heirs of this Lewisian modernism? After all, the subsequent influence of these authors on the field of popular music culture are very much self-evident.[4]

However, my issue with this approach is how it would not account for the inherent impurities and inconsistencies of a practicological aesthetics. Instead, it would return a body of work characterized by unexpected breaks and transitions between different artistic genres and media into the comparatively safe sphere of a straightforward literary historiography. To put it in Latourian terms, this approach would amount to a gesture of purification, which would effectively re-impose the primacy of the literary text — that is, of the written word — over other modes of aesthetic expression. However, Lewis was not merely a writer, but rather something akin to a modern Renaissance man: a writer of fiction who was also a philosopher, an essayist, a painter, and, not least, someone who understood the careful self-shaping of his public persona as "Mr. Wyndham Lewis, "Personal-Appearance" Artist" (Lewis, *Men Without Art* 95) as an integral part of his artistic activities. My argument is thus that these hybrid and hard-to-categorize aesthetic practices have more in common with the equally hybrid approaches in the field of popular music culture than with the relatively straightforward and "pure" artistic practice of the literary writer. Whether we are looking at Lewis's practicological high modernism or the haphazard approaches that we find in the field of art rock, we are dealing with multi-disciplinary artistic practices that do not slavishly adhere to the conventional categorizations of the arts. As my introductory example has already shown, I would argue that what, at least from the point of view of a conventional literary or art history, seems like an arbitrary and illegitimate connection is in fact a perfectly legitimate approach of crossmapping as a productive strategy of reading. If, after all, German pop theorist Diedrich Diederichsen claims that the smallest unit of the aesthetics of popular music culture is the *pose* (*Über Pop-Musik* xxviii), then surely these are points that

4 On the influence of J. G. Ballard on art rock aesthetics, particularly those of punk and post punk, see Simon Reynolds's *Rip It Up and Start Again,* p. xviii-xix. On the influence of William S. Burroughs, Jon Savage's contribution to the exhibition catalogue of the V&A's 2013 exhibition *David Bowie Is* provides a concise primer.

apply, in equal measure, to Lewis as that self-described personal-appearance artist.

Besides this brief elaboration of why I consider it perfectly a legitimate and, in fact, productive endeavor to cross-read or cross-map cultural artifacts from two spheres of culture that are conventionally not put in such close proximity to each other, it also seems wise to make a few more points regarding my choice of the term *practicological.* If the term refers to an aesthetic outlook and its related strategies that stress the overall primacy of external and impure practices over puristic theoretical abstractions and immanent ideals, then it is certainly legitimate to ask why I did not simply choose the more prevalent term *pragmatic.* There are several reasons for my decision. First, in its everyday use, *pragmatic* is a problematic term in how it implies a view or a way of approaching the world that prides itself to be essentially non-ideological (meaning a perfectly neutral approach guided entirely by objective and positive facts instead of normative creeds). However, as anybody with only a slight grasp of critical theory knows, to assume a perfectly objective and neutral stance is an ideological fallacy per se and I therefore would like to avoid suggesting, even unintentionally so, this unfortunate connotation of the term *pragmatic.* If I am saying that a practicological outlook is ideologically muddled and impure, then this is not to suggest that it is non-ideological. Rather, all that I am suggesting is that it proceeds from the view (which is a thoroughly ideological view) that all cultural activities and interactions are first and foremost a type of external practice in concrete social realities and thus, more often than not, tend to be messy, haphazard, contradictory, and are most definitely anything but ideologically pure. As such, it is itself a position that, whilst certainly ideological, remains more or less undisturbed by the question whether it represents an ideologically consistent or pure stance.

Another reason why I am avoiding the term *pragmatic* is due to its other meaning, namely as referring to the philosophical school of pragmatism. It could be noted, as an aside, that Wyndham Lewis wrote very appreciatively on William James as one of the major figures associated with pragmatism, referring to him as "philosophically [...] the best of company" (Lewis, *Time and Western Man* 257). However, as my object of study is neither pragmatism as a philosophical school nor its major representatives, but a *practicological modernist ethos* as a specific way of creating cultural artifacts within a modern reality and therefore also a specific way of engaging with that modern reality, this other meaning of the terms *pragmatic* and *pragmatism* provides another reason for wishing to avoid it. Finally, it should also be mentioned that *practicological* does not necessarily imply *pragmatic* or *practical* in the sense of *feasible* or *viable.* On the contrary, to

take a practicological stance does not, as we will see, preclude the actual results from being, in some instances, highly impracticable, quixotic, and self-defeating. After all, a mere awareness of the external practical ramifications of all cultural and, for that matter, human activity — of those Latourian imbroglios that constitute our world — does not yet provide an effective strategy of engaging with or responding to them.

However, this overall effort to write analytically about aesthetic practices that belong to two different spheres of culture and are both characterized by their resistance to be explained (that is, purified) by way of neat analytical categories calls for a certain degree of self-reflection on part of the writer. Bluntly put, there is an inherent difficulty to write not on only one but, simultaneously and in a comparative manner, on *two* hybrid and hard-to-pin down aesthetic approaches without the resultant text being something that will inevitably slip through the prospective reader's fingers as well. The methodological challenge of tying these disparate strands of culture together without losing focus requires an appropriate style of writing. I have therefore decided to use a mode of writing in this thesis that is fundamentally narrative. Rather than present a series of isolated chapters that could very well stand as individual essays or articles, the argument in this thesis unfolds more gradually over the course of the entire text. I will elaborate the individual primary materials and texts in a manner that constantly moves back and forth between descriptive narration and theoretical analysis with one example seamlessly leading into the next. This interconnected approach will provide text with an uninterrupted thread along which the reader can slowly but steadily assemble the individual bits of additional information into a coherent picture.

The advantage of this narrative mode is thus that it offers a commonly understandable framework on which to build the actual argument. On the other hand, the downside of this approach is that it will invariably result in a text that is significantly more verbose and meandering than a series of short, self-contained, and highly focused analyses would be. However, this seems a necessary concession to make, as I cannot realistically expect from prospective readers a high degree of previous knowledge in all of the disparate fields of culture and criticism that are to be discussed here. In fact, if one considers that the entire point of a crossmapping approach is to draw connections between disparate fields of culture that are conventionally looked at in isolation, it seems that this narrative or elaborative mode of writing presents itself as the only viable way to realize such an endeavor. Also, another advantage of this mode is that its comparatively loose and essayistic style runs less of a risk of suggesting a sense of finality, of an achievable theoretical purity to the argument, where

ultimately there can be none. If one of the characteristics of the practicological modernism is its impure hybridity, then surely it would do a great disservice to the primary texts if one simply explains them away by resorting to an overly puristic analytical idiom. Rather, it seems a more sensible approach to acknowledge the inherent hybridity of these texts by adopting a style of writing that is also hybrid to a certain degree in how it seamlessly combines aspects of narration, description, and critical analysis.

The need for such a hybrid mode of writing is also supported by looking at the existing body of research. Most of the research on Wyndham Lewis has tended to retain a monographic perspective. The currently available research on Lewis thus provides a solid corpus of factual information and critical ideas, but it does itself not exactly pave the way for a crossmapping approach. There are of course very good reasons for taking a monographic perspective on Lewis considering his position as a solitary figure at the margins of the established canon of modernism. In contrast to thoroughly canonized figures such as Woolf, Eliot, or Joyce, there is with Lewis always that concern that every piece of writing on him is inevitably also a part of an unfinished project to rehabilitate an unjustifiably marginalized figure of British high modernism. In some cases, such as in the work of Paul Edwards, who is without a doubt the most prolific contemporary scholar on Lewis, these efforts are explicitly declared as such (*Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* 1). In other cases, such as in Fredric Jameson's *Fables of Aggression*, the rehabilitating effort is performed in a more implicit manner. Although Jameson's study is already an older text (not least in terms of its very hermetic structuralist methodological approach), its status as a critical intervention into the scholarly discourse at a time when Lewis was deeply unpopular and, above all, unread makes it a landmark study that remains worthy of our attention. More recent publications have endeavored to widen the scope and read Lewis's body of work within a broader historical context of the cultures of modernism and modernity.[5] Nevertheless, these studies are usually produced

5 Most notable among more recent publications on Wyndham Lewis is the 2011 volume *Wyndham Lewis and the Cultures of Modernity,* ed. by Andrzej Gasiorek, Alice Reeve-Tucker and Nathan Waddell. Although also positioned as an effort to reevaluate the significance of Lewis to modernism, the collected essays take a less hermetic perspective by focusing on how his body of work can be read as a pioneering effort in twentieth-century cultural criticism. Gasiorek and Waddell have emerged as significant voices in current Lewis criticism with the latter's 2012 book *Modernist Nowheres: Politics and Utopia in Early Modernist Writing, 1900-1920* presenting another effort to read Lewis within a wider cultural context of (early) twentieth-century modernity. Another sign of a newly revived interest in Lewis is the recently released *Cambridge Companion to Wyndham Lewis* (ed. by Tyrus Miller). Despite this resurgence in Lewis criticism, there

within the discrete field of modernist studies and thus remain tied to both the idiom of literary criticism and to the clearly demarcated historical period from the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth centuries.

On the other side of the aisle, in the field of art rock, writers tend to be more liberal with regard to making connections with other spheres of culture, including the modern arts. However, the theoretical background of these approaches is usually the various strands of postmodernist and poststructuralist critical theories from the late twentieth century. As such, their politics, if we want to call it that, are less concerned with mapping a cultural afterlife and more about questioning the established normative frameworks of cultural fields (such as the distinction between the higher and the lower arts). In addition, pointing to the various influences of the modern arts on the comparatively "low" field of popular music culture has always also served as a legitimizing strategy, that is, a convenient way to argue for the artistic seriousness of the latter. If this thesis is certainly influenced by various strands of critical theory (the references to Bronfen, Didi-Huberman, and Latour above should have made that perfectly clear), it is nevertheless not my intention to write another treatise on the arbitrariness of the high/low distinction or the various strategies of subversion that are often ascribed to the field of the popular. For one, both has been done often enough. Furthermore, as a crossmapping approach is generally more interested in looking for continuities rather than breaks and divisions, these theoretical perspectives from the various theoretical *schools of difference* — whether we are talking about the Foucauldians, the Derrideans, or the Lyotardians — are ultimately of limited use. Thus, while several ideas and concepts from pop theory will be referenced in my argument and will complement the two core theoretical perspectives outlined above, they do not provide a ready-made methodological framework by themselves.

If the following chapters might therefore appear meandering in places, the only thing that I can do for the time being is to appeal to the trust of the reader that there is a purpose to this style of argument and that it is not my intention to take him or her on a wild-goose chase. Ultimately, my decision to go for a narrative and elaborative mode of writing was not only determined by the material itself and by my theoretical perspective, but also by an ethical desire to produce the kind of text that, hopefully, would remain open and understandable to the greatest number of prospective readers possible. In that regard, I am largely in agreement with Clifford Geertz's stance that scholarly writing should

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is still the issue that most of Lewis's own writings remain out of print; however, there are plans by Oxford University Press to publish a Complete Critical Edition of Lewis's writings in the near future.

strive to "resist subjectivism on the one hand and cabbalism on the other" (30). In fact, my decision for this narrative mode of writing is probably indebted in part to Geertz's famous concept of the *thick description* considering that, in *The Interpretation of Cultures,* he posited it as an effort

> to keep the analysis of symbolic forms as closely tied as I could to concrete social events and occasions, the public world of common life, and to organize it in such a way that the connections between theoretical formulations and descriptive interpretations were unobscured by appeals to dark sciences. (30)

The overall ethical thrust of this mode of writing is thus to not reject a more loose and elaborative style on the grounds of it being unnecessarily meandering and verbose, but to consciously deploy it as a positive and inclusive gesture: to make use of the inherent narrative capabilities of language and create a text that, despite its aim to traverse many disparate fields of culture and critical theory, remains essentially accessible to the average reader. At least to this writer, this seems a far more worthwhile and honorable way to approach scholarly writing than through exclusionary gestures that (mis-)use language in order to erect imposing and impenetrable walls of esoteric jargon.

Also, for all these caveats, the overarching argument of this thesis has, in fact, a clear structure. If the aim of this study is to describe a specific *practicological modernist ethos* and its cultural afterlife as a concrete manifestation of a popular modernism, then the overall structure of the argument can be broadly described as such: The first two chapters put the accent on the *modernist* part of the term — on its formal aspects and similarities between its Lewisian manifestation and its afterlife in British art rock. The third chapter then proceeds to locate this modernism within a broader British cultural historical context. Finally, the fourth and fifth chapter focus on the *ethos* part of the term: on how this practicological outlook informs a certain way of engaging aesthetically with the external social realities of modern life. The text thus follows the proven approach of establishing a set of directly observable formal criteria about the texts in question in order to build a solid foundation from which we can then, in the later chapters, move to a discussion of more abstract issues pertaining to the social and cultural settings of these texts.

Accordingly, the first two chapters will focus on a series of cross-readings of Lewis and one artistic collective from the field of art rock. The first chapter will focus on some of Wyndham Lewis's contributions to the Vorticists, Britain's first avant-garde movement, and juxtapose them with key works from what was arguably the country's first art punk group, the London-based four-piece Wire. There are several aims that I am pursuing with this juxtaposition. As we

will see, there is a common thread to their approaches in how both Lewis's Vorticism and Wire's to art-punk appear to deny their own avant-garde leanings in the same gesture that they assertively advance it. The results are very elusive and enigmatic texts that ultimately defy generic classification. As such, they share a certain practicological outlook in how they, above all, valorize the notion of practice — the idea *of doing something* regardless of whether this practice either corresponds to a preconceived consistent or purist ideological framework. Moreover, an analysis of key texts will show how both approaches are characterized by, on the one hand, a stern, angular, and decidedly linear formal aesthetics and, on the other hand, a perspective that valorizes a sober and analytical position of spectatorial detachment. This overly cool and reserved attitude is itself indicative of a certain elitism and a decided effort to *not* give the people what they want (the latter often to the detriment of their career).

As we will see, however, it is a decidedly *un-radical* elitism borne out of practical (or practicological) convictions and not of radicalist ideals. The problem of this moderately elitist stance — a highly ambiguous middle position somewhere between avant-gardist radicalism and conservative classicism — will be the focus of the second chapter. Taking Lewis's later critical writings and Wire's often erratic and muddled output from their second and third periods as our key texts, the chapter will focus on the difficulties of realizing this kind of impure practicological modernism in a cultural environment that valorizes puristic labels and clearly delineated categories, preferably those associated with notions of aesthetic radicalism or, as Lewis referred to it in his late writings, artistic *extremism* (*The Demon of Progress in the Arts* 3). We will discuss this fundamental impasse between the purifying desire of criticism and a recalcitrant artistic practice that, above all, desires to resist these externally imposed purifying efforts with regards to three key points: First, the rejection of abstract notions of immanence and intrinsicality in favor of an aesthetics of concrete externality; second, a return to an unfashionable valorization of artisanal skill; finally, a gradual move towards using the arts as a medium to express a kind of steely, harsh, and cold non-moral satire. Together, the cross-readings in these two chapters should provide a strong substantiation of my claim that there is a connection between the practicological high modernism of Wyndham Lewis and its popular modernist counterpart in British art rock. As we will see, Gary Lucas's spur-of-the-moment description of Wyndham Lewis

as "godfather of punk" might not be entirely wrong, but perhaps the more appropriate term would be "godfather of art rock".[6]

Having thus established a solid connection between these two disparate spheres of culture, the third chapter will move away from close formal analyses of key texts. Instead, it will locate this practicological modernism within a wider context of British cultural history by focusing, on the one hand, on seminal writings on British art by Nikolaus Pevsner and Erwin Panofsky and, on the other hand, on Diedrich Diedrichsen's theories of popular music. The core argument of this chapter is that the traditionally liminal status of British art in the international canon of art history and the seminal status of British pop in the international canon of popular music culture is connected in a sense that both appear driven, to a certain degree, by a practicological logic. By cross-reading key texts by Pevsner and Panofsky on English art with Diederichsen's more recent theoretical writings on the aesthetics of pop, we will see how the former, which were both written before the advent of modern pop aesthetics, appear to already anticipate the latter. These connections imply thus that the history of British pop can (and perhaps should) be read as a continuation of a longer history of British art, thereby providing a cultural historical foundation for my argument for the cultural afterlife of a modernist ethos in British art rock.

With the formal aesthetic aspect and the cultural-historical context thus firmly established, the final two chapters will then turn to the question of how this practicological artistic approach pertains to a question of a modernist ethos — how, in other words, does it point to or present a concrete way of engaging with, of living in a modern reality. The fourth chapter will argue that both Lewis's modernism and British art rock represented an ambivalent attempt at reconfiguring art as a survival strategy. A reading of Wyndham Lewis's novel *The Revenge for Love* juxtaposed with the post-heroic art rock theater of David Bowie will show how both present a simultaneously sober and regretful requiem to a grand, heroic vision of both art and the figure of the artist. In both cases, the impossibility of realizing a grand notion of art in a fundamentally artless and vulgar modern reality is acknowledged. In conjunction with the unfashionable valorization of artisanal skill discussed in the second chapter, this post-heroic view of art as a set of concrete and adaptable survival strategies results, in its stead, in a new conception of the artists as a shrewd and dextrous faker.

6 With respect to the term art rock, I am generally in agreement with Simon Reynold's stance that punk, at least its avowedly intellectualist and/or elitist factions (of which art-punk or post-punk artists such as Wire were and are very much a part), should be considered an offspring of a broader art rock tradition (Reynolds xx-xxi).

This notion of the artist as a clever and resourceful artificer is then further explored in the final chapter with respect to the question of how it pertains to the shaping of the (artistic) self. The core argument will be that this outlook on art as a survival strategy and the valorization of an external and superficial aesthetics as discussed in the second chapter also affects the notion of (an artistic) personality. As we will see, the practicological response to the social realities of modern life is a decidedly anti-psychological notion of the self as a hard and impenetrable surface, shell, or armor, which is shaped and reconfigured at will by the artist as a social actor. However, a cross-reading of, on the one hand, Lewis's portrait work and his novel *The Vulgar Streak*, and, on the other hand, the self-shaping strategies of post-Bowie art rock performer John Foxx will reveal how this supposedly liberating strategy of externalizing personality is not without its problems. To pursue this innovative and productive survival strategy to its logical conclusion transforms it, as a result of its cold and overly hostile disposition towards a given external reality, into a self-defeating and even self-destructive practice.

Having thus outlined some of the key concepts of this thesis — impure history, hybridity, practice and practicology as opposed to theoretical purity, the imbroglios of modern reality and its corresponding survival strategies, the enduring of cultural forms as a cultural afterlife etc. — it should already become apparent what is at stake in this thesis. What I am ultimately interested in is a perspective on modernity and modernism that is neither determined by static (and, as such, puristic and sterile) theoretical categories, nor by a desire to arrest these textual traces of concrete cultural practices within such a terminological framework and thereby rob them of their vibrancy and life. Rather, it is an attempt to approach these modern cultural artefacts productively and on their own terms, namely as what I believe to be fundamentally impure phenomena. As such, it is this overall outlook where the objects of my study, the chosen theoretical perspective, and the textual mode of elaboration ultimately intersect. Richard Rorty once wrote that "disengagement from practice produces theoretical hallucinations" (94). In that spirit, I hope that this text, as an effort to describe a practicological modernism on its own terms, might foster critical perspectives that take the notion of practice, however impure, messy, haphazard, and theoretically elusive it might be, seriously as that locus of all human activity — cultural, aesthetic, and beyond.

I “Violent Structure of Adolescent Clearness”: Wyndham Lewis’s Vorticism and the Art-Punk of Wire

In the international canon of the modern art of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, those modern painters and sculptors based in the United Kingdom play a marginal role at best. Visiting the major art museums around the globe, one is hard pressed to find sizable collections of, for example, the works of Walter Sickert, Wyndham Lewis, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Vanessa Bell, or Duncan Grant. As a matter of fact, I would wager that most of these names, in contrast to the big, global names in modern art, will not ring a bell with art-interested people who do not harbor a specific interest in British modern art of the high modernist period. According to the collection database of New York’s Museum of Modern Art, surely one of the standard bearers of the international canon of modern art, the number of works collected of the individual artists above are each in the single digits. Also, they are mostly sketches, drawings, or watercolors and only rarely an oil painting (the exception being Sickert, of which the MoMA possesses around thirty drawings and two oil paintings). At the time of writing, none of these works are on view in the museum’s exhibition space. As a matter of fact, most of the artworks and objects from that period remain in museums and private collections within the United Kingdom. Yet even there, one usually has to selectively go to the right places to see any British modernist art on display. Notably, the United Kingdom’s leading modern art museum, the Tate Modern in London, restricts itself, with a few sporadic exceptions, to the major continental schools and *isms* from that period: Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Cubism, Surrealism etc. One is instead advised to go to the Tate Britain with its exclusive focus on British art to see one or the other of Wyndham Lewis’s major oil paintings on display. At the time of writing, the Tate Britain is displaying his Vorticist composition *Workshop* (Fig. 2), painted around 1914-15, and his portrait of Edith Sitwell (Fig. 3), begun in 1923 but only finished in 1935; a few years earlier, the museum had his major painting *The Crowd* (Fig. 4) on view instead, which he had painted around 1914-15 as well. Although it is a very clichéd statement to make, British modern art of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century seems to have been and continues to be a largely insular affair.

There have been several efforts to try and explain why early twentieth-century British art did not play a significant role in the emergence of international modern art. One of the earliest examples is Nikolaus Pevsners still eminently readable *The Englishness of English Art* from 1956, but other art historians such as Werner Busch have attempted to address the question in more recent times as well. I will go into more detail about these texts in the third chapter. For the moment, it suffices to look at a 1987 exhibition review. In January of that year, the German newspaper *Die Zeit* published a review for the London exhibition *British Art in the Twentieth Century: The Modern Movement*, curated by the Royal Academy of the Arts. The exhibition was presented as a sequel to the Academy’s 1985 exhibition *German Art in the Twentieth Century*;[7] it is thus no surprise that the German art critic begins with a comparison of the two exhibitions. What is irritating, however, is the barely concealed condescending tone that permeates the entire review. An unfavorable comparison between the vivid colorscapes of the German *Die Brücke* artists to the comparatively “moderate” late takes on Impressionism of the Camden Town Group and the equally belated take on Cézanne by the painters of the Bloomsbury Group leads her to the overall diagnosis that the “English sense for abstraction, for the whole body of thought from Malevich to Mondrian and Kandinsky, was rather underdeveloped” (Kipphoff). It is only the Vorticist movement that is recognized as a proper “explosion of vitality and dynamism.” Nevertheless, it is, ultimately dismissed as well as a “friendly, anecdotal sideshow of Italian Futurism”. The fundamental deficit of British art, thus the quintessential claim of the review, is its essential *moderateness*.

This rather patronizing Continental European perspective of British modern art seems not to have changed significantly during the last twenty years. In 2014, the Kunstbibliothek Berlin presented a two-part exhibition entitled *Avantgarde!*, the first focusing on the avant-garde in the poster and advertising arts between 1890 and 1914, the second on manifestos and other publications by avant-garde movements between 1909 and 1918.[8] If a visitor had any doubts as to whether the Vorticists were still regarded as also-rans in the established historiography of modern art, they were quickly laid to rest in the halls of the exhibition. Copies of *Blast 1,* the first issue Vorticist movement’s literary magazine, which was edited by Lewis and of which only two issues were published in 1914 and 1915, were conspicuously placed in one of the smallest display cases in a far away corner of the exhibition hall. The overall sense of this placement was that neither had the

7 For the catalogue of the exhibition on British art, see Compton; for the catalogue on the exhibition on German art, see Joachimides.

8 For the catalogue of the exhibition, see Kühnel.

curators a proper idea how to integrate the Vorticist manifesto printed in *Blast 1* into their overall presentation, nor did they give much thought to it in the first place. One is tempted to grudgingly concede that they at least had the courtesy to even include this “friendly, anecdotal sideshow” among the big players on the field.

There are, of course, substantial reasons for this perhaps neglected treatment of Vorticism and British modern art in general. If one adheres to the historiography of modern art as one of ever progressing towards a higher degree of abstraction, then the dismissal of the British contribution to modern art as being both too late and too moderate is only logical. Furthermore, with regard to the Vorticist movement, history intervened with the First World War breaking out just one month after the publication of their founding manifesto in *Blast 1*. By 1916, several of its signatories and associated artists had enlisted into the British armed services; sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska had already died in the trenches a year earlier. By 1917, Wyndham Lewis had gone as well, as he later succinctly put it in the title of his 1937 autobiography, from *blasting* to *bombardiering* as an artillery officer on the Western Front. Meanwhile, Jacob Epstein, shaken by the realities of industrialized warfare, decided, in 1916, to mutilate his *Rock Drill* (Fig. 5), one of key sculptural works of Vorticism, into a far less imposing *Torso in Metal* (Fig. 6). The short-lived and local nature of the Vorticist movement thus meant that the number of existing (and surviving) artworks created under its banner remained fairly small. It is perhaps emblematic for these circumstances that the Tate Britain’s 2011 retrospective exhibition of Vorticism had to resort to presenting a 1973-4 reconstruction of Epstein’s *Rock Drill* as its initial showpiece (Fig. 7).[9] This was doubtlessly the correct choice considering that, even as a replica, it stands as one of the most immediately striking and impressive Vorticist artworks. However, the presence of a replica as a key piece in the exhibition also underlined the precarious status of Vorticism within the larger historiographical canon of modern art.

Continental European interest in British modern art of the early twentieth century has thus been very limited. Apart from the aforementioned 1986 exhibition, the only other notable exhibition entitled *Blast: Vortizismus – die erste Avantgarde in England, 1914-1918* (Blast: Vorticism – The First Avantgarde in England, 1914-1918) was presented ten years later in Hannover and Munich.[10] There also exists one published dissertation on Vorticism from 1986, Suzanne Kappeler’s *Der Vortizismus: eine englische Avantgarde zwischen 1913 und 1914*

9 For the catalogue of the exhibition, see Antliff.
10 For the catalogue of the exhibition, see Orchard.

(Vorticism: An English Avantgarde between 1913 and 1914), which, however, is not a problem-oriented thesis, but mainly presents a factual historical account of Vorticism to a German audience. This also shows how an already limited interest of non-experts in the works of Wyndham Lewis is usually restricted to his (altogether very brief) Vorticist period before and during the early years of World War One. Beyond that, and in contrast to canonized writers of British high modernism, Lewis still seems to belong to the domain of specialized scholars and aficionados.

What I would like to argue in this chapter is that, while the historical circumstances severely hampered the survivability and subsequent marketability of Vorticism, it is not just these external events that account for its marginal status in art history. Rather, it is also Vorticism itself, especially Lewis's contributions, that is strangely torn from within. By focusing primarily on a critical reading of excerpts of the Vorticist manifesto published in *Blast 1*, it becomes clear that, beneath the ostentatious prose, it presents as much a skeptical denial of avant-gardism as a bold proclamation of it. However, rather than reading this inherent skepticism as a flaw or weakness of Vorticism compared to supposedly more clear-cut and single-minded continental avant-gardes, we should read it as one of its essential traits. It is this moderate or moderated gesture of indeterminateness by which Vorticism denies both the avant-garde desire to express some salutary pledge and the radicalist or puristic grand historical narrative of modern art as a gradual progression towards ever greater visual abstraction. I will address this question of historiography in more detail in the third chapter. For the moment, I would like to focus on several excerpts from *Blast 1* in order to show how Lewis's notion of Vorticism was an impure one and very much aware of its impurity from the beginning. It is in this impurity where Lewis presented what was simultaneously a genuine avant-garde intervention as well as a sardonic rebuttal of the notion of avant-gardism per se.

If this makes Lewis a figure that, already in his early pre-World War One phase, was notoriously hard to pin down and, consequently, cannot be neatly fitted into a larger paradigm of modernism or modern art, his "denied" avant-gardism points towards a different trajectory outside of the fields of literary and art history. We will, as I will argue, find a similarly elusive gesture of aggressive denial in the work of British art-punk pioneers Wire. More than half a century after the publication of *Blast 1*, we can see the reemergence of a similar aesthetics in British culture: an aggressive commitment to avant-gardism from outside the established cultural cliques and circles, which is retracted or at least called into question in the same breath. It is a display of aloof elitism that declares itself do be above and distinct from everybody else, yet

also a rejection of the snobbism that usually characterizes avant-gardist cliques. However, it is the formal similarities that are most striking. In both cases, we find a brusque, disruptive, and belligerent aesthetics that could be described as deconstructive — were it not for the fact that it also relies strongly, on the one hand, on a valorization of sharp lines and clear-cut forms and, on the other hand, on a rejection of chaotic artistic excesses and unmitigated displays of spontaneity. The purpose of this first crossmapping is thus to substantiate, by means of example, my claim of a connection between Lewis’s modernism and the popular modernism we find in British popular music culture of the late twentieth century. This discussion will allow us to work out some of the more general shared characteristics, which we will encounter again in the texts to be discussed in the following chapters. The analyses provided in this chapter are thus to be seen both to support my general claim put forward in the introduction and to act as a steppingstone for the subsequent chapters.

One of the most bewildering aspects of the Vorticist manifesto printed in the first edition of *Blast 1* is its fractured and inconsistent nature. At least partly due to the disorganized process that led to the journal’s delayed publication in June 1914, the manifesto is anything but a monolithic whole. The massive and decisive blast suggested by the stark cover — the word “BLAST” printed diagonally and in giant capital letters over the entire, garishly pink-colored jacket (Fig. 8) — turns out to be a diversionary tactic. On the inside, we are, instead, presented with a set of smaller blasts, some of them more coordinated than others. The table of contents lists in fact *two* separate manifestos (in a strange case of redundancy, it does so twice: once under the heading “Great Preliminary Vortex” and again as separate entries) (Fig. 9). The first manifesto is the journal’s most visually striking part with a set of pages devoted to bestowing, in bold typography, a series of “blasts” and “blessings” to various cultural aspects, institutions and people of English and French society (Figs. 10 and 11). The second manifesto appears as a more systematic series of numbered statements divided into eight sections. We can add to those the journal’s preface entitled “Long Live the Vortex!” (7) and arguably some of Lewis’s brief essays printed in the back pages of the journal under the heading “Vortices and Notes” (129) as well as two individual contributions entitled “Vortex” by Ezra Pound (153) and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (156); due to the declarative tone of these contributions, they come across as their own little manifestos. A cursory leafing through the journal, where one will also notice an uneven layout and use of typography, is thus enough to observe that cohesion does not seem one of its strengths.

At the same time, however, the actual language of *Blast 1* is, in general, strong and assertive. Its ‚little manifestos‘ are not composed of long and meandering passages and extensive argumentation, but consists of short and succinct declarative statements — little islands of purity in a sea of chaotic hybridity. A sensible approach is thus to focus on some key passages in order to derive an overall view of the ideas and positions proposed in *Blast 1.* The first chapter of the second manifesto provides a good starting point; as one the most clear and succinct passages, it also remains one of its most oft-quoted parts:

1. Beyond Action and Reaction we would establish ourselves.
2. We start from opposite statements of a chosen world. Set up violent structure of adolescent clearness between two extremes.
3. We discharge ourselves on both sides.
4. 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.
5. Mercenaries were always the best troops.
6. We are Primitive Mercenaries in the Modern World.
7. We set Humour at Humour’s throat.
8. Stir up Civil War among peaceful apes.
9. We only want Humour if it has fought like Tragedy.
10. We only want Tragedy if it can clench its side-muscles like hands on it’s belly, and bring to the surface a laugh like a bomb (30-31, Figs. 12 and 13)

We can already recognize in these statements the sense of denied or moderated avant-gardism that I have suggested above. Not committing themselves to a singular cause, the Vorticists aim to establish themselves “beyond Action and Reaction”. However, the curious use of the modal verb “would” (instead of the far stronger “will” or the simple declarative form “we establish ourselves”) already seems to put into question the possibility of this purported act of autonomous self-creation. As Nathan Waddell observes, “the Vorticists communicated their yearning for detachment in a modal auxiliary form that knowingly cast doubt on the possibility of ever attaining complete disconnection between avant-gardism and the contexts against which it was defined” (*Modernist Nowheres* 174). Still, the overall choice of violent vocabulary suggests that this imagined outsider position would not be that of a peaceful and neutral observer. Instead of taking the traditional role of the avant-gardist as a soldier of a military vanguard, the Vorticist plays that of a “primitive mercenary”; the former’s clear commitment to an external cause is thus replaced by the latter’s fierce individualism, which manifests as a constant shifting of allegiances and a violent discharging towards and against all sides. A significant amount of critical writing has noted the strong

Nietzschean overtones in the Vorticist manifesto(s) (and, for that matter, in Lewis’s entire body of work) and they are indeed hard to ignore.[11] The Vorticists’ desire to establish themselves “beyond action and reaction” mirrors Nietzsche’s own view, as outlined in his *On the Genealogy of Morals*, of civilization as a permanent struggle between the active yet barbaric master morality and the reactive yet civilized slave morality (270-1). The Vorticist manifesto echoes Nietzsche in the sense that they, too, recognize a necessity to establish an ethics beyond good and evil; yet it also shares his doubts of whether the project of a “revaluation of all values” (“Umwerthung aller Werthe”) (269) can really establish a feasible position beyond active and reactive moralities.

We can thus already recognize in these few statements a fundamental skepticism in Lewis’s thinking towards abstract ideals, futures promises, and grand projects: Yes, we *would* establish ourselves beyond action and reaction, but we probably cannot, because the immovable facts of life — the restrictions and power relations of actual social and historical reality — tend to get in the way. In that regard, there is a pragmatist aspect to the Vorticist manifesto, which we can already recognize in the preface of *Blast 1:* “We stand for the Reality of the Present — not the sentimental Future or the *sacripant* [French for *rascal, braggart*, ed.] past” (7). Extrinsic reality, in other words, takes precedent over intrinsic ideas; the measure of all things must be the present as a material space of lived experience. However, this sober and non-idealistic stance is counteracted by a strong and confrontational prose that suggests a strong valorization of authority and order. To put it in the Latourian terms outlined in the introduction, there is, in Lewis’s writing, an almost schizophrenic desire for both absolute purity and total hybridity that is very difficult to put in words: One the one hand, his painting and writing veers towards erection of clear structures and orders — “violent structures of adolescent clearness” — as a means to contain and control the seemingly arbitrary chaos of modern life. However, this desire for purity and order is simultaneously undercut on two fronts: first, by a sober recognition of the tenuousness of such purist categories in what is essentially a hybrid world — “we would establish ourselves” — and, second, by a fiercely independent and individualist stance that resists authority and external control as a matter of principle: “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.” Yet, in the very logic that Latour describes, these displays of skepticism and acts of resistance only fuel the desire for more purifying impulses. Beyond the seemingly clear-cut and assertive language we thus find a mode of thinking that

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11 For a critical account of the Nietzschean influences on Lewis, see Weller.

is extremely slippery and tentative. This presents a significant challenge for the critic. As Jodie Greenwood has noted in her article on the *Blast 1's* reception:

> criticism has a drive towards tidiness and completion; its success comes with the squaring off of edges. Reason is its guiding principle. *Blast* poses a challenge to this approach, and the hermeneutic predicament it so demonstrably staged in 1914 is too often overlooked. If Lewis's aesthetics of 1914 marked a decisive shift from Enlightenment rationalism towards a contradictory, but to his mind more relevant, way of engaging with a radically changed world, criticism for the most part has too readily ignored this shift. (92)

Yet how, as Andrew Causey puts, it do we categorize an artist and writer who "could claim in his artistic manifesto [...] that ,the artist of the modern movement is a savage" while simultaneously claiming to be "Classical"? How do we make sense of an artist that exhibited an almost proto-Dadaist sense of anarchy and of the burlesque, an overall "respect for order and military virtue", *and* strongly developed "conservative instincts" (Causey 18)? In the triangle of the mutually exclusive positions of near-Dadaist absurdity, obsessive orderliness, and sober, rational pragmatism, Lewis remains a figure that seems impossible to pin down.

It is perhaps one of the manifesto's less regarded pages that provides one of the most descriptive images of this absurdist-yet-orderly pragmatism. I am referring to the second blessing in the first manifesto; curiously enough, it goes towards the hairdresser (Fig. 14), who is praised for "[attacking] Mother Nature for a small fee","[making] systematic mercenary war on this wildness", and "[trimming] aimless and retrograde growths into clean arched shapes and angular plots" (25). In his 1937 autobiography *Blasting and Bombardiering*, Lewis would himself refer to the page and explain it as such: "It exalts formality, and order, at the expense of the disorderly and the unkempt. It is merely a humorous way of stating the classic standpoint, as against the romantic" (38). However, Lewis's choice of the ordinary hairdresser seems more than a humorous but otherwise incidental illustration of his valorization of tidiness and order. Rather, we can read it as another sign of his favoring of the present external reality over abstract ideals. Elevating the hairdresser into the same mercenary rank of the Vorticist amounts to a heroization of a decidedly un-heroic and mundane activity. Hairdressing is, after all, a Latourian purification ritual par excellence: a slightly inconvenient and iterative everyday activity that is nevertheless necessary to keep the uninhibited spread of untidy hybrids temporarily in check. Lewis's own retrospective of his Vorticist phase thus seems to undersell his exaltation of the hairdresser. Apart from being one of those sardonic curveballs so typical of Lewis, it also points to his attempts to distinguish himself from

overly abstract and idealist avant-gardists by constituting his modernism on a decidedly practicological foundation — a modernism that is, in his own words, oriented on the reality of the present instead of a sentimental future.

We may thus understand the difficulty of pinning down Lewis’s aesthetic approach as a result of this practicological outlook. For the latter, ideological consistency does not count so much as dexterity and finesse. For Lewis, the modernist is a quick-witted, solitary urban animal that survives on its own terms and by its situational adaptability. Survival is not a matter of executing a grand plan, but of having at one’s disposal a broad ensemble of practices covering the entire ideological spectrum. Nevertheless, it is a creature that does not rely on instinct, but on intellect. If the traditional avant-gardists favored the metaphor of advancing under the banner of a military vanguard, then Lewis preferred the role of an urban guerrilla fighter or partisan waging a covert war in an occupied city — a metaphor that, perhaps, inclines one to consider Lucas’s epithet of Lewis as “godfather of Punk” as not so inappropriate after all.

Of course, Lewis’s decision to invent himself not as a solider under the banner of avant-gardism, but as an independent modern mercenary must also be regarded as a (self-)marketing strategy. Much has been written on how Vorticism represented a conscious attempt by British modern artists to carve out their own niche among the burgeoning avant-gardes of pre-World War One Europe, not least by the man himself. Having spent most of the new century’s first decade living in Paris and traveling around Europe, Lewis possessed a cosmopolitan perspective and was very much aware of the developments in European art of the time.[12] He also had a keen awareness for how the modern world was bringing forth entirely new cultural phenomena, which we would now subsume under umbrella terms such as the society of the spectacle and celebrity culture. In a striking passage from *Blasting and Bombardiering*, Lewis recounts his attempts of shaping himself as a new ‚star‘ of the art world:

> The Press in 1914 had no Cinema, no Radio, and no Politics: so the painter could really become a ‚star‘. There was nothing against it. Anybody could become one, who did anything funny. And Vorticism was replete with humour, of course; it was acclaimed the best joke ever. Pictures, I mean oil-paintings, were ‚news‘. Exhibitions were reviewed in column after column. And no illustrated paper worth its salt but carried a photograph of some picture of mine or of my ‚school‘, as I have said, or one of myself, smiling insinuatingly from its pages. To the photograph would be attached

12 On Lewis’s Continental European perspective, see, for example, the respective passage in Andrew Causey’s article “Formalism and the Figurative Tradition in British Painting” in the exhibition catalogue *British Art in the 20th Century* (Causey 17).

> some scrap of usually quite misleading gossip; or there would be an article from my pen, explaining why life had to be changed, and how. ‚Kill John Bull with Art!‘ I shouted. And John and Mrs. Bull leapt for joy, in a cynical convulsion. For they felt as safe as houses. So did I. (36)

Lewis’s roguish recounting of his Vorticist days, roughly twenty years after the fact, is of course a piece of blatantly exaggerated self-mythologizing. As Greenwood points out, reviews of *Blast 1* tended towards the defensive or confused instead of the ecstatic end of the scale (Greenwood 81-7), while Jeffrey Myers, in his 1980 biography of Lewis, notes the chaotic run-up to *Blast 1’s* eventual and much-delayed publication and how, “despite some appreciative reviews, the sale of *Blast 1* did not earn enough to pay the printer’s bill” (67).

Beyond his ironic self-aggrandizement, however, Lewis was of course correct in recognizing the increasing importance of shaping one’s own media-personality. The history of how the Vorticists emerged as a distinct group on the London art scene has been extensively documented.[13] Vorticism, in particular with regard to Lewis, was a platform by which he aimed to draw a clear line between himself and two of his competitors. On the one hand, it was to represent his break with art critic and Bloomsbury Group member Roger Fry — aesthetically, personally, and socially: The sharp, angular, and aggressive style and rhetoric was meant as a rejection of the post-impressionist aesthetics championed by Fry and adopted by Bloomsbury Group painters Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell. A quarrel over a supposed misappropriation of a commission had led to Lewis’s acrimonious departure from Fry’s Omega Workshops enterprise and the latter became one of the first of many prominent enemies in Lewis’s career. His contempt for Fry and the Bloomsbury Group circles in general would remain as major theme in his subsequent writings. More than his differences on matters of aesthetics, Lewis would particularly resent the Bloomsbury’s upper-class and upper middle-class snobbism. Their affluence meant that they could enjoy a relatively carefree existence detached from the harsher social and economic realities of life and devoted primarily to art and culture, yet it also meant that, in Lewis’s view, these entrenched cliques of wealthy and leisured “amateurs” and “dilettantes” prevented artists from less privileged social backgrounds from making a living from the arts. Lewis’s description of

13 The biographical details are extensively documented in the two major biographies of Lewis by Myers and, respectively, O’Keeffe. Beyond that, all of the catalogues for the major exhibitions of Vorticism and/or British modernist painting recount the historical context in some form or other (see, for example, the respective articles in Antliff, Compton, and Orchard).

the Vorticists as “primitive mercenaries of the modern world” was thus very deliberate. It positioned the artist as a class of professional soldiers, who had to earn their livings with their craft; furthermore, it argued that it was this rough-hewn professional cadre of soldiers — and not the volunteer amateurs — who have always been “the best troops”.

On the other hand, Vorticism’s break with the second competitor, Italian Futurism, was related more directly with matters of form and ideology. From 1910 on, the founder of Futurism and author of its 1909 manifesto, Fillippo Tommaso Marinetti, made a series of promotional trips to London. As O’Keeffe recounts, Lewis and other soon-to-be Vorticists initially showed a keen interest in Futurism, which is also readily apparent in their style of painting, their rhetoric, and their choice of subject matter; however, when it became clear that Marinetti’s intentions were to appropriate and label their work as a successful English offshoot of *his* Futurism and when critics started pigeonholing it as Futurist art, these developments provoked a counter-reaction (152-154). It was not Lewis but Ezra Pound who came up with the metaphor of the vortex to accentuate their differences with the aesthetic program of Futurism (O’Keeffe 154). If the latter, as vividly described in Marinetti’s *Manifesto of Futurism*, embraced the realities of industrial modernity in a radical and orgiastic gesture of self-abandonment that erased the boundaries between man and machine and between matter and movement, Vorticism argued for a more sober and measured approach.[14] Histories of art usually categorize the Vorticist style of painting as a synthesis of Cubism and Futurism (Myers 54). While this paints a very simplified picture, it is, to a certain extent, an appropriate description. We can read Vorticism as a style that, on the one hand, takes the former’s interest in questions of pictorial form and representation and its approach to dissect and arrange reality as patterns of squares and other simple polygonal shapes and, on the other hand, combines it with the latter’s enthusiasm for speed, machinery, cities, and the powerful, violent energies set free by industrial modernity. In another self-mythologizing passage from *Blasting and Bombardiering,* Lewis outlines this middle position between the analytic sobriety of Cubism and the

14 While accounts of the fundamental differences between the ecstatic and unrestrained radicalism of Futurism and the assertive-yet-restrained outlook of Vorticism can be found in virtually every secondary text on the history of Vorticism (again, the already cited exhibition catalogues provide excellent primers on the topic), one is given a far more direct impression by going directly to the original Futurist manifestos. For the original 1909 Futurist manifesto, see Marinetti; for the 1910 “Manifesto of the Futurist Painters” and “Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto”, see Boccioni, et al.

energetic excesses of Futurism by recounting a heated argument that he claims to have had with Marinetti and that had marked his break with Futurism:

> ‚You are a futurist, Lewis!‘ he shouted at me one day […].
> ‚No,‘ I said.
> ‚Why don’t you announce that you are a futurist!‘ he asked me squarely.
> ‚Because I am not one‘, I answered, just as pointblank and to the point.
> […]
> ‚You have never understood your machines! You have never known *ivresse* of travelling at a kilometre a minute. Have you ever travelled at a kilometre a minute?‘
> ‚Never.‘ I shook my head energetically. ‚Never. I loathe anything that goes too quickly. If it goes too quickly, it is not there.‘
> ‚It is not there!‘ he thundered for this had touched him on the raw. ‚It is *only* when it goes quickly that it *is* there!‘
> ‚That is nonesense,‘ I said. ‚I cannot see a thing that is going too quickly.‘
> […]
> ‚You are a monist!‘ he said at this, with a contemptuous glance, curling his lip.
> ‚All right. I am not a futurist anyway. *Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes.*‘ (34-5)

As O’Keeffe points out, this final and oft-cited statement — “I hate the movement that displaces the lines.” — remains one of the most succinct statements of the fundamental difference between the aesthetics of Vorticism (and, for that matter, of Lewis) and those of Futurism (153). In contrast to the reckless (self-)abandonment propagated by Marinetti, Vorticism laid claim to an Archimedean point at the center of the swirling vortex of modernity — the metaphorical eye of the storm — from which they could rationally observe and frame the modern world. There is, of course, another Nietzschean echo in this exaltation of the artist to a privileged, super-human observer position, from which he or she alone would be able to fundamentally grasp the chaotic hybridity of modern life.

Lewis’s 1914-15 oil painting *The Crowd* (Fig. 4) stands out as one of the most concise visual expression of this outlook. The semi-abstract composition of the 2.0 x 1.5m painting is dominated by bold horizontal and vertical lines in various shades of red, which subdivide the canvas into relatively clear individual sections and are suggestive of a top-down view of a city or, especially in the lower right-hand side, a side view of skyscraper architecture. In the lower left section we can recognize a number of abstracted, angular spectator figures silently contemplating the scenery, whereas in the upper left sections irregular, interconnected patterns of red lines suggest ant-like, de-individualized crowds of people. In some cases — the diagonal figures on the top led by distinctive stick figures carrying red flags — they seem to represent revolutionary mobs charging

against the urban, industrial order that encloses them; in the case of the figures in the middle, on the right, and on the margin on the left, they appear to be more accepting of their reality. It is only in the upper right corner where we can recognize round lines and shapes that are not in alignment with the rest of the composition; they are, perhaps, references to iron wheels and other industrial machinery with the stick figures in the spaces in between being literally crushed by the wheels of industry. Two more details of note are the French tricolor on the lower left-hand side and, to the right of it, letters spelling the beginning of the word ‚enclosure‘ or a related term.

The Crowd thus neatly encapsulates how Vorticism aimed to provide a sober and measured alternative to Futurism’s blind enthusiasm for industrial modernity. The various shades of bright red that dominate the painting are suggestive of the vibrant energies of modern urban reality, yet they are not blurred and displaced, but held in check by the clear delineation of the painting’s overall composition. At the same time, the overall sense of order is undercut by various gaps, irregularities, and a few slightly askew lines and round shapes; instead of a monolithic vision of a thoroughly purified city, we are presented with a view that acknowledges a certain degree of disorder as an intrinsic part of modern life. Lewis’s ambivalent stance over this aspect of energetic chaos, which is also apparent in the mingling and the revolutionary struggles of the crowds, is apparent in the calm and detached position of the observers in the painting. This position of privilege is, again, suggestive of a certain elitism: the notion that only very few exceptional individuals would be able to take that position, while the majority would be swallowed up by the ant-like masses. On a more basic level, however, it also illustrates the difference between the mercenary and the revolutionary avant-gardist. While the latter is driven by an ideological conviction or zeal, the former is able to act from a preferable and more effective position of professional distance. Finally, we note that the painting depicts what is essentially an impossible view. Despite the clear, uninterrupted lines, the overall sense of perspective with its unclear boundaries between top-down and side views remains vague. We can understand this as an attempt to frame the aforementioned privileged Archimedean point from which the Vorticist observes modern reality; we can also read it, however, as a statement on the impossibility, the essentially fictional nature, of this absolute point of observation. In essence, *The Crowd* thus presents the viewer with a framed and ordered vision of modernity, that we could describe, to use a term promoted by Fredric Jameson, as a kind of *cognitive mapping* of modern urban reality (*Postmodernism* 50-4). In this sense, it starkly differs from its Futurist counterparts, most notably the later paintings of Umberto Boccioni such as

The Street Enters the House (Fig. 15), whose painterly dynamism and vivid chromaticity — one that ultimately owes more to Impressionism than to Cubism — suggest an act of complete self-abandonment towards the energetic chaos of industrial modernity. *The Crowd* rejects this exuberant celebration of hybridity and instead asks the viewer to pause, look, and try to rationalize, that is, to mentally *purify* this urban chaos surrounding him or her. However, this demand for a certain degree of purification does not go so far — and this is where Lewis's outlook differs from that of a hypothetical radical purifier of modernity — as to completely negate its thoroughly impure factual, empirical reality.

Much later, in *The Demon of Progress in the Arts*, one of his last essays on the visual arts published in 1955, Lewis would speak of this period as his "extremist" phase: "Over thirty years ago I was teaching extremism, and I was myself an extreme artist" (34). There is, of course, an argument to be made that, to the eyes of a 1914 spectator unaccustomed to avant-gardist art, even the kind of moderated modernism that would be described as a "friendly sideshow" sixty years later must have seemed outrageous and extreme. Nevertheless, Lewis's retrospective view of himself as a formerly extremist painter who only moderated himself later on does not seem entirely convincing, as we can see already in his Vorticist phase an aesthetic program that, for all its martial rhetorics, shows an inherent detachment from or even disinterest in the promotion of radical proposals and puristic utopian ideals. Rather, it is already a modernism with its eyes set on practicological implications. As we will see, Lewis generally valorized an aesthetics of *the external*: an approach that "[relied] upon evidence of the *eye* rather than of the more emotional organs of sense" (*Men Without Art* 103). "Dogmatically, then", he wrote in 1934, "I am for the Great Without, for the method of *external* approach — for the wisdom of the eye, rather than that of the ear" (*Men Without Art* 105). We could say that Lewis's practicological outlook coincides with his valorization of *the external* and is, thus, an aesthetics that invariably harbors a suspicion towards total painterly abstraction, hypothetical concepts connected to a notion of immanent depth (the soul, the psyche, the unconscious, innate and eternal truth[s], etc.), and grand, totalizing projects, visions, and ideals. Understanding this external outlook of Lewis is central to understand his particular brand of modernism. If Lewis was acutely aware of how the progress of modernization had led and was leading to sweeping changes throughout virtually all areas of life, his external or practicological outlook meant that his response was not to try and come up with radical permanent solutions to the challenges of modernity. Rather, it was to gradually develop an adequate ensemble of practices — a flexible set of survival strategies — with which to adapt and to cope in this changing reality. It is an

approach that starkly differs from the aesthetics of both Futurism, where the question of survival was not really a priority, and of the Bloomsbury’s, whose detached aestheticism, safely sheltered from the harsher (economic) realities of modern life, was an avenue only open to the privileged few.

Having established these fundamental points on the practicological aspects to Lewis’s modernism and how it represents a denial of a radical avant-gardism, it is now time to gradually bring into focus how this particular variety of British modernism relates to late twentieth-century popular music culture. Lewis’s own relationship with the popular was, as we will see in more detail, rather peculiar. On the one hand, his high-modernist elitism entailed the obligatory gestures of disdain for everything to do with mass culture. On the other hand, as the quote from *Blasting and Bombardiering* on page 47 shows, his writing also betrays an uncanny fascination with mass cultural phenomena — radio, cinema, politics, celebrity culture — that undermines his pose of detached elitism.[15] We can, in that passage, already recognize traces of an inner conflict between his elitist convictions of what an artist is supposed to be and his awareness of how the far-reaching societal and cultural changes of the twentieth century were pointing in a completely different direction; his contrasting juxtaposition of the new media of his time with his own choice of artistic media — painting and writing — in regard to their relative star-making capabilities suggests a muted realization that, perhaps, he had chosen the wrong field for his career. In these moments, Lewis appears as a liminal figure: His view of the artist as a heroic solitary genius and representative of an intellectual elite places him, with one foot, in nineteenth-century notions of Romanticism; however, his practicological awareness of how the parameters of what it meant to be an artist were being rapidly changed by an emerging mass medial reality places him, with his other foot, firmly in the twentieth century and beyond. We find already in *Blast 1* several passages that highlight this struggle of finding the appropriate

15 Lewis’s interest in Charlie Chaplin stands as an insightful example of his ambivalent stance on popular media and mass entertainment. In *Time and Western Man,* Lewis appears to take a highly critical view of Chaplin and what he regarded as an essentially infantile and immature pathos manner (67-8). However, more recent criticism has argued that Lewis’s rejection came partly because he recognized Chaplin, as a synecdoche for cinema in general, as “the Vorticist’s threatening *Doppelgänger,* whose vision of art had the potential to rival or even usurp the position previously held by the ‘serious’ artist” (Klein 137). Lewis’s contradictory stance towards cinema and mass entertainment thus reflected “both a wariness and an interest in a […] nominally inferior new art form” that was nevertheless “more consonant with Lewis’s ideas of humour, social critique and representation than Lewis may have wanted to admit” (Klein 141).

terms to deal with this newly evolving world. In the editorial preface of the first edition, Lewis writes as follows:

> Blast will be popular, essentially. It will not appeal to any particular class, but to the fundamental and popular instincts in every class and description of people, TO THE INDIVIDUAL. The moment a man feels or realizes himself as an artist, he ceases to belong to any milieu or time. Blast is created for this timeless, fundamental Artist that exists in everybody.
> [...]
> Popular art does not mean the art of the poor people, as it is usually supposed to. It means the art of the individuals.
> [...]
> We want to make in England not a popular art, not a revival of lost folk art, or a romantic fostering of such unactual conditions, but to make individuals, wherever found.
> [...]
> We are against the glorification of ‚the people' as we are against snobbery.
> [...]
> The ‚Poor' are detestable animals! They are only picturesque and amusing for the sentimentalist or the romantic! The ‚Rich' are bores without a single exception, *en tant que riches!* (7-8)

Recognizing the socially and culturally constructed aspects of the categories "Rich" and "Poor" (thus the quotation marks), Lewis was already probing for an art beyond both the elitism and snobbism of bourgeois (high) art and the unrefined spectacles of (low) mass and folk entertainment. Yet we also note the tentative language behind this promise of a new and highly individualistic *mercenary* art. Whatever Lewis's plans for an art suited to the new realities of modern life were, he was still struggling to find the adequate critical vocabulary to define it. We should not forget, after all, that Lewis was writing these passages several years before the publication of what we now regard as seminal texts on mass production, mass culture, mass media, and the effects that these new forms of mass dissemination and communication would have on the arts. It would take another twenty years for Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* to appear and Theodor W. Adorno's analysis of the cultural industry as part of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* would not be published until thirty years later (Horkheimer). Furthermore, it would take until

the 1960s for these texts to be belatedly rediscovered and broadly recognized as seminal early studies in the field.[16]

Lewis's practicological outlook on modernity thus entails a highly ambivalent view of the popular. His elitist ideals clash with a contempt for the snobbish exclusivism that usually results when elitism is put into practice in actual social reality, whereas his disdain for the vulgar spectacles of modern mass media contrasts with his recognition of their vibrant dynamism. There lies in this ambivalence, at least implicitly, already a challenge to the well-established distinction between the higher and the lower arts. I would now argue that we find a similar ambivalence in certain parts of a *popular* modernism of late twentieth-century British popular music culture. We find there a similar practicological approach where the design of artistic survival strategies takes precedence over abstract goals and ideals. Furthermore, it is characterized by a similar ambivalent fascination and disdain for modern mass culture, to which it reacts to it with gestures of a detached elitism that are simultaneously undercut by an instinctive rejection of snobbish exclusivism. The fundamental difference lies, of course, in the fact that it proceeds from a different vantage point. If Lewis was formulating his strategies from the sphere of the high arts, then the popular modernism of British popular music represents an inverted form of this approach insofar as it chooses the sphere of the popular arts as its home base. To put it in Lewis's own vocabulary, we are dealing in both cases with a squad of mercenaries dispatching themselves against the same targets but from opposed sides.

The work of seminal art-punk band Wire presents an illustrative example to elaborate this connection for several reasons. First of all, there are the similarities in form. It seems appropriate to choose, as the central example to cross-read Lewis with, a band whose work has always been characterized by a sober and austere detachment, an analytical and intellectualist approach to art, and an aggressive vigor that is nevertheless kept in check by a commitment to brevity and a general sense of order. Furthermore, I have deliberately chosen a less-known example to coincide with Lewis's own liminal status. Of course, Wire are recognized as an important and influential band by people well versed in the history of pop and rock music.[17] However, their commercial success has always been modest and they are far from a household name in twentieth-

16 On the similarities between Lewis's cultural politics and those of the Frankfurt school, see Gasiorek, "Wyndham Lewis on Art, Culture and Politics in the 1930s" 215.

17 As evidence of the high esteem and popularity of Wire's early work among aficionados, despite their limited appeal to a broader public, we can point to the two retrospective reviews of Wire's first three albums on *Pitchfork,* arguably one of the most influential

and twenty first-century popular music culture. Ironically, this is largely due to their own uncompromising stance as popular elitist, that is, as artists working within the popular idiom but eschewing any kind of populism by decidedly *not* giving the people what they want. Their relative position in the history of popular music thus make them a fitting counterpart to Lewis. Finally, Lewis and Wire share, in their practicological approach, an essential ambivalence to the avant-garde. If the former’s Vorticist manifesto represents, as discussed above, both an avant-gardist intervention as well as a denial of avant-gardism, so do Wire’s early studio albums stand both as pioneering works in the genres of art- or avant-punk, and a firm denial of these categorizations and its associated aesthetics: art, the avant-garde, and punk.

Formed in London in 1976, Wire are commonly referred to as one of the first bands in the *art-punk*, *avant-punk* or *post-punk* genre. These terms require a few clarifying preliminary remarks. Generic terms in pop music tend to be vague and unsystematic, as they generally emerge not from academic writing but from their iterative and conventional use in journalistic and everyday discourses. The successful establishment of a generic term thus depends less on whether it establishes clear and precise categories and more on whether it manages to elicit vivid associations and suggestions and encapsulate a strong idea in a single phrase; the aforementioned examples with its juxtaposition of “punk” and either “art” or the “avant-garde” provides ample illustration of this. Generic terms in pop music can thus be very muddled in how they refer either to formal aesthetic aspects (musical, visual, and/or textual), matters of ideology, or to a specific place and/or time; in most cases, they refer to a heterogeneous combination of several (or even all) of these aspects, making it rather difficult for the uninitiated reader to decode the term. Genre terms of pop music can thus, at their best, be a powerful metaphor that in and of itself manages to immediately evoke in the reader a striking mental image or sound. However, at their worst, they are useless buzzwords thoughtlessly passed around by industry pundits without anybody having a clear idea about what they are supposed to refer to. Of course, the same criticism can be leveled, to a certain extent, against concepts and categories in the humanities as well — the many "-isms" in art and literary criticism comes to mind. However, there is still a substantial and established academic tradition behind these terms, whereas pop criticism is still a relatively young field of study. It is only reasonable to expect the terminology of the latter

music magazines currently being published: Both the debut and the second album were awarded the coveted but very rare highest possible grade of 10.0 (Tangari).

to be more muddled in comparison. It is thus all the more important to clear up the terms used in the following discussion in advance.

I will use the terms *art-punk*, *avant-punk*, and *post punk* primarily to refer to a style of popular music that emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the aftermath of the heyday of British punk in 1976 and 1977. They encompass a range of styles and artists that can roughly be described as the result of punk developing serious artistic ambitions. On the one hand, it retained punk’s “do it yourself” ethos and its contrarian or even combative attitude towards the listening and the broader public, as well as its valorization of brevity and directness. On the other hand, it jettisoned punk’s tendency for blunt political populism and empty and/or adolescent sloganeering, as well as its traditionalist stylistic elements; it can be said, after all, that punk rock was, essentially, a sloppier, angrier and faster version of rock 'n' roll. Most importantly, however, it abandoned punk rock’s fetishization of amateurism, interpreting the latter’s “do it yourself” ethos not as a rejection of actual skill and craftsmanship, but as a challenge to start making art and gradually get better at making art in the process. However, these ambitions were usually not directed at attaining and displaying any kind of of instrumental virtuosity; rather, the art-, avant-, or post punk ideal of craftsmanship lied in the development of innovative techniques of making popular music — of focusing on aspects of sound and timbre, and of the potential of using the recording studio as an instrument.

Simon Reynolds’s *Rip It Up and Start Again: Post-punk 1978-84* remains the most comprehensive history of this era and style to date. As the current standard work on the popular music culture of that era, it has also solidified the status of the term *post punk* as the generic term to refer to these intellectualist offshoots of the punk movement. His central thesis can be summarized as thus: Punk rock, for all its cultural importance, represented a stylistic dead end. Despite its “year zero” rhetoric, it did not fundamentally point towards a new future in popular music, but hankered back to an idealized simple and pure version of rock 'n' roll of the past before it was tainted by the stylistic and commercial excesses of the 1970s (xvii-xxi). Already by the end of 1977, punk rock had thus fossilized into a dead style with its lesser representatives dogmatically reiterating a formula whose limitations were quickly becoming all too apparent. The more talented and artistically hungrier bands managed to move on with The Clash during their stunningly prolific phase from 1977 to 1980 representing the trailblazers of the *traditionalist* faction: While their 1977 debut album remains one of the defining statements of punk rock, they were already embracing a more traditional 1970s hard rock sound on their 1978 follow-up *Give 'Em Enough Rope*; their seminal 1979 double album *London Calling* has entered the annals as a punk rock classic,

but its restless genre-hopping ranging from rockabilly to reggae was about as far from any puristic punk dogma as it gets and betrayed the band's encyclopedic interest and adulation for the traditional vocabularies of rock music — an interest that would culminate one year later in their even more ambitious *triple* album *Sandinista!*.

Reynolds's interest, however, lies in the other, *modernist* faction whose interest was less in updating and celebrating the existing languages of rock music, but in expanding its vocabulary and in trying to develop new and decidedly *anti-rockist* ways of making rock music. For them, punk rock represented not so much a stylistic point of reference than a career opportunity: Punk's valorization of amateurism and of its "do it yourself" ethos combined with its cultural impact meant that, for a few years, the barriers of entry for young bands and musicians were lowered significantly, as the industry wanted to capitalize on that moment. This led, as Reynolds argues, to a second golden age in the history of post-war twentieth-century popular music that was rivaled only by the late 1960s in creativity and diversity (xiv). Reynolds's core claim is thus that, stylistically, post punk represented less a continuation of punk rock but more of the tradition of *art rock* — an umbrella term usually referring to those artists and records that, from the mid 1960s on, aimed to transform pop music from its purely functional form as dance music into a serious form of artistic expression that was intended to be listened to and contemplated as much as enjoyed. Art rock is usually distinguished from its counterpart *progressive rock* in that the latter emphasizes instrumental virtuosity whereas the former puts its focus on developing and employing unconventional techniques, elements, and concepts. While important forbearers of art rock can be traced to the 1960s — The Beatles' *Sgt. Peppers* and The Velvet Underground's *The Velvet Underground and Nico* to name what are arguably the two most important examples — the breakthrough of art rock came in the early 1970s with David Bowie and Roxy Music's Bryan Ferry and Brian Eno acting as some of its most prominent trailblazers.

Following Reynolds's argument that the intellectualist offshoot of punk rock represented, in fact, a continuation of of a longer tradition of art rock, I would argue that we can place art rock itself within a longer tradition of British modernism. As the following discussion of works by Wire will show, we can recognize a similar ethos as in Lewis's Vorticist interventions from sixty years before — a detached intellectualist elitism undercut by a practicological outlook on life and art. I find Mark Fisher's notion of *popular modernism* useful to describe the cultural afterlife of this tradition or ethos within the sphere of the popular. Fisher argues that

> the music press and the more challenging parts of public broadcasting [...] were part of a UK popular modernism, as were postpunk, brutalist architecture, Penguin paperbacks and the BBC Radiophonic Workshop. In popular modernism, the elitist project of modernism was retrospectively vindicated. At the same time, popular culture definitively established that it did not have to be populist. Particular modernist techniques were not only disseminated but collectively reworked and extended, just as the modernist task of producing forms which were adequate to the present moment was taken up and renewed (22-3)

As mentioned above, Wire provides an illustrative example to argue this connection, because the parallels do not only exist on a level of abstract concepts and ideas, but can be observed directly and very tangibly on the level of formal aesthetics.

As is the case with many seminal British (art) rock bands, most of the individual band members of Wire had an art school background. The view of the British post-war art school system as a creative incubator for countless British rock and pop bands has become a fixture of pop historiography. As Neate writes, there are two common narratives about the relationship between art-school and pop musicians: “In one, the educational and cultural environment plays a part in shaping creative thinking and practices”, in the other “the educational aspect is irrelevant, as the aspiring musician uses the time and space that come with being a full-time student as a context in which to launch a band” (*Read & Burn* 30).[18] In the case of Wire, three of its four founding members went to art school: Guitarist Bruce Gilbert had studied painting at St. Albans School of Art and, briefly, graphic design at Leicester Polytechnic before working as an audio-visual technician at Watford College of Technology’s School of Art (Neate, *Read & Burn* 16-7). Born in 1946, he was already 30 years old when Wire was formed — roughly ten years older than the other group members — and thus represents one of the rare counterexamples to the common view that forming a rock band is an exclusively adolescent affair. He there met Colin Newman, Wire’s rhythm guitarist, primary singer and tunewriter, who had enrolled into art school not so much with an interest in the visual arts, but with the specific intent to eventually join or form a band. He had, as Wilson Neate notes, subscribed to the then already established “popular myth of art school

18 As Wire’s unofficial biographer, Wilson Neate provides the currently most up-to-date and detailed history of the group in *Read & Burn: A Book about Wire*. Together with his 2008 book *Pink Flag*, a history and close analysis of Wire’s 1977 debut album, it forms the bulk of the comprehensive critical writing on Wire. For a general sociological study of the British art school system and its relationship with British popular music culture, see Frith and Horne 1987.

as a factory for rock musicians” (33). Bassist and primary lyricist had studied textiles and fashion and was pursuing a promising career as a fashion designer when he joined the band (29-30). Only drummer Robert Grey did not attend art school, working several odd jobs and acquiring a few band experiences in the 1970s pub rock scenes before ultimately joining Wire.

Wire’s status as a seminal art-punk or post punk band largely rests on their first three albums. Together, they are commonly regarded as one of the definitive statements in the genre. *Pink Flag*, released towards the end of 1977, is usually seen as one of the first and most succinct deconstructions of the aesthetics of punk rock whereas its follow ups, *Chairs Missing* (1978) and *154* (1979) are seen as evolutionary records that significantly expanded the language of rock in their fusion of punk’s valorization of bluntness with art rock’s interest in unconventional sound textures and arrangements. What unites the three records are, on a formal level, an overall focus on brevity and restraint, a clean and almost clinically dry production, and tight, repetitive, and unembellished 4/4 rhythms as the foundation for most of the songs. The sound of Wire’s early albums thus can be read as a conscious excising of all the exuberance, the excesses, the unmitigated spontaneity — in short: of all the *rockisms* — out of punk rock and containing its energies within clear parameters and structures — a reaction that appears not dissimilar to the Vorticist response to Futurism.

“Reuters”, the opening track of *Pink Flag,* stands as a paradigmatic statement of intent for Wire’s realignment of punk aesthetics. Characteristic of the group’s contrarianism, it is, however, not only an oddity in the context of punk aesthetics but also in the context of the album itself. Spanning a total running time of just over 35 minutes with no less than 21 songs, more than half of the tracks on *Pink Flag* do not get past the 90 seconds mark; the shortest track is 28 seconds long (yet still manages to include multiple false endings). Through its satirical exaggeration of punk rock’s valorization of brevity and simplicity, the album betrays a sardonic and mischievous sense of humor behind the dry and austere production. “Reuters”, however, is one of only three songs that last longer than three minutes and it is, ironically, the album’s first track. It eschews punk’s predilection to start (and end) songs with a full blast, opening instead with a slow and faintly threatening intro: a muted single guitar note is repeated in eighth-notes and joined, at the 0:15 mark, by a harsher dissonant chord that is repeated eight times. At the 0:30 mark, the song moves into comparatively more standard punk rock territory: a simplistic, noisy two chord motif over which we hear Colin Newman’s characteristic hectoring vocal delivery. Superficially, the subject matter is relatively close to punk rock as well with its apocalyptic account of war and destruction. However, it is the perspective of the singer

that does not fit the punk idiom. If punk rock tends towards a first person view of somebody directly affected by and/or rebelling against the harsh realities of modern life, “Reuters”, true to its title, chooses the perspective of a value-neutral observer: “Our own correspondent is sorry to tell / Of an uneasy time that all is not well” (1-2). The use of the third-person singular does not reveal the exact identity and, for that matter, gender of the narrator. Instead, it signals his or her detachment — either by the correspondent referring to him- or herself in the third person as a sign of professionalism, or, in a gesture of double detachment, by the narrator being an anonymous proxy relating the (equally anonymous) correspondent’s report. In any case, the latter stays true to the highly impersonal and hyper-condensed style of news agency reporting:

> On the borders there's movement
> In the hills there is trouble
> Food is short, crime is double
> -
> Prices have risen since the government fell
> Casualties increase as the enemy shell
> The climate's unhealthy, flies and rats thrive
> And sooner or later the end will arrive. (3-9)

It is only in the final couplet when a sense of urgency emerges that directly affects the correspondent himself: “This is your correspondent, running out of tape / Gunfire’s increasing, looting, burning, rape” (10-11). The language now leaves no doubt that it is indeed the correspondent speaking to us directly. The three final words “looting, burning, rape” are shouted in chorus and the word “rape” is then repeatedly chanted as the song gradually comes to a standstill, illustrating the correspondent's predicament of running out of tape. Nevertheless, Newman’s delivery remains impersonal and detached, suggesting no personal investment in the events and the urgency solely stemming from the extraneous circumstances affecting the correspondent’s ability to do his job. In fact, the repeated chanting of “rape” towards the end of the song suggests not terror but a gleeful and voyeuristic fascination for the unfolding catastrophe.

One can read “Reuters” as an indictment of world politics and its mass-medial exploitation. If the correspondent is supposed to be a value-neutral and anonymous news agency reporter, the ambivalent and perverse fascination with “rape” implied by the word’s mantra-like repetition at the end suggests the practical impossibility of taking such a position of disinterested neutrality. In a similar way to Latour’s newspaper example discussed in the introduction, the song highlights how the inherent impurity of real-life experiences and practices

will inevitably stand in the way of living up to a puristic ideal of absolute (journalistic) neutrality. Wire drive this point home with the second song on *Pink Flag*. “Field Day for the Sundays” is, as Neate notes, as a masterstroke of track sequencing (*Pink Flag* 55): As a barebones fragment of a punk song that lasts only 28 seconds, it is the shortest track on the album and, superficially, could not form a sharper contrast to the brooding menace of “Reuters”. Thematically, however, it seamlessly connects to the opening track in that it presents another critique of mass-media. While “Reuters” focuses on the respected sphere of world news reporting, “Field Day for the Sundays”, on the other hand, covers the disreputable world of tabloids and gossip rags. Fully embracing the perverse element only hinted at towards the end “Reuters”, Newman now archly declares: “I wanna be a field day for the Sundays so they can fuck up my life / Embarrass my wife, and leave a bad taste / That striped toothpaste can’t remove on Monday mornings” (1-3). If “Reuters” thus represents Wire’s initial mission statement — their act of establishing themselves at a detached vantage point *beyond action and reaction* — the song’s coda and the 28 seconds that follow it represent that obstinate conditional *would*: the practicological realization that such a privileged position of ideal detachment will necessarily remain unattainable.

The core point to note about this type of media critique, however, is its obliqueness. It is characterized by a strong intellectualist undercurrent and expressed without emotional outrage or pathos. As such, it represents a sober and austere reply to the populism of punk and its call for direct action. Reading “Reuters” as Wire’s initial mission statement also means to note how it starkly differs from the sentiment expressed, for example, half a year earlier by The Clash on their debut single “White Riot”. As one of the seminal songs of British punk rock, its verses form a sequence of populist slogans (“All the power’s in the hands of people rich enough to buy it / While we walk the street too chicken to even try it” (13-14) that then culminates in the chorus’s call for a “White Riot” as a gesture of solidarity with oppressed ethnic minorities (“White riot, I want to riot / White riot, a riot of my own”). In contrast to this advocacy of active and revolutionary political engagement, Wire’s art-punk response is to observe and analyze the situation from a distance. Even though it includes a self-critical element by pointing out the actual impossibility of taking a position of complete detachment, it still regards the role of the artist-as-observer as more appropriate to that of the artist-as-rioter. In that sense, Wire’s stance is not unlike the one presented by Wyndham Lewis in *The Crowd:* The observer figures in the foreground are still in the frame and, as such, part of the urban scenery depicted in the painting — that is, not standing at an ideal or utopian vantage point *beyond* action and reaction. Nevertheless, they occupy a practical

position of relative safety and distance from the revolutionary rabble allowing them to take an at least somewhat detached stance towards the urban reality as it presents itself. While an ideal vantage point at the center of the modern vortex is thus out of reach and/or a purely hypothetical notion, the practical act of taking a few steps back and observe still allows for the creation of a temporary safety zone from which one can contemplate, in a sober and rational manner, the “reality of the present” before deciding on whether and how to intervene. If Vorticism advocated this imperfect-yet-practical temporary state of detached neutrality as an alternative to Futurism’s overly exuberant self-dissolution within industrial modernity, Wire’s art- or post punk stance represents an almost identical response in its relation to punk rock. In both cases, we are dealing with a cerebral and skeptical yet decidedly *non-introspective* type of detachment driven by and oriented on the practice of outward observation. In a broader sense, this stance is itself symptomatic of a general skepticism towards revolutionary struggles, especially with regard to the question of whether art should or should not commit itself directly to the service of political revolution. Both Vorticism’s reluctance to subscribe to a specific political ideology and Wire’s detachment from punk activism can be read as a rejection of the direct operationalization of art in overtly political struggles. Rather, the position of the artist should predominantly be a *theoretical* one in the sense of the term’s original etymological root as a spectator — a figure whose actions are primarily those of watching, observing, and describing.[19]

Lyrically, this view of the artist as a detached observer is expressed nowhere near as clear as on “Map Ref. 41° N 93° W”, the eleventh song on Wire’s third album *154*. With its title appropriately referring to the location of the city of *Centerville*, Iowa, the song’s first couplet already encapsulates the idea how the practice of detached observation and description represents an attempt to attain a temporary and limited form of control over what remains an essentially contingent and uncontrollable external reality: “An unseen ruler defines with geometry / An unrulable expanse of geography” (1-2). In contrast to the correspondent on “Reuters” and the observer figures in *The Crowd,* the first verse positions the cartographer on that hypothetical privileged vantage point outside of the frame as an “unseen ruler” ruling the scenery with his or her geometric ruler (which we can read as a figure for the equally invisible symbolic

19 I am referring here to the etymological roots of the term *theory* in the Old Greek term θεωρός (theoros), i.e. the *spectator* as designating a figure performing the very specific and concrete act of outward observation — a relatively grounded and restrained practice that in itself does not yet suggest the kind of abstract and/or speculative reasoning usually associated with the terms *theory*, *theorize*, and *theoretical* today.

order or *langue* of geometry). Nevertheless, the second verse immediately calls into question this privileged position by pointing out the essential unrulability of geographical expanse making up the scenery. This play on words, double meanings and homophonic similarities continues through the song’s entire and unsually lengthy first verse:

> An aerial photographer over-exposed
> To the cartologist’s 2D images knows
> The areas where the water flowed
> So petrified, the landscape grows
> Straining eyes try to understand
> The works, incessantly in hand
> The carving and paring of the land
> The quarter square, the graph divides
> Beneath the rule, a country hides. (3-11)

While the literal meaning of the sentence spanning lines 3-5 indicates the possibility of attaining a definite and reliable form of cartographical knowledge (through repeated exposition to maps one will attain an internalized form of areal knowledge), the suggestion of overexposed photography in line 3 already hints at the impurity of this knowledge: The landscape framed by the representative mode of a two-dimensional image will never be able to fully encompass the actual geographical landscape as a constantly growing, changing, and evolving entity (line 6). As the subsequent lines then point out, attempts to derive, from these acts of observation, a solid and stable type of knowledge are bound to remain exactly that: attempts. The cartographer has, in other words, to deal with the same epistemological impurities as the correspondent of “Reuters” — a sentiment which is then summarized in the song’s chorus: “Interrupting my train of thought / Lines of longitude and latitude / Define and refine my altitude” (12-14). Newman’s delivery is critical here, because he does not pause between the first and the second line. Seamlessly blending “train of thought” and “lines of longitude” into “thought-lines”, he emphasizes the intertwined nature of, on the one hand, the inward act of theoretical reflection and speculation with, on the other hand, the outward act of supposedly neutral empirical observation and geometrical description. The essential hybridity of geometry and ideology is then repeated in the chorus’s third line with its homophonic overlapping of the “altitude” and “attitude”.

Neate offers a vaguely structuralist or post-structuralist view of Wire’s approach to song lyrics. Falling somewhere between traditional rock lyrics and literary verse but fitting neither category (Graham Lewis, for that matter,

prefers to refer to his lyrics simply as “texts”), Neate argues that they are “rooted in Wire’s questioning of the terms of realist representation” and “appear less concerned with the representation of reality than with the ambiguity of language itself. The lyrics play with the notion that reality is not an unproblematic, objectively comprehensible matter and that language is unpredictable and unstable” (*Read & Burn* 65). As the examples of “Reuters” and “Map Ref. 41° N 93° W” show, we can indeed notice elements of such a critique of linguistic representability; however, I would not go so far as to read Wire’s lyrics as a purely self-referential postmodernist celebration of the open-endedness of language and of the epistemological uncertainties it entails. After all, the lyrics and their delivery only make up one part of an overall sonic aesthetics that, in spite of certain self-critical or self-reflective gestures and elements, valorizes (carto-)graphical clarity. If Wire show an awareness for the essential ambiguity of linguistic expression (and aesthetic expression in a wider sense), they nevertheless stress the practicological necessity of a continued insistence on referentiality.

Still, Neate’s recourse to (post-)structuralist notions of textuality makes sense at least in the immediate context of his argument, which is to point out how Wire’s detached and intellectualist approach to rock music and rock lyrics in particular represents a clear gesture of dissociation from punk rock’s lyrical focus on “unmediated energy and unfiltered expression” as well as on “one-dimensional realism and psychological verisimilitude” (*Read & Burn* 65). In relation to those rockist traditionalisms of punk rock, or, to be more precise, the particularly dogmatic and unimaginative traditionalisms that characterized much of the second wave of punk rock, Wire can indeed be regarded as deconstructivists. A particularly illustrative example of this anti-rockist intellectualism can be observed on “I Should Have Known Better”, the opening track on *154.* Sharing its title with the 1964 Beatles song and being one of the few songs in Wire’s catalogue dealing explicitly with intimate matters, the lyrics could still not be further from the standard pop love song fare. Although they deal with the breakdown of a relationship and are written in the first person from the point of view of one of the lovers, Wire approach the topic of love in the same way that they address world politics on “Reuters” and questions of epistemology on “Map Ref. 41° N 93° W”, that is, in a language completely devoid of psychological realisms and unmediated feelings. Instead of appealing to the listeners’ emotional sympathy by laying his or her soul bare, the lyrical I takes — again — a position of supreme intellectual detachment, from which he or she analyzes his or her plight in a manner as clinical and impersonal as possible. The choice of language — “contrition”, “calibrate”, “displeasure”, “redefine”, “albeit”,

“I offer no plea”, “no offer of terms or concessions” etc. — is so deliberate and carefully worded that the lyrics seem much closer to a deposition in an already proceeding divorce case than a spontaneous and authentic outburst of negative feelings. The forensic perspective and the lack of any suggestion of intimacy is further enhanced by the singer’s delivery. “I Should Have Known Better” is one of the occasional songs where Graham Lewis takes lead vocals and his dignified and aloof baritone suits the song well, emphasizing the emotional detachment already apparent in the lyrics.

However, their approach to writing lyrics is not the only area where Wire embraced a clear break with rockist clichés. Their unusual way with song structures is at least as important. I have already pointed out how “Reuters” stands as a very unconventional opening statement; with its unusual intro, its lack of a proper chorus, and its slow tapering out towards the end, it strongly deviates from the commonplace (punk) rock song pattern of “verse — chorus — verse — chorus — bridge — chorus — fade out”. “Map Ref. 41° N 93° W” presents an even stranger case, because the song, with its driving beat and its singalong chorus, is arguably one of Wire’s most immediately catchy pop songs in their entire catalogue. However, its catchiness is not only contrasted by song’s unusual lyrics, but also by its odd structure: The first verse is strangely elongated with a total of eleven lines followed by the chorus (which Newman archly announces beforehand). Strangely enough, the song then immediately goes the bridge, which is followed by a short second verse consisting only of four lines, and, finally, a repetition of the chorus. Neate reference to (post-)strucutralist or deconstructivist concepts in his discussion of Wire’s off-kilter approach to songwriting thus makes sense when read directly in relation to the conventional standards of pop and rock music.

Nevertheless, to resort to the differential vocabulary of (post-)strucutralism is also risky in the sense that it tends to force a perspective upon the reader from which one tends to privilege the differential, subversive, and/or deconstructive aspects of a text while ignoring the others. To pigeonhole Wire as postmodernists or deconstructivists because of their unconventional anti-rock aspects of their aesthetics would result in a grossly reductionist reading, because it would ignore the fact that Wire tend to frame these subversive elements by an overall sonic aesthetics that cannot be described in deconstructive terms. Although one could argue that Wire’s valorization of austere clarity and simplicity represented a subversive gesture in its firm anti-rockist stance, calling it deconstructivist would nevertheless be a stretch. One of the core elements of a typical Wire song is Robert Grey’s monotonous and metronomic 4/4 drumming, which, with its lack of fills and ornamentation, provides a

rock-solid and crystal clear rhythmical framework that, due to its peculiar dry and non-reverberated sound, also remains of unobtrusive and restrained. This rhythmical foundation is embellished by Newman’s and Gilbert’s guitar playing styles, which are not oriented on melody but on rhythm and sound; their emphasis is on the monotonous repetition of minimalist riffs or motifs, or even single chords or notes. As Neate and the group members themselves have noted, this minimalistic approach was partly a result of their initial lack of playing skills and experience (*Pink Flag,* 34). Nevertheless, this combination of dry and unadorned 4/4 drumming with repetitive and simplistic rhythmic guitar playing, which we can already notice on “Reuters”, would remain a cornerstone of Wire’s aural aesthetics for most of their career. It stands as something akin to a lowest common denominator of the “Wire sound”, which they would develop and refine over the years.

In fact, the speed by which they managed to hone their craftsmanship and improve on *Pink Flag’s* relatively unpolished prototype version of their sound remains astonishing. Released less than a year after their debut, their second album *Chairs Missing* shows a tremendous progress over *Pink Flag*. By that point, Wire had already jettisoned the most glaring punk stylistics of their debut: Most tracks manage to avoid some of the more predictable punk rock chord changes that were still apparent on *Pink Flag’s* more conventional songs. It also largely abandons the noisy, rockist guitar tones of their debut for cleaner and more restrained sounds that emphasize the uniform rhythmic propulsion of their characteristic repetitive riffing. Newman’s delivery has also changed slightly: If his yobbish shouting on *Pink Flag* was still indebted to punk rock, he sounds more detached and impersonal on *Chairs Missing* with a slightly smug, hectoring delivery that critic Jon Savage so aptly described as “London suburban art-school sarcastic” (Marcus 203). Finally, *Chairs Missing* sets itself apart form *Pink Flag* in its use of synthesizers. As the instrument that stood as the embodiment of the virtuosic excesses of 1970s progressive rock par excellence, the synthesizer was, of course, a total anathema for punk purists. However, Wire use it in a discreet manner mainly to create unobtrusive drones; nevertheless, it contributes an important textural element to the overall sound and thereby further emphasizes the sober and detached aesthetics pursued by the band. If *Pink Flag* thus stands as the presentation of an initial idea, *Chairs Missing* represents a significant step towards its realization. Stripped of the punkish spontaneity that still partly informed the former, the music now sounds more deliberate, disciplined, and confident. It is probably no coincidence that the album opener bears another programmatic title: “Practice Makes Perfect”. There is an overall sense of rigorous premeditation projected by *Chairs Missing* and its

1979 follow up, *154*. The chaotic energies of punk are now fully contained and, instead of spontaneously and aimlessly discharging in all directions, they are deployed with exact purpose as short and precise blasts. The rate by which Wire managed to improve their craftsmanship from the inspired but fairly unpolished *Pink Flag* to the much more refined approaches on display on *Chairs Missing* and *154* in the span of less than three years still remains astonishing to date.

Having mentioned songwriting, lyrics, and sound, what remains is to address that most immediate type of engagement with the audience: live performance. Fortunately, an hour-long performance on the German television program *Rockpalast,* originally recorded in February 1979 and re-released in 2004 as *Wire on the Box: 1979,* provides an excellent document of Wire's approach to live performances during their early years. As with their records, their concerts present a hybrid approach consisting of deconstructivist anti-rock gestures that are contrasted by a thoroughly focused and disciplined execution. One immediately notices the band members unassuming looks: Not going for the carefully styled grungy look of punk (or any other stage costume for that matter), Wire do their performance wearing everyday clothing and sporting unassuming haircuts. Nevertheless, it is obvious that this does not represent a rejection of “fake” rock theatricality in favor of a more “real” and authentic notion of everyday normality. Newman's choice of wearing a white shirt and striped tie, which makes him look like an average office worker, but, in the context of a rock performance, also projects a strong sense of the absurd, makes it particularly clear that these are, in fact, carefully selected stage costumes. In another statement against the one-dimensional emotional realisms and the cult of the authentic so prevalent in rock culture, Wire also do not engage in any stage banter or other audience interactions in between the songs. The band enter the stage in complete darkness, deliver a curt greeting (still out of the dark) and then — apart from the occasional “thank you” or announcement of the next song's title — focus entirely on the performance of the actual songs. They outright refuse to fake an amicable personal relationship with the audience. Yet this lack of stage theatrics is both indebted to punk and anti-punk at the same time. There is, on the one hand, a kinship between Wire's reductionist approach and punk rock's “back to the roots” ethos and its demand to focus on the absolute essentials. On the other hand, Wire clearly have a bit of a different idea of what these absolute essentials are. Their minimalism is very much anti-punk in their rejection of populist gestures and other appeals to a sense of community between the performers and the audience, and in how they, instead, emphasize an impersonal distance between the stage and the stalls by projecting a clear sense of mediated artificiality.

In that regard, Newman’s performance as the frontman is particularly striking. The most agitated band member on stage, he is nevertheless a very odd frontman, exaggerating his playing and hectoring through deliberately awkward movements and facial expressions. There is a robotic or puppet-like aspect to Newman’s histrionics that, paradoxically, works both as a raucous rock performance and a grotesque parody of charismatic frontman behavior. Lewis as the second band member at the front of the stage is similarly off-putting, but for completely opposite reasons: While Newman is weird, Lewis is threatening. Throttling his bass in a pugilistic stance and wearing clothes and a haircut faintly reminiscent of a 1950s greaser, he projects a sense of carefully contained aggression that might erupt at the slightest provocation. Still, his menacing stage presence is another carefully crafted persona, as it contrasts both with Lewis’s predilection for absurdist wordplay as a lyricist and the borderline affable dry wit he displays in interviews. The other two band members are the more discreet half of the *Rockpalast* performance. In the case of Grey, this is largely due to the camerawork. In live performances, Grey is a picture of complete focus and, with his thin and wiry frame, a virtual embodiment of his Spartan drumming. What the *Rockpalast* recording fails to convey is how this makes him not only an acoustic but also an important *visual* focal point in live performances. As Bruce Gilbert himself has noted, Grey has always been “the most interesting thing to look at in Wire” (Neate, *Read & Burn* 292). In the case of Gilbert, however, the lack of stage presence is deliberate. Always the least assuming performer of the band, he is a barely moving epitome of detachment standing almost in the wings of the stage from where he stoically and with scarcely any movement contributes his minimalist guitar noises. Though technically the lead guitarist (if only due to Newman clearly filling the traditional singer/rhythm guitarist role), Gilbert’s disengaged stage presence could not stand in sharper contrast to the conventional rockist pose of the guitar hero.

However, what is also immediately apparent from the *Rockpalast* recording is that, despite each of those odd and unusual elements, all of this fundamentally *works* as a rock performance. The band’s playing is very tight and focused and although the overall delivery is, as is to be expected, rawer than on record (not least due to the absence of synthesizers), this only enhances the sense of raucous and aggressive energy. Evidently, Wire were, for all their pronounced anti-rock gestures, rather good at putting on a rock show. One might read the polite but very restrained reaction of the (seated) audience as proof that Wire were indeed putting on a thoroughly avant-gardist anti-rock performance, which only managed to completely bewilder their audience; however, one would then

overlook the mundane fact that the concert was not recorded in a rock venue, but in the more controlled environment of a German television studio.

What is, however, in very palpable sense avant-gardist about the *Rockpalast* performance is how Wire were not looking back and making sure not to repeat themselves. Of the 19 songs performed, ten were yet unreleased tracks from the upcoming *154* album and the non-album single "A Question of Degree"; eight tracks were from *Chairs Missing*, which had been released only three months before; *Pink Flag* — an album released less than one and a half years at the time of the performance — was only represented by a reworked, unusually bouncy and bass-heavy rendition of the album's title track performed as an encore (a practice which the band have kept up with a certain regularity to this day). From a conventional concert goer's perspective, this refusal to serve up "the hits" and play mostly unknown and unreleased material is, of course, close to an affront. Wire's elitist stance of not giving he people what they want is encapsulated best in Lewis's dry quip when, right before the encore, an audience member shouts for the band to perform "I Am the Fly" (from *Chairs Missing*): "We don't do requests." It is another anti-rock aspect of their approach that is worth mentioning here, because is also arguably the most immediate way in which Wire were and still are staunch modernists. To not look back on their past work in a nostalgic way and to have their eyes set firmly on the present has been somewhat of a programmatic creed for their entire career. When, in 2012, the band (now sans Gilbert who had quit in 2004) set out to revisit a number of unfinished sketches from their early years, which were originally released on the 1981 live-album *Document & Eyewitness,* they did not settle for a hasty re-recording in the spirit of a retrospective, quasi-archival release. Rather, they radically reworked the material — in some cases beyond recognition — to make it fit to the sound aesthetics of Wire in the year 2012. The title of the resulting 2013 album was, appropriately, *Change Becomes Us*, a snippet taken from the final line on the album's penultimate track "& Much Besides" (itself a thorough reworking of the 1981 track "Eastern Standard" with completely new lyrics): "But change becomes us all in time — the course is *set*!" (10).

If we thus try to find an illustrative visual metaphor to summarize Wire's aesthetic approach, it seems most appropriate to say that their modus operandi, especially with regard to their sound, is decidedly *linear.* Their sound is characterized by a graphical (instead of a painterly) quality reminiscent of sharp lines and clearly delineated shapes. They use, in other words, their instruments like pencils instead of paintbrushes: The dry and monotonous drumming evokes rigid patterns of straight vertical and horizontal lines and the minimalist and repetitive yet exact guitar riffing is akin to hatchings and

cross-hatchings in the way it manages to create tonal shifts and contrast while still resting on to purely linear drawing techniques. There are aspects to their sound that could be described as painterly, such as the amorphous synthesizer drones, but they are usually held in check by the clear linear pencilwork of the guitars and drums. It is thus not far-fetched to remark that Wyndham Lewis's own maxim on the linear versus the painterly likewise applies to Wire's sound aesthetics: "I hate the movement which displaces the lines" (*Blasting and Bombardiering* 35). If Wire's sound from *Chairs Missing* on has sometimes been described by rock journalists as *psychedelic*, such as in Jim DeRogatis' anthology of psychedelic rock *Turn on Your Mind* (304-10), this is clearly a misnomer. Of course, the everyday discourses of rock journalism often deploy the term *psychedelic* as a vacuous catch-all word whenever things turn vaguely arty and/or experimental (a practice that might also be connected to the fact that, historically, art rock and experimental rock emerged out of late 1960s psychedelic rock). Still, it seems a rather ill-fitting term with respect to Wire considering that they never showed an interest in the infinite expanses of the mind or the meandering freeform experimentation characteristic of late 1960s psychedelic rock. The comparison made by prominent American rock critic Lester Bangs in a 1979 article (120) with early (Syd Barrett-era) Pink Floyd seems particularly misplaced. If anything, Wire's detached and disciplined aesthetics have more in common with the meticulously constructed, cold, and alienated sound of late 1970s Roger Waters-led Pink Floyd. Even as Wire quickly proceeded from the rudimentary execution of their debut with their songs growing longer and their adoption of synthesizers and sophisticated recording techniques leading to a more layered and textured sound, the result was never an aesthetics of psychedelic blobs, but always of sharp geometric shapes. Wire were and are, first and foremost, about getting to the point.

We can likewise recognize this fundamentally sober and austere approach in Wire's original seven rules of "negative self-definition", which Graham Lewis, in conversation with Neate, recollected as follows: "no solos; no decoration; when the words run out, it stops; we don't chorus out; no rocking out; keep it to the point; no Americanisms" (*Pink Flag* 36). It is this valorization of curtness and discipline, as well as an aversion to any kind of stylistic excess and self-indulgence, that connects it to the moderate modernism of Vorticism. If *Blast*, as discussed above, appeared radical in its advocacy of disruptive interventions against a prevailing sense of complacency in the arts of the time, it did not go as far as to follow Marinetti's call in his *Futurist Manifesto* to "set fire to the library shelves" and "turn aside the canals to flood the museums" (Marinetti 7). Wyndham Lewis's outlook was too strongly informed by and

oriented towards practical experiences — the “reality of the present” — for him to chime in with what he regarded as boring and buffoonish revolutionary posturing.[20] Though not a traditionalist in the narrow or regressive sense, his “conservative instincts” (Causey 18) led him to harbor suspicions towards any radical and/or utopian promises of a total break with tradition. Rather than establishing itself as a radical alternative to existing traditions and practices, his notion of Vorticism thus remained moderate in the sense that it recognized and reflected, from the beginning, the impossibility of establishing oneself at a position beyond action and reaction.

In many ways, Wire’s aesthetic approach follows a similar trajectory. In the context of (art) rock history, they appear radical or deconstructive in so far as their aesthetics represent a forceful criticism of stale rockist clichés and empty traditions. We can read their valorization of discipline and detachment or their absurdist humor, unusual lyrics and unexpected song structures as avant-gardist gestures of that kind. However, as *Blast,* with its garishly pink cover, represented an avant-gardist attack against cultural complacency that simultaneously kept a critical distance from radicalist avant-gardism, so were *Pink Flag* and its follow ups in how they questioned rock traditions while remaining firmly within the overall idiom of rock music. Wire did not proclaim to set fire to record collections or to flood the recording studios. They operated as a traditional four-piece band of a drummer, a bass, and a rhythm as well as a lead guitarist (though Bruce Gilbert as, at least technically, the band’s lead guitarist certainly did not play the role in a conventional way with his focus resting firmly on texture and sound instead of melody and solos); they wrote and recorded songs and released records; they toured. When all is said and done, Wire were (and still are) fundamentally a rock band. In fact, their negative rules of self-definition implied that “rocking” was still allowed (as their tight and disciplined 1979 *Rockpalast* performance attests); it was only “rocking out” — the excessive, undisciplined, self-indulgent, and, by that time, thoroughly clichéd manifestation of rocking — which was prohibited.

We can thus recognize, in all of the different medial aspects — textual, acoustic, visual, and performative — an essential hybridity to these aesthetics. The materials discussed above are peculiar in the sense that they are simultaneously modernist (in how they reject dead traditions and are driven by an

20 See, for example, Lewis’s rejection of Futurism and Marinetti in the editorial of *Blast 1*: “AUTOMOBILISM (Marinetteism) bores us. We don’t want to go about making a hullo-bulloo about motor cars, anymore than about knives and forks, elephants or gas pipes. […] The futurist is a sensational and sentimental mixture of the aesthete of 1890 and the realist of 1870” (8).

earnest wish to come up with new and adequate aesthetic responses for the present reality) and traditionalist (in how they shy away from modernism's radical and puristic calls to wipe the slate clean, to disavow the traditional canon, and to come up, from an absolute zero point, with a modernist aesthetics that is radically different and new). While it would probably be a stretch to call this mode contradictory or inconsistent, it nevertheless represents an equivocal aesthetic approach that remains very difficult to describe with a clear terminology. One gets the impression that for every declarative statement one makes about these aesthetics, one is immediately required to state that the opposite holds true as well. As such, the equivocality of the aesthetic strategies described above — constantly oscillating between opposing principles: modernist/traditionalist, clear/muddled, rockist/anti-rockist, brash/restrained, revolutionary/reactionary etc. — presents us with the methodological challenge of the available critical vocabulary simply not being up to the task of putting these aesthetics into adequate words. It is to this methodological challenge — to the metaphorical chasm between the puristic vocabulary of criticism and the muddled practices of artistic production — that we must now turn.

II The Demonology of Progress: Un-Radical Modernism and Non-Moral Satire

If our first juxtaposition of Lewis's linear and angular high modernist approach and the equally linear and angular popular modernist approach of Wire has allowed us to draw some initial formal aesthetic parallels, it has also made obvious some methodological challenges. As pointed out at the end of the previous chapter, what the two artistic strategies have in common is a certain (self-)conscious indeterminateness: a reluctance or straight refusal to let itself be defined by a clear and unambiguous set of terms, which manifests itself as essentially hybrid texts in how they seem to give form to contradictory stances and ideas at the same time. To the reader, there is something inherently frustrating about these texts in how they seem to promote an assertive and unquestionable clarity which, on closer reading, they simultaneously appear to undercut by questioning the very possibility of being absolutely clear-cut and unambiguous. As we have discussed using the example of the exhibition review in *Die Zeit,* the easy way to deal with these fundamentally equivocal texts is to dismiss them: to declare these aesthetic strategies as unfashionably moderate, muddled, and hesitant in a manner that cannot possibly hope to compete with those heroically clear-cut, uncompromising, and radical modernisms that make up the international canon of modern art.

However, I would like to suggest that the more honest approach in these cases is to not look for the source of the problem in the actual texts — their supposed muddledness or hybridity — but on the side of the reader. What appears to be the case with these puzzled reactions and the resulting dismissive stances is that they seem to be mostly the product of an inadequate critical vocabulary — a vocabulary that simply does not seem designed to deal with fundamentally hybrid and/or equivocal aesthetic approaches. It is for this reason that, as I have already suggested above, the familiar vocabulary derived from structuralism and semiotics, which still forms the absolute basis of the critical discourses of literary and cultural analysis, will inevitably reach its limits when trying to account for these phenomena. With their focus on difference and oppositionality, these theoretical approaches have an inherent tendency to, whether intentionally or not, condense the observed material into a set of mutually exclusive or even antagonistic binary terms: One is either an outsider *or* an insider, one either subverts *or* conforms, one is either a modernist *or* a traditionalist, a constructivist *or* a deconstructivist, normal *or* other etc. Of course, I am not

suggesting that contemporary literary and cultural criticism has not long moved past this rudimentary binary logic of early structuralist analysis. All I am arguing is that, due to these critical approaches being rooted in the fundamentally differential logic of the Saussurian theory of language, its critical vocabulary still tends to veer towards the enforcement of linguistic boundaries, differences, and clear-cut divisions and often does so even against the stated intentions of the person wielding it. In that sense, to use a fundamentally *differential* way of thinking to account for aesthetic strategies characterized by a strong sense of hybridity and equivocality — texts that, in other words, seem to somehow exist in an indeterminate middle position, sometimes moving to the one side, sometimes moving to the other, sometimes existing at two opposing points at the same time — seems to be a tall order to say the least. If we are dealing with texts that are simultaneously radical and conservative, modernist and classicist, chaotic and disciplined, and/or deviant and conformist, an over-reliance on binary terminology will eventually lead to an impasse. What is needed instead are theoretical perspectives that are more *dialogic* than *dialectic*, that are, in other words, focused more on elements of exchange and translation than on differentiation and the so-called *othering*.

There exists, of course, a countless number of more complex models derived from the original Saussurian terminology as deliberate attempts to move beyond the limitations of binary oppositionality. Greimas' semiotic square comes to mind as a particularly illustrative example of an extension of structuralist binarism within the structuralist mode of thinking, while the various efforts that have retrospectively been subsumed under the label of poststructuralism shared a common concern for coming up with critical approaches that could transcend the rigid binary logic of structuralist criticism. However, perhaps due to inherent complexity of these models, they have rarely gained traction beyond the hermetic discourses of high-academic textual criticism. As Neate's application of critical terms from literary theory within pop criticism and pop historiography shows, the use of more direct binarisms is more prevalent in these inter-medial fields of critical analysis. This is justifiable to the degree that simple binary oppositions provide a convenient and perhaps indispensable shorthand to navigate the muddled territory of popular culture. After all, the latter does not lend itself well to hermetic textual analysis and instead demands of the reader to reflect its fundamentally cross-medial nature: its intertextual relations with other spheres of culture and everyday life, its position within a wider cultural and/or social history etc. Yet this does not change the underlying issue that such binarisms, while helpful, are often not entirely adequate to describe the phenomena in question.

We could also say that, in the Latourian sense, a critical perspective too strongly relying on a differential vocabulary is inadequate, because it is an inherently *puristic* approach, which does not lend itself well to the analysis of texts characterized by an essential *hybridity* or *impurity*. As the discussion of both Lewis's Vorticist work and Wire's work during the *Pink Flag/Chairs Missing/154* era has shown, we are dealing with texts that are impure or hybrid in a twofold way: There is a first-order impurity in their transgressive, deconstructionist, and/or interventionist properties. However, there is also a second-order impurity in the way these anti-purifying or hybridizing gestures are expressed within an aesthetics that, formally, is very much suffused by a purifying sense of structure, order, and clarity. Although the Latourian terminology clearly reflects some of the same concerns as those of French structuralist and poststructuralist theory and can, to an extent, be counted among the aforementioned more complex approaches derived from it, it nevertheless provides a useful point of reference for two reasons: First, it can account for these twofold impure aesthetics. Second (and perhaps more importantly), it goes beyond a purely language- or discourse-oriented criticism by how it emphasizes, through its sociological perspective, how these aesthetics do not emerge from the abstract, conceptual, and self-sustaining sphere of language, but are the belated product of actual, that is, *external* social and material practices. We can again refer to Wire's negative rules of self-definition as an illustrative example of this practicological foundation, as Wire did not formulate them before the fact as some kind of artistic manifesto. Rather, they were the belated product of an attempt to come up *post facto* with a rationalization of what they had so far been doing (or, rather, what they had *not* been doing) in actual practice.

Furthermore, stressing how these aesthetics emerge from actual practices, which are fundamentally impure, allows us to avoid another pitfall of the inherent purism of the (post-)structuralist vocabulary of oppositionality, namely its tendency to over-valorize the other. One of the curious side effects of the far-reaching success of poststructuralist criticism in academia — but especially beyond academia: in journalism, politics, and political activism — is how, paradoxically, it seems to have brought it in line with what it originally set out to criticize. As is commonly known, poststructuralist theory, particularly that of the Foucauldian branch, takes up the task of criticizing the implicit hierarchies in linguistic binary distinctions and how these distinctions, in turn, account for, produce, and reproduce various real social forms of exclusion, repression, and discrimination. The underlying promise or, at least, hope of this critique is to ultimately come up with a way to epistemologically transcend these binarisms. Whether one goes back to Foucault himself, to Edward Saïd's critique

of Orientalism, or to Judith Butler's critique of gender binarism, their thinking is related in the sense that they recognize the necessity of overcoming binarisms and attempting to establish an impossible epistemological position somewhere, so to say, "beyond action and reaction". If poststructuralist theory thus emerged from a growing awareness that, counter to the promises of structuralism, the binary structures of language cannot fully encompass a pre-linguistic external reality, it has still retained the structuralist creed that language should deserve our prime attention, because it is, above all, language that constructs and affects what we perceive as reality. It is thus probably not surprising that the operationalized forms of poststructuralist theory — when it moved beyond the *pure* sphere of philosophy and developed into various *impure or hybrid* forms of applied literary and/or cultural analysis, both within academia and particularly outside of it — has a tendency to fall back on an over-reliance on deceptively simple linguistic binarisms. The project, in other words, seems to have fallen short at the very initial stage of simply insisting to give a voice to the hitherto repressed and marginalized other. While there is of course no doubt to the legitimacy, the necessity, and, not least, the honorable intentions behind empathic and insistent acts of these kinds, they nevertheless stand as incomplete and insufficient operationalizations of discourse criticism, which leads to fairly predictable and problematic results: They remain stuck in a simple reversal of the original hierarchy where hitherto repressed categories of otherness, deviance, and difference are now instinctively (over-)valorized, whereas the dominant categories of normalcy, uniformity, and conformism are either implicitly or explicitly denounced. The underlying structure of binarism, however, is not put into question and the differences, boundaries, and oppositions, which poststructuralist criticism seeks to overcome in theory, are, in practice, performatively enforced or replaced with entirely new binary distinctions.

Neate's use of (post-)structuralist vocabulary provides an example of this problem. Although *Read & Burn* presents an impressively thorough and valuable account of the group's history, the passages where his analyses fall back on (post-)structuralist theoretical vocabulary remain a bit unconvincing, as the text inevitably turns into a conventional heroic underdog story. Whether intended or not, the latent suggestion in these passages is that whatever counts as subversive, deviant, or different is to be categorically regarded as laudable and worthy of attention whereas all that is classified as normal, conventional, or conformist is to be rejected as clichéd and boring. Pop criticism is, of course, particularly susceptible to this instinctive (over-)valorization of the oppositional other for two reasons. First, it is due to the strong entanglement of popular

(music) cultures with various counter-cultural movements of the late twentieth century. If popular music stands as the pivotal form of expression of the various (youth) counter cultures that emerged since the 1950s, from mods and hippies to punk and hip-hop, then it is only logical that these languages express an explicit valorization of deviance and difference over normalcy and conformism. The second (and decidedly less heroic) reason has to do with the mercantile nature of the pop cultural industry. Subversion is, of course, simply a more marketable property than uniformity — the well-known irony here being that there is nothing remotely subversive about either buying or selling subversion as a commodity.

I would like to emphasize, however, that when I am taking Neate as an example of tendency to instinctively over-valorize difference, I do not mean to say that I fundamentally disagree with his analyses. Rather, I am referring to them simply as illustrative examples of how the inherent purism of a critical vocabulary based on the notion of difference exerts a gravitational pull towards purified binary perspectives, which might not even be a perspective the author intended to take. In fact, Neate's hefty volume, over the course of its four hundred pages, makes a convincing argument against Wire's aesthetics being merely oppositional or deconstructionist and manages to account for the fundamentally (self-)contradictory impulses that underline them. It is only that in the aforementioned passages where his descriptions directly resort to (post-)structuralist jargon that his critical language starts to work against this overall effort. In that regard, this problem of an inherently puristic theoretical vocabulary being at odds with an impure practical reality seems of a similar ilk to what Wyndham Lewis was already reacting to in his Vorticist phase. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Vorticist manifesto is itself a (self-)contradictory text in the way that it is a radical avant-gardist manifesto that simultaneously voices a fundamental skepticism towards the quixotic purism of the modernist avant-gardist manifesto. Essentially, the Vorticist manifesto performs this impossibility to reconcile a practicological outlook oriented on the "reality of the present" (that is, the messy, haphazard, and awkward hybridity of modern life) with "the sentimental future, or the sacripant past" (that is, the comparatively pure world of history, ideas, and ideals, i.e. of language itself). We can thus read Lewis as almost forestalling the Latourian response to poststructuralist discourse criticism. Latour's critique is in *We Have Never Been Modern*, after all, not only directed against the puristic tendencies in the natural and the social sciences, but also against the linguistic or discursive purisms in the humanities (4). As he argues, we have to acknowledge that the external, everyday world is not all language, signs, and/or discourse (as some of the

more stereotypical offshoots of poststructuralist or postmodernist theory likes to purport), but a messy interplay of practices constantly oscillating between the purportedly pure epistemological spheres of discourse, nature, and politics. His subsequent demand that we have to take a perspective focused on the actual external practices than on the puristic theoretical abstractions belatedly derived from them seems in a similar spirit to Lewis's own outlook. Lewis, after all, manages to encapsulate a similar critique of epistemological purism in that little word "would" standing in the way of attaining a point "beyond action and reaction": The outward-oriented practicological perspective is definitely not an ideal position to take; the ideal remains the hypothetical point beyond action and reaction — the center-point of the modern vortex. But it is the best and most viable option to take when the alternative are puristic fallacies, whose aims and intentions might very well be laudable but which, by their very nature, will never come to be realized.

My point for arguing there to be an inherent limitation to a critical vocabulary that privileges or focuses exclusively on the discursive or linguistic sphere is that the two issues elaborated above — the danger of unconsciously falling back on simple binarisms and, in association, the tendency to an instinctive over-valorization of otherness — present a methodological obstacle when it comes to accurately account for fundamentally hybrid phenomena. As the discussions of both Lewis's brand of Vorticism and Wire's brand of art-punk in the preceding chapter have shown, binary concepts may provide a useful theoretical tool, but only to a certain degree: The Vorticist manifesto, both in its demands and its blustering rhetoric, positioned Lewis and the other signatories in direct opposition to a complacent artistic establishment, yet they decidedly shied away from the brazen (and, for that matter, violent and destructive) radicalism of their Futurist forerunners. Lewis's own repeated calls for a radically different kind of modern art was constantly undercut by his own valorization of a preservative "classical" approach as well as a fundamental skepticism toward the actual feasibility of radicalist demands and positions. In a similar way, Wire, with their radically new brand of elitist anti-rock, represented a clear break with empty traditions, yet, when all was said and done, their overall aesthetic approach was still situated within the established idiom of rock music. While certainly being different, unconventional, and off-putting (the latter especially in their terse and borderline passive-aggressive relationship with the press and the public), they were simultaneously too orderly, sober, and (self-)restrained in their appearance to pass as radical avant-gardist iconoclasts. In that sense, as already discussed in the previous chapter with the example of the German exhibition review in *Die Zeit*, there is some truth to the accusation of

an essential moderateness to this type of a practicological modernism. However, the fact that moderateness itself is taken as grounds for leveling a fundamental critique against a specific modernist aesthetics tells us more about the accuser than the accused. It is, essentially, another example of the aforementioned reflex to regard aesthetic radicalism as a value by and in itself. As we will see, shortly, Lewis himself took a highly critical stance against this categorical imperative of modern art punditry.

If we want to define a term not derived from or leaning on binary notions to describe this aesthetic middle position a bit more accurately, one possibility would be to characterize it as a position of *eccentricity*. In its literal sense, the eccentric is characterized by his or her deviation from established cultural norms without being necessarily radical. In contrast to the figure of the outsider, the deviance of the eccentric does not necessarily represent an oppositional standpoint, which fundamentally rejects these norms and calls for their abolishment, replacement, and/or total destruction. Rather than being defined in the terms of dialectical secession from and opposition to the center, the eccentric is defined in a dialogical relation to the center characterized by a moderate distance and an active and mutual exchange. However, with regard to Lewis, this choice of terminology would then present us with an entirely different problem. In British literary and cultural history, the topos of the eccentric is not commonly used to refer to the type of artist-persona associated with someone like Wyndham Lewis. Rather than evoke the image of a stern, elitist, and imposing intellectual, the term eccentric is used mostly to refer to a type, whose behavior is either driven by affects and instincts or is simply a set of studied quirks and oddities with no deeper significance. In that sense, the eccentric projects a presence to the spectator or the reader that — once the initial moment of slight confusion has passed — is fascinating and amusing in a fundamentally positive way. We cannot say the same of the aesthetic approaches of both Lewis and Wire, which valorize cold, analytical distance and detachment, project an off-putting sense of passive intellectual aggression, and prefer their humor to be of the harsher and more acerbic type. There is also, as Aymes-Stokes and Mellet, an element of class to the term (12-14). Historically, the eccentric was someone who could afford to be an eccentric: a privileged figure, usually coming from an aristocratic or, at least, an upper middle-class background, whose mannerisms might have been off-center, but who, due to his or her socio-economic standing, was still very much a representative of that center. Lewis would thus certainly have balked at the suggestion that his skepticism towards radicalist and absolutist interpretations of modernism would give grounds to label him a slightly odd but essentially harmless figure in the cultural landscape of his time. After all,

one of the prime targets of his viciously satirical attacks on these genteel and idle types of artistic practices was Dame Edith Sitwell, poet, author of the 1933 study *The English Eccentrics*, and herself a quintessential personification of this type of English upper-class eccentricity. Lewis's resentment for the Sitwells — in *Blasting and Bomberdiering* he singled out Edith Sitwell "one of [his] most hoary, tried and reliable enemies" (91) — and similar artistic cliques mainly stemmed from his fundamentally meritocratic outlook. He regarded them as snobbish, upper-class dilettantes, who exploited their privileged heritage to prevent other, more talented individuals from lower social strata to realize their ambitions. As already discussed in the previous chapter, Lewis's ideal of the professional artist-as-mercenary was formulated in contrast to what he saw as stilted and innocuous artistic ramblings of privileged *in-crowds*. Although Lewis's critique of these circles would reach its apex in the inter-war years with his monumental satire *The Apes of God*, we can already recognize it in his Vorticist phase, for example in the blast/bless-section of *Blast 1,* where he attacks "humour" as a "Quack ENGLISH drug for stupidity and sleepiness. Arch enemy of REAL, conventionalizing like gunshot, freezing supple REAL in ferocious chemistry of laughter" (17). In contrast to this type of inoffensive humor, he then, of course, *blesses* English humor a few pages later on, but this time a humor of a decidedly more raw and aggressive kind: the Swiftian satire for its "solemn bleak wisdom of laughter" and Shakespeare for his "bitter Northern Rhetoric of humour" (26).

However, despite the issues resulting from the conventional and/or historical use of the term *eccentric*, I would still say that there is some merit to invoke it as part of an attempt to approximate the unusual aesthetic approach at stake here. As it is a term that is not derived from strong binary or oppositional notions, it seems seems useful to describe the aforementioned aesthetic middle position, which is located at a point of distance from a presupposed (cultural and/or social) center, but not necessarily in a relation of total difference or direct and incommensurable opposition. We could perhaps say that, in its conventional meaning, the term *eccentricity* refers less to this structural aspect (that is, how a specific position relates to a presupposed center position) and more to the more immediately apparent expression of this deviance in the form of unusual mannerisms and quirks. Edith Sitwell would then represent the eccentric in this conventional sense of the word: an actress deliberately staging these off-center mannerisms to entertain an audience, but who structurally remains very much a representative of the privileged center. With regard to Lewis, however, his eccentricity would be the exact reverse: His off-center position is structural in the sense that it is based on an intellectual critique of the makeup of that center directed from some point of relative distance to it,

whereas the conventional characteristics of eccentricity relating to mannerisms, appearances, and decorum do not apply to him. With regard to the former two, he espoused, as already discussed, a very center-oriented valorization of orderliness and discipline ("Bless the hairdresser!"), whereas with regard to the latter, Lewis, at least according to most biographical writing on him, essentially lacked it in spades.[21] We could thus perhaps describe his position more precisely as a *negative* structural eccentricity: It is, on the one hand, characterized by a critical stance towards the center that is expressed in a fundamentally negative mode. Whether as vicious satire or as polemical cultural criticism, the overall tone is unrelentingly hostile and aggressive. On the other hand, this dissidence, despite its outward hostility, stops short of calling for a radical and revolutionary overthrow of the center. It remains grounded on a practicological foundation by accepting — perhaps grudgingly so — the given social, cultural, and political circumstances as a stubborn matter of fact, preferring the relative safety of a state of stability and order over the far more threatening state of radical revolution. In that sense, what might outwardly come across as some kind of destructive intellectual raging and rioting remains, in a structural sense, fundamentally loyalist, conservative, and bound to an idea of civic duty.[22] It is this middle position of negative structural eccentricity that accounts for the strange simultaneity of guarded traditionalism (or, in Lewis's preferred terminology, classicism) and surging modernism. As already apparent in his pre-war Vorticist phase, the aim is not to completely destroy and/or replace tradition — it is about transforming it. A critique, however vicious and hostile in its articulation, must not move past a certain zero point and remain within stable and clearly framed parameters. If this sentiment is expressed in a rather opaque manner in *Blast 1*, we can discern it more clearly in some of his later non-literary writing.

Lewis's clearest and most concise statement against a purist radicalism in modernism is found in the final book-length essay published in his lifetime, *The*

21 For the seemingly endless number of episodes, stories, and anecdotes about Lewis's constant fights and altercations with both friends and enemies, ranging from petty feuds to libel lawsuits, both Jeffrey Myers' and Paul O'Keeffe's biographies of Wyndham Lewis provide ample reading material.

22 Again, Andrew Causey's argument about "Lewis's sense of the burlesque" being "balanced by his strong respect for authority" and his "conservative instincts" (18) seems useful here. We must not forget, after all, that for all his belligerent posturing and his quasi-Dadaist (or at least absurdist) interventions into a stale art scene were counteracted by a strong sense of duty that got him to voluntarily enlist as an officer in World War One and later accept a commission to work as an official war artist for the British government.

Demon of Progress in the Arts. The essay is a thorough renunciation of artistic radicalism — or, as he labels it, *extremism* — and its valorization by the art world for its own sake. What is striking about the essay, however, is that it is framed, again, by a practicological perspective. Directing his criticism primarily at the exhibitions of contemporary abstract art by the Parisian *Salon des Réalités Nouvelles*, Lewis's argument hinges neither on some immanent quality or ideal ascribed to the artwork per se, nor on some overarching abstract theory of modern art; instead, it is mainly derived from an observation of the practical constraints affecting the field of the visual arts conceived primarily as a *social* field. Lewis describes the art world as a complicated interplay between the spheres of the exhibition spaces, art schools, critics, dealers, curators, and, of course, the artists themselves, which is largely responsible for determining what is art and what is not, or, more specifically, what is in vogue and what is not. A few decades before Pierre Bourdieu would publish his seminal works on a sociology of taste, Lewis already showed an acute awareness of how it was primarily the material and social conditions of the art world, and not the abstract theoretical musings of art philosophers, critics and pundits, that were playing the vital role in setting and establishing aesthetic norms. Or, to put it more precisely, the latter represented only one cog, one type of practice, in a far more complex and interconnected social imbroglio that was shaping the realities of the art world. Lewis stresses the importance of the material conditions of aesthetic taste in an early section of the essay where he notes that, compared to the visual arts, the field of music in England has remained largely immune to extremist tendencies (13). He accounts for this difference by referring to the underlying economics of the situation:

> It may weigh more heavily against extremism than anything else, that there is a vast army of instrumentalists, which we may call the rank-and-file army of instrumental music. The interests of this horde of instrumentalists are protected by a powerful trade union. These instrumentalists are essential to many theatres, to great numbers of hotels, to dance halls, to performances of all sorts, to opera, to ballet, broadcasting etc. Now the rank and file of all these orchestras, large and small, favour what is normal and popular in music. Their bread and butter depends upon music which is normal and popular. Their livelihood would be menaced if most musical composers indulged in types of composition calculated to drive away the public. (16)

In contrast, Lewis notes that the visual arts are a fundamentally cheap form of art, noting that "the [British Art Council's] subsidy set aside for financing the ballet and the opera is four or five times as much as the quite modest sum required for the upkeep of the visual arts department" (17). As an aside,

the passage quoted above again highlights Lewis's fundamentally conflicted relationship with mass phenomena and dynamics. If the essay as a whole is an attack on the snobbish extremist art-elites of his time, Lewis's disregard for the other, more popularly oriented fields of art nevertheless shines through in his choice of words: "the rank-and-file army", "this horde of instrumentalists" etc. Right to the end, Lewis's elitism remained of a mercenary kind: disassociated from any camp and committed only to a professional code of his own.

However, if economical factors thus prevent certain fields of the arts from embracing extremist tendencies, this does not yet explain why other fields less dependent on a consistently high degree of funding are all the more susceptible to them. Here, Lewis offers a two-step explanation: Originally, the valorization of extremism in the arts is a product of the logic of modern political revolutions encroaching upon the field of the visual arts: "The age of political revolution was followed by the era of perpetual revolution in the arts. Halfway through the last century, the revolutionary zest, the turmoil of schools, the roaring of slogans and watch-words began to assume a crazy intensity" (22). The valorization of the revolutionary principle in the arts thus emerged as a consequence of the valorization of the bourgeois and, later, proletarian political revolutions starting in the late eighteenth century and intensifying up until the early twentieth century. However, Lewis remains essentially skeptical towards the emancipatory promises that the advent of revolutionary radicalism and, in turn, a great stylistic heterogeneity had brought into the arts:

> This heterogeneity is not an explosion of rugged individualism, but, on the contrary, quite the opposite. The personality is surrendered to some small well-disciplined group: it is always as groups that they advance to the attack upon the obsolete. If the contemporary scene could be confined to any one of these groups, it would seem a very homogeneous period. (22)

Lewis's view of the inherent dynamics of the revolutionary principle thus resembles Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno's critique of enlightenment thinking in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: The emancipatory ideal of the political revolution borne by the Enlightenment leads, if taken to its logical extreme, straight into a totalitarian system of domination and exploitation. According to Lewis, a similar point can be made about the art world. In their impure practical realizations, purist revolutionary ideas lead to greater stylistic diversity; however, instead of this diversity leading to a greater individualistic freedom for the individual artist, it only tends to result in new cases of tightly knit cliques and monolithic groupthink.

It is at this point that, according to Lewis, the extremist impulse, once established in the field of the visual arts, turns into a self-perpetuating and self-intensifying principle, which is itself ultimately subject to economical constrains. As Lewis argues, the notion of revolutionary art gradually loses its political meaning and is transformed into a purely formalist concern: "Although receiving their first impetus from a social revolution, the subsequent upheavals related purely to technical modifications" (23). In order for a system of the arts that has internalized the notion of revolution to sustain itself, it needs to continually keep pushing the boundaries between what is considered normal and acceptable and what is considered new, revolutionary, radical, and/or innovative. In what might be one of the most resolute defenses of restraint, moderateness, and discipline in his entire body of work, Lewis argues that this essentially sensationalist logic will, as in his example of the *Réalites Nouvelles*, invariably "advance" the visual arts to a point where they dissolve, or, rather, *abstract* themselves into complete nothingness:

> [...] as far as I personally am concerned, I do not object to the extremism of Henry Moore or of Graham Sutherland. In my own work I pushed at all times to that limit, although doing fairly traditional work as well. Having made this statement, let me add that extremism is not *necessary.* It is all right; some people tend to be extremist, and some are not extremist. There is no merit in extremism: although at the present moment it is a universal fashion. What I am arguing [...] is that an easily defined limit exists in painting and sculpture, in music, in the theatre, in literature, in architecture, and in every other human art. There are daring drivers who enjoy driving along the edge of a cliff, whenever the opportunity offers. All I am saying is that there is such a thing as driving *too near* the edge of a cliff. [...] beyond a certain well-defined line — in the arts as in everything else — beyond that limit there is *nothing.* Nothing, zero, is what logically you reach past a line, of some kind, laid down by nature, everywhere. As you must understand, we have reached the point at which a quite final position has to be taken up. It is where you have to say *yes* or *no.* [...]
> Infantile extremist sensationalism (as a by-product of self-seeking) is the curse of the pundit. What every artist should try to prevent is the car, in which is our civilized life, plunging over the side of the precipice — the exhibitionist extremist promoter driving the whole bag of tricks into a nihilistic nothingness. (32-33)

We can recognize in this lengthy quote how Lewis makes a fundamental distinction regarding artistic extremism. On the one hand, there is extremism as a tool — a mode of aesthetic expression — in the service of another goal. This is the kind of extremism that he admits to having pursued himself as a modernist and which he essentially condones, provided, of course, that the artist

knows precisely what he or she is doing and for what reason(s). Regarding the overall aim(s) that should be pursued by this extremism (and, therefore, by art in general), Lewis is usually loath to offer a clear statement. It is thus in the quoted passage that we find perhaps one of his most straightforward and succinct statements on the matter: "What every artist should try to prevent is the car, in which is our civilized life, plunging over the side of the precipice" (33). In other words, the role of the artist, even if he or she resorts to an extremist mode of aesthetic expression, should be that of a safeguard of civilization.

If Lewis's stance is thus conservative in the very literal sense of the word (artistic extremism as a tool in the service of cultural conservation), he contrasts it, on the other hand, with a (self-)destructive practice of artistic extremism as a fashion or a dogma. In his typically dismissive tone, this type of extremism is that of the dilettante artist and charlatan promoter: the "rank and file extremist [for whom] *nothing* is permitted. [The] slave of the great god Progress, who is a very jealous god indeed" (40). The irony, which is not lost to Lewis, is how this institutionalization of extremist modern art as "the contemporary" results in another case of the revolution eating its own children. The notion of aesthetic extremism as a virtue in itself subjects the art world and its participants to a puristic dogma, turning the former into a hermetically sealed playground with no significant connections to everyday social realities and making the latter its "progressive slaves" (40). In this purified space, art as imagined by Lewis ceases to exist. It is a depoliticized field, where the original extremist vocabulary still persists, but only as the empty buzzwords of a pompous jargon whose sole purpose is "to conceal the growing absence of culture behind these imposing façades" (27). The notion of the revolutionary gesture or movement does not signify fundamental change or progress anymore, but reverts to a more literal sense of the term as the perpetual *revolution* around a fixed center point — a movement without progression.[23]

Lewis's description of this system of modernism as contemporary art, resulting from the valorization of artistic extremism per se and driven mainly by art promoters, critics, and pundits, stands as an eerily accurate portrayal of what today commonly constitutes an outsider's view of the contemporary art market. Lewis's essay thus remains astonishingly vital in how it stands as an astute early analysis of the inner working of self-perpetuating ‚hype industries'. When Lewis predicted how "the ‚advanced' gestures" and all "the project-foolery" (22)

23 With regard to the paradoxically circular logic of the term *revolution,* Lewis's rejection of the vulgar Marxist re-interpretation of the term according to a logic of progressive determinism anticipates a similar argument that Hannah Arendt would make in her 1963 book *On Revolution* (31-2).

would eventually stabilize within an industry of their own, with the painter and pundit as its willing slave laborers, he was not just right — his choice of vocabulary was absolutely on point as well. Lewis's awareness for how art punditry with its jargon-heavy language mainly served as an arcane code to create socio-cultural distinctions and preemptively exclude certain people from participating predates Pierre Bourdieu's early work on that topic by more than a decade and might be one of the first critical study of what Alix Rule and David Levine have termed the language of "International Art English".[24] However, in contrast to Bourdieu's strictly academic perspective, Lewis's satirical eye cannot help to ultimately note the ridiculousness and absurdity of it all. Though there is a strong sense of cultural pessimism permeating the essay, Lewis nevertheless concludes his essay with biting sarcasm, pointing out that a self-destruction of the arts of this particular kind amounted not to a tragic but to a "clownish suicide" (92).

We can thus summarize the core claim of *The Demon of Progress in the Arts* as such: There exists, in contemporary art, a degenerate form of modern artistic extremism that valorizes newness for newness's sake. This type of rank-and-file extremism is an institutionalized and depoliticized offspring of the originally emancipatory gestures of modernist extremism in the arts. In order for this closed system of visual arts, which revolves around the dogma of newness for newness's sake, to sustain itself, it must perpetually call for gestures of an even more extremist kind, which manifest as an ever increasing degree of visual abstraction in the arts. This demand, however, amounts to a radicalist plunge of the visual arts into a purist nothingness — a self-erasing impulse both demanded and propped up by the pompous theoretical jargon of art punditry. Pundits act as the puritanical high priests of contemporary art: They are simultaneously the progressive slaves to the purist dogma of abstraction as well as its most vocal and powerful advocates and perpetuate what is essentially a tyrannical system of the arts at the expense of what Lewis considers more real, relevant, and valuable forms of artistic expression.

There are certain similarities in Lewis's description of the institutionalized art world to Theodor W. Adorno's critique of the cultural industry. In a similar way to Adorno, Lewis describes a complex network of social dependencies, cultural production and symbolic languages, which is promoted either by capital, state policy, or an amalgamation of the two. This network forms what is essentially a

24 Regarding Bourdieu's early studies on the sociological dimension of the museum system, see his 1969 study with Alain Darbel *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public.* On the term *International Art English*, see the respective article by Alix Rule and David Levine.

quasi-totalitarian cultural system of dominance and exploitation, which brings its participants into line all the while purporting, through its emancipatory vocabulary, to actually fulfill their wishes and desires as individuals. In many ways, the critiques of Lewis and Adorno both stand as early studies in how modern techniques of administration and organization encroach upon and negatively affect the fields of the arts and of culture. Where Lewis and Adorno differ, however, is in their respective object of study. The latter directed his critique at the low-brow sphere of popular and mass entertainment, arguing that the cultural industry worked as a system to indoctrinate and control the masses. Lewis, however, targets the exclusive and exclusionary high-brow spheres of modern and contemporary art, noticing the very same mechanisms of domination and exploitation, the very same "mass lunacy" (8) in the field that Adorno saw, or desired to see, as a bastion against totalitarian rule. Perhaps this points to that latent ambivalence of the Adornoian critical theory of the Frankfurt School in that one of the seminal early theories on totalitarianism had itself a whiff of authoritarianism about it. In what is admittedly a polemical passage in a work of popular science, Hans-Dieter Gelfert has neatly described this dilemma at the heart of the Adornoian brand of elitism as follows:

> [The notion of] value implies rank. Value also implies that it is desirable; it states an authoritarian demand. The more radically someone insists on values, the more authoritarian, elitist, and hostile towards the masses he necessarily has to be. Adorno was the positively tragic embodiment of this dilemma. He had to flee from Germany, because a totalitarian regime was threatening him; and he returned to Germany to erect, as a defense against the possible return of this regime, the authoritarian values of his "critical theory". […] his authoritarian views on art are fatally close to kitsch and his own literary style is so thoroughly suffused by an authoritarian ostentation that this author will not hesitate to describe it as *intimidation-kitsch* [Ger. *Einschüchterungskitsch*]. (203)

Apart from these issues about a supposedly authoritarian literary style, it is important to note that Adorno was, first and foremost, a philosopher, cultural theorist, and critic. As an amalgamation of, among other theoretical influences, Weberian sociology and Marxist and psychoanalytic theory, the Frankfurt School of critical theory was naturally concerned less with surface phenomena and more with grasping the immanent or structural logic of things. With Adorno, a high degree of theoretical abstraction is therefore to be expected.

It is this primacy of abstract theorems that, as I would argue, we do not find in Lewis's critical writings. Of course, he was, as Adorno, an elitist who did not hesitate to use his intellect as a weapon of intimidation. However, he was

simultaneously too solitary a figure — too detached from the elitist circles and cliques of his times — to not note the dilemma mentioned above. As we have already noted, his relationship with popular and mass phenomena was not, as Adorno, one of outright rejection, but far more conflicted and ambivalent. More importantly, Lewis's self-positioning was primarily that of an artist. Although he produced a significant body of critical and theoretical writing, his eye always veered toward the external: the actual practices of the artist and their material results. For all his "extremist" bluster, he thus remained wary of absolutist notions and, as an artist, he certainly did not see himself as beholden to the grand theoretical narratives of non-artists. In *The Demon of Progress in the Arts*, he lambasts the latter for driving promising young artists ever more towards "pretentious intellectualist abstraction[s]" (6) and argues that the relationship between the practically oriented artist and the pundit with his overarching theories is fundamentally problematic:

> One of my principal objections to the pundit-prophet is that he is always an agent of the *Zeitgeist,* whose function is to 'inspire' (to drill and to discipline) a generation. The *Zeitgeist* means fashion; and I do not think that the best work is done when the compulsion of fashion is at its intensest. The fact that this pundit has first to learn all his tricks from the painter, and then to dragoon him according to a theory which is often independent of painting, is an unsatisfactory situation. The pundit has interests of his own and is apt to look at things fundamentally differently from the painter, or sculptor, or other visual artist. (52)

It is interesting to see an avowed intellectualist as Lewis using the term "intellectualist" in a derogatory way, but we can see, in the longer quote, how Lewis lays claim to a different type of intellectualism to that of art theorists. In drawing a clear line of distinction between their perspective and that of the artist and clearly coming out in favor of the latter, he again makes a case for an outlook that is fundamentally grounded in artistic *practice* and not in abstract theoretical reasoning.

This distinction correlates with his general valorization of skills and knowledge of a technical and practical kind. In that regard, *The Demon of Progress in the Arts* is not only a defense of "true" modernism against its dogmatic institutionalized form as contemporary art; it is simultaneously a defense of the old-fashioned notions of craftsmanship and technical mastery. This becomes most apparent in a passage that seems, at first, to be the weakest part of the essay's argument: After having argued, as quoted on pages 85 to 86, that there is a limit to artistic extremism beyond which the visual arts would abstract themselves into nothingness, he finds himself unable to define for the reader

exactly where or what that limit is. Instead, he appeals for his or her trust, arguing that only artists such as him possess the necessary knowledge and experience to actually see that limit, which "differentiates a highly logical piece of 'extremism' of Picasso's from an average work hung in the *Réalités Nouvelles* exhibitions" (35). From an argumentative perspective, this sudden appeal to the reader's trust is disappointing and has all the marks of a flimsy excuse. However, if we take Lewis's valorization of artistic practice over theoretical abstraction into account, this appeal starts to make sense. To provide a definition of that limit would run counter to Lewis's argument in favor of practical mastery and against theoretical abstractions, because such a definition would essentially have to come in the form of a theoretical abstraction. Lewis's point, however, is precisely that this knowledge, or, rather, *skill*, cannot be conveyed in a neat theoretical axiom. Rather, it has to be arduously acquired through years of practical work and training as an artist. Lewis's understanding of an elite is thus based on a different idiom than that of an academical elite. While the latter grounds itself in a type of learned knowledge oriented on abstract and theoretical principles — in a certain way of *thinking about things* — Lewis's understanding of an elite is based on practical application and the skills and knowledge derived from it — on a certain way of *doing things*.

Lewis's argument that modernist extremism should be approached as a skill requiring practical mastery instead of a theoretical dogma demanding obedience evokes notions of artistic production that seem quaintly pre-modern: the master instead of the professional, apprenticeship instead of education, the workshop instead of the lecture hall etc. It is in this conflation of modernism and traditionalism that we notice, again, the impure element in Lewis's outlook, which seems to be evident of a fundamental inconsistency to his thinking. However, there is, in fact, a consistent logic to Lewis's modernist ethos, but it is a counterintuitive logic: Lewis's valorization of the practical is not synonymous with a denouncement of its supposed opposite, intellectualism, but an argument for an intellectualism grounded in and understood *as practice*. It is a logic that, in other words, only appears inconsistent in so far as it does not align with the purifying gaze of the critic/expert, who sees theory and practice as binary opposites. In that respect, however, Lewis's practical intellectualism at least stands in direct opposition to Adorno in spite of the above-mentioned similarities of their critiques: If Adorno was lamenting, together with Horkheimer in the preface of their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that the dominance of a purely operationalized form of rationalism came at the cost of a growing absence of theoretical education (Ger. *Bildung*), Lewis was arguing the opposite: The answer to the emerging modern forms of dominance and control was not to

come up with a better, that is, a "critical" brand of theory, but by insisting on the necessity of practice. In contrast to the Frankfurt School's call for more rigorous theoretical investigations, Lewis making a plug for the impure art of practice.

Seeing how Lewis's conception of art as a type of practice — both of the intellectual and of the manual kind — remained closely linked to notions of skill, craftsmanship, and mastery, it becomes clear why he had a fundamental issue with fully abstract, non-objective art. As a practical skill rooted in the here and now — the social, political, cultural, and sheer material reality — the object of art should be, according to Lewis, to productively engage with that external *old reality* as it presents itself and instead of dreaming up *Réalités Nouvelles.* It is thus not surprising that he reserved his praises for those artists that retained a figurative style and managed to form a productive relationship with the canonical tradition of the visual arts (meaning an engagement that went beyond trivial extremist gestures of outright and unapologetic rejection). Naturally, Picasso remains his ultimate point of reference, as his was an extremism firmly grounded in technical skill and an awareness and knowledge of tradition that he was unwilling to abandon (28). In the same way, we can see how Lewis recognized a similar skill set in a young Francis Bacon, pointing out how his "grotesqueries" were in the same spirit Goya and Hieronymus Bosch and how it was "the ethical and literary impulses throughout the work of Bacon [that] constitute him an artist at the opposite pole to the pretentious blanks and voids of *Réalités Nouvelles*" (*The Demon of Progress in the Arts,* "Explanatory Note on the Plates", no page no.). Lewis, in other words, regarded Bacon's modernist extremism as being not of a trivial kind, because it was grounded in an *old reality* and productively engaged with the tradition of portrait painting; the extremism of the *Réalités Nouvelles*, however, was trivial in the sense that its commitment to total abstraction amounted to a renunciation of painting (and reality) altogether.[25]

By coming out in defense of figurative painting in the 1950s, Lewis was putting himself — again — in a contrarian position. As he himself noted, the *Zeitgeist* was calling for non-objective art. Today, the 1950s are commonly seen as the decade when Abstract Expressionism gained mainstream recognition. It

25 It is, of course, idle speculation to imagine what Lewis would have thought of the further developments and trends of contemporary art of the 1960s had he lived to see it. Still, considering his valorization of artisanal skill and how the masterful execution of that skill would produce a convincing result as a lasting form, it is relatively safe to assume that he would have regarded subsequent trends — that is, the boom of conceptual and performance art from the 1960s onwards — as further steps into an even deeper theoretical nothingness beyond that limit that he posited in *The Demon of Progress in the Arts.*

is therefore not surprising, that Clement Greenberg published a hostile response to *The Demon of Progress in the Arts* in 1957 where he accused Lewis of a fundamental “anti-modernism” (164). Lewis’s essay does not mention Abstract Expressionism or Greenberg by name; its focus lies on the developments in France and the United Kingdom and, accordingly, its targets are French and English art critics, among them André Malraux and Herbert Read, the founder of the London Institute of Contemporary Arts (Lewis also singles out John Ruskin and Roger Fry as earlier exponents of that profession he refers to as the “pundit-prophet”). However, it is clear that American Abstract Expressionism and Clement Greenberg as its foremost champion were fitting the same mold: an abstract, non-objective type of painting advocated by a critical establishment, whose role as the tastemaker of the art scenes was, according to Lewis, mainly driven by a predilection for purist and theoretical *idées fixes* and other intellectualist mind-games and not by an interest in the external and practical realities of the visual arts. As Lewis was thus essentially calling into question the legitimacy of an entire profession, it is not surprising that Greenberg felt compelled to respond.

As already mentioned, *The Demon of Progress in the Arts* is one of Lewis’s late statements, published four decades after *Blast 1.* There is, of course, an argument to be made that a lot had changed during that long period, not least Lewis’s own outlook after having gone through one world war in active service, the interwar period in a highly prolific yet also very difficult and conflict-laden phase, and another world war in a self-imposed exile in Canada. His late style of critical writing is certainly different to his pre-World War One and his interwar writings; it is, in general, more measured and restrained, and, while still characteristically belligerent and opinionated, relying more on calm and sober argumentation than on bellicose blustering. Also, there is an overt sense of cultural pessimism running through *The Demon of Progress in the Arts*, but the same can already be said about much of his writing from the interwar period; it is only the pre-World War One work over which there does not yet hang a dark shadow of cultural pessimism. If it might thus seem slightly presumptuous to juxtapose “early” and “late” Lewis in that manner. Nevertheless, I would argue that there still is, in several respects, a sense of continuity running all the way from *Blast 1* to *The Demon of Progress in the Arts.*

First, we can clearly say that Lewis’s outlook in *The Demon of Progress in the Arts* remains firmly oriented on the reality of the present. Lewis’s criticism of what he regards as the pretentious mind games of an ivory-tower caste of art pundits mirrors the fundamental skepticism of the viability of puristic, utopian, or absolutist visions already apparent in *Blast.* If Lewis was blasting

the Futurist radicalism of Marinetti as a boring "automobilism" (*Blast 1* 8), his dismissal of modern non-objective art's infatuation with "new realities" instead of the present reality essentially takes the same line. Lewis's insistence on a modernism grounded in an impure practicological outlook remains constant. We can see this in a passage in *The Demon of Progress in the Arts* where Lewis argues the impossibility to come up with a pure definition of "the contemporary" in a way that can only be described as positively Latourian:

> First, you would ask yourself what was *purely* contemporary. You would have to disentangle it entirely from the past. You would carefully exclude the larger volume of something which is *always* going on, and which is much the same in 1854 as in 1954. Then you would have to eliminate anything which just *happens to be occurring* now; for the contemporary should be something which is *essentially* of today. (65)

Lewis's sardonic mockery of the term goes on for a few paragraphs more, but the point should be clear: In a way that is strikingly similar to Bruno Latour's newspaper example discussed in the introductory chapter, Lewis essentially anticipates the core claim of Latour's critique of overly purist conceptions of modernity. Arguing how an essentially impure and hybrid reality will always stand in the way of purist abstractions from it, he denounces the latter as unpractical and pretentious intellectualist shams.

In the same way we have already discussed with regard to *Blast 1*, we also note how, in spite of his rejection of those puristic grand abstract theories, Lewis's valorization of an essentially intellectualist outlook remains. Although Lewis espouses an aesthetic approach oriented on the reality of the present and grounded in somewhat quaintly pre-modern practical notions such as technical skill, mastery, and traditional knowledge, this does not amount to a rejection of intellectualism, but, on the contrary, to its inclusion as a central aspect of his own practicological idiom. The choice is not a binary one between mind *or* matter or between *either* purist academic intellectualism *or* instinctual romanticism. Rather, Lewis proffers a *different* kind of intellectualism that is still very much cerebral, analytical, and premeditated (as opposed to spontaneous, intuitive, and rash), yet is also fundamentally *extrinsic.* It is, in other words, not oriented on notions of immanence, inner realities, and abstract theories with a claim to universality, but an intellectualism that is both informed by and directed at the external world. In this focus on the external side of things, Lewis remains fairly consistent throughout his career. Next to *Blast 1* and *The Demon of Progress in the Arts,* we also find it in his critical writings of the interwar period. In *Men Without Art*, his main work of literary criticism of that time, he labels it the *External* or *Classical* approach to art, arguing that the only appropriate stylistic

mode to grasp the fundamentally superficial and absurd reality of modern life was a type of cold, non-moralist satire that focused on the externality of both things and people (or, rather, people-as-things) (95-105); on the internal approach that was fashionable in literary circles at the time (e.g. psychological realism, stream of consciousness writing, etc.) he caustically remarked that it should, in fact, only apply to "(1) the extremely aged; (2) young children; (3) half-wits; and (4) animals" (98). In *Time and Western Man*, the most important of his idiosyncratic efforts in the field of philosophy, we find similar claims against the (over-)valorization of intangible inner realities, for instance in the chapter on "God as Reality". Referring to the Aristotelian notion that all we have to make up our idea of God is what we possess in our experience (394), Lewis argues that

> that is exactly all that we have [...] and that, further than that, it is completely adequate. To at once be perfectly concrete, we can assert that a God that swam in such an atmosphere as is produced by the music of a Bach fugue, or the stormy grandeur of the genii in the Sistine Ceiling, or the scene of the Judgment of Signorelli at Orvieto, who moved with the grace of Mozart — any one may for himself accumulate such comparisons from the greatest forms of art — such a God would be the highest we could imagine; that God would be so perfect in power and beauty that, however much people may assert they find it possible to experience a greater God (to whom all human experience would be relatively imperfect) or analogically to posit one, we are entirely justified in not believing them. (394-395)

Even when it comes to the notion of God itself, Lewis takes a practicological and externally oriented view, stressing the primacy of the cognitive experience of divine reality over the positing of an abstract idea located in some utopian nowhere far beyond the reaches of the cognitive capabilities of the mind. It is worth pointing out that Lewis, when pointing to the arts as an example of this divine reality, is specifically pointing to the sheer, overwhelming physicality of the artwork itself — its existence in the here and now *as matter or form* — as the locus of that divine reality. In other words, he makes sure to avoid the idealist perception of seeing it only as a passive medium expressing or referring to some vague notion of the divine located somewhere far beyond the realms of perceptibility. To Lewis, external form is all that we have and is therefore all that matters.

It should be obvious that all of these positions outlined above were always also gestures of dissidence. When it came to manifestations of the *Zeitgeist* — radicalist avant-gardisms, utopian modernisms, stream of consciousness writing, non-objective painting, psychoanalysis etc. — Lewis reliably sat himself on the benches of the opposition. However, what should also have become

clear is that these gestures of dissidence are neither gestures of revolutionary radicalism nor are they empty acts of provocation for their own sake. Rather, they show an impulse that is not subversive or revolutionary, but, on the contrary, protective or conservative (in the literal and not necessarily political sense of the word). It is an impulse prompted by the question of how to best deal (aesthetically) with and, thus, survive in the reality of the present. Out of an acute awareness that coming up with puristic final solutions to this question is neither feasible nor possible, Lewis comes up with the unique blend of high intellectualism and grounded practicology that I have attempted to outline above. It is a position that is only oppositional in the sense that it leaves him detached from any ideological camp. For that matter, Lewis showed no qualms to discharge himself, as necessary, at both sides. As I have shown with the example of *The Demon of Progress in the Arts,* Lewis attacked both the mindless cultural proletariat (see, for example, his dismissive stance towards the rank-and-file orchestra musicians mentioned above) for their unrefined and average tastes and the high-minded art theorists and pundits for their infatuation with quixotic theoretical constructs. It is this oblique position, which fits no pre-given paradigm and which I have tried to describe as a *negative structural eccentricity,* that ultimately left him orphaned by both sides. Still, due to its focus on externality, Lewis's fierce individualism certainly did not fit the trope of the hermit or the monk. Although Lewis's approach made him, as Jeffrey Myers noted, "one of the loneliest intellectuals of the 1930s" (156), it nevertheless represented a highly public — though idiosyncratic — active engagement *with* modernity. Perhaps Lewis's own image he proposed in *Blast 1,* that of the artist-as-mercenary, still rings true the most. It is a figure beholden to no cause but his or her own which nevertheless has to sell his or her services due to simple external economic realities. As with the figure of the mercenary in general, it is thus not to be trusted entirely, resulting in a complementary relationship of self-imposed dissidence and externally imposed ostracism. At the same time, the term also manages to account for the specifics of the external approach outlined above as a hostile, if not violent engagement with the outside world characterized by a cold and premeditated professionalism.

This aggressively defended claim to artistic independence points to the final aspect that I would like to note at this point, namely how it, naturally, entails a skepticism towards the direct political operationalization of the arts. In *The Demon of Progress in the Arts,* Lewis addresses this matter of art and politics rather indirectly by arguing how an oppressive and exploitative system of the arts is not a conducive environment for good art to emerge. However, he had addressed the relationship of the artist with politics more directly two years

earlier in *The Writer and Absolute*, which can thus be read as a companion piece to *The Demon of Progress in the Arts.* If the latter is focused on what Lewis saw as an increasingly precarious environment for the visual artist, then the former deals with his other major role as an artist: that of a writer. Lewis's core argument in *The Writer and the Absolute* is that the writer should be able to work in a position of total independence from political causes, ideologies, party or government affiliations, or any other ties that might impair his or her freedom of expression (political or otherwise). The book is, first of all, a critique of writers who willingly forgo their independence and commit their profession to specific political causes or ideologies. More than that, however, it is a critique that, in a similar way to how Lewis describes the realities of the art world in *The Demon of Progress in the Arts,* focuses on the systemic pressures that forces an author, either through open censorship or through more subliminal discursive means of power, to adopt a specific political ideology in his or her writing. In line with his practicological outlook, Lewis is, of course, aware that a purist or utopian state of freedom completely detached from those influences of the powers that be is unattainable. When Lewis invokes the notion of freedom, he does not refer to some metaphysical concept, but to a concrete set of guaranteed civil liberties (21), arguing nevertheless that, in many respects, these civil liberties are often more a promise than a guaranteed reality:

> [...] reason dictates [...] that freedom is the privilege of the of the purely political writer, the mouthpiece of a party, protected by that Party. It is not, as Tom Paine believed, the privilege of any private individual, not enjoying the backing of a Party, or a very powerful group. (30)

In lieu of an absolute state of freedom and independence, Lewis therefore proposes a relative one: a, as he calls it,

> ‚republic of letters' [as] a kind of Switzerland: the ‚great neutral' [...] ‚where it is recognized that a person does not have to be this or to be that: and — provided he does not provoke those living all round him — may advertise his neutral mind?' (54)

In many ways, Lewis's argument for establishing a kind of demilitarized zone for writers where they would be able to work in a state of political neutrality, amounts to a blatant gesture of retrospective self-exoneration. As has been extensively documented, his erratic politics — his flirting with fascism during the 1930s in particular — significantly contributed to his ostracization from

the influential cultural circles of his times.[26] It is especially in his discussion of the work of George Orwell where this becomes clear. To see Lewis write in an appreciating manner about Orwell might seem surprising at first; after all, Orwell's very straightforward literary style, which often crossed over into blatant didacticism, was a far cry from Lewis's highly varied stylistic guises that he adopted over the course of his career as a writer. However, in the context of his overall argument, Lewis's appreciation of Orwell makes sense. As it is to be expected, Lewis largely dismisses Orwell's literary style (153-54) and instead praises the development of his politics in his writing. In Lewis's reading of Orwell's work, he appears as a somewhat naïve but ultimately honest man, who out of a genuine moral obligation subscribes himself and his writing to the socialist cause. Tracing Orwell's entire literary oeuvre, Lewis notes a gradual disenchantment with the socialist cause, leading him to surmise that Orwell's "left-wingery never ceased to be skin-deep" (183). As told by Lewis, Orwell's literary life thus represents a process of emancipation from revolutionary politics and "the dead hand of the *new*" (153), leading him to ultimately, as Lewis drily notes, write a good book (189). It is Orwell's final two novels, *Animal Farm* and *1984*, that Lewis praises, but not for their literary qualities (as he notes, "the language is business-like and adequate but that is all", [189]). Rather, his appreciation is directed at how Orwell, having thus achieved a position of relative political neutrality, manages to provide a convincingly bleak and detached analysis of the external realities, that is, of the mechanisms and technologies of political power structures in modern societies. In *1984*'s "hideous palaces of Truth and Love", "elaborate bureaucratic monstrosities", and "interminable torturing" (190), he manages to give shape to Lewis's own anxieties about how the advent of industrial modernity had vastly expanded the scope of possibilities to exert governmental control over the individual. However, what we also recognize in Lewis writing about Orwell is a Wyndham Lewis that is in fact indirectly writing about himself and his own legacy. There are certain uncanny parallels in the way Lewis narrates Orwell's gradual emancipation from the socialist creed to Lewis's own gradual recognition of the grim realities of fascism and his subsequent rejection of

26 For a survey of Lewis's erratic and inconsistent politics and his problematic flirtation with fascism, see the respective articles by Nathan Waddell and Alan Munton in the recent *Cambridge Companion to Wyndham Lewis* edited by Tyrus Miller (87-99 and 100-112). Also see Munton's 2006 article "Wyndham Lewis: From Proudhon to Hitler (and Back): The Strange Political Journey of Wyndham Lewis". An older but extensive study of Lewis's politics can be found in D. G. Bridson's *The Filibuster: A Study of the Political Ideas of Wyndham Lewis.*

it from the late 1930s onwards. Though Lewis was not one to offer public apologies, it is nevertheless clear from his post-1938 writings that he recognized how he had been thoroughly duped by the lure of fascism and regretted his earlier favorable testimonies on Hitler.[27] If Lewis was not one to grovel for past mistakes, he could at least offer a coded admission of having been on the wrong side of history. Thus, we may read Lewis's account of Orwell's intellectual development as a mirror version of his own in the sense that both managed to emancipate themselves from a misguided infatuation with a radical political ideology, arriving, ultimately, at a detached position of relative neutrality that was not beholden to any specific political ideology.

However, this is not a study on the supposed "real" politics of Wyndham Lewis (a puristic notion if ever there was one). It is certainly debatable whether Lewis's retrospective explanation of his political writings, which we could summarize as that it was, first, not intended to be programmatic, second, driven by a spirit of observant neutrality, and, third, written primarily as advice for how, as an individual artist, one is to defend oneself against the encroachment of modern governmentality (in *Rude Assignment*, Lewis described his most important book on political writing, *The Art of Being Ruled* [1926], as "jujitsu for the governed" [183]), holds up to scrutiny. However, I am not asking whether Lewis's justifications are convincing or come across as convenient excuses for what in fact had been a genuine enthusiasm on his part for a totalitarian ideology on his part. Also, I am not asking the question whether Lewis's claim for the writer to be granted a space of neutrality, from which he or she could exercise a freedom of expression unfettered by any political or moral boundaries, is a reasonable or an irresponsible thing to ask. At this point, I simply would like to note how Lewis's fierce and outward-oriented individualism and his aversion to any kind of groupthink extended from the arts to politics, where it led to similar gestures of dissidence and contrarianism as well as to somewhat stupefying and erratic ideological inconsistencies.[28] What remained fairly consistent, however,

27 According to O'Keeffe, Lewis's abrupt turnabout away from fascism came in the summer of 1937, when he inexplicably cut short a visit to Berlin (370-1). If anything, the two thoroughly anti-fascist books that he then wrote in short succession — the total renunciation of Hitler in *The Hitler Cult and How It Will End* and the philosemitic pamphlet with the misleading title *The Jews, Are They Human?* (the title being an allusion to a satirical 1931 book by Gustaaf Renier titled *The English: Are They Human?* [Munton par. 17]), both published in 1939 — make it quite clear that Lewis had already renounced fascism before the outbreak of the Second World War.

28 The best way to encapsulate Lewis's often puzzling political outlook(s) would probably be to say that, ultimately, he was an illiberal and elitist libertarian: For the representatives of an intellectual elite such as himself, he demanded the greatest possible degree

was how he saw the relationship between politics and the arts, namely that the direct operationalization of the latter under the banner of the former would only be to their detriment.

Having devoted an extensive part of this chapter to the elaboration of some core aspects of Lewis's outlook on (cultural) politics, it seems necessary to briefly summarize them and elaborate in what way they are essential to substantiating the cross-mapping of Lewis's modernism and the popular modernism of British art rock. We have outlined above several elements of the "Lewisian" aesthetic outlook: the orientation on impure external realities; an intellectualism that is very much practicological in how it remains wary of grand abstract or idealistic theories; the rejection of unfettered artistic radicalism for its own sake; the valorization of learned skills over pure, specialized types of abstract knowledge; the stance of pronounced individualism positing itself at an eccentric place of relative neutrality; and, finally, the aversion to groupthink and the direct operationalization of the arts in politics. What I would now argue in the second part of this chapter is that we can recognize these aspects of what constitutes part of a modernist ethos in a sub-group of British popular music culture. In that sense, the extensive discussion above was not a needless digression, but necessary for the overall argument. If we read Lewis's idiosyncratic practicological paradigm as a struggle to carve out a space of artistic autonomy in a social, political, economical, and cultural reality that seems to foreclose that possibility, then British art rock, as I would argue, represents in several respects a possible realization or vindication of that paradigm — not, of course, as a realization in a utopian sense beyond the persistent constraints of social reality, but, in a more impure way, as simply a practical realization of a practical idea.

As we will see, art rock consists, in many respects, of a similar ensemble of practices engaging with similar issues. I will further substantiate this claim in the next chapter with a cross-reading of writings on British art and pop theory. First, however, it seems more appropriate to still focus on primary texts and discuss how they relate to the stances and ideas elaborated above. For that purpose, I will again focus on several works of Wire. In contrast to the previous chapter, however, where my cross-reading was mainly concerned with

of negative liberty and was very much opposed to collectivist policies, whether they were coming from the left or the right side of the political spectrum. At the same time, however, he expressed illiberal views with regard to the masses, arguing that most people (that is, the less educated members of society) would not be able to manage in this quasi-autonomous state of maximum negative liberty and would, therefore, be better off under a strong government. In short, Lewis promoted the nanny state of whatever kind for the masses and the night-watchman state for the cultural and intellectual elites.

immediately observable *formal* similarities (the austere and detached linearity of Wire and *Blast,* the moderation of belligerent or deconstructive aspects by a simultaneous focus on clear and firm structures, etc.), the following discussion will lay a greater emphasis on how the *ideological* aspects discussed above apply to the works and career of Wire. Of course, this supposedly neat distinction between form and ideology only works to a certain degree and an overlap between the two levels is unavoidable. In the same way that the discussion of formal aspects in the previous chapter already pertained to some questions of ideology, the ideological aspects discussed in this chapter are inevitably tied up with their concrete manifestations as form. In that regard, the relentless impulses of hybridization as described by Latour also apply to this study.

In many ways, Wire's trajectory after they had released, as discussed in the previous chapter, their first three albums between 1977 and 1979, can be read as a struggle with those problematic extremist tendencies as described by Lewis. Canonically, *Pink Flag, Chairs Missing,* and *154* are regarded as something akin to the group's holy trifecta; it is generally agreed that their subsequent history became more fractured and, as a result, their work more inconsistent. After the release of *154*, Wire started to either move dangerously close to or were already moving past that Lewisian limit beyond which there is nothing. Neate describes this brief period as the moment where the band lost control of their bursting creativity, which had allowed them to progress from *Pink Flag* to *154* in less than three years. While, as discussed in the previous chapter, Wire's relationship with the traditional vocabulary of rock music was highly ambivalent, leading to their distinctive aesthetics of making a kind of anti-rock music that nevertheless worked quite well as rock music, this delicate balance was now on the verge of slipping: They refused to promote the album in the expected ways — that is, to go on tour — choosing instead to set up a four-day residency at the Jeannetta Cochrane Theatre in London called *People in a Room.* These performances were created in collaboration with students from the Central School of Art and Design and included elements of video art, performance art, and dance (Neate, *Read & Burn* 142-4). They were neither received well by the critics nor by their record label, EMI, with whom their relationship was already deteriorating, leading to the band leaving the label in early 1980 (Reynolds 148). Their last activity during that first phase was an infamous concert at the Electric Ballroom in London, where they performed mostly unfinished sketches for a planned fourth album, again enhanced with elements of performance art, to a largely unreceptive, if not hostile audience (Neate, *Read & Burn* 150-8). A few months later, they decided to indefinitely postpone any further band activities. In that sense, there was a certain logic to the disintegration of that first version of Wire in that it happened

at the same speed at which they had progressed from *Pink Flag* to *154* in less than three years.

Their second phase, which began after a five-year hiatus in 1985 and lasted until 1992, is regarded as a less successful period by both critics and the band members themselves. In *Read & Burn,* Neate ascribes the erratic and inconsistent output of the band during these years mainly to the growing aesthetic differences between Bruce Gilbert and Colin Newman. In his narrative, Gilbert fills the role of the deconstructivist extremist whose aesthetic outlook was framed by a "process-centered ethos", concentrating "mainly on his enthusiasm for the ideas informing the work and on […] the creative enactment of those ideas" (172). In contrast, Newman's role is that of a more strict formalist who was "by his own account, more interested in the final, formalised product than the idea or the theoretical statement" (172). It would then seem, superficially at least, that the Lewisian criticism of artistic extremism would apply to Gilbert with his theory- and concept-driven processual approach, as well as his predilection to pursue difference and newness for their own sakes. At the other end of the scale, Newman would then stand as the classicist who remained wary of abstract theoretical ideas, stressing instead the importance of skillful execution and the resulting external form. As Neate shows, however, the practical reality of that division within the band was, as so often, more complex — more hybrid.

Gilbert's ideas for a planned fourth album after the release of *154* provide a good example of how his "extremist" tendencies were affecting the trajectory of the band at that point and beyond. As Newman recalls, "Bruce in particular wanted to make a different kind of record — and I didn't really understand what kind of record he wanted to make" (Neate, *Read & Burn* 147). Gilbert, for that matter, describes his ideas for a possible follow-up to *154* as follows:

> One of the the ideas I had […] was that we should have two months off without doing anything, and that everyone should go home and make an instrument: electrified, acoustic — anything at all — but everybody should make an instrument that they could operate fairly effectively […] And then I thought we should make a group — who were Wire — but playing instruments that we'd made ourselves. And, without knowing what everybody else was doing, we'd go into a rehearsal room and make a noise. (147)

We can recognize, in Gilbert's high-concept approach to artistic creation, those extremist tendencies in the arts described by Lewis in *The Demon of Progress in the Arts* to move beyond a limit where there is nothing. His valorization of processuality and of spontaneous or even random experimentation over deliberate planning and a clear focus on the actual formal result are of the same

ilk as those contemporary approaches criticized by Lewis for threatening to abstract the arts into a conceptual nothingness. Gilbert's wording of wanting to make a or some "noise", which reoccurs repeatedly in his direct quotes in *Read & Burn*, is particularly telling in that regard. Noise, after all, is fundamentally unstructured and chaotic. It blurs lines and boundaries and drowns out distinct sounds and phrases. Unsurprisingly, Gilbert's solo work reflects this fascination with noise and chaos more overtly than his contributions within Wire. On his own, Gilbert tends to completely eschew traditional song structures and focuses on highly abstract and experimental compositions or sound-collages built on minimalist and amorphous drones and white noise. In contrast, Wire have, since Gilbert's departure in 2004, become more disciplined and structured (but arguably also more predictable) venture with respect to both the regularity in which they have toured and released records over the past decade, and the overall sound and structure of those records.

However, it would be too simple to see, in Gilbert's seemingly perversely disruptive influence (Newman retrospectively described him as "destructive of himself and destructive of everything around him" [Neate, *Read & Burn* 414]), a straight example of the fashionable extremism in the arts, which Lewis diagnosed in *The Demon of Progress in the Arts.* If Lewis was critical of the depleted types of artistic extremism that were dominating the discourses in institutionalized contemporary art circles and, in the process, were driving modern art over the proverbial cliff, then Gilbert's deconstructive impulses do not fit this paradigm, as they were driven by a fundamental anti-institutionalism. As Neate explains,

> [Gilbert] meant that their thinking had become deeply entwined with the idea of being on a label; they had come to take for granted the corporate ideology and structures within which they were working, viewing them as natural and inevitable. [...] His sense was that their only chance of progressing lay in attempting to work outside of that institutional context, finding a way to separate their creativity from a reliance on the music business — idealistic as that might sound. (147-48)

Gilbert was, in other words, behaving less as a complacent institutionalized extremist and more in a Lewisian spirit as the dissident artist trying carve out some neutral territory beyond the reaches of the established institutions. However, we have to consider at this point that Wire were, of course, wrestling with different kinds of institutions than Lewis. As I have already pointed out in the previous chapter, the connection between the high modernism exemplified by Lewis and the popular modernism exemplified by Wire is not one of a straight analogy, because they operate in different cultural spheres. Lewis was acting

out of and against the highbrow sphere of high modernist art and literature. As such, he was defending his practicological modernism primarily against the puristic demands emerging from that sphere — first, against radicalist forms of avant-gardism and, later, against their deflated institutionalized forms in the shape of the contemporary art scenes. As these puristic demands usually called for a greater degree of visual abstraction or for the artwork to conform to some predetermined theory of art and/or politics, his defensive strategies included, among other things, the valorization of the figurative, of artistic skill, and of the notion of external form over notions of inner realities or inner truths; it also entailed a certain critical regard for a classical tradition in opposition to the radical modernist belief in irreversible progress.

Wire's situation was, in several ways, an inversion of that. They were acting out of and against the traditionally lowbrow sphere of popular entertainment. Thus, they had to defend their brand of popular modernism against the mass-market demands for immediate readability, or, in other for, for a maximum degree of *consumability* by the highest possible numbers of record buyers. Wire established their critical credentials during the unique period of the immediate aftermath of punk rock, when record labels were willing to give young recording artists an unprecedented creative freedom in the hope of discovering the next big pop-cultural phenomenon. When critical acclaim did not result in commercial success on an equal scale, they started, from around 1980 on, to pull in the reins again, demanding, in short, less experimentation and more hit singles. Under these circumstances, it is only logical that Gilbert's defensive strategy called for *more* extremism, *more* abstraction, and an even stronger break with pop and rock traditions. Structurally, however, I would argue that the relationship to Lewis's modernism is very similar. In both cases, we are looking at the attempts of fiercely individualistic artists (to a degree that is arguably to their own detriment) to defend a certain middle position of artistic neutrality or independence from a system of institutional dominance. In both cases, these attempts are not put forward as overly idealistic or utopian demands, as they are made with the awareness of the practical constraints that would make the realization of these demands impossible.[29] Rather, it is a

29 For that matter, it is telling that Gilbert himself – arguably the most art-inclined member of the group — never aspired to elevate what Wire were doing into the higher echelons of modern and contemporary art and openly acknowledged that, ultimately, Wire were, first and foremost, a rock band and their medium was rock music: "I never thought Wire would make a career out of being performance artists, but I thought it was well worth investigating — seeing how it informed us and whether it could make a difference to our approaches to devising and making music" (Neate, *Read & Burn* 151).

comparatively simple demand for a relative degree of practical independence or neutrality from the whims and demands of what was currently fashionable and, as such, immediately marketable. From this structural perspective focused on the matter of institutional dominance, the question of the marketability *of what, by whom, and to whom* — of lowbrow popular music by the record industry to the consumer masses, or of highbrow contemporary art by the art market to the art buyers and collectors — appears mostly irrelevant. As Lewis himself suggested in *Rude Assignment*, when one considers the underlying social and economic realities, these distinctions seem arbitrary and fictitious.[30]

From this point of view, it would also be inaccurate to regard Newman simply as the stolid, disciplined, and *classical* — that is, the Lewisian — counterpart to the mercurial, deconstructive, and extremist Gilbert. If Neate's account of the group's history often quotes Newman's exasperation at Gilbert's disruptive ploys and ideas during their activities in the 1980s, this does not make him the straightforward critic of the kind of institutionalized artistic extremism that Lewis described in *The Demon of Progress in the Arts.* Rather, considering the inverse logic of Wire's relationship with their institutional frameworks, Newman's stance would make him more of an institutionalist than a dissident. In fact, some of Newman's preoccupations during the group's second phase would, in fact, prove to be as disruptively extremist, if not more so, than Gilbert's: During the 1980s, Newman developed a growing interest in the newest fashions of studio and recording techniques such as digital synthesizers, drum machines, samplers, and, later, digital sequencers and MIDI recording. The former contributed to the band gradually embracing a more synthetic sound during their second phase, which, although fashionable at the time, has dated very badly (most of their recordings from that time suffer, for example, from the kind of overly compressed drum sound that was typical of 1980s state-of-the-art production techniques, but retrospectively sounds very obtrusive). The latter was arguably more problematic in how it pushed the band past a reasonable limit and sacrificed a delicate artistic equilibrium for a desire to sound contemporary. It culminated in Robert Grey's temporary exit from the group in 1990, as the prevalence of sampled drum tracks made him feel superfluous as a drummer (Neate, *Read & Burn* 261-4) (ironically, the disruptive effect of Grey's absence was felt the most strongly by Gilbert, who stated that "it was all rather nerve-wracking without him, really" [266]). Still, it would also be wholly inaccurate to take these aspects in order to ascribe Newman with

30 See Lewis's rejection of the terminology of the "lowbrow" vs. the "highbrow" in the second chapter of *Rude Assignment* (15-19).

the role of the "progressive slave" to fashion and market demands within the group. Although Newman's style is, in general, more oriented on traditional song structures and his lyrical contributions to Wire are usually more literal than those of Graham Lewis; however, despite this layer of accessibility, there still remains, as discussed in the previous chapter, that overall element of cold and analytic detachment, as well as the complete absence of affected spontaneity and psychological verisimilitude expected of the average pop song. If, for instance, a song such as "Map Ref. 41°N 93°W" represents Wire at their most melodiously accessible, it still stands as a highly unusual and bemusing example of pop music, whose chances of achieving anything near mass-marketability were always very slim. If Newman thus shared his groupmates' aversion to the realities of the pop entertainment industry, he was, of all, perhaps the one least inclined to react by driving the proverbial car off the cliff.

However, what these ultimately unsatisfying attempts to assign clear and unchanging roles to individual group members show is that there is an underlying problem of this narrative strategy itself. This mode of narration has, of course, always been one of the major tropes in pop criticism from the moment the rock band emerged as a major cultural force; nevertheless, it amounts, again, to a problematic purifying gesture that, in an understandable desire to describe what are essentially highly complex and dynamic creative processes in a manner as clear and concise as possible. However, it thus represses the fact that the inner group dynamics, by the very nature of the band as an artistic *collective*, rather seems to follow, in all likelihood, a logic of hybridity. It is, in other words, a hypercomplex creative process in which each member tends to play *multiple* and even *contradictory* roles and, as such, is probably impossible to reconstruct after the fact by even the band members themselves. Wire, in fact, provide an illustrative example of the inherent shortcomings of this narrative mode of pop historiography: Until the recent publication of *Read & Burn*, the common narrative was that the creative fault line within Wire was not between Newman and Gilbert, but between Newman and Graham Lewis. The reason for the prevalence of that apparently unfounded narrative was probably very simple: As the lead singer and, respectively, occasional lead singer, Newman and Lewis simply were (and still are) the most visible and vocal group members, both on record and on stage; Gilbert — and Grey, for that matter — were, at least outwardly, the more quiet members and, as such, instinctively deemed by the casual external observer as being less important to the creative processes within the band.

In essence, these problems associated with the question of "Who did what?" in pop historiography point to a problem that literary criticism has addressed

a long time ago, namely the questions of authorship and of authorial authority. As a result of recognizing the literary text as a dynamic entity with no fixed meaning attributable to the intention of the author, literary criticism has largely adopted the mode of immanent textual analysis as its main method. The same cannot be said of pop criticism, which still largely relies on external documents and sources for its analyses: historical data, interviews with band members and associates etc. A reason for this might be the fact that most of pop criticism still emerges from the non-academic field of pop journalism. In contrast to literary criticism, journalism is, of course, a practice where the reliance on external sources to substantiate one's claims is not just important, but an absolutely essential element of it, without which it would not be journalism at all. However, in spite of this ongoing reliance on external documents and the authorial voice, there is a reasonable argument to be made that a reliance on authorial intention creates a problem that is even more difficult in pop criticism than it already is in literary criticism. As the "author" in question is, in that context, usually a band — that is, an artistic collective consisting of multiple individuals — it becomes even more difficult to determine a single authoritative voice than in the case of the literary text, which usually has only one individual as its author. In short, while it might be frustrating to abandon the comfort provided by the certainty of the authorial voice, delusory as it might be, we cannot but restate that core tenet of modern literary criticism: At the end, all we have is the text.

If we thus decide to put aside these questions of who might have done what and where the fault lines within the dynamics of the band might have laid and, instead, read the above-mentioned further developments of the band as collective statements, we can say the following: With their original trilogy of albums, Wire had established themselves as a continuously forward-looking modernist ensemble. During the final months of their first period in 1979 and 1980 and throughout their entire second period from 1985 to 1992, this positive modernist spirit had turned into a debilitating demon of progress. In a desire to live up to their reputation and uphold that original ethos (and defend it against increasing institutional pressures), they started to cross that proverbial limit of reasonable artistic extremism. Their various attempts to come up with appropriate aesthetic strategies to remain on the cutting edge led to opposite results. Whether these took the form of underdeveloped conceptual ploys or of an infatuation with the latest fashions of sound and production technology, the actual end products tended to be inconsistent, erratic, and, as such, palpable pieces of evidence of the tensions under which Wire were operating at the time. Perhaps the most glaring example of how, during their second period, Wire's forward-looking ethos had turned into a self-defeating obsession was in the

way band refused to acknowledge the existence of their entire output from their first period. It was particularly in the live environment where, out of a concern of becoming a stale institutionalized act playing the "old hits" to a complacent crowd, they categorically refused to perform any material from *Pink Flag*, *Chairs Missing*, or *154.* While there was some precedent to how Wire thus tended to foreground their own present creative state (as discussed in the previous chapter, about half of the 1979 *Rockpalast* performance consists of what was, at the time, yet unreleased material), the radicalness by which they completely rejected their own history also prevented them from productively engaging with their own body of work. As they later acknowledged themselves, this was modernist extremism taken one step too far (Neate, *Read & Burn* 199-200).

If Wire's second period thus represents, as Neate suggests, something of a "decadus horribilis" (*Read & Burn* 412), it is more interesting to look at how they eventually managed to reach a tentative resolution to these problems. This third period of the group (also commonly referred to as the *Send*-era after the title of their only LP release of that time), which began in 1999 after their second hiatus and lasted until 2004 when Gilbert retired from the band, represents, as I would argue, a successful rekindling and vindication of that original restrained modernism of their first period discussed in the previous chapter. Furthermore, it is a modernism very much in the spirit of what I have discussed with regard to Wyndham Lewis's argument in *The Demon of Progress in the Arts*: To a casual listener, the utterly fierce and brutal material of the *Send*-era must appear as the sound of a band not reigning in their self-defeating impulses but actually doubling down on their extremism. As we will see, however, that material represents in fact a significant step back from the proverbial cliff. In the same way that Lewis praised the extremism of a Francis Bacon because it was an extremism that had an inherent sense of purpose and was grounded by significant ethical and literary underpinnings, as well as an overall sense of history, so did Wire manage to develop an extreme aesthetics that went beyond — or, rather, *shirked back from* — the desire to progress simply for progress's sake. More importantly, what they came up with could veritably be described as a kind of Lewisian satire: a set of dark satirical observations of the present reality with its eye firmly focused on the hard externality of things. These litanies, while permeated by a sense of bleak cultural pessimism, are simultaneously aware of the essential comical absurdity of their objects of investigation; and, while recited with overwhelming hostility and aggression, their perspective is nevertheless one of a descriptive, sober, and neutral intellectual detachment.

To understand the particular aesthetics of the *Send*-era, however, it is necessary to first take a look at what is arguably the most important piece of

Wire's second era. The track "Drill", which the band first released on the 1986 EP *Snakedrill* and have subsequently developed into countless metamorphoses both in live environments and on record, could be regarded as one of the quintessential expressions of Wire's overall sound aesthetics. It is one of the few tracks of Wire's second period that has remained both an aesthetic reference point for the band and a staple of their live performances to date. If this second period, as elaborated above, was driven by a desire to move away from the traditionalist four-piece rock ensemble and embrace a more synthetic sound, then "Drill" represents somewhat of an oddity in its subdued use (or, depending on the iteration, complete lack of) synthesizers and other "artificially" created sounds. Nevertheless, it still fits the paradigm of the band's second period in how it represents an attempt to reduce (or *abstract*) supposedly "organic" rock music into a synthetic and radically minimalist sound of automated industrial machinery. As such, it could be regarded as a stylistic precursor of what would emerge in the early 1990s as minimal techno. "Drill" has, in short, neither a traditional song structure nor any discernible dominant melody and consists almost purely of rhythm. Its foundation is a monotonous groove played on a reduced drum kit of only a bass drum and a hi-hat (with a four-on-the-floor pattern played on the former and 16th notes on the latter). This basic groove is accompanied by repetitive and toneless guitar scratching (played in 16th notes as well). Although "Drill", in its rigid minimalism and repetitive rhythmicity (as well as in the fact that it is played predominantly on rock instruments) still echoes aspects of Wire's first period, its proto-techno aesthetics, which evoke the relentless pulse of industrial machinery, places it squarely in their second period. There are also the track's strong conceptual and processual undertones to consider. As mentioned above, there is no single or definite version of "Drill". Newman refers to it as a "Research and development track" (Neate, *Read & Burn* 242): a basic template from which the band could explore various stylistic possibilities, creating "Drills" that lasted only a few seconds or extended up to thirty minutes.

The importance of "Drill" as a central point of reference for Wire's subsequent stylistic developments is probably reflected best in the fact that the band came up with their own term to describe that basic yet distinctive "Drill rhythm": *Dugga.* The term is both used as a noun (referring the rhythm itself) and a verb (*to dugga* meaning to play the "Drill rhythm") and has a certain onomatopoetic quality that suggests the sound of industrial machinery. It is no surprise that Gilbert, ever the conceptualist, regards "Drill" (or, rather, its countless iterations) as Wire's finest achievement, both due to its *ready-made* character and the fact that, at least according to Gilbert, "*duggaing* is the least skillful thing you can do"

(Neate, *Read & Burn* 239). On that last issue, the other band members disagree, however, stressing that it takes a great deal of skill and discipline to play it properly (Neate, *Read & Burn* 239). Grey in particular emphasizes this necessity of skill (and, considering that the drummer carries the brunt of the track, one is inclined to believe him on that matter): "Even though you're doing the same thing, it has to be played well. Repetition sounds easy but it's not" (Neate, *Read & Burn* 241). "Drill" and *dugga* are thus not expressions of a pseudo-futurist machine fetishism, but an expression of a kind of man-machine hybridity. Despite Gilbert's suggestion that *dugga* implied *ready-madeness* and automated production, the "Drill rhythm" also emphasizes the underlying practical skill of the actual players involved. This emphasis on skill and exercise is also reflected in the lyrics. Although as fluid as its instrumental backing, there is a couplet that, as a sort of punchline, is recited (often repeatedly) in most iterations: "We're milling through the grinder, grinding through the mill / If this is not an exercise, could it be a drill?" Its pun on the double meaning of the term drill — the tool and the act of practicing by repetition — reflects the track's instrumental dialectics of repetitive yet precise playing as a bodily and organic act, and the very much inorganic sense of automated machinery evoked by this act.

In that respect, Graham Lewis and Newman see "Drill" and the skill of *duggaing* in a long musical tradition of "talented dugga practitioners", which they trace back as far as Johann Sebastian Bach. Graham Lewis remarks that "once you get into dugga, you come to Bach, who was a big duggaist in his time" (Neate, *Read & Burn* 239) and Newman refers to their 1991 album *The Drill*, an LP length album consisting entirely of variations of "Drill" as "Wire's *Canon of Fugue in D Major"* (Lester, chapter 8). Although these comparisons are given very much tongue-in-cheek, the reference to Bach is telling, because in their appreciation of Bach, Wire and Wyndham Lewis overlap. Although Lewis only occasionally wrote about music and usually with the added caveat that he regarded himself as a "musical ignoramus" (a claim that Nathan Waddell contests, arguing that Lewis probably knew more about music than he let on [Waddell, "Wyndham Lewis's 'Very Bad Thing'" 81]), he usually refers to Bach in his writing whenever he needs an example of what he regards as some of the highest achievement in the musical arts. This is only logical in the sense that, musically, the baroque fugues of Bach with their stately and rigid formality come closest to what Lewis valorized as the classical tradition in the arts. In contrast to what he negatively saw as the meandering excesses and fluctuations of nineteenth-century Romanticism, the artistry of the fugue rests on an extrinsic, formalist, and seemingly very rigid ruleset that, in the hands of a talented artist, nevertheless allows for a wide spectrum of aesthetic varieties. If, in other words,

the *romantic mode* (and, consequently, that of the *radical* modernist) is directed at the questioning, overstepping, or breaking of boundaries, Lewis's favored classical approach is best imagined as working, as cleverly and skillfully as possible, within a predefined aesthetic framework; to productively engage with the rules without outright putting them into question is, at least to Lewis, far more worthy as an artistic practice than that of simply trying to tear them down. It is in this outlook where we again recognize Lewis's dictum of "I hate the movement that displaces the lines". In that sense, it is also a point where Lewis's contradictory "modern classicism" intersects with Wire's rigid and linear sound aesthetics and their art of *duggaing*.

Wire's material from the *Send*-era is understood best as a condensation of the two preceding "research and development" phases: on the one hand, the first period's development of a kind of anti-rock rock music and, on the other hand, the synthetic and mechanistic minimalism of *dugga* developed during their second period. Of course, the two main issues that had plagued the band during their second period remained: first, the problem of external institutional pressures and how to maintain, against them, a state of relative artistic neutrality and, second, the question of how to remain artistically relevant for the present moment (how to remain, in other words, *contemporary*) without succumbing to self-defeating progressive extremism for its own sake. The former, however, was mitigated by technological progress and Newman's foray into production work: The advent of the internet allowed Wire to set up their own production, marketing, and distribution label, *Pinkflag*. Furthermore, the rapid spread of cheap digital recording and production technologies allowed Newman to set up a home studio and develop an expertise in sound recording and production, significantly reducing the band's reliance on costly third party facilities and producers. This organizational and technical infrastructure has enabled Wire to effectively control most aspects relating to production and distribution of their new releases, allowing them to operate as a fairly independent artistic unit.

The problem of contemporary relevance, however, had arguable become even more of an issue during the roughly ten years of their second hiatus. If several of the issues during their second period had been of their own making due to their categorical refusal to acknowledge their work of the late 1970s and their dogged pursuit of staying contemporary, the challenges facing their third period were largely of an external kind. Around the turn of the millennium, reformations of formerly successful bands had emerged as a veritable industry in itself. Usually, these reformations amounted to little more than a nostalgia circus: a retread of long past glories for aging fans and new generation of retro enthusiasts. With Wire's trilogy of their first albums now firmly canonized as art-punk classics

and the band members being in their late forties (or, in the case of Gilbert, in his mid fifties), the band squarely fit the demography of the aging nostalgia act. In accordance with their modernist ethos, it was, of course, imperative to avoid that trap at all costs. At the same time, however, the problems during their second period had made it clear that a simple disavowal of their legacy would be a mistake. The approach they ultimately came up with is best described as practical in how it did not refuse to acknowledge Wire's legacy, but confronted it head on and, in this process, productively transformed it.

Superficially, it might seem that the material of the *Send*-era represents a return to the raw art-punk of *Pink Flag. S*everal elements to the aesthetics of the *Send*-era appear to hark back to their debut. There is the return of extremely basic song structures (or, in some cases, song fragments) with equally fragmentary and enigmatic lyrics, for instance. Or there is the fact that, despite several notable anti-rock elements, the overall approach is still audibly rooted in the idiom of guitar-based rock music (the latter in contrast to the more electronics-based approaches of their second period). However, it would be wrong to suggest that the *Send* material simply represents a retread of their earliest work. Rather, one should see it as, at the very least, a significant reconfiguration or refinement. The group that recorded the *Send* material was, after all, a different entity than the one that had, more than two decades before, recorded *Pink Flag.* As discussed, the sound aesthetics of latter were, to a significant degree, borne out of necessity. *Pink Flag's* simplistic and fragmented approach was, among other reasons, also a result of the bands lack of playing abilities at the time. With twenty years of practical experience behind them, these limitations definitely did not apply to the Wire of the *Send* era. If the material of their third period thus superficially marks a return of the rigid art-punk of their early material, it simultaneously does not, because it does not bear the markings of a group of young newcomers still coming to grips with their instruments. Rather, it is driven by a deliberate professionalism and executed with the focus and determination of the seasoned veteran. In that sense, the *Send* material is very much of its time and to categorize it as a "back to the roots" gesture would grossly insufficient.

Wire also had another advantage that allowed them to avoid the aforementioned nostalgia trap: They were never a group whose work bore the markings of youth. Even their earliest material was neither driven by a youthful spirit nor did it deal with the usual concerns and anxieties of men in their late teens or early twenties. Rather, there was, from the very beginning, always something fundamentally ageless about the sober, detached, and "arty" intellectualism of their aesthetic approach. There was, in other words, never any sense of

youthfulness to their aesthetic for which they could nostalgically pine twenty years later. Thus, the realities of middle age did not really present a problem for an artistic collective like Wire. On the contrary, they managed to turn what would, in rock music, normally be seen as a disadvantage into an advantage. The overall professionalism as well as the sheer practical knowledge and experience gained by working within the field for more than twenty years did not alienate them from some proverbial roots; rather, it allowed them to significantly toughen up their original sound — to make it sound more disciplined, more violent, and more vicious.

The material from the *Send* period is indeed by far the noisiest and harshest sounding work in Wire's entire catalogue.[31] Almost all of the tracks recorded during that period are fast, loud, blaring, and aggressive to a degree heard neither before nor ever since from the band. As already mentioned, most tracks are structurally very basic; they are usually built off the reliably fast and unadorned drumming of Robert Grey and either a simple two- or three-chord guitar riff repeated at nauseam. With speed, volume, and monotonic *dugga*-rhythmicity being the main elements of these tracks, the sense of melodicity is very low, as is the presence of traditional and easily discernible verse/chorus structures. In contrast to their earlier material, there is also a great deal of distortion and fuzz tones to the individual instruments, though the overall mix remains fairly clean (meaning the individual instrumental tracks, though heavily distorted themselves, do not blur into each other, but remain audibly separate). The vocals are usually treated as well; in some tracks, they are buried deep in the mix and reduced to a ghostly whisper, in others they are slightly distorted, lending them a harsh and very robotic quality. Newman, whose hectoring delivery and discernible London accent always lent itself well to project a sense of spite, gives a particularly effective performance; his vocals either ooze with mean-spirited bile and sarcasm, or they explode into a savage guttural shouting and roaring.

In his review of *Send*, rock critic Robert Christgau, who had covered the band since the release of *Pink Flag*, proclaimed how, as a result of the bone crushing aggression of the material, "in short, they 'rock.' Finally". However, Christgau

31 The bulk of the material released during Wire's third period can be found on *Send Ultimate*, the 2010 reissue of *Send*. Wire had an unusual approach to releasing their material during the *Send* era: In 2002, they released two EPs titled *Read & Burn 01* and *Read & Burn 02*. The *Send* LP, which was released in 2003, consisted mostly of tracks already released on the *Read & Burn* EPs, although it featured four new tracks and omitted some of the *Read & Burn* tracks. The *Send Ultimate* reissue combines all of the material of the two EPs and the LP into one single package. A final EP, *Read & Burn 03*, was released in 2007 as a kind of house cleaning effort, consisting of material that was recorded during the same period but did not fit stylistically with the rest.

had a point to put "rock" in inverted commas. Although *Send* has the volume, the speed, the energy, and the sheer violence of a brutal rock record, it would be wrong to assume that Wire had essentially recorded a hardcore punk or trash metal record. Again, their overall aesthetic approach revolving around deliberate planning and an intellectually detached stance prevented that. As such, *Send* indeed "rocks" harder than anything that Wire had released before, but also stands as a very unusual rock record. The guitar tones, while loud and noisy, are processed in such a manner that they do not sound like rock guitars anymore; heavily compressed and stripped of harmonics, they are abstracted into the sounds of sirens, electric horns, and other odd and indeterminable synthetic blares. In addition, the *dugga* repetitiveness of the tracks is exaggerated to such a degree, that any suggestion of rockist swagger, swing, or spontaneity is resolutely excised. There is something robotic and artificial to both the blaring repetitiveness of the *Send*-sound as well as to Newman's livid declamations. Overall, the material projects a sense of dehumanized automation that is far removed from any rockist cliché. Clearly, the rule of "no rocking out" from Wire's original seven rules of "negative self-definition" still applied during the *Send* era. If we want to choose a war metaphor to encapsulate the aural aesthetics of that period, which seems appropriate considering the sheer sonic assault that the group stages on these releases, the individual tracks seem more like the carefully planned surgical strikes of twenty-first century high-tech warfare than comparatively primitive and uncoordinated large-scale bombardments.

If Wire's activities during their third period thus resulted in a kind of computerized *robot-punk* that, despite being grounded in a rock idiom, sounds strangely inorganic and synthetic, then a lot of this has to do with the fact that the material is actually a completely synthetic creation. In that sense, it is as much a logical continuation of their second period as it is a reconfiguration of their late 1970s art-punk. The tracks were not created in the traditional way, that is, with the entire band developing them collaboratively in a recording studio. Instead, most of the production was done on the computer with only Gilbert and Newman working on a Pro Tools workstation in the latter's home studio. There were, in fact, no formal recording sessions for the releases of the *Send* era. Rather, Gilbert and Newman mostly relied on individually samples and fragments recorded at various unrelated occasions, which they then proceeded to mangle, distort, rearrange, and otherwise disfigure beyond recognition until they came up with the tracks that comprise the material on the two *Read & Burn* EPs and the *Send* LP. The overall sense of the inorganic and artificial (or, rather, of an even more uncanny dehumanized man-machine hybridity) that permeates the material is thus reflected in its productional aesthetics. The tracks on *Send*

are veritable twenty-first century Frankensteinian monstrosities: post-human cyborgs stitched together from various unrelated parts and brought back to life digitally through the computer. The sound aesthetics of the *Send* era can thus be read as both a product and a comment on humanity in the information age. It paints a vivid picture of the present as an apocalyptic cyber-dystopia. The sound of *Send* is the sound of modern civilization imagined as a perversely huge computerized machinery spinning wildly out of control. It projects a pervasive sense of cultural pessimism, which, as I will discuss shortly, is also reflected in the lyrics, suggesting that this computerized reality is heading towards an inevitable point of collapse.

The *Send* material is thus an altogether grim affair. Nevertheless, for all its mean-spirited aggression and off-putting robotic sound aesthetics it is simultaneously very *funny*, although it is, of course, a humor of a very dark and absurdist kind. The humor stems from the fact that the material often sounds, for a lack of a better word, downright moronic. There is something utterly absurd to those endless repetitions of primitive two- or three-chord guitar riffs, whose tones have been digitally mangled into indeterminable blarings and bleatings. In fact, Newman noted that it was a deliberate aesthetic choice to make the material sound stupid: "The pieces often started off as jokes. The great thing about it was that the more moronic and dumb it was, the more Bruce loved it. [...] The music sounds quite serious and quite brutal, but we did laugh a lot" (Neate, *Read & Burn* 314). If the first impression of those digitally brought to life monstrosities will definitely be one of shock at the force of their unrelenting and brutal sonic assault, one will eventually notice that there is also a pathetic stiffness and awkwardness to the arrangements — a stuttering imbecility that makes these creations appear not only violent and threatening but, at the same time, also comical and ridiculous. Wire thus confronted the problem how those overly aggressive and violent genres of rock music often come across as unintentionally ridiculous by making their approach sound *intentionally* ridiculous. The end result was a sound aesthetics that was both funnier and more menacing at the same time.

It is very important to note how Wire's material of the *Send* era thus combines an utterly violent aesthetics expressing a dark and pessimistic outlook on humanity with a darkly comic sense of the absurd and the ridiculous. It is in this ambivalent aesthetic approach where the material closely resembles Wyndham Lewis's ideal of what he described as the *non-moral satire*. Lewis has, of course, often been accused of an anti-humanist or misanthropic outlook. His approach to satire, which he developed in the interwar period as a response to what he regarded as an essentially vulgar cultural and social reality of the

time, was, again, purely focused on the external side of things. Reducing his protagonists, or, rather, targets to *things* of pure externality, he effectively dehumanized them into what he termed w*ild bodies*: not fully formed humans with an intrinsic psychological depth or rich inner life, but imbecilic puppets or automatons awkwardly staggering through the reality of modern life, their behavior not expressions of some autonomous inner self, but conditioned reflexes determined by the existing external social and discursive structures of dominance and control. If this represents a rather grim perspective of humanity, Lewis's non-moral satires, though often crude, violent, and aggressive, should not be misread as destructive gestures. As Melania Terrazas argues, Lewis's notion of a non-moral satire is "in reality a sustained attempt to make a critique of existing reality grounded in a rejection of any form of dogmatism" (61). Lewis's own defense, as elaborated in *Men Without Art*, was that he was a satirist and, as a satirist, his job was not to provide moral coddling or edification (100). As the satirist is very much entangled with these external social structures and forces determining the actions of only seemingly autonomous human beings, he or she can, at best, only retreat to a position of relative distance; the privileged or pure position beyond action and reaction, from which one would be able to level a critique firmly grounded in absolute moral principles, is, as discussed, categorically unattainable. In other words, we are confronted, again, with Lewis's practicological outlook that proceeds not from abstract (moralist) ideas about the world itself or about how it should be, but from concrete external reality as it violently imposes itself on the individual. With the way to some metaphysical humanistic ideal thus barred, the satirist can only state as what he or she recognizes as basic and undeniable extrinsic facts.

It is there that we recognize the parallels to the harsh and violent sound aesthetics of Wire's *Send* period. In both cases, we notice a similar outlook on industrialized and, respectively, post-industrialized or computerized modernity. Humanity is seen as a horde of mostly unthinking and servile machines or puppets stumbling around in an ever growing, hypercomplex system of dominance that produces and reproduces their conformist behavior. However, the reaction of both Lewis and Wire is not one of high-minded moral outrage or deep despair but of a sober, if harsh acknowledgment of that reality. The implicit claim of this external approach is thus that it is primarily a descriptive mode: an attempt to find adequate aesthetic forms to represent or register these outside circumstances. We can read, as I have suggested above, the aural aesthetics of Wire during the *Send* period as precisely such an attempt to find a sound that fittingly represents the computerized reality of the twenty-first century.

However, I have also suggested that these aesthetics go beyond such a purely descriptive or representative approach. It is there that the satirical aspect comes to the fore: Besides hearing a representation of a grim spectacle of unthinking and imbecilic robotic bodies blindly staggering around in a computerized system that is itself on the verge of collapsing under its own weight, we also hear how this spectacle is somehow also quintessentially *funny*. The laughter that this kind of realization provokes is, of course, not one of pleasurable amusement. Rather, it is a harsh and sarcastic laugh that is neither edifying nor able to provide refuge in some unassailable moral certainty. It is a dirty and impure, or, as Lewis terms it, a *tragic* laugh (*Men Without Art* 92). However, if this type of satirical laughter does not offer some permanent consolation, it at least allows one to cope. As Lewis argues, the tragic laugh of the non-moral satire is not only a preserving force, it is also a great equalizer that momentarily cuts through all the brutalities of social divisions and other harsh external realities, providing an effective survival strategy in a fundamentally hostile world:

> And as to *laughter*, if you allow it in one place you must, I think, allow it in another. Laughter — humour and wit — has a function in relation to our tender consciousness; a function similar to that of art. It is the preserver much more than the destroyer. And, in a sense, *everyone* should be laughed at or else *no one* should be laughed at. It seems that ultimately that is the alternative. (*Men Without Art* 89)

To laugh with the non-moral satirist means to laugh, on equal terms, at everybody and everything, including oneself. In that sense, an aesthetic approach that seems divisive and destructive suddenly appears, on a practical if not on an idealist level, strangely humanistic. As Lewis further elaborates:

> By making a great deal of noise ourselves we at least drown the alarming noise made by our neighbours. And the noise that, above all the others, has been bestowed on us for this purpose is the bark which we describe as our *laugh*. I approve of a *barking man* myself — I find that I have less occasion, with his likes to anticipate a really serious *bite*. So laughter is *per se* a healthy clatter — that is one of the first things to realize about it. (*Men Without Art* 93)

The "great deal of noise" that Wire were creating during their *Send* period thus very much follows that Lewisian satirical logic. It is a "clatter" that sounds, at first, excessively brutal and violent, yet turns out to be of a fundamentally healthy kind.

The nature of Wire's satirical impulse becomes even clearer if we include the lyrics in our analysis. In keeping with the aural aesthetics of the material, the lyrics revolve around violent descriptions of the grim realities of the millennial

age, which are presented with a mixture of detached cultural pessimism and satirical glee, finding a momentary respite in fits of tragic laughter at the comical absurdity of it all. Thematically, *Send* can thus be read as an update to some of the lyrical approaches on *Pink Flag*. As we recall, Wire had adopted a similar lyrical mode as early as on "Reuters" with the correspondent persona of that song descending from detached reporting of global disasters into perverse voyeuristic fascination. Regarding the lyrics of the *Send* material, Wire revise this approach to focus on the anxieties of the Information Age, thus mirroring the cyber-dystopian atmosphere evoked by the music. They deal with themes such as the increasingly fragmented and digitalized reality of late modernity, the spread of global information and communication networks, consumerism, religiously motivated mass hysteria, and the looming societal collapse due to man-made destruction of the planetary environment.

Some of these themes are already alluded to in the titles of the actual releases: The numbered EPs titled *Read & Burn* (01 to 03) refer, on the one hand, to the disposability of art *not* in the age of mechanical reproduction, but in the age of infinite and lossless digital copyability. On the other hand, they also evoke the mental image of classified communiqués and memos within the intelligence services, alluding to twenty-first century cyber-paranoia with its visions (or, for that matter, the actual reality) of the full-scale surveillance of global data streams. Similarly, *Send* seems an appropriate title for the LP. In the twenty-first century, one does not draw attention anymore by hoisting a pink flag (or, for that matter, setting off pink blasts). Rather, the battleground has moved into the abstract realm of the internet, where one now fires off hate messages by clicking the respective button labeled "Send".

While the material on *Send* and the *Read & Burn* EPs is musically fairly uniform, lyrically it can be roughly divided into three types: There are extremely condensed pieces consisting only of a few single short phrases or sentence fragments and following no discernible formal lyrical structure. Then, there are more elaborate pieces where one can make out individual stanzas and a proper verse/chorus structure; syntactically, however, they are not formed of complete sentences but of a bricolage of seemingly unconnected nouns, noun phrases, and adjectives – a compound of news headlines, advertising slogans, and other random soundbites. Finally, there are a few songs with a full-fledged lyrical structure and syntax, through which, accordingly, the subject matter is conveyed in a fairly unequivocal manner. Overall, the lyrics rely on a fairly simple and direct vocabulary, eschewing exotic terms and elaborate lyrical conceits for uncomplicated everyday language; if Wire's reputation as lyricists mainly rests on their penchant for enigmatic and witty wordplay and

for introducing uncommon words into rock lyricism, during the *Send* era they preferred to keep it simple and to the point.

In his discussion of the material from that period in *Read & Burn*, Neate is not entirely convinced by this lyrical approach. He criticizes them for what he regards as a "postmodern sensibility" (322): a "slight and facile" concept that is "all about surface and noise" and thus "without substance, disposable and unoriginal" (323). Though he partly retracts this criticism by noting that this focus on surface and noise was clearly the intention of the band, he nevertheless states that "the lyric-writing during this phase of work offers little with which to engage, in terms of style and structure; there's nothing very noteworthy about the way the words work or the way ideas are presented" (323). Neate certainly makes a strong point with his more general critique about "the shelf life of this sort of postmodernism and the staleness of its representation strategies" (323). When he argues that "the vast majority of its practitioners fail to do anything authentically creative with their clichéd materials and produce work that is merely clichéd postmodernism" (323), it is hard to disagree with him.

However, where I would disagree is with his claim that Wire's lyrics of the *Send* era can or should be read in those terms. In fact, to describe their lyrical approach of that period as *postmodern* seems rather misleading. The recycling of found text fragments into a kind of lyrical bricolage is, after all, not an exclusively postmodern literary technique. Considering that both collage and montage are two absolutely essential concepts in *modern* art and literature and that the aesthetic engagement with an increasingly fragmented reality was one of the core concerns of numerous modernist movements, we could very well make an argument for this lyrical style to be quintessentially modern. The difference between the two, which is admittedly very difficult to put in exact terms, does not seem to lie in some immediately observable formal or productional aesthetic aspect, but rather in a more vague notion of an overall attitude or aim implied by the resultant work. With modernism, the works tend to suggest a sense of completeness or cohesiveness. Despite the reliance of modernist texts on highly experimental stylistic techniques and the fact that they usually attempt to address, in some way or other, the fundamentally chaotic and fragmented reality of modernity, the underlying notion or claim is still that the resulting work stands as a fully formed and complete unit and should be taken as such. Postmodernism, however, appears to openly embrace the notion of the work, or, rather, the text as a fragmentary and necessarily incomplete quantity with no connection to some stable referent outside of language. Its use of similar stylistic techniques such as the citation, recycling, or collaging of pre-existing language fragments is thus pursued as part of a self-referential

language game, whose primary aim is to point out this essential incompleteness or intertextuality of literature and the arts. It is with regard to this outlook where Neate certainly has a point when he argues that the actual results of this aesthetic mode are rarely genuinely insightful or creative. After all, once that meta-theoretical point about the essentially textual and intertextual nature of every cultural fragment has been made, there is not much additional insight to be gained from these texts. In that sense, Neate's critique intersects with Wyndham Lewis's critique of purist abstract art: Once a certain aesthetic mode has been firmly established as a theoretical dogma and has thus been depleted of whatever ethical concern it might have originally projected, it ends up as a vapid exercise in self-reproduction for its own sake; thereby, it pushes the act of artistic creation beyond a critical limit into a puristic non-space where, ultimately, the arts cease to have any relevance at all.

It should be fairly obvious, however, how this critique does not apply to Wire. As elaborated above, their aesthetic approach during the *Send* era, however extremist it might be, is not a purely self-referential language game that recycles pre-existing cultural fragments to restate that stale postmodernist critique of representation. Rather, we can make a case for it to be a decidedly modernist aesthetic for the following reasons: First, its concern with the reality of the present is one that emphatically understands reality not as a purely discursive or linguistic construct, but as *actual* reality — that is, as an intersecting complex of not only language, but nature and society as well. Second, while the aesthetic approach of the *Send* era heavily relies on supposedly "postmodern" techniques such as sampling, recycling, and citation, the end result is not a patchwork of incongruous styles and citations presented with the aim to point out that, ultimately, every text in this world is an intertextual patchwork. Rather, the *Send* material, perhaps more than any other material in Wire's entire body of work, is a highly cohesive and complete product; its grim and violent aesthetics are relentlessly monolithic and thus *modernist.*

In all likelihood, what leads Neate to misconstrue and subsequently dismiss Wire's lyrical material of the *Send* era as a postmodernist exercise in self-referentiality is the fact that, in his analysis of the work, he looks at the lyrics in isolation. This is, it cannot be stressed enough, a problem when it comes to reading song lyrics. As already pointed out in the previous chapter, song lyrics are fundamentally different from lyrical verse; they rarely work as poetry when transcribed on paper and read in isolation. The methodological challenge that comes with the analysis of the lyrical content of pop and rock music is that one always has to consider the context to which they are set. As Jarvis Cocker, singer and song writer of Pulp, has suggested, "lyrics are not poetry: they are the

words to a song" (3). The very same words that might seem slight or facile when put on paper and, as Neate argues, might offer "little with which to engage" (*Read & Burn* 323), can be highly effective and powerful when delivered in a specific manner and set to a specific soundtrack. It is this complete package — the compound of words, sounds, and images — that the critic has to keep in mind in the analysis of pop and rock songs, even though it makes his or her task significantly more demanding. "Read and Burn", one of the lyrically very minimalist tracks of the *Send* era, provides an illustrative example of this challenge. Written down on paper, the words come across as barely lyrics at all, but a set of nondescript sentence fragments:

> Read and Burn and
>
> You never know, never
>
> They can
> They might
> They can
> They will

This is indeed preciously little material to engage with. However, in the context of the track as a whole, a more discernible picture emerges. Keeping with the overall aesthetics of blending intimidating aggression with a sense of comical imbecility, "Read and Burn" is both brutal and funny. The track is built around the relentless repetition of a single dull bass tone and a two-note guitar motif, which has been heavily distorted into an irritating industrial drilling noise. At the same time — and this applies to all tracks — the crystal clear production, the subtle tonal variations throughout the track, and the insertion of various little bleeps and noises in the background suggest that a high degree of skill, care, and professionalism went into the creation of this seemingly primitive slab of noise. Fronting this exquisitely produced racked is Newman, who barks the song's words with the savagery of a demented drill sergeant, culminating in the ferocious guttural roar of "They *WILL!*" The overall effect is one of simultaneous intimidation and ridiculousness. While the meaning of the lyrics still remains opaque, the track evokes the image of a fragmented dispatch partly lost in the digital white noise: a hostile threat at worst or, at best, a not-so-friendly warning, which is to be immediately burnt after reading. We might not know exactly who "they" are and what they "can", "might", and, in all likelihood, "*will*" do, but the overall sense is that it spells disastrous news.

In a similar way, the tracks employing the aforementioned bricolage approach are lent an equally evocative power on record. On "Raft Ants", the musical

backing is based on an obtrusively irritating siren noise and a plummeting and downright amateurish sounding drum beat, which arguably makes it one of the most overtly moronic sounding tracks of that era. Each line of its lyrics is composed of four seemingly random yet rhyming words or phrases, which Newman recites (or, rather, shouts in his raging voice) at breakneck speed. Prime examples include lines such as "Nasdaq, stealth tax, Big Mac, heart attack", "White bread, Emin bed, in bred, pellet fed", or "Ebiola, Coca Cola, Emile Zola, Motorola". Yet, again, it would be misleading to dismiss these lyrics as a non-signifying postmodernist word-salad. In the second quoted line, for example, the juxtaposition of "white bread" with Tracey Emin's *My Bed* manages to signify without even needing a musical backdrop or a particular lyrical delivery. The latter, after all, has entered the collective consciousness as an epitome of the vacuity of contemporary conceptual art, while white bread is generally unhealthy, flavorless, and goes stale very quickly; in fact, this juxtaposition is so effective on its own that the subsequent reference to an "in bred" and "pellet fed" culture seems almost superfluous. Thus, rather than being a language game for its own sake, these lyrical bricolages manage to create a telegram-style panopticon of late modern reality imagined as a cultural wasteland. Rather than being a postmodern representational strategy, it is apparent that, as Robert Christgau remarked in a review of their self-titled 2015 album, Wire "don't like postmodernity much." "Spent" expresses a similar sentiment in a similar way: Lines such as "Rancid battery acid: fuel for dirty minds / Two-piece generator – neither art nor science" might not make much sense on a semantic level; however, in the way they are recited by an absolutely livid Newman and set to another simplistic and digitally distorted racket, their meaning is communicated all too clearly on an affective level: As the song's chorus (if one wants to call it a chorus considering that it only consists of the repeated shouting of the song's title) makes unmistakably clear, late modern civilization is "spent"; its foundations are crumbling away and it is heading towards a point of complete cultural collapse. However, the only adequate reaction to react to this grim spectacle is not to react with moralistic outrage or despondency, but to recognize its essential comical absurdity and confront it with a hysterical burst of tragic, satirical laughter.

The notion that we really might be heading toward some inevitable endgame is expressed in the more lyrically "complete" tracks, of which several allude to environmental issues. "You Can't Leave Now" is one of the very few songs with a slower tempo, but it is also one of the most menacing. Lyrically, it evokes a vision of a post-apocalyptic wasteland where wild dogs are roaming the streets and are "sensing fresh meat". The latter, in all likelihood, refers to the song's unnamed

addressee, who is already "as good as dead", because his or her "movements are too slow". In the song's chorus, the responsibility for that disastrous situation is laid squarely at the feet of the addressee and described as a debt that is both unforgivable and unrepayable:

> You've eaten your way through
> The whole menu
> You've savoured every thrill
> But haven't payed the bill
> And you can't. Leave. Now.
> No, you can't. Leave. Now.

Newman delivers these lines with a sober and unrelenting finality that leaves no shred of doubt that the addressee's fate is sealed. Yet again, there is no sense of moral superiority expressed in these lyrics; if anything, the overall sense is that of a sarcastic acknowledgment that, ultimately, the narrator himself will not be allowed to leave as well.

This suggestion is brought home on "Half-Eaten", the penultimate track on *Send* and the one that immediately follows "You Can't Leave Now". There, the narrator, in one of Bruce Gilbert's rare appearances as a vocalist, notes that the "world is half-eaten" and "Mother Nature [...] nearly beaten", expressing a desire that he would "like to leave, but [has] not got the fare". Gilbert's vocals are a barely comprehensible, ghostly whisper buried deep in the mix. It is as if the correspondent from "Reuters" has returned sending one final desperate broadcast over a collapsing communications network before he is himself consumed by the unfolding environmental disaster. Considering these grim subject matters, it is the gallows humor of "Comet" that, ironically, manages to provide one of the lighter moments on *Send*. Gleefully awaiting the "heaven-sent extinction event" of a "comet coming this way with your name on it" seems almost a relief. When Newman remarks how the song's "chorus goes: B- b- b- b- b- bang — then a whimper", the sense of comical absurdity overtakes the dark subject matter. Contrary to the Eliotian reference in the lyrics, the song suggest that, while the world is indeed beyond saving, the better way to bow out is *not* with bang or a whimper, but with a hysterical fit of bitter, Lewisian laughter.

It would thus be not enough to label the grim and aggressive aesthetics of Wire's *Send* material as examples of a cynical and dehumanized cultural pessimism. In a similar way to Lewis's notion of non-moral satirical or tragic laughter, its gesture is ultimately not one of destruction but of preservation; it represents an aesthetic practice of coping or surviving as a type of engaging with the undeniable and harsh external reality of the present. Therefore, it

is important to note that, however dehumanized Wire's style of the *Send* era appears (with its harsh sound, its grim subject matters, and its synthetic productional aesthetics), it is nevertheless the end result of a fundamentally human practice. The prolific burst of activity of the band during their third phase stands itself as a strong counterpoint to any suggestion of cynicism inferred from the formal aesthetic aspects of their material. In that regard, it is useful to point out how Wire successfully adapted the material to live performances, thereby foregrounding the practical and human aspect underlying the synthetic and robotic sound. Considering the issues that Wire ran into on that front when they first adopted electronics and digital technologies during their second phase, one would imagine that the fully computerized productions of the *Send* era would have presented an even greater problem. Wire's solution was both counterintuitive and completely obvious: they reconstructed the material to be performable as a conventional four-piece band playing live instruments. This process was of course helped by the simplistic compositional nature of the *Send* material, which had more similarities to their material from the 1970s than from their second period and thus lent itself well (bar a few exceptions) to be (re-)adapted into a band context. However, it also brought the aesthetic approach of the *Send* era full circle: If the releases from that period were fully computerized productions, their raw material consisted of recorded bits and pieces and samples of the individual band members' playing. In that sense, the reconstruction of that material for a live environment also meant bringing these indispensable physical and practical aspects back to the fore.

It is thus not surprising but still remarkable how their live performances from the early 2000s resemble those of the late 1970s. The most complete and widely available document from that phase is a filmed concert from a performance in Glasgow in April 2004, which was released a year later as part of a live album; the latter was titled *The Scottish Play*, which seems appropriate considering the metaphorical bloodbath created by the band on stage. In many ways, the performance mirrors the 1979 *Rockpalast* performance discussed in the previous chapter. The on stage dynamics remain unchanged: Grey embodies the dialectics of stoic discipline and robotic automation, Gilbert remains the face of complete intellectual detachment, Graham Lewis projects a menacing sense of bubbling aggression, and Newman, with his stiff and awkward stage antics, adds the most immediately discernible element of comic absurdity. At the same time, however, one notices that, in direct comparison with the 1979 performance, the overall mood is much more intense. While rock historiography generally tends to valorize the unspent energy and exuberance of bands in their early, more youthful periods (in line with its tendency to valorize unmediated spontaneity

and authenticity), Wire's live performances of the *Send* era — or, rather, their activities during that period taken as a whole — can be read as a plug for the experience of middle age. The stage dynamics might not have changed much in the 25 years between the *Rockpalast* and the Glasgow performance, but what the latter might lack in youthful brashness (which, as pointed out, had never really been a defining aspect of Wire's aesthetics), it more than makes up in its display of confident professionalism. Juxtaposing the two performances, one can observe how Wire were able to effectively hone their skills over the years and transform into a focused and tightly functioning mercenary squad. It is for that reason alone that to refer to the *Send* era as a *comeback* would be misleading, as the latter is an inherently nostalgic notion. Clearly, the material and their live presentations were not aimed at simply reiterating a particular moment or dynamic from the group's past; if anything, it represents a logical development from that past which highlights the practical skill and routine that the band members had attained in the interim. As such, their activities of that period should not be read as a successful "back to the roots" gesture, but instead as an equally successful testament for the importance and value of developing a degree of practical mastery and routine.

If these live performances thus stand as an important counterpoint to the inaccurate impression that the material of the *Send* era with its cold, harsh, and synthetic sound aesthetics express a sense of dehumanized cynicism and alienation, they also foreground the satirical aspects of the material. On stage, a noticeable contrast emerges between the brutality and directness of the sound and an understated sense of comical absurdity in the group's performance. This contrast, paradoxically, both counteracts and amplifies the performance's overall intensity. When Newman opens the set with a "solo" performance of "99.9", one of the very few tracks that could not be adapted into a piece performable by a live band, he already sets the overall tone. While the menacing, swelling drone of the musical backing track is played entirely from tape, Newman's performance — microphone in one hand, a bundle of lyric sheets in the other and sporting a set of reading glasses — consists of him lurching around on a barely lit and empty stage while reciting the lyrics and, little by little, working himself into a frenzied and screaming rage. The effect is simultaneously one of bemusement, of menace, and of hilarity. The most striking aspect of this carefully manufactured projection of absurdity is arguably the one which the band members could only influence in so far as they chose not to hide it: middle age. There is simply something comical about the notion of the violent sonic assault of the *Send* material being performed by a group of balding (or, in the case

of Gilbert, white-haired), middle-aged men who, for all intents and purposes, look like staid and unassuming upstanding members of society.

It is this aspect of inevitable corporality that Wyndham Lewis repeatedly brings up in his critical writing on satire: How the fundamentally flawed and imperfect reality — the essential *absurdity* — of the body or the bodily grasped as an ephemeral, external shell and, as such, as part of external actual reality, will always stand in the way of a purist theoretical, spiritual, or imaginary ideal; yet how these very same imperfect, depthless, and hollow shells are nevertheless capable of bringing forth and exerting powerful (aesthetic) forces and energies. It is in Wire's acknowledgment of this essential absurdity, which manifests itself in these individual moments of on-stage absurdity, that we can recognize this satirical impulse. We can see it when Newman, for no discernible reason, suddenly switches to a handheld microphone and continues to shred his guitar with his other free hand, while an unflappable Gilbert to his left barely seems to register. Or when we realize that Gilbert, with a perpetually deadpan facial expression and looking like a disgruntled pensioner, seems to perform the entire concert without moving even one part of his body other than his wrist. It is in how Graham Lewis, flanking Newman from the other side, forms another jarring contrast: bald, muscular and squarely built, he lurks the stage like a cornered animal — an angry bruiser threatening to burst a vein at any second. And we can see it, of course, in the haggard and wiry frame of Grey behind the drum kit, who perhaps embodies the dialectics of the modern man-as-machine most flawlessly with his stiff and monotonous, yet stoic and precise style of drumming, which suggests at the same time a sense of total individual self-control and one of completely de-individualized conditioned reflexes.

Yet if this display of comical absurdity manages to elicit a burst of satirical laughter, it also, for some hard-to-grasp reason, does not counteract but seems to actually *intensify* the serious artistic impulses of the material and the performance. The paradox is how it manages to contain these contradictory aspects and keep them in a mutually intensifying state of balance: the serious and grim subject matters versus the absurdist disruptions; the robotic and synthetical sound aesthetics versus the very real and very practical aspect of four actual human individuals performing; the show of controlled and dignified professionalism versus the overall sense of the comic and the ridiculous. However, perhaps this is the point where we recognize Wyndham Lewis's claim that the dismissive and harsh laughter of the satirist is not a destructor but a preserver. Wire's aesthetic approach embodies, as I would argue, Lewis's core argument that, in a modern reality characterized by inherently contradictory

forces of rationality and absurdity, all great art has to be created in the satirical mode. To not acknowledge this absurdity would be absurd, because the human condition in industrialized modernity is inherently absurd.

We can thus say that to assume there to be something essentially violent, extreme, cynical, and/or dehumanizing about the aesthetics that I have attempted to describe in these chapters is misleading. Rather than expressing some innate drive or desire to violence or destruction, these cold, harsh, detached, and aggressive formal elements are a logical consequence of a modernist aesthetics grounded in a practicological outlook. In the preceding discussions of key passages and works of both Wyndham Lewis and Wire, we have come up with a set of shared characteristics of that particular aesthetics. First and foremost, we have noted its fundamentally extrinsic orientation, meaning that it is both informed by as well as directed at external reality. Importantly, reality is not understood here as a purely discursive, imaginary, and/or theoretical notion, but the actual, real existing, external (material, social, political, etc.) facts and conditions of life. In other words, there lies, at the center of this aesthetic approach, a set of unquestioned and stable empirical facts, although these facts are not necessarily seen in a positivistic sense as something providing certainty, finality and, thus, a sense of comfort. Rather, external reality is seen more negatively or perhaps more ambivalently as a set of uncomfortable facts and obstacles — as these very basic unsurmountable facts of life to which all things will ultimately have to submit: bodies, matter, gravity, life, death. If I am a bit hesitant to describe this outlook as negative, it is because, ultimately, the reaction is neither negative nor positive; it is simply one of sober, rational, and non-moral acknowledgment. After all, to rail against or despair at what one regards as unsurmountable facts of life — conditions that are going to be there regardless what one thinks or does — would be both absurd and useless.

If this practicological modernism is thus rooted in a mentality of sober, rational, and decidedly intellectualist detachment, it formally manifests in a *linear* aesthetic approach: one that favors clear structures and strong lines, shapes, and contrast; one that, on the one hand, is interested in the hard, relatively stable, and directly observable external aspects of things and people and, on the other hand, remains either disinterested or suspicious of intrinsic notions, whether they be of a psychological or spiritual kind. Its rejection of aesthetic approaches that revolve around purely abstract ideas (that is, concepts pointing to things lying beyond the limits of discernible reality) manifests in a dismissive stance towards those approaches in the (modern) arts valorizing excess, spontaneity, improvisation, and loss of control. The conservative or preservative instincts that underlines a practicological outlook are as much set

against those movements that blur the lines as they are against rocking out. They orientate themselves on what can be framed by the eye or physically grasped with both hands.

Ideologically, its skepticism towards metaphysical, eternal, or abstract notions also makes this outlook one that is fundamentally anti-revolutionary or anti-utopian. Any artistic gesture of those works discussed so far that could be characterized as somewhat utopian simultaneously carries within itself its own retraction. Utopias being utopias, they are, after all, inherently impractical. Ultimately, this skepticism towards utopian ideals should be read as a specific symptom of a more general rejection of the primacy of theory. In that regard, what I am describing as a practicological modernism seems characteristically un-modern. If, very broadly put, we want to understand modernism and modern art in particular as a gradual triumph of theory (in the sense that the abstract idea or thought is regarded as more important than its practical execution), then the notion of a practicological modernism must appear as a contradiction in terms. However, this line of argument would be one that has already subscribed to the kind of conceptual or theoretical purity that a practicological modernism rejects. It follows, in other words, the logic of the kind of puristic modernism that Latour describes as having never been properly modern at all. The rejection of this primacy of theory and abstraction in the modernism that I have described so far is, however, simply a logical consequence of its own impure outlook on modernity: on the fact that it is not primarily informed by or directed at purist abstract ideas, but impure external realities — those dirty, irritating, and uncomfortable facts of life that will, ultimately, prove unsurmountable to everybody and everything.

As discussed, however, this stance is not to be confused with a vulgar materialism. Being a fundamentally intellectualist approach, it would be misleading to see it as an outright rejection of abstract concepts and ideas per se. Rather, it only questions the primacy of ideas and theories, stressing that they do not exist in a puristic vacuum independent or detached from external reality. In other words, they only matter in so far as they are discernible within, or, rather, *as a part of* external reality. Thus, a practicological aesthetic approach intersects with Latour's practicological perspective on epistemology: Theory is something that is derived from or emerges out of concrete practices executed in external reality; the thing and the act come before the idea, not the other way round. It is in this seemingly un-modern valorization of practice, of the act over the idea, where we can also recognize the aforementioned valorization of practical skill and mastery — not necessarily *over* abstract knowledge, but at least as being of equal value in the sense that both are ultimately aspects of artistic creation

understood *as a practice*. What thus makes this type of modernism so difficult to pin down is how through its practicological orientation, its fundamentally un- or anti-dogmatic stance, and its rejection of unchanging theoretical foundations it ultimately remains a highly contingent entity. For all its valorization of strong lines, of stability, and of disciplined self-control, it remains, ironically, a highly unstable, bewildering, and somewhat inherently contradictory set of thoughts.

If these are some of the most fundamental characteristics of this modernist ethos that I have elaborated so far, they, however, do not yet sufficiently explain the harsh, aggressive, and violent aspects of some of the resulting works. I would argue that the overall sense of cold and aloof detachment, which permeates these works and sometimes crosses over into vicious aggression, is simply another logical consequence of the external focus of this type of modernism. As Latour argues, if we look at modernity not as an abstract idea but as an ensemble of practices that are performed daily in an actual lived-in reality, we are bound to note the inherently contradictory nature of these practices. Latour's argument of modernity being structured according to a paradoxical logic of a twofold hybridity seems to reflect Wyndham Lewis's claim that modern reality is fundamentally absurd. It is this recognition of modern reality as an absurd theatre of contradictions that drives the satirical impulse in these works. This recognition, however, also entails the harsh truth that this theatre of the absurd more than often turns violent or even deadly. The toxic underbelly of modernity is one of war, blood, death, destruction, and systematic oppression and exploitation. This is the point where a practicological outlook becomes agonizing, as the only viable stance it offers is one of sober and rationalist intellectual acknowledgment: to bluntly recognize both the violent absurdity and the absurd violence of modern reality as another of those unsurmountable and very uncomfortable external facts of life. Having renounced the option of a convenient retreat into a puristic safe space — inner realities, abstract theories, metaphysical moralities, or other puristic symbolic orders — this spectacle of an unsurmountable practical reality then becomes a cold and harsh place indeed. To recognize this is what then turns satirical laughter into tragic satirical laughter.

It should thus be clear why at this point the matter of artistic creation becomes first and foremost one of mere survival. Stripped of any option to express some sort of utopian pathos, art turns from a secular doctrine of salvation into an art of self-defense. At the same time, however, it becomes clear that the resulting texts cannot be genuinely described as violent or aggressive. To claim that a text is inherently violent would mean to say that it expresses a purifying impulse: Its violence would consist of its drive to impose a puristic symbolic order onto external reality. We could thus say that the radical modernist text can be violent

through its gesture of claiming to define the new and attempt to impose it onto the world. It seems more questionable, however, to ascribe an inherent disposition towards violence or aggression to a practicological modernist text. By its own logic aligned with a position of sober intellectualist detachment, its aesthetic claim is not one imposition but of mere reflection. The externally oriented author or artist is not an interventionist, but more akin to an observing scientists who registers and states his or her observances from an uninvolved position of relative neutrality. If these observances are thus harsh or violent in character, they are only so in that they simply relay the harshness and violence already inherent in society. Of course, there is always the counterargument that there is no such thing as "merely and objectively stating the facts" and that statements (and language in general) always exert some form of power or violence. We have, however, remarked how the material discussed so far reflects this problem in its acknowledgment of the unattainability of a position of pure objectivity – one beyond action and reaction. In that regard, we can only refer again to the fundamental impurity of the practicological position, recognizing that it is always necessarily tangled up in social and political interdependencies, yet also resisting the pressure or desire for its direct political operationalization. The paradoxical middle position of the non-moral satirist is that he or she engages with (social) reality, but does so not with the overt purifying desire of the moralist or the artist-as-political-activist to directly affect or change it. Rather, his or her purported position is that of a passive observer or describer – in full knowledge of the fact that the role of an observer or describer is never purely passive. Ultimately, the self defense metaphor might again prove useful here: In the same way that the art of self defense works by reflecting the force of the assailant back at him- or herself, so does the non-moral satirist reflect the absurd and sometimes absurdly violent energies in society back at itself. As such, the task of how to deal with these energies is left to the recipient.

We could thus summarize that this uncomfortable and hard to pin down practicological middle position revolves around acknowledging what art critic David Sylvester has termed *The Brutality of Fact*. It is the original title of his collection of interviews with Francis Bacon published in 1988 (for some reason, later editions relegated it to a subtitle, while German translations have always omitted it altogether). *The Brutality of Fact* is certainly a poignant title for a seminal publication on an artist who likewise had to contend with accusations of projecting an exceedingly grim or cynical outlook on the world. Yet it also a term that neatly seems to encapsulate the ultimate focal point of a practicological outlook: the sheer brutality of the fact that there are indeed some unrelenting facts with which everybody will have to wrestle and come to terms in their daily

existence. One way of dealing with this is to find refuge in some relatively stable and coherent ideological system: to resort, in other words, to a purifying fantasy. The other significantly less comforting but also more immediate approach is that of sober, rational acknowledgment. Bacon, clearly belonging to the latter group, used to respond to suggestions that his art was expressing a grim or even violent outlook on life by stating that he was, in fact, born with an "optimistic nature" and was "profoundly optimistic about *nothing*" (*Francis Bacon and the Brutality of Fact* 31:40). The sardonic paradoxicality of that statement is almost Lewisian. Yet when Bacon suggests that "just existing today makes me optimistic", he both divulges a similar practicological outlook and provides a plausible and very succinct elaboration. The optimism of a practicological outlook informed by and directed at the (sometimes harsh and violent) factuality of outside reality is not directed at some vague future promise or hope, but derived entirely from the experience of the reality of the present. In light of this daily struggle with brutal factuality *as a practice*, to simply survive in that reality for another day is seen as reason enough to be optimistic – and, furthermore, it is seen as a perfectly adequate reason to be optimistic. It is to this experience of the *Brutality of Fact*, or, to express it in a more neutral terminology, this decisive orientation on the external or empirical factuality as a fundamental aspect of the modernism that I am describing in this study to which we must now turn.

III An "Antynomy of Opposite Principles": Englishness and the Practicological Approach in the Historiographies of British Art and Pop

In the previous chapters, we have attempted to describe the particular type of modernism that is, effectively, our overall object of study by juxtaposing various aspects of Wyndham Lewis's idiosyncratic high modernism with Wire's equally idiosyncratic brand of popular modernism. In the course of these discussions, we have noted several similarities and parallels. On the level of form, we have noted a valorization of clear lines and structures paired with a distaste for excessive or meandering aesthetic styles. On a thematic level, we encountered similar concerns about the position of the individual (and the artist as an individual in particular) in a modern society wherein the category of the autonomous or monadic individual seems to gradually lose its footing and the technologies of regulating social behavior seem to grow ever more pervasive. This core concern — *"How to retain, as an individual artist, a certain degree of independence in an ever more interdependent and administered world?"* — is met, as we have noted, with a similar ideological outlook. The reaction to these external circumstances is not directed at some vague future promise or some purist or utopian vanishing point; the highbrow spheres of idealism are either eyed with a considerable degree of skepticism or rejected outright. Instead, the ideological outlook is one with its eyes firmly oriented on an external reality, which is grasped as what we could also describe as an empirical a priori. In contrast to the pure world of ideas, this external *reality of the present* is seen as something that is fundamentally corrupted, impure, and unfavorable. Ultimately, it stands as a definite and unsurmountable obstacle that must be acknowledged as such. Hence, this external outlook proceeds from a sober and intellectually detached acknowledgment of this *brutality of the factual.* Art relinquishes its role of offering a (secularized) promise of salvation (either by pointing towards some utopian vantage point, by coming up with grand, totalistic visions, or by at least resolving those painful antagonisms of the real within the symbolic spheres of fiction) and becomes a strategy of survival. It is reconfigured into an ensemble of practices deployed to stem the flow of the everyday violence that permeates modern reality. The Lewisian non-moral satire presents an example of such a practice; its satirical aping provides a strategy to reflect this external violence, in both its brutal as well as its comical absurdity, back onto society.

With respect to this notion of modernism reimagined as a practice of self-defense or survival, we have also noted in the previous chapter, how this comes with a somewhat quaintly un-modern valorization of the practical aspects of artistic creation: the notions of technical skill and mastery. In contrast to the purist notion of perfection, which could be described as modern in how it refers to an intrinsic sphere of abstract ideas, the notions of skill and mastery, with their references to the extrinsic sphere of action or practice and their valorization of the actual execution over the abstract idea, seem slightly un-modern in their practical impurity. We have, however, also noted how this valorization of practice is not to be confused with a rejection of intellectualism derived from a trivialized understanding of "intellectual" theory and "concrete" practice as binary opposites; rather the overall outlook is still decidedly intellectualist, but in the sense that those mental activities — abstract reasoning, intellectual reflection — are themselves seen *as a type of practice.* To think and to act are not conceived as binary opposites. Rather, the former is seen as a subset of the latter: thinking *as* a type of action. In an attempt to come up with an apt descriptor of this particular ensemble of ideas and practices, we have established the term of a *practicological* outlook: an aesthetic approach informed to a significant degree by an awareness that it is first and foremost *practice* — those daily acts of doing, experiencing, and, in fact, enduring things in and as part of a given (physical, social, cultural, political, etc.) external reality — which shapes not only our outlook but also, and perhaps more importantly so, our actual scope of action.

By working out this set of criteria through a number of cross readings of core aspects in Wyndham Lewis's works and in those of Wire as a fitting example from the tradition of British art rock, we have thus established that there are indeed connections between the former's practicological *high* modernism and the latter's practicological *popular* modernism. If these connections still seem to appear a bit murky, haphazard, or random this is, unfortunately, inevitable to a certain degree. It would, of course, have been far simpler to establish a fixed set of abstract criteria beforehand and then deductively apply or, rather, impose it on the works in question. However, to rigidly apply a set of puristic and static abstract theorems on a practicological aesthetics — one characterized primarily by *not* being derived from or oriented on abstract principles, but engendered by the impure, muddled, and ever-altering execution and circumstances of practice — would have been a self-defeating and slightly absurd exercise.

Of course, this strategy of reading comes with its own problems in how it goes against the grain of the idiom of critical writing. At its heart, criticism is an act of explication and explanation, and this study is no different in that regard. As such, it cannot avoid relying either implicitly or explicitly on some presupposed

and fairly static terminology, ideas, and theoretical concepts. I readily admit to using the notion of a practicological approach as a relatively fixed theoretical concept in order to pin down an aesthetic characterized, among other things, by its unwillingness to be pinned down. The difficulty or, in fact, futility of this undertaking thus lies in latter’s perverse innate strategy of moving its own goal posts whenever one seems to get too close to almost pin it down. In contrast to absurdist art and literature, which openly declares inconsistency as its core aesthetic principle, this problem is further exacerbated by how the approach in question here categorically *denies* its innate inconsistency by means of a formal language that above all valorizes clarity, firmness, and order. We are dealing, in other words, with an aesthetic approach where, on the one hand, we must assume that every utterance could potentially be a red herring, but, on the other hand, we can never be sure whether we are really dealing with a red herring or whether a concrete statement is to be taken at face value. In dealing with an aesthetics permeated by several layers of interconnected paradoxes, one can only acknowledge that critical idioms, with their inherent momentum towards purification, will always remain at odds with it. It is therefore clear that to tackle those texts with a puristic “high-theory” approach would lead into a dead end. What one should do as a critic instead, is to try to keep a modicum of distance from an over-reliance on static theorems and develop a certain situational (or, for that matter, *practical*) awareness for their limitations. We could also say that one is forced, as a critic, to adopt a similar practicological outlook as the texts in question. In that sense, the narrative approach employed in the previous chapters — one that slowly and gradually moves from a description of the material itself towards the drawing of a tentative but practical cognitive map of this practicological aesthetic approach — was not just appropriate, but entirely necessary.

Despite these problems that, ultimately, come with any attempt to pin down a practicological aesthetic approach, the discussions in the previous chapters should have coalesced into a discernible picture of the kind of modernism that is at stake here. Having thus established the caveat that any attempt to come up with an all-encapsulating theoretical term for this aesthetic approach will fall short of providing a complete picture, we are nevertheless at a point where we need to put forward an argument that the connections described in the previous chapters are not coincidental and random. The aim of this chapter is thus to place this external or practicological approach, which I have outlined so far by discussing individual examples, within a broader context. My core claim is that we can locate this modernism as a part of what is commonly referred to the empirical tradition or empirical orientation within British art. By focusing,

on the one hand, on art historical arguments that attribute a fundamentally empirical principle to British art and, on the other hand, a theory of pop and popular music that ascribes an empirical outlook to popular music culture as well, we can substantiate the connection that we have so far argued by way of a discussion of concrete examples. At the same time, the extensive groundwork laid so far should make it clear that rooting this aesthetic approach within the larger context of the empirical inclinations of British art is not to suggest that we are dealing with a conscious passing down of a set tradition. In the spirit of the methodological approach of cross-mapping we should rather see these connections as examples of an unconscious cultural afterlife or as the mere survival of a set of cultural practices. Very simply put, I am not making a case for there to be any notion of some hidden depth or meaning to all of this. I am not suggesting that the unconscious cultural afterlife of a particular aesthetic practice points to the existence of an underlying permanent idea or principle, of which said afterlife is only its external manifestation or symptom. As already pointed out in the introduction, the poststructuralist re-figuration of the Warburgian notion of a cultural afterlife as suggested by Georges Didi-Huberman and Elisabeth Bronfen posits that, ultimately, those external surface phenomena are all that we have got; any notion of an underlying permanent law, idea, or structure determining these phenomena according to historical necessity or some transcendental principle is either a belated narrative construct or, if it indeed exists, fundamentally unknowable to us. If I am connecting the notion of the cultural afterlife of a practicological modernist ethos to the overarching view of British art displaying an inclination towards an empirical outlook, I am not implying that there is any immanent meaning or necessity to this. Instead, I am only aiming to substantiate my core argument on the persistence of that particular type of modernism — one that is persisting, however, not as an intrinsic and everlasting idea, but simply as an extrinsic practice in all its superficial factuality.

It is important to make this distinction at this point, because several of the texts mentioned in this chapter either outrightly posit or, at the very least, veer towards such notions of inner or historical necessity. Nikolaus Pevsner's 1956 study *The Englishness of English Art* still remains one of the seminal reference points in attempts within art history to describe what is particularly different or, for that matter, "English" about "English Art". Of course, Pevsner's methodological approach of invoking the notion of a national or ethnic character to categorize a particular provenance in the arts is not only outdated, but also ideologically problematic. Pevsner's argument in *The Englishness of English Art* is largely grounded on the tenets of the *geography of art* (Ger. *Kunstgeographie*),

a method of art historical study put forward by German scholars during the interwar years.[32] The geography of art suggests that styles within the arts are mainly determined by issues of place or geography: climate, the environment, the societal makeup, economic realities, and the sheer everyday reality of engaging with one's immediate material surroundings. This external approach to writing art history, which, in a sense, stresses the importance of those mundane and practical aspects in the development of certain artistic styles and forms that more idealist outlooks tend to forget or ignore, is in itself not a problem. However, what is more precarious is the political history associated with the geography of art. By tracing back certain artistic styles and forms to the notion of a specific national character, which was itself construed from notions of place and of ethnicity, several of its proponents used the approach to feed nationalistic narratives on the superiority of German art and, in turn, legitimize pan-Germanic claims on Eastern European territories and peoples (Kaufmann 80). We can still hear faint echoes of this dark association of the geography of art with Nazist ideology when Pevsner, in his conclusion to *The Englishness of English Art*, elaborates on the various racial types and physiognomies of the "Englishman". It has to be noted though that Pevsner's goes into these elaboration in order to refute those puristic or essentialist notions of ethnicity. Ultimately, Pevsner distances himself from an overvaluation of the question of race with regard to the arts, arguing that a convincing notion of "Englishness" cannot be based on clear-cut racial stereotypes. When he claims that "England has indeed profited as much from the un-Englishness of the immigrants as they have profited from the Englishing they underwent" (185), he aims to replace those unacceptable ideas of a *völkisch* racial discourse that had informed the geography of art with a more positive, inclusive, and hybrid notion of national identity. Nevertheless, the way in which these questions of racial or national belonging crop up in Pevsner's own geography of English art is bound to leave the contemporary reader with a sour aftertaste. Considering this dark undercurrent to the history of the geography of art as an art historical method, it is no surprise that it has, since then, tended to be sidelined by the other two major methodological approaches developed by German art historians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: Wölfflin's history of style and the iconological method of the Warburg school.

Furthermore and regardless of these specific historical aspects, any attempt to write art history strictly along national borders and to define what is specifically

32 On the geography of art as an art-historical method and its historical context, see Kaufmann.

“English”, “French”, “German” etc. about English, French, and German art must appear outdated today. One would imagine that the emergence of a post-national and post-imperial awareness of how the development of art usually showed little regard for national borders and, more importantly, how national idioms are not natural givens but belated constructs would have led to a determined shift towards more hybrid trans- or international perspectives. This, however, evidently has not happened so far. References to national categories and idioms as purely descriptive and illustrative terms in the (visual) arts still abound. There seems to be, in other words, a certain unshakeable factuality to those established forms of knowledge. This is, however, to be expected to some degree. After all, these national idioms have been ingrained and are constantly re-ingrained through years of practice in the various social fields pertaining to the arts. For example, it would be unreasonable to expect the major art museums around the world, whose collections have, often over centuries, been accrued, organized, and exhibited, among other things, according to national criteria, to radically change overnight. Furthermore, generic categories and *isms* have very often been used in conjunction with a national attribute (e.g. French impressionism, Italian futurism, American abstract impressionism, etc.) and are continued to be used that way, both out of blind conventionality and because there still is a pragmatic usefulness to these terms as convenient shorthands and broad points of reference. We could say that these everyday practices constitute a set of Latourian purification rituals, which, on a daily basis, produce and reproduce these deeply ingrained forms of knowledge. It would thus seem rather presumptuous to expect a mere theoretical awareness for the discursive nature of these norms and categories to be able to outweigh the large-scale and daily execution of these purification rites. For every critical intervention against these established idioms, tens of thousands of museum visitors around the world will walk through collections and exhibitions where the history of art is narrated along those old and well-established criteria of nationality and straightforward chronology. To put it in other terms, a theoretical awareness of these narrative and discursive frameworks constitutes only a small part of a much more wide-ranging ensemble of practices, which would need to be realigned along with said theoretical awareness. It thus seems reasonable to expect any ideas about post-national perspectives to remain, for the foreseeable future, confined to the spheres of specialized academic discourses.

For that reason, Pevsner’s *The Englishness of English Art* remains a seminal text. While we can and ought to criticize its methodology for both being outdated and having problematic ideological implications, Pevsner still provides a clear and vivid elaboration of those narrative reference points that continue to shape

contemporary understandings of or, more generally speaking, contemporary practices of engaging with English art. If it is thus a cliché to suggest that the English visual arts have tended to be insular both in their aesthetics and with regard to their status in the canon of European art history, it is nevertheless a cliché whose factuality is still being reproduced on a daily basis. One, for example, only needs to make a visit to the *Gemäldegalerie* in Berlin, without a doubt one of the world’s most comprehensive and, above all, illustrative collections of what constitutes the art historical canon of European painting from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century. There, one would notice the truly minuscule number of English paintings on display, consisting only of a handful of eighteenth-century portraits and conversation pieces (mainly by Thomas Gainsborough and Joshua Reynolds) tucked away in a corner room of the exhibition space. By placing its collection of English paintings at the outer margins, both literally and figuratively, and limiting it to a few solitary figures, the historical narrative implied by this presentation is one that reinforces, on a daily basis, the insular status of English visual arts within European art history. We could also say that this presentation mirrors the dismissive attitude towards British modern art and the neglected treatment of Vorticism as a European avant-garde movement discussed in the first chapter. Conversely, one could make a visit to the Tate Britain in London and note how, in contrast to national art galleries in France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, or Spain, one would mostly see works by painters and sculptors there whose names would, in all likelihood, not ring a bell to the average foreign visitor with only a casual knowledge of art history.

Pevsner’s argument in *The Englishness of English Art* represents both an acknowledgment of this insular status of English art, as well as an attempt to move beyond the presupposed normative framework of European art history, which had led to the relegation of the English visual arts to their marginal place in the first place. We encounter, in his elaboration of the specifically “English” characteristics in English art, several of the aspects we have noted in the previous chapters with regard to our notion of a practicological modernism. At the heart of Pevsner’s notion of “Englishness” lies a fundamentally empirical outlook: an affirmative disposition towards and orientation on the notion of a given, that is, an *empirical* external reality. English art, as Pevsner argues, is non- or anti-idealist in the sense that it does not tend to work from abstract principles and ideals in order to impose them on the external world, but proceeds from a close study or reflection of that external world itself. Pevsner describes this acknowledgment of the factuality of a given empirical reality not as a submission under the dictate of a monolithic and unrelenting concept of nature, but as a

pragmatic, productive, sober, and *realistic* engagement with its manifold features and possibilities. From this empirical outlook he derives a set of characteristics or broad tendencies within English art, among them a predilection for measured and moderate aesthetic approaches, a commitment to the figurative, a respect for traditions, and a reformist and restrained outlook on aesthetic development that favors incremental change over revolutionary upheavals.

Pevsner arguably provides the most vivid illustration of this moderate, casual, pragmatic, and empirical spirit, which characterizes his notion of “Englishness”, in his discussion of the English landscape garden. With its close ties to the aesthetic notion of the picturesque, the English landscape garden aims to imitate the unforced irregularities of natural landscapes instead of imposing a puristic geometric order on nature:

> The English Garden [...] is asymmetrical, informal, varied and made of such parts as the serpentine lake, the winding drive and winding path, the trees grouped in clumps and smooth lawn (mown or cropped by sheep) reaching right up to the French windows of the house. (164)

The core aesthetic principle of the English landscape garden is thus the picturesque curved line; we encounter it, for example, in the winding pathways and lakes, which imitate the irregular, serpentine shapes found in uncultivated nature. This unforced and casual elegance is contrasted with the aesthetics of the French garden with its rigid geometric layout, its straight pathways, and its neatly trimmed hedges. However, Pevsner argues that the picturesque aesthetics of the English landscape garden is only a specific manifestation of an underlying principle of an “Englishness” that can be observed throughout all of the arts and of the literature of England. He thus quotes Voltaire, who remarked with regard to Shakespeare that

> the English have only produced irregular beauties ... Their poetical genius resembles a closely grown tree planted by nature, throwing out a thousand branches here and there and growing lustily and without rules. It dies if you try to force its nature and trim it like the gardens of Marly. (177)

And he encapsulates the sober and empirical outlook lying at the heart of his definition of “Englishness” by quoting Hume that “nature is always too strong for principle” (177).

What is of particular interest for our argument, however, is Pevsner’s claim that the sober, moderate, and empirical disposition which characterizes English art would prove to be a disadvantage in the modernist period. Invoking the notion of a *zeitgeist* or a *spirit of the age*, Pevsner notes that this specifically

"English" ethos of making art was simply out of step with the demands and ideals of modern art:

> If England seems so far incapable of leadership in twentieth-century painting, the extreme contrast between the spirit of the age and English qualities is responsible. Art in her leaders is violent today, it breaks up more than it yet re-assembles. England dislikes violence and believes in evolution. So here, spirit of the age and spirit of England seem incompatible. (181)

With the spirit of the age of modernism and modern art calling for revolutionary gestures, radical solutions, utopian designs, and an orientation on abstract theories instead of concrete external reality, all of which formally manifested in a drive towards an ever greater degree of abstraction and of non-objective styles of painting, it is no surprise that, according to Pevsner, the British contributions to modern painting of the early twentieth century were fated to remain a marginal and insular phenomenon.

We can thus recognize in Pevsner's notion of Englishness certain parallels to some aspects of Wyndham Lewis's moderate modernism described in the previous chapters. Although Lewis is generally placed at the radical end of English modernism, I have argued so far that his idiosyncratic outlook on modernity and modern art does not match a straightforwardly radical stance. It has to be noted that Lewis was arguably one of the least insularly oriented figures of British modernism. As Myers points out, Lewis's many years spent abroad "endowed him with a European rather than an insular outlook" (1) and made him very much aware of what was going on in European intellectual and artistic circles at the time (15-16). There is thus certainly a sense of radicalism or extremism about the declamatory and didactic tone with which Lewis attacked and mocked those fields of English art and culture where the sober and moderate spirit as described by Pevsner had fossilized into somnolent complacency and empty tradition — the, in Myers' terms, "smug Edwardian insularity" (33). The sense of urgency that permeates his writings is certainly a far cry from that restrained disposition and his preferences as a painter for strong, straight lines and plain, hard surfaces seem to have nothing in common with the unforced elegance of the picturesque curved line. For all these temperamental differences, however, we can also point to a significant number of intersections with Pevsner's concept of Englishness: We have discussed at length how Lewis's modernism was oriented on a notion of a given external, that is, empirical reality and on the importance of practically working within and with that reality. We have noted how any potential revolutionary fervor was kept in check by his propensity for taking a quasi-neutral position of

sober and intellectualist detachment. We have also pointed out how Lewis, as a consequence of this practicological outlook, rejected the modernist fixation on purist abstract principles and remained skeptical of those aesthetic (and, for that matter, political) projects oriented on theoretical constructs of ideas, on unattainable utopias, and on vague future promises. We can say, in other words, that there is a very “Pevsnerian” English conservative or preservative undercurrent to his modernist ethos. His modernist outlook — and this is where we can also locate his commitment to a classical ideal — was one less informed by a desire to forcibly do away with old and bring forth the new in one fell swoop, but by the question of what can be salvaged from a culturally bankrupt world in order to ensure its continued survival.

It is in this conservative or at least anti-radical outlook of Lewis’s moderate and practicological modernism where it intersects with Pevsner’s notion of Englishness, as the latter is also closely connected to a question of cultural or societal survival. If *The Englishness of English Art* at times reads like a defense of a moderate aesthetics against the contemporary demand or, rather, cliché that art at its best has to be radical and radically new, this is because there is a clear political dimension to Pevsner’s argument. To Pevsner, “Englishness” in English art is not only an aesthetic or a style, but ultimately an expression of a wider political and societal ideal, namely that of the English liberal political tradition. If English art is characterized by a sense of casual moderateness and, thus, remained largely reluctant to embrace the revolutionary spirit that had inspired the arts on the European Continent since the Romantic period, this, according to Pevsner, only mirrored English political history. More precisely, it mirrors the mainstream Whig historiography of English parliamentarianism since the Glorious Revolution, which presented the political history of England as a gradual and unbroken — i.e. reformist rather than revolutionary — teleological progression towards ever greater liberty and enlightenment in the moderate forms of a constitutional monarchy and a liberal democracy. Again, the comparison between the aesthetics of the English landscape garden and the French garden provides an apt illustration of this political iconography. As Pevsner notes, the two contrasting garden types suggest that “England is Liberty, France is suppressed by her rulers” (166). The geometric rigidity that aesthetics of the French garden impose on nature is read as a metaphor for French absolutism where the crown exerts total control over both its territory and its subjects; the picturesque aesthetics of the English landscape garden with its unforced imitation of irregular natural forms, however, becomes a signifier for the liberal parliamentary monarchy of the United Kingdom. In a wider sense,

Englishness in the arts is thus read as an expression of the liberal humanist ideals of individual freedom, tolerance, fairness, and laissez-faire.

If eighteenth-century garden aesthetics provide the most vivid example of this ideological contrast between absolutist state control and liberal humanist laissez-faire, Pevsner also recognizes a pragmatic and laissez-faire logic to English city planning. He remarks how the dense urban sprawl of Central London was not built according to some grand overarching plan, but was rather left to grow organically and undirected in accordance with immediate needs. This led to an irregular cityscape that, in its lack of a discernible center point, a great and borderline chaotic variety of architectural styles, and a seemingly haphazard arrangement of roads, alleys and boulevards, expresses a certain picturesque quality, which he again associates with the pragmatic and liberal national character of the English people (178). As a counterpoint, Pevsner again points to France, more specifically to the far more structured, homogenous, and geometrically rigid appearance of Paris, which was, of course, largely the result of Haussmann's centralized and highly interventionist renovation project during the Second Empire.

More importantly, however, this contrast between English moderateness and Continental European revolutionary thoroughness obviously extends towards the twentieth century and thus to Pevsner's personal history. His appreciating study of moderate English aesthetics as an expression of a pragmatic and liberal humanist national character is clearly also the statement of an exile who had to flee from the worst and most destructive excesses of modern political radicalism. Though originally supportive of the cultural policies of the National Socialists, he nevertheless was dismissed from his university post due to his Jewish heritage and emigrated to the United Kingdom in 1934, where he then settled for the rest of his life. Pevsner thus became himself a victim of modern political radicalism and totalitarianism in its most extreme form (we could very well say that, in line with both Latour's critique of modernity and Horkheimer and Adorno's core thesis of their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, fascism stands as one of the possible endpoints of modernity viewed as an utterly relentless and thorough process of purifying the world). From that perspective, the appeal of the supposed moderateness of English art becomes obvious: It is not only a style or aesthetic that, in its insular perspective, remained out of step with the modern artistic developments on the continent, but also a cultural expression of the very same national character that proved impervious to those devastating modern political ideologies which ravaged the European continent in the early twentieth century. Furthermore, England becomes more than just a country of refuge; it is presented, both literally and figuratively, as the nation that had stood firm as

the final, stalwart bastion of reason, humanism, liberalism, and, not least, sanity during a time when the other great European nations had succumbed to the terrors of modern totalitarian regimes.

Pevsner’s perspective on Englishness is thus informed, at least to a certain degree, by the prevalent cliché of English culture, society, and politics being driven by an essentially sober, pragmatic, and realistic spirit. In the contexts of England’s role in World War Two and Pevsner’s personal history, this idyllic perspective on Englishness and the supposed English national character is, of course, understandable. Nevertheless, later research on English art has problematized this equation of the picturesque and political liberty. In her seminal study of English landscape aesthetics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860,* Ann Bermingham has argued that the supposed liberalism and pragmatism manifested in the picturesque aesthetics of the English landscape garden was only open to a small, economically privileged social class. Bermingham’s controversial argument, which strongly relies on an Althusserian critique of ideology, points to those elements that were usually omitted from these idyllic representations of picturesque landscapes. More specifically, she points to the glaring economic inequalities at the heart of eighteenth and nineteenth century English society and how the supposedly liberal and democratic picturesque landscape aesthetics emerged against the backdrop of the enclosure movement and the beginning of an industrialized farming economy. Thus, the Pevsnerian view of England and English culture is, to a significant degree, also a concrete example of the (still) popular Continental European fantasy of England and the United Kingdom as a bastion of reason, pragmatism, liberty, and equality. His idyllic perspective on England is, of course, not entirely unfounded in how reflects the political history of the United Kingdom from the eighteenth to the twentieth century measured against the much more fraught political history of Continental Europe of that period. However, it goes without saying that it still paints a very reductive picture of a much more complex and contradictory reality. In essence, Pevsner rose-tinted view of Englishness is the result of a Continental Europeans’ projection of an abstract ideal of liberalism onto the political body of the United Kingdom.

Pevsner, however, was by far not the only German exile who projected this image of England as a stalwart haven of tolerance and liberalism in an era of political extremism. In his 1963 essay “The Ideological Antecedents of the Rolls-Royce Radiator”, Erwin Panofsky presented an argument that was similar in substance though different in methodology. In contrast to Pevsner, Panofsky is more careful with invoking notions extrinsic to the field of the

arts such as geography, climate, race, and national character to expound his idea of a specifically English aesthetic. Instead, he chooses a more descriptive iconological approach. Englishness, he argues, is characterized by a peculiar coexistence of, on the one hand, a stately and rigid classicism and, on the other hand, a more irregular, casual, and nature-orientated style, which he alternately terms “gothic” (276), “romantic” (282), “rustic” (274), and even “modern” (274). He notes, for example, how, in the eighteenth century, the “serious secular architecture of the period, both in town and country, was dominated by […] Palladian classicism” (275). Yet he also points out how these classicist villas were often set in picturesque English landscape gardens, which were anything but classicist. With its “rolling lawns, its seemingly casual though artfully arranged clumps of trees, its ponds and brooks, and its serpentine footpaths”, the English landscape garden

> retains and accentuates precisely those “natural” values which the formal garden intended to suppress: the qualities of picturesque variety, surprise, and apparent infinitude […] and consequently, the power of appealing to the emotions instead of gratifying the sense of objective and rational order. (274)

Panofsky places this antinomy at the heart of “twelve centuries of Anglo-Saxon preoccupations and aptitudes” (288). He characterizes “Englishness” or the English style by a certain nonchalance in how it approaches and adopts various styles and aesthetics schools. Instead of settling for one specific school or style and adopt it as a puristic doctrine, which then has to be followed by the letter, English art and architecture are characterized by a more casual and flexible approach, which not only allows for the peaceful coexistence, but sometimes even the direct fusing of contradictory classical and un-classical styles and elements. To Panofsky, this simultaneity of the classical and the romantic — the conservative and the progressive, the traditional and the modern — appears as an “antinomy”, which, as he notes, “places English art both far to the right and far to the left of contemporary developments on the Continent” (277).

It is only at the very end of the essay when he finally gets around to discuss the Rolls Royce radiator mentioned in the title. To Panofsky, the formal characteristics of the Rolls Royce radiator perfectly encapsulate the essential hybridity of English aesthetics: “It conceals an admirable [modern] piece of engineering behind a majestic Palladian temple front; but this Palladian temple front is surmounted by the wind-blown “Silver Lady” in whom *art noveau* appears infused with the spirit of unmitigated “Romanticism”” (288). Similar to Pevsner, Panofsky draws an analogy between “this antinomy of opposite principles” in the arts and the wider spheres of English social reality, noting

"the fact that social and institutional life in England is more strictly controlled by tradition and convention, yet gives more scope to individual "eccentricity" than anywhere else" (277). Ultimately, however, he remains both fascinated and bemused by the English aesthetic tradition. With its nonchalant swinging back and forth between classicist and non-classicist styles and its flexible and irreverent approach to academic doctrine, English art not only represents an oddity in the art historical canon, but also remains to a certain degree un-categorizable. To the critic, the historian, or the academic scholar, whose work inevitably veers towards the establishing of clear and distinct categories, this fundamental hybridity, which resists any attempt to being untangled completely and labeled with an exhaustive set of critical terms, will always remain as a stubborn obstacle. It is thus perhaps appropriate that Panofsky concludes his essay not with a neat summary of his core findings, but with the thoroughly unacademic exclamation of "May it never be changed!" (288), resorting to what is essentially a toast to English art and its persistent survival in its unacademic eccentricity, its tolerant stylistic pluralism, and its casual oscillation between tradition and the new.

Even if Panofsky thus does not resort to the notion of an English national character, his description of Englishness still shares some similarities with Pevsner's. In both cases, what is specifically English about English art is how it is driven by an empirical and pragmatical outlook, which privileges questions pertaining to which specific approaches fit to and work best in a practical context of a given reality over questions concerned with academic dogmas and stylistic or ideological purity. As with Pevsner, there are thus several parallels between Panofsky's art historical characterization of English aesthetics and the notion of a practicological modernism. In addition to Pevsner, however, Panofsky's dialectic description of Englishness as an antonymic coexistence of traditional and untraditional (that is, modern) modes, which "places English art both far to the right and far to the left of Continental developments" (281), also gives us a better grasp of Wyndham Lewis's equally antonymous modernism. As we have discussed, one of Lewis's preferred terms for his stylistic approach was, paradoxically, "classical". Suffice to say that if we juxtapose Lewis's "classical modernism" with Panofsky's understanding of English aesthetics being fundamentally antonymous, the former's seeming contradiction in terms suddenly makes a lot more sense.

There is, however, another reason why Panofsky is an interesting point of reference here. If one of the core issues of this study revolves around the relationship between impure practice and a puristic conception of theory, knowledge, and ideas, Panofsky's iconology presents an interesting case in

how its overt idealist thrust is counteracted by a practicological undercurrent. Didi-Huberman, in his 2003 essay "Artistic Survival: Panofsky vs. Warburg and the Exorcism of Impure Time", takes a heavily critical stance of Panofsky and his iconological project. To him, Panofsky's role is that of the supreme purifier: the "high exorcising priest" (277) of the Warburgian notion of *Nachleben* (afterlife) and its associated notion of impure or anachronistic time. As discussed in the introductory chapter, Didi-Huberman undertakes a post-structuralist re-figuration of Warburgian iconology, arguing that the cultural afterlife of visual forms and expressions does not follow a purely rational or linear chronological logic. Rather, this survival of images and motifs is characterized by a conception of history that is fundamentally impure and haphazard — one that is permeated by irrational breaks, antagonisms, anachronisms, and unexpected reoccurrences. This process of a cultural afterlife thus cannot be fully grasped by a historical narrative that sees history as an uninterrupted and linear flow determined by an immanent rational *logos*. Contrasting Warburg and Panofsky, Didi-Huberman argues that Warburg's original conception of *Nachleben* already took into account these impure and irrational, or, as Elisabeth Bronfen refers to it in her terminology, "affective" (1) aspects of history. Panofsky, on the other hand, is presented as a rigid purist, whose "remodeling" of Warburgian iconology represents an endeavor to cleanse it of this speculative philosophical view of history and turn it into an accurate and objective scientific method. Repressing Warburg's deliberately vague and intuitive terminology such as "Nachleben" or "renascence" and jettisoning the underlying Nietzschean and Burckhardtian implications, Panofsky's iconology marks a return to a notion of history that is driven by a puristic and rationalistic spirit and oriented on quasi-objective notions such as direct influences and relationships, as well as differentiable periods and epistemes. Suffice to say that Didi-Huberman veritably demonizes Panofsky as an intolerant exorcist. By bringing iconology back into the fold of an idealist view of visual and art history — one that sees it not driven by the haphazard and ghostly survival of "undead" images and motifs (280), but by a homogenous and uninterrupted flow of clearly ascertainable immanent and immortal ideas — Panofsky, as Didi-Huberman argues, showed a fundamental misunderstanding of Warburgian iconology and its impure perspective of time (285).

However, I would like to suggest that this denouncement of Panofsky as a demon of either puristic, scientistic objectivity or idealistic homogeneity is perhaps not entirely justified. According to Didi-Huberman, Panofsky reinstated a "deep" or immanent historiography that returned to the deceptive narrative clarity and coherence provided by a history of ideas, whereas Warburg's

historiography was “superficial” in that it revolved around an intuitive tracing of the impure survival or afterlife of images and motifs *as external forms or surfaces.* Using our own terminology, we could say that Didi-Huberman claims Panofsky to be an idealist and Warburg to be a practicologist. However, I would argue that there is, to Panofsky, an undercurrent of impure practicology that goes against the puristic idealist grain of his iconological method. The common perspective of Panofsky’s iconological method is, of course, that it puts the notion of an immanent and eternal idea — the meaning *in* the arts — over the profane matter-of-factness of the external form. The trajectory through the three strata of Panofsky’s model of iconographical/iconological analysis, as he describes it in “Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art”, is very clear in that regard: One moves from the primary stage of pure form (“1. Primary or natural subject matter” [*Meaning in the Visual Arts* 28]) through the second stage, where this in itself “meaningless” form conveys an overt iconographic meaning based on conventionalized visual codes (“2. Secondary or conventional subject matter” [28]) in order to finally arrive at the third iconological stage. There, the focus lies on the artwork’s “intrinsic meaning or content” (30) as the product or expression of some unconscious historical spirit or *zeitgeist.* In other words, the artwork becomes, on this third iconological level, a medium for an abstract and intangible idea that transcends the former’s formal and semantic parameters.

There is, of course, an implied hierarchy to these three levels. Bluntly put, what really counts is that third iconological stage where we can locate the supposed “true” meaning of an image or artwork: the stable or immortal idea behind and/or within the artwork that, in Panofsky’s own words, constitutes its “essential” meaning, whereas the other two levels only refer to a superficial “phenomenal” meaning (28). Looked at from this perspective, Panofsky’s three stage method is thus an expressive or deterministic model, in which the notion of a deeper and hidden truth to be unearthed by the art historian is privileged over the profane phenomenal and superficial aspects of an image (that is, its formal qualities and its conventionalized visual codes). The latter are seen as only the passive reflection of an intangible and immortal idea that is supposed to have already been there before the fact.

However, despite this essentialist trajectory of the Panofskian method, we can locate, I would argue, a practicological or performative bent to Panofsky’s approach, which, perhaps, goes against the grain of its supposedly idealist heart. In its inductive approach that puts great emphasis on, first, a close study of the formal aspects of an image and, second, a deciphering of its conventional codes as the indispensable groundwork before one can move to

that third stage of the “essential” meaning, the method itself suggests that the external form and the visual codes it conveys are more than the mere passive reflection of that third stage meaning. Of course, Panofsky’s rigorous insistence on approaching the artwork inductively must be understood in the context of his need to establish a set of objective or scientific criteria on which to base his method of iconological analysis (this is, in a nutshell, one of the core points of Didi-Huberman’s critique: that Panofsky supposedly attempted to forcibly transform iconology from an idiom belonging to the humanities into one belonging to the exact sciences). Nevertheless, it takes only a small step to suggest that taking this inductive approach to its logical conclusion means reversing the entire hierarchy. It would mean to see iconological analysis not as the unearthing of a hidden idea that was always already there before the fact, but as a strategy of productive or performative reading that produces and repeatedly reproduces said idea. In fact, Panofsky admitted so himself. Stating that iconological analysis was driven by what he could only describe very unscientifically as a practice of “synthetic intuition” (38), Panofsky was very much aware of its practical or performative dimension: The external form, the practical production, circulation, and reception of visual shapes and gestures, brings forth a conventional iconographic meaning and it is these acts that then collectively and performatively realize and re-create, in the present moment (and not just passively mediate), an iconological meaning. The notion of an essential *zeit-* or *weltgeist* is thus relegated from its position of an intrinsic prime mover to that of a belatedly constructed and convenient theoretical term: a metaphor deployed in order to account for the latent presence of a common sense or a common cultural imaginary, which has, however, been performatively engendered and is consistently reproduced by these external cultural habits and practices.

Perhaps the most lucid example of this aspect of performativity in Panofsky’s iconological model is his famous example from the beginning of “Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art”. I am referring to his example of two acquaintances greeting each other on the street by lifting their hats (26-28). Panofsky uses it in the article to provide an initial description of how iconological analysis works: Beginning by describing the formal gesture itself (two people making the physical movement of lifting their hats), one then moves on to the iconographic level, where this gesture is analyzed according to a conventionalized code as an expression of a polite greeting. In addition to this synchronic reading, the iconographic stage includes a diachronic perspective that traces the historical development of that customary gesture. In the case of the act of lifting one’s hat, Panofsky traces it back to medieval times

“where armed men used to remove their helmets to make clear their peaceful intentions” (27). Together, form and code thus refer, on the iconological level, to an overarching set of cultural values and ideas: a shared and customary language about what constitutes politeness and civility and what it means for the individual participant of a given society to behave, in accordance with that shared language, in a polite and civilized manner.

This seemingly innocuous example is thus not randomly chosen. By explicitly picking an example that refers to a customary practice of signaling politeness, Panofsky already implies the ethical underpinnings of his iconological method: Iconology is not to be taken as a disinterested study of a conventionalized language of visual forms and motifs in a vacuum; to do so would mean to stop at the second, iconographic stage of analysis. Rather, what the third iconological stage implies is that this system, this visual language, both transmits and sustains a set of shared cultural values over time. More specifically, the underlying creed of Panofsky’s iconological method is that, as he argues in his introduction to *Meaning in the Visual Arts,* Western European art constitutes a “cosmos of culture” (6) which mediates the fundamental civilizational values of Western European humanism through the ages (4, footnote 3). Consequently, the gesture of lifting one’s hat, traced from its chivalric roots to its contemporary existence as part of a code of bourgeois civility, is not a random example that Panofsky simply uses to illustrate his analytical method; in its reference to a notion of common human decency and politeness, it also points to the capability of those visual codes to realize a fundamentally humanistic civilizational ethos.

Yet again, it seems misleading to understand this process according to an expressive logic, wherein the external phenomenal aspects — the concrete customary gestures of politeness realized as external form — are seen as only the passive manifestations of an intangible, homogenous and permanent civilizational spirit. Instead, it seems far more reasonable to read it performatively as the concrete gestures that engender this civilizational spirit in the first place. In fact, Panofsky himself alludes to this performative dimension by noting that “this [third stage, i.e. iconological] meaning can only be apprehended by re-producing and thereby, quite literally, “realizing”” (14) it and stressing the intuitive, irrational, and subjective aspects that contribute to this process (15). To lift one’s hat, in other words, does not mean to simply give form to an immortal humanist civilizational spirit or idea. It does not mean to simply *express* something that would persist regardless of whether it is realized as a concrete phenomenal gesture or not. Rather, it is the gesture itself — its countless re-iterations performed as actual, mental and physical practice on a daily basis — that performatively creates and nourishes that spirit of humanism, which

would otherwise wither and die. In short, humanist values such as politeness and civility do not exist as pure, homogenous, and eternal ideas outside or independent of their concrete and practical realizations. Rather than being the cause of their practical realizations, these abstract values are, in fact, their results.

This positioning of Panofsky’s iconological model in a performative context does not present a radical re-reading of it. After all, we have already noted how he himself retained a critical distance from absolutist or essentialist notions. To refer back to his essay on “The Ideological Antecedents of the Rolls Royce Radiator”, Panofsky refrains — in contrast to Pevsner — from invoking the notion of a specific and intrinsic English national character. When he gets closest to describing something akin to an essentialist English nature, he elegantly terms it “twelve centuries of Anglo-Saxon preoccupations and aptitudes” (288). This is a choice of words that is far from an ahistorical or essentialist notion of Englishness driven by some idealist concept of a pseudo-divine zeitgeist. On the contrary, he refers to a very practical terminology of mental and manual activities and capabilities (“preoccupations and aptitudes”) performed over a concrete (though admittedly rather extensive) historical timespan (“twelve centuries”). The gist of this choice of words is thus that Englishness is not an intrinsic or essential and, as such, eternal characteristic, but a performative one. It is one that is engendered and kept alive only through external cultural practice.

In this regard, it is also worth pointing out the well-known fact that Panofsky’s iconology, despite its supposed essentialist or idealist theoretical foundation, was an important source of inspiration for no less than Pierre Bourdieu, that great practicologist of style, taste, and class. As Bourdieu himself admitted in his postface to his 1967 French translation of Panofsky’s *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism*, it was Panofsky’s writings that provided him with the term *habitus* — arguably the core theoretical concept of his theory of practice (226). In his adoption of the Panofskian terminology, Bourdieu of course left behind those terms that suggested notions of immanence, essence, or intrinsicality. Instead, through his notion of habitus, supposedly immanent values, morals, and rules of socialization were engendered and entrenched externally through the (mimetic) mental and manual practices of individual social actors. With Bourdieu, any notion of an immanent, autonomous, and homogenous *zeitgeist* that is not the belated product of external social practice evaporates. Nevertheless, it should be clear how this practicological re-reading of Panofsky does not represent a radical realignment of the latter’s position. Rather, as Panofsky’s own language suggests, the awareness of the importance

of extrinsic practice to the creation and sustainment of civilizational values is already there. One is reminded of his famous conclusion to his essay on “Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures”, where he remarks that “the problem is to manipulate and shoot unstylized reality in such a way that the result has style” (32). By positing the very extrinsic, very superficial, very ephemeral, and fundamentally non-essentialist notion of *style* as the benchmark for what constitutes successful (cinematic) art, it becomes clear that Panofsky’s iconology was, for all intents and purposes, a study of surfaces and practices. If Panofsky’s partial reliance on a vocabulary of immanence and permanence prevented him from stating this as clearly as he could have, Bourdieu’s subsequent readjustment managed to bring this point into proper focus.

The crux of the problem — and this brings us back to Didi-Huberman’s critique — thus appears less with Panofsky himself and more with his (posthumous) reception. Although Panofsky posited iconology as a productive cultural practice of engaging with external forms and formalities, which he saw as a fundamentally humanistic activity and, as such, a necessary one to keep the humanist spirit alive, this is not how Panofskian iconology established itself as an analytical method. As tends to happen whenever a particular idea, method, or approach gains widespread traction and is established as a school of thought, what falls by the wayside are usually those aspects that remain indefinite and uncontrollable: those which rely on, to cite Panofsky again, a kind of “synthetic intuition” and thus cannot be seamlessly integrated into a rigid step-by-step methodology. If Didi-Huberman thus practically crucifies Panofsky for supposedly cleansing, in a zealous fit of scientistic mania, Warburgian iconology of its productive and vibrant impurities, one gets the impression that he should have directed this critique at Panofsky’s numerous epigones instead. This is essentially what Marxist art historian T. J. Clark did in his fiery and polemical 1974 essay “The Conditions of Artistic Creation”, where he wonders how Panofskian iconology had “in a generation […] declined from a polemic about tradition and its forms, an argument over the conditions in which an artist encountered an ideology, into desultory theme-chasing” (250). Clark thus seems more on target with his critique when he puts the blame not at Panofsky’s feet but on the anonymous and amorphous crowds of “the best art-historical circles” of Clark’s time for abandoning and denouncing those aspects of iconology that had constituted it as a productive and problem-oriented practice of engaging with visual artifacts as “a Hegelian habit [and] juvenile exercises that Panofsky grew out of” (250).

However, regardless of whether these accusations are deserved or not, what these critiques and interventions have in common is that, for all of them, what

is ultimately at stake is the role of the humanities as a productive intellectual practice. This holds true for any of the theoretical positions mentioned and/or discussed so far, whether we look at Panofsky’s positioning of iconological analysis as a practice of synthetic intuition, Didi-Huberman’s defense of the Warburgian notion of impure history, Clark’s demand to return to a type of inconvenient dialectical thinking, Bronfen’s practice of cross-mapping as a productive strategy of reading across periodical and epistemological boundaries, or, for that matter, Latour’s claim for abandoning a puristic notion of modernity and recognizing it as an impure amalgamation of various contradictory ensembles of practices. The common concern of these critical interventions is for the humanities to persist as a relevant and productive practice of reading, that is, of engaging with the external world. For this to be the case, as all of these positions argue in some way or other, the humanities have to be acknowledged as a partially impure and intuitive idiom; they recognize it not as a flaw, which would need to be exorcized, but as a fundamental characteristic by which the humanities distinguish themselves from the hard sciences. The “enemy”, so to speak, is thus not so much the (natural) scientific idiom itself (as we have already discussed with regard to Latour, it is very much acknowledged and respected), but something which we could describe as an effort at a *scientification of the humanities*: the improper transplanting of a categorically different and unsuitable idiom onto the humanities. This does not lead to greater scientific exactness and legitimacy, but instead to a flood of what T. J. Clark succinctly describes as “dreary professional literature” (250): to the neutralization and ossification of the humanities as a critical, productive, and vibrant discipline under the illusion of having elevated it into the upper echelons of the exact sciences.

For this reason, Didi-Huberman’s critique of Panofsky seems both a tad overzealous and directed at what is ultimately a friendly target. Of course, from a post-structuralist position with its combative Nietzschean outlook and its focus on irresolvable breaks, antagonisms, and contradictions, Panofsky’s comparatively serene and conciliatory style of arguing, which seems directed at resolving contradictions, mediating between antagonistic stances, and projecting a homogenous and organic view of history, will inevitably arouse suspicion if not outright rejection. Furthermore, his commitment to humanism smacks of a bourgeois and reactionary *Weltanschauung*. And, finally, his extensive elaborations in the introductory essay of *Meaning in the Visual Arts* of the parallels and similarities between the humanities and the natural sciences can be misread as alarmingly scientistic. However, as we have noted, Panofsky regularly undercuts these puristic gestures by stressing the intuitive aspects

of iconological analysis, resorting to a performative and practicological terminology that revolves around notions of synthetic re-creation, reproduction, realization, and enlivening. His humanism is thus not the stolid and regressive doctrine that structuralist and post-structuralist theories were (rightfully) criticizing at the time, but, as Clark accurately notes, a vibrant and creative dialectical engagement with the past (249-50).

Thus, it is more plausible to read Panofsky as a sober defense of a humanism conceived not as a doctrine or an abstract ideal, but as a concrete practice. On the one hand, he stages this defense against the encroachment of a puristic and "non-humanistic" scientistic idiom on the humanities without, however, demonizing the sciences per se (after all, Panofsky, in his introduction to *Meaning in the Visual Arts,* only goes into the aforementioned elaboration on the parallels between the sciences and the humanities in order to ultimately stress the fundamental difference of the two idioms [24]). On the other hand, in his insistence on the active or performative aspects of iconological analysis, he also demarcates his outlook from the puristic impulses emerging from within the humanities. When he argues that, despite having the outlook of a "vita contemplativa" instead of a "vita activa" (22), the humanist's practice of transmitting knowledge or learning constitutes a cultural or, more than that, a civilizational activity that, hence, cannot be divorced from notions of life, world, history, reality, and experience, it is clear that he is equally loath to see the humanities evaporate in a vacuum of pure philosophy or theory (for that matter, it seems worth remarking that, once it had been established as a "school", "method", or "doctrine" itself, even post-structuralist and deconstructionist thinking, with its anti-realist tendency to fetishize the spheres of pure textuality and language, ultimately proved fairly susceptible to these kind of purisms as well).

Panofsky's outlook thus appears characterized by a curious balancing act or, to use his own language, a set of antonyms: He proposes an organically whole and homogenous view of (humanistic) civilizational values, but is simultaneously undogmatic in that he sees the locus of these values not on a metaphysical plane but in their concrete phenomenal recreations, reenactments, and realizations in reality; his vocabulary of intrinsicality suggests a notion of meaning as an immanent and fundamentally stable quality, yet the processual nature of his inductive method suggests otherwise; and his insistence on an inductive approach suggests a quasi-scientific accurateness, which he then contradicts by describing iconological analysis quite unscientifically as a practice of synthetic intuition. It is thus not far-fetched to suggest certain parallels between Panofsky's defense of humanistic practices and Wyndham Lewis's critique of

modernist extremism in *The Demon of Progress in the Arts* as discussed in the previous chapter. In both cases, the motivation for their critical interventions appear to be driven by a shared concern for civilization — an anxiety about the survival of humanism or, in fact, of humanity within the ever-growing puristic abstractions of an anti-humanistic modern age. It is not hard to recognize, in Panofsky's insistence on holding on to a humanistic mindset, a similar effort to what Lewis, one year before the original publication of *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, described as preventing "the car, in which is our civilized life, [from] plunging over the side of the precipice" (33).

To put it in other words, if the arts are to persist and to retain their meaning, that is, their *significance*, this significance must be (re-)created outside as part of a daily practice in the same way that values of politeness and civility — to refer back to Panofsky's hat lifting example — only persist insofar as they are continuously realized in daily life. If the arts, as Lewis criticized with regard to the contemporary art scenes of post-war Europe, choose to sever that connection to everyday social practice, they will eventually abstract themselves into complete nothingness. Panofsky, whose own bias against abstraction and non-figurative art is well-known, made a similar claim against an unintelligible esotericism in the arts some years earlier. In a remarkable passage from "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures", he soberly notes that this humanistic civilizational practice had perhaps not vanished, but simply transplanted itself from the spheres of the "higher arts" to another medium altogether:

> Today there is no denying that narrative films are not only 'art' [...] but also, besides architecture, cartooning and 'commercial design' the only visual art entirely alive. The 'movies' have re-established that dynamic contact between art production and art consumption which, for reasons too complex to be considered here, is sorely attenuated, if not entirely interrupted, in many other fields of artistic endeavor. Whether we like it or not, it is the movies that mold, more than any other single force, the opinions, the taste, the language, the dress, the behavior, and even the physical appearance of a public comprising more than 60 per cent of the population of the earth. If all the serious lyrical poets, composers, painters and sculptors were forced by law to stop their activities, a rather small fraction of the general public would become aware of the fact, and a still smaller fraction would seriously regret it. If the same thing were to happen with the movies the social consequences would be catastrophic. (16-17)

The practicological aspects of Panofsky's thinking thus meant that he did not shirk back from "ignoble" notions of commerce, popularity, and audience appeal. Rather, his essay on the motion pictures betrays a neutral and consensus-ori-

ented stance. He soberly notes that a certain breadth of social impact is a basic requirement for the arts to have any cultural significance. With respect to the productional side of things, Panofsky points this out by drawing an analogy between cinema and medieval cathedrals, arguing that both are essentially the products of a collective cultural effort involving many different professions, with all of them being absolutely indispensable for the endeavor to succeed (29-30). On the side of the reception or consumption of art, he simply points out in his typically balanced outlook that "noncommercial has given us Seurat's 'Grande Jatte' and Shakespeare's sonnets, but also much that is esoteric to the point of incommunicability", whereas "commercial art has given us much that is vulgar or snobbish […] but also Dürer's prints and Shakespeare's plays" (30). He nonchalantly sums up the issue by noting that "while it is true that commercial art is always in danger of ending up as a prostitute, it is equally true that noncommercial art is always in danger of ending as an old maid" (30).

However, this social or practicological dimension to Panofsky's iconological method is often ignored. As we have already noted, Bourdieu registered it and it became an important theoretical point of reference in the development of his own sociology of practice. T. J. Clark did as well, which is not surprising considering his position as one of the pioneers of a Marxist social history of art (though his decision to label Panofskian iconology a "polemic" [250] seems a tad exaggerated considering Panofsky's generally conciliatory style of argumentation). However, the fact that, at the same time, Panofsky's theoretical language relies on essentialist and idealist terms means that one can easily choose to ignore this social dimension of iconology and take the method in a different direction, namely to focus again on analyses divorced from a notion of practice and concerned purely with a history of abstract concepts and ideas.

With regard to iconological perspectives on English art, this has largely been the case. An influential voice of a resurgent interest in iconographic-iconological perspectives on English art has been German art historian Werner Busch. His research on English art of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century has made an important contribution to rescuing English painting both from the margins of the European art historical canon and from purely documentary or facto-historical approaches. However, this endeavor came at a price: In order to convincingly argue for the significance of English painting within the larger context of European art history, he had to place it within a theoretical approach where history predominantly figured as a history of ideas. Busch, in other words, though writing in the vein of a Panofskian iconology, veers towards the idealist and not the practicologist dimension of the method. It is arguably his 1993 monography *Das sentimentalische Bild: Die Krise der Kunst*

im 18. Jahrhundert und die Geburt der Moderne (trans. *The Sentimentalist Image: The Crisis of Art in the 18th Century and the Birth of Modernity*) that most clearly conveys the trajectory of this grand history of ideas. To Busch, the eighteenth century marks a decisive turning point in the history of European painting, as it is a time when classical aesthetic norms are increasingly put into question and painters start coming up with new approaches in the pictorial genres of history painting, genre painting, portraiture, landscape painting, and caricature. It is especially among the three latter genres, where a significant number of English painters proved innovative. However, Busch’s overall claim is that these developments were not simply a limited phenomenon tied to a specific historical period. Rather, Busch reads this crisis of the hitherto firmly established classical norms of painting in the eighteenth century as an initial step towards the emergence of the aesthetics of modern painting. More concretely, the questioning of classicist motifs and formal aesthetic rules in painting during the eighteenth century — that transitional period between the early modern period and modernity proper, which Reinhardt Koselleck has termed the *Sattelzeit* — is read as an emancipatory gesture. It represents the planting of the seed of an idea in the pre-revolutionary era of the *ancien régime*, which would come to fruition in the form of the eventual triumph of abstract art in the twentieth century. The Panofskian dialectical antonymy of English art — its nonchalant and undogmatic oscillation between modern and classicist aesthetic principles — is thus incorporated into, or, rather, subsumed under a deterministic grand narrative of painting told as a progressive and revolutionary march towards non-objective art.

Busch’s narrative is thus a markedly political one, but it is also one that relegates politics to a symbolic sphere of pure ideas. It is centered on an intellectual world or *Geisteswelt* (as usual when it comes to grand, overarching, and abstract concepts, the German term hits much closer to the mark), which exists independently from the notions of society and practice or, at the very least, is treated as such by this methodological approach. In that sense, we could also say that Busch’s approach represents a return to the idealist, Neo-Kantian philosophical roots of the iconological method and thus chooses to ignore or repress the practicological undercurrents of Panofsky’s argument. History is fundamentally grasped as the abstract flow of ideas, not as something that, in a Bourdieuian sense, is constantly emerging from and shaped by impure practices. Consequently, any emancipatory political narrative told from such a perspective must be one about the triumph of an idea itself. The iconographical code that ties the emergence of abstract art to a notion of political emancipation can be described as follows: Visual abstraction is in itself an emancipatory gesture, as

it signifies the liberation of the artistic medium of painting — paint itself — from its subservience to the principle of the figure. In traditional figurative painting, the painter or, rather, paint, is tied down by a mimetic obligation: the dogma that paint has to depict, that is, to stand in for something that is already there in nature. The role of paint is, in other words, not that of an autonomous artistic material (paint simply existing on its own *as paint*), but that of a passive medium in the service of giving form to some external referent (a thing or an idea). Modern art upends that hierarchy. With the emergence of visual abstraction and, subsequently, non-objective art, painting is seen as staging a revolutionary struggle against this dogma of the figurative, ultimately freeing itself from the obligation to depict something which it is not and attaining the privilege to autonomously exist *as pure paint*, that is, as an artistic material in its own right. The triumph of visual abstraction over the figurative is thus read as a metaphor for the modern political struggle of the tenets of liberal democracy with its central promises of individual authenticity and autonomy against the despotic reigns during the *ancien régime*. In short, the artistic freedom implied by the triumph of visual abstraction also implies political freedom.

This political iconography of abstraction in the visual arts can be explained similarly by way of the opposite critical terms of the painterly and the linear mode of painting. In this respect, the linear mode represents the classicist principles of formal, proportional, and figurative clarity. On a metaphorical level, however, the linear mode also stands in for unfree social and/or political conditions; the line is then read symbolically as that which circumscribes or arrests the free flow of paint, restricting it from unfolding its full, or, rather, its *pure* aesthetic potential *as paint*. Conversely, the painterly mode, in which paint is not reduced to the servile role of filling in the gaps in between the lines that had been set down in advance, but allowed to freely and purely unfold on the canvas and develop an aesthetic language of its own, is equated with those liberal democratic fetishes of spontaneity, freedom, authenticity, and autonomy. In other words, what we encounter again is that opposition between a rigid, linear, and very much tradition- or rule-bound classicism set against a romantic or modern ideal, which upends these classicist rules or traditions and valorizes an aesthetic approach of subversion, revolution, and emancipation. More concretely, the latter manifests itself in an uprising of pure, abstract form against the figure and/or of the painterly principle against the doctrine of the line.

This narrative on abstraction in modern art told as a political narrative about the emancipatory realization of an idea is, of course, not what is new about Busch’s approach. Rather, the core claim of that narrative, namely that the move

towards the abstract in the visual arts constitutes, in its rejection of tradition, a political act, is a trope that, in some form or other, figures in many, if not all defenses and affirmative histories of modern art. We find it, to only name one example, in what arguably represents one of the watershed moments in the shaping of the popular consensus of modern art: The New York Museum of Modern Art’s 1936 exhibition on *Cubism and Abstract Art*. Although MoMa founding director Alfred Barr, who, as the curator of the exhibition also authored the highly influential exhibition catalogue, espoused a decidedly formalist and apolitical outlook (one which has survived in MoMa’s overall mission statement to date), his claim to an abstract formal aesthetic purism beyond the boundaries and restrictions of the figurative is, of course, highly political. On the one hand, as anyone with only a passing knowledge of the critique of ideology knows, espousing an apolitical stance is a political gesture par excellence. On the other hand (and more importantly), we find in his introductory article of the exhibition catalogue precisely the line of thinking that equates abstract or non-objective painting with notions of freedom, independence, and emancipation in the painting attaining its right, so to speak, to exist “as an end in itself with its own peculiar value” (14). Busch’s contribution in *Das Sentimentalische Bild* is thus how he integrates a specific period in English art into this grand emancipatory narrative of the drive toward abstraction in the visual arts. His core thesis, in a nutshell, is that English art in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century made a significant contribution to what could be read as the first chapter in a history of modern art conceived as an idealist history of the emergence and eventual triumph of abstract art.

This is a line of argument that Busch continues in his later publications. In *Das Unklassische Bild* (*The Un-Classical Image*), for example, there is an extensive chapter that deals with a juxtaposition of Turner and Constable, arguing, contrary to popular views, that it was Constable, and not Turner, who was the *un-classical* (and, in that sense, *proto-modernist*) painter of the pair. Of course, one would spontaneously regard Turner’s late paintings with their freely applied and expressive washes of paint as forerunners of modern abstract painting. However, art historical research has largely refuted this popular narrative, showing how the notion of Turner as the first modern abstract painter was largely the result of a skewed and belated reception of Turner on the continent starting with late nineteenth-century French art critics mistaking his style as a precursor of French impressionism (Wagner 120-3). In what could very well be called an intellectual sleight of hand, Busch thus upends the popular perspective and claims that Constable was the *real* forerunner of modern abstraction whereas Turner was, in fact, a staunch classicist (*Das*

Unklassische Bild 202). The latter, with his traditional education, his straight and focused career within the Royal Academy, and his strong commitment to classical themes and motifs was ultimately a traditionalist who only strived to develop and transform the classical tradition, but never showed any intention to radically secede from it (206). Constable, on the other hand, as the reclusive and commercially far less successful outsider, whose approach to landscape painting was equally unorthodox for the time, was the one who made that decisive break with classicism. In contrast to Turner, Busch presents Constable as a quiet rebel who had the audacity to depict landscape as *pure landscape* without any need to ennoble it by garnishing it with classical themes and motifs (208). First and foremost, however, it was Constable’s profound interest in the amorphous and ephemeral phenomenon of clouds. In a sophisticated argument, Busch claims that the great number of cloud studies that Constable produced in his life represented an attempt to transform the meteorological phenomenon in its countless variations into a reiterable artistic language of moods and states of minds.[33] The logical consequence of this abstracting trajectory from the external weather phenomenon in its manifold manifestations to the immanent notion of a reproducible vocabulary of moods and ideas is the abolishing of the external referent itself. Busch thus suggests that Constable’s aesthetic approach of turning mimetic representations of external natural phenomena into a self-sustaining visual code or language with no outside reference “ultimately had to lead toward abstraction” (232). With regard to the opposition of Turner and Constable, he concludes that the former’s approach was ultimately classical because it was about making the abstract concrete, whereas Constable’s was un-classical (and thus proto-modernist) because it was about making the concrete abstract (209).

We can thus see how Busch’s theoretical perspective is primarily concerned with rekindling an interest in English art and rescuing it from its perpetual outlier status by arguing for its relevance within a broader, that is, international art historical canon. However, we can also see how he only manages to do so by integrating it into a very specific narrative framework, which we can summarize as follows: First, it narrates the history of English and European art as the abstract unfolding of ideas divorced from a notion of actual societies and its concrete actors. Second, it has a very specific and borderline deterministic view of how, from where, and to where these ideas (and, thus, the arts themselves) were progressing, namely towards a gradual yet inevitable triumph of the principle of formal abstraction. Third, it assigns clear values to this development, politicizing the puristic notion of non-objective painting by reading it as the

33 See chapter 10 in Busch, *Das Unklassische Bild* (210-223).

realization of an emancipatory political promise against the rigid and oppressive classicist dogma of the figurative tradition.

It is thus clear to see how this idealist view of the history of European painting as one grand narrative of emancipation represents itself a very rigid discursive framework. By arranging centuries of artistic developments around that decisive moment when painting finally manages to break free of the tyrannical shackles of the figurative principle and attains the right to exist as pure painting, this emancipatory narrative becomes itself oppressive. The paradox of Busch's earnest effort to liberate English art from its marginal status lies in the fact that what begins with its rescue from the sidelines of art history ends with its arrest within a very specific and very rigid grand history of ideas. Both Pevsner and Panofsky recognized the uniquely impure and antonymous approach of English art as both its fundamental strength and its weakness. It meant that it could be at times highly original and innovative, but it also meant that it would never properly fit into those linear canonical narratives, which imagined art history as a relatively straightforward, gradual, and rational progression of aesthetic ideas and stylistic forms. Busch's effort to do precisely that must thus be read, in Latourian terms, as a thoroughly purifying gesture: an attempt to ennoble English art by embedding it into an overarching history of the development of modern art, thereby purifying but also *robbing* it of its inherent antonyms. It is thus perhaps only logical that Panofsky's antonymic view of English art finds its conclusion in the impure practical spheres of industrial design (the Rolls Royce radiator), whereas Busch's idealist narrative points to the purified sphere of the modern art museum (the non-objective painting).

We can thus see how these abstract and puristic histories of ideas repress that aspect or area where, ironically, one would ultimately hope to reap the benefits of the triumph of those emancipatory and empowering ideas: the sphere of mundane practice. A particularly illustrative example of this wide gap between these idealist approaches and a notion of actual practice can be observed in Busch's discussion of Alexander Cozens's "blot"-system.[34] Cozens, an eighteenth century English landscape painter, developed the "blot"-system as a practical aid, as well as a mental exercise for landscape drawers. The painter was instructed to quickly draw up, without orienting him- or herself on some external referent, an ink sketch of crude geometric shapes and "blots". This rough and quasi-abstract assemblage of amorphous blobs and other shapes would then serve as a visual outline or template, from which the painter could develop a more concrete landscape drawing. In Busch's idealist narrative, these "blottings" become much

34 See the respective chapter in *Das Sentimentalische Bild*, 335-54.

more than a practical drawing aid and mental exercise. Cozens's innovative approach to landscape drawing is read as nothing less than an assertion of the imagination as an autonomous source of artistic inspiration. By advising the artist to develop a landscape drawing neither from an adherence to the given classical rules of painterly composition, nor from an orientation on an actual scenery in nature, but from a spontaneously jotted down assemblage of ink blots, Cozens's technique becomes another piece of the puzzle in Busch's grand idealist narrative of the emancipatory struggle of painting towards a purely autonomous existence as a non-objective work of art.

It is perhaps not surprising that a more skeptical position was voiced, among others, by a scholar who had herself a practical knowledge of painting. Monika Wagner, who had first studied painting at art school before eventually embarking on an academic career as an art historian, tends to stay clear of these imposing histories of ideas. Instead, her perspective tends to locate phenomena such as Cozens's method in notions of artistic production and practice. In her recent book on William Turner, for example, she significantly refers to Cozens in the chapter on Turner's role as a student and a teacher of painting (10-1). Only mentioning it in passing as one of several methods and techniques that Turner encountered in his early years, she essentially strips it of any idealistic luster, suggesting that the method was nothing more but also *nothing less* than a practical exercise conceived to assist painters in the development of their artistic repertoires (17). In a similar way, her reading of the widespread interest in weather phenomena among early nineteenth-century English landscape painters does not anticipate some idealistic vision of absolute aesthetic autonomy, but points to social and cultural practice: It is an interest that, as Wagner notes, reflected a general interest in atmospheric phenomena at the time and also coincided with important scientific discoveries in chemistry and physics.[35] If both Turner and Constable where thus, in their own specific ways, fascinated by *Rain, Steam, and Speed*, they were, as Wagner implies, not interested in them as representations of some abstract tenets from aesthetic philosophy, but as external and material phenomena, on which recent scientific discoveries had cast an entirely new light. By juxtaposing Busch and Wagner, we could therefore say that if we were to make any argument for these painters having been proto-modernists, then it would not be because they were supposedly laying the groundwork for a purely aesthetic revolution to be realized several decades after their deaths. Rather, they were proto-modernist

35 See Wagner's remarks on Turner's friendship with Michael Faraday in “Wirklichkeitserfahrung und Bilderfindung: William Turner”, 131.

in the sense that they were acutely aware of and productively engaging in their own progressively unfolding and developing external material reality of the present.

The point of this juxtaposition is that it illustrates the fundamental incommensurability between a practicological perspective and an idealist or theory-driven approach. As the example of Busch has shown, the latter provides a convenient (and perhaps the only feasible) way to argue for the transhistorical relevance of a phenomenon tied to a specific place and/or time. Whether we look at Pevsner's argument that Englishness in English art is a manifestation of liberal humanist values or whether we look at Busch's reading of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English art as a prelude to the story of the triumph of the modern autonomous artwork, they both transpose their object of investigation onto a higher plane of abstraction in order to argue why it should be of interest to their prospective contemporary audience. As such, they are performing acts of purification that remove the material from its impure situatedness in actual practice to an abstract analytical sphere.

At the same time, however, these productive re-readings are, of course, both necessary and inevitable, as a pure contextualist approach would essentially mean to let the material be swept away by the flow of history, ultimately rendering it unapproachable and unreadable to a contemporary audience. The question is thus one of degree: How far do we want to stretch an analysis? How much theoretical appropriation is necessary or adequate and when do we reach a plane of abstraction that is simply too far removed from the material itself? It is a question not unlike that posed by Wyndham Lewis in *The Demon of Progress in the Arts* when he argued there to be an elusive limit between a sensible degree of abstraction and an irresponsible and destructive one. To Lewis, of course, the audacious argument performed by Busch would have been tantamount to driving the metaphorical car straight over the cliff at top speed. In this respect, Busch's idealistic approach to iconological analysis also provides another illustration to Lewis's claim that the artist and the critic share neither the same idiom, nor the same interests and that this gap ought to be taken seriously.

In comparison to Busch's idealistic abstractions, we could thus say that Panofsky again plays the role of the diplomat with his approach to iconological analysis conceived as a performative re-enactment amounting to a gesture of reconciliation. In understanding iconology as an essentially re-creative act, Panofsky acknowledges the practicological dimension on both sides — that of the artist and of the critic, or that of history and of the present — and thus manages to performatively reassert the ongoing relevance of a particular

visual artifact without dissolving its phenomenal specificity in some grand and abstract historical synthesis. In that sense, Panofsky's delicate balancing of the concrete practicological dimension and the abstract idealist trajectory results in a reasonable compromise between two essentially incommensurable positions.

More importantly, however, Busch's effort to ennoble English art by integrating it into a history of the idea of visual abstraction highlights the ongoing prevalence of the grand narrative of the modern autonomous artwork. Regardless of whether we look at political arguments that read the triumph of abstraction as an emancipatory act or at those espousing a purportedly apolitical formalism, the notion that the autonomous artwork represents something akin to a gold standard within the higher arts, against which one has to judge the relative importance of a particular period, seems to be a very deeply ingrained outlook. This only further illustrates the astuteness of Wyndham Lewis's critique of the contemporary art world that he brought forth already in the mid-1950s with *The Demon of Progress in the Arts.* As discussed in the previous chapter, his argument against abstraction and for a new classicism was motivated by the recognition that modernist extremism had, by then, turned itself into a tyrannical *doxa*.[36] By the time Lewis wrote his critique, the notion that abstraction, as a signifier for political and/or formal emancipation and autonomy, represented a good by itself had already been proven absurd by the social realities of the contemporary art world, which was, as Lewis argued, turning its participants into "progressive slaves". Lewis's practicological awareness of the social situatedness of these abstract values made it impossible for him to accept them as absolutist ideals; to him, any notion of absolute autonomy, whether manifested in abstract art or otherwise, was bound to be an illusion.

The way Lewis thus recognized that, for human realities, there simply was no beyond or outside of society (and, thus, no outside of social power relations), his outlook could very well be described as quasi- or proto-Foucauldian. Lewis's critique of "abstractism" in the arts is thus an extension of a more fundamental critique of bourgeois culture. More specifically, it was directed at what could be termed *the gentrification* of revolutionary modernism by those whom he referred to as "the revolutionary rich" (*The Art of Being Ruled* 134) or, as early as 1918 in his first novel *Tarr*, as "bourgeois-bohemians" (26): coteries of economically privileged and well-educated upper-middle- and upper-class urbanites who had

36 If *The Demon of Progress in the Arts* stands as Lewis's strongest statement against abstract art, it has to be noted that he had come out against the cult of abstractism in the visual arts several years earlier already, as, for example, his 1940 article "The End of Abstract Art" in *The New Republic* attests.

appropriated the language of revolutionary modernism and divested it of any genuine desire for broad social or cultural change. The "revolutionary rich", in other words, represented to Lewis a kind of fashionable modernist: artists, critics, creatives, patrons, socialites, etc., who purported to advance (and in many cases, had genuinely convinced themselves that they were advancing) progressive or revolutionary political, social, and/or cultural causes, but were, in fact, mostly concerned with themselves and their own circles. In spite of its lofty rhetorics, their "modernism" thus remained a purely symbolic or sublimated social practice that played out entirely within their own privileged socio-economic spheres. In that sense, Lewis recognized the modernism of the "revolutionary rich" as a kind of Borudieuian *habitus* that primarily served to create and reinforce social distinctions rather than work towards some broad social change. In contrast to their purported radical questioning of existing social and cultural norms or power relations, they were in fact either consciously or unconsciously upholding them.

It is hard not to recognize in the persistence of that grand narrative of the triumph of abstraction and the autonomous artwork a symptom of that commodified or gentrified modernism, in which an emancipatory impulse is relegated to a purely idealistic or symbolic sphere with only a tenuous or perfunctory connection to external social realities. More than that, Lewis's critique still seems pertinent, because it seems to apply on a much wider scale to the structural logic of today's cultural and intellectual marketplace. Lewis, in a nutshell, suggests that contemporary cultural practice valorizes a (purported) revolutionary radicalism that is, however, proffered primarily by a socio-economically privileged caste, which, at the end of the day, has absolutely no genuine interest in any kind of sweeping radical change to the given social and cultural conditions. "Radical art" thus becomes a leisurely pastime activity that is exclusively performed by and for a privileged bourgeois elite and is characterized by an aesthetic outlook that has transformed into a stolid dogma. The way this diagnosis still seems to apply to the contemporary cultural landscape seems so obvious that it almost seems superfluous to point it out in the first place.

To thus read the aforementioned purist notion of autonomous art symptomatically means to recognize it as an example of an underlying ideology that is uncannily similar to that described by Lewis: It valorizes the new as a good by itself. It self-styles itself as progressive without being concrete about what specific kind of progress it envisions or for what particular reason. It endorses a vocabulary of radicalism, establishing the question, especially in regard to the arts and to culture, of whether a specific gesture is critical, radical, innovative,

and/or disruptive as its prime qualitative benchmark. At the same time, however, the purist idealism espoused by this progressive dogma — the fact that it values abstract ideas, vague future promises, and utopian trajectories over impure present external realities and actual practice — means that the realization of that radicalism is perpetually deferred or sublimated to the sphere of the imaginary, the aesthetic, and/or the symbolic. In that sense, its claim to be representing a genuinely emancipatory gesture is neutralized at the moment of its utterance. Its concern with a notion of empowerment remains literally a theoretical concern.

If this crude paraphrasing of the logic of a gentrified modernism sounds like a cliché then that is precisely the point. After all, the aim of Lewis’s critique was precisely to highlight how modernist radicalism had established itself as a stolid bourgeois myth or cliché. In that sense, Lewis’s was describing something akin to a Barthesian myth: an outlook so common, so deeply ingrained in the fabric of society (or, at least, of the artistically inclined parts of bourgeois society) that one tended not to reflect on it anymore and automatically assumed it to be true. Even Pevsner provides a telling example of its pervasiveness: After having spent eight chapters arguing for, or, rather, mounting a spirited *defense* of, the essential moderateness of English art that ranges from the perpendicular Gothic style to the present, he himself succumbs to the radicalist myth by conceding that their tendency towards “moderation, reasonableness, rationalism, observation and conservatism” (186) was probably more a hindrance than an asset when it came to the visual arts: “Self-discipline”, he notes “may prevent that single-minded enthusiasm or fanaticism indispensable for the highest achievements in art” (186).

Considering this gentrification of the vocabulary of modernism as an empty bourgeois myth, it becomes even clearer why Lewis, in a typically contrarian gesture, began to refer to his own aesthetic approach as classical or classicist. His scathing critique of the contemporary art world of the 1950s was thus only one of the final contributions to a long line of cultural criticism focused on that issue. We have already discussed how even his supposedly “properly” avant-gardist phase of the Vorticist period (which he retroactively described as “severely classical” [“The End of Abstract Art”]) harbors a fundamentally skeptical outlook. Yet this skepticism morphed into direct and polemical criticism during the interwar years when it became clear to him that the various modernisms had been appropriated by the privileged cultural elites and turned into what he later referred to as “fashionable rackets” (*Rude Assignment* 162). Already in *The Art of Being Ruled*, he notes in a particularly forceful chapter that, having been granted entry into the spheres of respectable society, radicalist art and politics had essentially run out of steam:

> Revolutionary politics, revolutionary art, and, oh, the revolutionary mind, is the dullest thing on earth. When we open a ‘revolutionary’ review, or read a ‘revolutionary’ speech, we yawn our heads off. It is true, there is nothing else. Everything is correctly, monotonously, dishearteningly ‘revolutionary’. What a stupid word! What a stale fuss! (32)

In light of this institutionalization and subsequent neutralization of radicalism, it is only logical that Lewis concludes by stating that, paradoxically, the true revolutionary today could probably only experience a revolutionary thrill by being, of all things, *unradical* (33):

> Things have gone so far with ‘Revolution’, it is becoming so palpably, dogmatically, wearisomely, and insolently ‘top dog’ that it may some day even have to be rescued from poor old ‘Reaction’. (33)

What permeates all of these critical interventions is thus a fundamental awareness of how culture and the arts, including those of a modernist and/or revolutionary kind, both emerge from and mingle, very much impurely, with external social reality; they constitute, more specifically speaking, a small part of its highly complex and very much hybrid network of structures and practices. To Lewis, the gentrification of artistic modernism presents an affront precisely because it means, on the one hand, its transformation into a purely abstract and theoretical affair, with its only connection to social reality being that it provided a leisurely diversion for an isolated and economically privileged cultural elite, while, on the other hand, it is still being *sold*, so to speak, as a genuinely radical and transformative engagement with the world at large. To Lewis, those modern art scenes are, in short, a “sham” or a “racket”. Returning back to the notion of the autonomous artwork as a realization of the emancipatory promise of modernity, it seems clear how this idea must have seemed completely absurd to Lewis. The supposedly emancipatory act of securing the right to exist as a pure abstraction could, in pure theory, be regarded as painting achieving a state of total and unquestionable autonomy; however, this theoretical autonomy would, in practice, also come at the price of its voluntary imprisonment within the sterilized halls of the modern art museum. In that regard, Lewis’s critical furor ironically coincides with Panofsky’s more mild-mannered but no less poignant diagnosis: Thus detached and abstracted into an insubstantial nothingness, modern painting might indeed exist in a state of unprecedented purity; however, it is also a purity that has itself no bearing and thus no significance on the world at large anymore.

Lewis’s argument that avant-garde modernism, in its thoroughly abstracted and non-objective manifestations, had been turned into an empty bourgeois

sham thus represents, in a sense, a reversal of the Adornoian hope projected onto the higher arts. If the position of Frankfurt-school critical theory was that the latter should aspire to provide a compelling alternative to the encroaching lowbrow cultural industry, Lewis’s practicological awareness of how even the higher arts only existed within actual socio-cultural conditions and practices made it impossible for him to embrace this all-too abstract hope. Instead, Lewis’s argument ultimately boils down to the claim that the cultural logic of the higher arts was largely similar to that of the mass cultural industry. The only significant difference was that the “highbrow” cultural industry catered to a different, that is, more exclusive and more affluent, social caste. If Adorno thus vehemently rejected any suggestion of popular art expressing a genuine modernist impulse on the grounds that such supposedly modernist formal elements were, at best, only a thin veneer that masqueraded the underlying exploitative structures of the cultural industry, Lewis’s diagnosis was that this accusation applied to both sides: the popular *and* the highbrow. This led to Lewis repeatedly bemoaning the present state of public intellectual life. In *Rude Assignment*, for example, he argues that the triumph of bourgeois liberalism had not led to an improvement of public intellectual discourse over that of the aristocratic intellectual elites of the *ancien régime*. Rather, the “sham” promise of public education combined with the profit motivation of the modern businessman had resulted in an intellectually poor and industrialized book culture that, for the most part, aimed at the lowest common denominator (15-18). Modernization, in other words, also entails the replacement of a culture of letters with a book industry.

Up to this point, we can say that Lewis’s elitist critique still concurs with the Frankfurt School critique of mass culture. Where it differs, however, is in his assessment of the highbrow enclaves within that modern cultural-industrial reality. To Lewis, the “highbrow” was exactly that: insignificantly small and isolated enclaves of high intellectualism that neither genuinely wanted, nor had the necessary socio-cultural power or capital, to speak as an influential voice within the broader, industrialized public discourse. In fact, as a minuscule part of society, the “highbrow” followed the very same industrialized logic of the mass cultural industry: They consisted of highly specialized professionals providing a product tailor-made to a specific group of consumers, namely an affluent caste of *Bildungsbürger*. To Lewis, this retreat of the intellectual into specialized and professionalized enclaves is fatal, as, according to him, what is required by the writer is, in fact, “the whole” (18).

In that sense, Lewis’s fundamentally pessimistic outlook also presented a problem to him. If it was true that modernity was a gradual process towards the total automation, mechanization, and the thorough technocratic administration

of all spheres of life and culture and would thus render the classical (manual and intellectual) arts obsolete, this eventual reality would render his own lifelong pursuits as an artist and writer obsolete as well. In that sense, we could read Lewis's sheer productivity as a painter and writer as his very own sham-heroic or quixotic struggle against the inevitable vanishing of art. On a more practical level, however, this bleak theoretical stance also meant that it alienated him from virtually every existing cultural circle of his time, turning him into the eternal outsider figure of British modernism that he is commonly presented as in literary history. On the one hand, it alienated him from the radical high modernists, because he rejected their gentrified modernism as a self-righteous sham. On the other hand, he also did not fit in with the reactionaries and old-style conservatives, as his self-styled classicist stance was, of course, anything but that of an old-school traditionalist or conservative. At the same time, he shared with these exclusive and intellectualist circles a fundamentally elitist outlook that alienated him from the spheres of the popular. At heart, Lewis still venerated a heroic and individualistic conception of the artist. His classical heroes, so to speak, were the Michelangelos and Rembrandts, the Bachs and Mozarts conceived as monadic geniuses of times long gone by. As such, the industrialization of cultural production in the modern age of mechanical reproducibility was very much a catastrophic thing.

However, this romantic (and also falsely nostalgic) view of artistic production was itself undercut by his practicological outlook: his sober acknowledgement — in spite of his fatalist cultural pessimism — of the industrialized and automated nature of modernity and the dissolution of the higher arts as insurmountable and brutal facts. Furthermore, he recognized that these new types of media and cultural production precipitated by industrialized modernity also possessed an enticingly vigorous (if barbaric and unrefined) energy that the isolated and limp spheres of the highbrow so desperately appeared to lack (as an aside, it is of course this line of thought that also provides the link between Lewis's cultural criticism and that of media-philosopher Marshall McLuhan, who, as already pointed out in the introductory chapter, openly acknowledged Lewis's strong influence on his own work). These antagonisms — between mass culture and the detached elitism of highbrow intellectualism or between the modern and the conservative idiom — are consistent to Lewis's outlook insofar as we already recognize them as early as in the editorial of *Blast 1* discussed in the first chapter: "The 'Poor' are detestable animals" (but there is a raw and vigorous energy to be found among them), while "The 'Rich' are bores without a single exception" (but at least they tend to have a certain degree of education and intellectual refinement) (8). Or we could also refer to the remark by T. S. Eliot in

his 1918 review of *Tarr,* where he noted how "In the work of Wyndham Lewis we recognize the thought of the modern and the energy of the cave-man."[37]

As already discussed, Lewis's reaction to this problem was to distance himself as far as practically possible from these tainted cliques and circles; to take a solitary and anti-dogmatic position of pseudo-autonomy and speak as a self-styled "neutral mind" (*The Writer and the Absolute* 54) or, during the interwar years, in his persona of *The Enemy.* This proved to be a fundamentally paradoxical undertaking: On the one hand, his multidisciplinary effort, which ran the gamut of painting, fiction, literary and cultural criticism, and philosophy, represented a genuine and deeply serious struggle – a one-man project to recreate a notion of a cultural "whole" against the relentless centrifugal forces of modernity. On the other hand, his sober and unvarnished view of social realities also meant that this quasi-heroic effort was always also undercut by an undercurrent of self-awareness and self-questioning. From the decidedly conditional establishment beyond action and reaction in *Blast 1* to the tragically absurd wintry isolation described by Lewis in his late novel *Self Condemned*, in which he fictionalized his self-imposed Canadian exile during World War Two, there is a constant sense of futility that accompanies said restoration effort. Lewis, in other words, was fully aware of the practical absurdity of his undertaking – of the fact that his rigorous cultural critique would fall on deaf ears, and that his Renaissance man persona was completely out of touch with the industrialized, compartmentalized, and professionalized social reality of modern life. In that sense, Lewis's body of work must be read simultaneously as a serious attempt at cultural restoration *and* as a self-aware, perhaps tragicomic, and very much satirical act of self-absurdization.

We could also remark that this paradoxical strategy has posed and continues to pose a challenge to the critic: Lewis's multidisciplinary insistence on focusing on a notion of a "whole", his unsteady career, and the numerous paradoxes or hybridities permeating his work (between the classical and the modern, between the highly serious and the comically absurd, etc.) has made and continues to make it difficult to canonize him. After all, to canonize would mean to successfully integrate into a homogenous (purified) category an aesthetic approach that, due to its highly idiosyncratic nature, simply resists these efforts. Lewis, in other words, not only kept himself at a distance from the established cultural and social circles, fads, and fashions, but he also endeavored to keep the reader at distance from himself. His status as somewhat of an apostate or

37 See Scott W. Klein's introduction to *Tarr* in the 2010 Oxford World's Classic edition of the novel, ix.

outsider of British modernism thus lives on within or, rather, on the margins of the canon of modernism in how some aspects of his work appear to fit into some of its established categories, while others decidedly do not. In contrast to the key figures of modernism, who neatly fit (or have been made to neatly fit) into distinct categories — Woolf and Joyce: novelists; Eliot, Pound, Yeats: poets; Epstein and Gaudier-Brzeska: sculptors; Roger Fry and Clive Bell: art critics; etc. — the same cannot be said of the paradoxical hybridity that characterizes Lewis’s body of work. To a critical idiom, which by its very nature tends towards arranging its objects within a purifying and compartmentalizing logic, it inevitably continues to pose a challenge.

However, it is precisely this paradoxical antonymy to Lewis’s approach of making art (or literature, or criticism) that intersects with what we have noted, earlier in this chapter, about the Englishness of English art. Following both Panofsky’s and Pevsner’s arguments about the peculiarities of English art, we can read Lewis’s supposedly inconsistent approach(es) as symptomatic of a similarly agnostic outlook: one not beholden to purist theoretical ideas and categories, but emerging instead from a patchwork of muddled, undogmatic, hybrid, situational, and empirical practices. While his erratic and seemingly unpredictable jumps from painting to literature to cultural criticism to philosophy and back might appear inconsistent from a purely analytical perspective, they also suggest a resistance to abstract idealist purisms and an empirical acknowledgement of the essential hybridity of social reality. In that sense, Lewis’s insistence that the object of the writer is “the whole” does not refer to the absolutist ontological whole of abstract idealism, but the hybrid whole of external social reality: the whole grasped as Latour puts it, as “the imbroglios [that] weave our world together” (3). Lewis’s practicology thus overlaps with the Panofskian or Pevsnerian notions of Englishness in how its central point of reference is the notion of a given external reality and, consequently, how practices — extrinsic actions, *doing something* — both shape and are shaped by this necessarily antonymous empirical reality. It thus represents a sharp contrast to (or even a rejection of) an approach oriented on the question of whether it properly conforms to or embodies some preconceived set of abstract ideals, norms, or concepts. It also matches up with what we have said, in chapter one, about Lewis’s self-stylization as a *mercenary* of the modern world. The empirical approach as described by Panofsky and Pevsner is fundamentally *tactical* and *situational*; it regards artistic practice as an adaptable way of doing things derived primarily from the question of what specific external reality presents itself at a concrete moment in time. It is, in other words, an approach

that is less concerned with defining, framing, and/or legitimizing the modern, but with *making*, *performing*, and/or *practicing* it.

The fundamental irony of this cross-reading of Lewis and both Panofsky’s and Pevsner’s notions of Englishness is, of course, that the perpetual and perpetually belligerent outsider of English modernism, who demarcated himself from his peers by relentlessly attacking placid English provincialism and espousing decidedly un-insular (that is, Continental European and, later, globalist) views, becomes by this very observation perhaps one of its most distinctively English representatives. Following Pevsner and Panofsky, Lewis’s idiosyncratic, un- or anti-dogmatic practicology appears as a fundamentally English trait. My argument, however, is that we can draw these parallels even further. By suggesting a similarity between Panofsky’s and Pevsner’s notions of Englishness and Lewis’s particular outlook on and approaches to artistic production, it makes sense to suggest that these approaches can also be found in other texts from British cultural history. If my argument in the two preceding chapters was primarily focused on cross-readings between selected texts by Lewis and by Wire and highlighting specific parallels on the extrinsic levels of formal and productional aesthetics, my argument here is that these parallels are not merely circumstantial. What Panofsky’s and Pevsner’s theoretical perspectives allow us to do is to suggest that there is also a structural similarity between the two. They account for the claim that these formal similarities are not coincidences, but that they can be read as a genuine case of a cultural afterliving of a specific artistic ethos. They provide, in other words, the theoretical bridge between Lewis’s high modernism and the popular modernism of British art rock.

This connection can be substantiated further by referring to another theorist, this time from the field of pop theory and criticism. In his short but concise 1996 essay “Pop — deskriptiv, normativ, emphatisch” (trans. “Pop — Descriptive, Normative, Emphatic”), German theorist of popular music Diederich Diederichsen provides a set of three descriptive criteria that characterize what he terms *Pop*. Curiously, they correspond to several aspects of that practicological modernist ethos that we have been discussing so far. After all, Diederichsen opens his essay by remarking that, as a muddled and hybrid phenomenon, it is essentially impossible to provide a clear-cut (i.e. thoroughly purified) definition of pop. Adding to the difficulty, he notes, is the fact that even the supposedly straightforward English term *popular* does not have an exact semantic equivalent in German (in contrast to the neutral or even positive connotation of *popular* in English, its literal German translation *populär* usually carries a slightly negative connotation that implies vulgarity and mediocrity) (36). According to his first criterion, pop is thus “always a transformation

in the sense of a dynamic movement, by which cultural materials and their social environments shape each other and, in this process, transgress what have been hitherto fixed boundaries" (38-39). As defined by Diederichsen, Pop thus conforms to the Latourian notions of translation and the network, as well as his overarching concept of hybridization. Both as an aesthetic and a social phenomenon, Pop is characterized by a disinterest or even a blatant disregard for traditional and/or established boundaries. On a very basic formal level, the transgressive or hybrid aspect of pop can be observed in how it is an essentially inter- or multi-medial phenomenon. It takes its cues from the entire spectrum of the visual and the performing arts — music, theater, film, painting, graphic design etc. — as well as from literature and creates what we could describe as amalgamation of acoustic, visual, and linguistic signs or texts. Of course, "transgressive" does not necessarily have to mean "politically subversive" in that context. Although a blatant disregard for boundaries can be read as a consciously critical or political act of subverting a restrictive societal framework or system of the arts, Diederichsen first and foremost deploys the term "transgressive" as a descriptive criterion; as such, it does not necessarily have to imply an overt politics of subversion. Rather, to note that pop follows an inherently transgressive principle amounts to a simple statement of fact that heeding real or imagined aesthetic and/or societal boundaries is, for whatever reason, not seen as a particularly relevant factor when it comes to the matter of artistic production.

On the level of Pop as a social practice, the transgression of boundaries refers, of course, to those between nations, cultures, and, particularly with regard to British pop, social classes. Arguably the most far-reaching of those transgressions was the transatlantic crossing of American blues, rhythm and blues, and rock 'n' roll music to Great Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, where British youths then proceeded to develop their own takes on these musical styles, which then led to further moments of transnational crossings and to British pop and rock becoming a global cultural export. Regarding British art rock, however, I would like to point to how it, among other things, represented a transgression among social classes. As an effort to create an artistically credible and intellectually charged type of rock or pop music, it also presented young artists with working-class or lower middle-class backgrounds with an opportunity to express themselves artistically in ways that would otherwise have been closed off. Art rock was an outlet for lower-class youths to create a type of art both informed by and responding to those spheres of the arts, of literature, theater, film etc. normally reserved to the upper middle classes and above. In their landmark study *Art into Pop*, Simon Frith and Howard Horne

have shown how the post-war British art school system played a vital role in facilitating these opportunities, acting as a conduit for those “higher” arts to reach a significant number of young people, some of whom would later have successful careers as pop or rock musicians (27-30). In that regard, this arrangement bears a certain similarity to Lewis’s own background, his move into a career in art and literature, and how he fit in (or, rather, never really fit in) with the artistic and intellectual establishments of his time. As a Canadian immigrant coming from a similar gray area between the working class and the lower middle class and having been granted the opportunity to attend the prestigious Slade School of Fine Art, his subsequent invention as an intellectual giant who proceeded to trounce his artistic and literary peers coming from “better households” without mercy (a practice that arguably culminated in his *Enemy* phase during the interwar years) ought to be read as an impertinent undertaking to say the least.

Similarly transgressive or hybrid tendencies can then also be observed on the level of genre. It is particularly in those segments of popular music culture characterized by a certain degree of artistic ambition where generic purisms are usually avoided. Rather, the innovative melding of disparate styles and influences into something new or unheard of is generally valorized. If we look at the canonical history of rock music of the 1960s and 1970s — at Dylan, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Who, David Bowie, Roxy Music, Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin etc. — we could very well tell it as the history of a series of informal yet also very deliberate generic fusions and transformations. However, if popular music culture, looked at from that angle, appears as a fundamentally impure phenomenon, it is certainly curious to note how it has nevertheless developed a varied set of elaborate purification rituals. After all, the hybrid approaches of those aforementioned luminaries of pop and rock history were performed against a backdrop of a puristic genre fundamentalism. Arguably, Bob Dylan’s controversial electric concert at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965 represents a kind of *ur-scene* of those clashes between pop as hybridity and pop as a strictly codified and very much normative tradition. We could also refer to both The Rolling Stones’ and Led Zeppelin’s unorthodox approaches to American Blues, The Beatles’ playful fusions of various strands of traditional popular musical forms (both British and American), or Roxy Music’s parodies of the newly emerged normative iconographies of modern rock and pop culture themselves as further examples of the fundamentally transgressive aspect of popular music culture as described by Diederichsen.

However, there are other purification rituals in everyday discourses on pop that both coincide with and counteract those hybrid aspects and practices.

The most important of these is probably the invocation of a vague notion of authenticity in qualitative judgements of individual artists or works. In the context of pop, authenticity is an eminently puristic category, as it demarcates a concrete space within the field of popular music culture as a kind of sanctuary: a quasi-utopian space of absolute psychological realness or truth that provides a temporary shelter from the painfully alienated and false experiences of everyday reality. Pop journalism and other everyday discourses on pop are thus rife with appeals to authenticity despite it being (or precisely *because it is*) such a nebulous concept that basically allows one to project whatever meanings or attributes one fancies onto the term.[38]

A more tangible symptom of these purification rituals is how, over time, the field of popular music culture has developed a highly differentiated lingo of genre terminology and its associated hierarchies. To the outsider, these terms must appear as if they formed a highly intricate, borderline esoteric, yet ultimately coherent system of classification. For example, *folk* is clearly different from *folk rock*, which is related to but still not the same as *electric folk; psychedelic folk* could be both seen as a sub-genre of folk and of *psychedelic music* and is also related to the sub-genre of *progressive folk*; it also connects to more contemporary sub-genres (or sub-sub-genres) such as *indie folk, freak folk, nerd folk,* and *folktronica,* which are loosely associated with the umbrella term *New Weird America*, and so on. As one thus takes these terms under closer scrutiny, one quickly notices their essential ambiguity. Despite the earnestness with which these terms are usually invoked in order to neatly organize and compartmentalize a vast and unsystematic field of similar (but still different) cultural practices, they are ultimately unable to fulfill that promise. There is, ironically, just too much randomness and unpredictability in how these terms themselves are generated and disseminated through the many disparate registers of pop discourse. As they seamlessly move across the boundaries between unreflected casual talk about pop music and/or pop culture, genuine journalistic and/or academic attempts at classifying specific artists and works, and the racketeerish jargon of pop marketing, any serious claim to encyclopedic thoroughness is rendered moot.

In short, we can thus say that the Latourian logic of purification and hybridization applies here as well: Any earnest attempt to thoroughly purify the hybrid *imbroglios* that make up the actual lived-in world (or parts thereof) will inevitably lead to the emergence of new hybrids. Thus, the seemingly contradictory reality of pop as both fluid hybridity and an arrangement of

38 On the notion of authenticity in popular culture, see Barker.

strictly compartmentalized spheres of micro-cultures is not a contradiction at all. Rather, it points to the Latourian thesis that the more hybrids a particular ensemble of social practices begets, the more intense and thorough are its associated purification rituals (which, as discussed in the introductory chapter, then only beget the emergence of new hybrids demanding even more rigorous purification rituals, and so on).

The point of these remarks is that while these purisms indisputably constitute a significant part of the reality of pop, they are not the focus of the argument at stake here. As the discussion of Wire in the previous chapters should have made clear already, those practices which Diederichsen refers to as “normative modes of speaking about pop” (40) are not what this argument is about. These outlooks, which valorize stylistic and generic purity and argue for clear lines of demarcation between individually authentic styles, genres, and cultural fields, only form the necessary stolid backdrop for that other “descriptive” manifestation of pop, which is characterized by idiosyncrasies, hybridities, and transgressions. In other words, this is pop not *informed* by puristic norms, but consciously *performed* as an impure and muddled practice. It is pop that acknowledges the Latourian dictum that we have never been modern. To circumscribe this particular strand of pop under the umbrella term of *art rock* makes sense insofar as it is a type of artistic practice for which the ideal of authenticity is not a relevant category (or only relevant insofar as it rejects it). Rather than pursuing an ideal of absolute and authentic truth, art rock acknowledges that, due to its inextricable embroilment in actual social reality, artistic production is always a practice performed by *artificers* and the result is always something inherently *artificial.* The fundamental irony of art rock is thus that for its reputation of often being overly conceptual or even overcooked, both its rejection of false notions of authenticity and its open acknowledgment of its own limitations (and that of art in general) make it one of the more levelheaded genres in popular music culture. Art rock is thus fake and artificial only insofar as all cultural practice is ultimately fake and artificial. That fact alone, however, does not make it *false.*

It is this contradictory logic at the heart of art rock (or, in Diederichsen’s terminology, of the transgressive side of pop) that links it with the idiosyncratic modernism of Lewis. In both cases, we are dealing with a modern aesthetics driven by decidedly intellectualist ambitions and with its executions or performances held to very high standards. At the same time, however, this high-minded and serious project is undercut by a practicological awareness: how, ultimately, very mundane practical constraints — the gravitational force of actual social power relations so to speak — will invariably drag this undertaking back

down to earth and render it absurd. Thus, a high modernist or, respectively, popular modernist approach seamlessly moves over into the space of satire and self-satire and then, paradoxically, speaks with two contradictory voices at the same time: that of the serious, quasi-heroic champion of modern art and that of the mocking and self-mocking satirist.

Moreover, it is this simultaneity as another valence of a fundamentally impure hybridity that also points to Panfosky’s and Pevsner’s individual efforts to formulate a theory of the specific “Englishness” of English art. It is a trait that, from a rationalist viewpoint, appears inconsistent, absurd, and self-defeating. However, from the point of view of an aesthetics not driven on internal idealistic consistency, not governed by preconceived rules or doctrines, but understood as a casual, pragmatic, and fundamentally empirical or explorative practice, not only can these inconsistencies or antonyms coexist with each other, but they are not even recognized as a problem. In that sense, Pevsner’s and Panonfsky’s theories of Englishness connect Lewis’s impure practicological modernism with both the tradition of British art rock, and Diederichsen’s first descriptive criterion of pop.

It is thus not surprising in the least that Diederichsen’s second descriptive criterion ties in neatly with what we have discussed so far. According to Diederichsen, “Pop entertains a positive relationship with the perceptible part of the surrounding world, of its sounds and images [...] One could almost describe the relationship of pop to the world as a ‘philosophy of life’. Its revolt is derived from a big ‘yes’ (to life, world, modern world), not from a ‘no’ and a ‘yes’ to the idea of the utopia” (39-40). Diederichsen’s second descriptive criterion of pop is thus very similar to certain aspects of the practicological modernism that we have tried to frame so far. Diederichsen, to briefly point out the most important parallels, argues that pop is based on an empirical outlook in the sense that it presupposes a given external reality from which its own artistic practices are informed and on which they reflect back. Conversely, it is not driven primarily by abstract ideologies or immanently coherent systems of ideas, nor does it aim for the realization of unrealizable utopias. The notion of an *Ideenwelt* — a world of ideas — is, at best, secondary to the notion of a *Lebenswelt* — a lived-in world. It is needless to say that these points and implications about the aesthetics of pop correspond to a significant degree to what we have so far said about Lewis’s external aesthetics. We can point to Lewis privileging a “philosophy of the eye” over one of “the ear”, that is, his rejection of an aesthetics centered on immanent psychological matters and his argument that it is, instead, the externalities or superficialities of people that matter most. We can point to how this perspective informed his harsh satirical style of depicting

people as puppets or automatons: social actors superficially going through their conditioned motions, unconsciously strung along by the coercions of external social reality.

An important point to note about Diederichsen’s second criterion is that when he describes the relationship of pop with the external world as “positive” or as that of a “big ‘yes’”, “positive” does not have a normative connotation. Rather than suggesting that pop is inherently, uncritically, and unabashedly materialistic, “positive” here simply refers to a quasi-positivist affirmation or acknowledgment of empirical external reality as the ultimate measure of all things. The actual relationship that pop entertains with that external reality, however, is thoroughly ambivalent. In a very similar way to Lewis, pop, at least in its emphatic manifestations, is repulsed by the sheer vulgarity and violence that permeates said external reality. At the same time, however, it remains deeply fascinated by this world consisting entirely of external surfaces, materials, and things. The external world thus stands, on the one hand, as an unassailable limit: an entity that, whether one likes it or not, will always impose itself and severely constrain individual agency. On the other hand, the very same external world also presents itself as a space of aesthetic possibilities: a jumbled but vibrant array of cultural raw materials for the individual artist to work with. In this similarity between Diederichsen’s second descriptive moment of pop and Lewis’s own external approach, we could say that the latter almost represents a position that we could describe as *proto-pop.*

Furthermore, it is again Panofsky’s and Pevsner’s theories of Englishness that provide a connection between the two on the level of English cultural history. At the beginning of this chapter, we noted Pevsner’s explanation as to why English art, particularly modern English art, was a mostly insular affair: As an aesthetic tradition grounded in a moderate and pragmatic empiricism, it simply found itself out of step with the spirit of the times when the purist radicalism of modern art asserted itself on the scene. We could thus take Pevsner’s argument a step further and claim that the opposite observation can be made with regard to pop. The very same traits that prevented English art from attaining a significant position in the international canon of modern art allowed it to play a trailblazing role in the various fields of pop. When the *zeitgeist* of pop emerged with its empirical outlook and its fascination for the antonyms, contradictions, and impurities that permeated the various spheres of the actual lived-in world, the English aesthetic tradition was able to rise to the fore again. In a curious coincidence, Pevsner’s *The Englishness of English Art* was published in 1955 — one year before Richard Hamilton created that first major work, that *ur-icon,* of pop art, “Just what is it that makes today’s homes so different, so appealing?”.

We could thus say that, when both Pevsner and Panofsky made their respective attempts at theorizing English art and its peculiar place in art history, they were also already creating — *avant la lettre* — some of the first theorizations of pop. As such, their accounts of a supposed specificity of Englishness in English art could also be taken as part of an explanation as to why in the history of both pop art and popular music several of the most important and influential contributions emerged — seemingly out of nowhere — in Great Britain. Perhaps we could say, instead, that these, in fact, did not emerge out of nowhere. Rather, they too were derived from what Panofsky referred to as “twelve centuries of Anglo-Saxon preoccupations and aptitudes” (288). What he thus recognized as the ideological antecedents of the Rolls Royce radiator could also be seen as the ideological antecedents of pop.

In that sense, both theories of Englishness also overlap with Diederichsen’s theory of pop on his third and final descriptive criterion of pop. When he states that “pop appears as a secret code that is simultaneously open to everybody” (40), we can recognize in this statement the resistance of English art to embracing total abstraction and its valorization of the figurative principle. After all, if the semantics of pop derives its basic vocabulary from actual lived experience, its secret code will inevitably remain transparent to the degree that it remains rooted in the figurative principle and thus relatable to the lived experience(s) of the average reader. In sharp contrast to more esoteric (that is, abstract) approaches to art, where the act of reading amounts to learning an entirely new language, reading the secret code of pop means making sense of utterances and texts whose individual words and syntactic structures are already familiar.

In summary, what we have thus established in this chapter is a set of more general or theoretical connections between the more concrete and specific observations made in the previous chapters. Over the previous chapters, we had argued that there were certain formal and ideological correlations between Wyndham Lewis’s idiosyncratic modernism, for which I have also proposed the term *practicological* modernism, and, using the example of seminal art-punk group Wire, an intellectually charged part of British popular music culture, which I have subsumed under the umbrella term of *art rock*. Subsequently, we have now tied this outwardly similar aesthetic ethos — a belligerent-yet-moderate modernism in, on the one hand, its high and, on the other hand, its popular manifestation — to a broader perspective on British cultural history. Nikolaus Pevsner’s *The Englishness of English Art* has, despite its age and methodological shortcomings, allowed us to connect this modernism to a wider tradition of English aesthetics: one that is not oriented on abstract, immanent ideals, theorems, or dogmas, but proceeds from a more casual or empirical outlook;

its point of departure is a sober and detached observation of a given external reality towards which it then attempts to formulate appropriate situational responses. Erwin Panofsky’s argument in *The Ideological Antecedents of the Rolls Royce Radiator* — methodologically different to Pevsner but strikingly similar in regard to its core claims — has then allowed us to expand this notion of an English aesthetics. Panofsky’s argument is in line with that of Pevsner in how it describes the aesthetics of English art as permeated by various antonyms and conceptual inconsistencies, to which, due to its empirical outlook, it remains casually indifferent. Both texts can thus be read as individual attempts to categorize an aesthetics that is not easy (if not impossible) to categorize. In a similar way to what we have noted about the materials discussed in the previous chapters, Englishness as described by both Pevsner and Panofsky is not really a monolithic aesthetics but rather a loose and adjustable set of aesthetic practices and stratagems that ultimately remain unconcerned with whether they conform to some absolutist notion of theoretical purity. By definition, Englishness will thus always resist any attempt to be pinned down by a fixed theoretical framework or narrative.

As part of this elaboration of several (foreign) perspectives on English art history, we have also noted how these casual, antonymic, and/or unsystematic features of Englishness as a practice might account for its insular or outsider status in the canon of Western art history. If traditional art historiography is still rooted in a grand Hegelian perspective that regards history as a linear and quasi-deterministic progression of styles or ideas (or both), it is naturally difficult to integrate into these overarching narrative frameworks those concrete manifestations in the arts which do not conform to that progressive vision. As our discussion of the example of Werner Busch has shown, to subsume an empirical approach to making art under a grand and monolithic view of history is problematic, because it means to repress those very features by which it distinguishes itself from other approaches: those of being without a grand view of history as a central reference point and instead being characterized by its provisional, anecdotal, situational, piecemeal, and experimental nature.[39] At the same time, our reference to those theories of Englishness allowed us to

39 Despite his effort to integrate English aesthetics into a grand(er) narrative of the emergence of modern art, Busch is, of course, aware of the essential eccentricities of English art and art history. In his afterword to *Englishness*, Busch notes how, traditionally, English art historiography on English art has veered toward the documentary, autobiographical and/or anecdotal approach and remained wary of the grand theoretical abstractions of German art historiography and philosophy of art (224). In that sense, Busch argues, English art historiography mirrors the casual and empirical outlook of Englishness as an aesthetics in that it does not presume that individual artists

recognize the paradoxical Englishness of Wyndham Lewis’s modernism. The common perspective in English literary history is that of Lewis as the perpetual outsider of British modernism, who was staunchly critical of both reactionary English conservatism and the stylistic approaches of his radical modernist peers. Juxtaposing Lewis with Pevsner’s and Panofsky’s notions of Englishness has shown, however, that, for all its strong Continental European influences and orientations, Lewis’s idiosyncratic approach nevertheless represented a distinctively English take on modernism.

Most importantly, however, our elaborations on those theories of Englishness have allowed us to connect a theory of English aesthetics with a theory on the aesthetics of Pop. The parallels between both Pevsner’s and Panofsky’s core characteristics of Englishness and Diederichsen’s descriptive criteria of Pop are striking to a degree that we could even read the former as theories of Pop *avant la lettre*. As such, this juxtaposition has allowed us to substantiate on a level of aesthetic theory and/or cultural history what we have exemplified in our juxtaposed readings of Lewis and Wire. In hindsight, this begs the question whether it would not have been easier to structure the argument the other way around with the theoretical part laying a solid foundation first upon which we could subsequently have placed the analyses and cross-readings of actual works. However, as already noted at the beginning of this chapter, this approach — to impose a predefined set of abstract terms on concrete examples of artistic practices — would have amounted to a retroactive purification of the practicological modernism that is at stake here. As the heart of my argument is that this is a modernism that is very much characterized by hybridities, impurities, and inconsistencies, it would be improper to not approach it on its own terms: not guided by rigid and pure immanent principles, but as a somewhat messy and haphazard extrinsic practice. The bottom-up approach — the attempt to gradually circumscribe and reflect the extrinsic phenomena instead of imposing on them a predefined set of rigid theorems — thus presents itself as the only cogent way of coming to terms with that modernism.

Nevertheless, we have thus managed to come up with a description of both the formal characteristics of that practicological modernism and how it ties in with a broader perspective of British cultural history. It is a description that, however impure and tentative it may be, seems entirely adequate for our purpose. With this descriptive framework in place, we can shift our focus in the following chapters to how this set of modernist aesthetic practices pertain to a broader

and artworks have to be seen as part of a larger and coherent philosophical logic and/or grand vision of history.

modern or modernist ethos. As outlined in the introductory chapter, my interest in this modernism is not as a purely stylistic or historical term, but in how these styles, these modes of expression both present concrete examples of and pertain to a notion of practice. To put it in the simplest terms possible, modernism is grasped not as a thing but as a *way of doing things* in the fields of art and literature: a way of both reacting to and acting within a given modern reality. In other words, it forms part of the ensemble of practices that constitutes living or *surviving* in the realities of modern life. If our elaborations have so far focused on describing the formal characteristics of these particular ways or practices of making art, we must now shift our attention to how they constitute or suggest an art of surviving.

IV How to Survive in an Artless World: From Wyndham Lewis's Machine-Personae to David Bowie's Artist-as-Artificer

In the back pages of the second (and final) edition of *Blast,* also labelled the *War Number* and released in July 1915, Wyndham Lewis published another of his short Vorticist manifestoes, this one entitled "VORTEX No. 1. ART VORTEX. BE THYSELF" (Fig. 16). In sharp contrast to the implications of its strong title, however, the manifesto itself then proceeds, in an incisive yet also very playful manner, to argue *against* the notion of an authentic and monolithic self:

> You must talk with two tongues, if you do not wish to cause confusion.
> You must also learn, like a Circassian horseman, to change tongues in mid-career without falling to Earth.
> You must give the impression of two persuaders, standing each on a different hip — left hip, right hip — with four eyes vacillating concentrically at different angles upon the object chosen for subjugation.
> There is nothing so impressive as the number TWO.
> You must be a duet in everything.
> For, the Individual, the single object, and the isolated, is, you will admit, an absurdity.
> Why try and give the impression of a consistent and indivisible personality? (91)

In his typically assertive-yet-absurdist style, Lewis's argument against a coherent self is, paradoxically, not a call for chaos and incoherence. On the contrary, it is the attempt to appear as a coherent subject that causes confusion in the first place, whereas to act as a split subject ("a duet in everything") is seen as a precondition for clarity. It is only when one speaks with multiple voices and takes multiple perspectives ("four eyes vacillating concentrically at different angles") that one is able to effectively triangulate, that is, to frame and nail down an external object. It is, in other words, the *thyself* conceived in the traditional humanist way as a singular, autonomous, and authentic whole that is incoherent and absurd, whereas the reasonable and coherent subject is that which is divisible, incomplete, and inconsistent. To Lewis, the ideal subject has (at least) two faces and speaks with (at least) two voices.

Lewis's ironic broadside against the common humanist notion of the self should, however, not be misconstrued as akin to the psychoanalytic notion of a split self. If a psychoanalytic perspective usually proceeds from the view of an

involuntarily split individual psyche (as Freud famously put it, the notion that the Ego is not master of its own house [“Eine Schwierigkeit der Psychoanalyse” 137]), Lewis’s splitting of the self occurs voluntarily and on the outside. To invent oneself as a plurality of selves is a conscious choice that one takes in light of the individual’s structural embroilment in social realities. It is a precondition to attain a relatively high degree of individual agency with which one can effectively function in and engage with that given extrinsic reality. Lewis’s suggestion that splitting oneself into many selves represents a fundamentally empowering act is thus markedly different from the psychoanalytic point of view, which postulates an immanent splitting of the self as problematic a priori. The psychic apparatus of psychoanalytic theory is one that will always restrict the agency of the individual.

For that reason, Lewis’s choice of vocabulary to describe this notion of a voluntarily split self is decidedly un-psychological. His frame of reference is, again, the external world. On the one hand, he draws on the vocabulary of geometry: the strategic placement of objects in relation to each other within a given spatial frame. On the other hand, he refers to the actual movements and actions performed within that external frame of reference. However, not any arbitrary movement will do; rather, as his example of the Circassian horseman shows, he refers specifically to those movements executed with meticulous skill and discipline. To act as an inconsistent and divided self within that extrinsic frame of reference and to do it in a manner that is bold and effective is not simply a decision or an attitude; it is essentially an *art.*

Most importantly, however, Lewis resorts to a vocabulary of machinery:

> You can establish yourself either as a Machine of two similar fraternal surfaces overlapping.
>
> […]
>
> Any machine then you like: but become mechanical by fundamental dual repetition.
>
> For the sake of your good looks you must become a machine.
>
> Hurry up and get into this harmonious and sane duality.
>
> The thought of the old Body-and-Soul, Male-and-Female, Eternal Duet of Existence, can perhaps be of help to you, if you hesitate still to invent yourself properly. (91)

Lewis resorting to a mechanistic vocabulary and to the notion of man-as-machine is, of course, where his Vorticism overlaps most obviously with Italian Futurism. However, as already discussed in the first chapter, Lewis’s take on those machine aesthetics is nevertheless different from the brash and exuberant dynamism of Futurism. In contrast to the latter’s valorization of pure mechanical movement and action, Lewis’s *actionism* also always stresses, on the one

hand, those still moments of careful deliberation that come before the actual movement takes place and, on the other hand, the artful, even *graceful* nature of its eventual execution — with grace being, of course, a decidedly un-metallic, organic, and naturalistic trait. Lewis's man-machine as a voluntarily split self is thus not a Futurist cannon, automobile, or steam engine, but more akin to a hybrid and multipurpose neural network. Its beauty does not lie in its projection of sheer mechanical force, but in the intelligent, deliberate, and downright elegant spectrum of possibilities by which it may exert that external force. In that sense, we can again see how Lewis's practicological perspective blurs lines between thought and action. If Futurism presupposed a crude binary opposition between the two and then (in what we could read as the proto-fascistic ideological kernel of Futurism) proceeded to denounce thought and valorize action, this binary split does not apply to Lewis's perspective, as he regards both as mutually dependent practices. For him, as already argued, thinking itself is not only part and parcel of a broad ensemble of actions; the *acts* of careful deliberation and sober, critical reflection are perhaps some of its most essential ones. After all, even the supposedly brash and energetic *actionism* of Vorticism revolved around that calm point at the center, from which the Vorticist would not plunge him- or herself into the chaotic vortex of modern reality, but *review* it in a calm, sober, and rational manner.

We can thus say that for all its focus on harsh externalities, on clean and hard metallic surfaces, on disciplined and rigorously rehearsed movements and postures, on machine-like precision, and, most importantly, on the linguistic and painterly force with which he performed this aesthetic program, it is permanently undercut (or, rather, *accompanied*) by a strong sense of irony and theatricality. The humorous and downright joyous gesture with which Lewis deconstructs the monolithic notion of the humanist self into a diverse and productive space of possibilities sets an antonymic counterpoint to the supposedly cold aesthetics of machinery and discipline. As is apparent in the manifesto, it is an inconsistency in which the text literally flourishes:

> There is Yourself: and there is the Exterior World, that fat mass you browse on.
> You knead it into an amorphus [sic] imitation of yourself inside yourself.
> Sometimes you speak through its huskier mouth, sometimes through yours.
> […]
> You must catch the clearness and logic in the midst of contradictions: <u>not</u> settle down and snooze on an acquired, easily possessed and mastered, satisfying shape. (91)

Lewis's machine aesthetics is thus best grasped as a virtuoso performance of the artist as a congregation of multiple selves: a hybrid, mercurial, and

unpredictable, yet also very calculated, disciplined, and controlled acting out of many guises and faces. These performances of the selves, molded from an amalgamation of the "Exterior World" and the original self, are inherently contradictory in how they blur the boundary between subject(s) and object(s), yet simultaneously aim for a "clearness and logic" that suggest (in the Latourian sense) a clear line of distinction between subject and object (and, as we have already noted, Lewis expressed a clear hatred for "the movement that displaces the lines").

As such, the only way we can reasonably frame this aesthetic approach is by referring to notions such as the game, the theater, the carnivalesque, the acts of playing or play-acting, or even the figure of the prankster or the trickster. It is admittedly difficult to reconcile these fundamentally humorous and ironic terms and types with Lewis's strong and authoritative voice that permeates his writings, yet not entirely impossible. Irony, after all, is not to be confused with the attitude of not taking things seriously. Rather, irony exists in that limbo of absolute undecidability between irreverent joking and high seriousness.[40] Read as a fundamentally ironic text, Lewis's manifesto thus speaks simultaneously with a single puristic authoritative voice and with a hybridity of many contradicting voices, leaving the reader or listener in a permanent state of uncertainty. Moreover, it acknowledges the practical and external dimension of such speech: the awareness that the notion of text does not exist in a pure vacuum, but only as part of an extrinsic social interaction between the artist-as-player and his or her spectators.

It should be clear by this point that these aspects of play, of irony, and of the theatrical accompanying an otherwise serious and authoritative gesture, which we have discerned in the "Be Thyself" manifesto, are not a singular occurrence in Lewis's work. As our discussion of passages from *Blast 1,* for example, has already shown, this simultaneity of the serious and the absurd is one of the fundamental traits of Lewis's aesthetic approach(es). In his 1922 "Essay on the Objective of Plastic Art in Our Time", he makes an even more direct comparison between artistic creation and the notion of play, this time by referencing sports. The essay's second sub-chapter bears the title "Art and Games" and begins as follows:

> The game of cricket or billiards is an ingenious test of our relative, but indeed quite clumsy and laughable prowess. These games depend for their motive on the physical

40 On irony and undecidability, see Colebrook, particularly her elaborations on the Socratic and Platonic notions of irony and how they relate to the emergence of ethics and morality, 6-7.

> difficulties that our circumscribed extension and capacities entail. It is out of the discrepancy between *absolute* equilibrium, power, and so on, of which our mind is conscious, and the pitiable reality, that the stuff of these games is made. Art is cut out of a similar substance. (25)

Art thus revolves not around a spiritual act but an essentially physical one: that of a vain and, thus, absurd struggling against the vicissitudes and limitations set down by physical reality in the form of both the human body and the external material reality that surrounds it. "The charm of a game," Lewis continues, "consists partly in our inordinate satisfaction with ourselves when we succeed in some trivial physical manoeuvre. Such satisfaction would be impossible without the existence of the humorous philosophy of sport." (25). And further down, he concludes that "all intellectual endeavour is in the same contingent category as a game of cricket or billiards. [...] In art we are in a sense playing at being what we designate as matter" (26). Art is thus a fundamentally material practice: not the striving toward or realization of some high abstract or metaphysical ideal, but the successful, that is, *artful* execution of "some trivial physical manoeuvre." Thus tied up into the pitiful ramifications of existing, struggling, and surviving in a profane and artless material reality, art itself becomes part of that essentially absurd and ridiculous struggle. Although, as the paragraph above shows, the concept of a radical, romantic, or metaphysical absolute still figures in Lewis's elaborations, it only does so as an absolute negative: something which, in the sense of the Kantian sublime, can be imagined but never realized in practice. The essential unreality of that notion can thus not stand as an ultimate goal toward which the arts, conceived as an actual and real practice, can or should realistically strive. Rather, Lewis firmly places his accent on the external, empirical side: It is not the intangible, abstract ideal that counts, but the palpable and perceptible quality: its material form or shape and/or the masterful execution of a physical feat of skill or dexterity.

Lewis, in short, perceives humans — human bodies, to be precise — as clumsy, ridiculous, and absurd lumps of flesh and bones. They are puppets, that is, shells, things, grotesque organic machines or apparatuses, whose aimless, uncoordinated, and shambolic moving and staggering through the "pitiable reality" that is life presents an altogether ridiculous spectacle. The view of these impotent *wild bodies* only underscores that insurmountable brutality of the factual: that, at the end, the human body will always fail its inhabitant. Out of this absurd reality, the artist emerges as a player, gambler, or sportsman: not as a kind of superman that, for some reason or other, possesses the abilities to transcend these fundamental limits, but simply as a man of superior skill and talent in comparison to the average person. Like a professional athlete, all that

the artist is able to do is to perform those feats of dexterity and skill in a manner more disciplined, elegant, and artful than others; nevertheless, he or she remains tied to the very same and essentially absurd material reality. Bluntly put, not even the artist can beat gravity. However, in possessing a broader and more refined repertoire of skills, he or she can at least *project the illusion* of being able to defy it. It is thus arguably misleading to read Lewis's often maligned illiberal elitism as that of a dyed-in-the-wool supremacist or a quasi-fascistic ideologue.[41] Rather, it is the elitism of a profoundly sarcastic existentialist or that of a survivalist with a strong sense of the absurd. It is, in other words, not an ontological but a meritocratic elitism: If all humans are animals walking on two legs, the artist is merely a more rigorously trained and self-trained animal. As a result of that rigorous training, he or she is simply better at that whole dirty business of surviving.

The ultimate consequences of this absurdist view with regard to the arts and their position in social reality are, however, quite profound. Contrary to Lewis's often immodest rhetoric and his restorative gestures to preserve or re-realize a grand classical tradition in an increasingly artless world, his view of art as a material practice effectively points in the other direction. His view of art as a game of skill — as a deft but ultimately futile act of rebellion against an uncompromising and absurd reality — is categorically different from the pathos-laden view of Art with a capital 'A' and much closer to a notion of *art as artifice* with a small 'a'. Although the notion of art as an exceptionally noble practice still makes itself heard in Lewis's writings, his sober and agnostic realism — that even if there were a transcendental or metaphysical truth to which the arts could aspire, it would lie utterly beyond man's mental and physical capabilities to actually do so — is always right beside it to immediately quell those desperate fits of anachronistic romantic grandiloquence. Thus displaced from its lofty throne, what remains of art is a relatively insignificant thing: a mundane material practice, a game, an act of make-believe, a sleight of hand. However, even then art at least retains the potential to project some worldly or secular dignity: If art is only a game, the ultimate aim should then be to be exceedingly good at playing it.

This fundamentally ironic or sarcastic view of art is perhaps encapsulated best in a photographic portrait of Lewis from 1929 by George Charles Beresford (Fig. 17). It shows a very nonchalant Lewis — wearing a contemporary suit and

41 For a critical discussion of the illiberal aspects of Lewis's thinking, see Andrzei Gasiorek's article "Wyndham Lewis on Art, Culture and Politics in the 1930s"as well as the fourth chapter ("From Classicism to Satire") in his monograph *Wyndham Lewis and Modernism*, 58-76.

tie and a floppy hat, his left hand in his trouser pocket, and an unlit smoking pipe in the corner of his mouth — casually leaning, with his other hand, on a replica of an ionic column. The latter could be a plaster prop from a photo studio; at the very least, it is not a very majestic example, but a slight miniature version of a classical column, being only barely taller than Lewis himself. Lewis's nonchalant pose, his clothing, and his disinterested but firm gaze at some undefined point outside of the frame forms a sharp contrast to the rigid yet also paltry geometry of the pillar. In this juxtaposition, the portrait neatly encapsulates his ironic and contradictory stance on the arts. On the one hand, the column is there as an unambiguous signifier for the classical high ideal of the arts: that belatedly constructed view that the art of the classical period and, to a lesser degree, the Renaissance had achieved a level of perfection and purity that was both unprecedented and would never be achieved again. In accordance with that semiotic dimension, the column also provides an important structuring element on the formal level of the photograph. As a sharp vertical line, clearly offset from the dark background, it literally and figuratively anchors Lewis's comparatively angular and unstable pose. On the other hand, the column is anything but a majestic example of classicist aesthetics. Rather, it looks like a cheap and paltry replica: the kind of poor quality plaster or cardboard imitation one encounters as an anachronistic prop in countless examples of 19th Century *carte-de-visite* and cabinet card photography — the first industrialized and mass-market genres of portrait photography. By thus highlighting the sheer absurdity of the cultural after-living of the classical high ideal in the thoroughly un-classical age of industrialized modernity, it is simultaneously invoked and ridiculed.

Lewis's pose reflects this twofold and contradictory gesture. By, on the one hand, leaning on the column (that is, by both literally and figuratively relying on its support), he proverbially enacts his classical leanings. At the very least, his leaning pose amounts to a sober acknowledgment of the *Nachleben* of classical heritage as a historical fact. On the other hand, it is in his casual pose, his clothing, and his blatant act of ignoring the column's presence by staring into the distance that we also see the avowed modernist: the insubordinate and irreverent iconoclast who shows a clear disrespect for the classical tradition. It is in this contradictory pose as a classical modernist (or a modern classicist) where we recognize Lewis as the artist-as-artificer. As a fundamentally ironic and two-faced figure, it reflects his call in the "Be Thyself" manifesto to always act as two selves. In the essentially antonymic logic of that stance, we also recognize Panofsky's notion of Englishness. Finally, we recognize the practicological dimension of the notion of the artist-as-artificer: a figure that excels not by striving to transcend the limitations of external reality, but by finding clever

ways in how to take an advantageous pose or position within that unshakeable external reality. The artist thus appears as an ingenious faker.

If we take this notion of the artist as an artificer and now ask how it led a productive afterlife in the field of British art rock, we cannot avoid discussing David Bowie. As one of the most prominent and influential figures in pop and rock history, Bowie's approach to rock culture arguably revolved around the very principle of unmasking its own artificiality and stressing how rock was nothing more but, perhaps more importantly, also nothing *less* than plain artifice and theater. As such, he first and foremost provides a convenient reference point for our cross-mapping of Lewis's modernism and the popular modernism of art rock. His seminal status and broad influence thus allows us to cover a lot of ground. As pop critic Paul Morley noted, "David Bowie in the Seventies was like your Google Search at the time [...] Whatever David Bowie mentioned was therefore where you went" (*Kraftwerk — Pop Art* 0:20:05). The all too obvious discrepancy in this juxtaposition is of course that the same cannot be said of Lewis. While Bowie was and, even after death, remains a widely recognized and hugely influential artistic voice of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, Lewis to date still remains an acquired taste: a largely marginal voice only recognized by those with an explicit interest in British high modernism. As already pointed out in the first chapter, it is for largely this reason that I have avoided this juxtaposition so far and instead made the first cross-mapping between Lewis and, in Wire, a moderately known (but historically very important) example that would not be recognized by people without a clear interest in the field. At this point, however, the formal and structural similarities between Lewis's high modernism and the popular modernism of art rock have been firmly established and we can thus safely juxtapose Lewis and Bowie without it coming across as jarring or forced.

To refer back to Beresford's photographic portrait of Lewis, we can put it next to an iconic portrait of Bowie from 1978 by British photographer Lord Snowdon and recognize an engagement of a modernist artist with a classical heritage that comes across as strikingly similar to Lewis's serious yet playful leaning on the ionic column. It shows Bowie not leaning but standing on a classicist plinth (Fig. 18). As with Lewis, however, his one-legged pose is also one of a blatant un-classical irreverence and affected snobbery. More importantly, Bowie's cheeky self-presentation as a living statue, that is, of the artist as an artificial role or creation, is counteracted *and* underlined by the fact that he is not wearing an extravagant costume. Rather — and again similar to Lewis — his costume consists of everyday and blatantly *normal* contemporary clothing. In a comparable way to Lewis, Bowie thus presents himself as figuratively standing

in the footsteps of a classical tradition or iconography (though only with one foot as, tellingly, the other foot is leaning on Bowie *himself*), while simultaneously making a slight mockery of both that tradition and himself.

Beyond this arguably incidental example, however, we can also point to a more immediate biographical intersection between Lewis and Bowie, which only came to light after the latter's death in 2016. Although it was known among Bowie aficionados that he collected art, he largely kept this part of his life private and the wider public only got to know the extent and focus of his activities as a collector when his private collection was put up for auction in late 2016. Apart from an extensive collection of modern and contemporary art of the kind one would expect to have been of interest to Bowie — postmodernist furniture and design, pop art, various works by the Young British Artists etc. — a significant part of his collection consisted of British modernist painting including two drawings by Lewis from his Vorticist period. Of those two, it is the 1913-14 *Circus Scene* where we can recognize several intersections between Lewis's aptitudes and interests and those of Bowie (Fig. 19). First of all, there is the motif itself with the circus being that space of a popular or folk art where the emphasis clearly does not lie on some highbrow notion of art, but on artifice as a practice: the dextrous execution of physical stunts, tricks, and other performative acts. As the auction catalog notes with regard to the drawing, "Lewis had a lifelong fascination with the world of the stage. Whether it be the circus, playhouse, ballet or cabaret, the theatricality of these shows tapped into his fascination with the absurdist nature of life" (Sotheby's). This concurrence of a fascination for the physical or performative aspects of art and an absurdist view of life is important. It points to the fact that Lewis's fascination does not manifest itself simply as a shallow glorification the supposed authenticity of spontaneous action itself (a point we have already discussed with regard to Lewis's critique of Marinetti in the first chapter). As we can see in the drawing, the exhilarating effects of those palpable moments of physical artistry are reflected within their disciplined and disciplinary framework: The human and animal figures in the composition are abstracted into puppet-like shapes and the sharp diagonal and rounded lines not only suggest a strong sense of movement and dynamism, but also one of unyielding rigidity and order.

Most of all, however, it is the choice of color that is telling. Instead of the more obvious choice of vibrant colors from the red side of the spectrum, Lewis chooses a metallic cobalt blue that lends the scenery a sense of cool detachment. The drawing is thus less an unabashed celebration of circus artistry and clearly more of an analytical and ambivalent reflection of it. As such, the fascination for the energetic and dynamic spectacle of physical artistry is one that remains aware

of the latter's less pleasant or, in other words, absurdist sides: the painful and wearisome bodily exertions; the blood, sweat, and tears; the steely discipline and "rehearsedness" at the heart of those seemingly spontaneous and exhilarating acts of graceful artistry; and, finally, the mundane mechanistic routine of the performance and its profanity as an empty social gathering that point to the commodified nature of circus entertainment as a whole. In a typically Lewisian fashion, he then extends this point into a witty meta-commentary about the arts in general: Lewis's signature in the lower left part is not a part of the drawing itself. Rather, it is written on a little piece of paper that Lewis had then loosely glued onto the drawing. It comes across like a little price tag on the drawing, thereby conflating the profane aspects of the circus performance reflected in the painting with the equally profane commodified nature of the artwork itself.

The fundamental opposition negotiated in the drawing is thus one between a valorization of practice, of the very real and palpable energy generated by people *doing things in actual reality*, and the fact that these energies are always contained by and subject to the inherent structural necessities and limitations of the same external reality. It is a dialectical viewpoint that, as we have already discussed, Lewis extended to social life as a whole. What is important at this point, however, is how this outlook pretty much coincides with how David Bowie approached his role as an art rock performer. With Bowie, we find a similar interest in art not as a high ideal but as a palpable and extrinsic practice combined with a strong sense for the absurdity of life itself, including the arts. Bowie's insistence, arguably throughout his entire career, on presenting the rock star not as an authentic self, but as an actor, a professional performing various artificial personae on stage, can be read as a pragmatic response to this absurdist outlook. Out of an awareness about the unattainability of a transcendental ideal of Art with a capital 'A', Bowie draws a very similar conclusion, namely that art can only be effectively realized as artifice: as a calculated form of fakery, which, however, has to be executed with utmost skill. In other words, art is thus performed as a survival strategy and not as a gesture of genuine heroism. As with Lewis, however, the situation is not quite as simple as that, as Bowie too speaks with many contradicting voices. First of all, his practice of art as a kind of fakery is still permeated with some residues of an outdated romantic spirit, which is manifested as repeated expressions of a genuine desire to be an artistic hero, to, against the odds, lead a proper restorative effort, and to re-realize a grand notion of Art in an otherwise artless reality. This romantic voice, however, is negated by the voice of that aforementioned hard modern realism, which, however, is not to be mistaken for a cheap cynicism. After all, this voice is itself, again, undercut by both a fastidious work ethic and exemplary

artistic productivity. Whether we look at Lewis or Bowie, it is the sheer body of work that, in both cases, directly flies in the face of such rash suggestions of cynicism.

To thus understand Bowie as a faker and one of the most self-consciously absurd performers of the rock canon we have to consider the historical context of his work. Bowie's breakthrough as a performer came relatively late as a figurehead of the emerging post-utopian rock culture of the early 1970s. Although only slightly younger than the first generation of British rock royalty — Lennon, McCartney, Townshend, Jagger etc. — and already active as a musician during the 1960s, Bowie spent most of these years in near obscurity, producing a series of muddled and unfocussed early efforts that failed to garner noticeable attention. His eventual breakthrough did not come until 1972 when those luminaries had already peaked creatively. By then, however, the landscape of rock culture had shifted significantly. In its association with the countercultural movements of the decade, 1960s rock culture quickly developed a distinctly utopian bent, which arguably reached its apex during the *Summer of Love* of 1967. Five years later, these dreams had turned into a nightmare. When it gradually became clear that countercultural alternative lifestyles were impracticable and their promises unfulfillable (an awareness that was already reflected at that time in films like *Easy Rider* or *Zabriskie Point*) and when the mostly drug-related excesses of that lifestyle demanded its first prominent casualties, rock culture found itself, at the turn of the decade, in a kind of post-utopian hangover. Curiously enough, one reaction to this end of the utopian dreams of the 1960s was even *more* excess. The emergence of the genres of shock rock and glam rock in the early 1970s represented an even more blatantly hedonistic and more garish manifestation of rock culture: an overtly decadent and cynical offspring of 1960s rock culture that had been amputated of all of its starry-eyed utopian aspirations.

At the same time, however, the blatant artificiality and absurdity of this new bluntness in rock culture also opened up a space for new possibilities. Freed from any exaggerated utopian expectations or the need to be authentic, this supposedly cynical or even nihilistic new brand of post-utopian rock culture (by which it also represented the immediate precursor of late 1970s punk rock) allowed rock to exist as artifice. It is in this context that a figure like David Bowie finally managed to fit in. Having honed his craft as an artificer in the late 1960s by studying theatre and mime under Lindsay Kemp at the London Dance Centre, it was in this post-utopian environment of the early 1970s where he could realize his notion of rock conceived as a self-consciously inauthentic performance.

The common view is that his 1971 LP *Hunky Dory*, also widely considered his first classic album, presents something of a statement of intent in that respect. In contrast to his first three albums, which showed Bowie more or less chasing whatever style was currently in fashion (Zeppelin-esque hard rock on *The Man Who Sold the World* in 1970, psychedelic folk on *David Bowie* in 1969[42], and a patchwork of British pop and music hall tunes on his self-titled 1967 debut), *Hunky Dory* presents Bowie as taking a step back and approaching pop music in the more calculated manner of, as he credits himself on the back sleeve of the album, an "actor". It is, in its Dylanesque approach to its lyrics, a very wordy album and thus no surprise that several songs have been read as little manifestoes of that new meta-rock or rock-as-artifice approach. "Changes" with its lines of "So I turned myself to face me / But I've never caught a glimpse / Of how the others must see the faker / I'm much too fast to take that test" (*Hunky Dory* track 1) remains one of the most obvious examples of Bowie explicitly declaring his intention to reshape the figure of the rock performer into that of a shrewd and resourceful faker – one who makes absolutely no pretensions of being anything but a faker. This focus on the essential artificiality of rock is negotiated further on songs such as "Quicksand", where he imagines his artistic persona as an amalgamation of the unreal spaces of occultism, cinema and Nazi iconography:

> I'm closer to the Golden Dawn
> Immersed in Crowley's uniform
> Of imagery
> I'm living in a silent film
> Portraying Himmler's sacred realm
> Of dream reality. (*Hunky Dory* track 6)

And there are, of course, the odes to two other great artificers of the pop and, respectively, the pop art tradition, "Song for Bob Dylan" (track 9) and "Andy Warhol" (track 8), clearly pointing out the direction in which Bowie was heading at the time.

However, it is not on *Hunky Dory* but on the subsequent *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars,* released only six months later in the

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42 Bowie's second studio album was released in the UK as another self-titled album. In the United States, it was initially released with the title *Man of Words/Man of Music* and reissued in 1972 with a different cover artwork and the title *Space Oddity* (in order to capitalize on the album's opening track, which had by then become Bowie's first hit single). The most recent reissue of the album from 2009 has returned to the original UK title and its corresponding album cover.

summer of 1972, where the rock-as-performance or rock-as-artifice approach came to full fruition for the first time. Since then, *Ziggy Stardust* has, of course, established itself as one of the absolutely seminal records of the rock canon. Its monolithic status thus tends to distract from the fact that it is as much an absurdist satire of rock culture and of the unfulfilled promises of 1960s countercultures. As a loose concept album, the song cycle on *Ziggy Stardust* recounts the story of the titular character as performed by Bowie. Largely inspired by the self-destructive antics of rock 'n' roll singer Vince Taylor, Ziggy is both the perfect embodiment as well as a garish parody of the heroic rock star: an extraterrestrial being that comes to Earth in order to save humanity from a looming apocalypse foretold on the albums opening track “Five Years”. As an alluring, sexually ambiguous and promiscuous figure, Ziggy exhibits all the necessary charismatic qualities of a messianic rock star and quickly manages to gain a large following. However, the promises of salvation outlined in the album’s early tracks are never realized. What happens instead – predictably, it has to be said – is that Ziggy is ultimately destroyed by his excessive drug use and, as described on the album’s penultimate track “Suffragette City”, by the unfulfillable and parasitic demands of his fans. He ends up, on the final track, as a “Rock 'n' Roll Suicide” while Earth, in all likelihood, remains on track towards that apocalyptic event predicted on the album’s opener.

Bowie would revisit this theme of the false messianic promises of rock culture several times over the course of his career, most notably as the titular character in Nicolas Roeg’s 1976 film *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (which, although based on Walter Tevis’ 1963 novel of the same name, could very well be read as a retelling of *Ziggy Stardust*) and, shortly before his death, in the 2015 musical *Lazarus*, a sort of semi-sequel to the film that further explored the fate of its ageless and immortal main character. Still, it would be too simplistic to say that Bowie’s body of work revolves around that single theme of a cynical and/or gleeful deconstruction of rock mythology. Rather, as already suggested above, it deliberately speaks with many contradicting voices. On the one hand, *Ziggy Stardust* indeed represents a deconstruction of rock mythology bordering on the cynical and exploitative: a carefully concocted and dishonest glam-science-fiction fantasy peddled to a susceptible and mostly underage crowd. On the other hand, there is still too much of a sense of the real permeating the record to simply read it as a cynical cash-grab and a deconstructive meta-commentary on rock culture. In a similar way to the example of Wire discussed in chapters one and two, the album simply works too well as an immaculately crafted rock record to pass as a deconstructive anti-rock statement. As a matter of fact, it is safe to assume that, had this not been the

case, the album would have neither been a commercial success nor attained its current status as one of the seminal albums in rock history.

Furthermore, however much *Ziggy Stardust*, with its apocalyptic narrative and the deplorable fate of its main character, is steeped in cultural pessimism, it still speaks with a strong romantic voice at the same time. Nowhere is this as clear as during the album's climax. If the premise of "Rock 'n' Roll Suicide" is one of ridiculous desperation, of the death of the fallen hero as an utterly small and pitiful event bereft of any heroic pathos, the song contradicts this sentiment in its second half. In what is arguably the most theatrical moment on the entire album, Bowie's voice suddenly erupts into the defiant and all-embracing rallying cry of "Oh no, love! You're not alone!", a reference to a similar line from Belgian chansonnier Jacques Brel's 1964 song "Jef" (*Ces Gens-Là* track 2). This leads the thus-far sparsely instrumented song towards a loud orchestrated climax. With one sleight of hand, Bowie thus introduces an overabundance of impassioned pathos at the end of an album that so far has been about ridiculing the very same naive pathos of rock culture. Indeed, the song's final lines perfectly embody that paradoxical sentiment laying at the heart of rock culture: "Let's turn on with me and you're not alone / Let's turn on and not be alone / Gimme your hands cause you're wonderful." Performing this uplifting rallying cry in his role of the rock star, Bowie aims to elicit a sense of collective ecstasy by interpellating the individuals that make up his audience into that collective. At the very same time, however, it is an interpellation that purports to address every one of these individuals not as part of a collective but as autonomous and unique individuals. There lies, in other words, a logical fallacy at the heart of the *rockist* pose (that one can be simultaneously a unique individual and part of a collective), which is brushed aside by the rousing and persuasive projection of sheer musical, vocal, and bodily energies of the performers. In the way that Bowie seems to earnestly strike that pose towards the end of "Rock 'n' Roll Suicide", the satire of rock culture that is *Ziggy Stardust* suddenly seems to fall back on that logic of late 1960s utopian rock that it had ridiculed so far.

However, the situation is again not as clear-cut. In its abruptness, this outburst of excessive theatricality simultaneously comes across as insincere and fake. Bluntly put, by utterly *overacting* the pose, Bowie simultaneously points to the fallacious logic behind it. It is thus not surprising that this final burst of ecstasy remains short-lived and, in its final moments, the song quickly turns back to satire. Instead of going for the more obvious effect of gradually fading out the song on its climactic chorus, the latter rather abruptly comes to a close after roughly a minute. This is followed by a brief one-second pause and then, as a punchline, a final short sweep on strings. By drily ending the album on this

terse final chord, Bowie performs another sleight of hand. This ending closes the album on an altogether sobering note that cancels out the preceding theatrical eruption of a seemingly heartfelt pathos and is, as such, very much in line with the satirical ideas permeating the album. On a formal aesthetic level, we could also read that final chord as a deliberate and parodistic response to one of the most famous final chords in rock history: the thundering piano chord that concludes the Beatles' "A Day in the Life" (and thus the entire *Sgt. Pepper's* album) and, in the way it keeps on reverberating for more than forty seconds, seems to evoke some ideal of transcendental infinity. In a contrast that could not be more stark, the brusque final chord of *Ziggy Stardust* is where the finality of death reasserts itself in an unflattering manner. If, five years earlier, the mantra on "A Day in the Life" was still the seductive and optimistic "I'd love to turn you on" (a reference either to liberal drug-taking, sexual promiscuity, or both), the call up to "turn on with me" on *Ziggy Stardust* instead conjures the dark suicidal side of Rock 'n' Roll that had emerged over the intervening years. And it makes sure to have the final word.

It is in this playful speaking with many conflicting voices where we could say that Bowie reveals himself to be as much of a practicologist as Lewis. As a satirical meta-commentary on rock culture, his artificial brand of art rock is grounded in a similarly cool, detached, and analytical outlook. If it does not outrightly reject those salutary promises put forth by rock culture (and, by extension, any type of cultural or artistic production), at the very least it remains deeply wary of them, recognizing the fake and racketeerish nature of the underlying modern culture industry. However, his response is, in a way that is also similar to Lewis, neither one of maudlin melancholy nor of revolutionary fervor. Instead of embarking on a fruitless search for a puristic alternative by either deliberately shutting himself away from that reality or promoting the scorched earth approach of a radical revolutionary upheaval, Bowie's satirical approach lies somewhere in between those two extreme poles. On the one hand, it soberly acknowledges the overbearing vulgarity of modern reality as an unassailable fact; on the other hand, it clearly valorizes the act of at least doing something within that impure reality, however muddled and contradictory the result might be. In other words, it puts the focus on the practicological dimension of art: If art is something that only ever takes form in, and as, concrete social practices, it is utterly absurd to hold it to some unattainable ideal located beyond these spheres of actual social practices. Rather, what one should do is to try and execute that muddled practice as artfully and gracefully as possible. If one is able to do at least that, then, for better or worse, the result has to be considered entirely adequate.

Although Bowie's work from the early 1970s thus provides enough material to illustrate his post-heroic outlook on art, it is nevertheless important to stress that it remained as a constant theme that can be observed in virtually all phases of his work. We find it in his aborted 1974 attempt to adapt George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a musical (he was unable to secure the rights from Orwell's estate), which he then turned into a dystopian vision of his own making on the *Diamond Dogs* album — one that, with its hedonistic undercurrents, ironically seemed closer to Huxley than Orwell. The canny artificer was then on full display only one year later, when he turned his back on that approach of satirizing the excesses of rock culture with even more excesses and reinvented himself, on the *Young Americans* album, as a slick American R&B singer. However, fully aware of the absurdity of that undertaking, Bowie expanded his equivocal cultural critique of the commodified nature of modern popular music culture by embracing the originally derogatory term "plastic soul" as a monicker for his style at the time. Shortly after the album's release he publicly stated that the album was "the phoniest R&B I've ever heard" and how it represented "the squashed remains of ethnic music as it survives in the age of Muzak rock, written and sung by a white limey" (Pegg 938). While these statements are, again, indicative of a fundamentally pessimistic view of the modern condition as something that is irredeemably broken, tainted, and/or beyond rescuing, he nevertheless later partly retracted this view. In a display of the professional pride of an artificer, he remarked that he still appreciated *Young Americans* for the excellent craft and musicianship that went into its making, noting that it would not least be unfair to the people involved to dismiss it as a mere conceptual prank (Pegg 938). Again, we note how Bowie's satirical view remains practicological and non-moralistic in the sense that it acknowledges the satirist being always also an agent within that modern reality and thus not exempt from said satirical critique — an act of self-deprecation that, however, is partly canceled out by the projection of an overt sense of professional pride and a fastidious work ethos.

The list of examples could go on, but perhaps the most evident case of the equivocality in Bowie's post-heroic conception of rock as art (or art as rock) is his famous title track of the 1977 album *"Heroes"*. As one of the most widely recognized songs in Bowie's catalogue, it is simultaneously one of the most triumphant and heroic hymns in the songbook of rock and a sober and critical denial of Romantic heroism per se. There is, on the one hand, an undeniable all-embracing and totalistic pathos to the song with its carefully produced arrangement built around Robert Fripp's unique sustained guitar sound. There is Bowie's dramatic delivery, which starts out in a sober, almost spoken manner and then gets more urgent and intense with every verse until it finally breaks

into a shrieking, borderline hysterical, yet also triumphant climax. Above all, however, there is the song's unabashedly romantic subject matter inspired by the Berlin Wall (next to which, at the Hansa Tonstudios, the album was recorded) about two star-crossed lovers clandestinely meeting in the shadow of the wall, declaring, in a heroic act of defiance, they will be "King" and "Queen". On the other hand, this purportedly triumphant heroic pathos is gradually chipped away in the song with the lyrics suggesting that, although they "can be heroes", it will be "just for one day", because, ultimately, "nothing will drive them away". There are also the lines in the final verse referencing guns shooting above their heads while they are standing by the wall, suggesting that the lovers are ultimately shot for their trespassing. Unsurprisingly, the initially cocksure statements of "We can beat them" and "We can be heroes" is gradually replaced by a conditional "could" (similar to that conditional "would" in the Vorticist manifesto as discussed in the first chapter) and it is in the song's coda where harsh reality ultimately reasserts itself: "We're nothing, and nothing will help us / Maybe we're lying, then you better not stay" (*"Heroes"* track 3). Of course, these intricacies in the lyrics are easily overheard (and perhaps canceled out to some degree) by the sheer sonic force of the arrangement. Nevertheless, the cold realism permeating this ostensibly heroic rock hymn is made all too apparent by Bowie's deliberate decision to put the song's title in quotation marks. As such, ""Heroes"" can very well be taken as an uplifting hymn to individual heroism; still, it is, in its awareness of the dangerous absurdity of reckless heroic deeds, simultaneously a critical rejection of it. After all, what good are so-called heroes, if all they manage to achieve is to end up as bullet-riddled corpses?[43]

It is in this sense that we can understand how Bowie's post-utopian approach replaces the figure of the rock star as a Romantic hero with the more practicological figure of the artist-as-artificer. We can also see how, in this transformation, the notion of art as a survival strategy comes into play. With those utopian promises of art being acknowledged as unrealizable pipe dreams and absurd acts of self-deception, what remains in lieu of those gestures of a purportedly authentic pathos is a set of techniques built on notions such as cleverness, gamesmanship, trickery, and fakery. Conceived as such, art becomes

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43 The anti-heroic gestures of "Heroes" comes across even more clearly in the context of the entire album. The album's b-side consists mostly of an extended experimental instrumental piece encompassing the tracks "V-2 Schneider", "Sense of Doubt", "Moss Garden", and "Neuköln" [sic] and has been read as a sonic portrait of the bleak and scarred cityscape of Berlin (Pegg 975). From that point of view, the utterly bleak death-rattle of the saxophone that concludes the entire instrumental piece leaves no doubt about the fundamental skepticism that lies behind the exuberant facade projected by the songs on the album's a-side.

an ensemble of decoy-like practices one deploys in an effort to engage with and survive in that unassailable profane reality of modern life — which is, from a practicological standpoint, also the most that one can realistically expect from the arts. However, if this "humble" or "small" notion of art bereft of any transcendental pathos seems very sobering and pessimistic, it would be misleading to grasp it in purely negative terms. As discussed with regard to both Lewis and Bowie, it is an outlook that, in how it regards modern reality as something that is fundamentally tainted and vulgar, is indeed grounded in a cultural pessimism; nevertheless, the actual artistic practices derived from this acknowledgment are not per se pessimistic and bleak. Rather, to conceive the profession of the artist as revolving around such practices as clever fakery or gamesmanship also opens up a space of possibilities. After all, to see the modern artist as a player, as an artificer concerned with working out clever strategies to execute within that vulgar social reality means that the full spectrum of available practices will ultimately be much wider and arguably more effective compared to an approach where every potential action first has to be weighed against some preconceived metaphysical high ideal. We can thus say that the pessimistic acknowledgment of the overbearing reality of those essentially vulgar or absurd facts of life results, paradoxically, in a greater degree of artistic freedom. It is ultimately the sheer productivity of both artists that stands as the most convincing evidence for that claim. Even though the artistic outputs of both Lewis and Bowie each followed an inconsistent and muddled trajectory, which had its fair share of missteps and where unexpected detours and U-turns as well as half-finished projects were more often the norm than the exception, the overall scope of their productivity nevertheless remains staggering. It is in this scope and the sheer amount of individual works they were able to create within astoundingly short time periods that the very notion of artistic survival in an artless world manifests itself the most clearly.

Although we already recognize this necessity in the arts of pulling clever stunts, of catching an unsuspecting audience off-guard, while simultaneously critically reflecting that necessity as one of the defining characteristics of the pre-World War One Vorticist period, it is in two later novels where Lewis explored the post-heroic interrelationship between fakery and survival in greater detail: *The Revenge for Love* (1937) and *The Vulgar Streak* (1941). Of those, it is particularly the former that highlights the absurdity of holding on to a high ideal of art in an increasingly artless world. Framed against the economic fallout of the Great Depression and the onset of the Spanish Civil War, *The Revenge for Love* is a political thriller broadly reminiscent of a Graham Greene novel. More than that, however, it is a novel about fakery and deceit, depicting a political

and social reality wherein every participant is playing a game or several games of deception — some deliberately so, some knowingly and out of necessity, and others unknowingly and, in a tragicomic way, mostly against themselves. Far from making this a typical genre potboiler, Lewis gives the novel a typically absurdist spin. In the course of the story, the reader follows what is essentially a series of fake, deceptive, and/or make-believe acts and events where, ultimately, nothing of significance is achieved. Even the tragic fate that ultimately befalls some of the characters is barely a footnote in the larger scheme of things: not a noble death or suffering for a higher cause, but the unintended side effects of some petty deceptions and machinations. In fitting with that overarching theme of deception and fakery, Lewis originally intended the novel to be titled *False Bottoms* (Lewis, *Rude Assignment* 229). *The Revenge for Love* thus presents Lewis's sober post-heroism on full display. The novel depicts a modern political and social reality in which the overarching structural forces and power relations are simply far too strong for the individual to resist or rise above them. As such, it is also a reality completely robbed of any heroic pathos — one in which even the eventual and inevitable tragedies are only manifested as small, pitiful, and altogether insignificant things.

In keeping with its overarching theme, the novel does not have a singular protagonist or hero. Rather, we are gradually introduced to a number of characters unwittingly and semi-passively strung along in a series of deceptions and by events and conditions that they are ultimately unable to influence directly. The first part of the novel focuses on Percy Hardcaster, the first of two characters whose tough-sounding name stands in sharp contrast to his overall powerlessness in the unfolding plot. Hardcaster, a communist Englishman with a working class background, is introduced as an inmate of a Spanish prison. Held there by Francoist forces for his involvement in Spanish Republican activities, Hardcaster plots, with outside help from his communist contacts, his escape from prison by bribing one of the wardens, Don Serafín. However, another prison guard who is supposedly a staunch supporter of the Francoist cause, Don Alvaro, finds out about the plot, but nevertheless lets it play out. He only intervenes during the escape attempt itself, where Serafín is shot dead and Hardcaster is wounded in one of his legs, which subsequently has to be amputated. This first episode neatly sets the tone of the entire novel. A series of deceptions (Hardcaster's escape plan) and counter-deceptions (Alvaro finding out about the plan but letting it proceed in order to catch him red-handed) leads to a bungled escape attempt that is simultaneously tragic (in how it leads to the loss of both a life and Hardcaster's leg) and absurd (in how both the execution and the outcome are both pitiful affairs bereft of any heroism). The punchline,

however, is how Alvaro is then revealed as anything but a loyalist. As he points out to Hardcaster immediately after springing his trap, he did not foil the escape attempt out of a genuine sense of duty to the fascist cause. Rather, what he expected was that Serafín would evenly split the bribing money with him. It is only the latter's decision to double-cross him that eventually prompted Alvaro to foil the escape attempt.

However, the tragicomic absurdity of Hardcaster's spell in prison and his botched escape attempt are conveniently brushed under the carpet when he is finally deported back to England. Instead of the unheroic truth, the largely upper-class supporters of the Spanish Republican cause among the cultural elites of London concoct a more sensationalist story (in other words, another deception), which they then disseminate as pro-communist propaganda. Hardcaster himself is given a hero's welcome, though it would be more accurate to say that he is paraded around as a living trophy. At a party held in his honor by Sean O'Hara, a wealthy but dubious backer of the Spanish Republican cause, Hardcaster is presented in the manner of a living painting. The description of the one-legged revolutionary draped up as a red patron saint of communism and surrounded by fawning socialites shows Lewis in high satirical form:

> A red patriarch, Percy Hardcaster reclined, propped by a plethora of red cushions, upon a wide reddish settee, in Red invalid magnificence. A red punkah should have been there to complete the picture. He was surrounded by men and women — by the Red men and Red women. There were four women beside him upon the settee; in the place of honour Gillian Phipps pressed up against his sick leg, which stuck straight out pointing at the assembly with all the declamatory force of Lord Kitchener's forefinger ("I want *you*") terminating in an ironshod stump, provided by the Lerroux administration. (148-49)

Lewis's mocking description of this living history painting then culminates in a scathing critique of the narcissistic hypocrisy of London high society, to whom a purported support of revolutionary political causes amounts to little more than a fashion statement. His target is thus less the ludicrous parading of Hardcaster as a one-legged modern day martyr of radical leftwing politics and more the utter vacuity that these elaborate facades aim to conceal. To Lewis, they are vainglorious charades put up by a class of people to whom the entire spectrum of political activism consists of empty symbolic gestures. As such, they could be regarded as harmless vanity projects if it were not for their essentially offensive nature in how they try to cover up an essential cowardice:

> Of course all the men thought constantly how exceedingly unpleasant it would be to have a wooden leg. An advertisement it was not, from that standpoint, of

> unsalonesque class-warfare. [...] But one and all in their hearts determined that it was more necessary than ever to see to it that they should remain *the brains* of the Revolution. Never must they allow themselves to be inveigled into situations where such a drastic disfigurement awaited them, now or at any future time. (149-50)

We can thus read the passage as an early critique of a (high) bourgeois cultural left or of what Tom Wolfe would, a few decades later, term *radical chic*. What these coteries of salon communists pass as political engagement is, to Lewis, just another false bottom. Although all the signs of left political radicalism are there — the revolutionary political slogans, the theoretical vocabulary of Marxism, the visual iconography of communist parties and movements — they remain just that: signs. As purely symbolic gestures, they exist in a discursive limbo divorced from the nitty gritty of political activism — of all that repetitive, tiresome, and mundane as well as potentially dangerous or even life-threatening everyday dirty business of class warfare. In reducing the scope of political action to what is best described as a self-important practice of virtue signaling, the novel's salon communists not only grossly overvalue the symbolic side of political action; they also make a mockery of the more grueling work done on the actual front lines. If, from a practicological standpoint, political ideals do not exist intrinsically, but only when they are executed as external practices (that is, as something that always and only emerges from and remains situated in concrete social circumstances), then surely those symbolic gestures performed in the sheltered and clearly delimited spaces of a London upper class cannot count as an effective contribution to a collective leftist political struggle. The underlying truth, however, is that this sham-political theater is not meant to be that at all. Like almost everything that happens in *The Revenge for Love*, it is a fake and make-believe activity performed to distract from or repress the harsher and more violent realities of the political game. These empty cultural politics are unmasked by Lewis as being more about reinforcing a personal comfort zone than actually challenging it. His contempt and satirical fury are thus directed primarily at how the very notion of revolutionary struggle is deflated and turned into a kind of high-bourgeois folklore. In the hands of those fashionable upper class socialists, political activism becomes an empty purification ritual, by which these people comfortably reaffirm themselves of their modern revolutionary credentials without having to either genuinely question the status quo (which includes, of course, their own position of socio-economic privilege) or get their own hands dirty in the process (or, worse, lose their own legs).

It thus comes as no surprise that the story takes an altogether nasty turn when, in a later chapter, this critique is articulated on the diegetic level (though it still makes for what is arguably the most shockingly violent passage of the

entire novel). Initially playing along with the charade because he relies on the financial support of the moneyed classes, Hardcaster later drops the facade in a private meeting with Gillian Phipps, who acted as one of the fawning ladies in waiting at the aforementioned parade. Gillian's role in the novel is mainly to embody all those negative qualities that Lewis ascribes to those upper-class salon communists. A young woman who evidently comes from a wealthy family and is prone to slumming with struggling artists and communist activists from the lower ranks of society, Gillian attempts to seduce Hardcaster sometime after O'Hara's party. However, Hardcaster rebuffs her advances and what results instead is a lengthy argument between the two. Hardcaster's gradual debunking of the fake version of his failed escape attempt eventually culminates in a heated tirade, in which he mercilessly tears into Gillian and, by extension, the entire class of salon communists for how their empty posturing only serves to hide the skin-deep nature of their political convictions:

> You're in this game for the fun of it, like most people of the moneyed classes, and you want it to be *all* fun and excitement. The little peep behind the scenes you got from me debunked your little romance of revolution. [...] For us of the working-classes this is an ugly and hazardous business — we know if we go in with you that it's not *our* revolution but *yours* that we're working for. That is self-evident. We have no illusions about that. We know that it is not for our beautiful eyes that you run about with little red flags and play Bastilles and Jacobin Clubs, or put your hands in your pockets to finance strikes and insurrections. We know all that only too well. (212-13)

Hardcaster thus gives voice to Lewis's own contempt for those coteries of salon communists and his coldly pragmatic and thoroughly un-heroic perspective on the ugly realities of class warfare. However, Hardcaster's paradoxically *heroic* effort to break through that romantic bourgeois fiction does not lead to a moment of genuine reflection or insight. Rather, what follows is a shocking outburst of violence. By coincidence, their meeting is interrupted by the brutish Jack Cruze, whose profession as a successful tax accountant labels him as the novel's representative of the professional capitalist (upper) middle class. Practically confirming Hardcaster's accusations, the professed communist firebrand Gillian, thoroughly offended by his tirade, immediately sides with the capitalist Cruze and goads him into beating the crippled and defenseless Hardcaster within an inch of his life.

It is in this sudden and utterly unpleasant outburst of violence that Lewis's critique of the hypocritical nature of empty gestural politics. As a result, the real power relations behind that which the latter attempt to cover up manifest themselves in a graphic and pitiful climax. However, it is also in line with

Lewis's post- or un-heroic outlook that Hardcaster's little act of unintentional heroism — his attempt to break through the notion of class warfare conceived as a romanticized bourgeois fiction — is not only swiftly punished, but does not achieve anything. There is no catharsis resulting from the events, the episode has no further bearing on the subsequent development of the plot, and, ultimately, nothing is learned by any of the characters involved. Hardcaster has his views of the upper classes confirmed in a gruesome way. Gillian, however, only sees her own priggish views about the moral and intellectual superiority of the middle and upper classes reinforced:

> […] it was all for *their* [the working classes', ed.] sake that the Gillians and Tristrams of this world were going to make a revolution! And those who were not of the class for whom all this was being done had to be a sort of saint, as far as she could see, to stomach all that they had to stomach — in the way of ingratitude, recrimination, and general brutality. She left the flat on her way to go and seek consolation from a girl friend, also a Communist — feeling a very angry martyr, and seething with *noblesse oblige*. She was at the moment full of class-hatred of the class it was her hard lot to have to save. (223)

Finally, Cruze never even grasps the reality of the situation and just jumps at the opportunity to violently act out his animalistic machismo.

Over the course of the novel, the fate of Hardcaster repeatedly intersects with that of two additional victims of circumstances, though in contrast to the former's political struggles, the latter's are more of an economic kind. Victor Stamp (Lewis continues his ironic naming scheme by giving another character a name that suggests power and agency where there is in fact almost none) is a penniless Australian painter who, with his wife Margot, is struggling to make ends meet in a London suffering the ravages of the Great Depression. Lewis describes their relationship in a way that is markedly different to his usual narrative voice. If his normal approach is to clinically dissect and laugh at the numerous inadequacies of human nature, Lewis momentarily holds his satirical tongue when it comes to Victor and Margot. He describes them in unusually warm terms as a doting husband and wife in a mutually gratifying relationship, which is evidently based on a genuine love considering how it persists through all their economic hardships. The problem — and this is where Lewis lets his cold realism intrude into that warm and loving relationship — is that, despite Margot's unyielding support of Victor's artistic ventures, he is not particularly talented as a painter. Not only do several characters remark on his obviously limited capabilities, but, as an early passage in the novel shows, Victor is intelligent enough to realize his limitations by himself:

> And there it stood — not worth the sail-cloth it was painted on: a thing outside himself that *would* not do what he wanted it to do: a monument of his inability to bring anything to life outside himself at all. The thing literally shouted *Second-rate!* at him. *Art-student* yes! But *Artist* not! it kept up its offensive heckling and cowed him every time. He never answered back. He bowed his head. He knew it was true. (85)

Nevertheless, the stubbornness with which he persists in that fruitless venture makes Victor another of Lewis's numerous studies in the vigorous-but-impotent masculine type. Describing him as a "big rough fellow, so good a specimen of the stockman breed, taller than most over here, with his large bony good looks" (86), Lewis's interest is in how these tall and handsome men of action project, on the one hand, both a vigorously raw physical energy and an animalistic intelligence but, on the other hand, lack a certain sense of cultural or intellectual refinement to harness those capabilities in an effective manner — the paradox being that such a cultural refinement would, of course, neuter these primitive energies. In this gallery of Lewis's flawed masculine "heroes", Victor thus stands as a more agreeable counterpart to Jack Cruze. In contrast to the predatory and violent conduct (both sexually and physically), his animalistic vigor manifests itself as that of a gentle giant: an essentially good-natured and stubborn mulishness.

We could say that Victor's "heroic" stubbornness and Margot's equally "heroic" romanticism, by which she encourages Victor's fruitless pursuits, embody the same kind of misplaced and tragicomic heroism that we have discussed with the example of the two star-crossed lovers in Bowie's "Heroes". They both stubbornly perform a romantic charade against their better knowledge with results that are tragic in how it leads to their deaths and comic in how these are entirely pointless and unnecessary deaths. Margot is a particularly interesting and complex character in that regard, because she goes against the grain in how Lewis usually privileges a masculine perspective. To make no mistake, Lewis invokes a fair share of gender stereotypes in his characterization of Margot: She is prone to hysteric fits, such as at O'Hara's party, where Victor has to shield her when the event momentarily threatens to turn into an orgy, and, in a more intensely foreboding passage right before the novel's climax, when she suffers a severe panic attack in a surreal scene with a performing dwarf. Furthermore, Lewis depicts her as a hopeless romantic. Her unyielding devotion to her heroic husband Victor is accompanied by a stereotypically feminine interest in literature that is manifested in her gushing admiration of Tennyson and particularly Virginia Woolf, "that great queen among women" (235). Apart from satirizing that aspect of Margot's character, Lewis also jumps at the opportunity to take a jab at the real-life salon revolutionaries of the

Bloomsbury Group by denouncing Woolf's literary space as a snobbish and aloof "'highbrow' feminist fairyland" (235) .

However, for all these feminine clichés, Margot is also shown to be quite smart and alert — definitely more than Victor who, though far from a simpleton, turns out to be just a tad too good-natured and credulous to survive in a reality replete with false bottoms. In fact, Lewis introduces the character in a moment of tragical (self-)awareness, reflecting upon their economic plights while Victor is still asleep. It is Margot who refers to their desperate situation as the titular "revenge for love" (70): the punishment inflicted on her and Victor for their utter foolishness to surrender themselves to a genuine and authentic love in a reality too harsh and too *fake* to permit such heroic flights of fancy. Moreover, Margot repeatedly proves herself an accurate judge of character, showing an intuitive awareness of the snobbism, malice and overall bad intentions present among the salon communist cliques and other shady characters with which O'Hara surrounds himself. She acts as a constant warning voice through the novel, but these warnings are brushed aside by Victor, who conforms a bit too neatly to his own *masculine* gender stereotype of it being *his* task to act as the protector in their relationship. Margot's role to the plot is very much that of a Cassandra-like figure: a clear-sighted woman able to anticipate and warn of the unfolding tragedy, but, due to her gender and her lack of socio-economic privilege, unable to prevent it from happening. There are thus false bottoms even to the supposedly genuine and loving relationship between Victor and Margot: Victor, who repeatedly meets his wife's skepticism with a broad "Clark Gable smile" (72), misconceives himself as an empowered masculine hero of Hollywood cinema, while Margot sees herself mirrored in her numerous literary heroines from the fictional spaces of Homer to Woolf (307-13), with both fatally underestimating the harsh realities of their own plight.

Due to their precarious economic situation — there is no market for paintings in the depression-era thirties and certainly not for a mediocre painter — Victor eventually agrees to work as an art forger in an operation run by two of O'Hara's associates, the shady Abershaw and the gangster Freddie Salmon (who, Lewis notes, "had a really enormous false bottom to his face" [256]). Victor's brief spell at the "fake-masterpiece factory" leads to another preposterously comical scene. Tasked with forging a Van Gogh self-portrait, Victor decides that he could do a better job if he, despite not looking anything like the man, dressed up as Van Gogh himself:

> He was disguised in the fur cap of a Canadian trapper. A heavy white bandage, descending under the chin, covered his right ear. He was supposed to be Van Gogh. He was engaged in the manufacture of a Van Gogh 'self-portrait'. (249)

The altogether ridiculous disguise already betrays the fact that Victor is evidently not suited for the job of a forger. Too straightforward, honest, and, above all, too indebted to the heroic notion of art as the expression of a true authentic self, Victor is unable to approach his task in the appropriately playful manner of an artificer. Instead, he resorts to an awkward attempt to forcefully transform his own monolithic artistic self into Van Gogh with equally awkward results. Nevertheless and despite his limited talents, Victor actually manages to create a more or less competent forgery of a Van Gogh. However, he cannot do that final step required of a forger of art, namely to dissociate his own artistic self from his creation, that is, to disavow the authorship and thereby turn the painting from an imitation of Van Gogh into a real fake Van Gogh.

When Freddie Salmon, noting that Victor's painting is indeed still too much of a genuine Victor Stamp and not enough of a fake Van Gogh, requests that he makes the appropriate changes, Victor's stubborn anachronistic heroism gets the better of him. Insulted by the request to make that essential disavowal, he instead takes full ownership of his creation by destroying it. Violently *stamping out* the canvas with his boot, Victor's definite and irreversible claim of authorship of the painting is both an attempt to reassert his artistic autonomy and to appeal to the essential authenticity of his emotions: "[…] this is a lousy job, that's why, and that just about expresses my feelings about it. I thought I'd give my feelings a break too. They've earned it.'" (267). As with Hardcaster, however, this little act of rebellious heroism does not achieve anything beyond his immediate personal satisfaction (as Victor mirthfully notes: "'So ends my career as a faker!'" [267]). It only drives him further into debt with Abershaw, who ends the chapter on a sinister note: "'Mr. Stamp, however, will come to regret his day's work […] I can find him a type of work that he will like even less in the end than what he has been doing here. We shall see. Good-bye'" (274).

The novel contrasts Victor's unsuccessful attempt to pose as an art forger with that of his fellow painter Tristram Phipps, the husband of Gillian Phipps (who, however, predictably leaves him for Jack Cruze in the latter half of the novel). Phipps, or Tristy, as he is usually referred to in the novel, is in many respects very much the counterpart to Victor Stamp. Lewis does not make much of an effort to describe Tristy's physical appearance, but from what little we can gather he is far from the imposing embodiment of animalistic masculinity that Victor is. Rather, his looks seem to be mostly in line with his slightly twee and meek sounding name: skinny, young-looking, with an air described as "dreamy" (91), and very much the polar opposite in looks of Jack Cruze (98). It would be easy to assume that Lewis inserts Tristy into the novel simply to ridicule the cliché of the bohemian artist: the painter as an absent-minded

and whimsical outsider perpetually in need of money. However, there is also a very sober, rational, and calculating side to the character that belies that initial impression. In an argument with Gillian, for instance, that immediately follows the aforementioned incident with Hardcaster and Cruze, Tristy turns out to be anything but a flighty bohemian in how he, in a firm yet calm manner, manages to refute her outlandish claims by which she attempts to justify her newfound hatred of Hardcaster (224-31). It is clear that Tristy is intended to be a more nuanced character that transcends mere parody — one which, in contrast to the incorrigibly authentic and foolishly heroic Victor, seems aware of how his bohemian appearance is always also a consciously put-on act. His calculated restraint is on full display during a meeting with Jack Cruze:

> Like all artists, Tristram had a good opinion of himself [...] and he looked on Jack and what he did, when he first saw him, as so much dirt. [...] He dressed the part of the blooming young genius — he looked as though he hadn't washed for six months and probably he hadn't, it's always been the pose of the artists. But Tristram was the sort of lad who knew how to get on the right side of you — he didn't show to Jack's face, of course, that he considered him an inferior biped to himself. It was quite the reverse. He said it must be wonderful to know so much about income-tax as Jack did. (99)

Tristy, in other words, is very much aware of how the social reality of being a bohemian artist/genius also entails the conscious act of playing a role or projecting, in other words, a false bottom. In contrast to Victor, he is able to both look and act the part and, at least measured by how that act is received by others, does so with great success. What certainly helps, however, is the fact that Tristy — again in contrast to Victor — has genuine talents as a painter; he is lauded as "about the biggest artist in his generation" (98) and he provides essential assistance in Victor's awkward attempt at forging a Van Gogh.

However, Tristy's talents both as a painter and a social performer are not enough to make a living in the economic realities of the 1930s. As described by one of the patrons at O'Hara's party, in a modern world "of starving craftsmen, unsold statues, and unwanted masterpieces in oils and chalks" (160), even Tristy has to make his livelihood, as he relies to Cruze, "by doing drawings of motor lamps or of ladies' and gents' underwear for the advertisement pages" (100). In contrast to Victor, however, he just possesses enough sober pragmatism to survive in that environment, eventually ending up working at Freddie Salmon's art factory as well, albeit evidently with more success than his fellow painter. If both Victor and Tristy are very much Lewisian figures in their elitist outlook of seeing the artist as a special breed that stands out from the common man, Tristy is at least amenable to *acting out* this part of the artist as an actor instead

of authentically *being* it. Still, he needs to come up with his own contrived self-justification to reconcile his artistic ambitions with the fact that he has to realize them as a faker. His own false bottom is to presume that every major artist must have been a faker to some degree:

> Tristy was predisposed to believe that Van Gogh must have been a determined and inveterate 'faker' — a confirmed musclerin, coin and cribber, of other people's art, and most prone to help himself to all he could lay his hands on. […] And doubtless why so many of Van Gogh's pen-drawings are almost indistinguishable from a Rembrandt pen-drawing is because Van Gogh had so often faked the lucrative scratchings of the older master. (261)

If Tristy's self-justifying narrative that posits the artist per se as a faker making a living by gaming the system seems rather contrived, it is nevertheless the more practical view compared to Victor's. We could thus read Tristy as a Bowie-esque figure in how he is an artist with actual talents who, however, is also aware that to realize these talents in a post-heroic age he has to do so as an artificer. In that sense, the discreet and unassuming Tristy ends up as the real survivor in the novel. Though only a secondary character, he is the only one of the less privileged figures in the novel to come out of the story more or less unscathed. In a way that resembles Lewis's original Vorticist mercenary figure, Tristy engages with the modern reality of the present without being consumed by it. He is often present at key moments in the novel (even during some of the conspiratorial discussions involving O'Hara and Abershaw), but he simultaneously manages to keep a low profile and retain a critical modicum of distance from the proceedings. It is thus only logical that Tristy unceremoniously disappears from the novel at the end of its penultimate part. By exiting the stage at the right time and without drawing too much attention to himself, he quietly misses the novel's tragic climax and, as a consequence, survives. Tristy's low-key approach might thus not be one that conjures an authentically heroic or tragic pathos, but it is one that *works.* Victor's heroic masculinity, however, while certainly eliciting (not least from Lewis's narrator figure) a sense of awe or amazement, evidently does not fit in with modern reality and is thus bound to end in a comically absurd tragedy.

In the final part of the novel, the scenery shifts back to Spain with Victor having been coerced into another arrangement with Abershaw. He is ostensibly supposed to assist Hardcaster in a weapons smuggling operation operating from a French town near the Spanish border. Unbeknownst to both, however, Abershaw is playing another sinister game. Having learned to forge Victor's signature, which was foreshadowed at O'Hara's party where Margot observed

the incident, he is leaking faked correspondence to the Spanish Civil Guard in order to paint Victor as the ringleader of the operation. Although Margot suspects foul play, her pleas are ignored by Victor. When the actual smuggling run is supposed to proceed, there are thus multiple layers of deception at work: Victor deceives a worried Margot in order to slip away towards the Spanish border in the decoy car. Meanwhile, Hardcaster, in an attempt to make the decoy operation seem more credible, has deceived Victor by telling him that he is transporting the real weapon shipment. All of them, however, remain unaware of Abershaw's additional machinations from afar.

As a result of this excess of false bottoms, things take a turn towards the absurdly tragic. When Margot finds out about the smuggling run, she takes the train into Spain in order to intercept Victor before he makes the delivery. Hardcaster, who has quietly fallen in love with Margot in the meantime, follows her in an effort to protect her from potential harm. While Margot manages to intercept Victor and thus delay his arrival, Hardcaster is arrested at Victor's intended destination by the Civil Guard, who, tipped off by Abershaw's forged correspondence, had been lying in wait for the supposed ringleader of the operation. Still under the assumption that they are transporting real weapons, Victor and Margot flee in their car towards the border, running over and most likely killing a member of the Civil Guard during their flight. When their car breaks down in the Pyrenees, they continue on foot but not before finally uncovering the deception when Victor tries to arm himself with one of the weapons. Typically for Lewis, however, this grave moment of tragic realization is not met with shock or horror. Rather, he highlights the essential absurdity of the situation instead by having Margot break into what we could very well read as Lewis's own laughter. It is the harsh and knowing laughter of the satirist:

> But Margot still contemplated the patent car, built for the pawky racketeers. She grinned stupidly at this big murderous dove-grey body, all opened up, like the carcass of a captured shark, and now utterly shown up. Even for Victor it was quite discredited. And at last she laughed outright at the absurdity of it. She laughed loudly and without restraint. A false bottom — a false bottom on wheels; but all full of nothing at all, except packing paper and bricks! She went on laughing. The joke grew on her, the more she thought about it. She went on laughing more and more. (374)

Having finally become aware of the absurd nothingness at the center of the novel's labyrinth of false bottoms, it is only logical that Victor's and Margot's eventual fate is not narrated directly, but only relayed after the fact. The final chapter of the novel ends where it began: with Hardcaster languishing in a cell of a Spanish prison. The difference is, of course, that, having been caught

red-handed, his hopes of being set free and returned to England a second time are predictably slim. Through a newspaper article, he learns that Victor's and Margot's bodies had been found in the Pyrenees at the foot of a precipice. Presumably, they fell to their deaths when they were surprised by a storm while trying to cross the mountains on foot. It is in light of these events that, in the novel's final paragraph, the voice of tragedy finally makes itself heard in Hardcaster's mind. Tellingly, however, it is a voice that is only able to articulate itself out of the past:

> a strained and hollow voice, part of a sham-culture outfit […] was talking in his ears in a reproachful singsong. It was denouncing him out of the past, where alone now it was able to articulate; it was singling him out as a man who led people into mortal danger, people who were dear beyond expression to the possessor of the passionate, the artificial the unreal, yet penetrating voice, and crying to him now to give back, she implored him, the young man, Absalom, whose life he had had in his keeping, and who had somehow, unaccountably, been lost, out of the world and out of Time! (380)

If the novel thus concludes in a moment of genuine and moral outrage, Lewis nevertheless undercuts it by stressing how these outdated categories – morals, heroism, tragedy – must shatter against the harsh realities of modernity. The pure voice of tragedy is simultaneously denounced as both a "part of a sham-culture outfit" and an articulation of Hardcaster's self-pity. Lewis's cold rationalism, his absurdist outlook, and his sobering practicological voice thus even intrude into that final moment of deep despair. By relaying this pre-modern jeremiad with its direct biblical reference through, of all people, the mind of the staunch communist class warrior Hardcaster, Lewis mercilessly points to the folly and the anachronistic nature of heroism and romance in the modern age. If the notion of a pure tragic pathos is to find an outlet to articulate itself in modernity, this articulation will dissipate almost immediately and with no effect. As the novel's final sentence suggests, the impure extrinsic manifestation of that pathos amounts to nothing but "a sudden tear, which fell upon the dirty floor of the prison" (380).

We can thus read *The Revenge for Love* as a further statement of Lewis's ambivalent skepticism towards a heroic notion of art: that while those larger-than-life qualities of a truly heroic art may be desirable in theory, these aspirations must shatter against the improbability of realizing them in concrete practice. It is a point that we have already noted as early as in his Vorticist phase with his equivocal stance on avant-garde utopianism. The core difference is, of course, that in the latter case this skepticism was uttered in a playful and almost burlesque manner, whereas in *The Revenge for Love* the point comes across

much more urgently. Lewis's cultural critique gains an additional level of gravity simply by emphasizing the actual material consequences of ill-advised heroism: In the post-heroic reality of the present, those who play at being heroes will invariably end up as crippled or dead bodies. Far from being heroic figures, they are merely the cannon-fodder of an economically more privileged class. In contrast, the latter can still afford to live out these anachronistic fantasies; however, as the example of O'Hara's salon communist coteries and of Gillian Phipps show, this type of engagement can then only take the form of an empty leisurely distraction within that aforementioned "sham-culture outfit". In light of these hard facts, the fundamental ethical question for those who lack that privilege — the Hardcasters, Victors, Margots, and Tristys of this world — must thus not be how to live out some grand heroic ideal, but simply how to survive.

As with many of his novels, *The Revenge for Love* is partly informed by autobiographical events. Myers, for example, has noted how the positive portrayal of Margot and the affectionate relationship between her and Victor reflects Lewis's own relationship with his wife Froanna, whom he had married in 1930 (99). Moreover, the financial hardships he endured as a struggling artist during the interwar period and his resentment towards the, in his view, lesser talented but economically more privileged artists from the upper classes are very well documented.[44] Still, it is clear that *The Revenge for Love* is not to be read autobiographically. As our discussion should have made clear, Lewis's core concerns negotiated in the novel are very much abstracted onto different and clearly fictional characters, of which none can be read as an approximation of the author himself. It goes without saying that the credulous and only middlingly talented Victor is not to be read as Lewis's alter ego and neither is the discreet and slightly effeminate Tristy nor the stubborn and cantankerous Hardcaster.

However, if anything rings most clearly through the novel, it is Lewis's own anti-war stance. To be perfectly clear, Lewis was not a pacifist. In fact, he thoroughly resented the pacifist stances of some of his peers such as the Bloomsbury Group, because he saw these as self-righteous beliefs that one could only afford from a position of economic privilege. In that regard, what Lewis saw as the *Bloomsbury Principle* was very much in line with the idle talk of the salon communists lambasted in *The Revenge for Love.* Instead, his anti-war stance was derived from the perhaps somewhat unusual way he dealt with his own wartime experiences as an artillery officer at the Western Front of the First World War. What is striking is the way Lewis relates his frontline experiences in his first

44 See, for example, Myer's account of Lewis's lifelong quarrel with the Bloomsbury Group, 41-48.

autobiography *Blasting and Bombardiering*, which was written shortly after he had finished his work on *The Revenge for Love* and published in the same year. We find in Lewis neither the moral outrage of Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen nor, at the other end of the spectrum, something like Ernst Jünger's account of trench warfare as the extreme experience of a cosmic sublime. There are no such metaphysical points of reference to Lewis's own wartime memoirs. Rather they are written in a sober and almost clinically descriptive tone, setting themselves off from the jocular, conversational tone of the "Blasting" chapters, which focus on his artistic endeavors before and after the war. Lewis's choice to deal with the effects of the war in this sober and intellectualist manner echoes the Vorticist principle of calm spectatorial detachment – a principle he also visualized with regard to the war in *A Battery Shelled*, his commissioned large-size painting as an official war artist (Fig. 20). His denouncement of the war was therefore not rooted in absolute morals, but in a cold ascertainment of empirical facts. To Lewis, the war was not primarily a disaster because it was an abject crime or a tragedy, but simply because it was a thoroughly stupid and pointless waste. This stance is not to be understood as a belittlement of the war's enormous devastation and its far-reaching consequences, but as a way to not endow the industrialized mass slaughter of World War One with any kind of pathos, whether positive or negative. Lewis's external perspective thus responded to the war in a way that emphasized not its moral atrocities, but its nihilistic absurdity. In the way that his defense strategy against that absurd reality was not absolutist moral outrage, but a set of situational practices derived from a calm and disciplined ascertaining of the concrete situation, we recognize, again, the figure of the Vorticist mercenary.

If Lewis's survival strategy during the war, as relayed in *Blasting and Bombardiering*, was very much practicological in how it revolved around maintaining professional composure and acting decisively after cooly ascertaining the extrinsic facts at hand, then this approach extended to his anti-war sentiments. In the same way, the hard external shell of intellectualism did not permit for spontaneous emotional outbursts of moralistic rage, but only for the cold, rationalist deliberation of the external side of things. To Lewis, another war had thus to be avoided at all costs not because it would constitute a moral or human catastrophe, but simply because the ensuing devastation would be a thoroughly stupid, pointless, and unreasonable thing to engage in. The irony is, of course, that this seemingly sober and unperturbed pragmatism led him down a confused and politically indefensible zigzag course during the 1930s. Lewis's highly problematic politics during that period have been thoroughly documented: How he feared that another war would most likely result from

Soviet aggression and, ultimately preferring a sense of order over revolutionary chaos, came out on the side of fascism instead; how, in line with his maxim that another war was to be avoided at all costs, he advocated a strategy of appeasement toward the fascist regimes on the European continent; how he fatally underestimated the racist and antisemitic elements of fascism as mere political theater that was not to be taken seriously; how his combined illiberalism and anti-communism during that period irreparably ruined his reputation in literary circles and beyond; and, how he ultimately recanted his views around 1938, when it became clear that it would be the fascists and not the Soviets that would bring about the next war, writing in short succession the pro-semitic (but inopportunely titled) pamphlet *The Jews: Are They Human?* and his thorough denouncement of Nazism, *The Hitler Cult: And How It Will End* (both published in 1939). While, from an ideological point of view, Lewis's politics were wildly inconsistent, what remained consistent and, in fact, persisted past this moment of reckoning into the early years of the Cold War was how they were derived from that decidedly extrinsic or practicological outlook. In late critical writings from the late 1940s and the 1950s, most notably *America and Cosmic Man* (1949), *The Writer and the Absolute* (1952), and also *The Demon of Progress in the Arts* (1955), Lewis already ruminates on the looming threat of another world war — this time one of the nuclear kind — and on what would be the best course of action for civilization to somehow manage to live through it. What we can notice in these late reflections are how they still do not seem motivated by deep ideological convictions, but by a more superficial and immediate concern about how to keep the current state of society or civilization from disintegrating any further. Again, Lewis's primary concern was for the prosaic question of how to survive.

I am, however, less concerned with the specificities of Lewis's politics and more with the underlying outlook or ethos as such. Again, what we can notice is how this external, non-metaphysical, and, above all, ideologically noncommittal approach — Lewis once archly described his politics as "partly communist and partly fascist, with a distinct streak of monarchism in my marxism, but at bottom anarchist with a healthy passion for order" (Gasiorek, "Wyndham Lewis on Art, Culture and Politics in the 1930s" 206) — connects with the post-heroic and post-utopian stance of 1970s art-rock. As our juxtaposition with David Bowie has shown in this chapter, we can recognize several significant parallels: There is the abandonment of a notion of art oriented on quixotic ideals. If one of the core themes of *The Revenge for Love* is the folly of heroism in a post-heroic reality, then Bowie's parodistic approach to rock culture amounts to a similar rejection of the latter's naïve 1960s ideals: that compound of pacifism and blind hedonism

which found its expression in the creed that "All You Need Is Love" (Beatles). In both cases, however, this act of abandonment is not made with great enthusiasm; rather, it comes as the sober acknowledgment of a banal necessity, which is very much accompanied by a latent sense of regret for those lost hopes and dreams. In their stead, we note a decisive shift toward an external or empirical perspective that focuses on tangible surfaces, appearances, and poses (in other words, on extrinsic practices) instead of transcendental or "deep" concepts. This is a point, incidentally, which we also discussed in the preceding chapter in reference to Diederichsen's claim about the impure empiricism of pop. One of the consequences of this shift is that it results in an outlook on society that is altogether harsher and more combative. Whether we look at, for instance, at Lewis's reinvention during the interwar years as the artistic persona of "The Enemy" or Bowie's decision to frame his ""Heroes"" within inverted commas, we are looking at an artistic approach where, ultimately, the question of survival takes precedence. In more general terms, we could also say that it is a decisive shift away from the arts dealing with the questions of how things should be and how to best get to that point and towards the questions of how things actually are and how to best preserve that state and/or oneself as existing within that state. In both cases, a perhaps not entirely intended consequence of this shift is how the artist is removed from its exalted position into that of merely being a better trained or educated biped: a cunning faker or artificer who, like a professional athlete or an experienced mercenary, is simply able to do a better job at surviving or, at the very least, project the illusion of being able to do so.

If our cross-reading in this chapter has focused mostly on David Bowie as our reference point on the side of British art rock, it is important to restate here the point already made earlier in this chapter: The choice of Bowie should not suggest that he represents a singular example of what we have described as a post-utopian approach in rock culture. Rather, Bowie is simply a convenient choice to elaborate what is a much more widespread phenomenon. Bowie's work, in other words, stands as a preeminent example of how, from the 1970s onwards, a significant segment of British rock and pop culture started to embrace a post-utopian and post-heroic artistic ethos, in which art persists (that is, survives) by taking refuge in artifice, and artistic production is itself conceived as a fundamentally extrinsic and material practice of skillful fakery. In that sense, we could also say that this survivalist mindset is reflected in an ongoing concern about the threat of devastating or even world-ending wars with the apocalyptic backdrop of the *Ziggy Stardust* narrative or the post-apocalyptic New York hellscape of *Diamond Dogs* being only two of many examples where Bowie

continued the negotiation of Cold War anxieties, which we already encounter in Lewis's late critical writings.

The core point to note at the end of this chapter is thus that, while Bowie certainly stands as a seminal figure very much at the center of this shift, he is by far not the only one. It is in particular with the advent of punk that this survivalist outlook gained another level of intensity and I would argue that we should therefore read Bowie's self-reflective strand of post-utopian glam rock as very much a precursor of that style. As already pointed out, my argument is that there is a direct line of influence from the Bowie-esque side of glam to the intellectualist strands of punk and its offshoots such as art punk and post punk and that we should therefore read all of them as part and parcel of a broader ensemble of artistic practices, for which I have chosen art rock as an umbrella term. As concrete examples we should, of course, first refer back to our extensive discussion of Wire in the preceding chapters. It should be fairly obvious that what we have said in these chapters about Wire's artistic approaches — from the sober and analytical spectatorship of "Reuters" to the robotic and harsh satirical racket of *Send* — we could also easily apply to the survivalist ethos discussed in this chapter. In addition, we could also bring up the example of Magazine and their 1978 single *Shot by Both Sides,* in particular, which has become something of an early anthem of post punk. The song is an urgent, paranoid rocker driven by a 1960s spy guitar motif and lyrically very much a Lewisian statement of a noncommittal political stance taken in response to the harsh external realities of modernity: "I wormed my way into the heart of the crowd / I was shocked to find what was allowed / I didn't lose myself in the crowd." If the song's verses thus serve as a declaration of political neutrality, the chorus then echoes Lewis's own political paranoia and distrust in its acknowledgment that this gesture would invariably make one into an enemy hunted by all sides: "Shot by both sides / On the run / To the outside of everything."

Another example worth mentioning, particularly with regard to Lewis's notion of the self as a machine, is the early style of Siouxsie and the Banshees, where the liberating aspects of reinventing one's artistic persona as a machine come into play again with an added aspect of gender politics. On their debut album *The Scream,* Siouxsie Sioux's cold, declamatory odes to the beauty of the metal body ("Metal is tough / Metal will sheen / Metal will rule in my master scheme" ["Metal Postcard"]) is paired with an equally metallic sonic landscape of screeching guitar motifs and dry, minimalist drumming. As such, they are again examples of a combative but also carefully deliberated and professional response to harsh external circumstances — the kind of riposte of a Vorticist mercenary to punk's more spontaneous and psychologically direct outbursts of unmediated

anger. With regard to the obvious gender aspect, it seems particularly striking how the band's approach — its cold, detached, and robotic impersonality — seems less about suggesting a specifically female type of empowerment. Rather, it seems to reject outright any notion of agency rooted in concepts such as gender and identity. Instead of staging a re-appropriation of the (female) body as biological matter or a symbolic social construct, it embraces an external or practicological notion of agency taking shape as a genderless automaton or metal shell. In other words, agency is located not in an imaginary state of being but in a concrete set of actions or practices. It is a notion of empowerment that does not hinge on a given or essentialist notion of the self but solely — and this is where we hear echoes of Lewis's machine-selves — on the reconfigurable texture of hard external surfaces.

Stylistically related but closer to Lewis's notion of satire is Killing Joke, not least because the band's name already encapsulates how the Lewisian satire toes the line between describing external atrocities with blunt analytical detachment and reacting to it with absurdist satirical laughter. Once described by the band's drummer Paul Ferguson as "the sound of the earth vomiting" (Smith), their early sound represents the utterly bleak outer edges of post punk aesthetics: a mixture of robotic tribal drumming, harsh synthesizer drones, jarring guitar riffs, and stridently shouted vocals. With self-explanatory song titles such as "Requiem", "Wardance", "Bloodsports" (all part of their self-titled debut album), "Follow the Leaders", "Tension", or "Unspeakable" (from their second album *What's THIS for…!*), their records present a panopticon of death and destruction that stands as an altogether fitting soundtrack to the reawakening of Cold War tensions in the early 1980s.

Yet, at the same time, there is an absurdist and satirical undercurrent to this bleak spectacle. If the band's soundscapes are usually very harsh and aggressive, their rhythmical foundations are nevertheless usually rooted in disco or some other genre of dance music. As, for example, their early b-side "Pssyche" (to their 7-inch single *Wardance*) attests, there is an infectiously groovy quality underpinning the blunt display of aggression. On the visual level, there is also the fact that the figure of the jester or the harlequin has always been a central element of the band's iconography. In that respect, it is certainly no coincidence that Alan Moore appropriated the band's name as the title for his influential contribution to the Batman mythos, the 1988 Joker origin story *Batman: The Killing Joke*. This Joker-esque dark absurdism is perhaps most evident on Mike Coles' cover for their 1980 *Wardance* single. It consists of a photomontage clearly indebted to the work of John Heartfield, which shows the figure of Fred Astaire elegantly dancing over a blood-red battlefield littered with dead bodies (Fig.

21). In a 1979 fanzine interview, singer Jaz Coleman specifically referenced the trenches of World War One when asked to elaborate on the band's darkly absurdist outlook:

> The Killing Joke is like when people watch something like Monty Python on the television and laugh, when really they're laughing at themselves. It's like a soldier in the First World War. He's in the trench, he knows his life is gone and that within the next ten minutes he's gonna be dead … and then suddenly he realises that some cunt back in Westminster's got him sussed — 'What am I doing this for? I don't want to kill anyone, I'm just being controlled.' (Coleman)

What most of the examples mentioned above have in common is how, in pop journalism and criticism, they are often referenced as so-called survivors. The use of the term "survivor" in pop discourse is interesting in how it is casually bestowed as a badge of honor to those artists and bands who have enjoyed longevity without attaining the kind of superstardom that ensures a steady career regardless of one's creative trajectory over time. It is thus a clearly positive attribute that suggests a consistent artistic output and perhaps even relevance over a longer time period, usually at least two decades. Of the above, Wire and Killing Joke are particularly good examples, as they still remain very much active as a creative force at the time of writing. The implication of the term is, of course, that managing to survive in that way is something that is considered a rather unlikely outcome and thus is to be respected if not admired. What is thus interesting is how the term seems to have seamlessly inscribed itself into the idiom of pop discourse as a way to describe a thoroughly unheroic, pathos-free, and matter-of-fact approach to be able to persist as an artist — that is, *to survive* — without it seeming of lesser value than a purportedly genuine heroic mode.

The canonization of the notion of the artist as a survivor points to an essential sober-mindedness in a part of pop discourse that seems to stand in stark contrast to the often overinflated prose of everyday pop journalism — the kind of writing on the arts that Lewis was singling out as hollow punditry in *The Demon of Progress in the Arts.* Although the frequent use of the term might just be a case of it being a convenient and memorable phrase, it nevertheless seems to suggest a practicological acknowledgment of the fact that, if truly transformative, revolutionary, or transcendental art is often impossible to achieve, surviving might in fact just be enough. The same cannot be said of Lewis, although, according to the rules of pop discourse, he should have been canonized as one of the great survivors of high modernism decades ago. One particular difference that might at least partly account for his marginal status is how he generally

struggled to properly stake out that practicological artistic ethos; or, more likely, that it was impossible to properly articulate it in his contemporary environment. As we have noted on several instances, there is a persistent equivocality to much of his writing that oscillates between heroic highbrow aspirations and an awareness that this pose itself represents an anachronism in industrialized modernity. In other words, the heroic principle inherent to high modernism with its grand aspirations seemed much more of a last gasp of an older romantic spirit than a truly contemporary phenomenon fit for the reality of modern mass societies. In Latourian terms, we could say that it still, at least to a significant degree, subscribed to a notion of modernity seen as a steady and irreversible process of purification. In contrast, the popular modernism of art rock, as a segment of rock culture that had gradually divested itself from its naïvely heroic roots, already seemed much closer to Latour's own view on modernity: the awareness that we have, in fact, never really been modern. As such, it evidently was less of a problem in the art rock tradition to establish that sober survivalist approach — that of a canny artist-as-artificer — as a viable artistic practice. Those artists and bands frequently labelled survivors can be considered as having been canonized without dispute (if, for some of them, merely at the outer edges of the canon).

It seems fitting to conclude this line of thought — and the chapter — with a final reference to Bowie as arguably the most astonishing artificer in art rock. If Lewis, in his "Essay on the Objective of Plastic Art in Our Time", referred to art as an "ingenious test of our relative, but indeed quite clumsy and laughable prowess" (25), then Bowie's final act as an artist could in fact be read as an instance that managed to project a near perfect illusion of transcending that "clumsy and laughable prowess". I am, of course, referring to how, paradoxically, he succeeded in turning his own death into a perfectly choreographed and dignified act of survivalist defiance. To briefly recapitulate the essential facts: When Bowie, in 2015, recorded his final album, *Blackstar*, he was already suffering from terminal cancer, but he managed to keep both this and the recording sessions a complete secret from the press and the public. Parallel to the recording of the album, he was also working on the production of an off-Broadway musical titled *Lazarus*. The two productions were very much intertwined, as the latter's titular theme song ended up on the *Blackstar* album as well. When *The Times* reported on a rumor about the new album in October 2015, Bowie's management issued a brief and perfunctory statement confirming that a new album would be released on the 8th of January 2016, Bowie's 69th birthday (Hodgkinson). What followed was the usual pre-release buzz. There was the release of a first single, "Blackstar", with an accompanying

music video in November. Another single, “Lazarus”, followed in December and a corresponding music video was released the day before the actual release of the album. There were also the usual press photographs of the man himself, with one particularly notable example showing a spirited and youthful Bowie with blonde hair and a broad smile (Fig. 22). What stands out the most, however, is the near unanimous praise with which the album was received in pre-release reviews. The critical consensus of the music press, which was still completely oblivious about Bowie’s terminal illness, was that *Blackstar* represented a reinvigorated Bowie and perhaps another entirely new creative beginning for the artist.[45] Evidently, the album effortlessly managed to stand as a work on its own. However, only two days after the release, Bowie’s son, film director Duncan Jones, broke the news that his father had passed away on the 10th of January 2016.

Of course, hindsight is always twenty-twenty in these matters; nevertheless, it remains astonishing how unexpected Bowie’s passing came considering how his final artistic efforts seemed to be all about death: There was the album’s title, *Blackstar,* which is another term for a black hole — that is, a *dead star*. There were the lyrics of his final songs, which were full of references to death, mortality, and terminal illnesses. There were his two final music videos with the one for “Blackstar” showing the corpse of an astronaut in its opening scene, an obvious reference to Bowie’s first alter ego, Major Tom. The music video for “Lazarus” was even more blatant with its focus on Bowie as a dying man lying in a hospital bed. There was the *Lazarus* musical, which revisited the character of Thomas Jerome Newton, the immortal alien he played in the 1976 film *The Man Who Fell to Earth,* and dealt with his struggle to finally find some kind of eternal peace. Considering the sheer overabundance of hints like these, it speaks to his capabilities as a faker or illusionist that his passing still took both the press and the public by complete surprise.

The important point to make about all this is that this is a case, I would argue, where we can see very clearly what an art conceived as mere artifice can achieve at its absolute best. At the end of the day, it is clear that Bowie’s final artistic effort still remains firmly rooted in the realm of artifice. It would be missing the point to claim that the way he managed to string along his audience one last time amounts to the realization of an abstract metaphysical ideal or some other lofty or otherworldly principle. Rather, it is more fitting to say that this was still essentially a deftly executed trick, a dextrous feat, or a very clever sleight of

45 See, for example, the album review on *Pitchfork* which was published three days before Bowie’s death (Dombal).

hand. After all, we could read Bowie's final artistic effort as a take on that old magician's trick of hiding something in plain sight. However, we also have to concede that it is a sleight of hand executed in an astonishingly masterful way. If Bowie's art was, to quote Lewis again, a way of "playing at being what we designate as matter" ("Essay on the Objective of Plastic Art in Our Time" 26), he managed to do so in a manner that projected a near perfect illusion of him actually being capable of transcending that matter-of-fact state of being, leaving an utterly stunned audience in his wake. As such — and therein lies the paradox of an artificer performing his or her craft on that level — this mere material practice of survival, this "test [...] of our clumsy and laughable prowess" (25) turns into a practice that seems to survive even beyond death. If the role of the immortal hero is thus barred for the artist, then what remains is at least the choice of the impure or hybrid figure of the revenant Lazarus.

V Personality as Surface

In the preceding chapter, we discussed how both Lewis's modernism as well as art rock as a post-1968 variant of popular modernism overlap in how they appear to share a survivalist ethos: the concern that, if one is to survive in modernity, one has to divest oneself of false and anachronistic notions of heroism, even if that acknowledgement comes reluctantly and without any marked enthusiasm. Rather, what the individual living within the industrialized and artless mass societies of the modern reality of the present requires is a broad ensemble of cunning survival strategies: an adaptable set of skills and techniques, by which a subject can, if only temporarily, thwart or elude those overwhelming collective forces and power relations inherent to the modern condition and thus retain at least a modicum of relative agency. As I have argued, this is manifested, in the arts, in a reluctant turning of one's back to a grand notion of Art with a capital 'A' and towards a smaller notion of art as trickery or artifice.

I already alluded in the previous chapter to how this turning away from a grand and heroic pathos also affects the notion of the (artistic) self. Instead of the artist as a romantic hero, the survivalist mode of the artist in modernity is that of the unheroic and non-committal, but also thoroughly professional and highly disciplined figure of the mercenary. We could also say, in order to use a less warlike metaphor, that the only truly viable artistic mode of existing in modernity is as a *player*. In this chapter, I would like to explore this notion of the post-heroic self even further, as it will allow us not to highlight additional similarities between Lewis's modernism and the popular modernism of art rock, but also — and perhaps more importantly — point to some crucial differences. As should become clear, these differences allowed the representatives of the latter to engage with modernity in a way that, in a purely practical sense of the word, was ultimately more successful than Lewis's. I already made a similar suggestion in my cross-readings of Lewis and Wire in the second chapter. As I argued there, the differences in both their self-positioning as artists and the given institutional conditions they were operating in (Wire out of, and partly against, a popular idiom and Lewis out of, and partly against, a high cultural idiom) allowed the former to bring forth a more sustainable or, for that matter, more *practical* realization of that practicological modernism.

One of the fundamental ironies of Lewis is that, for all his explicit and implicit survivalist poses — for all his valorizations of the modern artist as a supremely talented tactician or a professional mercenary well-equipped to meet

the challenges of the reality of the present — he was in fact barely hanging on for most of his artistic life. It is particularly the more recent biography of Lewis by Paul O'Keeffe that reads like an endless series of missed opportunities and failed ventures: a promising artistic life lived constantly on the brink of bankruptcy and squandered due to countless petty and unnecessary feuds and squabbles. There is, in other words, a stark contrast to his sharp and sober analysis of the precarious realities that the artist finds himself in in modern industrialized mass societies and the (sham-)heroic pomposity by which he himself approached his own artistic career. If Lewis correctly recognized that it would be an utter absurdity to try to embody the role of the heroically authentic artist in a modern reality that had rendered this category obsolete, then he also proved completely incapable of applying that insight to his own artistic life. If British art rock adopted that post-heroic or practicological approach in the late twentieth century, then, as I would argue, it did so in a way that was ultimately more sustainable. Having already suggested as much in the more specific cross-reading of Lewis and Wire, I will come back to this claim on a more general level with regard to how the post-heroic concept of the artist-as-artificer discussed in the previous chapter affects the notion of the artistic self in modern reality.

However, it seems wise to briefly recapitulate the essential parallels from which we can then eventually move towards gradually working out the differences. What bears repeating is how strongly the notion of the (modern) artist as an artificer is intertwined with a practicological outlook. In the way that artifice as the only viable way to make art in an artless modern reality represents a superficial or depthless practice, it very much represents a practicological conception of art as something that is exclusively informed by and reflects back on a world constituted by sheer externalities. When we thus speak of a modern *ethos* of fakery or of art-as-artifice, it needs to be stressed that we are not referring to an ethos as a high ideal or an abstract morality. Rather, the term refers to its more practical meanings of *custom* or *habit* as an extrinsic ensemble of concrete practices rather than the abstract system of values ultimately derived from these concrete ways of living, of behaving, of simply *doing things.* It refers, in other words, back to the etymological (Old Greek) roots of the term as something describing concrete things ("an accustomed place") and practices ("custom", "usage", "manners") in external reality and not to the second-order philosophical abstraction of these concrete things and practices into a more permanent and "theoretical" *ethics.*

With regard to our notion of the artist-as-artificer, our discussion of Lewis's *The Revenge for Love* in the preceding chapter has shown that the adoption of

this artist-persona is mostly, if not entirely derived from external necessities. To survive in a superficial world of false bottoms, the artist (and, for that matter, every subject wanting to retain a shred of individual agency) has to consciously invent and project his or her own false bottoms and tenaciously persist as a surface him- or herself: as a thing, a shell, or a machine. While this absence of humanistic and/or psychological depth manifesting in this outlook might be disconcerting or difficult to deal with, the implicit argument of Lewis's novel is that taking the easier way and engaging in these protective fantasies would be fundamentally unwise. As the fate of the supposedly "heroic" figures in the novel shows, in modern reality, heroic pathos is a luxury only affordable by the already privileged classes as a mere commodity; for the others to indulge in that luxury usually results in needless and absurdly tragic deaths. Thus, the proper strategy to survive in modernity is, to again quote Lewis's retrospective assessment of his work of political philosophy *The Art of Being Ruled*, to engage in a kind of "jujitsu for the governed" (183): to respond to the labyrinth of false bottoms that make up modern reality by knowingly manufacturing and projecting one's own false bottoms back at that reality. One can and should not expect, in other words, genuine manifestations of an authentic heroic or transcendental pathos; however, one can at least work towards an artful conjuring up of an artificial worldly pathos. What the artist in modernity should thus be is a knowing manufacturer of that artificial pathos. This notion extends, as I would argue, to the more general notion of the artistic self. If the fantasy of a "deep" or authentic self is barred off due to it being unsustainable, if not borderline suicidal, the self, or rather, personality has to be conceived as surface.

As we noted in the previous chapter, David Bowie's emergence as a major pop performer in the early 1970s can be read as a watershed moment where it became a viable approach to consciously think and present the pop singer and/or musician as an artificial or superficial self: not as a figure expressing some authentic psychological state of being, but as a professional actor capable of playing a wide spectrum of different roles. On a formal aesthetic level, we can read this moment in pop history as the threshold between late 1960s psychedelic rock and art rock with the latter retaining the former's popular modernist focus on formal innovation while jettisoning its associated transcendental or utopian implications. There is, of course, an entire story to be told about how this realignment towards rock as pure externality — as a self-consciously staged theater whose performing artistic selves are seen as entities located entirely on the outside and/or the in-between of things — was subsequently re-appropriated by the more conventional view of the rock performance as an expression of a presupposed authentic inner (i.e. psychological) self. For that

matter, this happened rather quickly, as can already be observed in the 1974 BBC documentary film *Cracked Actor*, which followed Bowie's American tour of the same year where he was gradually reinventing his artistic persona as that of an American soul singer (Yentob). What is apparent by the statements of his (American) fans in the film is that they see the theatricality and flamboyance of Bowie's style not as a consciously superficial performance that questions the very notions of psychological authenticity and intrinsic personality, but, on the contrary, as a means to externally express a pre-given and very much authentic inner self.

This immediate counter-movement away from art rock's conscious staging of art as inauthentic artifice and towards a belated *re-authentication* of this highly stylized approach (which coincided with the reintroduction of a psychological realism into this kind of rock conceived as theater) can of course be observed in the countless epigones and their reception that followed in the wake of Bowie's success, from late 1970s new wave and early 1980s synth pop performers to the present. Arguably, it represents, at least from a quantitative standpoint, the more popular way in which the flamboyant theatricality of Bowie's early 1970 glam stylings have inscribed themselves into the vocabulary of popular music culture.[46] However, what is clearly more interesting and relevant in the context

46 One of the paradigmatic endpoints of that re-authentication of rock theater can be observed, for example, in a similarly flamboyant contemporary pop star figure such as Lady Gaga. Being an outspoken fan of David Bowie herself whose provocative stage costumes and overall visual identity is clearly deeply indebted to the tradition of that rock-as-theater approach, her own aesthetic approach is nevertheless fundamentally different to Bowie's consciously artificial style. It is in aspects such as her public self-identification as a "freak" or her programmatic call to her fans, which she affectionately refers to as "little monsters", to "be yourself" that we can recognize how the overt artificial theatricality of her performances is in fact closely tied to a notion of the authentic. In contrast to Bowie's overt inauthenticity, this re-authenticated glam theater represents a strangely contradictory fusion of the radically *constructivist* tenets and the vocabulary of queer theory with *essentialist* notions of "deep" psychological identity, where the outrageous performances are not to be read as an external play of surfaces that locates personality purely on the outside of things. Rather, it is an aesthetic approach that ultimately valorizes both the notion of a given authentic self and the right to live out — to express — that inner psychological identity in whatever way one sees fit. The fundamental difference between Bowie's approach to rock as inauthentic theater and this re-authenticated offspring of that style lies in the fact that for the former there is no intrinsic self to express, because the notion of authentic psychological depth simply does not figure as a relevant category. The fundamental claim behind Bowie's anti-authentic thrust was, after all, to point out that, while the notion of an immanent and authentic self may very well be a myth, there is at least a virtually endless space of possibilities in which we can invent and project a multitude of personalities conceived as a play of extrinsic surfaces and signs.

of the argument at hand is that group of slightly left-field figures who resisted the relentless gravitational pull of mass culture towards authenticity and psychological verisimilitude (an aspect where we, as an aside, again recognize the art punk of Wire) in favor of that original project of art rock, namely to stage the rock performance (as well as the artistic self that executes that performance) as a play of surfaces, where notions of the authentic, of an inner life, and of psychological realism only figure through their absence. In that regard, the notion of *personality* in this chapter is a fundamentally practicological and extrinsic category. In a similar way to the notion of *ethos* as discussed above, the term refers not to its modern meaning of an intrinsic and monolithic individual self, but to its pre-modern meaning of personhood as a mutable *social self* that emerges out of an extrinsic practice of *self-shaping* within concrete networks of society and culture.

One of the more interesting post-Bowie figures in British popular music culture that further explored this notion of personality as surface is John Foxx. In contrast to Bowie, Foxx's status in the rock canon is closer to that of Wire in that he is somebody who remains virtually unknown to the broader public, but is very much recognized and even revered as an important and influential figure by connoisseurs and other artists. More importantly, Foxx is an interesting case because his aesthetic approach shares a number of significant parallels and similarities with several aspects of Wyndham Lewis's approach. In a way comparable to Lewis's valorization of careful deliberation and neutral observation from a relative point of distance, Foxx's own artistic personality is also condensed in the figure of a detached observer of modern reality, which he dubbed the *Quiet Man*. In fact, the Quiet Man has, in a similar way to Bowie's 1976 persona of the *Thin White Duke,* become a convenient sobriquet for Foxx himself. At the same time, however, this quiet observer figure is also a satirist and, as we will shortly see, it is a satire not unlike Lewis's own concept of the non-moral satire: a harsh and violent pointing at and laughing at society that, however, includes the laughing figure — the author — among its targets out of the realization that even for the satirist there is no way to be outside of the practical embroilments of society.

Furthermore, in the way Foxx's concerns are very much about the externality of experiences and social relations in modern culture, we can recognize a quasi-Lewisian perspective in his works. Lewis and Foxx share a perspective that is less concerned with the supposedly complex psychological inner life of his subjects and, instead, sees the pivotal locus of social relations firmly on the outside as the exchange, collision, and interplay of outward gestures and movements. As such, we can find in both Foxx's own artistic persona and

in the subjects of his lyrics a similar notion of man as a (sometimes elegant, sometimes awkward) machine, shell, puppet, or actor, which we have already discussed in regard to Lewis (and, for that matter Bowie). There is, however, a fundamental difference in the trajectory of Lewis's and Foxx's version of that external, anti-psychological, and, perhaps also, non-humanistic approach: If the ultimate consequence of the former's clinically cold and analytical approach was an alienated retreat from social life into the wintry, solitary isolation that Lewis so vividly (or, rather, *chillingly*) described in his last novel *Self Condemned*, the same cannot be said of Foxx. What makes the juxtaposition interesting is that Foxx's reinvention into the impersonal anonymity of the Quiet Man ultimately led in the opposite direction: Out of that cold and non-humanistic approach, Foxx paradoxically managed to realize an aesthetics replete with a warm humanism.

For the predominant perspectives in pop criticism, the closest literary point of reference to Foxx's aesthetic approach is not Wyndham Lewis, but J. G. Ballard. Pop historians and critics with a focus on the experimental side of late 1970s and early 1980s popular music such as Simon Reynolds and Mark Fisher have noted the strong influence that Ballards's dystopian novels from the 1960s and 1970s had on a significant number of artists from the fields of British post punk and industrial music.[47] Some of the more obvious references include, for example, "The Atrocity Exhibition" (the opening track on Joy Divison's second album *Closer*) or The Normal's 1978 single *Warm Leatherette* and "Miss the Girl" by The Creatures (a side project by Siouxsie and the Banshees singer Siouxsie Sioux and her then husband/drummer Budgie [*Feast* track 8]), which both directly address the car-eroticism of Ballard's 1973 novel *Crash.* Foxx, for that matter, has openly acknowledged a strong Ballardian influence to his work. His first solo album, the cold and robotic *Metamatic,* is replete with Ballardian themes and imagery and his 2014 album *B-Movie (Ballardian Video Neuronica)*, originally a soundtrack to an experimental film by visual artist John Karborn, referenced the man directly in the title.

Of course, the connection between J. G. Ballard and the 1970s and 1980s British art rock tradition is both obvious and logical, as they address concerns and anxieties that are very much similar: an ambivalent spectatorial fascination with themes such as modern technocratic mass societies, the relationship between man and machine, modern technology and media and their effects on man as a social animal, the dystopian but also strangely enticing and libidinous urban spaces of concrete roads and high-rise architecture, the eroticism of

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47 See footnote 4.

chrome machinery etc. In how both Ballard and a significant number of artists coming out of the art rock tradition imagined the post-war development zones as both the essential locus of contemporary life and an apocalyptic and alluring no-man's land, the direct literary influences are immediately obvious. As such, these references of course extend beyond Ballard into a network of related points of reference in literary and cultural history, such as Anthony Burgess's *Clockwork Orange* (and, perhaps more importantly, Stanley Kubrick's 1971 cinematic adaptation), William Burroughs, Angela Carter, the early films of David Cronenberg, and, from the 1980s onward, William Gibson.

However, I have refrained from elaborating on these connections in more detail, as they are not the focus of the argument at hand. As I am concerned with a more long term trajectory that ranges from the high modernist period to its cultural afterlife in the late twentieth century, a detailed elaboration of the connection between art rock and literary figures such as J. G. Ballard, who were very much contemporaries of art rockers such as John Foxx or David Bowie, would not have been conducive to this argument and only reiterated what has already been said. In fact, a potentially fruitful line of questioning would be to ask instead whether one could read that strand of post-war dystopian, transgressive, and postmodernist literature as another particular instance of a cultural afterlife of Lewis's modernism. Apart from focusing on the obvious thematic parallels and the similarly cold and clinical perspective of the "Lewisian" and the "Ballardian" literary spheres, such an analysis would probably have to take a closer look at the role of media philosopher Marshall McLuhan. As, on the one hand, an important acquaintance of Lewis during his self-imposed Canadian exile (one who openly acknowledged Lewis's formative influence on his thinking [McLuhan]) and, on the other hand, an important voice in post-war discourses on mass media and mass societies, McLuhan could arguably be read as an intermediary figure between the two literary fields.

This perspective could indeed provide another way to argue against the notion that Lewis's aesthetic outlook was merely an idiosyncratic and highly individualistic oddity within British literary history that remained as isolated as its author. However, this line of investigation from Lewis's impure modernism to the transgressive literatures of the post-war era would, of course, be an undertaking for an altogether different book. More importantly, if we consider the importance of the act, the pose, the performance, or the personal appearance to Lewis's practicological aesthetic approach —as already pointed out, in *Men Without Art,* he explicitly refers to himself as "Mr. Wyndham Lewis, 'Personal-Appearance' Artist" (95) — then it is actually the more muddled and hybrid territory of popular music as a subset of the performing arts and not the

literary circles of post-war Britain that represents the more immediate example of a cultural afterlife. Again, Diederichsen seems a useful theoretical point of reference here, as he argues that the basic aesthetic unit in popular music is not the sound, the chord, the voice, the song, but *the pose* (*Über Pop-Musik* xviii). It is a claim that we could arguably apply to the aesthetic approach of Lewis as well.

Another aspect that Foxx and Lewis have in common is how both started to earnestly pursue their artistic careers relatively late. Less than two years younger than Bowie, Foxx was already in his late twenties when, as the bandleader and singer of the first iteration of the British new wave band Ultravox, his first work found a release. As a result, Foxx's approach to pop and rock music is not unlike that of Wire in that it lacks that supposedly essential adolescent element. When Foxx commented on youth culture (which is a subject that only really figures on the first two Ultravox albums and he would later abandon completely), he did so as a Quiet Man — that is, from a position of analytical detachment as an uninvolved spectator who nevertheless remains involuntarily embroiled with the scenery. Furthermore, Foxx's long artistic gestation period in virtual obscurity meant that he arrived on the scene with an already fully developed artistic persona. John Foxx is not a real given name (obviously, given the unusual spelling of the surname), but an artificial creation of Dennis Leigh, who was born in 1948 as the son of a Lancashire coal miner and millworker. Again, the element of class in that negotiation of an artistic persona seems worth noting: Leigh's invention of, or reinvention as, John Foxx also entailed an aspect of social mobility for someone born into an environment that was firmly working-class. Leigh/Foxx remarked on his creation as follows: "John Foxx is more intelligent than I am, better looking, better lit. A kind of naively perfected entity. Like a recording [...] where you can make several performances until you get it right [...] or make a composite, then discard the rest" (Roberts). Leigh/Foxx's comparison of his artistic persona to a recording or a performance is particularly interesting, as it stresses the point of it being less of an alter ego (that is, an alternative state of subjectivity) and more of an artistic object. Foxx, in other words, is grasped not as a state of being, but as a field of practice and experimentation. Leigh/Foxx's view thus echoes Lewis's view, as discussed in the previous chapter, of art as a way of "playing at being what we designate as matter" ("Essay on the Objective of Plastic Art in Our Time" 26).

In its anti-essentialist view of artistic expression, Foxx also mirrors Bowie's approach. After all, "David Bowie" was also very much a consciously artificial creation of one David Robert Jones, who privately held on to his given name for his entire life and simply did not use it in public where he performed as the

artistic matter that was David Bowie. To both Leigh/Foxx and Jones/Bowie, the private persona and the notion of the expression of an authentic self were simply irrelevant categories in the context of what they presented and represented as artists. Another obvious nod to Bowie was the way Foxx realized this notion of the overtly artificial artist-persona on a visual level. Using his distinctive facial features — his steely blue eyes, his sunken cheeks, and his pronounced chin and jawline — to great effect, Foxx projected an aura of androgyny and artificiality (Fig. 23), which both recalled Bowie's earlier glam stylings, but also, in its hints of asexuality, anticipated the angelic otherworldliness of someone like Rutger Hauer's character of the replicant Roy Batty in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner.*

Again, what should not be understated is how these artificial personae are connected to a notion of class mobility. As discussed with regard to Diederichsen's theorization of pop in the third chapter, the reinvention of somebody into some*thing* that he or she, judged by his or her class origin, is not supposed to be should also be read as a realization of and a comment on social mobility in a society still dominated by class thinking. Both Foxx and Bowie provide illustrative examples of this strategy, but we could also mention David Alan Batt's reinvention into the elegant and highly artificial aesthete-persona of David Sylvian, lead singer of the art rock band Japan (Fig. 24). The prototype of this approach to transgressing class boundaries, however, is arguably Bryan Ferry. To a contemporary spectator, it remains utterly inconceivable how this grand elder statesman of sophisticated art pop, this supreme embodiment of a highly discreet and worldly elegance and class, originally comes from a background that is as working-class as it gets, being the son of a Northern English farm laborer. As we will shortly see, Lewis, out of his own unprivileged background, also explored this idea of social climbing through embracing an artificial artist-persona. He did this not only through the repeated reconfiguration of his own artist-persona, but also more explicitly in his 1941 novel *The Vulgar Streak*. However, in contrast to the aforementioned figures of post-war popular music culture, Lewis's outlook on that possibility was decidedly less optimistic.

Still, it would be a stretch, at least from a commercial standpoint, to rate Foxx's execution of that strategy as a success. Although Ultravox eventually became one of the more successful synth-pop groups of the 1980s, this only happened after Foxx had already left the band and had taken most of the above-mentioned conceptual leanings with him. Both as the bandleader of Ultravox and as a solo artist, Foxx thus remained firmly on the margins of the pop music industry. However, the trio of studio albums that Ultravox produced during Foxx's tenure in the late 1970s still present an interesting case study in how 1970s art rock took

up and eventually transcended that Lewisian aesthetic approach of detached observation interspersed with controlled outbursts of satirical fury.

Although their eponymous debut album was released only in early 1977, the history of Ultravox stretched back several years, which accounts for the aforementioned fact that Foxx and the other band members were already in their late twenties when they released their first material and thus too old to take part in the emerging punk scene(s). Again, their position was one of mature detachment and distance. Originally an art school project named Tiger Lily founded by Foxx in 1973 (like many important artists in the field of 1970s and 1980s art rock, Ultravox were, like Wire, very much a product of the British art school system of the time), they rechristened themselves Ultravox in 1976 in order to accommodate a changing pop musical landscape. Their new name was significant in how it echoed the naming conventions from high-tech industries and, more precisely, manufacturers of musical and hi-fi equipment: Vox, Magnavox, Revox etc. Of course, this was by far not the first instance of a rock band reflecting on its embroilment with consumer culture as a commodity-producing business entity. As noted in reference to Diederichsen in chapter 3, this acknowledgment of a given external reality, which includes the reality of consumerism and capitalist modes of production, is a core aspect of pop aesthetics per se. Still, this was not the kind of playful and humorous engagement of 1960s pop art (exemplified, for instance, by The Who's 1967 album *The Who Sell Out* [Fig. 25]), but a more harsh and steely negotiation of those corporate realities — one that already seemed to anticipate the aesthetics of 1980s cyberpunk culture.

Fittingly, the album's front cover is unsettling to say the least: Under a garish neon letter display of the band's name, the five members, dressed predominantly in black PVC, are lined up against a black brick wall in oddly unnatural poses, their arms pressed firmly against their torsos, and with vacant facial expressions and a strange complexion that suggests plastic or vinyl rather than human skin (Fig. 26). Foxx and his consorts come across less as the human members of a rock band and more as discarded mannequins or switched-off androids (as this was before the advent of digital image manipulation, it must be assumed that the effect was achieved with make-up and lighting). It has to be stressed that this disturbingly un-naturalistic (self-)depiction of a rock band as puppets, robots, or androids was new at the time. Although art rock pioneers like Bowie or Bryan Ferry were already playing with the artificiality of the rock pose and performance as early as 1970, they refrained from such blatantly dehumanizing and impersonal displays of their artistic selves. The closest relative would be German electro pioneers Kraftwerk. Kraftwerk had toured the United Kingdom

in the autumn of 1975, but it would not be until 1978 when they released their seventh LP *The Man-Machine* with its now iconic album cover that referenced the visual language of Russian Constructivism and featured the band members as the (in comparison to Ultravox) decidedly less unsettling robots of the album's opening track (Fig. 27). Moreover, Ultravox were clearly not aiming for the meticulous perfectionism that characterizes the Kraftwerkian cosmos. Rather, there is something dirty, seedy, and unpleasant about those "creations" on the front cover of their debut. Lying somewhere between the conscious artificiality of art rock aesthetics and the grungy looks of punk culture, they come across not as Kraftwerk's perfectly functioning man-machine hybrids, but as their rejected prototypes.

In regard to the figure of the puppet or the android on album covers, there is another example that needs to be discussed here and warrants a short digression. Two years after Ultravox had released their debut, Roxy Music as one of Ultravox's main inspirations followed suit and put a group of mannequins on the cover of their sixth studio album *Manifesto* (Fig. 28). The *Manifesto* album is an important visual point of reference for several reasons. First, it represented a stark departure from the signature pop art aesthetics of Roxy Music's previous covers. The latter stand as important examples in the history of album covers, because the band consciously treated the medium as a design object. Instead of simply featuring, as most records did at the time, perfunctory shots of the band, they imitated the aesthetics of fashion magazines by using high-fashion photography of models in seductive pin-up poses, thereby reflecting the status of the album as a commodity and an art object in itself. In some cases, such as on the infamous *Country Life* cover (Fig. 29), these photographs of scantily clad models bordered on the exploitative or semi-pornographic. However, there was always a slightly unsettling element to these covers, which threw back that purportedly male gaze at the spectator: The model on the eponymous debut album was flashing her teeth in a provocative manner (Fig. 30); there was the growling panther on a leash and the ominous dark cityscape on *For Your Pleasure* (Fig. 31); and the models on *Country Life* responded to the voyeuristic (male) gaze of the viewer with two quite challenging gazes of their own. With *Manifesto*, Roxy Music seemed to take that critical aspect – the highlighting of the essential artificiality of the record and, by extension, the fashion, entertainment, and leisure industries – one step further by leaving the fashion photography approach behind and featuring instead a careful arrangement of stylishly dressed up mannequins in the middle of a lavish party. In the absurd notion of these lifeless plastic bodies being staged in a state of utter excitement and life, we again hear echoes of Lewis's satirical critiques of the fashionable cliques

and cultural elites of his time. If Lewis exposed the purportedly emancipated and rebellious frequenters of these circles as hypocritical conformists, then we could say that Roxy Music were suggesting something similar on the cover of their sixth studio album.

In fact, the sleeve of *Manifesto* directly quotes Lewis. Both the title and the track list on the back cover (Fig. 32) use the same typeset and elements of the layout that Lewis used in *Blast 1.* Apart from the album's title, more references to the Vorticists are found in the titular opening track, where Ferry states how he is "for a life and time by numbers / Blast in fast 'n' low" as well as — in a reference to Jacob Epstein's *Rock Drill* — for "the man who drives the hammer / That rocks you 'til the grave / His power drill shocks / A million miles away." We could also say that, on a conceptual level, the band references Lewis's ironic approach to the art manifesto. If the Vorticist manifestoes in *Blast 1,* as discussed in chapter two, can be read simultaneously as a serious avant-garde statement and as a parody of the hyperbolic grandiloquence of the modernist avant-garde movements, then at least the latter also applies to Roxy Music's own *Manifesto.* The quintessential joke of the record is that it does not contain anything resembling an earnest artistic and/or political statement of intent. The title track's lyrics consist of a random enumeration of empty platitudes and the rest of the songs do not express anything even remotely resembling positions or ideas one normally expects from a political and/or artistic manifesto. Thus, the album could be read as a similarly ironic statement as the *Blast 1* manifestos: a brash and exuberant proclamation of avant-gardism that, in its simultaneous questioning of the efficacy of avant-gardism, immediately undermines that very gesture.

The major problem with that reading, however, is quite banal: *Manifesto* is simply not a good album. Commonly regarded as the worst of Roxy Music's eight studio albums, brash and exuberant are about the last words one would use to describe the material on the record. Rather, it is a collection of dull and unmotivated vignettes that bear absolutely no resemblance to the raucous art rock that Roxy Music were pioneering only half a decade before. The band, for a lack of better words, simply sound tired, indifferent, and disoriented. If *Manifesto*, with its references to Vorticism and its ironic album cover, had any satirical intent, this effort ultimately falls flat, because there is nothing to undermine on the actual record. The reason for the lackadaisical nature of *Manifesto* is that it captured a band in a state of transition. Technically a comeback after a hiatus of approximately three years, the band members evidently had changed in the interim. They had largely abandoned the offbeat, experimental, and challenging aspects of their early albums, but not yet found

the formula for that smooth and hyper-competent adult contemporary pop sound that would characterize their final two albums as well as more or less the entirety of Bryan Ferry's solo efforts from the 1980s to today.

In his gradual transformation from ironic art rocker into a major figure of an old-school rock aristocracy, Ferry thus embodies the fundamental struggle between artistic autonomy and the realities of artistic production as a social practice, which Lewis had struggled with for much of his career.[48] As a student of Richard Hamilton, Ferry's artistic persona was very much a pop art project: an artificially designed new kind of rock star that was part Jazz Age crooner, part worldly and reserved aristocrat, and part suave playboy with an immaculate sense of style. Within that superficial persona, Ferry initially remained an off-center figure who did not so much represent the vacuity of the upper-class cultural elites, but commented on it from the sidelines. However, towards the beginning of the 1980s, that mask, which had allowed Ferry to transgress both the boundaries of class and those between the established vocabularies of rock and pop cultures, gradually became his face. Ferry the actor became Ferry the style icon and with it the more unpredictable elements of his art disappeared. Evidently, he had played his role so convincingly that his audience transformed him from an ironic commentator into an iconic embodiment of a new rock aristocracy — a position which Ferry ultimately seemed all too happy to embrace. This transformation was not lost on the members of Wire, who crossed paths with the 1979 iteration of Roxy Music as a supporting act for a few dates on the latter's European tour of that year. It proved a thoroughly negative experience for Wire, who were aghast at this new iteration of what once had been a major inspiration for them. As Colin Newman recalls, "Here we saw a band who had been like us [...] They'd been at the top of their generation, and what were they doing now? They were playing stadiums as Bryan Ferry's backing band. We thought: Fuck! Is that what we've got coming?" (Neate, *Read & Burn* 104).

However, despite these damning statements about him by a former admirer, Bryan Ferry presents a more nuanced case than that of the average rock dinosaur. The common narrative of late 1970s British punk rock and its related styles is, of course, that it represented a reaction against the bloated decadence that had infested popular music culture by that time — a development personified, as Newman's quotation shows, by the first generation of 1960s and early 1970s rock superstars. However, the sweeping denouncement that these performers

48 See our discussion of that issue with regard to *The Demon of Progress in the Arts* and *The Writer and the Absolute* in chapter 2.

were by then too old, too rich, and too established to play the role of the adolescent rebel without veering into self-parody arguably never fully applied to a figure like Bryan Ferry. Again, the caveat that art rock as a genre was largely unconcerned with being a part of youth culture proved to be an advantage. In fact, we could say that aiming to establish rock and pop music as a mode of artistic production beyond the confines of youth cultures was one of the primary characteristics of art rock. Ferry being from the outset an artificial creation — a meticulously groomed persona that had little if anything to do with youth cultures — meant that, in his case, the general accusation of *rock dinosaurism* only ever applied to a limited degree. On the one hand, there was a ring of truth to Newman's claim that he had become part of the boring establishment. On the other hand, in the case of Ferry it at least came without the element of awkward self-parody that inevitably accompanies those acts of projecting a youthful persona well into middle age and beyond. Like every rock performer of his generation, Ferry eventually got older; however, his particular rock star persona — ageless instead of youthful, artificial instead of authentic — at least allowed him to do so with his grace and dignity intact.

Thus, Ferry remains an ambivalent figure, simultaneously a dinosaur and a survivor of rock culture. One is, of course, hard pressed not to be disappointed by the fact that the initial five-year burst of highly influential and offbeat art rock was followed by 35 years of Ferry playing the role of a crooning pop dandy with all the edges filed off. However, apart from the listless transitional misstep of *Manifesto*, one also has to admit that, even then, the sense of craftsmanship and taste remained immaculate. Ferry had internalized the logic of pop art and camp to such a degree that there was never anything vulgar about the smooth and sophisticated adult contemporary pop which became his trademark sound from 1980 onward. Once aptly described by a critic as "an expensive gas" (Parkes), Ferry's post-1970s sonic identity was as vacuous and insubstantial as Andy Warhol's 1966 *Silver Clouds* art installation: a lushly produced but nevertheless discreet and understated brand of art pop that often flirted with kitsch but prudently kept it at arm's length. Ferry's late work in Roxy Music and his subsequent solo material was thus, on the one hand, an immaculately produced designer commodity — a functional and unobtrusive mood music for penthouse apartments and upmarket department stores. On the other hand, it is virtually impossible to not hear the fastidious and almost excessive craftsmanship behind these records. Ultimately, it is this confident display of artifice that suggests something which goes beyond the mere utility aspect of the end product.

If we were thus to sum up the ambivalence of Ferry then we could do it as follows: Ferry's artistic development could be seen as disappointing from

an ideological perspective in how the groundbreaking art rocker gradually transformed into (or unmasked himself as) a dull social climber and in the process accommodated his aesthetic language into pop music's equivalent of high-price designer merchandise. However, that dismissive view is at least partly counteracted by the dazzling skill and craftsmanship that remained on full display even after said transformation. What needs to be taken into account is, again, a practical or external aspect, which these ideologically puristic perspectives tend to overlook, namely the sheer artistic skill and discipline required to create that kind of over-engineered, smooth *sophisti-pop* without making the result come across as maudlin and tacky. On the one hand, by the end of the 1970s Ferry was technically one of the dinosaurs that a new generation of performers and critics wanted to consign to the dustbin of rock history. But on the other hand, it was the very same consciously superficial and artificial pop art approach, which he had originally introduced into the vocabulary of popular music culture, that allowed him to survive that purge with his dignity intact.

Nevertheless, the ambivalent case of Bryan Ferry clearly shows why subsequent art rock performers such as John Foxx had to embrace a harsher and more combative approach. Ultimately, Ferry's playful and positive pop-art-inspired approach to reinventing the rock star as an artificial persona was less that of a Lewisian satirist and more as someone in the vein of F. Scott Fitzgerald: a semi-detached bemused commentator of high-life living, yet also very much a participant in that high life — a figure both empowered and imprisoned by his own rigorously rehearsed cultural refinement. On the one hand, Foxx's response to that established or establishment approach aligned more with punk in that it emphasized grittier, seedier, and more inhumane aspects of that performer-persona. On the other hand, it remained aligned with the artificial art rock approach spearheaded by Roxy Music, Ferry, and Bowie in how it forewent punk's call to abandon all the artsy aspects that had supposedly infected rock 'n' roll and to return to the (of course, entirely imaginary) authentic "roots" of rock culture.

As discussed with regard to the front cover of *Ultravox's* debut album, this menacing aspect, which Ferry's pop art approach kept hidden behind a carefully maintained facade and could only hint at indirectly, was brought front and center by this new generation of art rock performers. The album's back cover continues that theme with a photograph of a starkly lit Foxx, surrounded by TV screens and video equipment, in a kneeling, praying pose and directly fixating on the viewer with an unsettling stare (Fig. 33). Again, the Ballardian or McLuhanesque signifiers are on full display here with the juxtaposition of high-tech mass media and pre-modern notions of religiosity. However, in its

direct reference to Roman Catholicism, there is also a Lewisian element to Foxx's pose. Though Lewis, in contrast to Foxx who was born into a Catholic family, never converted to Catholicism, he held a lifelong fascination with it. On one level, this of course coincided with his self-shaping as an oppositional satirist, putting him in a direct line with Alexander Pope, whose *Dunciad* stood as one of the models for Lewis's *The Apes of God* (Edwards, "*The Apes of God* and the English Classical Tradition" 94-5). More importantly, however, we find, in the ritualistic space of Roman Catholicism, a comparable logic to that external approach valorized by Lewis and taken up by British art rock performers: the un-essentialist and, for that matter, practicologist view that it is not the immanent and abstract idea, but extrinsic rituals — poses, gestures, images, and proclamations — that count; that faith or truth, in other words, is not something that, as suggested by Protestant views, has to be unearthed individually through a process of introspection, but is manufactured through the repeated and rehearsed execution of extrinsic social rituals. It is therefore clear how the ritualistic logic of Roman Catholicism would intersect to a certain degree both with Lewis's practicological modernism and the conscious artificiality of art rock. Foxx's fascination with Catholicism would reach a first culmination four years later when, on "Pater Noster", he would set the Latin text of the Lord's Prayer to an electronic dance beat, thereby further exploring the parallels between modern forms of mass entertainment and older ritualistic practices from the sphere of religion (*The Garden* track 5).

Foxx thus arrived on the scene as a more or less fully formed artistic persona — at least on a visual and conceptual level. By emphasizing the ritualistic and material aspects as the locus of modern (social and human) reality, he was still working within the same pop art tradition as Bryan Ferry, but he gave it a more overtly satirical spin. The reflection on materialism, consumerism, its associated rituals, and how they related to or, rather, *engendered* human relations was already a topic in the (predominantly early) material of Roxy Music. One of the most famous examples is of course found in the opening song of their self-titled debut album, "Re-make/Re-model". The first in Ferry's endless series of tales of unrequited love, the narrator's tale about his unsuccessful romantic pursuit of a woman is undercut by the repeated backing vocal chorus of "CPL 598H", which refers to the license plate of the car that the woman in question is driving. The ironic juxtaposition of the female object of desire and the car as the quintessential consumerist object of desire thus questions what exactly the lyrical I is pursuing here: an ideal of love or a commodity (or, for that matter, the ideal of love *as a commodity*). Despite these ironic undercurrents, however, Ferry still usually sang from the perspective of the disappointed dandy constantly

in pursuit of an ideal of authentic love but always failing (in that sense, the opening line of "Re-make/Re-model" can be read as this one overarching theme of Ferry's lyrics: "I tried but I could not find a way").

In contrast, Foxx jettisoned those last vestiges of romantic ballast from his lyrics and embraced a perspective of non-humanistic clinical detachment (Ferry, for that matter, arguably went in the other direction and gradually *added* romantic ballast to what began as a more pronouncedly cerebral and analytical approach). Foxx continued, in other words, that lyrical strand which Ferry explored early on in what arguably remains his most sinister and unsettling song: his 1973 paean to an inflatable sex doll, "In Every Dream Home a Heartache".[49] It is particularly on the closing song of Ultravox's debut album, "My Sex", where Foxx's complete detachment, his total externalization of every intrinsic human quality is performed most succinctly. Over a sparse piano and bass arrangement that gradually gives way to a Brian Eno-esque synthesizer melody (Eno assisted in the album's recording), Foxx sings or, rather, recites in a monotonous voice thoroughly devoid of emotionality a laundry list of various definitions of his "sex". All of them refer to extrinsic qualities, things, or ephemeral experiences and betray no sense of a transcendental immanent self or gender identity. "My sex", as each of the song's short verses begin, is described among other things as "a Novocaine shot", "an automat", "a golden glow", or "a spark of electro flesh / Leased from the tick of time / And geared for synchromesh." The lyrics are suffused with Ballardian imagery. Foxx's description of his "sex" as "an image lost in faded films / A neon outline on a high-rise overspill" or as being "invested in / Suburban photographs / Skyscraper shadows on a car crash overpass" is almost a pastiche in how its reads like a catalog of every major motif from the Ballardian literary space. Yet the core point to take from the song is how it stages a conscious and purposeful dehumanization of the self as a strategy of self-empowerment. In a similar way to Lewis's machine manifesto from the second edition of *Blast* as discussed in the previous chapter, subjectivity is located firmly on the outside — on the ephemeral but also malleable (bodily) surfaces and the relation in which they stand with other things or bodies:

My sex
Has a wanting wardrobe

49 An astonishing, eerily robotic live performance by Ferry can be observed in a 1973 television recording for the German music program *Musikladen*. The 1973 performance also stands as a testament to the thoroughly modernist and confrontative approach that Roxy Music were pursuing in their early period and how it forms a stark contrast to the more polished and sophisticated aesthetics of their post-*Manifesto* period and beyond.

I still explore
Of all the bodies I knew
And those I want to know

This attempt to locate some form of individual agency outside of the traditional humanistic notion of the intrinsic self is made even more obvious in the album's longest track "I Want to Be a Machine", where Foxx, in a direct reference to the famous Warhol quote, expresses his desire to recreate himself as an entirely artificial or machine-like entity. Foxx's notion of subjectivity is an amalgamation of external signs and cultural artefacts: "a cathode face from newscasts", "a crumbling fugue of songs […] from the reservoir of video souls", the "flesh of ash and silent movies" etc. Thus existing as "A nebula of unfinished creatures / From the lifetimes of my friends", the suggestion, though undercut by the mournful mood of the song, is that it is in this cold and detached notion of a self, which has been purged of all emotionality, where true individual agency lies: "Let's run to meet the tide tomorrow / Leave all emotion dying there / In the star cold beyond all of your dreams."

However, "I Want to Be a Machine" as a manifesto for this cold and hardened conception of subjectivity as a purely extrinsic quality is also emblematic for the entire album in how its lyrical ideas seem strangely and in a somewhat unsatisfying manner divorced from their musical execution. Overall, Ultravox's debut album is a stylistic mishmash predominantly rooted in early 1970s glam rock with various excursions into blues rock, funk, reggae, and folk. Most of all, the production sounds benign and restrained in a way that does not exactly help to properly get across the song's portentous lyrical ideas. On "I Want to Be a Machine", the only musical moment that actually seems to correspond with Foxx's lyrics is its furious coda, where it explodes into an aggressive, screeching violin solo. However, the song needs almost six minutes to get to that point, while the bulk of it is, curiously enough, based on an understated folkish motif played on acoustic guitar. Together with Foxx's wordy style of writing, which seems overly reliant on lyrical conceits, the song seems to have more in common with Bowie's early material from the late 1960s and early 1970s — "The Cygnet Committee" (*David Bowie* [1969] track 5) or "The Bewlay Brothers" (*Hunky Dory* track 11), for example — than the rigid and industrial aesthetics of post punk that would soon emerge. Apart from the reggae stylings on "Dangerous Rhythm", which mirrored punk's fascination with reggae, and in particular the modern synthesizer backdrop on "My Sex", which is very similar to what Bowie was doing at the same time on his Berlin-era albums, the album's sonic identity thus seems strangely muddled and out of time.

The uneven execution of the debut — visually and conceptually very much there, but sonically not quite — makes the band's subsequent transformation within less than a year all the more staggering. Unsurprisingly, the debut was met with indifference by the public and the press, which was mostly to do with the timing of the release. One could hardly imagine a worse time to release an art rock album than in February 1977, when the brief but intense media craze over British punk rock, which had broken out in the wake of the Sex Pistols' controversial appearance on Bill Grundy's *Today* show on December 1st 1976, had not yet subsided. In this environment, one could hardly have been more unfashionable than as an ambitious art rock ensemble fronted by a conceptually minded alumnus of the Royal College of Art in his late twenties and with a sonic language dominated by a classically trained keyboard player, who also seconded as a violinist.

Ultravox reacted swiftly with biting sarcasm and satire. By October of the same year, they had already recorded and released their second album, on which they adopted a significantly more abrasive lyrical and musical approach. Entitled *Ha! Ha! Ha!*, it is best described as a punk rock album made by people who were too intellectually-minded, musically too proficient, and had already outgrown the adolescent mindset of punk — or, to put it in more blunt terms, were about ten years too old — to play punk rock in a straightforward and earnest manner. As a result, *Ha! Ha! Ha!* stands as a strange hybrid — an album filled with energetic and vitriolic punk rock songs that, however, are simultaneously (or even predominantly) scathing satires of punk culture and the media hype that surrounded it at the time. This sarcastic approach is already apparent on the album's front cover. Designed by Foxx himself, he both adopted and simultaneously aped the cut-up aesthetics of punk — the low quality and makeshift monochrome photocopier look of punk fanzines — with its stark and distorted portrait row of the band repeated five times (Fig. 34). Echoing the sarcastic album title are the decidedly lackadaisical facial expressions of the band members. While thus presenting a clear stylistic departure from the more staged and elaborate visual approach of their debut, from a conceptual standpoint *Ha! Ha! Ha!* takes essentially the same line.

However, musically and lyrically the album is markedly different. The reminiscences of early 1970s art rock experimentation are mostly gone, as is the restrained production. In their place, *Ha! Ha! Ha!* presents a series of seemingly straightforward punkish rockers driven by aggressive rhythms, simplistic guitar riffs, and a blaring production that relies on copious amounts of feedback and distortion. Furthermore, Foxx had mostly abandoned the mannered lyrical style of the debut and, in line with the punk pastiche/parody stylings of their

sophomore effort, went for a more direct and prosaic approach instead. Still, *Ha! Ha! Ha!* very much remains an art rock album. Its aggressive energies are not channeled into punk's usual expressions of adolescent and narcissistic rage. Rather, Foxx's lyrics are still written from an analytical and detached perspective that morphs these punkish vignettes into short, piercing bursts of vitriolic satire. In that sense, *Ha! Ha! Ha!* is very much reminiscent of the notion of the non-moral satire that we have already discussed in the second chapter with regard to Lewis as well as Wire's material from their *Send* period. On *Ha! Ha! Ha!*, Ultravox are using punk aesthetics as a tool to critique the essential profanity of the modern world; but these critiques are not delivered from the high horse of moral authority. Instead, Foxx's lyrical I shows both an acute awareness of, and, more interestingly, a perverse delight in, his own pleasurable and painful embroilment in that very same modern reality.

The best way to grasp the art rock satire of *Ha! Ha! Ha!* is thus to describe the aspects where the album diverts from the straightforward punk formula of fast-paced, guitar-based rock in 4/4 time. While the latter serves as the album's basic stylistic framework, what is interesting are the numerous lyrical and musical curveballs that the band throw at the listener, thereby both parodying the rigid musical style of punk and using it as a tool for satire. The album establishes its firm art rock credentials already in the first track with its title "ROckWrok" being an obvious reference to Marcel Duchamp's 1917 Dada publication *Rongwrong*. The song can itself be read as a Duchampian prank at the expense of the predominantly heteronormative spirit of rock culture. Superficially, "ROckWrok" is a loud and fast-paced rocker. With its incessant repetition of its title as a catchphrase, it seems to belong to the kind of self-performative celebrations of rocking out in the tradition of, for example, Led Zeppelin's "Rock 'n' Roll". However, a closer look at the song's lyrics reveals that it is in fact an ode to promiscuous gay sex. Over the course of the song, Foxx rattles off, at a frantic tempo, a series of unambiguous references that range from "Penetration boys in hotel lifts / Invitations on sinking ships" to "An anal sailor in the bar, bar" that "fucks like a dog" and "bites like a shark", and "A lucky sucker in the car park", making it perfectly clear that the invented pseudo-slang term "ROckWrok" does not designate the civilized and very much heterosexually connoted act of rocking out, but a very dirty and illicit conception of non-heterosexual intercourse. However, most of these references would probably fly over the average listener's head due to Foxx's garbled, high-speed delivery of the lyrics. The essential prank of the song is thus that, by virtue of its sheer energy and tempo, it goads an implied heterosexual male listener to shamelessly "rock out" to a song that is actually a celebration of gay sex.

More importantly, "ROckWrok", despite clocking in at only three and a half minutes, decidedly outstays its welcome. At some point, Foxx's relentlessly repeated shouts of "Rockwrok" over the moronically simplistic backing track inevitably starts to get on the listener's nerves. This gets worse towards the end, where Foxx's delivery gradually becomes more of an idiotic and meaningless babble, while the musical backing track slowly falls apart. As a final punchline, this turns out to be a false ending and the song — unfortunately, one is compelled to add — explodes again into another grating rendition of its chorus. In that sense, Ultravox are pranking two targets at once. On the one hand, "ROckWrok" continues the tradition of the parody and knowing self-parody of rock culture in the vein of Bowie and early Roxy Music by staging a camp response to the latter's masculine heteronormativity. On the other hand, it is also a gesture of beating punk aesthetics at its own game. If punk rock represented an aesthetic strategy of challenging rock orthodoxies through impudent, amateurish, and disrespectful gestures that were primarily intended to irritate and to annoy, Ultravox appropriate that strategy on *Ha! Ha! Ha!* and, taking advantage of their superior playing skills, amplify its moronic aspects to a point where it reduces itself to utter absurdity. As such, this multi-targeted approach can also be read as anticipating how punk culture would fail to topple the orthodoxies of rock culture and, after its all-too-brief heyday, would quickly be absorbed by the latter as an established and conventionalized part of its aesthetic vocabulary.

This approach of first harnessing punk's primitive energies but then stylizing it by introducing several irritating or otherwise unusual details, thereby subverting both the established purisms of rock culture and the emerging purisms of punk rock, can be observed in many other instances on *Ha! Ha! Ha!*. There is still a pronounced use of organs and synthesizers, but they are used less for the foundation of the sound and more to introduce irritating sound effects and other interjections that disturb the overall proceedings. Furthermore, several of the songs have strange slow and foreboding intros before breaking out into the aforementioned fast-paced, punkish rock: the organ and the clicking fingers on "The Frozen Ones", the sinister synthesizer line on "Artificial Life", or, most obviously, on "Distant Smile" where the first half of the song consists of meandering piano improvisations and wordless chanting and the second half is relatively straightforward punkish rock. Again, the band toe the line between the primitiveness of punk and more serious artistic ambitions, but in this case they do so the other way around: They first pretend — mockingly — to stake out some serious artistic credentials, but then cheekily abort the effort by bursting out into mock-primitive rocking.

However, what is arguably the most interesting and irritating element in the sonic landscape of *Ha! Ha! Ha!* is the creative use of Billy Currie's violin. In the context of the individual songs, the violin performs the function of the lead guitar, usually contributing various solo parts. However, and in contrast to its more straightforward use on the debut, the violin is recorded in a way that its tone could convincingly pass as that of a high-pitched electric guitar; a casual listener would probably mistake it as one. Still, there is again an element of mocking exaggeration at play here. Always slightly out of tune and modulated in the studio to emphasize the ear-piercing higher frequencies, these "guitar solos on electric violin" are characterized by a nagging and screeching tone that is clearly intended to be as obtrusive and irritating as possible. The overall impression is thus of another sarcastic voice complementing that of Foxx himself. The violin solos parody the rockist notion of showy guitar heroics, while, in a twisted way, still working as straightforward guitar solos in the context of the actual songs.

This dialectics of certain aesthetic elements working simultaneously in a straightforward and a parodistic manner thus follows a similar logic to what we have discussed with regard to Wire's anti-rock working rather well as rock music. The point that needs to be emphasized is that these deconstructive and otherwise unorthodox gestures cannot be read in isolation as subversive gestures per se, but must be grasped within a dialectical logic, which considers the fact that they rely on and can only work within the stable and conventionalized framework of the rock or pop song. It is only within this framework that these subversions can be staged effectively and its requirement is the point where those very practical notions of skill and of skillful execution come into play again. To put it more concretely, the parody would not work as such if these were *not* solid, well-crafted, and well played rock songs that could very well stand on their own (as usual, it is the disciplined and tight rhythm section that makes the often overlooked but essential contribution in that regard). However, this mutual dependency also means that, for all their subversive and dissident gestures directed both at rock and punk culture, they also partake in and contribute to these cultures in an affirmative manner. The notion of an absolute and unconditional type of dissent is thus recognized as a fool's errand. In actual practice, any utterance of this kind will by definition remain entangled with and thus uphold the overarching structures to which it is responding.

If this self-aware element is already present on the level of sound, it is even more clearly reflected in the lyrics. Beyond the smutty prank of "ROckWrok", *Ha! Ha! Ha!* mostly deals with social and political satire. In that regard, it is thematically related to punk rock, but its overtly self-reflexive stance makes

it a closer relative of the art-punk approach of Wire. Although Foxx plays the role of the disaffected and detached observer, the lyrics and Foxx's delivery of them make it very clear that he recognizes his own embroilment in what he is satirizing, making the lyrical I both a mouthpiece and an object of his mocking tirades. Thematically, the satire is very much Lewisian in how it focuses on the conformist superficiality of fashionable cultural scenes and cliques and on the phony and staged way by which their participants go through their carefully rehearsed motions. On "The Frozen Ones" (track 2), Foxx projects a similar resentment at the nihilistic abandon lurking behind the superficial and mediatized selves of these scenesters:

> Marching across our own screens
> Our faces form all our needs
> The future's not returning
> All bridges built for burning

Foxx's use of the first person perspective — particularly in the sarcastic chorus, which goes "How can there be anything wrong? / Aren't we the frozen ones?" — could be read as him simply taking the point of view of those he is mocking in order to unmask their shallow and immature narcissism:

> We walk around inside each other visiting the empty rooms
> Put me on I'll put you on too
> You knew I'd have to follow you because you saw I'm hollow too
> But it's so nice being I too

However, there is a high degree of self-reflection to these lyrics that suggests a more ambivalent stance — that this is not Foxx aping the targets of his satire, but Foxx speaking directly from a position of knowingness and including himself as a target. In his energetic delivery of the lyrics, Foxx is literally brimming over with glee, ably supported by a backing track that simply works a bit too well as a straightforward rock song. The overall suggestion of the song is thus that, as much as Foxx is laughing at the shallow and snobbish participants of certain sham cultures, he is simultaneously laughing at himself for his own knowing participation in those same cultures and deriving some perverse or absurdist enjoyment from that realization.

However, by using the collective "we", Foxx also seems to point to a structural similarity that goes beyond this mere knowing participation in a shallow culture. What appears to be at stake here is that both approaches — Foxx's self-aware invention as an artificial persona and the habitual and unreflecting participation of the shallow scenesters he is ridiculing — follow essentially the same logic

in that both project an artificial and depthless persona as a means of a social survival strategy. From that point of view, the difference between the two approaches seems tenuous at best and characterized merely by some very elusive qualitative criteria and a degree of knowingness. On a structural level, however, it can be said that the collective "we" applies unconditionally in that both are ultimately the social strategies of the "frozen ones".

A similar sentiment is expressed in the more overtly political song "Fear in the Western World". Although it references various political hotbeds of the time, already the first couplet — "Your picture of yourself is a media myth / Underneath this floor we're on the edge of a cliff" — makes it clear that this is not a protest song in the conventional sense. Rather, in a way reminiscent of Wire's "Reuters", it reflects the mediatized nature of global political events and interpellates us as the receivers first and foremost as spectators. As Foxx excitedly barks in the song's chorus, global politics, especially those of a catastrophic kind, are imagined as exciting media events that seamlessly mesh with vulgar and irrelevant headlines from the society pages:

Dead on the streets
Who's that girl?
Ireland screams
Africa burns
Suburbia stumbles
The tides are turned
I can feel the fear in the Western world

As with "The Frozen Ones", the sentiment is not one of moralizing outrage or despair, but of a dubious carnivalesque excitement. Foxx's repeated staccato delivery of the line "I can feel the fear in the Western world" not only suggests a spectatorial schadenfreude at the unfolding death and destruction, but also incites the audience to follow suit with that sentiment. In highlighting the perverse enjoyment of mediatized violence, "Fear in the Western World" makes a similar point as Wire's "Reuters" with its menacing chanting of "rape" towards the end.[50] It also highlights the double-edged nature of that strategy of spectatorial detachment. If this disaffected stance is the end product of a necessary survival strategy arising out of one's entanglement with an external reality that is inherently antagonistic or even violent, it is also characterized by a problematic lack of empathy. Bluntly put, there is only a thin line between keeping a safe distance and shutting oneself away in nihilistic isolation. If

50 See our discussion of Wire's "Reuters" in chapter two, p. 60.

nothing else, the latter seems a particularly absurd end result of a stance that proceeds from the notion that there can, by definition, be no absolute detachment from concrete external social realities and power relations.

This conflicted outlook — the knowing and borderline cynical resentment at superficial cultures and scenes, with which, in what is both a source of great irritation and perverse pleasure, the speaker is himself inextricably entangled — is arguably expressed best on "Artificial Life". Its simplistic but effective chorus of "And it goes on, all night, all night / And it goes on and on, the artificial life", delivered by Foxx with a resentful finality, neatly encapsulates the song's core point. However, it is the progression of the verses that is particularly interesting here, as the text gradually moves from a detached spectatorial satire into a bleak evisceration of the self. One of *Ha! Ha! Ha!'s* few mid-tempo songs, "Artificial Life" starts out in relatively safe satirical territory with Foxx, over an ominous synthesizer backing, mockingly describing another desolate scene of shallow partygoers going through the motions: how "all the boys are wearing their utility drag", how "the girls slip identikits from their utility bags", and how "some refugees from suburbia are laughing / examining each other's gags." In the second verse, Foxx, now backed by primitive guitar riffs and a trudging rhythm section, continues his relentless mockery of these artificial scenes by picking on a specific participant:

> Mary, Mary got so confused
> About the fusion game (what a game!)
> Blunked on booze, she talks like a newsreel
> She'll take up any kind of bleak exchange
> She turned to perfection once
> But realized she'd only turned to pain
> She ran through divine light, chemicals, Warhol, scientology, her own sex
> Before she turned away
> And it goes on all night, all night [...]

Yet, after that, the song throws a curveball by having the satirist himself move from his detached vantage point onto the scene. Announcing himself with the insistent cry of "I've learned to be a stranger!", Foxx declares his knowing detachment from these shallow scenes; however, he continues to repeat the line to the point where it comes across less as a firm statement of defiance and more as an increasingly desperate cry for help, until his voice is finally drowned in a maelstrom of synthesizers and guitars and the listener is treated to another grating violin solo. This unexpected shift to the first person voice, which is subsequently drowned out by the noisy musical backdrop, effectively conveys

the all-pervasiveness of the superficial cultures satirized in the song, from which not even the satirist can hope to disentangle himself entirely and achieve a position of absolute impartial detachment.

It is only logical that the lyrics thus retain the first person perspective for the remainder of the song. In the third verse, which follows the aforementioned instrumental break, Foxx reappears not as a detached stranger, but now counting himself among those desperate fashion victims that he was deriding only moments ago:

> I should have left here years ago
> But my imagination won't tell me how
> This whirlpool's got such seductive furniture
> It's so pleasant getting drowned

This move from a position of satirical detachment to one of simultaneously disgusted and delighted entanglement is subsequently underscored in the song's final lines. There, Foxx interpellates everyone — the original targets of his satire, himself, and, not least, the implied listener — by shifting to the collective we, resulting in a conclusion brimming with a sense of absolute (self-)disgust:

> So we drink and sink and talk and stalk
> With interchangeable enemies and friends
> Trying on each other's skins
> While we're dying to be born again
> And it goes on all night, all night […]

Complementing this merciless act of (self-)evisceration is the song's subsequent instrumental coda, which is dominated by another furious violin solo with an even more heavily distorted tone than elsewhere on the record. Finally, the song collapses in a rather pitiful end: a few clumsy guitar chords followed by the track evaporating in a whizzing, silly-sounding electronic sound effect.

Thus, "Artificial Life" is exemplary in how its dramaturgy gradually moves through all the stages of kinds of non-moralistic satirical speech. It begins with the satirist standing at a detached position of assumed neutrality and, as an uninvolved stranger, projecting his resentment at a set of distant targets — namely those shallow and destitute participants of the eponymous "Artifical Life" mocked in the song's first two verses. However, the song then moves into a realization that the satirist is himself not only a part of the scenery that he is describing and mocking, but, by virtue of his perverse voyeuristic fascination and the formal means by which he realizes his satirical speech, also deeply invested in it. This moment of the satirist becoming aware that he

is, in fact, not standing in the privileged position of an uninvolved stranger subsequently moves the song into a far more cynical direction. Reacting, at first, with a mixture of raging fury and absurdist laughter at that realization of his own inextricable entanglement with a depressingly profane external social reality and the perverse pleasure derived from that fact, Foxx concludes with a statement of unconditional and absolute resentment directed at each and every one: the shallow scenesters, himself as the satirical observer/participant and, not least, the implied listener as another observer/participant.

f course, both the punk scenes and its pundits did not take kindly to Foxx's ambivalent approach, which straddled the line between punk-ish statements of defiance and a more (self-)critical perspective that fundamentally questioned the efficacy of these purported acts of defiance. As with the debut, *Ha! Ha! Ha!* was largely met with commercial indifference; the pundit reaction, however, is perhaps epitomized best by Julie Burchill's narcissistic non-review of the album in the *New Musical Express*, in which she accused Foxx and consorts of "chilling stupidity", mostly for the fact that "they're too ooooooold…". The irony behind Burchill reacting to Ultravox's equivocal stance with an affected display of snobbish derision is, of course, that her response was precisely the kind of shallow and conformist pseudo-deviancy that Ultravox were satirizing on *Ha! Ha! Ha!*, thereby essentially validating Foxx's point.

Still, Foxx was clearly making an important point with regard to the precarious position of the satirist by staging its more problematic and dangerous aspects. Foxx started out, on Ultravox's debut album, by reinventing himself, through a process of a voluntary dehumanization of the self, as a kind of imperfect android. As discussed with regard to "My Sex" and "I Want to Be a Machine", this purging of an intrinsic self and subsequent re-personalization as an entirely superficial and external self was a survivalist ploy to achieve a type of individual agency through a process of gradual detachment. On *Ha! Ha! Ha!*, however, this logic had shifted slightly. By significantly increasing the aggressive aspects of that approach, both sonically and lyrically, the record can be read as a staging of what would happen if that notion of personality grasped as an entirely malleable surface was taken to its logical extreme. Out of the inevitable conflict between, on the one hand, this machine persona as a concrete ideal of monadic autonomy and, on the other hand, the fact that even this radically artificial conception of the performed self would not be able to extricate itself fully from the practical constraints of social reality, there would emerge a figure characterized primarily by a sociopathic callousness towards itself and the world. As performed on "Artificial Life", this figure would, ironically, not be that of a survivalist, but one that would be destructive of both itself and

everything around it. It goes without saying that this is a cliff from which one ultimately had to step back.

Foxx's negotiation of the precarious position of the individual as a detached satirical observer is thus very similar to Lewis's struggles on that front. Lewis's trajectory can be broadly summarized as follows: During his Vorticist period and its immediate aftermath, he promoted a harsh and resolute machine aesthetics, arguing that man in the machine age must become a machine himself. The effective way to meet the reality of modern life was, in other words, to literally *steel* oneself. Over time, this confrontative stance gave way to a more sober and carefully deliberated position wherein a notion of the human or of humanism could figure more prominently again. What remained constant, however, was the cold and analytical outlook that focused on the superficial or external side of things — whether these were the steely surfaces of the person-as-machine or the less extreme but no less artificial and carefully cultivated personal appearances of the human personality. As discussed, Lewis rejected Futurism's (or, rather, Marinetti's) "Mediterranean" exuberance in favor of a more sober and restrained "Saxon" outlook that formed a lynchpin of the Vorticist aesthetics. Although the notion of primitive energies figured constantly in his aesthetics, usually in the form of roaring, unrestrained laughter, we have noted that the Lewisian laugh is not of a warm kind, but one that is cold and bitter — the acoustic counterpart to the penetrating stare of the satirist. Furthermore, what also remained unchanged was his general rejection of or, at the very least, disinterest in inner psychological realities. Whether as a Vorticist or later in his critical stance towards, for example, Surrealism or, as discussed with regard to *The Demon of Progress in the Arts*, post-war non-figurative art, questions pertaining to immanent principles, to psychology, and to states of mind were sidelined and regarded, at most, as symptoms of external constraints emerging from actual social practices and power relations.

Thus, Lewis's gradual and tentative rapprochement with humanistic notions (it is, for example, not a far-fetched claim to regard *The Demon of Progress in the Arts* as a fundamentally humanistic text, though one would have to add that it promotes an austere and cold type of humanism) shows how, in a similar way to Foxx, he became aware of the problematic sides of the external approach while still holding on to it in principle. What remained essentially unchanged was the stance that, in modern industrialized mass societies, the internal (i.e. psychologically oriented) approach and related notions of a warm humanism — bluntly put, to hold the idea of a soul or a spirit against a profane external reality — were outdated and impracticable concepts to survive in an age of machines. However, to completely turn one's back on a notion of the human

and engage the cold and impersonal abstractions of modern reality with an equally cold and detached stance was also a dangerous path to tread. Arguably, this problem accounts for his contradictory middle position of a modernist who also self-identified as a classicist; with the latter's aesthetic parameters being on the stern and rigid but nevertheless essentially *human* side of things, it presented an avenue to engage modernity in an appropriately cold and detached manner without making the Futurist mistake of lapsing into a self-destructive and anti-human modern machine fetishism. Still, Lewis arguably did not manage to readjust his approach as convincingly as Foxx, who enacted a more decisive realignment of his own external approach after *Ha! Ha! Ha!*. Instead, Lewis's own attempts at figuring out how to survive in this world as a creative person led to his gradual retreat from the external world into a self-contained isolation — a fate that ultimately seems rather ironic considering his career-spanning fascination with the imbroglios of the theater of society and the sharp analytical eye with which he observed them.

The medium where this aesthetic shift is most apparent is in Lewis's portrait paintings and, related to these, some of his caricaturesque efforts. As Paul Edwards has noted, "although the broad chronological trend in Lewis's work is away from abstraction, toward naturalist humanism, antinaturalist ideas [...] still exerted influence and occasionally reemerged in his critical writing" ("Lewis, Satire and Portraiture" 72). To recognize that stylistic shift, a simple juxtaposition suffices. It goes without saying that *Praxitella* (Fig. 35), his 1920-21 portrait of Iris Barry, with whom he was having a troubled affair at the time, is decidedly less naturalistic and more in line with a post-futurist man-as-machine (or, in this case, rather woman-as-machine) aesthetics than his 1938 portrait of Naomi Mitchison (Fig. 36). Still, a closer look at his entire body of portraiture works shows that this move from a more anti-naturalist toward a more naturalist style was not a linear stylistic development but a rough tendency at best. On the one hand, there are numerous portrait sketches, drawings, and a few oil paintings from the early 1920s that show a far more naturalistic style than the harsh and metallic abstraction of *Praxitella* and remain clearly indebted to the classical tradition of portraiture; on the other hand, Lewis continued to experiment with (semi-)abstract compositions well into the late 1930s and beyond. It is thus perhaps better to regard these stylistic differences not in the context of a gradual and irreversible chronological development, but as a set of modes or as a repertoire of aesthetic practices which Lewis could draw on as necessary.

What these modes had in common, however, was how they favored a linear style that focused on strong lines, clearly delineated and closed forms and

shapes, and pronounced color contrasts that sharply isolated the subject from its background. Again, Lewis's dictum of how he hated "the movement which displaces the lines" (*Blasting and Bombardiering* 35) can be applied here in how he evidently was not invested in the more loose and painterly approaches to (portrait) painting. Lewis's portraits, regardless of the supposed degree of naturalism or anti-naturalism, are all sharp profiles, chiseled and spotless faces, meticulously groomed hair ("Bless the hairdresser!"), and controlled and rehearsed (or conditioned) poses. In that sense, even his more naturalistic portraits project a strong sense of artificiality or, at the very least, of distance and, thus, establish a relationship between the sitter and the viewer that is essentially impersonal. The implied aim of these depictions is, in other words, not to provide a deep and revelatory insight into the sitter's psychological inner life; rather, it points the viewer to the outward personal appearance of the sitters as that which constitutes the superficial essence of a personality. It is not their implied psychology but the outward shell of their bodies that, in the sense that it amounts to a kind of malleable (artistic) material, delineates the space of possibilities for the fashioning of one's selves.

Regarding this un- or anti-psychological view of the self, Lewis's 1932 exhibition *Thirty Personalities* can be read as a programmatic statement. Comprising a series of portraits of various society figures of his time, among them G. K. Chesterton (Fig. 37) and Rebecca West (Fig. 38), the style of these pencil on paper drawings makes it clear that the term "personality" in the title of the exhibition does not refer to an immanent notion of the self, but to the outward appearance as its essential locus. Composed of elegantly curved lines that nevertheless suggest a similar geometric rigidity as the earlier angular style of his Vorticist period, as well as softly shaded tones of gray, Lewis emphasizes the plastic qualities of the sitters' faces, depicting them not as windows to the psyche, but as immaculately shaped and impermeable surfaces. The effect of these portrait drawings is simultaneously naturalistic (in the sense that they accurately capture the human likeness) and artificial in how the restrained drawing technique employed by Lewis creates a palpable sense of distance between the viewer and the sitter. Although the immaculate surfaces of these faces suggest a sense of the material, it is not the natural, biological materiality of imperfect flesh and skin, but a more delicate synthetic material — porcelain, perhaps, or a spotless enamel coating. For all their quasi-naturalistic human likeness, these faces, with their doll- or mask-like materiality, are presented as the medium, as well as the end product of a distinctly cultural technique of self-shaping. We could thus say that the head portraits of *Thirty Personalities* represent a similarly hybrid category as John Foxx's android persona that he

presented on the cover of Ultravox's debut album. They are not representations of naturalistic selves, but, together, form a model catalog of external personal appearances or possible types to present on the modern social stage. The social mask is thus conceived not as a secondary or superimposed concept (in how it is created to hide, distort, or suppress an actual authentic or natural face), but as the category that matters most. As, at least from a practicological standpoint, the self is an inherently social concept emerging from and only existing in relation to concrete social practices, it is this social mask, or, rather, this *social face* that should be the primary object of our interest.

Lewis's view of the self (or, at least, of that self which matters most) as an acquired or (self-)fashioned social role or persona (that is, as an entirely external affair informed by and reflective of a given social reality) bears certain similarities to what several German artists grouped under the term of the *New Objectivity* (Neue Sachlichkeit) were doing at the time. What Lewis and the artists of the New Objectivity movement shared was a cool, sober, and analytical focus on external social realities. In both cases, this matter-of-fact stance represented both a reaction to, and, at least in part, a rejection of, the grand idealist visions of the avant-garde. Arguing that it was the mundane everyday practices which formed the basis and also restricted the scope of action, both of groups and individuals, the artist should therefore direct his or her attention towards, or should, at the very least, greatly consider, these external realities instead of drifting off into abstract idealist speculations. Connected to this renewed interest in practical external realities was a return to a valorization of the figurative principle as well as to traditional genres and modes of representation. Considering the parallels between Lewis's practicological outlook and the aesthetic approaches of the artists of the New Objectivity, one could, for example, point to the parallels between Lewis's *Thirty Personalities* and August Sander's seminal photo book *Antlitz der Zeit* (*Face of Our Time*) with its subtitle of *Sixty Portraits of Twentieth-Century Germans.* Lewis's linear style of painting with its classical leanings and its interest in the external evokes associations with painters such as Christian Schad or Georg Scholz.

Most importantly, however, it is in the element of satire and of social critique where Lewis's aesthetics intersect with those of the painters of the New Objectivity. Similar to Lewis, the clinical gaze that the latter projected onto the surfaces of contemporary social reality was, though sober and detached, not a pseudo-scientific and neutral gaze that simply aimed to ascertain objective facts. Rather, it was, at least among those artists grouped among the *verists* within the New Objectivity, an aesthetic strategy to visualize and criticize social power relations and their concrete manifestations in everyday life. The

most obvious examples of this tendency are, of course, the satirical paintings by George Grosz, in which he viciously attacked the political and economic elites of the Weimar Republic, often depicting them, as Lewis did with the targets of his satirical works, as unthinking automatons such as in *Republica Automatons* or in *The Pillars of Society* (Figs. 39 and 40). However, and in line with his often hard-to-pin-down political views, we find in Lewis aspects of both broad tendencies of the New Objectivity: In his satirical and caustic critiques of contemporary society and culture, we recognize the harsh and aggressive thrust of the (politically staunchly left-wing) verists. At the same time, Lewis's restorative gestures, his valorization of order and discipline, and his preference for the painterly ideals of the Renaissance also point to the less politically charged classicist tendency within the New Objectivity.

However, Lewis differs from his German "relatives" in how he appears to emphasize the performative or theatrical aspect more strongly. Usually, the art of the New Objectivity is read as a reflection of and a reaction to the traumatic aftermath of World War One and the growing pains of the Weimar Republic (and, at least in the case of the verists, also an anticipation of the latter's end). If the artists of the New Objectivity shared with Lewis's aesthetic approach the stance that a sober and detached view of the external realities of society was the appropriate strategy to deal with this new world, Lewis put the accent less on a visualization (that is, an unmasking) of these given structural facts of life and more on the possible ways by which the individual could respond or adapt to these harsh circumstances. If, in other words, the individual is an actor in the theater of society, meaning that its scope of action is framed by the given external social constraints that make up the stage of that theater, then the fundamental question to ask is what kind of an actor one could hope to be. What is at stake is the question whether one would move on that stage as a puppet on a string, that is, as a conditioned automaton passively pulled along by the external forces and constraints of society, or whether one could establish oneself as a semi-autonomous actor. The latter, of course, would still be framed by the limits of the social stage; however, he or she would at least have a greater degree of agency in actively shaping his or her own movements, poses, and appearances. In contrast to the puppet, the actor, in other words, would at least have some control in deciding what surface persona he or she would choose to project on the social stage.

Of course, Lewis clearly saw himself as the latter. As Paul Edwards pointed out, "for Lewis, an image of himself, in art as well as life, tended to be an appearance to present to the world, a calculated statement, not a revelation of the hidden self" (Edwards and Humphreys 19). Accordingly, Lewis's numerous

self-portraits show a great range of stylistic breath and a precise use of various props such as glasses, smoking pipes, and, most importantly, his trademark black hat. Ranging from more abstract, angular, and minimalist compositions such as his 1911 self-portrait (Fig. 41) to more classically restrained pieces such as his *Portrait of the Artist as the Painter Raphael* from 1921 (which, incidentally, pointed out the reference to classical Renaissance painting in its title) (Fig. 42), Lewis's extensive self-portraiture must thus be read as part of a wider strategy of conscious self-shaping in order to invent himself as an actor on the social stage and thereby preclude him from instead being passively invented by forces outside of his control. The opposite to these active strategies of self-shaping — the aforementioned puppet or automaton — can be observed in some of his commissioned works. His 1945 portrait of Eleanor Martin, wife of Canadian MP and later minister Paul Martin (who was also the father of Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin [Jr.]), is one of these examples (Fig. 43). Painted out of economic necessity during his self-imposed Canadian exile, it is self-evident that Lewis did not care much for the sitter. Although the portrait, particularly the sitter's face, is painted in a detailed and altogether naturalistic manner, her stiff and unnatural pose, frozen facial expression, and blank stare suggest a persona that has not been consciously shaped by the sitter, but has been largely imposed by her social environment.

However, it is Lewis's best-known self-portrait in which the complex dialectical relationship between these strategies of confident and quasi-autonomous self-shaping and how they nevertheless remain inextricably tangled up with the constraints set by the given social reality is best negotiated. His 1920-21 portrait of *Mr. Wyndham Lewis as a Tyro* (Fig. 44) has become the definitive image of Wyndham Lewis the painter and author. The Tyro was a caricaturesque type that Lewis created in the early 1920s in a short-lived effort to reflect and satirize the cultural realities of England after the First World War. Lewis conceived these Tyros as deformed masculine figures dressed in contemporary attire and characterized primarily by their grotesque faces and their exaggerated, teeth-baring grins (Fig. 45). In this collision of the fashionably urbane and the barbaric, they represented another attempt to negotiate that fundamental contradiction which permeates a large part of Lewis's body of work: his valorization, on the one hand, of the raw energies of the primitive and uncivilized savage and, on the other hand, his elitist and intellectualist convictions that it was imperative for the artist and the modernist to possess the utmost degree of cultural refinement. The other major Tyro painting besides the aforementioned self-portrait, *A Reading of Ovid (Tyros)* (Fig. 46), succinctly encapsulates this *tyronic* logic. Its two figures are shown, as the title suggests, in a reading of the classical poet. However,

the idea of an engagement with classical literature — an activity that normally suggests or asks for a serene and cultured restraint — clashes with the grotesque and unrefined appearances of these tyronic figures. Their dark red skin, exposed white teeth, piercing stares, and deformed proportions imply an altogether more amateurish, if not barbaric engagement with the text. At the same time, the raw vigorousness of these figures is undeniable; as usual, Lewis's Tyros are simultaneously powerful and laughably absurd creatures. They are thus figures invented by Lewis to satirize the unrefined social climbers and artistic dilettantes of the Roaring Twenties and, by extension, the unrestrained and naïve optimism of the age. They are, to refer back to John Foxx's similar satirical thrust on *Ha! Ha! Ha!*, "Frozen Ones" gleefully living their "Artificial Life".

However, there is an additional layer of meaning in the exaggerated facial expressions of these tyronic figures. They can be read as a visualization of the unfiltered and primitive Lewisian laugh, but, as the figure on the right suggests, these facial expressions seamlessly fluctuate between forced smiles and contorted expressions of pain. In suggesting some unresolved traumatic experience behind these tyronic facades, Lewis was placing his satire of the exaggerated optimism of the 1920s against the backdrop of World War One — a reference that is also apparent in the right figure's pose, leaning over the back of his chair as if it was a crutch. The Tyro was thus a type through which Lewis attempted, as Paul Edwards noted, "to provide a satirical anatomy of society after the First World War, showing both the social aftereffects of that huge shock and the kind of infantilized society [...] that it might lead to" (Edwards and Humphreys 19). In that sense, we can again note the parallels between Lewis's aesthetic approaches and the verist tendency of the German New Objectivity.

What is thus curious about *Mr. Wyndham Lewis as a Tyro* is how Lewis consciously chose to present himself in this rather unflattering satirical role that he had invented in order to criticize contemporary culture and society. However, this choice seems to follow a similar logic as the already discussed example of John Foxx's satire on *Ha! Ha! Ha!*, specifically on "Artificial Life", namely that he acknowledged how even he, as a satirist, remained embroiled in, and thus a participant of, the same cultural realities as the exuberant dilettantes that he was satirizing. In this way, Lewis's self-portrait as a Tyro represents another practicological response to a given social reality, the logic of which is literally spelled out in the painting's title: Instead of revealing a supposed true or authentic self, the already artificial public persona of *Mr. Wyndham Lewis* presents himself on the social stage as another superimposed and artificial persona of a *Tyro* in a survivalist ploy to elude, as best as possible, those inextricable social mechanisms of compartmentalization, subordination, and

control. In addition, the aspect of the repression of war experiences applied, of course, directly to his own history. As a World War One veteran, Lewis veritably was a tyronic figure in how he himself had to move on by stoically grinning or, rather, *sneering* through his own wartime memories. In this sense, *Mr. Wyndham Lewis as a Tyro* can veritably be seen as his definitive self-portrait. Overtly, it conforms to the image of Lewis as the sneering, belligerent, and perpetual outsider of British modernism. However, beyond that it also reflects on and directly performs Lewis's wider aesthetic approach as a personal appearance artist: his ever-shifting strategy of consciously inventing and playing roles, and of constantly modifying his repertoire of artificial surface personae in order to survive in what he regarded as an essentially hostile social reality designed to suppress these desires for individual agency and control.

If Lewis's self-portrait as a Tyro thus stands as a particularly notable fruit of these conscious strategies of self-shaping, a more pessimistic and skeptical view can be found in his 1941 novel *The Vulgar Streak*. Not only does the novel make a case for how these assertive acts of self-fashioning would shatter against the harsh realities of the British class system, but it also presents a critical reflection on the problems that are inherent to the logic of these highly individualistic strategies themselves. Compared to *The Revenge for Love, The Vulgar Streak* is a fairly straightforward novel with a sympathetic main character and a clear plot, so a comparatively brief summary suffices here. What it retains from *The Revenge for Love* is how the themes of fakery and deceit in a bankrupt world are central to this novel as well. Set in the immediate run-up to World War Two, the story follows the efforts of Vincent Penhale, a penniless actor with a working-class background, to climb the social ladder of the British class system. Lewis continues his ironic choice of naming, as, not unlike Victor Stamp, Vincent's dreams and aspirations as a determined self-shaper are doomed to clash with and ultimately shatter against the harsh realities of society as it is.

The novel's first (and arguably most compelling) part is set in Venice against the backdrop of the Munich Conference. Vincent is visiting the city as a tourist with his compatriot, Martin Penny-Smythe, a member of the upper-classes, who, at the beginning of the novel, is still oblivious to Vincent's social background, which is not revealed until the fourth chapter. Martin's role in the novel is mainly to serve as a counterpart to Vincent and thereby illustrate what Lewis sees as the essential absurdities of class division. A stubby and timid member of the "tweed and water-proof class" (11) who "cultivated a mild stammer" (11), Martin is immediately established as inferior to the "athletic, handsome and elegant" (11) Vincent in everything except social class. Already in this initial juxtaposition, Lewis establishes the core theme or conflict of the novel:

As class distinctions are an entirely imaginary category, they can and, in fact, have to be realized and reinforced only through purely extrinsic gestures, utterances, and appearances: a proper command of manners, etiquette, and, above all, *speech.* Vincent's logical deduction is thus that, to break through the barriers of the class system, it is enough to convincingly *act* the part — to take on an aristocratic external appearance and learn the proper pronunciation. However, with his contrasting introduction of Vincent and Martin, Lewis already complicates matters, foreshadowing how Vincent will ultimately be proven wrong. Although class affiliation is indeed signaled and created through one's external appearance, Martin's privileged class background still allows him to cultivate an unrefined stammer. Lewis thus already alludes to what he regards as the essential hypocrisy and illogicality of the British class system: Yes, it thoroughly hinges on, is realized through, and, thus, attaches great importance to external rituals and appearances — only when, for some unfathomable reason, it does not.

Over the novel's first chapters, Lewis evokes a palpable mood of pre-war anxiety and dread. Newspaper reports and radio dispatches provide a constant stream of information about the development of the Munich Crisis, and the departure of most holiday guests from the hotel where Vincent and Martin are staying underscores the overall sense of crisis. In this atmosphere of uncertainty, Vincent, convincingly passing himself off as a member of the upper classes, emerges as a worldly, confident, and slightly mysterious character — a seductive, Bryan Ferry-esque figure after the latter's transformation into the elegant and aristocratic dandy. With his sophisticated manners and his eloquent grasp of politics, Vincent establishes himself as a calming and commanding figure among the remaining vacationers and manages to ingratiate himself with two other British guests, the upper middle-class Mrs. Mallow and her daughter April. Expertly seducing the latter, Vincent recognizes the Mallows as a means to move up the social ladder, eventually marrying into the family in the second part of the novel. The Venice arc of the novel thus reads like an antecedent of Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* with an added element of British class consciousness. Using the idyllic Italian setting as a backdrop, it tells a similar story of a nobody who, by his sheer skill of fakery, of inventing or shaping himself as a confident and charming man of the world, manages to insinuate himself into the confidence of an entire group of people above his own social standing and escape from the destitute squalor of his working class environment.

However, Vincent's social rise into the middle classes is about as long-lasting as the Munich Agreement. Although Martin does not reveal Vincent's secret,

mainly out of confusion, after the latter provides him with a confession of his real origins, which gradually turns into an elaborate rant about the social injustice at the heart of the British class system, the Venice arc already hints at the subsequent unraveling of Vincent's scheme. His cryptic and evasive remarks about his financial standing and the unexpected appearance of the brutish gangster Halvorsen at the hotel, who identifies himself as an associate of Vincent's, foreshadow the developments of the novel's second part, which moves the stage to London. As is gradually revealed to the reader, Vincent financed his trip to Venice and, by extension, his social climbing with counterfeit money that he and Halvorsen had printed. Picking up the theme of forgery again, which we have already encountered in *The Revenge for Love*, Lewis's introduction of counterfeit money as a plot element also reflects his own loss of trust in the credit system in the wake of the Great Depression, which he also repeatedly expressed in his later critical writings.[51]

Vincent's scheme unravels for good when Dougal Tandish, a snobbish upstart, who is very antagonistic to Vincent (but in many respects also his disagreeable mirror image), starts snooping into Vincent's past and, when he discovers the counterfeiting workshop, is murdered by Halvorsen. The subsequent police investigation leads to the arrest and probable conviction of Halvorsen, but, more importantly, also brings to light Vincent's deception. The ensuing scandal about Vincent, the false baronet, is mercilessly exploited by the yellow press and results in a great embarrassment for the Mallows. The already pregnant April, overtaken by these revelations, suffers a fainting spell and shortly afterwards dies in hospital of a hemorrhage, leaving Vincent stranded, penniless, and with the prospect of a high prison sentence. What is particularly chilling is the sober yet swift manner by which society moves to isolate the unmasked imposter and reinstate the proper social divisions. Lewis purposefully avoids giving the reader a first-hand view of the more scandalous aspects of this part of the plot such as the arrest, the police proceedings, or the sensationalist reporting. Rather, he relates these events indirectly through Vincent's conversations with Martin, his sister Maddie, his valet, and Mrs. Mallow. What is striking is how even his final conversation with Mrs. Mallow is completely bereft of any sign of moralistic outrage and remains altogether — and eerily so — polite and civilized. By highlighting the heavily understated way in which society ultimately deals with Vincent — the grieving Mrs. Mallow's remark of "Well! [...] You've made a pretty mess of things, haven't you!" (214) stands out particularly in this regard — Lewis points to the more latent and,

51 See, for example, *The Demon of Progress in the Arts* 77.

above all, structural resentment that lurks at the heart of the British class system and politely but firmly ensures its rigidity. In that sense, the coldly civilized manner by which Vincent is ultimately put in his place (again) only confirms and reinforces the latter's own resentful stance towards that system.

Having thus failed to break through this system, Vincent, in line with his strong-willed personality, chooses to at least go out on his own terms. In the novel's penultimate chapter, he is found by his valet "hanging from the disused gas-suspension in the middle of" (229) his apartment, a farewell note pinned to his chest: "Whoever finds this body, may do what they like with it. *I* don't want it. *Signed.* Its former inhabitant" (230). What can be read as a straightforward expression of dehumanized despair and defeat is simultaneously a defiant final statement of Vincent Penhale, the actor and strong-willed self-shaper. By pointing to the purely functional aspect of the body, Vincent insists, one last time, on his extrinsic conception of the self, which is bound neither by individual psychology nor imaginary social class barriers. Rather than seeing the body as an incarnation of a static self, Vincent's farewell note again posits the body as an adaptable vessel. It is simultaneously the artistic tool and the artistic material of the creative individual out of which he or she fabricates and projects an artificial self and uses that shaped self to establish him- or herself as a semi-autonomous actor on the social stage. With that tool having outlived its usefulness — its wings having been clipped, so to speak, by the repressive apparatuses of society, Vincent's suicide is thus a logical and defiant consequence of his categorical rejection of that rigid class hierarchy.

Yet *The Vulgar Streak* is more than an angry indictment of the injustices and hypocrisies of a class system designed to eradicate these individualistic desires at their root. It is also a novel in which Lewis negotiates the problematic underbelly of that superficial notion of the fabricated self and the ruthless and aggressive strategies of self-shaping derived from it. In a similar way to how John Foxx's man-machine aesthetics had acquired a destructive and misanthropic quality on *Ha! Ha! Ha!*, *The Vulgar Streak* points to an inherent danger emanating from these practices of superficial self-shaping. Towards the end of the second part of the novel, right before the murder of Dougal Tandish, Vincent seeks the advice of Humbert Perl, a Jewish Viennese psychiatrist living in London exile. The meeting leads to a cordial exchange between two outsiders: on the one hand, the young working class man who refuses to accept his "proper" place in society and the Austrian Jewish high-bourgeois intellectual, who had himself been forcefully ejected from his original social environment.

Perl, whose sole appearance in the novel is in that one chapter, is introduced as an external presence to the plot and serves mainly to provide an extra-diegetic

commentary on Vincent's character from within the diegesis of the novel. His conclusion is similar to what we have already discussed with regard to the (self-)destructive sarcasm that John Foxx veered into on *Ha! Ha! Ha!*. Vincent's aggressive response to the restrictive realities of the class system is inherently destructive. The danger of his radical external individualism, which rests not on a naturalistic notion of the self, but on the sheer unmitigated willpower to forcefully fabricate one's outward personal appearance and establish oneself at whatever cost within and against the preexisting societal norms, is that it is both egotistical and tyrannical:

> You are egotist [...] It is obvious, Vincent, that you suffer from a morbid degree from [...] an *excess of Will.* [...] Your will is so powerful that it drives you along like a relentless tyrant. You have a sort of *personal dictator* (to parody 'personal devil') inside you. It drives you on to do this, and to do that: something very distasteful and difficult, of course. You have an English expression: he 'steeled his will.' Well, Vincent, your will is *steeled* almost out of human semblance. (176-77)

Perl's (and, by extension, Lewis's) analysis thus suggests that Vincent's strategy of vigorous and ruthless self-shaping represents a *triumph of the (individualistic) will,* that, paradoxically, aligns with the totalitarian logic of fascism: "Mussolini and Hitler what are they, but extreme, and curiously disagreeable, expressions of this morbid will. Devils they are not so much as diabolical machines of empty *will"* (177).

The paradoxical logic of this superficial subjectivity negotiated in Vincent's meeting with Perl can thus be summarized as follows: For the strong-willed self-shaper, the self is not a monolithic entity in the humanistic sense of the term, but something that emerges from and only exists in concrete social practices. As such, the practice of actively shaping one's self (or, rather, one's repertoire of several possible selves) is to be read not as a struggle to conform to some given notion of an authentic self, but as an ever-changing survival strategy in a social game where the goal is to emerge in ever more advantageous positions on the social stage. However, there is a fundamental contradiction to that notion of subjectivity conceived as the permanent fabrication of selves. If, in this post-humanistic view of subjectivity, the self is both the player and product of a social game, its most skillful player would be characterized by a particularly ruthless brand of absolute self-reliance and egotism. His or her cold and calculating approach of shaping ever more advantageous selves would betray an overly antagonistic stance towards the very same social framework that paradoxically constitutes the superficial self in the first place. The most

efficient player of that social game of shaping one's subjectivity would, in other words, take the shape of a misanthropic sociopath.

Vincent's exchange with Perl is thus not only a critical reflection of the toxic underside of his character, but also an act of self-reflection performed by Lewis himself. As pointed out with regard to his (self-)portraits, Lewis's own artistic strategies as a personal appearance artist are very much mirrored in Vincent's vigorous and aggressive practice of self-shaping. *The Vulgar Streak*, and the Perl chapter in particular, shows that Lewis was thus very much aware of the dark and problematic sides of that playful or performative approach to a practice of self-fabrication. The irony is, of course, that, despite his sharp analytical insight, he seemed unable to heed his own advice. Rather, Lewis's own brand of strong-willed self-shaping as a strategy to assert himself on the social stage only led to his isolation and gradual retreat from society. His late writings, though characterized by a clear and plain style and conveying a generally sober-minded and calm disposition, are nevertheless pessimistic and bleak documents of the gradual vanishing of his own personal appearances as an active performer from the social stage. Nonetheless, they are still permeated by vivacious scenes underlining his fascination with the absurd spectacle of human bodily movements and interactions. The fumigating scene in *Self Condemned* (203-9) or the turbulent efforts of the builders and carpenters in the short story "The Rot" (*Rotting Hill* 105-7) come to mind as late examples of Lewis's lifelong interest in these concrete manifestations of "primitive energies". Generally, however, his later fiction revolves around a misanthropic desire to be completely isolated from an essentially disappointing and vulgar external social reality. It evokes the claustrophobic mood of someone who, to refer back to Bruce Gilbert's final lyrical contribution in Wire before his exit from the group, "would like to leave" but has "not got the fare" (*Send* track 10).

This shift away from outward acts of self-shaping to a practice of resigned self-insulation appears most prominently in *Self Condemned.* Fictionalizing his self-imposed exile in Canada during World War Two, Lewis presents another semi-biographical alter ego in René Harding, a renowned professor of history with Anglo-French roots. The novel's plot follows René as he resigns from his university position in protest over the hypocrisies of academia and of the established forms of historiography, cuts his ties with his entire London social circle and relocates with his wife Hester to Canada just as the Second World War breaks out. There, the two lead a destitute and largely solitary existence in a shabby hotel in Momaco, a fictional stand-in for Toronto, where Lewis and his wife were staying during their Canadian years. However, fully aware of the absurdity of this self-imposed hermitage in the context of a modern reality,

Lewis paints the Hardings' existence in that prison of René's own choosing not as a heroic retreat from a bankrupt society, but as a pointless and surreal state of limbo — a liminal state still very much connected to and depending on the material realities of that society. Isolated and uprooted, their hand to mouth way of living soon forces Harding to reluctantly take various odd jobs, which inadvertently leads him to reestablish in Momaco a kind of simulacrum of his previous social life. Hester, however, finds it increasingly difficult to cope with this dislocated existence and when René refuses to return to England after the end of the war, she finally takes her own life by stepping in front of a truck. An utterly vanquished René somehow persists, lingering on as a living but very much undead memorial of the catastrophes of the first half of the twentieth century. In the final chapter, fittingly titled "The Cemetery of Shells", a broken René ends up taking another post as a professor at an unnamed US university, leading to the novel's chillingly bleak conclusion:

> [...] in a few months he was installed in a small, warm, wooden dwelling not far from the campus of this much more pretentious seat of learning, five hundred miles farther south; and the Faculty had no idea that it was a glacial shell of a man who had come to live among them, mainly because they were themselves unfilled with anything more than a little academic stuffing. (407)

However, it is earlier in the novel that Lewis already provides the requiem for an ideal for a living that, at least according to him, had been eradicated for good by the monumental disasters and crimes that had befallen the early twentieth century. Lewis uses a visit by René to his friend Robert Parkinson, fittingly nicknamed "Rotter", to again elaborate and lament the vanishing of his ideal of an intellectual life:

> This was 1939, the last year, or as good as, in which such a life as this one was to be lived. Parkinson was the last of a species. Here he was in a large room, which was a private, a functional library. Such a literary workshop belonged to the ages of individualism. [...] It was really a fragment of paradise where one of our species lived embedded in his books, decently fed, moderately taxed, snug and unmolested. [...] According to any computation except that of the underprivileged, Parkinson was a poor man. [...] But what was it produced this blissful modest abundance that has been described above? Nothing more than writing a few reviews a month [...]. (75-77)

The reasons for the disappearance of that individualist way of life are, to Lewis, to be found entirely in practical economic constraints. Again, society is presented as something inherently and actively hostile to that individualist outlook:

> Why it is quite accurate to say that such a man nowhere today exists though he might receive the same remuneration for the same work, it is because the pound sterling has lost two-thirds of its stature. It only masquerades as a pound. […] The work he did would be paid as though the pound were still the pound, for the periodicals and newspapers sell not very far above the nineteen thirty-nine figure. And accordingly their contributor must live in some other way than the way Parkinson lived. The Individualist Age, composed of a multiplicity of small paradises, is no more. (77)

As a both a lament to the disappearance of that way of life and a sober acknowledgment of it as a practical fact, *Self Condemned* again seems to stand as another example of that Lewisian dialectics which veers between the individualistic desire to assert oneself "beyond action and reaction" and the practicological awareness of its impossibility. However, it also stands as evidence that, ultimately, Lewis never managed to resolve that fundamental contradiction in a satisfying manner. Instead, the struggle between these two poles simply came to a gradual halt in an exhausted stalemate. What remained of the formerly innovative strategies of self-shaping was a lackadaisical desire to insulate oneself completely from the disappointing realities of the outside world. However, even this comparatively modest goal was simultaneously acknowledged by Lewis as being impossible to achieve, as there simply cannot be an outside of one's embroilment in the messy and haphazard external practices of social reality. It is thus only logical that *Self Condemned* ends with René Harding as a living dead, stoically enduring and surviving, but with the ideal of vigorous self-shaping — simultaneously a concept of an exhausted past and an unrealized future — having been condemned to the cemetery of shells for good.

However, Lewis's shift from assertive self-shaping to resigned self-insulation ultimately points to a deeper problem in his overly antagonistic stance towards society. As I have argued, Lewis's practicological outlook was in many respects extremely forward-looking and ahead of its time — to a degree that arguably remains under-appreciated to date. Lewis's sound rejection of a focus on inner psychological realities as a compensating counterweight to the superficialities (in both a descriptive and normative sense of the term) of a modern reality as a fashionable and empty distraction of the more economically privileged social elites still seems to resonate today; so does his own "affirmative" stance towards that superficial external reality (to borrow Diederichsen's second descriptive criterion of pop again ["Pop — Deskriptiv, Normativ, Emphatisch" 39-40]) in the sense of his conviction that an effective response or engagement with a superficial reality must take the shape of a superficial and extrinsic practice as well. In fact, we could say that this anti-essentialist position, with its notion of

the subject as a fabricated superficial entity that would always and necessarily be shaped by and embroiled in extrinsic power relations, already anticipated the Foucauldian theories of subjectivity and the subject (a parallel that is perhaps not entirely coincidental considering that both Lewis and the Foucauldian school(s) of thought were both strongly influenced by Nietzsche).

Still, despite his fascination for the superficial spectacle that constituted the theater of society and his recognition that its most effective player would be an artful and assertive fabricator of selves, his actual responses — usually antagonistic and hostile — turned out to be Nietzschean as well (whether intentionally or not). Ultimately, Lewis's practicological awareness, which anticipated those post-humanistic notions of subjectivity that would be a major concern a few decades later in several strands of critical theory, led him to approach the social stage less as a space of possibilities and more as a battlefield. Despite his view that the self was an extrinsic and thus entirely negotiable and malleable concept, Lewis deployed his practices of self-shaping in the service of an uncompromisingly individualistic stance, which regarded external social reality first and foremost as a threat. The idea that the social stage could also be seen as a positive collaborative environment evidently did not seem to occur to him.

If the problems of Lewis's self-shaping can thus be ascribed to an overly negative view of society and, perhaps, to the lack of a certain capability for empathy, then we could also say that this negative stance anticipated Foucauldian discourse criticism as well. Lewis's aesthetic approach and his critical writing anticipated the latter in how he departed from a humanistic or psychological notion of subjectivity and understood society primarily in terms of extrinsic power relations. In that line of thinking, the subject becomes an entity primarily formed as a product of these (coercive) networks of power. These are the modern puppets and automatons about which Lewis wrote almost constantly. If Lewis's body of work can then be read as one big effort to wrest a modicum of individual freedom from that repressive social sphere, it is a gesture that he constantly undercut by his awareness — which was very much a proto-Foucauldian one — that, ultimately, there is no outside of social or discursive networks of power. In that sense, the liberation of the individual from the clutches of a monolithic humanistic self determined by its immanent psychological state of being turns into an even more oppressive vision. Although the idea of the self as an artificial social construct presents, at least theoretically, a more malleable and flexible concept, the consequence of Lewis's negative views of society as, first and foremost, *control societies,* results in a notion of the subject shaped and defined almost exclusively by society's oppressive aspects.

In this overemphasis of the negative and oppressive aspects of society, Lewis also seemed to have anticipated the bleak and troubling kernel of Focauldian theories of subjectivity and the subject. It is a line of thinking that is very astute at identifying real problems, but seems less able when it comes to formulating actual ideas about how to deal with these problems.

It would thus perhaps make more sense to look to theories of superficial subjectivities from the field of sociology to get a more even-handed view of the concept and its entanglement with social structures. During Lewis's time, one of the key texts that argued for the positive value and, in fact, sheer necessity of understanding subjectivity as an extrinsic and social category, was Helmuth Plessner's *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism.* In several respects, we find in Plessner, whom Helmut Lethen would later describe as the preeminent social theorist of the German New Objectivity (76), positions and arguments that are remarkably similar to those of Lewis. Like Lewis, Plessner rejects those radical communitarian visions of social organization that are based on supposedly authentic or naturalistic ideals of identity: the community of blood as in nationalism or the community of a common singular cause as in Marxism. Positing the modern social stage instead as an artificial space framed by conventional rules of interaction (rituals, manners, etiquette, diplomacy, etc.), Plessner ultimately emphasizes the innovative and positive potential of that *unnatural* social sphere. His argument that an impersonal subjectivity derived entirely from external appearances, gestures, and poses presents a liberating prospect for the individual in how it unchains it from the unchangeable notion of a true and authentic self strongly resembles Lewis's own ideology of self-shaping.

Furthermore, Plessner also corresponds with Lewis in how he rejects the (over-)valorization of intimacy (which follows an essentially communitarian logic) as a necessary antidote to the cold and impersonal reality of modern life. Rather than instinctively denounce these cold and distanced forms of social interaction as unnatural deviations from a supposedly true and more natural ideal of communitarian living, he strongly defends the former for roughly two reasons: On the level of the individual, the artificial masks provided by an impersonal society (as opposed to the intimate community) provide one with an effective armor and disguise, which allows one to act positively and effectively while protecting one from embarrassing oneself by accidentally losing (that is, unmasking) one's face. On the level of society, the tactfulness of these conventional social rituals offers an ensemble of pragmatic and beautifully choreographed practices – in the German original, Plessner uses the word *Takt* with its double meaning of tactfulness and rhythm – for coordinating

the interactions between people who are fundamentally different. The latter, of course, is something that a communitarian logic, which veers toward the establishment of closely knit cliques and groups is, by definition, unable to offer.

Where Plessner differs from Lewis, however, is essentially in tone. If we can read in Plessner, as a contemporary of Lewis, a theorization of Lewis's own impersonal and artificial strategies of self-shaping, what the latter ultimately lacked was a positive outlook on their intersubjective aspects. Bluntly put, when push came to shove, Lewis uncompromisingly insisted on the primacy of the individual with a vehemence that blatantly contradicted his own extrinsic concept of subjectivity as a socially determined, negotiated, and/or performed entity. Overstating the coercive aspects of that social game, it is only logical that Lewis's strategies of self-shaping — in contrast to Plessner, who took a more even-handed view of the theater of society — would eventually transform into strategies of self-insulation.

Interestingly enough, Plessner's core argument corresponds almost exactly to Richard Sennett's famous argument in *The Fall of Public Man*, which was first published in 1974, exactly 50 years after the original publication of *The Limits of Community.* Sennett does not refer to Plessner at all in *The Fall of Public Man*, but that could be simply due to the fact that *The Limits of Community* remained virtually unknown outside of Germany until the later decades of the twentieth century (an English translation was not published until well after the original publication of *The Fall of Public Man*). Still, the parallels are striking to say the least. Like Plessner, Sennett strongly argues against the over-valorization of supposedly more natural personal and intimate forms of social exchange at the expense of more artificial, rehearsed, and coercive forms of impersonal social interaction. Instead of denouncing the alleged unnaturalness of the fabricated impersonal persona, Sennett points to the liberating aspects of conceiving individual action not as an expression of an authentic self but as a form of external playacting, again mirroring both Plessner's argument in favor of societal (instead of communitarian) forms of exchange and Lewis's notion of the fabricated and superficial self. Rather than to liberate us from the chains of extrinsic social coercions, the overvaluing of the personal or private self would instead lead to a *tyranny of intimacy* (338), where the possible scope of individual action would be greatly restricted by an uncompromising dogma that every individual act must unconditionally conform to the image of one's authentic self.

More importantly, Sennett argues, these personal or private modes of social interaction, which hinge on a naturalistic notion of authenticity, are simply not adequate cultural techniques with which to organize and structure all aspects of

modern social life. As he forcefully argues in his famous conclusion to *The Fall of Public Man*, “the absorption in intimate affairs is the mark of an uncivilized society” (340). Furthermore, another consequence of that “retribalization” (339) of society is that the individual gradually vanishes as a politically emancipated subject:

> Community becomes a weapon against society, whose great vice is now seen to be its impersonality. [...] the belief in direct human relations on an intimate scale has seduced us from converting our understanding of the realities of power into guides for our own political behavior. The result is that the forces of domination or inequity remain unchallenged. (339)

If Plessner, in his critical intervention against the festering radical (and, as such, communitarian) movements of his time, thus represents a theorization of the social logic behind the aesthetics of Weimar-era New Objectivity, then Sennett, in his progressive critique of the communitarianism of 1960s countercultures, could be read as a theorization of the 1970s art rock response to the utopian ideals of 1960s rock cultures. In that sense, if British art rock represents a cultural afterlife of a modernist ethos already found in Lewis’s external or practicological approach, then, on the level of critical theory, a similar relationship of cultural (or, rather, theoretical) after-living could be argued in regard to Plessner and Sennett.

However, it is Sennett’s discussion of Hannah Arendt’s concept of *natality* in his 1990 book, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities,* where he pinpoints a fundamental problem of those entirely superficial and impersonal notions of subjectivity that also applies to Lewis’s approach of self-shaping. Natality, as defined by Arendt, refers to a notion of identity or of the self that is tied neither to a given individual psychology nor one’s (familial, national, ethnic, etc.) roots or origins. Rather, it refers to the shaping of an external self that emerges out of “political action” grasped as “a process of giving birth, of initiatives taken in a world that cannot be lived as it was inherited” (134). As Sennett recounts, Arendt developed that notion of an uprooted and, in a sense, practicological self partly as a response to her own experiences as an exile, deploying it as, what we could again describe as, a survival strategy to cope — to *give birth to oneself* again — in a social reality that was markedly different to the one she had to flee from. As with Lewis, the Arendtian self was one that had no investment in inner realities:

> For Hannah Arendt there was no inside to unfold; or rather, this inside belonged to that human animal, slave to its own instincts and emotions, trainable like a pigeon and in essence no different in eating, excreting, procreating, and dying. Arendt contrasted

> this to the human *being*, our nature expressed as an active verb; in being human, men and women find ways to detach themselves from slavery to their bodies. […] There is no destiny. […] there is only struggle for freedom in the present, a radical struggle for freedom, outside. (136)

However, for all the practicological dimension of her thinking, Sennett notes, there was a fundamental (and ironic) flaw to her approach: It did not prove itself entirely in practice. More specifically, Sennett argues that there was an inherent coldness to Arendt's approach that ultimately made it impossible for her to connect with other actors on the modern (urban) social stage:

> She could not connect […] she excluded sympathy from her compass. In the case of Mies [van der Rohe, ed.] we have seen how this exclusion made the building into a shrine, its integrity at odds with the city. In the case of Arendt, the exclusion of sympathy meant the work of mutual arousal failed. […] her understanding constantly misfired when brought to bear on concrete events. (137)

In other words, Arendt's highly intellectualist and, as such, entirely self-sufficient and elitist approach to shaping the (extrinsic) self was marked by a similar problem as Lewis's in how it saw social interaction in an entirely cold, hardened, and, above all, strategic terminology of struggle and assertion:

> Arendt's writings equate the impersonal with the tough, the strong, the resolute, as opposite to the weaknesses of a self-involved and sheltered subjectivity. She dismissed the powers of sympathy. […] She was opposed to considering 'soft' emotions because they seemed to give little of the strength needed to break with the past and gain the present. […] Her silence came out of that hardness. (140)

To be clear, Sennett's critique of Arendt is not to be understood as a rejection of her notion of self-shaping. Arendt was, after all, one of his teachers and Sennett has repeatedly acknowledged her as a major influence (Station). Furthermore, as he notes, there is a genuinely emancipatory aspect to her anti-naturalist outlook on subjectivity, in how "her writing could be seen as laying the ground for the feminist declaration that 'biology is not destiny'" (136). Nevertheless, when Sennett notes that, for Arendt, "'the birth of the political' […] means the creation of an almost super-adult, who deals with others without proclaiming his or her neediness, personal state, or inner condition" (140), it is hard not to hear echoes of Humbert Perl's exchange with Vincent Penhale in *The Vulgar Streak.* To conceive the fabrication of an extrinsic self as an entirely autonomous effort by a strong-willed rational mind would, if taken to its logical conclusion, *steel* its practitioner "almost out of human semblance" (177).

The major difference, of course, is that Lewis recognized this issue and, as discussed, critically reflected on it at length in his writings. His lifelong fascination with carnivalesque sceneries and with the raw energies of primitive laughter, which he posited as a dialectic counterpart to his hardened and disciplined rationality, are evidence of this; so are, mostly in his later writings, those moments of genuine sympathy and love between his principal characters — between Margot and Victor Stamp, between Vincent and April. Still, that awareness alone did not give him the capability to act on it. Sennett's argument about Arendt's cold and impersonal idea of identity boils down to the claim that this avowedly intellectualist approach only worked for her as a monadic individual: "When writers talk about the disappearance of the subject, about writing 'degree zero', they men a kind of flint-hard prose, in its very coldness an assertion of its strength" (141). However, by dryly noting that "this prose is less interesting to read than to write" (141), Sennett points to the inconvenient fact that the same approach failed her as an individual grasped in intersubjective term, that is, in relation to other individuals on the social stage: "Arendt rendered incomprehensible to herself the lives of those who had not achieved her own resolution, who remained needy, confused, and physical" (141). The same can be said of Lewis.

This is what finally brings us back to John Foxx. As pointed out earlier in the chapter, Foxx turned back from that cold notion of an impersonal subjectivity after outlining it on Ultravox's debut and, on *Ha! Ha! Ha!*, had got the Lewisian satire out of his system and realized its problematic implications. Although his best-known effort of his later solo career is the bleak and Ballardian *Metamatic*, an entirely electronic record on which he pushed the robotically sterile aesthetics he had outlined on "I Want to Be a Machine" to an extreme, it is not really representative of his subsequent works. Already a year later, on his second solo album *The Garden,* he had shifted back to a more hybrid sound aesthetics that relied equally on electronic and acoustic elements. If *Metamatic* thus stands as the most pure and thus most easily categorizable example of Foxx's original concept of a dehumanized machine-aesthetics, sonically it represents something of a stylistic oddity in his body of work. Overall, his artistic trajectory post *Ha! Ha! Ha!* points toward a realignment that seemed to distance itself from this cold and clinical perspective and embrace, in its stead, a properly intersubjective notion of the self.

To make no mistake, this realignment is not to be understood as a return to a conventional humanism or a psychological realism. Foxx's sonic identity remained predominantly based in synthesizers and other electronic instruments — even more pronouncedly so after *Ha! Ha! Ha!* than before — and he held on

to his external, superficial, and artificial idea of subjectivity. However, what Foxx did on his third and final album with Ultravox and beyond is perhaps best described as an effort to separate the notion of subjectivity entirely from the (flesh and blood) individual and locate it instead in that intersubjective space in between individuals. He took, in other words, Sennett's view that subjectivity and individuality were two entirely different things with the former only ever emerging and existing in and as concrete practice in those moments when an actual intersubjective exchange between individuals is taking place. Foxx elaborated that view in a 2013 panel discussion. Drawing on Marshall McLuhan's idea of how technology presented a means to "externalize one's nervous system", Foxx argued that cultural and scientific history of the human race could be read in terms of a "desire to connect everyone together" — both through technologies of communication and, for that matter, warfare as a "destructive kind of communication" ("If you throw a spear at someone, you are connecting with him") (Turner). Foxx's stressing of the terms of connection and communication is important, as, in contrast to the Lewisian and Arendtian view of extrinsic subjectivity as a means of asserting or establishing oneself, it defines the concept according to an entirely intersubjective logic. The fabrication of the self is seen as a more open, empathic, and communicative process — a kind of positive blossoming in society instead of a combative survivalism grasped in an entirely negative terminology. The consequence of the "disappearance of the subject" as performed by Foxx — namely as a concrete practice of intersubjective exchange — is that it did not result in an aesthetics characterized by "a kind of flint-hard prose" (Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye* 144). Rather, his effort to rethink the notion of impersonal subjectivity as an intersubjective process resulted in an aesthetic language that, while still blatantly and intentionally artificial, and electronic, was also decidedly *warm*.

Titling his final album with Ultravox *Systems of Romance*, Foxx already found the perfect encapsulation for that aesthetic realignment. The juxtaposition of those two contradictory terms (contradictory at least in their everyday uses) points to how, specifically, Foxx aimed to develop his own aesthetics of impersonality further. Although the concept of romance is afforded a place, a marked departure from both the sterile visions of "I Want to Be a Machine" and "My Sex" and the cynical misanthropy of *Ha! Ha! Ha!*, it is grasped within the rationalistic category of a system: an external structure or network of intersubjective relations and exchanges that has nothing to do with notions of individual psychology and its manifestation as spontaneous feelings or emotions. However, it is not so much the conceptual or lyrical aspects that represented a significant step forward, but the sonic language that Ultravox

developed on their third album. If the stylistic variety on their debut still seemed a rather tentative effort and *Ha! Ha! Ha!* was mainly defined by its aping of punk aesthetics through the eyes of musically far more proficient art rockers, then *Systems of Romance* presented a sound that came across as unmistakably new and different for its time.

In line with its contradictory title, the best way to describe these synthetic electronic soundscapes that manage to convey a genuine sense of warmth to the listener seems to be in equally contradictory terms as a type of *externalized electronic psychedelia. Systems of Romance* harks back to the aesthetic language of late 1960s psychedelia, but does so in a decidedly superficial manner, adopting it essentially as a stylistic code. What *Systems of Romance* takes from psychedelic rock is a strong reliance on sophisticated recording techniques — drones, electronic sound effects, guitars made to sound like keyboards and vice versa, soaring synthesizer lines etc. — to create a dynamic, vast, and seemingly infinite sonic space. What it jettisons, however, are virtually all of the cultural connotations of late-1960s psychedelic rock: its spiritual and transcendentalist ideological baggage and its reciprocal relationship with extensive drug taking. If the sonic identity of *Systems of Romance* could thus be characterized as psychedelic, it is a paradoxically non-spiritual, rationalist, intellectualist, and impersonal kind of psychedelia.

To understand this stylistic development, we have to shift our view to Germany again. *Systems of Romance* was recorded with German sound engineer and producer Konrad “Conny” Plank in his Cologne studio. Plank, whom Foxx referred to as a “genius” and one of only two producers that he had “fantastic admiration” for (the other being Beatles producer George Martin) (University of South Australia 0:12:40), is another of those liminal or cult figures. On the one hand, former collaborators, ranging from obscure German underground acts to Brian Eno and Eurythmics, speak of him only in hushed tones of reverence and admiration and more detailed histories of popular music care to mention his influence in greatly expanding the sonic vocabulary of popular music in the 1970s and 1980s. On the other hand, Conny Plank is — in contrast to George Martin — certainly not a name that rings a bell with a wider public. However, Plank’s role in Foxx’s and Ultravox’s stylistic shift from *Ha! Ha! Ha!* to *Systems of Romance* cannot be understated, as he was also very much a liminal figure from a formal aesthetic point of view. A key figure in the development of West German popular music of the late 1960s and 1970s, he was a vital link between the psychedelic sound of late 1960s countercultures and the synthetic and electronic sounds of the 1980s — and he did so not from one of the pulsating hearts of the

pop music industry, but from the comparatively remote location of Cologne, West Germany.

In *Future Days: Krautrock and the Building of Modern Germany*, David Stubbs's comprehensive history of West German popular music from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, the author argues how the liminal state of these artists in the wider scope of pop history led them to develop a highly innovative, influential, and thoroughly modernistic strand of popular music. In contrast to the established and professionalized music industries in the United Kingdom and the United States, popular music in West Germany (at least that of an ambitious kind) existed in a state of limbo. The space between the sharply demarcated spheres of the lowbrow *Schlager* tradition and the exclusionary highbrow sphere of the musical academies (encompassing both classical music and the various modernist strands of *Neue Musik*) was filled by cultural imports from the United Kingdom and the United States: British and American blues, beat, and rock 'n' roll. Out of this unsatisfactory situation and inspired by the aesthetic possibilities suggested by the emergence of art rock in the late 1960s, a disparate and only loosely connected number of bands and artists emerged. Some of them, such as Can and Kraftwerk, had a background in contemporary classical music, having studied at West German conservatories and even worked with Karlheinz Stockhausen; others, such as Amon Düül II, came from a non-musician's background of the West German commune scene. Although stylistically wildly different, Stubbs argues that what they had in common was a desire to come up with an aesthetics that properly reflected their own social and cultural realities of a rebuilt post-war and post-*Wirtschaftswunder* West Germany (21-33). Rejecting the traditional British and Anglo-American vocabulary of blues, rock 'n' roll, and beat music, they came up with a sound dominated by monotonous rhythms, minimalistic song structures and, particularly in the case of Conny Plank, on using the vast technological possibilities of the recording studio as an experimental instrument in itself.

In this way, these German underground bands paved the way for many styles and genres that emerged from the late 1970s onward: synth-pop, techno, post-rock, and even hip-hop. From an ideological point of view, however, they also represented a return to a modernist ethos. In a similar way to how British art rock strongly drew on ideas and texts from modern art, these efforts of West German bands also represented an attempt to reconnect with the modernist aesthetics of Weimar Germany. It is arguably in the works of Kraftwerk, particularly in their carefully designed visual identity, where we can recognize a genuine desire to reignite the aesthetic languages of the Bauhaus and of the

New Objectivity. In contrast to British art rock, there is of course a deeper pathos ascribed to the German effort, as these references to Weimar-era modernism also point to a deep traumatic wound. In how they evoke an underlying vision of German identity conceived as a decidedly non-nationalistic and pan-European cosmopolitanism, they also conjure up the regretful memories of an unrealized alternative future that was brutally cut short in 1933.

However, these nuances were initially lost on the foreign, that is, the British and American music press. Instead, the slightly pejorative genre term of *krautrock* gradually established itself to subsume all the unusual and experimental popular music that came out of West Germany in the 1970s. As Stubbs argues, the term is problematic in how it neither captures the great stylistic variety of the bands and artists that it claims to encompass, nor does it take into account the complex cultural historical background from which the latter emerged (8-9). More infamously, such as in John Mendelsohn's malicious 1975 *Rolling Stone* review of Kraftwerk's *Autobahn*, it tended to enforce simplistic and plain ignorant national stereotypes. The modal, monotonous, and pulsating sounds of krautrock were thus hastily associated with heavy machinery and modern engineering, thereby making it fit to a prejudiced national cliché of the German as a scrupulous, cold, and unaffectionate type.

It only takes a casual listening to some of the seminal krautrock recordings in order to realize that this image of cold and robotic music created by overly serious Germans could not be further from the truth. This prejudice appears particularly absurd with respect to Plank's production for various German groups such as Neu!, La Düsseldorf, Cluster, and, famously, for Kraftwerk's *Autobahn*, all of which preceded his work with Ultravox. Although its heavy use of drones, reverb, electronically treated instruments, and other studio trickery characterize these as unmistakably artificial and engineered creations, the resultant sound is nevertheless one that has a very warm and inviting quality to it. The often ascribed difficulty of krautrock music has less to do with aspects of timbre or mood, but with the fact that these compositions rarely follow conventional pop or rock song structures and harmonies. This fundamental misunderstanding is perhaps encapsulated best in the concept of *motorik*, a stylistic term that refers to a steady 4/4 beat with little to no variation. Described by music critic John Doran as "the war drum of modernity, pushing the listener forwards into the future", it characterizes many influential krautrock recordings and evokes the sense of a constant, pulsating, and seemingly endless flow forward not tied down by the formal conventions of blues and rock 'n' roll — a kind of sonic realization of a better future. Iggy Pop once fittingly described it as "some sort of pastoral psychedelicism" (Stubbs 250). Considering

these quasi-transcendental implications of the beat, the term motorik, whose exact origins remain unclear, seems ill-fitting in how it suggest, instead, the rigid mechanical reality of motors, machinery, and automobiles. Rather, it only reinforces the popular krautrock cliché of cold and austere German machine music. It is thus telling that Klaus Dinger of Neu!, who either invented or at least popularized the beat, always rejected the term for its misleading connotations, preferring to refer to it instead in a less technically-minded terminology of the *lange Gerade* (long straight line) and, later, of the *Apache Beat* (Adelt 33).

Reflecting on these dialectics of krautrock as a hybrid form of warm and inviting machine music and of a rhythmically rigid and monotonous yet simultaneously infinite sonic space, it is clear that Conny Plank's modernism cannot be understood alongside a terminology of coldness and austerity. Although it is a sound derived from the high-tech environment of the recording studio, it paradoxically elicits from these cold machines a very human sense of warmth. It is a warmth conceived not according to the logic of a vernacular romanticism, which would locate it in the space of the deeply personal, that is, the intimate, but one that is achieved not against but amidst, and with, the machines. In this way, Plank straddles the line between 1960s psychedelia and 1980s electronica: by realizing the ideals of the former with the tools of the latter, that is, by way of an impersonal and external process of experimentation, exploration, and exchange that engages with the technologies of modernity in a spirit of collaboration rather than conflict.

It is according to this logic that we have to understand John Foxx's stylistic shift away from the impersonal subjectivity characterized by a cold Ballardian perspective that culminated in the harsh and merciless Lewisian satire of *Ha! Ha! Ha!*. The sonic aesthetics of Conny Plank provided a formal vocabulary to reconfigure the concept of the impersonal and artificial self in significantly warmer terms without having to revert to notions of immanence and of authenticity. It is out of this combination — Plank's warm electronica and Foxx's detached artistic persona — that the figure of the quiet man could then emerge as a positive counterfigure to those cold and rigidly intellectualist approaches to shaping the subject which we have discussed with respect to Arendt and Lewis. Accordingly, while Foxx's core lyrical theme on *Systems of Romance* is, again, the dissolution of the individual as a conventionally humanistic, stable, and discrete entity, there is a marked shift in tone that is in line with Plank's warm electronic production. If Ultravox's debut negotiated this theme in icy and detached terms *Ha! Ha! Ha!* responded to the individual's inextricable entanglement with a vulgar social and material reality with bitter and borderline desperate sarcasm, *Systems of Romance* embraces that dissolution as a promise. It is an aesthetic shift

that is also mirrored in Foxx's singing style. Although Foxx's delivery generally remains detached and above the fray (an approach clearly indebted to Bowie and Ferry), his style on *Systems of Romance* is nevertheless markedly different from that of its two predecessors. If, on *Ha! Ha! Ha!*, the singer's detachment took the form of spiteful sarcasm and, on the debut, of icy emotionlessness, Foxx's detached delivery on *Systems of Romance* is simultaneously (and strangely) warm and melodic.

There are simply too many instances on the record where Foxx (lyrically) addresses this idea of a warm subjectivity conceived as a practice of impersonal intersubjective exchanges to discuss all of them at length. Almost every single track on *Systems of Romance* addresses the topic in one way or another. What they have in common is that they express a general disposition of being not repulsed or threatened, but intrigued by the theater of an external reality and reacting to it with a curious desire to get involved. Already the first track on the record, "Slow Motion", can be read as a programmatic statement in that regard:

> Looking out at the white world and the moon
> I feel a soft exchange taking place
> Merging with the people on the trains
> Whirling my face in conversation

Then again, so can the exhilarating second track, "I Can't Stay Long", where Foxx, supported by a motorik beat and a shimmering synthesizer and guitar soundscape, proclaims his desire to dissolve into the external world and thereby realize his own subjectivity: "I need to drift through all the walls / And let the scenery dissolve / Into some other life." There is also "Wearing Someone Else's Clothes", a giddy anthem to intersubjective exchange ("Check out some memories I don't recognize / Another country and another life / Oh-oh-oh — oh-oh-oh" [track 4]). And, of course, there is "Quiet Men" [track 6], arguably the album's centerpiece, which is essentially an ode to this particular social type — anonymous, detached, curious, invisible, intersubjective — which Foxx negotiates over the course of the entire album. Finally, the album's last track "Just for a Moment" condenses the non-naturalistic techno-romanticism of *Systems of Romance* into a minimalist piece of electronic pastoral. When Foxx describes how "Listening to the music the machines make" he "felt the floor change into an ocean", he encapsulates on a lyrical level what Plank's sonic approach — its attempt of eliciting a sense of genuine warmth from mechanical machines — aims to achieve.

In that regard, Foxx's exploration of the possibility of self-realization conceived not in opposition to but amidst and with the machines as a process of

individual dissolution seems to represent a decisive realignment away from the earlier Lewisian or Arendtian position. If the latter, as discussed, practiced the vanishing of the individual by fabricating an impenetrably hard shell of steely subjectivity, then Foxx's stylistic shift on *Systems of Romance* can be read as a Sennettian response to understand impersonal social interaction not in exclusively cold and combative terminology. If Lewis and Arendt were already questioning the binary opposition of intimacy and impersonality by arguing for the value and, in fact, the cultural necessity of the latter, then Foxx's art rock response took that view a step further by arguing that an impersonal, artificial and entirely external subjectivity need not necessarily be cold and harsh. In his embrace of an external subjectivity that is not grasped as a defense against society, but as a fundamentally intersubjective process of realizing one's own subjectivity outside of oneself, we could say that he also outlined a possible way of realizing a practicological approach in its entirety. To see the disappearance of the individual not as a threat but as a chance, Foxx was outlining a feasible middle position between a retreat into the deceptively warm *tyranny of intimacy* (Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* 338) and the cold self-encasement in an armor of impersonality. The alternative outlined on *Systems of Romance*, lyrically, sonically, and conceptually, is a sincere and warm but nevertheless impersonal openness towards the world — a notion of intersubjective subjectivity that has to be practiced, that is, *lived* on a daily basis.

Conclusion: The Moronic Inferno of Modernity

Having come to this point, it seems appropriate to briefly sum up the core points and issues that were at stake in our analyses. If I have argued that there exists a particular strand of British modernism that stretches from the idiosyncratic high modernism of Wyndham Lewis to the popular modernism of the British art rock tradition, then the key word that applies to both — and does so on multiple levels — is *impurity.* As cultural responses to the phenomena — that is, the given external reality — of the modern condition, they are responses that view the latter as thoroughly impure and are, as a logical consequence of that acknowledgment, fundamentally impure themselves. They are impure in the sense that they do not draw a clear line of demarcation between art and life — between the spaces of the aesthetic and the real. Instead, they are characterized by a practicological outlook in how they regard an aesthetic response to a concrete social and/or cultural reality as being itself part of that wider social reality and its practices; neither the actual acts of aesthetic production nor their eventual end products — the imaginary literary, visual, or sonic spaces — can be separated from that sphere of external social practice.

As we have noted in our discussions of Lewis's Vorticist style and the fractured art punk of Wire, they are also impure responses on a formal aesthetic level. They are simultaneously clear and equivocal, muddled and assertive, fiercely modernist and reluctantly traditionalist or classicist. As discussed, these formal aesthetic inconsistencies can be attributed to a practicological outlook that approaches aesthetic production as a carefully deliberated yet nevertheless situational reaction or response to a concrete (that is, practical) situation instead of a methodical execution of a preconceived and monolithic aesthetic program. The formal inconsistencies and unpredictabilities of this external (or, more precisely, *externally informed*) approach results in a modernism that, in several respects, goes against the grain of commonplace notions of modernism and modern art. In spite of its fierce rejection of dead traditionalisms and its equally fierce commitment to come up with aesthetic responses that adequately reflect the modern condition, it is simultaneously a critique of modernism in how its practicological outlook remains decidedly wary towards the notion of conceptual or theoretical purity or clarity usually favored by modernist and avant-garde movements. In its rejection of any kind of dogmatism, of lofty theoretical grand designs, and of absolutist utopian visions, it is a modernism that seems strangely un- or even anti-modernist at the same time.

However, we have also pointed out how this outlook, which we can very well describe as fundamentally skeptical and moderate, is itself counteracted by the assertive and borderline dogmatic tone by which this undogmatic position is proclaimed and defended. We have noticed this strange discrepancy between tone and message in the "violent structure of adolescent clearness" erected by Lewis and his fellow Vorticists in *Blast 1*, but also in the comparably terse and violent art punk of Wire with its aesthetic approach of "keeping it brief and getting to the point". In a similar way, we have noted, in the fourth chapter, how the sober acknowledgment of the death of (individual) heroism in modernity and the subsequent realignment of artistic production as an unheroic but more effective strategy of survival is constantly undercut by gestures of high pathos and a kind of nostalgic longing for a grand and heroic notion of art.

This reluctant realignment of art as a clever game of skill or an artful display of artifice or even fakery is, as discussed in the subsequent chapter, also reflected in the realignment of (artistic) subjectivity towards the external side of things. As I have argued, one of the core characteristics of a practicological modernism is how it regards subjectivity, or, at least, the culturally relevant aspects of subjectivity, as made up entirely of externalities: poses, gestures, appearances, utterances etc. It thus rejects or is at least disinterested in intrinsic notions of the self and its associated aesthetic strategies such as psychological realism or stream of consciousness writing. However, if a practicological perspective adopts a decidedly social conception of the self as an entity fabricated entirely out of external signs and attributes (ideally actively shaped by the artist him- or herself and not imposed coercively by society), this view is again accompanied by skeptical and regretful undertones. As with the reluctant abandonment of a grand notion of Art with a capital 'A', this adoption of an entirely superficial notion of personality is not regarded as a completely satisfactory solution to a real problem, but as something that is mostly done out of necessity — an improvisational and, to a certain degree, haphazard strategy of responding and surviving aesthetically in a fundamentally superficial modern reality. As we have noted in, to name a few examples, our discussion of Lewis's concept of the non-moral satire, in his absurdist and tragicomic critiques of a modern world of false bottoms, in the aggressive and deliberate idiocy of Wire's *Send* material, or in John Foxx's efforts to come up with a sustainable strategy of self-realization amidst the machines, there is a sometimes latent and sometimes explicit sense of cultural pessimism that permeates these texts. As much as the absence of a "true" or transcendental depth is rejected as a naïve illusion and the superficiality of cultures is soberly acknowledged as an empirical fact, this state of things is nevertheless criticized or even lamented. And it is in these lamentations that

we can still recognize a schizophrenic longing for a romantic and, by extension, *modernist* monadic heroism against one's better knowledge.

These inconsistencies, hybridities, or impurities, which permeate these texts on several levels and form an integral part of what I have termed a practicological modernism, are arguably the main reason why, at the end of the day, it seems impossible to come to definite terms with that particular aesthetic approach. As an *ethos* — not in the sense of a consistent belief system but of a particular habit or a way of doing things — it represents, first and foremost, a situational, exploratory, and experimental practice and precisely *not* the realization, execution, or concrete manifestation of a fixed ideal (though, frustratingly, the assertive tones of these texts often seem to suggest as much). As an ensemble of aesthetic practices characterized by a certain muddledness and indeterminacy, one has, as a reader, to come to terms with the inconvenient fact that the resultant texts will always defy a terminal critical analysis to a degree.

We have, however, also noted how the stubborn equivocality and recalcitrance of these texts cannot be sufficiently explained away by simply resorting to the shorthand label of literary or aesthetic radicalism. To respond to the ultimate uncategorizability of these texts by simply affixing them with the all-purpose label of (modernist) radicalism would be to fall into the very trap that Lewis described in *The Demon of Progress in the Arts*: the blind fetishization of artistic extremism as a good in itself. Furthermore, the label also seems insufficient and inappropriate, because, as we have noted, the ideological positions in these texts are not necessarily radical. If anything, what seems radical about Wyndham Lewis, the supposed great radical of British modernism, is how often his own idiosyncratic modernism was highly critical of the radical and totalistic utopianist visions and projects of the modernist avant-gardes; it was a moderate or even conservative claim that, however, he used to proffer with the fervor of a true radical.

In many respects, this point about Lewis's modernism being ultimately a "moderate" or "un-radical" modernism also applies to the similarly muddled, formally impure, and ideologically inconsistent aesthetics of pop. Again, there is a tendency in pop criticism, largely stemming from the postmodernist critical discourses of subversion, that hastily tends to ascribe the label of radicalism to the more artistically ambitious, unpredictable and/or challenging performers within the field. However, as we have noted in, for example, our discussion of Wire's art punk and their underlying anti-rock stance, the terminology of radicalism does not really seem to apply to these texts. Although similarly confrontative, stupefying, and driven by a strong desire to not cater to audience

expectations, they nevertheless exist, as we have noted, within the legible, conventional, and, ultimately, still quite accessible formal framework of rock music. In line with Diederichsen's point about the aesthetics of pop representing "a secret code that is simultaneously open to everybody" ("Pop — deskriptiv, normativ, emphatisch" 40), it seems more fitting to describe the aesthetic approach(es) of art rock as a similar type of moderate modernism. Thus, the predilection of pop criticism for a sensationalist vocabulary seems to say more about the conventions of pop criticism than pop itself. It reflects, again, Lewis's diagnosis in *The Demon of Progress in the Arts* of there being a seemingly insurmountable gap between the desires and interests of, on the one hand, the practicing artist and, on the other hand, the pundit-prophet. However, if criticism tends to treat the notion of moderateness in art as a red-headed stepchild, then one could respond to this prejudice by again referring to Panofsky's own critique of the racketeerish overvaluing of a supposed radicalism in the reality of the modern art market: In not being incomprehensible in its esotericism, a moderate modernism at least does not run the risk of ending as an old maid ("Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures" 30).

In again trying to account for this impure aesthetic middle position, I fear that even these concluding remarks only serve to underscore again how the contradictory logic of this practicological modernist ethos (if the term *logic* is even appropriate here considering that we are referring to an artistic approach characterized precisely by *not* being oriented primarily on an abstract *logos* but on concrete *praxis* instead) presents us with a difficult and perhaps unresolvable methodological challenge. As academic writing, whether it be literary criticism or art historical analysis, is a fundamentally analytical idiom driven by a desire to locate the permanent deep structures of individual texts and their cultural contexts, it is inevitably guided by a purifying logic. It therefore seems almost certain that this mode of reading and analyzing cultural artifacts will reach some kind of impasse when faced with these stubborn and unyielding texts, whose core characteristic is that they put into question the logic of purification itself.

This leads us back to my initial proposal to approach these texts from a theoretical perspective that, despite remaining firmly committed to the practice of critical analysis, makes an effort to hold back its own inherent desire to rigorously purify its objects of study. Elisabeth Bronfen's notion of crossmapping as a strategy of productive reading offers such an approach in how it cuts across or, rather, connects — that is, cross-maps — the established "pure" epistemological fields of literary and cultural criticism, thereby accounting for those affective, illegitimate, and impure connections and interrelations in cultural history without suspending them within a puristic logos. On the other hand, Bruno

Latour's notion of modernity as a fundamentally and paradoxically impure set of contradictory practices provides an appropriate theoretical vantage point that is more specifically geared towards the question of the modern condition. In both cases, they provide theoretical perspectives that recognize and acknowledge the limits of how far one can or ought to take the purifying impetus of critical analysis. However, they differ from the straightforward textualism of postmodernist and poststructuralist approaches (which, after all, share a similar concern for stressing fundamental openness and undecidability of the literary text) in how they both emphasize how this impure approach of reading represents a concrete cultural practice. When Bronfen stresses that crossmapping represents a critical "intervention in the cultural imaginary" (5), she points to the fact that the very act of reading — particularly this kind of *productive* reading — constitutes, in fact, an act. The openness or impurity of the text is, in other words, not a process that plays out entirely in the disembodied spheres of linguistic or semiotic discourses, but is regarded as a concrete way of doing something — of *acting* — within and as part of an external or empirical cultural reality.

It is in this active, productive, or *interventionist* thrust that we recognize how these theoretical perspectives ultimately intersect with what I have described as a practicological modernism. Furthermore, it is also at this point where the ethical underpinnings of this outlook become clear. If we acknowledge, as Latour suggests, the modern condition as a muddled field of concrete practices, which range from rigid purification rituals to haphazard and illegitimate processes of hybridization, then the modern project ought to be sustained by engaging in a type of cultural work that is itself practicological. As I have argued, this practicological ethos replaces the notion of modernism as a grand and all-encompassing project with a more sober approach of modernism conceived as an adaptable set of survival strategies. Nevertheless, it represents, as such, a call for holding on to the idea of a modernist project. It is a cultural practice that turns its back on the more totalistic or puristic approaches commonly associated with the term modernism without embracing, in consequence, a Lyotardian postmodernist position that diagnoses the irrevocable end of the modernist project due to it having lost its legitimacy. Rather, it reluctantly holds on to modernism as a cultural practice, but does so with a quasi-Latourian acknowledgment of modernity as being fundamentally impure. It proceeds, in other words, from the recognition that we have never been modern in the first place, but should nevertheless strive to realize — that is, to *practice* or to *enact* — this modern condition on a daily basis. In that sense, I can only reiterate what I have stated in the introduction, namely that the only appropriate approach

for coming to critical terms with a practicological modernism is to adopt, to a certain degree, a practicological approach as well — that is, a strategy of reading, of analyzing, of narrating, and of elaborating that acknowledges its own state as a necessarily muddled, experimental, but also productive cultural practice within an equally muddled modern reality.

In *Rude Assignment*, Lewis retrospectively describes his satirical writings of the interwar years as an effort to come to terms with a modern reality that he perceived as a "moronic inferno of insipidity and decay" (183). It is another quintessentially Lewisian description of the impure reality of the modern condition — a bleak view informed by a deep cultural pessimism that, however, is undercut by an undercurrent of roguish humor. As I have argued, it is this combination of bleakness and humor, recognized and relayed with a certain sober intellectual detachment, that we find in the British art rock tradition as well. As our discussions of various individual texts has shown, we can read the works of Wire, John Foxx, and of even more accommodating and popular performers such as Bowie and Ferry in their darker moments as artistic engagements with their very own moronic infernos of modernity. Ultimately, it is an outlook that is similarly bleak as that literary cornerstone of modernist cultural pessimism, T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land". Where it differs, however, is in how it responds to its own cultural diagnosis: not with melancholic pathos, but with a recognition of the essential absurdity of it all and a subsequent burst of bitter satirical laughter.

As a cultural diagnosis that, in its blatant labelling of mass cultures and societies as "moronic", is also thoroughly elitist, it definitely needs to be taken with a healthy dose of skepticism. Nevertheless, to view the modern condition as a moronic inferno seems to offer a pertinent perspective; after all, it hardly needs to be elaborated how the term itself loudly resonates with the reality of today. What remains valuable about this perspective is how it has the courage to acknowledge both the essential messiness of the modern condition and, more importantly, the impossibility of purifying it for good. Thus, while overtly very pessimistic, it is also a perspective that keeps a safe distance from those radical modernisms revolving around perfectionist narratives or totalistic utopian projects — projects that can only end in disappointment or, worse, insanity. Instead, the moronic inferno of modernity is seen as a given empirical reality to which, in an absurdist or tragicomic sense, one is inextricably tied as an active participant. The only viable survival strategy in this disadvantageous and imperfect reality is thus to respond to it with equally muddled situational practices. It is this concern and anxiety about how to survive in modernity that, roughly a century since Lewis launched the Vorticist movement, seems to

have persisted by leading a productive afterlife in other fields of British culture and, while not offering a particularly nice or appealing point of view, seems nevertheless a relevant one in the ongoing modern reality of the twenty-first century.

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Fig. 3. Wyndham Lewis. *Edith Sitwell.* 1923-35.

Fig. 4. Wyndham Lewis. *The Crowd.* exhibited 1915.

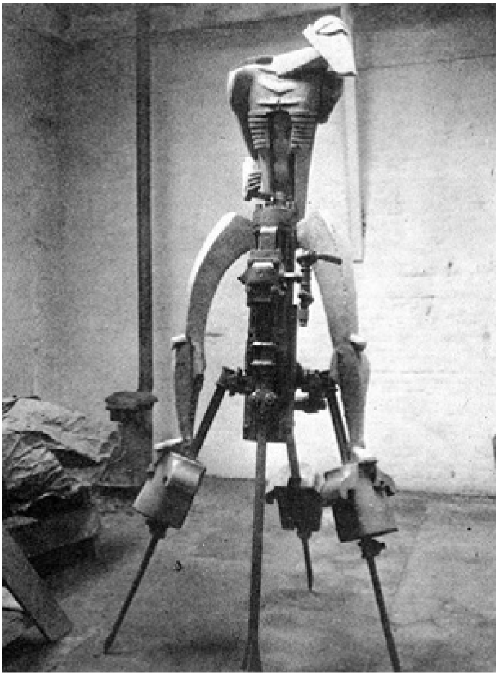

Fig. 5. Jacob Epstein. *Rock Drill.* 1913-15.

Fig. 6. Jacob Epstein. *Torso in Metal from Rock Drill.* 1913-16.

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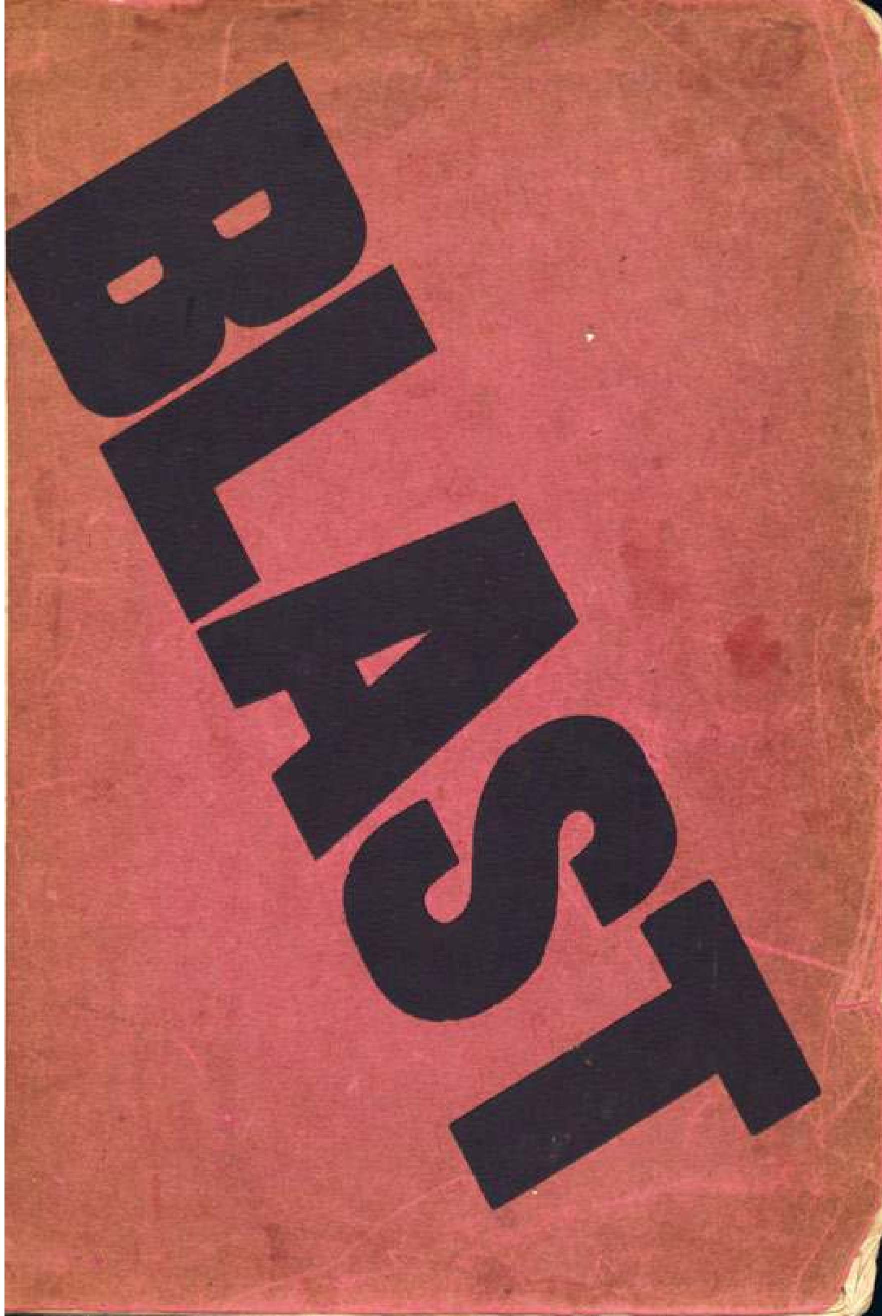

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Fig. 9. Wyndham Lewis, ed. *Blast 1.* Table of Contents. 1914.

CURSE 3

WITH EXPLETIVE OF WHIRLWIND
THE BRITANNIC ÆSTHETE
CREAM OF THE SNOBBISH EARTH
ROSE OF SHARON OF GOD-PRIG
OF SIMIAN VANITY
SNEAK AND SWOT OF THE SCHOOL-ROOM
IMBERB (or Berbed when in Belsize)-PEDANT
PRACTICAL JOKER
DANDY
CURATE

BLAST all products of phlegmatic cold
Life of LOOKER-ON.
CURSE
SNOBBERY
(disease of femininity)
FEAR OF RIDICULE
(arch vice of inactive, sleepy)
PLAY
STYLISM
SINS AND PLAGUES
of this LYMPHATIC finished
(we admit in every sense
finished)
VEGETABLE HUMANITY.

15

Fig. 10. Wyndham Lewis, ed. *Blast 1.* Excerpt from Manifesto I. 1914.

3

BLESS ENGLISH HUMOUR

It is the great barbarous weapon of
the genius among races.
The wild MOUNTAIN RAILWAY from IDEA
to IDEA, in the ancient Fair of LIFE.

BLESS SWIFT for his solemn bleak
wisdom of laughter.

SHAKESPEARE for his bitter Northern
Rhetoric of humour.

BLESS ALL ENGLISH EYES
that grow crows-feet with their
FANCY and ENERGY.

BLESS this hysterical WALL built round
the EGO.

BLESS the solitude of LAUGHTER.

BLESS the separating, ungregarious
BRITISH GRIN.

26

Fig. 11. Wyndham Lewis, ed. *Blast 1.* Excerpt from Manifesto I. 1914.

MANIFESTO.

I.

1 Beyond Action and Reaction we would establish ourselves.

2 We start from opposite statements of a chosen world. Set up violent structure of adolescent clearness between two extremes.

3 We discharge ourselves on both sides.

4 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.

5 Mercenaries were always the best troops.

6 We are Primitive Mercenaries in the Modern World.

30

Fig. 12. Wyndham Lewis, ed. *Blast 1.* Manifesto II. 1914.

7 Our Cause is NO-MAN'S.

8 We set Humour at Humour's throat.
Stir up Civil War among peaceful apes.

9 We only want Humour if it has fought like Tragedy.

10 We only want Tragedy if it can clench its side-muscles like hands on it's belly, and bring to the surface a laugh like a bomb.

31

Fig. 13. Wyndham Lewis, ed. Blast 1. Manifesto II. 1914.

2

BLESS the HAIRDRESSER.

He attacks Mother Nature for a small fee.
Hourly he ploughs heads for sixpence,
Scours chins and lips for threepence.
He makes systematic mercenary war on this WILDNESS.
He trims aimless and retrograde growths into CLEAN ARCHED SHAPES and ANGULAR PLOTS.

BLESS this HESSIAN (or SILESIAN) EXPERT

correcting the grotesque anachronisms of our physique.

25

Fig. 14. Wyndham Lewis, ed. Blast 1. Excerpt from Manifesto I. 1914.

Fig.15. Umberto Boccioni. *The Street Enters the House*. 1911.

WYNDHAM LEWIS VORTEX No. 1.

ART VORTEX.

BE THYSELF.

You must talk with two tongues, if you do not wish to cause confusion.

You must also learn, like a Circassian horseman, to change tongues in mid-career without falling to Earth.

You must give the impression of two persuaders, standing each on a different hip—left hip, right hip—with four eyes vacillating concentrically at different angles upon the object chosen for subjugation.

There is nothing so impressive as the number TWO.

You must be a duet in everything.

For, the Individual, the single object, and the isolated, is, you will admit, an absurdity.

Why try and give the impression of a consistent and indivisible personality?

You can establish yourself either as a Machine of two similar fraternal surfaces overlapping.

Or, more sentimentally, you may postulate the relation of object and its shadow for your two selves.

There is Yourself: and there is the Exterior World, that fat mass you browse on.

You knead it into an amorphus imitation of yourself inside yourself.

Sometimes you speak through its huskier mouth, sometimes through yours.

Do not confuse yourself with it, or weaken the esoteric lines of fine original being.

Do not marry it, either, to a maiden.

Any machine then you like: but become mechanical by fundamental dual repetition.

For the sake of your good looks you must become a machine.

Hurry up and get into this harmonious and sane duality.

The thought of the old Body-and-Soul, Male-and-Female, Eternal Duet of Existence, can perhaps be of help to you, if you hesitate still to invent yourself properly.

No clear out lines, except on condition of being dual and prolonged.

You must catch the clearness and logic in the midst of contradictions: not settle down and snooze on an acquired, easily possessed and mastered, satisfying shape.

We artists do not provide wives for you.

You have too many as it is.

91

Fig. 16. Wyndham Lewis. Blast: *War Number.* "Be Thyself" manifesto. 1915.

Fig. 17. George Charles Beresford. *Wyndham Lewis.* 1929.

Fig. 18. Lord Snowdon. *David Bowie.* 1978.

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Fig. 20. Wyndham Lewis. A *Battery Shelled*. 1919.

Fig. 21. Mike Coles and Killing Joke. *Wardance*. 7-inch single cover. 1980.

Fig. 23. Unknown Photographer. *John Foxx*. c. 1980.

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Fig. 25. David King, Roger Law, and The Who. *The Who Sell Out.* Front Sleeve Cover. 1967.

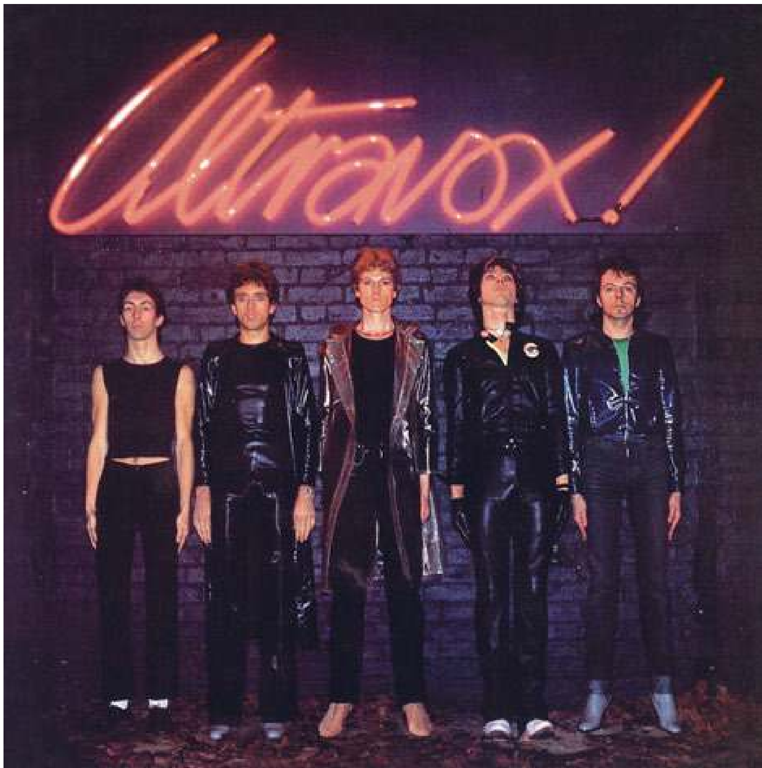


Fig. 26. John Foxx and Ultravox. *Ultravox!* Front Sleeve Cover. 1977.

Fig. 27. Ralf Hütter. *Die Mensch-Maschine.* Front Sleeve Cover. 1978.

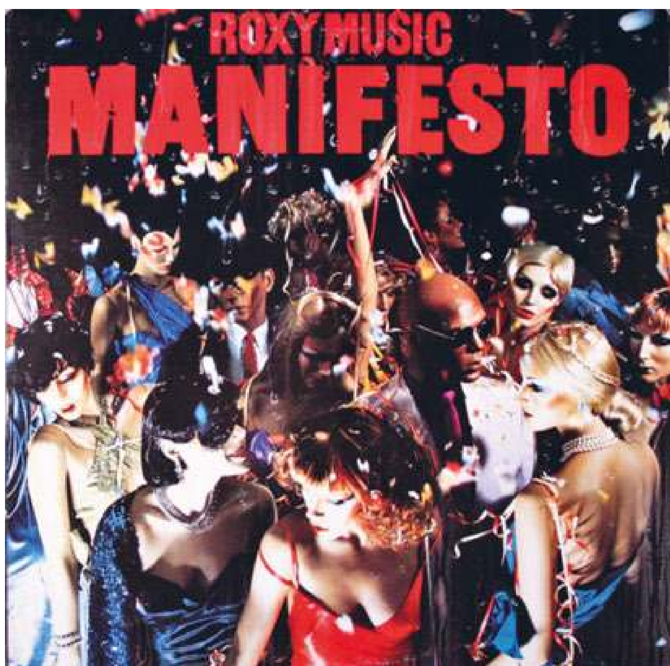
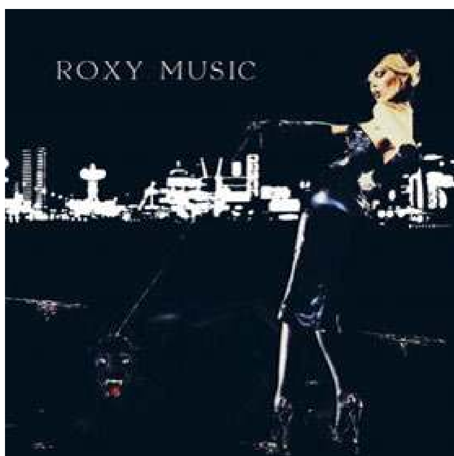


Fig. 28. Bryan Ferry and Antony Price. *Manifesto.* Front Sleeve Cover. 1979.



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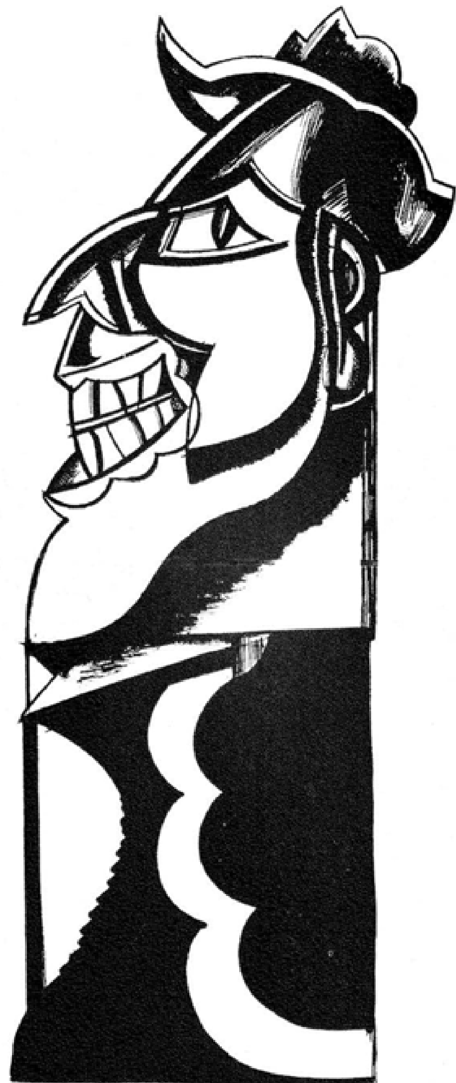

Fig. 42. Wyndham Lewis. *The Brombroosh.* 1921.

Fig. 46. Wyndham Lewis. *A Reading of Ovid (Tyros).* 1920.

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Fig. 34: John Foxx and Ultravox. *Ha! Ha! Ha!* 1977. Front sleeve cover. Source: Ultravox. *Ha! Ha! Ha!*

Fig. 35: Wyndham Lewis. *Praxitella.* 1920-1. Oil on canvas. 142.2 x 101.6cm. Leeds City Galleries, Leeds. Copyright: Bridgeman Images.

Fig. 36: Wyndham Lewis. *Naomi Mitchison.* 1938. Oil on canvas. 101.6 x 76.2cm. Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh. Copyright: The Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust. All Rights Reserved / Bridgeman Images.

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Fig. 41: Wyndham Lewis. *Self-Portrait.* 1911. Pencil and watercolor on paper. 30.5 x 23.5cm. Private collection of C.J. Fox. Source: Edwards, Paul. *Wyndham Lewis: Portraits.* Copyright: The Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust / Bridge man Images.

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Fig. 43: Wyndham Lewis. *Mrs. Paul Martin.* 1945. Oil on canvas. 150 x 90 cm. Source: Edwards, Paul. *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer.*

Fig. 44: Wyndham Lewis. *Mr. Wyndham Lewis as a Tyro.* 1921. Oil on canvas. 73 x 44 cm. Ferens Art Gallery, Hull City Museums and Art Gallery, Hull. Copyright: The Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust / Bridgeman Images.

Fig. 45: Wyndham Lewis. *The Brombroosh.* 1921. Black ink on paper. 50 x 38 cm. Reproduced in *The Tyro No. 1.* Source: Lewis, Wyndham, *The Tyro.*

Fig. 46: Wyndham Lewis. *A Reading of Ovid (Tyros).* 1920. Oil on canvas. 165 x 90.2cm. National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh. Copyright: The Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust / Bridgeman Images.

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