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ANTISOCIAL MODERNISM:

H.G. WELLS, DOROTHY RICHARDSON, WYNDHAM LEWIS

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by

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ABSTRACT

Antisocial Modernism: H.G. Wells, Dorothy Richardson, Wyndham Lewis argues that the fiction of the British modernists H.G. Wells, Dorothy Richardson, and Wyndham Lewis comprises a series of attempts to imagine experimental social and political forms precisely in and through formal experiments in narrative. My readings of Wells’s manipulations of romance, Richardson’s experiment in antinarrative, and Lewis’s practice of non-moral satire reveal an intrinsic antisocial and political impulse expressed through modernist aesthetics. In The Human Condition, Hannah Arendt describes “the social” as a distinctively modern realm in which concerns for the cyclical reproduction of bare life characteristic of labor and for the teleological projects characteristic of work threaten to destroy the capacity for politics that makes us distinctively human. In Antisocial Modernism, I argue that modernist fiction undertakes aesthetic experiments in order to negate the force of the social in order to open a space for politics. The work of Wells, Richardson, and Lewis, thus exemplifies a modernism in which aesthetic experiments refuse the social constitution of our world and instance the properly political insistence that another world is possible.
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“We are wont,” Hannah Arendt writes in “On Humanity in Dark Times,” “to see friendship solely as a phenomenon of intimacy, in which the friends open their hearts to each other unmolested by the world and its demands.” But Arendt offers us also a version of friendship as a constant exchange of talk about the world that endows friendship with a properly political importance. Conversation, while charged with the affective pleasure of a friend’s presence, “is concerned with the common world, which remains ‘inhuman’ in a very literal sense unless it is constantly talked about by human beings…. However much we are affected by the things of the world, however deeply they may stir and stimulate us, they become human for us only when we can discuss them with our fellows.” Entitled “Antisocial Modernism,” this dissertation is also about friendship – about modernist writers whose experiments in fiction contest destructive social forms in order to create space for new forms of relation we might call new forms of friendship. And as the lonely business of writing was itself a course in the antisocial, my dissertation would not exist without five cherished friends: Mike Jolley, Jennifer Kates, Jessica Jones, Amy Clukey, and Liz Kuhn.

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DEDICATION

For Mom, Dad, James, Kelly, Ashley, Matt, and Katelyn.
Chapter 1

Introduction: Antisocial Modernism

“A liberated society would be beyond the irrationality of its faux frais and beyond the ends-means-rationality of utility. This is enciphered in art and is the source of art’s social explosiveness.”

– Theodor Adorno

It is a queer but not accidental fact that one of the foundational texts of modern sociology takes as its subject an act apparently not social at all: suicide, the negation of oneself, the rejection of the social. Yet Emile Durkheim's 1897 Suicide – a book that forms, along with The Division of Labour in Society, The Rules of Sociological Method, and The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, Durkheim's contribution to what has become known as the classical theory of sociology – undertakes to interpret the apparently personal act of suicide as an epiphenomenon of contemporary social life: a personal act largely overdetermined by the social forces of modernity. If second wave feminism has generated the now worn commonplace that "the personal is political" in order to express succinctly the view that there is a deep and necessary interface between human beings' seemingly private, personal lives and the forms of politics that both script them and issue from them dialectically, then we might imagine that the tacit thesis of Suicide is that the personal is social.

This tacit thesis is a gambit by which Suicide attempts to demonstrate the explanatory power of the social sciences. If, for instance, the nascent science of sociology can show that the act of taking one’s own life instances not simply some wholly personal pathology but instead the machinations of the social at work in and through particular human beings, then sociology in turn can arrogate to itself the ability to explain the totality of human life. If sociology can account for
an act that seems properly asocial or antisocial, then it can account for things that don’t seem social at all. Interestingly, therefore, Durkheim’s book offers an argument that precisely reverses the arguments of foundational works of psychoanalysis (like Freud’s Civilization and its Discontents and Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego) that insist upon the power of psychoanalytic research into human beings’ apparently personal psychic lives to explain social life. Though proceeding from contradictory directions, psychoanalysis and sociology both constitute themselves by articulating an interface between the personal and the social.

Durkheim’s book accounts for suicide not by case studies but by counting. Suicide’s arguments, that is, issue not from personal accounts of particular suicides but instead from Durkheim’s interpretation of a massive quantitative data set whose statistics report suicides in Denmark, Belgium, France, Bavaria, Austria, and Prussia. Durkheim, moreover, further decomposes this data set in order to correlate rates of suicide with social facts such as gender, marriage and divorce, bachelorhood and spinsterhood, parenthood, levels of education, profession, and religion and with such nonsocial facts as seasonal length of days and even the weather. Coding and interpreting this data set enables Durkheim to describe suicide objectively as a social phenomenon and to posit thereby a scientific theory about its causes. Sociology thus posits an account of suicide in which the act is not primarily subjective but instead the overdetermined outcome of a play of social forces. Suicide, the detachment from the social through the negation of the self, is in Durkheim’s account a paradoxically antisocial social act.

Suicide instances, in this account, not simply the negative outcome of some personal and individual despair but in fact the structural impact of the social order upon particular human beings. Durkheim thus offers a taxonomy of four genera of suicide able, in his view, to account for almost all specific suicides: altruistic suicide, fatalistic suicide, egoistic suicide, and anomic suicide. Each genus describes an empirical discovery in Durkheim’s quantitative data; each genus defines, moreover, a form of self-negation overdetermined by a human being’s relation to
the social. Durkheim differentiates these genera by presenting them as the results of varied intensities of the social bond, of the social order’s hold upon the individual. So, for instance, altruistic and fatalistic suicides are acts of self-negation that result from social bonds that are too intense – in which the demands of the social order upon the individual occlude any sense of her mobility or agency. Suicide then offers a minimal zone of action by which to negate the power of the social even as this action is largely enforced by the weight of the social. Conversely, anomic and egoistic suicides result from social bonds that are not intense enough. Durkheim’s famous concept of anomie, for instance, names an experience of rapid transition in which social structures have broken down without adequate replacements, thereby leaving human beings without an effective social tie. Likewise, egoistic suicide results from a sense that the individual lacks social ties altogether and has nothing to live for. If Durkheim selects declassification – the rapid movement down the hierarchy of social class – as the exemplary instance of anomie, egoistic suicide’s emblems are bachelors: men not tied to wives and children through marriage. Anomic and egoistic suicides thus seem merely to ratify forms of social exclusion already in force.

The personal feeling of despair that leads to suicide thus instances the individual’s experience of properly social facts. Indeed, all four genera of suicide result quite precisely from the sense that the individual has no future in the social – no future that is not the same as the present – and chooses not to endure social life any longer. Conversely, the endurance of the social order depends on the exclusion of those forms of life that threaten its future reproduction. As bachelors exemplify social exclusion in Durkheim’s scheme, marriage instances likewise the exemplary form of the social tie. Although this lesson remains merely tacit in Suicide, marriage itself occupies such an important role in the future reproduction of the social order that nearly one hundred years later, amidst the orgy of self-congratulation that was the United States in 1984, we encounter in the famous “It’s Morning Again in America” advertisement from Ronald Reagan’s re-election campaign the not accidental remark that marriage is tied directly to low inflation.
Everyone remembers the précis form of “Morning in America”: inflation in 1984 is half what it was in 1980, when that ninny Jimmy Carter left office, taking with him his perpetual malaise; now that inflation is lower, more Americans will go to work, buy new houses, and raise flags; why, therefore, would we elect Walter Mondale and ruin everything? What we may not recall is the statement, made in the middle of the sixty second long version of “Morning in America,” that “this afternoon 6500 young men and women will be married, and with inflation less than half of what it was just four years ago, they can look forward with confidence to the future.” One implication here is obvious: if the rate of inflation was at 1980 levels, these 6500 young men and women would not have confidence in the future and might not get married at all. Inflation, of course, is the erosion of the present value of money such that a unit of money in the present has less purchasing power in the future. So it is, of course, that married couples’ confidence in the future in 1984 results from the belief that in the next four years, inflation won’t negate their savings. In other words, this confidence issues precisely from the belief that the values of the present will have purchase in the future: that the present as it is constituted will persist into the future; that the social will endure. Reagan’s campaign, therefore, vows to undertake a defense of the social by limiting inflation (one practice of Reaganomics was the elimination of collectively-bargained contracts that peg wage increases to inflation and produce more inflation) and in turn granting young men and women the confidence in the future they need in order to marry and to reproduce. “Morning in America” articulates therefore a properly domestic policy of national security that is precisely correlative with Reagan’s anti-communist foreign policy, exemplified perhaps best by another 1984 re-election campaign commercial, “The Bear,” in which a Russian bear threatens to destroy the American way of life and to eat Walter Mondale. Likewise, George W. Bush’s 2004 re-election campaign self-consciously modeled itself upon Reagan’s and complemented, therefore, the numerous state referenda against gay marriage with an advertisement featuring a pack of terrorist wolves too scary for John Kerry.
Indeed, as politics in our world seems largely oriented toward securing and defending the social, we might be tempted to name this a politics of social security were it not the case that Reagan and Bush (and Clinton) made it policy to destroy any actually existing remnants of collectivism.

Insisting upon the social dimension of personal life, this politics forms the precise counterpart to Durkheim’s study of suicide insofar as both inscribe marriage and reproductive heterosexuality as the very foundation of the social order. If I have established a preposterous speculative identity between two epiphenomena of modernity separated by nearly one hundred years, I do so not as the prolegomena to a history of the social but instead to offer these texts as two instances of the same perpetual present that has occluded the movement of history in the service of reproducing itself into the future ad infinitum. These texts, in other words, form emergent and later examples of a modernity that reproduces itself perpetually not in order to invoke novelty and difference but only in order to perpetuate the same. Throughout this dissertation I follow Hannah Arendt in designating this realm “the social,” which Arendt describes in *The Human Condition* as a specifically modern realm in which the reproduction of bare life has become the political issue par excellence – a realm, therefore, constituted as perpetually the same insofar as it wholly occludes the novelty and difference of properly political life. Indeed, as Arendt defines the social in terms that render it coextensive with modernity, I use “the social” as another name for modernity.

To treat “modernity” and “the social” as commutative terms is to explain the privileged place of postpositivist social science in modernity. It is also, however, to explain the marginal place of a thinker like Georg Simmel within the canon of sociology itself. If *Suicide* attests to Durkheim’s interest in positing sociology as a discipline through an apparently objective and scientific attention to quantitative data that creates thereby an empirical description of social forms, Simmel’s interests lay precisely in experimental play with social forms – experiments whose novelty necessarily escapes statistical descriptions. Simmel’s writings comprise therefore
brief anatomies of modes of play with social forms, experiments that negate the perpetual sameness of the social in order to bring something new into the world. Indeed, Simmel’s work evinces constant fascination with experimental parodies of social forms: coquetry, for example, as the play form of courtship; sports as the play form of war; and sociability as the play form of social behavior. If Simmel’s attention to formal experiments has rendered him a pariah within sociology, it has conversely endeared him to literary critics of modernism, whose attention to aesthetic experiments in literary forms – modernist experiments that, as the critic Astradur Eysteinsson puts it, *interrupt* modernity – makes Simmel seem a fellow traveler.

As Simmel designates sociability the play form of social behavior, I define modernism as the experimental play form of modernity. Modernism, that is, instances a series of aesthetic experiments that depart radically from normal forms of life in modernity in order to bring novelty and difference into a world constituted as perpetually the same. Readers will recall here, of course, the great modernist dictum “make it new,” a *topos* that has always seemed both pointed and vague, never specifying what “it” is. But we should also recall Lucien Goldmann’s statement in *Towards a Sociology of the Novel* that the novel itself is an essentially oppositional form, bearing hostility to social life and evoking, if only as spectre, the negation of our world and the possibility of another. For Goldmann, the novel is a form of resistance to bourgeois society precisely in the sense that it rejects the social order to open the possibility for a different kind of society. Following Goldmann, let us read “make it new” as a strange provocation to negate the perpetual present of modernity in order to create a space for novelty and difference. If, as one influential critic has proposed, modernist fiction derives its experimental form by canceling some element of realism, then modernism in general might be read as an attempt to cancel the given form of our reality precisely through experiments in aesthetics. We encounter in such aesthetic experiments a modernism against modernity. As, moreover, I will treat “modernity” as synonymous with “the social,” I will name this radical impulse towards negation – expressed not
as a particular literary form, but as an experimental impulse to interrupt or to cancel received forms – antisocial modernism.

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If the very conjunction of the words “antisocial modernism” seems tautological, it is due in no small part to the continuing influence of Georg Lukács’s attack on modernism in The Meaning of Contemporary Realism. There Lukács argues that modernism marks (or is marked by) a refusal of sociality in its frequent fixation on individual pathology – viz., for Lukács, in the works of Beckett, Joyce, Musil, and Kafka. For Lukács, the source of this antisocial, pathological impulse lies in modernism’s general refusal to admit the perspective of history, of the future, in particular the perspective of socialism. Refusing to acknowledge history and the future compels modernist writers to take the present as static and to generalize the malaise proper to a particular historical moment into an eternal, unshakeable aspect of the human condition: absurdity, angst, what Heidegger terms gerworfenheit ins Dasein. In turn, this produces on the formal level of modernist fiction an inward turn that refuses sociality: “man, for these writers, is by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings” and this antisocial worldview largely determines modernist forms.ii As Lukács argues that human relations with others and the world comprise human personality, in “destroying the complex tissue of man’s relation with his environment, [modernism] furthered the dissolution of personality. For it is just the opposition between man and his environment that determines his personality.”iii

While the logical armature of Lukács’s designation of modernism as antisocial has mostly been dropped, the idea that modernism is antisocial has become a critical commonplace. Though few present day critics would accept that the source of modernism’s antisocial impulse is to be located in the refusal to accept the perspective of socialism, few too would disagree that an important strand within modernism refuses sociality and personality. On one hand, Frederic Jameson (a Marxist critic who possibly would accept Lukács’s argument about the perspective of
socialism) can argue offhandedly, in a way that suggests he’s simply reiterating common knowledge, that postmodernism’s turn away from psychopathology represents “the falling away of the protopolitical vocation and the terrorist stance of the older modernism,” signaling at once that modernism’s “terrorist stance” or refusal of sociality is merely a protopolitical vocation – an aborted political vocation that is therefore not really a political vocation – and that this “terrorist stance” needs no demonstration because it’s already common wisdom. On the other hand, even a non-Marxist critic like Michael Levenson can begin his magisterial book A Genealogy of Modernism from the assumption that our typical story about modernism is that it represents an increasing turn toward psychic interiority, exemplified by the movement from the technique of Conrad and James to the even more radical solipsism of something like Ford’s The Good Soldier, in which both sociality and personality come under erasure. From this perspective, it does seem that “Antisocial Modernism” has become a tautology. Indeed, when I described this project as “Antisocial Modernism” at a recent MSA conference, a typical reaction was “don’t you just mean ‘modernism’?”

The gambit of my dissertation is that “Antisocial Modernism” isn’t a tautology. In refusing to take the phrase as a tautology, in rethinking its status as a critical commonplace, and in considering in more precise ways what is the force of modernism’s antisocial tendency, we can detect a strangely utopian impulse within modernism, a heretofore untheorized political vocation of modernism – just as recent work in queer theory has wondered whether there may not be some political vocation for the term “antisocial.” One commonplace of queer theory has been the potentially radical antagonism of certain modes of desire toward extant forms of community. In Homos, for example, Leo Bersani suggests that this potential antagonism is a “radical possibility: homo-ness itself necessitates a massive redefining of relationality. More fundamental than a resistance to normalizing methodologies is a potentially revolutionary inaptitude – perhaps inherent in gay desire – for sociality as it is known.” My dissertation contends that modernism
invokes this “massive redefining of relationality” by negating the social in order to open a space for other forms of relationality. But because this wholesale redefinition entails the refusal of extant modes of being-in-common, history, and politics – including, for example, extant forms of socialism – modernism’s political force looks like and is mistaken for the total refusal of politics and history. To call modernism “antisocial” therefore turns out to mean something quite different than what Lukács and those who follow him intend: not simply the negation of this world, but an attitude (expressed precisely as refusal) that another world is possible. I read the works of H.G. Wells, Dorothy Richardson, and Wyndham Lewis as case studies of antisocial modernism.

Wells’s, Richardson’s, and Lewis’s works exemplify modernist experiments in narrative form that aim to negate received social forms in order to invoke another space of possibility for human being and life. As the unfortunate critical neglect these authors have suffered both derives from and reinforces a caricature version of modernism whose politics are at best inert and at worst reactionary, renewed attention to Wells, Richardson, and Lewis compels us to redefine modernism as a radical utopian impulse expressed through radical experiments in aesthetics.

The question of the consequences of Bersani’s claim for a “potentially revolutionary inaptitude… for sociality as it is known” has animated a continuing debate between Tim Dean and Lee Edelman, beginning with Dean’s Beyond Sexuality, running through Edelman’s No Future, and culminating in a special session on “The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory” at the 2005 MLA convention. Rehearsing the poles of this debate will help clarify what we mean by “antisocial.” Succinctly: while both Dean and Edelman accept that the figure of the queer compels this “massive redefining of relationality,” the theorists differ on the consequences of such a redefinition. On one hand, Dean argues that Lacanian psychoanalysis teaches that queer desire is the rule of desire and not an aberration. In other words, because desire is originally provoked by an impersonal, impossible virtual object (the objet petit a) and only later, only contingently attached to persons, it is incorrect to regard homosexuality as a perversion of
heterosexuality. Both homosexuality and heterosexuality represent the diversion of desire from this impersonal object and toward a gendered person. In turn, this opens the possibility of other such diversions and, with them, other modes of relationality or sociality – represented, for Dean, by “the myriad possibilities of aesthetics.” The figure of the queer, therefore, heralds for Dean the future proliferation of alternative modes of relationality or sociality.

On the other hand, in No Future, Edelman notes that the queer has typically been regarded not as a figure heralding new modes of sociality, but as an absolute threat to the future of sociality as such. Engaging the discourse of what he terms “reproductive futurism,” Edelman argues that since the social order is frequently imagined to be held in trust for the future, and since children and childbearing represent the most immediate concrete embodiment of the future (insofar as children are those for whom the future is held in trust), the hysteria about queer desire’s refusal of reproduction and threat to children evinces a fantasmatic formulation in which the queer represents a standing threat to the future of the social. Because this fantasmatic formulation (what Edelman terms “sinthomosexuality”) is, in Edelman’s view, integral to the logic of the present social order, it is impossible for the social order to regard the queer as anything but a threat. In other words, homophobia can’t simply be elided from the normal workings of the social as if it were some kind of extraneous abnormality. The future thus represents a standing threat to the queer. Rather than working to accommodate “reproductive futurism” by becoming more like heterosexuals, queer “politics” should assume the fantasmatic mantle thrust upon it, refusing all modes of politics oriented toward the future of the social – even one oriented toward the promise of new modes of sociality. In “Antagonism, Negativity, and the Subject of Queer Theory” – a capsule version of his remarks from “The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory” panel – Edelman opposes the queer, as a figure of negativity, nonproductivity, disruption, to the “Futurch,” a figure of positivity, “sense, mastery, and meaning.”
Edelman’s “sinthomosexuality” looks strangely similar to Lukács’s claim that modernism’s fixation on individual pathology represents the refusal of sociality: in both cases, the pathological seems to threaten the relational or the social and the negation of a positive, future-oriented perspective, be it “socialism” or “reproductive futurism.” In turn, this might suggest that Dean’s provocative call for the “myriad possibilities of aesthetics” to offer models for new, future modes of sociality or relationality could repeat (unintentionally, though not accidentally) Lukács’s earlier evocation of socialism, itself a novel, future mode of sociality. Perhaps this would be the most effective way to read Jose Esteban Munoz’s claim, in his contribution to the Antisocial Thesis panel, that “queerness is primarily about futurity. Queerness is always on the horizon.” vii Far from being a static perspective that refuses, disrupts, negates or fucks with the future, queerness always heralds a utopian future yet to come, opening the time and the space of what Derrida terms “forms of solidarity yet to be invented.” viii Given this analogy, we can speculate that for Edelman Lukács is a Futurch and modernism queer.

We should also note the possibility of a kind of dialectical sublation of Dean’s and Edelman’s positions on the “antisocial thesis.” What Dean regards as a proliferation of new modes of sociality also represents the undoing of the present social order, so that the “myriad possibilities of aesthetics” herald first an end to “reproductive futurism” and thence a “massive redefining of relationality” – and therefore such new modes of sociality are also curiously antisocial. Such a negation of negation offers a clue as to how one might conceptualize a political vocation for that which frequently has been deemed – and often figures itself as – a negation of the future, of history, and of politics: modernist literature. Recall Stephen Dedalus’s exclamation “history is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake;” D.H. Lawrence’s aggressively impersonal refusal of extant modes of human being-in-common, Miriam Henderson’s (in Dorothy Richardson’s Pilgrimage) declaration “I’m through taking sides” in political questions, and the radical refusal of all extant politics that provides the animating impulse for Wyndham Lewis’s
The Art of Being Ruled – to say nothing of the exclusion of H.G. Wells from modernism precisely because his literary interests lay in politics and utopia and not static “moments of being.” While for Lukács (and perhaps for Edelman), such refusals of politics, history, and the future signal something like suicidal resignation – a literary instance correlative with Durkheim’s taxonomy of suicide – the negative impulse of antisocial modernism in fact works to open the space for some kind of higher order politics, history, futurity.

To connect all this to the apparently non-queer realm of political theory, I invoke Hannah Arendt’s otherwise extremely strange argument in The Human Condition that what she terms “the social” actually occludes politics. There, Arendt imagines a tripartite scheme consisting of labor (the cyclical maintenance of human life), work (the ends-directed production and destruction of durable objects), and action (the human capacity to incite new things and the necessary lack of control over incitements.) Key here is the speculative distinction Arendt makes between the project-oriented perspective of labor and work and the decidedly uncontrollable projections of action and politics. Whereas, for instance, labor and work operate through the projection and determined attainment of ends, action and politics are characterized precisely by their absolute lack of knowledge about or control over such ends. While Arendt makes a speculative distinction between the spaces in which labor and action take place – labor proper to the privacy of the home, action proper to the public space of politics or the polis – she argues that modernity evinces a blurring of this distinction and the emergence of a new, hybrid space, “the social.” In “the social,” the ends-means rationality of labor and work displaces the precariousness of action and politics. Concern for bare life and the project-oriented perspective of production come to be the “political” issues par excellence, to the exclusion of what Arendt would regard as truly political issues: the issuing of unpredictable deeds instancing the human capacity for freedom. Moreover, “the social” marks the emergence of the sundry “normalizing methodologies” characteristic of what Leo Bersani terms “sociality as it is known”: “society,” Arendt writes,
“expects from each of its members a certain kind of behavior, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to ‘normalize’ its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement.”

Not coincidentally, Arendt’s discussion of “the social” frequently seems to converge with Lukács’s own concept of “social being.” In The Ontology of Social Being, a work roughly contemporaneous with The Human Condition, Lukács claims “it is right to see labor as the model for all social practice, all active social relationships.” Labor itself marks the important leap that generates truly human being: just as the leap from the inorganic to the organic marks the emergence of life, the emergence of labor represents the production of the human world – the realization of what Lukács calls “teleologically posited human purpose” in the material world – and a new ontological category of “social being.” In a particularly striking passage, Lukács writes that “labor becomes the model for social practice, for in such social practice – no matter how ramified its mediations – teleological positings are always realized, and ultimately realized materially.” We should remark the strangeness of his phrasing: labor, the future oriented projection and achievement of some ends is the diagram for any and all social practice because all social practice (even if it doesn’t appear so at first glance, even if it is so thoroughly mediated as to render this fact invisible) is also ultimately directed toward some projected material ends. In terms of modernism, the point is that socialism represents the grandest and most hopeful such “teleological positing” and modernist refusals to admit the perspective of socialism are antisocial – or refuse “social being” – because they refuse this future-oriented “teleological positing” and consequently reify the malaise of a particular historical moment, transforming it into a universal human condition. In Lukács’s view, to reject the future, to stop time, to see relationality as a threat, is to refuse exactly that which makes us human, “social being.”

For Arendt (to paraphrase something she says about statistics), “the danger is not that this is true, but that it may become true.” For if Lukács had objected that modernism’s aesthetic had
reified a particular historical malaise into a universal human condition, Arendt’s objection to “social being” or “the social” is that to imagine labor as the essence of human being is both to occlude other, more important possibilities of human being and to eliminate the realms of action and freedom in which such possibilities can be realized. In “the social,” when such novelty and spontaneity has been excised, human beings actually do become statistically predictable, laboring beings – giving rise, incidentally, to sciences like economics and sociology that make such statistics their business. As Lukács and Arendt differ not so much in their descriptions as in their evaluations of “the social”/”social being,” a quote from Lukács can illustrate this point from Arendt:

> the developed social character of production gives rise to a closed system of the economic, with its own immanent basis, in which real practice is possible only through an orientation to immanently economic goals and the search for means to achieve them. The rise of ‘economic man’ is by no means accidental; it expresses very adequately and concretely man’s immediate necessary behavior in a world in which production has become social.xii

So, back to my epigraph: Theodor Adorno, who famously disagreed with Lukács’s evaluation of modernism, locates art’s “social explosiveness” precisely in its capacity simultaneously to disrupt “the ends-means rationality of utility,” to negate the teleological positings characteristic of labor, and to instance some kind of imagined other space “beyond” this project-oriented vision of the future. One of Adorno’s most astute critics, Astradur Eysteinsson, argues that Aesthetic Theory is actually a theory of modernist aesthetics, which locates the particular agency of modernist literature in its “aesthetics of interruption”: modernism’s formal capacity to disrupt normal modes of communication, normal models of community, and normal forms of sociality.xiii In turn, this suggests a possible political vocation for modernism in its very negation or refusal of “social being” or “the social.” The antisocial impulse of queer theory – or
of antisocial modernism – is an impulse to resist the force of the social and to restore to human beings spontaneity and freedom of action, unencumbered by some sort of future-oriented political program. Moreover, this antisocial impulse also operates as the attempt to think through new modes of relationality and sociality, ungoverned by and “teleologically posited” condition of belonging. This locates modernism’s political power in what Lukács regards as its political failing and, moreover, suggests that Edelman’s refusal of the Futurch does not amount to the destruction of politics – precisely because this negation opens the space for another kind of politics.

Indeed, Christopher Lane’s Hatred and Civility: The Antisocial Life in Victorian England and Heather Love’s Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History instance two recent attempts to identify in the aesthetics of fiction an impulse towards social negativity. In Hatred & Civility, for instance, Lane tracks the trope of misanthropy throughout Victorian fiction and argues that such representations of incivility aim quite precisely to antagonize extant forms of politics in nineteenth century England. Likewise, Feeling Backward reads in the work of the modernists Walter Pater, Willa Cather, Radclyffe Hall, and Sylvia Townsend Warner a record of the negative affects produced by social exclusion by tracking tropes of queer loss. Though these works differ precisely insofar as they present contradictory active and passive forms of negativity, Hatred and Civility and Feeling Backward share a sense that the impulse toward negation is and is expressed as a trope, or turn. In other words, Lane and Love identify in the aesthetics of fiction a series of formal elements that instance sundry turnings away from the social. As Walter Benjamin remarks in “The Storyteller” that the reading of fiction is an essentially antisocial act, so we might follow Lane and Love and describe a certain aesthetics of fiction as a formal turning away from the social.

This formal turning is the experimental aesthetics of antisocial modernism. In turning upon their heads received conventions of literary form, modernism aims to cancel received forms
of the social precisely in order to open a space for other, novel, experimental modes of human being-in-common. Paradoxically, then, it is by canceling some element of Lukács’s vaunted realism that modernist fiction evinces a form of utopianism that works to negate the social. This negation opens space for conceiving other possibilities of human being and life but frequently does not posit in that space a utopian content. Antisocial modernism aims primarily at negating the constitution of our world and only tangentially at constituting another. Antisocial modernism, that is, insists merely that another world is possible. Even in a modernist like H.G. Wells – whose very name is virtually synonymous with utopian speculation – experiments in fiction insist foremost upon antagonism to our world, while the utopias that actually exist in his fiction aim to provoke open thought about how to reconstruct the social.

I have selected the works of Wells, Richardson, and Lewis as exemplary instances of antisocial modernism precisely because their works comprise simultaneously and inseparably a series of statements about social forms and a series of experiments in fictional forms. As we will see, these twin series operate dialectically insomuch as these authors’ aesthetic experiments mediate, cancel, and sublate their statements about the social. In other words, insofar as Wells, Richardson, and Lewis embed statements about the social into experimental narratives (and antinarratives) they simultaneously posit and negate dicta about social life. Such formal mediations cancel the posited content of their statements about the social, negate the political projects these statements propose, yet retain thereby a utopian impulse antagonistic to the positive constitution of our world. It is precisely in this sense that the formal experiments modernism undertakes enact a mode of utopian thinking: modernist forms mediate and thereby cancel the given social form of our world. Though my dissertation selects the works of Wells, Richardson, and Lewis as exemplary of antisocial modernism, I believe that all other instances of what we call modernism offer various forms of utopian thinking and that all modernism is, therefore, antisocial modernism.
As Wells’s, Richardson’s, and Lewis’s modernist fiction enacts a dialectical movement between the positive content of statements about the social and the negative motion of their formal experiments, in what follows I undertake to trace such movement through a dialectic between close reading and more distant readings informed by structuralist narrative theory. This dialectical movement emerges in my writing as an alternation between close readings of particular passages from texts that strive to accede to the force of the demands such passages place on readers’ attention and deployments of narrative theory that aim, conversely, to refuse such demands. If a narrative text is a machine that places – when functioning – a spell upon readers’ attention, I conceive narrative theory as an instrument for describing how this machine works, for suspending its operation, and for breaking its spell. As my allegiance to narratology is an allegiance to its negative movement (and not primarily to whatever positive systems of narrative it can establish), my invocations of narrative theory aim primarily to mediate close readings of fictional texts and not to posit total accounts of these texts. Such mediations work to cancel our unthinking responses to modernist fiction and to open a space for new thinking about modernism, just as antisocial modernism aims to break the spell of the social.

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If "social being" operates in Lukács as an essentially Marxist idea that offers a project-oriented perspective of human labor as the incipient diagram for all sociality – and indeed as the ontological foundation for all human being. Arendt's "the social" equates Lukács's "social being" with something like Heidegger's das Man – an entity that occludes the spontaneity of human action and politics, excludes the truly new from entering the world, and therefore actually forecloses important aspects of human being. In other words, while "social being" and "the social" can be seen as two different modes for describing the same condition, Lukács imagines "social being" as the ontological pre-condition for human being, while Arendt imagines "the social" as an ontological affliction, a fallen condition, that eliminates precisely those capacities
for politics that give human being its specificity and therefore threatens human being as such. In turn this implies different attitudes toward aesthetics and, specifically, to modernist aesthetics. For Lukács, the modernist rejection of "social being" is in fact inhuman insofar as it rejects the ontological condition of the human. For Arendt, the modernist rejection of "the social" would be a rejection of the inhuman, of that which afflicts the human condition, a precondition for restoring human being.

In turn again, these different evaluations of "the social"/"social being" also imply different attitudes toward futurity. For Lukács, "social being" is the ontologically necessary precondition for human being and also operates as the ontologically necessary precondition for human futurity. What Lukács identifies as a modernist refusal of "social being" is therefore also the refusal of futurity. For Arendt, "the social" marks not only an ontological affliction that threatens human being in the present, but also an affliction threatening the future of human life – even as "the social" offers its own vision of reproductive futurity insofar as "the social" marks the occupation of the space of politics by the cares of the household. The modernist refusal of "the social" might therefore amount to the refusal of both that which afflicts the human condition and that which would propagate this affliction into the future. This distinction between "social being" and "the social," between one futurity and another, converges with a later distinction in queer theory: between Tim Dean's call for "the myriad possibilities of aesthetics" to offer a different kind of social future and Lee Edelman's call for the rejection of sociality and futurity as such. Reading Lukács and Arendt with Dean and Edelman turns on its head Lukács's declaration that modernism values a disintegration of personality and reveals that modernist "impersonality" – a form of disintegrating personality – exhibits not only some greater political force than it has heretofore been accorded, but marks as well a point of convergence of modernism, political theory, and queer theory. Indeed, the concept of "impersonality" and – more generally – of antisocial modernism might help us identify more radical modernist imaginings of community.
and sociality than those identified, for instance, by Jessica Berman's *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community*. Marking the convergence of modernism, political theory, and queer theory, and the convergence of modernist “impersonality” and community may enable us to theorize more sophisticated connections between modernist aesthetics and politics. In turn, this may compel us to rethink not only how to define the passage from modernism to postmodernism, but in fact whether we can justify any distinction between these two supposedly separate periods. If we still live in “the social,” if the Dean and Edelman “antisocial thesis” debate can be read as repeating positions earlier occupied by Lukács and Arendt, then our contemporary twenty-first century world may not be so different from the early twentieth century world of Wells, Richardson, and Lewis. If true, this would mean not only that modernism remained our contemporary but also that particular modernist writers offer valuable engagements with our present human condition.

My next chapter will take H.G. Wells – a writer who appears profoundly *prosocial* and *antimodernist* – as a paradoxical example of antisocial modernism insofar as his work undertakes experiments in aesthetics to imagine incessantly new social forms less prone than the present social order to destruction and more conducive to human life and human flourishing. Opening *The Outline of History*, Wells remarks that as modernity advances, “human life becomes increasingly a race between education and catastrophe.” We can interpret this as a statement that unless something is done to alter the present social order, human life will suffer the catastrophe of extinction. Wells’s work comprises a massive pedagogical project. It is pedagogical in the sense that Wells aims through it to prepare human beings for a new social order which will escape the catastrophe he sees as immanent to the present social order. It is a project in the same sense that Lukács’s “social being” is a project: it is the consequence of what Lukács terms a “teleologically posited human purpose” projected into the future, as a way of parrying the destructiveness of the present social order. For Wells, the present social order is curiously antisocial insofar as he
believes it will lead to social disintegration and human extinction. Indeed, in his late work *Mind at the End of its Tether*, Wells figures this immanent catastrophe as “a frightful queerness come into life,” and his various utopian and social projects can be read as myriad possibilities for escaping an antisocial queerness. We might say that while Wells shares the Arendtian view that “the social” threatens important aspects of human being, Wells’s remedy turns out to be quite Lukácsian. Far from refusing the project-oriented perspectives of labor and work as afflictions to human being, Wells offers even more intense versions of what Arendt derides as “collective housekeeping”: sophisticated, collectively planned versions of economics which not only defend “social being” from extinction but also free human beings for endeavors beyond simple bare life.

Collectivity in Wells thus becomes a malleable instrument for enabling human life to evade the present social order’s destructive threat to human being. In novels like *A Modern Utopia* and *The World of William Clissold* and in nonfiction works like *The Open Conspiracy* and *The Phoenix*, Wells imagines various different forms and scales of collectivities (world governments, business organizations, political groups, family structures) whose new organizational models would offer not only more security and a better future to the human species, but also would enable capacities for human erotic, intellectual, and political flourishing stunted at present. Wells’s work thus undertakes a dialectical mode of action: Wells’s scientific romances incessantly imagine the total destruction of the human species – a negation that is largely the consequences of destructive present social forms. Concurrently, Wells imagines in and through the experimental narrative forms of what have repeatedly – and wrongly – been named his “materialist” fiction myriad experimental social forms that emerge quite precisely as what Tim Dean has named “myriad possibilities of aesthetics.” These myriad possibilities of novel, experimental social forms offered by Wellsian aesthetics aim foremost at negating the present form of the social precisely in order to open a space for thinking about new forms of collectivity less prone to suffering extinction.
The third chapter presents Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage* as an antisocial modernist counterpoint to Wells’s prosocial modernism. I argue that *Pilgrimage*’s technique and content evince a general refusal of sociality and that this transmutes action from what Wells theorizes as the production of new collective forms of life into a form of reflection predicated on withdrawal from collectivity. The action of *Pilgrimage* is this withdrawal from relationality. In one sense, this would seem to confirm the Lukács’s view of antisocial modernism: *Pilgrimage*, like other modernism, vaunts a particular character’s consciousness at the expense of repudiating all forms of “social being,” working to disconnect Miriam Henderson (the novel’s focal consciousness) from her social environment in order to decompose her personality. In this reading, the novel would collaborate with an ontological threat to human being insofar as it enacts the undoing of the social. In turn this would render the novel ideological or reactionary. But taking Arendt’s “the social” instead of Lukács’s “social being” would compel us to revise this reading into something more in line with the spirit of *Pilgrimage*: viz., that if “the social” is an ontological affliction rather than the precondition for human being – an affliction that threatens to corrode or dissolve important aspect of human being, acting, and reflecting – then to detach from “the social” becomes a necessary restorative political maneuver and not an apolitical regression into personal pathology.

To withdraw from “the social,” to flee even the structures of personal intimacy characteristic of “the social,” therefore becomes a strange kind of political action. Indeed, the novel’s technique itself acts out withdrawal by withdrawing from conventional structures of emplotment and narration, creating an antinarrative that refuses Lukácsian and Wellsian modes of action and identity-based models of personal consciousness in favor of reflection and impersonality. In the novel, Miriam repeatedly passes into and out of various collectivities, from the familial hierarchies she inhabits in the novels first few volumes, to the various political groups – Quakers, Fabians, Suffragettes – in its later volumes, including throughout the micro-level
collectivities of conventional erotic relations. Every such established collectivity, from the
“Society of Friends” to the society she fleetingly shares with Amabel in Dawn’s Left Hand, turns
out to be a threat to Miriam’s impersonal self, such that she declares at one point that “it was
only… with the unlocated being of these people that she desired communication and not at all
with the sight and sound of their busy momentary selves.” Withdrawal from collectivity, refusal
of sociality, becomes in Pilgrimage a strange sort of action that signals in its refusal also the
ghostly invocation of an impersonal community of “unlocated being.” This refusal of relation is
both the negation of all that threatens to make “unlocated being” banal and the necessary
prerequisite for imagining myriad new possibilities of paradoxically antisocial relation. If
Pilgrimage can be called a pedagogical project, it is a course in impersonal intimacy and
antisocial relation.

Chapter four will read the work of Wyndham Lewis as an even more aggressive refusal
of “the social.” If Pilgrimage has imagined action as withdrawal from extant modes of
collectivity, Lewis’s work suggests that there is increasingly nowhere to withdraw to – nowhere
the structures of global capitalism or Soviet communism had not already annexed. In Time and
Western Man, Lewis describes the ideological basis of “the social,” termed by Lewis in The Art
of Being Ruled “millionaire society”: a “time-mind” which has vaunted the procession of time,
the flux of life, the movement of history, and the correlative imperative of action at the expense
of space, stasis, and reflection. Indeed, this “time-philosophy” – visible in such disparate writers
as Bergson, Malinowski, Spengler, Stein, Anita Loos, Joyce, and Pound, and also in such
performers as Charlie Chaplin and the Ballet Russe – is a mechanism by which “millionaire
society” had occluded the other, utopian or heterotopian spaces, precisely in insofar as it
forecloses of the notion of any space outside capitalist modernity. Like Lukács’s “social being,”
Lewis’s “millionaire society” operates as a collective, future oriented project by which human
beings achieve increasing industrial and technological power. But like Arendt’s “the social,” this
increase in technical powers appears only alongside a decrease in capacities for human flourishing, as if human being itself were somehow the price paid for increased capacities to act on nature. In *The Art of Being Ruled*, Lewis notes that “the capitalist state increasingly becomes an educationalist state” in which human beings are conditioned and adjusted to the social. Just as the social in Arendt represented the transposition of labor and the cares of the household into the public space of politics, transforming the space of politics into a collective household and politics itself into collective housekeeping, so too does Lewis argue that “millionaire society” takes place *sub persona infantis*, under the influence of the “child-cult,” in which people have been deprived of an essential aspect of human being and reduced to the level of children. Indeed, the “time-mind” is the ideology of the “child-cult” (and therefore of “millionaire society”) insofar as it reduces human being and ontology in general to a single doubled-valenced childish principle: time or life. To the extent that Lee Edelman’s later attacks on “reproductive futurism” amount to attacks on the “child-cult,” it may be said that the “time mind” and “millionaire society” remain with us today.

If we can imagine Wells’s work as a massive pedagogical project, we can also imagine a strange pedagogical dimension to Lewis’s own work: while Lewis envisions the capitalist state as an educationalist state, in which human beings are perpetually children at school, he imagines his work as bearing quite different pedagogical purposes. The avowed aim of *The Art of Being Ruled* (an aim that also governs *Time and Western Man* and such novels as *The Vulgar Streak*, *Snooty Baronet* and *Tarr*) is “only to clear a little space in the midst of the ruins of our society, where a few of the advantages of the future society… can be enjoyed by those who care to avail themselves of certain facilities here specified.” In other words, Lewis’s work is pedagogical in the sense that it offers tactics for clearing out a space for the stasis of reflection and aesthetics in the midst of a society governed by time. Lewis imagines aesthetic agency as the violent cancellation of life in order to produce static aesthetic objects. Novels like *Tarr*, *The Revenge for
Love, and The Vulgar Streak along with Lewis’s non-fictional work evince a complex interplay between aesthetic action and political action: aesthetic and political agency both turn out to be modes of refusing the ideological vaunting of life Lewis finds characteristic of the contemporary world, to be modes of provoking stasis as a corrosive force that would negate “millionaire society.” While the typical reading of Lewis imagines his work as proto-fascist in order to dismiss it as antiutopian, I will argue that Lewis’s work of antinarrative satire offers a negative form of utopian thinking precisely in the sense that its aggressive, destructive impulses result less in a positive (fascist) political programs than in the relentless negation of contemporary political ideologies in order to create a space for the aesthetic and, correlatively, human freedom.

In the 1962 preface to his 1920 book The Theory of the Novel, Lukács rejects that book for its “highly naïve and totally unfounded utopianism,” and remarks that its only present value inheres in the fact that it “expresses nonetheless an intellectual tendency which was part of the reality of that time.”

The Theory of the Novel closes, of course, by speculating that in the formal experiments of the Dostoyevsky – a writer who anticipates modernism – we might encounter the queerly expressed hopes for another world to come, “hopes still so fragile that they can easily be crushed by the sterile power of the merely existent.” Though he locates in Dostoevsky’s modernist formal experiments an impulse towards the negation of the “sterile power” of our world as it exists, though he imagines in this negative movement properly utopian hopes, Lukács later rejects modernism tout court as reactionary. But if Lukács’s 1962 preface cancels the hope that modernist formal experiments insist that another world is possible, my dissertation hopes to cancel this cancellation in order to read modernism as the aesthetic expression of utopian desires. Antisocial modernism is a work of negation, a mode of art that refuses the constitution of our world at present, and exemplifies Adorno’s dictum (in his essay “Commitment”) that “it is not the office of art to spotlight alternatives, but to resist by its form alone the course of the world, which permanently puts a pistol to men’s heads.”


Ibid., 28.


Ibid., 3.

Ibid., 87.

See Astradur Eysteinsson, *The Concept of Modernism*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 40-41, where Eysteinsson writes that modernist art’s “social context is that of an ever-expanding, monolithic capitalist society, moving toward a system of total exchange as well as total rationality, which is equivalent to absolute reification in matters of social interaction. In the face of this human debasement, art’s basic mode of resistance is in a sense that of opting out of the system’s communicative network in order to attack it head on from the ‘outside.’ In one of his essays Adorno even goes so far as to say that ‘the topical work of art gets a better grip of society the less it deals with society.’”


Ibid., 153.
Chapter 2

“A frightful queerness has come into life”: H.G. Wells’s Narratives of Futurity

...with a kind of madness growing upon me, I flung myself into futurity.

– The Time Machine

Cities, nations, civilizations, progress – it’s all over. That game’s up.

We’re beat.

– The War of The Worlds

The writer finds very considerable reason for believing that, with a period to be estimated by weeks and months rather than by aeons, there has been a fundamental change in the conditions under which life, not simply human life but all self-conscious existence, has been going on since its beginning. If his thinking has been sound, then this world is at the end of its tether. The end of everything we call life is close at hand and cannot be evaded.

– Mind at the End of its Tether

I.

Queerly for a thinker interested foremost in the vast linear stretches of evolutionary time offered by the perspective of biology, H.G. Wells’s late career evinces a recurrence of the themes and the stories which animated his earliest fin de siècle scientific romances. As, for example, 1937’s Star Begotten: A Biological Fantasia recycles the plot of Martian invasion made famous in 1898’s The War of the Worlds, so too does 1937’s The Croquet Player revise (in less technically adept form) the theme of 1895’s The Time Machine. Wells’s own despairing 1945 volume Mind
at the End of its Tether insists such repetition has now become impossible and therefore life itself has suffered some essential damage. “Hitherto,” Wells remarks,

recurrence has seemed a primary law of life. Night has followed day and day night. But in this strange new phase of existence into which our universe is passing, it becomes evident that events no longer recur. They go on and on to an impenetrable mystery, into a violent limitless darkness, against which this obstinate urgency of our minds may struggle, but will struggle only until it is altogether overcome.\textsuperscript{iv}

We encounter here a strange echo of Gertrude Stein’s Narration: there, Stein argues that the newspaper reader reads the newspaper, record of happenings and events, each day for the comforting sense that events have not ceased but have continued to happen, to recur. If a day passes without reading the newspaper and the reader despairs of such comfort, “then the newspaper reader feels that it is like the sun standing still or any abnormal thing there is a day and nothing has happened on that day.”\textsuperscript{v} In each case, the cyclical movement of the sun stands in for the recursive events that signal the normal maintenance of life. A stop to the sun’s movement indexes for Stein the end of the sequence of events comprising narrative; for Wells, it marks the end of the recursion of events underwriting human life itself. As narrative offered, for Stein, some human capacity to comprehend events through stories, the recurrence of events that had “seemed a primary law of life” ensured for Wells a predictable “pattern of things to come.”\textsuperscript{vi}

Moreover, as narrative endows human beings with the capacity to comprehend past events, so too does the recurrence of events endow human beings with some capacity to understand the future. If, that is to say, events in the past and present repeat in the future, then it becomes possible to tell stories anticipating the future of human life – this, to be sure, is the principle animating much of Well’s work, from Anticipations to The Shape of Things to Come, books which aim explicitly to narrate the future. Conversely, as Stein argues that narrative has given way to lyric in the modernist period – as, in other words, human beings’ capacity for making sense of events has
given way to a capacity for understanding intensive states of being – so too had the non-recurrence of events in modernity blinded human beings’ capacity to speculate about future patterns of life. Once events no longer recur, they proceed instead into “an impenetrable mystery, into a violent limitless darkness” against which all human speculation must ultimately fail. Wells’s statement that “there is no ‘pattern of things to come,’” therefore, is precisely corollary to his declaration that “the human story has already come to an end.”

Indeed, in *Mind at the End of its Tether*, Wells’s offers an implicit revision of J.M. Keynes’s 1936 statement, in *The General Theory*, that “new capital-investment can only take place in excess of current capital-divestment if future expenditure on consumption is expected to increase. Each time we secure to-day’s equilibrium by increased investment we are aggravating the difficulty of securing equilibrium to-morrow.” Wells poses the consequences of the loss of the future in economic terms: “*our* universe,” he writes “is not merely bankrupt; there remains no dividend at all; it has not simply liquidated; it is going clean out of existence, leaving not a wrack behind. The attempt to trace a pattern of any sort is absolutely futile.” Keynes’s remark attests to the necessary structural role of future economic growth – the expectation of some future increase in “expenditure on consumption” – to motivate present investment. A net increase in present investment will only occur if the future promises some greater return on such investment. When Keynes notes that securing “to-day’s equilibrium by increased investment” aggravates “the difficulty of securing equilibrium to-morrow,” his statement suggests that present investment, investment which secures the present, demands a pattern of steadily increasing growth, postponing into the future correlatively increasing insecurity. More simply, however, the statement suggests that the present itself depends upon a pattern of events proceeding into the future. In other words, the present is secured only by borrowing from the future. Or, present human life is secured only by contracting a perpetual, perpetually increasing, debt to the future. If there is “no pattern of things to come,” no future to borrow from, then the present itself suffers
an intrinsic damage as it is exposed to all the risk from which it had heretofore been insured.

With no future, human being in the present is wholly precarious: “Our universe” is “bankrupt,” leaves “no dividend at all,” disappears altogether without legacy. No future entails, for Wells, no present.

Framed thus the seemingly aleatory first discussion of the future in The Time Machine becomes charged with a species of dramatic irony. After the time traveler announces his discovery of time travel and invention of the time machine, his guests first consider using the machine to travel into the past, to “verify the accepted account of the Battle of Hastings,” or to “get one’s Greek from the very lips of Homer and Plato.” Then they imagine the future: “‘then there is the future,’ said the Very Young Man. ‘Just think! One might invest all one’s money, leave it to accumulate at interest, and hurry on ahead!’ ‘To discover a society,’ said I, ‘erected on a strictly communistic basis.’” At first glance, these pictures of the future seem not simply at variance but actually in contradiction. While the Very Young Man imagines the future will bear out a pattern of capitalist accumulation in which present investment would grow exponentially through added interest, the narrator predicts the emergence of a communist society. At base, however, these visions share an optimism about the future that imagines it as the steady progress of equilibrium or security. Each vision, thus, imagines security in the future. Of course, the future the time traveler encounters and recounts offers only insecurity and the death of human being. Recall that in the year 802,701, in which much of his story occurs, Homo sapiens as such has passed away altogether, generating two new species, the Eloi and Morlocks. And as that story presents the bankruptcy of human life, Chapter 11 evokes the bankruptcy of life as such. There the time traveler recounts his venture “more than 30 million years” into the future, in which the earth has stopped rotating, has “come to rest with one face to the sun,” life has died out altogether save for some slime covering a rock and “some black object flapping about,” and the sun has dimmed into an eternally “remote and awful twilight.” Strikingly, the narrator
describes the absolute silence of the dead earth: “All the sounds of man, the bleating of sheep, the cries of birds, the hum of insects, the stir that makes the background of our lives – all that was over.” The future thus reveals the precariousness of human society and life in general. Such antisociality and extinction can perhaps be codified best not by Foucault’s rather banal remark (near the end of The Order of Things), that the discursive object of man will soon disappear like a figure written in sand, but instead by Keynes’s own dictum “in the long term we’re all dead.”

This conjunction between the desperate feeling of no future in Wells’s final book and the sense in one of his earliest works that the future promises only nothingness suggests a solution to the problem I posed to begin this chapter: viz., how can Wells declare on one hand that events no longer recur and on the other hand recycle events repeatedly such that novels like Star Begotten and The Croquet Player repeat The War of the Worlds and The Time Machine? Paradoxically these fictions all repeat a sequence of events that ends in the end of events as such. As Mind at the End of its Tether declares “the human story has already come to an end,” these fictions tell stories about the end of human being and life. And as Mind at the End of its Tether itself thus merely reprises themes of Wells’s earliest scientific romances, it is perhaps unsurprising that it echoes as well Wells’s earlier essays. “The Extinction of Man,” collected in the 1898 volume Certain Personal Matters, comprises primarily a catalogue of four species Wells imagines might replace man on earth. Closing the essay, Wells insists “man’s complacent assumption of the future is too confident…. In the case of every other predominant animal the world has ever seen, I repeat, the hour of its complete ascendancy has been the eve of its entire overthrow.” If, therefore, these four Wells novels fictionalize the very hour in which human beings are overthrown, Mind at the End of its Tether declares that hour is at hand. At this hour, Wells suggests “a frightful queerness has come into life,” that “something is happening so that life will never be quite the same again.”
These four novels therefore fictionalize the irruption of a “frightful queerness” into life. By this I mean not simply that these fictions adopt the death of human being and life as a theme but also and especially that they adapt the end of the human story into their dominant structural principle, a principle in accordance with which their plots are fictionalized. These fictions assume in their very formal structures the queer destruction of life Wells thought imminent when writing *Mind at the End of its Tether* in 1945 but which was already the theme of his earliest essays and scientific romances. Such formal subsumption, to be sure, endows Wells’s best work with its continuing aesthetic power and affective impact: these works operate simultaneously as affect machines and as time machines, producing their frightful affects precisely as their narratives enact the irruption of an inhuman time into the human present, concurring the hour of human beings’ overthrow with the hour of our ascendancy. In various ways, that is to say, these novels enact the retroversion of a queer, inhuman, antisocial future into the human present and the strange consequence, in a strangely reversed sequence of cause and effect, of no future on the present. If Keynes’s remarks on investment demonstrate the structural dependence of the present upon the future – viz., that the securing of life in the present depends upon an expectation of security in the future – then these novels disclose the bankruptcy of a human present that has no future.

If *The Croquet Player* and *Star Begotten* repeat, in the late 1930s, elements of Wells’s 1890s scientific romances *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds*, this compulsion to repeat is driven by the theme of total extinction and takes the form of the repeated irruption into these novels narrative presents of various inhuman futures. In this sense then what links Wells’s *fin de siècle* scientific romances with his novels of the late 1930s is their shared sense of *fin du globe* – of the end of the human world, a theme Bernard Bergonzi identifies as a commonplace of decadence and modernism and an animating concern of Wells’s early fiction – operates in these works also as a shared formal principle such that the theme of total death drives each novel into a similar narrative structure, producing various examples of antisocial modernism.
The Time Machine, for example, adapts the otherwise quotidian device of the frame story in order quite literally to enact the irruption of an inhuman future into the present. Like the typical frame story, The Time Machine embeds into the primary level narrative a second level narrative text, apparently containing its own discrete plot. That is to say that The Time Machine seems to contain two complete and distinct plots. First, a primary-level plot in which an unnamed character bound narrator recounts a sequence of events beginning with the time traveler’s revelation of the time machine, proceeding to the hearing of the time traveler’s story, and culminating in an epilogue which functions as a kind of response to that story. Second, a second-level embedded plot in which the time traveler ventures into the future, encounters the Eloi and Morlocks, travels further into the future and witnesses the total extinction of life, then returns to the present. Let us designate these plots “fabulas,” recalling the distinction Mieke Bal makes in Narratology between fabula and story: viz., that while events in a fabula occur in their necessary logical and chronological sequence—such that one event follows another in a sequence of causality or chronology—events in a story are reordered through an act of focalization. In other words, a story will reorder events in a fabula such as, for instance, to invert chronology or to separate cause from effect. Bal, following Genette, designates these transformations of sequence anachronies: “differences between the arrangement in the story and the chronology of the fabula we call anachronies.” Indeed, anachronies are such essential constituents of narrative that Bal claims “in nearly all novels anachrony can be found, even in emphatically chronological ones.” That some of the earliest extant narratives—The Iliad and The Odyssey—offer stories that employ anachrony to begin in medias res suggests that anachrony itself is the rule rather than the exception of narrative. Indeed the sundry embedded narratives in The Odyssey suggests that embedding itself operates, too, as a kind of grammatical rule in narrative.

We should also distinguish between an embedded text and an embedded fabula. According to Bal, an embedded text is any text embedded into the primary level of narrative
comprising words other than the narrator’s own. The most common instance of embedded text is dialogue, in which the narrator quotes thoughts or spoken words of characters. In modernist fiction, embedded texts also frequently take the strange form of free indirect discourse. Rather than quoting character’s words directly, free indirect discourse blends the discourse of the narrator with the discourse of a character, giving rise to a phenomenon termed text interference, in which “the narrator’s text and actor’s text are so closely related that a distinction into narrative levels is no longer possible.” For convenience sake, I will adopt terminology offered by William Nelles to designate narrative levels. In *Frameworks: Narrative Levels & Embedded Narrative*, Nelles suggests the series of levels be distinguished “by Greek prefixes marking the number of levels represented in the text.” Thus, the primary or first level – the level of an external narrator – would be termed extradiegetic, the secondary level – level of a character bound narrator – intradiegetic, the tertiary level metadiegetic. “The level after the metadiegetic,” Nelles writes, “would be the tetradeiegetic, followed by the pentadiegetic, the hexadiegetic, the heptadiegetic, octadiegetic, and so on.” In such terminology, text interference would represent some fusion or confusion between two numerically contiguous levels. While quoted dialogue maintains a clear distinction between the words of the primary extradiegetic general narrator and those issued by an intradiegetic character, the blending of intradiegetic discourse with extradiegetic discourse propels these narrative levels towards a zone of indistinction in which the text cannot be assigned definitively to a single level. Although I have used the example of interference between extra- and intradiegetic texts, in principle there is no conceptual reason such text interference could not take place at a numerically higher level – for example, between hexa- and heptadiegetic levels. Indeed, as Nelles notes that John Barth’s story “Menelaiad” reaches the level of octadiegetic embedding, a full taxonomy of postmodernist fiction would likely include several species of higher level text interference.
If and only if an embedded text offers a narrative in itself can we demarcate an embedded fabula. In other words, the minimal criterion for an embedded text to have a fabula is that that embedded text comprises a story presented by a narrator – a logical and chronological sequence of events formed into a story. While most dialogue would not meet such a criterion and therefore would properly be termed simply embedded text, embedded narrative texts would by definition mark embedded fabulae. Frame stories, stories presented intra- and metadiegetically offer perhaps the most common instance of embedded fabulae in the totality of narrative literature. Recall such examples as The Decameron, The Arabian Nights, The Saragossa Manuscript, various gothic novels from Melmoth the Wanderer to Absalom, Absalom!, Conrad’s Heart of Darkness, and such postmodernist instances as John Barth’s The Tidewater Tales and Italo Calvino’s If on a winter’s night a traveler – and, of course, The Time Machine, which embeds the time traveler’s metadiegetic narrative text into the unnamed character-bound narrator’s intradiegetic text.

Leaving aside the conceptual possibility of a purely aleatory relation – a nonrelation – Bal discerns three possible relations between primary and embedded fabulae. First, the embedded fabula can explain the primary fabula; second, the embedded fabula can determine the primary fabula; third, the embedded fabula can resemble the primary fabula. In this last relation, we can note varying degrees of similarity such that it is possible to mark, for instance, which of Scheherazade’s stories most closely resembles her own story or to specify the significant contrasts between primary and embedded fabulae in something like Heart of Darkness or Melmoth the Wanderer. Indeed, we may imagine that even purely aleatory embedding of narrative could be accounted for by considering the degrees of similarity, rendering the relation of resemblance a function largely of speculation and interpretation. We should, however, take care to distinguish precisely between relations of explanation and determination. In explanation, Bal writes, “the relationship between the fabulas [is] merely explanatory”; the embedded fabula “is of no influence on the outcome of the primary fabula.” Determination, conversely, occurs when
“the function of the embedded fabula is no longer merely explanatory. The exposition [of the embedded story] influences the primary fabula. Consequently the structure of narrative levels becomes more than a mere story-telling device; it is part of the narrative’s poetics, and needs to be understood for the narrative to be appreciated.”

Quite simply, therefore, the minimal feature distinguishing explanation from determination is that in the latter relation the embedded fabula produces a change and thus constitutes an event in the primary fabula while in the former relation the embedded fabula takes its place there merely as an existent. A determinative embedded fabula will be accounted as an event or an action in the primary fabula and an explanatory embedded fabula merely as an element of exposition.

To decide whether the time traveler’s embedded story explains or determines the unnamed narrator’s frame story is, therefore, to decide whether the embedded fabula comprises an event in the primary fabula. Recall the narrator’s final assessment of the time traveler’s story, given in the epilogue of *The Time Machine*. Having heard a story narrating the future extinction of human being and life itself, the narrator remarks there his disbelief: “I, for my own part,” he insists, “cannot think that these latter days of weak experiment, fragmentary theory, and mutual discord are indeed man’s culminating time,” even if the time traveler – “long before the Time Machine was made – thought but cheerlessly of the Advancement of Mankind, and saw in the gray pile of civilization only a foolish heaping that must inevitably fall back upon and destroy its makers in the end.”

Such words suggest that though the time traveler’s story of extinction elaborates and explains his pessimistic outlook on the future, the story itself produces no significant change in the state before the story was narrated. As, that is, the time traveler had already been of the opinion that human civilization “must inevitably fall back and destroy its makers in the end” even “long before the Time Machine was made,” the events experienced in his journey and recounted in his story amplify and intensify but do nothing to change his vision of the future. Though, moreover, the narrator has heard a story attesting to the imminent destruction of civilization and extinction of life, this story does not alter his belief that the present moment of
human civilization represents not “man’s culminating time.” If the time traveler’s story compels no change in state in the intradiegetic fabula, it does not constitute an event in the primary fabula, and therefore the embedded fabula operates merely in an explanatory and not determinative relation. If, moreover, the time traveler’s story of a queer future heralding only a promise of extinction has no significant impact on the state of the present but instead merely explains an already held belief, then I would be wrong to suggest that The Time Machine fictionalizes the irruption of a “frightful queerness” into life and its consequences on the present. This latter assertion, essential to my argument, depends upon the notion that a future heralding total death determines particular consequences in the present: viz., that confronted with no future, present human being and “life will never be quite the same again.”

The narrator’s final contradictory statements codify the distinction between whether the time traveler’s embedded fabula explains or determines the primary fabula. Closing the epilogue, the narrator responds to the time traveler’s vision of the future. For the time traveler, we have noted, the future holds only the imminent ruin of human civilization. “But to me,” the narrator explains, “the future is still black and blank – a vast ignorance, lit at a few casual places by the memory of his story. And I have by me, for my comfort, two strange white flowers – shriveled now, and brown and flat and brittle – to witness that even when mind and strength had gone, gratitude and mutual tenderness still lived on in the heart of man.” The first statement places the time traveler’s story into a purely explanatory relation to the primary fabula. Even though it has explained “a few casual places” in some possible future, in total the future remains “a vast ignorance,” bearing apparently no necessary relation to the present. “Still black and blank,” the future thus offers an open, undetermined zone of freedom – there is, in other words, no necessary impact of the future on the present, of the embedded fabula upon the primary fabula. The second statement, however, reports of a gift the time traveler has given the narrator – “two strange white flowers,” given him by one of the Eloi during his journey to the future – and thus indexes at least one specific consequence of the embedded fabula upon the primary fabula. This gift marks a
determinative relation between the embedded fabula and the primary fabula insofar as the narrator could not have been given the flowers if Weena (the Eloi) had not first given them to the time traveler. Insofar as the event of the gift in the primary fabula depends upon the event of the gift in the embedded fabula, such that the former cannot happen without the latter having happened, we should read – at least provisionally – the time traveler’s embedded fabula to determine and not simply to explain the primary fabula. Queerly, however, to read this relation as determinative entails quite literally to imagine the present to depend upon the future. If the gift in the intradiegetic fabula depends upon a gift in the metadiegetic fabula, then an event in the narrator’s present depends upon an event happening 800,000 years later. In this sense, the cause of the present is the future; the present is the effect of the future.

Given this Borgesian, perhaps even postmodernist, paradox of cause and effect, it should not surprise us that Borges himself selects these two strange white flowers as marking a clandestine affinity between Wells and Coleridge, even if we may be surprised that Borges actually does not attend to that which endows these flowers with their greatest narrative interest. In “Coleridge’s Flower,” Borges compares The Time Machine’s flowers to a flower Coleridge imagines given in a dream of paradise, still there when the sleeper wakes: “If a man could pass through Paradise in a dream and have a flower presented to him as a pledge that his soul had really been there, and if he found the flower in his hand when he awoke – Ay! – and what then?” Comparing this flower to the time traveler’s gifts from Weena, Borges suggests that “more incredible than a celestial flower or a dream flower is a future flower, the contradictory flower whose atoms, not yet assembled, now occupy other spaces.” Though Borges rightly senses an affinity between these two entities, these two narrative existents, he so quickly propels this affinity into support for the hypothesis that the history of literature is not a succession of various authors but the various works of a single total author (“the history,” as he approvingly quotes from Valery, “of the Spirit as the producer or consumer of literature”) that he neglects to consider precisely what structural elements produce the affinity. In brief, both Coleridge’s
fragment and *The Time Machine* enact a determinative relation of an embedded fabula to a primary fabula such that events in the embedded fabula produce events in the primary level fabula and such that existents in the embedded fabula – the very things furnishing the embedded fabula – become existents in the primary level fabula. This replication of metadiegetic existents – the flowers – in the intradiegetic world generates a sort of ontological interference between different narrative levels. Rather than Borges’s properly undecideable question of whether literature comprises the various emanations of a single spirit of literature, it is precisely such ontological interference that is most interesting and puzzling about the conjunction of Coleridge and Wells. Both authors generate through manipulations of embedded narrative an unlikely ontological impact of the embedded narrative upon the world in which it is told.

Coleridge’s flower and *The Time Machine* in fact should be the most intense examples in Borges’s catalogue of narratives that efface the distinction between levels by recursively embedding the primary level fabula back into itself. In “When Fiction Lives in Fiction,” Borges notes several texts that embed narratives of their own production into their primary narratives, including *Hamlet*, whose third act stages a play sharing the plot of *Hamlet*, *Las meninas*, in which Velasquez paints himself painting *Las meninas*, and *At-Swim-Two-Birds*, in which the characters of a novel embedded at the pentadiegetic level kidnap its tetradiegetic author.\(^{xxxi}\) Most famously, Borges describes night 602 of the *Arabian Nights*. “On that strange night,” he writes,

> the king hears his own story from the queen’s lips. He hears the beginning of the story, which includes all the others, and also – monstrously – itself. Does the reader have a clear sense of the vast possibility held out by this interpolation, its peculiar danger? Were the queen to persist, the immobile king would forever listen to the truncated story of the thousand and one nights, now infinite and circular.\(^{xxxii}\)

In fact this recursion threatens two “peculiar dangers”. First, the danger Borges describes of producing an infinitely recursive loop through the embedding. If night 602 embeds the primary level of the *Arabian Nights* back into itself such that it generates a recursion back to the first
night, albeit at a higher diegetic level, then the narrative on whatever level can never proceed beyond night 602. The same sequence of events, that is to say, will recur *ad infinitum*, generating a spiraling infinitely propagated series of narrative levels. Incidentally we might recall that Wells does not find this eternal recurrence of events particularly dangerous; indeed, such recursion *defers* the end and thence maintains the present.

More dangerous for Wells is a second “peculiar danger,” implicit but unarticulated in Borges’s essay: that the recursive embedding of a primary level narrative back into itself interferes with the very distinction between different levels such that primary and embedded fabulae become effectively the same fabula. In Borgesian terms, this danger is precisely the threat to “make reality appear unreal to us.”xxxiii That it would, in other words, efface the boundary between fiction and life, making life itself appear to be another fiction. Night 602 therefore would confront Schahriar with the possibility that his own life takes place in some embedded fiction; *Hamlet, Las meninas, and At-Swim-Two-Birds* offer similar possibilities.

Had Borges included Coleridge’s fragment and *The Time Machine* in his catalogue, he would have noted an even more peculiar consequence of this effacement of narrative levels: viz., that both texts offer examples of embedded fabulae that turn out to be later, future moments of the primary fabulae. For instance, one reading of Coleridge’s fragment might be that the man has had a dream of the afterlife and has received a flower from the future as a sign that the dream is not merely a fantastic vision but in fact prophesies events to come. The flower thus signals the “unreality of reality” in the sense that it “pledges” or promises a paradisiacal realm, perhaps outside time altogether, as the future of human time. This prophecy heralds the redemption of the present and thus the revocation of the present. The obvious answer, then to Coleridge’s question “and what then?” is that then man would live piously in accordance with the flower’s promise, as if the future were already present, as if the present were not. The reduplication of the flower in the embedded dream and the primary waking narrative binds the embedded fabula together with the primary fabula such that this ontological interference makes it impossible to distinguish
between primary and embedded fabulae. Indeed, we might speak of a sort of horizon beyond which it is impossible to distinguish whether events take place in one fabula or the other because they are effectively the same fabula. If free indirect discourse instances text interference in which we can no longer attribute words to one narrative level or another, this event horizon produces what we might call fabula interference.

Near the end of chapter two of *The Time Machine*, the time traveler offers to recount his journey if the guests will consent to a single condition. “I will,” he says, “tell you the story of what has happened to me, if you like, but you must refrain from interrupting me.” “I shan’t sleep,” he continues, “till I’ve told this thing over to you. Then I shall go to bed. But no interruptions! Is it agreed?” The guests agree and do not interrupt as the time traveler recounts his journey in a narrative embedded in chapters 3-11 of the novel. Precisely at the middle of the embedded narrative, in the fifth of nine chapters presenting his story, the time traveler suffers its single interruption, the single irruption of the intradiegetic level into the metadiegetic level. The time traveler tells his audience that

Weena had been hugely delighted when I began to carry her, but after a time she desired me to let her down and run along by the side of me, occasionally darting off on either side to pick flowers to stick in my pockets. My pockets had always puzzled Weena, but at the last she had concluded that they were an eccentric kind of vase for floral decoration. At last she utilised them for that purpose. Ant that reminds me! In changing my jacket I found…

*The Time Traveler paused, put his hand into his pocket, and silently placed two withered flowers, not unlike very large white mallows, upon the little table. Then he resumed his narration.*

In the midst, in the middle of the embedded narrative, the primary narrator interrupts to note the very presence of the withered flowers the time traveler has just recounted receiving as a
gift in the future. (Though the narrator compares them to “mallows,” we later hear from a “Medical Man” that they are unaccountable – in chapter 12, he remarks “I certainly don’t know the natural order of these flowers.”xxxvii) The narrator’s interruption signals the irruption of the present fabula into the future fabula at exactly the same time as it signals through ontological interference the irruption of the future amidst the present. As in Coleridge’s fragment, such reduplication of the flower in both the embedded fabula and the primary fabula binds both fabulae together such that they effectively become indistinguishable. Ontological interference thus leads to fabula interference, transforming the flowers into pledges or promises of the imminence of the future. The time traveler’s story narrates the necessary sequence that will conclude the primary narrative’s fabula: the extinction of human being and life. And this interference transforms the future’s immanent destruction of the present into an immanent destruction of the present. Paradoxically, such interference actually represents the embedding of the primary fabula into the embedded fabula insofar as it places the human time of the primary fabula within the inhuman evolutionary time of the time traveler’s story. If the man in Coleridge’s fragment receives the dream flower as a pledge or promise of future redemption and consequently lives as though the present was redeemed already, as if the unredeemed present was not, as if paradise already was, the narrator’s response to learning that the human future promises only extinction, that the time traveler’s story is the necessary and unavoidable end to the present human story, that the time traveler’s embedded fabula in fact anticipates the events in which the narrator’s human time is destroyed is quite precisely to live as though that necessary future was not. Even if evolutionary time heralds only a future of total extinction, the narrator insists “it remains for us to live as if it were not so.”xxxviii

To live, that is, as if human time were primary; as if it were not embedded as a brief and fleeting moment within the inhuman movement of evolutionary time. If, as I have argued, The Time Machine’s embedded story of an extinct future marks a “frightful queerness come into life” in the narrator’s human present, a queerness that dissolves the frame story precisely by enframing
it in an inhuman evolutionary time, then the narrator advises “for us to live as if it were not so,” as if the frame of the present had not been broken by the threat of the future. If, as in my epigraph, madness is the necessary accompaniment to human beings’ confrontation with evolutionary time – “with a kind of madness growing upon me,” the time traveler recounts, “I flung myself into futurity” – then the narrator’s exhortation to live as if evolutionary time “were not so” provides an antidote to such madness offered as well by George Frobisher, narrator of The Croquet Player. Closing that novel, a book that repeats The Time Machine both thematically and structurally over 40 years later, Frobisher insists that even despite the suggestion that evolutionary time threatens the destruction of human being and life, he will continue to live as if it did not. Having been told by the “psychotherapeutist” Dr. Norbert (one of “two queer men [George] met on the Pomona terrace”) that soon for human beings “there will be no ease, no security, no comfort any more,” that Homo sapiens is a species destined to die, Frobisher replies “I don’t care. The world may be going to pieces. The Stone Age may be returning. This may be, as you say, the sunset of civilization. I’m sorry, but I can’t help it this morning. I have other engagements. All the same – laws of the Medes and Persians – I am going to play croquet with my aunt at half-past twelve today.”

Incidentally, let us note that Frobisher’s words present the maintenance of social conventions – of sociality – as a sanity-preserving response to the threat of no future. In other words, if to confront the fact of no future for human being is to solicit madness, then to maintain insistently even the most quotidian aspects of human civilization is to occlude the force of an antisocial future with the repetitive force of sociality as such. In section two of this chapter I will argue that this response to the queer threat of extinction in fact becomes the animating principle of much of Wells’s work between the early scientific romances and The Croquet Player, evident in such varied works as Ann Veronica, The New Machiavelli, and The Open Conspiracy. Such works repeatedly imagine on thematic and formal levels the proliferation of new modes of sociality and civilization that would neutralize the evolutionary force of extinction – modes of
sociality to negate the force of the antisocial, the force of the “queerness come into life,” the force of what Wells also terms in Mind at the End of its Tether “The Antagonist”: “the term the present writer will employ to express the unknown implacable which has endured life for so long by our reckoning and has now turned against it so implacably to wipe it out.”

The Time Machine’s formal conceit – the aesthetic experiment by which its structure enacts its theme – is its manipulation of embedding in order that its embedded story of evolutionary time shatters the human time of its frame story. If I have suggested that The Croquet Player is a later formal and thematic repetition of The Time Machine it is so precisely in the sense that Wells’s later novel also manipulates (though far less adeptly) embedded narrative to enact the irruption of evolutionary time into the present’s human time. The Time Machine’s primary level narrative comprised an intradiegetic narrator recounting his experience of the time traveler’s embedded story. The Croquet Player repeats this structure. Its narrator, George Frobisher, recounts hearing two stories in which the awareness of evolutionary time afflicts human beings with a kind of madness.

The Croquet Player’s four chapters are proportioned according to a symmetry that embeds these two stories as chapters two and three, while the primary level narrative takes place in chapters one and four. The first chapter presents the scene of the frame – the terrace of the Source Hotel in Perona, where Frobisher and his aunt “have been recuperating… after a rather discouraging conference of the Women’s World Humanity Movement at Chicago.” Opening the first chapter, Frobisher remarks “I have been talking to two very queer individuals and they have produced a peculiar disturbance of my mind. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that they have infected me and distressed me with some very strange and unpleasant ideas.” Indeed, the desire to neutralize this infection motivates Frobisher’s telling, as if embedding these stories into his own will deprive them of their force: “I want to get my story,” he says, “into a shape that will enable one or two sympathetic readers to reassure me about the purely imaginative quality of
what these two men had to say.-xlili If *The Time Machine*’s narrator had closed his story by
attesting to his disbelief of the factuality of the time traveler’s story (vowing to live as if it were
not true) then Frobisher’s frame story vows to operate as a strategy of containment for the
embedded stories insofar as rendering them “purely imaginative” would make them less
disturbing. Frobisher closes chapter one by declaring “I will put myself into the background, so to
speak – or ‘frame’ perhaps is better – and tell you about the first of these two queer men I met on
the Perona terrace.”xliv

In the first embedded story, Dr. Finchatton recounts his growing dread after arriving in a
town he calls Cainsmarsh, a “queer uneasiness of the mind” that produces in him nightmares,
insomnia, and anxiety.xlv Dr. Norbert attributes this queer uneasiness to something he calls “The
Evil”: “an unhappy, wicked spirit that creeps into us all,” something Dr. Finchatton imagines has
always been buried there in Cainsmarsh, underground.xlvi “There was something mighty and
dreadful,” Finchatton explains, “Buried in Cainsmarsh. Something colossally evil.”xlvii By the
end of the story, Finchatton specifies this buried evil. It is literally the remains of prehistoric
humans, bones excavated by archaeologists, discovered along with “axes, spears – nothing but
huge weapons for killing and killing!xlviii The dreadful evil, the source of Finchatton’s “queer
uneasiness of mind,” is the atavistic past of human beings, a time before civilization in which
human beings greatest capacity was to kill one another. This evolutionary past then stands as a
reminder of an antisocial moment of the human species, in which human interaction takes the
form of the consistent threat of violence and death, that antedates the sociality of present
civilization, as if present civilization had merely supplemented and not supplanted the atavistic
earlier moment of evolution.

In *The Croquet Player*’s third chapter, Dr. Finchatton recounts a subsequent story in
which he seeks to counter the “endemic panic” he and others have suffered from “The Evil” by
looking at prehistoric bones excavated from Cainsmarsh, now housed in a museumxlIx He
encounters there a skeleton – “almost unbroken,” nearly complete – identified by the museum’s curator as “more probable than not” an ancestor of *Homo sapiens*. Dr. Finchatton recounts learning that the long span of prehistoric time ruled by such human ancestors dwarfs the historical time of *Homo sapiens*: “his sort,” he says of the skeleton, “had slouched and snarled over the marshes for a hundred times the length of recorded history. In comparison with his overlordship our later human rule was a thing of yesterday.”ii Near the end of the chapter, we learn that this “primordial Adamite,” with its “infernal Paleolithic skull,” has infected Dr. Finchatton’s dreams such that in his nightmares he sees the skeleton grow to a size proportionate to its age, surrounded by “his innumerable descendents, swarming like ants,” making gestures of submission and offering a blood sacrifice in tribute to his violent atavism.iii In order to quell the force of these nightmares, Finchatton seeks out Dr. Norbert, “the psychotherapeutist” who exhorts him to “see things unfeelingly.”iii

Chapter four returns from the embedded narrative to the narrator’s frame story. There, we learn that the nightmare described by Finchatton has infected George Frobisher such that “the Cave Man,” he reports, “was becoming more and more a living presence as the story germinated in my mind.”iv In other words, the impact of the embedded story is to infect Frobisher with the same panic that had afflicted Finchatton and, as we learn, Norbert as well. The embedded fabula thus threatens to determine the primary fabula of Frobisher’s frame precisely in the sense that it threatens him with precisely the same affective response suffered by Finchatton in the embedded fabula. Thus storytelling as such becomes, strangely, a vector for infection and Frobisher’s attempt to inoculate this infection takes the form of an attempt to negate the determinative relation between embedded and primary fabulae by rendering the embedded fabula only imaginative – to maintain a purely aleatory relation, that is, between frame story and embedded story.
The Croquet Player attributes this infection to what the museum curator and Dr. Norbert term “breaking the frame of our present.” In chapter three, the curator explains to Dr. Finchatton that

‘A century or so ago,’ he said, ‘men lived in the present far more than they do now. Their past went back four or five thousand years, their future hardly went as far, they lived for now. And what they called the eternities. They knew nothing of the remote real past. They cared nothing for the real future. That,’—and he nodded at the cave man’s skull—‘just wasn’t there. All that was buried and forgotten and out of life. We lived in a magic sphere and we felt taken care of and safe. And now in the last century or so, we have broken that. We have poked into the past, unearthing age after age, and we peer more and more forward into the future. And that’s what’s the matter with us.’

In chapter four, Dr. Norbert echoes the curator’s words, explaining to Frobisher that unlike animals, who “live wholly in the present” and are “framed in immediate things,” human beings, we men, we have been probing and piercing into the past and future. We have been multiplying memories, histories, traditions; we have filled ourselves with forebodings and plannings and apprehension. And so our worlds have become overwhelmingly vast for us, terrifying, appalling. Things that had seemed forgotten for ever have suddenly come back into the very present of our conscience.

In sum, it is precisely the fact that human beings can no longer live wholly in the immediate present but must also account for the atavistic past and antisocial future of evolutionary time that generates the “endemic panic” that has infected Finchatton and Norbert and threatens to infect, through the vector of embedded narrative, George Frobisher. Archaeologists’ excavation of the prehistoric past—represented by the cave man’s skull—breaks the frame of the present by introjecting evolutionary time into human time, dispelling the “magic sphere” of civilization and security, so that human beings no longer feel “taken care of and safe.”
The span of evolutionary time surpasses the span of human time, thus breaking the frame of the present insofar as that frame can now only be seen as embedded between atavistic past and antisocial future. Just as the skull marks, for Finchatton, the curator, and Norbert, the breaking of the frame of the present (and the occlusion of any possibility of continuing to live immediately in the present), so too do the embedded stories mark the breaking of The Croquet Player’s primary level frame story. If, that is to say, the skull operates as a vector for transmitting the “endemic panic” that accompanies the experience of evolutionary time, a “kind of madness” we have seen described in The Time Machine, the embedded fabula threatens to infect Frobisher with madness in the primary fabula. If I have speculated that an analogy exists between the various exhortations to sociality offered to inoculate from the sickness of no future – offered, that is, by The Time Traveler’s narrator, by George Frobisher – then in turn we could imagine H.G. Wells’s sundry repetitions of the end of human being and life as themselves attempts to inoculate against evolutionary time.

I close this section by considering briefly two other Wellsian repetitions of the end of human being and life: The War of the Worlds and Star Begotten: A Biological Fantasia. In The War of the Worlds, the narrator speculates that the Martians – whose invasion effects the “swift liquefaction of the social body” – could be the evolutionary offspring of a species like Homo sapiens. “To me,” he says, observing the Martians from his hiding place in a ruined house,

it is quite credible that the Martians may be descended from beings not unlike ourselves, by a gradual development of brain and hands (the latter giving rise to the two bunches of deliberate tentacles at last) at the expense of the rest of the body. Without the body the brain would, of course, become a mere selfish intelligence, without any of the emotional substratum of the human being.\textsuperscript{lviii}

The narrator thus imagines a possible evolutionary connection between the human species and the Martians. Not only does the narrator speculate that “the Martians may be descended from beings not unlike” Homo sapiens, but he imagines the specific physical
adaptation that would have sublated the human species into a monstrous, inhuman form. “A gradual development of the brain and hands,” he explains, and concurrent diminution of the rest of the body, would have transformed the species’ whole being, rendering the brain “a mere selfish intelligence,” and erasing wholly “the emotional substratum of the human being.” In other words, the narrator locates in the very physical appearance of human beings – in the very species of Homo sapiens – those affective capacities that define human being as such. Just as the adaptation of the Morlocks and Eloi in The Time Machine render them inhuman descendents of human beings, the Martians, “descended from beings not unlike ourselves,” mark an inhuman future produced through the adaptive movement of evolution. The Martians thus embody a possible future moment of evolutionary time in which an inhuman species has emerged from Homo sapiens. If The Time Machine’s formal conceit was to embed human time into evolutionary time, revealing the human present and evolutionary future to be segments of the same fabula, the Martian invasion in The War of the Worlds enacts the retroversion of an inhuman future into the human present insofar as human beings and Martians exist upon the same evolutionary line.

This inhuman future is an antisocial future. In the same scene in which he speculates about Martian evolution, the narrator describes Martian reproduction:

In the next place, wonderful as it seems in a sexual world, the Martians were absolutely without sex, and therefore without any of the tumultuous emotions that arise from that difference among men. A young Martian, there can now be no dispute, was really born upon earth during the war, and it was found attached to its parent, partially budded off, just as young lily-bulbs bud off, or like the young animals in the fresh-water polyp.

In man, in all the higher terrestrial animals, such a method of increase has disappeared; but even on this earth it was certainly the primitive method. Among the lower animals, up even to those first cousins of the vertebrated animals, the Tunicates, the two processes occur side by side, but finally the sexual method superseded its
competitor altogether. On Mars, however, just the reverse has apparently been the
case.\textsuperscript{\textit{li}}

What is most “wonderful,” most horrifying about the Martians is that they do not
reproduce heterosexually. Imagining Martian evolution, the narrator hypothesizes that the
physical adaptations suffered by the Martians have effaced “the emotional substratum of the
human being.” Sexual difference itself seems to comprise this emotional substratum such that
without such difference, the Martians also lack “any of the tumultuous emotions that arise from
that difference among men.” Without sexual difference the Martians are entirely homosexual;
without sexual difference, they can only reproduce asexually – through a process of budding off
whereby their offspring are merely clones. Martian reproduction, therefore, can only be the
endless reproduction of the same, even to the point that the Martians die because they are
afflicted by the same earthly disease in exactly the same way. Queerly, the narrator imagines the
Martians as both less and more evolved than human beings: as both the remnant of an atavistic
past and a retroversion of an inhuman future. Budding off “on this earth was certainly the
primitive method” and heterosexual reproduction ultimately superseded asexual reproduction –
the Martians mark a reversal whereby heterosexuality itself passes away, giving way to a queer
future.

All the more poignant, then, are the narrator’s final words closing the epilogue of The
War of the Worlds. Recall that in the early days of the invasion, the narrator leaves his wife
under the pretext of returning a cart he had borrowed and the couple does not reunite until the
Martians have all died. In the epilogue, the narrator catalogues his strange impressions in the
invasion’s aftermath. “Strangest of all,” he writes, “is to hold my wife’s hand again and to think
that I have counted her, and that she has counted me, among the dead.”\textsuperscript{\textit{lix}} The narrator’s marriage,
thus, will always thenceforth be mediated by the Martians and by death, just as he remarks that
his experience of London always henceforth will be mediated by his vision of the city laid waste.
Wells had closed 1896’s The Island of Dr. Moreau with a similar ending, whereby the events that
novel’s narrator had experienced afterwards always mediate his experience of London, making him imagine that Londoners are all animals shaped through vivisection into the guise of human beings. Both novels’ conclusions then imagine the irruption of the inhuman in the very presence of the human and mark what I have argued is the most typically Wellsian concern: the destruction of human being by cosmic evolutionary time. If Wells had described such destruction as “a queerness come into life,” then the vision of death mediating always and forever the narrator’s marriage imagines such queerness as that which will destroy future reproduction.

As The Croquet Player repeats The Time Machine’s irruption of evolutionary time into the human present, Star Begotten repeats The War of the Worlds’s irruption of a queerness into life by transforming the Martians into merely a name for a cosmic process that disrupts reproduction and thereby threatens an intrinsic damage to human being and life. There Joseph Davis imagines the Martians as agents sending “cosmic rays” to affect some mutation of human beings by transforming the biochemistry of human fetuses. Although that novel closes with Davis accepting that nothing can be done about such changes (accepting, indeed, that he and his wife already have been affected, mutated), Mind at the End of its Tether demonstrates that Wells himself could accept the passing of human being only with despair. “The human story has come to an end,” Homo sapiens is doomed to pass away, “the stars in their courses have turned against him and he has to give place to some other animal better adapted to the fate that closes more and more swiftly upon mankind.”

II.

In Building Cosmopolis: The Political Thought of H.G. Wells, John S. Partington notes the influence of Thomas Henry Huxley upon Wells. In 1894, Wells had undertaken to study under Huxley at the Normal Schools of Science. According to Partington, it was precisely Huxley’s attendance to evolutionary biology that offered the greatest impact upon Wells’s
subsequent aesthetic and political imaginings, especially insofar as Wells came to share Huxley’s distinction between the progress of the human species and the cosmic evolutionary process into which *Homo sapiens* are embedded.\textsuperscript{lxiii} For Huxley – and for Wells – the emergence of *Homo sapiens* from the biological process of evolution marks an ontological leap whereby human beings achieve some singular capacity to control, direct, or quell cosmic evolution, even as the human species remains simultaneously and inextricably embedded in evolution. Huxley’s 1893 essay “Evolution and Ethics” argues that it is precisely the emergence of human sociality which introduces this ontological difference: “the history of civilization,” Huxley argues, “details the steps by which men have succeeded in building up an artificial world within the cosmos.”\textsuperscript{lxiv} We must repeat, however, that for Huxley as for Wells this “artificial world” – however complex it may become – remains always embedded with cosmic evolution, determined by it in the last instance. Thus Huxley remarks that

> men in society are undoubtedly subject to the cosmic process. As among other animals, multiplication goes on without cessation, and involves severe competition for the means of support. The struggle for existence tends to eliminate those less fitted to adapt themselves to the circumstances of their existence. The strongest, the most self-assertive, tend to tread down the weaker. But the influence of the cosmic process on the evolution of society is greater the more rudimentary its civilization. Social progress means a checking of the cosmic process at every step and the substitution for it of another, which may be called the ethical process; the end of which is not the survival of those who may happen to be the fittest, in respect of the whole of the conditions which obtain, but of those who are ethically the best.\textsuperscript{lxv}

This last point marks not only Huxley’s critique of Social Darwinism but also his account of the adaptive value of human sociality as such. While Social Darwinism imagines that cosmic evolution impacts human beings immediately – such that “survival of the fittest” becomes the
inexorable law of the social as well as the biological – Huxley regards human sociality not simply as a mediation but in fact as an engine of warfare against cosmic evolution. “Let us understand, once and for all,” he insists, “that the ethical progress of society depends not on imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combating it.” Huxley thus posits a dialectical relationship between human beings and the natural world in which *Homo sapiens* exists simultaneously as a particular epiphenomenon of the cosmic process of evolution and as its determinate negation. Though *Homo sapiens* “are undoubtedly subject to the cosmic process,” though the reproduction of human life resembles that of “other animals” (“go[ing] on without cessation, and involve[ing] severe competition for the means of support”), the incipience of sociality introduces a difference whereby human evolution comes to contradict cosmic evolution at every moment. Indeed, Huxley proposes a sort of inverse ratio whereby the progress of human civilization concurs precisely with the regress of the impact of the cosmic process upon human beings. Thus, as we have seen, Huxley speculates both that “the history of civilization” is the history of the dialectical mediation between *Homo sapiens* and nature and also that “the influence of the cosmic process on the evolution of society is greater the more rudimentary its civilization.” We might imagine, then, that the progress of the social approaches total negation of the cosmic process asymptotically – approaches it, that is, without ever reaching it. If, as we have seen in the first section of this chapter, the cosmic process of evolution operates as the negation of human being and life, human beings can only ever posit our world precariously as the negation of the negation, retaining always some cosmic force toward extinction.

As Huxley opposes nature’s cosmic evolution with *Homo sapiens*’s ethical evolution – while insisting that human beings remain simultaneously both attached to and detached from cosmic evolution – Wells argues in his 1894 essay “Human Evolution: An Artificial Process” that human beings still suffer the force of biology even as the artificial world of human civilization insulates against that force. There Wells argues that
in civilization we have (1) an inherited factor, the natural man, who is the product of
natural selection, the culminating ape, and a type of animal more obstinately
unchangeable than any other living creature, and (2) an acquired factor, the artificial man,
the highly plastic creature of tradition, suggestion, and reasoned thought. In the artificial
man we have all that makes the comforts and securities of civilization a possibility. That
factor and civilization have developed and will develop simultaneously.\textsuperscript{lxvii}

Wells insists here that human civilization itself comprises both the cosmic process of
evolution – precisely in its particular representative, the “natural man,” epiphenomenon of natural
selection – and the ontological novelty of human sociality, described by Wells as “an acquired
factor” generated by “tradition, suggestion, and reasoned thought.” Though human civilization
includes these two contradictory factors, it is the introduction of the acquired or artificial factor
that makes human sociality possible. Distinguishing the “inherited factor” of biological evolution
from the acquired factor of civilization, Wells insists that their difference lies precisely in the fact
that the natural factor is “obstinately unchangeable” while the artificial factor is “highly plastic.”
In other words, their difference is their malleability: biology is fixed, civilization is plastic.

Civilization thus becomes a dialectical process of retaining the intransigent necessity of the
natural world and canceling it in order to open a space for human freedom. Wells’s remark that
this negative force of the “artificial man” – negating, that is, the determination of biology – has
“developed and will develop simultaneously” with civilization is precisely correlative with
Huxley’s statement that “the history of civilization details the steps by which men have succeeded
in building up an artificial world within the cosmos.” Embedded within the natural world, this
artificial world negates biology in order to accommodate truly human being and to make “the
comforts and securities of civilization a possibility.”

Wells and Huxley offer corollaries to Lukács’s argument in The Ontology of Social
Being that in its orientation to nature, Homo sapiens evinces “a double relation of linkage and
autonomy.”\textsuperscript{lxviii} In Labour, third section of The Ontology, Lukács marks the very ontological
leap that distinguishes human beings from nature as emergence of labor as a distinctively human activity whereby human beings project ends into nature and also achieve those ends by turning nature against itself. Lukács terms this distinctively human activity “teleological positing”; for simplicity sake I will use the term “project.” Lukács, of course, derives the notion of “teleological positing” from Hegel and Marx: through *Homo sapiens*, as Hegel explains, “nature’s own activity, the elasticity of a watch-spring, water, wind, etc., are employed to do things they would not have done if left to themselves, so that this blind action is made purposive, the opposite of itself”; thereby, Marx adds, “man not only effects a change of form in the material of nature, he also realizes his own purpose in these materials.” Ontologically, the turning of nature against itself to realize human ends marks simultaneously and irreducibly the emergence of distinctive human consciousness, the schism between *Homo sapiens* and nature, and the appearance of “social being” as a specifically human realm. Human consciousness and social being emerge, in particular, precisely at the moment that the possibility of choosing among different uses of nature emerges. Human beings are confronted at this moment with a choice of alternate possible uses of nature: “the act of this alternative,” Lukács writes, “contains a moment of decision, a choice, and the ‘place’ of this decision is human consciousness. It is precisely this ontologically real function that lifts this consciousness above the epiphenomenon of animal consciousness, which is completely conditioned by biology.” Like Wells and Huxley, Lukács’s account figures *Homo sapiens* dialectically both as subject to natural processes and free of this biological determination. Lukács designates this dialectical leap as “the emergence of man from merely animal existence.”

Likewise, Lukács describes this distinction of *Homo sapiens* and nature in both dialectical and evolutionary terms. Lukács explains that this genesis is simultaneously both a leap (from the organic to the social) and a prolonged process lasting for millennia. The leap presents itself as soon as the new property of
being is actually realized, even in the most rudimentary and isolated acts. But it is then
an extremely lengthy development, for the most part inevitably full of contradictions and
uneven, until the new categories of being extend in such a way, both extensively and
intensively, that the new level of being manages to constitute itself as well defined and
resting on its own basis. \(\text{lxii}\)

This ontological leap, this “emergence of man from merely animal existence,” occurs
paradoxically in and through the long course of the cosmic process of evolution. Lukács
therefore argues concurrently both that even “the most rudimentary and isolated acts” of human
projects instance an ontological difference between \textit{Homo sapiens} and nature and that the
collection of such rudimentary and isolated projects into the foundation of a distinctly human
world of social being is an adaptive process lasting millennia. Another way to put this is to
suggest that even though the isolated projection of ends occurs at an early moment among
individual human beings, it takes millennia for such projects to define the particularity of the
human species. Correlatively, though isolated and rudimentary projects evince the emergence of
a unique and new kind of consciousness, it is only when projects define \textit{Homo sapiens} as such
that this novel consciousness produce social being as autonomous and ontologically new.

As Huxley discerns a distinctly human ethical evolution operating at every moment as a
check on cosmic evolution, as Wells distinguishes between the obstinately unchangeable natural
element of human being and the artificial element which made that obstinacy “highly plastic,” so
too does Lukács imagine social being, product of labor, as an opposition to biology. Labor,
Lukács’s name for human projects, “is a vehicle for the self-production of man as man. As a
biological being, man is a product of natural development. With his self-realization, which in his
case means only a retreat of the natural boundary, and never its disappearance, its complete
conquest, he enters into a new and self-founded being, into social being. \(\text{lxiii}\) Social being, then,
marks an asymptotic approach to the negation of nature and the concurrent positing – as the
negation of nature, the negation of the negation of human being and life – of a thenceforth “self-founded being.”

When Lukács describes the progress of social being as proceeding simultaneously “both extensively and intensively,” his point is that the establishment of social being as self-founded, distinctively human realm operates simultaneously as the extension and complexification of artificial social conventions (that order relations between human beings) and as the correlative intensification of structures of habit governing individual human beings. Late in Labour, Lukács remarks that such intensifications of habit, these demands of social being and the human community, eventually become purely reflexive, automatic: “if, for example,” he notes that man’s control over his emotions as a result of labour is a value, as it undoubtedly is, it is contained in labour itself and can become a social reality without necessarily having to immediately have a conscious form and making its value character something actual for the working man. It is a moment of social being, and is therefore really existent and effective even if it is not conscious, or only incompletely so.\textsuperscript{lxiv}

As a “really existent” aspect of social being, then, such intensification and control over emotions – over, that is, those biologically motivated impulses which counter and contradict human reason as a capacity for devising and realizing projects – do not operate as conscious decision on the part of individual human beings, but in fact come to organize human consciousness itself. This purely reflexive control over biological impulses, over what Wells terms the natural “inherited factor” in human beings, is the cost, demand, and precondition of sociality and civilization. As I have remarked that Lukács reiterates, in some sense, arguments made by Huxley and Wells over half a century before, it should not surprise us to hear in Labour an echo of Huxley. If Huxley had contrasted the cosmic process of evolution with \textit{Homo sapiens}’s ethical evolution, this contrast implies both that human evolution had produced an artificial world within the cosmic process and that the artificial world of civilization had effected an ethical transformation in individual human beings. So, Huxley writes, the extension of social
conventions adapts as a defensive front against the cosmic process precisely in and through transforming the character of human beings: “laws and moral precepts are directed to the end of curbing the cosmic process and of reminding the individual of his duty to the community, to the protection and influence of which he owes, if not existence itself, at least the life of something better than a brutal savage.”

Social being thus operates as an artificial counter to the cosmic process, a negation of the negative force of cosmic evolution, cultivating a distinctively human ethos and a distinctively human process of ethical evolution. Recall that Wells juxtaposes these dual processes on the level of individual human being, such that human beings bear both an implacable “inherited factor” determined by biology and a plastic “acquired factor” cultivated through social being. As a consequence of this contradiction, Wells argues, conventions of morality become the agents of social being, defending against the destructive force of cosmic processes: “what we call Morality,” he insists, “becomes the padding of suggested emotional habits necessary to keep round the Paleolithic savage in the square hole of the civilized state.” For Wells, then, morality does not instance some immutable metaphysical law but instead a collection of imperatives in and through which social being negates the cosmic process – negates, that is, the natural element in human beings through the propagation and intensification of the artificial element, even as the imperfect fit between the “round Paleolithic savage” and the “square hole of the civilized state” generates always some implacable remainder. Wells thus judges morality not in terms of its conformity with universal laws but instead on the basis of its adaptive or maladaptive tendencies: on the basis, that is, of its capacity to defend human being and life from the cosmic destruction Wells imagines unrelentingly throughout his work.

Modernity, for Wells, marks a moment at which social conventions and strictures of morality have become positively maladaptive, exacerbating the disjointure between the implacable “Paleolithic savage” and the “square hole of the civilized state” into which it is to fit. Out of joint, human civilization is no longer shaped to offer an effective check upon biology –
either upon human biological impulses or upon the cosmic process itself. We might therefore imagine that this increasing disjointure concurrently increases the implacable remainder that seems for Wells an irreducible consequence of the intrinsically imperfect fit between the inherited and acquired factors in human beings. Though the fit between biology and sociality is intrinsically imperfect, for Wells different forms of social being offer different capacities for negating the cosmic process. Though social being always generates some ante- or antisocial remainder – instanced variously in biological impulse and the cosmic process – different particular forms of social being achieve different degrees of success in negating the antisocial. Wells’s critique of modernity, then, centers on his notion that in exacerbating the disjunction between biology and sociality, between the cosmic process and human beings’ “artificial world within the cosmos,” modernity has compounded the implacable remainder to the very point at which it now threatens human being and life with extinction. Thus Wells remarks in his 1896 essay “Morals and Civilization” that “the future of our civilization depends upon the possibility of constructing a rational code of morality to meet the complex requirements of modern life, and of efficiently organizing the forces of moral suggestions to render it operative.”

Wells, then, imagines that the future of human civilization as such depends upon the project of devising and realizing a new mode of social being. As Wells’s scientific romances imagine repeatedly the destruction of human being and life – the destruction of the social by the antisocial – his realist fiction, his utopias, and much of his nonfiction comprises a pedagogical project for transforming the social into a form better able to defend Homo sapiens from extinction. Let us insist here, however, that for Wells such social transformations aim simultaneously at protecting the human species from cosmic destruction and at making possible the happiness of individual human beings: these are, for Wells, the same end. Thus, in “Human Evolution: An Artificial Process,” Wells speculates that

In the future, it is at least conceivable, that men with a trained reason and a sounder science, both of matter and psychology, may conduct their operations more intelligently,
unanimously, and effectively, and work towards and at last attain and preserve, a social organization so cunningly balanced against exterior necessities on one hand, and the artificial function in the individual on the other, that the life of every human being, and indeed, through man, of every sentient creature on earth, may be generally happy.

Succinctly, then, Wells’s career evinces at the same time both a series of fantasies of the destruction of human being and life and a series of projects for the reconstruction of human being and life, aiming to secure the human world in the cosmos. In Wells, therefore, we encounter both a queer antisocial element and a perhaps queerer prosocial element: Wells’s scientific romances imagine and enact the irruption of a “queerness into life” that threatens to negate human being and life while Wells’s realist fiction, as I will argue, instances the projection of new forms of social being that simultaneously ensure the reproduction of human life even as they also dismantle all the structures of heterosexual morality which have formed around reproduction the ideological constellation of reproductive futurism. Paradoxically, then, Wells’s project of securing social being in the future insists upon a radical transformation of social being in the present.

Incidentally, let us here note the queerness of Wells’s use of genre. Northrop Frye’s Anatomy of Criticism teaches that the basic way to distinguish romance from realism is in terms of human capacities for action: in romance, capacities for action are exaggerated and intensified; in realism, circumscribed and denigrated. Wells, however, inverts this distinction such that his romances offer meditations on the futility of human action and the imminence of human extinction while his realist fiction offers the wholesale reconstruction of social being as a project entirely within human powers. As The Time Machine, The War of the Worlds, and The Island of Dr. Moreau argue that all human action results only in our extinction, so realist novels like Ann Veronica, The New Machiavelli, and The World of William Clissold (among others) argue that through human action our world can be remade. In such terms, we might contrast works of nonfiction like Mind at the End of its Tether – which fantasizes about the destruction of human
being and life – and works like 1928’s *The Open Conspiracy*, a practical manual presenting a realistic project for worldwide revolution to reconstruct social being.

Indeed, we might even speculate that Wells’s career evinces a movement from romance to realism and back to romance (as in late scientific romances like *Star-Begotten* and *The Croquet Player*), bearing in mind that this movement corresponds, queerly, to a correlative movement from human futility to possibility and back. One might write a literary biography of Wells along such lines. Though strictly speaking tangential to our argument, such speculative concerns bear at least the virtue of focusing attention upon the queer admixtures of realism and romance which take place in Wells’s greatest post-1900 fiction: 1905’s *A Modern Utopia* and 1915’s *Boon*. As Wells’s *fin de siècle* scientific romances assume the queer eruption of no future into the human present as their dominant aesthetic principle – enacting through their form the theme of human extinction – so too do Wells’s modernist anatomies *A Modern Utopia* and *Boon* adapt as their primary aesthetic principle the juxtaposition of the cosmic process with the human project of social being. Wells’s conception of aesthetics as a project for securing human being and life from extinction marks, paradoxically, both the disjunction of Wells from other modernists and simultaneously the conjunction of Wells with modernists like D.H. Lawrence, Dorothy Richardson, and Wyndham Lewis, whose aesthetics aim, in varying degrees, at the utopian impulse of ameliorating human being and life in modernity.

The social being of the human world thus marks a second level project embedded in the primary level of the cosmic process. Social being, moreover, marks the cancellation and sublation of the cosmic process insofar as it shields human beings from the total force of cosmic evolution, while retaining some natural element adapted into the human world. In *Mind at the End of its Tether*, Wells designates this distinctively human realm “the human story,” suggesting that this human story comprises the history of social being (a history, to be sure, he imagines soon to end) and accommodates some small subset of the events of cosmic evolution into which social being is embedded. Social being is for Wells akin to a narrative embedded in the primary level
narrative of the cosmic process. Social being is a story framed by the cosmic process, a story with the peculiar capacity to neutralize or negate its frame. Social being is, in this sense, an embedded narrative with a strange determinative relation to the narrative that frames it: it is the determinate negation of the determinative necessity of the cosmic process. This determinate negation generates always some implacable remainder as a consequence of the imprecise fit between social being and the cosmic process. If social being is an embedded narrative that negates its frame, this implacable remainder indexes that element of the cosmic process that is not negated. Indeed, in Huxley, in Lukács, and in Wells, this natural element remains always amidst human sociality, though different forms of social being offer more or less effective checks upon the cosmic process and thus produce larger and smaller remainders.

When Wells remarks in *Mind at the End of its Tether* that the human story has come to an end, that events in the human story no longer recur, this is precisely because social being no longer retains its capacity to shield human beings from the events of evolutionary time. Modernity’s form of social being, that is, can no longer negate nature – can no longer insure human being and life against the risk intrinsic to the cosmic process – because the very instrument that had heretofore shielded human beings from cosmic precariousness has compounded the implacable remainder into an exponentially greater risk. When Wells declares that “a frightful queerness has come into life” and that therefore “the end of everything we call life is close at hand and cannot be evaded,” this “frightful queerness” names the very implacable element confronting human beings with precarious life in the cosmos. In sum, modernity marks a moment at which the human story no longer negates its frame, no longer mitigates the precariousness intrinsic to the cosmic story of evolutionary time. Social being in modernity suffers the threat of extinction precisely because it no longer repels the cosmic process; the human story comes to an end precisely because it is no longer a good story.

Here we encounter a key to Wells’s aesthetic. Wells’s narratives offer numerous alternative experimental forms of the human story – his stories imagine various possibilities for
reconstructing social being into forms simultaneously more hospitable to biological impulses and more effective in defending *Homo sapiens* from extinction. Although apparently contradictory, these aims form the same project: reconstructing social being into a form calibrated more precisely to fit biology negates thereby the implacable remainder threatening *Homo sapiens* with extinction. If the scientific romances offer narratives imagining various forms of human extinction, Wells’s other narratives imagine conversely various new forms of social being to shield against extinction: the formal experiments of Wells’s fiction are experiments imagining new forms of social being. This immediate interface between aesthetic and political forms – between forms of art and forms of human collective life – signals, as I have remarked, both the disjunction of Wells from purely aestheticist versions of modernism and the strange conjunction of Wells with modernisms that aim through aesthetic experiments to realize novel experimental forms of human being and life. Indeed, one of the few critics who takes Wells seriously as a modernist seizes upon the fact that although Wells has been left out of the modernist canon for sundry historical and disciplinary reasons, Wells’s work bears striking formal and rhetorical similarities to modernist anatomies like Woolf’s *Three Guineas*, Lawrence’s *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, and Lewis’s *The Art of Being Ruled*, all of which aim to ameliorate human life.

Though focusing primarily on aesthetics, Robert Caserio’s essay “The Novel as a Novel Experiment in Statement” thus complements John Partington’s *Building Cosmopolis: The Political Thought of H.G. Wells* insofar as Wells’s aesthetic and political thought are themselves complementary. When we encounter in the closing pages of Tim Dean’s *Beyond Sexuality* the apparently radical claim that utopian impulses toward new social forms can be sought in “the myriad possibilities of aesthetics” – that new forms of human being together can perhaps be deduced from new forms of aesthetics, enlarging the modernist dictum “make it new” to compass not only individual affective response but also human collectivity as such – we must not forget that this claim can only strike us as novel or radical if we remain wholly ignorant of Wells’s numerous attempts to make art imagine new social forms. Wells’s experiments in aesthetic forms
are themselves experiments in political forms: retellings of the human story are reconstructions of social being.

When we read such apparently antimodernist novels as *Ann Veronica* and *The New Machiavelli* – novels whose realist mode marks them as distinctly unmodern in the judgment of modernist tastemaker Virginia Woolf – we should understand that these works offer experiments with the form of social being *as* aesthetic experiments. In other words, such novels tell stories which revise the form of the human story, imagining new social forms less susceptible to extinction, and thereby experiment with forms of human collective life not simply in place of experiments with aesthetic forms but precisely *as* experiments with aesthetic forms. Such novels’ experimental imaginings of new forms of human association are, in a strict sense, experiments in aesthetics.

In *Ann Veronica* we encounter a narrative that seems at the same time both highly conventional in terms of its dearth of experiments in aesthetic form and yet wholly antagonistic to conventional forms of sexual morality. Antagonism to social forms whose maladjustment to the erotic impulses of biology (impulses that embody the cosmic process most immediately) entirely motivates *Ann Veronica*’s plot. The narrative proceeds from a conflict between Ann Veronica’s erotic impulses and social convention and resolves this conflict by presenting a novel *modus vivendi* in which eros and civilization fit more precisely. What animates the aesthetic form of *Ann Veronica* is an attempt to conceive an experimental form of social being whose new conventions more efficiently sublate biology. This is disclosed by the novel’s two opening sources of conflict. *Ann Veronica* opens, to be sure, amidst a “crisis” it declares to be the narrative’s motive force. The opening paragraph presents Ann Veronica’s decision to flout social rules and attend “the first of the two great annual Fadden Dances, the October one,” a decision she imagines will be met with hostility by her father. “One Wednesday afternoon in late September,” the novel opens,
Ann Veronica Stanley came down from London in a state of solemn excitement and
resolved to have things out with her father that very evening. She had trembled on the
verge of such a resolution before, but this time quite definitely she had made it. A crisis
had been reached and she was almost glad it had been reached. She made up her mind in
the train home that it should be a decisive crisis. It is for that reason that the novel begins
with her there, and neither earlier nor later, for it is the history of the crisis and its
consequences that this novel has to tell.\textsuperscript{lxxi}

Indeed, this resolution encounters only hostility. Several pages later, the novel narrates
Mr. Stanley’s composition of a letter forbidding the dance. Her father writes

\textit{The fact of it is, and this absurd project of yours only brings it to a head, you have begun
to get hold of some very queer ideas about what a young lady in your position may or
may not venture to do. I do not think you quite understand my ideals or what is becoming
as between father and daughter. Your attitude to me—and your aunt—and, indeed, to
most of the established things in life is, frankly, unsatisfactory. You are restless,
aggressive, critical with all the crude unthinking criticism of youth. You have no grasp
upon the essential facts of life (I pray to God you never may), and in your rash ignorance
you are prepared to dash into positions that may end in lifelong regret. The life of a
young girl is set about with prowling pitfalls, from which she must be shielded at all
costs. So long as I am your father, so long as your life is entrusted to my care, I feel
bound by every obligation to use my authority to check this odd disposition of yours
towards extravagant enterprises. A day will come when you will thank me. It is not, my
dear Veronica, that I think there is any harm in you; there is not. But a girl is soiled not
only by evil but by the proximity of evil, and a reputation for rashness may do her as
serious an injury as really reprehensible conduct. So do please believe that in this matter
I am acting for the best.\textsuperscript{lxxii}}
Mr. Stanley’s hostility issues precisely from his sense that Ann Veronica’s “project” of attending the Fadden dance contradicts the propriety and formality of social conventions. Ann Veronica’s project, that is, signals to Mr. Stanley an antagonism toward such “established things in life” as the formal conventions of social being; the project signals that Ann Veronica is “restless, aggressive, critical with all the unthinking criticism of youth.” Mr. Stanley frames these conventions as conventions of sexual morality. For a “young girl” like Ann Veronica to flout them, he suggests, is to risk implicitly sexualized “prowling pitfalls” – risks against which conventions of morality insure, “at all costs.” Mr. Stanley proposes that Ann Veronica is unable properly to assess those risks. She, in his view, has “no grasp on the essential facts of life”; she, ignorant of such “facts,” risks in attending the dance entering “positions that may end in lifelong regret.” It is therefore as a sort of actuary – whose greater knowledge enables more effective insurance against risk – that Mr. Stanley imposes himself as a representative agent of social convention. Indeed, when Mr. Stanley remarks that it is within his “authority to check” Ann Veronica’s intention to attend the dance, this authority has been conferred by social convention – let us call it patriarchy, or reproductive futurism. Mr. Stanley derives his authority to forbid Ann Veronica from risking (unwittingly) her reproductive future – her marriage prospects – in part from his position as her father. It is in fact his duty, his “every obligation,” to insure her marriage prospects. Therefore, even though he insists that he sees no intrinsic immorality in Ann Veronica, he forbids the dance precisely because he accounts for the risks that attending might “soil” her “by the promixity of evil” and that this may mark her with a harmful “reputation for rashness,” making her unmarriageable. There are risks from which he must shield her, he insists, “so long as your life is entrusted to my care.”

The letter’s rhetoric thus enacts a strange admixture of financial, moral, and sexual registers. I have remarked that Mr. Stanley imposes himself as a sort of actuary to forbid the dance – imposes himself, that is, as someone with a greater ability to assess risks to Ann Veronica’s future. While the letter does not deploy rhetoric of risk and insurance, Mr. Stanley
offers another, perhaps even stranger, financial rhetoric for explaining the forbidden dance. Mr. Stanley remarks, as we have seen, that “so long as I am your father, so long as your life is entrusted to my care, I feel bound by every obligation to use my authority to check this odd disposition of yours toward extravagant enterprises.” Mr. Stanley, then, juxtaposes as appositive his dual roles as Ann Veronica’s father and trustee of Ann Veronica’s life. As appositives, these dual roles become in fact the same role, such that Mr. Stanley’s authority issues from a single double-valenced source: in his view, to be Ann Veronica’s father is to direct a trust encompassing Ann Veronica’s life. His daughter’s life, that is, is a trust he holds for the future, akin to a financial portfolio he has been bound to protect from risk for its beneficiaries. Such a conflation of paternal and fiduciary roles indexes precisely the conjunction of patriarchy and economics in the form of social being we have named reproductive futurism: viz., that as Mr. Stanley’s authority derives simultaneously from his positions as father and trustee, Ann Veronica’s position as a woman is simultaneously that of vector for reproduction and property bearing value. Thus, when Mr. Stanley figures Ann Veronica’s project of attending the dance as one of her “extravagant enterprises,” he signals that they are like business ventures whose risk surpasses their return. The social conventions Mr. Stanley defends aim to insure against risk and to ensure the future reproduction of Homo sapiens.

For Wells, as we have remarked, such conventions of social being, in their inexact fit with the biological facts of life, both inhibit individual human beings’ happiness and threaten the future reproduction of the human species. Later in Ann Veronica the narrator declares that the world of reproductive futurism seems to Ann Veronica stultifying and inhuman: “it presented itself in the likeness of a great, grey, dull world, a brutal, superstitious, confused and wrong-headed world, that hurt people and limited people unaccountably.” Moreover, as Ann Veronica herself says even later in the novel, social conventions of reproductive futurism, masquerading as instruments for mitigating the risk of human being and life in the cosmic process, actually exacerbate and intensify precariousness, especially for women: “I suppose all
life is an affair of chances. But a woman’s life is all chance. It’s artificially chance. Thus it is simultaneously against the capricious hurts done to individuals and against the unnecessary precarious life of human beings on earth that Ann Veronica rebels, rebelling against her father. As Ann Veronica tells us, the apparently minor skirmish over the dance stands in for – and indeed becomes – an open war against the totality of the destructive present form of social being: “I thought I was just up against Morningside Park and father, but it’s the whole order of things – the whole blessed order of things.”

Therefore we should read the novel’s opening conflict – Ann Veronica’s decision to provoke a crisis, her resolution to attend the Fadden dance against her father’s will – not simply as the contravention of Mr. Stanley’s wishes, but indeed as the contradiction of the whole of reproductive futurism. In the opening paragraph I have cited above, the narrator first reports Ann Veronica’s affective response to her resolution to precipitate crisis. Ann Veronica, we read, returns to Morningside Park “in a state of excitement”; after “trembling on the verge of such a crisis before this moment, she now “felt almost glad it had been reached.” This, to be sure, is apparently commonplace writing, offering little in the way of modernist experiment. More than one reader, perhaps, has scanned these opening lines, concurred with Woolf’s denigration of Wells, and rejected this book for another. We, however, should pay attention to the opening paragraph’s queer final line, in which the extradiegetic narrator declares its rationale for beginning the novel with Ann Veronica’s decision. Although she has almost resolved to provoke such a crisis numerous times before, this resolution finally transmutes Ann Veronica’s discontent into action. The narrator thus remarks that “it is for this reason that the novel begins with her here, and neither earlier nor later, for it is the history of this crisis and its consequences that the novel has to tell.” The narrator thus declares that the present work is a novel, a fictional narrative populated by fictional characters that are fabrications and functions of the narrative – wholly narrative creatures – and conversely that Ann Veronica maintains some kind of positive existence apart from the narration, in which she has repeatedly resolved to precipitate crisis only to stop
herself before acting. Indeed, the narrator seems to imply that this story is worth telling precisely because this resolution finally will result in action. To be sure, the declaration that characters in a novel bear some kind of extradiegetic personal history is a technique of realist fiction which aims to effect verisimilitude and thus seems appropriate in an historical novel like *Ann Veronica*.

*Ann Veronica* tells a story in which reproductive futurism comes to threaten the future reproduction of the human species and Ann Veronica’s act of antagonism marks an attempt to achieve a new form of life that can accommodate human happiness and the future of human life. If narrative in some sense offers an imitation of an action, *Ann Veronica*’s narrative offers an imitation of the action of opening hostility to those regressive conventions of social life that diminish human happiness and exacerbate the risk of extinction – structures of civility adapted originally to maintain social being now become maladaptive and destructive. The narrative tracks the event and the consequences of an act of incivility by which Ann Veronica rejects the strictures of social life in order to summon another mode of social life more conducive to human happiness. The novel’s experiment, then, is its attempt to imagine a *modus vivendi* simultaneously antisocial insofar as it rejects corrosive social arrangements and prosocial insofar as it seeks new social arrangements more conducive to human being and life. This strange double nature confers upon Ann Veronica’s decision a properly dialectical character insofar as it signals the negation of the corrosive force of social being and the reconstruction of social being into an ameliorated form. As the experiment in imagining a new mode of social being animates the very form of the novel, the narrator’s declaration that the narrative records an antisocial deed and its consequences means precisely that the story of *Ann Veronica* seeks a new form of the human story.

In an instance of dramatic irony, Mr. Stanley thus insists not only that Ann Veronica has “no grasp upon the essential facts of life” but also and especially that “I pray to God you never may.” Recall here the novel’s apparently subsidiary source of conflict: viz., the contradiction between Mr. Stanley’s wish that Ann Veronica remain ignorant of the essential facts of life – signifying in his letter those erotic impulses social conventions of morality aim to neutralize –
and Ann Veronica’s own wish to study biology at the Imperial College. Indeed, in the argument about the dance, Ann Veronica explains that it isn’t simply the dance that has led to the crisis but in fact dissatisfaction with her whole position in the social order:

‘You see, Father,’ she said, ‘it isn’t only the dance. I want to go to that because it’s a new experience, because I think it will be interesting and give me a view of things…. I want to be a human being; I want to learn about things and know about things, and not be protected as something too precious for life, cooped up in one narrow little corner…. I want to be taken seriously. A girl – at my age – is grown-up. I want to go on with my University work under proper conditions now that I’ve done the Intermediate.’

As Mr. Stanley’s chief objection to her attending the university is its potential to cultivate impropriety and immorality – he declares the work of one of its faculty “next door to shameful” and says that he has heard immoral “stories, too, about his demonstrator, Capes” – so does the novel’s resolution present Ann Veronica falling in love and eloping with Capes, who has engaged in the sexual impropriety of an affair and seeks, unsuccessfully, a divorce from his estranged wife. Ann Veronica rejects a marriage offer from the bourgeois Mr. Manning and repels the sexual advances of the rapacious Mr. Ramage in order to share her life with Capes, even though (as Capes explains) to do so “means social isolation – struggle.” Ann Veronica follows the erotic impulse of her love for Capes even though those social conventions aim to prohibit such erotic connections through marriage laws and thus threaten to remove them altogether from the social world, enforcing the ban of “social isolation.” Marriage indexes those regressive elements of social being most threatening to human happiness and human life and Ann Veronica thus denotes marriage the focal point of reproductive futurism. The novel’s conclusion – in which Capes and Ann Veronica receive her father and aunt as guests “four years and four months” after their elopement, their refusal of social convention in the name of a happier antisocial mode of living – marks the reconstruction of social being into a form capable of accommodating
theretofore prohibited modes of social relation. The ending marks, that is to say, the end of an experiment to find a new social form even as it succumbs to fictional conventions for avoiding ambiguity; the triumph, that is, of Ann Veronica’s “queer ideas” for living amidst the apparently unqueer form of the realist novel.

As eros marks in Ann Veronica the ante- and antisocial impulse that contradicts established conventions of social being, so too in Wells’s political novel The New Machiavelli, eros also indexes a force antagonistic to extant modes of politics and social relation. As Ann Veronica’s formal experiment was to imagine an experimental form of life operating as the determinate negation of social being, The New Machiavelli’s similar experiment imagines a project for reconstructing social being into a form more amenable to human happiness – a project undone precisely due to the contradiction between social being and antisocial eros. If Ann Veronica enacted a critique of marriage as a social institution inimical to happiness, The New Machiavelli argues that conventions of marriage have become maladaptive and thus threaten to destroy human being and life.

The New Machiavelli’s aesthetic form is the confession. The novel presents itself as the autobiography of Dick Remington, a Liberal-turned-Tory Member of Parliament who attempts to institute an Endowment of Motherhood for the benefit of the British Empire – and, by proxy, for the benefit of civilization as such. Remington describes this Endowment as a social insurance program designed to recognize “bearing and rearing good children in the State as a generally rewarded public duty and service,” to enable mothers to choose “their husbands freely and discerningly,” and to ensure that mothers would be “in no way enslaved or subordinated to the men they have chosen.” Remington insists, too, that this modification entails a radical reconstruction of social being. “It is no use,” he remarks, “pretending that this is not novel and revolutionary; it is. The Endowment of Motherhood implies a new method of social organization, a rearrangement of the social unit, untried in human experience.” Such a reconstruction of social being aims explicitly to defend human being and life from the destruction of the cosmic
process: “it is the only line that will prevent a highly organized civilization from ending in biological decay.” According to Remington,

The public Endowment of Motherhood is the only possible way which will ensure the permanently developing civilized state at which all constructive minds are aiming. A point is reached in the life-history of civilization when either reconstruction must be effected or the quality and *morale* of the population prove insufficient for the needs of the developing organization. It is not so much moral decadence that will destroy as a moral inadaptability. The old code fails under the new needs. The only alternative to this profound reconstruction is a decay in human quality and social collapse. Either the unprecedented rearrangement must be achieved by our civilization, or it must presently come upon a phase of disorder and perish…. Remington thus describes this “profound reconstruction” of social life as an “attempt to biologize Imperialism” – an attempt to bring the Empire into harmony with the demands of biology. In other words, Remington intends the Endowment of Motherhood to operate simultaneously as a reactionary defense of the British Empire and as a properly “revolutionary” transformation of the Empire’s basic “social unit.” Such radical transformation, such “unprecedented rearrangement” is urgently necessary to suture a disjunction between the character of individual human beings and the continued life of civilization. Either, he insists, social being must be transformed or “the quality and *morale* of the population” will lead to the destruction of social being as such. Remington, like Wells, judges morality in terms of its adaptiveness: as Wells had remarked in “Human Evolution: An Artificial Process” that morality instances not some immutable metaphysical law but merely a collection of imperatives for defending *Homo sapiens* from cosmic destruction, so here Remington explains that “it is not so much moral decadence that will destroy as moral inadaptability.” The urgent demand for social reconstruction does not issue from some decadent disharmony with moral law but instead from
the fact that present social arrangements have become positively maladaptive and threaten human being and life with extinction. Either social arrangements undergo radical reconstruction or social being itself will suffer total destruction; either Homo sapiens undertakes “profound reconstruction” or the species will undergo “a decay in human quality and social collapse.”

As marriage operates as the primary interface between conventions of moral conduct and the reproduction of human being and life, the Endowment of Motherhood aims to ensure the continued reproduction of Homo sapiens precisely by radically revising marriage. Remington remarks that the Endowment effectively recognizes the import of motherhood to the continued life of civilization. The Endowment, he explains, recognizes motherhood as no longer a chance product of individual passion, but a service rendered to the state.

Women must become less and less subordinated to individual men, since this works out in a more or less complete limitation, waste and sterilization of their essentially social function: they must become more and more subordinated as individual independent citizens to the collective purpose.

Marriage as a form of attachment, then, seems here maladaptive insofar as it enforces “limitation, waste and sterilization.” The monogamous attachment of marriage thus gives birth, in Remington’s view, only to human extinction. As a remedy, the Endowment of Motherhood, therefore, aims simultaneously to detach individual human beings from their destructive monogamous attachments to other individual human beings and to reattach them to the human collectivity as such. Such reconstruction implies as well another kind of detachment: the detachment of the function of motherhood from the impulse of eros. While marriage, in this view, seeks regressively to attach reproduction to eros such that marriage laws ensure perpetual and exclusive erotic attachments between parents, the Endowment of Motherhood detaches parental function from eros. The parental function is sutured to the state, eros remains contrastingly unbound. The Endowment of Motherhood, then, aims to dissolve limited modes of human erotic attachment as it summons unlimited possibilities for eros in order to defend and to
maintain human reproduction. To defend social being from the queerness of extinction, thus,
Remington proposes queering social being by rendering the traditional form of marriage extinct.
Paradoxically, to defend against what Wells names the “frightful queerness” that has come into
life – a queerness threatening Homo sapiens with extinction – Remington proposes to summon
another form of queerness into life.

The Endowment of Motherhood fails in The New Machiavelli precisely because public
knowledge of Remington’s extramarital affair with Isabel (one of his parliamentary staff) shatters
his political influence and bans him from the social world. Remington’s own position as an M.P.
was made possible by his politically advantageous marriage to Margaret: “I was to marry
Margaret,” he explains, “and freed from the need of making an income I was to come into
politics.” From the outset, the marriage proves a poor match. Remington declares “there was
no kindred between us and no understanding,” that their “very mental texture was different,” that
while his bearing in the world “is sensuous and ruled by warm impulses; hers was discriminating
and essentially inhibitory.” Indeed, Remington locates the “fundamental breach” between
them in this contradiction, a difference that leads her to reject “what she did not like or find
sympathetic in me on the score that it was not my ‘true self,’ and she did not so much accept the
universe as select from it and do her best to ignore the rest.” Remington figures these
contradictory outlooks on life as contradictory relations to the universe. Whereas he accepts the
totality of the cosmic process, Margaret selectively ignores its unpleasant elements. If in some
sense Remington’s worldview stands in for a relation to the cosmos capable of projects for
securing Homo sapiens against extinction, Margaret’s indexes a maladaptive relation to the
cosmic process. By proxy, their marriage stands in for the contradiction between the maintenance
and the reconstruction of social being as such.

Remington insists that this relation effaces his “true self.” In a later passage, Remington
presents as a fundamental problem of politics the contrast between the “ostensible self” and the
“true self,” between the personal self and “the greater personality behind,” between those aspects of the self subject to social conventions and those aspects whose antisocial force dissolves all such conventions. Considering the “frontage” of his social self, Remington writes

I am tremendously impressed now in the retrospect by the realization of how little that frontage represented me, and just how little such frontages do represent the complexities of the intelligent contemporary. Behind it, yet struggling to disorganize it and alter it altogether, was a far more essential reality, a self less personal, less individualized and broader in its reference. Its aims were never simply to get on; it had an altogether different system of demands and satisfactions. It was critical, curious, more than a little unfeeling – and relentlessly illuminating.

It is just the existence and development of the more generalized self-behind-the-frontage that is making modern life so much more subtle and intricate to render, and so much more hopeful in its relation to the perplexities of the universe. I see this mental and spiritual hinterland vary enormously in that people about me, between a type which seems to keep, as people say, all its goods in the window, to others who, like my self, come to regard the ostensible existence more and more as a mere experimental feeder and agent for that greater personality behind. And this back-self has its history and phases and its crises and happy accidents and irrevocable conclusions, more or less distinct from the adventures and achievements of the ostensible self. It meets persons and phrases, it assimilates the spirit of a book, it is startled into new realizations by some accident that seems altogether irrelevant to the general tenor of one’s life. Its increasing independence of the ostensible career makes it the organ of corrective criticism; it accommodates disturbing energy. Then it breaks our overt promises and repudiates our pledges, coming down at last like an overbearing mentor upon the small engagements of the pupil. xcviii

We encounter in this passage a contradiction between two ontologically distinct modes of being: between the self entangled in social conventions and the self inimical to all such
conventions. The “ostensible self,” Remington suggests, operates within the domain of
“promises” and “pledges” – in the realm, that is, of conventional forms of social being binding us
to others as if contractually. This ostensible self functions as a legal subject only insofar as it
passes itself off as the “true self.” As a sort of legal fiction, however, this “frontage” really does
represent the true self precisely to the extent that it stands in for the “hinterland” in the realm of
social being. The ostensible self represents only such aspects of human being that the social
realm allows to appear; social being, conversely, occludes most aspects of human being. Indeed,
we could designate these two modes of being the social self and the antisocial self.

These two modes of being are intrinsically (and perhaps irreconcilably) contradictory.
Remington closes the passage by describing the relation between the social self and the antisocial
self. Though the social self engages us in quasi-contractual obligations, the antisocial self
“breaks our overt promises and repudiates our pledges,” contradicting and undoing the every
action of the social self. Remington figures this antisocial self, moreover, as a more profound and
experienced “mentor” in relation to the “pupil” that is the social self. Its dissolution of social
obligations, he remarks, is its “coming down at last like an overbearing mentor upon the small
engagements of the pupil.” This contrast is instructive precisely insofar as it figures the antisocial
self as possessing greater knowledge and experience – and thereby wider scope – than the limited
and inexperienced social self. Contradicting social being, undoing the obligations of the social
self relentlessly with its “disturbing energy,” its domineering, “overbearing” force antagonistic to
all extant social relations, this antisocial self thus operates in an obstinate, oppositional, “critical”
capacity against the social.

Even as, however, the force of the antisocial self disturbs the extant form of human
sociality – “struggling to disorganize it,” working to dissolve its social relations – this “disturbing
energy” marks not only the negation of social being but also the reconstruction of social being
into an ameliorated, more adaptive form. Thus Remington writes that this antisocial self
confronts social being both by “struggling to disorganize it” and by seeking to “alter it
altogether.” Moreover, he describes the antisocial self as an “organ of corrective criticism”: an organ of criticism aiming not merely to antagonize social being but indeed to reform it. So it is that this intransigent element indexes not the negation of *Homo sapiens* but instead, in Remington’s words, makes “modern life much more hopeful in its relation to the universe.” If, as I have argued, Wells imagines that the inexact fit between the acquired factor and natural factor in human beings generates perpetually an ineluctable remainder whose increase correlates with an increased threat of human extinction, then Remington here suggests that the intransigent antisocial element of being incessantly provokes new form of social being whose “more hopeful” relation to the cosmic process would secure human being and life from extinction. *The New Machiavelli* transmutes the great modernist theme of impersonality into a problem of human adaptiveness.

Though Remington later explains that politics, like “everyday affairs and whatever is made into everyday affairs are transactions of the ostensible self,” *The New Machiavelli* evinces an experiment in reconstructing politics and social relations into a form able to accommodate those ante- and antisocial impulses whose unrelenting force contradicts the extant mode of social being. The Endowment of Motherhood marks – in its very attempt to destroy conventional marriage and to detach the antisocial realm of eros from the social realm of contractual obligation – precisely *The New Machiavelli*’s experiment in reforming social being and revising the human story. If, as Remington remarks, “the life-history of civilization” has reached a decisive moment at which it must perforce suffer either reconstruction or destruction (a moment at which the human story must be revised or come to an end), then *The New Machiavelli*’s formal experiment attempts to reconstruct social being precisely by destroying conventional marriage. To shield against what Wells elsewhere describes as a “frightful queerness come into life” – the negative force of the cosmic process, a force threatening to lay waste all human projects – *The New Machiavelli* undertakes the project of making politics and social being queer, precisely through destroying the basic institution of reproductive futurism, marriage.
The New Machiavelli, then, undertakes the perhaps *a priori* impossible project of imagining a novel form of social being hospitable to the antisocial energy of the cosmic process, exemplified by the impulse of eros and the impersonal self. The novel, that is, acts to imagine a new social and political form even as its very prose enacts the conventions of realist fiction. Like *Ann Veronica*, then, *The New Machiavelli* performs an experiment with the form of social being both in place of and as an experiment with aesthetic form. Unlike *Ann Veronica*, however, *The New Machiavelli* evinces through the failure of the Endowment of Motherhood the failure of this experiment. That the Endowment of Motherhood fails precisely due to a furor over Remington’s own experimental erotic affair suggests that politics and social being confront schemes for such reconstruction only antagonistically.

If so, then Wells’s conviction that *Homo sapiens* will only suffer destruction by the cosmic process in which the species is embedded, that the human story is destined immediately to come to an end, would intensify with every such retrenchment of conventional human arrangements. Indeed, it is hard not to hear in Wells’s 1929 volume *The Open Conspiracy*, a practical manual for effecting a worldwide revolution to reconstruct social being, a book its recent editor W. Warran Wager quite seriously suggests may one day be seen as the “most important book written in the twentieth century,” an echo of those impulses which animate his so-called realist fiction. Describing in that book “the present crisis in human affairs,” Wells remarks that social being has, in modernity, become maladaptive and thereby destructive, threatening *Homo sapiens* with extinction:

*We are coming to see more and more plainly that certain established traditions which have made up the frame of human relationships for ages are not merely no longer as convenient as they were, but are positively injurious and dangerous. And yet at present we do not know how to shake off these traditions, these habits of social behaviour which rule us. Still less are we able to state, and still less bring into operation, the new conceptions of conduct and obligation that must replace them.*

*""
III.

Shortly after reading Boon, The Mind of the Race, The Wild Asses of the Devil and The Last Trump in July 1915, Henry James wrote a letter to its author, his friend H.G. Wells. Woefully unread today, Boon is a remarkably strange modernist anatomy which includes – as perhaps its only element familiar to contemporary scholars of modernism – Wells’s caustic satire of Jamesian fictional technique, culminating with a fictional sketch of an absurd novel “rather in the manner of Henry James,” The Spoils of Mr. Blandish. In the letter, James explains that this satire has damaged their friendly sympathy. “It is difficult,” he writes,

for a writer to put himself fully in the place of another writer who finds him extraordinarily futile and void, and who is moved to publish that to the world – and I think the case isn’t easier when he happens to have enjoyed the other writer enormously, from the back; because there has then grown up the habit of taking some common meeting-ground between them for granted, and the falling away of this is like the collapse of a bridge which made communication possible.

In his reply, Wells confirms that Boon instances not simply the “falling away” but in fact the obliteration of this “common meeting-ground” for their views of literature and life. “You may take it,” Wells replies,

that my sparring and punching at you is very much due to the feeling that you were ‘coming over’ me, and that if I was not very careful I should find myself giving way altogether to respect. There is of course a real and very fundamental difference in our innate and developed attitudes towards life and literature. To you literature like painting is an end, to me literature like architecture is a means, has a use.

Closing his reply, Wells notes willingness to cede the ground of aesthetics entirely to James:

“I had rather be called a journalist than an artist, that is the essence of it, and there was no other antagonist possible than yourself.”
As Wells’s reply signals an anxiety of influence by James, Boon endeavors to resist such influence. If James had imagined that his aesthetic ideals had converged with Wells’s upon some shared “common meeting-ground,” Wells’s reply suggests this territory had never quite been shared, had only ever been a colony or suzerainty wholly dominated by James. In Wells’s words, what motivates Boon is the urgent need to resist Jamesian aesthetics in order to demarcate a space for his own aesthetics. Let us then perhaps imagine Boon as a terrorist act aiming to negate James’s influence on Wells precisely by destroying that “which made communication possible” between them, that which served as a vector for James’s influence to “come over” Wells. An act, that is, which aims to preserve the fundamental difference between Wells and James – as well, perhaps, between Wells and other modernism. Indeed, after declaring Boon’s function as an act of resistance against Jamesian influence, Wells charts the “fundamental difference” in their “attitudes towards life and literature”: for James, “literature like painting is an end”; for Wells, “literature like architecture is a means, has a use.” In stark terms this distinction is one of utility, with James’s vision of literature indexing an aestheticist notion that art is an end in itself while Wells believes that art has an end outside of itself. But the analogy also presents this distinction in terms of differences between particular forms of art. While James’s vision of literature as having an end in itself makes it “like painting,” Wells’s vision of literature as having an end outside of itself is “like architecture.”

We should interpret this contrast in terms of a contrast between a human being’s relation to painting and her relation to architecture: viz., that while architecture aims through its production of shared space to structure human relations, painting aims through its seizure of individual attention at something non- or even antirelational. While painting solicits an individual human being’s attention and thereby makes a subjective claim upon human consciousness, architecture transforms the objective conditions structuring human consciousness and in which relations between human beings take place. Wells’s contrast, then, is a distinction in which Jamesian aesthetics ends in its affective impact upon a human being’s consciousness.
while Wellsian aesthetics ends in its reconstruction of an objective world shared by human beings. If conventional terms might describe James’s fictional technique as “impressionistic” and Wells’s as “utopian,” such terms are accurate to the extent that they index a contrast between the Jamesian impulse to transform literature into an art akin to impressionist painting and the Wellsian impulse to transform social being and human relations through literature. This largely polemical distinction most likely exaggerates the difference between these two modes of art, rendering James’s modernist aesthetic intrinsically antipolitical as it renders, concurrently, Wells’s politics intrinsically antiaesthetic. In *Caravaggio’s Secrets* Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit propose that painting also offers a political project in the sense that its seizure of individual attention implies a mode of human community and therefore that “to modify the way in which the human being is addressed would modify the relationality that constitutes the human as we know it.” In this sense, even the apparently antipolitical aesthetic of a modernist novel like *The Golden Bowl* would imply political consequences insofar as its peculiar mode of soliciting a reader’s attention might herald the transformation of human relations as such. If so, Jamesian painting and Wellsian architecture would name two modes of the same unacknowledged yet properly modernist project of transforming social being.

If Wells prefers to “be called a journalist” rather than “an artist” like James and other modernists, this is a polemical distinction with which modernists have been inclined to agree. In “Modern Fiction,” Virginia Woolf performs perhaps the foundational rhetorical act of modernism precisely through excluding Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy as “materialists”: writers whose work engages more thoroughly with objective material conditions than with the subjective consciousness of their characters. Wells, she writes, “is a materialist from sheer goodness of heart, taking upon his shoulders the work that ought to have been discharged by Government officials, and in the plethora of his ideas and facts scarcely having leisure to realize, or forgetting to think important, the crudity and coarseness of his human beings.” “Does not the inferiority of their natures,” she asks, “tarnish whatever institutions and ideals may be provided
for them by the generosity of their creator? Such meretricious characters offer, in Woolf’s view, the fundamental indictment of Wellsian aesthetics and make his work more akin to the work of a “Government official” than a novelist. Woolf’s quarrel with Wells centers on her judgment that Wells’s compulsion to revise social being compels his work to miss some essential element of human being, some element that does not escape from those novelists whose work she praises: Hardy, Conrad, Joyce, and James. Recall that Woolf insists the task of modernist fiction is to capture the life of “an ordinary mind on an ordinary day”; this is the point of the essay’s most famous statement:

> Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration of complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible?

For Woolf, Wells’s concern with the objective material and institutional conditions for human being operates as an alien element in his fiction, disrupting the very unity of life by atomizing it into a set of material concerns. As, in Woolf’s view, human consciousness experiences life as a unity – as a single “luminous halo” rather than a “series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged,” as if in some planned order – to take up the multiple determinants of social being as a project of fiction is to negate fiction’s capacity for representing human consciousness. As Woolf suggests that fiction aims to capture life, Wells’s fiction fails for her precisely because it fails to capture life.

Doubtlessly, then, Woolf would agree with Well’s self-criticism in *Experiment in Autobiography* that while James thought of the novel “as an Art Form and of novelists as artists of a very special and exalted type,” Wells denies such honor. “I was disposed,” he remarks there, “to regard a novel as about as much an art form as a market place or a boulevard. It had not even
Wells, that is, imagines the novel as an essentially social and popular form in contrast with Jamesian (and Woolfian) visions of the novel as private and subjective. Indeed, Wells’s 1911 essay “The Contemporary Novel” is a manifesto proposing a vision of the novel as an intervention into social being: “it is to be the social mediator, the vehicle of understanding, the instrument of self-examination, the parade of morals and the exchange of manners, the factory of customs, the criticism of laws and institutions and social dogmas and ideas.”

Midway through the essay, Wells poses a question implied by Woolf’s view of fiction. “Why,” he asks, “look to the work of prose fiction as the main instrument of this necessary process of, so to speak, sympathizing humanity altogether.” In other words, why should the novel operate as a mechanism for imagining and producing better social arrangements, more harmonious human communities, a happier and more secure form of social being? Wells’s answer is precisely that the novel is “irresponsible and free” – that it is not bound by any responsibility to historical fact or subjective consciousness, that there is nothing “alien and external” to the novel, and that it bears therefore a capacity for unlimited critique. As Woolf had criticized the “crudity and coarseness” of Wells’s characters, Wells argues that the roughness of characters in the novel endows the form with its peculiar freedom, in which its characters are bound not to any positive historical or phenomenological fact but only to the structure of the novel. These characters, Wells remarks, “are figments and phantoms, they can be made entirely transparent.”

It is the structure of the novel that produces a “power of veracity quite beyond that of actual records.”

If Woolf had proposed that modernist fiction’s triumph of verisimilitude lay precisely in its technical capacity to render human beings’ subjective consciousness immediate, unified, and therefore visibly opaque, Wells’s contrasting project conceives of the novel as an instrument for rendering consciousness “transparent” in order to make visible the structures of social being which mediate human experience. Characters are merely counters for Wells, figures indexing the
force of social determinants. Against the positive facts of history and phenomenology, against
the “actual records” of social being and consciousness, the novel operates for Wells as a
mechanism of relentless critique, able to achieve thereby a greater truth. And if Wells argues that
the novel is “irresponsible and free,” this is so precisely because the novel, in his view, can negate
the given form of social being in order to call forth another. Here we might recall two of
Adorno’s dicta in *Negative Dialectics*: that “to receive something as it is offered at a time,
dispensing with reflection, is potentially always tantamount to recognizing it the way it is;
virtually all thoughts, on the other hand, cause a negative motion” and that “the confidence that
from immediacy, from the solid and downright primary, an unbroken entity will spring – this
confidence is an idealistic chimera.” Insofar as Woolf’s proposed end for modernist fiction –
to record the life of “an ordinary mind on an ordinary day” in order to present a unified “luminous
halo” surrounding consciousness – is a mode of receiving consciousness “the way it is,” “as it is
offered,” without mediation, this project is not a mode of thought but merely an entirely false
“idealistic chimera.” By contrast, that which Woolf identifies as Wells’s singular failure – the
roughness of his human beings – instances the very “negative motion” of his thought. We might
parry Woolf’s insinuation that Wells’s novels include much that is “alien and external,” that their
unity thereby dissolves into randomness, with Adorno’s correlative statement that “the open
thought has no protection against the risk of decline into randomness.” We could thereby parry
Woolf’s insistence that modernist fiction should aim to capture life in its unity with Wells’s own
insistence that contemporary novelists should aim to capture and critique the multiple
determinants of human being and life:

we are going to write about it all. We are going to write about business and finance and
politics and precedence and pretentiousness and decorum and indecorum, until a
thousand pretences and ten thousand impostures shrivel in the cold, clear air of our
elucidation. We are going to write of wasted opportunities and latent beauties until a
thousand new ways of living open to men and women. We are going to appeal to the
young and the hopeful and the curious, against the established, the dignified, and the defensive. Before we have done, we will have all life within the scope of the novel.\textsuperscript{cxvi}

In such terms we might characterize – crudely, to be sure – the divergent aesthetics of modernist and Wellsian aesthetics as a contrast between positivism and negation. If I have proposed that modernists like James and Woolf imagine the novel as an art of simultaneously recording and affecting subjective consciousness, Wells conversely imagines the novel as an instrument for unfettered critique of social being in order to call forth new modes of social being. If in some sense these projects seem irreconcilable, this is a contradiction of which Wells was fully aware. Recalling his disagreement with James over the proper ends of the novel, Wells remarks “I had a queer sense we were both incompatably right.”\textsuperscript{cxvii}

Indeed this contradiction between the Wellsian view of the novel as a social mediator – as, that is, an instrument for the critique and reconstruction of social being – and the opposing modernist view of the novel as a mechanism for representing subjective consciousness detached from sociality prefigures the formal distinction Lukács makes between realism and modernism. In the discussion of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky that closes \textit{The Theory of the Novel}, Lukács notes that “the novel is the form of the epoch of absolute sinfulness, as Fichte said, and it must remain the dominant form so long as the world is ruled by the same stars.”\textsuperscript{cxviii} In other words, the novel as a literary form can only reflect an intrinsically broken, “sinful” form of social being. Though the novel may critique and reject this form of social being, it will do so only by way of an abstract refusal and not by offering concrete visions of ameliorative social forms. “In Tolstoy,” Lukács thus explains, “intimations of a breakthrough into a new epoch are visible, but they remain polemical, nostalgic, and abstract.”\textsuperscript{cxix} So it is that Lukács makes the otherwise strange claim that “Dostoyevsky did not write novels,” precisely because “it is in the words of Dostoyevsky that the new world, remote from any struggle against what actually exists, is drawn for the first time simply as a seen reality.”\textsuperscript{cxx} Dostoyevsky, that is to say, offers concrete visions of some new
form of social being that escapes altogether from the “sinful” world which actually exists – offers, indeed, an anticipation of a novel, redeemed world. If the novel can only reflect the destructive form of social being, a form offering concrete visions of new and better forms of social being cannot be a novel. Lukács therefore insists that Dostoyevsky and his fiction “lie outside the scope of this book” on the novel. Though both Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky lie outside the scope of the present work, we should heed the imperative with which Lukács closes The Theory of the Novel. Confronted by Dostovevsky’s and other experimental fictional forms, Lukács declares that the task of subsequent formal analysis of fiction is “to decide whether we really are about to leave the age of absolute sinfulness or whether the new has no other herald but our hopes: those hopes which are signs of a world to come, still so weak that it can easily be crushed by the sterile power of the merely existent.” If the novel as a form indexes a destructive form of social being, new fictional forms in place of the novel may herald the concrete potential for new forms of social being.

While Lukács’s famous attack on modernist experiments in fictional form has become common wisdom and even an object of ridicule in subsequent modernist criticism, such common wisdom misses the crucial point of the argument of The Meaning of Contemporary Realism: viz., that modernism is ideological precisely because it supplants concrete potentiality with abstract potentiality. In other words, modernism substitutes for possibilities which can be concretely realized in the objective world another set of possibilities which can never be made real, which must thereby remain wholly abstract. Discussing the common event of a character’s decision in a work of literature, Lukács explains “the literature of realism, aiming at a truthful reflection of reality, must demonstrate both the concrete and abstract potentialities of human beings in extreme situations of this kind. A character’s concrete potentiality once revealed, his abstract potentialities will appear as essentially inauthentic.” In realism, that is, once a decision renders a potentiality concrete by projecting and realizing it in the objective world, the set of
possibilities excluded by the decision will seem wholly inert – merely abstract potentialities that are therefore no longer potentialities at all. “Abstract potentiality,” Lukács remarks, “belongs wholly to the realm of subjectivity; whereas concrete potentiality is concerned with the dialectic between the individual’s subjectivity and objective reality. The literary presentation of the latter thus implies a description of actual persons inhabiting a palpable, identifiable world.” Whereas concrete potentiality involves a distinction between the objective world of social being and the subjective realm of individual consciousness, abstract potentiality subsists entirely within the subjective realm insofar as it lacks any possibility for objective realization. If realism offers a principle for distinguishing concrete from abstract potentiality, “the ontology on which the image of man in modernist literature is based invalidates this principle.”

Lukács contends that whereas realist literature evinces a complex dialectical interplay between individual characters and the world of social being, modernism wholly severs this connection, vaunting subjective consciousness at the expense of the social world. Lukács argues, therefore, that in “all great realistic literature,” the “human significance” and “specific individuality” of characters “cannot be separated from the context in which they were created.” By contrast, Lukács insists that

the ontological view governing the image of man in the work of leading modernist writers is the exact opposite of this. Man, for these writers, is by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings. Thomas Wolfe once wrote: ‘my view of the world is based on the view that solitariness is by no means a rare condition, something peculiar to myself or to a few specially solitary human beings, but the inescapable, central fact of human existence.’ Man, thus imagined, may establish contact with other individuals, but only in a superficial, accidental manner; only, ontologically speaking, by retrospective reflection. For ‘the others,’ too, are basically solitary, beyond significant human relationship.
“Man, thus conceived, is an ahistorical being”: intrinsically detached from social being, a human being loses some essential connection with the world and with others and becomes thereby merely subjective consciousness, wholly detached from the passage of time and the succession of historical events. For Lukács this ontological view of consciousness as primary and history as static determines the forms and techniques of modernist fiction such that, for example, experiments in autonomous interior monologue (in what has been imprecisely called stream of consciousness) feign directly to confront readers with some subjective mind that neutralizes the passage of time in the objective world. So it is that of the interior monologues of Ulysses Lukács contends that their “perpetually oscillating patterns of sense- and memory-data, their powerfully charged – but aimless and directionless – fields of force, give rise to an epic structure which is static, reflecting a belief in the basically static character of events.” If an event is minimally defined as a dynamic change in state and a function of time, to endow events with a “static character” is by definition to neutralize their force as events, to conceive them as fixed states. Modernist experiments in autonomous interior monologue, then, negate the objective passage of time and the events of history. If history is static and unchangeable, then the social atomization, detachment, and solitariness instanced by modernity is no longer the “specific social fate” of a particular historical moment but becomes instead an inalterable “universal condition humaine.” This is the point of Lukács’s citation of Thomas Wolfe: solitariness is, in Wolfe’s words, “not a rare condition,” but is the central, inalterable feature of human being as such.

If an essentially static conception of events implies a vision of the world in which time has ceased and history no longer happens – a world, we might say, with no future – this conception also implies that potentiality itself can only ever be abstract, never concrete. If the distinction between concrete and abstract potentiality is a distinction between potentiality realized in a transformation of the state of the objective world and potentiality that stands wholly apart from the objective world, to conceive of the events as essentially static is to deny that the state of
the objective world can be changed. In turn this renders all potentiality abstract. To conceive events as static is to nullify any possible distinction between concrete and abstract potentiality. Lukács thus argues that in modernist literature “the distinction between abstract and concrete potentiality becomes null and void.”\textsuperscript{cxxix} Moreover, as Lukács insists, “if the distinction between abstract and concrete potentiality vanishes, if man’s inwardness is identified with an abstract subjectivity, human personality must necessarily disintegrate.”\textsuperscript{cxxx}

To sum up this distinction between modernism and realism in terms of distinction between the modernist and the Wellsian aims of fiction, let us note that Lukács’s most damning argument against modernism is that whereas a writer like Dostoevsky aims at the concrete realization of a new form of social being, modernist rejections of social being amount only to abstract rejections that can by definition never be realized in the objective world. Lukács remarks that in the former “the protest – reaching out beyond the point of departure – was based on a concrete \textit{terminus ad quem}: the establishment of a new order. However indefinite the structure and content of this new order, the will towards its more exact definition was not lacking.”\textsuperscript{cxxxiii} Conversely, although modernism also indexes “a desire to escape from the reality of capitalism,” its ontological view “implies the primacy of the \textit{terminus a quo}, the condition from which it is desired to escape. Any movement towards a \textit{terminus ad quem} is condemned to impotence.”\textsuperscript{cxxxii} If realist literature had often aimed at the concrete realization of a new form of social being, modernist literature effectively maintains the status quo and renders inert impulse toward a new social form. Wells, as we have seen, makes precisely this point when he declares that while for James and other modernists, “literature like painting is an end,” for himself “literature like architecture is a means, has a use.” As realism contradicts modernism, so the Wellsian project for the novel as a “social mediator” functioning to reconstruct social being contradicts the modernist project of capturing subjective consciousness apart from sociality.
Faced with this contradiction, this “queer sense” that the Wellsian and modernist projects are incompatible, we may be tempted to resolve it by concurring with Wells’s preferred designation as “a journalist [rather] than an artist,” with Woolf’s contention that Wells’s is the work of a “government official” rather than an artist, with modernist criticism’s total exclusion of Wells’s from its canon. I propose another. I have already noted that Wells conceives of the basic difference between himself and James in terms of their attitudes toward the aims and the ends of literature: viz., that for James “literature like painting is an end,” while for Wells “literature like architecture is a means, has a use.” For James literature is an end in itself; for Wells literature has an end outside itself. I suggested, too, that we attend to the analogy that frames this distinction in terms of different forms of art. In such terms, I proposed that while painting aims through the seizure of individual attention at something non- or antirelational – something intrinsically solitary, antisocial – architecture aims at an objective transformation of the shared space structuring human relations as such. Put this way, the Jamesian project of literature seems intrinsically antisocial, the Wellsian project intrinsically social. As I have just noted, this contradiction corresponds precisely with Lukács’s distinction between modernism and realism.

I have contrasted Wells’s work and modernism in terms of a contrast between an intrinsically social mode of art and an intrinsically antisocial mode of art. I have claimed that Wellsian “architecture” contrasts with modernist “painting” precisely insofar as the former aims to modify the form of human relations while the latter effects the negation of human relationality as such. This contrast, in a sense, merely reframes Lukács’s contrast between realism and modernism. If this distinction is one Lukács, Wells, and modernists would perhaps accept, it is a distinction Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit reject altogether. In Caravaggio’s Secrets, as we have seen, Bersani and Dutoit propose that painting, too, implies new modes of community – new forms of social being, new conceptions of relationality – in its very seizure of individual attention. In their words, “to modify the way in which a human being is addressed would modify the relationality that constitutes the human as we know it.” Even a form of art that seems
antirelational and antisocial in is in some sense about relationality and social being insofar as it functions to transform the structure of human relations constitutive of human being. Jamesian painting, thus imagined, bears a clandestine affinity with Wellsian architecture. Both function to modify relationality and thereby herald new forms of social being.

The obvious objection here repeats the distinction between concrete and abstract potentiality. Though, one might say, both Wellsian architecture and modernist painting imply new modes of human relations, they differ insofar as the former aims at the concrete, objective transformation of the social world while the latter effects only the negation of social being through its escape into subjective consciousness. Modernism, in this view, negates any capacity for distinguishing between concrete and abstract potentiality, renders all potentiality abstract, and damns human beings to the “universal condition humaine” of solitariness. Such literature presents human beings as intrinsically and irrevocably damaged: “if the distinction between abstract and concrete potentiality vanishes, if man’s inwardness is identified with an abstract subjectivity, human personality must necessarily disintegrate.”

Modernism’s abstract refusal of the present form of social being is the disintegration of human personality. Conversely, Wellsian architecture would aim to effect the concrete transformation of social being and concurrent maintenance of personality. However, Wells’s The New Machiavelli imagines in concrete terms a new form of social being structured precisely to accommodate the antisocial force of what its narrator terms “a self less personal.” This “back-self,” this antisocial self, which Dick Remington insists contradicts the overt human personality – breaking its “overt promises and repudiating [its] pledges” – actually negates the social relation as such. This impersonal self, that is, instances the antisocial force of a cosmic process threatening to destroy human life on earth. As we have seen, Wells imagines the transformation of social being as an urgent imperative because the imprecise fit between the social and the antisocial generates an ineradicable remainder that threatens to destroy social being as such. As The New Machiavelli proposes that conventions and obligations of social being – particularly erotic
conventions and obligations – must be transformed in order to secure human being from extinction, Wells’s work as a whole contends that human personality must be disintegrated in order to make a space for impersonality, lest Homo sapiens die. As Wells writes in The Open Conspiracy, “established traditions which have made up the frame of human relationships for ages are not merely no longer as convenient as they were, but are positively injurious and dangerous.”

To disintegrate the human personality becomes for Wells an aspect of his overall project for concretely imagining a novel form of social being. The antisocial abstraction of impersonality is, therefore, the necessary dialectical counterpart to the concrete vision of a new social form. Indeed, if Wells insists that forms of social being that do not accommodate the impersonal, antisocial self are intrinsically doomed to extinction, then the abstract project of “modify[ing] the relationality that constitutes the human as we know it” instances some desperate urgency, rather than meaningless abstraction. The disintegration of personality, the evocation of impersonality, aspects of modernism Lukács accurately names but inaccurately diagnoses, are in fact the precise complements to Wells’s utopian projects. This implies not only that modernist evocations of impersonality – such as those instanced in the works of Dorothy Richardson, Wyndham Lewis, D.H. Lawrence, William Butler Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Djuna Barnes, Virginia Woolf, Mary Butts, and so on – form an integral part of the same concrete project for social reconstruction articulated in something like The New Machiavelli, but also and especially that Wells’s aesthetic forms, however queerly, form part of what we can designate modernism’s antisocial utopian impulse.

Impersonality, not coincidentally, forms part of what might be called the antisocial utopian impulse in contemporary queer theory. Tim Dean’s Beyond Sexuality reads Lacan to derive a model of desire or eros that is intrinsically and essentially queer insofar as eros is directed and attached to impersonal part objects only contingently integrated into persons. Dean suggests, that is, that because eros is provoked or solicited by things precisely not integrated into
persons – integrated into persons only contingently – then “relationality involves other persons only contingently.”

Dean writes that

if desire is, in the first instance, impersonal, then our primary relations aren’t with other persons. The human infant relates to its mother not as a person but as an object. We start to see that, harsh as it may sound to say so, other people provide merely contingent supports for psychical relations that are at bottom impersonal. This being the case, the impersonalist conception of sexuality gives rise to different ideas about relationality. It might be possible to develop some of our most intense and satisfying relations within realms of experience other than the interpersonal or intersubjective.

Eros is intrinsically queer, therefore, because it only contingently attaches to persons of the opposite sex. Erotic relations with other people, then, index a mode of sublimation in which some part object that has provoked desire has been integrated into a personality. This integration is, in this view, a mode of sublimation whereby the basic aim of eros has been diverted toward a substitute. Relations with people enact a diversion from relations with objects, such that “other people provide merely contingent supports for relations that are at bottom impersonal.” If relationality is intrinsically impersonal and antisocial, then personality and social relations represent deviations from an originary relation with disintegrated objects, erotic conventions like marriage, heterosexuality, and homosexuality each mark forms of sublimation, and other forms of sublimation are possible. Social being – for Dean as for Lukács and for Wells – is a form of sublimation of some antisocial cosmic or primary process.

As we have seen, both Wells and Lukács evince the urgency of reconstructing social being – reconstructing, that is, the form of sublimating the antisocial impulse. For Wells, the exigency is precisely that the present form of sublimation no longer works, threatening the future of human life: social being no longer negates the force of the antisocial; the antisocial thus threatens Homo sapiens with extinction. Wellsian aesthetics, as I have argued, performs experiments in imagining new forms of social being precisely in place of experiments in aesthetic
form. While this distinction yet marks a separation between aesthetic and political forms – i.e., Jamesian painting and Wellsian architecture – Dean’s imperative to think of social life primarily as a form of sublimation suggests a deep affinity between aesthetic and political forms insofar as both sublimate the antisocial force of eros. Dean notes that this “impersonalist perspective on sexuality reveals intersubjective relations as simply a subset of a far broader matrix of relationality, in which aesthetic investments may be viewed less hierarchically. In other words, aesthetic experiences should be considered no better or worse – no higher or lower – than sexual ones.”

This implies, Dean explains, “the possibility that some people ‘love literature’ in exactly the same way as others love sex.” But it implies also that aesthetics offers a mode of cultivating human attachments analogous to political and social modes. In other words, both art and social being are forms for integrating attachments.

Dean therefore concludes *Beyond Sexuality* with the quite striking contention that, in his words,

> aesthetics is no less political – only differently so – than more familiar kinds of group activity. Far from a poor substitute for sex, art may represent a more inventive mode of approaching *jouissance*. Having cultivated explicitly impersonalist modes of relating, gay men might now develop alternative ways of being open to forms of otherness that exceed the comparatively familiar otherness of other persons. Beyond sexuality lie the myriad possibilities of aesthetics.

> These “myriad possibilities of aesthetics,” myriad possibilities of sublimation, are myriad possibilities of politics and social being. Though Dean endows gay men with the capacity to cultivate such possibilities, we might grant this capacity as well to other modes of life which aim to detach relationality from reproduction, heterosexuality, and personality. In other words, though gay men exemplify a social group that has cultivated forms of social being not determined by reproductive futurism, we might identify and imagine other such forms. As we have seen,
Wells’s novel *The New Machiavelli* works precisely to imagine a form of social being detached from the exigency of reproduction in order to accommodate impersonality. There the Endowment of Motherhood aims simultaneously to detach individual human beings from conventions of marriage bound to reproduction and to enable forms of attachment between human beings more conducive to happiness because more attuned to erotic impulses. As we also have seen, Wells believes that without such queering of social being, social being and human life itself will suffer extinction.

Paradoxically, then, Wells argues that the future reproduction of *Homo sapiens* depends on the production of a social form in which erotic attachments aren’t determined by the reproduction of life. Though Wells’s realist fiction repeatedly imagines new social and political forms, incessantly performs what Woolf regards as “the work of a government official” rather than a novelist, such fiction performs the work of imagining new forms of sublimation in order to secure the future of human life. Wellsian politics is therefore no less aesthetic – “only differently so” – than what we are used to calling modernism.

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iv Ibid., 15.
vi Wells, *Mind at the End of Its Tether*, 17
vii Ibid., 17, 18.
xi Ibid., 6-7.
xii Ibid., 67, 68, 71.
xiii Ibid., 72.
xv Wells, Mind at the End of Its Tether, 4.
xviii Ibid.
xix Ibid.
xx Ibid., 52.
xxii Ibid.
xxiii Bal, 53-57.
xxiv Ibid, 54.
xxv Ibid, 54.
xxvi Wells, The Time Machine, 75-76.
xxvii Wells, Mind at the End of Its Tether, 4.
xxviii Wells, The Time Machine, 76.
xxx Ibid., 241
xxxi Ibid., 160-162
xxxii Ibid, 161.
xxxiii Ibid 161.
xxv Ibid.
xxvi Ibid, 56.
xxvii Ibid., 73.
xxviii Ibid., 76.
xl Wells, Mind at the End of Its Tether, 13.
xli Wells, The Croquet Player, 15.
xlii Ibid., 9.
xliii Ibid., 9.
xliv Ibid, 16.
xlv Ibid., 36
xlvi Ibid., 38, 40.
xlvii Ibid., 40.
xlviii Ibid., 42.
xlix Ibid., 56.
l Ibid., 59.
lI Ibid., 59.
lII Ibid., 70.
Ibid., 81.

Ibid.

Ibid., 63, 88.

Ibid., 63.

Ibid., 88-89.

Wells, The War of the Worlds, 72, 102.

Ibid., 101.

Ibid., 145.

Wells, Mind at the End of Its Tether, 18.


Ibid., 27-29.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Wells, Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction, 217.


Ibid., 12, 3.

Ibid., 39.

Ibid., 46.

Ibid., 50.

Ibid., 46.

Ibid., 94-95.

Huxley, 12.

Wells, Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction, 217.

Ibid., 227.

Ibid., 218.

Ibid., 400-401.


Ibid., 5.

Ibid., 15-16.

Ibid., 110.

Ibid., 181.

Ibid 181.

Ibid., 26-27.

Ibid., 27.

Ibid., 253.

xcii Ibid.,
xciii Ibid.
xciv Ibid., 399.
xcv Ibid., 216.
xcvi Ibid., 250-251.
xcvii Ibid., 251.
xcviii Ibid., 283-284.
xcix Ibid., 312.


ci Ibid., 264.

cii Ibid.


cvi Ibid.

cvii Ibid., 103-104.

cviii Ibid., 106.

cix James and Wells, 216-217

cx Ibid., 154

cxi Ibid., 152
cxii Ibid.

cxiii Ibid., 154.


cxv Ibid., 35.

cxvi James and Wells, 156.

cxvii James and Wells, 220.


cxx Ibid.

cxxi Ibid.

cxviii Ibid., 153.


cxxiv Ibid., 24.

cxxv Ibid., 19.

cxxvi Ibid., 20.

cxxvii Ibid., 21.

cxxviii Ibid., 18.
Ibid., 24.

Ibid., 24-25.

Ibid., 29-30.

Ibid., 36.

Bersani and Dutoit, 40.

Lukács, The Meaning of Contemporary Realism, 24-25.

Wells, The Open Conspiracy, 52.

Tim Dean, Beyond Sexuality. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 274.

Ibid.

Ibid., 277

Ibid.

Ibid., 279.
Chapter 3

Against the World, Against Life: Antinarrative in Richardson’s Pilgrimage

Who would, after all, come out for abortion or stand against
reproduction, against futurity, and so against life?

– Lee Edelman

They despise women and they want to go on living—to reproduce—themselves. None of their achievements, no ‘civilization,’ no art, no science can redeem that. There is no pardon possible for man. The only answer to them is suicide: all women ought to commit suicide.

– Pilgrimage

I.

Midway through Deadlock, the sixth “chapter-novel” in Dorothy Richardson’s massive series-novel Pilgrimage, Miriam Henderson and Michael Shatov walk through London, arguing about the proper relation between individual human beings and the whole human race. Miriam, protagonist and focal consciousness of all of Pilgrimage (indeed, this relentless singleness of focalization throughout the novel’s more than 2100 pages confronts readers with a tour de force unrivalled by any work outside of A la recherché du temps perdu) argues for the absolute primacy of the individual’s importance in relation to the race: “the race,” she says, “is nothing without individuals.” Against this, Michael asserts the importance of the race. When Miriam suggests that “the biggest thing a race does is to produce a few big individualities,” Michael parries by insisting that “the biggest thing a race does is that it goes on. Individuals perish… what is certain
is – that the greatest individual is great only as he gives much to the race; to his fellow creatures. Without this, individuality is pure-negative.”iv In other words, individuals are only truly individuals to the extent to which they further the continuance of the race; or, individuals are only individuals insofar as they are not, paradoxically, individuals. Individuals entirely free from propagating the race are merely the negation of the race. To Michael’s latter assertion, Miriam indignantly replies, “individuality cannot be negative.”v

Here the argument reaches stalemate: neither Miriam nor Michael will relent their assertions enough to accommodate anything of the opposing view. Moreover, the very words exchanged enforce the stalemate. If Michael defines the individual human being purely as the negation of the human race – and not as an entity with some positive being on its own – this excludes Miriam’s belief, expressed variously throughout Pilgrimage, that the individual does in fact harbor some sacred, positive being apart from participation in all human groups. The dialectical escape from this stalemate, of course, would be to assert individual being as some kind of negation of negation. If, for instance, one accepts Michael’s view that the human race exists as the negation of any particular individual (which is in fact the corollary to his claim that outside of the race, “individuality is pure-negative”: the race itself must negate free, pure individuality such that the greatness of the individual is measured only in terms of her great contribution to furthering the race), one could escape the impasse dialectically by asserting that free, positive, individual human being is also the negation of that which negates free individuality. “Individuality,” thus put, “cannot be negative” precisely because the negation of the negation is, in Engels’s version of the dialectic, a positivity. This logical move would resolve the impasse immanently: it would offer an exit from within the contradictory logic of the very terms that have occluded any exit or resolution. A stalemate made into a sublation.

But of course this is not the resolution of the argument. Pilgrimage, for reasons I will explore momentarily, is wholly inimical to such dialectical sublations both in its themes and in
the narrative structures expressing its themes. Instead, what follows the stalemate are several paragraphs of Miriam’s interior monologue, as if the stalemate reached in her exchange with Michael, blocking further communication, erupts into Miriam’s individual mind. Miriam thinks “something here and there in his talk threatened happiness…. He seemed to see people only as members of a nation, grouped together with all their circumstances…. There was no need to do or be anything, individual.”vi What in his talk threatens happiness is his total subordination of the individual to the race. If people are only the agglomerate of everything surrounding them, all their conditions of belonging to groups, then free individuality really is negative, and that to which Miriam has assigned absolute value, valueless. The threat Michael’s idea poses is transferred metonymically to communicating the idea. As happens frequently with other exchanges in Pilgrimage, here communication with Michael becomes a threatening stand-in for the threats Miriam perceives to her individual being from community with others. Something “here and there” in Michael’s talk threatens both Miriam’s abstract conceptual articulation of the individual and the group and her own immediate individual being, which she maintains at odds with any and every community. It should not therefore be surprising that one important deadlock in Deadlock is Michael’s offer to marry Miriam – an attempt to subordinate her individual being to the propagation of the race – an offer Miriam refuses.

If it is accidental that this standstill, this impasse, this stalemate takes place at the end of the sixth of Deadlock’s thirteen chapters, that this deadlock takes place at the center of the the sixth of thirteen “chapter-novels” comprising Pilgrimage, this accident serves only to highlight the fact that the deadlock between individual human beings and human collectivities – and the search for a way out of this deadlock – is both Pilgrimage’s central theme and the novel’s dominant structural principle. The perhaps accidental centrality of Miriam’s argument with Michael about the individual and the race indicates the thematic centrality of the general antithesis between individual and community throughout Pilgrimage. Although the conclusion of
Miriam’s argument with Michael here only accidentally takes place precisely at the center of *Pilgrimage*. I offer it not only as a strange resolution of the particular impasse of their argument, but also as an example of the narrative’s nondialectical resolution of the deadlock between individual and collectivity. Closing the chapter, Miriam asks Michael,

“Do you think that the race is *sacred*, and has purposes, supermen, you know what I mean, Nietzsche, and that individuals are just fitted up with the instincts that keep them going, just to blind them to the fact that they don’t matter?”

“If one must use these terms, the race is *certainly* more sacred than the individual.”

“Very well then; I know what I think. If the sacred race plays tricks on conscious human beings, using them for its own sacred purposes and giving them an unreal sense of mattering, I don’t care a button for the race, and I’d rather kill myself than serve its purposes. Besides, the instincts of self-preservation and reproduction are *not* the only human motives. They are not human at all.”

Miriam asks whether Michael believes the human race is “sacred,” which means in this case not only that it is holy, worthy of veneration, and sanctified, but also that it is dedicated wholly to a single use or purpose: the aim of propagating itself through whatever means.

Devoted wholly to procreation, the human race “fit[s] up” human beings “with the instincts” necessary to reproducing human life. Although human beings may maintain some sense of free, pure, positive individuality apart from the race, such notions have been endowed or adapted only because they enable the human race to reproduce. Moreover, human beings remain “blind” to the biological force of the sense of individuality: it works entirely to the extent to which it is not seen as something that works, something at work. To Miriam’s question, Michael replies “the race is *certainly* more sacred than the individual,” meaning both that the race is more worthy of veneration than the individual and that the single aim of the race is more important than the single
aim of any individual. Indeed, it is perhaps the greatness of the race’s single aim that makes it more venerable than any individual: “the race … goes on. Individuals perish,” Michael has said. This suggests that no individual aim will last as long as the race’s aim while introducing a strange future-oriented temporal criterion for articulating the relation between human race and human being – a criterion no individual can ever meet. According to such logic, individual human beings really “don’t matter.”

This is a recipe for another deadlock. In Michael’s logic, the individual is by definition less important than the race and the argument must come to an impasse unless the criterion is refused. Curiously, however, Miriam doesn’t challenge futurity as a criterion; or at least, she doesn’t challenge it directly. Instead, her response makes to accept Michael’s premise: “if the sacred race plays tricks on conscious human beings, using them for its own sacred purposes and giving them an unreal sense of mattering, I don’t care a button for the race, and I’d rather kill myself than serve its purposes.” We could paraphrase Miriam’s response as something like this: if your criterion for judging the human race to be of more value than individual human beings is true, then rather than subordinate myself to its more important aim, rather than discarding the “unreal sense” of individuality the race has endowed me with, I choose to remain free from its aim by killing myself and stopping my part in the future reproduction of the race.

This is not the only time Miriam refuses what Lee Edelman has termed “reproductive futurism,” an ideology that subordinates the singular life of the individual to the future reproduction of the human species. In my epigraph, for instance, Miriam imagines women collectively committing suicide as a reaction to patriarchal misogyny and heterosexism: men “despise women and they want to go on living – to reproduce – themselves. None of their achievements, no ‘civilization,’ no art, no science can redeem that. There is no pardon possible for man. The only answer to them is suicide: all women ought to commit suicide.”

Interesting here is the conjunction between men’s hatred for women and their absolute dependence on
women, phrased as if an extreme form of the cliché “can’t live with them; can’t live without them.” For although men “despise women,” they also want to go on living, to reproduce. For this they depend on women. Let us note in passing, however, that what men want to reproduce is “themselves.” This does not simply mean that each of a number of particular men want to reproduce. In fact, the catalogue of men’s achievements – “civilization,” “art,” “science” – indicates that what men want to reproduce through women is only the sameness of humanity in the abstract and not difference: only the race of Man, and not individuals, to use the terms of Miriam’s argument with Michael Shatov. Indeed, Michael’s insistence on the superiority of the human race over individual human beings makes explicit the logic subtending “reproductive futurism” – the subordination of the singularity, the difference, of individuals and the superordination of the singleness, the sameness, of the race. In such terms, the human community itself stands for the occlusion of individuality and Miriam’s imagined resistance to the threat the community poses is collective suicide. If Virginia Woolf’s Three Guineas imagines a “society of outsiders” belonging to no truly public community and participating in no truly concerted action, Pilgrimage imagines a community whose only positive condition of belonging is the concerted action of killing oneself: a society of suicides.

While such threats of suicide may be hyperbole, their resistance to patriarchy, heterosexism, and an insistence upon the ultimate exigency of reproduction quilts together patriarchal logic and the propagation of human life and discloses their deep and necessary interconnection in reproductive futurism. In other words, suicide seems the proper mode of resistance to both masculine rationality and to the subordination of the individual to the reproduction of the species’ life precisely because both logics make any alternative mode of life seem impossible, unlivable. To live is to remain subject to reproductive futurism; to refuse reproductive futurism is to commit suicide. In this deadlock, the human community always and forever must destroy singular individuals in order to propagate itself, individuals must always die,
and to take one’s life has at least the virtue of authentic refusal. That no real alternative community can arise from collective suicide renders the imagined collective action a total refusal of community as such: for the individual to remain free, community itself must be killed. Living community apparently only consigns individuals to death.

Pilgrimage’s society of suicides has but one member: Miriam’s mother, who has killed herself in the interim between Honeycomb and The Tunnel, the third and fourth chapter-novels in the series. Mrs. Henderson’s suicide appears in Pilgrimage only through periodic retroversions, most pointedly in the four times, presented at distant intervals, Miriam encounters Teetgan’s Teas, a teashop she recalls having visited with her mother. Chapter seven of The Tunnel narrates the first of Miriam’s visits to Teetgan’s teas in one of the novel’s most haunting passages:

Why must I always think of her in this place? . . . It is always worst just along here. . . . Why do I always forget there’s this piece . . . always be hurrying along seeing nothing and then, suddenly, Teetgan’s Teas and this row of shops? I can’t bear it. I don’t know what it is. It’s always the same. I will always feel the same. It is sending me mad. One day it will be worse. If it gets any worse I shall be mad. Just here. Certainly. Something is wearing out of me. I am meant to go mad. If not, I should not always be coming along this piece without knowing it, whichever street I take. Other people would know the streets apart. I don’t know where this bit is or how I get to it. I come every day because I am meant to go mad here. Something that knows brings me here and is making me go mad because I am myself and nothing changes me. ix

Two things are particularly striking about this passage, a paragraph which actually comprises the whole of chapter 7 of The Tunnel: its formal use of first person, present tense narration to represent Miriam’s consciousness and its insistence that “something” compels Miriam to come to Teetgan’s Teas apart from her conscious choosing. The chapter’s form seems an example of what critics often imprecisely term “stream of consciousness” technique, whereby an author’s
flouting of the conventions of realist narrative conventions achieves a transparent (and therefore apparently verisimilar) view into the mind of a character. Indeed, praise for stream of consciousness technique often hinges upon its verisimilitude, as if a style like Molly Bloom’s monologue concluding Ulysses or the style of To the Lighthouse was more adept at representing the actual workings of the human mind than the narration of Dickens or Henry James. Such evaluations seem to ignore the fact that the verisimilitude of stream of consciousness also depends upon a highly complex and equally artificial set of conventions and constraints which produce the apparent realism. At first glance, the passage seems to exemplify what critics call stream of consciousness – indeed, Richardson is often considered an inventor of the technique itself – with its first person, present tense narration, its fragments and ellipses suggesting, as critics love to point out, that the human mind doesn’t usually think in complete sentences. Such a reading, however, must forget that this technique of fiction is itself a technology for representing consciousness and not in fact some kind of neutral recording device. Indeed, these readings threaten to collapse Miriam Henderson into Dorothy Richardson and turn Pilgrimage into Richardson’s autobiography instead of a novel. One of the earliest works on Pilgrimage not only uses “Miriam” and “Dorothy” interchangeably but often even performs the at least virtuously honest move of referring to them together as “Dorothy-Miriam.”

It is impossible to collapse the distinction between Richardson and Miriam if we acknowledge narratological distinctions between autobiography and fiction. In Transparent Minds, Dorrit Cohn argues that one “vanishing-point of the autobiographical genre is the precise starting-point for interior monologue as fictional genre…. Only fictional characters can be ‘heard’ as they put thoughts into words without speaking them aloud or writing them down; or rather, they can be ‘overheard,’ for they address their discourse to no one, least of all a reader.” To put this another way: the irruption of autonomous interior monologue in a text which, both before and after chapter 7 of The Tunnel, deploys external narration marks quite precisely the point at which...
Pilgrimage should be regarded not as an autobiographical text but instead recognized as a work of fiction, an aesthetic object bearing only tangential relation to Richardson’s own life – an experiment in aesthetics by which Richardson negates our world. As autonomous interior monologue occurs only in fictional and not autobiographical texts – as the presence of autonomous interior monologue would by definition make a text fictional and not autobiographical – moments like chapter 7 make it nonsensical to speak of Pilgrimage as autobiographical. Only insofar as Miriam is a fictional character can we ‘overhear’ her thoughts given in the present tense, not subordinate to past and future, given between past and future.

It is the present tense of autonomous interior monologue, a technique possible only in the mode of fiction, that not only produces the passage’s haunting affective impact but also exemplifies Pilgrimage’s incessant deployments of narrative and antinarrative experiments in order to theorize the human being’s involvement in collective social life. Indeed, what is most haunting here is the fictional evocation of some singularity that exists beyond not only the community but also, even more strikingly, beyond the conscious will of the individual. Something seizes Miriam and compels her to return to Teetgan’s Teas: “something that knows brings me here,” Miriam thinks. Seized against her will, seized by an impulse surpassing her will, Miriam is also moved by a knowledge beyond her own: “if I wasn’t meant to be driven mad,” Miriam thinks, “I shouldn’t always be coming along this piece without knowing it, whichever street I take.” The impulse seizing Miriam knows how to drive her to Teetgan’s Teas, knows along which streets to direct her, no matter which street she willfully chooses to take: “I don’t know where this bit is or how I get to it.” Inescapable, this insistence in fact neutralizes any willful choice Miriam makes and supplants her will with its own, transforming her agency into a form of passivity. “I don’t know what it is,” Miriam thinks, suggesting the insistence’s radical alterity from the conscious mind readers ‘overhear.’
One term we could use to describe this strange insistence is the unconscious, which Slavoj Žižek describes in an essay as an “unknown known”: as that which the conscious human being does not know that she knows. A knowledge and power beyond Miriam’s conscious will – an unconscious force – drives her to Teetgan’s Teas, against her will and without her knowledge. This unconscious force, this passion, dissolves Miriam’s agency, motivating Miriam while evacuating her will. Moreover, this passion threatens her with insanity: “it is sending me mad,” she thinks, figuring the insistent force as that which will dispatch her from the un-mad human community. “Other people,” she thinks, “would know the streets apart”: other people would not just be driven to Teetgan’s Teas and to madness. That Miriam does not know the streets apart both locates her difference from others precisely in her being seized by an unconscious force and also threatens to exacerbate such difference and distance from others, sending her toward a madness that amounts to social death. Being sent toward madness is being sent to death, a passive form of suicide. Suicide, in fact, stands in for being at odds with the human community insofar as to go mad is to be sent away from the community. Indeed, the passage describes Miriam’s being sent mad in terms of a melancholy fixation on her mother, who has committed suicide, precisely because the logic of the community has made her mode of life under reproductive futurism into a mode of death. In reproductive futurism, death is the lot of the individual. Miriam’s melancholy fixation on her mother reveals the threat of madness as the threat of death.

Another name we could give this insistent force, sending Miriam mad, threatening her with death, threatening to negate her tie to the social by negating her life, is the “compulsion to repeat.” In Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud argues that the compulsion to repeat exemplifies a drive that “is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of being, which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces.” This drive, he continues, is
acquired historically and tend[s] toward the restoration of an earlier state of things…. If conditions remained the same, [the living organism] would do no more than continually repeat the same course of life…. Every modification which is thus imposed upon the course of the organism’s life is accepted by the conservative organic [drives] and stored up for further repetition.xiv

In other words, the compulsion to repeat operates as a force within organic beings – including and especially within human beings – to resist the impacts of the external world upon their internal being. Impacted from without by “external disturbing forces,” this internal state of being generates a drive – “acquired historically,” produced through the dialectical interaction between being and whatever affects being – that moves insistently and unremittingly toward “an earlier state of being.” Key here is that the drive is historically malleable: Freud’s remark that “every modification which is imposed upon the course of the organism’s life is accepted by the conservative organic [drives] and stored up for further repetition,” indicates that even as the drive moves to resist such external modifications, it does so by adapting these external disturbances into a repeatable form, thereby to conserve a particular state of being. Recalling this will keep us from misunderstanding the drive as simply a naturally given instinct – for however given, the drive always bears some element of contingency insofar as its expression expresses past encounters with contingent external modifications.

Chapter 7 of The Tunnel presents thematically, as it enacts formally, this “compulsion to repeat.” I have already noted how the passage describes a force beyond Miriam’s conscious will that drives her insistently toward Teetgan’s Teas, towards her mother’s suicide. This insistent force is an insistent repetition. “I come everyday because I am meant to go mad here,” Miriam thinks. This force of repetition drives Miriam “always [to] be coming along this piece without knowing it.” Such thought push the autonomous interior monologue – that “vanishing-point” of discourse, moving toward which “narration sheds its narrative characteristics en route” – back
toward narrative insofar as Miriam’s monologue about the events she experiences in the present tense implies an iterative, reiterated, and reiterating series of events that have happened in the past and will likely continue into the future. In other words, the antinarrative monologue itself comprises a strange series of narrated events. If this autonomous interior monologue is the “vanishing-point” of narrative, it is a quite curious vanishing point insofar as it seems to retain precisely that which Cohn argues it should make vanish: the procession of events an antinarrative experiment would bring to a halt.

Attending to the form of Miriam’s monologue can help us begin to see how Pilgrimage evacuates the successive teleology of narrative in asymptotic approaches to narrative that remain experiments in antinarrative even as they advance toward that which they ultimately repudiate: teleology and the social end of heterosexual reproduction. As Pilgrimage imagines the logic of narrative as interconnected with the logic of reproductive futurism articulated by Michael Shatov – a logic whereby the future of the race must always trump the singularity of the individual – the novel’s experimental resistance to narrative enacts also a mode of resistance to reproductive futurism and the subjection of the individual human being to the human race: antinarrative against the succession and future reproduction of a human race that negates individuality in the present; an aesthetic experiment that negates the negation of individual human being. As I have just argued, however, Chapter 7 of The Tunnel, an autonomous interior monologue in the mode Cohn would regard as the “vanishing-point” of narrative, does not in any simple sense halt narrative, or make narrative vanish. To do so would be to quell the succession of events altogether and, as we have seen, the passage actually does imply a future succession of events, even as these events are presented in the present tense. Autonomous interior monologue, then, would become here a form of simultaneous narration whereby narrative takes place in present tense without ceasing altogether.
Describing autonomous interior monologue, Cohn notes that linguists distinguish between three kinds of present tense. The punctual or instant present tense describes events that happen once. The habitual or iterative present tense describes events that happen repeatedly. The timeless or gnomic present tense describes events that happen always. I have argued that this passage from The Tunnel describes not only events that happen punctually, simultaneous with the monologue, but also events that happen repeatedly. Encountering Teetgan’s Teas – described as “this place,” the deictic indicating a specific place presently at hand – punctually in the present, Miriam describes the insistent force within her as something that happens over and over again, driving her repeatedly to “this place.” With these two modes of the present tense – the punctual present and the iterative present – the passage fuses the third mode: the timeless or gnomic present, which describes events that happen always, events that are never not happening, and are therefore never really events at all because they don’t produce events’ requisite change from one state to another. On one hand, lines like “one day it will be worse” suggest an event causing a future deterioration which will expel Miriam from the sanity of the human race (“if it gets any worse,” she thinks, “I shall be mad.”) On the other hand, the passage closes emphatically with Miriam thinking “something that knows brings me here and is making me go mad because I am myself and nothing changes me.” “[N]othing changes me” amounts to a refusal of events because Miriam thinks that nothing external ever affects her internal being. As events by definition compel a change in state, to insist that no change in state ever occurs is to deny that events occur. Or, conversely, to insist that Miriam’s state of being escapes the impact of external events. The same passage, therefore, narrates in simultaneous narration the punctual event of Miriam’s encounter with the teashop, narrates in iterative present tense Miriam’s compulsion repeatedly to encounter the teashop, and deploys gnomic present tense to insist that in spite of (or because of) such events, Miriam always remains the same.
In this conjunction of present tenses, the passage brings narration to a halt. Juxtaposing the narration of events with the insistence that these events never alter Miriam’s singular, individual human being, the passage operates as precisely the “vanishing-point” at which events cease to happen insofar as their impact ceases and Miriam’s state of being remains the same. Becoming cedes to being. Indeed, it is in the iterative present tense describing the insistent force compelling Miriam repeatedly to encounter the teashop (and thereby repeatedly to fixate upon her mother’s suicide) that transforms punctual events into non-events. Freud’s remark that “every modification thus imposed upon the organism’s life is accepted by the conservative organic [drives] and stored up for further repetition” can be adapted to describe the experimental technique of narrative here. Punctual events, the external modifications of being from one state to another, are “stored up” and transformed into iterated or repeated events in order to defend and conserve a state of being from events and to hark back to what Freud calls “an earlier state of things.” The punctual encounter with the teashop becomes, on the level of the narration, an iterative, iterated series of encounters in order to conserve a gnomic state in which such encounters no longer affect Miriam’s being. The passage moves from narrative to antinarrative through its movement through the iterative present tense from the narrative presentation and antinarrative repudiation of punctual events. Such iteration becomes one of Pilgrimage’s central antinarrative experiments, through which the novel’s aesthetic form operates as a resistance to and repudiation of reproductive futurism without lapsing into suicidal modes of refusal. Antinarrative negates the dialectical movement of narrative.

Late in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud notes that “two kinds of processes are continually at work in living systems, operating in contrary directions, one constructive and assimilatory and the other destructive and dissimilatory.” From the former constructive, assimilatory impulse derives the production and future reproduction of the human race as a collective – the production and reproduction of what we’ve seen Miriam refer to as
“civilization,” with derisive scare-quotes. Psychoanalysis has sometimes designated this constructive, assimilatory impulse with the name “eros,” harking back to the Socratic tale of primordially split beings seeking erotic reattachment with their lost other halves, placing eros wholly on the side of civilization and reproductive futurism. Against this, the “destructive and dissimilatory” impulse – the impulse resisting the reproduction of human life and reproductive futurism itself – acquired the contrasting name “thanatos,” death impulse, death instinct, or death drive. This impulse to resist the reproduction of life, to dissimilate individual human beings from subordination to the continued life of the race, to destroy the race in order to preserve the singular being of the individual, is precisely that drive Freud claims is instanced by the compulsion to repeat. As the compulsion to repeat strives to conserve a present state of being or restore an earlier state of being against future modification by external events – as the repetition compulsion transforms events into nonevents by neutralizing their impact on being – it instances the death drive by disrupting the future.

In this sense the compulsion to repeat operates as a “destructive and dissimilatory” impulse – operates as the death drive. Insofar as chapter 7 of The Tunnel moves from a narrative mode to an antinarrative mode through an iterative present tense formally enacting the repetition compulsion – while describing thematically the neutralization of events, their inertness or incapacity to affect Miriam’s singular being – the passage ultimately also enacts the death drive. That is to say that if Miriam’s singular, individual being remains always the same (“I am myself and nothing changes me”) despite whatever external encounters, the stasis of that singular being disrupts the movement of the race into the future in a way analogous to the imagined society of suicides. The passage’s aesthetic enactment of the death drive, of the dissimilating, destructive, and antisocial impulse, suggests how Pilgrimage as a whole offers an aesthetic resistance to reproductive futurism – and the teleological modes of narrative interconnected with reproductive futurism – as an alternative to the suicidal resistance we saw imagined at the beginning of our
discussion. In short: far from imagining suicide and death as the only alternatives to total subordination to the collective life of the human race, Pilgrimage offers, through its very experiments in antinarrative (in making narrative cease) new ways to think singular being unsubordinate to the demand to reproduce human life.

In The Sublime Object of Ideology, Žižek describes the death drive in Lacanian terms. The death drive, he writes, is the possibility of “the radical annihilation of the symbolic texture through which so-called reality is constituted. The very existence of the symbolic order implies the radical possibility of its radical effacement, of “symbolic death” – not the death of the so-called “real object” in its symbol, but the obliteration of the signifying network itself.”

Indeed, Žižek claims that the death drive is “exactly the opposite of the symbolic order.” This opposition between the symbolic order and the death drive is precisely the opposition Freud articulates between the “constructive, assimilatory” impulse and the “destructive, dissimilatory” impulse. Against the symbolic order, against that set of structures, symbols, and identifications buttressing the reproduction of the life of the human race, the death drive counterposes the possibility of the “radical annihilation” of the entire network undergirding future human life. This possibility of “radical annihilation” or “radical effacement” derives from the [fact] that the symbolic order produces, at its very foundation, an anterior constitutive excess. “In its very kernel, at its very centre,” Žižek writes, lies “some strange, traumatic object which cannot be symbolized, integrated into the symbolic order.” We can name this excess madness: when Miriam describes the force within her driving her mad, she describes precisely the traumatic, dissimilatory excess always escaping human civilization, threatening the reproduction of the human race. Lee Edelman names it queerness, writing in No Future that “queerness figures . . . the place of the social order’s death drive” and that “the death drive names what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability.” If the symbolic order capacitates every viable mode of social life, if it buttresses the
future reproduction of the social, if it grants the social a viable future, the negation of such reproductive futurism figures the death drive under the names of its negation: queerness, madness, suicide, stasis. Such names denote that which is socially unviable because it disrupts the future viability of the social. If the future beneficiary of the social, of the symbolic order, is the child (in Edelman’s words, “the Child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as that for which that order is held in perpetual trust”), if Michael Shatov’s elevation of the race above the individual implies the future reproduction of children, then queerness “names the side of all those not fighting for the children, the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism”: the side of madness, suicide, and stasis.\textsuperscript{xxii}

Here I’d like to return to Edelman’s question, the text of my first epigraph: “Who would, after all, come out for abortion or stand against reproduction, against futurity, and so against life?”\textsuperscript{xxiii} Our answers here, obviously, are Miriam and Pilgrimage. Miriam, as we have seen, declares herself against reproductive futurism, against bare life, in her several declarations of suicide as a proper mode of resistance to the subordination of the individual to the race. These declarations call for resisting the viability of the social by enacting an extreme form of social unviability, of death, and resist the future through an act that has precisely no future. Pilgrimage itself offers, by contrast, an attempt to think through a viable resistance to reproductive futurism through its aesthetic experiments in antinarrative. Pilgrimage’s aesthetic experiments attempt to imagine a mode of life at odds with reproductive futurism, at odds with the social, that does not thereby become a mode of death: a viable individual human being that doesn’t turn suicidal, an antisocial mode of life. Here we might note that while Lee Edelman’s avocation of a queer politics of negativity often seems suicidal, other queer theorists locate precisely in “the myriad possibilities of aesthetics,” such viable, antisocial modes of life. Judith Halberstam, for instance, proposes an archive of such antisocial aesthetic possibilities in such disparate texts as works by
Andy Warhol, Henry James, Marcel Proust, Oscar Wilde, Valerie Solanas, Patricia Highsmith, Shulamith Firestone, and Patti Smith. xxiv

At the center of this virtual archive we should place Pilgrimage. If I have concentrated so far on Pilgrimage’s invocations of suicide, of extinction, of the death drive, it is precisely because the novel’s refusals of life, of reproductive futurity, make it an example of what I have termed antisocial modernism. Insofar as the novel refuses the maintenance of what Agamben terms “bare life” as the proper ends of human being – insofar as it experiments with aesthetic form, bringing narrative and the teleology of narrative to a halt through its experiments in antinarrative – the novel offers an aesthetic resistance to the concerns for life, reproduction, and fabrication that characterize the social, social being, reproductive futurism, and modernity itself. If, as I have argued in my introduction, experiments in modernist fiction express the strange, the queer desire for another world against the social world of reproductive futurism, then Pilgrimage serves as the ne plus ultra exemplar of an aesthetic imagining that another world is possible. In the next section, I will track how the novel’s aesthetic experiments thwart the ends-directedness of instrumental rationality and the imperative to maintain bare life in the name of another modernity (posed against actually existing modernity) that would accommodate and make singular, individual human being viable.

II.

A 2005 MLA panel wedded, at least provisionally, Edelman and Judith Halberstam as queer theorists of negativity, theorists of what the panel termed the “antisocial thesis in queer theory.” As described by Tim Dean – a panelist whose work seems to oppose the antisocial thesis – theorists of negativity risk embracing, “at least provisionally,” homophobic representations figuring queerness a threat to the social:
instead of arguing against the vicariously homophobic representations of homosexuality as sterile, unproductive, antifamily, and death-driven, [the antisocial thesis] insists that ‘we should listen to, and even perhaps be instructed by, the readings of queer sexualities produced by the forces of reaction.’ If there is a germ of truth in homophobic stereotypes of queerness as destructive, then we might heroically identify with those negative stereotypes in order to short circuit the social in its present form.\textsuperscript{xxv}

Dean cites Leo Bersani’s statement, from the famous essay “Is the Rectum a Grave?” as a germinal version of the negativity of the antisocial thesis: “it is perhaps necessary,” Bersani writes, “to accept the pain of embracing, at least provisionally, a homophobic representation of homosexuality.”\textsuperscript{xxvi} Such homophobic representations demonize homosexuality and queerness as modes of life threatening the future viability of life as such. Insofar as queerness is seen as “sterile, unproductive, antifamily, and death-driven,” queerness threatens the future of the social.

To put this another way: insofar as the presence of the social depends on the future reproduction of the social, a futurity achieved through the future reproduction of human life in general defended so vigorously and vociferously both by contemporary forces of “family values” conservatism-neoliberalism and by Michael Shatov in Deadlock, nonreproductive sexualities and modes of life – modes of living which refuse the reproduction of life in general as an aim – are deemed socially unviable threats to the future viability of the social. Designating nonreproductive modes of life as constant threats to the social, the social operates consequently as a standing threat to nonreproductive modes of living. As in Michael Shatov’s formulation, the future of the race negates the singular individual in frequently deadly ways. Indeed, these modes of life become modes of death not only in the sense that they are “sterile, unproductive, antifamily, and death-driven,” but also and especially in the sense that death itself becomes the only alternative to reproduction. Rather than working to revise or reform such homophobic conceptions of nonreproductive modes of life, the antisocial thesis exhorts us to learn from these
conceptions of “queerness as destructive” to the social. What we might learn, Dean speculates, is to valorize these modes of life as mechanisms “to short circuit the social in its present form.”

It is in this sense, then, that I offer Pilgrimage as an instance of antisocial modernism. Insofar as the novel operates as an extended meditation upon and valorization of Miriam Henderson’s antisocial modus vivendi, insofar as the novel experiments in antinarrative in order to short circuit the future-orientation of narrative as such, this antisocial antinarrative strives to make viable singular individual human being unsubjected to the future prospects of life in general at the same time as it strives to attend to singular being as such unensnared by the dialectical movement of narrative. It is through Pilgrimage’s formal experiment in antinarrative that the novel imagines a viable mode of singular, individual human being that does not become, by virtue of its antithesis to and antagonism with the social, a mode of death. Pilgrimage thus stands at the center of a virtual archive in which “the myriad possibilities of aesthetics” help to imagine and to capacitate modes of living unsubordinate to the demands and threats of the social. Pilgrimage’s antinarrative experiment in detaching being from events, in quelling events in order to accommodate existents or existence, ultimately offers us a way to think radically different modes of community accommodating singular, individual human being without subjecting these singularities to an operative, dialectical principle such as reproductive futurism. Akin to what theorists have named “inoperative community,” “coming community,” or “community of unbelonging,” Richardson’s experiment in antinarrative fiction works to negate the social and opens a space for instances of community far more radical than those located by Jessica Berman in the work of James, Woolf, Proust, and Stein: what we could paradoxically call antisocial community.

Implicit in the debate over the antisocial thesis is a notion of the social to be opposed by something we can designate the antisocial. When Dean explains that enacting negative stereotypes of queerness might “short circuit the social in its present form,” he echoes Edelman,
Halberstam, and Munoz (other participants in the debate over the antisocial thesis) in regarding the social as fertile, reproductive, pro-family, and life-driven and the antisocial as that which threatens or negates fertility, reproduction, family, and life. As reactionary stereotypes of queerness depict it as the negation of life, the queer instances the antisocial.

But a more capacious definition of the social would enlarge the antisocial, expanding it beyond simply identity with queerness and broadening the concept to include all that negates or refuses the realm of bare life. To conceive this more capacious version of the social, I wish to invoke what I would regard as an accidental yet instructive resonance between the antisocial thesis in queer theory and Hannah Arendt’s conception of the social – accidental even despite the fact that an important theorist has already noted the possible connection without granting it the importance it deserves. In his introduction to Fear of a Queer Planet, Michael Warner writes that following Hannah Arendt, we might even say that queer politics opposes society itself.

Arendt describes the social as a specifically modern phenomenon: “[T]he emergence of the social realm, which is neither private nor public, strictly speaking, is a relatively new phenomenon whose origin coincided with the emergence of the modern age and which found its political form in the emergence of the nation-state.’ She identifies society in this sense with ‘conformism, the assumption that men behave and do not act with respect to each other’ – an assumption embedded in economics and other knowledges of the social that ‘could achieve a scientific character only when men had become social beings and unanimously followed certain patterns of behavior, so that those who did not keep their roles could be considered to be asocial or abnormal.’ The social realm, in short, is a cultural form interwoven with the political form of the administrative state and with the normalizing methodologies of modern social knowledge.xxvii

Key here is Warner’s citation of Arendt’s claim that the social ‘coincided with the emergence of the modern age.” Indeed, the social and modernity are commutative terms. When
Warner argues that the social is “interwoven with the political form of the administrative state and with the normalizing methodologies of modern social knowledge,” we should understand this to mean that the social marks or names the convergence between cultural, technical, and governmental apparatuses of modernity itself – what Foucauldians might term biopolitics or governmentality. Warner offers queerness then, as a name not simply for particular modes of dissension or flight from regimes of heteronormativity, nor simply to designate a particular mode of death-driven, destructive, anti-family resistance to regimes of reproductive futurism, but to name as well the refusal of modernity tout court. “Organizing a movement around queerness,” Warner writes, “also allows it to draw on dissatisfaction with regimes of the normal in general.” Queerness designates, in Warner’s view, an attempt to short circuit the social and therefore to short circuit modernity as such: “can we not hear,” he asks, “in the resonances of queer protest an objection to the normalization of behavior in this broad sense, and then to the cultural phenomenon of societalization?” In this sense, then, antisocial modernism could also be named queer modernism. Or, to play with the name of a leading journal, a modernism against modernity.

Warner’s invocation of the social in Hannah Arendt must operate as a prolegomenon to any future discussion of the antisocial, to the antisocial thesis, and to the particular aesthetic resistance to modernity taking place in antisocial modernism. Indeed, if we are to generate a concept of the antisocial designating more than simply the death-driven, suicidal refusal of the incessant reproduction of bare life, then we should turn to Arendt’s conception of the social in *The Human Condition*. Arendt imagines there a tripartite scheme of three different conditions of human being: the conditions of labor, work, and action.

“This the human condition of labor,” Arendt writes, “is life itself.” Arendt notes that Marx has defined labor as “man’s metabolism with nature”: as labor comprises the cyclical reproduction of life together with the cyclical, incessant consumption of material for life, labor
Even the strictly linear movement of an individual human life “forever retains the cyclical movement of nature” because its “very motion nonetheless is driven by the motor of biological life which man shares with other living things.”

Human being, therefore, in its condition of labor, amounts to no more than the incessant reproduction of bare life; individual human beings amount to no more than vectors for reproducing human life in general. When Michael Shatov declares, as we have seen, that “the biggest thing a race does is that it goes on” and “that the greatest individual is great only as he gives much to the race,” he asserts in these terms the primacy of the human condition of labor. The primacy, that is to say, of bare life.

The human condition of work, by contrast, consists in the production of a durable world to accommodate bare life, securing life against the vicissitudes of nature. Thus, Arendt writes, work “corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence”: in that which pulls human life out of the cycles of nature. Drawing upon a distinction Heidegger makes between the natural earth and the human world, Arendt suggests that “the human condition of work is worldliness”: the fabrication of an artificial, durable human world. Just as the durable human world work creates contrasts with the consumable natural earth enmeshed with labor, so to does the aim of work contrast with that of labor. If the aim of labor is the cyclical reproduction of bare life in accordance with the cyclical metabolism of natural, the aim of work is the ends-directed fabrication of durable objects. According to Arendt, “the actual work of fabrication is performed under the guidance of a model in accordance with which the object is constructed.”

Fabrication, therefore, operates precisely through the teleological positing and achievement of an end already extant in the mind of the fabricator, an end that subordinates everything else into means to an end: “man, insofar as he is homo faber, instrumentalizes, and his instrumentalization implies a degradation of all things into means, the loss of their intrinsic and independent
value."xxxvi The work of fabrication, the work of homo faber, is a dialectical process in which the aim of fabrication – the material realization of a pre-existing model operating as a teleological end – transmutes all things into means, bearing value only insofar as they facilitate achieving an end. Homo faber, the guise of the human condition of work, subordinates the whole earth in order to produce the world and subordinates the whole of human being to the ultimate ends of securing, against the precariousness of living on earth, bare life.

As the human conditions of labor and work ultimately subordinate all human being to the ends of securing the future life of the human race, as labor and work subject singular, individual human being to the dictates of reproductive futurism, reducing the variegated appearance of singular human beings to a single, collective human race, the human condition of action depends precisely upon difference, singularity, what Arendt terms plurality. “Plurality,” she writes, “is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live.”xxxvii If labor and work marked the reduction of all human beings to sameness – to vectors for propagating or means of securing bare life – action marks the restoration of difference insofar as it designates an essential similarity between human beings, paradoxically, in their irreducible difference.

“This plurality,” writes Arendt, “is specifically the condition – not only the conditio sine qua non, but the conditio per quam – of all political life.”xxxviii It is in the aimlessness of political life that Arendt locates the condition of human plurality, a plurality that would accommodate singular human being without reducing it to the procession of the race. For if labor and work – if homo faber – aim monomaniacally at the propagation and security of bare life, transforming all aspects of life into instruments for maintaining bare life, action and politics parry the immutable sameness of bare life with the novelty and difference of political life. In The Human Condition, Arendt describes action as a “miracle,” as if it offered miraculous escape from the regular, predictable aims of labor and work. “Action,” she claims, “would be an unnecessary luxury if
men were endlessly reproducible repetitions of the same model, whose nature or essence was the same for all and as predictable as the nature or essence of any other thing." Unlike labor and unlike work, which achieve the aims of reproducing and securing life while transforming everything, including human beings, into vectors or means, the only aim of action is the disclosure of plurality and difference. Indeed, the possibility of action itself operates as the condition of plurality, difference, and novelty in the world – and this is precisely why action is not “an unnecessary luxury” but a treasured aspect of human being. Action is human being’s very capacity to introduce novelty into the world. Describing action as initiative that introduces novelty, Arendt notes that

the new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and the probability which for all practical everyday purposes amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle. The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable.

As many commentators note, Arendt’s distinction between the human conditions of labor, work, and action corresponds with a distinction between the realms in which they take place: labor and work are essentially private activities and take place only in the private realm, while action is an essentially public activity and can therefore only take place in a public realm. Key, therefore, to Arendt’s argument is that the emergence of modernity itself corresponds with a third realm in which the essentially private concerns of labor and work for maintaining bare life become, to the detriment of action, politics, and political life, public concerns. This third realm, blurring the distinction between public and private, between labor, work, and action, Arendt calls the social. The social marks, in Arendt’s words, “the admission of household and housekeeping activities to the public realm” and exhibits “an irresistible tendency to devour the older realms of the public and the private” as it grows. The social’s “constant growth . . . derives its strength
from the fact that through society it is the life process itself that has been channeled into the public realm. The emergence of the social corresponds precisely with the obtrusion of economics into the public realm, turning politics into a form of collective housekeeping aimed at the maintenance of life rather than the disclosure of individuality, generating otherwise oxymoronic terms like “political economy” (which Arendt claims once “would have been a contradiction in terms”), and prefiguring behavioral sciences like sociology that seek and are able to quantify and predict human activity statistically. The social marks, thus, the emergence of statistically predictable human beings and the dominance of ends-directed human projects: the emergence of *homo economicus* and *homofaber*.

Note the resonance between Arendt’s pejorative description of the social (and its “social sciences”) and Warner’s evocation of queerness to name not simply for non-normative, non-hetero sexualities but also to index all that resists the social’s “regimes of the normal” and “normalization of behavior.” Insofar as Warner invokes “queer politics” as the opposition to the social as such, “queer politics” designates something Arendt would, queerly enough, simply name politics: that which escapes the statistical predictability of behaviorism, introduces novelty to the world, and discloses individuality. Indeed, this convergence between queer politics and Arendtian politics – and between queer theory and political theory – might help answer those of Arendt’s commentators who find the social a confused, confusing concept. Hannah Pitkin, for instance, devotes an entire book to considering the social in Arendt’s work: *Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt’s Concept of the Social*. There Pitkin cites the social’s “irresistible tendency to grow” and compares the social to a B-grade movie monster: “Arendt depicts it as a living, autonomous agent determined to dominate human beings, absorb them, and render them helpless.” Pitkin’s reading of *The Human Condition* focuses precisely on a question queer theory can help answer: viz., what is the connection between behaviorism and regimes of the normal on one side, and the biological imperative to propagate human life on the other, between
the “conformist, or parvenu social and the economic or biological social”? In our terms, what is the connection between Michael Warner’s evocation of queerness as a name opposing the “conformist, or parvenu social” – the field of behaviorism and regimes of the normal – and the antisocial thesis’s evocation of queerness as a “sterile, unproductive, antifamily, and death-driven” opposition to the “economic or biological social”?

The answer, of course, is given in Arendt’s characterization of the social. The social names the emergence of modernity insofar as it also names the convergence between behaviorism and biologism, between homo economicus and homo faber. As homo faber works to make a world hospitable for the reproduction of life and as the work of homo faber produced the social by channeling the life process into the public realm, human capacities for politics and action atrophy such that the statistical laws of behaviorism become true and Homo sapiens becomes homo economicus. Indeed, both homo faber and homo economicus might name what Lee Edelman elsewhere has termed the “Futurch,” the agent of reproductive futurism, a figure of “sense, mastery, and meaning,” who works to ensure the future viability of bare life by ensuring the future of the social. As Edelman opposes the Futurch with the queer – as he opposes the agent of the social with the agent of the antisocial – so we should oppose homo economicus and homo faber with the queer realm of Arendtian politics and action. Action and politics name precisely those aspects of human being that by definition escape the social’s imperative to “sense, mastery, and meaning.” Queerness, the antisocial thesis, the antisocial, and antisocial modernism, mark various refusals of modernity that aim to restore precisely those capacities of human being which modernity has atrophied. This queer convergence, moreover, accounts for the resonance between Arendt’s claim that in the realm of labor and work, in the social, a human being exists “not as a truly human being but only as a specimen of the animal species man-kind” and Miriam Henderson’s otherwise strange declaration to Michael Shatov that “the instincts of
self-preservation and reproduction are *not* the only human motives. They are not human at all.\(\text{xlv}\)

Arendt connects the human capacity for action, for initiative, for introducing novelty into the world, with natality – quite literally the fact of birth itself. In its close connection with labor and work (and therefore with reproductive futurism and the social), Arendt’s concept of natality helps, like *Pilgrimage*, to parry the death-driven, suicidal rhetoric of Lee Edelman’s version of the antisocial thesis, expressed to forcefully and concisely in *No Future*’s incendiary statement “Fuck the Child!” In *The Human Condition*, Arendt explains that

labour and work, as well as action, are also rooted in natality insofar as they have the task to provide and preserve the world for, to foresee and reckon with, the constant influx of newcomers who are born into the world as strangers. However, of the three, action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting.\(\text{xlvii}\)

Though the social occludes action, novelty, and singular human being insofar as it channels bare life – the concern of labor and work – into the space of politics, the antisocial need not thereby amount to the refusal of life tout court. Indeed, if we might imagine the social, the occlusion of action by labor and work, as the reduction of natality simply to birth, we might imagine the antisocial not as the cessation of life but as instead the restoration of natality. The social makes the novelty of action increasingly impossible and thereby disconnects birth from action. As a consequence, the incessant propagation of human life no longer heralds the miraculous introduction of novelty and difference into the world but only the reproduction of the same. The antisocial therefore could mark the reconnection of birth to action and the restoration of natality and not some death driven repudiation of life.
A corollary to this point is that in the social the rare deeds Arendt cites as examples of action disclosing difference, novelty, and singularity succumb to an incessant doing propagating only sameness. Just as the perpetual reproduction of bare life in the social destroys natality’s connection with action, so too does the social’s incessant doing efface action’s deeds. And it is here that we should return to Pilgrimage. In Honeycomb, the third chapter-novel in the series, Miriam Henderson considers a distinction between “feminine worldliness” and “masculine worldliness”:

that was feminine worldliness, pretending to be interested so that pleasant things might go on. Masculine worldliness was refusing to be interested so that it might go on doing things. Feminine worldliness then meant perpetual hard work and cheating and pretence at the door of a hidden garden, a lovely hidden garden. Masculine worldliness meant never really being there; always talking about things that had happened or making plans for things that might happen. There was nothing that could happen that was not in some way the same as anything else. Nobody was ever quite there, realizing.

Focalized through Miriam and given by an external narrator, this paragraph takes place at the end of a long consideration of the difference between “worldly life” and something Miriam imagines beyond it. Earlier in the long passage of third-person narration leading into the passage I have just cited – a passage that closes chapter three of Honeycomb – Miriam asks “what is worldly life?” Her answer imagines worldly life as exemplified by the banal everyday world of social convention. Immediately following the question, Miriam imagines conventionalized scenes of lunch, tea, and dinner. She envisions “the gay bright shimmering lunch, the many guests, the glitter of the table, mayonnaise red and green and yellow, delicate bright wines; strolling in the garden in the afternoon.” She pictures “tea, everyone telling anecdotes of the afternoon’s walk as if it were a sort of competition, great bursts of laughter and abrupt silences and then another story.” She describes dinner: “dinner was the noise and laughter of teatime
grown steadier, a pillow fight with harder whacks and more time for the strokes, no bitterness, just buffeting and shouts, and everyone laughing the same laugh, as if they were all in some high secret.\textsuperscript{113} This description imagines the afternoon as a continuous social convention whose force intensifies as it proceeds. Lunch leads to afternoon strolls; afternoon strolls lead to stories and laughter at tea; the idle talk of tea becomes the idle talk of dinner, more forceful and insistent; this idle talk unites everyone “in some high secret” until everyone laughs the same laugh, unanimously. “There were all in some high secret,” Miriam thinks, “the great secret of worldly life; and if you prevented yourself from thinking and laughed, they seemed to take you in. That was the way to live the worldly life. To talk absurdly and laugh; to be lost in laughter.”\textsuperscript{113}

Worldly life, therefore, is a queerly public secret. Known to all in its force and manifestations, its secret is that it occludes, through the insistence of social convention, something beyond. As long as idle talk and laughter go on, people are united in a single community, “everyone laughing the same laugh.” As long as idle talk goes on, that is to say, it is possible to forget the antisocial, arelational beyond of social convention. “But when the laughter ceased,” Miriam notes, “everyone ran away and the rest of their day showed in a flash, an awful tunnel that would be filled with the echo of the separate footsteps unless more laughter could be made, to hide the sad helpless sounds.”\textsuperscript{113} In other words, it is precisely laughter that maintains sociality and relationality as such. As laughter stops, human beings are atomized, consigned to some antisocial or arelational space, imaged as “an awful tunnel” filled only with the “echo of the separate footsteps.” Laughter functions to drown out the report of “separate footsteps,” of separation or arelationality, just as Heideggerian idle talk drowns out some more authentic form of communication. Indeed, in this passage, laughter is idle talk insofar as both occlude some direct encounter with being, figured throughout \textit{Pilgrimage} as something entirely arelational – something beyond worldly life, something antisocial.
Earlier in chapter three of *Honeycomb*, Miriam imagines the momentary disclosures of something beyond worldly life that take place in church. Although parishioners experience these disclosures only momentarily – and thus know the beyond only fleetingly – “priests and nuns know it all the time; even when they are unhappy; that is why they can care for dying people and lepers; they see something else all the time. Nothing common or unclean. That is why Christ had blazing eyes.” This “something else” seen beyond the quotidian is not only structurally equivalent to the “awful tunnel” Miriam imagines opens once the quotidian ceases. Indeed, the “something else” and the “awful tunnel” are two modes of experiencing being: holiness and horror, respectively. If the “blazing eyes” of Christ mark the direct experience of being as such, the “sad helpless sounds” and “the echo of separate footsteps” denote some oblique, mediated encounter – a looking awry on being that isn’t actually looking but instead merely hearing the reverberation of solitary steps. Akin to some Platonic gallows, the lay experience of being as simply the falling away of laughter, of emptiness and isolation, suggests that that which is outside social convention (outside the incessant doing of the social) can only be experienced as a sort of social death. On the other hand, the holy experience of being (seeing, with blazing eyes, something else all the time) offers an alternative to thinking being not as the falling away of something, as total lack and social death, but instead as a sort of supplementary fullness or perfection that redeems social life. While the lay experience of being as antisocial conceives of disentanglement from social convention as an absolute horror, the holy experience of being as antisocial conceives of this realm apart as absolute joy. While lay experience conceives of being as antisocial only in the sense that it negates social connection, holy experience conceives of being as antisocial in the sense that it negates that which negates or occludes being. Posing the distinction in such terms enables us to break the deadlock between Lukácsian and Heideggerian conceptions of social being.
In Arendtian terms, while the rare deeds of action disclose singular being, the social’s incessant doing wholly occludes not only singular being but also makes deeds impossible. For in the social’s incessant doing, actions deeds can no longer be distinguished from ends-directed doing and deeds therefore effectively lose their capacity to disclose being, as they are swallowed up by the social. What is lost, then, is not merely the capacity to act but access to some mode of being beyond the social. All deeds, that is to say, become doing; all action becomes social. The antisocial, therefore, need not signal some force of will to action – and in fact cannot, since the will to action is already merely an aspect of the social – but instead some activity that grants access to being. In the passages in which Miriam contrasts “masculine worldliness” and “feminine worldliness,” masculine worldliness corresponds precisely to social doing: “masculine worldliness was refusing to be interested so that it might go on doing things…. Masculine worldliness meant never really being there; always talking about things that had happened or making plans for things that might happen.” Masculine worldliness – one manifestation of worldly life – therefore operates by refusing to attend to the state of the present, refusing to be inter esse, among being, in order to compel ceaseless events in the future. Refusing attention to the state of the present, “never really being there,” means always only accounting for past and future events. Masculine worldliness’s quality of “always talking about things that had happened or making plans for things that might happen” indicates in its conjunction the close affinity between homo faber and what we might call homo fabulans. For if, as we have seen, homo faber works to plan for events in the future, homo fabulans – the human being in its capacity as storyteller – uses narrative to account for events that have happened in the past. Both modes of attending to events ignore the existence of the present and thus refuse being. “Nobody was ever quite there,” in the present; incessant happenings mean only that “there was nothing that could happen that was not in some way the same as anything else.”
Conversely, “feminine worldliness” entails feigning interest “so that things might go on.” When Miriam notes that “feminine worldliness thus meant perpetual hard work and cheating and pretenses at the door of a hidden garden, a lovely hidden garden,” she invokes Pilgrimage’s central image of being: the reiterated memory of a garden experienced in Miriam’s childhood. In Experimenting on the Borders of Modernism, Kristin Bluemel notes that this memory “is recalled through language but exists as a return in consciousness to experience before speech.” In Lacanian terms, this memory, then, may exist in the imaginary: as a sense of fullness prior to the symbolic convention of language and its deep interconnection with the social. In other words, this garden memory operates as the presocial, asocial, or antisocial beyond of language. And it is precisely as a result of Miriam’s attempts to evoke this memory in connection with others that constitute the novel’s efforts to conceive a different form of the social, an antisocial community akin to that implied in Luce Irigaray’s discussion of Hegel in “The Eternal Irony of the Community.”

What distinguishes “masculine worldliness” and “feminine worldliness”, therefore, is that while the former engages in ceaseless doing in order to evade being, propagating social convention in order to avoid an encounter with being, the latter employs social convention tactically in order to encounter being directly. While masculine worldliness always heralds past and future events, evading present existence, feminine worldliness leads to stasis and presence. While masculine worldliness merely propagates the social, feminine worldliness is intrinsically antisocial insofar as it leads back to singular being, outside of any relation with others. And just as masculine worldliness corresponds both to homo faber – in its ends-directed projection of plans into the future – and to homo fabulans – in its retrospective, narrative accounting of events, feminine worldliness corresponds to the quelling of both the social and of narrative. In other words, feminine worldliness is here both antisocial and antinarrative insofar as it brings past and future events to a halt in order to realize present existence. Indeed, the technical experiment of
Pilgrimage is to enact this antisocial antinarrative by inverting the relative proportion of events and existents, events and states. It is Pilgrimage’s technical refusal of events in favor of existences that produces in readers a feeling that, despite its historical breadth and scope, nothing really happens in the novel. Wholly subordinating events to existents, Pilgrimage inverts narrative into antinarrative. In other words, as Pilgrimage evacuates the events – transformations from one state to another – that serve as the conditio sine qua non of narrative, the novel enacts in its deep attention to existents a version of feminine worldliness through antinarrative. And through antinarrative, imagines aesthetically an alternative to the social.

In narratological terms, an event is minimally defined as a dynamic transformation from one state to another. Existents, conversely, can be defined as the static elements of a scene in which events take place. Gerald Prince’s A Dictionary of Narratology defines an event as “a change of state manifested in discourse by a statement in the mode of Do or Happen.” In other words, events appear in narrative texts through statements expressing doings either performed or experienced by actors. On the other hand, Prince’s Dictionary defines existents as static entities furnishing narratives: an existent is “an actor or an item of setting,” and also, I contend, settings, scenes, or states themselves. So for instance when Prince notes that states are designated by “stasis statements,” his given definition of stasis statements implies that states and existents differ only in scale and not qualitatively: a “stasis statement” is “a narrative statement in the mode of is, one presenting a state and more specifically establishing the existence of entities by identifying them or qualifying them.” As stasis statements index states precisely by indexing existents, so too do existents, as static entities, constitute states in miniature. Existents and states, naming the same stasis, are synonyms.

In the earlier monograph Narratology, Prince collapses the distinction between events and existents – between doing and being – into a single term. There, Prince argues that events can be either active or stative. While active events mark the dynamic transformation from one state to
another, stative events constitute the maintenance of a single state. Terminologically, this represents merely a vicissitude of naming (much as different narratologists – Mieke Bal and Seymour Chatman, for example – designate different things by the term “story”) inasmuch as the distinction between events and existents still operates in the distinction between active and stative events. Philosophically, however, the conjunction of events and existents in a single term marks the deep interconnection between apparent opposites we find in something like Kenneth Burke’s version of the dialectic. So, for example, the distinction between active and static events retains in some sense a primordial indistinction that may be forgotten in the apparently stark distinction between events and existents. Indeed, in A Grammar of Motives, Burke distinguishes between “actus” and “status” while retaining the sense of their basic interconnection. Burke envisions one way of conceiving the distinction between act and state “whereby status is considered as potentiality and actus as its actualization. That is, in a state there are implicit possibilities and in action those possibilities are made explicit.” Thus, when Burke explains that “in the medieval frame, the primary act, the act of God, is to be,” we can understand this not as a simple contradiction in terms – viz., that God’s primary doing is being – but as a paradox highlighting a primordial indistinction between doing and being.

Nonetheless, in the passage from Honeycomb we have just read, we have seen Miriam describe “worldly life” or “masculine worldliness” as an ignorance or refusal of the primordial indistinction between doing and being and the intensification of doing at the expense of being – in Heideggerian terms, the forgetting of being. In other words, if masculine worldliness entails relentless accounting of past and future events and unceasing inattention to present states or existents, then it entails also a ceaseless procession of doing and a ceaseless refusal of being. If, as Prince suggests, “narrative is the representation of one or more changes in state,” if narrative is minimally defined by the occurrence of one or more events, then masculine worldliness’s incessant consideration of events designates the logic of narrative at precisely the same time as it
designates the logic of the social. Two points should be made in this regard: first, this implies that the social itself is narrative, that *homo faber* is *homo fabulans*. Second, that antinarrative is antisocial: that the quelling of events is, in a way akin to the way we saw Miriam’s death-driven Teetgan’s Teas monologue stop events and refuse the social, the eruption of the antisocial. If, as Prince argues, narratives derive their feelings of dynamism or stasis from their relative proportions of events and existents – such that a narrative in which events predominate will feel more dynamic than one in which existents predominate – the near absolute predominance of existents and states in *Pilgrimage* pushes the novel toward some vanishing point at which a quantitative predominance of existents becomes a qualitative metamorphosis of narrative into antinarrative. At this point of sublation or phase transformation, doing cedes to being and the social cedes to the antisocial.

Here we should remark that this antinarrative supersession of doing by being, of events by existents, is by no means peculiar only to *Pilgrimage*, even if the novel’s relentless sense of inaction presents an extreme instance of modernist antinarrative. Describing modernist narrative experiments in the second lecture of *Narration*, Gertrude Stein notes that although prose narrative traditionally has presented the succession of events, while lyric poetry presented intensive (often psychic) states, in the modernist period narrative evinces a supersession of successive events by existents or states. “As narrative has mostly been written,” Stein remarks, “it is dependent upon things succeeding upon a thing having a beginning and a middle and an ending.” Lyric poetry, conversely, “was a calling an intensive calling upon the name of anything” and “as it has been that thing as it has been a calling upon a name instead of a succession of internal balancing as prose has been then naturally at this time all the time the long time after the Elizabethans poetry and prose has not been the same thing no not been at all.” In other words, what has distinguished poetry from prose in the past was that while poetry operated as the “intensive” naming of a single state, prose narrative has presented the succession of events, of changes of
state, in the mode of a beginning, a middle, and ending – a plot. In our terms, we can say that while lyric poetry(5,12),(995,992) enacted an intensive encounter with being, prose narrative accounts for doing. Or, that as prose narrative was intrinsically social insofar as it depended upon doing, lyric poetry was intrinsically antisocial insofar as it represented the singular encounter with being.

One of Stein’s most striking examples of prose narrative is the newspaper. Explaining that “narrative concerns itself with what is happening all the time,” Stein remarks (in the third lecture in *Narration*) that “

the newspaper reader wants to read the newspaper every day because he wants the idea of happenings happening every day and if there is a day without the happening of that day which is really the happening of the day before then the newspaper reader feels that it is like the sun standing still or any abnormal thing there is a day and nothing has happenend on that day. lxiii

Let us note here the strangeness of Stein’s phrasing. As the newspaper indexes the procession of happenings or events, the reader reads the newspaper to maintain the sense that events are always happening, that there has been no cessation of events. To miss the newspaper, even for a day, is to lose the normal sense that events are always happening, to feel that they have ceased. Key here is Stein’s remark that what the newspaper records “is really the happening of the day before” and not the happening of the present day. The newspaper offers a retrospective, narrative summing up of events: a provisional totalization of knowledge of events. That is to say that although there are always likely more events or happenings yet to come, the newspaper’s prose narrative offers a provisional, dialectical summation or totalization of events from the past. This totalization offers readers the comfort that the world operates normally, that events will keep happening. If a day passes without the plotting of yesterday’s events, “then the newspaper reader feels that it is like the sun standing still or any abnormal thing.” A day passing without the retrospective plotting of events is like the sun standing still – it is as if something had gone horribly wrong with the cycle
of life of earth, as if the very rotation and revolution of earth had stopped. Strikingly, therefore, Stein renders narrative emplotment and succession equivalent with the cyclical maintenance of life we have seen characterizing both Arendt’s version of the human condition of labor and Michael Shatov’s celebration, in Pilgrimage, of the maintenance of the life of the human race. The cessation of events, an “abnormal thing,” evokes the cessation of life. In this sense, then, Stein presents antinarrative as queer.

Although Stein gives the newspaper as a current example of prose narrative, she describes her own work as antinarrative insofar as it denies or escapes the narrative succession of beginning, middle, and ending: “the Making of Americans,” she notes, “was an effort to escape from the thing to escape from the inevitable feeling that a thing that every thing had meaning as beginning and middle and ending.” As a rationale, perhaps, for such antinarrative impulses, Stein recalls the impressive sight of American soldiers standing around in France during World War 1. “It is a much more impressive thing to any one to see any one standing, that is not in action than acting or doing anything doing anything being a successive thing, standing not being a successive thing but being something existing. That is then the difference between narrative as it has been and narrative as it is now.” It is Pilgrimage’s relentless attention to “present existence: the ultimate astonisher” instead of past and future events that draws its affinity not only with Stein’s description of antinarrative as the thwarting of succession and of endings, but also with versions of modernist narrative that become antinarrative insofar as they enact in narrative form the intensive encounter with being characteristic of lyric poetry. In this sense, then, to track the eruption of lyric modes into modernist narratives would be to track antisocial experiments in narrative.

Indeed, the problem of narrative ending has marked one of the most contentious points over Pilgrimage’s form and function. Although the novel comprises thirteen volumes, or chapter-novels, and concludes with what could be (and has been) construed as an ending – March
Moonlight, a chapter-novel that describes Miriam’s becoming a writer as surely as Time Regained describes Marcel’s similar avocation – in fact the final chapter-novel is merely a fragment and biographers report that Richardson had planned subsequent volumes. In other words, unlike other modernist masterworks like Ulysses or The Waves (though like, perhaps, Kafka’s novels or even, arguably, A la recherche du temps perdu) and unlike subsequent series-novels like Doris Lessing’s Children of Violence or C.P. Snow’s Strangers and Brothers, Pilgrimage literally has no ending. In Experimenting on the Borders of Modernism, Kristin Bluemel catalogues critical responses to Pilgrimage’s aborted ending. Gloria Fromm, for instance, argues that we should not regard March Moonlight as the ending of the novel because by 1946 Richardson herself “could no longer take this fragment seriously.” Rachel Blau Duplessis places Pilgrimage among a group of twentieth-century women’s narratives that refuse conventional narrative closure as a feminist tactic. Elaine Showalter argues, in A Literature of Their Own, that Pilgrimage’s aborted ending indexes a fear on Richardson’s part of the end of life: “as Richardson grew older, her relationship to Pilgrimage became more obviously possessive and anxious. The book was an extension of herself; to complete it was to die.” Joanne Winning’s monograph, The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson, detects in the fragmentary, aborted ending of March Moonlight an attempt by Richardson to work out the deadlock between lesbian desire and heteronormative social codes. In a manner akin to other practitioners of what Winning terms “lesbian modernism” – Woolf, Stein, H.D., Djuna Barnes, to name a few – Richardson makes experiments in literary form to herald experimental modes of life. Bluemel’s own reading of the aborted ending is that it highlights, even if accidentally, the problem of endings in general in the novel. “Endings as such,” Bluemel remarks, “become impossible in Pilgrimage as the form and meaning of beginnings and endings prove to be interchangeable.”
Indeed Bluemel advocates a strategy of reading *Pilgrimage* that “assumes that the novel not only encourages but actually instructs its readers to violate conventional codes of reading by abandoning their desires for narrative beginnings, middles, and ends.”[lxxi] After tracking the overall stasis of Richardson’s short stories (collected in *Journey to Paradise*), Bluemel suggests that one lesson of *Pilgrimage* is that “the meaning of reading itself arises from and returns to the means and middle, rather than the ends, of narrative.”[lxxii] In other words, it is precisely the middle between the beginning and ends, between past and future, that bears *Pilgrimage*’s encounter with singular being. Though narrative and reproductive futurism seek to remove meaning or being from the present, directing it to some end or enfolding it in a deterministic causal chain, Richardson’s antisocial antinarrative derives its force precisely from its attention to present existence between past and future, to a present that negates reproductive futurism.

**III.**

Bluemel’s argument that *Pilgrimage* violates traditional modes of narrative and traditional practices of reading precisely through its attention to “middles” rather than to beginnings or endings echoes, in a sense, Stein’s declaration that modernist forms of narrative – such as *The Making of Americans* – are efforts “to escape from the inevitable feeling that every thing had meaning as beginning and middle and ending.” Indeed, this general convergence between Stein’s dictum about modernist antinarrative and Bluemel’s reading of *Pilgrimage* as antinarrative helps to explain another otherwise strange convergence between Stein’s work and *Pilgrimage*: viz., that both evince relentless attention to descriptions of objects and rooms, to what we have called existents and states, to what some contemporary critics call things. Just as, for instance, Stein’s *Tender Buttons* presents a barely classifiable antinarrative account of objects, food, and rooms, so too does *Pilgrimage* often read like a catalogue of the various objects and
rooms, existents and states Miriam encounters. For example, in chapter two of *Interim* (the fifth chapter-novel of the series, whose very title designates the suspended state between events its prose enacts aesthetically), readers encounter this description of Miriam’s experience of the drawing-room at Mrs. Bailey’s boarding house at Tansley Street, where Miriam had rented a room:

She crept downstairs through the silent empty house, pausing at the open drawing-room door to listen to the faint far-away subterranean sounds coming from the kitchen. All the furniture seemed to be waiting for someone or something. That was a console table. She must have noticed the jar on it as she came into the room, or somewhere else, it looked so familiar. In the narrow strip of mirror that ran from the table high up the wall between the two French windows stood the heavy self-conscious reflection of the elegant jug. It was elegant and complete; the heavy, minutely moulded flowers and leaves festooned about its tapering curves did not destroy its elegance. It stood out alone and complete against the reflected strip of shabby room. Extraordinary. Where had it come from? It was an imitation of something. A reflection of some other life. Had it ever been seen by anybody who knew the kind of life it was meant to be surrounded by?]

Similarly, in chapter ten of *Honeycomb*, readers encounter Miriam’s experience of the drawing-room at her family’s villa, into which the Hendersons had moved during Miriam’s term as a governess with the Corries. Having described Miriam watching a group of people outside through the window, the narrator states

She hid herself from view. The room closed round her. She could not sit down on one of the new chairs. The room was too full. Things were speaking to her. Their challenge had sent her to the window when she came into the room. It had made her feel like a trespasser. Now she was caught. She stood breathing in curious odours; faint odours of new wood and fresh upholstery, and the strange strong subdued emanation coming from
the black grand piano, a mingling of the smell of aromatic wood with the hard raw bitter
tang of metal and the muffled wooly pungency of new felting. …

The walls swept up, dimly striped with rose and green, the green misty and
changeeful, glossy or dull as you moved. And on the widest spaced wall, dreadful
presences . . . two long narrow dark-framed pictures, safe and far-off and dreamy in shop
windows, but now, shut in here, suddenly full of sad heavy dreadful meaning. A girl,
listening to the words she had waited for, not seeing the youth who is gazing at her, not
even thinking of him, but seeing suddenly everything opening far far away, and leaving
him, going on alone, to things he will never see, joining the lovely women of the past,
feeling her old self still there, wanting every one to know that she was still there, and cut
off, for ever. There was something ahead but she could not take him with her. He would
see it now and again, in her face, but would never understand. And the other picture; the
girl grown into a woman; just married, her face veiled forever, her eyes closed; sinking
into the tide, his strong frame near her the only reality; blindly trying to get back to him
across the tide of separation.  

Similar descriptions of encounters with objects, with existents and states, appear
throughout Pilgrimage, always with the same implication of granting access to some realm
beyond the social, some being beyond social being. As in the first passage I have cited, from
Interim, such encounters invariably herald some other mode of life, some antisocial modus
vivendi: “a reflection of some other life.” Indeed, that passage presents such encounters by
Miriam as experiences of uncanny familiarity – encounters with alternate modes of life
simultaneously both familiar and strange. The jar, for instance, that reflects “some other life” is
felt by Miriam not merely as the irruption of an utterly novel experience but as the provocation of
a familiar but forgotten memory: she must have noticed the jar before, the narrator explains, “it
looked so familiar.” The jar, the table, and all the things in the room seem primarily to serve the
same function of waiting to solicit this uncanny feeling. When the narrator notes that “all the furniture seemed to be waiting for someone or something,” it implies that these things, like the jar, operate as standing provocations for those capable of attending to them: that they operate precisely as standing reserves of solicitation, states holding the potential for provoking and seizing someone’s attention. That Miriam wonders, the narrator reports, whether the jar had “ever been seen by anybody who knew the kind of life it was to be surrounded by?” implies that the jar’s proper surroundings are not this mode of life but instead some other mode, more attuned with the state it reflects. Furthermore, Miriam’s question suggests that not everyone shares the capacity of attention demanded by the jar and the other things in the room, or that these things’ capacities for seizing attention work on Miriam but not necessarily on everyone else. As we saw in the contrast between masculine worldliness and feminine worldliness – between the masculine encounter with the world and the feminine encounter with the world – only a certain mode of experiencing things can fully accede to their solicitude. Thus, though they seem “to be waiting for something or someone,” we should note that these things aren’t therefore waiting for everyone. Indeed, that this drawing-room – site of moments of social encounter between human beings akin to those we saw described in terms of conventional lunches, teas, and dinners – can only disclose its solicitation of Miriam when the boarding-house is “silent [and] empty” reprises the trope that this “other life” can only be encountered in moments when talk and social relation itself have fallen away. To put this another way, silence and solitude are in some sense necessary preconditions for things to extend the full force of their claim upon someone’s attention; laughter, idle talk, and social relation occlude the claim upon attention and must become, at minimum, “faint far-away subterranean sounds.” When Miriam wonders whether anybody had ever seen the jar as she had, her question is, in part, a question about whether the jar (and the other things in the room) had ever exercised the full force of its solicitation.
But Miriam’s question is also a question about taste, about whether anyone who encountered the jar had had the capacity to experience its solicitude, to grant it the depth and quality of attention it demands. Describing the reflection of the jar in a mirror, the narrator notes that it “was elegant and complete; the heavy, minutely moulded flowers and leaves festooned about its tapering curves did not destroy its elegance. It stood out alone and complete against the reflected strip of shabby room.” The description defines the jar’s beauty by contrasting it in two ways: from the shabby drawing-room and from the meretricious engravings, both of which might mar its beauty. Of the latter, we are to infer that these complicated embellishments, these “minutely moulded flowers and leaves festooned about its tapering curves,” aren’t simply extraneous to the jar’s elegance but actually threaten to “destroy its elegance.” Added, doubtless, as a decorative supplement intended to heighten the jar’s beauty, the “flowers and leaves” engraved as if in a garland about the jar’s “tapering curves” literally represent nature. Imitating flowers and leaves, these decorative embellishments imitate, therefore, a cyclical mode of life akin to the reproductive futurism propounded by Michael Shatov. Against such ornaments, the narrator reports that Miriam imagines the jar’s true beauty to issue from the fact that it stood “elegant and complete,” from its capacity to stand “out alone and complete” from the festoons and shabby room. The jar’s beauty, in other words, issues from its capacity to maintain its intrinsic elegance, its simple essence, even in confrontation with the extrinsic complication of the “heavy” engravings and shabby surroundings. Confronted by such extrinsic challenges, the jar protects and maintains some simple unalloyed essence of being.

When the narrator reports Miriam’s thought that the jar bears “a reflection of some other kind of life,” we are to understand this other kind of life as a contrast with the bare life represented by the tawdry engravings and also with the social life of the shabby drawing-room. This other mode of life is a mode of life unencumbered by the cyclical imperatives of reproductive futurism and by the social impositions of the drawing-room, offering instead the
possibility – in its very aesthetic form – for the simple disclosure of singular being. Moreover, when Miriam wonders whether the jar has “ever been seen by anybody who knew the kind of life it was meant to be surrounded by,” she asks a question about taste: viz., has anyone ever had refined enough taste to experience the full claim of the jar upon attention? Has anyone ever been capable of being seized by the full extent of the jar’s ethical demand on attention? Although to present the response to singular being here as a question of taste seems to imply some community of human beings sharing in common the capacity to respond to the jar – some sensus communis or shared sense of taste and singular being – the fact that the implied answer to Miriam’s question is “no” suggests that this community remains heretofore (and perhaps always) merely virtual, that human beings capable of such ethical response are woefully, terrifyingly few. When the narrator suggests that the jar and all the things in the room “seemed to be waiting for someone or something,” the implication is that the “something” things await is precisely taste, that the “someone” these things await is someone with the taste to suffer their disclosures of being, and that therefore the “other life,” the other “kind of life,” these things are meant to be surrounded by is the life of a human community capable of ethical responsiveness to being: a virtual community with a shared sense of being, an antisocial community yet to come. This virtual community or sensus communis seems not an ethical capacity to be developed in the future but instead a reversion to some properly ante-social capacity lost in the social, something uncannily familiar.

The passage I have cited from Honeycomb also juxtaposes things’ solicitation of some other realm beyond the social and the social relation, that wholly occludes access to this beyond as in the passage from Interim. This passage begins with Miriam alone in a room and results in things in the room communicating with her. Here, however, the insistent force of things seems more intense. Though things in Mrs. Bailey’s drawing-room “seemed to be lying in wait” to communicate, in Miriam’s family’s drawing-room, “things were speaking to her.” In other words, in this passage, things don’t merely stand in potential as provocations but instead actively
provoke or “challenge” Miriam, in ways akin to the challenges leveled by furniture and other things in Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Death of the Heart*. So, for instance, as Miriam moves away from the window to hide “herself from view” of those outside, the narrator transforms the state and its existents – the room and its things – into an actor, endowing it with capacity to act by presenting it as the subject of several process statements describing actions. “The room closed round her,” “things were speaking to her,” “their challenge had sent her to the window,” the narrator notes. In each formulation, it is existents and the state they comprise which bear the force of activity while Miriam concurrently becomes wholly subject to such force, wholly neutralizing her own capacity for action: “now she was caught.” In manner akin to the insistent force drawing her to Teetgan’s Teas, here Miriam is compelled by a force beyond her will to suffer the drawing-room. Here this force becomes an insistent presence impinging itself upon Miriam. When the narrator notes that in Miriam’s encounter with it, “the room was too full,” it implies that this full presence renders Miriam herself an unnecessary interloper – as if there is no proper place for her there, such that there is not even a place for her to sit, such that the room itself had sent her, centrifugally, toward its outside (“to the window”) and that thereby Miriam feels “like a trespasser.”

This compulsion, this expulsion, relents only when Miriam incorporates aspects of the room into herself, inhaling its scents. The final sentence of the first paragraph catalogues the sundry “curious odours” Miriam “stood breathing in”: “the faint odours of new wood and fresh upholstery,” “the strange strong subdued emanation coming from the black grand piano.” Seized by the force of the room, Miriam literally incorporates aspects of its things into her very being; having had her agency neutralized by the state of the room, Miriam commingles with the state’s existents. In this sense, far more radically than Gerald Prince’s taxonomy of existents as things and characters, here a character intermixes with things. As the distinction blurs between
phomena capable of doing (of producing events) and those capable “merely” of being, being and doing telescope back towards a primordial zone of indistinction.

Following upon this reversion towards indistinction between things and actors, between being and doing, the narrator describes Miriam’s encounter with two paintings, “dreadful presences” in the room, that would have been “safe and far-off and dreamy in shop windows” but are, in the situation of Miriam’s encounter with the room, “suddenly full of sad heavy dreadful meaning.” Elsewhere, in “shop windows,” the presence and force of these paintings would have been neutralized – they would have been “safe and far-off” and this distance would have quelled their threatening presence, rendered them merely fantastic, “dreamy.” Enclosed in the drawing-room, however, these paintings become “full of sad heavy dreadful meaning,” bearing a terrifying, sublime, onerous force. Indeed, it is in part the very eclipse of distance that charges the paintings with such force, as if the collocation of the paintings with the things in the room compounded with their immediacy there deprived the encounter of some necessary frame that would neutralize dreadfulness. If the shop Miriam imagines mediates their force, here in her family’s drawing room, these paintings can place some immediate claim upon Miriam’s being. If the social neutralizes access to being, here in the empty drawing room (in which all social conventions have fallen away), such being discloses itself with radically insistent force.

We would be amiss, however, not to note that these paintings, “dreadful presences,” offer two contrasting stories – stories which generate their “dreadful meaning.” The first painting presents the story of a girl, “listening for words she had waited for,” who ignores the solicitous social gaze of a young man – indeed, ignores his presence altogether – and looks instead at some distant irruption: “seeing suddenly everything opening far far away.” In the painting’s narrative, the girl then leaves the young man altogether and enters, “alone,” a realm of “things he will never see.” In this realm beyond the quotidian, the girl encounters not only “the lovely women of the past” – who are implied therefore to maintain a kind of access to this beyond which we had
already seen named “feminine worldliness” – but also “her old self,” some primordial version of herself who also would have retained access to this realm. Encountering the women of the past and her primordial self, the girl wants all these women “to know that she was still there”: that she had remained in part in this realm beyond the social, “cut off, for ever,” from the social in some essential aspect of her being. As part of her self had retained access to this realm beyond, that part of herself had remained always “cut off” from social relation, such that even though she encounters this essential self again in the beyond, to approach it is necessarily to leave the young man behind. “He would see it not and again, in her face,” the narrator explains, “but he would never understand.” This story, then, is a story about the contradiction between access to a realm of being beyond social relation, on one side, and the social relation which can never share access to being as such, on the other.

Although the story begins with the girl “listening to the words she had waited for” – words of love, we may surmise, uttered by the young man – a vision of the ante- or antisocial realm of being emerges precisely as these words are spoken and figures of vision thence predominate in the story. As the young man looks at the girl, a gaze concomitant and consubstantial with his words of love, the girl does not reciprocate his gaze but instead gazes toward her vision of being, forgetting him. Even as the young man would continue to gaze at her in their subsequent life, her gaze would remain always fixed upon this “something ahead” and he would only ever catch brief glimpses of the other realm, through its reflection “now and again, in her face.” In a story entirely about the impossibility of some shared relationship to being between the young man and the girl, therefore, it is precisely the fact that the pair can never share the same vision of being that offers the central image of the contradiction between romantic, heterosexual social relation and the antisocial relation to being.

Vision, too, dominates the second painting’s story. There, the girl has grown and has married the man. As this fruition of his words of love recalls her from the realm beyond into
married life, as the other reality gives way to his bodily presence – “his strong frame near her the only reality” now – the narrator repeatedly deploys images of occluded vision to emblematize her entrance into married life. Married life means “her face veiled forever, her eyes closed”; returning to quotidian social life from the realm beyond means “blindly trying to get back to him.” If the first painting presented shared vision of being as stricto sensu impossible, this second painting presents the sharing of married life as the sharing of an impossibility of vision of being. In our terms, married life, cynosure of reproductive futurism, a prospect so horrific for Miriam that she would prefer to commit suicide than to suffer it, is utterly inimical to a sense of being and utterly incompatible with a vision of a realm beyond the social. As in other passages we have read, the social’s focus on the reproduction of bare life absolutely contradicts antisocial attendance to singular being.

In its descriptions of the two paintings in an empty drawing room, Pilgrimage presents two apparently contrasting and properly narrative accounts of marriage’s social threat to singularity and individuality. The stories about marriage these existents evoke demonstrate quite precisely the antagonism and contradiction between marriage and singular being, between reproductive futurism in the social and antisocial forms of life. This contradiction emerges most starkly in the narrator’s description of the second painting, in which marriage effectively blinds the woman’s vision of singular being insofar as it entails the woman’s face to be “veiled,” forces “her eyes closed forever,” and ends with her deprived of that which grounds her own singularity, “blindly” groping her way back toward a husband who has supplanted all other forms of relation. Marriage, in this story, ends by contradicting and occluding all other forms of relation except the marriage relation. Conversely, in the story presented in the description of the first painting, the narrator figures access to some other kind of relation. Though the young man speaks words of love, these words fail their performative function of establishing a marriage relation because at the moment of their utterance, the girl’s vision focuses on some form of virtual (and perhaps
cosmopolitan) relation that operates by detaching from the social in order to establish a form of higher order attachment. The girl is both “still there” and also “cut off forever” from her immediate relation with the young man; she sees “things he will never see.”

In my reading of the passage describing the jar in *Interim*, I remarked that the jar solicits an aesthetic taste that would ignore the meretricious images of reproduction embellishing its exterior in order to attend to the other “kind of life” its form evokes. I suggested moreover, that such solicitation of taste solicits, in fact, a human community in which aesthetics supplants the social imperative of reproductive futurism insofar as the jar seems to be lying in wait for the responsiveness of people capable of attending to it. If the jar hails therefore some kind of *sensus communis* as an instance of an antisocial community in which aesthetics supplants reproduction, then *Honeycomb*’s descriptions of the two painting tell stories about the antagonism between this antisocial form of relation and the social relation of marriage.

In this contradiction, *Pilgrimage* figures marriage and reproduction as the end of such antisocial relations to aesthetics – as putting an end to singular forms of relation not subordinate to the social. Indeed, when the narrator remarks of the second painting that in it the woman is “blindly trying to get back to him across the tide of separation,” this statement figures the social relation of marriages as a form of attachment that depends upon detachment from all other forms of relation. The descriptions of the paintings form, in fact, a single narrative: the first painting represents an earlier, intermediate moment in a narrative that ends in marriage; concurrently, the second painting figures marriage as an ending that occludes both access to some form of singular being and the antisocial forms of relation figured in the first. These descriptions tell a story in which marriage itself puts an end to a responsiveness to being available at some earlier, intermediate moment, some interim, some middle not yet subordinate to narrative ends. These descriptions, therefore, offer a critique of narrative ending’s tie with the social end of heterosexual reproduction that is analogous with *Pilgrimage*’s antinarrative attention to existents
and states as a contrast with events. Paradoxically, too, this critique of narrative takes place precisely within a description of existents in a process that marks a similar antinarrative frustration of narrative ends: description that overtakes narrative.

Kristin Bluemel argues that *Pilgrimage* violates traditional modes of narrative and traditional reading practices through its antinarrative attention to middles. If *Interim* and *Honeycomb* figure such middles as privileged moments and spaces of access to singular being not subordinate to the dialectical end of reproductive futurism, then *Pilgrimage* as a whole undertakes its antinarrative experiment in frustrating narrative ends as a formal corollary to its reiterated thematic refusals of heterosexual marriage. Indeed, in *Come as You Are: Sexuality and Narrative*, Judith Roof works to demonstrate a deep interconnection between narrative endings and reproductive futurism. Roof contends that the archetypal narrative pattern imitates our narrative of life: birth, passing time, reproduction, death. It is analogous, as Robert Scholes has observed, to our narrative of orgasm. The structural analogue among the various ends explains why it seems that totality, knowledge, and meaning coincide in the end, the end simultaneously providing some insight or meaningful pattern to the rest of the narrative and some sense of a stopping point constituting an end to a series of events that separates one narrative from another. The connections among these three narrative – Oedipal mastery, life and death, and orgasm – where knowledge, death, and coming all occupy the structural position of the end is made not only through the metaphorical or paradigmatic equation of the various ends but also through some ideological link among them. Reflecting finally the belief that meaning can be had at all, the fact of an end appears to give us a sense of mastery over what we can identify as a complete unit.

Here Roof figures narrative a movement that totalizes an otherwise seemingly aleatory and nonsensical encounter with the world into an apparently complete, discrete, and easily
identifiable unit – a movement that mediates difference in order to reproduce the same.

Narrative, in Roof’s estimation, mediates some perhaps nonsensical collection of elements with an ending that yokes these constituents into a totality, granting us a “sense of mastery” by putting an end to singularity and difference that escape mastery. Narrative’s ends, that is, mediate interim moments or middles in order to subordinate these middles to a higher order whole. In Roof’s view, this dialectical movement of narrative knowledge corresponds to similar movements in our given cultural narratives of heterosexual social and erotic life insofar as each such dialectic cancels differences in order to insist only upon the same. Narrative, in this sense, seems to operate as an ideological movement synonymous with reproductive futurism: if Lee Edelman names “the Futurch” the agent of reproductive futurism that aims to establish and enforce sense, mastery, and meaning by subordinating all of the present to the end of reproducing the social into the future, then in Roof’s account narrative itself instances the Futurch. Likewise, if Edelman designates as queer a mode of living resistant to the imperatives of reproductive futurism, then Come as You Are identifies myriad instances of modernist antinarrative whose fixation upon middles frustrates narrative ends and thus abort reproductive futurism, creating a space for antisocial modes of life. Indeed, Roof takes Djuna Barnes’s Nightwood as a privileged example of such modernist antinarratives insofar as its form frustrates sense, mastery, meaning, and narrative ends while the book presents thematically a virtual catalogue of queer modes of life antagonistic to the end of heterosexual reproduction. (Indeed, we might speculate that Dr. Matthew O’Connor, a character who continually frustrates gender and sexual identities, is in some sense thus an abortionist.) An antinarrative experiment against the social imperative of heterosexual reproduction, a modernist novel whose formal experiments against the novel enact its queer themes, Nightwood offers an exemplary instance of what Roof identifies (but does not name) as antisocial modernism.
If I have offered Pilgrimage as another exemplary instance of antisocial modernism, it is so precisely insofar as its formal experiment in antinarrative enacts a form of resistance to the ends-directed dialectical logic of reproductive futurism – a resistance correlative with Miriam Henderson’s incessant refusals of marriage, reproduction, and all forms of heterosexual social relation. I opened this chapter with a particular instance of such refusal: Miriam’s rejection of Michael Shatov’s marriage proposal, a rejection made precisely because marriage to Michael would represent a self-abnegation, a total subordination of Miriam’s singular being to the social end of reproducing the human race. Miriam’s rejection of Michael, however, offers just a single instance of a reiterated series of other refusals of heterosexual reproduction including her rejections of Hypo Wilson—a character based on H.G. Wells, with whom Miriam has a single repulsively described sexual encounter—and Richard Roscorla, the patriarch of a Quaker community described in Dimple Hill, whose shared reverence for singular being embodies the kind of antisocial community solicited by aesthetic objects—a community that is ruined for Miriam by Richard’s insistence upon marriage. Even Amabel, a French suffragette with whom Miriam has a kind of love relation in Dawn’s Left Hand and Clear Horizon, suffers rejection when Miriam discovers that Amabel has broken into a strongbox containing private letters and realizes that this lesbian relation takes the same possessive form as heterosexual social relation. As Deleuze remarks somewhere that Proust’s work forms an anatomy of friendship, we might therefore be tempted to read Pilgrimage as a queer anatomy of forms of detachment from heterosexual relation. Indeed, Miriam’s closest relation in Pilgrimage seems to be with a woman named Jean, who serves as interlocutor of the installment that is effectively the end of the series-novel, March Moonlight (although this is only so because Richardson’s publishers literally put an end to the Pilgrimage by publishing a four-volume “complete” edition without Richardson’s consent), and who exists not as an actor but only as an addressee whose very name seems merely to duplicate Miriam by embedding the French form of the first person pronoun. Pilgrimage’s
ultimate form of erotic attachment for Miriam thus seems in some sense merely to mirror Miriam’s attachment to herself.

These sundry instances of Miriam’s detachment from heterosexual social relations exemplify a thematic antagonism to the social end of reproductive futurism that Pilgrimage enacts formally as an antinarrative resistance to narrative ends. Like Roof, Pilgrimage comes to believe that the end of narrative operates as the ideological counterpart to the end of heterosexual reproduction and the novel thus undertakes an experiment in antinarrative to negate both narrative and reproduction. Pilgrimage thus presents themes of antisocial detachment against social attachment as it enacts formally an experiment that vaunts existents against events, states of being against becoming, middles against ends, and description against narration.

In “Narrate or Describe?” Georg Lukács contrasts narration and description precisely in terms of their divergent ends. The narrative mode characteristic of realist authors like Balzac, Dickens, and Tolstoy presents, in Lukács’s view, an objective picture of social life by totalizing an arrangement of events and existents with a proper narrative ending. Conversely, the descriptive mode instanced by literary naturalism and modernism wholly efface any such sense of objectivity by presenting events, existents, and human consciousness as atomized and wholly detached from social relations. While narration presents such narrative elements as parts of a progressive movement towards an end, description presents these elements as static and not subordinate to narrative’s end. Indeed, though Roof does not cite Lukács, “Narrate or Describe?” figures narrative endings as the locus of sense, mastery, and meaning – as the feature of narrative that enables readers to comprehend the world as a totality. In Lukács’s view,

The involved complexity of patterns of life is clarified only at the conclusion. Only in activity are particular personal qualities in the totality of character revealed as important and decisive. Only in practical activity, only in the complicated intercatenation of varied acts and passions is it possible to determine what objects, what institutions, etc.,
significantly influence men’s lives and how and when this influence is effected. Only at
the conclusion can these questions be resolved and reviewed. Life itself sorts out the
essential elements in the subjective as well as the objective world. The epic poet who
narrates a single life or an assemblage of lives retrospectively makes the essential aspects
selected by life clear and understandable.

Narrative ends, for Lukács, clarify the meaning of middles by setting the various,
complicated, and contradictory elements into a relief that demonstrates their true proportions and
patterns and discloses objective truth about our world by revealing the interconnections among
things that constitute the world as a totality. Indeed, Lukács insists that it is “only in practical
activity,” only in movement, only in events that the dialectical relation between human beings
and the world discloses itself. “Only at the conclusion,” that is, is this relation disclosed precisely
because only the conclusion reveals what this dialectic was moving towards. So it is that Lukács
insists that narrative is essentially retrospective: narrating life “retrospectively makes the essential
aspects selected by life clear and understandable”; only at the end of a narrative is the morass or
muddle of the middle “resolved and reviewed.” If narrative, in this view, is a form of knowledge
that operates retrospectively by looking backwards upon events and existents in order to endow
them with significance, disclosing the pattern of their future movement to some end, then the
significance of any particular event or existent issues, conversely, only from its orientation
toward the future. In other words, events and existents have meaning only insofar as they are
subordinated to the future. For Lukács, narrative operates by subordinating the present to a
dialectical end: the epic poet endows the present with significance by placing it wholly in relation
to the future.

Conversely, the descriptions that occur in literary naturalism and modernism fail
aesthetically, for Lukács, insofar as they do not subordinate the present to the future and thus
instance only middles without proper dialectical ends. “Description,” Lukács writes
contemporizes everything. Narration recounts the past. One describes what one sees, and the spatial ‘present’ confers a temporal ‘present’ on men and objects. But it is an illusory present, not the present of the immediate action of the drama. The best modern narrative has been able to infuse the dramatic element into the novel by transferring events into the past. But the contemporaneity of the observer making a description is the antithesis of the contemporaneity of the drama. Static situations are described, states or attitudes of mind or conditions of things – still lives.\textsuperscript{\textit{lxxvii}}

Description’s quelling of events and actions and its negation of narrative ends, moreover, abort meaning and sense and result, for Lukács, in nonsensical aesthetic failures offering no discernable pattern or proportion:

Description provides no true poetry of things but transforms people into conditions, into components of still lives. In description, men’s qualities exist side by side and are so represented; they do not interpenetrate or reciprocally interact with each other so as to reveal the vital unity of personality within varied manifestations and amidst contradictory actions. Corresponding to the false breadth assigned to the external world is a schematic narrowness in characterization. A character appears as a finished “product” perhaps composed of varied social and natural elements. The profound social truth emerging from the interaction of social factors with psychological and physiological qualities is lost.\textsuperscript{\textit{lxxviii}}

Note here Lukács’s distinction between the “contemporaneity of the drama” and the “contemporaneity of the observer making the description.” Drama “contemporizes” action and events insofar as it imitates actions occurring in the present, while description instances only an “illusory present” that freezes actions and events, transforming them into “still lives.” Lukács remarks that prose fiction’s capacity to represent action issues quite precisely from retrospective narrative – “by transferring events into the past” and situating them in relation to some narrative
end. Description’s “illusory present,” conversely, transmutes dynamic events into static existents and thus renders action as inaction. Description’s false contemporaneity, that is, aborts narrative’s dialectical movement toward an end. Indeed, Lukács insists that the stasis of description wholly occludes any dialectical account of the interaction between human beings and our world. As it halts any movement toward a narrative end, description figures the elements of our world as radically detached, as essentially unrelated, and as constituting no totality. Lukács’s exemplary instance of such atomization is the human personality: if narrative reveals “the vital unity of personality within varied manifestations and amidst contradictory actions,” if narrative reconciles these sundry antithetical elements into a totality, description operates as an antinarrative mode that resists, thwarts, or aborts such unity. Consequently, Lukács insists that description figures these antithetical elements as irreconcilable and loses thereby “the profound social truth” which issues from narrative accounts of the dialectical relation between characters and “social factors,” between human beings and the social.

Description, therefore, results in an antisocial antinarrative: a mode of fiction that brings the dialectical movement of narrative to a halt and consequently presents human beings as detached from social relations insofar as they are likewise detached from narrative’s dialectical end. It is precisely in this sense that Lukács regards the descriptive mode characteristic of literary naturalism and modernism – of Dorothy Richardson and, as I will argue in the next chapter, of Wyndham Lewis – as a capitulation to modernity that seems to refuse any socialist or utopian future. For Lukács, the stasis that results from modernist antinarrative instances a form of ideological resignation to the present state of our world, capitulation to the belief that the present will perpetuate itself indefinitely into the future, and the effacement of any notion of progressive historical change. So it is that Lukács writes that

The decisive ideological weakness of the writers of the descriptive method is their passive capitulation to these consequences, to these phenomena of fully-developed
capitalism, and seeing the result but not the struggles of opposing forces. And even when
they do describe a process – in the novel of disillusion – the final victory of capitalist
inhumanity is always anticipated. In the course of the novel they do not recount how a
stunted individual had been gradually adjusted to the capitalist order; instead, they
present a character who at the very outset reveals traits that should have emerged only as
a result of the entire process. That is why the disillusionment developed in the course of
the novel seems so feeble and purely subjective. We do not watch a man whom we have
come to know and love being spiritually murdered by capitalism, but follow a corpse in
passage through still lives becoming increasingly aware of being dead. The writers’
fatalism, their capitulation (even with gnashing teeth) before capitalist inhumanity, is
responsible for the absence of development in these “novels of development.”

Just as writers of the descriptive method take the present as static and tending toward no
future, atomizing human beings and negating all social relations, so too do such writers take the
present as it is constituted as inevitable and immutable without accounting for the historical and
social process that produces it. Description figures the present as a reified product rather than as
a moment in a process. Effacing this process, naturalist and modernist fiction represents
characters, in Lukács’s view, only as victims of modernity’s alienation without showing the
process by which they have been victimized and disillusioned. It is in this sense that Lukács
figures the typical character in modernist fiction as a “corpse in passage through still lives
becoming increasingly aware of being dead.” Modernism, for Lukács, represents not a
contestation and negation of modernity but instead collaborates with modernity’s inhuman
“spiritual murder.” If modernity alienates all social relations, transmuting relations among people
into relations among things, Lukács figures modernism an accomplice to modernity’s “spiritual
murder” of human beings. Modernism, in this view, is antisocial insofar as it lays waste to our
social being.
If, for Lukács, the defining feature of human beings is our capacity to posit and execute our own dialectical ends—manipulating nature in order to create a place for human “social being”—to negate social relations is to destroy the defining feature of human being in an act of inhumanity. Let us recall, however, that Hannah Arendt figures social being, the social, as a realm that emerges along with what both Arendt and Lukács regard as an inhuman modernity. Arendt thus renders the social relation itself as inhuman insofar as its unrelenting aim of reproducing bare life perpetually into the future occludes precisely the essential element of human being: the disclosure of singular being made possible only through detachment from the ends-directed projects of work and the cyclical reproduction of life characteristic of labor. Arendt’s account of the social, let us recall, insists that modernity dehumanizes by subordinating singular human being to the social end of reproducing life. If Arendt thus insists that Lukács’s “social being” is commutative with what Lee Edelman names “reproductive futurism,” then we should likewise regard antinarrative—in Pilgrimage, in literary naturalism, and in modernism generally by the technique of description—not, like Lukács, an accomplice of modernity’s spiritual murder of human being, but instead as a queer rejection of the social end of reproducing bare life, an end that negates any individual human being in order to ensure the future of the human species. If Lukács formulates narration as a kind of Futurch, then modernist antinarrative is queer.

An antinarrative against the social, against our world, against the reproduction of life, Dorothy Richardson’s Pilgrimage offers through its experiments in description and autonomous interior monologue an aesthetic instance of detachment from the social and an example of an antisocial modernism whose form aims to negate our world in order to open a space for another.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., II:221.
[xii] In “Between Two Deaths: The Culture of Torture,” Žižek asks “Who can forget the Department of Defense news briefing in February 2003, when Donald Rumsfeld pondered the relationship between the known and the unknown: ‘There are known knowns. There are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns. That is to say, we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns, the ones we don't know we don't know.’ What he forgot to add was the crucial fourth term: the 'unknown knowns', things we don't know that we know, which is precisely the Freudian unconscious, the 'knowledge which doesn't know itself', as Lacan used to say.” 3 June, 2004. London Review of Books.
[xiv] Ibid., 45. Here I substitute “drive” for “instinct” as a more accurate translation of Trieb.
[xv] Cohn, Transparent Minds, 174.
[xvi] Ibid., 190.
[xvii] Freud, 57.
[xix] Ibid.
[xx] Ibid.
[xxii] Ibid., 3.
[xxiii] Ibid., 16.

xxviii Ibid.

xxix Ibid.


xxxii Ibid., 8.

xxxiv Ibid., 97.

xl Ibid., 140.

xli Ibid., 156.

xliv Ibid., 7.

xlii Ibid., 98.

xliii Ibid., 178.

xliii Ibid., 45.

xlv Ibid., 29, 45


xlvi Ibid., 177.

xlvii Arendt, 46; Richardson, III:151.

xlviii Richardson, I:388.

xlix Ibid., I:386

l Ibid.

li Ibid., I:387

lii Ibid.

liii Ibid., I:387

liv Ibid., I:386


lvii Ibid.

lviii Ibid., 92


lx Ibid., 43.


lxii Ibid., 25-26

lxiii Ibid., 30, 36.

lxiv Ibid., 35.
lxv Ibid., 19-20.
lxvi Bluemel, 130.
lxvii Ibid., 131.
lxviii Ibid., 131.
lxx Bluemel, 130.
lxxi Ibid., 125.
lxxii Ibid., 165.
lxxiii Richardson, II:331.
lxxiv Richardson, I:448-449.
lxxvii Ibid., 130.
lxxviii Ibid., 139.
lxxix Ibid., 146.
Chapter 4

“The intellect works alone”: Wyndham Lewis’s Antisocial Satires

Why cannot two people, having talked and annoyed each other once or twice, re-become strangers simply? Oh for multitudes of divorces in our moeurs, more than the old vexed sex ones!

– Tarr

These are exceedingly hard and heavy times – hard in every sense. They are times of great and wonderful proficiencies and plenty and of technical powers of limitless production beyond man’s dreams. But upon all that plenty, and that power to use it, is come a dark embargo. It is all locked away from us. By artificial systems of great cunning this land flowing with milk and honey has been transformed into a waterless desert. ... That is why I break the social contract, the human pact.

– Snooty Baronet

The dual nature of artworks as autonomous structures and social phenomena results in oscillating criteria. Autonomous works provoke the verdict of social indifference and ultimately of being criminally reactionary; conversely, works that make socially univocal discursive judgments thereby negate art as well as themselves.

– Theodor Adorno
I.

“...I am not a narrative writer,” insists Sir Michael Kell-Imre, character-bound narrator of Wyndham Lewis’s 1932 satire *Snooty Baronet*.iv “As to being a ‘fiction’ writer,” he continues, I could not bring myself to write down that I am not that. I may never I hope be called upon to repudiate an imputation of that order. But the art of narrative, that is a different matter to ‘fiction.’ To Defoe I take off my hat. Then there was Goldsmith. I should prefer to make it clear at once at all events that I occupy myself only with scientific research. Such claim as I may have to be a man-of-letters reposes only upon the fact that my investigations into the nature of the human being have led me to employ the arts of the myth-maker, in order the better to present (for popular study) my human specimens.v

Though regarded by one of his commentators as Lewis’s best novel, *Snooty Baronet* thus begins with a declaration by the character-bound narrator – a writer presented quite explicitly as authoring the text – that he writes not narrative but some sort of antinarrative fiction.vi Some form of fiction, that is, that operates according to a structural logic of fiction but not of narrative. Kell-Imre thus makes a statement that can only strike contemporary readers of novels (of narrative fiction, of fictional narratives) as absurd: “the art of narrative,” he insists, “is a different matter to ‘fiction’.” This means not simply the banal statement that narratives exist in forms other than prose fiction, but also and especially the far stranger statement that there are forms of fiction which are not narrative: that narrative and fiction are substantially different, of “different matter.” Strangely, Kell-Imre praises Daniel Defoe and Oliver Goldsmith, writers of narrative fiction who could be credited with creating the English novel as a modern form – though creating it, strangely, through writing narratives in prose that pass themselves off as *nonfictional* narratives: viz., in examples like *Robinson Crusoe* and *A Journal of the Plague Year*. But he insists, as well, that his own fiction comprises only “scientific research” and not storytelling in any normal sense. Thus, we learn, Kell-Imre’s only claim to be a “man-of-letters” – a novelist in
the Jamesian if not the Wellsian sense – lies in the fact that he has “employ[ed] the arts of the myth-maker” in order to capture his human research subjects more accurately.

Queerly, then, Michael Kell-Imre’s fictions precisely reverse the sort of passing exemplified by the novelists whose work he praises. If *Robinson Crusoe*, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, and *Oliver Goldsmith* are fictional narratives that pass themselves off as *nonfictional* narratives, then Kell-Imre’s texts (including *Snooty Baronet*) are antinarrative fictions that are mistaken by readers as narrative fiction largely because such “arts of the myth-maker” as Kell-Imre deploys in his prose can pass as the narrative arts of the storyteller or novelist. We are left here with the strange paradox that techniques of narrative – or techniques so close to narrative as to be indistinguishable from narrative – offer the most accurate way for Kell-Imre to present the explicitly antinarrative fiction recording his scientific research.

Later in *Snooty Baronet*, Michael Kell-Imre describes these fictions and declares their aims and techniques. Kell-Imre’s first book, we are told, rewrites *Moby Dick* in order to refigure the whale’s conflict with Ahab as a conflict of “the great solitary colossus that was the private soul of any creature” against the great numbers of humankind which aim only and relentlessly “to exterminate all those creatures of [their] own kind who seemed destined to advance to a higher perfection of living, or who had Infinity in their glances,” a conflict of “the One over against the Many.”

“Since my *fish* book,” Kell-Imre remarks, “two books of mine have been published. In these I have taken up the study of Man upon exactly the same footing as ape or insect.” These fictions, then, increasingly and explicitly come to regard human beings *en masse* as a species indistinguishable from insects precisely in the sense that the human collectivity as such occludes and threatens the singularity of any being distinct from the mass: “man, the little rogue, was compacting with the insects!” and this compact signals a death sentence for any alien form of being or life. As Ahab marks in Kell-Imre’s first book the perpetual threat of the “Many” to the “One,” the threat of humankind in mass to “the private soul of any creature,” so too does the compact with insects mark humankind’s “purpose to exterminate” other human beings who seek
“a higher perfection of living,” who seek other modes of living distinct from normal social forms. Kell-Imre’s fictions thus articulate research into the contradiction between the normal frame of social conventions and habits and other forms of being and life that negate such conventions. These fictions offer, moreover, a picture of human beings in which we are animals: dehumanized, inhuman.

Indeed, Kell-Imre declares that “Human is a silly word no more: all the so-called ‘human’ values depend upon (1) training: or (2) the agency of the civilizing intellect of ‘sports’ (exceptional men). There is nothing else but the animal welter.” In other words, those human values we imagine as intrinsic, essential aspects defining human being as such, distinguishing us from “the animal welter,” are scripts learned through sundry forms of training. Even as this account solves the vague imprecision of the very word “Human” – it “is a silly word no more” because Kell-Imre’s account eliminates what he views as its vague imprecision – it results in the alarming contention that human beings are no different from animals. So it is that Kell-Imre’s first book studying human beings as if they were insects is entitled “People Behaving”: our behaviors result from training that makes us believe ourselves human in some essential sense and an account of such behaviors comprises research into the sheer brutality underlying the sentiment that we are somehow special, endowed with special “human values.”

Succinctly, human beings believe we are “a higher perfection of living,” believe that we have “Infinity in our glances,” but these beliefs result only from forms of training akin to those used to teach dogs to sit. We are, in this vision, like Red Peter in Kafka’s “A Report to an Academy”: animals trained to believe we are not animals, animals trained to believe that we act as unique beings and not according to automatic and unconscious behaviors. Kell-Imre’s antinarrative fictions aim to dispel us of such notions. These fictions comprise research into how human beings behave and thereby aim to present an accurate picture of the essentially inhuman form of the human, precisely through fictional form. To put this another way, Kell-Imre’s books aim to reflect what human beings are really like and the most effective form in which to do so
precisely is a form of fiction that is not narrative even as it passes as (and is mistaken for) narrative. As Kell-Imre explains,

for the purposes of these in part mock-researches, I have invented a new literary technique. Into this it is not necessary to go very deeply. It is sufficient to say that I do not simply measure, catalogue, and plot out graphs and statistics. Mine is a picturesque method. I show my exhibit in action. I select a case of typical behavior. This is of course how it comes about that my pitch marches with that of the narrative writers. But it is quite distinct.

As this technique “marches” in “pitch” with the technique of narrative, Kell-Imre notes that the human subjects of his research “have been treated as if they were characters in a novel” by his readers. To explain why readers understand his “specimen people-behaving” as characters and, moreover, to explain why his readers imagine that these fictions “are really Works of Art,” and “should be looked upon purely as art,” Kell-Imre elaborates on the method of his antinarrative fiction. “It is important for me,” he declares

to supply in more detail the technique of the success of these two books. Recently a book called ‘Babbitville’ was written – that was vaguely upon my lines. The author went and settled in a Middle West town, exactly as if it had been a settlement of Pueblo Indians. He compiled an account of the lives and habits of the inhabitants as if he had been studying a tribe of backward Indians. – But I am different to that. I do put up a good show for your money. My exhibits have adventures. They marry and are given in marriage. As I have said, I display their ‘behavior’ in a suitable situation – adapted of course to bring out the most full-blooded response of which they are capable.

Let us note here that Kell-Imre presents this explanation of technique precisely as an account of the success of his books – of the fact that they have achieved a wide and avid readership unexpected for books of scientific research. Remarking that his human research
subjects have been read as if they were characters in a novel, Kell-Imre adds “I have had a good success after my two books.” Indeed, such success is the very aim of his fictional technique, by which he “put[s] up a good show for your money.” An antinarrative fiction that passes as a novel, “People Behaving”’s success derives largely from the fact that it marches in pitch with the novel and therefore is read as a novel. Distinguishing his fictions from alternative forms such research could take, Kell-Imre explains that his texts “do not simply measure, catalogue, and plot out graphs and statistics,” on the model of other research in the human or what Hannah Arendt calls the “behavioral sciences.” Rather, we learn, Kell-Imre’s technique is “a picturesque method. I show my subject in action. I select a case of typical behavior.” This fiction, then, selects and presents exemplary instances of people’s doings in order to capture some scientific truth about human beings. Insofar as they display representative human actions, these fictions read like novels – our familiar form of prose fiction disclosing actions – even though Kell-Imre insists the two forms are “quite distinct.” To be sure, if we recall Gerard Genette’s description of the poet as a storyteller whose fictions display actions, we may be inclined to reject Kell-Imre’s distinction, to regard him as a “man-of-letters,” and to read “People Behaving” and Snooty Baronet as narrative fictions: as novels. Recall that in “Fiction et Diction,” Genette remarks that the poet must be a maker not of verses but of stories, since it is by virtue of his fiction that he is a poet, and that what he feigns is action. Genette here collapses the distinction between narrative and fiction in order to figure both as matters of imitating action. Apparently mimetic in precisely the same sense in which stories are mimetic, Kell-Imre’s fictions imitate and therefore appear to be novels.

After explaining that “it is not necessary to go very deeply” into a discussion of the techniques by which his fictions imitate yet remain “quite distinct” from novels, Kell-Imre recants and declares that more discussion of technique is in fact necessary. “It is important for me,” he remarks, “to supply in more detail the technique of the success of these two books.” What follows then, forms an explanation of technique intended precisely to account for the wide
readership of his research. Succinctly, his fictions have been read widely as novels because they imitate novels. To define his method, Kell-Imre contrasts “People Behaving” with “Babbitville,” a strange ethnography “vaguely upon my lines.” The author of “Babbitville,” we are told, “went and settled in a Middle West town, exactly as if it had been a settlement of Pueblo Indians.” As Kell-Imre’s fictions take up “the study of Man upon exactly the same footing as ape or insect,” so too does “Babbitville” present an ethnography of a Midwestern town exactly as if it harbored an alien form of human life.

“But,” he insists, “I am different to that.” “People Behaving”’s fictional technique differs, we are told, from the ethnographic method of “Babbitville” precisely insofar as Kell-Imre’s book “put[s] up a good show for your money.” “People Behaving” offers, that is to say, a better, more entertaining show. Indeed, Kell-Imre puts on this more entertaining show by recounting significant experiences in the lives of his research subjects. “My exhibits,” we are told, “have adventures.” The exemplary instance of such significant experiences is marriage: immediately after he states that his “people behaving” have “adventures,” Kell-Imre gives an example of such adventures, remarking that “they marry and are given in marriage.” These marriage plots, to be sure, make his antinarrative fiction resemble the novel, a form of narrative fiction which frequently features marriage plots as dominant structural principles. In Kell-Imre’s fiction, however, the adventure of marriage offers an occasion to solicit and to capture some truth about his specimens. So it is that we are told that marriage enables his fiction to display “their ‘behavior’ in a suitable situation – adapted of course to bring out the most full-blooded response of which they are capable.” Marriage, that is to say, is a social situation contrived in Kell-Imre’s fiction to solicit and to disclose some true element of human being.

Note here the sardonic tone with which Kell-Imre designates marrying and being given in marriage as “adventures” – as experiences that solicit from his specimens “the most full-blooded responses of which they are capable.” In “The Adventurer,” Georg Simmel defines adventures as experiences that interrupt “the continuity of life.” There Simmel notes, too, that “we ascribe to
an adventure a beginning and an end much sharper than those to be discovered in the other forms of experience. An adventure thus emerges as an event sharply distinguished from the continuous flow of everyday life – an event that punctuates the state of our banal everyday life with an experience radically other and new. Indeed, Simmel designates as an adventure precisely this intrusion of alterity and novelty:

we speak of adventure precisely when continuity with life is thus disregarded on principle – or rather when there is not even any need to disregard it, because we know from the beginning that we have to do with something alien, untouchable, out of the ordinary. The adventure lacks that reciprocal interpenetration with adjacent parts of life which constitutes life-as-a-whole. It is like an island in life which determines its beginning and end according to its own formative powers and not – like the parts of a continent – also according to those of adjacent territories.

Here Simmel’s description of the form of adventure indexes its striking similarity to narratology’s figuration of the event. As adventure punctuates and disrupts the constitution of “life-as-a-whole,” as adventure introduces a precisely bounded novel and alien element as an interruption of the state of everyday life, so too does an event in narratological terms designate an action or happening that interrupts a state. Indeed, a minimal definition of narrative might distill its essence into a scheme comprising an initial state punctuated by an event, thence succeeded by the state’s restoration or transformation. In *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, for instance, Genette writes that “as soon as there is an action or an event, even a single one, there is a story because there is a transformation, a transition from an earlier state to a later and resultant state.” As adventure indexes an alien element disrupting the state of everyday “life-as-a-whole,” so event names an alien intercession into a state in narrative.

As narrative operates, moreover, as a mechanism accounting for (or recounting) events precisely in order to suture an alien element into some continuity, so too does “the adventurer” in
Simmel’s formulation integrate the contingency of the adventure into the continuity of his “life-as-a-whole.” The adventurer, Simmel explains,

lets the accident somehow be encompassed by the meaning which controls the consistent continuity of life, even though the accident lies outside that continuity. He achieves a central feeling of life which runs through the eccentricity of the adventure and produces a new, significant necessity of his life in the very width of the distance between its accidental, externally given content and the unifying core of existence from which meaning flows. There is in us an eternal process playing back and forth between chance and necessity, between the fragmentary materials given us from the outside and the consistent meaning of life developed from within.\textsuperscript{xix}

The adventurer thus assimilates this alien, “accidental” element into the “consistent meaning of life” precisely by enlarging this consistent state, modifying it such that it accommodates the alien and aleatory. Simmel draws a distinction between the different sources of the state of “life-as-a-whole” and the adventure: the state of everyday life is constituted from “within” one’s being, while the adventure is “externally given” – “given us from outside.” As the state of life is figured here as constituted and defined internally, so the adventure intrudes as an alien element precisely insofar as it disturbs the limits of our consistent and continuous meaning. As this distinction endows our consistent, continuous sense of life with an air of necessity, so any event that lies outside this state acquires a contrasting sense that it is accidental. Succinctly: the adventure, the event, is an accident. The adventurer accommodates this accident by redrawing the boundaries of her sense of life in order to treat the alien as if it were proper, the accident as if it were necessary. Most importantly, Simmel proposes that this dialectic of accident and necessity belongs not simply to the adventurer but in fact to all human beings – that we are all adventurers. “There is in us,” Simmel writes, “an eternal process playing back and forth between chance and necessity, between the fragmentary material given us from the outside and the consistent meaning of life developed from within.”
To the extent that narrative itself operates as a dialectical “process playing back and forth between chance and necessity,” a movement between events and states that endows events with meanings, Simmel’s formulation suggests that our capacity to endow our lives (and accidents that befall us) with meaning is narrative. Indeed, as Robert L. Caserio reminds us, the very essence of narrative is this capacity to mediate the contingency of events with the necessity of meanings. “Any narrative is by nature,” he remarks in a discussion of Conrad’s *Chance* in *The Novel in England, 1900-1950*, “a tug-of-war between totalizing impulses and capricious ones.” In this sense, narrative is a form of risk management. Just as human beings mitigate the contingency of the adventure by suturing it as one constituent into a new state of life, so too narrative totalizes events (which disturb states) into new states.

When Michael Kell-Imre remarks that what distinguishes his fiction from “Babbitville,” his distinction hinges on the fact that *his* “exhibits have adventures. They marry and are given in marriage.” Whereas “Babbitville” aims to record representative ordinary experiences, “People Behaving” (we are told) presents extraordinary experiences, experiences wholly alien to the constituents of everyday life. In other words, Kell-Imre’s fiction records events. Note the strangeness of this formulation. Kell-Imre insists that he writes fictions but not narratives. This means not only that he writes antinarrative fictions but also that his readers make a mistake when they regard his fictions as novels and his specimens as characters. Simultaneously, however, we are told that Kell-Imre’s antinarrative fictions record events in exactly the same way that narrative fiction records events. As these antinarrative fictions pass, in formal terms, as narrative fictions, Kell-Imre’s readers – including readers of *Snooty Baronet* – might thereby be excused if we concur with the belief that such fictions should be read as novels, “should be looked upon properly as art.”

This reading neglects altogether, however, the sardonic, ironic tone in which Kell-Imre designates marrying and being given in marriage as adventures: these experiences are at once
adventures and not adventures. In other words, marrying and being given in marriage are simultaneously singular events that interrupt and transform the consistent, continuous flows of his specimens’ everyday lives and common occurrences emerging precisely as ordinary experiences already within the limits of one’s consistent sense of “life-as-a-whole.” Kell-Imre’s phrasing simultaneously echoes and reverses its biblical source: viz., Matthew 22:30. There we read that “at the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like angels in heaven.” The aim of this statement is to exemplify the radical difference between the biblical eschaton and the ordinary state of “life-as-a-whole” precisely through its suggestion that this human commonplace will no longer take place “at the resurrection.” Moreover, the implication here is that the moment of the resurrection will differ radically from our ordinary present world and that even our most common experiences and social conventions will be cancelled and torn asunder. The ironic inversion insists that we as yet live only in the ordinary world, with its commonplace experiences like marriage. The point is precisely that even as human beings encounter marrying and being given in marriage as if they were adventures — or events — these experiences in fact lay entirely within the constituent, continuous form of everyday “life-as-a-whole,” are therefore not externally given or alien experiences, and are in fact therefore not adventures or events at all. As these experiences are what pass for adventures in the lives of his research subjects, so Kell-Imre’s fictional accounting of such non-adventures or non-events passes as narrative fiction recounting events. When Kell-Imre remarks that such adventures are situations contrived for his research subjects to solicit “the most full-blooded response of which they are capable,” the implication is that the most intense such response is not very intense at all — that it is appropriately calibrated to the utter banality of the experience. Even this “most full-blooded response” exemplifies only trained behavior. Even responses that should disclose some essential truth about human being disclose only behavior.

In the world of people behaving, adventures are not adventures and events are not events. Significant experiences that seem somehow alien and new offer neither alterity nor novelty. As
Kell-Imre thus designates marriage ironically as an adventure, so too does he sardonically remark that in the “picturesque method” of his fiction “I show my exhibit in action”: what his fiction records is precisely some spoiled form of action. In “People Behaving,” we are told, Kell-Imre has “invented a new literary technique” to record his “in part mock-researches” in a form distinct from other social, human, or behavioral sciences. “I do not simply,” he writes, “measure, catalogue, and plot out graphs and statistics. I show my exhibits in action. I select a case of typical behavior.” This distinction concerns only the form of Kell-Imre’s research and not its intention. Though the form of “People Behaving” is qualitative rather than quantitative, it aims like statistics to capture some average or “typical” picture of human being. When Kell-Imre states that he shows his research subjects “in action,” this does not mean that his fictions record significant or extraordinary deeds but instead that they capture representative doings – habitual activities indexing some average or “typical behavior” of human beings collectively.

Insofar as they aim to capture human beings’ typical, average behavior, Kell-Imre’s antinarrative fictions depict what Hannah Arendt names “the social.” These fictions, that is, depict the distinctively modern realm in which the very “possibility of action” as a capacity to cause or suffer events has been occluded entirely by the social’s expectation “from each of its members [of] a certain kind of behavior, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to ‘normalize’ its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement.” In The Human Condition Arendt defines action as a capacity to invoke alterity and novelty, to disturb states in precisely the same sense as events disturb states, to be the agent of events. “To act,” Arendt remarks, “in its most general sense, means to take initiative, to begin, to set something into motion.” Like adventure, the initiative of action introduces novelty into a state precisely by disrupting the bounds of its constitution with some alien, “externally given” event – an event that does not seem to emerge from among the state’s internal constituents but instead confronts it as alien from without. “It is in the nature of beginning,” Arendt insists, “that something new is started which cannot be expected from
whatever may have happened before. The character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings and all origins.\textsuperscript{xxv}

This element of “startling unexpectedness,” this unaccountable element of novelty, improbability, and unpredictability, not only defines action as such but also distinguishes it sharply from behavior. In contrast with the ordinary or typical activities described quantitatively by the human sciences or presented qualitatively in “Babbitville” or “People Behaving,” action is in Arendt’s view so extraordinary, so atypical, alien and new that it looks miraculous. “The new,” Arendt writes,

always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle. The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected of him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable.\textsuperscript{xxvi}

Action breaks statistical laws. This formulation figures action as \textit{stricto sensu} impossible because these statistical laws are virtually unbreakable: “for all practical everyday purposes” they amount “to certainty.” Action “always appears in the guise of a miracle” precisely because what action initiates is always alien to the set of possibilities which constitute everyday “life-as-a-whole.” Action is impossible, then, in the sense that it is statistically unaccountable.

Incidentally, let us note the not improbable convergence between Arendt’s concept of action and Slavoj Žižek’s conception of “the act.” In Žižek’s formulation, “the act” is an impossible deed that shatters the very constitution of the social order, appearing as an alien, external element not given by the social order as a possibility. If “the act” seems nonsensical in Žižek, this is so precisely because his thinking lacks Arendt’s clarity. Like human beings’ capacity for action, a human being’s capacity to undertake “the act” paradoxically (as Arendt insists) “means that the unexpected can be expected of him” – that events not given within the set of extant possibilities are nevertheless possible.
In passing, let us also note action’s affinity with two other apparently dissimilar notions: viz., the Situationist-inspired May ’68 slogan “be realistic: demand the impossible!” and John Maynard Keynes’s account of entrepreneurship in *The General Theory of Employment, Money, and Interest*. To be sure, Žižek frequently invokes the former in his discussions of the act. The act, or action, is precisely a demand for the impossible – a demand, that is to say, for events which lie *stricto sensu* outside the extant set of possibilities in the state of the present. As this slogan concurs with Arendt’s dictum that action “means the unexpected can be expected” in its paradoxical claim that such impossible demands can be made real, so too can we note a similar affinity with Arendt in another May ’68 slogan: viz., “revolution is an initiative!” Keynes, moreover, suggests capitalist enterprise is itself a form of action. In *The General Theory*, Keynes writes that it is

> the characteristic of human nature that a large proportion of our positive activities depend on spontaneous optimism rather than on a mathematical expectation, whether moral or hedonistic or economic. Most, probably, of our decisions to do something positive, the full consequences of which will be drawn out over many days to come, can only be taken as a result of animal spirits – of a spontaneous urge to action rather than inaction, and not as the outcome of a weighted average of quantitative benefits multiplied by quantitative probabilities. Enterprise only pretends to itself to be mainly actuated by the statements in its own prospectus, however candid and sincere. Only a little more than an expedition to the South Pole, is it based on an exact calculation of benefits to come.\( xxvii \)

Enterprise, that is to say, occurs as the abrogation of statistical probabilities. Keynes contends that many – perhaps most – of what he designates our “positive activities depend on spontaneous optimism rather than on a mathematical expectation.” Undertakings that posit and aim to achieve some devised end issue from “a spontaneous urge to action rather than inaction,” an urge Keynes names in his now famous phrase “animal spirits.” Insofar as such positive undertakings are underwritten only by “spontaneous optimism” unwarranted by any statistical
calculation, Keynes’s statement here generates the rather Sartrean paradox that positive activities occur only and precisely as the negation of statistical law. While I have no space here to grant this point the attention it deserves, such affinities between Keynes and Arendt and between Keynes’s and modernist fiction’s peculiar relation to risk suggest the possibility that Keynes’s economic thought may have a far stronger connection to modernist formal experiments than could be accounted for in any study focusing superficially on his affiliation with Bloomsbury. If modernist formal experiments index, as Caserio argues, sundry ways of thinking about “the opportunity and obstacle presented to totalizing impulses,” Keynes here suggests that the positive activity of enterprise operates essentially as a mode of courting risk. Indeed, Wyndham Lewis conceives this Keynesian imperative to action as a central feature of capitalism and therefore of modernity as such.

Keynes’s claim that such positive undertakings are unaccountable largely because of their inevitable extension into the future vaguely prefigures Arendt’s own statement that “action has no end.”\(^{\text{xxviii}}\) As Keynes remarks that “the full consequences of [positive activities] will be drawn out over many days to come,” so Arendt insists that action is inherently risky because its consequences are unpredictable and potentially unlimited. Arendt writes that “men never have been and never will be able to undo or even to control reliably any of the processes they start through action.”\(^{\text{xxix}}\) “The reason why we are never able to foretell with certainty the outcome of any action,” Arendt continues, is simply that action has no end. The process of a single deed can quite literally endure throughout time until mankind itself has come to an end.

That deeds possess such an enormous capacity for endurance, superior to every other man-made product, could be a matter of pride if men were able to bear its burden, the burden of irreversibility and unpredictability, from which the action process draws its very strength. That this is impossible, men have always known. They have known that he who acts never quite knows what he is doing, that he always becomes “guilty” of
consequences he never intended or even foresaw, that no matter how disastrous and unexpected the consequences of his deed he can never undo it, that the process he starts is never consummated unequivocally in one single deed or event, and that its very meaning never discloses itself to the actor but only to the backward glance of the historian who himself does not act.

As this formula deprives the actor of any control over the outcome of action, as it renders her responsible for an infinity of potential unintended consequences, as it makes her “guilty” of unanticipated disasters that could threaten even her own being, the formula radically refigures our notion of agency. An actor at once performs and suffers the consequences of action; action is at once to initiate and to suffer a deed; agency is at once a form of patience. So it is that Arendt writes that the actor is “never merely a ‘doer’ but always at the same time a sufferer. To do and to suffer are like opposite sides of the same coin, and the story that an act starts is composed of its consequent deeds and sufferings.”

Action thus is fundamentally then an undertaking in which an actor both sets an event into motion and is moved by an event. This queer version of agency contradicts received notions of agency as control over events and Arendt insists that our given concept of agency issues from political traditions imagining agency as dominion, perhaps captured best in a statement she cites from Plato’s Laws: “only the beginning (arche) is entitled to rule (archein).”

In this view, political rulership, political dominion issues from a monopoly on initiative, on domination.

Arendt’s conflation of action and passion, of agency and patience, of doing and suffering perhaps prefigures Mieke Bal’s definition in Narratology of agency as a capacity “to cause or to experience an event.” Bal defines an event conversely as “the transition from one state to another state, caused or experienced by actors.” Arendt and Bal imply in this formulation some primordial indistinction between action and passion, between causing and suffering an event. This affinity between narrative theory’s and Arendt’s concept of action suggests that
narrative theory offers a theory of action perhaps more capacious than that of political theory. Indeed, Bal remarks not only that her discussion of action in narratological terms “also bears to some degree on extra-literary facts,” but also and especially that everything narrative theory states about action and events “should also be applicable to other connected series of human actions as well as to elements in film, theatre, news reports, and social and individual events in the world.”

There is, to be sure, a heuristic impulse within narrative theory to sever causing and experiencing an event, to dissociate action and passion, to cleave agency and patience by decomposing the single concept into antithetical constituents. In *Story and Discourse*, for instance, Seymour Chatman decomposes events – largely for descriptive purposes – into two species: actions and happenings. After designating characters a species of existents defined by their capacity to act, Chatman remarks that events are “either acts, or actions, in which an existent is the agent of the event, or happenings, where an existent is the patient.” As Chatman specifies events in terms of their relation to existents, so David Herman’s *Story Logic* specifies various instances of narrative actor precisely in terms of their relation to and degree of mastery over events. In a figure presenting what he terms an “Actor-Undergoer Hierarchy,” Herman offers a graded continuum of actorial roles demarcated by actors’ relation to events. Herman punctuates a continuum bounded by the agent (who only initiates an event) and the patient (who only suffers it) with a variety of forms of relation: “affector/author,” “experience,” “locative,” and “theme.” Though motivated by the need for precise terms to describe narrative constituents, such specifications unintentionally repeat a mistake Arendt ascribes to all political philosophy since Plato, a mistake still with us in virtually all discussions of action and agency: viz., the mistake of regarding action and agency as capacities for initiating and for controlling the outcome of events. To figure agency as a positive form of mastery in which an agent posits and achieves an expected end by inciting and controlling an event, to reserve some
other concept to designate unexpected events, is to discard the sense in which agency operates simultaneously and necessarily as the negation of control. As Arendt notes, action’s creative power issues precisely from the fact that it negates the predictability, probability, and given possibilities of statistical laws in order to summon the alien and new into our world. An impossibility, action is impossible to control. Agents at once then initiate and suffer events without guarantee and with infinite risk. If heuristically less precise than Chatman or Herman, Bal’s designation of agency as a capacity both to cause and to experience events retains this sense in which action draws its positive force precisely from its total negation of predictability and statistical law.

In the social and in “People Behaving,” action and events no longer happen. Though Michael Kell-Imre distinguishes the technique of his fiction from quantitative social science that would “measure, catalogue, and plot out graphs and statistics” defining such statistical laws empirically, “People Behaving” yet aims to represent the “typical behavior” of human beings and as such indexes the predictable, determinative force of statistical law. Presenting the emergence of the social as corollary with the emergence of modernity, Arendt notes that we can correlate both with the emergence of economics and the social sciences:

to gauge the extent of society’s victory in the modern age, its early substitution of behavior for action and its eventual substitution of bureaucracy, the rule of nobody, for personal rulership, it may be well to recall that its initial science of economics, which substitutes patterns of behavior only in this rather limited field of human activity, was finally followed by the all-comprehensive pretension of the social sciences which, as “behavioral sciences,” aim to reduce man as a whole, in all his activities, to the level of a conditioned and behaving animal. If economics is the science of society in its early stages, when it could impose its rules of behavior only on sections of the population and on parts of their activities, the rise of the “behavioral sciences” indicates clearly the final
stage of this development, when mass society has devoured all strata of the nation and
“social behavior” has become the standard for all regions of life.xxxix

Arendt suggests that the behavioral sciences accurately describe human beings in
modernity, in the social: “the unfortunate truth about behaviorism and the validity of its ‘laws’ is
that the more people there are, the more likely they are to behave and the less likely to tolerate
non-behavior.”xlix The statistical laws of the behavioral sciences are empirically true; the
behavioral sciences accurately describe an extant constituent of modernity – the fact that human
beings no longer act and only behave. So it is that Arendt remarks that economics and the social
sciences “could achieve a scientific character only when men had become social beings and
unanimously followed certain rules of behavior, so that those who did not keep the rules could be
considered asocial or abnormal.”xl In the social, then, actions and events no longer happen and
the statistical laws of behavioral sciences have become objectively true. Human beings “become
social beings” as they fuse “unanimously” into a mass collectivity, observe social conventions, or
risk being “considered asocial or abnormal” – queer, or antisocial.

Earlier we noted a peculiar contradiction in Snooty Baronet. Michael Kell-Imre insists
that he is “not a narrative writer,” that the fictions comprising his social science research are not
narrative even as they pass and are mistaken by his readers for narrative fictions. As we have
seen, however, Kell-Imre also insists that these fictions show his research subjects “in action” and
record their “adventures”: that his antinarrative fiction seems to record actions and events in
precisely the same way that narrative fiction records actions and events. We remarked that as
these antinarrative fictions pass, in formal terms, as narrative fictions, Kell-Imre’s readers
(including us) should be excused for mistakenly reading his fictions as novels. However, though
Kell-Imre’s antinarrative fiction seems to record actions and events in the same way that novels
record action and events, Kell-Imre’s fictions merely pass as narrative – while remaining
antinarrative – precisely because the actions and adventures they record are neither actions nor
events but only the mechanistic behaviors of the continuous state of life in the social. Behavior and the flow of “life-as-a-whole” substitute for, pass for, and are mistaken for action and events in the social. Fictions that record behaviors and continuous states of banal everyday life, therefore, substitute for, pass for, and are mistaken for narrative fictions. Fictions recording non-actions and non-events that imitate actions and events thus imitate narrative fiction. In the social, then, even antinarrative appears to be narrative.

II.

In his magisterial *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye reminds us of the existence of another form of prose fiction frequently and incorrectly mistaken for the novel: the Menippean satire, the anatomy, characterized in such writers as Apuleius, Rabelais, Swift, and Voltaire as a “loose-jointed narrative form often confused with the romance.” Distinguishing satire from the novel, Frye remarks

satire presents us with a vision of the world in terms of a single intellectual pattern. The intellectual structure built up from the story makes for violent dislocations in the customary logic of narrative, though the appearance of carelessness that results reflects only the carelessness of the reader or his tendency to judge by a novel-centered conception of fiction.

As narrative offers the occasion for the satirist to depict our shared world as systematized into “a single intellectual pattern,” such enlistments and adaptations of narrative techniques have solicited readers’ mistaken reception of satires as novels. As, moreover, satire parodies narrative techniques precisely in order to depict our world as a total “intellectual structure,” so satire’s imitation of narrative fiction so radically disrupts “the customary logic of narrative” that readers frequently mistake satires for poorly constructed novels. Frye contends that such mistaken judgments index “carelessness” or inattention on our part: we mistakenly misjudge satires as
aesthetically failed novels precisely because we are too lazy or inattentive to judge them in terms of their specific genre. Frye remarks that judged by the specific aesthetics of the novel, many satirists have fared badly and that, for instance, a satirist like Thomas Love Peacock “has fared even worse, for his form not being understood, a general impression has grown up that his status in the development of prose fiction is that of a slapdash eccentric. Actually, he is as exquisite and precise an artist in his medium as Jane Austen is in hers.xxlii To judge satire in terms of the aesthetics of the novel is to make a careless mistake and such carelessness and indiscrimination on our part, moreover, cancels and negates our very capacity for aesthetic judgment. Modernist criticism’s own inattention to Wyndham Lewis derives precisely from its own carelessness in aesthetic judgment whereby Lewis’s fictions are read as failed novels rather than successful satires. This mistake in aesthetic judgment, moreover, ramifies into a mistake in political judgment such that modernist critics continuously excoriate Lewis’s apparent fascism (or, as Frederic Jameson finesse it, his “proto-fascism”) without undertaking an account of either Lewis’s work or fascism. Indeed, these twin failures provide perhaps the surest confirmation of Hannah Arendt’s identification of aesthetic judgment and political judgment, made in her discussion of the Critique of Judgment in her Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy: modernist critics’ dealings with Wyndham Lewis generally index poor aesthetic and political judgment.

If “People Behaving” and Michael Kell-Imre’s other fictions are satires and not novels, then the very fact that they – as we are told – have been read favorably as novels indicates not only that his adaption of narrative techniques passes indistinguishably for the narrative techniques of the novel (such that his scientific research succeeds in terms of the novel’s aesthetics) but also and especially that his readers lack any capacity for discriminating satires from novels, lack any capacity for aesthetic judgment. Let us note here the source of Frye’s synonym for satire, “anatomy”: Robert Burton’s Anatomy of Melancholy. In Burton’s satire, “human society is studied in terms of the intellectual pattern provided by the conception of melancholy,” just as Kell-Imre’s “People Behaving” studies society in terms of the intellectual pattern offered by the
conception of behavior. Frye remarks that “the word ‘anatomy’ in Burton’s title means a
dissection or analysis, and expresses very accurately the intellectualized approach of his form.
We may as well adapt it as a convenient name to replace the cumbersome and in modern times
rather misleading ‘Menippean Satire.’” If Anatomy of Melancholy thus dissects society in
terms of melancholy, “People Behaving” dissects society in terms of behavior. An anatomy of
behavior, an analysis of human beings collectively in terms of the statistical laws of behavioral
sciences, “People Behaving” thus dissects the body social.

Frye insists that satire is an intrinsically parodic form – so much so, in fact, that its name
bears the etymological trace of its parody, or parasitism. “The word satire,” he remarks, “is said
to come from satura, or hash, and a kind of parody of form seems to run all through its
tradition.” So it is that anatomy appears as a mixed form, a hash of other forms sutured
together in order to picture society in terms of a single intellectual pattern rather than in terms of
patterns given and determined by any extant genre. Indeed, Frye suggests that satire itself
operates as a parody of a particular genre: romance. Describing satire’s animating impulse as
“militant irony,” Frye proposes that its distinctive form should be understood as an imitation of
the form of romance: “as a structure, the central principle of ironic myth is best approached as a
parody of romance: the application of romantic mythical forms to a more realistic content which
fits them in unexpected ways. No one in a romance, Don Quixote protests, ever asks who pays
for the hero’s accommodations.”

Romance’s defining formal element is adventure. The form operates as a fictional
narrative recounting a procession of heroic adventures, events, and actions. Indeed, Frye notes
that “at its most naïve it is an endless form in which a central character, who never develops or
ages, goes through one adventure after another until the author himself collapses.”
Unintentionally, perhaps, this strange formulation figures quite nicely the distinction between
romance and realism in terms of a discrepancy between the romance hero’s capacity for action
and human beings’ actual capacities for action. Insofar as he never “ages or develops,” insofar as he remains forever “child-like,” the hero’s agency is in principle unlimited and is curtailed only by the author’s mortality. A function of the form, the hero’s exaggerated and unrealistic capacity for action leads Frye to designate romance “the nearest of all literary forms to the wish-fulfillment dream” – such an inflated sense of agency corresponds to childish fantasies of omnipotence. So it is that Don Quixote’s protest – viz. that no one in a romance asks who pays for the hero’s lodging – indexes the circumscription of puerile fantasies of action by the realities of our world. Don Quixote succeeds aesthetically because it parodies romance by embedding the form of romance into a naturalistic narrative world utterly inimical to romance and thus quite literally circumscribes romance’s hyperbolic agency with cruel, continuous, satirical frustrations and inhibitions of action. As many critics regard Don Quixote the first modern novel, we might be inclined to propose that the novel as a modern form emerges as a fusion of satire and romance – or, of course, as a satire of romance. Indeed, even a book we might regard as the first modernist novel, Flaubert’s Madame Bovary, operates according to a similar dynamic in which Emma Bovary’s reading confronts unhappily, like Don Quixote’s, a cruel world inhospitable to romance. Indeed, one might write a history of the novel as a dialectical form in which satire mediates romance precisely by frustrating and mocking romance’s exaggerated action in order to produce a sense of what we would call “realism.”

Conversely, however, one might imagine romance as a form that negates the given reality of our world. So Wyndham Lewis does in Time and Western Man – a modernist anatomy that studies social life in terms of the intellectual pattern provided by modernity’s conception of time – when he notes that “romance is the great traditional enemy of the present.” For Lewis, romance is an antagonist to the present precisely insofar as it is out of joint temporally with the present. Declaring romance “the opposite of the real,” Lewis proposes that in relation to present reality, “romance is a thing that is in some sense non-existent. For instance, ‘romance’ is the
reality of yesterday, or of tomorrow; or it is the reality of somewhere else. Untimely, out of place, romance thus seems to confront given reality with a utopian mode of life radically incommensurable with the present. If Frye designates romance the literary form nearest to “wish-fulfillment,” Lewis characterizes the form as utopian insofar as it contradicts reality’s repressions of such child-like fantasies with another reality formed wholly in accordance with fantasy. As romance, seems, in this formulation, intrinsically to bear utopian desires, we might conversely detect the impulse of romance in radical utopian political statements from the May ’68 graffiti “I take my desires for reality because I believe in the reality of my desires” to the contemporary antiglobalization dictum “another world is possible!” Indeed, if these statements invoke antagonism to the present and codify thereby some impulse of romance, so we might detect a similar element of romance in the critic Astradur Eysteinsson’s claim, in The Concept of Modernism, that modernist experiments in aesthetics seem to imply that there is “some other modernity to be created.” Read this way, we might also detect in modernism’s sundry aesthetic interruptions of modernity a species of romance – this, to be sure, motivates Time and Western Man’s critique of modernism as such.

Like Frye, Lewis notes that the defining formal element of romance is its recounting of adventure. Recall that in our earlier engagement with Simmel, we characterized adventure as an alien event that departs from and disrupts the normal, continuous state of everyday “life-as-a-whole.” As this formula figures adventure as antagonistic to the usual state of everyday life, inimical to our sense of everyday life, so romance operates as alien to reality. “The normal, the known, the visible,” Lewis explains, “is what Romance is not. ‘Romance’ is unusual, not normal, mysterious, not visible, perhaps not susceptible at all of visual treatment.” To put this another way, romance instances – like the adventures its narrative sequentially recounts – an alien intercession into the present state of reality. As adventure operates precisely as an event punctuating a state of life with an external element that can be assimilated only by some novel,
transfigured state of life, so romance itself operates as a genre contradicting the normal, known, and visible constitution of reality with the alien and new. A narrative form distinguished by adventure, romance’s hostile relation to the present itself indexes a kind of adventure. Indeed, as Gerard Genette argues that the minimal feature of narrative is its representation of an event punctuating an initial state, so the narratologist Tzvetan Todorov contends that the primal form of narrative is the quest-romance, which transforms the continuous action of adventure into a new form of properly narrative knowledge. The narrative logic of romance thus operates as a means of totalizing the alien element of adventure into a new form of the known, the normal.

If romance promises novelty, adventure, action, and difference from the constitution of the present, Lewis paradoxically contends that modernity itself operates as a form of romance precisely insofar as it keeps such promises. So it is that *Time and Western Man* names advertising the *ne plus ultra exemplar* of romance in modernity. There, Lewis writes that romance, as currently used, then, denotes what is unreal or unlikely, or at all events not present, in contrast to what is *scientifically* true and accessible to the senses here and now. Or, it is, in its purest expression, what partakes of the marvelous, the extreme, the unusual. That is why Advertisement (in a grotesque and inflated form) is a pure expression of the romantic mind. Indeed, nothing is so ‘romantic’ as Advertisement.

A hyperbolic version of romance, endlessly promising extraordinary novelty, advertising represents a procession of adventures so intense and incessant that everyday life in modernity is thus constituted as perpetual romance. Paradoxically, then, advertising indexes the extent to which the state of everyday “life-as-a-whole” in modernity comprises only a perpetual series of adventures and novelties constituting no true state. Adventures and events become utterly redundant because they no longer punctuate the state of everyday life with difference but only with more of the same. To put this another way: the state of everyday life in modernity isn’t a state at all but merely a procession of adventures, of doings, of actions. So it is that Lewis remarks that modernity itself offers nothing enduring except a kind of planned obsolescence:
the world in which Advertisement dwells is a one-day world. It is necessarily a plane universe, without depth. Upon this Time lays down discontinuous entities, side by side; each day, each temporal entity, complete in itself, with no perspectives, no fundamental exterior reference at all. In this way the structure of human life is entirely transformed, where and in so far as the intensive technique gets a psychological ascendancy. The average man is invited to slice his life into a series of one-day lives, regulated by the clock of fashion.

An instance of romance in modernity, advertising thus indexes modernity’s total decomposition of a continuous sense of “life-as-a-whole” into a nonsensical and discontinuous procession of unrelated and unrelatable elements. This procession of “one-day world[s],” endlessly emerging and expiring, frustrates any and every impulse towards stasis. Constituted by such one-day worlds, modernity thus reconstitutes human beings’ everyday lives. Rather than envisioning his life as stable, durable, and punctuated by the novelty of adventure, “the average man is invited to slice his life into a series of one-day lives,” a procession of adventures constituting no whole. Striated by modernity into a sort of perpetual adventurer, the typical human being loses some aspect of his humanity and “becomes the regulating frame for a generation or sequence of ephemerids, roughly organized into what he calls his ‘personality.’”

Indeed, “impersonality” names in Lewis’s work the refusal of the romance of modernity through the particular refusal of “personality” as an affliction to human being wrought by romance. So Lewis remarks that advertising “is not intended for people in robust health, but for the debilitated and ailing members of a ruined society.”

We encounter here, then, a paradoxical reversal whereby romance operates no longer as a utopian critique of reality but constitutes instead the defining feature of reality as such. In other words, romance no longer confronts the present with untimely and utopian impulses because the present already constitutes itself, in modernity, as untimely and utopian. The romance of
modernity deprives the form of romance of its capacity to contradict and to negate the present. Constituted as romance, modernity offers itself as already intrinsically utopian. So Lewis remarks in *The Art of Being Ruled* that we live in an “already revolutionized society” in which “everything is correctly, monotonously, dishearteningly ‘revolutionary.’” Here the point is precisely that if everything is revolutionary then nothing is. Revolution itself—an event punctuating the constitution of the present with radical novelty and difference—emerges only “monotonously,” as banality. Insofar as all is revolution, revolution introduces no difference; insofar as all is romance, romance instances no utopia; insofar as all is adventure, adventure indexes nothing alien; insofar as all is action, action initiates no events. Revolutionary action, framed thus, is in modernity an oxymoron.

*Time and Western Man* thus identifies as a signal feature of the romance of modernity what Lewis names its particular “romance of action” whereby modernity elevates action to the highest value as it deprives action of any capacity to disclose difference or to initiate events. Modernity, that is to say, has incited an unrelenting will to action that has inverted action into a form of inaction. Noting the central ideological function of romance in the modern world, Lewis explains its interface with what he designates “the gospel of action,” a dogma which has, through “the romantic energetics of war, already made a living melodrama of the Western World. The last ten years of action has been so overcrowded with men-of-action of all dimensions, that they none of them have been able to act; and what has been done on this doctrinal but terribly real field-of-action has brought us to our present state of inaction.” Note here that the dialectical reversal of action into inaction results, in Lewis’s account, from an increase in the quantity of action such that action itself is no longer rare and new but instead monotonous and banal. “Overcrowded” with this banal form of action, the world no longer offers human beings a space for disclosure and initiative because the profusion of actions and actors means “that none of them have been able to act.” Deprived thus of any of the singular consequences of action, action in the modern world becomes an utterly hollow form. Deprived, as a corollary, of any antagonism to
reality, romance becomes a wholly ideological genre: it advertises merely modernity’s promises for incessant yet hollow action and adventure.

As we have seen, Frye defines satire as a parody of romance, a form that imitates the form of romance precisely in order to frustrate romance’s hyperbolic sense of action, curtailing romance’s unlimited sense of agency with the given determinants of the real world. If, as we have seen as well, Lewis figures romance as a form bearing a strange utopian impulse, confronting the present world with the possibility of another world, confronting reality’s limits upon possibility with demands for the impossible, then satire operates conversely as an inherently anti-utopian, reactionary form. Circumscribing and inhibiting romance, satire thus presented would function as an ideological form, negating desires for another world and defending the constitution of the present with unrelenting insistence that there is no alternative to our world. As I have argued, however, Lewis believes our modern world has subsumed romance as an important, perhaps dominant constituent feature: modernity constitutes itself as a revolutionary utopia offering endless adventures and incessant action. If, in this sense, romance thence operates as a form marking the nexus of modernity’s total world system – the nodal point in what we have seen Hannah Arendt name “the social” – then in its determinate negation of romance, satire functions conversely as the privileged literary form for critique of modernity. Though we might not wish to characterize Wyndham Lewis’s work as utopian (except in the restrained sense that it issues from a writer who figures himself, platitudes about constantly Lewis remind us, “the enemy” of the present), we should read his body of work as a series of modernist anatomies intended to critique the “romance of action” and the romance of modernity. Indeed, such varied texts as “Enemy of the Stars,” Tarr, The Art of Being Ruled, Time and Western Man, The Revenge for Love, The Lion and the Fox, Snooty Baronet, The Vulgar Streak, Left Wings Over Europe, Count Your Dead: They Are Alive!, The Childermass, Malign Fiesta, Monstre Gai, and even the infamous Hitler – whose mere existence and lack of attentive readership has resulted in Lewis’s reputation as exemplar of “the modernist as fascist” – constitutes a series of anatomies
studying our world in terms of the intellectual pattern provided by modernity’s conception of action. As Michael Kell-Imre insists in Snotty Baronet that his antinarrative fiction is an anatomy of behavior, so we should read Wyndham Lewis’s work as a body of satires – as a series of antinarrative fictions anatomizing the social. As Lewis’s works constitute a total critique of the social, we might name such works antisocial anatomies.

Incidentally, let us note that the implied readers of this antisocial satire are human beings embedded inextricably in the social, afflicted by modernity’s imperative to striate ourselves into perpetual adventurers in accordance with romance, “the debilitated and ailing members of a ruined society.” Though Lewis’s anatomies aim therefore at a perverse form of consciousness-raising whereby we are exhortated unrelentingly to recognize our complete and total saturation by modernity itself, our situation within the social incapacitates out judgment such that (just as we are inclined to mistake a hollow form of action for action itself) we are inclined to read Lewis’s satires as examples of the forms they parody. We are inclined to repeat, thereby, the mistake made by Michael Kell-Imre’s readers in Snotty Baronet when they treat his human research specimens “as if they were characters in a novel” and consequently read his anatomies of behavior as novels. To be sure, modernist criticism’s recent inattention to Wyndham Lewis issues both from Lewis’s reputation as a “proto-fascist” and from critics’ own ignorance of anatomy as a singular form of modernist writing. As a consequence, those of Lewis’s works that do seize critics’ attention do so only insofar as they instance (like Blast, Time and Western Man, and The Art of Being Ruled) seemingly unaccountable modernist curiosities or insofar as they pass aesthetically as successful novels, like Tarr. Indeed, this mistake accounts for critical judgments that The Revenge for Love – a work that parodies almost indiscernibly a genre of largely meritless political novels about the Spanish Civil War – is Lewis’s most fully realized work. A mediocre novel with a plot as moronic as the political plots of its frustrated revolutionaries, The Revenge for Love succeeds aesthetically as a satire of romance, as an anatomy of action.
Though likewise absurd, the plot of Lewis’s 1941 satire *The Vulgar Streak* operates also as the pretext for an anatomy of action. In *The Vulgar Streak*, we encounter Vincent Penhale, the son of an impoverished English family whose passing of counterfeit money enables him to pass as a Baronet belonging properly to the upper class. Strikingly, Vincent presents both forms of passing as forms of revolutionary action: as insurrectionary resistance to the constitution of the social. In a conversation with his friend Martin Penny-Smythe (an aristocrat privy to the fraudulence of Vincent’s assumed place in the social order), Vincent recalls learning from his accomplice Bill Halvorsen about the very constitution of modern capitalism. Before he learned about modernity’s financial basis, Vincent insists that he
didn’t know that Banks has no gold capital to back up the so-called cheques they issue to
us with such lighthearted prodigality. . . . Money theory is much more subversive than
straight, emotional, radical stuff. To learn that a Bank is really a licensed forger of
paper-money was a new one on me. I had always thought, that if people were poor, it
was because there wasn’t enough wealth (gold) to go round: so some had to go short.
Something simple-hearted like that.\textsuperscript{lxiv}

As Vincent concurs with this conception of money, banking, and finance – which figures the monetary basis of modernity as “licensed forgery” and systematized fraud – so Vincent adopts his accomplice’s imagined form of revolutionary action:

Bill hates the social order as it exists to-day, and regards it as something like a highly
moral act to defraud it. He is a moralist, is old Bill. In his view, the modern state is
based upon organized – legalized – Fraud. See? Consequently, to counterfeit its
fraudulent and oppressively administered currency appears to him, an act of poetic
justice.\textsuperscript{lxv}

“The social order” thus constitutes itself as a monopoly on legitimate fraud that grants
banks exclusive license to forge paper money in volumes exceeding reserves of “gold capital.”

As paper money passes itself off as the representative of some fixed substance of wealth, as
money imitates through such passing some substantive or positive index of wealth, so the social order as such passes as positive substance through fraud. The positive constitution of the social thus depends precisely on a lack or negation; “the modern state,” we are told, is a structure of fraud passing itself off as a positivity. Though Vincent’s distinction between gold and paper money likely exaggerates their intrinsic difference – like bank issued bills, gold functions as money through a structure of social conventions – this hyperbolic distinction instances two disparate accounts of the source of modernity’s economic inequalities and deprivation.

Conceived as a fixed substance and volume of gold, wealth would exist in our world as an immutable and static quantity. If, in this conception, “there wasn’t enough wealth (gold) to go round,” then no alteration of the social can ever ameliorate poverty itself: always, “some had to go without.” As, however, banks are licensed to issue paper money in excess of their gold reserves, such licensed forgery enables the social order to overcome any natural limit on wealth. Floating, conceived as a forgery, detached from fixed gold reserves, paper money thus marks modernity’s very capacity to negate natural limits to wealth and thereby to invoke a utopia in which the social itself harbors no inequality. In this conception poverty issues from no natural order but instead results from a sinister “oppressive administ[ration]” of money. Poverty and deprivation result, in this view, from the social.

Modernity thus creates through its fraudulence an immoral economic stratification. If the social order thus counterfeits some natural source of stratification precisely through counterfeiting money, Bill and Vincent thus regard counterfeiting and fraud as “highly moral act[s].” To counterfeit is to undertake an insurrection against the social; to defraud is to perform a revolutionary action, negating the social by defrauding it with the very fraud of its constitution. So it is that Vincent conceives of his passing of counterfeit money and his passing as an aristocrat as forms of political action:

‘My acting is a form of action – not of make-believe. I have attempted, haven’t I, to act my way out of a predicament . . . . I have never been a real actor. It would have been
better if I had become more of an artist, Martin. I am always too much in earnest. I am a very solemn fellow indeed, really.’

‘Are you, Vincent?’ Martin rumbled skeptically, thinking gloomily at him.

‘Oh, yes. Really. I’m always acting and throwing myself about, and wisecracking, so you think I’m not, but I’m always in dead earnest, really. Remember, I have been gambling with my life. Only solemn fellows do that. You seem to have been taken in by the gambler’s mask. I am a very solemn fellow, like all actionists. For what is the driving-power that kept me in such incessant activity? Answer: a sensation of life-and-death importance attached to whatever I had in hand. The will to change something: all will-to-action (and damn-the-consequences) is that. But with it goes the belief that it will be better different. lxvi

Defining his counterfeiting and fraudulence as a form of action insofar as such acting undertakes, like action, to initiate some change in the state of the present, Vincent thus imagines his passing as an attempt to escape social determinants, “to act my way out of a predicament.” As a model for revolutionary action, then, such acting seeks to negate the social by imitating its fraud. Let us note here Vincent’s repeated insistence that he and other “actionists” are always in “earnest”: they risk their lives because they are earnest, “solemn,” and believe sincerely that as a result of the change they initiate, “it will be better different.” If, in simple terms, this means that revolutionary action is an earnest project undertaken to change the present state of life and make it “better different,” then we should be struck by a particular contradiction: viz., that action here replicates precisely the form of the social order it seeks to change – both are forms of earnest fraud. So it is that Vincent’s acting, his form of action, effects no change. The Vulgar Streak curtails Vincent’s action by making him the unwitting accessory to a capricious murder committed by Bill Halvorsen. Investigating that murder, the police discover and halt the counterfeiting operation and disclose Vincent’s fraud publicly. Declassified, frustrated in his
action, Vincent commits suicide; the satire’s plot thus culminates in a radical end to action and the triumph of the social.

In passing let us note Vincent’s strange remark that it “would have been better if I had been more of an artist.” This statement contrasts artists and “actionists” explicitly in terms of their earnestness. If action is characterized as naively earnest, naïve in its belief that through some change action invokes things “will be better different,” then art seems to be characterized by its rejection of action, change, and earnestness. If, moreover, Vincent imagines his fraud as “a highly moral act,” an act aiming to contest the immorality of the social order, then we might be inclined to imagine art – as it is figured implicitly here – as amoral. Indeed, in the next section of this chapter we will attend to Lewis’s statements about an aesthetic practice he names in Men Without Art “nonmoral” satire: a form of art against action, against change, against earnestness, against romance, against the social, and so against modernity.

Snooty Baronet operates aesthetically, likewise, as an anatomy of action. When Michael Kell-Imre declares “People Behaving” a form of antinarrative fiction that passes as a novel, this statement means precisely that his fiction is satire, anatomizing behavior. His fiction, however, offers also an anatomy of action insofar as action in modernity has been hollowed out and made indistinguishable from behavior: action has become a form of behavior. In “People Behaving,” Kell-Imre explains, “I show my exhibit in action. I select a case of typical behavior. That is of course how it comes about that my pitch marches with that of the narrative writers. But it is quite distinct.” “People Behaving” parodies narrative fiction almost indiscernibly as it tracks the likewise almost indiscernible collapse of action into behavior. As narrative recounts events and actions, so “People Behaving”’s antinarrative records forms of behavior indiscernible from action and thereby cannot be distinguished by its readers from a novel. If we might thereby imagine “People Behaving” as a sardonic joke on modern readers lacking discernment, so we might read Wyndham Lewis’s anatomies as an elaborate joke upon his readership, the “debilitated and ailing members of a ruined society.” As Lewis’s joke aims at a transformative sort of consciousness
raising, so Kell-Imre’s avowed aim in writing Snooty Baronet is to impress upon his readers the privileged explanatory power of behaviorism in modernity precisely through recounting in an apparently narrative form a series of actions that actually instance wholly conditioned behavior. Snooty Baronet thus passes itself off as a picaresque or a romance even as it parodies action, adventure, and romance itself.

The action of Snooty Baronet is Kell-Imre’s venture to Persia to write an anatomy of Mithraism, an ancient mystery cult he describes as a popular “religion of Action” whose rituals, as Jesse Weston instructs, were the incipient source of the literary form of romance. Describing Mithraism as “a nasty little Christmas present, presented with its best compliments by the Persian Empire to its friend the Roman Empire,” Kell-Imre notes that the cult spread from its Persian source as the dominant religious practice of “the simple-hearted roman legionaries” and that it was only narrowly overcome by Christianity as the primary religion of Europe. As Weston notes the intimate connection between Mithras — a Persian sun-god — and a divine bull in Mithraic eschatology, so Kell-Imre imagines how Europe itself would have been different if Jesus had not triumphed over Mithras. Instead of cathedrals, Europe would have had “Tauroboliums,” Mithraic altars for sacrificing bulls; “herds of fighting bulls,” we are told, “would have grazed all over Salisbury and at the foot of Sussex Downs. England would have been rather like Spain — full of Toreadors.” Had Jesus not triumphed, “instead of the rather sickly Christianity (that is the puritan evangelical variety) with its humanitarian sentimentalism always tripping it up — we should have had a red-blood gospel of Action with Mithras.” If, in this formula, Europe has no “gospel of Action,” Kell-Imre’s literary agent Humph proposes that such a gospel can be found among still extant Mithraists in Persia. Humph proposes that Kell-Imre write a book on Mithraism as an antithesis to his prior anatomies of behavior. “Your next book,” Humph says, “ought not to be about your behaviorist people, if you ask me. … People, you know, are a little tired of behavior.” Indeed, this quest for some Mithraic gospel of action
as an alternative to behavior motivates the central place of Mithraism in the action of Snooty Baronet.

In *From Ritual to Romance*, Jesse Weston speculates that the incipient and singular source of all Grail romances was a set of now lost religious practices centered upon fertility rites and analogous to Mithraism. “After upwards of thirty years spent in careful study of the Grail legend and romances,” she writes, “I am firmly and entirely convinced that the root origin of the whole bewildering complex is to be found in the Vegetation Ritual treated from the esoteric point of view as a Life-Cult, *and in that alone.*” Weston, moreover, notes that “the Grail romances repose eventually, not upon a poet’s imagination, but upon the ruins of an august and ancient ritual, a ritual which once claimed to be the accredited guardian of the deepest secrets of Life.”

Grail romances and romance as such issue from a set of religious rituals aimed precisely at restoring life and fertility to a sterile world, a point Northrop Frye makes when he remarks that “translated into ritual terms, the quest-romance is the victory of fertility over the wasteland.”

Describing romance as a genre defined by its conflict between a hero and an enemy, protagonist and antagonist, Frye remarks that

> the hero of romance is analogous to the mythical Messiah or deliverer who comes from an upper-world, and his enemy is analogous to the demonic powers of the lower world. The conflict, however, concerns *our* world, which is in the middle, and which is characterized by the cyclical movement of nature. Hence the opposite poles of the cycles of nature are assimilated to the opposition of the hero and his enemy. The enemy is associated with winter, darkness, confusion, sterility, moribund life, and old age, and the hero with spring, dawn, order, fertility, vigor, and youth.

The actions and adventures undertaken by the romance hero, therefore, aim to restore fertility by vanquishing whatever antagonist has rendered the world moribund. As such, romance itself operates as a literary form of what Jesse Weston names “Vegetation Rituals”: rituals
marking seasonal cycles of sterility and fertility. As Grail romances transmute such rituals into stories about the conflict between an antagonist enforcing sterility upon the world and a hero seeking to restore fertility, as romance narrates a quest to vanquish moribund life, so *Snooty Baronet* seems to narrate a quest to vanquish moribund behavior by seeking a vital form of action.

*Snooty Baronet*, that is, narrates the quest for a vital Mithraic “gospel of Action” as an antithesis to behaviorism, modernity’s hollow or dessicated form of action. *Snooty Baronet*’s narrative, that is, recounts a series of adventures as Michael Kell-Imre journeys from New York to London to Spain to Naples, across Europe to his destination in Persia, a scene expected to contain an extant cult of Mithras. This quest for a living Mithraic form of action wholly motivates the action or plot of *Snooty Baronet* such that the book seems in one sense to be a romance. Its plot, to be sure, comprises a sequence of picaresque adventures all aimed precisely toward the goal of dispelling the moribund behavior general across Europe with an orientalist antidote equivalent to the Grail. If Humph proposes that Kell-Imre write a book about Mithraism as an antithesis to behaviorism, *Snooty Baronet* takes the form of a romance recounting the quest for this antithesis. Protagonist of *Snooty Baronet*, Michael Kell-Imre thus instances the structural role of hero insofar as he ventures in quest of Mithraism. Kell-Imre thus occupies the paradoxical (but not therefore accidental) role of a satirist who becomes the hero in a romance, a role Wyndham Lewis also assigns to Pullman in *Childermass* and *The Human Age*. Such a paradox offers a key, perhaps, to *Snooty Baronet* (and to Lewis’s aesthetics more generally) insofar as it foregrounds its constituent antagonisms and contradictions akin to this insistence upon the antagonism between romance and satire. Indeed, as we have seen, Lewis imagines this particular contradiction as reversible such that romance itself marks, in modernity, the frustration of action while satire, conversely, marks some utopian impulse, however nascent. Recall Frye’s insistence that satire operates essentially as a parody of romance: the Menippean satire or anatomy is, in his view, a “loose-jointed narrative form often confused with the romance.” Such mistakes result precisely from the fact that satire quite literally *takes the form* of romance, imitating romance
almost indiscernibly. A “loose-jointed” narrative of adventure occurring in a world in which adventures are not adventures, a quest for action taking place in a world in which action is already behavior, *Snooty Baronet* forms a satire of romance in the social, a realm in which action is indiscernible from behavior, adventure indistinguishable from everyday life, and romance interpolated to advertisement. Attacking this realm as relentlessly as Don Quixote attacked the windmills, the satirist paradoxically assumes the role of hero.

Once readers encounter the orientalist scene promising some vital form of action, Kell-Imre presents this scene as determined wholly by behavior. Kell-Imre presents Persia, the very place figured throughout *Snooty Baronet* as a realm of living action antithetical to behaviorism, as a realm overtaken by behaviors enacted by Humph and Val, companions of Kell-Imre’s quest. In a Persian town designated “Yes,” as if the name indexed the hollow positive affirmation of people behaving in the social, a form of positivity utterly devoid of any content, akin therefore to modernity’s hollow form of action, Kell-Imre remarks the total determination of the events he experiences in Persia.ІІХ “Events in Yes were overshadowed by what followed,” he explains, but of course many minor patterns of behavior (on the part of my behaviorist troupe of two) were sketched in by *Time’s moving finger*, to use an Omarkhayyamish figure of speech, and incorporated into the main design: and once having writ or drawn same, nothing that Time subsequently did altered or rubbed out those influential sub-patterns, and potent smouldering spells, of the long days in the bag. Into that one capital Event (whose zero hour struck in Humph’s City office) these minor events are built. Perhaps more than I was aware, they were contributory to the particular shape possessed by the I think rather imposing Whole (looked at of course in retrospect).ІІХІ

Here the point is precisely that occurrences that seem to be events – alien elements erupting into or interrupting the constitution of the present – in fact emerge from a constellation of “patterns of behavior” that are already the constituents of the present. So it is that Kell-Imre sardonically dismisses the very capacity of time itself to impact the present, rejecting as laughable
the “Omarkhayyamish” notion of time’s agency: “nothing that Time subsequently did altered or
rubbed out those influential sub-patterns” of behavior and time’s forward motion thereby
instances only the perpetuation of such patterns, instances only a perpetual present. Indeed, when
Kell-Imre locates the “one capital Event” as having occurred in Humph’s London office, at the
moment Humph proposed an adventure to Persia and a book about Mithraism, the implication is
precisely that all of Snooty Baronet’s incidents emerge as “minor events” entirely determined by
Humph’s book proposal – as incidents already “built” into the state of the present at the moment
of that “zero hour.” Indeed, Kell-Imre insists that the retroversion of a narrative understanding –
and understanding aiming to account for these events “in retrospect” – would reveal that the
incidents of action Snooty Baronet recounts instance only wholly determined influence and
underwriting of “sub-patterns” of behavior already latent within the desiccated state for which the
book seems to seek an antidote. If so, the incidents of Snooty Baronet are not events; its action is
not action.

Snooty Baronet’s concluding incident therefore takes the form of an acte gratuite that is
not an acte gratuite. In a Persian desert, the place in the satire furthest removed from the scene of
moribund London in which Michael Kell-Imre’s anatomies of behavior take place, at the furthest
point in his quest for a vital Mithraic form of action, Kell-Imre, Val, and Humph are ambushed by
“a band of twenty or thirty suspicious-looking horsemen.” Kell-Imre figures this ambush as
an eruption of romance:

a fantasia developed – a savage musical-ride of desert horsemanship, a wheeling and
galloping in all sense at once, a firing and shouting. I turned in the direction of Humph,
who had halted in his pony, pivoted in his saddle, every inch a Bedouin, every inch a
Briton. He was aiming playfully in our direction, and the next minute I saw the flash. I
cannot tell you upon what impulse I acted, but lifting my rifle I brought it down till it was
trained just short of the rim of his white puggaree, and fired. In the general confusion my
action went unnoticed. I saw Humph pitch forward upon his pony, he was hit. Then I
fired a second shot, and you may believe me or not, but of all the shots I have ever fired, at all the game I have ever hunted (and this includes the hippopotamus) I don’t believe that any shot ever gave me so much pleasure as that second one, at old Humph’s shammyleathered, gusseted stern, before he rolled off his pony and bit the dust. (The first was not great fun – it was almost automatic. I scarcely knew I was doing it. But I knew all about the second.)

Amidst this “fantasia,” this romance whose action Kell-Imre compares to “a savage musical-ride” as it enacted an imitation of a feature film, Kell-Imre undertakes the action of shooting his literary agent twice. Kell-Imre, that is, murders the agent who had proposed seeking Mithraic action as an antidote to social behavior. The passage figures the first shot as a reaction, an “almost automatic” behavior provoked by the appearance of a flash nearly coinciding with Humph’s “aiming playfully in our direction.” This coincidence elicits the first shot, a shot motivated by an impulse that seems largely a reaction in self-defense. Amidst the romance of action circling about, this reaction “went unnoticed.” If the first shot occurs as a reaction and not as an act of will, Kell-Imre insists that the second shot was an entirely willed free action: “I knew all about the second,” we are told. Kell-Imre, moreover, distinguishes the two shots in terms of the disparate affects he experiences during each. Though the first shot “was not great fun,” the second gives him more pleasure than any other shot during his time spent hunting. These disparate affects seem to result precisely from the extent of will or agency involved in the act, such that automatism produces no affect while unrestrained joy emerges as the companion of an acte gratuite. Note, however, that regardless of such disparate affects, such varied intensities of will and agency, the passage figures both the “almost automatic” first shot and the entirely capricious second as taking precisely the same form. Considered from an objective point of view, the passage figures action and reaction as formally indistinguishable. Indeed, the passage seems even to figure reaction as a more efficacious form of action than the acte gratuite itself insofar as the reaction here not only precedes free action but in fact causes an event – the death of Humph,
the death of Kell-Imre's literary agent – while free action merely imitates reaction and effects nothing new. This dialectical reversal of action and reaction offers a particular instance of a general reversal of romance and satire that I have argued Wyndham Lewis believes takes place in modernity. Amidst such reversals, Lewis’s antisocial aesthetics indexes simultaneously the reactionary impulses detected by critics like Frederic Jameson and far stronger utopian impulses, akin to those one might find in Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*.

If Michael Kell-Imre’s strange, perhaps capricious murder of his agent marks a breaking of the social contract, if his antinarrative fictions researching human beings as if they were animals subject to animal-like automatism signals some violation of the human as such, the statement of *Snooty Baronet* seems to be that the romance of action in modernity (in which action becomes merely an automatic form of behavior, in which human beings acting become merely people behaving) itself marks a dialectical reversal whereby modernity’s seemingly unlimited and vital agency lays waste our world. Paradoxically, then, modernity itself is both a form of romance and a cruel parody of romance: modernity is a form of romance that enforces sterility upon the world. As Kell-Imre explains,

> these are exceedingly hard and heavy times – hard in every sense. They are times of great and wonderful profusion and plenty and of technical powers of limitless production beyond man’s dreams. But upon all that plenty, and all that power to use it, is come a dark embargo. It is all locked away from us. By artificial systems of great cunning this land flowing with milk and honey has been transformed into a waterless desert. There all the nations of the earth come in tremendous masses as if afflicted with the pestilence that follows famine. From being skinned and fleeced, we shall at last have nothing. And it is not *nature* but it is *man* who is responsible for this. That is why I have thrown my lot in with nature – that is why I break the social contract, and the human pact.

Or, as Herbert Marcuse writes in “The End of Utopia,” “today any form of the concrete world, of human life, any transformation of the technical and natural environment is a possibility,
and the locus of this possibility is historical. Today we have the capacity to turn the world into hell, and we are well on the way to doing so.\textsuperscript{lxxxiii}

\section*{III.}

Living amidst this reversal in which the romance of modernity constitutes at once a cruel parody of romance that lays waste our world, in which modernity’s constituent utopianism paradoxically thence lays waste utopian impulses as such, we might concur with Theodor Adorno’s judgment in “Juvenal’s Error” (a fragment from \textit{Minima Moralia}) that in our world the parodic impulse of satire is superfluous, that “our situation makes a mockery of mockery.”\textsuperscript{lxxxv}

If, in formal terms, satire mocks romance, marks thereby a discrepancy between romance’s falsehoods and reality, and allies itself with truth, Adorno insists that this “medium of irony has itself come into contradiction with truth” because reality itself is now false.\textsuperscript{lxxxvi} In past instances of satire, Adorno remarks, the ironic impulse “convicts its object by presenting it as what it purports to be; and without passing judgment, as if leaving a blank for the observing subject, measures it against its being-in-itself. It shows up the negative by confronting the positive with its own claim to positivity. It cancels itself out the moment it adds a word of interpretation.”\textsuperscript{lxxxvii}

Satire, in Adorno’s view, thus confronts a given object with its own claims to given-ness, positivity, and necessity, its claim that its appearance is its true “being-in-itself,” by figuring it precisely as it appears to be. In principle, satire thus discloses the falseness of such claims, thereby negating the appearance of positivity. This negativity “shows up” in the space opened between what an object or objective situation “purports to be” and what it is. Satire creates “a blank,” a space between the positive and its “claim to positivity” that solicits from the “observing subject” a negative movement of thought or reflection. So integral is this space of thought, this space of reflection, this space of negation that Adorno insists that the ironic impulse of satire negates itself, “cancels itself out,” the very moment this space is filled by the satirist with even a
single explicit word of judgment or interpretation. Satire thus seems intrinsically a form of
negation, a form that negates the positivity of an objective situation by opening a space for human
beings’ reflection.

Satire, in this view, now no longer functions because the objective situation of modernity
– what situationists name “the spectacle,” what Arendt names “the social,” what Wyndham Lewis
names “romance” – constitutes itself as a realm of total appearance, a realm in which appearance
has entirely overcome truth, a realm in which no space exists between what our world purports to
be and what it is. Adorno writes that

irony used to say: such it claims to be but such it is; today, however, the world, even in its
most radical lie, falls back on the argument that things are like this, a simple finding
which coincides, for it, with the good. There is not a single crevice in the cliff of the
established order into which the ironist might hook a fingernail. Crashing down, he is
pursued by the mocking laughter of the insidious object that disempowered him. lxxxviii

Our world, that is, constitutes a totality of appearance, a total claim to positivity lacking even
the slightest opening for the work of satire. Even as a totality of falsehood, our world proceeds as an
empty, incessant, and thereby persuasive affirmation of itself and excises thereby even the
minutest space of negation. Expunging this space of negation, our world thus expropriates the
work of satire insofar as it mocks the satirist, agent provocateur of mocking laughter, with its own
laughter. Our world, in Adorno’s view, thus “makes a mockery of mockery” precisely insofar as
it seems to satirize satire itself. If, as Adorno remarks, “he who has laughter on his side has no
need of proof,” then our world has usurped satire’s provocation of mocking laughter in order to
frustrate and to mock those who would contest its claim to positivity and necessity with an
incessant, wry insistence that there is no alternative, that “things are like this.”

The perpetual insistence of our world’s necessity, the empty affirmation that in our world
“things are like this” and that there is no alternative, forecloses, in Adorno’s view, the space of
thought or negation heretofore instanced by satire’s militant irony. If satire operates through
mockery in order to achieve an agreement that an object or a situation is not in fact what it appears to be, if such consent emerges from the space of negation satire opens, then our world likewise mocks such shared mockery with its own enforced consent: “the gesture of the unthinking That’s-how-it-is is the exact means by which the world dispatches each of its victims, and the transcendental agreement inherent in irony becomes ridiculous in the face of the real unanimity of those it ought to attack.” As satire aims through mockery and laughter to form an agreement that objects and situations are not what they claim to be – that they are in fact passing themselves off as something false – so satire has become absurd now because our world has achieved a unanimous consent that things really are like this. Adorno, moreover, insists that we blame this unanimous false consciousness not primarily upon some widespread subjective failure – a failure akin, for instance, to those ascribed human beings in works like E.D. Hirsch’s *Cultural Literacy*, Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind*, or Mark Bauerlein’s *The Dumbest Generation* – but on the objective state of our world:

the impossibility of satire today should not be blamed, as sentimentality is apt to do, on the relativism of values, the absence of binding norms. Rather, agreement itself, the formal *a priori* of irony, has given way to universal agreement of content. As such, it presents the only fitting target for irony and at the same time pulls the ground from under its feet. Irony’s medium, the difference between ideology and reality, has disappeared.

Ideology has, in this view, overcome reality, cancelled the space of negation, and eliminated thereby the space of irony and satire. As such we might thereby be inclined to revise Juvenal’s dictum “it is difficult not to write satire” to read “it is impossible now to write satire.”

Here we encounter the paradoxical claim that our world instances both a form of romance that cruelly parodies romance and a form of satire that cancels satire itself. If Wyndham Lewis had figured romance a utopian impulse now inverted that lays waste to our world, Adorno conversely remarks that this romance has wholly usurped the critical weapon of irony and wholly negated the space of satire. Our world, in this formulation, constitutes itself as both romance and
satire: modernity deploys its hyperbolic agency, its enormous technical powers, precisely in order to transform our world into a barren hell – thus mocking romance itself – and frustrates the negative agency of satire, mocking satire’s insistence that the romance of modernity is false. Indeed, the total absorption of romance and satire into the positive constitution of our world renders these forms largely indiscernible in precisely the same sense as the social effaces any distinction between action and behavior. Action, the initiative of impossibility, gives way in this world to the sense that action itself is stricto sensu impossible. If action, in Arendt, operates as the negation of possibilities described by statistical laws in order to invoke some impossibility not properly inherent in the present, the confusion of romance and satire in the social means the incessant perpetuation of the present into the future – that we have no capacity to negate the constitution of the present in order to invoke some other future insofar as both action and satire appear to depend on some now absent space of negation by which to contest the relentless positivity of our world.

Deprived of this space, satire would seem to be frustrated in precisely the same sense as action has been frustrated. Both forms of negation seem to have been overcome by the total positivity of our world. So, as we have seen, Adorno insists that in collapsing the “difference between ideology and reality,” the distinction between falsehood and truth, “our situation makes a mockery of mockery” by depriving satire of any space in which to confront the immorality of our world with the morality of truth: as Adorno writes elsewhere in *Minima Moralia*, now “all morality has been modeled on immorality.”xci If Adorno laments that the closing of this space between ideology and reality, between appearance and truth, between immorality and morality has made satire as such impossible in modernity, Wyndham Lewis articulates a theory and practice of satire that does not depend on morality, on a space between appearance and truth – a practice, that is, of what Lewis calls “non-moral” satire that undertakes unrelenting critique without depending upon a proper space of negation. Declaring satire a practice of seeking truth – “the objective non-emotional truth of scientific intelligence” – Lewis asks rhetorically in *Men
Without Art how satire can function without a moral standpoint antagonistic or contradictory to the fraudulence of what it mocks:

but how can satire stand without the moral sanction? you may ask. For satire can only exist in contrast to something else – it is a shadow and an ugly shadow at that, of some perfection. And it is so disagreeable, and so painful (at least in the austere sense in which we appear to be defining it here) that no one would pursue it for its own sake, or take up the occupation of satirist unless compelled to do so, out of indignation at the spectacle of beauty and virtue. – That is, I think the sort of objection that, at this point, we should have to meet.

Provisionally I will reply as follows: it is my belief that ‘satire’ for its own sake – as much as anything for its own sake – is possible: and that even the most virtuous and well-proportioned of men is only a shadow, after all, of some perfection; a shadow of an imperfect, and hence ‘ugly,’ sort. As to laughter, if you allow it in one place you must, I think, allow it in another. Laughter – humor 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.

Lewis’s rhetorical question seems to anticipate Adorno’s view that satire is now impossible precisely because our world absorbs satire as a constituent and forecloses thereby the space in which satire would “exist in contrast to something else.” The “moral sanction” here is in fact some guarantee of shared truth offering and objective refutation of the falsehood of ideological claims to truth, a guarantee dispelled by our world’s effacement of a contrast between ideology and reality. To put this another way: if satire is only an “ugly shadow” of “some perfection,” if satire’s mocking laughter aims to demonstrate the imperfection of an object or an objective situation by showing the falseness of its claim to perfection in contrast to its true being as such, then satire requires some guarantee or standard of perfection against which to measure
the contrasting imperfection of its object. As the critical, negative work of satire takes place by contrasting the true and the false, a world in which appearance has posited itself as truth (and thereby foreclosed this contrast) is a world in which the “disagreeable” and “painful” work of satire could only be undertaken “for its own sake.” Apparently rendered pointless, the negative work of mockery, of militant irony, can offer no contrast to its object.

If Lewis’s rhetorical question thus prefigures Adorno’s claim that satire is impossible today because its medium has disappeared, rendering it extraneous in a world that “makes a mockery of mockery,” Lewis answers by insisting on the possibility of satire “for its own sake”: satire that performs the work of negation without depending on a moral sanction against immorality, without guarantee of some difference between reality and ideology, without an open space between an object and what that object purports to be. So Lewis remarks that even empirical reality, truth, or perfection itself is inherently imperfect, false, or even ideological. If our world has cancelled the point of satire by canceling what Adorno takes to be the formal aim of irony – negating the positive world to invoke an alternative – then Lewis imagines that the aim of satire inheres not in some positive, true reality but instead in the negative work of mockery and laughter. Indeed, Lewis insists that satire should perform the kind of total mockery Adorno finds characteristic of our world, whereby the world makes a mockery of any impulse to contest its empty affirmation that “things are like this”: “everyone,” Lewis writes, “should be laughed at or else no one should be laughed at.” Lewis moreover paradoxically figures the negative work of satire as conservative insofar as it functions as “the destroyer” of everything to which it aims its negativity, precisely in order to operate simultaneously as “the preserver” of something intrinsically human and incessantly threatened in modernity – “our tender consciousness.” The negative work of satire aims, in Lewis’s view, not to posit a space for some alternative concrete utopia but to destroy that in the social that threatens to destroy human being as such. In this sense, paradoxically, satire – like art itself – operates as a form of action by contradicting the
social, reminiscent of Luckacs’s claim in *The Theory of the Novel* that “art always says ‘and yet!’” to life.”

The satirist’s mockery is *not* inhuman even if it is antisocial: “our deepest laughter,” Lewis writes, is not, however, inhuman laughter,” precisely because it aims to preserve something intrinsically human now threatened. However, such laughter is (in Lewis’s words) “non-personal and non-moral. And it enters fields which are commonly regarded as the preserve of more ‘serious’ forms of reaction. There is no reason at all why we should not burst out laughing at a foetus, for instance. We should after all only be laughing *at ourselves!* – at ourselves early in our mortal career.\textsuperscript{xxiii} Extending to its limits the principle that everything deserves to be laughed at, Lewis here insists upon satire’s capacity to mock even objects we would find it inappropriate to mock: even a helpless fetus or an infant child. Indeed, here we might designate the mocking negativity of satire an abortion of seriousness. Let us recall Northrop Frye’s dictum that romance is a genre characterized by a potentially unlimited series of adventures indexing a kind of puerile wish-fulfillment – adventures curtailed only by the author’s death, in which the hero never ages or develops. Parodying romance, satire thus mocks some moment at which human beings’ “mortal careers” have been stunted, some Peter-Pannish eternal childhood. In this sense, then, Lewis’s insistence that “there is no reason at all why we should not burst out laughing at a fetus” offers merely a hyperbolic analogue to Frye’s definition of satire as a formal parody of romance. As, however, Lewis figures the form of romance a primary constituent of modernity, of the social, satire’s mocking laughter forms an essentially social critique. That is to say that as romance forms a constituent of the social, the practice of non-moral satire operates intrinsically as the negation of the social. If Frye figures romance an inherently childish literary form, Lewis designates our “millionaire society” – as he names our situation in *The Art of Being Ruled* – an inherently childish social form: a world dominated by what Lewis calls “the cult of the child,” a form of life lived “sub persona infantis.” To laugh at a
fetus, to laugh at an earlier childish moment in the mortal career of human beings, is to laugh at our world of puerile romance.

In a chapter of *Time and Western Man* entitled “A Brief Account of the Child-Cult,” Lewis writes “I suppose that there is no one who has not noticed, passim and without attentiveness, perhaps, the prevalence of what amounts to a cult of childhood, and of the Child. This irresponsible, Peterpannish psychology is the key to the utopia of the ‘revolutionary’ Rich.”\(^{xciv}\) In this brief account, Lewis designates the wish for “irresponsible” freedom perhaps the most salient feature of the childish romance of modernity. Lewis explains that the ubiquitous cult of the child indexes our world’s likewise ubiquitous romance of action, in which human beings idealize childhood’s apparently irresponsible freedom of action as utopian at the very historical moment at which action and utopia are wholly circumscribed and frustrated. (Indeed, the first third of *Time and Western Man* comprises a series of attacks on modernists whose aesthetics Lewis believes collaborate with this romantic “Child-Cult”: viz., Proust, Stein, Anita Loos, Charlie Chaplin, and even Joyce, all of whom Lewis believes adapt the Child-Cult as a formal principle.) In *The Art of Being Ruled*, Lewis remarks that such puerile irresponsibility has become, in our world, the very model for political freedom as such: it is a belief operating tacitly amongst human beings in modernity, “at the root of a great deal of behavior today, that freedom and irresponsibility are invariably commutative terms.”\(^{xcv}\) Or rather, that this romantic sense of freedom is an instance of the romance of action and as such offers a hollow social form of freedom, a freedom that is not freedom. As Lewis writes, “where the political one does not yet exist, a social precursor, a cheap advance copy, a social caricature of it exists.”\(^{xcvi}\) The Child-Cult thus operates as a caricature of utopian freedom.

*The Art of Being Ruled* proposes that our world exists “sub persona infantis,” under the sign of the infant, as a society in which most human beings have been infantilized as a result of the contradiction between the romance of action and our very incapacity to act. This
contradiction, Lewis explains, provokes a wish for a return to a childish moment prior to existence in our world, a moment in which action would not be wholly frustrated. “It is in Freudian language, for instance, the desire of man to return into the womb from whence he came: a movement of retreat and discouragement – a part of the great strategy of defeat suggested to or evolved by our bankrupt society.”

Lewis suggests that modernity’s romance of action and its correlative Child-Cult constitute a kind of grand strategy of arrogating power for the political formation that rules our world: “to make everybody ‘like unto little children’ is not such a bad way (to start with),” Lewis writes, “of disposing of them. The political power that is taking command in the world today seems to have said to all those immature, inapertiva men, who were gradually forced away from all the seats of authority that they had for so long held in Europe, ‘Run away and play!’”

Just as romance operates in modernity as a counterfeit utopianism in which the social has inverted romance’s utopian rejection of the present into the constituent element of the present – thereby depriving romance of its utopian force – so the Child-Cult operates as an inherently frustrated wish for political freedom that can achieve only irresponsibility. Though Lewis locates the advance guard of the Child-Cult in the emergence of a group of the “‘revolutionary’ Rich” deprived of political power as they have achieved economic power, he notes that their response to frustrations of action imitates some imagined “proletarian” response and signals a form of behavior ubiquitous in the social. So it is that Lewis writes both that “a small privileged class is playing at revolution, and aping a ‘proletarian’ freedom that the proletariat has not yet reached the conception of” and that “both the grown-up and the rich man find the natural outlet for their ambition and vitality blocked.”

The cult of the child thus emerges as a corollary of modernity’s romance of action; the Child-Cult represents the formal evacuation of the utopian desire for irresponsible, unfettered freedom of action. As the social, what Lewis terms our “millionaire society,” wholly circumscribes the freedom of Arendtian action, the Child-Cult indexes the hollow form of
freedom still possible: “whenever men,” Lewis writes, “are prevented from satisfying their ambitions in a full, active, and competitive life, they will loiter on, or, if expelled from, return by the back door or the back window to the Nursery.” This desire to remain in the nursery is precisely a desire to return to an earlier point in a human being’s “mortal career,” a movement toward infantilization Lewis believes general in our world, a wish elicited by the frustration of action in the social. As such infantilization compasses the totality of the social, Lewis’s art of non-moral satire aims to provoke mocking laughter at the social order by provoking mocking laughter at ourselves – at ourselves insofar as we are wholly embedded in the social. The negative work of satire thus operates as an aesthetic movement corollary to an antisocial impulse codified in the Situationist dictum “to call into question the society in which you live, you must first call yourself into question.” Satire mocks people behaving in the social to negate the social in order, in turn, to cancel the irresponsible freedom of the Child-Cult and to replace it with a more fully political freedom modeled, strangely, on the artist.

Lewis envisions the irresponsible freedom vaunted by the cult of the child correlative to another idealized form of irresponsible freedom cherished by the cult of the artist. “Both the Nursery and the Studio or Study,” Lewis remarks, are being pillaged and overrun by a vast crowd of ‘grown-ups’ who covet the irresponsibilities and unreality of these two up till now sacred retreats.

To state in its awful simplicity the true inner nature of what is happening, every one wants to be a child, and every one wants to be an artist; All the privileges of lisping innocent and potted childhood, and all the privileges of art, are coveted by the masses of the mature and the rich. The mature have developed this particular consciousness because their privileges, the privileges and ambitions of mature life, have been ravished from them. The nursery and the studio (or study), realms of the child and the artist (or intellect) thus present themselves here as the social compensation for modernity’s expropriation and frustration of “the
privilige and ambition of mature life,” of what Arendt names a human being’s “vita activa.” But if our world offers a childish social form of freedom commutative with irresponsibility as compensation for some properly political freedom and thereby debases freedom itself, so too does it debase true childhood and authentic art by falsifying such forms into forms of freedom that yet depend on the unfreedom of others. The cult of the child and the cult of the artist celebrate forms of life that “are both rigidly dependent on other people. They are both obtained at the expense of other people, and the servitude of others is their condition.” Paradoxically, yet purposively, thus, the instance of freedom made most widely available in our world functions only to extend and to perpetuate unfreedom – just as, let us recall, the romance of action extends and intensifies behavior and thereby cruelly parodies romance itself.

Lewis imagines that the most ubiquitous and visible instance of the cult of the artist is an impulse and inducement for human beings to “express” their “personality”: to disclose some distinctive truth about themselves that would distinguish one human being from another, producing the kind of plurality Arendt laments has been lost in the social. In our world, however, this impulse towards expression has been inverted such that it discloses not difference but only the same. Rather than distinguishing one human being from another, quasi-aesthetic expressions of personality insist only upon the total fusion of human beings into a mass whose sole capacity is to affirm the social. If people were observed during their attempts to disclose and distinguish themselves, Lewis writes, they would be found only to disclose the indistinction of people behaving in the social:

if they were subsequently watched in the act of “expressing” their “personality,” it would be found that it was somebody else’s personality they were expressing. If a hundred of them were observed “expressing their personality,” all together and at the same time, it would be found that they expressed this inalienable, mysterious “personality” in the same way. In short, it would be patent at once that they only had one personality between them to “express” – some “expressing” it with a little more virtuosity, some a little less. It
would be a *group personality* that they were “expressing” – a pattern imposed on them by means of education and the hypnotism of cinema, wireless, and the press. Each one would, however, be firmly persuaded that it was “his own” personality that he was “expressing.”

Lewis, that is, insists that in our world a human being’s personality is inherently social, singular and unique only in the sense that it participates in a single and unanimous “group personality.” That which seems most properly one’s own, that which seems in one to be most “inalienable” and “mysterious,” that which ought thereby to distinguish one from others, turns out upon closer inspection to be the very medium binding an individual to the social. Thus the very mechanism by which a human being feels most able to distinguish herself most authentically has been inverted into the cruel affirmation of her *indistinction* from a mass of others. This movement towards individuation away from the social reverses its course and finally expresses only the individual’s total saturation by the social. Expressing one’s personality, one expresses in fact a collective “pattern” that cancels distinctions between human beings and makes each human being, even in her inmost solitude, already a crowd. The social thus indexes an inverted movement whereby one’s most authentic effort becomes the very mechanism of one’s own alienation, a perversion codified, perhaps, in Adorno’s statement in *Minima Moralia* that in our world “estrangement shows itself precisely in the elimination of distance between people.”

The cult of the artist and its perversions of art mark thereby an aborted movement toward authentic, unestranged life that is precisely correlative with the Child-Cult’s frustrated wish for some properly political freedom. As our world offers a childish irresponsible freedom (a form of freedom that depends on and thence perpetuates unfreedom) in place of political freedom as such, so its offer of some individuation from the social only reinforces the social. “So it is,” Lewis remarks, “*sub persona infantis* that the strategy of today would present itself”: our world constitutes itself, at present, under the sign of the child, through the mechanism of an infantilization that propagates unfreedom and perpetuates the present indefinitely into the future,
ensuring that the future will always be the same. If this is so, then Lewis proposes that it is only the authentic work of art, instanced by the work of satire, that can negate the necessity of the social. In *Men Without Art*, Lewis explains that the work of satire – and, in turn, the work of art – aim to negate such necessity in order to open a space of freedom. “*Freedom,*” Lewis writes, “is certainly our human goal, in the sense that all effort is directed at that end: and it is a dictate of nature that we should laugh, and laugh loudly, at those who have fallen into slavery, and still more, at those who baten on it.” Indeed, Lewis insists that the function of the artist is to interrupt the movement of the present into the future, to negate through detached thought the very movement by which life perpetuates itself incessantly. “The artistic sensibility,” in Lewis’s words, “is another ‘province of nature’” – an element of nature that is paradoxically antagonistic to nature’s perpetual movement of life. “The artist steps outside this evolutionary upward march, and looking back into the evolutionary machine, he explores its pattern – or is supposed to – quite cold-bloodedly.”

If Hannah Arendt figures the social as a distinctively modern realm in which the reproduction of bare life has become the very point of politics – such that other important aspects of politics, free action chief among them, have been occluded by social behavior – Wyndham Lewis imagines here that the work of the artist cancels or negates the “evolutionary upward march” of reproduction itself. Indeed, art seems here to negate bare life’s reproduction precisely in order to achieve some space of freedom from reproduction. The satirist, for instance, aims to provoke laughter in order to mock those aspects of our world that index unfreedom. When Lewis remarks that “the artistic sensibility is another ‘province of nature,’” this means quite precisely that the artistic impulse is an aspect of natural life that is properly antagonistic to life. Let us recall here the primary form of social behavior Michael Kell-Imre avows, in *Snooty Baronet*, to mock in his antinarrative fictions: marriage, a form of behavior that is experienced as free action even as it discloses – in Kell-Imre’s view – the similarity of *Homo sapiens* to animals. Simply put, marriage in *Snooty Baronet* is experienced as an unlikely adventure or event even as it marks
the insistent force with which reproduction determines human life. It is in this sense that Wyndham Lewis’s insistence that our world persists *sub persona infantis* means not only that people have been infantilized but also and especially that the social aims incessantly to reproduce the child. Though the cult of the artist likewise reproduces the child, true and authentic art aims to negate reproduction and the social itself in an action correlative, perhaps, with Adorno’s statement that “the task of art today is to bring chaos into order.”

*Tarr*, Lewis’s most famous and widely read fiction, stages a confrontation between the cult of the child and the cult of the artist, on one hand, and true and authentic art on the other. Readers of *Tarr* likely recall that the book’s doubling of artists in the figures of Tarr and Otto Kreisler functions quite precisely as a contradiction between true and false forms of art. Indeed, *Tarr* opposes these twin artists in a dialectic that figures Kreisler as a failed, frustrated artist — an artist whose attempts to produce art invariably fail — while enabling and seeming to endorse Tarr’s statements about the antagonism of art to bare life. In a discussion with Anastasya near the end of the book, Tarr insists upon deadness, on the cancellation of life, as a necessary feature of true art: “This is the essential point to grasp: Death is the thing that differentiates art and life. Art is identical with the idea of permanence. Art is a continuity and not an individual spasm: but life is the idea of the person.” Tarr presents art therefore as something beyond the social imperative to express one’s individual personality; art is beyond the personality, lies beyond social relations and is therefore properly antisocial. “Consider,” Tarr proposes to Anastasya, “the content of what we call art. A statue is art. It is a dead thing, a lump of stone or wood. Its lines and proportions are its soul. Anything living, quick, and changing is bad art always; naked men and women are the worst art of all, because there are fewer semi-dead things about them. The shell of the tortoise, the plumage of a bird, makes these animals approach nearer to art. Soft, quivering and quick flesh is as far from art as it is possible for an object to be.”

“Aart is merely the dead, then?”
“No, but deadness is the first condition of art. The armoured hide of the hippopotamus, the shell of the tortoise, feathers and machinery, you may put in one camp; naked pulsing and moving of the soft inside of life – along with elasticity of movement and consciousness – that goes in the opposite camp. Deadness is the first condition for art: the second is absence of soul, in the human and sentimental sense. With the statue its lines and masses are its soul, no restless inflammable ego is imagined for its interior: it has no inside: good art must have no inside: that is capital.”

Tarr thus insists not only that deadness or antagonism to life is the conditio sine qua non of true art but also and especially that art concerns itself entirely with surfaces, with exteriors. So it is that Tarr distinguishes between true and counterfeit forms of art precisely in terms of a distinction between sundry strange instances of natural life itself. Bad art, in this formulation, comprises that which is “living, quick, and changing” – anything, that is, dynamic, “pulsing and moving,” anything of the “soft inside of life.” True art’s emblems, conversely, appear here as static exterior surfaces: hippopotamus hides, tortoise shells, birds’ plumage, all of which appear to be dead things. As we have noted, Lewis’s suggestion that art is an element of natural life paradoxically and antagonistically distinct from life, such dead things here seem to be art precisely in the sense that they are elements of life that have become dead. Interestingly, however, these dead things – hides, shells, feathers – make the lives of their organisms possible: the shell of a tortoise, for instance, provides a hardened static protective carapace that defends the living organism’s “soft, quivering and quick flesh” from the impact of the world. Art thus seems paradoxically a form of deadness that makes living in the world possible; conversely, life itself depends upon art’s dead things.

The interior, moreover, depends on the exterior. In order to clarify the distinction between art and, Tarr himself presents here two contrasting and contradictory versions of the soul. Art by definition refuses any interior soul in our “human and sentimental sense”: “no restless inflammable ego is imagined” for the interior of statue. Instead, a statue’s “lines and
masses are its soul,” “its lines and proportions are its soul.” The soul of art, that which is most essential in art, thus emerges from a play of surfaces. Indeed, Tarr rejects the possibility of an aesthetics of the interior: “good art,” we are told, “must have no inside” and conversely that which aims to capture the inside is counterfeit and sentimental art. Authentic art, that is, aims to provoke responses only through its play of surfaces.

Insofar as it functions by presenting objects and objective situations exclusively in terms of their surface appearance, the work of satire instances the ne plus ultra exemplar of authentic art. As Tarr here designates bad, false art an attempt to express interiority, likewise in Men Without Art Lewis attacks the use of “the internal method” – interior monologue, what has been called stream of consciousness technique – in modernist fiction. There, Lewis proposes radically circumscribing the number of occasions in which the “internal method” should be used, insisting that it should only be used for those characters who have been infantilized in some way in the social: “what I think can be laid down is this: In dealing with (1) the extremely aged; (2) young children; (3) half-wits; and (4) animals, the internal method can be extremely effective. In my opinion it should be entirely confined to those classes of characters.”

Conversely, Lewis presents satire precisely as an aesthetics of exteriority:

Satire is cold, and that is good! It is easier to achieve those polished and resistant surfaces of a great externalist art in Satire. At least they can are achieved more naturally than can be done beneath the troubled impulse of the lyrical afflatus. All the nineteenth century poetry of France, for instance, from the Fleurs du Mal onwards, was stiffened with Satire, too. There is a stiffening of Satire in everything good, of ‘the grotesque,’ which is the same thing – the non-human outlook must be there (beneath the fluff and pulp which is all that is seen by the majority) to correct our soft conceit.

If Tarr’s remarks echo Lewis’s insistence on the necessary coldness and externality of authentic art, Tarr itself frustrates Kreisler’s artistic ambitions precisely by characterizing him as the inhabitant of a zone of indistinction between dead art and mobile life. As, that is, true art’s
very existence depends upon instancing an antagonistic distinction between its cold exterior and
the vital interior movement of life itself. Tarr locates Kreisler in a realm in which such
distinctions disappear. Recall that midway through Tarr, when Kreisler’s father summons him
from Paris to Germany and insists that he relinquish his frustrated pursuit of art in order to work
in commerce, Kreisler replies by threatening to negate his own life by shooting himself. After
remarking Kreisler’s resignation to death, the narrator describes his curious zombie-like existence
in language that propels Tarr’s later contrast between dead art and mobile life towards a zone of
indistinction: “instead of rearing pyramids against Death, if you imagine some more
uncompromising race meeting its obsession by means of an unparalleled immobility in life, a race
of statues, in short, throwing flesh in Death’s path instead of basalt, there you would have a
people among whom Kreisler would have been much at home.” The narrator thus imagines
Kreisler as belonging to a human group that has effaced the distinction between dead art and the
reproduction of life by transforming its own life into a form of death, fashioning itself into “a race
of statues.” Paradoxically, this race of people aims to stave off its own death, aims to perpetuate
its own life, precisely by adapting the “immobility” of death into the very principle for its
reproduction. This human group perpetuates itself into the future by making its present
immobile: it perpetuates the unchangeable present into the future in precisely the same way we
have said that the social persists into the future. So the narrator imagines Otto Kreisler as
belonging to the social and figures such belonging as the condition of his frustrated art. If true art
depends on the distinction between death and life, between deadness and vitality, the social
effacement of this distinction mocks both art and life, depriving art of its negative capability as it
arrays the romance of modernity around the reproduction of bare life. The cult of the artist
thereby complements the cult of the child insofar as both celebrate only the persistence of our
world.

Readers of Tarr, however, should recall that the book’s comedic plot begins and ends
with marriage. In part one, for instance, Tarr contemplates and rejects marriage with Bertha
precisely in order to retain the freedom of his art. By the end of the book, however, Tarr marries
Bertha in order to legitimate her child by Kreisler. If Tarr has figured Kreisler as an artist
frustrated by life in the social, the book concludes by locating Tarr within exactly the same
structural position: Tarr is an artist likewise frustrated by marriage and the cult of the child. This
satire, then, enacts on the level of its characters the effacement of a contradiction between true
and false forms of art. Authentic art gives way in the social to the cult of the artist and the cult of
the child. Tarr thus enacts the utter frustration of art in modernity, making a mockery of art’s
mockery by suturing art into the social. The book operates therefore precisely as an anatomy of
the cult of the artist and the cult of the child.

If Tarr presents the attachment of marriage as an exemplary instance of other social forms
of attachment that occlude any capacity to negate the social, it is in the very opening pages of
Tarr, perhaps, that we encounter a kind of resistance to the social in terms of a yearning for
detachment Tarr’s plot ultimately frustrates. Encountering a repulsive figure named Hobson, Tarr
imagines the very possibility of an antisocial detachment in a passage that forms one of my
chapter’s epigraphs: “(‘Why cannot most people, having talked and annoyed each other once or
twice, rebecome strangers simply? Oh for a multitude of divorces in our moeurs, more than the
old vexed sex ones!’)” cxiv Though Tarr here yearns for a mode of detachment Lewis ultimately
denies him, The Art of Being Ruled insists that the detachment of the artist and the intellect from
the human collectivity is the necessary condition of authentic art and, indeed, of thought itself.
Discussing there what Lewis terms the “Politics of the Intellect,” Lewis insists that “the intellect
is more removed from the crowd than is anything: but it is not a snobbish withdrawal, but a going
aside for purposes of work, of work not without its utility to the crowd…. More than the prophet
or the religious teacher he represents the great unworldly element in the world.” cxv For Lewis,
such detachment from the human collectivity not only operates as the necessary condition of art
but also exemplifies in its negation of the social a form of freedom that is not commutative with
irresponsibility: this “life of the intelligence is the very incarnation of freedom.” Lewis contends, is a very rare freedom, that possessed by the intellect alone. It is contingent on no physical circumstance, is not obtained or held at the expense of others – indeed is altogether independent of people; and although it is a source of power, is an unrecognized and unofficial source, and takes with it, under favourable circumstances, some of the advantages of irresponsibility: and at the worst, and deprived of all power, still, as freedom, remains unaffected by fortune.

Lewis, then, conceives art and the function of the artist precisely as an antisocial impulse to withdraw from, to negate, the world as it exists in order to instance some properly antisocial “unworldly element in the world.” As art and aesthetics negate the perpetual reproduction of life, so the artist refuses the social in order to go “aside for purposes of work.” In contrast with the vision of the artist’s irresponsible freedom enshrined at the center of the cult of the artist, the authentic artist’s withdrawal from the social for work exemplifies a properly political freedom neither commutative with irresponsibility nor dependent upon others’ unfreedom. When Lewis remarks that the freedom of the artist, the freedom of the intellect, “is contingent upon no physical circumstance,” this means that such freedom marks quite precisely the negation of any and all such circumstance that creates, like the work of satire, its own space in the social.

Likewise, when Lewis remarks that such freedom “is not obtained or held at the expense of others,” this means, moreover, that the freedom of the artist, the freedom of the intellect, exemplifies a mode of political freedom that does not entail domination. Lewis remarks that this “very rare freedom” operates simultaneously as a “source of power” and as, perhaps, “deprived of all power.” We should understand this contradiction to mean that the freedom of the artist, the freedom of the intellect, functions in modernity as a means to escape and to negate modernity’s total determination without invoking another form of determination. This freedom opens a space
within the social for other modes of living undetermined by the social and thence offers an exemplary tactic of the art of being ruled in the social.

In this sense we can detect in Lewis’s aesthetic practice of nonmoral satire an antisocial impulse: an impulse to negate the social through experiments in narrative aesthetics that work to open a space for satire at the very moment Adorno insists such a space has forever closed. If Lewis’s modernist aesthetics thus seems, paradoxically, more Adorno than Adorno, we might thereby dismiss Frederic Jameson’s argument in *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, The Modernist as Fascist*, that Lewis’s work instances a reactionary, “proto-fascist” impulse within modernism. There Jameson argues that Lewis’s fiction evinces some dialectical movement between the radical impulse of its sentences and the reactionary conservatism of its plots: between what Jameson designates the “molecular” and “molar” levels of Lewis’s fiction, respectively. Jameson argues, therefore, that the conservatism of Lewis’s plots aborts the revolutionary impulse of his style in a manner that transforms such plots into apparatuses for capturing antagonisms to contemporary capitalism in a properly reactionary form of fascism. As we have seen, however, the plots of Lewis’s satires aim through almost indiscernible parody of romance to mock the romance of modernity, to negate the social, and through such antisocial aesthetics to open a space to contest modernity. Here let us recall Adorno’s statement in *Aesthetic Theory* (a passage that forms the third epigraph of this chapter) that it is art’s paradoxical opening of a space of freedom within the social realm of total determination that mars critical judgments of art: “the dual nature of artworks as autonomous structures and social phenomena results in oscillating criteria. Autonomous works provoke the verdict of social indifference and ultimately of being criminally reactionary; conversely, works that make socially univocal discursive judgments thereby negate art as well as themselves.”

In this, Adorno seems to anticipate Jameson’s designation of Wyndham Lewis’s aesthetics as “proto-fascist.” An aesthetics that aims at autonomy amidst total social determination, Lewis’s art elicits from Jameson the complaint that it is, in effect, “criminally
reactionary.” At the same time, however, Lewis’s aesthetics work to avoid “socially univocal
discursive judgments,” to avoid positing new forms of social life, precisely because this is not the
vocation of art. “It is not,” Adorno reminds us in “Commitment,” “the office of art to spotlight
alternatives, but to resist by its form alone the course of the world, which permanently puts a
pistol to men’s heads.” As Adorno remarks that “the source of art’s social explosiveness”
inheres precisely in its formal interruption of the irrational rationality of our world, so Lewis’s
work forms an instance of freedom from the romance of the social. Let us conclude here,
therefore, by designating Wyndham Lewis’s antisocial satire an exemplary instance of antisocial
modernism insofar as its aesthetic negation of the social figures, however slightly, a means to
escape from modernity’s perpetual threat to human freedom.

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ii Wyndham Lewis, Snooty Baronet. ed. Bernard Lafourcade. (Santa Rosa, CA: Black
Sparrow Press, 1984), 103.
iii Theodor W. Adorno, Aesthetic Theory. trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. (Minneapolis:
University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 248.
iv Lewis, Snooty Baronet, 16.
v Ibid.
vi See Timothy Materer, Wyndham Lewis the Novelist. (Detroit: Wayne State University
Press, 1976,) 100-111.
vii Lewis, Snooty Baronet, 63-64.
viii Ibid., 64
ix Ibid. “I am a ‘sport’ of course,” he explains to the reader.
x Ibid.
xii Ibid., 65. “For instance,” we are told, “My Miss X. Three (my people have numbers
not names) has been compared to Miss Demolines, the Bayswater Adventuress, in “The
Last Chronicle of Barset.” An English ‘Pecuchet’ another was called. I have had a good
success after my two books.”
xii Ibid.
xvi Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,
1990), 45.
xiv Quoted in Dorrit Cohn, The Distinction of Fiction. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins
xv Georg Simmel, Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms. ed. Donald N.
xvii Ibid., 188.
xviii Ibid., 189.
Indeed, Caserio notes that one defining aspect of modernism is its peculiar form of risk management, indexed precisely by its aesthetic form. “Any theory or history of modernism,” Caserio writes, “must come to terms with the role that chance plays in modernist instances. If these instances have anything in common, I propose that their communion results from their sensing, in a profoundly shaping way (whose only precedent, strangely enough for modernism, lies in the ancient world), the impact of chance on human affairs. Essential to this shaping impact is the opportunity and obstacle presented by chance to totalizing impulses.” Though properly outside the scope of the present work, this implies a possible comparison between modernism itself and modernity’s other signal form of risk management: insurance and other financial instruments. Any cultural or economic history of modernist aesthetics must account for this odd convergence. Indeed, recent works like Michael Szalay’s *New Deal Modernism* track precisely this conjunction between aesthetic and financial forms of risk management.

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**xxix** Simmel, 191.


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**xxii** Lewis, *Snooty Baronet*, 65.

**xxiii** Arendt, 40.

**xxiv** Ibid., 177.

**xxv** Ibid., 177-178

**xxvi** Ibid., 178


**xxviii** Arendt, 233.

**xxix** Ibid., 232-233.

**x** Ibid., 233.

**xxxi** Ibid., 191.

**xxii** Ibid., 224


**xxiv** Ibid., 182.

**xxv** Ibid., 177-178.


**xxviii** “Action, moreover,” Arendt writes, “no matter what its specific content, always establishes relationships and therefore has an inherent tendency to force open all limitation and cut across all boundaries. Limitations and boundaries exist within the realm of human affairs, but they never offer a framework that can reliably withstand the onslaught with which each new generation must insert itself. The frailty of human institutions and laws and, generally, of all matters pertaining to men’s living together,
arises from the human condition of natality and is quite independent of the frailty of 
human nature. The fences inclosing private property and insuring the limitations of each 
household, the territorial boundaries which protect and make possible its political 
existence, are of such great importance to the stability of human affairs precisely because 
no such limiting and protecting principle rises out of the activities going on in the realm 
of human affairs itself. The limitations of the law are never entirely reliable safeguards 
against action from within the body politic, just as the boundaries of the territory are 
never entirely reliable safeguards against action from without. The boundlessness of 
action is only the other side of its tremendous capacity for establishing relationships, that 
is, its specific productivity; this is why the old virtue of moderation, of keeping within 
bounds, is indeed one of the political virtues par excellence, just as the political 
temptation par excellence is indeed hubris (as the Greeks, fully experienced in the 
potentialities of action, knew so well) and not the will to power, as we are inclined to 
believe.” Arendt, 191.

xxxix Ibid., 45.
xl Ibid., 43.
xxi Ibid., 42.
xxiii Ibid., 310.
xxiv Ibid., 308.
xxv Ibid., 311.
xxvi Ibid., 311-312.
xxvii Ibid., 233.
xxviii Ibid.
xxix Ibid., 186.
l Ibid.
li Ibid.
lii Wyndham Lewis, Time and Western Man. ed. Paul Edwards. (Santa Rosa, CA: Black 
Sparrow Press, 1993), 5.
liii Ibid.
lv Lewis, Time and Western Man, 6.
University Press, 1977), 120-142.
lvii Lewis, Time and Western Man, 11.
lviii Ibid., 12.
lx Ibid., 12.
lx The Art of Being Ruled, ed. Reed Way Dasenbrock. (Santa Rosa, 
lxii Lewis, Time and Western Man, 20.

Ibid., 204-205.

Ibid., 224-225.


Ibid.

Jessie Weston, *From Ritual to Romance*. (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2005), 130: “Mithraism taught the resurrection of the body – Mithra will descend upon earth, and will revive all men. All will issue from their graves, resume their former appearance and recognize each other. All will be united in one great assembly, and the good will be separated from the evil. Then in one supreme sacrifice Mithra will immolate the divine bull, and mixing its fat with the consecrated wine will offer to the righteous the cup of Eternal Life.”


Ibid., 90.

Ibid., 75.

Ibid., 73.

Weston, 127.

Weston, 146.

Frye, 186

Ibid., 187.


Ibid., 227-228.

Ibid., 232.

Ibid., 235.

Ibid., 103.


Ibid.


Ibid., 210.

Ibid.

Ibid., 211.

Ibid., 211-212.

Ibid., 211.

Ibid., 187.


Ibid., 113.

Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, 51.


Ibid., 134.

Ibid., 162.

Ibid., 162-163.
Ibid., 134-5, 137.
c Ibid., 137.
ci Ibid., 136-137.
cii Ibid., 135.
ciii Ibid., 148.
civ Adorno, Minima Moralia, 41.
cv Lewis, Men Without Art, 116.
cvi Ibid.
cvii Adorno, Minima Moralia, 222.
cviii Lewis, Tarr, 312.
cix Ibid.
cx Lewis, Men Without Art, 120.
cxi Ibid., 121.
cxii Lewis, Tarr, 164.
cxiii Ibid.
cxiv Ibid., 12.
cxv Lewis, The Art of Being Ruled, 374.
cxvi Ibid.
cxvii Ibid., 135-136.
cxix Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, 248.
Chapter 5

“Novels that are like hand grenades”

“Might an IRA bomb and Joyce’s Ulysses have anything in common?”
– Enda Duffy

“The literal is barbaric.”
– T.W. Adorno

“Pregnancy is barbaric.”
– Shulamith Firestone

Rudyard Kipling’s “With the Night Mail: A Story of 2000 A.D.” – a strange science fiction tale collected in the 1909 volume Actions and Reactions – narrates the passage of the dirigible Postal Packet 162 from London to Quebec from the perspective of its commander, Captain Purnall. In the story, dirigibles and other airships are the primary form of transportation and a supranational organization, the Aerial Board of Control (A.B.C.), has emerged to guarantee the free passage of Postal Packets and other aerial transport across the globe – a charge the A.B.C. encapsulates with the motto “Transportation is Civilization.” Though the A.B.C., a “semi-elected, semi-nominated body of a few score persons of both sexes,” has been charged only with ensuring the free movement of the mail and other aerial vehicles, in practice this supranational organization “controls the planet.” “Theoretically,” Captain Purnall explains midway through the story, “we do what we please so long as we do not interfere with the traffic and all it implies.” Practically, the A.B.C. confirms or annuls all international arrangements and, to judge from its last report, finds our tolerant, humorous, lazy little planet only too ready to shift the whole burden of public administration on its shoulders.

Were there any contemporary readers of “With the Night Mail,” Captain Purnall’s single paragraph account of the political constitution of 2000 A.D. would seem to them an aberration. (Indeed, in Fifty Works of English and American Literature We Could Do Without, Brigid
Brophy, Michael Levey, and Charles Osborne remark “few writers have been so often revived as Kipling. But then few have been so often discredited. The frequency with which critics rediscover him – about once every five years – is a mark not of any vitality but of his propensity for dying on his rediscoverers’ hands.” The paragraph musing on the A.B.C.’s political power occurs amidst a narrative otherwise wholly devoted to a very literal account of the passage of Postal Packet 162 from London to Quebec. In the course of this journey, we are told about Captain Purnall’s interaction with his crew, the Packet’s encounters with disabled airships, and even the mysterious power source for the dirigible – a gas heated by “Fleury’s Ray,” in a process that remains “a mystery to this day” even to Fleury himself. The story begins in London, proceeds through a relatively banal account of the journey, and concludes with the arrival of Postal Packet 162 in Quebec, its delivery of the mail, and its departure for return to London.

Though this is the end of the story, it is not the conclusion of the text. In fact, Captain Purnall’s story comprises only half of “With the Night Mail”: the second half of the text features “extracts from the magazine in which it appeared,” a publication of 2000 A.D. apparently devoted to reporting news about the Aerial Board of Control. These extracts include notices about navigation lights, lists of casualties and missing persons, weather reports, letters to the editor, book reviews, classified ads, and even an advice column. Amidst this cavalcade of documents, readers of “With the Night Mail” encounter one that is aberrant as Captain Purnall’s single paragraph account of the political constitution of the world. A note entitled “Crete and the A.B.C.” presents news of a properly political dispute on Crete, a story apparently first told in the “A.B.C. Monthly Report,” “not without humor.” Until 25 October, Crete remained “the sole surviving European repository of ‘autonomous institutions,’ ‘local self-government,’ and the rest of the archaic lumber devised in the past for the confusion of human affairs.” This residual democratic government had transformed Crete into a tourist destination that “has lived practically on the tourist traffic attracted by her annual pageants of Parliaments, Boards, Municipal Councils,
But, we are told, the Cretans “grew wearied” of “playing at being savages for pennies,” destroyed all the landing-towers for Postal Packets, and ceased communication with the outside world precisely in order to provoke the Aerial Board of Control to govern the island directly. The note explains that “the A.B.C. have taken over the administration of Crete on normal lines; and tourists must go elsewhere to witness the ‘debates,’ ‘resolutions,’ and ‘popular movements’ of the old days.” Lest we be tempted to condemn this Cretan abdication of democratic government, autonomous institutions, and political self-determination, the note reminds readers that during the years leading up to 2000 A.D., many other “large, prosperous, and presumably public-spirited communities” have abdicated democratic self-determination and “have deliberately thrown themselves into the hands of the A.B.C.”

“The Night Mail” embeds this allusion to the numerous previously autonomous and self-determining communities within a sequence of otherwise banal excerpts from the magazine in which Captain Purnall’s story is supposed to have appeared. The story thereby subordinates the political (or antipolitical) dimension of the Aerial Board of Control to an entirely literal account of the technical aspects of delivering the mail. If the story thus presents Crete’s relinquishment of democracy as, effectively, an afterthought, Kipling’s sequel “As Easy as A.B.C.” narrates a direct confrontation between the A.B.C. and a demand for radical democracy. Collected in the 1912 volume A Diversity of Creatures, “As Easy as A.B.C.” opens with a question from its narrator, “the Board’s Official Reporter”: viz., “isn’t it almost time that our Planet took some interest in the Aerial Board of Control?” “One knows,” we are told, “that easy communication nowadays, and lack of privacy in the past, have killed all curiosity among mankind,” but the narrator frames his tale as an account intended to provoke curiosity and even gratuity for the A.B.C.’s operations.

Taking place in 2065 A.D., “As Easy as A.B.C.” narrates the organization’s response to a provocation from the Mayor of Chicago and government of the District of Northern Illinois who
“had riotously cut itself out of all systems and would remain disconnected till the Board should take over and administer it direct.” – thus repeating the very action Crete had undertaken in “With the Night Mail.”xvi In the story we learn that this interruption of communication has taken place precisely because the Mayor of Chicago seeks the A.B.C.’s help in putting down a mass political demonstration. The A.B.C. dispatches a military fleet to Chicago; its commander, De Forest, is told that unless the A.B.C. directly administers the district, the Mayor will have the entire crowd killed: “We’ve finished with Crowds! We aren’t going back to the Old Days! Take us over! Take the Serviles away! Administer direct or we’ll kill ‘em! Down with the People!”xvii The A.B.C.’s fleet preserves the people’s lives, dispersing them with a nonlethal crowd-control device: blinding beams of light that elicit pained, harrowing screams intoning “certain notes – one learnt to expect them with terror – [that] cut through one’s marrow,” which give way to one collectively expressed “single devastating wail that shook all the horizon as a rubbed wet finger shakes the rim of a bowl.”xviii The crowd’s crime is precisely that it has formed a crowd: in 2065 A.D., the value of privacy is held absolute such that public gatherings and demonstrations are regarded as threats to the entire social order. To disperse this public demonstration, therefore, is to defend the constitution of the social.

If the social and the public are presented here as contradictory, the crowd’s demands seek an explicitly political form of life wholly antagonistic to the A.B.C.’s antipolitical guarantees of privacy and easy communication. A member of the crowd, we are told, agitates explicitly for a kind of democracy far more radical than the parliamentarianism relinquished by Crete:

he demanded that every matter of daily life, including most of the physical functions, should be submitted for decision at any time of the week, month, or year to, I gathered, anybody who happened to be passing by or residing within a certain radius, and that everybody should forthwith abandon his concerns to settle the matter, first by Crowd-making, next by talking to the Crowds made, and lastly by describing crosses on pieces
of paper, which rubbish should later be counted with certain mystic ceremonies and oaths. Out of this amazing play, he assured us, would automatically arise a higher, nobler, and kinder world, based – he demonstrated with the awful lucidity of the insane – on the sanctity of the Crowd and the villainy of the single person.\textsuperscript{xix}

“With the awful lucidity of the insane,” then, this member of the crowd articulates a demand for radical democracy and self-determination whose insistence upon public deliberation aims to endow the world with a properly Arendtian form of politics, in which the public sphere guarantees the very possibility of deliberation and self-disclosure and will result, we are mockingly told, in a “higher, nobler, and kinder world.” Though the A.B.C.’s Official Reporter presents this demand for democratic self-determination as a nuisance to be dismissed – an annoyance readers should be thankful the A.B.C. exists to put down – we should read this demand for radical democracy quite precisely as a demand for a kind of politics wholly occluded by the A.B.C.’s guiding imperative: to facilitate unimpeded, easy communication.

Easy, transparent, and literal communication, then, comes into contradiction with politics as such: if the unhindered movement of letters entails that the A.B.C. must cancel any political forms that could interrupt communication, if the Board thence negates all established political forms in order to constitute itself as a supranational technocracy whose guiding imperative is to ensure the easy communication of letters, then conversely the very form of politics comes to entail disrupting such easy communication. If we might read these two Kipling stories as a preposterous depiction of Adorno’s dictum (made in \textit{Aesthetic Theory}) that “the literal is barbaric” – implying here that the guarantee of literal meaning, of the controlled movement of the letter, results perforce in an inhuman barbarism – then we could conversely see in sundry modernist formal experiments that aim, queerly, not to communicate in any transparent or literal way, a series of attempts to negate the inhuman movement of modernity as such and thereby to open a space for politics. Indeed, it is in modernism’s very interruption of easy communication
that the critic Astradur Eysteinsson locates modernism’s utopian force. In The Concept of Modernism, Eysteinsson proposes that we should see modernism as an attempt to interrupt the modernity that we live and understand as a social, if not “normal” way of life. Such norms are not least buttressed by the various channels and media of communication, and this is where the interruptive practices of modernism appear in their most significant and characteristic forms. In refusing to communicate according to established socio-semiotic contracts, they seem to imply that there are other modes of communication to be looked for, or even some other modernity to be created.**

As Eysteinsson locates in modernism a political impulse whose force emerges in sundry attempts to interrupt communicative rationality through aesthetic experiments, adopting the metaphorics of “With the Night Mail,” we might imagine modernism as a kind of letter-bomb: a letter sent to destroy the easy communication that subtends Kipling’s vision of the social through an agency expressed in Adorno’s comment (a remark that forms the first epigraph of my dissertation) about the “social explosiveness” of art.*** Art’s social explosiveness, Adorno insists, derives from its impulse to open some utopian space in and through aesthetic experiments which negate our world as it is constituted. I have named this negative, utopian aesthetic impulse “antisocial modernism.”

The works of H.G. Wells, Dorothy Richardson, and Wyndham Lewis instance therefore a series of experiments in antisocial modernism: works whose queer forms of narrative aim primarily to negate the social constitution of our world in order to open a space for imagining other, better social forms. Recall here Hannah Arendt’s definition of the social as a specifically modern realm that effaces the distinction between public and private, corroding thereby the specificity of politics by transforming its space of freedom and disclosure of singularity into a realm wholly determined by the ends-directed imperative of work and the cyclical maintenance of life that characterizes labor. In the social, therefore, projects for the future reproduction of life
wholly occlude politics and negate thereby the singular freedom of action specific to human beings. The social thus represents for Arendt, the supplanting of that which makes us most distinctively human by the inhuman conditions of work and labor. By contrast – as we have seen – Georg Lukács locates our most intimately human qualities precisely in labor, a capacity he defines as an ability to project and realize human ends in the world, a capacity to undertake teleological projects whose dialectical movement subordinates individual human beings to what he names “social being.” It is precisely in this sense that Lukács designates modernism antisocial: modernism, he insists, rejects the very social relations that make us human through its insistence on representing what he regards as pathological forms of life – characters who reject social relations tout court. Lukács excoriates modernism because it interrupts the social.

The works of Wells, Richardson, and Lewis, however, exemplify a modernism whose aim is to interrupt the social in its Arendtian sense. If Arendt presents the social as a realm in which the future reproduction of life contradicts the distinctively human capacity for politics, then Wells, Richardson, and Lewis instance sundry examples of a modernism that rejects what Lee Edelman names reproductive futurism though formal experiments in narrative and antinarrative. These works, moreover, exemplify an antisocial modernism that rejects reproduction as a defining aspect of human being and prefigures thereby Shulamith Firestone’s statement in The Dialectic of Sex that “pregnancy is barbaric.” These words rhyme with Adorno’s “the literal is barbaric” in both form and content: reproduction is, in Firestone’s view, barbaric insofar as it deprives women of their humanity and The Dialectic of Sex thus presents a project for curtailing the influence of reproduction on women’s lives in order to open a space for their freedom. Firestone’s book thus operates foremost as an attempt to negate the social and only secondarily as a positive project for constructing a novel social form.

Likewise, though we encountered in the novels of H.G. Wells a series of attempts to imagine new social forms in and through aesthetics, this series comprises primarily a repeated sequence of attempts to negate the social through aesthetic imaginings whose force insists that
another world is possible. In this sense, Wells’s collective projects for the reconstruction of our world aim primarily to negate our world as it is constituted and to open a space for imagining new social forms. Wells’s positive, prosocial utopian projects thus appear only as the corollary of a negative, antisocial impulse that rejects the constitution of our world as destructive and inhuman.

We encountered in Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage* an instance of antisocial modernism whose experiment in antinarrative enacted on a formal level its protagonist Miriam Henderson’s repeated rejections of reproductive futurism and any form of life threatening to subordinate her singular being to the social. *Pilgrimage* thus negates the social thematically and aesthetically, producing an antinarrative that effaces events, endings, and narration in favor of existents, middles, and description. *Pilgrimage* thereby negates the social precisely by interrupting the dialectical movement of narration, opening a space for singular being not subordinated to the social dictate of reproducing life.

Similarly, Wyndham Lewis’s body of satires instances an antisocial modernism in which antinarrative parodies the traditional narrative form of romance in order to negate the constitution of our world. As satire operates, for Lewis, as a form of freedom that opens a space to cancel determination, Lewis’s work rejects the social as a realm that engenders a hollow form of action and meaningless series of revolutions while remaining perpetually the same. For Lewis, aesthetics itself is inherently antisocial insofar as it contradicts both dialectical projects and the reproduction of life in order to make a space for stasis, reflection, and thought. Antinarrative in Lewis thus often seems a more aggressive version of Richardsonian antinarrative: each expresses an intransigent desire to detach from the social in order to make space for reflection.

The works of Wells, Richardson, and Lewis thus exemplify a series of experiments in narrative that aim quite precisely to interrupt literal communication in order to explode the social. These authors’ works, moreover, represent here instances of an impulse general within modernism to resist through form alone the social as it is constituted. If, in this sense, modernism *tout court* is antisocial, if, that is to say, modernism aims to interrupt easy communication in
order to destroy the social and open a space for politics in an agency akin to an explosion destroying one of the A.B.C.’s Postal Packets, then we might be inclined to answer affirmatively Enda Duffy’s question “Might an IRA bomb and Joyce’s Ulysses have anything in common?”

Modernism, as Adorno reminds us, is a socially explosive form of art that lays waste to social forms as it undertakes experiments in aesthetic forms. Perhaps we might therefore say of modernist fiction in general what one critic has remarked of the fiction of Ivy Compton-Burnett (a modernist who writes fiction as if it were drama) in particular: that modernist novels “are like hand grenades” intended to destroy the social in order to open a space for the political capacity that makes us distinctively human.

iii Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex. (London: Paladin, 1972), 188.
v Ibid.
vi Ibid., 136.
viii Kipling, Actions and Reactions, 120.
ix Ibid., 111.
x Ibid., 147.
xi Ibid.
xii Ibid.
xiii Ibid., 148
xv Ibid.
xvi Ibid., 4.
xvii Ibid., 28.
xviii Ibid., 18-19.
xix Ibid., 31-32.
xxi Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, 227.
xxii Firestone, 188.
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