In ‘the mouth of [the] cave’: Wyndham Lewis, Myth and the Philosophical Discourse of Modernity Circa 1914

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Abstract

The central aim of this thesis is to clarify the conceptual role which 'myth' plays in Lewis's Vorticist '*pattern of thinking*' and in doing so to deepen the existing critical understanding of Lewis's central importance to modernism.[1] As a reflective participant in modernism's turn to myth, Lewis, as I treat him here, opens a new and important chapter in the philosophical discourse of modernity, showing both the creative possibilities which myth presented the modern artist and highlighting the alarming consequences of seeking a new home for art among the ruins of ancient 'world pictures'.[2] This point of focus leads me to join together two previously unconnected but highly relevant strands of Lewis scholarship, represented on one side by certain notable studies of Lewis's application to mythical sources from Hindu, Buddhist and Gnostic typologies and, on the other side, in the identification of a corresponding anthropological rationale in Lewis's early writings. My analysis focuses particularly on instances in Lewis's Vorticist works when a mythopoeic tendency is consciously undercut by a lurking anthropological tendency which compels the rational disclosure of the myths being created. These warring elements of *mythos* and *logos* I take to be the '*master-subject*' of Lewis's Vorticist text *Enemy of the Stars* and a crucial but previously underappreciated aspect of Lewis's early thought.[3] In order to access this feature of Lewis's works it has been necessary to conduct some preliminary research into the context of modernist 'primitivism', the formulation of Vorticist aesthetics and philosophy, and the thematic relation which exists between Lewis's early paintings and writings. These preparatory discussions are conducted in chapters one, two and three respectively, while the role played by myth in Lewis's pattern of thinking and the broader philosophical significance of this are addressed directly in chapters four and five.

[1] Wyndham Lewis, *Rude Assignment: An Intellectual Autobiography*, ed. by Toby Foshay (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1984), p.238.
[2] Martin Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture', in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), pp.115-154.
[3] Wyndham Lewis, *The Lion and the Fox: The Rôle of the Hero in the Plays of Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1966), p.201.

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Contents

That we are eternal miners, lashed in the clumsy process of learning by the retribution that awaits our mistakes, and dreaming, steeped in transcendental values that transform the mechanical basis of our life into a fairyland, is the first truth that we must accept.

Wyndham Lewis, 'The Anonymity of Perfection'

Introduction

(i) An Encounter at 'the mouth of his cave'

In 1935 Wyndham Lewis suggested that the birthplace of his literary imagination could be found in a short story among the quixotic adventures of his early protagonist, Ker-Orr the 'Soldier of Humour'. In the short essay entitled 'Beginning' Lewis wrote: 'It was the sun, a Breton instead of a British, that brought forth my first short story — "The Ankou" I believe it was: the Death-god of Plouilliou'.[1] 'The Death of the Ankou' was not published until 1927 in *The Wild Body* and there is evidence to suggest that it was actually the last and not the first story of this collection to be written.[2] But the prominence that Lewis gave 'The Ankou' in retrospect is revealing. While it was not the earliest work of his long writing career, it was evidently the one to which Lewis preferred to turn in search of the origin, or essence, of his early literary activities.

There appear to be two significant reasons for this. The first is that the plot and characters of 'The Ankou' grew directly out of a carefully handwritten account of a beggar whom Lewis had painted in the Breton town of Gestel in 1908 and 'preserved all his life'.[3] This handwritten note, one of the earliest known excerpts of Lewis's writing, would thus qualify as the original work to which he referred in 'Beginning'. The second, more significant reason is that for Lewis, looking back in the mid-thirties on the early stages of his literary career, 'The Ankou' epitomized more clearly than any of his other works the preoccupations and strategies of his early writings. The encounter which lies at the heart of this unassuming 'call of the wild' tale is so expressive of the

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[1] Wyndham Lewis, 'Beginning', in *Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change: Essays on Art, Literature and Society 1914-1956*, ed. by Paul Edwards (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989), pp.262-267 (p.266).

[2] Paul Edwards provides evidence for this claim: 'The contents page of the bound volume of typescripts [of *The Wild Body*] includes the title of the story […] as a late insertion, annotated by C. H. Prentice (Lewis's editor at Chatto & Windus) as "to come". Prentice also refers there to a letter of 19 September 1927, indicating "The Death of the Ankou" did not arrive until some time after that date. *The Wild Body* was published on 24 November 1927' ('Wyndham Lewis's Narrative of Origins: "The Death of the Ankou"', *The Modern Language Review*, 92.1 (1997), pp.22-35 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3734682> [accessed 20 April 2012], Footnote 8, p.23).

[3] This short handwritten account is held in the Wyndham Lewis Collection in the Carl A. Kroch Library of Cornell University, filed with the 'Breton Journal' of 1908 and is published by Paul Edwards in 'Wyndham Lewis's Narrative of Origins: "The Death of the Ankou"', p.24.

theme which I here take as the central subject of my study that a brief recapitulation of the narrative is worthwhile at the outset.

The story is presented through the first-person narration of Ker-Orr, a cultivated young Englishman who has departed the tame comfort of modern civilization on a journey, enticed by the primitive side of life. The tale begins with Ker-Orr sitting in the crowded inn of a small town on the Côtes-du-Nord of the Brittany coastline reading about the folklore and imbibing the spirit of the place. As he pores over a guidebook to the region he is taken especially with the local myth of '*Ervoanik Plouillo*', the blind death-god traditionally associated with a statue in the church at Ploumilliau, whose spectral manifestation signified imminent death to the unfortunate beholder.[4] According to local legend the death-god, the Ankou, was reputed to travel the lanes of the Breton countryside raised by his cart above the hedges, peering to left and right in search of his next victim, until, that is, he was struck blind by the 'revolutionary archangel' St. Peter.[5]

Ker-Orr engages romantically with the sinister stories associated with the Ankou and experiences the reverie of the tourist entering vicariously into the 'authentic' mode of life and imaginative world of the native people. He speaks of his tendency to cross a threshold from his real-world setting into an imaginative space:

> When I am reading something that interests me, the whole atmosphere is affected. If I look quickly up, I see things as though they were a part of a dream. They are all penetrated by the particular medium I have drawn out of my mind.[6]

Prone to daydreams, as he raises his eyes from his guidebook to the gnarled figure of an old blind beggar forcefully entering the crowd of people Ker-Orr momentarily inhabits a 'fairyland', believing that he is experiencing a visitation from the Ankou himself.[7]

Pausing here for a moment, it is curious to note how Lewis's story contains certain of the key ingredients of an M. R. James ghost story. A young scholar finds

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[4] According to the myth: 'If the peasant were overtaken by the cart on the night-road towards the morning, he must die within the month' (Wyndham Lewis, 'The Death of the Ankou', in *The Complete Wild Body*, ed. by Bernard Lafourcade (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1982), pp.105-115 (p.109)).
[5] Ibid., p.108.
[6] Ibid., p.109
[7] This reference to a 'fairyland' is taken from the epigraph (Wyndham Lewis and Paul Edwards, 'The Anonymity of Perfection', *Modernism/Modernity*, 4.2 (1997), pp.165-169 <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/23164> [accessed 14th October 2013], p.166).

himself conducting some personal research into the folklore and ecclesiastical history of an unfamiliar and primitive community where he is confronted by forces beyond the scope of rational explanation. James's *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* had been published in 1904 and there are good reasons for believing that Lewis may have been familiar with these.[8] Yet the narrative outcome of Lewis's tale is far from being what we might expect from a typical Jamesian ghost story, in which a straight-laced scholar is wrenched from his rational worldview, learning the disconcerting truth that '[t]here are more things in heaven and earth, […] | Than are dreamt of in [his] philosophy'.[9] Rather, Ker-Orr purposefully goes in search of occult mysteries and is highly conscious of the gratifying 'sensation of mock-superstition' which he experiences at the entrance of Ludo, the blind beggar.[10] Quite unlike the protagonist in a Jamesian ghost story he savours the thrill of his 'first impression, when [Ludo] was the death-god' and seeks to preserve the power of the 'superstition' against rational exposition.[11]

After their first encounter at the inn Ker-Orr indulges his fascination with this 'feeble death-god', visiting him two days later at his ramshackle home in 'the mouth of his cave' on the road out of town.[12] The balance of power subtly shifts as the story develops until the cultivated youth becomes a sinister omen in Ludo's world:

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[8] Peter Caracciolo has documented the evidence of 'parallels (too numerous […] to be coincidental)' which exist between certain of Lewis's writings and the ghost stories of M. R. James in three essays for the *Wyndham Lewis Annual* between 1999 and 2001 under the title 'Wyndham Lewis, M. R. James, and Intertextuality' Parts I to III (Peter L. Caracciolo, 'Wyndham Lewis, M. R. James, and Intertextuality Part II: Canons of the Uncanny', *Wyndham Lewis Annual*, VII (2000), pp.43-54 (p.43)).

[9] This line is spoken by Hamlet to Horatio in Shakespeare's play 'The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark'*, The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works,* ed. by Stanley Wells and Cary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), I.5.168-9. I allude here to the use which M. R. James makes of it in 'Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You My Lad', where the quotation is spoken in reference to the experience of Parkins, the story's protagonist, as he encounters ghostly forces beyond his capability of rational understanding (M. R. James, 'Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad', *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (London: Dover Publications, 1971), pp.106-130).

[10] 'The Death of the Ankou', p.112. Often the names of Lewis's fictional characters have thematic importance in their plots (we shall explore this in relation to the character 'Arghol' in *Enemy of the Stars* in chapter 4). The provenance of 'Ludo' is uncertain, but one possibility is worth noting. In the debate which raged in the pages of *The New Age* in 1913 between T. E. Hulme and Anthony Ludovici, regarding the significance of the 'new' geometric art which was emerging in England at that time, Hulme referred mockingly to his adversary as 'Mr. Ludo'. Lewis was attuned to this debate and supportive of Hulme's criticism of the reactionary views of Ludovici. It is possible then that 'Ludo' is in part a satirical portrait of Ludovici as a blind and dogmatic figure who dwells within an antique symbolic order, from which he is eventually wrenched by an archetypal modern intruder (T. E. Hulme, 'Mr. Epstein and the Critics', *The New Age*, 14.8 (1913), pp.251-253 <http://library.brown.edu/pdfs/1140814260105227.pdf> [accessed 20 September 2016] (p.252)).

[11] 'The Death of the Ankou', p.113.

[12] Ibid., p.112.

> When I said, 'You don't look well,' his hands moved nervously on his club. His face responded by taking on a sicklier shade.
> 'I'm ill,' he said.
> 'What is it?'
> 'I'm indisposed.'
> 'Perhaps you've met the Ankou.' I said this thoughtlessly […] He did not say anything to this, but remained quite still, then stood up and shook himself and sat down again. He began rocking himself lightly from side to side. […] I felt that I had suddenly grown less popular. What had I done? I had mentioned an extinct god of death. Perhaps that was regarded as unlucky.[13]

Realising that his presence was no longer appreciated, Ker-Orr finished his cigarette and simply 'walked away', on to the next stop on his travels.[14] In the last line of the story the reader is left with the obscure sensation that the hunter had become the hunted, with Ker-Orr assuming the sinister role of the Ankou in an curious ritual of role-reversal when it is revealed that 'later that summer […] Ludo was dead'.[15]

This encounter between two contradictory characters and their distinct ways of perceiving the world provides an eloquent introduction to the central subject of this study. My focus here is upon precisely the 'paradoxical fascination' which steers the encounter between Ker-Orr and Ludo in Lewis's story.[16] As civilization meets ceremoniously with its exotic other distinctions between the modern and primitive mind, reason and myth, are underlined and brought into question. It is telling that Lewis described Friedrich Nietzsche as 'the paramount influence' on his thought 'prior to world war I', for Lewis's tale is clearly developed from Nietzsche's philosophical distinction between the debased and 'unsatisfied modern culture', with its 'consuming desire for knowledge', and the deep sense of 'loss' which this entails, 'the loss of the mythical home'.[17] However much Lewis may have distanced himself from 'the

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[13] Ibid., p.114
[14] Ibid., p.115
[15] Ibid., p.115
[16] Bernard Lafourcade describes it as a tale of 'paradoxical fascination' in his brief introduction to the story ('The Death of the Ankou', p.106).
[17] Wyndham Lewis, *Rude Assignment: An Intellectual Autobiography*, ed. by Toby Foshay (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1984), p.128; Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Birth of Tragedy', in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 2000), pp. 29-144 (p.136). The full quote from 'The Birth of Tragedy' (1872): 'The tremendous historical need of our unsatisfied modern culture, the assembling around one of countless other cultures, the consuming desire for knowledge—what does all this point to, if not to the loss of myth, the loss of the mythical home, the mythical maternal womb?'

teachings of the execrable "Neech"', from around the time of *BLAST* in 1914 the underlying structure of the Nietzschean dialectic of two opposed principles, the Apollonian and Dionysian, permeates much of the work throughout the first decade of Lewis's career.[18] In 'The Death of the Ankou' the Nietzschean conflict between two opposed worldviews, *mythos* and *logos*, provides the essential structure of the encounter.

The fact that the narrative reaches its climax in the mouth of a cave is also important, since in one sense Lewis's tale presents an updated version of Plato's Allegory of the Cave. The encounter between Ker-Orr and the unfortunate Ludo highlights a distinction between two types of humanity. One is shown to manipulate the symbols and images to which the other is adherent, blindness and sight becoming equivalent to mythical and rational forms of knowledge.[19] It is significant that Ludo 'retreated into his cave' at Ker-Orr's mention of the Ankou, the cave standing ultimately for the fatalistic mythic consciousness of the 'primitive' and unenlightened type of humanity which Plato imagines to be chained in the darkness.[20] But 'The Ankou' is a cave allegory which toys with reversed designations of Plato's original account. Ker-Orr's journey among the 'primitive' inhabitants of the Brittany coastline is ultimately a Nietzschean-inspired bid to escape the blinding light of reason and delight himself instead with the mysterious shadows cast by 'marionette players' on the cave wall.[21] He becomes contaminated, however, with his own 'consuming desire for knowledge', a guidebook providing his surest method of entry into the 'mythical home' which he seeks. In Lewis's treatment, modern man — for whom Ker-Orr is a symbolic representative — is caught between the twin poles of his dissatisfaction. Fleeing the strict ordinance of modern rationality he finds, however, no refuge in the mythological cave of his ancestors. He flirts with the 'primitive' side of life but is ultimately too 'civilized' to return. At the heart of Lewis's tale is thus an acute crisis of identity. Erring

[18] Wyndham Lewis, 'The God of Sport and Blood', in *BLAST 2: The War Number* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1993), pp.9-10 (p.10).
[19] Paul Edwards highlights Lewis's dependence on Henri Bergson's analysis of language in *Time and Free Will* (1889) in writing 'The Ankou' and particularly the idea that '[l]anguage submits us to determinism' by entailing 'submission to the "symbolic order"' ('Wyndham Lewis's Narrative of Origins', p.26). The relationship between Ker-Orr and Ludo is in this sense one between an adaptable 'educated man' for whom 'reality can be brought under quite different categories or sign-systems' (p.29) and 'the peasant' who remains 'peculiarly entrapped within a deterministic symbolic order' (p.26).
[20] 'The Death of the Ankou', p.115.
[21] Plato, 'The Republic', in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett, 4 vols (London: Sphere Books, 1970) IV, p.296.

between rationality and superstition the modern human being is figuratively homeless, burdened with the task of balancing the opposed drives which govern over him.

It is not difficult to see why Lewis attached such importance to the story of the Ankou in later life, for the dynamic confrontation which it orchestrates between these two worlds and their respective systems of knowledge is a theme which runs like a thread through most of his early writings, and indeed which animates many of his paintings also. In numerous instances, as we shall see, the Lewisian protagonist figuratively lurks in the mouth of the primordial cave, vacillating between the enlightenment offered by reason and the obscure enticements of myth. This thematic tension between the modern, rational worldview and its primitive, mythical counterpart has been largely overlooked in Lewis's work until now, but the crisis which his early work sets up between these two worldviews leads us straight to the heart of his importance to modernism.

(ii) Wyndham Lewis and the Crisis of Modernism

The idea that modernism may be most effectively defined in terms of a 'crisis' situation is widespread among critics.[22] Significant among these is Susan Stanford Friedman's discussion of the way in which the term 'modernism' is prone to contradiction for the reason that the term itself 'means not just different things, but precisely opposite things'.[23] For the cultural critic, she writes, modernism 'is the (illusory) break with the

[22] 'Crisis' has been conceived by various critics as a coherent defining concept for modernism, though in different ways. For Theodor Adorno, modernism's crisis was aesthetic and expressive. In his view early twentieth-century art had been placed in an 'insufferable' condition; being effectively denied an 'affirmative essence' and thus a significance beyond its own activities, modern art turns to 'challenge its own essence' (*Aesthetic Theory* (1970), trans. by C. Lenhardt, ed. by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p.2). For Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, modernism signifies 'the point at which the idea of the radical and innovating arts, the experimental, technical, aesthetic ideal that had been growing forward from Romanticism, reaches formal crisis—in which myth, structure and organization in a traditional sense collapse, and not only for formal reasons. The crisis is a crisis of culture' ('The Name and Nature of Modernism', in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin, 1991) pp.19-55 (p.26)). Of particular importance to the present study is the sense in which modernism signifies the point 'collapse' of a 'mythic' structure, for as we have already glimpsed, modernism also involves certain efforts to renovate ancient mythological and typological practices in order to more effectively 'organize early-twentieth-century experience' into a firm conceptual structure (Carrie J. Preston, *Modernism's Mythic Pose: Gender, Genre, Solo Performance* (Oxford University Press, 2011), p.16).

[23] Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of *Modern/Modernity/Modernism*' *Modernism/Modernity,* 8.3 (2001), pp.493-513 <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/23422> [accessed 21 November 2015], p.494.

past, a willed forgetting of tradition, continuity, order. It is the embrace of chaos. It is the crisis of representation, fragmentation, alienation'.[24] For the social scientist on the other hand,

> Modernism is state planning. Modernism is totalization, centralized system. Modernism is the Enlightenment's rational schemata. 'Progress'—'Science'— 'Reason'— 'Truth.' Modernism is the ideology of post-Renaissance modernity—conquest—and the inscriptions thereof.[25]

The distinct objects of study to which the cultural critic and the social scientist are apt to turn in their respective endeavours may provide some explanation for the distinction which Friedman makes here. To some extent the distinct phenomena pertaining to the spheres of culture and of society can account for the critical assertion of the existence of two 'modernisms'. Yet the deeper significance of Friedman's comments is the insight they provide into modernism's vacillation between an often chaotic vision of freedom and a will to rational control. Lewis playfully captured this when he described his political views as being 'at bottom anarchist with a healthy passion for order' in *The Diabolical Principle* (1931).[26] According to Friedman such instances of modernist paradox are more than mere flippancy. She makes the vital point that modernism can only be properly understood through its ambivalent relationship with modernity, and thus that the 'opposite things' which modernism stands for are essentially linked in the art and literature of the period.

Carrie J. Preston has recently continued this discussion about modernism's paradoxical nature and the 'crisis' out of which it is formed, commenting that:

> Modernist studies has adopted […] crisis as one of the defining features of the field and tends to separate a group of what might be called antimodern-classicists from modernist-materialists. The former retreated from modernity into myth and tradition, the story goes, while modernist-materialists confronted the crisis and celebrated modernization, technology, revolution.[27]

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[24] Ibid., p.494
[25] Ibid., p.494
[26] Wyndham Lewis, 'The Diabolical Principle', in *The Diabolical Principle and The Dithyrambic Spectator* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931), pp.1- 157 (p. 126).
[27] Preston, *Modernism's Mythic Pose*, p.7.

Opposed factions of 'antimodern-classicists' and 'modernist-materialists' in truth never existed within modernism — as Preston herself comments 'few artists fit neatly into either group' — although the distinction provides a highly valuable characterization of the conflicting currents of thought which gave shape to modernism.[28]

Crucial to observe is the composite idea given off by the combined accounts of Friedman and Preston on this opposition at the heart of modernism. Through both accounts we are given, on the one hand, the idea of a rebellious 'antimodern' tendency within modernism which is motivated by a desire to break away from the path of the modern tradition — namely the rational order established in post-Enlightenment society and culture — and turn instead towards an ideal of radical liberation from the strictures of progress. As Preston points out, this narrative of liberation frequently involved a nostalgic return to the primordial energy of myth and the metamorphic vision of reality which this offers.[29] On the other hand, they each indicate a materialist tendency within modernism. For Preston this is identifiable in modernism's active celebration of 'modernization, technology, revolution', while for Friedman it takes a more deterministic form as the 'rational schemata' of the modern world: '"Progress"— "Science"— "Reason"'.

As we have already seen in the short analysis of 'The Ankou' with which this introduction opened, Lewis's early fiction outlined and explored the same crisis within modernism's identity. Ker-Orr embodies both modernism's romantic wanderlust as it seeks a wilder, more fundamental connection to life, and its tendency to carry the rational schemata of modernity wherever it goes. Works like this which provide a contemporary lens on the paradoxical dispositions within the modernist psyche have an important role to play in our understanding of modernism, providing a mirror which we can hold up to the creative and critical works of the period.

Viewed in this way Lewis's works provide compelling confirmation of modernist 'paradoxy', a word which Robert Scholes has used 'to indicate a kind of confusion generated by a terminology that seems to make clear distinctions where clear distinctions cannot — or should not — be made'.[30] While many of the key theorists of modernism have defined it in dichotomous terms — as a defensive, 'rear-guard'

[28] Ibid., p.7.
[29] This idea is central to Adorno's analysis of modernism. He writes: '[t]he gesture toward primeval history seemed to serve the emancipation of constricted art rather than its regimentation' (*Philosophy of New Music*, trans. and ed. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p.112).
[30] Robert Scholes, *Paradoxy of Modernism* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), p.xi.

movement designed to bolster a threatened 'High' culture against the newly dominant 'Low' or 'kitsch' culture, or as a movement towards a 'New' kind of art which attacked the 'Old' traditions, for example — Scholes, and I shall argue Lewis too, urge us to seek the 'middle' ground which is suppressed by such 'binary oppositions' in order to properly understand the situation in which the modernist creative psyche existed.[31] In his early works Lewis developed a rigorous analytical method designed to unpack and explore the dichotomies or dualistic tensions which were prevalent in modernist theories of culture. This method or style of thinking must be clarified at the outset.

(iii) Lewis's Dualistic '*pattern of thinking*' in Context

Looking back on his long career in 1950 Lewis suggested that his books all adhered to a 'type of thinking, belonging to a certain type of mind'.[32] The thread of continuity among his 'litter of books' he described as '*a central pattern of thinking,* which is common to the past and to the present'.[33] If we apply this fruitful idea to the first decade of Lewis's career as a writer and painter a distinctive pattern of thinking can be readily outlined. In a superficial sense we might simply suggest that Lewis's works of this period exhibit a delight in contradiction, but in a deeper sense it is evident that almost all of Lewis's works before the First World War — paintings as well as writings — demonstrate some conceptual use of a programmed dualistic *modus operandi*. This dualistic method was given its clearest articulation by Lewis during the Vorticist period.

In the first issue of *BLAST* (1914) Lewis described the Vorticists as 'Primitive Mercenaries in the Modern World' who sought figuratively to preserve and bolster both sides in any rhetorical conflict, fighting 'first on one side, then on the other, but always for the SAME cause, which is neither side or both sides and ours'.[34] As this

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[31] Martin Puchner, 'The Aftershocks of Blast: Manifestos, Satire, and the Rear-Guard of Modernism', *Bad Modernisms*, ed. by Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp.44-67 (p.45); Scholes, *Paradoxy of Modernism*, p.xi. Puchner argues the existence of a 'rear-guard' faction within modernism which sought 'to correct and contain the avant-garde's excess without falling behind and losing touch with it entirely' and suggests that this 'culminates in Lewis' and is 'crystallize[d] in the journal *Blast*' ('The Aftershocks of Blast', p.45). This reduction of Lewis and Vorticism to a singular, reactionary position within modernism is a gross oversimplification, however. Lewis's activities within Vorticism were more an effort to explore the binary terms of modernism's self-definition; to lay out the terms of modernism's paradoxical nature in order to evade partisanship of the kind Puchner suggests.

[32] *Rude Assignment,* p.153.

[33] Ibid., pp.153, 238.

[34] Wyndham Lewis, 'Manifesto', in *BLAST* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009), pp.30-43 (p.30).

demonstrates, one aspect of the rationale that underpins Lewis's adherence to dualistic opposition was a 'mercenary' pragmatism. By evading partisan allegiance to either side in a conflict, remaining free from any singular principle or position, the mercenary is at liberty to change sides in the interests of self-advancement. While such pragmatism is certainly observable in the rhetorical marketing strategies that accompanied the launch of the Vorticist movement, there is a deeper significance to Lewis's use of dualism than this.

The rationale was given further definition in the second issue of *BLAST*, 'The War Number' (1915), where Lewis propounded the maxim: 'You must catch the clearness and logic in the midst of contradictions: not settle down and snooze on an acquired, easily possessed and mastered, satisfying shape'.[35] The idea that a 'clearness and logic' may be attained 'in the midst of contradictions' is connotative of the Vorticist still point at the centre of conflicting forces, which is also the 'point of maximum energy'.[36] This figurative clearing or no man's land, outside the remit of defined battle lines or positions, is a revered site in Lewis's early pattern of thinking, which provides a detached view of the conflict which rages around it. In 'The Ankou' this liminal site of privileged perception is the figurative mouth of the cave from which we are afforded a clear glimpse into both the fatalism of the mythic consciousness and the spiritual homelessness of the modern human being.

By setting these two worldviews in conceptual opposition against each other Lewis reveals aspects of their relation that would be lost in any isolated treatment of either one. We learn how they may relate to each other intimately through a form of magnetism, which both attracts and repels. While the modern mind is drawn nostalgically to the superstitions of the old world, the 'primitive' recoils with a dread fascination at the power of the domineering interloper. We learn also that '[t]he essence of an object is beyond and often in contradiction to, it's simple truth', as Lewis put it in 'A Review of Contemporary Art' in *BLAST 2*, since the 'enlightened' rationality which Ker-Orr parades on his travels amongst 'primitive' communities is shown becoming 'deeply engulfed in mythology' as it fetishizes the object of its fascination.[37] In Lewis's dualistic treatment, the free human rationality, having emerged from the '*self-incurred immaturity*' of superstition as Immanuel Kant described it, is found faltering

[35] Lewis, 'Wyndham Lewis Vortex No.1', in *BLAST 2,* p.91.
[36] Ezra Pound, 'Vortex', in *BLAST*, pp.153-154 (p.153).
[37] Lewis, 'A Review of Contemporary Art', in *BLAST 2*, pp.38-47 (p.45); Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 2010), p.11-12.

nostalgically back towards the comforting dogmas of the past.[38] As the instance of the encounter in 'The Ankou' demonstrates, the strategies underpinning Lewis's dualistic pattern of thinking were analytical and philosophical, propelled by a desire to unpack or 'deconstruct' the binary theoretical oppositions which dominated the intellectual climate of Europe at this time.

A range of important influences on Lewis's early thought are found fused together in his dualistic pattern of thinking. As already discussed, Lewis clearly took much philosophical inspiration from the dialectical or dualistic oppositions which he found in the writings of Nietzsche. From Nietzsche's aphoristic writing style and technique of revealing philosophical insight through staged contradictions Lewis also clearly took a lot of stylistic inspiration, and it is likely that his 'mercenary' philosophical position was also influenced at least in part by Nietzsche's own self-styled identity as an intellectual outsider of the mainstream culture of his day. The clearest indication of Nietzsche's influence on Lewis at this time is to be found in 'The Code of a Herdsman' (1917), a text which not only reiterates the distinction between superior and inferior types of humanity found in *The Genealogy of Morals* but which does so in a decidedly Nietzschean style, developing through a numbered series of philosophical maxims.[39]

Lewis also appears to have been highly attuned to the emerging structuralist theories of culture and social organization during the first decade of the twentieth century. His early literary style represents a philosophical approach to language which is very much of its time, echoing the contemporary work of the founder of structural linguistics — and the inspiration for the later twentieth-century structuralist movement — Ferdinand de Saussure. Lewis's pattern of thinking, like Saussure's theory, represents a reaction against the prevailing theoretical model of positivism, proposing instead a radical new model of thought which involves 'a movement from a substantive way of thinking to a relational one', so that 'for units, entities, substances, are substituted values and relationships', as Fredric Jameson writes in *The Prison-House of*

[38] Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?,* trans. by H. B. Nisbet (London: Penguin, 2009), p.1.
[39] Lewis's figurative possession of a lofty 'mountain' top position from which to command the 'herd' below ('The Code of a Herdsman', *The Little Review*, 4.3 (1917), pp.3-7 <http://library.brown.edu/pdfs/1297799167671879.pdf > [accessed 6 November 2015] (p.5)) clearly grows out of Nietzsche's distinction between the 'great birds of prey' and the 'little lambs' that they hunt. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Dover Publications, 2003), p.25.

Language (1974).[40] Lewis's anthropological interests during this time would seem to account for the route of this influence. According to Bernard Lafourcade Lewis 'must have been acquainted in some way or other with the work of Durkheim and Frazer, and possibly with that of Lévy-Bruhl and Van Gennep, all part and parcel of the new Zeitgeist' by the summer of 1909, since his short story 'Les Saltimbanques', which was published in *The English Review* in August that year, clearly reflected 'the new intellectual interests of the age in anthropology and sociology'.[41]

Amongst the influences on Lewis's early thought a special note must be made about William Blake. As a prolific painter and writer similarly engaged in dualistic themes Blake may quite appropriately be described as Lewis's 'great English predecessor'.[42] The parallels between the two run deep, particularly when we acknowledge the 'theological dimension to Lewis's interests'.[43] Richard Humphreys writes that by the time Lewis was settling in London in December 1908 this tendency is indicated:

> by a fascination with occult and mystical matters, often seemingly at odds with the hard, satirical tone of much of his art and writing. Nevertheless, the 'hardness' itself has roots in Lewis's deep interest in dualistic philosophies and religious traditions.[44]

The fact that Blake's work exerted an early influence on Lewis during his three years of study at the Slade School of Fine Art (1898-1901) may help to account for the origin of Lewis's lifelong fascination with dualism.[45]

The work of each is marked by a fascination with Gnostic myth and the dualistic tension between light and dark, good and evil which lies at its core. Receptive to the dualist programme of Gnostic thought, each similarly consolidated an expressive strategy out of the contradistinction of two opposed principles. In his exploration of the antagonistic symbolic figurations of Blake's 'myth', Leopold Damrosch provides some comments specific to Blake which could almost be taken as applying to Lewis:

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[40] Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton University Press, 1974), p.13 and p.15.
[41] Bernard Lafourcade, Introduction to 'Les Saltimbanques', in *The Complete Wild Body*, ed. by Bernard Lafourcade (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1982), p.236.
[42] Paul Edwards, '"Creation Myth": The Art and Writing of Wyndham Lewis', in *Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957),* (Madrid: Fundación Juan March, 2010), pp.21-33 (p.22).
[43] Richard Humphreys, '"A Strange Synthesis": Lewis, British Art and a World Tradition', *Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957),* (Madrid: Fundación Juan March, 2010), pp.35-43 (p.36).
[44] Ibid., p.37.
[45] 'Illustrated Biography', in *Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957),* p.10.

> Blake scholarship has tended to organize dilemmas into diagrams and to celebrate 'contraries' without examining them rigorously, but what A. C. Bradley said of Wordsworth is still more true of Blake: the way into his mind 'must be through his strangeness and his paradoxes, and not round them'.[46]

The applicability of these comments to Lewis is striking, for the great critical works of Lewis scholarship have likewise found it necessary to enter the artist's creative psyche directly through 'his strangeness and his paradoxes, and not round them'. One valuable example of this, which has exerted a significant influence on my own analytical method in this thesis, is found in David A. Wragg's treatment of the theoretical 'contradictions' and 'aporias' which Lewis's works frequently develop as 'structurally binding dualities'.[47] In consolidating a way of working with, and not against, Lewisian paradox Wragg attempts to 'flag up the danger of reducing Lewis's work to a "watertight" critical schema' and further reveals the sense in which his work does not merely voice a singular critical and theoretical perspective but 'can be read as a symptomatic expression of the problems let loose by a discourse of Enlightenment'.[48]

In one sense then Lewis emerges within modernism as the artistic and philosophical protégé of Blake, using similar dualistic strategies to undertake a philosophical critique of modernity. Certainly both devoted their extraordinarily diverse talents to a rigorous interrogation of the social and cultural processes which were unleashed by the Enlightenment, and both ultimately invested their creative energies into a vision of the modern human condition which is derived from the structure of Gnostic myth.[49] In another sense, however, Lewis's pattern of thinking is very much of its time. Framed by Nietzschean philosophical concepts and the emerging structuralism of the era, Lewis's dualistic *modus operandi* is an important exponent of the crisis situation of modernism which highlights the continuities as well as the distinctions between the modern world and its imagined 'primitive' counterpart.

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[46] Leopold Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth* (Princeton University Press, 1980), p.4.
[47] David A. Wragg, *Wyndham Lewis and the Philosophy of Art in Early Modernist Britain: Creating a Political Aesthetic* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005) p.3.
[48] Ibid., pp.1, 4.
[49] For a detailed account of Lewis's engagement with Gnostic myth in *The Human Age* trilogy see Michael Nath, '"Monstrous Starlight": Wyndham Lewis and Gnosticism', in *Volcanic Heaven: Essays on Wyndham Lewis's Painting and Writing*, ed. by Paul Edwards (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1996), pp.149-167.

(iv) The Aims of the Study and its Contribution to Existing Research

The central aim of this thesis is to clarify the conceptual role which 'myth' plays in Lewis's Vorticist pattern of thinking and in doing so to deepen the existing critical understanding of Lewis's central importance to modernism. As a reflective participant in modernism's turn to myth, Lewis, as I treat him here, opens a new and important chapter in the philosophical discourse of modernity, showing both the creative possibilities which myth presented the modern artist and highlighting the alarming consequences of seeking a new home among the ruins of ancient 'world pictures'.[50] This point of focus leads me to join together two previously unconnected but highly relevant strands of Lewis scholarship. This is represented on one side by the studies of Lewis's application to mythical sources from Hindu, Buddhist and Gnostic typologies which have been conducted by James Selby and Michael Nath, each focussing on different mythological traditions and different periods of Lewis's career.[51] On the other side is the identification of a corresponding anthropological fascination in Lewis's work which has been made by Bernard Lafourcade and Victor Barac.[52]

The combination of these two trends in Lewis scholarship is highly fruitful. In the first instance it reveals in detail the way in which Lewis's mythopoeia was borne out of his anthropological research, which led him to adopt and renovate ancient myths for his own narrative purposes. Secondly, in bringing together the mythological and the anthropological aspects of Lewis's work the nature and the method of Lewis's philosophical critique of modernity becomes clarified. The irony which stalks a 'myth' formulated out of anthropological knowledge — namely that it is a myth contaminated by its own rational disclosure — was clearly not lost on Lewis. Modernism's attraction to myth as a possible ground for art and spirituality in the modern world provided him with valuable materials for an analysis of the culture of modernity. By tracing this aspect of Lewis's early works the thesis continues the attempt made by David A. Wragg

[50] Martin Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture', in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), pp.115-154.
[51] James Selby, '*Enemy of the Stars*: An Inquiry into its Intellectual Sources', *Wyndham Lewis Annual*, 2 (1995), pp.30-40 and Nath's '"Monstrous Starlight": Wyndham Lewis and Gnosticism'.
[52] Bernard Lafourcade, Introduction to 'Les Saltimbanques' (p.236) and Victor Barac, 'The Anthropology of Wyndham Lewis', *Wyndham Lewis Annual*, 8 (2008), pp.36-43.

'to read Wyndham Lewis's literary and artistic production before 1930 as a symptomatic response to Enlightenment'.[53]

Modernism's turn to myth is most readily identified in T. S. Eliot's advocacy of the 'mythical method' as an 'ordering' principle in his essay on *Ulysses* of 1923 but, as numerous scholars convey, modernism's mythic posing took on a variety of forms.[54] Lewis appeared to draw attention to his own mythopoeic credentials when he cited the influence which his Vorticist play *Enemy of the Stars,* first published in *BLAST* in 1914, had exerted on James Joyce's masterwork of 'mythic' modernism. In *Time and Western Man* Lewis wrote:

> Into *Ulysses* a great many things have been mixed […] *The Enemy of the Stars*, a play written and published by me in 1914, obliterated by the War, turned up, I suspect, in Zurich, and was responsible for the manner here and there of Joyce's book.[55]

Given the marginalization which Lewis's reputation suffered in the late 1920s, this is most clearly explicable as an attempt to reinsert himself in the modernist canon and thus raise his profile as an experimental modernist writer every bit as important as the then widely acclaimed Joyce. But Lewis built the case for this alleged influence even further in the commentary which accompanied the 1932 version of *Enemy of the Stars*, commenting this time:

> It has been said that this play, the first of its kind in English, influenced the form to some extent of the famous play in the middle of *Ulysses*. The explosive technique employed, together with the economy of statement, is certainly suggestive of the novel form of the stage directions in the Walpurgis Nacht fantasia of Mr Joyce. It is obvious that there are other factors in the *Ulysses* play beside that provided by the form of *The Enemy of the Stars*, but the fundamental structure of the two is noticeably similar.[56]

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[53] David A. Wragg, 'Aggression, aesthetics, modernity: Wyndham Lewis and the fate of art', in *Wyndham Lewis and the Art of Modern War*, ed. by David Peters Corbett (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.181-210 (p.181).
[54] T. S. Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order and Myth' (1923), in *Modernism: An Anthology*, ed. by Lawrence Rainey (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp.165-167.
[55] Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, ed. by Paul Edwards (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1993), p.107.
[56] This commentary is published in Alan Munton's 'Explanatory Notes' in Wyndham Lewis, *Collected Poems and Plays*, ed. by Alan Munton (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2003), p.221-222.

The similarities which *Enemy of the Stars* and the 'Circe' episode are supposed to share are most obviously technical, although close examination of the 'fundamental structure' of Lewis's Vorticist play also reveals a text which adheres to a 'mythical method' every bit as much as Joyce's *Ulysses* or Eliot's *The Waste Land*. I am not aware of any sustained consideration of Lewis's early work in this theoretic context and so it is important to clarify how the focus on 'myth' in the present study relates to existing criticism.

To date, Lewis's association with this mythic and primitivist tradition in modernist literature has largely been treated in negative terms, with his disparaging analysis of D. H. Lawrence's primitivist sensibilities in *Paleface* (1929) guiding the conclusions of most critics.[57] Yet despite the vehement criticism which emerges in several of Lewis's texts it is undeniable that Lewis himself also venerated the primitive energies which he criticized others for seeking, styling himself as a 'primitive' against the mainstream of modernist 'primitivism'. This is demonstrated by his suggestion that '[t]he Art-instinct is permanently primitive' in the Vorticist Manifesto and also that 'the artist [is] older than the fish' in *The Caliph's Design* (1919).[58] In this thesis I intend to reveal in more detail the peculiar nature of Lewis's own idealized conception of the primitive.

Since this necessarily involves analysis of the mythic structure which he presents in early works, in one sense this study is a further application of the 'myth criticism' which was in vogue in the 1950s and 1960s to a hidden corner of the modernist canon.[59] Yet while it finds accord with certain of the strategies of the modernist myth criticism of the 1950s and 1960s — particularly the technical precedent which this provides for the analysis of mythical themes, symbols and motifs of a literary work — the present study also shifts focus to the cultural context in which those works emerged. Indeed the exposition of Lewis's 'myth' is here designed to serve a discussion of a more philosophical nature about the crisis situation of modernism and the lengths to

[57] Wyndham Lewis, *Paleface: The Philosophy of the 'Melting-Pot'* (New York: Gordon Press, 1972). The section most relevant to Lewis's criticism of Lawrence can be found around pp.174-184.
[58] Lewis, 'Manifesto', in *BLAST*, p.33; Wyndham Lewis, *The Caliph's Design: Architects! Where is your Vortex?,* ed. by Paul Edwards (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1986), p.65.
[59] As Patricia Rae comments, myth criticism produced 'numerous commentaries on allusions to myth and ritual by modernist writers, and also analyses of their reliance on myths as organizational devices'. Patricia Rae, 'Anthropology', *A Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture*, ed. David Bradshaw and Kevin J. H. Dettmar (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006) pp.92-102 (p.97).

which many modernists would go in order to lay effective foundations for a new kind of art.

An important precedent of my approach can be found in Carrie J. Preston's *Modernism's Mythic Pose: Gender, Genre, Solo Performance* (2011). Preston's research has done a great deal to reveal the character of modernist applications to mythic sources, focussing particularly on the influence of the French musician and choreographic theorist François Delsarte on modernism. She writes:

> Delsartism took the antimodern position that modernity had separated the body from the soul and that expressive solo performance could reunite a whole person, but it was not enclosed in an idealistic realm apart from modern technologies. Delsartism posed myth in ambivalent relation to modernity, as a *still* or pause that could function both as a skeptical critique and nostalgic diversion. Mythic posing […] framed questions and threats to modernity but also served as a sentimental escape.[60]

Preston gives voice here to the emancipatory promise which 'myth' held for many modernists. She provides important evidence of the way in which modernism's nostalgic gaze to the origins of art became transformed into a vision of a new vitalized and emancipated form of modernity. In many ways this study begins where Preston's research leaves off, moving from performative to philosophical quarters of the modernist canon in order to explore in more detail the underlying motivations and consequences of modernism's turn to myth.

(v) Methodological Notes

I limit my focus here to those of Lewis's paintings and writings which emerged from the earliest phase of his career, which I define as that span of time from his return to London in December 1908 — when he achieved a settled working routine, publishing for the first time his writings in periodicals and exhibiting his paintings in prominent London galleries — until he enlisted in the Royal Artillery in March 1916. This eight-year period saw Lewis develop an abstract technique in painting, which, although highly receptive to developments which were taking place among the continental avant-

[60] Preston, *Modernism's Mythic Pose*, p.5.

garde, is unique in its expressive style and conceptual schema. The period also saw the publication of a series of short stories, essays, and plays and of course the two issues of the Vorticist magazine *BLAST* which would establish Lewis as a creative writer and cultural critic at the heart of British modernism.

While my analysis is attuned to the distinct technical and stylistic criteria of each expressive medium in which Lewis worked my principal interest lies in the thematic interconnections between his visual and literary works. Throughout the thesis I treat both the paintings and writings which Lewis produced during this period as 'complementary creation[s]' which emanate from a shared conceptual schema.[61] Guided by the desire to understand this schema — what I have described as Lewis's dualistic pattern of thinking — I use Lewis's 'two arts' as alternative perspectives on a shared base of ideas and themes.[62] The nature of this enquiry into the conceptual unity underlying an expressive multiplicity of styles, mediums and genres has caused me to seek a style of analysis which remains flexible and responsive to a range of critical approaches and analytic methods.

Lewis's work is so multifaceted — occurring in distinct expressive mediums and genres and exploring phenomena at numerous interlaced levels of analysis — that the entrenched perspective of any particular critical approach is ill-equipped to make a substantial characterization of his overall pattern of thinking.[63] In an attempt to avoid the restrictions presented by any specific critical bias my analysis is grounded, at a technical level, in close reading and critical interpretation. My critical interpretations have been informed throughout by a wide but carefully chosen range of secondary critical and philosophical sources from the discrete but interconnected spheres of literary and art criticism, cultural and social theory, anthropology and above all philosophy. Throughout I also turn to Lewis's own critical writings from 1916 onwards for theoretical support, since the thematic threads which combine to form his early pattern of thinking are often clarified in later works which deal with similar or related themes. Caution is required in handling Lewis's later-life commentaries on his early works, since these are often underpinned by rhetorical strategies that serve to refract and

[61] 'Beginning', p.266.
[62] Ibid., p.266.
[63] Not only does Lewis's creative production develop in the two expressive mediums of painting and writing, but within the category of writing it branches into numerous expressive and analytical modes: fiction, drama, poetry, cultural criticism, art criticism and philosophy. Even within the discipline of philosophy Lewis's discourses move between the distinct fields of metaphysical inquiry, ethics, epistemology, ontology and political philosophy.

distort the originals. From the 1930s on Lewis's reputation suffered greatly largely due to his temporary political affiance with National Socialism in Germany and many of his subsequent critical writings make an attempt to resurrect his status as a central figure in the modernist canon and thereby to escape the marginal position he had acquired in British culture. We have already observed one instance of this in Lewis's suggestion that Joyce had borrowed substantially from *Enemy of the Stars* while writing *Ulysses*. Wherever relevant I have therefore highlighted any surreptitious strategies and possible grounds of distortion which might complicate the application of Lewis's later critical works to the paintings and writings of the Vorticist period.

Overall, this style of analysis has been designed to set Lewis in dialogue with his contemporary cultural context and the intellectual sources which gave shape to his developing thought so that more can be learned about his contribution to the philosophical discourse of modernity. This ambition situates the study within a theoretical terrain which was largely defined by a German philosophical tradition of the nineteenth and twentieth century which interrogated the concept of 'modernity', a trajectory of philosophical enquiry which demands terminological clarity. As Peter Brooker clarifies, 'modernity' is a 'capacious' term which has a vast history and multiple interrelated senses.[64] I here use the term in the sense it is given by late twentieth-century cultural theorists to indicate the historical process of a 'rational' re-structuring of society which grew out of the Enlightenment, and which was conceived by certain prominent nineteenth-century critics as having thrown art and the creative human subject into a crisis situation.

Terminological caution must be observed when translating German philosophers and cultural theorists into the English literary critical idiom of 'modernism' and 'modernity', since as Peter Osborne explains:

[64] Brooker writes that modernity 'has long been differently employed in the social sciences and in literary history and criticism as well as across different European intellectual and artistic traditions. If it is commonly understood to refer to epochal shifts in the social and political order which ushered in the modern age, modernity is variously dated from as early as the fifteenth century, or the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, or is associated with post-Victorian societies' ('Afterword: "Newness" in Modernisms, Early and Late', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, ed. Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Longworth, Andrew Thacker (Oxford University Press, 2010) pp.1012-1036 (p.1015)).

> in translations of German philosophical texts, such as Adorno's, it is [the] term, *der Moderne*, rather than *Modernismus* [a more pejorative term], which is usually being translated by the English 'modernism' […][65]

He notes that a similar point applies to 'some uses of the English "modernity"', highlighting especially the English translation of Habermas's influential lecture series *Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: Zwölf Vorlesungen* (1985) which has been published in English under the title *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Both Adorno and Habermas are central to this study of 'modernism' and 'modernity' and in both cases I have followed the English translators of their works in observing a terminological distinction between 'modernism' and 'modernity' which is present in the German term '*der Moderne*'.

The central argument of the thesis develops through five chapters. In chapter one, 'Wyndham Lewis, the Primitive Against Modernist Primitivism', I explore in detail the precise nature of Lewis's adherence to a primitive kind of art. This is a task which by necessity demands preliminary examination of the broader context of modernist primitivism, which highlights both the intellectual roots of the venerated conception of the 'primitive' in post-Enlightenment philosophy and outlines the way in which this discourse passed into modernism. Nietzsche and Henri Bergson in particular provided the theoretical parameters for modernism's idealized conception of the primitive and the transcendent aspirations which this entailed, so I focus particularly on the elements of their respective philosophies which were distilled by their modernist inheritors into the principles of an aesthetic philosophy of 'primitivism'. Throughout it is my aim to observe the way in which Lewis engaged critically with this discourse of primitivism and thereby to highlight — by means of a process of theoretic disentanglement — not only the grounds of his opposition to primitivism but also the unique nature of his own adherence to a primitive vitality in art.

In chapter two, '"Mercenaries" of the European Avant-Garde: Wyndham Lewis and the Formation of Vorticist Aesthetics and Theory', I turn from the theoretic formulation of the primitive in Lewis's works to consider in more precise detail the structure of Vorticism's 'mercenary' philosophy. This entails a shift of focus from the

[65] Peter Osborne, 'Modernism and Philosophy', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, ed. Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Longworth, Andrew Thacker (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.388-409 (p.393).

broad theoretical context in which modernist primitivism emerged to the narrower avant-garde context in which Vorticism emerged. My aim in this chapter is to indicate the way in which Lewis and Vorticism assimilated many of the key ideas and aesthetic techniques of their avant-garde rivals in their own explosive and often contradictory philosophy. More specifically I present a new model with which to understand Vorticism's acquisitive attitude towards its key competitors among the pre-war avant-garde. I treat Miranda B. Hickman's suggestion that Cubism, Futurism and Kandinsky form the three 'point[s] of the compass' in the development of Vorticism's aesthetic programme as a valuable but skewed formulation.[66] In place of Hickman's emphasis on the importance of Cubist and Futurist compositional technique especially, I suggest a more theoretical way of reading Vorticism's inheritance in terms of the dualistic collision which Lewis observed in Cubism's material aesthetic and Kandinsky's 'spiritual' art. In this way Vorticism's key avant-garde coordinates are re-plotted in a way which reveals more about the conceptual narrative which Lewis was developing at this time, and especially the conflict which he observed taking place between the two opposed metaphysical principles of matter and spirit in the modern world.

In chapter three, 'Lewis's "*pattern of thinking*" in Words and Images', I turn my focus from the key sources of Lewis's aesthetic theory to observe in more detail the way in which these ideas were developed in Lewis's creative works in the lead up to Vorticism. In particular my aim here is to demonstrate the way in which his paintings and writings of the period can be seen to adhere to, and emanate from, the shared system of concepts and themes which constitutes Lewis's early pattern of thinking, compelling a critical treatment which unites literary and artistic discourses as elements in a more holistic, philosophical analysis of his creative and critical works. I adopt a particular two-step method in attempting this, treating first the conceptual narrative in his visual works with reference to contemporary writings, before moving on to consider how visual, compositional criteria were invested in the typography and writing style in *BLAST* to convey a certain meaning to a reader well-versed in modernist experiments in poetry. Here I wish to outline the conceptual narrative which underpinned Lewis's path into abstraction during the period 1912-1914 and to demonstrate the sense in which this developed at every stage by means of a complex process of 'symbolic classification'.[67]

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[66] Miranda B. Hickman, *The Geometry of Modernism: The Vorticist Idiom in Lewis, Pound, H.D., and Yeats* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), p.5.
[67] Rodney Needham, *Symbolic Classification* (Santa Monica: Goodyear Publishing, 1979).

In chapter four, 'Immoral Theatre: "Savage Worship" in *Enemy of the Stars*', I gather the themes raised in the earlier chapters and return to the metaphorical mouth of the cave where we began the study, exploring the broader significance of this in Lewis's early pattern of thinking. The central claim which I make here is that *Enemy of the Stars* — the first full-length literary work which Lewis published — is a text invested with all the themes, symbols and theoretic tensions which he had developed in his paintings and writings up to 1914. Close examination of the text can thus clarify and develop the themes which were consolidated in the analysis of Lewis's earlier symbolic classifications in chapter three. At the heart of my analysis of Lewis's Vorticist 'play' I wish to highlight the conceptual opposition between myth and modernity, *mythos* and *logos,* which the text elaborates and explore the significance of this with reference to other of Lewis's critical and philosophical writings of the period. Of particular relevance here is Lewis's affirmation of an anthropological rationale in his early fictions. The characters of these works are described as 'carefully selected specimens of religious fanaticism' which are 'congealed and frozen into logic'.[68] In this way Lewis evokes the sinister power suggested by anthropological texts in his fictions and draws us closer to the precise role which myth played in his early pattern of thinking.

In chapter five, 'Lewis's Vorticist Myth and the Philosophical Discourse of Modernity', the analysis takes a more reflective, theoretical turn as I explore the significance of the *mythos*/*logos* dualism which runs through Lewis's early works. In the first instance, I explore the possibility which has been raised by Michael Nath that Lewis's work in the end constitutes a genuine instance of myth, though one which is consciously adapted to accommodate the new historical situation of humankind in the modern world. While entertaining this possibility I also consider the peculiar nature of a myth which is not just formed out of modern anthropological knowledge but which is also designed to explain the underlying '*dynamic*' of the modern world.[69] The point of this is to inquire whether a myth formed in this way can ever share the essential attributes of ancient myths. The historical situation and function of Lewis's mythopoeia — as a means by which the claims of rationalism can be exposed and undermined by an antagonistic model of thought — leads me to explore the contribution which Lewis's

[68] Wyndham Lewis, 'Inferior Religions' (1917), in *The Complete Wild Body*, ed. by Bernard Lafourcade (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1982), pp.313-319 (p.316).
[69] I use the word *dynamic* here as Lewis understands it in *Time and Western Man* to refer to 'a *relation*, a something that *happens*, between two or more opposites, when they meet in their pyrrhic encounters' (p.21).

early thought makes to the philosophical discourse of modernity. I end by treating particularly the way in which Lewis departs from the early influence of Nietzsche and Bergson while anticipating certain key themes of Critical Theory later in the twentieth century, in an attempt to clarify his situation within modernism and the broader cultural theoretical debate about modernism.

The rationale behind the order of these chapters and the way in which my argument develops deserves some clarification. While chapter one raises the central theme of my study in broad, introductory terms — namely the philosophical and cultural context within which myth came to represent a possible route of escape from the excesses of modernity — chapters two and three depart this theoretical terrain in order to elaborate with more precision the key elements of Lewis's developing pattern of thinking and the manner in which these were expressed in his Vorticist paintings and writings. Although this represents a departure from the central focus of my thesis, it serves to clarify in concrete terms the key themes and symbols which run through Lewis's work at this time and thus provides the necessary material for a closer analysis of the *mythos*/*logos* dualism in his work. With these materials at hand I discuss of the conceptual role of 'myth' in Lewis's Vorticist works in chapter four (paying special attention to *Enemy of the Stars*) and address the key issues which this raises in chapter five. Sections of my analysis involve detailed discussion of the compositional properties of visual works by Lewis and his contemporaries among the European avant-garde. Images which have a central relevance to my argument have been reproduced and are included in an appendix at the end of the thesis.

Chapter 1

Wyndham Lewis, the Primitive Against Modernist Primitivism

II.

[7] The Art-instinct is permanently primitive. […]

[9] The artist of the modern movement is a savage

III.

[3] […] we believe that an Art must be organic with its Time […][1]

In these comments from sections two and three of the Vorticist Manifesto Wyndham Lewis exemplifies the 'general paradox of modernist primitivism', as Michael Bell describes it, 'that the primitive and the avant-garde can be combined'.[2] The suggestion being made is that the modern world — the fruition of humankind's progress to a supposedly advanced stage of civilization — was somehow as conducive to savage worship as was the natural wilderness of humankind's deep past. In Lewis's view, as he made clear in *BLAST*, the central difference between the original wilderness and its modern variant lay in the materials of the external world and their formal composition. While 'primitive man' had explored the labyrinths of the natural world, 'the modern town-dweller of our civilization sees everywhere fraternal moulds for his spirit, and interstices of *a human world*' (*my emphasis*).[3] For Lewis the modern metropolis was to be conceived as a vast and forbidding forest where 'steel trees' had reared up 'where the green ones were lacking'.[4] While the external structures and the governing logos of the world had changed fundamentally the modern world nevertheless remained an enticing, though at times hostile, wilderness for the artist to explore. The 'enormous, jangling,

[1] Lewis, 'Manifesto', in *BLAST*, pp. 33, 34.
[2] Michael Bell, 'Primitivism: Modernism as Anthropology', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, ed. Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Longworth and Andrew Thacker (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.353-367 (p.365).
[3] Lewis, 'The New Egos', in *BLAST*, p.141.
[4] Lewis, 'Manifesto', in *BLAST*, p.36.

journalistic fairy desert of modern life', wrote Lewis in section two of the Vorticist Manifesto, 'serves [the modern artist] as Nature did more technically primitive man'.[5]

This blend of modernism and primitivism is typical of numerous theories of the pre-war avant-garde. The vital energies of the modern world routinely kindled hopes of humankind's transcendence of material limitations and caused many to perceive in their own historic moment the potential for a new beginning to History. To 'stand on the last promontory of the centuries' was at the same time to gaze boldly towards 'the very first dawn', as F. T. Marinetti stated in the Futurist Manifesto (1909).[6] Entrance into the most advanced stage of civilization came to be viewed as heralding a return to humankind's primitive 'origin' and a recovery of the absolute freedom associated with the state of nature. It is with the sense of this 'origin' and the meaning of 'primitive' among modernist artists and writers which I concern myself here.

The aim of this chapter is to clarify the pool of ideas in which Lewis immersed himself in the lead up to Vorticism. More specifically, I aim to reveal how Lewis's early thought was heavily influenced by the conception of the primitive which had passed into modernism through a significant discourse in post-Enlightenment European philosophy. As I hope to demonstrate, however, Lewis's own adherence to a primitive vitality in art was defined in opposition to the main current of modernist primitivism. While he was a central participant in this discourse, he was an intellectually isolated participant who refused to conform to the ideals and assumptions of his contemporaries.

Lewis's position in this discourse is complex and unique. To understand this it will be necessary not only to observe the rationale for Lewis's hostility towards the philosophical principles which underpinned modernism's veneration of the primitive, but also to highlight the reasons for his criticism of the 'techniques of strangeness' which his contemporaries were pioneering in order to attain the aura of the primitive in their artworks.[7] The nature of this project demands that we observe the negative side of Lewis's early thought; the way in which it is founded in criticism of and disagreement with others. But this emphasis on the negative, it should be noted, is only the necessary preliminary to our understanding of the positive aspect of Lewis's theorizing: the highly original and carefully worked out vision of a 'primitive' art to which he alone adhered

[5] Ibid., p.33.
[6] F. T. Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism' (1909), in *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. by Umbro Apollonio (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), pp.19-24 (pp.21, 20).
[7] James L. Kugel, *The Techniques of Strangeness in Symbolist Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

in the lead up to Vorticism. At the outset, it will be necessary to approach this matter from a broad historical perspective, to identify the cultural and philosophical roots of modernism's discussion of a primitive kind of art. Only once modernist primitivism is contextualized in this way will it be possible to properly appreciate the complex nature of Lewis's position within this tradition.

(i) The Roots of Modernist Primitivism

The idea of the 'primitive' cannot exist apart from the perspective of the 'civilized', for whom it functions as a tool of 'self-reflection'.[8] First appearing in the English language in the fifteenth century — when it signified 'the "original or ancestor" of animals, perhaps of men' — the word *primitive* came into wider usage among Enlightenment thinkers in the eighteenth century.[9] Here, as Marianna Torgovnick points out:

> it acquired specialized meanings in many fields, including art, mathematics, and grammar – the common element being that *primitive* always implied 'original,' 'pure,' 'simple' – as the dictionary says, 'with implications of either commendation or the reverse'.[10]

A sideways glance at the great work of the Enlightenment — the *Encyclopedia* of Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert (publication started in 1751) — can help to demonstrate this ambivalence in the concept.

In the entry on 'Humanity' in Volume Eight of the *Encyclopedia,* published in 1765, the word *primitive* is used twice to refer, on the one hand, to the personal and social norms of the 'ancient' inhabitants of Tartary and, on the other, to the 'original' qualities of humankind.[11] The connotation implied by each is, however, different. In the

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[8] Michael Bell writes: '[i]t must be almost as old as the capacity for civilised self-reflection for which "primitive" is a necessary term. And by the same token it is always a projected attribution dependent on the viewpoint of the civilised' ('Primitivism: Modernism as Anthropology', p.353).
[9] Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), p.18.
[10] Ibid., p.19.
[11] In the first instance it is written that: 'Tartar blood is mixed on one side with Chinese and on the other with the eastern Russians; and this mix has done nothing to efface the traits of this primitive race'. In the second: 'White appears therefore to be the primitive color of nature that climate, food, and custom alters, and causes the gradation from yellow and brown to black'. Denis Diderot, 'Humanity (Type)', in *The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project,* trans. by Naomi J. Andrews

first instance the point being made is that inter-racial breeding had done little 'to efface' the 'ugliness' and 'immorality' of the Tartars, *primitive* carrying in this context a decidedly negative connotation.[12] In the second instance, *primitive* is used to commend the supposedly original and pure white skin-colour of human beings, before it became 'tainted' by environmental factors. From this time on we may observe a significant rift developing in the philosophical usage of the word.

While for the progressive liberals and modernizers of eighteenth and nineteenth-century philosophy *primitive* came to signify the 'crude and undeveloped' past which contrasted with the maturity of modern thought, it came to signify 'what is unspoiled, a pure origin' among those philosophers who adopted a more critical stance on the Enlightenment project of a rationally re-ordered society.[13] Jean-Jacques Rousseau's essay of 1750 'Discourse on the Arts and Sciences' may be taken as an effective start-point for this tradition. This essay, Rousseau's first published work, was submitted in response to a question proposed by the Academy of Dijon for their annual essay competition — 'Whether the restoration of the arts and the sciences has helped to purify morals' — and won first prize.[14] At the height of the French Enlightenment the idea that this question should be answered in the negative may have seemed inconceivable, but Rousseau used his text to expound a historical critique of civilization, arguing that every stage of humankind's supposed advance had in truth been process of moral degeneration.

By the nineteenth century the view was growing that art would play the decisive role in accounting for the moral and spiritual deficit of the modern world, which many thinkers — following the implications of Rousseau's philosophy — had already identified as a consequence of humankind's loss of the mythical home. In his 'Talk on Mythology', published in 1800, Friedrich Schlegel argued:

> Our poetry, I maintain, lacks a focal point, such as mythology was for the ancients; and one could summarize all the essentials in which modern poetry is inferior to the ancient

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and Ann Arbor (Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2010) <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.0000.242> [accessed 6 November 2015].

[12] Ibid. The preceding line provides the context of the comment: '[t]he women are as ugly as the men. They have neither morals nor religion'.

[13] Bell, 'Primitivism: Modernism as Anthropology', p.354.

[14] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Discourse on the Arts and Sciences', in *Selected Writings* (London: CRW Publishing, 2005), p.21.

> in these words: We have no mythology. But, I add, we are close to obtaining one or, rather, it is time that we earnestly work together to create one.[15]

In Schlegel's philosophical system, developed a century before the emergence of the avant-garde in Europe, we encounter what appears to be the conceptual foundations for the abstract art which would emerge in the early twentieth century. The key idea emanating from Schlegel's work, as Habermas puts it, is that:

> only poetry that has become autonomous, that has been cleansed of associations with theoretical and practical reason, opens wide the door to the world of the primordial forces of myth. Modern art alone can communicate with the archaic sources of social integration that have been sealed off within modernity. On this reading, the new mythology demands of a dirempted modernity that it relate to the 'primordial chaos' as the other of reason.[16]

Although European culture would have to wait another century to witness works of art that were truly 'cleansed of associations' and therefore open to the 'primordial chaos' of myth, the seeds of modernist primitivism were clearly sown in eighteenth and nineteenth-century critiques of modernity.

The idea of the 'primitive' was given its radical edge — as a systematic disavowal of reason and the principles of the Enlightenment — in the philosophy of Nietzsche. What is significant about Nietzsche in this context is that he was the first theorist to turn dissatisfaction with the modern world and the path of reason into a wholesale rebellion against the principles of the Enlightenment. In this way Nietzsche initiated a path of reasoning which would come to dominate the early twentieth-century scene of European thought, as many among the first generation of modernists were inspired by the key idea which his works disseminated, that '[i]n the forms of a revived mythology, art can reacquire the character of a *public* institution and develop the power to regenerate the ethical totality' of the community.[17]

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[15] Friedrich Schlegel, 'Talk on Mythology' (1800), in *The Rise of Modern Mythology 1680-1860*, ed. by Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), pp.309-313 (p.309).
[16] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* trans. by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p.90-1.
[17] Ibid., p.88.

At the heart of his critique of Enlightenment modernity, and the counter-offensive application to myth, lies a concern about the narrowing sphere of agency of the human subject in the modern world. As David A. Wragg writes:

> [Nietzsche's] comment that 'the people itself is the artist of the future' holds on to the idea of a reconstituted social unity, based on the resurgence of mythic consciousness delivered by art. For Habermas, Nietzsche appeals to myth as the antidote to rationalism, manifested in 'the forces of social integration consolidated by competitive society'.[18]

Seeking a way out of rational categorization on behalf of the ailing human subject, Nietzsche provided a clear model of interpretation in which myth played a conceptual role as the 'antonym' of science and therefore as a possible antidote to the crisis which modernity had initiated in the arts.[19] *Mythos,* a way to knowledge conceptually opposed to the rational *logos* of modernity, in this way came to signify a source of nourishment for the modern artist and as a possible conceptual home for modern art.

The appellation 'primitive' thus took on a significant value during the modernist period, becoming a term that was not any longer 'simply bound by temporality', but which entailed 'a forward and utopian' vista.[20] Andrzej Gasiorek provides a useful example of how this was occurring:

> Victor Reynolds wrote of the need for modern art to return to 'primitive' and 'Egyptian' sources in *The New Age* in 1910. He maintained that such art forms offered 'the seeding ground and the hope of future progress' because their survival was 'so fragmentary as to preclude any possibility of direct imitation'.[21]

Further evidence of this new evaluative connotation of the primitive can be found in the fact that when C. R. W. Nevinson sided with Marinetti and the Futurists against the

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[18] Wragg, 'Aggression, aesthetics, modernity', p.194. Wragg quotes here from Jürgen Habermas, 'The Entry into Postmodernity: Nietzsche as a Turning Point', in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (Hemel Hempstead, 1993), pp.51-61 (p.54).
[19] William G. Doty writes that in modern times '"myth" represents an antonym to "science", to such an extent that "science" has become the "natural", "myth" the "cultural" or artificial' (*Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals*, 2nd edn (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2000), p.89).
[20] Bell, 'Primitivism: Modernism as Anthropology', p.354.
[21] Andrzej Gasiorek, 'Modern Art in England Circa 1914: Hulme and Wyndham Lewis', in *Vorticism: New Perspectives*, ed. by Mark Antliff and Scott W. Klein (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.51-67 (p.54).

artists associated with the Rebel Art Centre in the Spring of 1914 his justification was based on the claim that the Italian Futurists were 'the real Primitives, the Primitives of a new and modern sensibility'.[22] As Gasiorek clarifies, for Nevinson 'such primitivism did not imitate earlier "forms or technique" but rather expressed "the spirit of its age"'.[23]

Lewis expressed a strikingly similar idea to this in his statement that modern art must be 'primitive' in order to be 'organic with its Time' in the Vorticist Manifesto, the epigraph to this chapter. Whether this was coincidence or duplication is unclear and perhaps unimportant, for the idea was widespread among the first generation of modernists that modernity was a situation which called for a new primitive aesthetic. But Lewis's position in this tradition is far from simple. While he was evidently conversant with the philosophical critiques of modernity which were occurring during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and highly supportive of the revitalizing potential of primitive artworks, he maintained a critical detachment from the main primitivist current of thought within modernism. It is important to see why this was.

(ii) Lewis's Opposition to Modernist Primitivism

In later works Lewis was openly critical about the idealization of the primitive which was widespread amongst his contemporaries. In *The Diabolical Principle* (1931) he attacked the 'new nihilism' of Elliot Paul and the associated belief of Pierre Drieu La Rochelle that 'Man need never have left the forest. He is a degenerate, nostalgic animal'.[24] In the partner-essay to this, *The Dithyrambic Spectator* (1931), Lewis launched an equally scathing critique of Jane Ellen Harrison's *Ancient Art and Ritual* (1913), in which she had called for modern art to 'recross […] the ritual bridge back into life'.[25] Lewis objected especially to what he described as the 'emotional confusion' and 'snobbery' in Harrison's thesis, arguing that by appealing so wholeheartedly to emotion Harrison had simply conformed 'to the democratic ideals of her time'.[26]

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[22] C. R. W. Nevinson, 'Vital English Art', *The New Age*, 15.7 (1914), pp.160-162 <http://library.brown.edu/pdfs/1140814300827373.pdf> [accessed 4 November 2016] (p.160).
[23] Gasiorek, 'Modern Art in England Circa 1914', p.54.
[24] 'The Diabolical Principle', p.107.
[25] Jane Ellen Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1913?), p.207.
[26] Wyndham Lewis, 'The Dithyrambic Spectator', in *The Diabolical Principle and The Dithyrambic Spectator* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931), pp.159-238 (p.231).

Behind these nostalgic visions of the primordial 'forest' in which humankind originally dwelt, the transcendental ideal of Nietzsche's Dionysian philosophy is only thinly concealed. The embrace of a primordial chaos was valued in this sense for the escape it provided from modernity and the narrowing sphere of subjectivity which this was supposed to have brought upon the human subject. Harrison's theory is clear about this. She applauded the contemporary Expressionist movement and the emphasis which it placed on 'the expression and communication of the artist's emotion', since in her view it was 'the business of the modern artist to feel and transmit emotion towards this unity of man'.[27] This ecstatic or transcendent function of art — conceived as a 'removal' or 'displacement' from the natural order of things, 'a standing outside oneself' to become united with all of humankind — is a key aspect of modernist primitivism.[28] The primitive, whether in the guise of myth, ritual or an amoral attitude in human conduct, was valued as a vehicle of conveyance which could reconnect the dislocated individual of modern civilization with the fundamental pulse of Life.

Lewis's paintings of around 1912-1913 demonstrate careful engagement with this idea and the specific form it was given in Nietzsche's Dionysian philosophy. In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) Nietzsche had described the primitive urges behind Dionysian worship as originating in the desire to tear apart 'the veil of *māyā*' and leave it 'fluttering in tatters before the mysterious primordial unity' of life.[29] The form of the worship had been the *dithyramb*:

> In song and in dance man expresses himself as a member of a higher community; he has forgotten how to walk and speak and is on the way toward flying into the air, dancing. His very gestures express enchantment. […] he feels himself a god, he himself now walks about enchanted, in ecstasy, like the gods he saw walking in his dreams. He is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art […].[30]

This empowered and ecstatic state, which is gained through the medium of dance, was the central theme of Lewis's nine-foot square painting *Kermesse*, commissioned by Frida Strindberg and displayed in her nightclub 'The Cave of the Golden Calf' during

[27] Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, pp.232, 239.
[28] Ernest Klein, *Klein's Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (Bingley: Emerald, 2003), p.237.
[29] Nietzsche, 'The Birth of Tragedy', p.37.
[30] Ibid., p.37.

1912 and 1913.[31] The painting consolidated Lewis's growing reputation as an advanced artist, being recognized at the time as 'the first Modernistic "masterpiece" of British painting'.[32] *Kermesse* has been lost since 1930, but we are afforded a glimpse into its Dionysian aesthetic in *Study for Kermesse* (1912; Fig. 9).[33]

In this composition Lewis adopts characteristics of the Cubist style, with all the painted elements being rendered in sharp, dissecting lines. Yet Lewis's use of Cubist technique does not result in a static image of condensed material forms. Rather, the arcing lines give a sense of movement, the forms appear in a state of transformation, so that what is rendered in isolated detail as a condensed unit of matter also becomes explicable as the motion of a skirt billowing with air. The garments and anatomical features of the human figures appear to fuse with the scenic elements of their surrounding in the tumult of the dance, giving the impression of a group of human beings who have come loose from their restrictive moldings, shortly to become wholly fluid.

But there is also a sinister undercurrent to the image, not only in the 'two wicked looking eyes' of the central dancer looking directly at the viewer over the shoulder of his companion, but the skeletal features of the visible faces, especially the female figure being pirouetted in the right of the picture.[34] Her scream of delight looks unnervingly expressionless, as if she is really a slack-jawed skeleton. Here then we have an early expression of Lewis's later identification of the 'dionysiac' as 'a *relation*, a something that *happens*, between two or more opposites, when they meet in their pyrrhic encounters'.[35] Although the group is gaining in vitality and 'life' as the dance gathers momentum, the individuals involved appear stripped to the bone.

While *Kermesse* may have been applauded by Lewis's contemporaries for the expression which it gave to the Dionysian impulse towards primordial unity through dance, Lewis's own thought was clearly developing beyond Nietzschean parameters at this time. *A Feast of Overmen* from the *Timon of Athens* Portfolio (1912; Fig. 12) further conveys the 'pyrrhic encounters' that Lewis believed were entailed in the

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[31] Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (Yale University Press, 2000), p.78.
[32] Ibid., p.78.
[33] Wyndham Lewis, *Study for Kermesse*, 1912, pen and ink, wash and gouache on paper, 35 × 35.1 cm, Yale Centre for British Art.
[34] These 'two wicked looking eyes' were commented on when the image was exhibited at the Allied Artists' Association in July 1912 (Edwards, *Painter and Writer*, p.78).
[35] *Time and Western Man*, p.21.

Dionysian impulse.[36] Here Lewis gestures not to the fluidity of dance but rather gives visual expression to the swollen egos which might be created by Nietzsche's philosophy of the *Übermensch*. As Paul Edwards writes:

> When Lewis claimed in *Rude Assignment* to have been 'reasonably immune' to Nietzsche's doctrine of the superman, he could have instanced *A Feast of Overmen* to support his claim. The image can be interpreted in the light of Lewis's later (dated 1915) Prologue to *Tarr*: 'Nietzsche's books are full of seductions and sugar-plums. They have made "aristocrats" of people who would otherwise have been only mild snobs or meddlesome prigs … and they have made an Over-man of every vulgarly energetic grocer in Europe'.[37]

As model citizens of the new world, the Overmen in Lewis's painting gorge themselves on food and wine at the expense of their host, Timon in Shakespeare's play. As they carouse they grow in strength and stature and begin to fuse with the inanimate scene around them. Here then is another expression of Lewis's concern about Nietzsche's invitation to reconnect with a more basic aspect of life. Like the skeletal face of the pirouetting woman in *Study for Kermesse* these figures also reveal how the Dionysian drive for unity and empowerment may result in the extinction of the individual.

The clearest articulation of Lewis's position on this during the earliest phase of his career is found in 'Futurism, Magic and Life', in which Lewis issued a humorous warning to the artist of his day to resist the temptation to return too wholeheartedly to the primordial unity of 'Life':

> The Artist, like Narcissus, gets his nose nearer and nearer the surface of Life. He will get it nipped off if he is not careful, by some Pecksniff-shark sunning it's lean belly near the surface, or other lurker beneath his image, who has been feeding on it's [*sic*] radiance.[38]

[36] Wyndham Lewis, Portfolio *Timon of Athens: A Feast of Overmen*, 1913, lithograph on paper, 38.8 × 27.2 cm, Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust, G. and V. Lane Collection.
[37] Edwards, *Painter and Writer*, p.89.
[38] Lewis, 'Futurism, Magic and Life', in *BLAST,* pp.132-135 (pp.134-5).

This passage jars with the primitivist idealization of an art which would re-cross the ritual bridge back into life.[39] In the first instance, Lewis's metaphorical comparison of the artist to Narcissus implants the idea that art's return to life is really a disguised form of self-absorption, modernism's evocation of myth amounting in the end to an alluring pose. Secondly, Lewis instates an elemental distinction between the two realms of art and life. The artist, we are led to believe, would not survive in the inhospitable region of pure, undiluted life. In the lines which follow this passage we learn more about the rationale behind Lewis's insistence on this separation:

> Reality is in the artist, the image only in life, and [the artist] should only approach so near as is necessary for a good view. The question of focus depends on the power of his eyes, or their quality.[40]

The ocular bias in this definition of art — a pursuit which depends above all on the 'power' of the artist's 'eyes' — contrasts sharply with the 'emotional' theory of art which Harrison presented, and indeed the general temper of modernism's Nietzschean-inspired ambition to reconnect art with life. This leads us to the crux of Lewis's disagreement with the idea of the primitive that was advanced by his modernist contemporaries.

The rationale behind most modernist applications to the primitive had been derived from Nietzsche's pessimistic characterization of the situation in which the modern individual existed, being notionally closed into an ever-narrowing sphere of subjectivity. With this theoretical underpinning, the primitive came to represent a route by which the subject could reconnect with the broader stream of social life. For Lewis, the logic of this account was not only misguided, but carried potentially catastrophic consequences. He later commented in 'The Perfect Action' that art is a 'phenomen[on] of *separation*' which is 'identifiable with the arrival on the scene of the *individual* or Subject: and its disappearance is coeval with the death or suppression of the Subject'.[41] Thus for Lewis, the salvation of the modern human subject lay not in its immersion in

[39] It also ought to be noted that Lewis's complaint a page earlier in 'Futurism, Magic and Life', that 'Art merges in Life again everywhere', seems to be a direct retort to Harrison's theory (*BLAST,* p.132).
[40] Ibid.*,* p.135.
[41] From proofs 'The Perfect Action', quoted in Paul Edwards, 'Wyndham Lewis and the Uses of Shellshock: Meat and Postmodernism'*,* in *Wyndham Lewis and the Cultures of Modernity*, ed. by Andrzej Gasiorek, Alice Reeve-Tucker and Nathan Waddell (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), pp.223- 240 (p.236-237).

life, but in individuation. In contrast to the unifying ideals of his contemporaries, Lewis's thought at this time is concerned especially with implementing safeguards which would guarantee the subject's freedom from any encroaching unity which might attempt to consume it, whether that is termed 'object', 'Nature' or indeed 'Life'.

Such 'questions of fusion and separation' were central to Lewis's developing pattern of thinking during the Vorticist period.[42] The issue of transcendence became one of the central dilemmas of Lewis's career, which he expressed eloquently in *Time and Western Man*:

> What I am concerned with here, first of all, is […] the very fundamental question of whether we should set out to transcend our human condition (as formerly Nietzsche and then Bergson claimed that we should); or whether we should translate into human terms the whole of our datum.[43]

As this passage makes clear, Nietzsche and Bergson represented for Lewis two sides of one 'dream of transcendence' which had entranced the first generation of modernist artists and writers.[44] The relationship between these two philosophers in the modernist psyche is important to understand. While it was Nietzsche who set the theoretical parameters for modernism's idealization of a primitive art, it was Bergson who presented the most compelling rationale for the creative human subject's transcendence of material limits.

Although he may not be classed among the key theorists of modernist primitivism, Bergson's account of evolution as a 'collision of descending matter and ascending spirit' readily leant itself to a distinction between a modern civilization in the throes of entropic collapse and a primitive, mythic counterpart which presented the chance for renewal.[45] His philosophy provided the European avant-garde with an attractive solution to the problem of how to understand the most advanced stage of civilization as a new dawn for the species. The evolutionary frontier at which

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[42] Wyndham Lewis, 'The Critical Realists', Wyndham Lewis Collection, Box 1, Folder 11 (Buffalo: The Poetry Collection), p.25.
[43] *Time and Western Man*, p.110.
[44] Shane Weller, 'Nietzsche Among the Modernists: The Case of Wyndham Lewis', *Modernism/Modernity*, 14.4 (2007), pp.625-643 <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/224185> [accessed 4 April 2016], p.627.
[45] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. by Arthur Mitchell (New York: Dover Publications, 1998), p.264.

humankind supposedly stood in modernity he conceived as a site of transcendence. Bergson's 'vision of man at the apex of evolution' in many ways furnished modernism with the missing piece of Nietzsche's philosophy, providing a more complete image of the 'future "superman," a man more fully in possession of himself', than Nietzsche had managed.[46] It is important to understand the effect Bergson's vitalist philosophy had on modernism and more specifically on Lewis's early thought, if we are to fully account for Lewis's theoretical opposition to primitivism at this time.

(iii) Henri Bergson's Vitalism and Modernist Ideas of Transcendence

It is not difficult to understand why the two philosophies of Nietzsche and Bergson may have overlapped to such a profound degree in Lewis's thought. He had first read Nietzsche in French translation during his student days in Paris around the same time that he attended the lectures of Bergson at the Collège de France. During this time he would have observed the correspondences between the Dionysian 'will to power' presented in the philosophy of Nietzsche and the *élan vital* of Bergson.[47] Charlotte de Mille has shown that Bergson's lectures of 1903 — which Lewis is thought to have attended — would have been highly complementary to a student of Nietzsche's critique of modernity given that they too concerned the 'different methods of thought' which can be distinguished 'from the ancients to Kant', highlighting especially a distinction between 'the "method of intuition and the method of analysis, — of absolute knowledge and relative knowledge, by signs and concepts"'.[48] The Nietzschean distinction between 'mythic' and 'rational' worldviews was in this way highlighted and widely disseminated in the immensely popular work of Bergson.[49]

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[46] Charlotte de Mille, '"Blast … Bergson?" Wyndham Lewis's "Guilty Fire of Friction"', *Understanding Bergson, Understanding Modernism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp.141-156 (p.146).
[47] Lewis 'read Nietzsche and Dostoevsky in French translations, attended lectures by Henri Bergson and studied his writings', as Edwards comments (*Painter and Writer,* p.10).
[48] de Mille, '"Blast … Bergson?"', p.142.
[49] With over two hundred articles being published about Bergson between 1909 and 1911 in the British Press alone, few philosophers before or since have garnered such a degree of celebrity as Bergson achieved in his heyday. Looking back in 1932 T. S. Eliot described 'Bergsonism' as an 'epidemic'. The American pragmatist philosopher William James commented that Bergson's powers of expression were 'simply phenomenal', that the effect of opening one of Bergson's books was that 'new horizons loom on every page; it is like the breath of the morning and the song of the birds' (Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass, in *The Crisis in Modernism: Bergson and the Vitalist Controversy*, ed. Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.3).

A devoted reader of Nietzsche's philosophy himself, Bergson captured the transformative evolutionary possibilities which were widely felt to be stirring in the first decade of the twentieth century. In *Creative Evolution* (1907) he presented a general view of 'life as *tension*' in which 'the "living and concrete self" is always striving to slough off the "crust" of rationalization it constantly exteriorizes'.[50] Evolution was thus explained as a model of interacting forces, of dynamic propulsion encountering a static restraining element: though life in-itself is defined as 'pure mobility', the 'particular manifestations of life accept this mobility reluctantly, and continually lag behind'.[51] At a time of dynamic thrust towards the newly transformed modern world Bergson's philosophy guided a generation further along the radical path of reasoning that Nietzsche had initiated, providing a further philosophical rationale for transcendence.

Perhaps Europe's foremost philosopher of the first decade of the twentieth century — certainly the most influential philosopher among modernist artists and writers, as Mark Antliff has shown — Bergson expressed the view that the twentieth century represented a point of evolutionary departure for humankind, involving the passage of evolutionary sovereignty from Nature to humankind:[52]

> […] consciousness is essentially free; it is freedom itself; but it cannot pass through matter without settling on it, without adapting itself to it […] humanity no longer seems isolated in the nature that it dominates […] all organized beings, from the humblest to the highest, from the first origins of life to the time in which we are, and in all places as in all times, do but evidence a single impulsion, the inverse of the movement of matter, and in itself indivisible. All the living hold together, and all yield to the same tremendous push. The animal takes its stand on the plant, man bestrides animality, and the whole of humanity, in space and in time, is one immense army galloping beside and before and behind each of us in an overwhelming charge able to beat down every resistance and clear the most formidable obstacles, perhaps even death.[53]

Transcendence — typically the preserve of mythological and religious doctrines — was in this way given a philosophical rationale by a leading thinker of the day, the metaphysical conflict between spirit and matter having been conceptually aligned with

[50] Ibid., p.5.
[51] Ibid., p.5.
[52] Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
[53] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p.270-271.

the technological conflict taking place between humankind and material nature. As de Mille writes: 'With the *élan vital*, Bergson effectively bridged the gap between the insecurity engendered by neo-Darwinian theory and the human need for some form of spiritual force'.[54]

But Bergson's philosophy left a great deal open to interpretation. For all adherents to his interpretive model the task remained to identify which phenomena properly belonged to which side of the dualism of spirit and matter; whether, for example, nature was to be conceived as inert matter or vital energy, and whether the new phenomena of machinery were manifestations of humankind's vital creative spirit or further material limitations on the spirit's ascent. The most pressing issue for artists working in the Bergsonian model of interpretation was to clarify whether art was to be aligned with spirit (as in the case of Wassily Kandinsky and the Formalist theory of art) or materiality (as in the case of F. T. Marinetti and the Italian Futurists), or whether it would play off a conflict between both sides (as in the case of Lewis and the Vorticist movement). In all instances, despite the apparent contradictions which arise, the energized propulsion of the *élan vital* was affirmed by Bergson's modernist inheritors as a primitive surge of energy which could break apart the outmoded cultural institutions which they had inherited.

The Bergsonian model was used by Marinetti and the Italian Futurists to justify the idea that by populating the world with a new species of machinery, humankind had liberated itself from the draconian rule of material Nature. Life's ascent was identified with the vital energies of the machine-age and the aggressive combat which the Futurists perceived humankind as having launched against material nature. In this way Futurism celebrated the machine-age as the final and decisive stage of Kant's 'Enlightenment', conceived as 'man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity'.[55] By unleashing the power of the machine the Futurists argued that humankind was effectively overthrowing the authority of natural laws. 'Time and Space died yesterday', wrote Marinetti, '[w]e already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal, omnipresent speed'.[56]

It is perhaps Jacob Epstein's sculpture *Rock Drill* of 1913 (Fig. 14) which most forcefully illustrates the new evolutionary possibilities which this moment of historic

[54] de Mille, '"Blast … Bergson?"', p.141.
[55] Kant, *An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?,* p.1.
[56] Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism', p.22.

severance awakened in the modernist psyche.[57] As Richard Cork writes: 'Half human and half automaton, the figure [...] appears to be the harbinger of a different, harsher and more disturbing world'.[58] Certainly the figure is designed to express the aggressive vitality of the machine-age. Its phallic positioning, aggressively poised to plumb the earth, conveys well the passive conception of nature which we find in these years. Yet embedded in the armoured structure of the driller's ribcage we find the fragile embryo of organic life, as yet shapeless and unconscious, the progeny of the new type of humanity — presumably a man-machine hybrid — that would populate the new world.

Futurism and Epstein's *Rock Drill* may now be regarded as products of Bergson's transcendental hypothesis and emblems of the belief that humankind was nearing its date with destiny in the early years of the twentieth century. But as much as the artworks and theories of this time conveyed the heavy influence of Bergson's idea of the *élan vital*, they were taking a strident step forward within the parameters of Nietzsche's emancipatory hypothesis. The modern world was believed to represent a homecoming for the primitive instincts of humankind, a situation in which art would once again blossom in 'the *Apollinian* and *Dionysian* duality' and all the 'perpetual strife' which that brings.[59] Culture, as many modernists deeply felt, would be rejuvenated with some of art's original potency and thus returned to its original cultic function.

(iv) 'Everywhere LIFE is said instead of ART': Lewis's Opposition to Bergson and his Modernist Disciples

In his review of 'The London Group' exhibition in March 1915 Lewis complimented Epstein's *Rock Drill* as 'one of the best things he has done'.[60] He writes there that 'The nerve-like figure perched on the machinery, with it's [*sic*] straining to one purpose, is a vivid illustration of the greatest function of life'.[61] This apparent celebration of the

[57] Jacob Epstein, *Rock Drill*, 1913-15, [reconstruction by Ken Cook and Ann Christopher after the dismantled original, 1973-4], polyester resin, metal and wood, 205 × 141.5 cm, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery.
[58] Richard Cork, *Wild Thing: Epstein, Gaudier-Brzeska, Gill* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2010), p.161.
[59] Nietzsche, 'The Birth of Tragedy', p.33.
[60] Lewis, 'The London Group', in *BLAST 2*, pp.77-79 (p.78).
[61] Ibid., p.78

violent and destructive 'function' of life chimes with the idea which Lewis expressed a year earlier in the first issue of *BLAST*:

> Killing somebody must be the greatest pleasure in existence: either like killing yourself without being interfered with by the instinct of self-preservation – or exterminating the instinct of self-preservation itself![62]

Read together, but in isolation of the wider context of his writings at this time, these statements might lead us to imagine that Lewis developed from Bergson's concept of the *élan vital* a rationale for the regenerative power of machine-age violence, sharing in Futurism's glorification of war as 'the world's only hygiene'.[63] Yet while a bellicose rhetoric undeniably flavours Lewis's writings at this time, we ought not to fall into the trap of reading this statement as a firm articulation of Lewis's position. In the first instance it is humorously undercut by an additional comment a couple of lines later concerning the manner in which most people choose to wrestle with the domineering 'instinct of self-preservation': 'Some people enjoy best by proxy, some by masturbation'.[64]

A closer look at the context in which this apparent celebration of killing (or being killed) occurs clarifies its meaning. It is found in that crucial expository essay in *BLAST* 'Futurism, Magic and Life' where it follows Lewis's account of the prevailing intellectual tendency among his contemporaries to venerate an idealized conception of 'Life':

> In Northern Europe (Germany, Scandinavia and Russia) for the last half century, the intellectual world has developed savagely in one direction – that of Life. His war-talk, sententious elevation and much besides, Marinetti picked up from Nietzsche. Strindberg, with his hysterical and puissant autobiographies, life-long tragic coquetry with Magic, extensive probing of female flesh and spirit, is the great Scandinavian figure best representing this tendency. Bergson, the philosopher of Impressionism, stands for this new prescience in France. Everywhere LIFE is said instead of ART.[65]

[62] Lewis, 'Futurism, Magic and Life', in *BLAST*, p.133.
[63] Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism', p.22.
[64] Lewis, 'Futurism, Magic and Life', in *BLAST*, p.133.
[65] Ibid., p.132.

It is a situation which Lewis suggests has been aggravated by both sides. As much as he perceives a wholesale shift among late nineteenth-century European intellectuals towards the concerns of 'Life', resulting in a venerated conception of the 'Wild Body and the Primitive Brain', he alludes to the self-sabotaging role which was played by *fin de siècle* Aestheticism, which, with its mantra of 'art for art's sake', played that 'selfish trick of cutting [art's] connections' with life.[66] Lewis thus represents the last half of the nineteenth century as a period of open warfare, when it became necessary for artists to decide which side they belonged to: whether among the 'immoral' and decadent coterie of pleasure-seeking artists, plunging into sensuous oblivion, or among the plain and inconspicuous majority of 'living' folk, 'whose heads were, with an honest Birmingham screw, straightly riveted into their bodies'.[67]

Faced with the choice which the late nineteenth century presented them, many 'good artists', Lewis writes, 'repudiated the self-indulgent, special-privileged, priggish and cowardly role of "Artist," and joined themselves to the Birmingham screws'.[68] Thus 'England emerged […] about 1900' with 'Wilde in prison' and all 'Lupinars and Satanics' banished, a land in which Life had conquered Art and the degenerate image of hedonistic pleasure-seeking which it had lately come to stand for.[69] 'This', writes Lewis, 'brings you to the famous age where we are at present gathered, in which Humanity's problem is "[to] live with the minimum of pleasure possible for bare existence"'.[70]

It is in this context, as an allusion to the imaginative poverty of his contemporary society, that we must read Lewis's celebration of the 'pleasure' of killing. The comment is inflected with exasperation at a culture in which 'Life' is blithely glorified by a mass of people who nevertheless stand to gain very little pleasure from it. The suggestion Lewis is making is that life without art provides humanity with little in the way of an imaginative solution to, or a diversion from, 'bare existence'. Killing — or to put it more accurately destroying — would be the greatest pleasure left in an

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[66] Ibid., p.133.
[67] Ibid., p.133. Lewis plays on Rousseau's vision of civilization as a form of moral degeneration, quoting the idea expressed in his *Letter to Jean Le Rond D'Alembert* that 'The theatre is immoral, because a place where people go to enjoy other people's sufferings and tears' ('Futurism, Magic and Life', *BLAST*, p.133).
[68] Ibid., p.133.
[69] Ibid., p.133.
[70] Ibid., p.133. The 'to' preceding 'live with the minimum of pleasure' is omitted in *BLAST*. That this is merely a typographical error is indicated by the fact that Lewis reproduces the line including the correction: '"to live with the minimum of pleasure possible for bare existence"' in *Wyndham Lewis the Artist: From 'BLAST' to Burlington House* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1939), p.104.

existence devoid of creativity. He thus highlights the sense in which life's triumph over art was really a pyrrhic victory, with damaging consequences. Living 'with the minimum of pleasure possible' had led his contemporaries to seek and find 'a new outside art of their own', killing becoming explicable in this sense as a new sport or pastime.[71]

Read within this context, what appeared at first to be a celebration of violence actually becomes explicable as a satirical characterization of the masochism of those modern artists who seek to reconnect, by violent means, to the primordial pulse of existence. Convincing themselves that they are putting art in the service of life, they are in fact worshipping death. With the benefit of over a century's hindsight, we may read in this a remarkable diagnosis of the hidden springs Europe's growing thirst for war. There is a grim poignancy in the line: 'The Wild Body and Primitive Body have found a new outside art of their own', especially when we situate this in the imaginative context of its original publication date, a mere four days after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on 28 June.[72] But Lewis's prescience is perhaps not as impressive as his ability to dissect the complex and interwoven processes which were conspiring to bring about art's demise at the hands of 'life' discourses. We may take measure of this by observing how closely Lewis's diagnosis of the situation of modern art chimes with the account given over sixty years later by Jürgen Habermas.

In 'Modernity versus Postmodernity' (1981) Habermas described 'cultural modernity' as the ramification of a 'unified world concept' into three autonomous spheres of human discourse — science, morality and art — with each 'fall[ing] under specific aspects of validity: truth, normative rightness, authenticity and beauty [and] handled as questions of knowledge, or of justice and morality, or of taste'.[73] The privileged position of science as the sole aspirant to objective truth ought to be compared here with the crisis which modernity initiates in morality and art; both

[71] Lewis, 'Futurism, Magic and Life', in *BLAST*, p.133.
[72] Ibid., p.133. There is ongoing debate about the actual release date of *BLAST*. The title page is dated 20th June. It is on or around this date that the magazine went to print at the premises of Leveridge & Co. in Harlesden which may therefore be taken as the date at which the final content was all in place (Michael E. Leveridge, 'The Printing of *BLAST*' *Wyndham Lewis Annual*, 8 (2000), pp.20-31). But Paul O'Keeffe tells us that the actual release date was delayed while Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders, under orders from the publisher John Lane, undertook the unenviable task of 'blacking out' Pound's indelicate use of the word 'testicles' along with his graphic 'description of sexual orgasm' in the poem 'Fratres Minores' on page 48 of each printed copy. Due to this, writes O'Keeffe, 'it was not until 1 July 1914 that Blast made its appearance, or at least had its appearance noted' (Paul O'Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), p.156).
[73] Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity versus Postmodernity', *New German Critique*, 22 (1981), pp.3-14 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/487859> [accessed 7 January 2014], p.8.

discourses which traditionally derive their meaning from participation in a grand narrative. Without a super-ordinate *telos* they are inevitably rendered relative and contingent, and ultimately trivial in the main concourse of social life. Habermas's theory translates readily into Lewis's chosen terminology, echoing the idea that the dominance of 'life' discourses in the nineteenth and early twentieth century had harried 'art' to the isolated position in which it now exists on the margins of social life.

It seems remarkable now that Lewis's cultural criticism was attuned to these complex processes as they were unfolding in 1914. Foreseeing the damaging consequences which the modern world carried for art, Lewis stood opposed to those of his contemporaries who became enamoured with Bergson's *élan vital* and the possibility which it presented to plunge deeper into Life. The Futurists especially he regarded as naively investing confidence in the transcendent possibilities of modern technology. In *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937) Lewis relates a humorous anecdote which demonstrates the grounds of his opposition to Futurism eloquently. Arguing with Marinetti after one of his public lectures in London, Lewis claims to have said:

> 'you Wops insist too much on the Machine. You're always on about these driving-belts, you are always exploding about internal combustion. We've had machines here in England for a donkey's years. They're no novelty to *us*'.[74]

These comments, although undoubtedly glossed by Lewis's memory, accurately capture the tone of condescension which Lewis always tended to adopt in his discussions of Futurism. Even in *BLAST* he explained 'Futurism, as preached by Marinetti', as 'Automobilism and [the] Nietzsche stunt': a rather extravagant sideshow in what he described as 'The Melodrama of Modernity'.[75]

Despite his admiration for modern machinery — which he described as 'the greatest Earth-medium' in section six of the Vorticist Manifesto — Lewis remained cautious about the benefit this new materialism would have for humankind.[76] In 'Inferior Religions' he refers to the muted presence of that great metaphysical other — 'the Sovereign force beneath the surface', 'the skeleton at the Feast' — which he envisaged lurking at the wings of humankind's arrogant show of power, awaiting a

[74] Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting & Bombardiering: An Autobiography (1914-1926)* (London: John Calder, 1982), p.34.
[75] Lewis, 'The Melodrama of Modernity', in *BLAST*, pp.143-144 (p.143).
[76] Lewis, 'Manifesto', in *BLAST*, p.39.

suitable moment to expose hubris.[77] This is a correlative concept of that 'Pecksniff-shark' which suns its 'lean belly' just under the 'surface' of life and represents the great enemy of the human subject, which haunts its 'pyrrhic encounters' with the Dionysian impulse towards unity.[78] It stands for the metaphysical unity of Nature, or the object which stands perpetually across from subject, until they are reunited in death. It is an altogether more sinister vision of metaphysical unity than that which was espoused by Nietzsche and Bergson and adopted by their modernist disciples. By promoting the occult, interpenetrative faculty of intuition as a vehicle for the species' transcendence Bergson especially had blithely condemned the human subject, and art itself, to what Lewis regarded as a deadly tryst with Life.

Against this general trend among his contemporaries to amalgamate art and life, subject and object, Lewis developed a reactive principle of his own which held firm to a 'violent structure of adolescent clearness between two extremes'.[79] It is an important aspect of his dualistic *modus operandi* in Vorticism: wherever he picks up the scent of monism Lewis reasserts the structure of hallowed binary distinctions which he regarded as essential foundations for art, and indeed the freedom of the human subject. As he put it in 'Vortex No. 1 […] Be Thyself' in the second issue of *BLAST*:

> There is nothing so impressive as the number TWO. You must be a duet in everything. […] There is Yourself: and there is the Exterior World, that fat mass you browse on. […] Do not confuse yourself with it, or weaken the esoteric lines of fine original being. Do not marry it, either, to a maiden.[80]

This passage powerfully conveys the firm dualistic structure which Lewis instated against the monistic tendencies of his contemporary culture. It is a vision of creative strength through individuation which jars dramatically with a monistic model of interpretation.

We have seen how Lewis stood profoundly opposed to the underlying principles of modernist primitivism. But it was not only the principles of this movement which Lewis opposed, he objected also to the manner in which his contemporary artists and

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[77] Wyndham Lewis, 'Inferior Religions' (1917), in *The Complete Wild Body*, ed. by Bernard Lafourcade (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1982), pp.313-319 (p.318).
[78] Lewis, 'Futurism, Magic and Life', in *BLAST*, p.134-5.
[79] Lewis, 'Manifesto', in *BLAST*, p.30.
[80] Lewis, 'Wyndham Lewis Vortex No.1', in *BLAST 2*, p.91.

writers attempted to attain the aura of the primitive in their works, that is to say the aesthetic styles and techniques which they pioneered. Again Lewis's position on this is a complex issue to negotiate. On the one hand, he shared in the desire to move art beyond the strictures of the mimetic and realist traditions, which had dominated Western art since the renaissance. He is in many ways emblematic of the modernist desire to create artworks that were savage and abstract, thereby opposing the moribund aesthetic criteria of more civilized and settled times. But in his conception of how this primitive element was to be invoked in works of modern art we find that Lewis once again stands apart from the majority of his modernist contemporaries.

(v) The Abstract Revolution in Modern Art

Pablo Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907, Fig. 2) is arguably the breakthrough work of visual art of the avant-garde years of experimentation before the First World War, which brings together many of the key modernist fascinations with primitivism and vitalism, as well as presenting a model for the more direct, abstract mode of expression of the type that Schlegel had imagined a century before.[81] Although it was not exhibited publicly until 1916, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* serves as an effective seismograph of the intellectual climate in which modernist artists like Lewis were working during the first decade of the twentieth century. It is a work which breaks decisively with the mimetic tradition in Western art, and which offers the observer an opportunity to view in more concrete terms precisely how modernist artists attempted to realize their primitive visions in technical terms. The central question for our present purposes is: where did this new abstract style in art come from and what did it signify?

A look at the sources for Picasso's painting can help us answer these questions to a certain extent. One key stylistic influence on the painting was the exhibition of African art at the Ethnographic Museum of the Trocadéro in Paris in 1907. X-rays have shown how Picasso's primitive aesthetic was derived directly from his experiences at the Trocadéro exhibition. During the spring and early summer of 1907 Picasso had painted the five female nudes in the 'Iberian' style indicated by the three figures on the

[81] Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907, oil on canvas, 243.9 × 233.7 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

left-hand side.[82] The 'primitive masking and hatching features got into *Les Demoiselles* in the autumn of 1907', as Christopher Butler writes, with Picasso over-painting the two figures on the right in the style of the African masks he had seen during his summer break.[83]

Armed with this primitive aesthetic style, Picasso set out to provide a stark yet carefully conceived expression of Charles Baudelaire's belief that the prostitute 'is a perfect image of the savagery that lurks in the midst of civilization', thereby presenting his own credentials as the archetypal 'Painter of Modern Life' in line with Baudelaire's theory.[84] Certainly Picasso was much influenced at this time by the Symbolist poets and a central motif which is found in their works: that the modern industrialized and mechanized world presented itself as a wild and suggestive 'forest of symbols' for the modern artist.[85] But what can Picasso's painting tell us about modern life, beyond the supposed savagery of the women which it depicts? One significant answer to this question was provided by the German art historian Wilhelm Worringer a year after Picasso painted *Les Demoiselles*.

In *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (1908) Worringer brought into question the emphasis which art history had — since its formulation as a discipline in the nineteenth century — placed on the artist's ability to imitate the organic forms of nature and the human body. He argued that works of art, whether mimetic or abstract, were not significant principally for the accuracy of their rendition, but rather that their principal importance lay in the seismographic measure they took of a society's psychological or spiritual attitude, encoding especially the orientation in which a culture stands towards nature. Worringer's great step, as Hidde Van Ameyden van Duym points out, was in suggesting at a moment of great social and cultural upheaval that 'art was an organism independent from nature, and [that] it derived from the same psychological forces as did

[82] Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism: Literature, Music, and Painting in Europe, 1900-1916* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p.109.
[83] Ibid., p.109.
[84] Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. by Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1964), pp.1-40 (p.36). Picasso's admiration for Baudelaire's essay is discussed in depth by John Richardson in *A Life of Picasso, 1907-1917: The Painter of Modern Life* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996), pp.11-17.
[85] This phrase is taken from James McGowen's translation of the opening quatrain of Charles Baudelaire's poem 'Correspondences': 'Nature is a temple where living pillars often let emerge confused words; man passes through forests of symbols which observe him with familiar looks' (*The Flowers of Evil*, trans. by James McGowen (Oxford University Press, 1998), p.xxxii.

religion'.[86] His analysis of abstract art as a manifestation of 'an immense spiritual dread of space' — an expressive technique which connotes the collapse of a 'happy pantheistic relationship of confidence between man and the phenomena of the external world' — is highly relevant here, since by extrapolation it provided modern abstract art with an anthropological context and the basis of a theoretical rationale.[87] Picasso's *Les Demoiselles*, in light of Worringer's theory, was a key exhibit of the new psychological orientation of humankind in the modern world: the move back to an abstract technique heralding the breakdown of humankind's empathetic relationship with nature.

At a time when abstraction was fast becoming the *locus classicus* among advanced painters in the pre-war European avant-garde, Worringer's theory had clear relevance. In the art criticism of T. E. Hulme — the theorist who more than anyone else was responsible for feeding Worringer's ideas into English modernism — the implications of his theory for modern abstract art were teased out. In 'Modern Art and Its Philosophy' Hulme explored a comparison of the 'attitudes' entailed by modern 'geometrical' art and its archaic antecedents:

> The new geometrical art will probably in the end not in the least resemble archaic art, nor will the new attitude to the world be very much like the Byzantine […] One can only make certain guesses at the new attitude by the use of analogy. Take two other attitudes of the past which went with geometrical art: say primitive and Byzantine. […] The primitive springs from what we have called a kind of mental space-shyness, which is really an attitude of fear before the world; the Byzantine from what may be called, inaccurately, a kind of contempt for the world. Though these two attitudes differ very much, yet there is a common element in the idea of separation as opposed to the more intimate feeling towards the world in classical and renaissance thought. In comparison with the flat and insipid optimism of the belief in progress, the new attitude may be in a certain sense inhuman, pessimistic. Yet its pessimism will not be world rejecting in the sense in which Byzantine was.[88]

[86] Hidde Van Ameyden van Duym's 'Introduction' to Paul van Ostaijen, *Feasts of Fear and Agony*, trans. by Hidde Van Ameyden van Duym (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1976), p.4.
[87] Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, trans. by Michael Bullock (Chicago: Elephant Paperback, 1997), p.15.
[88] T. E. Hulme, 'Modern Art and Its Philosophy', *The Collected Writings of T. E. Hulme*, ed. Karen Csengeri, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp.268-285 (pp. 276-277).

Both modern and ancient variants of abstract art were supposed by Hulme to communicate a disconnection between humankind and nature. But as this passage suggests, the distinction between them lies in the cause of this disconnection, whether it is rooted in a sense of fear and inferiority (a 'world-rejecting' kind of 'pessimism') as was the case in Byzantine art, or — if we follow the implication — the world-embracing form of 'pessimism' which Hulme associates with modern geometrical art.

Hulme's description of the 'new attitude' as a kind of 'pessimism' that is not 'world-rejecting' is paradoxical, but nonetheless highly revealing. Hulme wishes to describe the attitude exhibited by the new geometric art towards the world as something far removed from 'insipid optimism' of naturalistic art, so he chooses the opposite term 'pessimism', in spite of the apparent contradiction it leads him into. It is a clear example of modernist 'paradoxy', indicating 'a kind of confusion generated by a terminology that seems to make clear distinctions where clear distinctions cannot — or should not — be made'.[89] This, after all, is a kind of 'pessimism' from which is extracted all connotations of fatalism, gloom and resignation. It is a 'pessimism [that] will not be world-rejecting': that is to say, a stance of opposition towards the world which is not rooted in a sense of 'dread' but rather in an active sense of mastery over Nature.

In comments which he makes in the concluding section of 'Modern Art and Its Philosophy', Hulme provides the key to this cryptic description of the attitude entailed in the new art:

> In conclusion, I might hazard some conjectures as to the probable nature of the specific and peculiar quality which will differentiate this new geometrical art from its predecessors. As far as one can see, the new 'tendency towards abstraction' will culminate, not so much in the simple geometrical forms found in archaic art, but in the more complicated ones associated in our minds with the idea of machinery.[90]

Elsewhere in 'Modern Art and Its Philosophy' Hulme comments that 'fear is in no sense a necessary presupposition of the tendency to abstraction' and in his identification of the 'idea of machinery' as the central inspiration for modern abstract art he implies that this is a form of abstraction founded in machine-age confidence.[91] For Hulme, the bold angular machine-forms of modern abstract art had little to do with a passive 'dread' of

[89] Scholes, *Paradoxy of Modernism*, p.xi.
[90] Hulme, 'Modern Art and Its Philosophy', p.282.
[91] Ibid., p.274.

nature found in archaic forms of abstract art, rather it seemed to be born out of a celebration of the modern world and the sense of eminence which it had cultivated in the modern subject.[92]

The twist which Hulme gave to Worringer's theory provides an important insight into the aesthetic practices of modernist artists exploring a primitive sensibility in their works. While he believed that modern abstract art was indeed a recurrence of a primitive aesthetic sensibility, he suggested that at its most powerful and expressive this sensibility was attuned to the angular, geometric forms of the modern world and not aesthetically dependent upon the inherited formulae of ancient or exotic variants of primitive art, as Picasso's breakthrough work had been. This idea draws us closer to the peculiar blend of modernism and primitivism which we noticed in Lewis's aesthetic theory at the start of this chapter. The view was shared by both Lewis and Hulme that for modern abstract art to be effective it must derive its primitive vitality from the spectacle of the modern world and the profound sense of historic severance which this entailed, rather than seek among the ruins of a lost or faded exoticism for an abstract formal coda to imitate.

In the sculptures of Jacob Epstein and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, and the paintings of Wyndham Lewis, Hulme argued that the *Weltanschauung* of the modern age was finding its clearest expression. What impressed him most about the modern art he saw emerging in England just before the First World War was, as Gasiorek explains, the 'provenance' which 'these artists discovered […] in certain kinds of "primitive" art' and their subsequent turn towards 'what Hulme called "archaic yet permanent formulae"'.[93] The new geometrical art of the Vorticists provided something 'fixed and necessary' in an unstable world, infused with the 'Classicist' spirit of the machine-age.[94] Here at last was a kind of 'primitive' art that was 'organic with its Time'.[95]

(vi) Lewis and Hulme: Different Degrees of Abstraction in Modern Art

[92] Andrzej Gasiorek supports this reading when he writes: 'Hulme followed Worringer's emphasis on the separation of anti-vital, geometric art from the world with which it engages, but he did not believe modern art was the product of anxiety in the face of a threatening environment or a world in flux. This was the key difference between the art Worringer had discussed and the art Hulme was trying to comprehend' ('Modern Art in England Circa 1914', p.53-4).
[93] Ibid., p.53.
[94] Hulme, 'Modern Art and Its Philosophy', pp.271-2.
[95] Lewis, 'Manifesto', in *BLAST,* pp.33-4.

Hulme's theory in many ways provides the key with which to understand Lewis's own theory of abstraction in modern art and the way in which this stood against the theories pioneered by his contemporaries. But the relationship between Lewis and Hulme is a complex one, with certain shared elements but also some key distinctions to be highlighted. In the first instance we ought to highlight a key similarity between their early theories: the shared belief that modern abstract art was an expression of a new and different attitude towards the external world. Hulme's idea that modern abstract art demonstrated a shift towards a new *Weltanschauung* based upon the supremacy of modern man over nature was also a key theoretical insight of Lewis's Vorticism.

Indeed for Lewis the new worldview of the modern age entailed a new type of human being. In *BLAST* he described how the 'NEW EGOS' differed in kind from the 'civilized savage' of an earlier phase of human history. No longer with eyes 'in the top of their head', 'full of blank light', the eyes of this new human species 'sweep life horizontally' over 'a world and elements [they] control'.[96] These comments imply Lewis's awareness of both Worringer's analysis of primitive abstraction and the theory of modern abstract art which Hulme derived from this. Clearly Lewis agreed with Hulme on this point: the vast increase in material control which humankind now exerted upon the world was an expression of a changed relationship between humankind and the external world.

In *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937) Lewis took care to confirm the affinity between his own ideas during Vorticism and Hulme's art philosophy, highlighting especially the way in which they apparently shared a rigorous ideal of abstraction:

> All the best things Hulme said about the theory of art were said about my art. […] We happened, that is all, to be made for each other, as critic and 'creator.' What he said should be done, I did. Or it would be more exact to say that I did it, and he said it.
>
> In England there was no one else working in consonance with an 'abstract' theory of art to the same extent as myself. Neither Gaudier nor Epstein would in the end have been 'abstract' enough to satisfy the requirements of this obstinate abstractionist. He would have had to fall back on me.[97]

[96] Lewis, 'The New Egos', in *BLAST,* p.141.
[97] *Blasting & Bombardiering,* p.100.

Andrzej Gasiorek has given good reason for suspicion about this speculative claim.[98] Certainly we should note the rhetorical strategy underlying Lewis's claims here. Writing from the margins of British culture in 1937 Lewis is clearly keen to appropriate the ever more widely celebrated Hulme as an early follower and theorizer of his Vorticist aesthetic practice in an attempt to re-affirm the central importance of his work in the modernist canon. The passage thus tells us a great deal about the desperate struggle to gain recognition for his work which Lewis experienced in the 1920s and 1930s. But equally, as we turn now to consider the precise nature of Lewis's early ideas on abstract technique, this passage enables us to highlight in detail the distinction between two degrees of abstraction advocated by Lewis and his contemporaries.

When we pursue Lewis's claim that he alone among the pre-war avant-garde would 'have been "abstract" enough to satisfy the requirements' of Hulme's theory, 'obstinate abstractionist' that he was, we actually find a crucial distinction between their respective theories.[99] In the end Lewis turns out to be far too abstract to be effectively housed in Hulme's theory. The issue revolves around the artist's orientation to 'reality'. The model for this discussion is provided by Hulme in 'Modern Art II: Preface Note and Neo-Realism':

> If you will excuse the pedantry of it, I think I can make the matter clearer by using a diagram:
>
> R ……p (r) …… a (r) …… A
>
> I take (R) to represent reality. As one goes from left to right one gets further and further from reality. The first step away being p(r), that is the artist's interpretation of nature. The next step a(r) being an art using abstractions (a), with a certain representative element (r). The element (a) owes its significance to, and is dependent on the other end (A) of this kind of spectrum – a certain 'tendency to abstraction'. I assert that these are two arts, the one focused round (R), which is moved by a delight in natural forms, and the other springing from the other end, making use of abstractions as a method of expression.[100]

[98] Gasiorek's reservations focus upon the fact that Hulme took Epstein and Gaudier as his 'aesthetic touchstone in the early months of 1914' ('Modern Art in England Circa 1914', p.52).
[99] *Blasting & Bombardiering,* p.100.
[100] Hulme, 'Modern Art II: Preface Note and Neo-Realism', *The Collected Writings of T. E. Hulme*, ed. Karen Csengeri (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp.286-293 (p.288).

This clear and highly effective interpretative model can help us to understand the theoretic distinction between Lewis and Hulme in 1914. In order to observe this it is important to observe how it was used by Hulme to provide an account of how modern abstract art had emerged. In Paul Cézanne he identified the technical point of departure from which Cubism took its inspiration.

Hulme opposed the belief of the contemporary painter Charles Ginner (his theoretical antagonist in 'Modern Art II: Preface Note and Neo-Realism') that Cézanne 'was a pure realist', arguing instead that, in the 'simplification of places' and the 'emphasis on three-dimensional form' in his paintings, Cézanne consolidated the technical 'elements which quite naturally develop into Cubism'.[101] In this discussion Cézanne is treated by Hulme as an artist whose works sit halfway between p(r) and a(r) in the above diagram, grounding his compositions in real world scenes while gesturing towards certain techniques of 'simplification and abstraction'.[102] For Hulme 'Picasso came along and took over these elements isolated by Cézanne, and organised them', presenting an art that was, for the first time in the modern world, clearly expressive of the 'tendency to abstraction' and thus situated at a(r) on the diagram.[103]

The most crucial aspect of Hulme's theory of abstraction, for our present purposes, is that it maintains that 'whatever he may do theoretically, at any rate practically, the artist must keep in continual contact with Nature', and thus that a pure kind of abstraction (A) is unattainable.[104] He writes in the concluding paragraphs of 'Modern Art II: Preface Note and Neo-Realism':

> There must be just as much contact with nature in an abstract art as in a realistic one; without that stimulus the artist could produce nothing. In Picasso, for example, there is much greater research into nature, as far as the relation of planes is concerned, than in any realist painting; he has isolated and emphasised relations previously not emphasised. All art may be said to be realism, then, in that it extracts from nature facts which have not been observed before. But in as far as the artist is creative, he is not bound down by the accidental relations of the elements actually found in nature, but

[101] Ibid., p.290.
[102] Ibid., p.290.
[103] Ibid., p.290.
[104] Ibid., p.292.

> extracts, distorts, and utilises them as a means of expression, and not as a means of interpreting Nature.[105]

As this passage conveys, for Hulme, all art takes its source material from nature, abstraction merely amounting in the end to an aesthetic 'tendency' or a technical way of working with those original sources. He is clear that no art can begin from the other end of the scale, in the isolated realm of pure abstraction.

This is where we may observe a vital distinction between the theories of Hulme and Lewis, for Hulme, on examination, turns out not to be the 'obstinate abstractionist' that Lewis would like to suggest he is in 1937. Lewis, for his part, presents a far more extreme idea of abstraction, one which repositions 'reality' in the company of (A) at the other end of the scale which Hulme sketched out in 'Modern Art II: Preface Note and Neo-Realism'. In 'Futurism, Magic and Life' he wrote that 'Reality is in the artist, the image only in life', presenting a conception of the artist as a creative force whose talent was not primarily receptive and imitative but who could emanate designs of his own and ultimately 'MA[K]E NEW BEINGS'.[106] A few lines later the radical nature of this abstract schema comes out in detail:

> At any period an artist should have been able to remain in his studio, imagining form, and provided he could transmit the substance and logic of his inventions to another man, could have, without putting brush to canvas, be [*sic*] the best artist of his day.[107]

This extraordinary passage comes after Lewis's criticism of the 'imitations' turned out by the 'host of first rate interpreters' he believed to dominate the European avant-garde.[108] The abstractions of the Cubists he argued were really a disguised form of naturalism in which the artist 'gets caught in [the] machinery' of the 'real' world.[109] Removing art from any dependence on an exterior world — even to the extent that the 'invention' itself need not be manifested in material substance — Lewis presents a radically purified notion of artistic creativity which takes its source material from the artist's imagination instead of the external world.

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[105] Ibid., p.293.
[106] Lewis, 'Futurism, Magic and Life', in *BLAST*, pp.135, 132.
[107] Ibid., p.135.
[108] Ibid., p.135.
[109] Lewis, 'Relativism and Picasso's Latest Work', in *BLAST*, pp.139-140 (p.139).

We come, therefore, to a distinction between two types, or rather two degrees, of abstraction. On the one hand, abstraction may be conceived as a compositional procedure which departs from the pictorial conventions of Western art but which remains anchored to the given forms of the external world. This was Hulme's idea of abstraction as a technical procedure and according to this the artist would take the primary materials of their composition from the world around them and then engage in a process of formal manipulation in which the naturalistic logic of the original image is recast into a new and unfamiliar constellation of lines and surfaces, its original organic integrity being pulled apart or squeezed. The resulting image is a disjointed and fragmented equivalent of the original.

On the other hand, the theory of abstraction to which Lewis adhered in Vorticism is an idea of artistic creation that derives its essential materials from the reality which is 'in the artist' and not from the external world. In *Time and Western Man* Lewis clarified this idea of 'pure creation' by expressing his belief that a 'great number of practitioners of art […] do not possess the essential qualifications of the artist' for the reason that '[t]he production of a work of art is, I believe, strictly the work of a visionary':[110]

> If you say that creative art is a spell, a talisman, an incantation – that it is *magic*, in short, there, too, I believe you would be correctly describing it. That the artist uses and manipulates a supernatural power seems very likely.[111]

These ideas are given a more specific rationale in Lewis's letter to Charles Handley-Read of September 1949, when he describes the technique of his Vorticist compositions in purely abstract terms:

> The way those things were done is that a mental-emotive impulse — and by this is meant subjective intellection, like magic or religion — is let loose upon a lot of blocks and lines of various dimensions, and encouraged to push them around and to arrange

[110] *Time and Western Man*, p.187.
[111] Ibid., p.187.

> them as it will. It is of course not an accidental, isolated, mood: but it is recurrent groups of emotions and coagulations of thinking, as it were, that is involved.[112]

From both these passages — in abstract theoretical terms as well as concrete instances — we are given a conception of artistic creativity as a magical life-giving and world-making activity which has no need to negotiate the formal arrangements of the world outside, being more a mysterious concentration of energy amassing in the imagination and finding its way into formal expression on the canvas. The artist, according to this idea, is a magician shuttling between the natural and the supernatural realms, who transposes 'visions from within' into an exterior reality, which he thereby helps to create and control.[113]

(vii) Wyndham Lewis the Primitive

With his radical theory of abstraction clarified, we may now be in a position to understand with more precision the meaning of Lewis's claim that 'the Art-instinct is permanently primitive'. True artistic creativity, for Lewis, does not start half way through an already existing process of material evolution, but goes back to origin. This idea is expressed clearly in *The Caliph's Design* (1919):

> The artist goes back to the fish. The few centuries that separate him from the savage are a mere flea-bite to the distance his memory must stretch if it is to strike the fundamental slime of creation. And it is the condition, the very first gusto of creation in this scale of life which we are set, that he must reach, before he, in his turn, can create![114]

This passage clarifies perhaps more than any other the particular sense which the appellation 'primitive' — so common among modernist artists — had for Lewis. It is a conception of the artist as a miniature god, a prime mover, who must start from the beginning of the chain of creation.

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[112] Lewis writing to Charles Handley-Read, September 1949. Reproduced in Richard Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age, Volume 1: Origins and Developments*, (London: Gordon Fraser, 1976), p. 217.
[113] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, pp.51-85 (p.68).
[114] *The Caliph's Design,* p.65.

Despite his evident bugbear with modernist primitivism, Lewis in 1914 arguably qualified as the most vociferous advocate of the creative potential associated with humankind's origin. But Lewis's extreme conception of the creative potential of the primitive was out of step with all of his contemporaries. His idea of the primitive was not of a 'degenerate, nostalgic animal' but of a semi-divine creativity. In this respect he was highly attuned to Nietzsche's philosophical prognosis of the coming *Übermensch*. But Lewis drew different conclusions about the nature of this new human specimen to most of Nietzsche's modernist inheritors, inclining to the view that it would be one step removed from the divine, rather than one pace ahead of the animal. Certainly he denounced the vanity and optimism of his contemporaries' assertion that this new model human being had arrived with the dawn of the twentieth century.

As he explained years later in an article for *The Architectural Review* (1934), 'the spoilt child of the Machine-age' was 'not an ultimate flower exactly […] not the end of a progress' but rather 'an embryo […] a foetus, of what should be'.[115] For Lewis the 'child of the Machine-age' had been invested with far too much hope by a generation inspired by the vision of transcendence they derived from Nietzsche and Bergson, being simply 'a cave-man who has no art — but only a cave'.[116] The analogy that he drew between his present epoch and the age of the first cave-art is highly informative of his own conception of the primitive:

> The marvellous art of the Altamira Caves would be as appropriate in *his* [the child of the machine-age] cave as in those at Altamira, or any others, if he had reached that stage of cultivation; but he has not. He is too primitive as yet, so there are no cave-paintings.[117]

This passage helps to highlight the great paradox in modernist primitivism as Lewis saw it. In this context Lewis uses the word *primitive* to mean 'underdeveloped'. This use of the term, however, ought to be contrasted with his description of the 'permanently primitive […] Art-instinct' in *BLAST*, where it denotes instead a vital surge of creative

[115] Wyndham Lewis, 'Plain Home-Builder: Where is Your Vorticist?', in *Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change: Essays on Art, Literature and Society 1914-1956*, ed. by Paul Edwards (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989) , pp.246-256 (p.255).
[116] Ibid., p.255.
[117] Ibid., p.255.

energy and forward propulsion, the means by which the artist creates works 'organic' with his own time.

As this distinction helps to indicate, opposed concepts fought under the single banner of the primitive within modernism. Lewis may be described as the primitive who stood against primitivism. His equivocal relationship with the thought of Nietzsche and Bergson ought, therefore, to be clarified. On the one hand, Lewis takes the transcendental potential of the primitive very much to heart, so much so that he develops an almost shamanic conception of artistic creativity as a form of magic. On the other hand, he stands virulently opposed to the specific rationales of transcendence that both Nietzsche and Bergson present and indeed the view that was widespread amongst his contemporaries, that the machine-age marked a significant evolutionary advance for the species. Rather, for Lewis, the modern world was a threshold, the future path of which had still to be defined. Thus, while it is certainly true that Lewis's early works adopt a 'Nietzschean symbolic landscape' by setting up a distinction between mythic and modern worldviews, this fact cannot lead to the neat reduction of Lewis's work to Nietzschean counters, nor can it justify the rather extreme idea that 'the early Lewis [is] no more than an acolyte of Nietzsche'.[118] He stands rather as a thorn in the side of Nietzsche's modernist inheritors, disrupting the revolutionary 'ritual' taking place with some rather sober criticism and pointing out especially the degenerate character of the specific *Übermensch* to which they attached their hopes.

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In this chapter we have observed how for many modernists '[t]he aesthetic nerves quiver[ed] to return to the Stone Age', as Adorno puts it.[119] My purpose in charting this terrain of modernist primitivism has been twofold. Firstly, it provides a frame of reference which is essential to the later sections of the thesis, where the analysis will depend upon detailed knowledge of the intellectual context within which Lewis was immersed during the lead up to Vorticism. Secondly, my analysis here has also served to indicate the grounds of Lewis's dissociation from the conception of the primitive that was widely venerated by his contemporaries. We now have a clearer image of Lewis as

[118] John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880–1939* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), p.184; Weller, 'Nietzsche Among the Modernists', p.626.
[119] Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p.113.

a critically detached participant in modernism's evocation of a primal, mythic energy in art. We will continue to observe how Lewis worked with — though always in antagonistic terms — the ideas of his contemporaries in the next chapter. This time, however, we move from the broad pool of ideas within which Lewis's early thought matured to consider in more precise detail the process of rarefication or distillation by which Lewis formed his philosophy and aesthetic technique in Vorticism. In particular, we shall observe how Lewis and his Vorticist collaborators formed their aesthetic techniques and theory out of a 'strange synthesis' of elements derived from Cubism, Kandinsky and Futurism.[120]

[120] Wyndham Lewis, 'A World Art and Tradition' (1929), in *Wyndham Lewis on Art: Collected Writings 1913-1956*, ed. by Walter Michel and C. J. Fox (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), pp.258-259 (p.259).

Chapter 2

‘Mercenaries’ of the European Avant-Garde: Wyndham Lewis and the Formation of Vorticist Aesthetics and Theory

Vorticism has received numerous, diverse critical treatments over the century since the movement was launched with the publication of *BLAST* in the summer of 1914.[1] Most scholars agree that the aesthetic and philosophical principles of the movement arise out of a combination of elements derived from Vorticism’s major rivals in the avant-garde art scene in pre-war Europe. In ‘A Review of Contemporary Art’ in *BLAST 2* (1915) Lewis himself suggested that Vorticism proposed a ‘new synthesis’ of contemporary art practices and theory that sought to ‘CORRECT’ the negative ‘tendencies’ of ‘the other various groups’ among the European avant-garde.[2]

[1] The critical terrain indicates the multi-faceted nature of the movement and the sense in which it is always open to different, occasionally contradictory readings. In the first instance, Vorticism has most frequently been treated as a set of decidedly masculine aesthetic and art-theoretical principles developed by Lewis and Pound working almost alone, while more recent criticism has tended to highlight the significant role played by other less prominent members and associates, particularly the underappreciated work of Vorticist women such as Rebecca West, Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders (see especially Brigid Peppin, *Helen Saunders, 1885-1963* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1996) and Miranda Hickman, ‘The Gender of Vorticism: Jessie Dismorr, Helen Saunders, and Vorticist Feminism’, in *Vorticism: New Perspectives* (Oxford University Press, 2013) pp.119-135). To list a few other instances of important critical distinctions, Vorticism has been read as a movement founded on the ‘exploitation of national loyalty’ (Paul Peppis, *Literature, Politics, and the English Avant-Garde: Nation and Empire, 1901-1918* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.84) and also as an international movement which extended far beyond the art scene in London in 1914 (see Rebecca Beasley, ‘Vortorussophilia’, pp.33-50; Scott W. Klein, ‘How German Is It: Vorticism, Nationalism, and the Paradox of Aesthetic Self-Definition’, pp.68-86; and Anne McCauley, ‘Witch Work, Art Work, and the Spiritual Roots of Abstraction: Ezra Pound, Alvin Langdon Coburn, and the Vortographs’, pp.156-174; all in *Vorticism: New Perspectives* (Oxford University Press, 2013)); as a movement grounded in and expressing the new marketing strategies of promotional culture (Keith Tuma, ‘Lewis, Blast, and Popular Culture’, *ELH*, 54.2 (1987), pp.403-19 and Jodie Greenwood, ‘The Crisis of the System: *Blast*’s Reception’, in *Wyndham Lewis and the Cultures of Modernity*, ed. by Andrzej Gasiorek, Alice Reeve-Tucker and Nathan Waddell (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), pp.77-94) and as a more philosophical effort to disclose the material pressures to which art was susceptible in the modern world (David A. Wragg, *Wyndham Lewis and the Philosophy of Art in Early Modernist Britain: Creating a Political Aesthetic* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005)); as the English derivative of Italian Futurism and as an original and significant avant-garde movement in itself, ‘the high-water mark that “advanced” painting reached before the First World War’, as Paul Edwards puts it (*Painter and Writer*, p.100).

[2] Lewis, ‘A Review of Contemporary Art’, in *BLAST 2,* pp.42, 41.

Reflecting a general tendency in scholarship, the precise nature of the Vorticist 'synthesis' has been defined by Miranda B. Hickman as a 'fusion' primarily of 'what [the Vorticists] regarded as the best elements of both Cubism and Futurism', with Kandinsky's Expressionism being 'add[ed] […] as a third "point of the compass"'.[3] Hickman clarifies the way in which these coordinates are supposed to fit together thus:

> From Cubism, the Vorticists drew a commitment to a vocabulary of exactly delineated, geometric forms, as well as a concomitant refusal of the 'fluid and imprecise' approach they saw as a characteristic of much Futurist work; from Futurism, a dedication to suggesting dynamic motion – which, according to Vorticist rhetoric, Cubist work lacked. Steering its course so as to avoid the errors of its contemporaries, Vorticism shunned what it read as the 'deadness' of Cubism, the unbridled 'vivacity' of the Futurists, and Kandinsky's Expressionism, which, Lewis noted, exhibited much the same passivity as Cubism and much the same indefiniteness as Futurism.[4]

Hickman's account here is entirely valid, yet slightly skewed towards a simplified technical analysis of Vorticist aesthetics that affords too great a significance to the influence of Futurism and not enough appreciation of the conceptual nature of Lewis's interest in contemporary aesthetic innovations.

There can be no doubt that Hickman sets the correct coordinates of Vorticism's synthesis in the three compass points of Cubism, Futurism and Kandinsky's Expressionism. But the suggestion I wish to make here is that these coordinates ought to be plotted in a different way, more in line with the conceptual schemata of these movements than their purely technical and aesthetic qualities. Once the conceptual background to Lewis's aesthetic programme is taken into account it would be more accurate to describe Vorticism's synthesis as a staged theoretical collision between the art of matter (Cubism) and that of spirit (Kandinsky), named by Ezra Pound as the 'father and mother, classicism and romanticism of the movement', respectively.[5] In this sense, Futurism played a rather less productive role in the formation of Vorticism than Hickman would grant it. The two movements share the same interests and concerns — Marinetti's pugnacious style no doubt helped to determine the rhetorical mode of

[3] Hickman, *The Geometry of Modernism,* p.5.
[4] Ibid., p.5.
[5] Pound, 'Vortex', in *BLAST*, pp.153-154 (p.154).

expression in the Vorticist Manifesto — but the greatest gift that Futurism gave Vorticism was a clearly defined theoretical and aesthetic enemy.

Here my aim is to present the case for this new reading of the Vorticist synthesis. But before we can assess these opposed conceptual and aesthetic tendencies and observe the way in which they come together in Vorticism it is necessary to devote some attention to the theoretical model that facilitates their combination. The vortex is a highly significant symbol in this respect, which serves a similar function as a prism, through which contemporary modernist ideals and practices are refracted; becoming strangely altered in form and significance as they emerge in Lewis and Vorticism's theoretical insights and aesthetic practices. Of equal importance is Vorticism's mercenary strategy of entering conflict whilst evading partisan allegiance to either side. We shall begin, therefore, with a close examination of the function of these two ideas.

(i) The Formation of Vorticism's 'Mercenary' Philosophy

In *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) George Lakoff and Mark Johnson present the idea that '[o]ur conceptual system […] plays a central role in defining our everyday realities' and that the surest way to understand the 'reality' to which we incline 'is by looking at language', with an eye particularly on the metaphorical systems which we use in order to express ourselves.[6] Their first example of this has great relevance to Vorticism, for it is the overarching 'conceptual metaphor' in Western society that 'ARGUMENT IS WAR'.[7] This philosophical analysis of the role which metaphor plays in structuring our thought provides a useful backdrop for a reading of *BLAST* which leads us to the simple but important insight that Vorticism is a philosophical and artistic movement saturated by metaphors of war.

What makes *BLAST* so original and compelling in this respect is the great care which Lewis took to shift the ground of metaphorical applications to war from their common and everyday uses — in which, for example, arguments can be 'attacked', 'won' or 'demolished' — to new and original designations.[8] The central Vorticist metaphors of war are the 'blast' which announces the movement's arrival; the 'violent

[6] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p.3.
[7] Ibid., p.4.
[8] Lakoff and Johnson provide an extensive list of the most common uses of the metaphor that argument is war in *Metaphors We Live By*, p.4.

structure of adolescent clearness between two extremes' which they 'set up' as their philosophical model; the veneration of the 'mercenary' in this context; and the detailed analysis of what it means to be an 'enemy'. It is important to observe how these metaphors function within Vorticism for they are the key concepts which Lewis used to articulate his philosophical position and situate Vorticism on the map of the pre-war European avant-garde.

In the first instance, Vorticism's 'blast' is most frequently read as a straightforward expression of aggressive dynamism, which is of course entirely accurate. But we should not fail to observe the word's particular meaning in cellular biology, which is said to have attracted Lewis.[9] According to this the 'unipotent' but as yet undifferentiated 'blast cell' facilitates the growth of an organism by cell division.[10] Transposing this from a biological into a cultural idiom, Vorticism's blast takes the connotation of a potent unified structure that contains within itself a seed of renewal and thus a vital capacity to generate 'blueprints for […] a new civilisation'.[11] The idea that this regeneration is supposed to occur through a process of 'division' reflects the heterogeneous foundations which the Vorticist movement proudly displayed in the colliding styles that are presenting in the various contributions to *BLAST*. The destructive connotation of the blast obviously carries the connotation that regrowth can only take place after the decaying remnants of the existing cultural scene have been purged.

The violent structure of opposition which Lewis set up in the Manifesto — one of the clearest examples of Vorticism's debt to the bellicose rhetoric of Futurism — provided the movement with its model for self-definition, as a warrior clan which was accustomed to conditions of intense adversity. In 'The Improvement of Life' Lewis clarified this idea, describing particularly the great strengthening power that he believed sustained hardship had on artists:

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[9] Paul Edwards writes that 'Lewis is said to have liked the coincidence of this homonym for the germ cell of an organism and for an explosive force, encapsulated in the title of the Vorticist magazine' ('"Creation Myth": The Art and Writing of Wyndham Lewis', note 5, p.33).

[10] Gerd Kempermann, *Adult Nuerogenesis: Stem Cells and Neuronal Development in the Adult Brain* (Oxford University Press, 2006), p.57.

[11] This is taken from a famous passage in *Rude Assignment* where Lewis writes: 'It was […] a new civilization that I — and a few other people — was making the blueprints for […] It was more than just picture-making: one was manufacturing fresh eyes for people, and fresh souls to go with the eyes' (p.135).

> Adverse climatic conditions — drastic Russian winters, for example — account for much thought and profundity.
> England which stands for anti-Art, mediocrity and brainliness among the nations of Europe, should be the most likely place for great Art to spring up.
> England is just as unkind and inimical to Art as the Arctic zone is to Life.
> This is the Siberia of the mind.
> If you grant this, you will at once see the source and reason of my very genuine optimism.[12]

In one respect then Vorticism's warrior code was born out of the modern artist's colossal struggle with external conditions. But this appetite for conflict was further sharpened by the constant infighting that raged among the different factions of the modern movement. The context in which Vorticism was formed bears witness to this.

Richard Cork has argued that the disruption of Marinetti and Nevinson's launch of 'The Manifesto of Vital English Art' at the Doré Gallery on the 12 June 1914 — in which Lewis led a group which included Gaudier-Brzeska, Wadsworth and Epstein — was a key event in the unification of the movement.[13] Michael H. Levenson supports Cork's interpretation, pointing out that '[t]he early press notices for *Blast* nowhere described it as a Vorticist journal', the manifestoes and the badges of the group's collective identity being added after the 'Futurist intrusion' in early June.[14] The fact that Nevinson referred to the intruders on that evening by the title 'Vortickist' — the mispronunciation of the hardened 'c' being repeatedly corrected by Gaudier-Brzeska who 'stayed resolutely on his feet in the middle of the audience' throughout Nevinson's lecture — indicates that the movement must already have formed its identity by this point.[15] But the sense in which the members bonded through shared opposition is important to note. Earlier events further convey the sense in which the Vorticist movement was largely composed of a battle-hardened group of artists with a keen appetite for conflict. We must cast our minds back to Lewis's break with Roger Fry and the Omega Workshop in October 1913 and the subsequent formation of The Rebel Art Centre in April 1914 for what is arguably the source of Vorticism's pugnacity.[16]

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[12] Lewis, 'The Improvement of Life', in *BLAST*, p.146.
[13] Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age*, pp.214-238.
[14] Michael H. Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.124.
[15] O'Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius,* p.154.
[16] Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism*, p.126.

Vorticism was thus a movement which was defined at every stage in opposition to its rivals amongst the avant-garde as much as the contemporary art world. But equally it was a movement which contained within itself an explosive mixture of aesthetic practices and a constant tendency towards theoretical and aesthetic paradox, contradiction and juxtaposition. Lewis's later account of Vorticism and especially his suggestion in *Rude Assignment* that in *BLAST* 'I wanted a battering ram that was all of one metal' certainly jars with the reality of what was a varied and wilfully contradictory movement.[17] Michael Hallam suggests that the 'acute collision of styles' which confronts *BLAST*'s reader is best exemplified by the stark transition from Lewis's experimental play *Enemy of the Stars* to the wistful prose of Ford Madox Hueffer's 'The Saddest Story', with lines like '"Mastodons, placid in electric atmosphere, white rivers of power" [being] separated from "poor Florence's broken years" by just a few pages'.[18]

The lack of any fixed position or style in *BLAST* guides us towards the most significant Vorticist metaphor of war for our present purposes, namely the idea that the movement was composed of 'mercenaries'. Clearly this idea takes a double aspect when we appreciate the sense in which Vorticism was in one respect a mercenary-movement which notionally traded with enemies among the European avant-garde and, in another respect, a movement composed of mercenaries which often allowed itself to fragment into a series of conflicting styles and 'opposite statements'.[19] The key significance of this adherence to a mercenary status, however, is that Vorticism consciously arrived on the discursive battleground of the pre-war avant-garde eager for battle but without a definitive position to defend. In an artistic context which was increasingly defined by partisan allegiance to the competing aesthetic programmes and art philosophies of Futurism, Cubism and Expressionism, Vorticism developed instead a disinterested and acquisitive attitude towards its rivals, 'fight[ing] first on one side, then on the other, but always for the SAME cause, which is neither side or both sides and ours'.[20]

The lack of any defined position in Vorticism, or any apparent 'philosophy' whatsoever, was the focus of A. R. Orage's first review of *BLAST* for *The New Age* on 9

[17] *Rude Assignment*, p.138.
[18] Michael Hallam, 'In the "Enemy" Camp: Wyndham Lewis, Naomi Mitchison and Rebecca West', in *Wyndham Lewis and the Cultures of Modernity*, ed. by Andrzej Gasiorek, Alice Reeve-Tucker and Nathan Waddell (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), pp.57-76 (p.61).
[19] Lewis, 'Manifesto', in *BLAST*, p.30.
[20] Ibid., p.30.

July 1914.[21] He wrote disapprovingly that 'its significance will have to be put into it; for of its own self it contains none'.[22] That it was more the appearance than the substance of *BLAST* which had informed Orage's initial views is demonstrated by more complimentary comments a week later:

> When I wrote my note on 'Blast' last week I had not read Mr. Wyndham Lewis' chief contribution — 'Enemy of the Stars.' It deserves to be called an extraordinary piece of work […] [which] contains ideas of an almost grandiose dimension, though felt rather than thought.[23]

Despite being impressed with Lewis's central literary contribution, Orage maintained a critical perspective on the movement. In his second review he argued that Vorticism exhibited an anarchic tendency, preferring 'the feeling of ideas to the clearly thinking of them', and was thus symptomatic of a wider reaction against 'common sense' and 'the dry light of rationalism'.[24] Having initially stated that it was a movement without philosophy, Orage thus changed the grounds of his criticism to the type of philosophy which the Vorticist movement presented. In fact his characterization of Vorticism as a form of intellectual 'anarchism' gets closer to the movement's mercenary philosophy than most of its contemporary reviewers, pointing especially to the sense in which Vorticism was founded on a radically alternative idea of 'significance' to the one which Orage and the old guard of British intellectuals adhered to; rather more as 'the relatedness of things' than as a definite and coherent position.[25]

BLAST was shocking because it could not be read as a coherent series of statements which lead towards some carefully defined conclusion. Rather, it exhibited a dialogical tendency to set conflicting ideas against each other in conceptual opposition, thereby evading the strictures of dogmatic certitude. Paradox and juxtaposition are key techniques in Vorticist theorizing. The anarchism which Orage discerned in Vorticism and its lack of a coherent philosophy was thus in truth a carefully considered strategy.

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[21] A. R. Orage (under pseudonym R. H. C.), 'Readers and Writers', *The New Age*, 15.10 (1914), <http://library.brown.edu/pdfs/1140814305338554.pdf> [accessed 23 April 2016], p.229.
[22] Ibid., p.229.
[23] A. R. Orage (under pseudonym R. H. C.), 'Readers and Writers', *The New Age*, 15.11 (1914), <http://library.brown.edu/pdfs/1140814306795303.pdf> [accessed 23 April 2016], p.253.
[24] Ibid., p.253.
[25] In 'The Critical Realists' folio Lewis quotes the idea which A. N. Whitehead presented in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge* (1919) that '"Significance" is the relatedness of things. […] Our perception of natural events and natural objects is a perception from within nature, and is not an awareness contemplating all nature impartially from without' ('The Critical Realists', p.24).

Lewis, as the theoretical architect of the movement's mercenary status, sought critical detachment from the competing aesthetic programmes and art philosophies of the avant-garde in order to gain a greater insight into the binary logic to which they adhered. While other movements were '[s]lave[s] of Commotion', notionally engaged in a furious battle for supremacy, Vorticism adopted a position of detached mastery: '[t]he Vorticist', Lewis wrote, 'is at his maximum point of energy when stillest'.[26]

This paradoxical statement lends support to Jodie Greenwood's view that 'dazzle camouflage offers an illuminating metaphor' for Lewis's activities in *BLAST*, conveying particularly the dynamic idea of stillness which Lewis had in mind in his contradictory characterization of the Vorticist philosophy.[27] The Vorticist-inspired geometric patterns which were daubed across the hulls of navel vessels during the First World War were designed to confuse the enemy and evade the detection of a singular position (Fig. 24 and Fig. 25).[28] In a military sense dazzle camouflage made detection of the vessel's size, distance and speed of travel more difficult and thus ensured that bombardment would be made less effective.

In an analogous sense, Lewis's strategic use of paradox in his articulation of Vorticism's key principles prevented the movement from freezing into any stable articulation and thus enabled it to maintain a fluid and manoeuvrable position among the European avant-garde. There is a practical purpose to this, as Faith Binckes notes:

> little magazines compete in a highly volatile field. As such, formalizing their positions might not be the best strategy for survival. What constitutes a 'manifesto' is also open to question[29]

As a relative latecomer to this competitive and volatile field of new magazines, manifestos and movements, Lewis and his Vorticist colleagues took care to adopt certain strategies for survival, embracing an expressive style which raised more questions than it settled. The question of what actually constitutes a 'manifesto' is

[26] Lewis, 'Our Vortex', in *BLAST*, pp.147-149 (p.148).
[27] Jodie Greenwood, 'The Crisis of the System: Blast's Reception', in *Wyndham Lewis and the Cultures of Modernity*, ed. by Andrzej Gasiorek, Alice Reeve-Tucker and Nathan Waddell (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), pp.77-94 (p.77).
[28] Edward Wadsworth worked on these designs during the First World War. Figure 24 shows Wadsworth's woodcut design *Dry Docked for Scaling and Painting* (1918) and Figure 25 is a photograph of HMS *Amphitrite* painted in dazzle camouflage in the same year.
[29] Faith Binckes, *Modernism, Magazines, and the British Avant-Garde: Reading Rhythm*, *1910-1914* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p.44.

particularly apt, when we consider what Vorticism actually claimed to stand for. Ostensibly 'a document of an ideology, crafted to convince and convert', the Vorticist Manifesto twists and turns playfully through contradictory avowals and utterances precisely in order to carve out a conceptual home at the centre of avant-garde concerns which could embrace the discursive conflict taking place.[30] The Vorticist movement thus built its claims to exclusivity upon foundations which were inclusive of a great deal of opposed ideas and principles. With this strategy, Lewis and Pound in 1914 were launching their dazzlingly conspicuous brand in an aggressive bid for a market takeover.

(ii) The Branding of Vorticism and the Symbol of the Vortex

Vorticism's debt to marketing strategies can be most clearly viewed in the bold typographical layout of the text in the BLAST/BLESS sections preceding the Manifesto. Greenwood has indicated the influence of contemporary newspaper adverts on this, citing especially the typographical resemblances that an advertisement for a 'SHORT SEA ROUTE TO BELGIUM' (which ran repeatedly thought the spring of 1914 in *The Manchester Guardian*) has with the 'BLESS ALL PORTS' section on page 23.[31] As this conveys, Vorticism's attempt to launch itself as a new aesthetic product in an already saturated marketplace took technical inspiration from the linguistic and typographical innovations which were being used to market consumer products in these years.

In terms provided by Lawrence Rainey in *Institutions of Modernism* (1998), *BLAST* is a clear example of a work which 'invites and solicits its commodification' and becomes in the process 'a commodity of a special sort'.[32] While *BLAST* utilizes what Greenwood describes as the 'hard sell' language of consumer marketing — involving a 'move away from logical narrative in favour of an emotional rhetorical appeal' — it is a 'commodity' which ultimately offers a vision of cultural renewal in place of a cheap thrill.[33] There thus emerges an 'unstable synthesis' between the deeply serious, almost

[30] Mary Ann Caws, 'The Poetics of the Manifesto: Nowness and Newness', in *Manifesto: A Century of isms*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws (University of Nebraska Press, 2001), pp.xix-xxxi (p.xix).
[31] Greenwood, 'The Crisis of the System', p.91.
[32] Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites & Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p.3.
[33] Greenwood, 'The Crisis of the System', p.89.

sacred, conception of art which is being presented and the comparatively debased instrumental strategies which are being used to present it.[34] One instance of this tension can be observed in the Vorticist brand logos of the 'blast' and the 'vortex', particularly when we distinguish the aggressive imagery that they impart from the more complete conceptual function they serve in Vorticist philosophy.

As we have already noted, Vorticism's blast is a multi-layered concept connoting both the indiscriminate destruction of contemporary culture and the process of productive division through which the new civilisation is to be generated. The vortex is a symbol which similarly communicates a conception of unity-in-diversity, yet one which has a centripetal rather than a centrifugal connotation; absorbing and containing the plurality which the blast had initially released. This aspect of the vortex is widely appreciated within Lewis scholarship, although the precise nature of its contained tension is given different characterizations.[35]

For Pound — who coined the movement's name — the value of the vortex as a figure of unity-in-diversity is found primarily in the relation which it can establish between the past and the future in the artist's psyche. 'The vortex is the point of maximum energy', he writes, a 'turbine' into which '[a]ll experience rushes' and out of which '[t]he DESIGN of the future' will emerge.[36] Pound is here raising a key distinction between receptivity and productivity of the artist, as the following passage makes clear:

> You may think of man as that toward which perception moves. You may think of him as the TOY of circumstances, as the plastic substance RECEIVING impressions.
> OR you may think of him as DIRECTING a certain fluid force against circumstance, as CONCEIVING instead of merely observing and reflecting.[37]

According to this, artistic productivity cannot take shape without a certain degree of receptivity to a wider scene of art, both historic and contemporary. This was Pound's

[34] Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism*, p.3.
[35] For Reed Way Dasenbrock the key virtue of the 'image of the vortex' is that it 'offers one representation of th[e] separation' between art and life 'as the artist and art work attain the still point, leaving the flux of the external world behind them' (*The Literary Vorticism of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis: Towards the Condition of Painting* (John Hopkins University Press, 1985), p.171). For Toby Foshay on the other hand the conflict within the image of the vortex 'is meant to convey the tension between dynamism and stasis'; including 'energy not only in space but also in time' (*Wyndham Lewis and the Avant-Garde: The Politics of the Intellect* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), p.26).
[36] Pound, 'Vortex', in *BLAST*, p.153.
[37] Ibid., p.153.

conception of the point of maximum energy at which the Vorticist artist notionally stood. Claiming a distinctive and exclusive situation among its rivals, Vorticism thus gains its uniqueness and originality by appropriating and claiming proper ownership of all that it affirms amongst its rivals, cohering 'all the past that is living and worthy to live' into its own vision of the future.[38] It is an explicit attempt to absorb the opposition within its own inclusive and often contradictory philosophy, the symbol of the vortex serving the movement as a skeleton key which can access and appropriate the key insights of the competing artistic prophets among the European avant-garde.

In one instance Pound demonstrates this programme of contradiction by deliberately mixing metaphors in his definition of the vortex. On the one hand, he uses an industrial metaphor to describe his idea of the vortex as a 'turbine', a creative input-output machine which gives form to substance and which generates energy out of 'flacid' [*sic*] materials.[39] A page later he applies a biological metaphor, describing the vortex as a womb in which 'all the past that is capable of living into the future, is pregnant'.[40] The distinction between natural and artificial modes of creation is no accident, it is a careful expression of the dualistic strategy at the heart of the Vorticist programme and a pure expression of the urge to discharge itself on both sides of a culture/nature dualism, in this instance evoking the mixed strains of 'classicism and romanticism' out of which the movement was formed.[41]

As Richard Humphreys makes clear, Pound was initially attracted to the image of the vortex for the conceptual synthesis which it facilitated between mechanical power and 'mystical thought'.[42] Pound's vortex was both a conscious application of 'mechanical and scientific imagery' (of 'maximum energy' and 'mechanic[al] efficiency') to the creative prowess of modern artists and the power manifested in their designs, and a subtle reference to the artist's God-like arrangement of 'order […] out of chaos, of the mind organizing form and of a perpetual "pulse" within the macro- and microcosms'.[43]

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[38] Ibid., p.153.
[39] Ibid., p.154.
[40] Ibid., p.153.
[41] Ibid., p.154.
[42] Richard Humphreys, 'Demon Pantechnicon Driver: Pound in the London Vortex, 1908-1920', in *Pound's Artists: Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts in London, Paris and Italy* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1985), pp.33-80 (p.44).
[43] Pound, 'Vortex', in *BLAST*, p.153; Humphreys, 'Demon Pantechnicon Driver', p.44.

Pound's poem 'Plotinus' of 1905 indicates that the vortex had been on his mind for some years already as a symbol of transcendence.[44] There he had explored the emanationist cosmology of Plotinus from the alienated perspective of a lost soul in the material world, degraded through long separation from the One.[45] The poem elaborates a moment of clarity, though not quite enlightenment, during which a human soul — becoming aware that it has been '[o]bliviate of cycles' wanderings' — reaffirms its essential orientation towards the One and plants the seed of its return: 'As one that would draw thru the node of things, | Back sweeping to the vortex of the cone'.[46] It is conceivable that some productive exchange of ideas relating to Pound's 'vortex of the cone' motivated Lewis's design of the Vorticist Cone which appears seven times in *BLAST* (Fig. 21), but the letters between Pound and Lewis are silent about this.[47]

Described in a contemporary review of *BLAST* in *The New York Times* as 'something like an extinguisher and something like a dunce cap', Lewis's geometric figure of the vortex as a cone communicates a symbolic narrative in line with the theme of transcendence which was presented in Pound's earlier poem.[48] In the relation of the cone to the pole that dissects it we may observe both the centrifugal descent of the emanations and the centripetal ascent of the transcendent soul on its return to the metaphysical One. The cone is thus an important example of what Miranda Hickman has described as the 'geometric idiom' within which Pound and Lewis worked during Vorticism; their 'shared investment in geometric figures' reflecting the way in which 'they imagine and figure ideals' and frame their abiding 'philosophical attitudes'.[49] The Vorticist, occupying 'the point of maximum energy', is figuratively placed at the vertex

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[44] Peter Liebregts writes: 'According to Noel Stock, "Plotinus" was written in 1905, thus around the time of the compositions of the poems of "Hilda's Book"' (*Ezra Pound and Neoplatonism* (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), p.54.

[45] *Emanationism* is the doctrine that the world was created *ex deo* (out of God) as opposed to the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* (out of nothing). According to this the material cosmos emerges as a series of emanations departing from the One, like ripples that spread from a drip in a pool of water.

[46] Ezra Pound, 'Plotinus' (1908), in *Collected Early Poems of Ezra Pound*, ed. by Michael John King (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p.36.

[47] Only one item of correspondence remains from the period of intense activity and exchange of ideas which led up to *BLAST*'s publication in July 1914, a typed letter from Pound requesting proofs of the poems to feature in *BLAST* dated '30-4-'14' (*Pound/Lewis: The Letters of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis*, ed. Timothy Materer (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p.6). But the claim that Lewis took inspiration from Pound's 'vortex' is made more compelling when we appreciate the possibility 'that the use of the term "vortex" in "Plotinus" is derived from Blake's *Milton*', for — as a keen follower of Blake's work himself — this would undoubtedly have piqued Lewis's interest in the expressive potential of the 'vortex' (Peter Liebregts, *Ezra Pound and Neoplatonism* (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), p.54).

[48] Greenwood, 'The Crisis of the System', p.84.

[49] Hickman, *The Geometry of Modernism,* p.2.

of the cone, having 'mastered the elements' through 'knowledge of their civilisation' as Gaudier-Brzeska writes, suspended on the verge of drawing through the node of things.[50] Lewis's cone design thus serves as a symbolic map of Vorticism's conceptual situation: holding the high ground in a certain sense — the site of maximum energy — and resisting both downward and upward pressures.

Henri Bergson clearly exerted a heavy influence on the metaphysical dualism which lay at the heart of the developing Vorticist philosophy. There is even a possibility that the particular sense which Lewis and Pound attached to the vortex was derived directly from their reading of Bergson. Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass go as far as to suggest that '[t]he ingenuity of Bergson's vitalism, a philosophy of freedom, owes directly to his profound awareness of the "vortex"'.[51] Proof of this can be found in the early commentary on Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things* which Bergson published in 1884, in which he states his admiration of Lucretius's ability to 'grasp outright the two-sided nature of things' and to recognize the truth that mankind seems doomed 'to act and not achieve, struggle and not succeed, and be unwillingly drawn into the vortex of things'.[52]

In *Creative Evolution* (1907) Bergson further developed his own conception of the vortex as an effective symbol for the 'two-sided nature of things', writing at one point:

> Life as a whole, from the initial impulsion that thrust it into the world, will appear as a wave which rises, and which is opposed by the descending movement of matter. On the greater part of its surface, at different heights, the current is converted by matter into a vortex.[53]

This idea of the vortex as a symbol of the eternal conflict between spirit and matter was consolidated in modernist thought by Bergson and appears to have been picked up intact by Pound and Lewis in 1914. However, in Vorticist 'doctrine', as it is tempting to call it, it was not transcendence but rather a state of suspension — holding ground at the still point which is also the point of maximum energy, on the verge of drawing through the node of things — which was sought. But in a way which has clear resemblance to

[50] Pound, 'Vortex', in *BLAST*, p.153; Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, 'Vortex', in *BLAST*, pp.155-158 (p.158).
[51] Burwick and Douglass, *The Crisis in Modernism,* p.3.
[52] Cited by Burwick and Douglass, *The Crisis in Modernism*, p.3.
[53] Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p.269.

Bergson's theory, this depended on the artist's ability to synthesize or sublate the conflict between spirit and matter, subject and object, the conflicting currents out of which the vortex is formed.[54]

For the visually inclined Pound (an Imagist poet) and Lewis (a painter who professed to think in patterns) Bergson's account also evidently provided an effective lens through which to perceive the abstract revolution that was taking place in modern art. As a symbol of unity-in-diversity, the vortex served as a tool which enabled them 'to systematize or to find a common language' and 'to link different types of art and artists' in their own aesthetic programme, as Michael Hallam notes.[55] Positioning himself at the confluence of two distinct movements in modern art championed by Picasso and Kandinsky respectively, Lewis's visual works emerged as the aesthetic offspring of two mutually opposed schools in modern art defined by their allegiance to the subjects and techniques pertaining to the domains of matter and spirit respectively. As we have seen, the symbol of the vortex stood for a conceptual synthesis or sublation of precisely this dualism and in Lewis's paintings of the period leading up to Vorticism we may recognize the way in which this synthesis was given an aesthetic rationale.

(iii) Picasso, 'father […] of the movement'

Arguably the greatest influence on Lewis's painting style in the developing phase of Vorticism was the Cubist abstraction of Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso. It is unclear when and in what context Lewis first viewed the early works of analytic Cubism by Braque and Picasso — these works were not on public display until much later — but it is obvious that 'a form of Cubism entered his work' at an early stage.[56] Richard Humphreys suggests that by the time Lewis had settled for good in London in 1908 'he had […] seen Cubist and Expressionist art at first hand and had also imbibed much of the literary, political and philosophical culture out of which they had grown'.[57] Exhibition timings around the time of Lewis's departure from Paris may provide some clues.

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[54] *Aufheben* in Hegel's philosophy, which means 'to supersede, to cancel, to sublate' the dialectical opposition of thesis and antithesis in a synthesis, in which they each 'are also preserved' (Thomas Mautner, *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* (London: Penguin, 2000), p.50).
[55] Hallam, 'In the "Enemy" Camp', p.60.
[56] Edwards, *Painter and Writer*, p. 54.
[57] Humphreys, '"A Strange Synthesis"', p.36.

Braque's *Houses at L'Estaque* (Fig. 3) — considered by many to be the breakthrough work of Cubist abstraction — was painted in August 1908 and first exhibited at Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler's gallery in Paris in November, a month before Lewis embarked for London in December of that year.[58] Evidence of Cubist technique in Lewis's work emerges as early as *The Celibate* (1909), albeit in a noticeably 'rudimentary' form at this stage.[59] Evidence of a more considered approach in Lewis's adoption of Cubist technique can be found in *Girl Asleep* (1911) and *Smiling Woman Ascending a Stair* (1912; Fig. 6).[60] These visual works demonstrate that Lewis's interest in Cubism was primarily aesthetic and expressive and that he had little interest in assimilating the Cubist style wholesale, preferring to borrow those elements which helped him work out his own conceptual treatment of the subject/object dualism, which was fundamentally opposed to that of Cubism.

In *Figure Holding a Flower* (1912, Fig. 8) it is possible to observe how Lewis was connecting Cubist techniques with the constraining effect of matter in Bergson's vitalist philosophy.[61] The work voices 'Bergson's warning in *Creative Evolution* that "evolution is not only a movement forward; in many cases we observe a marking time, and still more often a deviation or turning back"', as Charlotte de Mille has recently pointed out.[62] The figure is bisected by two opposed elements, sinking down to become at one with formless matter with only its head and hand protruding above the horizon. The flower, possessing a medium 'amount of freedom in recalcitrant matter', is situated above the mineral strata in Bergson's evolutionary system but below the animal and human.[63] But as Edwards suggests this figure 'seems barely able to sustain [its] position

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[58] Butler, *Early Modernism,* p.58; 'Illustrated Biography', *Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957),* p.10. Georges Braque's *Houses At L'Estaque* (1908, oil on canvas, 60 × 73 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Bern) was the work which first inspired the epithet 'Cubist' after the art critic Louis Vauxcelles commented on 'recollections of the static art of the Egyptians' which Braque's work conjured and suggested that '[h]e despises form, reduces everything, sites and figures and houses to geometrical complexes, to cubes' (John Golding, *Cubism: A History and an Analysis 1907-1914*, 3rd edn (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), p.62).

[59] Wyndham Lewis, *The Celibate*, 1909, pencil, ink, watercolour and gouache on paper, 37.5 × 28.5 cm, Tatham Art Gallery, South Africa. In his notes on the painting in *Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957)* Paul Edwards writes that *The Celibate* 'shows a rudimentary understanding of Cubism, which is here understood as a clarification and sculptural simplification of form' (p.100).

[60] Wyndham Lewis, *Girl Asleep*, 1911, pencil and gouache on paper, 28 × 38.5 cm, Manchester City Galleries; *Smiling Woman Ascending a Stair,* 1912, charcoal and gouache on paper, 95 × 65 cm, private collection.

[61] Wyndham Lewis, *Figure Holding a Flower*, 1912, graphite, pen and ink, and gouache on paper, 38.1 × 29.1 cm, Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust.

[62] de Mille, '"Blast … Bergson?"', p.144.

[63] Edwards, in *Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957),* p.110.

on the human side of the vegetable-human border', wistfully slipping down the scale of evolution, longing even for the level of freedom possessed by plants.[64]

As a meditation on the regressive counter-tendency to the forward propulsion of evolution, the picture has a curious relation with the following lines in August Strindberg's 'The Dream Play' (1901):

> THE DAUGHTER: […] father, why do flowers grow out of dirt?
> THE GLAZIER [*simply*]: Because they do not feel at home in the dirt, and so they make haste to get up into the light in order to blossom and die.[65]

Lewis knew Frida Strindberg, the second wife of the Swedish playwright, and was engaged in decorating her London nightclub 'The Cave of the Golden Calf' in the spring of 1912 around the time that Edwin Björkman's translation of Strindberg's plays went on sale in London. *Figure Holding a Flower* was produced in the same period, so it is entirely possible that this passage could have had a direct influence Lewis's composition.[66] Whether or not Lewis actually knew Strindberg's play at this time, the affinity between the two works provides an indication of how deeply ingrained in the modernist psyche the idea of evolutionary counter-tendencies had become, readily providing the structure for a tragic tension between the ascent of the spirit and the descent of matter.

As the art of a purely material dimension, Cubism implicitly presented an array of aesthetic techniques with which to approach this tension and Lewis was quick to develop his own conceptual narrative out of these. *Smiling Woman Ascending a Stair* (Fig. 6) demonstrates the strategy behind Lewis's manipulation of Cubist techniques. One of the key characteristics of the Cubist painter, as Butler clarifies, is that he 'no longer respects the identities of the separate objects before which he stands, but "materializes" the space between'.[67] In *Smiling Woman*, however, no attempt has been made to invade the spatial integrity of the figure and dispense with the third dimension, as would be proper to a work of analytic Cubism. Rather Lewis 'is content to allow

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[64] Edwards, in *Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957),* p.110.
[65] August Strindberg, 'The Dream Play', in *Plays by August Strindberg*, trans. by Edwin Björkman (London: Duckworth & Co., 1912), pp.23-104 <https://archive.org/details/playsstrindbjork00striuoft> [accessed 25 May 2016], p.29.
[66] The dates are provided in Jeffrey Meyers, *The Enemy: A Biography of Wyndham Lewis* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), p.334.
[67] Butler, *Early Modernism,* p.60.

these arbitrary planes to coincide spatially pretty exactly with the forms of a naturalistic rendition'.[68] In epistemological terms, subject and object coexist in naturalistic harmony, and yet Cubist technique is being used to highlight a dissonance in the relationship between organic life and inorganic structure. Angular planes and mechanical divisions between surfaces are being used to show the human body, in every way real and accurate, as an assemblage of mechanical parts.

Paul Edwards has described this as one of Lewis's 'most characteristic artistic strategies: producing figures we respond to as though they were "living" even though essential attributes of life have been denied them'.[69] It is a strategy which Lewis also invested in his early fictions, in which his characters — what he describes in 'Inferior Religions' as 'carefully selected specimens of religious fanaticism' — are brutally 'congealed and frozen into logic'.[70] The petrification of the human spirit in the 'Wild Body' stories correlates quite closely with the rough treatment of the human form which we can observe in his visual works of the period and encourages closer analysis of Lewis's purpose.

This purpose can be clarified by observing the critique of Bergsonian philosophy which is encoded in the design of *Smiling Woman*. The incongruity of the grim smile which the female figure parades in this painting is an important indication of his developing thought at this time, as Michael North suggests.[71] Indeed, the painting — which Lewis described as 'a Laugh' in a contemporary interview —illustrates his theoretic reversal of Bergson's philosophy of humour.[72] In *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1901) Bergson had applied his interpretation of the *élan vital* of human nature in an analysis of the social function of comedy, arguing that 'laughter, by checking the outer manifestations of certain failings, thus causes the person laughed at to correct these failings and thereby improve himself inwardly'.[73] This conception of laughter as a corrective measure designed to bolster the vital spirit and thus prevent the human being from sliding into the monotonous rhythm of a mechanism is deliberately contradicted by Lewis.

In 'The Meaning of the Wild Body' — a text written as a foreword to *The Wild Body* collection of short stories in 1927 but derived from ideas which were active in

[68] Edwards, *Painter and Writer,* p.56.
[69] Edwards, *Painter and Writer,* p.72.
[70] 'Inferior Religions' (1917), p.316.
[71] Michael North, *Machine-Age Comedy* (Oxford University Press, 2009), p.134-135.
[72] Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age,* p.20.
[73] Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (Rockville: Arc Manor, 2008), p.93.

much earlier works — Lewis argued that '[t]he root of the Comic is to be sought in the sensations resulting from the observations of a *thing* behaving like a person'.[74] This 'radical rewriting' of Bergson's theory is a further application of Lewis's dualistic schema, which reasserts 'the dichotomy of mind and body' that Bergson's vitalism had sought to collapse.[75] The resulting tension is clearly present in Lewis's works as far back as *Smiling Woman*, in which 'the Comic' is displaced far from mirth, being treated rather as a technical procedure of dissection. As North puts it, *Smiling Woman* 'announces comedy […] as an important source of the artistic techniques that were to make Lewis the most significant abstract painter in England'.[76] It is the product of Lewis's early aesthetic application of his anti-Bergsonian comic theorem, revealing how 'abstract art dissolves the figure into the ground, subjecting it to circumstance as comedy traditionally drags the overweening individual down to ground'.[77]

Smiling Woman seems to have been carefully designed to question the prevailing assumptions about human life amongst his contemporaries, emphasizing the existence of the material body, the 'thing', over that of the 'person'. The figure's direct mechanical gaze sows the seeds of an unsettling series of questions in the mind of the viewer. Is the human being a mere 'MACHINE OF LIFE'?[78] Is the distinction between organic life and inorganic matter finer than we imagine, or perhaps non-existent? Or, to phrase it in terms provided by Jean-François Lyotard: 'what if what is "proper" to humankind were to be inhabited by the inhuman'?[79] By provoking this kind of intellectual engagement in the mind of the viewer Lewis's painting enacts an imaginative departure from the Cubist aesthetic technique which it utilizes. It is important to see how this occurs.

The subject/object relation presented in the early works of analytic Cubism had been framed in essentially epistemological terms. Works like Picasso's *The Aficionado* (Fig. 7) and Braque's *Still Life with a Violin* involve 'the combination of several views

[74] Wyndham Lewis, 'The Meaning of the Wild Body', in *The Complete Wild Body*, ed. by Bernard Lafourcade (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1982), pp.155-160 (p.158).
[75] Vincent Sherry, 'Anatomy of Folly: Wyndham Lewis, the Body Politic, and Comedy', *Modernism/Modernity*, 4.2 (1997), pp.121-138 (p.124); 'The Meaning of the Wild Body', p.157.
[76] North, *Machine-Age Comedy,* p.135.
[77] North, *Machine-Age Comedy*, p.136.
[78] Lewis, 'Relativism and Picasso's Latest Work', in *BLAST*, p.140.
[79] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), p.2.

of an object in a single image', as John Golding writes.[80] Dissecting an object into the multiple perspectives from which it may be viewed, the Cubist artist then presents these multiple viewpoints all at once, as a multiplicity of overlapping structures. The dynamic subject's circumnavigation of the object of perception is thereby concentrated into a single viewpoint causing the naturalistic integrity of the object and the third dimension to be figuratively lost. Implicitly then, such works reflect the supposedly dynamic agency of the modern subject and the corresponding passivity of the object-world, but they also inevitably comment upon the psychological experience of the modern city-dweller. Instead of viewing objects from the outside, the modern eye — by moving through the objective structures of the metropolitan landscape — becomes absorbed within those structures, observing their planes overlap and intersect, and the open space between separate objects disappear with the perpetual expansion of material forms, reflecting also the sense in which no space remains empty for long in the modern city.

In *BLAST* Lewis expressed a similar view about the way in which the modern city had altered human life, revealing that, in prognostic terms at least, he was at one with the Cubists:

> the modern town-dweller of our civilization sees everywhere fraternal moulds for his spirit, and interstices of a human world […] We all to-day (possibly with a coldness reminiscent of the insect-world) are in each other's vitals — overlap, intersect, and are Siamese to any extent.[81]

But however much Lewis might have agreed with Cubism's insight into the altered epistemological situation of the modern subject, he had little interest in turning out what he viewed as 'natures-morte of modern life'.[82] In his critical articles in *BLAST* Lewis expressed the view that Cubism's epistemological bias rendered it 'naturalistic', enslaving the artist to the already existing forms of the material world, the experience of which the Cubists sought to 'imitate'.[83] In *Smiling Woman* Lewis utilizes Cubist technique not to give an impression of the concrete phenomena of modern the world, but rather to tap into the sinister process of dehumanization which was occurring in

[80] Pablo Picasso, *The Aficionado (Le Torero),* 1912, oil on canvas, 135 × 82 cm, Kunstmuseum, Basel; Georges Braque, *Still Life with a Violin*, 1912, charcoal and pasted paper, 62.1 × 47.8 cm, Yale University Art Gallery; John Golding, *Cubism: A History and an Analysis 1907-1914*, p.10.
[81] Lewis, 'The New Egos', in *BLAST,* p.141.
[82] Lewis, 'Relativism and Picasso's Latest Work', *BLAST,* p.139.
[83] Lewis, 'Relativism and Picasso's Latest Work', in *BLAST,* pp. 139, 140.

modernity. The design thus takes its principal inspiration from the artist's imagination and not from the external world.

As we have already seen in chapter one, from Lewis's perspective, the failure of Cubism rested upon its inability to recognise the sense in which 'Reality is in the artist, the image only in life'.[84] This interior spring of subjective 'Reality' he contrasted with '[t]he "Real Thing"' in the objective or phenomenal world, which 'is always Nothing', and warned that '[o]nce an Artist gets caught in that machinery, he is soon cut in half'.[85] Viewed with these rigorous principles in mind, works of analytic Cubism communicate the restricted sphere of agency in which the modern subject was existing, agency ultimately revolving around the subject's supposedly 'dynamic' ability to watch a fluctuating phenomenal world which is no longer within its control. The static forms of Cubist painting come to reflect the passivity of a subject withdrawing further into an interiorized perception of the expanding material world, becoming caught in the machinery in the process. For Lewis, Cubism was thus figuratively allowing the object world to invade and dominate the subject. He likened Cubism to a restful cul-de-sac in modern art, considering Braque and Picasso as technically gifted artists who were, however, content to watch modernity unfold as passive onlookers. In his own art theory, as we have seen, Lewis attempted to reinstate a balance in the subject/object dualism by advancing a conception of artistic creativity as 'subjective intellection, like magic or religion', to account for the deficit in Cubism's naturalistic bias.[86]

Lewis's critique of Cubism is highly significant and its implications ought to be clarified. Harold Rosenberg may be correct to suggest that the 'modern situation of art […] began with Cubism' but the 'link' which, according to Christopher Butler, Cubism first made 'between art and its critical-theoretic appreciation' is taken a stage further by Lewis.[87] Lewis's own path to abstraction, as we shall see in more detail in the following chapter, is guided particularly by the conceptual content which he observed in Cubist aesthetic technique and the expressive possibilities which he associated with this. The lesson which Lewis learnt from Cubism was thus technical and theoretical. He became fascinated with the aesthetic possibilities and conceptual implications raised by

[84] Lewis, Futurism, Magic and Life', in *BLAST,* p.135.
[85] Lewis, 'Relativism and Picasso's Latest Work', in *BLAST,* p.139.
[86] Lewis writing to Charles Handley-Read, September 1949. Reproduced in Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age,* p. 217.
[87] Harold Rosenberg, 'The Cubist Epoch', in *Art on the Edge* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp.162-172 (p.162); Butler, *Early Modernism*, p.70.

Cubism's surgical dissection of organic form and used Cubist technique to highlight the inert and mechanical structures which constitute the living human form.

But he stood opposed to the fusion of subject and object which was entailed by Cubism's naturalistic bias. In Lewis's developing schema the role of the artist took on a far more dynamic creative significance. 'The first reason for not imitating Nature', as Lewis wrote in *BLAST 2*, 'is that you cannot convey the emotion you receive at the contact of Nature by imitating her, but only by becoming her'.[88] For Lewis, the artist was a dynamic creator of new life forms, productive of and not merely receptive to the new world, a sort of midwife of the future guiding 'visions from within' into reality.[89] This conception of art as a creative enterprise of world-changing potential was in part derived from his reading of Wassily Kandinsky's influential text of 1910 *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, first translated into English by Michael Sadler in early 1914 and reviewed by Edward Wadsworth in *BLAST*. Certainly, in Lewis's developing pattern of thinking at this time Kandinsky's emphasis on the imaginative basis of artistic creation — as an activity which is grounded in subjective intellection — seems to have presented a viable palliative with which to counteract Cubism's fatal tryst with the object of perception.

(iv) 'Kandinski, […] mother of the movement'

In his philosophical critique of art's essential function Kandinsky defined the task of the modern artist in decidedly mystical terms, as humankind's guide in the 'spiritual revolution', who would help the initiate to 'turn away from the soulless life of the present' in order to 'give free scope to the non-material strivings of the soul':[90]

> The nightmare of materialism, which has turned the life of the universe into an evil, useless game, is not past yet; it holds the awakening soul still in its grip. Only a feeble light glimmers like a tiny star in a vast gulf of darkness. This feeble light is but a presentiment, and the soul, when it sees it, trembles in doubt whether the light is not a dream, and the gulf of darkness a reality.[91]

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[88] Lewis, 'A Review of Contemporary Art', in *BLAST 2*, p.45.
[89] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, p.68.
[90] Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. by M. T. H. Sadler (New York: Dover Publications, 1977), p.14.
[91] Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p.2.

> The spiritual life, to which art belongs and of which she is one of the mightiest elements, is a complicated but definite and easily definable movement forwards and upwards.[92]

With heavy dependence on the religious imagery of darkness and light, and their moral equation with material evil and spiritual goodness, Kandinsky viewed modern art as the herald of a spiritual ascent, implicitly referring to the same mystical return which Pound had written about in 'Plotinus'.

The Vorticists praised Kandinsky for his theoretic integrity, with Wadsworth acknowledging his 'important contribution to the psychology of modern art' in his review of Kandinsky's 1910 text in *BLAST*.[93] Their respect for 'Herr Kandinsky' was derived from a shared belief in the 'eternally objective' truths which art was capable of expressing and a feeling that they were similarly hunting big game: more interested in art's 'relation to the universe and the soul of man' than 'its relation to the drawing-room or the modern exhibition' as Wadsworth put it.[94] The Vorticists approved especially of the concept of '*inner need*', by which Kandinsky 'means primarily the impulse felt by the artist for spiritual expression', as Michael Sadler comments.[95] This pseudo-shamanic conception of the artistic process marries well with Lewis's ideas in *BLAST*. Both Lewis and Kandinsky conceived the responsibility of the artist as possessing a regenerative responsibility for nothing less than the birth of 'NEW BEINGS' and the expansion of 'Life's possibilities'.[96] Similarly both believed that to achieve his task the artist must be purified of any desire to imitate the external forms of the world, appealing instead to the reality which is in the artist.

In a similar way that Lewis had appropriated Cubist technique for his own purposes, it seems that he drew strength from Kandinsky's art theory without supporting his technical strategies. In 'Orchestra of Media' Lewis expressed support for Kandinsky's emphasis on 'the possibilities of colour' as a key advance in the expressive 'media […] in contemporary painting'.[97] He writes also that 'Kandinsky at his best is much more original and bitter [than Matisse]. But there are fields of discord

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[92] Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p.4.
[93] Edward Wadsworth, 'Inner Necessity', in *BLAST*, (pp. 119-128) p.119.
[94] Ibid., pp.120, 119.
[95] Sadler makes this suggestion in footnote 4 on p.26 of *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*.
[96] Lewis, 'Futurism, Magic and Life', in *BLAST*, p.132.
[97] Lewis, 'Orchestra of Media', in *BLAST*, p.142.

untouched'.[98] It is important to clarify the significance of these comments, for Lewis is elaborating a comparative scale between the 'harmony' conveyed in the fluid compositions of Henri Matisse and the programmatic 'discord' presented by analytic Cubism, positioning Kandinsky somewhere between the two extremes.

Always keen to scrutinize both sides of a dualistic tension, Lewis himself explored both strategies in early works. *Courtship* (1912) demonstrates how keen Lewis was to understand 'the primitivist pastoral idyll found in the work of Henri Matisse', which he treats as the aesthetic counterpoint to his Cubist-influenced works like *The Celibate* and *Smiling Woman*.[99] In this drawing Lewis experimented with the precise opposite technique to that which he used in *Smiling Woman*, opting instead for the inside of life and trying especially to give a 'sense of the internal "feel" of the body in movement'.[100] *Courtship* provides a valuable demonstration of just how receptive Lewis was to the various tendencies and techniques that were being developed in modern art. But in the end the visual harmonies sought by Matisse and Kandinsky were far from Lewis's ambitions. As he consolidated his own technique and theory discord became the key aesthetic principle in Lewis's Vorticist works. A closer look at Kandinsky's *Composition VII* of 1913 (Fig. 11) may help to clarify the sense in which Kandinsky and Lewis were being shepherded to very different aesthetic practices by their respective ideas about the function of abstract art.[101]

In this painting Kandinsky ostensibly presents a swirling vortex of his own, yet in aesthetic terms which are far removed from Lewis's at this time. As the title suggests, *Composition VII* exemplifies Kandinsky's effort to create a visual equivalent to musical harmony, breaking all ties with the phenomenal world in order to attain a fusion of subject matter and form. In this sense it is a work which illustrates Kandinsky's theory of '*inner need*'. The work grows directly out of Arthur Schopenhauer's theory of the transcendental significance of music, inviting discussion in the critical language of 'tones', 'rhythms' and 'harmonies'. Colour and form are here treated as the primary elements — the visual equivalents to musical notes and harmonies — which are cast upon the canvas according to the 'inner necessity' of their relations.

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[98] Ibid., p.142.
[99] Wyndham Lewis, *Courtship*, 1912, pencil, ink and pastel on paper, 25.5 × 20.5 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum. Quote from Edwards, in *Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957),* p.109.
[100] Edwards, in *Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957),* p.109.
[101] Wassily Kandinsky, *Composition VII*, 1913, oil on canvas, 200 × 300 cm, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

The influence of Matisse is important to note. In 'On the Question of Form' Kandinsky described Matisse's *La Danse* (1909-10; Fig. 4) as a 'rhythmic composition' which had 'an internal life and consequently a sound'.[102] The significance of this musical analogy in Kandinsky's theory of art is outlined in detail in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* where Kandinsky writes:

> Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul.[103]

As this passage clarifies, Kandinsky's attempt to aspire to the 'condition of music' in painting has a religious connotation, being essentially concerned with finding 'a new home, a new community and a new source of transcendence' for a spiritually bankrupt humankind.[104] Kandinsky's abstract paintings were an attempt to 'tune up the soul', as Butler writes.[105]

Lewis was clearly impressed by the purity of Kandinsky's abstract technique, identifying in his works a 'visionary' ability to depart decisively from the mimetic tradition and engage instead with the 'supernatural power' which is used and manipulated by the artist.[106] In *BLAST* Lewis gave Kandinsky the revered titled of 'the only PURELY abstract painter in Europe', a striking compliment when we appreciate the extreme conception of abstraction to which he adhered in 1914.[107] But while the two shared a semi-mystical conception of the artist, there is a fundamental distinction to be made in the purpose which each attached to this. While for Kandinsky this entailed a conception of art as a vehicle of conveyance from the evils of the material world to the perfect realm of spirit, for Lewis the artist was regarded as a liminal figure who existed on the boundary of the common world and the Absolute. According to this, the essential role of the artist was as an intermediary with a responsibility to return and transform the

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[102] Henri Matisse, *La Danse*, 1909-10, oil on canvas, 260 × 391 cm, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersberg; Wassily Kandinsky, 'On the Question of Form', *The Blaue Reiter Almanac,* ed. by Klaus Lankheit, trans. by Henning Falkenstein (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), p.182.
[103] Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p.25.
[104] Roger Griffin, 'Series Editor's Preface', in John Bramble, *Modernism and the Occult* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), p.xiii.
[105] Butler, *Early Modernism,* p.37.
[106] *Time and Western Man*, p.187.
[107] Lewis, 'A Review of Contemporary Art', in *BLAST 2*, p.40.

limited and degenerate material world with the 'magic' he had acquired in his encounters with 'a supernatural power'.[108]

In Kandinsky's aspiration to attain the conditions of music in painting we can highlight with more precision the grounds of this disagreement. In *Time and Western Man* (1927) Lewis decried what he described as the 'barbaric clumsiness' of those theorists who identified music as a model for the plastic arts.[109] It is a one-way process for Lewis, by which 'Music eats up the Plastic, dissolves it' in the ceaseless drive towards '*unity* in everything'.[110] Oswald Spengler, Walter Pater and Richard Wagner are treated as the most dangerous advocates of this idea, cast by Lewis as the cultural officers in a catastrophic '*Destiny-theory* of history': 'destiny' signifying in this instance 'a musical, dematerializing, body-squandering orgasm'.[111] The same sentiment appears to be present in Vorticism, which — in stark opposition to the transcendent aspirations of Kandinsky's ethereal, 'musical' paintings — presented an aesthetic philosophy which was rooted in the material world and paintings which had 'the qualities of sculpture'.[112] In *BLAST 2* Lewis wrote that Kandinsky's tendency 'to be passive and medium-like [and] to avoid almost all powerful and definite forms' made his works 'wandering and slack'.[113] Underpinning this criticism is a distrust of what Lewis perceived as a 'dematerializing, body-squandering' inclination in Kandinsky's spiritual art.

From Lewis's perspective Kandinsky's art was thus a dangerous sort of 'spell' which offered no benefit for the living, but which rather ushered humankind towards a dissipating and deadly union with the Absolute. While he acknowledged the supernatural power of art he believed that the proper function of this was to reaffirm a separation, rather than instigate a union, between the human and the divine realms. As Edwards writes, Lewis at this time exhibits a 'growing tendency to regard art as an exploration of the complexities of our limited human condition rather than as a vehicle for transcendence of that condition'.[114] This idea is elaborated in his 'Essay on the Objective of Plastic Art in Our Time', in an analogous comparison of art and games:

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[108] *Time and Western Man*, p.187.
[109] Ibid., p.277.
[110] Ibid., p.277.
[111] Ibid., pp.282, 281.
[112] In a letter to John Quinn dated 10 March 1916 Ezra Pound suggests it was Jacob Epstein's comment that 'Lewis's drawing has the qualities of sculpture' that originally 'set me [Pound] off looking at Lewis' (cited in Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age,* p.119).
[113] Lewis, 'A Review of Contemporary Art', in *BLAST 2*, p.40.
[114] Edwards, *Painter and Writer*, p.109.

> The game of cricket or billiards is an ingenious test of our relative, but indeed quite clumsy and laughable, prowess. These games depend for their motive on the physical difficulties that our circumscribed extension and capacities entail. It is out of the discrepancy between *absolute* equilibrium, power, and so on, of which our mind is conscious, and the pitiable reality, that the stuff of these games is made. Art is cut out of a similar substance. […] the 'sporting' attitude […] is nothing but a humorous (an artistic or a philosophic) acknowledgment of our grotesque and prodigious limitation.[115]

The description of art as 'an acknowledgement' of human 'limitations' echoes the idea expressed by Lewis in 'The Perfect Action' that art, like religion, was essentially a 'phenomen[on] of *separation*' — 'the expression of a cleavage between an inside and an outside, a Self and a Not-self' — and not a mode of transcendence.[116] The idea of the artist which this develops is, as previously mentioned, of a mediating consciousness who stands halfway between the divine and material realms, forcefully holding them apart. In comparison, Kandinsky's art theory signified an irresponsible and naïve departure from the practical, material reality of human life, an imaginative flight of fancy into the supernatural territory of the divine.

Lewis's criticism of Kandinsky, we ought to note, was thus phrased in the precise opposite terms that his criticism of Picasso had been. While the Cubist painter was enslaved to the outward forms of the material world, Kandinsky was too enraptured with visions of the beyond to present any vital contribution to modern art. Once again we can notice the synthesizing tendency within Lewis's developing philosophy to set up a violent structure between two extremes to serve as scaffold for his own mercenary exploits.[117] At the heart of Lewis's developing philosophy of art is the perception that the modern world compelled a response from the modern artist, though in a subtle and carefully worked out way. It would not do to simply flee from the material world, nor to become aesthetically enslaved to the materiality of the modern world. In *BLAST* Lewis

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[115] Wyndham Lewis, 'Essay on the Objective of Plastic Art in Our Time', *The Tyro: A Review of the Arts of Painting, Sculpture and Design*, 2 (1922) pp.21-37 <http://library.brown.edu/pdfs/1160152014374642.pdf> [accessed 7 June 2016], p.25.
[116] Edwards, 'Wyndham Lewis and the Uses of Shellshock', p.236.
[117] Lewis, 'Manifesto', in *BLAST*, p.30.

advocated an 'Art that is an organism of this new Order and Will of Man', but one which does not 'get caught' in the 'machinery' of the modern world.[118]

In his own formulation of Vorticism Lewis opposed both extremes represented by Kandinsky and Picasso, but used the two in combination to cover the inadequacy which he discerned in each. Picasso's perceived dependence upon materiality served to alleviate the trenchant subjectivism of Kandinsky, while Kandinsky's emphasis on the spiritual purpose of art served as an effective palliative for the soulless natures-mortes of Picasso's work. But neither, taken alone, provided suitable foundations for the 'new civilisation' which Lewis had in mind.[119] In situating his own art philosophy between Picasso's Cubism and Kandinsky's Expressionism Lewis provides one of the clearest examples of his dualistic *modus operandi*: rejecting partisan allegiance to either side in a conflict, he carves his own theoretic niche in the site of their collision. Denouncing both Kandinsky's spiritualism and Cubism's naturalism he finds in their combination a workable rationale for his own art.

Lewis's Vorticist art is thus founded at the confluence of inner and outer necessity: the reality which is in the artist coming into creative collision with the reality which has exploded in useful growths in the material world. Evading both extremes, Lewis sets his stall on the battlefield where subject meets object. Sharing this middle ground we find Italian Futurism, albeit in a way which also served to collapse the subject/object dualism by glorifying the liberating potential of machine-age violence. Although it serves, in my treatment, as the third 'point of the compass' in Vorticism's aesthetic philosophy after the synthesis of Cubism and Kandinksy's Expressionism, Futurism also played an important role in the development of Lewis's early thought and work, and so it is important to attend to this if we are to fully understand the developing pattern of thinking within Lewis's Vorticist paintings and writings.

(v) Vorticism and Futurism

Futurism ushers us, as Marjorie Perloff writes, back to 'what we might call the "science-fiction" world of the early century, which contains so many seeds of our own

[118] Lewis, 'Manifesto', in *BLAST*, p.39 and Lewis, 'Relativism and Picasso's Latest Work', in *BLAST*, p.139.
[119] *Rude Assignment*, p.135.

mythologies'.[120] There exists in Marinetti's definition of the Futurist movement such an incongruous blend of technological obsession and transcendent aspirations, a thoroughgoing materialism expressed in spiritual motifs, that most commentators have felt — in common with Kandinsky's close ally in Der Blaue Reiter movement Franz Marc — that the greatest attraction of Futurism is 'the strange contradiction' to be found in their ideas.[121] In 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism' Marinetti declared that 'Mythology and the Mystic Ideal are defeated at last' while simultaneously claiming that, by virtue of the modern phenomena of electricity, speed and mechanical force, he and his disciples were 'already liv[ing] in the absolute'.[122]

The Vorticists' admiration for the outward forms of the modern world and the apparently unconquerable 'Will' of machine-age vitality led many contemporary commentators to suggest that the movement was simply the English section of a pan-European Futurist movement under the directorship of Marinetti.[123] It was an association which Lewis took care to distance himself from, explaining in 'The Melodrama of Modernity' that the general application of the tag 'Futurist' to modern painters in England was rooted in the ignorance of the public concerning the development of modern art.[124] He offers the clarification that 'Futurism, as preached by Marinetti, is largely Impressionism up-to-date. To this is added his Automobilism and Nietzsche stunt'.[125]

The basis of Lewis's opposition to Marinetti's Futurism is brought out well in a section of *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937) in which Lewis relates an early encounter with Marinetti as the two 'were passing into a lavabo together' after one of Marinetti's public lectures.[126] Marinetti called out 'You are a futurist, Lewis!' and was coldly rebuked.[127] The theoretical jostling which ensued helps to clarify Lewis's own position and is worth quoting in full. Marinetti begins:

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[120] Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (University of Chicago Press, 2004), p.195
[121] Quoted by Umbro Apollonio in his Introduction to *Futurist Manifestos* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), p.7.
[122] Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism', pp.20, 22.
[123] Lewis, 'Manifesto', in *BLAST*, p.36.
[124] Lewis, 'The Melodrama of Modernity', in *BLAST*, p.143.
[125] Ibid., p.143.
[126] *Blasting & Bombardiering*, p.34.
[127] Ibid., p.34.

> ‘You have never understood your machines! You have never known the *ivresse* of travelling at a kilometre a minute. Have you ever travelled at a kilometre a minute?’
> ‘Never.’ I shook my head energetically. ‘Never. I loathe anything that goes too quickly, it is not there.’
> ‘It is not there!’ he thundered for this had touched him on the raw. ‘It is *only* when it goes quickly that it *is* there!’
> ‘That is nonsense,’ I said. ‘I cannot see a thing that is going too quickly.’
> ‘See it — see it! Why should you want to *see*?’ he exclaimed. ‘But you *do* see it. You see it multiplied a thousand times. You see a thousand things instead of one thing.’
> I shrugged my shoulders — this was not the first time I had had this argument.
> ‘That’s just what I don’t want to see. I am not a futurist,’ I said. ‘I prefer *one* thing.’
> ‘There is no such thing as *one* thing.’
> ‘There is if I wish to have it so. And I wish to have it so.’
> ‘You are a monist!’ he said at this, with a contemptuous glance, curling his lip.
> ‘All right. I am not a futurist anyway. *Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes*.’
> At this quotation he broke into a hundred angry pieces.[128]

Being so one-sided an account and removed from the event itself by over twenty years, this passage should not be taken as an accurate representation of their interaction. In truth it expresses nothing so much as Lewis’s talent for dramatic dialogue and characterization. But nevertheless the exchange does provide a useful indication of the grounds of Lewis’s opposition to Marinetti during Vorticism.

It is worth focussing particularly on the quotation which caused Marinetti to break ‘into a hundred angry pieces’. The line is from Baudelaire’s poem ‘Beauty’ (1857), translated into English it reads ‘I detest any movement displacing still lines’.[129] It is well chosen — no doubt in retrospect — for the significance which it has in the context of the dispute. Baudelaire was a cult hero of the avant-garde who was frequently cited in support of their aesthetic theories and thus merely by demonstrating his own accord with the theories of Baudelaire, Lewis could claim to be the truer heir to his philosophy of ‘The Painter of Modern Life’ than the Futurists.[130] But in a deeper sense

[128] Ibid., p.34-35.
[129] This is a literal translation of the line’s meaning. In James McGowen’s translation of the poem it reads: ‘I hate only impulse, the breaking line’ (Baudeliare, *The Flowers of Evil*, p.39).
[130] Shirley W. Vinall has demonstrated the importance of Baudelaire to Marinetti’s early poetry, an insight which Lewis, as a keen reader of Marinetti’s works in the 1900s, would also no doubt have been aware of. Shirley W. Vinall, ‘Marinetti, Soffici, and French Literature’, *International Futurism in Arts and Literature,* ed. Günter Berghaus (Berlin: deGruyter, 2000), pp.15-38 (p.31).

this line is used by Lewis to refer to the physical object of perception and the moving 'lines of force' in Futurist aesthetic technique. As Richard Humphreys explains, Lewis valued the 'line' for very different reasons to the Futurists: '[t]he dynamism he [Lewis] sought would be in the rigorous organisation of line and form, rather than in the repetition of lines suggestive of perceived movement'.[131]

This aspect of Lewis's opposition to the Futurist aesthetic programme is expressed well in the 'Essay on the Objective of Plastic Art in Our Time', where he adopts Schopenhauer's view as it was expressed in *The World as Will and Representation* that art '"pauses at this particular thing: the course of time stops: the relations vanish for it: only the essential, the idea, is its object"'.[132] For Lewis this idea provided the antidote to Futurist aesthetics, carrying a rationale for an art which depended on the static rather than the dynamic object:

> A sort of immortality descends upon these objects. It is an immortality, which, in the case of the painting, they have to pay for with death, or at least with its coldness and immobility.[133]

This passage helps to bring out the deeper aesthetic and philosophical rationale behind Lewis's preference for '*one* thing' and gives further support to his claim that anything which 'goes too quickly, […] is not there', for it communicates a notion of perfected being ('immortality') which is gained through spatial stillness rather than temporal movement.

Lewis's theory thus contrasts sharply with Miranda Hickman's claim that 'from Futurism' the Vorticists drew 'a dedication to suggesting dynamic motion'.[134] It is perhaps unfair to pick out Hickman here, as the view is relatively widespread in Lewis criticism. A similar idea is present in David A. Wragg's suggestion, for example, that Lewis practised the aesthetic 'admixture of Futurism and "analytical" Cubism' in order to '*re*present modernity from a position of detachment'.[135] These readings of Vorticist designs as marking out an aesthetic mid-point between the static forms of Cubism and the dynamic motion suggested by Futurist lines of forces misrepresents the aesthetic

[131] Humphreys, '"A Strange Synthesis"', p.37.
[132] 'Essay on the Objective of Plastic Art in Our Time', p.30.
[133] 'Essay on the Objective of Plastic Art in Our Time', p.30.
[134] Hickman, *The Geometry of Modernism,* p.5.
[135] Wragg, 'Aggression, aesthetics, modernity', p.187.

strategies of Vorticism. As Lewis expressed it in the first issue of *BLAST*, Vorticism was 'fed up with […] dispersals' of energy, desiring instead 'the immobile rhythm of […] swiftness', seeking the 'energy' in 'stillness' and finding form in an aesthetic programme of 'clearness and restraint'.[136]

The matter must ultimately be resolved with reference to the Vorticist designs in *BLAST*, which testify to this programme of stillness and solidity. Even in earlier works like *Study for Kermesse* (Fig. 9) and *Lovers* (both of 1912) in which a suggestion of poised dynamism is decipherable it seems 'to be stopped short by some form of limit', the 'energy of creation' being 'arrested by its material vehicle', as Edwards suggests.[137] By the time of the mature Vorticist works like *Timon of Athens* (Fig. 18) and *Portrait of an Englishwoman* — both painted in 1913 and reproduced in *BLAST* — we can see clearly Lewis's adherence to an aesthetic of coldness and immobility.[138] Certainly these designs contain no overt technical inheritance of the Futurist lines of force of the sort which Hickman implies.

That is not to say, however, that Vorticism is free from any Futurist influence. Yet the clearest evidence of this influence is not to be found in aesthetic technique but in the new 'narrative possibilities' which Futurism perceived in the altered condition of humankind in the modern world, as Richard Humphreys comments:

> Lewis admired the Futurists' inventive and often iconoclastic attitude and their ambition to extend the subject matter and narrative possibilities of art in the modern world; however, for him, 'modernity' did not simply mean mechanisation and speed, cities and radical politics.[139]

As Humphreys suggests, Futurism presented Lewis with the model for a more dynamic engagement with the phenomena of the modern world than was found in Cubism, which explored the significance of humankind's new relationship with machinery and not merely its epistemological basis. But modernity, for Lewis, was a complex process

[136] Lewis, 'Our Vortex', in *BLAST*, pp.149, 148; Lewis, 'The Melodrama of Modernity', in *BLAST*, p.144.
[137] Wyndham Lewis, *Lovers*, 1912, pen and ink, and watercolour on paper, 25.5 × 35.5 cm, private collection; Paul Edwards, 'Wyndham Lewis's Vorticism: A Strange Synthesis', in *The Vorticists: Manifesto for a Modern World*, ed. by Mark Antliff and Vivien Greene (London: Tate Publishing, 2010), pp.35-46 (p.38).
[138] Wyndham Lewis, *Timon of Athens*, 1913, pencil, pen and black and brown ink, and wash on paper, 34.5 ×26.5 cm, private collection; *Portrait of an Englishwoman*, 1913, pen and ink, pencil and watercolour on paper, 56 × 38 cm, The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art.
[139] Humphreys, '"A Strange Synthesis"', p.37.

encompassing every aspect of the human condition, which required careful analytic treatment. The central problem with Futurism as Lewis saw it was its blind optimism and glorification of technological advance.

If Lewis had discerned in Cubism a passive and epistemologically bloated subjectivity in the throes of collapse, then he saw in Futurism a potentially catastrophic reconciliation of the subject/object dualism which entailed the total dissolution of the creative subject and consequently the abolition of art. It is telling, in Lewis's dramatization of their interaction, that while Marinetti adopts an ontological level of discourse with the claim '[t]here is no such thing as *one* thing', Lewis counters with a response which emphasises the artist's agency: 'There is if I wish to have it so. And I wish to have it so'. This comment subtly serves to bolster and reaffirm the subject as a creative force who remained independent from the dizzying spectacle of the modern world. It remains implicit that for Marinetti the inevitable destiny of the subject was to become ecstatically submerged within the dynamic processes of technological advance.

Confirmation of this aspect of the Futurist philosophy is found in the correspondence of Umberto Boccioni. In a letter to his mistress of July 1916, written a few days before he was killed during a cavalry drill, Boccioni wrote: 'War is a beautiful, marvellous and terrible thing! In the mountains it even seems like a battle with the infinite. Grandiosity, immensity, life and death! I am happy!'[140] Four years prior to this, in the 'Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture' of 1912, Boccioni had described idealized aesthetic perception as a disorientating receptivity to the chaos of the plastic world: 'We want the entire visible world to tumble down on top of us, merging and creating a harmony on purely intuitive grounds'.[141] His sculpture of 1913, *Synthesis of Human Dynamism* (Fig. 16), may be regarded as a demonstration of his wish to 'SPLIT OPEN OUR FIGURES AND PLACE THE ENVIRONMENT INSIDE THEM', and we might conclude that his experience of war on the Veronese front during the First World War consummated his aesthetic vision.[142]

Synthesis of Human Dynamism is a work which communicates a conflict between the inner and outer worlds, and the fragmentation which the human figure undergoes as a result of the subject's collision with the expansion of the material object-

[140] Quoted in Perloff, *The Futurist Moment*, p.39.
[141] Umberto Boccioni, 'Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture' (1912), in *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. by Umbro Apollonio (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), pp.51-65 (p.63).
[142] Umberto Boccioni, *Synthesis of Human Dynamism with Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, 1913, lost and thought destroyed; Boccioni, 'Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture', p.63.

world; being ultimately broken up into an assemblage of material signifiers which cohere in a radically de-structured human form. Boccioni's figure is intelligible both as a grim prophesy of the destruction of the human form in warfare, and as a vision of the subject's confrontation with 'the infinite'. To the Futurist psyche divine visitations took the form of incendiary bombs 'tumbling down': the irrepressible expansion of matter enveloping and fracturing subjectivity — indeed severing the umbilical cord in all subject-object relations — until the artist's 'pulse is […] at one with the pulse of the universe'.[143] The point of the soul's union with the absolute is also the site of the body's destruction, all subject/object distinctions effectively collapsing in a moment of visionary fragmentation.

At the heart of Lewis's opposition to Futurism was thus a similar concern about the dissipating consequence of transcendence as that which we observed in his critique of Kandinsky. The central difference here is that while Kandinsky's transcendence had led the subject out of the evil clutches of the material world, Futurism attempted to assimilate the subject within the pulsing dynamism of the machine-world. But Lewis also expressed annoyance that Marinetti and his entourage had appropriated the 'future' as the central slogan of their movement. In the 'Essay on the Objective of Plastic Art in Our Time' he complained about a particular 'sort of artist (of which the Italian Futurist, now deceased, is an excellent specimen) who should really be called a Presentist':

> He pretends to live, and really succeeds sometimes, a sort of spiritual hand-to-mouth existence. He has tried with frenzy to identify himself with matter—with the whizzing, shrieking body, the smooth rolling machine, the leaping gun. […] A space must be cleared, all said and done, round the hurly-burly of the present. No man can reflect or create, in the intellectual sense, while he is acting—fighting, playing tennis, or making love. *The present man in all of us is the machine.* The farther away from the present, though not too far, the more free. So the choice must be between the past and the future. Every man has to choose, or rather the choice is early made for each of us.[144]

As this passage conveys, the Futurist movement was for Lewis a mere symptom of the age, which unconsciously reflected the tendencies of the 'present' without ever exhibiting the creative power to remodel the world as he believed art should. Yet

[143] Perloff, *The Futurist Moment*, p.43.
[144] 'Essay on the Objective of Plastic Art in Our Time', p.35.

'[t]here are […] some men', he writes on the same page, 'who seem to contain the future as others contain the past', they are 'the hosts of the unlived thing'.[145] This comment chimes closely with Pound's idea of the vortex as a 'turbine' into which '[a]ll experience rushes', and out of which 'The DESIGN of the future' will emerge.[146] It communicates the sense in which Lewis's own artistic ambition to sketch the blueprints for a new civilization and to make new beings with which to populate it might itself be termed 'futurist'. The Futurist movement was thus truly 'Presentist' in its outlook and ambitions; the key to the 'future' lay, figuratively at least, with the Vorticists.

(vi) The Theoretic Situation of Vorticism in 1914

With Cubism, Kandinsky and Futurism as the three points of their compass Lewis and the Vorticists launched their new avant-garde brand in the summer of 1914. Vorticism's synthesis, as I hope I have indicated, did not simply result in a derivative aesthetic style or technique, but actually became the basis for a new and important aesthetic philosophy, which highlighted the changing relationship between subject and object in the modern world. It is important to appreciate the sense in which Vorticism's synthesizing strategy enabled Lewis to combine those aesthetic and theoretical elements of the other avant-garde movements which he believed best palliated their individual excesses, and thereby to re-instate a degree of conceptual balance. Cubism's focus on matter and Kandinsky's on spirit are brought together in one of modern art's most intelligent narrative responses to its own altered situation in the modern world.

By attaining a position of command over their rivals in this way Vorticism is figuratively propelled to the vertex of the cone, just as the mercenary factions in medieval European wars were raised to positions of power; gaining strength through a containment of the conflicting currents within themselves and exploiting the partisan allegiance of others for their own visionary end. The symbolic site of the Vorticist artist is thus the vertex of the vortex: the site of extraordinary experience or perception and the point at which the creative artist stands on the verge of 'union with the absolute', while forestalling any definite resolution.[147] By 'discharging' themselves 'on both

[145] Ibid., p.35.
[146] Pound, 'Vortex', in *BLAST*, p.153.
[147] The Vorticist artist thus stands on the brink of a kind of *mysticism*, which the *OED* defines as the 'belief that union with or absorption into the Deity or the absolute […] may be attained through

sides' of the dualism, establishing a post 'Beyond Action and Reaction', Lewis and the Vorticists could lay claim to a higher vision than their rivals.[148] In this way, Pound and Lewis understood their movement as achieving a form of aesthetic sublation of the conceptual antithesis between Picasso's Cubism and Kandinsky's spiritual art, as much as a straightforward defeat of the Futurist camp.

In all these movements Lewis discerned the same potentially catastrophic impulse towards unity. Cubism was guilty of pacifying the creative subject in the face of an expanding object-world, Futurism of destroying the subject in a frenzied and ungratifying ritual of machine violence, while Kandinsky had initiated an ascetic withdrawal into the inner recesses of the subject, seeking spiritual liberation from the material world. They had all tacitly further weakened the already ailing human subject by so wilfully 'cutting the connections' between subject and object, and, implicitly, art and life.[149] For Lewis, the inward turn of art at this pivotal moment had played directly into the hands of a technologically advanced society, which was increasingly defining human life in the fixed terms of object-relations. When in 1926 he wrote '[w]e are *all* slipping back into machinery, because we *all* have tried to be free' he seems to capture the sense in which the celebration of a creative and dynamic human subject had obscured the reality of the situation during those visionary pre-war years of modernist art.[150] Certainly by 1914 Lewis's own critical position had become more refined, as he began to see the structures in which humankind had become immersed more clearly as cages. This idea can be seen clearly in *The Crowd* (1914-1915; Fig. 20).[151]

Here modernity is shown as the herald of a more collective and automatic kind of humanity than ever previously existed. The crowd of 'reddish-brown humanoid cyphers' is harried into an 'enclo[sure]' and figuratively merged with the background scene of modernity, their 'progress through the picture space culminat[ing] in their working, or being worked by, the treadmill in the top right-hand corner', as David A. Wragg comments.[152] The French and Communist flags, ironic banners of freedom, represent the ideological 'religions' which have shaped and which are in the process of

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contemplation and self-surrender' (*New Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. by Judy Pearsall (Oxford University Press, 2001), p.1225). Though crucially the Vorticist reaffirms the individuated self as it stands figuratively at the point of union.

[148] Lewis, 'Manifesto', in *BLAST,* p.30.

[149] Lewis, 'Futurism, Magic and Life', in *BLAST,* p.133.

[150] Wyndham Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled*, ed. by Reed Way Dasenbrock (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989), p.125.

[151] Wyndham Lewis, *The Crowd*, 1914-15, oil and pencil on canvas, 200.7 × 153.7 cm, Tate Galleries.

[152] Wragg, 'Aggression, aesthetics, modernity', p.203.

shaping the modern world, providing humanity with 'a world in a corner of the world, full of rest and security'.[153]

For Richard Humphreys the painting 'is a grand statement of the political realities of the time' showing how 'massed groups of human units are […] trapped in an urban landscape of diagrammatic terror'.[154] In one sense then *The Crowd* serves as 'a full-scale map' of the forces which Lewis 'saw shaping future civilisation: an anonymous, uniform crowd controlled by equally anonymous powers signified by robotic figures in the foreground'.[155] But equally the painting calls to mind the ambition which Lewis stated in 'Inferior Religions', to sketch out a 'new human mathematic' and assemble 'a book of forty propositions' collating his 'creaking men-machines'.[156] The canvas in this sense behaves rather like an ethnographer's cabinet filled with 'specimens of religious fanaticism'.[157] Humankind is shown here at the end of a complex process of dehumanization, treated en masse as just as many 'intricately moving bobbins' as can be packed into structural grid.[158] Elsewhere Lewis would comment that in modernity humankind was attaining a degree of mass-organization comparable with the rationalized societies of the insect world.[159]

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The Crowd is the final visual development in a rigorous process of symbolic classification taking place in Lewis's paintings and writings during this period, which will occupy the central focus of the next chapter. We have seen here how receptive Lewis was to the wider discourses and expressive strategies within modernist art and we turn next to examine more closely his productivity in generating ideas and interpretative outcomes of his own. I focus especially upon the development of Lewis's 'two arts' in the period leading up to 1914 and the unique path into abstraction which he pioneered in

[153] 'Inferior Religions' (1917), p.316.
[154] Humphreys, '"A Strange Synthesis"', p.40.
[155] Ibid., p.40.
[156] 'Inferior Religions' (1917), p.315.
[157] Ibid., p.315.
[158] Ibid., p.315.
[159] In *The Caliph's Design* (1919) Lewis suggests that one of the great dangers facing humankind in modernity is 'that we should become overpowered by our creation, and become as mechanical as a tremendous insect world, all our awakened reason entirely disappeared' (p.76). In 'The Meaning of the Wild Body' Lewis also suggests that without 'self-observation […] men sink to the level of insects' (p.158).

his paintings.[160] Lewis took great care in this period of his career to translate the conceptual implications of aesthetic principles into a literary discourse, and vice versa, to apply philosophical principles in his own visual works. In this way Lewis gained awareness of the linguistic potential of abstract art to facilitate a symbolic mode of expression.

[160] 'Beginning', p.266.

Chapter 3

Wyndham Lewis's 'pattern of thinking' in Words and Images

In this chapter I approach the 'strange synthesis' which Lewis's Vorticism attained from a different perspective.[1] We have already seen how Lewis derived and synthesized the materials for a conceptual dualism between spirit and matter from two of his major rivals among the pre-war avant-garde, Kandinsky and Picasso. Here my focus is on the synthesis which Lewis attained personally in his commitment to two distinct modes of artistic expression: the visual and the literary. My analysis thus involves a shift of focus away from the context in which Lewis's thought developed towards a closer consideration of his own creative output during the Vorticist period, which is essentially split between these two artistic mediums.

The central claim I wish to make here is that the thematic overlaps between Lewis's paintings and writings of the Vorticist period are so numerous and significant that they compel a critical treatment which does not isolate them into the discrete spheres of artistic and literary discourses, but which treats them as distinct but complementary emanations of Lewis's philosophical pattern of thinking. That is to say, the boundaries which critical disciplines set up between different mediums of artistic expression, although useful in highlighting the distinct criteria and technical demands of those mediums, should not restrict our appreciation of thematic or conceptual ground which they often share. In the case of Lewis, this shared ground can be elaborated with reference to his philosophical conception of language.

In a lecture given at the BBC in 1951, 'The Essential Purposes of Art', Lewis provided a rationale with which to understand his paintings and writings as participating in a shared system of linguistic signs:

> Being a writer and painter I am I dare say especially conscious of the extent to which the visual arts are a language. [...] Everything that we see that is not nature but man's

[1] 'A World Art and Tradition' (1929), p.259.

> handiwork also belongs to the realm of visual expression, every cigarette kiosk, water cart, policeman's helmet, or lamp post is expressing something as clearly as do the words upon a printed page, almost they are an ideographic language.[2]

As an utterance in a visual 'language' a drawing or painting is, according to this idea, necessarily composed of signifiers which may be translated into more common terms of our everyday verbal language. In 'Beginning' Lewis informs us that there occurred no overt 'mixing of the *genres*' among his creative products, but he lends support to the idea of a deeper level of accord when he comments that originally '[t]he "short story" […] imposed itself upon me as a complementary creation', and that 'the two arts, with me, have co-existed in peculiar harmony'.[3] Thus, while his paintings and writings did not mix in any overt way, remaining responsive to the technical demands of their respective mediums, they may be seen to participate in a shared system of signs and symbols. In other words, they both adhere to, and emanate from, a particular pattern of thinking.

It is curious to note how this phrase — which Lewis used in *Rude Assignment* to refer to the thread of continuity which ran through all his books — serves to affirm the connection I am suggesting between Lewis's visual and literary works, by enticing us to visualize the relation between ideas. It is Lewis's own stand-in phrase for the more conventional 'system of thought' prevalent among traditional philosophers. In place of the reassuring tone of finality and durability conveyed by 'system' Lewis prefers the comparatively more malleable, visual notion of a 'pattern'. The fabric of this pattern is 'thinking', the present progressive verb form being preferred to the objectified noun 'thought' with its connotation of completion. The vocabulary which Lewis applied to ideas and concepts was frequently visual in nature, indicating that a certain degree of mingling occurred between visual and linguistic criteria in Lewis's creative works

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[2] Wyndham Lewis, 'The Essential Purposes of Art' (1951), *The Enemy Speaks* (LTM 2411) [CD].

[3] 'Beginning', p.266. There are good reasons to be dubious about Lewis's claim that there occurred no overt 'mixing of the *genres*' among his creative products. In the first instance, Lewis's illustrations in *The Apes of God* (1930) and Michael Ayrton's character sketches in the books of *The Human Age* (1955-1956) indicate that he was at least interested in combining the two mediums even if they are not, strictly speaking, 'mixed' in these instances. However, clear examples of 'mixing' are to be found in *BLAST*, where an image entitled 'The Enemy of the Stars' with thematic relation to Lewis's play is situated a page before the text opens; in the unfinished manuscript of 'Hoodopip' which appears to have developed in line with Lewis's Tyro paintings in the early 1920s (Edwards, *Painter and Writer* pp.256-259); and in Lewis's collaboration with Naomi Mitchison on *Beyond This Limit* (1935), with 'each of them taking turns to invent the story through words (Mitchison) and drawings (Lewis)' (Janet Montefiore, *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s: The Dangerous Flood of History* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.115).

across both mediums. It is thus possible to speak of the coherence of Lewis's ideas as compositional rather than logical in nature and the designs of his visual works as conceptual to a certain degree.

To tap into this deeper level of accord which exists between Lewis's Vorticist paintings and writings I have adopted a particular method. I trace the developing interactions between Lewis's visual and literary works over the period which led up to the launch of Vorticism in the summer of 1914, fixing attention particularly upon the shared structural characteristics and symbolic arrangements which populate and energize Lewis's various creative activities and holding focus until the '*central pattern of thinking*' from which the various products of his creative consciousness emanate can be discerned.[4] I use the term 'emanate' here in full consciousness of Fredric Jameson's recent suggestion that the *Timon of Athens* portfolio of 1912-13 is the 'point [...] on which all of Lewis's multiple activities converge, or better still, from which we can observe them all to emanate' (see especially Figs. 12 and 13).[5] While it is no doubt true that Lewis's *Timon of Athens* portfolio marks a significant point of development in his creative achievements, it is important to bear in mind that this point resides within what was a continuous process of what I am calling 'symbolic classification' here.[6] I have structured my analysis here to give equal weight to the visual and the literary: we begin by exploring the conceptual content of Lewis's visual works with close reference to his writings of the period and we then turn to consider the visual aspect of Lewis's writings in *BLAST*.

(i) From *The Vorticist* to Vorticism

The Vorticist (Fig. 10) was completed by Lewis in 1912.[7] It was given this title retrospectively by Edward Wadsworth who clearly perceived certain qualities which made it exemplary of the aesthetic principles of the movement with the benefit of hindsight, and it is not difficult to see why. As we saw in the previous chapter,

[4] *Rude Assignment,* p.238.
[5] Fredric Jameson, 'Wyndham Lewis's *Timon*: The War of Forms', in *Vorticism: New Perspectives,* ed. by Mark Antliff and Scott W. Klein (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.15-30 (p.17).
[6] The term is taken from Rodney Needham's *Symbolic Classification* (Santa Monica: Goodyear Publishing, 1979). The broader relevance of this terminology will be clarified towards the end of this chapter.
[7] Wyndham Lewis, *The Vorticist*, 1912, watercolour on paper, 42.2 × 32.2 cm, Southampton City Art Gallery.

Vorticism can be conceived (following Pound) as the offspring of two mutually opposed schools in modern art, championed by Picasso and Kandinsky, which developed aesthetic techniques pertaining to the domains of matter and spirit respectively. *The Vorticist* demonstrates Lewis's early attempt to set these two worlds against each other aesthetically and conceptually.

The material signs of the painting are composed of interpenetrating surfaces and overlapping layers which lock the figure into a material dimension, and illustrate clearly Vorticism's debt to the Cubist aesthetics of condensed materiality. At the same time, however, we can observe in the figure's closed eyes a traumatized withdrawal from the dominion of pure matter into the inner recesses of the self. Penned-in on all sides by the irrepressible expansion of material planes, the figure seeks 'for the road which is to lead us away from the outer to the inner' as Kandinsky wrote in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*.[8] Here we can begin to observe the sense in which Lewis's aesthetic manoeuvres in painting accord with certain ideas expressed in his writings of the period, although it is important to stress that at this stage he remained reliant upon mimetic detail in painting in order to achieve this.

The painting depicts a crude human form emitting an agonized cry as it is all but torn asunder by two opposed forces which hold dominion over human life: self and world. The painted elements of the picture represent the domain of pure matter which comes to consume and dissect the figure, personhood ultimately being broken up into a collection of material signs. The stains of rust which are visible at the fringes of the body subtly indicate that biological nature has come to condemn this metallic figure to the scrapheap, enacting the same symbolic function as does the 'RED OF STAINED COPPER' which dominates the scene in *Enemy of the Stars.*[9] In the triangular apex which dissects the figure's cranium (aglow with the fires of industry?) we may observe a metallic implement (the figure's own piston-like paw?) pounding on what the figure's closed eyes imply is a hermetically sealed subjectivity.

The pressure to which this figure is being subjected appears unbearable. Caught between two mutually opposed forces, being pulled inside out in a metaphysical tug-of-war between self and world, the figure's head appears as a turbine, its slight retraction between the shoulders indicating perhaps the beginning of a spin. Here then, is a figure

[8] Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, pp.35-36.
[9] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, p.60.

which dwells at 'the point of maximum energy'.[10] The requisite conditions for a vortex are in the process of forming as the outer world attempts to invade the inner: the subject is forced to withdraw from the expansion of the object world at the same time that the 'theatre' of selfhood, as Lewis phrased it in 'Breton Journal', is 'outflowing'.[11]

By staging a conflict between the aesthetic principles of Vorticism's two parent-movements, the compositional elements of *The Vorticist* open a conceptual narrative in which two opposed principles (self and world) occupy the lead roles. Lewis's painting magnifies the dual metaphysical principles which underpin and animate his subject, revealing the human being as a fragile surface-dwelling split-creature. We find 'questions of fusion and separation', both metaphysical and epistemological, arise when we consider the human being as suspended between two mutually opposed principles: to which side do we properly belong, and from which will we finally be banished?[12] Or indeed, is the dualism 'absolute'; are these 'two independent coeternal principles, irreducibly set against each other from eternity'?[13] Such questions must be held to one side for a full treatment, but at the present stage of our investigation they provide invaluable preliminary parameters for our consideration of the process of dual symbolic classification which underpins Lewis's creative work of this period.

In one respect we can already glimpse, in the conceptual arrangements which are taking shape here, a certain degree of continuity among Lewis's paintings and writings of the period. In 'Beginning' Lewis had described how his literary creations emerged as 'the crystallization *of what I had to keep out of my consciousness while painting*', that '[t]he waste product of every painting […] makes the most highly selective and ideal material for the pure writer'.[14] If we follow this idea, *Enemy of the Stars* would immediately appear to qualify as an example of literary reinvestment of the discarded matter from Lewis's painterly consciousness. After all the 'CONDEMNED PROTAGONIST' of his Vorticist play is similarly suspended between two mutually opposed metaphysical principles.[15] Arghol is the representative of 'Self [...] the ancient race' whose futile opposition to 'Mankind', 'the universe', 'God and Fate', leaves him

[10] Pound, 'Vortex', in *BLAST,* p.153.
[11] Wyndham Lewis, 'Breton Journal', Paul Edwards's transcription; personal communication. Manuscript held in the in the Wyndham Lewis Collection in the Carl A. Kroch Library of Cornell University, p.2. Lewis uses the French term 'debordant' which is translated as 'outflowing' in Edwards' transcription.
[12] 'The Critical Realists', p.25.
[13] Yuri Stoyanov, *The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), p.4.
[14] 'Beginning', p.266.
[15] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* p.61.

braced on 'the world's brink' against 'thought heavy as a meteorite'.[16] *The Vorticist* could almost be a depiction of Arghol receiving one of his nightly beatings from his 'uncle'.[17]

But there are certain significant reasons why the drawing of 1912 ought to be marked off from the subsequent phase of Lewis's Vorticist painting. Firstly, as already mentioned, such comprehensive mimetic detail in the depiction of the figure is altogether lacking in a work like *Composition* of 1913 (Fig. 17), where the human form is entirely reduced to an abstract code of material signifiers (the arching mantis-like inclination of torso and arms is topped with a single bulging metallic eye).[18] In *The Vorticist*, despite its traumatic submission to a dehumaniz*ing* pressure, the figure remains recognizably human. Secondly, whereas the figure in *The Vorticist* occupies an indeterminate space, a blank void, Lewis's later Vorticist figurations are contained on all sides by the warm-toned interior planes of the cubic forms among which they find their proper niche of existence.

The process which instigated Lewis's move from *The Vorticist* to Vorticism thus involves a shift of focus from human subject to the external process and condition of life, but crucially it also involves a new vocabulary in which to express this. The distinction between these two points in his development is really one between an intermediate and an advanced user of a language, in this case a personally conceived abstract language. What occurs in the mature paintings and writings of Lewis's Vorticist period is heightened proficiency in expression and articulation. The 1912 painting shows Vorticist aesthetic and conceptual arrangements in a comparatively superficial aspect, for here Lewis was heavily reliant upon mimetic detail to demonstrate the conceptual background to his paintings. The result is an explicit image, which uses literal depiction to convey its meaning. What occurs next is a process of abstract refinement in the visual vocabulary of his paintings, which become subtler and for that reason capable of expressing more.

The matter has recently been addressed by Fredric Jameson, who identifies 'the warring intersection — the mortal struggle — of the square and the round' in Lewis's *Timon of Athens* series of 1912-13 as a sort of geometric shorthand with which Lewis's painterly consciousness was able to interrogate the changed 'ontology of being' which

[16] Ibid., pp.66, 69, 70.
[17] Ibid., p.66.
[18] Wyndham Lewis, *Composition – Later Drawing of Timon Series*, 1913, pen, watercolour and pencil on paper, 34.3 × 26.7 cm, Tate Galleries.

modern life had fostered in human beings.[19] The geometric figures of the square and the circle are infused with symbolic significance in Jameson's analysis of Lewis's proto-Vorticist works, in a way which demands clarification. His distinction between these forms would seem to tie in with the spirit/matter dualism we have been discussing in Lewis's visual works. In this sense the circle, without beginning or end, suggests the complete, indivisible realm of the spirit while the square connotes the endeavour of rationality to control material form by dividing it into uniform, linear arrangements.

One significant implication which is raised by Jameson's distinction is therefore that Lewis's paintings participate in some way within the philosophical tradition which sought to attain rational control over the occult processes of God's creation by 'squaring the circle'. The mathematical 'compass' is identified as the key instrument of this effort, which enables the user 'to discriminate the original chaotic unity, or *prima materia*, into four opposing elements that […] could be recombined into a more integrated whole'.[20] This idea is illustrated in William Blake's famous depiction of the 'law-making demiurge' Urizen at the moment of creation, leaning out of the realm of pure spirit (symbolized by the circle) to enact material creation (symbolized by the right-angled corner of the square) (Fig. 1).[21] The hand of God in this image undertakes the creation of the material world by wielding the compass. Geometrical mastery of the compass in this way heralds the possibility of human mastery over the material conditions of existence and a way of attaining, by rational means, the creative power of God.

In one respect then, Jameson's identification of a 'warring intersection […] of the square and the round' in Lewis's paintings serves to extend the narrative of dualistic conflict which we have already observed in Lewis's proto-Vorticist works, indicating the sense in which the new geometric art which Lewis was pioneering might be viewed as an attempt to rationally master the chaotic unity at the heart of existence. This is an important symbolic background to Jameson's application of the square/circle distinction to Lewis's works, although it is not an association which he explicitly draws attention to in his analysis. Rather the particular meanings which Jameson assigns to these geometric figures in Lewis's paintings appears to be derived specifically from T. E. Hulme's distinction between 'geometric' and 'vital' art in 'Modern Art and Its

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[19] Jameson, 'Wyndham Lewis's *Timon*: The War of Forms', pp. 26, 25.
[20] 'Compass', in *The Book of Symbols: Reflections on Archetypal Images*, ed. by Ami Ronnberg and Kathleen Martin (Köln: Taschen, 2010), pp.510-11 (p.510).
[21] William Blake, *The Ancient of Days*, 1794, pen and ink, watercolour and paper, private collection. Quote from 'Compass', in *The Book of Symbols,* p.510.

Philosophy'.[22] The geometric forms of the square and the circle would in this case connote a primarily aesthetic distinction between the inorganic forms which proliferate the geometric style of abstraction in modern art and the organic and vital forms associated with the mimetic tradition in post-renaissance European art.

For Jameson, Lewis's *Timon* paintings of 1912-13 demonstrate conscious engagement with 'a fundamental task in the history of art': to conceive how 'to fit this round peg [the living body] into the square hole of the frame [the inanimate scene]'.[23] In Lewis's case, the traditional mimetic answer to this question no longer held any aesthetic or conceptual integrity. There could be no ground gained by 'imitating' the outward forms of life any longer, this would amount to a misrepresentation of the reality of contemporary life.[24] 'Dehumanization is the chief diagnostic of the Modern World', Lewis wrote in 'The New Egos', and the task beholden to the modern artist was to 'MAKE NEW BEINGS' in order to demonstrate this.[25] According to Jameson, Lewis's solution, in the *Timon* series at least, was to stage an aesthetic battle between the signifiers of vital organic life (the round principle) and the signifiers of the inert, inorganic scene (the square principle).

The metaphysical tension between self and world which had frozen the figure of *The Vorticist* into a traumatized lethargy is recast, in the *Timon* series, into a Bergsonian conflict between the dynamic thrust of organic life and the 'descending movement of matter'.[26] Jameson's reading of *A Feast of the Overmen* (Fig. 12) clarifies this. This painting, he writes:

> marks a relative predominance of the round or circular principle [...] The body and its appetites are the source of this organic and voluptuous rotundity, which scarcely however affords us mortals much of the visual luxury of the old-fashioned Flemish kermesses. Its couplings are ominous and metamorphic, the spade-shaped principle has already taken hold on the heads, the circular movements, although rising vertically, go nowhere and promise little in the way of development.[27]

[22] Hulme, 'Modern Art and Its Philosophy', p.269.
[23] Jameson, 'Wyndham Lewis's *Timon*: The War of Forms', pp.25-26.
[24] Lewis, 'Futurism, Magic and Life', in *BLAST,* p.132.
[25] Lewis, 'The New Egos', in *BLAST*, p.141; Lewis, 'Futurism, Magic and Life', in *BLAST,* p.132.
[26] Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p.269.
[27] Jameson, 'Wyndham Lewis's *Timon*: The War of Forms', p.29.

These semi-organic forms are beginning to merge with the inorganic structures around them. They correspond with 'the modern town-dweller[s] of our civilisation [who] see everywhere fraternal moulds for [their] spirit[s]'.[28] The relation of Lewis's *Timon* designs to the play from which they take their inspiration is not difficult to see, for the implied supremacy of the square principle expresses Timon's tragic realization that mankind's insatiable hunger for material wealth will always win out against the levity characteristic of kindness and compassion. These paintings are really Lewis's attempt to translate the conceptual dynamic which drives Shakespeare's play into a visual format. The viewer is shown the world refracted through the enlightened, though embittered, consciousness of Timon, observing 'nature as it grows again toward earth | Is fashioned for the journey dull and heavy'.[29] By gorging themselves upon food and wine and adorning themselves in 'diamonds', the Overmen at the Feast effectively load themselves with 'stones' weighted to sink further into the material dimension by which they are contained.[30]

The identification of a symbolic interaction between the geometric principles of the square and the round in Lewis's early Vorticist paintings inevitably provokes 'an allegorical reading in which two opposing forces are locked in combat', as Jameson suggests.[31] Applying terms which Pound provides in his 'Affirmations' in *The New Age* on 28 January 1915, we might suggest that the square and circle are basic and repeated 'pattern-units, or units of design' which qualify as the primary visual building blocks of his early pattern of thinking.[32] Certainly the dualistic tension between squared and the circular forms evidently helped Lewis formulate compositions which developed his philosophical interest at this time. This being so, we are confronted with a significant interpretative problem when we approach works in which the round principle is noticeably absent, such as *Composition* and *Timon of Athens* (Figs. 17 and 18). How then are we to apply Jameson's model to these mature abstract works?

(ii) Symbolic Classification in Lewis's Vorticist Paintings

[28] Lewis, 'The New Egos', in *BLAST,* p.141.
[29] William Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.224.
[30] Shakespeare, *Timon*, p.259.
[31] Jameson, 'Wyndham Lewis's *Timon*: The War of Forms', p.27.
[32] Ezra Pound 'Affirmations IV. As for Imagisme', in *The New Age,* 16.13 (1915), pp.349-350 <http://library.brown.edu/pdfs/1140814350421165.pdf> [accessed 19 May 2015], p.349.

Where the human form is present in these works it is broken up into an abstract assemblage of material signifiers, the vital spark of organic life having effectively been 'banished from matter'.[33] Following the geometric symbolism we have observed in Jameson's interpretation, one possible rationale for this is provided by the Jungian analyst Aniela Jaffé:

> In most modern art, the connection between these two primary forms [the circle and the square] is either nonexistent, or loose and casual. Their separation is another symbolic expression of the psychic state of 20th-century man: His soul has lost its roots and he is threatened by dissociation.[34]

If we follow Jaffé's interpretation we are invited to conclude that the process of dehumanization is being shown at a stage nearing completion in Lewis's later Vorticist abstractions. No longer dignified as vital living organisms, human beings feature in Lewis's fully abstract works as 'men-machines' being operated by the vast and indifferent mechanism of the modern city.[35] Little wonder then that these later Vorticist works tend to place their conceptual emphasis on the collective aspect of humankind, as in *The Crowd*, and the functional context of collective participation, as in *Workshop,* of 1914-15.[36] As Lewis's focus shifts further towards the external conditions of life and the logical end of this process of dehumanization, the category 'man' is absorbed entirely in the inorganic structures which underpin and surround the sphere of human life, eventually making humankind itself the truest referent of the square principle.

What happens then to the round principle in Lewis's Vorticist paintings? Is it simply banished from these later works? If so, the predominance of the inorganic, square principle would presumably imply a conceptual monism. But isn't it '[a]lways a deux'?[37] We are forced to look deeper into these works for the presence of a war of forms, or conflict of symbols, but not without reward. Visual signifiers of the round principle survive in a ghostly aspect, in certain gestures towards the compositional technique of naturalistic art.

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[33] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* p.84.
[34] Aniela Jaffé, 'Symbolism in the Visual Arts', in *Man and His Symbols*, ed. by Carl G. Jung (London: Dell Publishing, 1964), pp.255-322 (p.284).
[35] 'Inferior Religions', p.315.
[36] Wyndham Lewis, *Workshop*, 1915, oil on canvas, 76.5 × 61 cm, Tate Galleries.
[37] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* p.80.

Lewis's Vorticist abstractions, as we know, were the products of a concern not to imitate the outward forms of life, but to make new beings in order to capture the truth that 'dehumanization is the chief diagnostic of the modern world'. As a classically trained painter of the Slade School of Art, this required Lewis to break out of the naturalistic conventions of mimetic art in which he had been versed, and to consolidate a new style more in keeping with the temper of the modern world. This resulted in a shift of focus away from organic forms captured with mimetic detail towards the abstract cubic forms of the inorganic realm. But even the fully abstract works, in characteristic Lewisian fashion, are Janus-faced; gesturing towards naturalistic compositional technique at the same time that they render all forms inorganic, albeit in a few spectral lines. To understand this more clearly we must withdraw ourselves from the finished canvas and look further into the compositional procedure which Lewis used.

The procedure of Lewis's Vorticist abstraction involved the retrieval and subsequent segregation of cubic form from certain strategic compositional arcs and circles (a technique associated with naturalistic art, particularly portraiture) which determine their structural parameters. These compositional arcs are highlighted by Antonella Abatilli in Fig. 19, taking *Timon of Athens* (1913) as her model.[38] Here we can see that a similar tussle between the square and round principles which Jameson observed in the *Timon* series is present in Lewis's later Vorticist abstractions. The round principle is identifiable in the hidden naturalistic architecture which enabled Lewis to create the geometric forms which populate his Vorticist abstractions. But in these fully abstract works the symbolic designations of the square and the round are altered, provoking an interpretation which mirrors certain of Lewis's ideas about the new relationship which existed between humankind and Nature in the modern world. The round principle, no longer associated with the 'vital' human form, is at this stage aligned with the indivisible and all-encompassing metaphysical unity of Nature.

The greatest interpretive difficulty which we face is that the square and the round principles function as double, or rather two-faced, signifiers in Lewis's Vorticist works; the transition from the *Timon* series of 1912-13 to the abstract works of 1913-14 actually involving a reversal of their symbolic designations. It was observed that in *The Vorticist* and the *Timon of Athens* series the round principle functions as a signifier of

[38] These visual studies are from Antonella Abatilli's unpublished research into Wyndham Lewis's compositional practice during the Vorticist period.

human life at the same time that the square signifies the inanimate structures of the external world. In *Timon of Athens* (1913), with the process of dehumanization now complete, the square principle stands for humankind which, having populated the world with a new species of machine-forms, stands now triumphant over Nature; the self-proclaimed master of creation. Or, to put it in terms which Lewis himself provides in the Vorticist Manifesto:

> our industries, and the Will that determined face to face with its needs, the direction of the modern world, has reared up steel trees where the green ones were lacking; has exploded in useful growths, and found wilder intricacies than those of Nature.[39]

Jameson's model is reversed here, as the inorganic creations of the machine-age herald humankind's triumphant liberation from the laws of Nature. This narrative is mirrored in Lewis's own compositional procedure where the decidedly artificial forms which occupy the canvas appear to have broken free of compositional conventions associated with the mimetic tradition in painting; Lewis effectively composing a new symbolic vocabulary with which to articulate the changed conditions of modern life. It is crucial, if we are to complete this symbolic narrative, to remind ourselves that the compositional arcs and circles (a technical trait of a naturalistic painter) remain visible in the finished drawing, gesturing towards the constant, albeit temporarily muted, presence of the organic realm of life and death. In a sense then, these surrounding arcs reveal the presence of what Lewis described in 'Inferior Religions' as the 'Sovereign force beneath the surface'.[40] There is thus an ever-present *memento mori* in these celebrations of the modern world.

His paintings and writings of the Vorticist period indicate that Lewis was inclining towards a particular interpretative position concerning 'the direction of the modern world'. Humankind's apparent triumph over Nature, about which the Italian Futurists had rhapsodized, is deftly undercut in Lewis's works of the period up to the publication of *BLAST* by a pessimistic strain. We are led to wonder whether the technological controls placed by humankind over wild Nature may in fact amount to a relatively insignificant symptom of a broader process which was driving the materialization of world, in which case material Nature would be the inevitable victor.

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[39] Lewis, 'Manifesto', in *BLAST*, p.36.
[40] 'Inferior Religions', p.318.

The idea which Lewis communicates is reminiscent of Samuel Butler's mock-Darwinian vision in *Erewhon* (1872) of a world in which machines use humankind in order to evolve: what appears like bold independence from Nature is in fact a disguised submission to 'Her' programme of materialization.

The First World War seemed to confirm this idea for Lewis, which he expressed most eloquently in his short-story of 1917 'Cantelman's Spring-Mate'. Cantelman's imperious attitude and confused belief that by mating and murdering he was somehow 'outwitting Nature' resonates with the message conveyed by Lewis's Vorticist abstractions, which also communicate the prowess of a new invulnerable type of human being, 'fashioned for its journey dull and heavy' in a manner befitting a liveried servant of the inorganic realm.[41] Lewis understood humankind at this time to be wilfully entering servitude enamoured with the material equipment of its own bondage. It is tempting to suggest that Lewis's articulation of humankind's complacent attitude towards Nature was modelled on Goethe's prescient comments in 'Nature: A Fragment':

> Nature! We are surrounded by and entangled in it, incapable of escaping from it, and incapable of penetrating deeper inside it. Without being asked and without warning, it draws us into the vortex of its dance and sweeps us away, until we are exhausted and drop from its arms. [...] We act on it continuously, yet have no sway over it. It seems to have staked everything on individuality, yet does not know what to do with individuals. It always builds and always destroys, its forge is inaccessible. It lives through its children; but where is the mother? [...] Each of its works has its own essence, each of its appearances the most singular characterization, yet it makes out of everything a *unity*. [...] Even the most unnatural thing is Nature […] He who does not see it everywhere does not see it correctly anywhere […] We obey its laws even when we go against them; we work *with* it even when we want to work *against* it.[42]

[41] Wyndham Lewis, 'Cantelman's Spring-Mate', *The Little Review* 4.6 (1917), pp.8-14 <http://library.brown.edu/pdfs/1297800529375003.pdf> [accessed 5 June 2015], p.14; Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*, p.224.

[42] This is an exert from Alan N. Shapiro's translation of Johann Wolfgang von Geothe's 'Die Natur: Fragment' ('Nature: A Fragment'), available on his website: <http://www.alan-shapiro.com/nature-a-fragment-by-johann-wolfgang-goethe/> [accessed 7 April 2014]. I have chosen this translation for the use which Shapiro makes of the word 'vortex' in translating the German word 'kreislauf' (an act of encircling), where other translators use 'circle' or 'whirl', as in Charles Sherrington's *Goethe On Nature and On Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1949), p.37. It is a fortuitous use of terminology in the present context.

The delight with which Goethe communicates the paradoxical and elusive workings of metaphysical Nature provides an effective coda with which to understand Lewis's developing pattern of thinking in this period. Certainly, Lewis remained acutely aware that humankind's apparent mastery over creation may turn out to be a pyrrhic victory after all. Despite the fact that the modern world had manifested 'wilder intricacies than those of Nature' Lewis registered this not as a resounding victory for humankind, but rather as an aesthetically prodigious sleight of hand on the part of 'Anglo-Saxon genius'.[43] He remained dubious about the scale of humankind's triumph: the surrounding arc of Nature had been hidden from view, but not erased entirely. The pessimistic strain which breaks through his works of this period suggests that Lewis believed, with Goethe, that Nature would come 'without being asked and without warning', to 'draw us into the vortex of its dance and sweep us away'; the apparently impregnable structures of modern civilization vanishing in an instant.

The key point to observe at this point in our examination is that, in the apparent war of independence which was supposed to be raging between humankind and Nature Lewis evaded partisan allegiance. It is difficult to over-emphasize the role which the symbol of the vortex played in Lewis's articulation of this idea: as both image and concept the vortex provided Lewis with a unique symbolic vehicle for his dualistic pattern of thinking. But it is also true to say that the image of the vortex itself — conceived as a whirlpool of energy converging on a central point — actually conditioned the outcome this pattern. The process of symbolic classification which was evolving in Lewis's paintings and writings between 1912 and 1914 is as receptive of the language of symbols as it is productive, the vortex effectively providing him with an interpretive model with which to explore the outcome of the various dualistic tensions which were preoccupying him at this time.

But as much as Lewis applied the literary to the visual, investing philosophical ideas in his paintings, he applied his compositional aesthetic to language itself in both its visual aspect and its conceptual and referential meaning. Observance of the symbiotic relation existing between the paintings and writings of Lewis's Vorticist creations has so far led us to observe how Lewis invested literary and philosophical concepts in the formal, symbolic arrangements of his paintings. We have seen clearly

[43] Lewis, 'Manifesto', in *BLAST,* p.39.

the sense in which the visual arts are a language for Lewis. Now we turn our attention to the sense in which language may itself be submitted to the logic of visual composition.

(iii) The Context of *BLAST*: The Philosophical Rationale for a Mobile Language and the 'Image' in Modernist Poetry

The composition and printing of *BLAST* is an event, which, like Lewis's own abstract technique in painting, cannot be properly understood without taking into account the wider context in which it emerged. The creative potential associated with language in the minds of writers, printers and philosophers at this time is important to clarify. In the first instance, the visual aspect of the written word was already a well-established field of creative experimentation among printers and typesetters, originating in what Jerome McGann has described as 'the late nineteenth-century's Renaissance of Printing'.[44] Competitive printing presses in all major European cities at this time were attuned to the increasing emphasis which writers, readers and, crucially, advances in technology placed on the formal qualities of a text.[45] The late nineteenth-century renaissance in printing constitutes a 'threshold event', as McGann describes it, when text and word cease to be conceived as secure and fixed carriers of meaning, when the formal, visual aspect of the writing comes to be treated as alive with signifying possibilities.[46] McGann in this way affirms Foucault's notion of an *epistemic* break, arguing 'that literature crossed a threshold when it began to be read not as a set of works but as a scene of writing'.[47]

This idea guides us towards a more philosophical aspect of the creative engagement with printing which was occurring in the early twentieth century. The 'problem of poetry's relation to its material encoding' grows out of a deeper problem which was then widely perceived to exist within language itself.[48] In 'On Truth and

[44] Jerome McGann, *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism* (Princeton University Press, 1993), p.41. McGann highlights the role played especially by Kelmscott and Bodley Head — two of the most significant British presses of the 1890s — in pioneering the communicative power of typography and page layout. 'Both', he writes, 'share the view that meaning invests a work at the level of its physical appearance and linguistic signifiers, but each has in mind a different range of signifieds […] the medievalism of Kelmscott does not correspond to the crisp aura of contemporaneity constructed by Bodley Head books' (p.12).
[45] Ibid., p.12.
[46] Ibid., p.40.
[47] Ibid., p.40.
[48] Ibid., p.45.

Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense' (1873) Nietzsche had expressed suspicion of the idea that an objectively verifiable and truth-apt 'natural' language was attainable, arguing instead that the categorical terms which 'the investigator' treats scientifically as 'pure objects' are really 'metaphors': '[h]e thus forgets that the original intuitive metaphors [of the language he has inherited for use] are indeed metaphors and takes them for things themselves'.[49] In this way Nietzsche highlighted the arbitrary nature of linguistic references and sketched out an understanding of language as a fluid pattern of metaphors rather than a fixed system of facts. This conception of language as an equivocal realm of human experience, half way 'between observation and wish-fulfilling dream', opened the door not only to Saussure's 'movement from a substantive way of thinking to a relational one' but to a radical new conception of the evolutionary significance and creative potential of language in the philosophy of Bergson.[50]

In *Creative Evolution* Bergson argued that the evolutionary function of language was to facilitate 'community of action', but he distinguished between the static and the dynamic potential of such organization.[51] The language of insect societies, for which there is undoubtedly community of action, he imagines to be 'based on instinct, and consequently […] more or less dependent on the forms of the organs', whereas human language is not determined or fixed by biological or material limits:[52]

> In human society, on the contrary, fabrication and action are of variable form, and, moreover, each individual must learn his part, because he is not preordained to it by his structure. So a language is required which makes it possible to be always passing from what is known to what is yet to be known. There must be a language whose signs — which cannot be infinite in number — are extensible to an infinity of things […] what characterizes the signs of human language is not so much their generality as their mobility. *The instinctive sign is* adherent, *the intelligent sign is* mobile.[53]

For Bergson, as this passage clarifies, language is an evolutionary tool which may lock a species further into its fixed biological niche of existence, but which may also, under certain circumstances, become a vehicle for a community's renewal and a species'

[49] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense', in *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*, trans. and ed. by Sander L. Gilman, Carole Blair and David J. Parent (Oxford University Press, 1989), pp.245-258 (p.253).
[50] Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, p.13
[51] Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p.157.
[52] Ibid., p.157.
[53] Ibid., p.158.

transcendence of all previous limits placed upon it by nature. The nature of language is determined by the extent to which its system of signs are closed or open, and the extent to which it reflects the community's orientation to the business of living.

What sets humankind apart from the animal world in Bergson's view is an aspirational impulse to break continually through evolutionary categories so that new heights may be reached. While insect and animal languages need only reflect a relatively simple range of instinctive operations in the service of mere preservation, human language may facilitate a continual passage from 'what is known to what is yet to be known'.[54] He writes:

> The collision of descending matter and ascending spirit is one short step away: […] in the animal, invention is never anything but a variation on the theme of routine. Shut up in the habits of the species, it succeeds, no doubt, in enlarging them by its individual initiative; but it escapes automatism only for an instant […] The gates of its prison close as soon as they are opened […] With man, consciousness breaks the chain. In man, and in man alone, it sets itself free. The whole history of life until man has been that of the effort of consciousness to raise matter, and of the more or less complete overwhelming of consciousness by the matter which has fallen back on it. The enterprise was paradoxical […] It was to create with matter, which is necessity itself, an instrument of freedom, to make a machine which should triumph over mechanism, and to use the determinism of nature to pass through the meshes of the net which this very determinism had spread.[55]

As this passage clarifies, language took on a double aspect and paradoxical status in Bergson's philosophical appraisal, as a medium of both material restraint and emancipation. To use T. S. Eliot's terminology in *The Waste Land* it is both the 'prison' and the 'key', analogous to a cell or cage which a prisoner may push in certain ways to achieve mobility, though which can never be entirely escaped.[56] Nevertheless, the transcendental potential which Bergson attached to language — the idea that the word can be made 'transferable and free' — inspired a generation of poets already steeped in the Symbolist philosophy of art and freshly equipped with new typographical

[54] Ibid., p.158.
[55] Ibid., p.264.
[56] I have adopted this terminology from the line: 'Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison' (Eliot, 'The Waste Land', p.43).

possibilities in printing.[57] As Henri Brémond commented in *La Poésie Pure* (1926), the philosophy of Bergson had helped a generation 'to identify pure poetry — (*la poésie pure*) — that poetry which goes further than the word which expresses it'.[58]

In his *Calligrammes* (1913-16) Guillaume Apollinaire made perhaps the most explicit attempt to create a kind of poetry which goes further than words (see Fig. 22). In these works, Apollinaire sought to loosen linguistic signs from their conventional structural grammar and thus make poetic language more mobile and suggestive. By assembling the typography of the poem into a visualization of its subject matter Apollinaire intended to create a kind of poetry which married form with content and thus depended as much on its visual aspect for meaning as it did the linguistic units of which it was composed. In this sense Apollinaire harks back to the formal and technical poetic innovations of Stéphane Mallarmé, whose 'wide-spaced typographical distribution of the words' in the poem 'Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard' were designed 'to secure "une vision simultanée de la page"', and thereby to challenge the reader to engage with 'the poem on different spatial and conceptual levels'.[59]

'Eyes on the Half-Shell' (Fig. 23), written by Apollinaire's American disciple Robert Carlton Brown and published by Marcel Duchamp's journal *The Blind Man* in 1917, offers a further glimpse into the way the image was being used in modernist poetry around this time. In this example of Brown's 'optical poetry' the eyeballs which punctuate the text function as visual signposts which guide the reader towards opposed orientations within the text, entangling the ego or 'I' in (or perhaps disentangling it from) a vertical relation with God. The sketched eyeballs are not decorative elements; they are to be read as linguistic signs on the same level as the words of the poem. In later life Brown described this early experiment as a break-through moment:

> I have since taken this for a symbol of what I have been trying to do in writing, off and on for fifteen years…I like to look at it, merely sit and look at it, take it all in without

[57] Bergson, *Creative Evolution,* p.159. The role played by Symbolism is also important. As Christopher Butler writes: 'Twentieth-century verse makes very few technical changes which go far beyond those to be found in the French Symbolist poetry of the nineteenth century, which had already experimented with free verse, typographical rearrangement, and an irrationalist association of ideas. Modernist poets had to come to terms with this earlier tradition, and in particular with the crisis it provoked concerning the poetic use of language, given Rimbaud's and Mallarmé's encouragement of the belief that poetry should devise a language which goes beyond the conventions of everyday speech' (Butler, *Early Modernism,* p.4).
[58] Quoted by Lewis in *Time and Western Man*, p.180.
[59] Butler, *Early Modernism,* p.5. In translation the poem is entitled 'A Throw of the Dice will Never Abolish Chance', the typography of which was supposed to secure 'a simultaneous vision of the page'.

> moving an eye. It gives me more than rhymed poetry. It rhymes in my eyes. Here are Black Riders for me at last galloping across a blank page.[60]

Nietszche's idea of 'truth' as 'a mobile army of metaphors' looms large in Brown's explanation here.[61] Words 'gallop' free of fixed significations, impressing an array of 'relational' meanings on the mind of the reader without ever conquering entirely the indeterminate and equivocal region symbolized by the blank page.

The key insight which Brown derived from Apollinaire's work on the *Calligrammes* was that the heightened communicability of the visual aspect of a poem 'does not at all require figural decorative ornaments', but rather the 'physical medium of any kind of textuality […] can be manipulated to the same effect', as McGann comments.[62] This is a subtle point, but one which is important to consider in relation to Lewis's work across two arts, for at the heart of the avant-garde experiment with visual language as it was conceived by both Apollinaire and Brown was a determination to move beyond the *ekphrastic* relation of two artistic mediums towards a new hybrid art, the essence of which would be a synthesis of the literary and the visual.

Imagism is arguably the most sophisticated attempt which modernist poetry made to attain a purer expressive language by means of a visual aesthetic programme. 'Les Imagistes' — the French form being used in early announcements of the group 'to underline a comparison with contemporary French post-symbolist movements, such as *unanimisme* and *impulsionnisme*', as Rebecca Beasley clarifies — appear to have formed around the spring of 1912 following T. E. Hulme's attendance at a philosophical conference in Bologna, at which he heard Bergson lecture on the relevance of 'the image' to modern ontology.[63] This aspect of Bergson's philosophy is given its most comprehensive discussion in *Matter and Memory* (1896), in which the image is treated in a similar way as the vortex, as a synthesizing device, which unites the percipient with the object of perception. In the image Bergson claimed to identify the 'common frontier' between realism and idealism, which he described in terms of 'an extended *continuum*' that is at one and the same time a 'virtual action of things upon our body

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[60] From *Readies For Bob Brown's Machine* (1931), quoted in Jerome McGann, *Black Riders*, p.85.
[61] Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense', p.251.
[62] McGann, *Black Riders*, p.85.
[63] Rebecca Beasley, *Theorists of Modernist Poetry: T.S Eliot, T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound* (London: Routledge, 2007), p.37; Peter Jones in his Introduction to *Imagist Poetry*, ed. by Peter Jones (London: Penguin, 2001), p.17.

and of our body upon [the] things [of] our perception'.[64] It should be noted that the synthesizing manoeuvre which the image facilitated in Bergson's philosophy is indicative of a wider philosophical trend in the modernist period to resolve dualistic tensions by blending opposed concepts or indicating their point of convergence, so that the traditional philosophical dualisms of spirit/matter, mind/body, subject/object, percipient/object of perception, could be overcome.[65]

Bergson's influence is readily observed in Imagist theory. His synthesized treatment of the 'real' and the 'ideal' became the first principle for Imagist poetry, as articulated by F. S. Flint: '1. Direct treatment of the "thing," whether subjective or objective'.[66] In 'A Few Don'ts By An Imagiste' Pound further described the key concept of the movement in decidedly Bergsonian terms: '[a]n "Image" is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time'.[67] The precise way in which this idea was supposed to be invoked in poetry can be clarified with reference to Pound's poem 'In a Station of the Metro' (1913), which can be seen in its original typography in Fig. 15.[68] The success of the poem, as Rebecca Beasley suggests, depends 'on a central metaphor: […] faces seen as petals'.[69] She makes the point that the effect of the poem 'is not cumulative, but sudden', occurring 'outside the words themselves', in the fusion of the poem's two central images which occurs in the reader's mind.[70]

To clarify the way the poem functions it is important to note the sense in which these two images originate in different ontological quarters of the poetic psyche, the faces entering the percipient's consciousness from the external world, while the petals

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[64] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), p.309.
[65] Phenomenology provides other relevant examples of this tendency. While Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger attempted to overcome the entrenched dualism of subject/object which had so long dominated epistemology by placing emphasis on the shared ground represented by the *phenomena*, 'the thing itself' of perception (see Dan Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology* (Stanford University Press, 2003)); Maurice Merleau-Ponty makes a more concerted effort to overcome the Cartesian dualism of mind/body by insisting 'that the human body is one reality which is at the same time material and spiritual' (Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy Vol.9: 19th and 20th Century French Philosophy* (New York: Continuum, 2003), p.400).
[66] F. S. Flint, 'Imagisme', in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse,* 1.6 (1913), pp.198-200 <http://library.brown.edu/pdfs/1201897921671875.pdf> [accessed 7 May 2015] p.199.
[67] Ezra Pound, 'A Few Don'ts By An Imagiste', in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse,* 1.6 (1913), pp.200-206 <http://library.brown.edu/pdfs/1201897921671875.pdf> [accessed 19 May 2015], p.200.
[68] Ezra Pound, 'In a Station of the Metro', in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse,* 2.1 (1913) <http://library.brown.edu/pdfs/1205845053374034.pdf> [accessed 19 May 2015], p.12.
[69] Beasley, *Theorists of Modernist Poetry*, p.39.
[70] Ibid., p.39.

emanate from the mind as it searches for some recognizable pattern in the scene with which it is presented. In a certain sense then, the two images move at variance to one another until, that is, they cross paths to become united in one 'intellectual and emotional complex', or '*continuum*' as Bergson would have put it. In this way Pound's poem is an eloquent expression of Bergson's idea, which uses the image as the common frontier of the percipient and the object of perception, the point at which a dynamic, creative subject organizes the impingements of the real world into meaningful patterns.

By the time he began editing the papers of the American philosopher Ernest Fenollosa in December 1913 Pound had one foot in the Imagist movement and the other tentatively planted in the group of artists who would become the Vorticists.[71] At this point Pound's interest in the image shifted from Bergson's theory towards the logographic system of Chinese and its visual vocabulary of pictograms, which Fenollosa had advocated as an effective medium for pure poetry. In 1919 Pound published Fenollosa's notes on 'The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry', in which the rationale for a purer imagistic dialect for expression clearly emerges:

> In reading Chinese we do not seem to be juggling mental counters, but to be watching *things* work out their own fate […] these ideographic roots carry in them a *verbal idea of action* […] examination shows that a large number of the primitive Chinese characters, even the so-called radicals, are shorthand pictures of actions and processes.[72]

As this important passage helps to indicate, part of the fascination with a mobile and active language in Pound's thought was associated with a desire to reunite the word and the thing in the world which the word denotes, and thus to reactivate the force of a mythic notion that the name was identical with the thing it named.[73] The image in this sense fuses the object's appearance with its essence and thus allows the poetic psyche closer access to a primordial unity.

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[71] This date is confirmed by Beasley in *Theorists of Modernist Poetry,* p.73.
[72] Ernest Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, ed. by Ezra Pound (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1968), p.9.
[73] A full account of this idea can be found in Robert C. Elliott's *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966).

When Pound turned away from Imagism 'toward the brighter sun' of Vorticism in 1914 he thus brought with him a philosophical conception of language which would certainly have challenged the stanchly dualistic Lewis.[74] Nevertheless, despite Lewis's distrust of the quest for unity which Pound had picked up from Bergson, some form of mutual exchange between the two clearly occurred, which had a lasting impact on the way literary modernism would come to be defined. In the first instance, Pound was confronted with a pressure to establish an artistic programme for the literary activities of what Lewis later described as 'purely a painters' affair'.[75] 'The critical terminology Pound developed during this time', as Rebecca Beasley comments:

> was immensely influential in placing a technical vocabulary deeply indebted to early twentieth-century art criticism at the heart of twentieth-century literary criticism. Without Pound's translation of terms between artistic fields, the most familiar characterisations of modernism, as, for example, 'a new era […] in which art turns from realism and humanistic representation towards style, technique, and spatial form', would have been literally unthinkable.[76]

An example of Pound's translation of terms can be found in his essay 'Vorticism' of September 1914. 'The image is the poet's pigment', he wrote, 'with that in mind you can go ahead and apply Kandinsky, you can transpose his chapter on the language of form and colour and apply it to the writing of verse'.[77] Pound's most obvious attempt to achieve this is his poem 'Dogmatic Statement on the Game and Play of Chess', published in *BLAST 2*.[78] In a letter to Harriet Monroe he wrote that 'The pictures proposed in the verse are pure vorticism'.[79]

Lewis, for his part, gained from his collaboration with Pound a crucial precedent for his own desire to attain some visual force in writing. The writing style which he adopted in Vorticism bears certain of the hallmark poetic innovations of Imagism.

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[74] Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism*, p.124.
[75] Lewis quoted in Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age,* p. 261.
[76] Rebecca Beasley, *Ezra Pound and the Visual Culture of Modernism* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.49.
[77] Ezra Pound, 'Vorticism', *Fortnightly Review*, 96 (1914), pp.461-471 <http://fortnightlyreview.co.uk/vorticism/> [accessed 16 November 2016].
[78] Pound, 'Dogmatic Statement on the Game and Play of Chess', in *BLAST 2*, p.19.
[79] Quoted in Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism*, p.127. We should also note that the poem may also qualify as an example of 'pure' structuralism: the idea that language was like a game of chess was one of Saussure's favourite metaphors, highlighting the sense in which it was a functional 'system' (Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, p.21).

Indeed, the principle underpinning Lewis's 'jagged prose' — the intention being 'to eliminate anything less essential than a noun or a verb', as Lewis commented in a letter to Hugh Kenner in 1953 — is obviously borrowed from the Imagist code: '[t]o use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation' (Flint) and to '[u]se no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something' (Pound).[80] But in other respects we may discern that Lewis's use of language in *BLAST* is a clear theoretic departure from Imagism.

(iv) 'White and Black are two elements': The Typography of *BLAST* and the Visual Language of Vorticism

While Pound had inherited from Fenollosa's theory of poetry 'the basis for a metaphysic' of 'things in motion, motion in things', Lewis preferred an aesthetic of stillness expressed in solid forms.[81] This can be viewed in the typography and layout of the text in *BLAST,* which is programmed to evoke a range of thoughts and associations in the mind of a reader well versed in the wider scene of avant-garde literary experiments.[82] But Lewis deployed a visual layout of text far removed from the fluidity of Symbolist typography and the modernist experiments of Apollinaire, Brown and Pound. The dense lettering of 'Grotesque 9' occupies the page in a way quite unlike other fonts that were popular at this time.[83] The text in the BLAST/BLESS sections and the Manifesto especially explode on the page in short volleys of discrete aphoristic units as if each expression of a thought in language were an immense strain requiring force and volume (conveyed by the frequent capitalization of words) to overcome the resistant silence of the white page. The units of text have the solidity of engravings on a stone tablet, reflecting the characteristic 'qualities of sculpture' of Vorticist design.[84]

Lewis's technique of solidity can also be found in the prose style which he developed in *Enemy of the Stars*, which, as Dasenbrock comments, is counterposed to Pound's celebration of the moving image, being essentially a style which 'cannot move

[80] *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, ed. by W. K. Rose (London: Methuen, 1963), p.553; Flint, 'Imagisme', p.199; Pound, 'A Few Don'ts By An Imagiste', p.201.
[81] Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism*, p.128; Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, p.10.
[82] McGann, *Black Riders,* p.45.
[83] Alan Munton, personal communication.
[84] Pound cited in Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age,* p.119.

at all'.[85] With sentences built out of 'a series of ambiguously connected phrases' Lewis presents a language which 'is static and immobile'.[86] *Enemy* demonstrates particularly Lewis's scorn for Pound's advice to '[g]o in fear of abstractions'.[87] As he comments in *Rude Assignment,* his Vorticist play was precisely an attempt to transform 'words and syntax […] into abstract terms' along similar lines to his paintings of this time, and thereby to show his literary contemporaries — whom he 'looked upon as too bookish and not keeping pace with the visual revolution' — the way.[88] In *Enemy*, as Edwards writes,

> Lewis's sentences, or assemblages of non-finite phrases, are reluctant to transmit the messages they are charged with, and the experience of reading the text is a frustrating accumulation of blocks of resistant ideas and imagery, all finally discharged in unsatisfying violence as the play reaches its climax of murder and suicide.[89]

Certainly the complexity of the piece cannot link it in any way to the guiding principles of Imagism, and the care which Imagist poets had for clarity. We ought to spare a thought for the 'puzzled and bewildered typist' with whom Lewis and Jessica Dismorr spent mornings during the spring of 1914 at the Rebel Art Centre 'trying to translate *Blast*'.[90]

For Dasenbrock, Lewis adopts the 'same attributes' of 'deadness and immobility' in *Enemy* that he criticized in Cubist painting.[91] Dasenbrock goes as far as to suggest that Lewis 'deliberately botched' the narrative, his sole interest in writing *Enemy* being to 'gesture' towards the possibility of abstraction in prose.[92] It certainly appears to have been a deliberate attempt 'to identify the feature of writing that was equivalent to representation in painting' and eliminate it, making the text inevitably immobile and disjointed.[93] But there is a deeper strategy behind this 'botched' attempt at literary abstraction which ought to be acknowledged. The lack of mobility in Lewis's use of language is clearly designed to reflect an alternative to Bergson's theory, being

[85] Dasenbrock, *The Literary Vorticism of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis,* p.131.
[86] Ibid., p.131.
[87] Pound, 'A Few Don'ts By An Imagiste', p.131.
[88] *Rude Assignment*, p.139.
[89] Edwards, *Painter and Writer*, p.142.
[90] This episode is related in an interview with Kate Lechmere and quoted in Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age,* p.232.
[91] Dasenbrock, *The Literary Vorticism of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis*, p.131.
[92] Ibid., p.133.
[93] Ibid., p.129-130.

more suggestive of the restrictive mechanism in which human beings are tangled than the possibility of expressive emancipation.

But more specifically Lewis's discordant text renounces Pound's Imagistic ideals, programmatically mixing 'abstraction[s] with the concrete', as in the description of Arghol as he 'LIES LIKE HUMAN STRATA OF INFERNAL BIOLOGIES' and then 'SITS LIKE A GOD BUILT BY AN ARCHITECTURAL STREAM, FECUNDED BY MAD BLASTS [of] SUNLIGHT'.[94] In the language of *Enemy* Lewis opposes Pound's idea that 'the natural object is always the *adequate* symbol', communicating instead the sense in which the *symbol* is 'an expression of man's urge to speculate in metaphysical terms' which points 'past the physical world to "something that moves beyond the senses"'.[95] Lewis takes care to wrench his symbols apart from nature, offering an arbitrary and artificial use of language with which to oppose the naturalism implied in Pound's Imagist principles. As Fredric Jameson writes: 'the doctrine of the arbitrariness of the sign eliminates the myth of a natural language'.[96]

The idea that Lewis was adhering to a doctrine of arbitrariness in his use of language in *BLAST* is highly revealing. While this is clearly an active element in his expressive prose style in *Enemy* it can also, once again, be observed in the typographical design of *BLAST*. Jodie Greenwood has shown how the 'lack of conventional syntax and explanatory diction' coupled with the overall 'sensationalism' of the language 'has parallels with the language of advertising, which also relies on provoking a powerful and sometimes ambiguous response with an economy of words'.[97] She makes the important point that 'the advertisers' use of typography was relatively arbitrary, working primarily to attract the eye and to engage the emotions' and contrasted sharply with the experimental 'employment of typography' of Lewis's contemporaries which 'was very much tied up with content; italics and bold type [being] used in the suggestion of meaning'.[98] Thus Lewis's adoption of the 'arbitrary' typographical designs deployed in advertising perhaps becomes explicable as an attempt

[94] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, p.61.
[95] Pound, 'A Few Don'ts By An Imagiste', p.201; A. De Ruijter, Review of *Symbolic Classification* by Rodney Needham, in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 136.1 (1980), pp.171-173 < http://www.jstor.org/stable/27863294> [accessed 6 October 2016], p.171; Levenson quoting from W. B. Yeats's *Ideas of Good and Evil* (1903) in *A Genealogy of Modernism*, p.110.
[96] Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language,* p.31.
[97] Greenwood, 'The Crisis of the System', p.89.
[98] Ibid., p.90.

to evade the kind of fusion of form and content which was present in many modernist experiments in poetry.

It may, in light of this, appear ironic that by attaining an aesthetic of solidity and adhering closely to a doctrine of arbitrariness in both the formal layout of the text and his prose style, Lewis does marry form with content to a compelling degree. But we should note that this occurs in a way which stands fundamentally opposed to the tendency towards naturalism which he perceived among his contemporaries: far from wishing his language to connect with any natural image and thus to lure the reader towards the 'common frontier' which it shares with the external world, Lewis used both form and content — the outside and the inside of a text — to reinstate a separation between language and nature, subject and object. 'White and Black are two elements' he wrote in 'Notes on Some German Woodcuts', giving voice to the sense in which language and culture (represented by the black ink of the printed text or image) is a human imposition on the blank, white void of nature.[99]

In *BLAST* the stark, mechanical units of black text as much as the complex and artificial symbolism of *Enemy* serve ultimately to wrench language apart from nature, placing it firmly back in the domain of the creative human subject, who thereby exerts the power to manipulate linguistic forms and meanings. While Apollinaire, Brown and Pound had offered their poetry as a sort of devotion to the natural image, Lewis refused to give any hand outs to nature. As he explained in 'Prevalent Design': 'Work done "from Nature," and work done "out of your head": those are the extreme rough figures of this conflict'.[100] In his textual experiments as well as his paintings during the Vorticist period Lewis leaves us in no doubt that he worshipped at the 'altar' of 'the 'Monster of Design', while his contemporaries crowded towards the cult of 'Monster Nature'.[101]

His quest for a more abstract and arbitrary kind of language in which to communicate ultimately reflects Lewis's conception of the artist as a visionary creative force. His textual experiments in *BLAST* place emphasis on the artist's dynamic 'power to create signs' above the more passive kind of 'specialized skill or endowment which is

[99] Lewis, 'Note on Some German Woodcuts at the Twenty-One Gallery', in *BLAST*, p.136.
[100] Wyndham Lewis, 'Prevalent Design', in *Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change: Essays on Art, Literature and Society 1914-1956*, ed. by Paul Edwards (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989), pp.50-60 (p.51).
[101] Ibid., p.50.

the power to speak' within a natural language.[102] Lewis's distinction between the 'man of his word' and the 'man of words' in 'Physics of the Not-Self' demonstrates a certain degree of reflection on this idea:

> *The former* man is the man you respect — whose 'word,' you know, is worthy of credence, and probably 'as good as his bond.' He is the 'man of his word.' His word is *his own* word. The other man's 'word' might be anybody's!
> The latter man, you would say, is a 'man of words.' But the former securely possesses, as a lightly-held property, the tame word, which obediently represents the man and his interests. The latter (the 'man of words') is a slave, the former (the 'man of his word') is a free-man. The latter is afraid of a 'word': the former is not afraid of any 'word.' One would sacrifice himself to a mere 'word,' the other would see any 'word' hanged first. The latter is the man you will instinctively *trust*.[103]

The conception of language which Lewis presents here bears a striking affinity with Bergson's description of language as a 'paradoxical enterprise' in *Creative Evolution*: 'an instrument of freedom' which may be used to 'triumph over mechanism', yet one which is itself a 'machine', the overall procedure being 'to use the determinism of nature to pass through the meshes of the net which this very determinism had spread'.[104] The passage communicates the idea that each instance in which language is used is a battle for control between the 'man' and the 'word'. The implied conclusion to which this passage leads us is in tune with Bergson: freedom is attainable by means of a kind linguistic mastery through which the self imposes its intention on language, displaying the creative power to create signs which convey the desired meaning. The man of his word is the master of language, the man of words a mere slave.

Yet we must not overlook the heavy irony with which this passage is laden. The man of his word may appear at once 'the *truthfuller* of the two' in a court of law, giving 'frankly and freely' his answer 'without hesitation', but this is because he is enslaved to an over-simplistic and inept relationship with language, believing it to be a stable and coherent system of signs.[105] He is — in his confident assumption that there exists an essential connection between the linguistic sign and the 'real thing' to which it refers —

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[102] Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language* p.31.
[103] Wyndham Lewis, 'Physics of the Not-Self', in *Collected Poems and Plays*, ed. by Alan Munton (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2003), pp.193-204 (p.197).
[104] Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p.264.
[105] 'Physics of the Not-Self', p.197.

a naïve adherent to linguistic naturalism. His mistake, as Nietzsche tells us, is 'to hold man up as the measure of all things'.[106] The man of words, on the other hand, reflects the 'slippery, metaphorical characterization of language' in Nietzsche's philosophy.[107] He is far more cautious in his conduct with words, knowing only too well the caprice of a language formed out of 'metaphors' which have been mistaken 'for things themselves'.[108]

Thus the man of his word is truly a fool, for he believes himself to be free; the man of words is wise, on the other hand, for he knows only too well the danger of enslavement to language and must start all his activities in acceptance of this fact. With reference to the epigraph which I have used for this thesis, the distinction may be put another way: one type of human being lives in the knowledge '[t]hat we are eternal miners, lashed in the clumsy process of learning by the retribution that awaits our mistakes' while another is found perpetually 'dreaming, steeped in transcendental values that transform the mechanical basis of our life into a fairyland'.[109] For Lewis — who commented elsewhere that 'we are surface-creatures only and […] committed to a plurality of being' — the creative freedom of the human subject is found within the mechanism of language, not, as Bergson and his modernist disciples would suggest, in the transcendence of this mechanism.[110]

Nevertheless, the influence of Bergson on Lewis's conception of language in *BLAST* is important to observe. Certainly Lewis appears to have focused more heavily on the Bergsonian paradox of language than his contemporaries. In the first instance Lewis appears to dramatize the Bergsonian dualism, with the expressive surge of vital ideas encountering the resistance of the printed word in which meaning is habitually caged. The typography and page-layout of *BLAST* is designed to represent the battle which rages between 'man' and 'words' for control over meaning, the solid word-units representing the downward motion of matter which at every stage of its descent constrains the intended meaning of the subject's expression. In *BLAST* we encounter no 'Black Riders galloping across the page', but rather something more akin to a detachment of jet-black tanks approaching across an arctic waste.

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[106] Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense', p.253.
[107] Butler, *Early Modernism,* p.9.
[108] Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense', p.253.
[109] 'The Anonymity of Perfection', p.166.
[110] *Time and Western Man,* p 377-8.

As Paul Edwards has shown, Lewis made use of Bergson's theory of language in 'The Death of the Ankou' to highlight a distinction between the 'one-dimensional world of Ludo […] and the multi-dimensional world of Ker-Orr'.[111] Ker-Orr thus represents an important aspect of Bergson's theory of a mobile language, namely 'the ability of the totally emancipated person to escape from the determinism of customary sign-systems, to live what Ker-Orr calls a "joke-life"', setting himself up — in Edwards' view — as a 'trickster' who manipulates the sign-systems to which others are adherent.[112] Thus, though he may have disagreed strongly with the transcendent evolutionary possibilities which Bergson attached to a language of mobile signs, Lewis certainly entertained the idea that a certain amount of power could be gained by those who are emancipated from a naturalistic, deterministic conception of sign-systems.

The figure of the trickster is highly relevant to Lewis's activities in *BLAST*. In *Enemy* — a work which extends the dialogue which we have observed between Lewis's paintings and writings — this sinister aspect to linguistic control which is found in the relationship between Ludo and Ker-Orr once again comes into focus, as the play-text forms a horizon in which human life goes on, but a horizon which actively surrounds and imprisons its 'condemned protagonist'.[113] Language is here made to function as a deterministic net in which the speaker is trapped. The paradoxical attributes of language which Lewis discussed in 'Physics of the Not-Self' — an essay which he described as a 'metaphysical commentary' on his 1914 play — come out in a startling detail in *Enemy of the Stars* in the form of a dynamic conflict.[114] The empowered man of words, loosening himself from the deterministic mechanism of language with the knowledge that it is a mechanism, comes to hold a magical, 'authorial' power over language. He is shown to determine the reality of others, forcing the naïve man of his word to submit to the narrative mechanism within which he exists, shutting his victim into 'the prison-house of language', to borrow a phrase from Jameson's reading of Nietzsche's aphorism 522 in *The Will to Power*.[115] Lewis's formal use of language in *BLAST* is thus tied to the central theme of his 1914 play, as we shall observe in more detail in the next chapter.[116]

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[111] Edwards, 'Wyndham Lewis's Narrative of Origins', p.30.
[112] Ibid., p.30.
[113] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, p.61.
[114] 'Physics of the Not-Self', p.195.
[115] In the translation by Kaufmann and Hollingdale the passage reads as '*We cease to think when we refuse to do so under the constraint of language*; we barely reach the doubt that sees this limitation as a limitation' (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, ed. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p.283). The replacement of 'constraint of language' for 'prison house of language' is apparently due to Eric Heller, with Jameson later adopting

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In this chapter we have observed how the move into abstraction was for Lewis a process guided at every stage by the symbolic classifications which his creative experiments generated, the earlier consolidation of certain 'pattern-units' gradually being invested into the larger scale pattern of thinking which runs through his mature Vorticist paintings and writings.[117] My use of the term 'symbolic classification' here deserves some clarification, for it serves to clarify the central claim of the thesis: that myth plays an important role in Lewis's Vorticist pattern of thinking. 'Symbolic classification' is a term coined by the British anthropologist Rodney Needham, which he derived from his reading of Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss's *Primitive Classification* (1903).[118] It originates in a distinction between 'practical schemes of distinctions' which pertain to the easily categorizable aspects of reality which are susceptible to human control (these Durkheim and Mauss termed 'technological') and the realm of classifications which serve to extend human knowledge into the ineffable aspects of reality (these are moral or religious in nature and termed 'symbolic' by Durkheim and Mauss).[119]

The application of this anthropological concept to the creative products of Lewis's Vorticist period has a twofold function here. On the one hand, it provides a concrete demonstration of Lewis's idea of the artist as a visionary go-between, with one foot in the natural and the other in supernatural realm. In Lewis's case the traditional mythical and religious dualism of spirit and matter is used to map the uncharted metaphysical regions of the world far beyond the surface of human existence, yielding, in the end, a mythical narrative concerning the altered situation of humankind in the modern world. The first function of analysing his early works as pertaining to a process

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this version for the title of his book <http://lists.project-wombat.org/pipermail/project-wombat-project-wombat.org/2011-December/006975.html> [accessed 5 February 2016].

[116] Toby Foshay provides support for this in his suggestion 'that *Enemy of the Stars*, far from a mere stylistic or "gestural" tour de force (Dasenbrock 135), is a work of formidable thematic substance, and further that the thematic content of the play is a shaping force behind the experimental form of the text' ('Wyndham Lewis's Vorticist Metaphysic', in *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 24.2 (1993), pp.45-63 (p.45)).

[117] Pound, 'Affirmations IV. As for Imagisme', p.349.

[118] See Rodney Needham's *Symbolic Classification* (Santa Monica: Goodyear Publishing, 1979).

[119] Rodney Needham in his Introduction to Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, *Primitive Classification,* trans. and ed. by Rodney Needham (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009), p.x.

of symbolic classification is thus to indicate how Lewis was engaged in mythopoeia in his Vorticist paintings and writings.

On the other hand, by using anthropological concepts to inform my method of analysis here I do not simply want to suggest that Lewis created a myth. I also wish to highlight the paradoxical sense in which this is a myth which itself grew out of anthropological sources: a myth formed out its own rational disclosure, in a certain sense. It is important to recognize the sense in which modernism and the emerging discipline of anthropology grew up together during the first two decades of the twentieth century to clarify this point. Anthropological texts were widely read among modernist artists and writers, providing them with a rich source of exotic narratives and themes derived from myth and ritual.[120] 'The mutually influential relations of literature and anthropology' during this time, as Michael Bell has suggested, 'provided ways of reading literature which suggested that its most profound level of significance was as a form of myth'.[121] In Lewis's early pattern of thinking we find one clear instance of the way in which modernism deployed anthropological sources in order to attain the themes and structures of myth in their own creative works.

It is unclear how far Lewis's research at this stage in his career took him into the emerging field of anthropology. Numerous anthropological texts published during or before Vorticism can be found in Lewis's library and in the index of *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926).[122] Bernard Lafourcade has suggested that at the time of writing 'Les Saltimbanques' (at some point between August 1908 and August 1909) Lewis 'must have been acquainted in some way or other with the work of Durkheim and Frazer, and

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[120] John B. Vickery's *The Literary Impact of 'The Golden Bough'* (Princeton University Press, 1973) presents a convincing portrait of James Frazer's influence on literary modernism. Emile Durkheim — whose book *The Elementary Forms of Religion* was reviewed by T. S. Eliot in the Westminster Gazette in August 1916 — and Marcel Mauss also played a significant role in shaping modernist ideas, highlighting especially the close relation between 'civilized' and 'primitive' social and religious functions in a way that had clear relevance to modernism's critique of modern civilization. In particular, for Mauss and a generation of French intellectuals, the Dreyfus affair which shook French politics in the last decade of the nineteenth century was proof that 'the general schema of sacrifice — its grammar', as Marcel Fournier writes, was alive and well in technologically advanced modern societies (Marcel Fournier, *Marcel Mauss: A Biography*, (Princeton University Press, 2006), p.75).

[121] Bell, 'Primitivism: Modernism as Anthropology', p.366.

[122] Lewis's personal library is now stored at the Harry Ransom Centre Book Collection at the University of Texas, Austin. This includes certain anthropological texts which were published during or before Vorticism, in particular: Isaac Taylor, *The Origin of the Aryans: An Account of the Prehistoric Ethnology and Civilization of Europe* (London: W. Scott, 1889) and F. B. Jevons, *The Idea of God in Early Religions* (Cambridge University Press, 1913) <http://catalog.lib.utexas.edu/search> [accessed 17 November 2016]. Works by Vladimir Bogoraz and Maria Czaplicka (both of whom were publishing their research into the belief systems of Siberian tribes during the 1900s and 1910s) are found in the index of *The Art of Being Ruled*.

possibly with that of Levy-Bruhl and Van Gennep, all part and parcel of the new Zeitgeist'.[123] Victor Barac (2008) has extended this claim to suggest that Lewis's oft-quoted comment in *Rude Assignment* that '[w]hat I started to do in Brittany I have been developing ever since' may be linked to the ethnographical strain of thinking which seems to have propelled his writings from first to last.[124]

Certainly Lewis's creative works in the five or so years leading up to Vorticism indicate the development of a complex and sophisticated process of dualistic symbolic classification which reflects the influence of anthropological research. But with Lewis this appropriation of mythic themes from anthropological texts did not occur unreflectively. One of the central concerns in his works at this time is to understand the ironic status which myth has in the modernist psyche. Few other modernists at this time acknowledged that the 'myth' which they had pinned all their hopes on, as a vehicle of liberation from the rational excesses of the modern world, possessed only the residue of its original force, after passing through the logical dissections of anthropology. We shall observe this in more detail in the following chapter.

[123] Lafourcade, Introduction to 'Les Saltimbanques', p.236. 'Les Saltimbanques' is set in the Bretton town of Quimperlé, where Lewis stayed with his mother in August 1908 (O'Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius,* p.88). It was published a year later in the August issue of *The English Review* (1909), so must have been written at some point between these dates (Lafourcade in his introductory note to 'Les Saltimbanques', p.236).
[124] Barac, 'The Anthropology of Wyndham Lewis', pp.36-43.

Chapter 4

Immoral Theatre:

'Savage Worship' in *Enemy of the Stars*

Enemy of the Stars emerged in 1914 as the earliest work of Expressionist drama in Britain and arguably the first to be written in the English language. Paul Edwards has suggested that 'the closest equivalent […] is to be found in such proto-Expressionist works as [Oskar] Kokoschka's 1907 *Murder, Hope of Women*' and we ought not to discount the further possibility that Lewis wrote *Enemy* with some knowledge of August Strindberg's 'The Dream Play' (1901), a work widely acknowledged as the first Expressionist drama.[1] Most obviously the play's theme developed as a riposte to Marinetti's narrative poem of 1902 *The Conquest of the Stars,* and his bold declaration in 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism' that:

> An immense pride was buoying us up, because we felt ourselves alone at that hour, alone, awake, and on our feet, like proud beacons or forward sentries against an army of hostile stars glaring down at us from their celestial encampments.[2]

In *Enemy* the same Gnostic-inspired conflict between the human soul (the 'pneuma') and the guardians of the material universe (the 'Archons', associated in Gnostic thought with the stars) is used to characterize the human condition in the modern world, with Marinetti's optimism being reversed by a strain of pessimism about the human

[1] Edwards, *Painter and Writer,* p.142. Strindberg's play was published in Sweden in 1901, first performed in Stockholm in 1907 and published in English translation by Edwin Björkman in 1912, becoming available in London around the same time Lewis was decorating the nightclub of Strindberg's second wife Frida, 'The Cave of the Golden Calf' just off Regent Street (Meyers, *The Enemy*, p.334). There is thus a strong possibility that Lewis became aware of Strindberg's play around this time. Certainly by the time of writing *BLAST* Lewis had a comprehensive knowledge of Strindberg's life and works, commenting particularly on 'his hysterical and puissant autobiographies, life-long tragic coquetry with Magic, [and] extensive probing of female flesh and spirit' ('Futurism, Magic and Life', *BLAST*, p.132).

[2] Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism', p.19.

condition which Lewis derived particularly from Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*, a work which lies at the heart of much of Lewis's thinking during this period.[3]

As much as the style and central theme of *Enemy* grow out of historic and contemporary literary sources, however, the play clearly also grows more directly out of Lewis's own earlier works. Certainly the text appears to have been used as a test bed for ideas put forward in his critical and philosophical prose. It is also highly expressive of the conceptual tensions which we have observed in Lewis's paintings of this period. My central claim here is that, during the intense period of creativity which resulted in the publication of *BLAST*, *Enemy* is the key text, which functions rather as the central scripture to which Lewis's paintings relate as mandalas or talismanic images; a text in which Lewis gathered all the symbols, themes and theoretic tensions which his works had gathered over the years and recast them for the first time into a comprehensive narrative. In this sense *Enemy* represents Lewis's deepest engagement with myth during the Vorticist period, which elaborates a more complete vision of the human situation in the modern world than we have so far discovered in Lewis's works.

This chapter thus brings together a series of themes which have grown out of the earlier chapters and returns us to the mouth of the cave where we began the study. In *Enemy* we once again witness a 'paradoxical encounter' between two opposed worldviews.[4] The text is built around the dualistic distinction between *mythos* and *logos* that Lewis inherited from Nietzsche; setting the transcendent mythical consciousness in conflict with its rational, modern counterpart; constructing and derailing myth in equal measure. In this chapter I aim to analyse this complex and revealing conflict in more detail than before, observing the sense in which *Enemy* qualifies both as Lewis's deepest engagement with myth and as a key critical reflection upon the inability of modern art to attain its longed-for mythical home. I shall begin by observing the way in which *Enemy* joins up with the 'pattern-units' which were being developed in earlier works. Only then will we be in a position to characterize and treat the full mythic structure which Lewis's narrative presents and programmatically derails.

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[3] It is relevant to note that the English Vorticists and the Russian Futurists each presented a dramatic response to Marinetti's Gnostic rebellion, with the pessimism of *Enemy of the Stars* (1914) finding a significant thematic mirror in *Victory Over the Sun* (1913), a play that extends Marinetti's optimism about machine-age man's possibilities of transcendence. These connections are laid out by Edwards in *Painter and Writer*, p.144.

[4] Lafourcade, in his brief introduction to 'The Death of the Ankou', p.106.

(i) Tracing the Thematic Elements of *Enemy of the Stars* in Lewis's Earlier Works

Our observation of the development of Lewis's visual and literary works up to the publication of *BLAST* in 1914 has led us to a vantage point from which certain thematic elements of *Enemy* can immediately be understood. The text, we discover, is in constant dialogue with Lewis's other works, allowing us to analyse the overall pattern of thinking which Lewis's Vorticist works elaborate for the first time. Here I'd like to focus particularly on the way in which the text develops the existing narrative concerning the overlapping dualistic conflicts between subject and object, self and world, spirit and matter, which we have observed in earlier works. The way in which the scene is set is highly revealing of the text's activities in this respect.

The dramatic action of *Enemy* takes place where '[t]he Earth has burst, a granite flower, and disclosed the scene'.[5] This line appears to refer directly to *Figure Holding a Flower* (1912; Fig. 8) and identifies the situation of the drama as the point at which the two opposed metaphysical elements of spirit and matter converge. It is the site of Bergson's evolutionary 'vortex' in which 'life […] will appear as a wave which rises, and which is opposed by the descending movement of matter'.[6] The 'STAGE ARRANGEMENTS' also convey the sense in which this scene is cut out of the same primordial rock face as Ludo's ramshackle home in the mouth of the cave.[7] The 'CHARACTERS TAK[E] UP THEIR POSITION AT OPENING OF SHAFT LEADING DOWN INTO MIMES QUARTERS', a site of colliding energies where 'A GUST, SUCH AS IS MET IN THE CORRIDOORS OF THE TUBE', makes the characters' 'CLOTHES SHIVER OR FLAP'.[8] It is Lewis's earliest literary application to the mouth of the cave as a metaphorical space within which to explore the two trajectories entailed in Bergson's evolutionary hypothesis.

The tension which this evokes between upward and downward pressures chimes with Lewis's earlier visual works of around 1912 — *The Starry Sky* or *Two Women* (1912), *Man and Woman* (1912) and of course *Figure Holding a Flower* (1912) —

[5] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, p.62.
[6] Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p.269.
[7] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, p.60.
[8] Ibid., p.60.

which may assist the reader's imagination of the scene.[9] We have a concrete example then of Lewis's claim in 'Beginning' that the 'waste product of every painting' — the 'discarded matter' of what Lewis felt he '*had to keep out of* [his] *consciousness while painting*' — 'makes the most highly selective and ideal material for the pure writer'.[10] In imagining the scene of *Enemy* Lewis effectively translated and reinvested his earlier visualizations of the Bergsonian dualism into literary terms in order to further explore the human being's susceptibility to slip from their advanced positions in the evolutionary scale and merge with inanimate scene which surrounds them, becoming at one with matter.

From the arrangement of the scene we know that the characters will ultimately face one of two destinies: either swelling in self, or spirit, sufficiently to liberate themselves from the closed domain of matter, or slumping to become immersed in the bedrock from which they originally 'emerged'.[11] As in 'The Ankou', this is a matter ultimately to be decided by the characters' ability to emancipate themselves from a deterministic sign-system and so to gain the power of self-determination. In the case of both *Enemy* and 'The Ankou', however, the destiny of the 'CONDEMNED PROTAGONIST' is already written in the fatalistic mythic narrative by which they are bound.[12] The description of Arghol, in the first line of the play-text, as being 'IN IMMENSE COLLAPSE OF CHRONIC PHILOSOPHY' leaves us in little doubt that he possesses the kind of consciousness which will tend to constrain rather than liberate him from his unfortunate situation.[13] His 'instrument of thought, [is] too heavy' to facilitate his bid for freedom.[14]

It is thematically relevant then that the physical appearance of both Arghol and Ludo is described as being inanimate. Ker-Orr's observation that 'Ludo's face […] was *blind*', carrying 'its own life with the outer world' and 'no longer serving to secrete thought any more than the foot', finds close equivalence to the description of Arghol as being 'CENTRAL AS STONE' and lying 'LIKE HUMAN STRATA OF INFERNAL

[9] Wyndham Lewis, *The Starry Sky* or *Two Women*, 1912, pencil, pen and ink, gouache and collage on paper, 48 × 62.5 cm, Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre; *Man and Woman*, 1912, chalk, pen and ink, wash and gouache on paper, 36 × 26 cm, Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust, G. and V. Lane Collection.
[10] 'Beginning', p.266.
[11] At the start of the text we are informed that 'CHARACTERS AND PROPERTIES BOTH EMERGE FROM GANGWAY INTO GROUND AT ONE SIDE' ('Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* p.59).
[12] Ibid., p.61.
[13] Ibid., p.59.
[14] Ibid., p.74.

BIOLOGIES', 'his hands a thick shell fitting back of head, his face grey vegetable cave'.[15] These visual descriptions of the outside of these characters are designed to reflect their inner makeup. The logic of this is expressed by Ker-Orr in 'The Ankou', who speculates while examining the rugged facial features of Ludo whether 'to be lost *outside* is much the same as to be hidden in the dark *within*'.[16] In *Enemy* a similar idea is expressed in Arghol's description of his 'unpleasant' destiny:

> I must live, like a tree, where I grow. An inch to left or right would be too much. In the town I felt unrighteous in escaping blows, home anger, destiny of here. Selfishness, flouting of destiny, to step so much as an inch out of the bull's eye of your birth. (When it is obviously a bull's eye!)
> A visionary tree, not migratory: visions from within.[17]

As this passage conveys, the attribution of a solid, inanimate exterior correlates with the fixed, deterministic psychology of the character: believing himself to be fixed to a certain destiny, Arghol, like Ludo, pinions himself to a fixed biological niche in existence, so that the person becomes the existential equivalent of a 'tree'.[18]

But there is another aspect to this passage which is important to observe. While he resolutely fixes himself to his life's destiny Arghol identifies a subjective source of freedom in 'visions from within'. As it is with Ludo, for Arghol the two attributes appear to be correlates of one another: losing one's ability to engage creatively with the external world and thereby becoming 'lost *outside*' entails at the same time a fatal inward turn, the subject effectively becoming 'hidden in the dark *within*'.[19] Like Ludo

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[15] 'The Death of the Ankou', p.113; Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* pp.61, 65.
[16] 'The Death of the Ankou', p.113.
[17] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* p.68.
[18] This episode, we should note, is closely related to an idea expressed by Bergson in *Creative Evolution*: 'a tree never grows old, since the tips of its branches are always equally young, always equally capable of engendering new trees by budding. But in such an organism […] *something* ages, if only the leaves and the interior of the trunk' (p.16). Lewis annotated the following comment in the margin next to this passage in his own copy of *Creative Evolution* during the 1920s: 'The TREE | [drawing of 5 concentric circles] | interesting comparison | with life of a man. | If all his life grew & | grew, like a snowball, | dead inside, live only at the surface, till it | filled universe like | the swelling circular | expanding surface of tree' (Paul Edwards's transcription; personal communication. Harry Ransom Centre Book Collection at the University of Texas, Austin). The dialogue which this marginal note opens with Bergson's idea is highly revealing of Lewis's philosophical temperament, since he places emphasis on the 'swelling' deadness at the interior of the trunk above the perpetual youth of the buds. Although the note originates in the 1920s it illuminates the meaning of Arghol's claim to be 'a visionary tree', since his adherence to destiny connotes a state of non-adaption which leaves him figuratively dead inside ('Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, p.68).
[19] 'The Death of the Ankou', p.113.

he is blind, albeit in figurative sense; so enraptured by mythic visions of transcendence that he cannot any longer engage rationally with the external world.

Both characters thus experience a personal collapse of the subject/object dualism in a way that calls to mind Lewis's painting of 1912 *The Vorticist* (Fig. 10), for in this figure also the intensification of one element in this dualistic tension is shown to carry a corresponding intensification of the other; as he withdraws further into a hermetically sealed recess of subjectivity he falls victim to a materializing pressure which freezes him into a static and lifeless situation. Arghol, Ludo and the figure in *The Vorticist* all qualify as archetypal specimens of a tragically transformed (or perhaps it is more accurate to say *de*formed) humanity in Lewis's pattern of thinking, poised at 'the world's brink' and battered by 'thought heavy as a meteorite'.[20] In *Enemy,* however, we find a closer analysis of this traumatic tug-of-war between self and world than anywhere else in Lewis's early works.

Roughly split into the two sections of dialogue and dream, the narrative structure of Lewis's play demonstrates this tug-of-war clearly. In the first part of the play in the 'wheelwright's yard', self is depicted on an ascending trajectory.[21] During this phase of the narrative Arghol occupies a relatively stable, worldly position in his dialogues with Hanp. The turning point of the narrative occurs at page 76, where, following his fight with Hanp, a different order takes over, as 'a dream began valuing, with its tentative symbols, preceding events'.[22] From this point on Arghol withdraws from the real-world stage of action into a 'dream' of his life in the city. Withdrawing into himself in this way, Arghol's commanding grip over the direction of the narrative is loosened, the ascending trajectory of self is disrupted by a descending movement and he becomes effectively powerless in his own story. The textual shift which occurs here from dialogue to narration, from present to past, from real-world action and dialogue to dream, forms the most significant dramatic node in the play, making all other sectional distinctions somewhat irrelevant.

Charlotte de Mille has recently suggested that *Enemy* emerges as Lewis's engagement with the vitalist philosophy of Henri Bergson deepened 'to encompass the psychological and societal affects of the condition of degradation'.[23] For de Mille this is seen especially in 'Arghol's battle against the communal tendencies of his

[20] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* p.70.
[21] Ibid., p.62.
[22] Ibid., p.76.
[23] de Mille, '"Blast … Bergson?"', p.144.

consciousness', represented by Hanp, and the sense in which 'his attempt to define his own identity is simultaneously rendered futile by the constraints of his environment'.[24] The narrative shift which occurs at page 76 introduces us to the particular nature of these environmental constraints, for here in Arghol's dream of '[h]is room in the city' we learn the manner and equipment of the self's imprisonment in the modern world.[25] The inward turn of the modern subject is essentially linked to its material submission to the processes of the modern machine-age world, a dreamlike delirium being part and parcel of the external cage of materialization in which the self is ultimately caught.

Like one of the figures in *The Crowd* (Fig. 20), Arghol is caught within his own religious dream of freedom, an intoxicant which pacifies him as he is dehumanized — 'congealed and frozen into logic' — by the social and technological controls of the modern city.[26] In a sense the second half of the narrative can therefore be understood as an isolated and detailed treatment of one of the caged figures depicted in *The Crowd*, whose personal narrative of freedom and destiny (their 'inferior religion') is juxtaposed harshly with the external conditions of their life, according to which they are mere specimens in a sociological survey. Our introduction to Arghol's dream room carries an exacting and controlling tone which is telling in this respect:

> A black jacket and shirt hung on nails across window: a gas jet turned low to keep the room warm, through the night, sallow chill illumination: dirty pillows, black and thin in middle, worn down by rough head, but congested at each end. […] His room in the city, nine feet by six, grave big enough for the six corpses that is each living man.[27]

The contents of the room are listed here in a coldly rational tone reminiscent of a crime scene inventory. Yet at the same time, when we acknowledge the sense in which the narrative of *Enemy* follows the gruesome procedure of a sacrifice ritual (a feature which I shall explore in more detail later on in this chapter) this passage may also appear as having an incantatory tone which is designed to prepare the scene in all the necessary and seemingly inconsequential details for the ritual taking place.

This duality within the language of the text — between mythic and modern modes — helps to clarify the thematic relation which the narrative of *Enemy* has with

[24] Ibid., p.144.
[25] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* p.76.
[26] 'Inferior Religions' (1917), p.316.
[27] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* p.76.

The Crowd. In the latter part of the narrative we are entering the interior of one of those grim cells in the diagrammatic grid which represents the modern city, learning about the personal world (the 'inferior religion') of one of the 'cyphers' in Lewis's 'new human mathematic' at the same time that we carry the detached perspective we had on the outside, perceiving just another room in the city.[28] Crucially these two perspectives are not mutually exclusive. Rather they become significant in the narrative through their simultaneity, as opposite viewpoints which encounter each other in a constant process of juxtaposition.

Just as the narrative as a whole turns upon a dramatic node which departs the real-world realm of action and dialogue for a dream, so the text throughout is animated by a see-saw tendency to slip between two narrative modes, appearing as a mythical incantation on the one hand, and as an expression of the controlling rationality of modernity on the other. This susceptibility which *Enemy* has to be read in these two opposed ways is crucial to my following analysis of the text. But before we explore this tension in detail, it is important to spend a little more time elaborating the myth which *Enemy* presents. Now that we have observed the way in which the narrative joins together the pattern-units which were being developed in earlier works, we are in a good position to explore the full mythic structure which Lewis's narrative presents.

(ii) The Mythic Structure of *Enemy of the Stars*

Orientalism was very much in vogue in London during the decade or so before the war. Indeed Pound and Lewis had been first introduced in 1909 by Laurence Binyon because of their shared interest in the art and religion of the East.[29] It is unsurprising then to find numerous symbolic elements derived from Eastern myth in *Enemy*. James Selby has convincingly shown that Lewis made as much use of the Hindu Sankhya dualism as he did of the Kantian subject/object distinction in the symbolic conflict between Arghol and Hanp. Arghol, he suggests, faces the existential dilemma which is represented in Hindu mythology by 'perusha', a masculine principle symbolizing the 'archetypal

[28] 'Inferior Religions' (1917), p.316 and p.315.
[29] Binyon was the keeper of prints and drawings at the British Museum who published three works on Oriental art between 1908-1911 – *Painting in the far East* (1908), *Japanese Art* (1909) and *Flight of the Dragon* (1911). The context of the introduction of Lewis and Pound is described by Timothy Materer in *Pound/Lewis: The Letters of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis* (p.3).

intelligence' of the percipient, who stands opposed to 'prakriti', a feminine 'holistic principle' symbolizing material life and nature.[30]

Encountering prakriti, perusha may decide to 'love her and lie by her' and in doing so submit to the cycle of samsara, or he may choose to 'leave her' in order to 'realize his true distinctness from prakriti' and thus to attain 'final release' or 'moksha'.[31] The metaphor of seduction ties very closely with the warnings which Lewis issued in both issues of *BLAST* about any attempt of the subject to marry or otherwise abscond with object in an vitalist-inspired love affair.[32] Arghol's aspiration to escape, his attempt to 'burst Death's membrane through' is, in light of Selby's mythological excavations, therefore explicable as a bid for transcendence.[33] Failure would mean continued enslavement to the material world in countless other lives. But significantly, it is not explicitly disclosed in the narrative what Arghol's 'banish[ment] from matter' really amounts to: whether reabsorption into the cycle of life or the final release entailed in moksha.[34]

The matter ultimately comes down to how we conceive the selfhood of which Arghol is deprived. Arghol's paradoxical descriptions of self — as, on the one hand, the last remnant of 'the ancient race', a 'sacred act of violence', and on the other hand as 'a loathsome deformity […] affliction got through indiscriminate rubbing against [one's] fellows: Social excrescence' — play upon an important ambiguity in the Western conception of selfhood which is clarified in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy.[35] In Eastern philosophies a firm distinction is drawn between the worldly self or ego (the *jiva*) and the immortal, 'true self' (*Atman*). In *Enemy* both connotations are used interchangeably in Arghol's discussion of self and so we are left with a lingering doubt as to which of these finally gets the upper hand; whether, for example, Arghol's true self (*Atman*) is curtailed in its bid for transcendence, his worldly self (*jiva*) thereby being ploughed back into the realm of material existence, or whether his banishment

[30] Selby, '*Enemy of the Stars*: An Inquiry into its Intellectual Sources', p.33.
[31] Quoted from *Svetasvatara Upanishad* in Selby, '*Enemy of the Stars*: An Inquiry into its Intellectual Sources', p.33.
[32] See Lewis's use of the metaphor of Narcissus in 'Futurism, Magic and Life' in *BLAST* (p.134-135) and 'Art Vortex: Be Thyself' in *BLAST 2* (p.91).
[33] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* p.68.
[34] Ibid., p.84. In light of this, Scott W. Klein's claim about Arghol's 'failure of transcendence' would seem to oversimplify the matter (*The Fictions of James Joyce and Wyndham Lewis: Monsters of Nature and design* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 57-58). Lewis was almost certainly aiming for tension without resolution and so leaves it an open question what Arghol's banishment from matter ultimately stands for.
[35] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* pp.66, 71.

from matter signifies the transcendence of the true self from the world and the bodily shell it occupied there. The only certainty we are left with is that Lewis leant upon Eastern religious sources in order to highlight a paradox within the Western concept of self, which served to intensify the tension in the denouement of his drama.

Alongside these important elements of Eastern myth there is another mythic tradition at work in the structure of *Enemy*'s narrative which is important to highlight. Paul Edwards has described *Enemy* as a 'parable about Gnostic aestheticism', drawing our attention to a theme in Lewis's writings that has been well established.[36] In '"Monstrous Starlight": Wyndham Lewis and Gnosticism' (1996) Michael Nath has also demonstrated Lewis's adherence to the Gnostic cosmological myth in writing the texts of *The Human Age* and suggests that the fundamental dualism which lay at the heart of Gnostic philosophy might be taken as a characteristic element in Lewis's personal philosophy. It is not difficult to trace this Gnostic mythic structure back to Lewis's Vorticist works, particularly *Enemy.* To identify the chief correspondences, we may note the strict dualism of two metaphysical principles and the division which is wrought in the self as a consequence of this; the stars personified as oppressive rulers (*Archons*) of the material world, implementing the law of Universal Fate (*Heimarmene*); and salvation conceptualized as transcendence of the present context and a return to the original purity of the spirit-world.

Lewis's choice of the name 'Arghol' would seem to further bear out the Gnostic connection. It is a linguistic sign unusually rich with beneficial connotations in this context. Hugh Kenner initiated the debate about the possible meaning of 'Arghol' by suggesting that Lewis's protagonist was named after 'the double star Algol (*Alpha Persei*)', in the northern constellation of Perseus.[37] For Kenner, the case for this derivation of the name was self-evident since it described:

> the very condition of [Arghol's] existence —[to] waltz eternally about a common center of gravity with this unluminous companion, which eclipses his light with clockwork periodicity and transforms the effulgence of his genius into a recurrent demoniacal wink.[38]

[36] Edwards, *Painter and Writer*, p.164.
[37] Hugh Kenner, *Wyndham Lewis* (Connecticut: New Directions, 1954), p.23.
[38] Ibid., p.23.

Although it went unnoticed by Kenner, this characterization of Arghol as a double-sided astral being would also provide an important thematic link with Gnostic myth. Alan Munton has challenged this interpretation, however, asking: 'why should the enemy of the stars be named after a star, or stars?'[39] Munton's challenge is blunted by the fact that the text itself provides clues that this is the case. Paul Edwards cites a section of the text which explicitly references Arghol's dependence on the astral system which he opposes for his vitality: he is, after all, 'FECUNDED BY MAD BLASTS OF SUNLIGHT'.[40] Alongside this must be counted Arghol's own reference to the fact that the force he opposes is also the source of his personal vitality and rebellious agency:

> Energy has been fixed on me from nowhere — heavy and astonished: resigned. Or is it for remote sin! I will use it, anyway, as prisoner his bowl
> or sheet for escape: not as means of idle humiliation.[41]

As this passage implies, the energy which Arghol conceives as a potential source of escape is tied up with the situation of his imprisonment. It is as if he is being handed the cell-key by his gaoler as a grim joke designed to confirm his captivity.

Thematically, it actually makes great sense for Arghol to be conceptually linked to the system he opposes. Arghol's 'energy' is to be understood in similar terms as the paradoxical nature of 'language' we examined in the previous chapter, as both the prison and the key to emancipation. In the terms which Lewis later provided in his commentary on *Enemy*, Arghol is like 'the man of his word' caught within the deterministic web which is imposed upon him by his adherence to the fallacy of a natural language. Whether he is read as a textual entity trying to break free from the determinism of the text, or as a deviant, double or two-faced star attempting to break free from the astral system, his identity with the system he opposes correlates with a central theme of Lewis's thought at the time and reveals an important relation to Gnostic pessimism about the human condition.

It is not clear precisely which Gnostic sources Lewis made use of at the time of writing *Enemy*, but there are numerous thematic overlaps with William Blake's own Gnostic-inspired myth as it was presented in *Jerusalem, the Emanation of the Giant*

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[39] Alan Munton in his notes on *Enemy of the Stars* (1914), in *Collected Poems and Plays*, p.220.
[40] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, p.61.
[41] Ibid., p.68.

Albion (published in instalments between 1804-1820). One clue to this link may be found in the name 'Hanp', which Paul Edwards and Richard Humphreys have suggested may be derived from 'Hand', the eldest son of Albion in Blake's *Jerusalem*.[42] Hand and his brothers represent a sort of demonic materialism in Blake's myth which seeks 'to Vegetate the Divine Vision | In a corporeal & ever-dying Vegetation & Corruption'.[43] Together the brothers are said to 'become One Great Satan'.[44] This correlates closely with the symbolic role of Hanp in *Enemy*, who is equally the representative of a murderous materialism.

A shared thematic core runs through both *Jerusalem* and *Enemy*. In *Jerusalem* 'Los cries: "No Individual ought to appropriate to himself | Or to his emanation, any of the universal characteristics"', and we can make sense of the transgressive behaviour and 'criminal' status which Arghol is given in similar terms as deriving from his 'masquerading as Humanity like a child in clothes too big for him'.[45] Arghol is a representative of those 'blasphemous selfhoods' that Los denounces, 'who dare appropriate to themselves universal attributes' and therefore 'must be broken asunder'.[46] His destruction within the narrative is symbolic of the material principle gaining ascendency over the mind or soul. For both Blake and Lewis this dualistic tension was to be explained with reference to the two coeternal metaphysical principles of good and evil, spirit and matter; the materialization (or 'Vegetation') of the Divine spirit being conceived by each as a kind of 'bastard form' coming to 'infect the original'.[47]

The full metaphysical pattern of Lewis's myth is at first barely visible underneath the heaped symbols, syntactic disruption and experimental formal manoeuvres, but a coherent symbolic narrative runs through *Enemy* which is written shorthand in the line: 'The sky, two clouds, their two furious shadows, fought'.[48] To understand this we must strip the line apart into its component parts. The sky — a holistic principle indicating the cosmos in its entirety — is comprehensible as the battlefield upon which two metaphysical principles (or clouds) are constantly at war. In

[42] Edwards, *Painter and Writer*, p.151.
[43] William Blake, 'Jerusalem, the Emanation of the Giant Albion', in *The Poems of William Blake*, ed. by W. H. Stevenson (London: Longman, 1971), pp.622-840, IV. 90. 41-2 (p.826).
[44] Ibid., IV. 90. 43 (p.826).
[45] Ibid., IV. 90. 28-9 (p.825); Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, p.66. '[M]asquerading as Humanity like a child in clothes too big for him' is a line taken from section five of the Vorticist Manifesto (*BLAST*, p.38). I include it for the clear relevance which it has to the situation of Arghol.
[46] Blake, 'Jerusalem, the Emanation of the Giant Albion', IV. 90. 32-3 (p.825).
[47] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, p.70.
[48] Ibid., p.75.

the wheelwright's yard we observe their two shadows collide. In terms of the Gnostic dualism which Lewis utilized in his narrative, Arghol is the emanation of the spiritual essence (known in Gnostic writings as the 'alien God'), who enters into conflict with Hanp, the emanation of the material principle represented by the god of creation.[49] The two central characters of the play thus represent the 'ancient and valuable iranian principle of duality' between the 'two characters' of the 'killer' and the 'maker' which attempts to maintain in 'violent […] contrast' and keep at all costs from 'confus[ion]'.[50] This Gnostic structure provides a way of reading the text which is important to highlight.

(iii) Reading *Enemy of the Stars* as a Metaphysical Shadow Play

The 'shadow play' was a popular form of entertainment in Munich during Lewis and Wadsworth's stay there from February to July 1906 and it is possible that Lewis may have drawn some inspiration from his experience of this during the city carnival or indeed a visit to the Schwabinger Shadow Theatre, as Kate Armond has recently suggested.[51] This would qualify as an important source for the puppetry metaphor which Lewis uses in 'Inferior Religions' to explain the function of his early fictions. Certainly *Enemy* may be conceived as a sort of conceptual shadow play itself, in which 'God and Fate' are 'constant protagonists'.[52] Arghol and Hanp are vertically aligned to their warring metaphysical overlords. The constant reference to a battle raging in the universe at large beyond the immediate scene notionally advises the reader to lift focus from the squabble in the wheelwright's yard to observe the greater sphere of conflict, where the 'ice field of the sky swept and crashed silently'.[53] It is a peculiar feature of the narrative of *Enemy* that the further we are taken from the action between the human

[49] A fuller account of these aspects of Gnostic myth can be found in Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, 2nd edn (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991). See especially pp.49-51 for a fuller account of the 'alien God' and pp.62-68 for an account of the Gnostic idea that the God of Genesis was an evil demi-urge responsible for imprisoning the soul (or *pneuma*) in its material prison.
[50] *The Art of Being Ruled*, p.25.
[51] Armond writes: 'At the time of Lewis's stay in Munich, the shadow play was a particularly popular form of entertainment and featured as part of the city carnival that Lewis attended. […] the genre continued to thrive in Munich's Schwabinger Shadow Theatre until 1912' (Kate Armond, 'Vorticism in 1915: Official and Unofficial Germany', in *The Journal of Wyndham Lewis Studies*, 6 (2015), pp.34-59 (p.49)).
[52] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, p.69.
[53] Ibid., p.64.

characters 'the more violent and vivid' the agency seems to be.[54] From the lethargic interactions between Arghol and Hanp — even when he fights, Arghol, we are told 'd[oes] not hit hard' for he is '[l]ike something inanimate', a 'soft, blunt paw of Nature' — we may trace a growth in the reserve of agency in the wider topography ('THE RED WALLS OF THE UNIVERSE') and further to the stars.[55]

Hypallage — the re-attribution of agency from the characters to the normally passive scene — was identified by Fredric Jameson as an essential characteristic of Lewis's early prose style. In *Fables of Aggression* Jameson suggests that Lewis's writings:

> offer […] a glimpse of a world in which the old-fashioned substances, like marbles in a box, have been rattled so furiously together that their 'properties' come loose and stick to the wrong places.[56]

Cantelman's stroll through 'the *strenuous* fields' in Lewis's short story of 1917 serves as a useful example of this, as does his professed fascination with the 'imbecility of the creaking men-machines *some little restaurant or fishing-boat works*' in 'Inferior Religions' (*my emphasis*).[57] In one sense, when properties do come loose in these early works they all end up sticking to the one variegated surface of metaphysical Nature, or whatever name Lewis adopts in each particular context for 'that fat mass you browse on'.[58]

The effect produced by Lewis's hypallage in the reader's consciousness was described by Jameson as the 'delirium of metonymy': a 'contamination of the axis of contiguity' causing the characters to melt with the comparatively more active scene.[59] This idea has driven David Graver to raise hypallage from the level of 'a central trope' to a 'metaphysical principle' and the 'unifying principle of *Enemy*'.[60] A further effect, which Jameson and Graver neglect to mention, however, is that Lewis's use of

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[54] 'The farther, the more violent and vivid, Nature' (Ibid., p.64).
[55] Ibid., pp.75, 61.
[56] Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p.27. Jameson quotes Heinrich Lausberg's definition of *hypallage* as a destructuring of syntactic arrangements in which 'the adjective is grammatically referred to a different substantive in the context than that to which it ought semantically to be applied' (p.27).
[57] 'Cantelman's Spring-Mate', p.8; 'Inferior Religions', p.315.
[58] Lewis, 'Wyndham Lewis Vortex No. 1', *BLAST 2*, p.91.
[59] Jameson, *Fables of Aggression*, p.27.
[60] David Graver, 'Vorticist Performance and Aesthetic Turbulence in *Enemy of the Stars*', *PMLA*, 107.3 (1992), pp. 482-496 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/462756> [accessed 5 May 2013], pp.492, 493.

hypallage in *Enemy* subtly draws the reader's consciousness away from the interaction taking place between the characters towards the hidden agencies that govern their movements. In this way the reader is attuned to a two-tiered organization within the narrative.

By re-attributing the agency normally possessed by human characters to a lurking presence beyond the immediate scene, Lewis attained narrative conditions which were reminiscent of a puppet show. But equally, in another respect, it allowed him to explore the central schema of ritual, the text effectively enacting a ritualistic invocation of mythical forces by means of symbolic representatives in the arena of sacrifice. Once again we find that both interpretive avenues lie open to us, the two-tiered structure within the narrative highlighting the puppets' relation to their master as much as the mysterious relationship which exists between a community and the mythical and metaphysical forces which ultimately rule over them. This double aspect of *Enemy*, part puppet show and part ritual invocation of the gods, guides us to the heart of the text's significance in Lewis's early pattern of thinking.

(iv) Theatre of Ritual

Examination of *Enemy*'s narrative reveals how closely it adheres to the grim procedure of a sacrifice rite.[61] The characters are two 'GRAVE BOOTH ANIMALS' who take up their position 'AT OPENING OF SHAFT', their clothes 'full of fiery dust and sinewy energetic air'.[62] The associations with blood sports which these descriptions conjure is confirmed by subsequent references to 'a human bull rush[ing] into the circus' and 'a gladiator who has come to fight a ghost'.[63] But while Arghol is 'the prime athlete exponent of this sport in its palmy days', he is also described as having a 'sacred' significance as a representative of 'Self […] the ancient race', and would thus appear to represent the sacrificial victim in a scene of *tauromaquia* highly reminiscent of the

[61] Toby Foshay acknowledges this ritualistic element to the play's narrative, citing particularly the description of Arghol as a 'Foredoomed Prometheus' in the 1932 version of the play (*Collected Poems and Plays*, p.145) as an indication of his grim role as 'a propitiatory sacrifice to the forces both human (historical, temporal) and cosmic (eternal, spatial) that are ranged against him' ('Wyndham Lewis's Vorticist Metaphysic', p.46).
[62] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, pp.55, 60, 55.
[63] Ibid., pp.59, 61.

'grotesque pantomime' of 'Ox-murder' which Jane Ellen Harrison had described in detail in her 1913 book.[64]

From his entrance Arghol is carefully prepared in his role as sacrificial victim. The reason the holy Bull must die, as Harrison clarifies at one point in *Art and Ancient Ritual*, is 'because he *is* so holy, that he may give his holiness, his strength, his life, just at the moment it is holiest, to his people'.[65] Arghol is similarly fattened before the 'sacred act of violence'.[66] 'Nothing spent, stored rather in strong stagnation', he accumulates in himself an energy 'fixed on [him] from nowhere' and wonders at the 'superstition' which curbs his master from killing him outright, concluding '[h]e must have palpable reason for my being alive'.[67]

The moment of Arghol's execution is even choreographed as a sacrificial murder, with Hanp approaching the kneeling figure of Arghol with 'knife held stiffly at arms length'.[68] Hanp is equivalent to the 'Ox-striker' presiding over the Dionysian rites at Athens, and like the death of the 'holy Bull' Arghol's banishment from matter is symbolically linked to the rejuvenation of the material world, his 'blood sinking down, a moist shaft, into the ground' to the '[r]elief of grateful universe'.[69] In this way the 'play' becomes explicable as a scene of ritual sacrifice, the stage becomes an altar, and the reader becomes immersed in the collective worship, joining in the 'CLOSE ATMOSPHERE OF TERROR AND NECESSITY TILL THE EXECUTION IS OVER'.[70] Care is taken to prepare the reader for their role in the rite, with the narratorial voice suggesting that we are embarking on 'our honeymoon' and must adapt to this 'strange place for initial stages of our intimate ceremonious acquaintance'.[71]

The barbaric spectacle which the text enacts would seem to have thematic relevance to Lewis's quotation of Rousseau's view in 'Futurism, Magic and Life' that '[t]he theatre is immoral, because a place where people go to enjoy other people's sufferings and tears', since *Enemy*'s reader is cast in the position of a tourist at a

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[64] Ibid., p.66; Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, p.91.
[65] Ibid., p.89.
[66] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* p.66.
[67] Ibid., pp.68, 69.
[68] Ibid., p.84.
[69] Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, pp.91, 100; Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* p.84. This moment when Arghol's blood sinks down the shaft back into the ground is clearly designed as the dramatic counterpoint to the play's opening, when the characters had taken up 'THEIR POSITION AT OPENING OF SHAFT' (p.60) through which they had 'EMERGE[D]' out of the 'GROUND' (p.59). It thus signifies Arghol's inevitable slump back into matter, after briefly blossoming like 'a granite flower' at the surface of existence (p.62).
[70] Ibid., p.61.
[71] Ibid., p.59.

bullfight who plays a tacit part in the execution of the innocent animal.[72] In this way the text seems to convey the idea which Lewis would later discuss in *The Lion and the Fox* (1927), that the dramatist carries forward the professional responsibility of the 'public executioner', compelling a human representative onto the stage to adopt a 'deadly rôle' in order to purge the sins and misfortunes of the community.[73]

Its presentation of a spectacle of ritual sacrifice inevitably places *Enemy* in dialogue with certain important anthropological and artistic works which emerged in 1913. In one sense Lewis's text may be seen to undertake the project suggested by Harrison a year earlier, to reunite the divided elements of the modern theatre (stage and audience) into the original 'orchestral' space of worship, thereby returning the art of drama to the 'ritual dance' — the *dithyrambs* of the cult of Dionysus — from which it first grew.[74] It is unclear whether Lewis first became acquainted with Harrison's book at the time he was writing *Enemy,* but there are some reasons to believe that this may have been the case. *Ancient Art and Ritual* had been published during the summer of 1913, and would certainly have complemented his already keen interest in anthropology. A well-used copy was later found in Lewis's library, which has no date of publication and may be a first edition which Lewis bought at the time it came out.[75] Furthermore, Lewis's activity in *BLAST* appears to engage with Harrison's idea that modern art would 'recross […] the ritual bridge back into life', albeit in contradictory terms. While *Enemy* would appear to qualify as the fruition of this project, Lewis's complaint that 'Art merges in Life again everywhere' in 'Futurism, Magic and Life' would seem to reject Harrison's thesis.[76]

The earliest readers of Harrison's book could not have failed to notice that her call for modern art to 'recross […] the ritual bridge back into life' had already been

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[72] Ibid., p.133.
[73] Wyndham Lewis, *The Lion and the Fox: The Rôle of the Hero in the Plays of Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1966), pp.145, 142.
[74] Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, p.207. According to Harrison the rites had originally involved the collective participation of the whole community, there being 'no division at first between actors and spectators; all are actors, all are doing the thing done, dancing the dance danced' (p.126). But eventually religious faith began to wane, and then 'bit by bit, out of the chorus of dancers some dancers withdrew and became spectators sitting apart, and on the other hand others of the dancers drew apart on to the stage and presented to the spectators a spectacle, a thing to be looked *at*, not joined *in*' (p.192-3). The result of this gradual process of historical detachment was the emergence of 'art' as a phenomenon that stood apart from 'life'. In *Ancient Art and Ritual* Harrison called for modern artists to reconnect with the wider currents of social life and identified certain nascent signs of this already taking place. 'Art in these latter days', she writes at one point, 'goes back as it were on her own steps, recrossing the ritual bridge back into life' (p.207).
[75] Paul Edwards, personal communication.
[76] Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, p.207; Lewis, 'Futurism, Magic and Life', in *BLAST*, p.132.

answered in one emphatic instance.[77] Igor Stravinksy's *Le Sacre du Printemps* (*The Rite of Spring*) was first performed by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées on 29 May 1913, at roughly the same time that Harrison was putting the finishing touches to *Ancient Art and Ritual* (the preface is dated June 1913). Allegedly the realization of Stravinsky's dream of 'a scene of pagan ritual in which a chosen sacrificial virgin danced herself to death', the ballet anticipates Harrison's work by attempting to transform the modern stage into a sacrificial altar.[78]

Taken together *The Rite of Spring* and *Ancient Art and Ritual* occupy a critical point in the development of modernism's fascination with the primitive which can certainly help to inform our understanding of *Enemy*'s ritualistic narrative. As Butler writes:

> By the time of its [*The Rite of Spring*] production in 1913 the aggressive impulses [displayed within modern primitivist art] were ripe for the further rationalization offered by an anthropological context, which could give to violent emotional materials the ritual distance of 'myth'.[79]

The idea which Butler expresses here ought to be clarified. The turn to myth, he suggests, was already to be identified with certain 'aggressive impulses' in the modernist psyche before the spring of 1913. But Stravinsky's ballet marks a moment when this latent aggression is channelled by a growing self-consciousness that modernism's 'myth' was refracted through a rationalized, anthropological perspective. Butler thus draws attention to a perceived conflict which arises in modernism between the 'ritual distance of "myth"' and its 'rationalization' within 'an anthropological context'.

Whether or not Lewis worked in full knowledge of either Harrison's book or Stravinsky's ballet, *Enemy* emerges directly out of the discourse concerning the expressive potential of myth, and its anthropological disclosure, which is set up by these works of 1913. One of the defining features of Lewis's text is the antagonism which it presents between the two worldviews entailed by this, imposing rational controls upon the mythic forces which from one perspective it unleashes. We have already observed

[77] Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, p.207.
[78] Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Expositions and Developments* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p.140.
[79] Butler, *Early Modernism,* p.115.

the way in which the text elaborates the procedure of a ritual sacrifice, but it is equally important to see how this is compromised by certain decidedly modern references in the text. However much the narrative of *Enemy* may attempt to usher us towards art's sinister past, we are never left in any doubt that it is a drama being performed in a modern theatre.

(v) From *Altar* to *Stage*

The theatrical context, equipment and personnel of 'THE PLAY' are faintly visible from the start.[80] The reader enters the play-text at page 51 in the same distracted shuffle as a theatre audience entering a venue, passing on two occasions the bold play title 'ENEMY OF THE STARS' and the 'ADVERTISEMENT' daubing at the entrance.[81] A picture-gallery of six paintings and 'decorations' are placed along the metaphorical corridor into the arena, in the ante-room to the play itself, where the reader is encouraged to while away the few remaining moments before the call visually absorbed in images which have a thematic relation to the narrative.[82] Then we are called to our seats with the brusque announcement of 'THE PLAY'.[83] Characters and scenes are introduced and the audience are subjected to a seduction ritual, invited by the proprietorial figure of the narrator into an 'intimate ceremonious acquaintance', to suspend disbelief while the actors do their work.[84]

Awareness of the theatre persists into the narrative action. When Arghol enters reeling from the violent attack of his uncle, 'the super', the reader's focus is drawn towards a possible interference at the wings of the imagined stage.[85] There is a sense in which this 'supernumerary', an extra in the action, is really part of the theatrical context in which the play itself is supposed to be taking place, a stage-hand or even perhaps the director himself kicking the clown onto stage after he has missed his cue. The text would seem to allow this interpretation, given that Arghol is twice called for, implying initial absence from the scene before he receives his beating. A visual staging would seem to entail a lone Hanp calling nervously, with a 'child's voice hunting its mother',

[80] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, p.57.
[81] Ibid., pp.51, 55.
[82] Ibid., illustrations v*a*.-viii*a*, pp.55-59.
[83] Ibid., p.57. It should be noted, however, that according to Lewis's notes on 'Errata' in *BLAST* (p.4) the intended position of this announcement was 'between Pages 60 and 61'.
[84] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, p.59.
[85] Ibid., p.63.

into the wings for his companion to accompany him onstage now that the play has begun.[86]

In various ways the reader is encouraged to frame the unfolding narrative with extra-narrative knowledge of the backstage and front of house activity within the imagined theatre, observing the drama of 'ritual' with occasional glances towards the equipment and personnel of the theatre in which it is being performed. It is a theme which visibly grows out of Lewis's earlier works which similarly explored a contrast between the imaginative world created by an artwork and its material context, like 'Les Saltimbanques' and *The Theatre Manager* (1909; Fig. 5).[87] But in *Enemy* the effect of lifting the curtain is that a starkly modern light is shone on an otherwise murky scene of ancient ritual. The ritual is unmasked, the spell is broken. This is no longer a scene of collective worship in which a community speak with their gods, rather it is a pre-scripted procedure repeated to a different audience each night; a debased form of the original rite from which it grew.

From this perspective the theatre is 'immoral' or at least reprehensible not because it involves any real suffering but rather because it is a marketplace of representations where the original is perpetually counterfeited. Significantly, this was the view which Rousseau was really trying to communicate in in his *Letter to Monsieur d'Alembert on the Theatre* of 1758, in one instance describing the theatre as a carrier of 'bad faith'.[88] In his *Letter to d'Alembert* Rousseau described the theatre as a place where '[c]ounterfeiting, forgery, theft, imposture, lying, cruelty […] everything is applauded'.[89] As the editors clarify in their introduction to Rousseau's *Letter* (2004) the audience experience is key to Rousseau's moral stance:

> This experience is more fundamental than the content or message of the plays being performed. […] The essence of this experience is one of identification with the characters portrayed on the stage and forgetting about oneself.[90]

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[86] Ibid., p.63.
[87] Wyndham Lewis, *The Theatre Manager*, 1909, pencil, ink and watercolour on paper, 29.5 × 31.5 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum.
[88] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Letter to D'Alembert and Writings for the Theater: The Collected Writings of Rousseau,* vol. 10, trans. and ed. by Allan Bloom, Charles Butterworth, and Christopher Kelly, (Dartmouth: University Press of New England, 2004), p.265.
[89] Ibid., p.284.
[90] Ibid.,, p.xxiii.

The danger, for Rousseau, lay in the theatre's ability to corrode the integrity of the self. This, we should note, is precisely the effect it has on Arghol, who similarly suffers 'degradation […] of the original solitude of the soul' in 'some bleak circus'.[91] Rousseau's meaning was playfully subverted by Lewis in 'Futurism, Magic and Life' in a way that seems to chime with his strategy in *Enemy*, evoking an idea of the theatre which is at once dangerously real and deceitfully false. What are we to make of this two-faced work then?

In one sense *Enemy* provides a stark illustration of Harrison's belief in *Ancient Art and Ritual* that '[r]itual must wane that art may wax'.[92] As the wheelwright's yard is revealed as a theatrical space Lewis provides his own illustration of the way the orchestral space was divided up into an audience and a stage. But it also seems likely that in *Enemy* Lewis was exploring the Nietzschean idea that 'the continuous development of art is bound up with the *Apollinian* and *Dionysian* duality' and all the 'perpetual strife' which that brings.[93] In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche had described a dialectical process by which the primitive urges behind Dionysian worship — to tear apart 'the veil of *māyā*" and leave it "fluttering in tatters before the mysterious primordial unity' — had been harnessed by the growing Apollinian tendency in Greek culture to harmony, structure and reason.[94] For Nietzsche the great flowering of Attic Tragedy had been stimulated by the combination of these two opposed drives, the intoxicating urge towards metaphysical unity encountering an opposed tendency towards sober individuation.[95] The result was an aesthetic reconciliation of the eternal struggle between self and world. But for Nietzsche, the golden age of Attic Tragedy was as fast to fade as it was to blossom.

As Greek culture grew more confident and more stridently humanist, the primitive Dionysian drive was suppressed by a new kind of rationalism that was emerging, according to Nietzsche. The Apollonian tendency towards order and rational control, or rather a bastardized version of this tendency, gained ascendancy. The death-blow was struck by Socrates: 'we may recognize in Socrates the opponent of Dionysus.

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[91] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* pp.70, 55.
[92] Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, p.228.
[93] Nietzsche, 'The Birth of Tragedy', p.33.
[94] Ibid., p.37.
[95] As David A. Wragg clarifies: 'Apollonian culture' serves Nietzsche as 'a form of *necessary* illusion which protects against the barbarism of unmediated Dionysian energy', with this 'illusion' becoming 'the special province of art' ('Aggression, aesthetics, modernity', p.193).

He is the new Orpheus who rose against Dionysus'.[96] This became 'the new opposition' in Nietzsche's dialectic: 'the Dionysian and the Socratic — and the art of Greek tragedy was wrecked on this'.[97] For Nietzsche art was strongest when it contained within itself the two opposed drives of the Apollonian and Dionysian principles, before *mythos* was decisively displaced by *logos*.

In *Enemy* a rather caricatured form of the Nietzschean dialectic appears to be at work.[98] Hanp and Arghol clearly represent the 'duality' of chorus and tragic hero which Nietzsche described as 'the expression of two interwoven artistic impulses, the Apollinian and the Dionysian'.[99] Indeed Toby Foshay has identified a 'series of parallels' which the work has with classical tragedy: 'the action is an agon; Arghol is a Prometheus figure; the characters, as in classical drama, wear masks designed to amplify their voices'.[100] Lewis's 'HEATHEN CLOWNS', however, would be more at home in a Punch and Judy show than an Attic Tragedy.[101]

Hanp, the voice of common sense and thus the critical vent for the audience, calls Arghol down from his lofty perch with enticements of food and gestures of reconciliation with the world. But Arghol knows well the parameters of his tragic role and the necessity to first 'be very rich or eminent in some way, and then suddenly lose all my money or my social position'.[102] He is perpetually driven to higher moral ground — even to the melodramatic whine '[a]nything but yourself is dirt. Anybody that is. I do not feel clean enough to die, or to make it worth while killing myself' — in order to perform his 'tragic drop from hubris and happiness to misery and disaster'.[103]

The Dionysian altar is there still but it is now once again simply a stage. The grim procedure of the sacrifice rite is shown to pass naturally over into the logical schema of the tragic narrative. And because of this the spirit is somewhat changed, we are no longer being called to participate in a ritual, accepting an invitation to primal unity as we previously thought we were, rather we are set apart from the action as spectators of an imagined drama. We learn that this 'new un-Dionysian spirit […] reveals itself most plainly in the *dénouements* of the new dramas', for the gods have

[96] Nietzsche, 'The Birth of Tragedy', p.86.
[97] Ibid., p.82.
[98] Lewis, 'Manifesto', in *BLAST,* p.30.
[99] Nietzsche, 'The Birth of Tragedy', p.81.
[100] Foshay, 'Wyndham Lewis's Vorticist Metaphysic', p.47.
[101] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* p.55.
[102] *The Lion and the Fox,* p.252.
[103] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* p.70; *The Lion and the Fox,* p.251.

been replaced with narrative devices.[104] In this respect *Enemy* is like a puppet-show in which the strings are visible. Occasionally we may also glimpse the hand which moves them.

(vi) Narratorial Conflict

After his fight with Hanp, Arghol succumbs to a dream of Berlin. It is the moment of Arghol's 'tragic drop' and another presence, perhaps identifiable as the narrator, assumes control of events. Arghol is pacified into a dream-state and harried 'through confused struggles and vague successions of scenes'.[105] Suddenly he rouses himself from his dream-stupor, and 'a new state of mind assert[s] itself'.[106] At this moment the combative narratorial voice enters as a *deus ex machina* taking 'the place of metaphysical comfort' in Arghol's narrative.[107] The voice mercilessly mocks Arghol's 'awakening':

> A riddle has been solved.
> What could this be?
> He was Arghol once more.
> Was that the key to something? He was simply Arghol.
> 'I am Arghol.'
> He repeated his name — like sinister word invented to launch a new Soap, in gigantic advertisement — toilet-necessity, he, to scrub the soul.[108]

The speaker of these mocking lines is impossible to identify with certainty given the use which Lewis makes of free indirect narration throughout the text. We may identify it with the figure of the narrator or indeed with Arghol himself. But because the narrative technique which Lewis deploys shuttles us back and forth between a third-person perspective and the first-person perspective of Arghol and Hanp we cannot tell who is ultimately responsible for condemning Arghol.

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[104] Nietzsche, 'The Birth of Tragedy', p.108.
[105] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* p.80.
[106] Ibid., p.80.
[107] Nietzsche, 'The Birth of Tragedy', p.109.
[108] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* p.80.

One interpretative possibility is raised by the introductory note which Strindberg included at the front of 'The Dream Play', under the title of 'A Reminder' in Björkman's translation. There Strindberg wrote:

> the author has tried to imitate the disconnected but seemingly logical form of the dream. […] The characters split, double, multiply, vanish, solidify, blur, clarify. But one consciousness reigns above them all — that of the dreamer; and before it there are no secrets, no incongruities, no scruples, no laws.[109]

These guiding principles relate closely to Lewis's Expressionist experiment, providing further compelling evidence for the possibility that Lewis drew upon 'The Dream Play' as a source for his 1914 text.[110] Crucial to observe is the distinction which Strindberg highlights between the play's characters and the 'one consciousness' which 'reigns above them all'. In Lewis's play a similar distinction is found, albeit more severe and violent than Strindberg's, which takes the form of an irreconcilable conflict between the play's condemned protagonist and the ruthless narratorial voice which governs over him and finally descends to 'banish' him 'from matter'.[111]

A further interpretative possibility is found in Michael Seidel's notion of 'Fourth-estate narration'. This idea originates in Seidel's analysis of the narrative technique in James Joyce's *Ulysses* and the need which he expressed there to account for '[a]nother kind of narration', which is not 'interior' to the characters' psyches but which is 'militantly exterior'.[112] The relevance of this to *Enemy* should be clear, for in Lewis's 1914 text it is also 'almost as if another layer of narration runs parallel to the ones that advance the action, a narrative mode that is more supplemental than sequential'.[113] Both Strindberg and Seidel provide useful clues to the puzzling conflict which instigates Arghol's downfall. Certainly Arghol appears to be condemned by a

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[109] August Strindberg, 'The Dream Play', *Plays by August Strindberg*, trans. by Edwin Björkman (London: Duckworth & Co., 1912), pp.23-104 <https://archive.org/details/playsstrindbjork00striuoft> [accessed 25 May 2016], p.24.
[110] In the first instance Lewis's play is also half 'dream', the action during the second half of the play taking place in Arghol's dream of Berlin during which the characters are subject to a disorientating succession of transformations. We ought to note also the sense in which the interactions between the two central characters Arghol and Hanp offer a 'symbolical interpretation […] of human interrelationships', a defining feature of Strindberg's experimental drama according to Björkman in his 1912 introduction to *Plays by August Strindberg* (p.17).
[111] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, p.84.
[112] Michael Seidel, *James Joyce: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), p.88.
[113] Seidel, *James Joyce,* p.88.

consciousness which does not belong to either of the two central characters, but which rather 'reigns above them' as a 'militantly exterior' overlord, before whom there can be 'no secrets, no incongruities, no scruples, no laws'. For the sake of terminological clarity I shall refer to this presence as the play's nefarious and controlling 'narrator' in his role as master of ceremonies, presiding over the ritual sacrifice in which Arghol has been cast as the sacred victim.

The most significant aspect of this sudden rift in the narration is the distinction which it highlights between mythic and modern modes, with Arghol's bid for mythical transcendence being effectively collapsed by a claustrophobic and possessive rationality. The narrator performs the function of 'God and Fate' in the narrative, condemning Arghol to his unpleasant destiny.[114] But he also represents the '*Socratic* tendency' towards rational illumination, banishing the mysteries perpetuated by myth.[115] In this way *Enemy* presides over a rite of its own, though in this case the hangman is found to deal in symbolic death.

On the verge of personal destruction Arghol grips hold of that last vestige of self and tries out his authentic name: 'I am Arghol', enacting the mythic notion that the name is what it names.[116] These are the only words he is able to speak in this section. For the narrator this has the circular significance of a truism, since '[h]e was simply Arghol'. But Arghol is trying out some of that primitive magic, conjuring his real self through the act of naming himself, stoking the fire of life by means of 'a dynamic subjectivism'.[117] It is an instance of what James George Frazer calls 'Imitative Magic' in *The Golden Bough* (1890), the principle being that 'like produces like', so that the name has a direct influence on the person.[118]

Arghol's attempt to coerce the objective world to obey his ego is, however, undermined by the narrator.[119] His last effort of sorcery is disrupted, as the narrator compares Arghol's desperate outburst to an 'advertisement'. In this critical episode in the narrative the thematic 'depth' is found 'on the surface' of the text, as Arghol is transformed into a dramatic 'product' locked into the dense units of text which present

[114] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* p.69.
[115] Nietzsche, 'The Birth of Tragedy', p.82.
[116] A thorough account of this can be found in Robert C. Elliott's *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966).
[117] Richard Chase, *Quest for Myth* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1949), p.84.
[118] James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2009), p.26.
[119] As Richard Chase writes: 'magic is the envelopment and coercion of the objective world by the ego' (*Quest for Myth,* p.84).

his tragedy as a form of *kitsch* entertainment.[120] The fact that this ultimate act of degradation is conducted with reference to an advertisement is important, for it recalls to the reader's mind both the advertisement which precedes the main text and the sense in which Lewis had modelled the typography of *BLAST* on the dense units of text used in contemporary adverts. In effect, Arghol is denied his bid for authenticity and transformed into a consumer product. This is the moment of Arghol's defeat. It revolves around mastery over language, and by extension, control of the narrative itself.

Arghol represents the primitive mythic psyche which intuits an identity between the word and the object which it denotes. He thus commits the naturalistic fallacy of the man of his word, as Lewis characterized him in 'Physics'. The narrator correspondingly represents the empowered man of words, who is emancipated from the determinism of a one-dimensional sign-system and uses the power which this gives him to condemn others who are. In this way *Enemy* highlights the fallacy of the 'Romantic desire for authenticity' as an ideal which is 'inevitably compromised by the very condition of being', as Paul March-Russell writes.[121] The narrative reveals the sense in which 'to live is also to act — and be acted upon — in [and by] the world'.[122] The following passage from Bergson's *Time and Free Will* is likely to have played some role in Lewis's developing thought at this time:

> Consciousness, goaded by an insatiable desire to separate, substitutes the symbol for the reality, or perceives reality only through the symbol. As the self thus refracted, and thereby broken into pieces, is much better adapted to the requirements of social life in general, and language in particular, consciousness prefers it, and gradually loses sight of the fundamental self.[123]

This account of the role which society plays in the evolution of selfhood helps to explain the tragic situation of Arghol. Indeed it is almost a summary of the play's narrative. Arghol is representative of Bergson's philosophy, striving to re-access the 'fundamental self' and thus to throw off the self 'that the baffling requirements of

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[120] 'One must hide depth. Where? On the surface' Hugo von Hofmannsthal, quoted by Ronald Bush, 'Modern/Postmodern: Eliot, Perse, Mallarmé, and the Future of the Barbarians', *Modernism Reconsidered*, ed. by Robert Kiely (Harvard University Press, 1983) pp.191-214 (p.191).
[121] Paul March-Russell, 'The Neo-Romantic Wyndham Lewis', *Legacies of Romanticism: Literature, Culture, Aesthetics*, ed. Carmen Casaliggi and Paul March-Russell (London: Routledge, 2012) pp.165-178 (p.166).
[122] Ibid., p.166.
[123] Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will* (London: Elibron Classics, 2005), p.128.

society had made'.[124] He is, however, unable to return to the original self which Bergson's philosophy advances. In Lewis's hands, the self, once corrupted, is shown unable to return to its longed-for state of purity.

Arghol is thus representative of the Bergsonian hypothesis, put on trial for his fallacious romanticism. In the ritual organization of the narrative Lewis notionally adopts the dramatist's professional role as 'hangman', upholding the law which he laid down in *BLAST 2*: '[y]ou must catch the clearness and logic in the midst of contradictions: not settle down and snooze on an acquired, easily possessed and mastered, satisfying shape'.[125] Whether we identify the play's militant ruling consciousness as the 'narrator', Arghol's own alter-ego, or indeed as the author *qua* puppet-master intervening conspicuously in the activities of his marionettes, Arghol's narratorial opponent in *Enemy* implements the force of this 'logic' in the lives of his unfortunate characters, exuding a fanaticism in his role as executioner.

(vii) Anthropology of the Wild Body

Like Lewis's earlier short stories and character sketches, *Enemy* is thus a work which explores the narrator's control over the characters, or 'puppets', within his command.[126] The rivalry which takes place in *Enemy* between the narrator and Arghol may be seen to derive from the carnivalesque showdown between the proprietor of the circus and the clown, 'the people's favourite', in 'Les Saltimbanques'.[127] But it is perhaps more relevant to note the sense in which the tone of the narrator in *Enemy* anticipates the aggressive, controlling narratorial style of Ker-Orr in *The Wild Body* (1927). Like Arghol, the unfortunate figure recruited to play the 'principal rôle' in Ker-Orr's 'comed[ies]' would remain 'convinced […] that he [is] taking part in a tragedy' as 'extremely complex and unmanageable forces [are] set in motion' for his master's 'edification'.[128]

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[124] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, p.78.
[125] Lewis, 'Wyndham Lewis Vortex No.1', *BLAST 2*, p.91.
[126] Toby Foshay has discussed the 'heavy dependence' which Lewis places on the narrator of his early works, 'who describes and extensively interprets characters, action, and fantastic setting' ('Wyndham Lewis's Vorticist Metaphysic', p.47).
[127] Wyndham Lewis, 'Les Saltimbanques', in *The Complete Wild Body*, ed. by Bernard Lafourcade (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1982), pp.235-247 (p.239).
[128] 'Wyndham Lewis, 'A Soldier of Humour' (1927), in *The Complete Wild Body*, ed. by Bernard Lafourcade (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1982), pp.15-46 (pp.19, 20).

In ‘Inferior Religions’ — published in 1917 but written during the Vorticist period — Lewis provided the fullest account of the strategy behind this narratorial style.[129] These works, he suggested, were inspired by an anthropological interest: ‘These studies of rather primitive people are studies in a savage worship and attraction’.[130] The characters in these pieces he described as ‘carefully selected specimens of religious fanaticism’ which are ‘congealed and frozen into logic’, evoking the sinister power suggested by anthropological texts to scorn the ‘primitive’ people they wish to understand.[131] With their ‘Totems’ and ‘Gods’ shown to be ‘illusions hugged and lived in’, the springs of vitality from which they once drew their strength are polluted.[132] They exist thereafter as ‘cyphers’ in ‘a new human mathematic’, and thus as ‘shadows of energy, and not living beings’.[133]

It is not so evident in the earliest short stories of 1909-1911, but by the time of *Enemy* and ‘A Soldier of Humour’ (1917) the figure of the narrator becomes like a totalitarian leader of the narrative over which they preside, imposing their iron will on the plot and jealously controlling their characters.[134] This type in Lewis’s early work —

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[129] In his notes Bernard Lafourcade suggests that it was ‘written early in 1917, when Lewis was still training as a bombardier’ (‘Inferior Religions’ (1917), p.314). But there is evidence to suggest it was written much earlier during the Vorticist period. In the ‘Editor’s note’ which he included with ‘Inferior Religions’ on the occasion of its publication in *The Little Review* in September 1917 Pound comments: ‘[t]his essay was written as the introduction to a volume of short stories’ which ‘was in the process of publication (the author had even been paid in advance on it) when war broke out. The last member of the publishing firm has been killed in France, and the firm disbanded’ (‘Inferior Religions’ (1917), p.314). The contract for the volume with Groschen is dated 12 June 1914 (Wyndham Lewis, ‘Our Wild Body’ Contract, Guide to the Wyndham Lewis Collection, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Box 57, Folder 15, <http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/EAD/htmldocs/RMM04612.html> [accessed 12 November 2016]) and on 25 June 1916 Lewis writes to Pound stating ‘I wish you would keep your eyes on that book of mine that Goschen [*sic*] took & paid for […] Our Wild Body it was called’ (*Pound/Lewis,* ed. by Timothy Materer, p.43). References which Lewis makes in ‘Inferior Religions’ to the ‘trenches’ occupied by the ‘opposing armies in Flanders’ suggest it must have been written after the war of mobility ceased in the autumn of 1914 (‘Inferior Religions’ (1917), p.318).

[130] Lewis, ‘Inferior Religions’, p.315. This essay has also been recognized as being ‘primarily an anthropological […] exercise’ by Charlotte de Mille in ‘“Blast … Bergson?” (pp.143-4).

[131] Lewis, ‘Inferior Religions’, p.316.

[132] Ibid., p.316.

[133] Ibid., pp.316, 315, 316.

[134] A continuous development can be identified in the changing role and style of the narrator in Lewis’s fictions between the earliest short stories of 1909 and the 1927 presentation of *The Wild Body*. The earliest narrators, of ‘The “Pole”’ and ‘Les Saltimbanques’ (both 1909) for example, are like passive commentators of the burlesque scenes they encounter. A marked change occurs when Arthur Pine emerges as the narrator of the 1917 version of ‘A Soldier of Humour’, for here Lewis begins to invest his narrator with more power as a dynamic shaper of narratives who, like a self-conscious Don Quixote, deliberately places himself ‘in a vortex of strenuous and burlesque encounters’ whenever he gets the chance (‘A Solider of Humour’ (1917), in *The Complete Wild Body*, ed. by Bernard Lafourcade (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1982), pp.323-354 (p.324)). This aggressive kind of narrator – ‘a visi-gothic […] *laughing* machine’ who populates his stories with his trophies of his ‘barbarism’ – grows ultimately into the figure of Ker-Orr, whose exploits we have observed in ‘The Death of the Ankou’ (‘A Soldier of Humour’ (1927), p.17).

what he described in 'Inferior Religions' as 'the Wild Body, the generic puppet of all' — is fully realized in Ker-Orr and the narrator of *Enemy*, each of whom appear to be partly modelled upon the figure of the anthropologist among the savage peoples of their studies.[135] The effect which this has in the narratives is to highlight the conditions of control: 'to foreground the act and technical apparatus of persuasion, to reveal the forms of power, the "art" by which one is ruled', as Tyrus Miller writes.[136]

Lewis's narrators examine their characters and interrogate their interior worlds, before hunting them out of their superstitions into the cold light of logic. In this way they represent an all-pervading rationality invading the mysteries of the spirit-world, in the case of *Enemy* reducing a shamanic ritual to a performance on the stage of a modern theatre. Their victims, Arghol and Monsieur de Valmore in 'A Soldier of Humour', suffer something like 'extermination by museumification', as Jean Baudrillard has described it.[137] The following passage from *Simulations* (1983) might help make this point more clearly:

> mummies do not decay because of worms: they die from being transplanted from a prolonged symbolic order, which is master over death and putrescence, on to an order of history, science and museums — our own, which is no longer master over anything, since it knows only how to condemn its predecessors to death and putrescence and their subsequent resuscitation by science. An irreparable violence towards all secrets, the violence of a civilisation without secrets.[138]

This might almost be taken as a summary of Lewis's narrative strategy at this time, as it was expressed in 'Inferior Religions'. The irreparable violence of the narrator to his characters' secrets provided the model for many of Lewis's early fictions. Arghol is transplanted from a scene of ritual and thrown into a modern theatre. He is congealed and frozen into logic by the narrator, who exhibits the tendency which Nietzsche described as '*aesthetic Socratism*, whose supreme law reads roughly as follows, "To be

[135] Lewis, 'Inferior Religions', p.315.
[136] Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars* (London: University of California Press, 1999), p.117.
[137] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. by Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), pp.20-21.
[138] Ibid., p.21.

beautiful everything must be intelligible"'.[139] It is thus really *mythos* which is being put on trial in *Enemy*.

This would seem to carry an ironic twist for Harrison's theory since the way back to ritual is forcefully blocked, 'the past is preserved as the destruction of the past'.[140] Lewis takes to a logical extreme Harrison's view that 'the Churches of to-day must and should become the Museums of to-morrow'.[141] He illustrates how in the theatre as much as in museums and galleries — what Lewis described in 'The Essential Purposes of Art' as 'mausoleums of dead languages' — we touch the sacred only by having it broken in pieces before our eyes.[142] In *Enemy* this degradation is suffered equally by the self.[143] The quest for original purity is in all cases dealt a severe blow with the realization that 'the bastard form infects the original'.[144]

But nevertheless some of that original mythical darkness is unleashed in the arena. While *mythos* is put on trial in *Enemy*, it is ultimately undone by its own grim logic. The *modus operandi* of logocentric debasement is shown to be essentially no different to the sacrifice rite of the ancient savage, as a representation of mythic man is ritually desecrated at the altar of the new religion.[145] The narrator helps to indicate one of Lewis's key ideas at this time: that very primitive instincts stir within *logo*centric control.[146] He thus occupies a liminal position and in his forays between the 'primitive' and 'civilized' worlds he is able to bring back the aura at least of art's sacred origin. He is, like Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), a trickster who plays off both sides for his own gain; an archetypal figure in Lewis's early fictions whose ultimate role is to 'catch the clearness and logic in the midst of contradictions'.[147] In this way *Enemy* conveys the power which art has to order, structure and control, but it also communicates the '*magical* quality in artistic expression — a recognition that the artist

[139] Nietzsche, 'The Birth of Tragedy', p.83-84.
[140] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.xv.
[141] Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, p.237.
[142] 'The Essential Purposes of Art' (1951).
[143] Foshay supports this idea when he writes that *Enemy* 'is Lewis's attempt to point to the source of the modern agon as a dividedness of man from himself, within himself, which reduces him to the bathos of a pure self-involvement' (*Wyndham Lewis and the Avant-Garde,* p.29).
[144] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* p.70.
[145] This aspect of *Enemy* resonates with Adorno's closing comments in *Philosophy of New Music*: '[t]he falsification of myth bears witness to an elective affinity with genuine myth. Perhaps that art alone would be authentic that would be liberated from the idea of authenticity itself, of being thus and not otherwise' (p.158).
[146] This is of course a central theme of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), which make have been a source for Lewis.
[147] Lewis, 'Wyndham Lewis Vortex No.1', in *BLAST 2*, p.91.

is tapping the supernatural sources and potentialities of our existence', as Lewis wrote in *Time and Western Man*.[148]

Although this figure of the narrator is clearly derived from Nietzsche's idea of an independent warrior guided only by a personal morality of strength, it is possible to observe here one of the ways in which Lewis was disentangling his own thought from Nietzsche's heavy influence. For Nietzsche this idealized human specimen had been conceived as the embodiment of non-rational instincts, and thus entirely purified of the rational *logos* of Socratism and modernity. But in *Enemy* Lewis attempted to show how the Dionysian spirit was present all along within the rational controls entailed by 'Socratism', and that modernity was already a 'primitive' situation.[149] In this way Lewis anticipates the work of Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), who thirty years later would suggest that 'enlightenment with every step becomes more deeply engulfed in mythology'.[150] *Enemy* thus marks a significant point of departure in Lewis's imaginative life, a moment when he made Nietzschean models serve his own purposes.[151]

It seems possible that Lewis may even have modelled Arghol partly on Nietzsche who, as a modern 'cynic' philosopher, may have reminded him of Shakespeare's Timon.[152] Arghol would be a very convincing portrait of Nietzsche in the guise of his own detested 'theoretical man' — who 'no longer dares entrust himself to the terrible icy current of existence: he runs timidly up and down the bank' — since he is similarly stationed at 'the world's brink' in 'collapse of chronic philosophy', without ever being bold enough to take the plunge.[153] The defenestration of Max Stirner's book in Arghol's dream of Berlin may, in light of this comparison, be read as a humorous portrait of Nietzsche's furious disavowal of influence in the face of mounting

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[148] *Time and Western Man*, p.188.
[149] Nietzsche, 'The Birth of Tragedy', p.137.
[150] The full quote is worth citing: 'Just as the myths already realize enlightenment, so enlightenment with every step becomes more deeply engulfed in mythology. It receives all its matter from myths, in order to destroy them; and even as a judge it comes under the mythic curse. It wishes to extricate itself from the process of fate and retribution, while exercizing retribution on that process' (*Dialectic of Enlightenment,* pp.11-12).
[151] This challenges Jodie Greenwood's claim that only in the works of the 1920s and 1930s do we 'see Lewis critically engaged with Nietzsche's philosophy', while *BLAST*, 'in its celebration of the individual, the present moment and the principles of Apollo and Dionysus, shows an influence that was as yet less rigorously questioned' ('The Crisis of the System', p.88). In *BLAST* Lewis was clearly already distancing himself from Nietzsche's influence by interrogating the key concepts of his philosophy.
[152] *The Lion and the Fox,* p.252.
[153] Nietzsche, 'The Birth of Tragedy', p.113; Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* pp.70, 59.

accusations of plagiarism; the philosopher of the 'self' casting away the figure of his hated teacher.[154]

The episode with Stirner's book has equal relevance to Lewis, however, and the transition which he was making in his Vorticist work, because in *Enemy* and his other contributions to *BLAST* Lewis was exorcizing his own earlier dependence on the ideas of Nietzsche and Bergson. While Lewis acknowledged the impact which Nietzsche had on his early thought he took care to clarify that 'what I like least about Nietzsche' is the 'titanic nourishment for the ego', the aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy which he supposed attracted the 'majority of people'.[155] We may surmise then that Nietzsche's heavy influence on Lewis's work notionally departs with Stirner when the 'ego' is cast out of the window in Arghol's 'room in the city'.[156]

But as much as he was distancing his work from early influences, Lewis was situating himself and Vorticism within modernism in a way that is important to observe. What he explores in *Enemy*, in terms which marry with more recent cultural criticism, is one of the defining features of modern art: that it is deprived of an essence.[157] By viewing the artistic quest for origin through an anthropological lens, he suggests that the only 'origin' attainable in the modern world is a corrupted version reconstituted out of modern anthropological knowledge. *Enemy* then serves as a parable for modernity's desecration of the sacred. It conveys how susceptible the modern world is to wish-fulfilling fallacies: the turn to myth, which was supposed to keep 'the flame of [High]

[154] This occurs at p.77 of 'Enemy of the Stars' in *BLAST*. The claim that he had derived his philosophy from Stirner, and even plagiarized large sections of Stirner's book *The Ego and His Own* (1845), dogged Nietzsche throughout his writing career.
[155] *Rude Assignment,* p.128.
[156] A further disavowal of influence, this time concerning Arthur Schopenhauer, may be found in Arghol's enraged comment to Hanp, 'I find I wanted to make a naïf yapping Poodle-parasite of you', and his melancholic realization that 'I shall always be a prostitute' ('Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, p.73). Schopenhauer owned a succession of pet poodles which he named 'Atman' and it is possible that this episode in the dialogue between Arghol and Hanp satirizes this fact. According to this idea, Arghol takes on the role of the great philosopher of universal pessimism, realizing that he had mistaken the qualities of his companion; finding only base instincts where once he had perceived a superior moral nature.
[157] For Adorno, as Peter Osborne clarifies, the 'crisis of modernism' was that its evaluative prescriptions lacked substantive foundations. No longer granted an 'affirmative essence' beyond its own activities, modernist art exists in an 'insufferable' context in which it is forced to 'challenge its own essence' and to revolt against itself: 'All modern art, according to Adorno, is inscribed within the terms of this contradiction' (Peter Osborne, 'Adorno and Modernism', in *The Problems of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin,* ed. by Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1989), p.24).

culture alive', is revealed as an instance of the 'less elevated' forms of *Kitsch* popular culture; a burlesque theatre-house entertainment and not a sacred ritual.[158]

Yet in various ways the text also entices us into its own ritualistic 'play' and mythical vision. It is itself enacting a ritual of sorts, as we have seen, breaking apart the original stability of the self in a way which would have brought Rousseau to tears. In *Enemy* Lewis effectively performs Rousseau's nightmare vision of the theatre, dramatizing Rousseau's view that the actor's profession involved the 'traffic of [the] self'.[159] He takes care to lure his audience as much as his characters out of themselves and into an 'intimate ceremonious acquaintance' with the spectacle.[160] In doing so he affirms the power which art has to create realities of its own. *Enemy* is thus itself an instance of myth, at least as Nietzsche understood it, in the sense that Lewis used it to crystallize his present historical moment into a metaphysical vision '*sub specie aeterni* and in a certain sense as timeless'.[161]

Mixing *mythos* with *logos*, myth with modernity, *Enemy* carves out a conceptual home of its own within modernism, dancing with the contradictions with which it is inscribed. It demonstrates the dualistic strategy of Vorticism clearly, preferring a mercenary status to partisan allegiance to either side in the struggle. Like many of his fictions it appears that Lewis used *Enemy* as a test bed for ideas put forward in his critical and philosophical prose. It is a work invested with many of the theoretical tensions which had grown out of modernism's séance with the past. The result is a text which is often troublingly obscure and paradoxical, and yet which allows us to take a measure of the competing ideas about the quest for origin at a key moment in modernism's development.

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[158] In this way *Enemy* explores what Robert Scholes has described as the 'paradoxy' of 'High and Low' cultures in modernism. I refer particularly to his discussion of Clement Greenberg's distinction between the *avant-garde* and *Kitsch* (*Paradoxy of Modernism*, p.7).
[159] Rousseau, *Letter to D'Alembert,* p.309. At the end of his *Letter to d'Alembert* Rousseau expressed his concern about the effect the theatre has on the integrity of the self in terms which reflect the degradation which Arghol suffers, by 'prostitut[ing]' himself to his audience ('Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, p.73): 'What is the talent of the actor? The art of counterfeiting himself, or putting on another character than his own, of appearing different than he is, of being passionate in cold blood, of saying what he does not think of naturally as if he really did think it, and, finally, of forgetting his own place by dint of taking another's. What's the profession of the actor? It is a trade in which he performs for money, submits himself to the disgrace and the affronts that others buy the right to give him, and publicly puts his person publicly on sale. I beg every sincere man to tell if he does not feel in the depths of his soul that there is something servile and base in this traffic of oneself' (*Letter to d'Alembert,* p.309).
[160] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* p.59.
[161] Nietzsche, 'The Birth of Tragedy', p.137.

In this chapter we have identified the central 'pattern' of Lewis's Vorticist works as a dualistic tension between the two opposed worldviews: *mythos* and *logos*. We have observed that *Enemy* presents what we might describe as a myth about myth.
On the one hand, the text performs the grim procedure of a sacrificial ritual and presents a mythical narrative about the modern condition, but this is complicated by another tendency which the text exhibits, to rationalize and thereby unravel the mythic pattern which has been woven. While Lewis takes great care in designing and building a mythic structure for his artworks, he invests equal energy in disassembling — or perhaps it is more theoretically relevant to say deconstructing — the myth he has elaborated. In the final chapter of this thesis I turn to consider the deeper significance of this tension in Lewis's Vorticist works, exploring especially the contribution which Lewis's mythopoeic activities make to the philosophical discourse of modernity.

Chapter 5

Lewis's Vorticist Myth and the Philosophical Discourse of Modernity

Having identified the dualistic tension between mythic and modern worldviews as the central theme in Lewis's early pattern of thinking, one other significant task remains to be done. As yet we have no decisive indication of the interpretative outcome of the *mythos/logos* dualism as it features in these works: whether, for example, Lewis ultimately wished to denounce modernism's turn to myth, or whether he simply aimed to highlight the fallacy of seeking a mythical home in anthropological sources. For Val Plumwood a dualism always 'results from a certain kind of denied dependency on a subordinated other'.[1] Applying these rigorous terms to Lewis's Vorticism we are led to suppose that either the mythic or the modern worldview ultimately triumphs at the expense of the other, the relation between the two being an essentially negative correlation.

But in *Enemy*, as we have seen, the dualistic tension results in no clear resolution. The negative correlation of denied dependency seems to operate on both sides of this dualistic tension: the 'mythic' is gained only through the lens of anthropological rationality, at the same time that the 'modern' is infused with a primitive ritualistic darkness. The possibility remains that Lewis's dualistic strategy really is as mercenary as it claims to be, depending ultimately upon an unresolved state of theoretic conflict. Certainly we must be prepared to postpone identification of any definitive or essential position in Lewis's works of this period and instead remain receptive to the arena of significance which is opened by strategies of juxtaposition and paradox. With this in mind I have adopted a particular method in this chapter, focussing upon the two roles which 'myth' is made to play in Lewis's Vorticism: as a route back to sacred origin and as a calamitous dead-end for modern subjectivity. I shall begin by

[1] Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.41.

considering the possibility that Lewis's creative effort across two arts in the end constitutes a genuine instance of myth.

(i) Lewis and Gnosticism: The Case for a 'Totalizing Mythography'

In *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* Ernst Cassirer comments that '[a]nyone aiming at a comprehensive system of human culture has, of necessity, turned back to myth'.[2] This idea provides a useful start point for our analysis of the mythic credentials of Lewis's Vorticism, for it presents an explanation of the way in which the modernist ambition to renovate culture — to exchange the old for the new world — became manifest in an idealized conception of myth. In their world-creating mode, modernists were inevitably led back to the content and form of myths, where they found important precedents for their own attempt to sketch 'blueprints for […] a new civilization'.[3] But equally there was something about the modern world, so markedly different to what had come before, which seemed to demand a radically new orientation towards life. Mythic narratives — with their depictions of a chaotic universe of warring forces and fluctuating phenomena — also provided a highly effective model with which to capture this.

Lewis's Vorticist paintings and writings belong at the centre of this tradition in modernism. In 'The New Egos' he commented on the new type of humanity which the modern world was breeding, no longer with eyes 'in the top of our head, and full of blank light', the eyes of the modern town-dweller 'sweep life horizontally'.[4] The idea we are given here is that the vertical orientation of a transcendent God or of objective Truth no longer had any place in a world where the human being encounters 'everywhere fraternal moulds for his spirit, and interstices of a human world'.[5] The old ways of conceptualizing the world were outmoded. The modern world, we are led to suppose, resembled a mysterious labyrinth more than a divine hierarchy. It was a situation in which '[o]ne feels the immanence of some REALITY more than any former human beings can have felt it'.[6] This new orientation towards an immanent rather than

[2] Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms Volume 2: Mythical Thought,* trans. by Ralph Manheim (London: Yale University Press, 1955), p.3.
[3] *Rude Assignment,* p.135.
[4] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST,* p.141.
[5] Ibid., p.141.
[6] Ibid., p.141

transcendent reality is an important aspect of Lewis and modernism's turn to myth. One of the key practices of mythopoeia, as Cassirer writes, is to 'grasp' reality 'according to its own *immanent*, structural law' (*my emphasis*).[7] In his Vorticist paintings and writings Lewis explored humankind's new and unsettling relation to the 'real' in the modern world, and in his careful interpretation of the 'structural law' which underpinned this new reality he elaborated a myth of his own.

In making the claim that Lewis's Vorticism constitutes a genuine instance of myth, however, more interpretive problems than solutions are raised. We may immediately discern two major issues which need to be clarified. In the first instance we must ask: what is the meaning and importance of the claim that Lewis's Vorticism qualifies as myth and not merely a collection of literary and artistic works which *use* mythical sources? What are the qualifying criteria for a 'myth' and why is the qualification significant in this instance? Crucial to our approach here is the theoretical antagonism which has been established between the mythic and the modern worldviews.

Michael Nath's '"Monstrous Starlight": Wyndham Lewis and Gnosticism' provides useful co-ordinates for our analysis of the mythic credentials of Lewis's work. In this essay Nath focuses his analysis on the presence of elements of Gnostic myth in the texts of *The Human Age* and enquires whether we may 'discover in Lewis a transition from conceptualization to totalizing mythography?'[8] With reference to Hans Blumenberg's monumental *Work on Myth* (1985) he clarifies the nature of the debate. In essence, it comes down to this: whether we understand Lewis's work as being coherently rooted within a specific mythic tradition, interpreting present historical conditions in terms of that myth's 'fundamental configuration'; or whether we view his work as an 'art myth' which stands apart from any single tradition, while simultaneously uprooting mythical ingredients to serve a relatively more spontaneous act of creation.[9] In order to explore the possibility of a deeper, more fundamental resonance with Gnostic myth, of the sort suggested by Nath, it is important to see how

[7] Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms,* p.4.
[8] Nath, 'Monstrous Starlight', p.159.
[9] For Nath this is clarified in Hans Blumenberg's conceptual distinction between 'art myths' and 'fundamental myths'. He writes: 'Whereas the fundamental myth is formed through an evolutionary process, so that its latest, surviving configuration is also its fundamental (because necessary) configuration, the art myth is a comparatively spontaneous and individual creation, which adapts its entire mythic inheritance to present conditions' ('Monstrous Starlight', p.158).

far the mythic ingredients in *Enemy of the Stars* fit the Gnostic 'pattern', and indeed which variant of the Gnostic tradition it most clearly belongs to.

There is a text from what Hans Jonas calls the 'Iranian doctrine' which may help to illuminate in more precise detail the Gnosticism of *Enemy of the Stars*. There is no evidence that Lewis was aware of this text at any point in is career, so my purpose in elaborating its thematic comparison with *Enemy* is to highlight affinity rather influence. The 'Hymn of the Pearl' is a prose narrative from the apocryphal Acts of the Apostle Thomas which describes the seeker of *gnosis* as 'a stranger' on a singular mission in the world:[10]

> When thou goest down into Egypt and bringest the One Pearl which lies in the middle of the sea which is encircled by the snorting serpent, thou shalt put on again thy robe of glory and thy mantle over it and with thy brother our next in rank be heir to our kingdom.[11]

The complex symbolism at work here is brought out well by Jonas. The *pearl* symbolises the 'pneuma', or soul 'in the supranatural sense', a metaphorical designation which is common among many mythological systems.[12] The *serpent*, the *sea* and *Egypt* are all stock Gnostic symbols of materialism which, however, refer to different spheres and aspects of the soul's material enslavement. Numerous Gnostic writings describe the outermost circle of the material universe as being surrounded by 'the earth-encircling dragon of the original chaos, the ruler or evil principle of this world'.[13] This is depicted visually as a dragon which surrounds the world, swallowing its own tail.[14]

Egypt at the time the 'Hymn' was written stood as a symbol of worldly oppression through its role in Israel's bondage in 'The Book of Exodus' and through its association, by peoples of the East, with death — as, for instance, 'the home of the cult of the dead, and therefore the kingdom of Death' — and in the case of the 'Hymn of the Pearl', with slumber and loss of personal vitality.[15] '*Seas* or *waters*', Jonas writes, are

[10] The 'Hymn of the Pearl' is found in the apocryphal Acts of the Apostle Thomas where it is named 'Song of the Apostle Judas Thomas in the Land of the Indians', but Hans Jonas provides a translation from the original Syriac text in *The Gnostic Religion* (pp.112-129).
[11] Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion,* p.113.
[12] Ibid., p.125.
[13] Ibid., p.116.
[14] Ibid., p.117.
[15] Ibid., p.118.

'standing gnostic symbol[s] for the world of matter or of darkness into which the divine has sunk.'[16]

The 'Hymn' is most interesting to our present purposes because of the way in which it conceptualizes the divided self, for here both the natural worldly self and the supranatural, true self (*pneuma*) are conceived as garments to be worn. In the first instance, arriving as a stranger to his 'fellow-dwellers in the inn', the seeker of the Pearl clothes himself 'in their garments' to evade detection, but in their company he succumbs to the fleshly pleasures of meat and drink.[17] 'Through the heaviness of their nourishment' he falls 'into deep slumber' and grows forgetful of the pearl for which he had been sent.[18] This *impure garment* which the stranger puts on to conceal his true identity from the Egyptians stands for the physical body and the material self (equivalent to the *jiva* in Eastern religions).[19]

But the Divine self is also conceived as a garment which the seeker must put on to attain completion. When finally he is roused by 'the call' and throws off the 'filthy and impure garment', the stranger seizes the pearl from the snorting serpent and returns to his home in the East.[20] On his way he encounters his 'robe of glory' which had been sent out to meet him:

> As I now beheld the robe, it seemed to me suddenly to become a mirror-image of myself: myself entire I saw in it, and it entire I saw in myself, that we were two in separateness, and yet again one in the sameness of our forms […] And I cast the royal mantle about my entire self. Clothed therein, I ascended to the gate of salutation and adoration.[21]

As this passage clarifies, salvation in Gnostic myth takes the form of a reunification of the divided self. In attaining Divine Unity the 'stranger' becomes synthesized with 'the mirror-image of himself'; suggesting, as Jonas makes clear, the intriguing possibility

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[16] Ibid., p.117.
[17] Ibid., p.113.
[18] Ibid., p.114.
[19] Ibid., p.118.
[20] In the 'Hymn' the call takes the form of a letter from his father, the King, which 'rose up in the form of an eagle […] and flew until it alighted beside me and became wholly speech' (Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion,* pp.114, 115.
[21] Ibid., p.115.

that this represents 'a twin brother or eternal original of the saviour remaining in the upper world during his terrestrial mission'.[22]

'Duplications of this kind abound in gnostic speculation', Jonas explains at one point, and clearly they also help to explain a great deal about the divided self as it is treated by Lewis in *Enemy*.[23] Like the stranger in the 'Hymn of the Pearl', Arghol also observes a distinction between the self that is of Divine origin, 'the ancient race', and the self that is a 'loathsome deformity […] got through indiscriminate rubbing against [ones] fellows'.[24] He is the archetypal Gnostic stranger in the world, rendered passive by mankind, hunted by the stars, and ultimately ruled over by 'God and Fate'.[25] Unlike the central figure in the 'Hymn of the Pearl', however, Arghol appears unable to attain *gnosis*.

What appears to set *Enemy* apart from the Gnostic myth to which it is otherwise so closely related is the fact that its narrative forecloses the possibility of salvation, opting rather to display the depth of the human soul's material entanglement and the impossibility of overcoming this. In the first place Arghol demonstrates the strain undertaken to rouse oneself from slumber to hear the call (he is described as being in a 'collapse of chronic philosophy'). Once roused, however, he faces an even more impossible task to distinguish which is the 'bastard' self and which 'the original'. Hanp presents himself both as Arghol's divine other-half (Arghol says to Hanp at one point 'I wanted to make you my self') and as a cumbrous and distracting acquaintance ('impudent parasite of his solitude').[26]

As the scene and narrative of *Enemy* makes clear this pessimistic intensification of the Gnostic tragedy is partly to be explained in terms of the new historical situation. Berlin, 'the great city of their world' and a harbinger of a new kind of materialism,

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[22] Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion,* p.123. Jonas relates that in the Mandean Liturgies for the Dead it is written: 'I go to meet my image and my image comes to meet me: it caresses and embraces me as if I were returning from captivity' (*The Gnostic Religion,* p.122). The thematic resemblance that this Gnostic distinction between the two parts of the self has with ancient Egyptian, Zoroastrian and Malay schemas, which may have been known to Lewis, is important to note. In ancient Egyptian mythology the self is distinguished into five component parts of which the 'Ba' (the individuated, unique self, or personality) and the 'Ka' (the vital spark which gives life to that personality) form a significant dualism. In Zoroastrianism the true self is understood as a 'Fravashi', a personal spirit. In Malay mythology the 'conception of the Human Soul (*Sĕmangat*) is that of a species of "Thumbling," "a thin, unsubstantial human image," or manikin, which is temporarily absent from the body in sleep, trance, disease, and permanently absent after death' (Walter William Skeat, *Malay Magic: An Introduction to the Folklore and Popular Religion of the Malay Peninsular* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1965), p.47).
[23] Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion,* p.123.
[24] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, pp.66, 71.
[25] Ibid., p.69.
[26] Ibid., pp.73, 78.

stands in the place of Egypt as a symbol of worldly oppression.[27] This aspect of the narrative is clarified in the line: '[s]omehow […] the City had settled down on Arghol'.[28] The fact that Arghol and Hanp are employed in the manufacture of wheels and are occasionally beaten by 'the Super', Arghol's uncle, is also relevant to note.[29] This might lead us to suggest that the Gnostic myth is indeed being reaffirmed and updated with subtle references to the contemporary situation.

Mixed in with this gnostic myth about forestalled transcendence are numerous other mythical ingredients, however, and it would be wise to observe how themes borrowed from Eastern religion intersect with the Gnostic elements in *Enemy* before we are led towards any firm conclusions about the mythic credentials of Lewis's Vorticism. The Hindu and Buddhist sources excavated by James Selby interact with the basis of this Gnostic myth in a remarkably coherent way. In the first instance, the Sankhya marriage of *perusha* with *prakriti* corresponds closely with the imprisonment of the Gnostic *pneuma* in the material world. Both mythic systems present a dualism which cuts through the heart of human life, suggesting that we are composed of two opposed metaphysical principles, broadly identifiable as spirit and matter.

Where the Hindu and Buddhism traditions do differ from Gnosticism is in their distinct conceptions of 'life' in the context of salvation. Salvation for each entails the severance of spirit from matter and its subsequent reunion with the One, a transcendence or sublation of the two opposed principles which results in a state of unity. But while Eastern religions comprehend this unity as a state of non-being, a metaphysical void, Gnosticism treats it as the attainment of a more complete Life in the presence of the Divine Being. Curiously, this incongruence between the two myths does not raise any apparent problems of coherence within Lewis's own myth, because the most striking feature of this is its rigorous adherence to Dualism against all forms of monism.

In most historic instances the function of the mythical dualism is that it must be overcome for salvation to be achieved. Hindu, Buddhist and most Gnostic traditions

[27] Ibid., p.72.
[28] Ibid., p.72.
[29] The relevance of the wheel here is that it symbolizes the endless and repetitive cycle in which they live, reflecting 'the plight of the Soul in the labyrinth of the hostile world', as it is conceived in Gnostic thought. According to this, the soul or *pneuma*, once captured in matter, is condemned to an endless cycle of existence — 'she dies, forever to be reborn' — and thus bears a clear resemblance to the cycle of *samsara* in Eastern religions (Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion,* p.67).

share this feature.[30] But as the first principles of the Vorticist Manifesto make clear, the essential function of Vorticism was to maintain discord between two opposed principles at all costs. In Lewis's handling, the reduction of two opposed principles to One is reversed, with every effort being made to maintain the dualism and prevent it slipping into Oneness. The strictness of the dualism which Lewis posits makes it comparable only with the Manichean configuration and so we are left to inquire why Lewis adheres so keenly to the Manichean Dualism?[31]

(ii) Lewis's Vorticism as Manichean 'Art Myth'

Perhaps the clearest expression of the rationale behind Lewis's adherence to the Manichean Dualism can be found in the description which he gives of his purpose in writing *The Art of Being Ruled* over a decade later. There he writes that the principal ailment of 'the present '"transitional" society' was its confusion of two rigidly opposed principles or 'virtues':[32]

> The virtues that we are apt to confuse in our excessive officially promoted pragmatism are the *disruptive* and the *creative* ones: or rather, katabolism comes too much to be described as *life*. If I kill you, that is a different thing from giving birth to you.
>
> In our society two virtues are badly contrasted, that of the *fighter* and *killer* (given such immense prestige by nineteenth-century darwinian science and philosophy) and that of the *civilizer* and *maker*. But the ancient and valuable iranian principle of duality is threatened. We confuse these two characters that we violently contrast. The effort in this essay is to separate them a little.[33]

[30] Neoplatonist and Valentinian variants are examples of moderate Gnostic dualisms.
[31] In his analysis of 'Physics of the Not-Self', Toby Foshay has highlighted what he describes as Lewis's 'inconsistency in claiming an equivalence between the monism of Platonism and (advaitic) Hinduism and the dualism of the war of the powers of light and darkness in Manicheism' (*Wyndham Lewis and the Avant-Garde,* p.35). But this reading takes Lewis's use of these religious and philosophical systems too much at face value and neglects to observe the aspect of Platonism and Hinduism which he actually harnessed in his own works. Lewis does not adopt these models wholesale, but rather borrows those elements which serve his strategy. Underlying the monistic metaphysic of Platonism and Hinduism is a structural dualism between two opposed elements. Lewis highlights this dualistic tension while downplaying the implicit suggestion that this can be overcome, and Oneness attained.
[32] *The Art of Being Ruled*, p.25.
[33] Ibid., p.25.

As this passage indicates, Lewis's dualistic methods leant ultimately upon moral foundations. Up to now we have appraised his adherence to dualism as an analytical strategy and a theoretic device with which to explore the consequences of supporting each side in a conflict. But in his effort to reaffirm the 'valuable iranian principle of duality' (the Manichean school of Gnostic thought) Lewis reveals a deeper level of attachment to dualism.

Catabolism, the process by which complex substances are broken down into smaller particle-units, is the scientific metaphor which Lewis uses to stand for the interbreeding of the 'disruptive' with the 'creative' virtues which he perceived to be taking place in his contemporary society. His concern that the modern world was initiating the collapse of hallowed dualistic distinctions and rendering even the most pressing issues of life and death relative is everywhere present in Lewis's Vorticist works. From around the time of the *Timon of Athens* portfolio in 1912 Lewis's visual works used what Jameson has termed 'the square and the round' principles as a symbolic shorthand for the inorganic and organic realms respectively. As we observed in chapter three, gradually the 'square' structures of the inorganic realm come to swallow the 'round', indicating a devastating conclusion to the process of dehumanization which he perceived to be occurring in the modern world.[34] The same dynamic is found in *Enemy*, where the integrity of the self is broken apart, Arghol succumbing in the end to a process of 'extermination by museumification'.

Clearly then, Lewis's Vorticism has its conceptual roots in the strict duality presented by the Manichean tradition of Gnostic thought. But this alone does not entail the conclusion that what we encounter is an instance of 'Gnosticism' rather than simply 'dualism', as Nath suggests. Indeed, upon closer examination this idea seems deeply problematic. Lewis's myth behaves strangely when it is placed in the Blumenbergian schema which Nath deploys, in a way that is important to observe. For Blumenberg the most basic function of myth — the aspect which would qualify it as 'fundamental' — is to exert explanatory control over the world and thereby to lay to rest the anxiety inspired by what he calls the 'absolutism of reality'.[35] As a rationalization of a recalcitrant reality, it therefore shares the same function as science.

[34] Jameson, 'Wyndham Lewis's *Timon*: The War of Forms', p.26 and p.25.
[35] Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, trans. by Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), p.3.

Blumenberg thus rejects the 'from mythos to logos' schema which was born out of Enlightenment philosophy. Myth and metaphor, logic and science are, in Blumenberg's theory, distinct but simultaneous endeavours in 'making human existence possible by overcoming the problem of our biological nonadaption, our constitutional deficit of instinct', as Robert Wallace comments.[36] For Blumenberg, history is not to be conceived as 'a teleological sequence' but as a gradual 'working through of solutions to one original all-encompassing problem, the problem of the "absolutism of reality"'.[37] The criteria against which we are supposed to judge whether a myth is fundamental or contingent (artistic) are thus essentially teleological and historical. For a myth to qualify as fundamental it must pertain to an ancient tradition which seeks to make of the world a conducive home for human culture.

At first sight Lewis appears to conform to Blumenberg's definition here. In 'Inferior Religions' he expresses a similar conception of myths and religions as essentially 'illusions' to be 'hugged and lived in':

> They are like little dead Totems. Just as all Gods are a repose for humanity, the big religions an important refuge and rest, so these little grotesque idols are […] it is a world in a corner of the world, full of rest and security.[38]

This account ties closely with Blumenberg's account of myth as a way of imaginatively managing the scale and force of reality, for Lewis also conveys the sense in which fetishes and idols help his savage subjects to centre the world on their lived experience. In 'Inferior Religions' he also makes it clear that this is not restricted to a primitive type of human. The civilized also have 'attendant objects or fetishes' which offer them 'regular food for vitality'.[39] So even the anthropologist may be regarded as fetishizing the specimens of a savage humanity which he gathers to dissect at the altar of his rationality. All, in the end, qualify as inferior religions, the anthropological pursuit is itself a totemic fiction, a myth designed to mold reality into a pleasing shape for the

[36] Robert M. Wallace in his introduction to Blumenberg's *Work on Myth*, p.xi-xii.
[37] Ibid., p.xiv.
[38] 'Inferior Religions' (1917), p.316.
[39] Ibid., p.316. Just as the 'wheel at Carisbrooke imposes a set of movements on the donkey inside it', so all human beings are like 'intricately moving bobbins' subject to a particular fascination for 'a set of objects or one in particular' ('Inferior Religions', p.315). For John Constable it was '[a] stormy landscape', for Leonardo 'a red rain on the shadowed side of heads' and for Korin 'the symmetrical gushing of water, in waves like huge vegetable insects' ('Inferior Religions', p.319). For Lewis it is the 'specimens' of a savage humanity which he, as their creator, fetishizes.

human subject. Lewis thus shares with Blumenberg the psychological characterization of the shared motive underlying both mythic and scientific ways to knowledge: they are both equally attempts of the human subject to rein in the vast expanse of the objective world — to control the perceived absolutism of reality — so that it can be made a place of rest and security. But what constitutes 'security' for Lewis, as an artist living in the historic situation of modernism, is very different to what it signified to the ancient mythmaker or the modern scientist.

From Lewis's perspective the greatest threat to human culture was the impending triumph of humankind's bid to domesticate the once wild external world. In *The Art of Being Ruled* he wrote that '[w]e are *all* slipping back into machinery, because we *all* have tried to be free', communicating the sense in which the *technos* which had first liberated humankind from the terror and drudgery of a life enveloped by Nature, and spurred the species on to such an advanced stage of organization, was now its greatest enemy.[40] The reason for this was that it was perceived to be collapsing the dualistic tension between self and world, subject and object, which — Lewis agreed with Nietzsche on this point — had first brought art into existence. The interpenetrative union of subject/object which was widely hailed by philosophers, writers and artists in these years in this sense reflects the metaphysical situation of the modern world as a moment when 'the energy concealed in nature is unlocked' and 'no longer stands over against us as object', as Martin Heidegger puts it.[41] Lewis realized that the valuable principle of duality was threatened in the modern world and stood rigidly opposed to the drive towards 'a *unity* in everything'.[42] His Vorticist myth reflects this.

Thus in contrast to the account of myth given by Blumenberg, Lewis's myth finds 'security' in a wild rather than a domesticated world. In common with Blumenberg's theory, it is explicable as an attempt to create a conducive home for human culture, but this, for Lewis, involved the renewed separation of subject from object, self from world; not their union. Vorticism is not an attempt to fit in with the world or allow art to merge any further into life, rather it arises from the struggle to

[40] *The Art of Being Ruled*, p.125.
[41] Martin Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', in *Basic Writings,* ed. by David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), pp.307-342 (p.322). This quotation in a full: '[when] the energy concealed in nature is unlocked, what is unlocked is transformed, what is transformed is stored up [...] We call it the standing-reserve [...] Whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over against us as object'. For Heidegger, the consequence of this is that 'the illusion comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct [...] it seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself' ('The Question Concerning Technology', p.332).
[42] *Time and Western Man*, p.277.

stand out against the reigning uniformity and resist absorption into the mechanism.[43] While 'Blumenbergian man creates his "symbolic forms" in order to overcome his [...] self-contradictory natural state as a creature lacking the instincts to fit into a "niche" in nature', Lewis, on the other hand, affirms this self-contradictory state and relishes his role as 'an oddity outside the machine', the enemy of all who seek coherent self and a safe niche in existence.[44]

In this sense the orientation of Vorticist myth towards the historical context of modernity is of *mythos* against *logos*. *Enemy* particularly juxtaposes these two ways of knowing the world, conceptually aligning myth with the 'creative' principle and logocentrism with the 'disruptive', as we observed in chapter four. In this way Lewis's myth is a bid to evade domestication and a programmed effort to 'rewild' a tamely uniform and rational world.[45] Far from being a safe shelter from the dread of an uncontrollable reality, Lewis's myth is an attempt to absolutize the modern reality and prevent it falling into the clutches of the comprehensive and universal logic which is entailed by 'katabolism'.[46] Examined within the Blumenbergian schema which Nath utilizes, Lewis's myth is thus a counteroffensive movement against the prevailing urge towards unity of subject with object which underpins all historic mythological and scientific endeavour. It is a myth anchored in the modern world and the altered situation of humankind there, which starts not from the traditional problem of the 'absolutism of reality', but from the new problem facing humankind: the omnipotence of human rationality.

T. E. Hulme's distinction between ancient and modern variants of abstraction in art is relevant to this distinction. Both are expressions of a divorce between humankind and nature, but whereas the former may be read as an expression of humankind's dread at being unable to control natural forces, the latter emerges out of a situation of humankind's technological mastery over nature. Lewis's myth belongs to this latter category. It figuratively serves to stall rationality's implacable drive towards ultimate

[43] In support of this claim I refer to Lewis's complaints in 'Futurism, Magic and Life' that 'Art merges in Life again everywhere' (*BLAST*, p.132) and the modern situation is one in which 'Art has to behave itself and struggle' (*BLAST*, p.133).
[44] Robert M. Wallace in his introduction to Blumenberg's *Work on Myth*, p.xv; Lewis, 'Physics of the Not-Self', p.195.
[45] Robert Caserio has suggested that 'the creators of modernist works are negative demystifiers' in that 'they unmask absolutism, rationalism, idealism—and all illusions' (*The Novel in England, 1900–1950* (New York: Twayne, 1999), p.82). Lewis's activities during Vorticism provide an eloquent counterpoint to this idea.
[46] In Roland Barthes' terms it is a programmed effort to 'multiply signifiers, not to attain some ultimate signified' (*S/Z* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p.165.

mastery over nature by re-instating an imaginative gap between the human subject and the external world; meting out agency from the already bloated human subject to the external world in order to attain an equal distribution of power between the two, and thus prevent the dualism from collapse.[47] As a myth of modernity Vorticism ultimately serves to mystify and 'make-strange' the all-too-rational structures of the modern world. *Mythos* is being set strategically against *logos*, in the Enlightenment schema, precisely to shake the rationalist foundations of the present civilization.

William Blake once again provides a useful correlative for our analysis of Lewis's Vorticism's mythic credentials. Blake scholars routinely describe his oeuvre as constituting a 'mythology', emphasizing the interconnected symbols and mythemes which run through his poems and paintings. As Leo Damrosch notes, Blake's myth also overlaps at numerous instances with the central ideas of Gnostic myth, yet in his view this was 'not because he "was" a Gnostic but because the Gnostic form of Neoplatonism' — represented for Damrosch by the philosophical teachings of Plotinus and Valentinus — 'arrived at similar answers by an analogous route'.[48] The characteristics which Blake shares with the Gnostic form of Neoplatonism are to be found especially in the reconciliation of dualistic and monistic metaphysical interpretations which is offered by the doctrine of emanationism. Thus, despite adhering to an emanationist metaphysic which closely resembles Plotinus' philosophy, Blake's myth stands apart from the Gnostic tradition in Damrosch's view.

What is crucial to observe is the way in which both Blake and Lewis revert to myth, and Gnostic models in particular, in their respective critiques of modernity. Although their mythological endeavours clearly resonate within the fundamental structure of the ancient mythic tradition of Gnosticism, the orientation of *mythos* in both Blakean and Lewisian systems is as a category opposed to *logos.* These are not, as Blumenberg would have it, sibling techniques in a programmed domestication of the wild. The original impetus of 'fundamental myth' would thus appear to be lost in these 'art myths' which emerge after and about modernity. Indeed the broader function of a 'myth' which is composed after the Enlightenment and which is motivated by critical opposition to its philosophy of omnipotent rationality must be taken into account.

[47] This, it should be noted, is the ultimate function of Lewis's use of *hypallage* in *Enemy of the Stars*.
[48] Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth*, p.168.

(iii) Myth as the Other of Enlightenment Modernity

Lewis's myth may have grown out of the Gnostic tradition, but it is important to look towards a more recent discourse on myth in order to appreciate the full significance of Lewis's creative efforts in this period. In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987) Jürgen Habermas provides clues to the proper historic situation and cultural significance of Lewis's myth:

> Since the close of the eighteenth century, the discourse of modernity has had a single theme under ever new titles: the weakening of the forces of social bonding, privatization, and diremption — in short, the deformations of a one-sidedly rationalized everyday praxis which evoke the need for something equivalent to the unifying power of religion. Some place their hope in the reflective power of reason, or at least in a mythology of reason; others swear by the mythopoetic power of an art that is supposed to form the focal point of a regenerated public life. What Hegel called the need for philosophy was transformed from Schlegel until Nietzsche into the need — critical of reason — for a new mythology.[49]

It is precisely as an expression of this need for a new mythology, rather than as a renewed utterance of an ancient mythological system, that Lewis's Vorticist works appear most significant. Clearly Lewis's Vorticism was in part a response to the Nietzschean idea that '[i]n the forms of a revived mythology, art can reacquire the character of a *public* institution and develop the power to regenerate the ethical totality' of the community.[50]

In this Lewis was not alone. Numerous modernists similarly used myth as a teleological foundation for modern art. Where disagreement arises, this concerns the manner in which myth and ritual are to be evoked in order to instigate a cultural rebirth appropriate to the modern situation of art. It is relevant to note that during the time that T. S. Eliot was formulating his own schema for a 'mythical method' he criticized Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* in his 'London Letter' of October 1921 for delving too wholeheartedly into the 'entertaining stories' which anthropological studies of myth

[49] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* p.139.
[50] Ibid., p.88.

provide without giving a 'sense of the present'.[51] These comments provide a crucial indication of the direction in which Eliot's own theory of modern art was leaning in 1921, for in *The Waste Land* (and indeed in Joyce's *Ulysses*) the 'immense panorama of futility and anarchy' which Eliot associated with the modern world was treated as the essential substance of the poetic narrative; myth being used as an organizing structure which could bring form to what would otherwise be a chaos.[52] Myth, for Eliot, is significant for the reason that it makes 'the modern world possible for art'.[53]

Eliot's criticism of Stravinsky is echoed by Adorno, who similarly questioned the effectiveness of art's retreat into an idealized primitive past. In *Philosophy of New Music* (1973) Adorno expressed the view that the primitivist innovations which were pioneered by Stravinsky ultimately failed for the reason that they represented the modern artist's familiar 'aesthetic flirtation with barbarism' without 'being burdened with meaning'.[54] He extends the claim to Picasso's Cubist paintings, suggesting that the musical experiments that were being undertaken by Stravinsky and Schoenberg drew their principal inspiration from contemporary 'developments in painting'.[55] The criteria to which Adorno appeals in his critique of modernism's 'archaism' are important to highlight.[56] 'For Adorno', as Butler clarifies, 'the main task of Modernism is to evolve, and, what is more, to do so in a law-governed manner as shown in the work of Hegel and Marx'.[57] From this perspective works like *The Rite of Spring* and *Les Demoiselles D'Avignon* attempt to conceal their 'reactionary aim' while encouraging their audience to 'participat[e] in the collective force in magical regression', as Adorno puts it.[58] The end result is that the aura of mythical enchantment is simulated by an artist motivated primarily by disenchantment with his own historical situation.

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[51] This quote in full: '[i]t was interesting to anyone who had read *The Golden Bough* and similar works, but hardly more than interesting. In Art there should be interpenetration and metamorphosis. Even *The Golden Bough* can be read in two ways: as a collection of entertaining stories, or as a revelation of that vanished mind of which our mind is a continuation. In everything in the *Sacre du Printemps*, except in the music, one missed the sense of the present' (T. S. Eliot, 'London Letter', *The Dial*, 71.4 (October 1921), pp.452-455 <http://www.std.com/~raparker/exploring/tseliot/works/london-letters/london-letter-1921-10.html#paragraph-1> [accessed 7 April 2016], p.453).
[52] Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order and Myth', p.167.
[53] Ibid., p.167.
[54] Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p.108.
[55] Ibid., p.141.
[56] Ibid., p.120.
[57] Butler, *Early Modernism,* p.118.
[58] Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music,* p.112 and 119.

The idea which both Eliot and Adorno wish to communicate is presented by Lewis also in the axiom that 'Art must be organic with its Time'.[59] The great danger with modernism's turn to myth was that art might ultimately become enveloped by its own negative orientation towards the present condition of culture, and thus be prevented from reacquiring the character of 'a *public* institution'. This is clarified by Butler:

> As the language of rhythm, or the ambivalently emancipated dissonances of atonality, or the multiple perspectives of Cubism dominate a work, there is a very significant loss, which is compounded by the appeal to the primitive, collective, and mythical depths of the unconscious. It is part of the destruction of our sense of the individuality of human character, and of a corresponding critical commitment to a personal sensibility as projected through an innovatory artistic language.[60]

Butler's comments here capture the naivety which stalked modernism's turn to myth. As a bid to regenerate the ethical totality of the community, modern art is often peculiarly incapacitated by its own methods. Through the very 'techniques of strangeness' which gave modernist works of art their primitive aura, there comes a loss of communicability which threatens to close art off from its wider public altogether.[61] Thus, in a figurative sense, myth was modernism's mirage oasis, a dreamt of source of communal nourishment which never really materialized.

As a quest for modernity's alienated 'other' in myth, and an expression of an essentially aesthetic relation to reality, Lewis's Vorticism is, in one sense, just one among many art myths of the avant-garde. But it is an art myth which is strangely duplicitous, playing a double hand. While Lewis presents a myth against modernity — typical of the contemporary context of modernist primitivism — it is also a myth which is both crystallized and deconstructed self-consciously through an anthropological perspective; through the lens of the radicalized Enlightenment, in a manner of speaking. *Enemy of the Stars* especially demonstrates that pure myth is not possible to the modern artist, merely a montage of mythic typologies cobbled together out of anthropological knowledge and modernity itself, through which glimpses of the original mythical darkness are nevertheless discernible. Lewis stands therefore with one foot inside and the other outside the nineteenth-century discourse on the mythic renewal of art,

[59] Lewis, 'Manifesto', in *BLAST*, p.34.
[60] Butler, *Early Modernism*, p.118-119.
[61] See Kugel, *The Techniques of Strangeness in Symbolist Poetry* (1971).

highlighting both the power and the weakness of myth as a source of art's salvation in the modern world.

The key theoretic development made by Lewis's Vorticism within this discourse is the step which it takes beyond the 'messianic' traditions which precede it, presenting instead an essentially ambivalent critique of the theoretical terrain upon which modernism's turn to myth stands. It is important to understand more about the messianic traditions from which he departed before we can situate Lewis's contribution to this discourse with more precision. In Habermas's view Nietzsche's Dionysian philosophy may be read as a radical development of the 'Romantic messianism' which had dominated early nineteenth-century critiques of Enlightenment modernity.[62] As he points out, the key shift in theory and sensibility which marks Nietzsche off from his Romantic predecessors was in disentangling the redemptive promise of the god Dionysus ('*the god who is coming*') from the figure of Christ; the two being perceived by his Romantic predecessors as 'parallel' figures, both having 'died and left behind bread and wine until [their] return'.[63]

In Romantic messianism the investment of a primordial Dionysian potency in the figure of Christ had served a particular purpose. It provided a way of maintaining the integrity of roots of Western culture while at the same time disavowing the rationalism which had grown from these roots, suggesting that the spiritual deficit within modernity could be accounted for by reconnecting Western culture with a prior stage of its own development. Romanticism in this way kindled hopes for modernity's redemption, indicating a way in which 'the principle of subjectivity — deepened and at the same time authoritatively brought to dominance by the Reformation and the Enlightenment — could lose its narrowness' through renewed devotion to the Dionysian figure of Christ.[64]

Nietzsche enters this discussion as the first theorist to suggest that this toxic rationalizing and subjectivizing tendency within Western culture may be traced beyond the modern epoch back to the Christian and Socratic roots from which, he argued, it had first emerged. In the philosophy of Nietzsche, as Habermas writes:

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[62] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* p.92.
[63] Ibid., p.91.
[64] Ibid., p.92.

> the criticism of modernity dispenses for the first time with its retention of an emancipatory content. Subject-centred reason is confronted with reason's absolute other. […] A 'break-up of the principle of individuation' becomes the escape route from modernity.[65]

In this way Nietzsche took a radical step beyond the critical parameters of Romanticism. Observing no way of reconciling the modern *logos* with the lost *mythos* of humankind's past, he sets these two principles against each other in dynamic conflict, calling ultimately for a revolution which would overthrow the 'bastard form' in favour of the 'original', to use Lewisian terminology.

Lewis — a key figure among what Rebecca Beasley has described as the 'anti-romantic modernists' — stands in relation to Nietzsche as Nietzsche had stood to his Romantic predecessors, taking a step beyond the theoretical parameters which he inherited.[66] Yet this step is not one of radicalization or intensification of the critique of modernity. Rather it takes the form of a theoretical withdrawal from the discussion, which serves to highlight the theoretical parameters within which it was taking place. In light of this, it is not difficult to observe the functional value which Gnostic myth had in Lewis's developing thought. In Lewis's Vorticism the role of Nietzsche's (and Romanticism's) Dionysian principle, the god who is coming, is transposed into a Gnostic idiom of the 'alien God', the God who is perpetually absent.[67]

(iv) The Role of the 'Alien God' in Lewis's Dualistic Pattern of Thinking

The most marked effect of Lewis's theoretical manoeuvre in replacing the Dionysian with the Gnostic mythological model is that the criterion of the subject's salvation is removed to an impossible distance. Both 'origin' and ultimate 'destiny' are in this way forestalled and the practical business of life highlighted. In *Time and Western Man* (1927) Lewis gave a clear explanation of the reasoning behind this aspect of his philosophy:

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[65] Ibid., p.94.
[66] Beasley, 'Vortorussophilia', p.47.
[67] A fuller account of the 'alien God' of Gnostic religion can be found in Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, pp.49-51.

> If there is a God, we can say, we have, for this life, our backs turned on each other. This must be so for things to be bearable at all for us as creatures: for such unrelieved intimacy as would otherwise exist, such perpetual society — of such a pervasive, psychic, overwhelming kind — would not be socially possible. We at least must *pretend* not to notice each other's presence, God and ourselves to be *alone*. […] To confront or 'encounter' God is for us physically impossible, we can conclude; *we can only see God, if at all, from behind*.[68]

As these comments clarify, Lewis was alive to the consequences of encountering God 'face to face'. Such an encounter, as he makes clear, would be inimical to life. A few lines on he writes: 'As we define ourselves, we negate Perfection, understood as an absolute Unity […] Whatever happens, we are bound to shut the door upon Mr. Bradley's Absolute, or upon Spinoza's God'.[69]

As this makes clear, Lewis stood for a life lived under the *principium individuationis* and thus against all doctrines of unity, whether religious or philosophical. The ideal of 'Perfection' is discouraged by Lewis in 'Essay on the Objective of Plastic Art in Our Time' also, the ultimate rationale there being that the arts — and all human endeavour — test our 'relative', not *absolute*, 'prowess': 'you must not mix it *too* strongly, or vitalize it too much: for he who sees God, dies'.[70] For Lewis the ultimate aim of all human endeavour is the cultivation of a bearable and productive surface life, free from the ecstatic paralysis of union with the Absolute. He presents a pragmatic solution to the problems of existence which, rather than making any bold claims for ultimate redemption, seeks simply to reconcile the human subject with its relatively limited sphere of agency.

'[Q]uestions of fusion and separation' are central to Lewis's developing pattern of thinking during the Vorticist period and remain a dominant theme throughout his career.[71] They become more distinct in his critical works of the 1920s. In 'The Critical Realists' he called in the support of the Canadian philosopher Roy Wood Sellars to help him formulate, in more theoretical terms, his antagonism towards the doctrine of unity which he perceived to dominate contemporary philosophical discourses. He quotes from

[68] *Time and Western Man*, p.372.
[69] Ibid., p.372.
[70] 'Essay on the Objective of Plastic Art in Our Time', pp.25, 30.
[71] 'The Critical Realists', p.25.

Sellars's 1916 book *Critical Realism: A Study of the Nature and Conditions of Knowledge*:

> '[…] I open my eyes and perceive concrete things. What are concrete things? They are not merely character-complexes. They are co-reals to be adjusted to, independent, common, and full of various capacities… Perceived things are co-real with the percipient, and independent of him in exactly the same way and to the same degree that they are independent of one another […] Mr. Bergson desires a penetrative intuition of the object in which the subject and the object somehow merge'. […] But Mr. Sellars at least disposes of this sticky, adhesive flowing together. Fresh air once more passes between people's legs.[72]

The common-sense epistemology which Lewis advocates here can be easily traced back to *BLAST* and particularly the humorous warning which he presented to the artist of his day, not to lean too near 'the surface of Life' for fear their nose would be 'nipped off' by 'some Pecksniff-shark […] or other lurker beneath [their] image'.[73] The creative subject's penetrative intuition of the object-world is depicted in this instance as a sort of deadly tryst in which the lover will be consumed by the beloved.

Lewis's reference to Narcissus in this passage from 'Futurism, Magic and Life' communicates his concern about the solipsistic trait to withdraw into subjectivity which was evident within his contemporary culture. But equally the 'Pecksniff-shark' which lurks 'beneath his image' is a metaphor for the encroachment of object into the territory traditionally associated with subject. Lewis's comments resonate with the general tendency among his contemporary fiction writers to either heighten subjectivity so thoroughly that the objective world is negated — Joyce, as Eliot writes in his first essay on Milton (1936), dispenses entirely with the 'visible world' around half way through *Ulysses* — or else to attain a sense of what Virginia Woolf described in *The Waves* (1931) as 'the world seen without a self'.[74] Despite the different orientations of these alternative 'routes to modernism', as Rosemary Summer convincingly argues, they are

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[72] Ibid., p.29.
[73] Lewis, 'Futurism, Magic and Life', in *BLAST*, p.134-5.
[74] T. S. Eliot, 'Milton I' (1936), *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), pp.138-145 (p.143); Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London: Wordsworth, 2000), p.162. Eliot writes: 'In his early work, and at least in part of *Ulysses*, there is visual and other imagination of the highest kind; and I may be mistaken in thinking that the later part of *Ulysses* shows a turning from the visible world to draw rather on the resources of phantasmagoria' ('Milton I', p.143).

both 'doing the same thing'.[75] Whether 'penetrative intuition' was to be sought through the interior or the exterior world, modernist writers ran in parallel lines towards the collapse of the subject/object dualism. For Lewis, the maintenance of the dualism was of critical importance in ensuring the proper functioning of art.

In Lewis's pattern of thinking object — referred to elsewhere as 'Nature', the capital 'N' indicating its metaphysical status — plays a significant supporting role in artistic creation as the eternal antagonist of the human subject. In his early thought this deadly other is cast in a vindictive and mischievous role, exploiting human pretensions and always having the last laugh. In 'Inferior Religions' he described it as the 'bogey of True Life' and 'the Sovereign force beneath the surface'.[76] In both this description and the one offered in 'Futurism, Magic and Life' in *BLAST* we are given the idea of a hidden power always lurking beneath the surface of life, and advised that the subject 'should only approach so near as is necessary for a good view'.[77] This position is reiterated in the second issue of *BLAST*:

> There is Yourself: and there is the Exterior World, that fat mass you browse on. […] Do not confuse yourself with it, or weaken the esoteric lines of fine original being. Do not marry it, either, to a maiden. […] The thought of the old Body-and-Soul, Male-and-Female, Eternal Duet of Existence, can perhaps be of help to you, if you hesitate still to invent yourself properly.[78]

The invitation to unity is again depicted here as an attempt at seduction which the subject must refuse if it is to preserve its personal integrity and creative potency. In a way that is reminiscent of Odysseus's close encounter with the song of the Sirens, Lewis conceived the subject's enticement to marry or otherwise abscond with object as a sure route to destruction.

However attractive the sublime union may appear — even if, in the guise of the Absolute, it is the dream that propels human endeavour forward — we must, according to Lewis, be sufficiently prudent to realize that it would be a catastrophic destiny to

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[75] Rosemary Summer, *A Route to Modernism: Hardy, Lawrence, Woolf* (London: MacMillan, 2000), p.1. Summer begins by citing a letter of 1931 in which Virginia Woolf wrote to Ethel Smythe: '[t]he fact about contemporaries is that they're doing the same thing on another railway line; one resents them distracting one, flashing past the wrong way' (p.1).
[76] 'Inferior Religions' (1917), p.318.
[77] Lewis, 'Futurism, Magic and Life', in *BLAST*, p.135.
[78] Lewis, 'Wyndham Lewis Vortex No.1', in *BLAST 2*, p.91.

seek in life. The passionate religious invocation of a blessed after-life is, for Lewis, in the end an invitation to death. It is likely that his respect for Gnosticism springs largely from its classification of the relationship between God and humankind — extreme among mythical and religious systems in its pessimism — as one of apparently insurmountable separation.

Art and religion in this way come to be understood by Lewis as phenomena which perform a serious function in maintaining a necessary separation between subject and object. He writes in an unpublished section in the proofs of 'The Perfect Action':

> Art is identified — it is identifiable — with the arrival on the scene of the *individual* or Subject: and its disappearance is coeval with the death or suppression of the Subject [...] Both art and religion are phenomena of *separation* [...] They are the expression of a cleavage between an inside and an outside, a Self and a Not-self [...] They are terms to express the same foreign principle that comes into existence when the cleavage between one thing and another is sufficiently great to require this third principle. They are the organization, as it were, of *nothing*: and the 'god' is always the separator, the necessary third principle, for subject and object, once the subject has been born.[79]

His mythological or religious 'position' comes more clearly into focus here, since the principal value of God, or whatever principle of metaphysical Unity we may wish to fetishize, is that it functions as the benefactor of the artist, offering the subject a sort of metaphysical privacy wherein 'human individuality [could] be regarded as [its own] kind of artificial godhood'.[80] These later discussions on the function of art and religion resonate closely with the pattern of thinking which Lewis developed in his Vorticist works. Throughout all these works we find Lewis in a complex relationship with the thought of Nietzsche, struggling to free himself of Nietzsche's Dionysian messianism whilst simultaneously developing a more complex Gnostic messianism of his own.

Lewis's opposition to Nietzsche and his modernist adherents was based on his observation that the Dionysian hypothesis ultimately failed at precisely what it claimed to achieve. In attempting to emancipate the subject from its narrowing path in modern existence, to offer a way out of a claustrophobic and isolated form of selfhood, Nietzsche presented the ideal of a regained union with the vital, chthonic pulse of

[79] From 'The Perfect Action' proofs, quoted in Edwards *'Wyndham Lewis and the Uses of Shellshock: Meat and Postmodernism',* p.236-237.
[80] *Time and Western Man*, p.372.

existence. But for Lewis the turn to myth and ritual was itself an inward turn, which lured the modern subject into a nostalgic trance, and thus prevented it engaging productively with its new historic situation. It amounted in the end to a naïve withdrawal from the subject/object dualism and thus, contrary to Nietzsche's own wishes, ultimately heralded the dissolution of art. Lewis's adherence to dualism presents a warning then, that what his contemporaries celebrated as a way of freeing the modern subject from its narrowing sphere of agency was in reality a decisive step further towards subjective immersion, which tokened the death or suppression of the subject and the extinction of art.

For Lewis, '[t]he Romantic retreat into subjective expression is not only impoverished but also naïve', as Paul March-Russell writes.[81] But equally, insofar as 'the freedom of the artist and the absolute priority of personal vision' became the theoretical basis for his own art philosophy, 'then it appears as only an extreme romantic individualism', as Levenson states.[82] The Romantic aspect of Lewis's Gnostic messianism ought not to be overlooked. But this is a kind of Romanticism which goes very much against the grain of modernist primitivism, taking great care to bolster the ailing subject/object dualism and thereby to re-invigorate hopes of modernity's redemption. From Romantic and Dionysian variants of messianism, Lewis moved in the direction of the fundamental dualism of Gnosticism, which appealed to him for the security which it vouchsafed art as a phenomenon requiring metaphysical separation in order to flourish.

How Lewis came to this critical position is a matter which is important to pursue. We are now familiar with the sense in which his philosophy never entirely settled in a solid and durable 'system of thought'. Rather what we encounter is a fluid 'pattern of thinking' which was susceptible to alterations at each stage of its development. An important stage of this process, which has so far been absent from the analysis, is to be found in Lewis's earliest known writings. There is a moment during a very formative period of Lewis's early development as a painter and writer when we find him wrestling with questions of fusion and separation in a way that reveals a great deal about his move beyond Nietzsche's influence.

[81] March-Russell, 'The Neo-Romantic Wyndham Lewis', p.167.
[82] Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism*, p.135.

(v) The Subject/Object Dualism and the Aesthetic Redemption of Modernity

In a journal entry of August 1908 we can tap into an important moment in Lewis's intellectual development, when Nietzsche's Dionysian hypothesis loomed large in his thoughts. This was written at a significant moment of change in Lewis's life, during the last summer of seven years which he spent travelling the European centres of culture to study art, literature and philosophy. In August Lewis escaped the social and romantic entanglements of his life in Paris for a summer sojourn with his mother on the Brittany coastline.[83] One evening, as he entered the deserted square in the small Breton town of Clohars after the village fete had faded into evening, the twenty-four year-old Lewis perceived among the local inhabitants of the town the materials for philosophical speculation about the different orientations within human nature.

He begins by observing the way in which the village elders had positioned themselves apart from the evening's festivities:

> the group of four or five men come together [...] having now created their own & particular atmosphere, each man still robed, physically & spiritually in the garment of strangeness or rather in the nakedness of strangeness[84]

In Bergsonian terms these men are the dried out remnants of a wave of life, left exposed by the departing tide of the community's celebration. Although united in a 'brotherhood' we are told that each man is 'still robed, physically & spiritually in the garment of strangeness'. Here 'strangeness' is being used to signify individuation, the separation of the self from the crowd. Lewis's vacillation over whether this is more accurately described as a 'garment' or a 'nakedness' indicates that, at this juncture, he is uncertain whether the individual is an essential or contingent unit of 'life' and thus whether the principle of individuation or the principle of unity is the profounder philosophical characterization of human nature.

Nevertheless, Lewis clearly wishes to convey the sense in which these men parade a thicker, more pervasive sense of self than those who continued carousing into

[83] Meyers, *The Enemy,* p.22.
[84] 'Breton Journal', p.1.

the evening. As he would write around ten years later in an unpublished essay entitled 'William James, Russell and Pantheism':[85]

> What life is busy doing, fundamentally and all the time, in its material evolution, is getting individuality; separating itself, fencing itself off, intensifying its particularity. But that can only be done by a progressive hardening and stabilizing — by a compromise between itself and death. [...] It makes the mould as resistant as it can, and gets as much fluid and fiery 'sensation' into it as it can.[86]

Although these ideas are obviously derived from Bergson's theory of the evolution of species, they readily apply to the isolated outcrop of individuals Lewis discusses in 'Breton Journal'. The old men in the square represent the residue of the day's celebrations, but they are also the densely layered counterparts of their youthful vigour, reclining within the weighty 'garments' of selfhood, which a lifetime has gathered as a mode of insulation against envelopment by the 'wider mechanism' of life.[87]

The spectacle of the old men leads Lewis to muse about the other faction at the fete who revel in a scene of bacchanalian rites:

> The[se] fêtes are essentially orgies. […] All these people bring all their indignations, all their revolts, and bewilder'd dreams, and sacrifice them [...] instead of keeping jealously their passions & reveries hidden in their hearts, they come here and fling all to the winds, leave themselves bare, make a bonfire of what the intelligence tells us is most precious.[88]

The thing the intelligence tells us is most precious is implicitly the self or ego. The function of the dance is that it affords those who partake in it a moment of union which is achieved precisely because the sober, individuated self is dissolved in dance. As Frank Kermode writes in 'Poet and Dancer before Diaghilev', the dance 'belongs to a period before the self and the world were divided, and so achieves naturally that

[85] Wyndham Lewis, 'William James, Russell and Pantheism' (section of 'The Critical Realists' folio), Wyndham Lewis Collection, Box 1, Folder 11 (Buffalo: The Poetry Collection), p.35.
[86] 'William James, Russell and Pantheism', p.35.
[87] 'Inferior Religions' (1917), p.315.
[88] 'Breton Journal', p.2.

"original unity"'.[89] This idea, which was central to Nietzsche's theory in *The Birth of Tragedy*, clearly exerted a great theoretical attraction to the young Lewis. He continues:

> Many in these fêtes, in the society of their comrades or of some one met there, know the sweetness of this union, & a melancholy at this death, — this dissipation, this gross throwing away of something born to the ideal, without knowing the cause of either.[90]

His admiration for the dancers and fascination with the glorious 'dissipation' which it involves, reveals that Lewis was at this stage deeply attuned to Nietzsche's Dionysian philosophy.

Yet there are already subtle indications of his later theoretical departure from Nietzsche. In the first instance this can be seen in his vacillation over the proper orientation of self: whether towards personal individuation or dissolution within a collective unity. His later support for the philosophy of the subject against Nietzsche's Dionysian philosophy was founded on theoretical support for the former interpretation, but at this early stage he remains undecided, preferring to explore the two sides to human existence as opposed but complementary aspects of life. Significantly, however, we can already discern a binary logic in Lewis's thinking at this time. A few lines after his comments on the 'sweetness of union' he explores the value of the antagonism between self and world, subject and object, suggesting that the strength of one depends on the correlative strength of the other:

> The world must not distend with our spirits, if we are to be gay: if material life grew larger & fairer materially & not only by the spell of our imagination, in our moments of inspiration, we should not feel the interior change, & have no measure by which to judge the greatness of our souls: & for the proper explosion of our animal spirits, on occasions of festivity, cramped material conditions is almost an essential.[91]

This passage is highly informative of the way in which Lewis tended, from a very early stage, to analyse phenomena in what Wragg has termed 'structurally binding

[89] Frank Kermode 'Poet and Dancer before Diaghilev', in *What is Dance? Readings in Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.148.
[90] 'Breton Journal', p.2.
[91] Ibid., p.2-3.

dualities'.[92] Indeed, it appears to demonstrate that Lewis's use of dualistic interpretations is contrary to the definition provided by Val Plumwood. Lewis's dualistic encounters, rather than resulting from the 'denied dependency' of a superior element on an inferior counterpart, appear to result from a necessary and mutual dependency between two alternative and thus conceptually opposed elements. For the spirit to ascend, matter must descend; for the self to grow to greatness, the world must provide it with 'cramped material conditions'. Without such limiting factors, 'spirit' or 'self' would exist in a void.

Here then we can already observe the rationale that would lead Lewis to support the absolute Dualism of Manichaeism: the two elements in the dualism are mutually dependent on one another. Crucially we also find, in the realization of his own status in the fete, Lewis's earliest formulation of the role and responsibility of the artist as a perpetual outsider:

> The artist, in his defiance of Fate, has always remain'd a recluse, & the enemy of such orgaic participation of life, and often lives without prooving [*sic*] this emotion felt in the midst of it's wastefulness.[93]

This passage is significant, for it demonstrates how 'the search for Dionysus [is] blocked by the artist's cultural marginality', as Wragg suggests.[94] Baudelaire's conception of the artist as 'flâneur' — an outsider observing critically from a distance the ways and means of social participation — informs Lewis's critique of Nietzsche's Dionysian hypothesis. His comments indicate that he was already at this stage inclining towards a conception of art as a phenomenon of separation and thus as an activity which depended upon the comprehension of 'life' in terms of the principle of individuation. Despite being registered in a tone of anguish at not fitting in with the orgiastic rites of the community, Lewis's early realization of the role of the artist thus initiated the disentanglement of his own thought from that of Nietzsche.

Lewis's early relationship with Nietzsche was a complex process of give and take. He denounced the orgiastic participation in life which Nietzsche had rhapsodized about and affirmed instead the artist's responsibility to stand back from the void of

[92] Wragg, *Wyndham Lewis and the Philosophy of Art in Early Modernist Britain,* p.3.
[93] 'Breton Journal', p.2.
[94] Wragg, 'Aggression, aesthetics, modernity', p.194.

primordial unity, preferring to hold fast to 'what the intelligence tells us is most precious'.[95] In this way he gestures towards a redemptive possibility within reason and the philosophy of the subject, a view which is entirely opposed to Nietzsche's radical solution. But some aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy became stock ideas in Lewis's own pattern of thinking. He accepted wholeheartedly, for example, Nietzsche's emphasis on the centrality of art and affirmed Nietzsche's dialectical definition of art as a synthetic phenomenon which grew out of the colliding forces of reason and myth.

As the following passage in *Time and Western Man* indicates, Lewis also affirmed Nietzsche's dialectical definition of 'action':

> action is impossible without an opposite — 'it takes two to make a quarrel.' The dynamical — or what Nietzsche called the dionysiac, and which he professed — is a *relation*, a something that *happens*, between two or more opposites, when they meet in their pyrrhic encounters. The intellect works alone. But it is precisely this solitariness of thought, this prime condition for intellectual success, that is threatened by mystical mass-doctrines.[96]

Here Lewis uses Nietzsche's relational theory to temper the more 'fanatical' and 'religious form of the doctrine of *action*' which was prevalent among his contemporaries.[97] He supports Nietzsche's definition of 'action' as something which occurs when two forces collide. He disapproves, however, of the way in which Nietzsche's modernist inheritors had gleaned from this the rationale for a pseudo-mystical conception of 'Action' and 'Life', and the messianic purpose which these served in elaborating a new route of salvation for a spiritually bankrupt humankind. There are thus clues in this passage that Lewis did not oppose Nietzsche as much as the radical incarnation of his key ideas in modernism. Certainly the relational, dualistic structure of Nietzsche's Dionysian philosophy, and the primacy which it gave art as a world-changing activity, appear to have shaped Lewis's early thought to a profound degree. The way Nietzsche's philosophy would be read by the majority of Lewis's contemporaries — as a battle cry for absolute 'Action' and 'Life' — has more to do with a general tide change which was occurring in European thought at the close of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.

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[95] 'Breton Journal', p.2.
[96] *Time and Western Man*, p.21.
[97] Ibid., p.20.

The German logician Gottlob Frege gave voice to this in his 1894 review of Husserl's *The Philosophy of Arithmetic*, where he declared that there had become a great 'confusion of the subjective with the objective' in contemporary philosophy and called 'for the sun of truth to [once more] penetrate the fog which arises out of the confusion of psychology and logic'.[98] Frege's comments serve as an effective seismograph of the will to collapse all traditional dualisms which dominated philosophy at this time. Lewis's Vorticist works reflect a similar idea. The ultimate purpose of modern art, as Lewis conceived it, was to maintain the dualism of subject and object against all threats of collapse. From this perspective, the 'Breton Journal' clearly provides the blueprint for the later Vorticist art myth. The artist, according to Lewis, was a solitary creature who occupied the middle ground in an eternal tug-of-war between individuation and immersion, battling ceaselessly to maintain the sacred dualism against all threats of collapse.

(vi) *BLAST*: The Handbook of External Culture for Inner Barbarians

We may now be in a better position to assess the situation of Lewis's Vorticism within the philosophical discourse of modernity. This discourse, as Habermas notes, has largely been defined by two opposed critical camps which grew out of the Enlightenment. On the one hand there are those who advocate a 'radicalized enlightenment', seeking to balance modernity's spiritual deficit by means of reason itself.[99] On the other hand there are those who seek to abandon the path of reason altogether in favour of modernity's absolute 'other' in myth and ritual. For Lewis, modernity (and the privileged position which it affords reason) is not affirmed or negated in itself. Rather, it is conceived as the stage or battlefield upon which the conflict raged between these two opposed critical positions.

In his Vorticist works Lewis adopted a dualistic strategy in order to interrogate the validity of each position in this discourse from the perspective of its antithetical other. At the heart of his own philosophy we find the pragmatism of an artist who knows well the value of 'separation' and so fights willingly for any side in a conflict but always to ensure a balance of power. In an illuminating section of *Rude Assignment* (1950) entitled 'Nature of Change in My Political Position' Lewis presented the view

[98] Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism*, p.90.
[99] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p.86.

that '[n]o one holds to one opinion without modification, naturally, an opinion being in the nature of a rough working hypothesis, a logical product of experience'.[100] It is reminiscent of the maxim which is sometimes accredited to John Maynard Keynes: 'When the facts change, I change my mind'.[101] With this statement of pragmatism firmly in mind, we can begin to clarify which side in the discourse of modernity Lewis 'discharged' his energy on during the Vorticism period.

Rather in the same way that Nietzsche, according to Habermas, was using reason as a 'ladder' which could be cast away in order to 'gain a foothold in myth as the other of reason', Lewis appears to have used Nietzsche's invitation to 'the mythical home' as a theoretical 'ladder' to be cast away.[102] The central paradox within Lewis's Vorticism is the sense in which myth is constructed precisely so that it can be deconstructed, and it seems that this can be explained at least in part by Lewis's exploratory mode of dialectical reasoning and the underlying pragmatism upon which this rests. Observing a sinister tendency within the Nietzschean and Bergsonian factions of modernism, Lewis — in what we might characterize as an act of theoretical espionage — chose to explore these principles himself; seeking the mythical home in his own artworks so that he could perceive more clearly the consequences of this.

The most significant result of this effort is *Enemy of the Stars* and its radical portrayal of the modern subject's claustrophobic internalization, as Nietzsche had described it in *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (1874):

> Knowledge, taken in excess without hunger, even contrary to need, no longer acts as a transforming motive impelling to action and remains hidden in a certain chaotic inner world […] and so the whole of modern culture is essentially internal: on the outside the bookbinder has printed something like 'Handbook of Inner Culture for External Barbarians.'[103]

For Lewis — who had the benefit of viewing certain of the consequences of Nietzsche's philosophy crystallized in the intuitionist philosophy of Henri Bergson — Nietzsche had mistaken the 'prison' for the 'key', and vice versa. While Nietzsche had identified

[100] Lewis, *Rude Assignment,* p.106.
[101] Tony Judt attributes this quote to Keynes in the epigraph for *When the Facts Change: Essays, 1995-2010*, ed. by Jennifer Homans (London: William Heinemann, 2015).
[102] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, pp.86, 87.
[103] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. by Peter Preuss (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1980), pp.24-25.

the Dionysian principle as the only hope for the subject's emancipation, Lewis could perceive the natural consequence of this as the subject's destruction. And while Nietzsche had viewed the philosophy of the subject as essentially a process of claustrophobic interiorization, Lewis considered it as yielding a situation in which '[f]resh air once more passes between people's legs.'[104]

His perception of a topsy-turvy logic in Nietzsche's arguments led Lewis, in customary dualistic fashion, to invert the structure of critique. Thus we find in Lewis's critical writings of this period a deep-seated cynicism about the hopes of attaining the desired purity in myth. Indeed *BLAST* itself may be read as a creative riposte to what Nietzsche scornfully termed the 'Handbook of Inner Culture for External Barbarians'. It is, in a sense, quite the opposite of what Nietzsche would have imagined as an apologia on behalf of the individuated subject: a Handbook of External Culture for Inner Barbarians. In various instances Lewis's writings in *BLAST* would seem to accord with this idea. Not only does it clarify the meaning of the Vorticists' claim to be 'Primitive Mercenaries in the Modern World', but it also marries humorously with a section of the dialogue between Arghol and Hanp in *Enemy of the Stars*.

As they discourse on 'destiny' in scene two, Hanp complains to Arghol that '[i]t is not the destiny of a man like you to live buried in this cursed hole'.[105] In response Arghol explains '[o]ur soul is wild, with primitiveness of it's own. It's wilderness is anywhere — in a shop, sailing, reading psalms: it's greatest good our destiny'.[106] It is a small exchange but one filled with significance for Lewis's critique of Nietzsche. Hanp appears to represent Nietzsche's concern about the internalizing tendency of the modern subject, but we should note that he is himself a less than flattering portrayal of the 'external barbarian' which Nietzsche had in mind. For his part, Arghol presents the idea that a 'primitive' soul finds itself quite at home in even the most mundane settings of the modern world. We may read this then as an exchange between the external and the internal barbarian which serves to invert Nietzsche's heroic philosophy, while analogously revealing the sense in which the great radical of nineteenth-century philosophy was himself so deeply planted in his own 'cursed hole' that he was unable to perceive the sense in which a primitive soul was native to the modern world.

[104] 'The Critical Realists', p.29.
[105] Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, p.70.
[106] Ibid., p.70.

In light of this it seems likely that Lewis's concept of the 'wild body' was in part derived from his reading of Nietzsche; being explicable as an attempt to satirically draw the primitive soul out of its self-imposed cage into the cold light of day. Certainly the narrator of 'A Soldier of Humour' — Arthur Pine in the 1917 version and Ker-Orr in that of 1927 — compels a comparison with Nietzsche's 'magnificent *blond brute'* in *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887), who, 'avidly rampant for spoil and victory must get loose again [and] return to the wilderness […] from time to time'.[107] Just as Nietzsche's 'beast of prey' — with his 'thirst for enemies and antagonisms and triumphs' — takes delight in devouring placid lamb-like creatures, so too does Lewis's soldier of humour gnash his grin in the passive faces of the characters which populate his adventures.[108]

But once again, in Arthur Pine and Ker-Orr we find a rather satirical portrait of Nietzsche's ideal 'barbarian', who, denied his primordial forest, is forced to divert his hunting expeditions into hotel drawing rooms and restaurants; the vast wilderness of his dreams becoming transposed into a rather more quotidian scene of European café-culture. In writing 'A Soldier of Humour' Lewis was certainly keen to elaborate the 'burlesque encounters' of a modern day Don Quixote and found highly suitable materials for the characterization of this figure in Nietzsche's 'blond brute'.[109] Clearly, Nietzsche's philosophy presented Lewis with material that was ripe for satire. But in the end we find both tragic and comic modes being used to denounce modernism's turn to myth in these early writings. What had been venerated and idolized by artists and writers throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century as a source of cultural rebirth, becomes explicable, in Lewis's hands, as a dangerous cul-de-sac, a cursed hole within which art and the creative subject were being entombed.

The central interpretative issue here, which was raised at the start of this chapter, is whether the *mythos/logos* dualism in Lewis's Vorticism resulted from a kind of 'denied dependency on a subordinated other', with one principle being favoured at the

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[107] Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals,* p.22-23.

[108] Ibid., pp.22, 25. There is further evidence of this influence which is relevant to note. In *The Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche writes of 'the blonde beast that lies at the core of all aristocratic races' as a figure 'obsessed with the loathsome spectacle' of 'the "tame man"', which he describes as a 'wretched mediocre and unedifying creature, [who] has learnt to consider himself […] a "higher man"' (p.24). In a related sense, the 'visi-gothic […] *laughing* machine' who narrates 'A Soldier of Humour' is just such a 'brutal survival' of a 'barbarian' aristocracy who similarly identifies his fair complexion as an indication of his nobility: '[m]y body is large, white and savage', 'this blond-skinned gut-bag […] is my stalking horse' ('A Soldier of Humour (1927), p.17-18). There is an even more explicit link with Nietzsche's 'blonde beast' in the 1917 version, where, in a section deleted from the later version, Arthur Pine describes himself as really 'a neo-Teuton barbarian' ('A Soldier of Humour (1917), p.323).

[109] In the 1917 version Arthur Pine explicitly identifies himself with that 'extravagant warrior […] Don Quijote' ('A Soldier of Humour (1917), p.324).

expense of the other; or whether Lewis is truly as free from 'Action and Reaction' he claims to be in *BLAST*.[110] It is important to note then that a singular position does appear to emerge through this dialectical opposition, with Lewis indicating support for the redemption of rational modernity above the wholesale turn to myth. In this way, the rational *logos* notionally comes out on top. Yet it is also crucial to observe the sense in which this position remains contingent and pragmatic. For Lewis, the drive towards unity — the keynote of both modernism's turn to myth and the 'Time-worship' he believed to prevail among contemporary philosophers — carried the catastrophic consequence of collapsing the hallowed dualism of subject and object.[111] His support for the rational *logos* against the anti-rationalist conception of myth is thus a technical theoretical measure designed to rebalance the dualism and maintain the structure of opposition around which human life, and (crucially) art, is organized.

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A final word should be said here about the role played by Lewis's 'two arts' in ushering me towards this interpretation. The predominantly literary focus of my analysis here has inevitably conditioned its outcome, to a certain extent. This is not merely because Lewis's writings — with the possible exception of *Enemy of the Stars* — serve as rational expositions of the issues which they deal with and thus pertain naturally to the preserve of *logos*, although this does seem significant. But more specifically, Lewis's critical and philosophical writings from the time of Vorticism become devoted to a particular purpose: namely to expose the dangers inherent in the drive towards '*unity* in everything' and denounce those of his contemporaries who Lewis believed were most actively promoting this.[112]

Focussing on these writings, we naturally become accustomed to the great noise which Lewis makes in denouncing pseudo-mystical ideas about 'Time' and 'the mythical home' which modernism inherited from the philosophies of Bergson and Nietzsche. This has the subtle side-effect that we are distracted from Lewis's own creative dependence on mythic themes and structures, a subject about which he is virtually silent in his critical writings. Thus in depending so heavily on Lewis's critical

[110] Lewis, 'Manifesto', *BLAST*, p.30.
[111] *Time and Western Man*, p.212.
[112] Ibid., p.277.

and philosophical writings for my analysis of his earliest fictions and paintings, I have inevitably prioritized the discursive over the expressive and the expository over the experimental aspects of his work.

To look again at the paintings, however, and especially the development which occurred in the 1920s and 1930s, we may safely say that this was the realm of Lewis's creative output more naturally conducive to mythopoeia. A further instalment of this study of the *mythos*/*logos* dualism in his works, which set its focus primarily on the paintings, would reveal that myth was never eradicated from Lewis's work, and would likely conclude that the presence of mythic themes and symbols grows and becomes more dominant over time. Paintings such as *Figures in the Air* or *On the Roof* (1927), *Manhattan* or *New York Mystic* (1927; Fig. 26), *Red Scene* (1933-36; Fig. 27) and the numerous paintings entitled *Creation Myth* illustrate how deeply ingrained mythic narratives about the origin and destiny of humankind were in Lewis's imagination and how fundamental these were to his creative instinct.[113]

The symbolic classifications which emerge in these later works use a visual vocabulary which is distinct from that which Lewis developed in Vorticism and so cannot be explained in the same terms. But they share with the earlier abstract works a mystical quality, similarly communicating the sense in which the *symbol* is 'an expression of man's urge to speculate in metaphysical terms' which points 'past the physical world to "something that moves beyond the senses"'.[114] These enticing speculations on the development of Lewis's myth must be left to one side for treatment in another work. But it is important to highlight the sense in which this glimpse into the mythopoeic aspect of his paintings reveals the provisional nature of the conclusion I have reached here, having depended so heavily on textual sources.[115]

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[113] Wyndham Lewis, *Figures in the Air* or *On the Roof*, 1927, pencil, pen and ink, watercolour and gouache with papier collé, 29.2 × 16.5 cm, private collection; *Manhattan* or *New York Mystic*, 1927, pen and ink, watercolour and gouache with papier collé, 37 × 25 cm, private collection; *Red Scene*, 1933-36, oil on canvas, 71.1 × 91.4 cm, Tate Galleries; see especially *Creation Myth No. 17*, 1941, charcoal and graphite with watercolour and gouache on wove paper, 50.1 × 34.9 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

[114] A. De Ruijter, Review of *Symbolic Classification* by Rodney Needham, p.171; Levenson quoting from W. B. Yeats's *Ideas of Good and Evil* (1903) in *A Genealogy of Modernism*, p.110.

[115] We should note, therefore, that while Lewis's paintings and writings from the Vorticist period certainly work together as mutual expressions of a particular pattern of thinking, it is also important to remain attuned to the distinction which exists between different expressive mediums. Paintings and writings utilize different organizational structures in order to communicate — equivalent perhaps to the *mythos*/*logos* distinction — and so we are naturally required to adopt alternative models of thought depending on whether we are viewing a visual work or reading a text.

Conclusion

In this study I have set out to examine the role which myth plays in Lewis's Vorticist pattern of thinking. Some preliminary research into the context of modernist primitivism and the precise formulation of Vorticist aesthetics and philosophy was required to access this question. We may say that the 'stage' had to be set as well as a narrative outline of the 'drama' clarified before the 'role' of myth could be properly assessed. That stage was provided by a philosophical tradition of skepticism about the benefits of unbridled rationality which had grown out of the Enlightenment and the scenery cut from Nietzsche's Dionysian philosophy, especially the call for a return to the mythical home which lay at the heart of this. The drama was then shaped by Lewis into a dualistic encounter between two opposed worldviews. Personified in characters like Arghol and Ludo and of course the 'creaking men-machines' of Lewis's early fictions, myth is found to play the role of a tragi-comic hero in Lewis's Vorticist works, which can only be properly understood when placed in relation to its antagonist in the drama — the villain of the piece — which is always a representative embodiment of the rational *logos* of modernity (Ker-Orr, the 'narrator' of *Enemy*, or perhaps even the anthropological author of these 'primitive' narratives himself).[1]

The dualistic structure of opposition we find here corresponds closely with 'the struggle between chivalry, "celtism," Christian mysticism, on the one hand, and the "scientific spirit" of the renaissance mind and of the modern world on the other', which Lewis identified as the 'the *master-subject* of Shakespeare's plays' in *The Lion and the Fox* (1927).[2] Wearing the familiar livery of the 'lion' and the 'fox' in Lewis's Vorticist works I have also identified the '*master-subject*' of a struggle between 'barbaric' and 'civilized' worldviews, *mythos* and *logos*, which is 'the form which all the deeper conflicts therein take'.[3] Clearly, as early as the

[1] 'Inferior Religions' (1917), p.315
[2] *The Lion and the Fox,* p.201.
[3] Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, 'Mr. Gaudier-Brzeska on "The New Sculpture"', *The Egoist*, 6.1 (1914) <http://library.brown.edu/pdfs/1305050375234379.pdf> [accessed 6 June 2016], pp.117-118; *The Lion and the Fox,* p.201. Gaudier writes: 'The archaic works discovered at Gnossos are the expressions of what is termed a "barbaric" people — i.e. a people to whom reason is secondary to instinct. The pretty works of the great Hellenes are the productions of a civilized — i.e. a people to

Vorticist period Lewis had conceived the outline of 'a ground plan of history' and historical consciousness, and 'through the constant comparing of everything with everything' had systematically juxtaposed alternative 'world pictures' in order to better characterize the 'spirit' of his own time.[4] With this dialectical approach to history Lewis highlighted the essential dynamic — when this is understood as 'a *relation*, a something that *happens*, between two or more opposites, when they meet in their pyrrhic encounters' — which had run continuously from the Renaissance down to his own time: the gradual overcoming of 'the ancient race' by 'the new one'.[5]

The situation and function of art in this gradual epochal shift was a central concern of artists. There is an implicit question faced by all (though answered by few) artists from the moment the modern world began to take shape: would art stand for the departing glory of a mythical past or would it defect to the side of an ever-growing materialism? This apparent ultimatum became more pronounced in the modernist period, for by the early years of the twentieth century the exterior world and the situation of human life within it was perceived to have been irretrievably altered by the new human relationship with machinery. Lewis's response to this question, we should note, marries with the response he identified in Shakespeare's plays and ties in also with the dualistic conception of art which he inherited from the writings of Nietzsche (as a phenomenon originally formed out of a conflict between Apollonian and Dionysian tendencies). Art, for Lewis, would have to stay true to its mixed ancestry and become 'mercenary', playing off the strengths and weaknesses of each side in the conflict taking place, 'but always for the SAME cause, which is neither side or both sides and ours'.[6]

His focus on the perceived conflict within which art and the human subject had been situated enabled Lewis to evade partisan allegiance to either side — of the kind found in Cubism, Futurism and Kandinsky, for example — and thereby afforded him a more detached, theoretical perspective from which to assess the

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whom instinct is secondary to reason. […] The modern sculptor is a man who works with instinct as his inspiring force. […] That this sculpture has no relation to the classic Greek, but that it is continuing the tradition of the barbaric people of the earth (for whom we have sympathy and admiration) I hope to have made clear' ('Mr. Gaudier-Brzeska on "The New Sculpture"', pp.117-118).

[4] Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture', p.123.

[5] *Time and Western Man*, p.21; Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *BLAST*, p.66.

[6] Lewis, 'Manifesto', in *BLAST*, p.30.

underlying dynamic of the modern world. The result is that — running as a continuous thread through both the paintings and writings of this period — we can trace a dramatic narrative concerning the modern subject's quest for a conceptual home, an essence and origin, in the new world order. Treated by so many of Lewis's contemporaries as the key to the subject's emancipation from a claustrophobic interiority, myth is shown to have a double aspect in Lewis's works.

In characters like Arghol and Ludo especially we learn the dangers of investing too much confidence in the mythical route of escape from modern rationalism, for they willingly lock themselves into a deterministic one-dimensional sign system which leaves them inert and blind (literally so in the case of Ludo) to the possibility of productive engagement with the limited niche of existence which they inhabit. In the end they become so entranced by 'visions from within' that their outward forms 'congeal' and they slump into matter, becoming the existential equivalents of a rock or tree. Lewis leaves us in little doubt that these characters are 'self condemned'.[7] 'Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison', wrote T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land* and in Lewis's Vorticism the logic of this idea, and its broader relevance to modernism's turn to myth, is spelled out in detail.[8] For Lewis, myth was the 'key' that confirmed the 'prison'. As well as an idealized source of liberation for the modern subject, in Lewis's treatment, myth plays a constraining role, guiding the subject further into its own narrowing interior world in headlong retreat from an expanding material world.

As I have indicated in chapter five, this double aspect which Lewis assigned to myth has a philosophical significance which reaches beyond the rarefied field of modernist literary and artistic criticism. Lewis's Vorticism, I have argued, makes a valuable contribution to the philosophical discourse of modernity by challenging the prevailing Nietzschean hypothesis in a way that resonates to a remarkable degree with the work of later twentieth-century critical theorists. Andrzej Gasiorek has pointed out that Lewis's critical work of the 1920s and 1930s 'bears more than a passing resemblance to the critique […] of what the Frankfurt School theorists dubbed the "culture industry"' in their works of the 1940s and 1950s, and we may now be in a position to appreciate another feature

[7] Wyndham Lewis, *Self Condemned* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1983).
[8] T. S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land', p.43.

of this association.[9] The significance of Lewis's myth can also be clarified in the critical idiom of Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), since here myth similarly falls into an ambiguous and double-sided relationship with modernity and the philosophy of the subject.

On the one hand, Adorno and Horkheimer conceptualize myth as a way back to origin, a homecoming which entails reabsorption into primal Oneness after the horror of 'being uprooted' by modernity.[10] On the other hand, myth is also explicable as the method by which the thinking subject disentangles itself from 'the primal state of man'.[11] In this sense it is a narrative opportunity to individuate the self from the mythic forces which constrain it into a deterministic niche of existence.[12] To put this another way, myth is both the one-dimensional sign-system within which the subject is imprisoned and the narrative technique by which the subject liberates itself to attain the comparative freedom of a multi-dimensional sign-system.[13] Adorno and Horkheimer cite Homer's *Odyssey* as a key example of this, for it is a myth which charts the 'adventures through which subjectivity (whose fundamental history is presented in the Odyssey) escapes from the prehistoric world'.[14] 'The quintessential paradox of the epic', they write, 'resides in the fact that the notion of homeland is opposed to myth'.[15] According to this, by overcoming the perils as well as the enticements of myth to return to his home in Ithaca, Odysseus is representative of humankind's '*emergence from his self-incurred immaturity*', as Kant described it, and is a historic marker of humankind's progress towards 'enlightenment'.[16]

The myth we encounter in Lewis's Vorticist works appears closely related to this. Through his paintings and writings of this period we can clearly discern the formation of a myth, though in the end this serves to disentangle the subject from the constraining power of old, outmoded myths. They are works which attempt to refashion and 'renew our idols' in order to 'break up the rhythm of our

[9] Andrzej Gasiorek, 'Wyndham Lewis on Art, Culture and Politics in the 1930s', in *Wyndham Lewis and the Cultures of Modernity*, ed. by Andrzej Gasiorek, Alice Reeve-Tucker and Nathan Waddell (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), pp.201-221 (p.213).
[10] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* p.108.
[11] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.78.
[12] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* p.108.
[13] I adopt this terminology from Paul Edwards's analysis in 'Wyndham Lewis's Narrative of Origins: "The Death of the Ankou"', p.30.
[14] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.78.
[15] Ibid., p.78.
[16] Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?*, p.1.

naviety', as Lewis put it in 'Inferior Religions'.[17] At the heart of his Vorticist pattern of thinking is thus an awareness that modernity itself compels the assaults of reason on its own myths and the constant reinvention or creation of new myths better adapted to humankind's developing historical situation. From this perspective Lewis's philosophy is explicable as an inversion of Nietzsche's. For while Nietzsche used reason as a 'ladder' with which to 'gain a foothold in myth as the other of reason', Lewis used myth as a narrative technique with which to emancipate the human subject from the determinism of myth and thereby to gain access to a rational discourse concerning the human situation in the modern world.[18] Myth, in Lewis's philosophy, is not the end but the means to an end, a way of shepherding a community towards a productive and creative rhythm of activity. It is a powerful tool which, in his view, ought to be held essentially in the preserve of the visionary artist.

As the maker of myths and the creative force responsible for ensuring these are relevant to each new historical situation, the shamanic figure of the artist occupies a central importance in Lewis's pattern of thinking. Lewis's artist is like the guardian angel of a community; a self-exiled outsider who acts and speaks on their behalf; a trickster who shuttles between the natural and the supernatural realms to bring new gods and idols back to the community which he represents. In this sense he is equivalent to Cassirer's '*animal symbolicum*', a creature 'without a clearly defined biological niche' for whom all possibilities remain open, who is responsible for continually manufacturing a new 'niche' for a community to occupy, which can — for a limited period of time at least — provide a meaningful 'world in a corner of world, full of rest and security'.[19]

The Lewisian artist thus figuratively belongs in the mouth of the cave. His business is divided between the two realities which he mediates. On the one side he is the 'marionette player' who, with his hands inside the cave, operates the 'puppets' in a shadow play which keeps the herd of creaking men-machines entranced and contented.[20] But he himself exists outside the mythical reality which he creates, attuned to shifting dynamics and forces in the external reality,

[17] 'Inferior Religions' (1917), p.315.
[18] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p.86
[19] Robert M. Wallace in his introduction to Blumenberg's *Work on Myth*, p.x; 'Inferior Religions' (1917), p.316.
[20] Plato, 'The Republic', p.296.

always prepared to renovate his myths in order to make them more suited to the changing needs of the audience he holds captive inside his cave. This idea perhaps explains more about the danger which Lewis perceived art to face in the mass, rationalized societies of the modern world, since the modern artist was being figuratively bypassed by the flood of newly 'enlightened' humanity who clamoured for a more direct involvement with the 'Life' outside the cave. His closing comment in 'Inferior Religions' communicates the sense in which Lewis believed the modern artist was finding it increasingly more difficult to keep up with the scale of this exodus. 'It is obvious', he wrote, 'that we should live a little more in small communities'.[21]

The modern world may be regarded as the fruition of Plato's call for humankind to leave the mythical cave, to be 'released from their bonds, […] liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and […] look towards the light', realizing in the process that what they 'saw before was an illusion'.[22] The primacy which Plato granted rationality in his philosophy certainly set the general course of Western philosophy down to the present day. Modernism emerges in this historical trajectory as a moment of profound critical reflection on this tendency, more attuned to the perceived dangers of mass enlightenment. For Lewis, as we have seen, once abandoned this original cave could never be recovered. This was the fallacy many of his contemporaries were liable to commit in their determination to regain the aura of humankind's primal situation. But for Lewis it wasn't necessary to turn nostalgically back to a lost past in search of this primitive element. It was present all along. As he clarified in *Time and Western Man*, we each possess 'that extraordinary Aladdin's Cave, that paradise' — a 'magnificent private picture-gallery of […] stretched-out imagery' in which we are 'allowed to wander in […] any direction, and to any private ends we pleased' — in '*our minds*'.[23]

[21] 'Inferior Religions' (1917), p.319.
[22] Plato, 'The Republic', p.297.
[23] *Time and Western Man*, p.376.

Appendix

Illustrations

[the following images have been redacted from this digitised version due to potential copyright issues]

Figure 1 William Blake, *The Ancient of Days*, 1794, pen and ink, watercolour and paper, private collection.

Figure 2 Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907, oil on canvas, 243.9 × 233.7 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Figure 3 Georges Braque, *Houses At L'Estaque*, 1908, oil on canvas, 60 × 73 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Bern, Switzerland.

Figure 4 Henri Matisse, *La Danse*, 1909-10, oil on canvas, 260 × 391 cm, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersberg.

Figure 5 Wyndham Lewis, *The Theatre Manager*, 1909, pencil, ink and watercolour on paper, 29.5 × 31.5 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum.

Figure 6 Wyndham Lewis, *Smiling Woman Ascending a Stair,* 1912, charcoal and gouache on paper, 95 × 65 cm, private collection.

Figure 7 Pablo Picasso, *The Aficionado (Le Torero),* 1912, oil on canvas, 135 × 82 cm, Kunstmuseum, Basel.

Figure 8 Wyndham Lewis, *Figure Holding a Flower*, 1912, graphite, pen and ink, and gouache on paper, 38.1 × 29.1 cm, Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust.

Figure 9 Wyndham Lewis, *Study for Kermesse*, 1912, pen and ink, wash and gouache on paper. 35 × 35.1 cm. Yale Center for British Art.

Figure 10 Wyndham Lewis, *The Vorticist*, 1912, watercolour on paper, 42.2 × 32.2 cm, Southampton City Art Gallery.

Figure 11 Wassily Kandinsky, *Composition VII*, 1913, oil on canvas, 200 × 300 cm, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Figure 12 Wyndham Lewis, Portfolio *Timon of Athens: A Feast of Overmen*, 1913, lithograph on paper, 38.8 × 27.2 cm, Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust, G. and V. Lane Collection.

Figure 13 Portfolio *Timon of Athens: The Thebaid*, 1913, lithograph on paper, 38.8 × 27.2 cm, Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust, G. and V. Lane Collection.

Figure 14 Jacob Epstein, *Rock Drill*, 1913-15, [reconstruction by Ken Cook and Ann Christopher after the dismantled original, 1973-4], polyester resin, metal and wood, 205 × 141.5 cm, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery.

Figure 15 Ezra Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro' in its original typographical layout from *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse,* 2.1 (1913), p.12.

Figure 16 Umberto Boccioni, *Synthesis of Human Dynamism with Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, 1913, lost and thought destroyed.

Figure 17 Wyndham Lewis, *Composition – Later Drawing of Timon Series*, 1913, pen, watercolour and pencil on paper, 34.3 × 26.7 cm, Tate Galleries.

Figure 18 Wyndham Lewis, *Timon of Athens*, 1913, pencil, pen and black and brown ink, and wash on paper, 34.5 ×26.5 cm, private collection.

Figure 19 Wyndham Lewis, *Timon of Athens*, 1913. Here the compositional arcs have been outlined by Antonella Abatilli as part of her unpublished research into Vorticist asethetics, revealing more of the compositional procedure behind Lewis's abstract Vorticist paintings.

Figure 20 Wyndham Lewis, *The Crowd*, 1914-15, oil and pencil on canvas, 200.7 × 153.7 cm, Tate Galleries.

Figure 21 Wyndham Lewis, Vorticist 'cone' design used repeatedly in *BLAST* (1914).

Figure 22 One of Guillaume Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*, 'Poème du 9 Février 1915'.

Figure 23 Bob Brown's 'Eyes on a Half-Shell' (1917).

Figure 24 Edward Wadsworth, *Dry Docked for Scaling and Painting*, 1918, woodcut, 22.2 × 20.3cm.

Figure 25 Photograph of HMS *Amphitrite* (1898) in dazzle camouflage in 1918 after conversion to minelayer.

Figure 26 Wyndham Lewis, *Manhattan* or *New York Mystic*, 1927, pen and ink, watercolour and gouache with papier collé, 37 × 25 cm, private collection.

Figure 27 Wyndham Lewis, *Red Scene*, 1933-36, oil on canvas, 71.1 × 91.4 cm, Tate Galleries.

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