

'It Is All Just Matter': 'Vital Materiality' in Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End*

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The reconciled condition would not be the philosophical imperialism of annexing the alien. Instead, its happiness would lie in the fact that the alien, in the proximity it is granted, remains what is distant and different, beyond the heterogeneous and beyond that which is one's own.

Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 191.

'marketing of personality'

Douglas Mao, *Solid Objects*, 30.

I. Objects as Metonyms for Subjects



Since in English 'actor' is often limited to humans, the word 'actant', borrowed from semiotics, is sometimes used to include nonhumans in the definition.

Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Box*, 'Glossary: Actor, Actant', 303.

The collector [...] makes his concern the transfiguration of things. To him falls the Sisyphean task of divesting things of their commodity character by taking possession of them. But he bestows on them only connoisseur value, rather than use value. The collector dreams his way not only into a distant or bygone world but also into a better one — one in which, to be sure, human beings are no better provided with what they need than in the everyday world, but in which things are freed from the drudgery of being useful.

Walter Benjamin, *Paris, Capital of the 19th century*

A standard piece of Victorian advice on child-rearing was [...] that ‘[e]very house ought to possess a “Museum”, even if it is only one shelf in a small cupboard’.

Douglas Mao, *Solid Objects*, 28

Mao here quotes from C. A. Montresor, *Some Hobby Horses: or, How to Collect Stamps, Coins, Seals, Crests, and Scraps*, London: W. H. Allen, 1980, 192.

Contemplation replaces action; sheer existence takes precedence over signification; [...] and the ornamental or aesthetic supplants the instrumental.

Mao, 29

Those rebellions in which the aesthetes and decadents pitted a doctrine of beauty as terminal value against the renowned Victorian tendency to stress art’s powers of moral instruction.

Ibid.

What, then, were tall candles in silver sticks for? And polished panelling in galleries?

Some Do Not . . ., 230.

When Wilde [...] remarked, 'I find it harder and harder every day to live up to my blue china' [...], he may have achieved a certain ironic distance from his own self-fashioning; but such irony can be resisted in turn by a strong claim to take seriously the idea of a **moral imperative in things** [...].

Mao, 30

Every possessive project aims at constituting the For-itself as the foundation of the world or a concrete totality of the in-itself, and this totality is, as totality, the for-itself itself existing in the mode of the in-itself.

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, tr. Hazel Barnes, 762.



From the rectory had come the immense scarlet and lapis lazuli carpet, [...], the great curtains [...] and all the polished Chippendale arm-chairs. Amongst all these, [...] still in dark blue silks, with an amber necklace and her elaborate black hair, waved exactly like that of Julia Domna in the Musée Lapidaire at Arles, moved Mrs Macmaster—also from the rectory. [...] An astonishingly beautiful and impressive woman: dark hair; dark, straight eyebrows; a straight nose; dark blue eyes in the shadows of her hair and bowed, pomegranate lips in a chin curved like the bow of a Greek boat . . .

Some Do Not . . . 245-6

Jane Morris (The Blue Silk Dress)
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1868

II. Aspects of Modern Life: Commodifying the Self





Fashion stands in opposition to the organic. It couples the living body to the inorganic world. To the living, it defends the rights of the corpse. The fetishism that succumbs to the sex appeal of the inorganic is its vital nerve. The cult of the commodity presses such fetishism into its service.

Walter Benjamin, *Paris, Capital of the 19th century*, 8



She knew that, like her intimates—all the Elizabeths, Alixs, and Lady Moiras of the smooth-papered, be-photographed weekly journals—she was man-mad. It was the condition, indeed, of their intimacy as of their eligibilities for reproduction on hot-pressed paper.

Some Do Not, 147

III. Embracing the Erosion of the Human/Non- Human Divide



The masculine body's relation to machinery found a particularly sharp focus in the First World War: in terms of its power to kill and maim, in terms of its rupturing of the integrity of the self in shell-shock, and in terms of a wider statistical appraisal of the body and its value.

Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body*, 95.

In battle – and in the battle zone – the whole world, humanity included, seems to assume the aspect of matter dominated eventually by gravity. Large bits of pot fly about, smash large pieces of flesh: then one and the other fall, to lie in the dust among the immense thistles. [...] It is all just matter – all humanity, just matter; one with the trees, the shells by the roadside, the limbered wagons, the howitzers and the few upstanding housewalls.

Ford Madox Ford, 'A Day of Battle', 1916

There were [...] three bundles of rags and what appeared to be a very large, squashed crow. How the devil had that fellow managed to get smashed into that shape? It was improbable.

A Man Could Stand Up, 552



Dix's post-war paintings combine the prosthesis as subject with collage and mixed-media techniques which graft in fabric, newspapers, glass, and other materials, as if the body can no longer be represented in any unmediated way.

Dix's collages work as metaphors for the hybrid character of prostheses. Again, this redefinition of humanity, this impingement of the object on the subject, bears major consequences on mimesis. The subject can no longer be rendered directly, and a profound renewal of representation is required.

Armstrong 97-8

Skat Players
Otto Dix, 1920



The man with the eyeglass had stuck a half-crown in his other eye. He was well-meaning. [...]

Tietjens was stretching out his two hands from the waist. It was incomprehensible. His right hand was behind her back, his left in her right hand. [...] He was swaying slowly. The elephant! They were dancing! Aranjuez was hanging on to the tall woman like a kid on a telegraph pole. [...] There was a fellow with a most beautiful voice. He led: better than a gramophone. Better. . .

A Man Could Stand Up— 674

The Elephant Celebes
Max Ernst, 1921

Why advocate the vitality of matter? Because my hunch is that the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption. It does so by preventing us from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies. These material powers, which can aid or destroy, enrich or disable, ennoble or degrade us, in any case call for our attentiveness, or even “respect” (provided that the term be stretched beyond its Kantian sense). The figure of an intrinsically inanimate matter may be one of the impediments to the emergence of more ecological and more materially sustainable modes of production and consumption.

Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, ix

He lay staring at the withy binders of his thatch shelter; the grass was infinitely green; his view embraced four counties; the roof was supported by six small oak sapling-trunks, roughly trimmed and brushed from above by apple boughs. French crab-apple! The hut had no sides.

The Italian proverb says: He who allows the boughs of trees to spread above his roof invites the doctor daily. Words to that effect! He would have grinned, but that might have been seen.

For a man who never moved, his face was singularly walnut-coloured.

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