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THE ART OF HUNGER

AESTHETIC AUTONOMY AND THE AFTERLIVES OF MODERNISM

Alys Moody

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Introduction

The Aesthetics of Hunger

Hunger as a metaphor for art is a surprisingly pervasive trope in modernism. Arthur Rimbaud's sonorous, "Ma faim, Anne, Anne" of his 1872 poem "Fêtes de la faim" and the quiet death by starvation of Herman Melville's Bartleby inaugurate this tradition in proto-modernist writing, but the trope resonates in a peculiarly vivid way within—or more accurately, on the margins of—modernism proper. For Norwegian writer Knut Hamsun, it was the key figure of his first semi-autobiographical novel, *Hunger*. For Kafka, it provided one of his most potent metaphors of artisthood in his 1922 short story "A Hunger Artist." The trope was taken up by many of their successors, particularly the Parisian surrealists and the American Lost Generation. In post-war and contemporary literature, the metaphor of writing as a kind of starvation continues to resonate in the works of writers grappling with their relation to modernism, from Samuel Beckett, to Paul Auster, to J. M. Coetzee.

This book argues that this tradition—what I call, following Auster, "the art of hunger"—uses the figure of hunger to dramatize and work through a set of aesthetic problems. More specifically, I argue that the art of hunger emerges as a figure for aesthetic autonomy in crisis; a figure, that is, for aesthetic autonomy that has failed to secure the social consensus that would make autonomy legible. Without this social assent, the link between aesthetic autonomy and freedom—which has long been one of its most pervasive and powerful justifications—disappears. The art of hunger instead imagines the aesthetic as a realm of unfreedom and physical suffering, marked by a refusal to bow to necessity that nonetheless fails to end in liberation. This aesthetic stance negates most familiar justifications for art—it is neither free nor pleasurable, neither politically or morally edifying nor intrinsically satisfying—and in this sense it dramatizes the loss of social assent by radically assenting to be as unredeemable as art's most vehement critics assume it to be. Nonetheless, from this position of failure and negation, the art of hunger imagines a novel

aesthetics that sees the body as the point of mediation between art and society, between necessity and negation. In doing so, it offers a way of thinking art beyond the requirement of freedom, and of testing what an unfree art might be capable of.

The art of hunger is best understood as a fundamentally modernist trope, in the sense that, in its dramatization of aesthetic autonomy, it stages the crisis of one of modernism's signature aesthetic positions. Modernism's association with autonomy has been one of its most controversial characteristics, often fuelling attacks on the writing of this period and on its heirs. Much modernist scholarship since the field's resurgence in the 1990s—work on gender and race, on the middlebrow, on modernism's relationship to media and popular culture, and on its relationship to celebrity and the literary marketplace—has implicitly or explicitly sought to redeem modernism (or to undermine it) by unpicking the apparently inviolable connection between modernism and autonomy, revealing new, less autonomous modernisms and exposing the less autonomous flipside of high modernism.[1] This work has demonstrated the extent to which modernism's association with autonomy has been the result of a narrow canon—often disproportionately European, male, and white—and of a too-hasty willingness to take authors from this canon at their word when they have espoused positions of autonomy. It has shown that modernism was a larger tent than previously assumed, and that the espousal of aesthetic autonomy constituted only a single strand within this complex literary-historical picture. Nonetheless, a more recent wave of scholarship, typified by Andrew Goldstone's *Fictions of Autonomy* and Lisa Siraganian's *Modernism's Other Work*, has sought to swing the pendulum back, reaffirming the centrality of aesthetic autonomy to modernist literature, by arguing that autonomy is less formalist, less apolitical, and less asocial than we have tended to assume. The art of hunger is a modernist practice in the sense that, like the modernist writing examined by Goldstone and Siraganian, it interrogates writing's relationship to autonomy. *The Art of Hunger* seeks to contribute to the revival of interest in modernist autonomy from the besieged and beleaguered position implied by the art of hunger.

While the art of hunger is a modernist trope, its tentacles reach not only back into the nineteenth century but forward to the very end of the twentieth. This book traces the modernist art of hunger's contemporary

[1] See, for example, Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Aaron Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Houston A. Baker Jr, "Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance," *American Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (1989): 84–97.

legacies, focusing primarily on writing between 1945 and 1990, particularly the work of Samuel Beckett, Paul Auster, and J. M. Coetzee. In orienting myself towards the writing of the late twentieth century, I am less interested in arguing that these later writers should be classed as modernist, than in tracing modernism's legacies in more recent writing. Aesthetic autonomy after modernism has a checkered history, retaining much of its earlier prestige in certain circles, but also experiencing a series of profound crises and shocks that challenged its on-going viability as an aesthetic position. Throughout these travails, aesthetic autonomy was consistently understood as a modernist position, and modernism's fate was insistently linked to that of aesthetic autonomy. Modernism as an idea in the late twentieth-century literary imagination was thus intimately bound up with the idea of aesthetic autonomy. When late modernists like Beckett, postmodernists like Auster, and postcolonial writers like Coetzee draw on the art of hunger, they do so in dialogue with its earlier modernist manifestations. This tradition therefore becomes a path by which post-war and contemporary writing negotiates its relationship to modernism, and works through the fate of aesthetic autonomy beyond the modernist era. It offers an alternate version of aesthetic autonomy—less certain of its social position, and less utopian in its claims—that remains more tenable during moments of aesthetic autonomy's most acute crises, as modernist autonomy seems, repeatedly, to enter what feels like its death throes, losing (and then regaining) its prestige without losing its centrality to many writers' conceptualizations of the aesthetic.

1. AESTHETIC AUTONOMY WITHOUT SOCIAL ASSENT

If the art of hunger represents a failure of social assent to aesthetic autonomy, it confronts an immediate objection, in that we do not typically think of aesthetic autonomy as a social phenomenon. While its critics have worried over its apparent irresponsible refusal of the social, however, theorists of aesthetic autonomy have repeatedly emphasized that it relies upon social assent. The communicability of apparently subjective aesthetic judgements—what he calls "common sense"—is a central tenet of Kant's definition of the aesthetic in the *Critique of Judgement*, usually taken as the inaugural document of aesthetic autonomy.[2] In "The Crisis in Culture," Hannah Arendt foregrounds this dimension of Kant's writing,

[2] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, ed. Nicholas Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 68, 69.

arguing that "the ability to see things not only from one's point of view but from the point of view of all those who happen to be present" is central to Kantian aesthetics.[3] Arendt's reading of Kantian judgement shifts his aesthetics somewhat, insisting that it is not the universality of Kantian "common sense" but the more limited, more context-bound assent of "all those who happen to be present" that defines the sociality of aesthetic experience, but they share a conviction that aesthetics requires social assent for its operations.

Pierre Bourdieu, who has traced the emergence of an autonomous literary field in France in the late nineteenth century, makes the most sustained and influential case for aesthetic autonomy as an inherently social phenomenon, arguing that the "society of artists" produces a market that has "the virtue of assuring a form of social recognition for those who otherwise appear (that is, to other groups) as a challenge to common sense."[4] Bourdieu's sociological analysis of this literary field is made possible by his understanding of autonomy as a social category that declares its separation from—even opposition to—the wider society, even as it generates its own social dynamics. His work offers a conceptual framework for more recent analyses of modernist autonomy, such as Andrew Goldstone's reading of it as "a shared social-aesthetic project" in which, he argues, "fictions of autonomy change according to what they seek to be autonomous from."[5] Despite the sometimes fairly dramatic differences in their positions, these theorists all agree that aesthetics in general, and aesthetic autonomy in particular, are inherently social phenomena, and that art can only meaningfully be autonomous if this autonomy is grounded in the community's assent, be that the assent of the presumptively educated bourgeoisie implied by Kant's "common sense" or that of Bourdieu's oppositional "society of artists." Moreover, as both Bourdieu and Goldstone suggest, aesthetic autonomy as we know it today has achieved its most influential and stable social context in the communities and coteries of modernism.

The art of hunger presents a special case of aesthetic autonomy as a social phenomenon, however, because it dramatizes the breakdown of this assent. The authors discussed here experience the loss of the sociality of the aesthetic on two fronts. On the one hand, they confront a public that does not grant the autonomy of the aesthetic. On the other, they

[3] Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), 221.

[4] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 58.

[5] Andrew Goldstone, *Fictions of Autonomy: Modernism from Wilde to de Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15.

experience art as an intensely isolated and isolating experience, stripped of the alternative social recognition of Bourdieu's "society of artists." I do not mean to confuse this collapse of sociality with earlier understandings of aesthetic autonomy that deny the importance of the social to this concept entirely. With Rita Felski, I agree that, "Art works must be sociable to survive, irrespective of their attitude to 'society'."[6] This book is interested, however, in a tradition whose problematic attitude to "society," and whose sense of society's equally complicated relationship to its authors, pushes its artworks to the limits of their ability to survive (the art of hunger, after all, is a figure for art that approaches death). My work offers a gentle corrective, from the margins, to claims like Lisa Siraganian's insistence that, "Autonomy from the world was never, for the modernists, a failure of relation to it."[7] I argue that, for the tradition of modernism that I examine here, autonomy from the world *did* imply a failure of relation, but that this was neither triumphant nor desired—and did not, whatever the difficulties it threw up, exempt them from seeing autonomous art as a social phenomenon. Instead, the writers I discuss in this book experience their writing's failure of relation to society as a traumatic collapse of context and purpose. The art of hunger is the tradition, I suggest, that seeks to explore the possibilities that remain available for art when a writer's aesthetics entail a collapse of their social context.

One way of understanding this position is to see the art of hunger as the desocialization of the more familiar trope of the starving artist. Bourdieu notes that, "the invention of the pure aesthetic is inseparable from the invention of a new social personality, that of the great professional artist who combines, in a union as fragile as it is improbable, a sense of transgression and freedom from conformity with the rigor of an extremely strict discipline of living and of work, which presupposes bourgeois ease and celibacy."[8] The starving artist typifies this new professional artist, his starvation signifying both prongs of this "personality": starving is simultaneously a form of discipline, as in the practice of fasting; and the visible manifestation of the poverty that signals the artist's refusal to conform to the strictures of the marketplace. He (these artists are always presumptively male) is a familiar figure in modernist self-representation: he is the protagonist of autobiographies from Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* to Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*, and appears with enough frequency in surrealist self-mythologization that Mina Loy felt moved to

[6] Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 166.
[7] Lisa Siraganian, *Modernism's Other Work: The Art Object's Political Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4.
[8] Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, 111.

satirize it with her novel *Insel*. But all these starving artists, however taciturn and wilfully unpleasant, are embedded within a bohemian social milieu that makes their behavior intelligible as a form of aesthetic practice. Indeed, for many of them, the social is precisely the point: *A Moveable Feast* is above all a portrait of the social world of 1920s expatriate Paris; *Insel* above all the story of a friendship. In these cases, adopting the persona of the starving artist is understood to cement a writer's or artist's position *within* bohemia, rather than to cast them out of it.

The art of hunger that I examine in this book both is and is not part of this starving artist tradition. Like the starving artist, the writers of the art of hunger combine social transgression with intense discipline; they aspire, that is, to become the kind of "social personality" capable of embodying the autonomy of art. But, in an important sense, they fail—fail in part because aesthetic autonomy requires an audience that is not available to them, a society of artists that is neither an uncomprehending mass audience nor the complete absence of an audience. The difference between a figure like Kafka's hunger artist, who ends as a lonely and unrecognized (and dead) failure, and one like Henry Miller or Ernest Hemingway, who is able to leverage his performance of starving autonomy to cement his position within a literary field, is, in large part, one of positioning. Those writers most centrally involved in elaborating the art of hunger—Hamsun, Kafka, and Beckett, for instance—stand persistently at the margins of modernism. Socially, ethnically, geographically, or historically, they are all notably peripheral to the main game of Anglo-American "high modernism," and to the other major modernisms flourishing in Germany and France in the early twentieth century. They sit, like Hamsun, on Europe's underdeveloped edges; like Coetzee, in its "provincial" colonies (and at its extreme historical margins); or, like Kafka, as part of a marginal and displaced minority, writing in another culture's language, producing what Deleuze and Guattari have called his "minor literature."[9] Or, like Beckett and Auster, they are in the right place at the wrong time, writing a second- or third-generation expatriate Parisian modernism, long after the expatriates have all left Paris. On these historical and geographical peripheries, where European modernism's hegemony fizzles out, the autonomous literary field as Bourdieu describes it does not exist to provide the kind of well-developed social milieu that he finds in late nineteenth-century Paris. Out here, aesthetic autonomy is only an aesthetic principle, not a social dynamic. And without the social organization that validates and elucidates the principle, the starving artist is less a

[9] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

recognizable "social personality" than a choleric old crank, refusing to eat for no reason at all.

These writers, then, are marginal—but not *too* marginal. The canon of hunger artists, at least insofar as hunger functions as a reliable and readable trope for aesthetic autonomy, is an exclusively white male one, and for good reason. As a large body of scholarship has recognized, self-starvation has a long association with women and with femininity. As a result, female hunger artists—Emily Dickinson or Simone Weil would be strong candidates—are inevitably read as participating in a tradition that is deeply invested in the political, social, and religious roles of women.[10] Similarly, poverty became increasingly racialized in many parts of the English-speaking world during the twentieth century, both domestically within countries like the US, the UK, and Australia, and globally as the concept of "world hunger" emerged, foregrounding extreme poverty in regions such as Africa and South Asia. In this context, the starving bodies of people of color developed their own inescapable set of cultural meanings, inscribing them within a narrative that linked poverty to race, as I discuss in the context of South African apartheid in Chapter 4. Because starvation has such strong political and cultural associations for both women and people of color, it is only white men whose starvation can reliably be read as a purely aesthetic gesture, and therefore only white men for whom hunger can reliably function as a trope for autonomy. This caveat ought to remind us that the art of hunger tradition is not exempt from the older criticisms that have been mounted against aesthetic autonomy: that it tends to be a privilege, like other forms of autonomy, reserved for white men, and that its canonization has tended to disproportionately exclude women, people of color, and working-class writers from its ranks.[11] Indeed, it is particularly important to bear in mind the racialized and gendered nature of this tradition as I move, in the pages that follow, to conceptualize its relation to freedom and embodiment.

One of the curious side effects of these writers' combination of white masculinity with a marginal modernism has been to make them sometimes

[10] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Sigal Gooldin, "Fasting Women, Living Skeletons and Hunger Artists: Spectacles of Body and Miracles at the Turn of a Century," *Body and Society* 9, no. 2 (2003): 27–53; Walter Vandereycken and Ron van Deth, *From Fasting Saints to Anorexic Girls: The History of Self-Starvation* (London: Athlone Press, 1994).

[11] For a feminist critique of autonomy, see Mary Devereaux, "Autonomy and Its Feminist Critics," in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Kelly (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); for a discussion of autonomy's difficult relationship to its racial others, see Simon Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

appear to critics as towering, isolated geniuses, even as contemporary criticism has theoretically abandoned such affectations. Despite on-going work that seeks to place them in their historical moments, scholarly communities around authors like Beckett and Coetzee continue to read the oppositionality of their aesthetic position as making them into ahistorical figures who somehow transcend their social contexts. One of the claims of this book is that the crisis of aesthetic sociality that is crystallized in the art of hunger is itself a social position, and that the historical, discursive, and social contexts out of which these authors write shape their aesthetics more profoundly than much criticism has acknowledged. This book is interested in how the crises that confront the legacies of modernism in the latter half of the twentieth century place aesthetic autonomy under siege in these new discursive environments. Locating Beckett within the debates around aesthetic autonomy in post-war France, Auster in the intellectual and political foment of post-1968 US and France, and Coetzee in the hyper-politicized literary field of late apartheid South Africa, I argue that each of these authors stakes a claim to autonomy and seeks to affiliate themselves to modernism in literary fields that no longer straightforwardly recognize such claims. They therefore adopt positions that, while oppositional, are best understood within the debates out of which they arise. Moreover, by tracing these debates, I suggest that we get an insight into the travails of aesthetic autonomy itself over the twentieth century, and a sense of the extent to which modernism set the terms for late twentieth-century thinking on art and aesthetics.

2. TASTE AND TASTELESSNESS: AGAINST CULINARY ART

But why turn to hunger to describe this crisis of aesthetic autonomy? Part of the answer, which I explore in more detail in Chapter 1, lies in its capacity to dramatize the less-than-glamorous stakes of being outside the protection of society and its economic arrangements. Another part of the answer is more philosophical. The art of hunger is in key respects the bastard child of German Idealist aesthetics, which invented the concept of aesthetic autonomy through the systematic exclusion of food from the categories of art and beauty. This tradition emerges in opposition to eighteenth-century British taste philosophy, in which the concept of aesthetic taste was initially developed by analogy to literal or bodily taste.[12] Hume, for instance,

[12] For a much more detailed account of this philosophical tradition, and its impact on British Romanticism, see Denise Gigante, *Taste: A Literary History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

draws upon "the great resemblance between mental and bodily taste" to derive a definition of the all-important "delicacy of imagination" from a story, taken from *Don Quixote*, about the ability of Sancho Panza's relatives to distinguish faint overtones of metal or leather in a barrel of wine.[13] This definition rests on the assumption that aesthetic taste is something like bodily taste applied to a different object. It takes place in the context of a broad assumption that aesthetics is principally a question of sensation—that is, that it is phenomenological and acts on the body.

Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, the foundational document of aesthetic autonomy, represents the decisive break from this tradition, the moment at which food is exiled from the realm of art and beauty. Writing out of and against the British tradition, Kant retains the concept of taste as the faculty by which aesthetic judgements are passed, but draws a bright line between its aesthetic and bodily manifestations.[14] This distinction becomes the foundation upon which Kant builds one of the most distinctive and influential aspects of his theory of aesthetics, that of the disinterestedness of the aesthetic. For Kant, "*Taste* is the faculty of judging an object or a mode of representation by means of a delight or aversion *apart from any interest*. The object of such a delight is called *beautiful.*"[15] Kant develops this definition of the aesthetic by arguing that the beautiful is devoid of both sensory interest in the agreeable and conceptual interest in the good. If Hume and other taste philosophers could derive properties of aesthetic taste by exploring its analogy with bodily taste, Kant instead takes eating and physical taste as paradigmatic examples of the agreeable. Thus, Kant uses "a dish that stimulates the sense of taste with spices and other condiments" as his example of that which is agreeable but not good, and illustrates the inherently particular nature of the agreeable by observing that the claim "Canary-wine is agreeable" always implies only, "It is agreeable *to me.*"[16] The agreeable—with the pleasures of dining as its principal manifestation—is neither disinterested, nor universal, nor purposive without purpose, nor necessary, failing on each of Kant's four definitions of the beautiful. It stands therefore for everything that he seeks to exclude from the category of the aesthetic, leading him to found the principle of aesthetic autonomy on an opposition between aesthetics and eating.

Kant's repudiation of eating, however, is not an embrace of hunger. For Kant, eating is only one manifestation of the whole realm of bodily

[13] David Hume, *Four Dissertations*, Eighteenth Century Collections Online (London: printed for A. Millar, 1757), 216–17.

[14] Kant uses the German term *Geschmack*, which retains the double sense of the English. He makes only one, rather disingenuous, reflection on the derivation of the word in its aesthetic sense, observing that bodily and aesthetic taste both require singular judgements, not derivable from general principles. Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 114–15.

[15] Ibid., 42. [16] Ibid., 39–40, 43.

experience and desire that maintains the subject in an interested relation to the physical world. Hunger, another manifestation of bodily interest, is similarly excluded. Indeed, in a rare elision between physical and mental taste, Kant opposes hunger to all kinds of taste, arguing that it removes the faculty of discrimination on which aesthetic taste is founded. As a result, he concludes, "only when people's needs have been satisfied can we tell who among the crowd has taste or not."[17] Hunger in this sense emerges as a paradigm of interest, an experience of investment so strong that it erases everything outside itself. Moreover, its inimicality to either taste or a properly disinterested aesthetic is also, crucially, the mechanism that preserves the class structure of Kant's aesthetic theory, ensuring that the poor, those whose needs have not yet been satisfied, are by definition excluded from entry into the bourgeois realm of Kantian taste.

Kant's formulation of aesthetic autonomy has been enormously influential for post-Kantian philosophers, artists, and audiences, standing at the foundation of discussions of aesthetic autonomy wherever it appears. This influence, however, has frequently carried within it the implicit opposition between eating and aesthetics. Writing in the wake of Kant, aesthetic philosophers have had constant recourse to this trope in their attempts to establish art's autonomy. Where Kant is interested in the subjective processes that allow us to make aesthetic judgements, understood broadly to include not only artistic but also and primarily natural beauty, Hegel's aesthetics shifts the focus to the nature of art itself. For Hegel, art is a particular expression of *Geist* and therefore "has the vocation of revealing *the truth* in the form of sensuous artistic shape."[18] Nonetheless, like Kant, Hegel opposes this truth-embodying sensuous shape to "purely sensuous apprehension," where the latter has much in common with the Kantian category of the agreeable. For Hegel, art is opposed to desire, which he defines as an "appetitive relation to the outer world." Echoing and extending Kant's profession that the aesthetic must be divorced from any interest in an object's actual existence, Hegel emphasizes that, "desire requires for itself not merely the superficial appearance of external things, but themselves in their concrete sensuous existence. Mere pictures of the wood that it wants to use, or of the animals that it wants to eat, would be of no service to desire."[19] Here Hegel draws an explicit distinction between real objects capable of inciting desire and art which, deferring the object's actual existence, also defers its relation to desire.

[17] Ibid., 42.
[18] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Inwood, trans. Bernard Bosanquet (London: Penguin, 1993), 61.
[19] Ibid., 41.

Here, as in Kant, eating returns as one of the key examples of such desire. In fact, as Hegel's editor, Michael Inwood, suggests in his commentary, Hegel's arguments in this section seem "more appropriate to the desire to eat than to e.g. sexual desire," suggesting that Hegel's conception of the desire that he posits as antithetical to art takes the desire for food as its exemplary and informing instance.[20] While for Hegel the determining feature of art is its sensuous embodiment of truth, this sensuousness remains opposed, as in Kant, to bodies that eat or that desire to eat.

Arthur Schopenhauer, Hegel's rival and fellow post-Kantian Idealist, adopts an even stricter and more thoroughgoing view of the separation of art and appetite. For Schopenhauer, the true value of art lies in its suspension of the will, which he sees as the source of all suffering, the desiring property that motivates and corrupts all (phenomenal) existence. Art presents Ideas, which, like the Platonic idea or Kantian thing-in-itself, constitute the true nature of the world, divorced from the impulses of the will. As the bearer of these will-less Ideas, art therefore promises to still the will. The desire to eat, in contrast, is one of the principal manifestations of what Schopenhauer at one point calls the "hungry will," and he makes extensive use of examples drawn from the domain of food and eating to illustrate its malevolent force.[21] In his definition of the charming—a rough analogue to the Kantian agreeable—Schopenhauer extends this exclusion to specifically prohibit the depiction of food in art, singling out Dutch still life painting for "err[ing] by depicting edible objects." This misstep, Schopenhauer suggests, negates their very status as art, for, "By their deceptive appearance these necessarily excite the appetite, and this is just a stimulation of the will which puts an end to any aesthetic contemplation of the object."[22] Schopenhauer, radicalizing the exclusion of eating from the aesthetic, insists that anything that might give rise to even the *thought* of eating compromises proper aesthetic detachment, stirs the will, and thus undermines art's true function.

Despite his firm rejection of hunger that is oriented towards an object, Schopenhauer, alone among the Idealists, reserves an important place for self-starvation. In the fourth book of *The World as Will and as Representation*, Schopenhauer sets out his ethics, which are supposed to achieve what Schopenhauer's aesthetics cannot: a permanent renunciation of the will, in place of the temporary reprieve offered by art. Here, he advocates an asceticism whose aim "is to serve as a constant mortification of the will,

[20] Ibid., 126.
[21] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), 154.
[22] Ibid., 1:207–8.

so that satisfaction of desires, the sweets of life, may not again stir the will, of which self-knowledge has conceived a horror"—a practice that finds one of its highest expressions in the renunciation of the will to eat.[23] Schopenhauer is, however, careful to keep his embrace of asceticism separate, both structurally and conceptually, from his aesthetic rejection of eating. The reasons for this derive from the Idealists' shared conception of aesthetic autonomy: aesthetics, for Schopenhauer, as for Kant and Hegel, is a purely mental phenomenon. This is the source of its strength as a site for the Kantian play of faculties, Hegelian revelation of truth, and Schopenhauerian suspension of the will. It also means, however, that the price of this autonomy is its exile from the everyday life of either artist or spectator, as well as from the realms of bodily experience and sensation. Art, in such a model, can have as little to do with hunger as with eating, for both are experiences that must be lived out from within a body and both therefore necessarily violate the relegation of the aesthetic to the mental, on which its autonomy is constructed. In this context, the art of hunger might be understood as a calculated misreading or parody of German Idealism's opposition between eating and aesthetics, an attempt to reinscribe aesthetic autonomy in the material realm from which the Idealists exclude it.

In this sense, Friedrich Nietzsche can be read as an early philosophical precursor to the art of hunger. The German Idealist tradition excludes eating from the realm of art in order to develop a theory of aesthetic autonomy that is not bound to the body. Nietzsche, whose aesthetics tend towards the heteronomous and embodied, develops a counter-metaphor, figuring modern art as a form of starvation. For Nietzsche, the playwrights of late Greek drama are "emaciated epigones," whom he condemns to "Hades so that there you can for once eat your fill on the crumbs of the masters of a previous age."[24] In their humiliating starvation, they are, he claims, the forebears of modern culture, whose "uncanny agitation" is nothing more than "the starving man's craven grasping and snatching for food."[25] For Nietzsche, starvation is a sign of belatedness and derivativeness, of an excessive reliance on "history and criticism," and of a generalized cultural enervation. He rejects aesthetic autonomy, and the literary historical and critical traditions that he associates with it, on the grounds of its deleterious effects on the body. While the writers I discuss in this book do not share Nietzsche's skepticism of aesthetic autonomy or his

[23] Ibid., 1:381–2.
[24] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 62.
[25] Ibid., 123.

repudiation of bodily weakness, they nonetheless carry forward the claim that modern art is undergoing a crisis, linked to its belatedness, and that hunger offers a way of inscribing that belatedness on the body.

Together, these philosophers from Kant to Nietzsche constitute a tradition whose influence on modernist art and aesthetics has been immense. In different ways, each of these thinkers has articulated and pioneered some of modernism's key ideas. Kant's model of autonomous art underpins many modernist theories of aesthetics, while Hegel's claim that modern art had reached or passed a critical endpoint is an early expression of the sense of crisis that pervades modernism. Schopenhauer's alternate articulation of the central importance of art, which places music at its heart, was similarly influential throughout the nineteenth century and beyond, while Nietzsche has frequently been read as one of the great aestheticians of modernism.[26] These philosophers' ideas, and the models of aesthetic autonomy that they embrace (or, in Nietzsche's case, reject), pervade the modernist period and underpin much of its artistic production.[27]

Modernist writers continue to make use of both German Idealism's exclusion of food from the realm of the aesthetic and its coupling of this unconsuming art with the notion of aesthetic autonomy. Examples of the modernist disdain for appetitive art are numerous, and span modernism's stylistic and ideological range. Bertolt Brecht, in one of the most influential formulations of this trope, despairs of "our existing opera" which, he argues, "is a culinary opera . . . To every object it adopts a hedonistic approach."[28] Henry James similarly dismisses those readers whose aesthetic taste too closely resembles its literal counterpart in "The Art of Fiction," complaining that, "The 'ending' of a novel is, for many persons, like that of a good dinner, a course of dessert and ices, and the artist in fiction is regarded as a sort of meddlesome doctor who forbids agreeable aftertastes."[29] George Orwell reprises the metaphor in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, where Gordon Comstock expresses his disgust for the "soggy, half-baked trash" of the popular novel, imagining it as "pudding, suet pudding. Eight hundred slabs

[26] On Schopenhauer's influence on modern literature, see David E. Wellbery, *Schopenhauers Bedeutung für die Moderne Literatur* (Munich: Carl Friedrich von Siemens Stiftung, 1998).

[27] Robert Pippin goes further, arguing that Kant was the "first thoroughgoing 'philosophical modernist'" and that the post-Kantian German tradition as a whole is characteristically modernist in its attempts to grapple with the "deepest assumption in modernity's self-understanding (the assertion of autonomy)": Robert B. Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, 2nd edn (Malden: Blackwell, 1999), 11, 10.

[28] Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (London: Eyre Methuen, 1964), 35.

[29] Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch, 2nd edn (New York: Norton, 2010), 747.