Identity and Difference: Jackson Pollock and the Ideology of the Drip

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This art is deeply rooted, I believe, in the self and its relation to the surrounding world. The pathos of the reduction or fragility of the self within a culture that becomes increasingly organized through industry, economy and the state intensifies the desire of the artist to create forms that will manifest his liberty...1

Of the modernist art criticism of the 1950s, the most enduring has proven to be that of Meyer Schapiro. In the remarks quoted above, Schapiro moves away from the tendency to see Abstract Expressionism in universal, existential, terms (though he does argue it has a universal claim on the spectator), stressing instead the socio-political motivation of the movement, namely a sense of revulsion at the increasingly administered, homogeneous culture of post-war late capitalism. In one sense, Schapiro's comments, though timely, were premature, for it was only some twenty years later that attention turned to the political connotations of American modernism of the immediate post-war era,2 since when the formalism of Fried, Greenberg and Sandler, or the existential utopianism of Rosenberg, have given way to a more sober evaluation of the enmeshing of American modernism in the ideology of post-war capitalist America.

Of this change in approach perhaps the best-known example is Serge Guilbaut's book How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art, which argues that work of the New York School artists was gradually co-opted by the propaganda machine of Truman's administration during the onset of the Cold War.3

Such a reorientation towards the politics of American modernism, while generally accepted, has not achieved universal acclaim, however — not least, as would be expected, on the part of those whose theories form the principal object of criticism.4 Recent criticism of the very idea of an interlinking of Abstract Expressionism and American political ideology has come from David Anfam and Stephan Polcari, the latter writing that: 'this vein of Late Marxist writing depends on faulty premises; specious associations; perpetuations of original critical misunderstandings; simplistic political recontextualisations and entrapments; factual errors; dismissal of personal, and intellectual concerns; sweeping abstraction and generalizations; pernicious political distortions; and wilful ignorance of the intentions, subjects, forms and imagery of the artists.'5 The ill-tempered nature of this assertion is striking, and one suspects that motivating Polcari's critique is less a concern with factual errors in Guilbaut's arguments, of which there are admittedly many, than with a desire to maintain the mastery of the artist over the meaning of the work. In this respect, it is notable that Polcari happily overlooks the problematics of authorship, paying scant regard even to New Critical objections to the notion of intentionality, much less to structuralist and post-structuralist exploration of the 'death' of the author.

The objections of Polcari ultimately stem, of course, from a more general political hostility to Marxist art history, and have accordingly to be read in the context of the American Right.6 While they have to be greeted therefore with some degree of caution, they do nevertheless point to a problem, specifically in Guilbaut's book; namely, the overriding emphasis on the reception of Abstract Expressionism during the Cold War, that is to say its (putative) co-option by the Truman administration, at the expense of any substantial interest in its production. In other words, it does not really address the relation of artistic production to the objective reception and putative appropriation of the works in question. Hence, in order to explore the politics of Abstract Expressionism more fully, it is necessary to pass beyond a purely reception-theoretical approach, in order to examine not only the politicization of the works by others, e.g. critics, dealers, buyers, but also the network of discursive formations within which they take their place, and which govern the works' production. By means of such an examination, objections of the type raised by Polcari, namely, that the artists in question did not intend the meaning read into their work by others, fall apart, since the meaning of the works is a function of the symbolic order superseding the supposed subjective intent of the artist.

It is naturally not necessary to engage on a description of the principles of a post-humanist aesthetic, since the decentering of subjectivity already occupies a familiar place in the contemporary intellectual landscape. A clear example of the phenomenon I am referring to, however, can be seen in the paintings of Barnett Newman who, as David Craven has recently confirmed, remained committed to an anarchist politics, stubbornly hostile to the value of post-war American society.7 Within the context outlined by Craven, the meaning of Newman's well-known assertion that a proper understanding of his work 'would mean the end of all state capitalism and totalitarianism'8 would hardly seem to require clarification. Against this anti-capitalist stance, however, one has to contend with the difficulty that Newman's choice of the
sublime as the properly anarchic aesthetic, as the dissolution of all boundaries, also serves as the ideological vehicle of many of the values he believed his painting undermined. In his famous essay of 1948, 'The Sublime is Now', Newman's identification of sublimity with the American modernist aesthetic, in contrast to the European concern with matters of mere beauty, unwittingly contributes to the wider myths sustaining American notions of cultural identity, in other words, the belief in America as the land of (implicitly masculine) self-assertion, free enterprise, rugged individualism, which underpinned the ideology of free capitalist America. It is well-known that Pollock, both as painter and as public icon, easily fitted into this ideology, yet it appears in Newman's rather more spiritualized line) self-assertion, free enterprise, rugged individualism, which underpinned the ideology of free capitalist America. It is well-known that Pollock, both as painter and as public icon, easily fitted into this ideology, yet it appears in Newman's rather more spiritualized works too, albeit in sublimated form. For the capacity of Newman's painting to be appropriated to support the political rhetoric of the time does not necessarily indicate capitalism's ability to domesticate and recoup everything, even its own negation. Rather, it stems from the fact that the features of Newman's oeuvre unconsciously lent it to such uses through the political meanings of sublimity.9

In this paper I intend to explore these issues as they relate to the problem of Pollock. Specifically, I intend to examine the ideological reference of Pollock's painting, focusing in particular on his interest in the unconscious. In the debate over the political meaning of Pollock's work, the concern with the unconscious which Pollock exhibited has been frequently omitted from the equation. Guilbaut's study displays little interest in the unconscious as an element in Pollock, while at the other extreme Polcari seems to suggest that the psychological interest excludes the political dimension to Pollock. That is, of course, quite startling given that so much contemporary psychoanalytic writing, specifically Lacanian and post-Lacanian theory, is concerned precisely with the intersection of politics and psychoanalysis.10 Hence I wish to suggest that the political meanings of Abstract Expressionism are related directly to the psychological theories underpinning so much Abstract Expressionist practice, not only in terms of Pollock's interest in Jung (albeit in popularized form), but also in terms of the visual metaphors chosen by Pollock to symbolize the unconscious. I shall be arguing that both Pollock's symbolic language and the conception of the unconscious which that language represents, in a manner parallel to Newman's aesthetic of the sublime, unwittingly bear the imprint of capitalist ideology, and that it is this which allows one to speak of the politics of Abstract Expressionism, rather than the grander, but ultimately problematic claims made by Guilbaut.

I

'The Source of my Painting is the Unconscious.'11

One of the principal issues in approaching the question of the unconscious in Pollock's work is how to interpret his claim regarding the unconscious as the source of his painting. His often cited assertion is, perhaps, overly familiar, yet the question as to whether the unconscious in Pollock functions as the source of production or as the subject of representation nevertheless merits consideration. If we see it as the source of production, of Pollock's productive energies, it is necessary to psychoanalyse Pollock in order to understand both the semi-figurative symbolic language of his earlier paintings and drawings and also the abstract, 'poured' paintings for which he gained his fame. On the other hand, if the unconscious is recognised as the represented content of the paintings, analysing Pollock achieves little, since according to this argument he would be painting under the guidance of a theory of the unconscious, and hence the putative spontaneity of even his automatism would have to be read as something other than spontaneous. This is not to imply that Pollock did not produce the drip paintings spontaneously, since of course he did; what it does imply is that it is necessary to explore why Pollock chose to paint in this way, a decision reached after a period of some deliberation.

The former interpretation gained popularity following the publication in 1970 of the so-called psychoanalytic drawings of Pollock, i.e. drawings produced by him in 1939–40 while in therapy with Joseph Henderson. Amongst the Jungian interpreters of these works, apart from Henderson himself, is Elisabeth Langhorne, who has argued that a properly Jungian interpretation should 'focus on Pollock's images as expressions of conscious and unconscious psychic forces', a view conveniently bolstered by the similarity between many of the figures in the drawings and the Jungian lexicon of archetypal symbols inhabiting the collective unconscious.12 More recently, Donald Kuspit has seen the ready acquiescence on the part of Pollock to Henderson's own Jungian interpretation of the drawings as a desire to give a universal meaning to the bizarre images produced, part of Pollock's 'need to hide his personal pathology from himself'.13

This Jungian interpretation has, except amongst sympathetic Jungians, not achieved widespread appeal, and since the publication of Michael Leja's magisterial study of 1940s painting, seems far less convincing than a broader reading stressing the conscious investment by Pollock in representing certain ideas of the unconscious.14 As Leja points out, Abstract Expressionism can be related to contemporary debates over the state of modern subjectivity — what Leja terms 'Modern Man discourse' — a concern which, spurred by the experience of the Second World War, could be found in numerous articles and books of the immediate post-war era, as well as in the genre of the film noir. While in formal terms the New York school appeared avant-garde, many of their anthropological and psychological interests belonged to a much wider cultural sphere than the (relatively) small coterie of artists and critics associated with Abstract Expressionism. Indeed, while Pollock was a self-professed Jungian, that interest stemmed not so
much from a direct and sustained encounter with Jung's work itself, but rather from contact with figures such as Helen Marot, Violet de Laszlo, Joseph Henderson and his teacher Thomas Hart Benton, who introduced him to much of the popular literature on psychology such as James Harvey Robinson's *The Mind in the Making*.

These considerations naturally lead on to the question of how to interpret the drip paintings, which, as Hal Foster has argued, rather than being unmediated images of the unconscious are highly metaphorized representations of a conception of the nature of the unconscious. Following Foster's argument, there is no reason to assume that Pollock's works are 'truer', more authentic images of the unconscious than those of any other artist, since the very idea of overcoming mediation in the abstract representation of a theoretical subject is incoherent. This is true, also, of the first experiment in automatism, namely Surrealism, which as Laurent Jenny has pointed out, was similarly caught up in a paradoxical rhetoric, both reaching out towards a pre-symbolic consciousness and also privileging a specific symbolic language as the authentic expression of this consciousness. Hence the claim that the unconscious functions as the unmediated source of production is simply untenable in the failure to recognise the mediated nature of the symbolic artefact.

The added strength of the sociopolitical approach to the question is apparent, too, in its ability to explain the presence of Jungian elements in the drawings. Unless one is to maintain a strongly Jungian line, arguing that the motifs in Pollock's drawings constitute products of the unconscious at work, a reawakening, as it were, of repressed archetypes, it has to be recognised that they display such a degree of deliberateness, conscious control that their proximity to Jungian symbols is more explicable in terms of a conscious effort by Pollock to articulate in visual terms an emerging, as it were, of repressed archetypes, it has to be argued that the motifs in Pollock's drawings constitute products of the unconscious at work, a reawakening, as it were, of repressed archetypes.

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the 'primitive' cultures of pre-Columbian America, and to apply the same reductive method. In his 1941 painting, Birth (Fig. 2), for example, Pollock has painted the motif of a fetal figure which is also a mature plumed serpent. The figure, as Elizabeth Langhornes pointed out, is based on Orozco's fresco Aztec Warriors, which includes a feathered serpent, the symbol of the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl. Pollock's painting is the result of a number of months' working with this motif, and several serpent drawings from the same period exist. The significance of Pollock's appropriation of the symbol is that he recast it as a Jungian archetype signifying personal psychic rebirth, without regard for any cultural meaning it had within Aztec society, much less for its function in Orozco's mural, with its central political role in the founding of a Mexican national consciousness.

In this context it is also worth mentioning Pollock's use of sand in his painting Bird of the same year, which he included upon seeing Navajo sand painting, although the image itself was more probably inspired by a Hopi mural Pollock saw in the 1941 exhibition at MOMA, Indian Art of the United States. Here, one might observe, first, Pollock's willingness to conflate two distinct cultures, i.e. the Hopi and the Navajo and, second, his reinterpretation of the Navajo sand in strongly Jungian terms as bringing about a state of harmony and healing, in contrast to its meaning for the Navajo themselves. A further example could be seen in Pollock's Male and Female of 1942, which once more draws on the work of Orozco, specifically his mural Omnicia (1925), transforming it into a Jungian symbol of the unity of opposites, with scant regard for the significance of the original work.

In drawing attention to these features of Pollock's work of the early 40s I am not merely pointing out that, through the heavy influence of Jungian theory, he misinterpreted the meaning of various native American, Aztec and Mexican cultural phenomena. Instead, my critical point is to indicate the parallel here with the early European modernist appropria-
tion of African tribal objects, and, as with that misappropria-
tion, the primary source of interest is not with the mere fact that the symbols were re- or misinterpre-
ted, but with what that misinterpretation amounted to. For the reifying process levels out the symbolic content of myths, legends, taboos, rendering them interchangeable in the abstract system, and it is in this sense that Pollock's work of the early 40s can be seen as already embedded within the culture of capital. One can see, too, the difference here between Jung and Freud, who, despite his reductive desire (critiqued by Deleuze and Guattari[25]) to see Oedipus everywhere, nevertheless allows for personal meanings, for the specificity of the dream-world. In contrast, Jung (and Pollock) attempts to portray the universal inner life, recouping all in a totalising gesture.

In conclusion, then, Jung, and by implication the early Pollock, brand all with the mark of the identical, and with this we are moving towards a notion which will figure more prominently later in the discussion, namely 'identity'. For Jung's yearning for the erasure of difference through the unity of opposites appears far less spiritual in origin and rather more founded in an economic model, specifically, that of the abstract circulation of commodities. It is appropriate in this context to refer to Adorno's remarks on identity in Negative Dialectics. Adorno wrote that: 'it is through barter that non-identical individuals and performances become commensurable and identical. The spread of the principle imposes on the whole world an obligation to become identical, to become total.'[26] This recognition of the socio-economic basis of what Adorno terms 'identity thinking', of which Jung furnishes a good example, will come to be central to my interpretation of the politics of Abstract Expressionism.

II

At this point in the discussion, it may of course be argued that Pollock was in fact aiming at a radical cri-
tique of capitalist society, that he would have been the last to have colluded in the promotion of capital-
ism, in affirming its production of a system of generalised indifference and equivalence. This is certainly the general tenor of Polcari's rejection of Guibault, namely that Pollock's declared intent ran counter to everything that Guibault and others have seen in his work. Indeed, even if we grant that the psychoanalytic drawings and the paintings of the early 40s may be guilty of such a falsifying, levelling appropriation of myth, it might be objected that when we move to the abstract paintings of the later 40s, there are scant grounds for claiming that Pollock is (unconsciously) supporting the rationalising, reifying, effect of capital-
ism. There are two different criticism presented here, and I shall deal with each in turn.

First, the argument that Pollock intended a radically anticapitalist type of art, indeed believed he had found inspiration for it in the psychoanalytic writings of Jung and Jungianism, fails to account for the ideological nature of his concerns. I am referring here to the political unconscious at work, to the fact that Jungianism, despite its avowedly 'spiritual' concerns, can itself be considered as an expressionism of late capitalist consciousness, and to the fact that certain forms of resistance at a deeper level only succeed in replicating the features of the negated object. Pollock's early paintings and drawings, through repeating what I have termed the levelling out so central to Jungian thought, are thereby caught up in the ideological mesh of Jungian thought, regardless of Pollock's conscious intent. This first line of criticism thus carries little weight, since it cannot address the fact that Pollock's choice of Jungianism is just as significant as what he saw in it, just as Newman's choice of an aesthetic of the sublime crucially undermined his intended anarchism. As Clark has noted: 'the whole idea of having and sustaining one's own word... is fragile and paradoxical',[27] and this is not because others might misappropriate one's work (although that is also a very real problem), but primarily because it is located within a context always already containing meanings which subvert any claim to genuine originality. Within the specific history of Abstract Expressionism, this means that the 'primitive' and the 'unconscious', as cultural and aesthetic categories, already possessed meanings and aroused expectations, over which Pollock could have little control, whatever his own personal reasons for engaging with them.

Turning to the drip paintings, however, there is a much more substantial problem. For while Pollock maintained an interest in Jung, this interest is seemingly not uppermost in the paintings themselves. Indeed, in these works Pollock has left behind the Jungian interest in Man's universal symbolism, adopting instead a strongly antirationalist vitalism. It is hardly novel to note that in paintings such as One (Number 21, 1950) (Fig. 3), Autumn Rhythm or Number 2, 1949: Tiger, Pollock is presenting a powerful visual metaphor of a level of experience more primal than the idea of the unconscious represented by Surrealist imaginary, which remained for the most part entangled within the bourgeois Oedipal rationalisations of Freud. The familiar argument continues that Pollock's primitivism aims to go beyond even the idea of the savage mind sustaining so much of Modernism's primitivist discourse, in order to excavate a layer of experience preceding all rational, conceptual thought. One might add to this account that by virtue of their formal properties these paintings articulate a concept of human experience which in psychoanalytic terms seems to have far more in common with the Kleinian analysis of infantile part-object relations than with Jungian discourse.[28] Indeed, if we wish to pursue the parallels with psychoanalytic theory still further, Jung is far less illuminating on this issue than the work of Lacan, Kristeva or Deleuze and Guattari, all of whom attempt to negotiate the relation between unconscious desire and the law of the symbolic order.
in ways which are of particular pertinence to the interpretation of Pollock's later work. I shall develop this point later.

Returning to the drip paintings, a variety of features are of interest here, features which gave the works their original radicalism. They have been well documented, but merit mentioning once again in this context for reasons which will become clear shortly. Most obviously, and probably the most striking feature of these works, is their almost complete dissolution of hierarchy. In other words, the all-over technique of Pollock decentres the image, disrupting any attempt to give greater weight to one part over any other, a decentering which results in a lack of structure. It aims to offer an immediate image of the unconscious prior to its being forced into the mould of any formal, representational language. It is worth noting in this context the comments of the unjustly neglected critic Adrian Stokes, that: 'I think it permissible to identify in one of its aspects the “all-overness” characteristic of so much modern painting with the visionary stamp of “is-ness”.'

What Stokes refers to here with the notion of 'is-ness' is the sense of the paintings' embodying the pure, abstract being of the unconscious lacking any internal determinacy, being preceding any division by the symbolic order. The image thus produced presents an apparently undifferentiated tangle of lines, which do not seem to have been subjected to any organising principle. What I am working towards here is the essential 'sameness' of the works in question. With the notion of 'sameness' I do not necessarily mean that all the works have a similar appearance, although this might appear to be the case when comparing Number 1 (1948) (Fig. 4) with Lavender Mist or Autumn Rhythm, thus confirming what Adorno refers to as the philistine's view of the 'monotony' of modern art. In contrast, however, I mean that many of them display an oppressive homogeneity, as if a repetition-compulsion fixes on certain motifs, reproducing them indifferently across the canvas, where the decentering removes any constraint on the process other than the ultimate limit of the physical dimensions of the canvas itself. Of course, Pollock was aspiring to anything but a compulsive, almost mechanical, repetition, even if the practice of automatism by its very name indicates a form of consent to technology's formative effect on experience and its modes of self-articulation. Yet the fact that his works produce this effect suggests a singular failure to judge in advance the consequences of an espousal of absolute spontaneity, absolute non-identity. As if to confirm this impression, it is striking how Pollock avoids the one significant means he might have exploited to disrupt the two-dimensional monotony of the works, in other words, depth. For, while in works such as Reflection of the Big Dipper the multiple layers of paint serve to lend the painting a certain depth, a dimension to relieve the sameness of the all-over technique, this is done only half-heartedly. The attention to the thick materiality of the paint (and other media used in other works) cancels out the appearance of recession, a cancelling out which strengthens the claims of the image to pure immediacy.

By attending to the privileging in Pollock of the immediate, of pure, undifferentiated, being — 'isness' to borrow Stokes' term — we come closer to the crux of the issue, since it lays bare the ideology of the all-over technique and moreover indicates the continuing relevance of gestural painting to contemporary psychoanalytic theorising. Pollock's drip paintings
draw their strength from the assumption of an essentially productive unconscious, which, as the locus of pure desire, is in some sense the source of an authenticity prior to the socially induced construction of subjectivity.

I noted above that this position shares far more with Melanie Klein than with Jung; in fact Pollock's work has resonances which invite comparison both with Klein's heirs Deleuze and Guattari, and also the 70s thinking of writers such as Luce Irigaray. The automatism at the root of Pollock's painting of the later 40s suggests parallels with Deleuze and Guattari's vision whereby 'desire is a machine, a synthesis of machines, a machinic arrangement — desiring machines',31 while Pollock's search for presymbolic immediacy recalls Irigaray's employment of the metaphor of liquidity as a figure for the (putative) presymbolic maternal body.32 The motivation underlying Deleuze and Guattari's position, which seeks to privilege the absolutely heterogeneous desiring-machines of the unconscious,33 is to oppose what the authors perceive to be the over-reliance of traditional psychoanalysis, principally Freudian, on the notion of representation as key to understanding the unconscious. What they mean here is the assumption that the unconscious as something represented (through dreams, jokes, slips of the tongue, to use classic Freudian examples) is thereby something represented, a unit, a discrete entity, whereas for Deleuze and Guattari: 'In desiring-machines everything functions at the same time but amid hiatuses and ruptures, breakdowns and failures . . . distances and fragmentations, within a sum that never succeeds in bringing its various parts together to form a whole.'34 Hence their hostility to the Oedipal scene, where desire is inscribed within the triangulation of the bourgeois family, a formulation which misrecognises the anocedipal nature of desire where 'the unconscious is an orphan'.35

Fundamental to the thought of Deleuze and Guattari, therefore, is a resistance to any theory which treats the unconscious as a unity, as an archive, the contents of which are susceptible to re-presentation through the symbolisations of the image or language. A similarity emerges here again with Irigaray, whose work is equally anti-Freudian, equally anocedipal in its definition of a feminine specificity predicated on an unmediated, unproblematic relation to an origin which exceeds the phallic symbolisms of Oedipal law. Quite clearly, both the schizoanalysis of Anti-Oedipus and the work of Irigaray bear marked similarities to the project of Pollock's automatic technique. Unlike the automatic drawings of, say, André Masson, which remain tied to a form of quasi-figurative representation, Pollock's works pass beyond the limitation...
of Surrealist practice in striving for the non-symbolic basis of unconscious desire. Indeed, if one were to psychoanalyse Pollock (about which I have expressed my reservations above) it would be tempting to read his drip paintings as motivated by the desire to reclaim the lost maternal body.

As I have suggested previously, this general position which one sees in the paintings of Pollock and the theorisations of Deleuze-Guattari or Irigaray, is not without its considerable problems, not least because the quest for immediacy in Pollock is based on the mistaken belief in the possibility of overcoming representation itself. Yet more is at stake here, above all in the concept of the unconscious central to Pollock’s artistic vision, and in order to examine this problem further it is necessary first to take a detour via Lacan, Hegel and Adorno, before focusing on the political problematic I am ultimately trying to indicate.

If it is the case that in Deleuze-Guattari primacy is accorded to the desiring-machines of the unconscious (a term which for obvious reasons would have to remain sous nature), and if it is the desiring-machines which themselves produce social reality, this has to be played off against the Lacanian position which inverts the relation of desire and social reality (the symbolic). In Lacan, desire is seen as produced by the symbolic, and this not merely the result of a lapse into the ‘errors’ of psychoanalysis criticised in Anti-Oedipus. Rather, it results from the role of language in the splitting of the subject, whereby the ego becomes such for others by the agency of the letter. The process leading to ego-formation, becoming a signer for other signifiers (egos), is also the process whereby the self becomes alienated from itself through the mediation of the symbolic. The ego is thus produced by the dialectic of identity and non-identity, where the identity supposedly guaranteed by the signer: ‘I’ is contradicted by the non-coincidence of subject and signer, indicated, for example, by the shifting status of the ‘I’. As Lacan argues: ‘man cannot aim at being whole . . . while ever the play of displacement and condensation to which he is doomed in the exercise of his functions marks his relation as a subject to the signer.36 This is, of course, the theory of the mature Lacan in papers such as ‘The Signification of the Phallus’ and ‘The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious’,37 but it is also central to Lacan’s earlier work on the mirror stage, where the subject is caught between the imaginary unity of the specular image and the actual motor incapacity of the infant. It is within this field, generated by the non-self-coincidence of the subject, that desire takes its place too, for desire is produced by the tension between the subject’s lack and the demand for unconditional fulfilment by the Other. In other words, demand always has to pass through the mediation of language, its object is the Other as the locus of the signer; the demand for satisfaction becomes demand for love of the Other. Since the metonymic chain of signifiers is never stable, this demand for total fulfilment always remains unfulfilled. Lacan notes: ‘Desire begins to take shape in the margin in which demand becomes separated from need’,38 a consequence of the ‘difference that results from the subtraction of [the appetite for satisfaction] from [the demand for love]’.

I have emphasized the dialectic of subjectivity and the law in Lacan for two reasons. First, it marks out the difference between Lacan and Irigaray or Deleuze-Guattari. The latter reject any notion of a dialectic, instead celebrating the absolute heterogeneity of desiring-machines or the maternal body anterior to the symbolic order.40 Second, it reminds us of the fundamentally Hegelian basis of Lacanian thinking (albeit through the mediation of Alexandre Kojève), on the basis of which one can see a coalition emerging, consisting of Lacan, Hegel and Adorno (to whom I referred to earlier), all of whom indicate the difficulties inhabiting both the work of Deleuze-Guattari and the drip painting of Pollock. I shall elaborate further.

Since Hegel, it has been a near philosophical commonplace that the idea of pure immediacy is an empty abstraction, as empty indeed as that of pure nothingness. This recognition serves as the foundation of both Lacan and Adorno’s theorisations of the subject — both of whom might be seen as Hegel’s true heirs in this century. For Lacan, as we have seen, the subject never enjoys unmediated experience, since the subject first emerges in the alterity of the signer.41 Similarly for Adorno: ‘The confidence that from immediacy, from the solid and downright primary an unbroken entirety will spring . . . is an idealistic chimera’;42 instead ‘philosophical reflection makes sure of the nonconceptual in the concept’.43

This Hegelian critique of immediacy, of identity, obviously applies to the all-over technique of Pollock, since the aim of Pollock’s drip paintings was to capture a type of immediacy not even apparent in the automatism of the Surrealists. At this point the attentive reader will have noticed that in describing Pollock’s works I have oscillated between seeing them as metaphors of an absolute immediacy drawn from the pure being of the unconscious, and also as metaphors of a spontaneous absolute difference. In other words, Pollock’s works seem to be expressions of both pure being and also non-being, identity and difference. This oscillation is, however, not a consequence of the inconsistency of my approach, but rather of the fact that Pollock does not negotiate the two dialectically, a position which he shares with Deleuze-Guattari. The importance of this will become clear shortly.

T. J. Clark has drawn attention to the presence of dissonance in Pollock’s work, pointing out that while many of the paintings display a kind of One-ness, what I have termed above an ‘homogeneity’, some display marks of ‘discontinuity and aimlessness . . . roughness and dishevelment’.44 Pollock’s work seems thereby to oscillate between two poles, the one embodying harmony and wholeness and the other tending towards disharmony, decay, disunity. The most obvious way of interpreting this presence of dis-
sonance would be to conclude, in the manner of Adorno, that it functions as the mimesis of modern subjectivity, and indeed Clark moves in this direction. However this duality can be traced back, I think, to the problem I have been discussing. This revolves around the difficulty of choosing the appropriate visual metaphor of pure, asymbolic, consciousness, a difficulty which itself derives from the difficulty of deciding what the idea of primal experience actually \textit{means} in concrete terms. For the concept of a dynamic continuum of experience can be interpreted in two ways. It can be seen as consisting of a primordial oneness (an interpretation which one sees in the late nineteenth-century vitalism of figures such as Bergson, Brandes and Klages), which evidently underpins much of Pollock's own work. According to this idea, consciousness could also be conceived as a harmonious unity of opposites — an idea which would accommodate Jung's own concerns with unity, primarily that of male and female, though in Jung the tendency is towards a more general (undialectical) overcoming of opposites.

Alongside this type of reading, however, asymbolic experience can also be interpreted as essentially dynamic and mobile, as an anarchic collection of contradictory drives and impulses, a conception equally resistant to structure, but this time not due to a oneness preceding division and structuring, but rather an utterly random multiplicity irreducible to any logical order. Quite clearly this is the reading chosen by Deleuze and Guattari in their resistance to Freudianism. In art-historical terms one might also think of the precedent of Dada and its fascination with the chaotic, and consequently the dissonance in certain of Pollock's works observed by Clark can be read as symptomatic of this alternative conception. Given this oscillation between the harmonious and the dissonant it is tempting to conclude that we are faced with a conflict of interpretations; it is as if Pollock himself cannot decide which metaphor is more appropriate. Ultimately, however, the significance of this presence in Pollock both of unity (Stokes' 'is-ness') and the disharmonious perhaps points beyond any putative indecision on the part of Pollock towards the dialectical relation between the two, where absolute dissonance passes over into the indifferent oneness so central to Pollock's works. Musicologically one can see a similar problem in the compositions of Schoenberg, which Adorno analysed in his \textit{Philosophy of Modern Music}.

As is well-known, Schoenberg's expression of modern subjectivity occurs through his dissolusion of traditional tonal melodic structures, replacing them with the dissonance of his twelve-tone technique. Thus 'all restricting principles of selection in tonality have been discarded', being supplanted by pure \textit{atonality}, a technique which in its negation of canonical musical structure functions as the mimesis of the more general dissonance of modernity. Yet while in Adorno's account Schoenberg remains the Modernist hero, pursuing the logic of disruption to its conclusion (in contrast to the 'regressive' tendencies in Stravinsky), Adorno is at the same time aware that the production of pure atonality leads to a dead end, to a point where dissonance loses its meaning and ceases to function as such. Adorno admits: 'the foolish reproach of the layman against the monotony of modern music . . . contains a grain of truth . . . Differentiation is only of any force when it distinguishes itself from that which is already established.' Thus Schoenberg's neglect of the dialectic of identity and difference leads to state of pure indifference where 'the very universality of dissonance has suspended the concept itself', where in the absence of any tonal structure against which atonality can be measured, atonalities 'no longer even sound out of tune.'

Given my earlier remarks on the question of oneness and homogeneity in Pollock, it is hopefully clear where the current argument is leading. Following Adorno, the espousal of absolute non-identity or pure difference as a strategy of resistance to modernity ends up repeating the same reifying effect of commodification it attempted to oppose. Moreover, this is a problem which besets the drip paintings of Pollock, one which fatally undermines their status as a radical critique of the rationalizing abstraction of Modernity. What I mean here is that the dissonance in Pollock's paintings, while undoubtedly an element which has to be recognized, does not actually amount to very much. In other words, the works which Clark singles out as being quite different from those paintings exhibiting an undifferentiated wholeness, ultimately fail to distinguish themselves significantly enough for them to emerge as a markedly different type of painting. Against the general background 'noise' of dribbled paint the signs of dissonance, of hesitancy, of disharmony, lose their impact. The resulting overall effect is of a generalized dissonance which produces the same effect as the other more explicitly 'whole' works.

What underlies this contradiction in Pollock is the problematic of the discourse sustaining his artistic production, and more specifically its anti-rationalist conception of primal experience. For, as with Pollock and Schoenberg, this discourse of primal experience unwittingly replicates the object of its criticism, namely the oppressive homogeneity of modernity in all its forms. Much the same can be said of Deleuze-Guattari, too, whose anti-Oedipal schizoanalysis of the desiring-machines of the unconscious shares so much with the dissonant works of Pollock. Through their refusal to confront the \textit{dialectic} of identity and non-identity, they lack the means to make meaningful distinctions between the plurality of desiring-machines, resulting in a single, undifferentiated general desire. Here the equation of desire and the machine is of particular significance in the replication of the effects of the hypertrophy of (technological) reason.

As a consequence of the criticisms outlined above the discourse of primacy, of immediacy, is presented with two alternatives. Either it clings to a pure irrationalism which, through its lack of concrete determinacy, reproduces the anonymous, featureless...
landscape which rational identification is itself accused of producing, or, in order to avoid this inde-
terminate, empty, levelling abstraction, i.e. in order to explain how one has specific thoughts, it has to
gain determinacy by taking on conceptual concretion.
In this regard one can draw on the comments of
Adorno that 'there is no so-called principle which, in
order to be thought at all, does not require precisely
that which, according to its own determination, it
excludes'.50 We have seen this operative in Schoen-
b erg's progression towards complete atonality, and so
here, too, in Pollock (and Deleuze-Guattari) pure
non-identity, pure flux, pass over into identity. Of
course, at the heart of Adorno's criticism lies his own
insistence on the necessity of resisting conceptual refi-
cation not by espousal of pure non-conceptuality, but
by pursuing the dialectic of concept and non-concept,
identity and non-identity, rational thought and non-
rational experience. It is a form of immanent critique
which consists of an engagement with 'full unreduced
experience in the medium of conceptual reflection',51
where one 'must strive, by way of the concept, to
transcend the concept',52 rather than simply negating
it in the name of non-conceptuality.
This criticism, if accepted, explains, too, why what
I have termed the vitalist discourse of immediacy in
Pollock's drip paintings has always failed as a strategy
of resistance. Simply, it has the character of a pecu-
liarily bourgeois form of critique which reproduces
the features of the capitalist culture it seeks to subvert.
A form of consciousness increasingly regularized and
levelled by the hegemonic patterns of identification
engendered by the principle of exchange has con-
ceived of the Other in a form which is readily cognisa-
ble, readily identifiable, as the complete dissolution
of identity. But as in the case of Schoenberg's extreme
atonality, non-identity in this process loses its mean-
ing, and hence nothing is exchangeable and at the
same time everything is. Far from being undermined,
the governing principle of identity has in fact been
reinforced since it succeeds in overcoming the threat
of its absolute Other, which turns out to be merely its
mirror image.

In this article I have attempted to address the relation
between the objective reception of Abstract Expres-
sionism and the values invested in its production. At
the heart of my argument has been the assumption
that Abstract Expressionist painting, and in particu-
lar the drip paintings of Jackson Pollock, generated
political meanings not because of the efforts of the
Truman administration, but rather because of the
ideological connotations of the drip technique and
the discourse sustaining it. Central to my argument
has been to attend to the formal characteristics of Pol-
lock's drip paintings, i.e. their flatness, the monotony
of the all-over technique, and the frequent signs of hes-
tancy and dissonance, and to read those qualities
through the interrogation of identity by psychoanaly-
sis and Critical Theory. Specifically, I have examined
Pollock's quest for immediacy through the use of the
drip in the light of the critique of immediacy articu-
lated by Adorno and Lacan. In addition, I have mobi-
lized Adorno to bring out the political values invested
in the model of subjectivity underpinning Pollock's
artistic project from the late 40s onwards.

The fact that Pollock chose to articulate his con-
cerns in the manner he did is itself politically signifi-
cant, regardless of whether or not Pollock himself was
aware of this. The attempt to restrict the meaning of
his painting to what he intended them to mean necessar-
ily falters, not least because Pollock relied on a large
number of pre-existing discourses, which Leja gathers
under the general term 'Modern Man discourse'.

Inevitably Pollock's association with the discourse of
Modern Man, and in particular with Jungian and
vitalist thinking, means that his ideas and their repre-
sentation will of necessity bear many of the same ideo-
logical connotations as those intellectual sources. I
have argued that Jung, and especially Jung's less
sophisticated disciples such as Campbell, offer a clear
example of late capitalist consciousness, where the
aim is to seek patterns of repetition and identity in the
most diverse of phenomena. In his earlier works, Pol-
lock, by repeating this in his adoption of Jungian sym-
bolism, becomes implicated in this same ideological
process. The case of the drip paintings is more com-
plex, given what initially seems to be their much stron-
ger claim to represent a vigorously anti-capitalist, anti-rational form of critique. As the work of Adorno
indicates, however, even here identity is ultimately
reasserted through the resolutely undialectical rejec-
tion of conceptual discourse which those works
embody. In this regard their flatness, so often cele-
brated, functions as a primary vehicle of their homo-
genocity.

The oscillation between identity and non-identity
in Pollock, with the eventual triumph of the identical
finds a curious parallel in Sol LeWitt, who in works
such as *Floor Piece #4* or *122 Variations of Incom-
plete Open Cubes* depicts an obsessive, decentred rational-
ity, 'a world', as Rosalind Krauss puts it, 'of substitu-
tions and transpositions nowhere legitimated by the
revelations of a transcendent subject'.53 Despite its
obvious orientation to the rationalities of geometrical
reason, this world nevertheless bears many marked
similarities to that of Pollock's drip paintings, espe-
cially when one considers the lack in LeWitt's work of
any organizing centre, a decentering which mirrors
the all-over character of Pollock. Comparison of the
two raises a number of interesting questions, most
notably the fact that whereas hitherto Pollock's auto-
matism has been seen as the sign of an absolute subjec-
tivity obeying only its own impulses, exactly the same
feature in LeWitt leads Krauss to interpret his works
as emblems of a hypertrophic, subjectless mechanistic
rationality. Significantly, Krauss formulates her read-
ing in opposition to Kuspit, who saw in LeWitt a cele-
bration of rational clarity, whereas for Krauss LeWitt is
articulating a critique of the relentless rationalizing
process of modernity which has turned into an instru-

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ment of domination. Now, although my own tendency is to favour the reading of Krauss, I do not intend to argue definitely for the one interpretation over the other, since my interest is in the fact that the same works can be seen as either celebrating the power of rational subjective thought or condemning the negation of the subject through the uncontrolled expansion of rationalization. For there is a parallel here with Pollock, who in his putative absolutization of a primal subjectivity has ultimately elevated the content of his works to the level of a subjectless, empty and abstract generality. In other words absolute subjectivity is the negation of the subject. The desiring-machines of the unconscious are precisely machines. I have explored in this paper the ideological content of this latter consequences in Pollock's drip paintings, but I am not thereby contending that they do not represent a primal subjectivity. Rather, I am arguing that Pollock can be read in two ways, and that it is not a matter of choosing between them, of counting one and discounting the other. Instead one must recognise that the two belong together, that Pollock's automatism and all-over style have these other meanings not necessarily intended by Pollock himself, that his particular set of interests and their symbolism bore considerable ideological weight from the beginning and that, finally, the politicization of Abstract Expressionism follows from the ideology of the drip.

Notes

4. In his critical exchange with Clark over the politics of modernism, Michael Fried writes, for example: 'I find Clark's thumbnail analysis of the socio-political content of modernism both crude and demeaning, before going on to reassert, of course, the validity of his own highly formalist reading of modernism: see Fried, 'How Modernism Works: A Response to T. J. Clark', in Frascina, Pollock and After, pp. 70-1.
6. In this context it is important to mention Polcari's recent criticism of Marxist Art History in 'Righting' Today's Art History, American Art, vol. 5, 1991, pp. 6-9. Polcari argues: 'What is often being written is not about art and history but the political and ideological agendas of the current university generation' (p. 6), as if history and art history were politically and ideologically neutral. The shortcomings of this assumption hardly require spelling out.
9. Commenting on the political substance of Abstract Expressionism, Nancy Jachec has argued that: 'To be "for" democracy meant having to support its current vehicle', indicating that in their opposition to totalitarianism the painters at the time recognised that endorsement of American capitalism was a necessary consequence of supporting its freedoms. If anything Abstract Expressionism was a critique of totalitarianism and of Western modernity, otherwise it seems impossible why freedom had to be metaphorized in terms of the primitive, the archaic (i.e. the pre-Modern). — Jachec, "The Space between Art and Political Action": Abstract Expressionism and Ethical Choice in Postwar America 1945-1950, Oxford Art Journal, vol. 14, no. 2, 1991, pp. 18-29.
10. Of course this is especially the case with post-Lacanian feminist writers such as Kristeva or Irigaray (post-Lacanian in the sense that their work consists of a thorough-going critique of Lacan while also remaining attached to certain key Lacanian tenets).
17. Curiously enough Foster would find an ally in Ernst Gombrich who argues in like manner against the notion of unmediated expression, noting that: 'It is because art operates with a structured style governed by technique . . . that representation could become the instrument not only of information but also of expression' (Gombrich, Art and Illusion (Oxford, 1983), pp. 319-20).
20. Erwin Panofsky, Tomb Sculpture (New York, 1964), pp. 25-6. Panofsky was, of course, speaking in a rather different context, yet the term is equally applicable here.
23. Leja points out the numerous parallels between Pollock's statements on art and ideas in Ferguson's Modern Man. Notable here is perhaps Pollock's assertion of American Indians that: 'Their vision has the basic universality of all real art' (Leja, Reframing Abstract Expressionism, p. 185).
27. Clark, 'Jackson Pollock's Abstraction', p. 177.
28. Perhaps Melanie Klein's most significant contribution to psycho-analysis is her work on the function of the pre-Oedipal in personal development. At this early stage according to Klein the infant is unable to identify objects as whole, independent and neatly defined entities, and instead relates to objects, primarily the mother's breast, as aspects or part-objects, the meaning of which is solely determined by the emotional state projected onto them by the infant. See, for example, 'The Oedipus Complex in the Light of Early Anxieties', in Klein, Love, Guilt and Reparation and other works 1921-1945 (London, 1975).
32. Lucie Irigaray, Speculum de l'autre femme (Paris, 1974).
33. In the opening of Anti-Oedipus Deleuze and Guattari argue: 'There is no such thing as either man or nature now, only a process that produces the one within the other and couples the machines together. Producing-
machines, desiring-machines everywhere, schizophrenic machines . . .
the self and the non-self . . . no longer have any meaning whatsoever
(p. 2).
34. Anti-Oedipus, p. 42.
35. Anti-Oedipus, p. 49.
37. Ecrits, pp. 281-325.
38. Ecrits, p. 311.
40. The foregrounding by Deleuze-Guattari of the plurality of desiring-machines has evident parallels with Derrida's work on difference. The key text here is, of course, the essay 'La Differance', in Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, trans. A. Bass (Chicago, 1982).
41. It is worth noting at this point that Lacan finds an ally in Julia Kristeva, who tempers Irigaray's privileging of the 'beyond' of signification with the recognition that this can only be reached through language. That Kristeva's notion of the semiotic is not simply a description of the pre-symbolic becomes apparent from Kristeva's comment that: 'The semiotic "prior" to symbolization can thus only be a theoretical supposition justified simply by the necessities of the description; in practical terms it is only ever interior to symbolisation . . . That is to say that symbolisation permits the complexity of this combinative semiotic, which only a theory can isolate as "prior"' (Kristeva, La Révolution du langage poétique (Paris, 1974), p. 67).
42. Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 40.
43. Negative Dialectics, p. 12.
44. Clark, 'Jackson Pollock's Abstraction', p. 200.
45. Philosophy of Modern Music, p. 51.
46. Philosophy of Modern Music, p. 70.
47. Philosophy of Modern Music, p. 85.
50. Adorno, Philosophische Terminologie (Frankfurt am Main, 1974), vol. 2, p. 23.
52. Negative Dialectics, p. 15.