

Eyes in the Heat

The Question Concerning Abstract Expressionism

Daniel Neofetou

PhD Thesis, Centre for Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London

The work presented in this thesis is the candidate's own.

Signed:..... Date:.....

Abstract

Since the 1970s, revisionist art historians have elaborated how Abstract Expressionism was exhibited abroad by the post-war US establishment in order to characterise the movement, especially on Clement Greenberg's account, as an artistic correlate to United States' post-war dominance and worldwide imposition of capitalism. However, in this thesis, drawing on the theoretical resources of Theodor W. Adorno and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, I argue that Greenberg's criticism in fact indicates how Abstract Expressionism stakes a claim against the rule of exchange-value. I interrogate the still prevalent notion that a development which Greenberg would retrospectively identify as a shift from Trotskyism to art-for-art's-sake in the New York art scene of the '30s and '40s resulted in a movement, Abstract Expressionism, which lent itself to co-optation by US imperialism. I show that Abstract Expressionism's deployment in efforts of cultural imperialism was certainly informed by Greenberg's positioning of it as the pinnacle of the European modernist lineage due to its determinate negation of non-medium-specific elements. However, taking cues from philosopher J.M. Bernstein's Adornian account of Abstract Expressionism, I then contend that this determinate negation is at the same time the affirmation of particularity delegitimated by capitalism. I then take recourse to both Greenberg's and the artists' accounts of their praxis, to show that it entailed a dialectic of construction and mimesis whereby the latter is guided by that which it forms. I then elaborate how, contrary to predominate accounts of Greenberg's criticism, he in fact indicates the way in which the artworks invite mimetic comportment on the part of spectators, and engage cognition in a manner inextricable from corporeality. I contend that, thus, rather than buttressing the reified pluralism of capitalism, Abstract Expressionism both condemns capitalism's disregard for corporeal subjects and prefigures the possibility of reconciliation which capitalism debars.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Josie Berry for four years of dedicated supervision while I fitfully changed direction in this project, and to Marina Vishmidt for secondary supervision over the final year of writing. Thanks to everyone who was there for me when I suffered a (minor but debilitating) breakdown last year, particularly Luke Carlisle, Kris Tarasova, Miri Davidson and Kat Black. Most importantly, however, thanks to my parents for being as utterly and totally unconditionally loving and supportive as it is possible for parents to be.

Contents

Introduction	8
Chapter One: Greenberg's Trotskyism	20
Chapter Two: Social Realism and Reification	36
Chapter Three: Determinate Negation Depoliticised	49
Chapter Four: Extremely Impure Ends	59
Chapter Five: Artistic Abstraction Contra Societal Abstraction	72
Chapter Six: Subjective Sovereignty and Social Democracy	91
Chapter Seven: Making Things of Which We Know Not What They Are	108
Chapter Eight: Greenberg's Kantianism contra Greenberg's Positivism	129
Chapter Nine: The Silent World of the Sensible	150
Chapter Ten: Denunciation and Anticipation	179
Conclusion	199
Bibliography	211
Figures	230

Abbreviations

- (AT) Adorno, Theodor W. (1997) *Aesthetic Theory* Trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor London: Routledge
- (ND) Adorno, Theodor W. (1973) *Negative Dialectics* Trans. E.B. Ashton London: Routledge
- (AVB) Bernstein, J.M. (2006) *Against Voluptuous Bodies: Late Modernism and the Meaning of Painting* Stanford: Stanford University Press
- (ACC) Craven, David (1999) *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique: Dissent During the McCarthy Period* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- (NY) Guilbaut, Serge (1983) *How New York Stole The Idea of Modern Art* trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- (CEC1) Greenberg, Clement (1986) *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Volume 1*. Ed. John O'Brian. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press
- (CEC2) (1986) *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Volume 2*. Ed. John O'Brian Chicago: The University of Chicago Press
- (CEC3) (1993) *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Volume 3*. Ed. John O'Brian Chicago: The University of Chicago Press
- (CEC4) (1993) *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Volume 4*. Ed. John O'Brian. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press
- (PPA) Jachec, Nancy (2000) *The Philosophy and Politics of Abstract Expressionism 1940-1960*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- (EA) Jones, Caroline A. (2005) *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press
- (VI) Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1968) *The Visible and the Invisible* trans. Alphonso Lingis Evanston: Northwestern University Press,
- (PP) Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1993) *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting* eds. Galen A. Johnson, Michael B. Smith Evanston: Northwestern University Press
- (MAIA) Motherwell, Robert; Reinhardt, Ad eds. (1951) *Modern Artists in America* New York: Wittenborn Schultz
- (SWI) Newman, Barnett (1990) *Selected Writings and Interviews* ed. John P. O'Neill. New York: Alfred A. Knopf
- (MA) Schapiro, Meyer (1982) *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries*. New York: George Braziller
- (LA) Trotsky, Leon (1970) *Literature and Art* ed. Paul N. Siegel London: Pathfinder

Introduction

In an interview with Robert Burstow published in *Frieze* upon his death in 1994, the critic Clement Greenberg denounced the notion that ‘the State Department supported American art and that it was part of the cold war, and so forth’ as ‘a lot of shit’ (Burstow 1994: 33). In this, he was referring to the revisionist accounts of Abstract Expressionism forwarded by art historians since the 1970s, which interrogate how and why, in the years following WWII, Abstract Expressionism was promulgated in overseas exhibitions or organised by bodies with vested interest in US capitalism, particularly the United States Information Agency (USIA) and the International Council at the Museum of Modern Art (IC). While the differences between these accounts will concern us throughout this thesis, all of the revisionist historians contend that Abstract Expressionism was exported as a cultural buttress to the US post-war economico-military dominance of the world, particularly in Western Europe, and all of them argue that this decision was not arbitrary; that something in the artworks rendered them amenable to such co-optation. The most cited of these accounts is certainly Serge Guilbaut’s *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (1983). However, it was preceded by shorter essays by scholars such as Max Kozloff and Eva Cockcroft, and succeeded by other book-length studies, most recently Nancy Jachec’s *The Philosophy and Politics of Abstract Expressionism* (2000). Now, these accounts have consistently faced criticism.¹ However, their conclusions are nevertheless so pervasively accepted that, as Claude Cernuschi notes, ‘art historians and social critics now repeat [them] without deeming it in need of justification, documentation, or defence’ (1999: 32). As Irving Sandler, author of the once canonical and resolutely apolitical account of the movement, *Abstract Expressionism: The Triumph of American Painting* (1970), has recently written in frustration, ‘Guilbaut’s allegation has come to be the received wisdom for several generations of art historians’ (2009: 173). For an

¹ I will address some of these objections throughout this thesis, notably that of David Craven. However, for surveys of the responses, see Francis Frascina ‘Looking Forward, Looking Back: 1985-1999’ (2000).

indication of the extent to which this is the case, one need only note that the writers of both the lead catalogue essay and educational guide to an exhibition as institutional as *Abstract Expressionism* at the Royal Academy of Arts in London in 2016, felt obliged to acknowledge the movement's co-optation and cursorily exculpate the artists.²

Yet, in spite of the ubiquity of their conclusions, the revisionist accounts are, broadly, remarkable for precisely their lack of attention to the artworks in question. Their accounts rest almost entirely upon discourse *on* the artworks and the ends to which the artworks were deployed. For the revisionist historians, it is as if, to quote Benjamin Buchloh in a contemporaneous review of *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, 'the ideological machinations [...] and critical follies to which a work was originally subjected' exhaust 'the aesthetic construct itself,' which in fact is 'a force that continues to operate in the present and that outlives the forces that originally attempted to contain it' (1984: 21). The question of the extent to which the 'aesthetic constructs' of Abstract Expressionism align with these 'ideological machinations' was taken up in the '90s by the art historian T.J. Clark, under whose supervision Guilbaut developed his thesis as a doctoral dissertation, in the essay 'In Defence of Abstract Expressionism' (1994), later republished as the final chapter of his book *Farewell to an Idea* (1999). Clark works from the premise that Abstract Expressionism still holds a hegemonic grip over the present possibilities for art. For Clark, the task of modernism was to 'imagine modernity otherwise' (1999a: 9). To do so, however, he contends it was always necessary to make the 'previous moment of high achievement a thing of the past,' to 'lose it and mourn it and, if necessary, revile it' (Ibid: 371). This, he posits, is precisely what we have been incapable to do with Abstract Expressionism. For Clark, proving that Abstract

² In the lead essay for the catalogue, David Anfam acknowledges the 'CIA's advancing Abstract Expressionism abroad during the 1950s' but affirms the artists 'were neither chauvinists nor nationalists' (2016: 31). In the educational guide Ben Street acknowledges that the CIA '[f]amously funded exhibitions of Abstract Expressionism abroad in an attempt to promote the notion of cultural freedom in the United States in contrast to the perceived restrictions of the Soviet Union,' but stresses that the Abstract Expressionists 'did not want to be associated with, and the paintings were not made to articulate' the 'political messages' which the US government thus tried to transmit with them (2016: 23). The catalogue pertinently also features an essay on the subject of the artworks' co-optation by Jeremy Lewison entitled "'A New Spirit of Freedom": Abstract Expressionism in Europe in the Aftermath of War' (2016).

Expressionism belonged ‘to a Cold War polity, with patrons and art world institutions to match’ has not resulted in a decisive attitude towards the paintings themselves:

It was one thing to answer the question, “What are the circumstances in which a certain national bourgeoisie, in the pride of its victory after 1945, comes to want something as odd and exotic as an avant-garde of its own?” It is another to speak to the implications of that encounter for the avant-garde itself, and answer the question, “To what extent was the meeting of class and art practice in the later 1940s more than just contingent? To what extent does Abstract Expressionism really belong, at the deepest level – the level of language, of procedure, of presuppositions about world-making – to the bourgeoisie who paid for it and took it on their travels?” (Ibid: 374).

Clark thus endeavours to address Abstract Expressionism’s ‘place in a determinate class foundation [...] which took on the specific trappings of cultural power in the years after 1945’ (Ibid: 388). In this, he differentiates between Abstract Expressionism’s position ‘in a state apparatus [...] or a museum/art-world superstructure’ upon which the revisionist historians’ accusations are based, and its participation in ‘that class’s whole construction of a “world”’ (Ibid). Clark contends that, in terms of the latter, Abstract Expressionism indeed ‘grasps most fully the conditions of representation – the technical and social conditions – of its historical moment’ (Ibid: 401). For Clark, the artworks reveal ‘a certain construction of the world we call “individuality” [...] in its true [...] vulgarity,’ the artists making work ‘under the sign or spell of such a construction [...] believing utterly (innocently, idiotically) in its power’ (Ibid: 376-7). To exemplify this, Clark, for instance, describes Mark Rothko’s paintings as maintaining ‘a hectoring absolute of self-presence’ (Ibid: 387). He writes of Willem de Kooning as ‘sustaining the right pitch of tawdriness, idiot fallacy, overweening self-regard’ (ibid: 393). He asserts that Hans Hofmann’s work ‘is tasteless to the core [...] tasteless in its mock religiosity, tasteless in its Colour-by-Technicolor [...] and the cloying demonstrativeness of its handling’ (ibid: 397).

On the whole, Clark's argument is as oblique and contentious as these quotes indicate. As Jonathan Harris has noted, an ungenerous verdict of it would be 'that Clark [...] is simply reading in his own meanings with a vengeance' (112). Moreover, Clark's lack of engagement with the specifics of the revisionist historians' accounts means his speculations as to whether the artworks 'really belong, at the deepest level' to the post-war US bourgeoisie who wanted 'an avant-garde of their own' and 'took the art on their travels,' do not take account of the reasons why they did. Central to the latter, I will show, is something which is in fact indicated by Greenberg in the sentence directly proceeding from his dismissal of the revisionists' thesis quoted in the first line of this introduction, when he claims that it 'was only after American art had made it at home and abroad, principally in Paris, that the State Department said we can now export this stuff,' affirming that '[t]hey hadn't dared to before that' (Burstow 1994: 33). While the direction of causality Greenberg posits here is questionable, we will see that it is certainly the case that Abstract Expressionism was disseminated by the US establishment in the post-war era because it was anticipated that the movement was *likely* to be critically appreciated in Western Europe, thus shoring up US hegemony by reassuring the people of Western Europe that US culture was of the same civilisation. And I will show that Greenberg himself was instrumental to this assessment in his consistent championing of the Abstract Expressionist artists throughout the 1940s and '50s, because he identified their work as the latest instantiation in the European modernist tradition. As we will see, critics arguing for Abstract Expressionism's divergence from the ends to which it was deployed have thus contended that Greenberg's account does not adequately represent the movement. However, I will not take such an approach. Instead, reading Greenberg through the aesthetic philosophies of Theodor W. Adorno and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, I want to argue that it is also via Greenberg's account of Abstract Expressionism that we might best understand how the artworks are not aligned with these ends, and in fact (still) challenge them.

In Chapter 1, 'Greenberg's Trotskyism,' I will begin, as do many of the revisionist historians, by working from an aside made by Greenberg in an essay in the early sixties, wherein he claims that in the New York art scene of the late 1930s, Trotskyism became art-for-art's sake. For the revisionist historians, this claim is telling in terms of how Greenberg's criticism helped effect an ideological shift which allowed for Abstract Expressionism's co-optation. However, I want to trace the development of Greenberg's theory of avant-garde art in terms of the influence of Trotsky because I will ultimately contend that the fundamental dynamics which Greenberg inherited from Trotsky's art theory also indicate how Abstract Expressionism opposes the ends to which it was put. I will first delineate how, for Trotsky, the revolutionary content of art is not to be sought at the level of prescribed themes, but rather in the extent to which the art follows its own laws, by which Trotsky affirms it constitutively bespeaks a protest against capitalism. Without interrogating Trotsky's reasons for this in any depth at this point, I will then elaborate how for Trotsky this fulcrum of art's 'laws' which propels revolutionary art, is the determinate negation of prior art's conventions, which the artist accordingly must master. I will then elaborate how, in Greenberg's essays, the same dynamic obtains, as Greenberg similarly contends that art guided by its own laws is corrosive to a capitalism in decline. However, whereas Trotsky makes clear that he is not arguing for 'pure' art free of thematic content, even if the latter should not be prescribed, for Greenberg this determinate negation of prior art's conventions entails the negation of thematic content, and affirmation of medium-specificity. Greenberg does not delineate how such art opposes capitalism. However, I will note that we might draw a parallel between Greenberg's account of autonomous art, and that of Adorno, in so far as for both autonomous art is contrasted with the art of the culture industry, whose modes of distribution and consumption they both contend maintained the status quo. Nevertheless, according to the revisionist historians, despite Greenberg's insistence that autotelic art posed a threat to capitalism's existence, Greenberg's championing of such art contributed to an artistic ferment that precipitated a turn away from the Social Realism which previously predominated, and thus gave rise to the

supposedly apolitical Abstract Expressionism, which was accordingly readily co-opted in efforts of US imperialism.

Before interrogating this co-optation, in Chapter 2, 'Social Realism and Reification,' I will explore how this negative reasoning for Abstract Expressionism's assimilation is untenable. Drawing on research contemporaneous to the revisionist historians' work by Frances K. Pohl, I will explore how, in fact, the pre-eminent Social Realist Ben Shahn was afforded a retrospective at the US Pavilion at the 1954 Venice Biennale, at which there was also a retrospective of de Kooning, and the manner in which Shahn's work was presented did not obfuscate his work's protest against the injustices of capitalism, but emphasised it. In this, it seems to confirm the way in which Adorno surmises that such realist work's critique of capitalist epiphenomena, even when politically radical, entails an accommodation to the reified world, constitutively failing to challenge it on a fundamental level. Indeed, I will show how for many of the Abstract Expressionists this was precisely why they rejected Social Realism, that is, not because it was too politically radical, but because, in the face of modernity, it was not politically radical enough. Nevertheless, in Chapter 3, 'Determinate Negation Depoliticised,' I will show how the revisionist historians are certainly correct to claim that Greenberg had ostensibly depoliticised his championing of medium-specificity by the time he came to recognise its apotheosis in Abstract Expressionism. I will explore how, in the critical writing of the '40s and '50s in which he acclaimed the work of the Abstract Expressionists, he figures their significance primarily in terms of aesthetics, and disregards their non-western influences, thus positioning their art at the forefront of the European modernist tradition. I will then proceed in Chapter 4, 'Extremely Impure Ends,' to explore how Greenberg's affirmation that the Abstract Expressionists' negation of thematic content meant they had inherited this tradition, rather than this negation of thematic content negating Social Realism, certainly lent Abstract Expressionism to efforts of US imperialism. I will show how, after WWII, the Marshall Plan's aid to Europe was necessary both to create new markets so as wartime levels of production could be maintained and stagnation avoided, and

to prevent economic collapse in those countries turning the populations towards the Eastern Bloc. However, this ostensible largesse was met with suspicion by these countries' populations, especially France and Italy, who considered the United States to be culturally inferior, and whose coalition governments' substantial left-wing representation did not decrease. Accordingly, the US establishment organised touring exhibitions of Abstract Expressionism in order to convince these populations otherwise, and, with recourse to both the revisionist historians' research and primary documents, I will show that these efforts were certainly informed by the isomorphy of Greenberg's critical framework with the progressivist history which undergirded US imperialism during the Cold War. That is, Greenberg's account of Abstract Expressionism as the most advanced instantiation of the European modernist tradition, chimed with the notion that US capitalism marked the culmination of the Enlightenment's progressive maturation. However, Adorno contends that authentic art traces this progressive history's obfuscated underside. I will proceed in Chapter 5, 'Artistic Abstraction Contra Societal Abstraction,' to elaborate how Abstract Expressionism lends voice to precisely this nonidentity. I will do so by taking cues from the account of Abstract Expressionism forwarded by the philosopher J.M. Bernstein. Bernstein recasts the history of modernism at the pinnacle of which Greenberg placed Abstract Expressionism as the history of artworks affirming their particularity in resistance to the very determinate judgements of capital in the service of which Abstract Expressionism was deployed in efforts of US imperialism. I will elaborate how Abstract Expressionism affirms its particularity in this way in terms of two analogies drawn by Adorno to thus describe authentic art's semblance of autonomy in a heteronomously defined world, by which Abstract Expressionist artworks have often been characterised – nature and language. It is this conviction that the artworks resist capitalist reification by way of their particularity, which will orient the second half of my thesis.

In Chapter 6, 'Subjective Sovereignty and Social Democracy' I will differentiate this defence of Abstract Expressionism from David Craven's critique of the revisionist historians,

which is the most substantial hitherto published. For Craven, to discern Abstract Expressionism's asymmetry with dominant ideology, we should disentangle Abstract Expressionist praxis from Greenberg's account, and return to the characterisation of the movement as disalienated praxis in an otherwise alienated world by another of its contemporary critics, Meyer Schapiro. Craven contends that Greenberg's so-called formalism, which he understands as prescriptive, contrasts with Schapiro's account of Abstract Expressionism as Taylorist management contrasts with worker's self-management. However, I will contend that, while registering something of the subjective intensity of the experience of Abstract Expressionist artworks, which will become crucial in chapters 9 and 10, Schapiro's account of the movement as a bulwark against reification in fact facilitated its co-optation. For Schapiro, Abstract Expressionist artworks are essentially impressions of their artists' unreduced subjectivities, otherwise stymied under capitalism. Thus, contrary to Adorno's account of authentic art as akin to the being-in-itself of nature, Schapiro characterises Abstract Expressionist artworks as stamped with the sovereignty of their artists' minds. I contend that this dynamic not only reproduces the indifference of identity-thinking towards its object, but also that such conceptual subsumption lent the artworks to US imperialism. I argue that this is the case in so far as characterizing the artworks as manifestations of their artists' subjective interiorities rendered them ideal for a US Department of State eager to convince Europe that freedom of expression flourished under corporate capitalism, a case which I make with recourse to both research by the revisionist historians, particularly Nancy Jachec, and the work of the liberal intellectual Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., which is generally understood to typify the theoretical framework orienting US cultural imperialism during the Cold War. On the other hand, I will posit in Chapter 7, 'Making Things of Which We Know Not What They Are,' that, far from imposing dictates for art production, Greenberg's account of Abstract Expressionist praxis attests to the way in which it models reconciled labour receptive to its object. I will elaborate this in terms of Adorno's description of authentic art production as a dialectic of spiritual construction and

mimetic expression. For Adorno, the domination of art praxis corrects extra-aesthetic domination with paratactic synthesis. That is, it is the organisation of compositional elements which eschews hierarchical subordination, maintaining the integrity of these elements. Whereas capitalist ratiocination curtails the irreducible particularity of its object, for Adorno the paratactic synthesis of art praxis renders its object's particularity bindingly eloquent by way of the kind of mimetic impulses which Adorno claims have been extinguished by reification. I will argue that Greenberg might be read as characterising Abstract Expressionist praxis similarly, and in so far as this is the case, I will suggest that the determinate negation which he identifies as the fulcrum of the European modernist tradition, is less the determinate negation of non-medium-specific properties which he often characterised it as, but rather the determinate negation of reified, conventional forms. I will then conclude by showing that this characterisation chimes well with how the Abstract Expressionists appear to have worked, paradigmatically with reference to Joan Mitchell's painting *Mandres* (1961-2).

Having established that we might read Greenberg as accounting for the way in which the Abstract Expressionist artists worked in mimetic receptivity to particularity, however, in Chapter 8, 'Greenberg's Kantianism contra Greenberg's Positivism,' I will address the accusation, levelled by many critics, that Greenberg's 'positivist' account of Abstract Expressionism prescribes a mode of reception which primes the sensorium to subordinate precisely the contingency of one's somatic and affective particularity in a manner amenable to the status quo. The most substantive account of this is Caroline A. Jones's *Eyesight Alone* (2005), but it was preceded by significant accounts by Rosalind Krauss, Bryony Fer, and Amelia Jones. In the latter's critique, as is not uncommon in similar dismissals of Greenberg, emphasis is placed upon Greenberg's self-proclaimed Kantianism, in so far as Amelia Jones claims that, following Kant's distinction between the agreeable and the beautiful, Greenberg demands disinterestedness on the part of spectators, whereby they must bracket their contingent particularity in deference to his categories of medium-specificity. However, I will argue that if we turn directly to Greenberg's references to Kant, it is clear that he

overwhelmingly appeals to Kantian aesthetic reflective judgement in attempts to describe how Abstract Expressionism engages spectators *on the basis of* particular experience. To elucidate this, I will read Greenberg's references to Kant through Adorno's account of Kantian aesthetic reflective judgement. For Adorno, whereas the lineaments of the transcendental subject set out by Kant in his theoretical philosophy elaborate and legitimate capitalist reification, and thus certainly truncate and delegitimize elements of particular experience, aesthetic reflective judgement concerns that which is truncated and delegitimized. It is precisely the appeal to such elements of particular experience, I will contend, which Greenberg found compelling in artworks. Thus, his account of the response invited by Abstract Expressionist artworks might be understood as characterising the artworks as engaging us on the somatic and affective stratum of experience of which a corrected rationality would take account.

An elaboration of this claim will concern Chapter 9, 'The Silent World of the Sensible.' In this chapter, I will in the outset return to Trotsky's theories on art, and show that the reason why Trotsky claims inherent seditiousness for art which follows its 'own laws' rather than prescribed themes is because it thus engages 'feelings and moods' stymied by capitalism. While Caroline A. Jones claims that focus on how art affects recipients in this way is abandoned by Greenberg after WWII in favour of reified categories of medium-specificity, I will argue that it in fact remained fundamental to his criticism. I will argue that Greenberg's criticism attests to how Abstract Expressionism's negation of non-medium-specific elements which I show in Chapter 7 might be understood as the determinate negation of reified forms, invites assimilation to otherness and through this engages cognition in a way that is emphatically inextricable from the corporeal. I will elaborate this not only with recourse to Adorno, but also Merleau-Ponty, who dedicates far more attention to the reception of art. In this, I will contend that Greenberg's self-identified 'positivism' and the 'metaphysical' self-description of many of the Abstract Expressionists, which are often counterposed, in fact both refer to the same elements of experience dismissed as fundamental determinants of life under

capitalism. Then, in Chapter 10, ‘Denunciation and Anticipation,’ I will contend that the assimilation to the other through which such elements of experience are engaged, also prefigures a world in which life *would* be fundamentally determined by such subjective experience in reciprocity with its object. I will show that when the revisionist historians, namely Guilbaut and Jachec, address the notion that Abstract Expressionism prefigures utopia, they dismiss it as a spurious projection which leaves the status quo untouched yet allowed the artists to maintain a superficial political radicalism. They make this case with recourse to two statements by Robert Motherwell. In one, written with Harold Rosenberg, he asserts that the Abstract Expressionists, in working without heed to organised thinking, keep faith in possibility. In another, Motherwell claims that Abstract Expressionism is fundamentally ethical. However, I will contend that these statements in fact attest to the way in which Abstract Expressionist artworks (still) promise another relationship with the world, whose possibility inheres in the present. Again reading Adorno alongside Merleau-Ponty, I will argue that the latter’s late phenomenology of a chiasmatic intercorporeity between subjects and objects, which he terms ‘the flesh,’ might be understood as a prefiguration of reconciliation extrapolated from the aesthetic experience which Adorno terms ‘distanced nearness,’ which I will contend is typified by Abstract Expressionist artworks. I will discuss this with particular reference to the painting *City Night* (1949) by Norman Lewis, the only African-American member of the New York School’s first generation. Lewis affirms that his decision to eschew Social Realism was informed by the inefficaciousness of the latter to effect social change, and he claims that to do so he instead turned to direct political protest. While Lewis does not correlate his adoption of an abstract aesthetic with such action, I hope my thesis will have established that, in spite of its co-optation by US imperialism, Abstract Expressionism is united precisely with the struggle by corporeal subjects against the domination of capital. I will then, in the conclusion, survey contemporary abstract painting in light of my thesis.

Chapter One

Greenberg's Trotskyism

Often taken as indicative of the development traced by accounts of Abstract Expressionism's complicity with imperialism, is a bracketed addendum made by Greenberg to a sentence in his 1957 essay, 'New York Painting Only Yesterday,' upon its republication as 'The Late Thirties in New York' in *Art and Culture* four years later. The essay was occasioned by an exhibition at the Poindexter Gallery entitled *The '30s: New York Paintings*, and is one of Greenberg's many retrospective surveys of Abstract Expressionism. It focuses particularly on how Arshile Gorky, Willem de Kooning and Hans Hofmann drew influence in the late 1930s from Matisse, Klee, Miró and early Kandinsky, in developing what Greenberg was then arguing was the most advanced art of its time. Early in the essay, Greenberg writes that 'radical politics was on many people's minds but for them Social Realism was as dead as the American Scene' (CEC4: 19). However, in the revised version he adds 'that is not all, by far, that there was to politics in art in those years; some day it will have to be told how "anti-Stalinism," which started out more or less as "Trotskyism," turned into art for art's sake, and thereby cleared the way, heroically, for what was to come' (1961: 230). Without the addendum, the sentence is simply an acknowledgement that the neglect of so-called 'political' subject matter did not necessarily coincide with a decline in political engagement on the part of the artists. With the addition of the bracketed aside, however, is implied the notion that the turn towards abstraction was both precipitated by, and eradicated, a commitment to radical politics on the part of the artists who would become Abstract Expressionists. This assumption orients many of the revisionist historians' accounts, and these scholars understand as emblematic of this shift the way that, in his seminal essays 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' (1939) and 'Towards a Newer Laocoon' (1940), both published in *Partisan Review* – whose editorial line at the time was firmly Trotskyist-by-way-of-Anti-

Stalinism³ – Greenberg depoliticised the ideas central to two pieces by Trotsky previously published in the same journal in 1938. These pieces were an essay entitled ‘Art and Politics in our Epoch,’ and a manifesto for a proposed *International Federation of Independent Revolutionary Art* (FIARI) co-authored with Andre Breton and signed by the Mexican artist Diego Rivera in place of a fugitive Trotsky.

Now, Greenberg does not cite Trotsky in ‘Kitsch’ and ‘Laocoon,’ and in interviews late in his life Greenberg throws into question the notion that the essays might be understood as significantly informed by Trotsky’s preceding pieces. While assenting with Robert Burstow that ‘Kitsch’ was ‘alas’ written within a Trotskyist framework, he also claims that, despite having ‘great admiration for Trotsky,’ he could only have been described as a ‘half-assed Trotskyist’ and elsewhere asserts that he ‘didn’t agree with’ Trotsky’s articles on art (Burstow 1994: 33; 2003: 236). However, such a disclamation is in keeping with Greenberg’s tendency in old age, spurred by what he candidly referred to in 1984 as his ‘revulsion (a repentant sinners’) against leftist cant,’ to downplay his youthful commitment to revolutionary socialism (2003: 140).⁴ Instead, evidence in fact suggests that his engagement

³ Partisan Review was founded by Joseph Freeman, Edwin Seaver, William Phillips and Philip Rahv as a mouthpiece for proletarian literature when the editors were members of the New York chapter of the John Reed Club, the US arm of the communist International Union of Writers and Artists (see Wald 1987: 81-82). In 1936, it dissolved, largely due to the ideological split in the left caused by the Moscow Trials cleaving its editorial team in two, with Freeman and Seaver remaining committed to the USSR, and Phillips and Rahv aligning themselves with the exiled Trotsky. In the next year, however, Phillips and Rahv re-established the magazine as an, to quote the editorial authored by Philips and Rahv, ‘unequivocally independent’ publication ‘aware of its responsibility to the revolutionary movement in general, but [disclaiming] obligation to any of its organised political expressions’ (Partisan Review Editors 2007: 60). It was a year later that Dwight Macdonald, a Trotskyist addition to the editorial board who would go on to commission Greenberg’s first essays, extended an invitation to Trotsky to express his views on the contemporaneous art, which Trotsky – albeit with misgivings – accepted, resulting in ‘Art and Politics in Our Epoch,’ much of the ideas in which Trotsky reiterated anonymously with Breton in ‘Towards a Free Revolutionary Art.’

⁴ Caroline A. Jones speculates that this tendency extended to Greenberg most likely actively suppressing the republication in his otherwise almost comprehensive *Collected Essays and Criticism* of his ‘10 Propositions on the War’ (EA: 445, n111), which was a 1941 piece co-authored with Dwight Macdonald and published in the July-August issue of Partisan Review, in which the authors argue against immediate US intervention in WWII, and instead contend that ‘[to] win the war against fascism, we must work for the replacement of the present governments in England and the United States by working class governments committed to democratic socialism’ (1941: 277). Whether Greenberg suppressed the republication of this essay is questionable, as the equally uncompromisingly radical ‘An American View’ is republished in the *Collected Essays and Criticism*, and it is thus likely that ‘10 Propositions’ was not reproduced simply

with Trotsky was certainly more than lackadaisical or superficial. As one of Greenberg's biographers Alice Goldfarb Marquis affirms, throughout the 1930s Greenberg 'had been assiduously studying the works of [...] Leon Trotsky' to the extent that it is very likely he was not only acquainted with the two essays in *Partisan Review* but also Trotsky's writing on art going back to 1923 (2006: 50-1), and this dedication is evident in his youthful letters to his confidante Harold Lazarus, in which, for instance, he in 1936 enumerates as one of his paramount concerns the hope that 'Trotsky gets safely into Mexico' (2000: 171).⁵ Moreover, just months prior to the publication of 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch,' he reports to Lazarus that he was invited to join the American section of the FIARI (2000: 196).

because, as John O'Brian notes in the introduction to the first volume, articles that were jointly written were not included (CEC1: xviii). Nevertheless, Greenberg was certainly dismissive of '10 Propositions' late in life: In 1994, Greenberg blithely attributes this article to the influence of his Stalinist brother Sol, claiming that, like Sartre, in the 1930s he 'reasoned that the Stalinists were showing him the true path' (2003: 237). This of course makes no sense, not only because – notwithstanding his hope, which he held until at least 1944, that Stalinism might still have been fomenting the conditions for its own demise, as 'an increase in production and productivity, coupled with the slackening of foreign danger', may have released 'the socialist tendencies which Trotsky said lay locked in soviet economy' (CEC1: 187), it is easily demonstrable from Greenberg's letters that his hatred of Stalinism, and specifically Sol's dedication to Stalinism (2000: 127), was fierce and visceral at the time – he describes how Stalin's 'darkness infects the mind more thoroughly than syphilis infects the blood' (Ibid: 177) – but more simply because opposing US intervention in WWII in July 1941 was of course *anti-Stalinist*, since the very trigger for US intervention was Germany invading the USSR in June 1941. In fact, Greenberg himself justified his stance as Luxemburgian (EA: 44), which is certainly notable, because Rosa Luxemburg provides a model of revolutionary art very similar to Trotsky's, writing that '[w]ith the true artist, the social formula that he recommends is a matter of secondary importance; the source of his art, its animating spirit, is decisive' (qtd. in Siegel 1970: 28).

⁵ Tracing the development of Greenberg's politics in the '30s through these letters also reveals a more than trivial commitment to the radical left in general. To an extent, one can see the justification for Greenberg's dismissive retrospective characterisation. At times it seems as if Marxism as just another curio amongst his cultural activities: He at one point writes that he's 'been reading Communist pamphlets and Henry James'; makes a point of his aloofness even when affirming that he voted for the socialists in 1932; and, rather than Trotsky, the Marxist figure who receives the most attention in these letters is Brecht, who Greenberg discovers in 1931 and swiftly proclaims as 'everything!' (2000: 140; 76; 55). However, he repeatedly describes his investment in contemporary struggles in markedly affective terms, as if his 'faith in the revolution' is wholly imbricated with his 'faith in [himself],' as he puts it in one letter (Ibid: 251). In 1933, for instance, he describes being moved to tears and going 'home all jagged up' after attending a Communist mass-meeting about a cotton picker strike in the San Joaquin valley, and three years later, he uses similarly affective phraseology to describe his emotive responses to reading a book about the Socialist uprising in Austria, and news of a strike in France – 'all cut up' and 'all stirred up' respectively (Ibid: 108; 150; 164). Furthermore, while his commitment did not extend to volunteering for the Spanish civil war, it preoccupies him constantly; he bemoans that it is 'all [he] can think of in the morning,' and '[i]f the Loyalists were winning [he'd] really be happy in a personal way' (167; 174).

As we will see, in Trotsky's essays he propounds that dedication to art's own laws, rather than prescription in terms of content, is necessary if art is to be allied with revolution. He thus identifies a crisis in the fact that such revolutionary art was contemporaneously losing the bourgeois patronage by which it had been hitherto fostered – albeit only to ultimately assimilate it – and hence, rather than existent Stalinist organisations, which exacted servility from artists and thus stymied dedication to art's laws, he calls for the establishment of an anarcho-communist federation to support revolutionary art. Greenberg's essays argue a markedly similar case. Greenberg, too, posits that art dedicated to its inherent laws was a threat to capitalism's existence in 1939, and he similarly calls for socialism to preserve it in lieu of bourgeois patronage. However, whereas Trotsky's pieces bear a political urgency at the expense of discussing aesthetics in any specificity, Greenberg's pieces are concerned overwhelmingly with aesthetics, and the dynamics by which socialism was to preserve an avant-garde art which supposedly posed a threat to capitalism, or indeed the question of how avant-garde art posed a threat to capitalism, are not addressed to any meaningful extent. Accordingly, the revisionist historians argue that Greenberg thus developed a paradigm which both legitimated the Abstract Expressionists' praxis in pseudo-politically radical terms, despite – indeed due to – its 'distance from party politics and political organisation' (Orton and Pollock 1985: 181), and by the same token allowed for the sloughing off, or total assimilation, of these terms by the time the work was exported in efforts of US imperialism during the 1950s.

In the face of these accounts, art historians defending Abstract Expressionism against its synonymy with US imperialism over the last three decades have been eager to establish how such a move from Trotskyism to an art-for-art's-sake only applies to Greenberg's criticism. David Craven, for instance, writes that 'far from encapsulating the dominant ideological journey of the US art world,' the transformation from 'Trotskyism' to 'art for art's sake' 'merely summarizes [Greenberg's] own rather lonely, even singular, trek to the right of the political spectrum' (ACC: 42), and David Anfam stresses that this move was 'Greenberg's

private odyssey' (1990: 55). Accordingly, Stephen Polcari accuses the revisionists of 'specious associations [...] dismissal of the personal, cultural, and intellectual concerns; sweeping abstractions and generalizations; and wilful ignorance of intentions, subjects, forms, and imagery of the artists' (1988: 177). Guilbaut's case, especially, relies upon homogenising claims that the American art world was able to aggressively impose its painting as the heir to European Modernism because it comprised 'liberal Modernists' unified behind 'the leading force' of Abstract Expressionism in full knowledge of its 'symbolic role in international cultural politics' (1990: 33-36). Yet, while other Marxist New York intellectuals such as Sidney Hook moved to the right in the same era (see Wald 1987: 193ff), it has been ably demonstrated that there was no such broader ideological shift for the artists and intellectuals associated with Abstract Expressionism, who generally retained their left-wing convictions (not least Pollock, whom Greenberg himself dubbed a 'Goddamn Stalinist from start to finish' in an interview with Clark, a claim which Clark thinks Greenberg 'meant [...] seriously' (1999a: 442 n16)).⁶ However, in what follows I do not want to trace the development of the paradigm by which Greenberg championed Abstract Expressionism as a

⁶ Pollock is known to have been staunchly anti-capitalist and actively involved with left-wing politics as a youth. To adduce this, Craven quotes a letter from the young Pollock to his father, in which the artist 'repeatedly criticized the capitalist system and "the rest of the hokum that goes with the price system"' (ACC: 48), and in B.H. Friedman's biography of the artist, Pollock is quoted claiming to have attended 'a number of Communist meetings' (12). Despite all this, Pollock is one artist singled out by Eva Cockcroft as having 'left behind his earlier interest in political activism,' and for Cockcroft this is tantamount to his submission to the status quo (129). Yet, as Anfam writes, Pollock 'so far is known, kept his youthful left-wing views' (1991: 55; see also Naifeh and Smith 1989: 406). Similarly, As David Anfam observes, those Abstract Expressionists who began as committed radicals, such as David Smith and Ad Reinhardt did not abandon their socialist principles afterwards' (1990: 55). While Reinhardt's support of the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) into the '50s is well documented, (see most recently Corris, 2008: 52-59), he was not the only Abstract Expressionist whose dissidence lead to investigation by the FBI. As Craven details, Reinhardt's file 'runs to around 123 pages,' but 'Motherwell's comprises 45, Rothko's 21, Gottlieb's 5, and Krasner's a mere 2 pages, albeit very provocative ones' (ACC: 81). The inclusion of Gottlieb and Rothko in this list is particularly notable, because their involvement in the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors (FMPS) is often adduced as evidence of their active complicity with 'the social and political function to which [their work] was put,' due to the Federation's role as 'an active agent for anti-Communism in the art world' (Stonor Saunders, 275; see also Cox, 29; Jachec, 34, 149). Now, this judgement is questionable, because, while Annette Cox demonstrates that the FMPS 'sought to expose Party influence in such organisations as Artists for Victory and Artists' Equity' (29), its opposition to the CPUSA was expressly rooted in anti-Stalinism rather than pro-Americanism. It was founded in reaction to the American Artists' Congress passing a resolution 'that to many [...] appeared to sanction the Russian invasion of Finland' (Ashton 1996: 67), and, similarly to Trotsky and Breton's earlier manifesto which I will discuss below, its first statement of aims 'described the Soviet and Nazi regimes as two examples of "totalitarianism of thought and action" which valued the artist "only as a craftsman who may be exploited"' (Cox 1982: 28-29).

move from Trotskyism to art-for-art's sake as microcosmic of a wider ideological shift in the New York art scene. Rather, I want to identify Greenberg's criticism as rooted in Trotsky's art theory because I will contend that the fundamental dynamics of Trotsky's account of revolutionary art as art which refutes heteronomous constraint and yet progresses by determinately negating elements of preceding art, are not only central to the way in which Greenberg's criticism, when hypostasised, contributed to Abstract Expressionism's co-optation, but also to how Greenberg's criticism bears witness to the way in which Abstract Expressionist artworks indict the ends for which they were enlisted.

In his two *Partisan Review* essays preceding 'Kitsch' and 'Laocoon,' Trotsky espouses conviction that revolutionary art must be free from heteronomous constraint as opposed to the mandated socialist realism of the USSR, from which he had been exiled by Stalin a decade before. He writes of how, in the USSR artists 'who still [consented] to take up pen or brush' had been reduced 'to the status of domestic servants of the regime, whose task it [was] to glorify it on order, according to the worst possible aesthetic conventions' (LA: 117). For Trotsky, socialist realism was to be discredited as 'based on lies and deceit' (LA: 106). He, for example, indicts Alexei Tolstoy's novel *Bread* (1937), which glorifies the military exploits of Stalin and Voroshilov at Tsaritsin, when in reality both were relieved of their posts; and various paintings which portray a then-recently retrospectively fabricated auxiliary central command of the October revolution consisting of figures who were contemporaneously faithful to Stalin (LA: 107-109). It is understandable, then, that in discussing Trotsky's influence on Greenberg, Erika Doss surmises that Trotsky's opposition to art 'determined by its function, such as the Soviet style of socialist realism' was 'shaped' by 'personal anti-Stalinism' (327). However, Trotsky had already maintained the necessity of artists' independence fifteen years before in his work *Literature and Revolution* (1923), when Lenin was still head of the government and socialist realism was not mandated to artists. In *Literature and Revolution*, Trotsky claims that a 'work of art should, in the first place, be judged by its own law, that is, by the law of art' (LA: 37). He affirms that the 'Marxist

conception of [...] the social utility of art, when translated into the language of politics, does not at all mean a desire to dominate art by means of decrees and orders' and Marxists do not 'regard only that art new and revolutionary which speaks of the worker' or describes 'a factory chimney, or the uprising against capital' (LA: 31).⁷ Instead, for Trotsky, if free of heteronomous prescription, art fulfils its revolutionary role whether or not 'it appears in a given case under the flag of a "pure" or of a frankly tendentious art' (LA: 30). Thus, it is wholly in keeping with his earlier writing on art when Trotsky counterposes to Stalinist socialist realism art for which what is decisive is its significance *as art*, contending that 'true art' cannot tolerate orders 'by its very essence,' and becomes 'a strong ally of revolution' by remaining faithful to 'its laws' (LA: 114).

Commentators have seemed to interpret Trotsky essays as thus advocating fidelity to one's conscience, values, ideological commitments, or whatever other concept might come under the rubric of 'self.' Robert Wistrich and Isaac Deutscher make such assumptions, both apparently paraphrasing a letter which Trotsky wrote to Breton subsequent to the publication of the manifesto, in which he vaguely defines 'the struggle for artistic *truth* [...] in terms of *the immutable faith of the artist in his own inner self*' (LA: 124). Wistrich writes that for Trotsky the 'ultimate criterion for the artist' is faith in their 'inner *self* and in [their] struggle for truth' (156), and Deutscher claims that for Trotsky an artist might act as 'a necessary part of revolution,' through 'unyielding faithfulness to himself' (433). It is certainly the case that

⁷ Nevertheless, in this early work he censures art whose content actively opposes the revolution, and maintains the necessity to enforce 'a resolute and severe, but of course, not petty, censorship' (LA: 240, n.11). Because of this, Alice Goldfarb Marquis asserts that Trotsky equivocates 'wildly between asserting the freedom of the creative artist and the need to control his or her output to support the revolution' (2006: 118). However, this exigency should be understood not as a transhistorical mandate, but rather in terms of the supposed necessity for the transitional regime of the dictatorship of the proletariat to lay down 'severe limitations upon all forms of activity, including spiritual creation' (LA: 96). Moreover, Trotsky still maintains that these limitations did not mean the government could act as 'commander in the sphere of science, literature and art,' and formulated its relationship to artists as 'holding over them all the categorical criterion, *for* the revolution or *against* the revolution,' while giving them 'complete freedom in the sphere of artistic self-determination' (LA: 96-7). Thus, it might be said that, rather than equivocating, for Trotsky freedom for artists and censorship so as their art does not oppose the revolution are coextensive, because for him it would be impossible to consider art which actively opposed the revolution as the product of free creativity. That is to say, for Trotsky, as Adorno claims four decades later, 'political falsehood stains [...] aesthetic form' (2007c: 186).

extra-aesthetic impulses as central to Trotsky's account of radical art. Trotsky's ferocious invectives against the formalism of Victor Shklovsky, whose 'assertion of complete independence of the aesthetic "factor" from the influence of social conditions' Trotsky condemns as idealism, mean that one could never assume that he considers art's laws wholly internal to it (LA: 32-41).⁸ As will be addressed in Chapter 9, for Trotsky the notion that art dedicated to these laws is 'unable *not* to be revolutionary, *not* to aspire to a complete and radical reconstruction of society' is bound up with his conviction that unmet and repressed 'inner needs of man and mankind' are engaged by this dedication (LA: 117). However, he continually stresses that these needs are mediated by artistic technique – 'artistic creation is [...] a deflection, a changing and a transformation of reality, in accordance with the peculiar law of art' (LA: 34) – and implies that they cannot be transparently expressed in rhetoric shared with art which serves as an apology for the status quo.⁹ As Adorno would assert twenty years later, for Trotsky in 1938 it seems that the latter cannot be countered 'simply by a determination to look at things in what purports to be a more objective manner,' but instead art reveals 'whatever is veiled by the empirical form assumed by reality' by the progress of its autonomous laws (2007b: 162). Trotsky accordingly contends that 'the development of tendencies in art' unhindered by heteronomous prescription, always bespeaks 'a protest against reality' (LA: 104-5). To adopt a distinction between senses of the word 'content' in German employed by Adorno in his aesthetic theory, Trotsky's opposition to the officiated art of the Soviet Union is premised on its *Inhalt* (paraphrasable subject matter), but he

⁸ It should here be noted, however, that in 1923, the same year as the publication of *Literature and Art*, Shklovsky and the Russian Formalists joined the Left Futurists and Mayakovsky, of whom Trotsky had a far more sanguine opinion, to produce the magazine *LEF*, in which formalism was politicised in a way that Stanley Mitchell has argued should be understood as marking it out as an antecedent of Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* (1974: 76).

⁹ Admittedly, the only specific examples of 'true artworks' Trotsky gives in either *Partisan Review* essays are Rivera's frescoes inspired by the October revolution, which he asserts reveal its 'hidden springs' in a way which art of the USSR could not (LA: 110). However, for Trotsky this veracity is to be understood less in the sense that these murals correct the falsehoods peddled by the likes of Alexei Tolstoy, and more in the sense that these murals bear witness to the revolution's essence by manifesting its 'mighty blast,' a claim which Trotsky corroborates not by detailing the correspondence of the murals' imagery with fact, but by pointing out that the murals provoked the ire of 'Catholics and other reactionaries, including, of course, Stalinists' evidenced by the vandalism inflicted upon them (*ibid*).

conversely champions as inherently revolutionary what he refers to as ‘true art’ on the basis of its *Gehalt* (unparaphrasable import).¹⁰

Now, while previously these avant-garde tendencies had found patronage in the bourgeoisie, in 1938 Trotsky asserts they risked losing even the minimum conditions for their existence at a moment when their protest against reality might have actually become a transformation of reality, for precisely the reasons why the conditions for this shift were so fecund. That is, Trotsky contends that the bourgeoisie was no longer willing to support avant-garde art because, due to the acuteness of the economic crisis, it feared ‘superstitiously every new word, for it [was] no longer a matter of corrections and reforms for capitalism but of life and death’ (LA: 105). It is in the face of this impasse, then, that in ‘Towards a Free Revolutionary Art’ Trotsky calls with Breton for the founding of the FIARI as a revolutionary International in support of this art. The manifesto’s indeterminacy as to the particularities of the FIARI has lead scholars such as Martin Puchner to claim that Trotsky and Breton leave open ‘the question of how to bring revolution and art into unison,’ and denote the authors’ attendant slogan ‘the independence of art – for the revolution / The revolution – for the complete liberation of art’ an ‘oscillating chiasmus’ (2006: 195). Yet, while certainly ambiguous, this unison of art and revolution is not tautological in the way that Puchner implies; for Trotsky, as we have seen, ‘true art’ could only be revolutionary, and thus the revolutionary

¹⁰ As Robert Hullot-Kentor writes in a translator’s footnote to *Aesthetic Theory*, ‘Inhalt’ means ‘the idea of thematic content or subject matter,’ while ‘Gehalt’ means ‘content in the sense of import, essence, or substance of a work’ (AT: 368). Ulrich Plass notes that Adorno inherited these terms from Goethe and Schiller, and draws this quote from Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby to further elucidate the distinction: ‘If we are capable of responding to the totality of the form the artist has made, then we have access to the “meaning” inherent in it, a meaning which is different from any or all of the meanings of the various materials which has gone to its making. For this “meaning,” which is implicit in the form of a work of art, and never to be explicated out of it by formulation in any other terms, Goethe and Schiller usually reserved the term *Gehalt* [...] Whereas *Gehalt* is the unitary import of a unitary form, *Inhalt* has something of the multiplicity of the materials out of which the latter was made [...] *Inhalt* is that which, unlike *Gehalt*, can be abstracted from any representational work of art, and expressed in other terms’ (qtd. in Plass 2012: 223, n15). In an aside in ‘Laocoon,’ Greenberg draws a similar distinction between the axes ‘subject matter’ and ‘content,’ with the former as *Inhalt* and the latter as *Gehalt*, when he claims that the avant-garde rejected ‘[s]ubject matter as distinguished from content: in the sense that every work of art must have content, but that subject matter is something the artist does or does not have in mind when he is actually at work’ (CEC1: 28). Central points in what follows will pivot on the notion that Greenberg’s concept of ‘medium-specificity’ refers to the former rather than the latter.

International of the FIARI was to be founded in lieu of a bourgeois willing to provide an economic base for art which by its very nature challenged their declining society.

In detailing the historical dynamic of such art's development, in 1938 Trotsky indicates that it is rooted in negation, in terms of how '[e]very new artistic or literary tendency (naturalism, symbolism, futurism, cubism, expressionism, and so forth and so on) has begun with a "scandal," breaking the old respected crockery' as each movement was totally assimilated by its patrons and 'from the ranks of a new generation of bohemian artists [...] a fresher revolt would surge up to attain its turn' (LA: 102; 105). These negations, then, are determinate rather than abstract; 'united to the tradition from which [they were] seeking to break,' as Paul N. Siegel puts it (1970: 11). This emphasis on the importance of 'the methods and processes evolved in the past' also bears continuity with Trotsky's earlier writing on art (2005: 195). In *Literature and Revolution*, this contention sets Trotsky against the Proletkult, the Organisation for Proletarian Culture founded in 1918, which rejected bourgeois art *tout court* and set up a network of studios throughout post-revolutionary Russia in which proletarians were to develop entirely new art-forms (see Laing 1978: 20-45; Arvon, 1974: 56-70). Quite aside from the fact that the idea of proletarian art presupposes the very 'class culture' that the Soviet Union's transitional dictatorship of the proletariat was established to abolish in order 'to make way for human culture' and thus it is not a proletarian art but a socialist art befitting the latter which must ultimately be conceived, Trotsky contends that any such socialist art would be developed through 'a systematic, planful and [...] critical imparting to the backward masses of the essential elements of the culture which already exists' (LA: 42; 49). For Trotsky, '[m]astery of the art of the past is [...] a necessary precondition [...] for the creation of new art' and the groundless repudiation of art of the past would only render a culture 'at once [...] poorer spiritually' (LA: 86-7). Thus, Trotsky contends that the verses which appeared in pre-revolutionary workers' publications are 'a political event, not a literary one' (LA: 65). These verses 'contributed not to the growth of literature but to the growth of the

revolution,’ and the latter would only give rise to a new art upon ‘the cultural growth of the working people’ (65).

Like Trotsky, Greenberg maintains a dialectical conception of artistic development fundamentally propelled by determinate negations. Furthermore, as we will see, in ‘Kitsch,’ Greenberg also implies that this progress is endangered by the very same circumstances of economic crisis which mean it might serve revolution. Yet, for Greenberg this fundamental model of art’s progress which he shares with Trotsky manifests in a genealogy of avant-garde art for which not only is art’s adherence to its ‘own laws’ rather than thematic content decisive for its quality, but the former eschews the latter. As he puts it in an insight which he attributes to Hans Hofmann:

Picasso, Braque, Mondrian, Miró, Kandinsky, Brancusi, even Klee, Matisse and derive their chief inspiration from the medium they work in. The excitement of their art seems to lie most of all in its pure preoccupation with the invention and arrangement of spaces, surfaces, shapes, colours, etc. to the exclusion of whatever is not necessarily implicated in these factors. (CEC1: 9)

Trotsky, it seems, disclaims such developments when he affirms that it is ‘far from [his] wish to revive a so-called pure art which generally serves the extremely impure ends of reaction’ (LA: 120). And below, I will of course address the ways in which the revisionist accounts contend that Abstract Expressionism, the ‘so-called pure art’ which Greenberg would come to champion, served the ‘extremely impure ends’ of US imperialism. In ‘Kitsch’ and ‘Laocoon,’ however, Greenberg certainly roots the origins of the avant-garde in leftist politics. While he notoriously affirms that the avant-garde has hitherto been attached to the ruling class by an ‘umbilical cord of gold’ (CEC1: 11), he aligns its emergence with ‘the first bold development of scientific revolutionary thought in Europe’ – by which, as Clark notes, Greenberg of course means ‘pre-eminently the thought of Marx’ (1985: 48) – in so far as the avant-garde’s rejection of academicism was bolstered by such thought’s rejection of ‘the

prevailing standards of society' which was thus 'shown to be, not an eternal, "natural" condition of life' (CEC1: 7). Nevertheless, the fact that in both essays Greenberg focuses upon how avant-garde artists proceeded to 'escape from ideas' (CEC1: 28) has lead some critics to wholly differentiate Greenberg from Trotsky even at the point of 'Kitsch' and 'Laocoon,' on the basis that, as Robert Storr contends, while Greenberg professed a desire for social revolution in the late 30's and early '40s, it was already his 'conviction that continuity of tradition was an ultimate value and art itself was a product of purely artistic dynamics' (1990: 169). However, Greenberg maintains in 'Kitsch' and 'Laocoon' that, in spite of its ostensible lack of politics, the reason why the avant-garde has tended toward the 'so-called pure art' which Trotsky derides, is in fact a principle which I have shown Trotsky affirms as politically vital, at least in his writings on art prior to the *Partisan Review* essays: the exigency to retain continuity with art of the past, 'to keep culture *moving*' amidst the 'ideological confusion and violence' of social upheaval (CEC1: 8), which Trotsky avers should not lead to the wholesale repudiation of art of the past. Admittedly, whereas Trotsky in 1923 makes this argument in opposition to the Proletkult, on the precipice of World War II in 1939, in his most evocative statement on the matter Greenberg identifies this abstract negation of bourgeois art – this 'plebian' resentment towards the culture of those who 'administer' the social order – with fascism's 'statue-smashing' in 'the name of godliness or the blood's health, in the name of simple ways and solid virtues' (CEC1: 18-9). Nevertheless, in targeting fascism's orchestration of mass antipathy towards the art of the bourgeoisie, Greenberg is not siding with the latter because it is the product of bourgeois society any more than was Trotsky in his disputes with the Proletkult in 1923. Contrarily, as I will now explore, Greenberg's affirmation that it is necessary for the avant-garde to maintain continuity with the bourgeois art which preceded it, is both rooted in a desire shared with the Trotsky of the '20s to retain the baby of culture while throwing out the bathwater of capitalism (to adopt a figure of speech which Adorno deploys in order to make the same point

in *Minima Moralia* (43-45)), and a faith shared with the Trotsky of the *Partisan Review* essays that this culture is in fact corrosive of capitalism, at least when the latter is in decline.

As we will see, many of the revisionists persist in identifying the avant-garde culture which Greenberg champions in these early essays as inherently bourgeois. Guilbaut, for example, deploys a similar figure of speech to that which I cited from Adorno to inverse ends when he summarises Greenberg's position in 'Kitsch' as 'The house might be in danger, but by fighting to protect Western culture, at least the furniture might be saved' in order to characterise the critic as 'sanctioning a conservative mission to rescue bourgeois culture' (NY: 35-6). Certainly, in 'Kitsch,' Greenberg claims that under prevailing relations of production avant-garde art 'actually belongs' to the ruling class (CEC1: 10). However, as Clark writes, for Greenberg this was always a 'contradictory belonging-together-in-opposition' (1985: 51), and as Guilbaut in fact acknowledges (without this, apparently, problematising the avant-garde's bourgeois character¹¹), it was precisely because the bourgeoisie was abandoning the avant-garde that this rescue mission was necessary.¹² As Trotsky claims the crisis of capitalism in 1938 had left the bourgeoisie reluctant to support avant-garde art, in 'Kitsch' Greenberg claims that the bourgeoisie, pandering to the aforementioned resentment towards bourgeois culture on the part of the masses, had devised the ersatz culture of kitsch. Greenberg thus claimed it was no longer enough 'to have an inclination towards [avant-garde art]' (CEC1: 13). Instead, it was necessary to harbour 'a true passion for it,' so as to 'resist the faked article that surrounds and presses in' (CEC1: 13). In the 1920s, after the Russian revolution, Trotsky saw it as necessary to develop universal

¹¹ Guilbaut notes that for Greenberg 'the causes of the crisis of Western culture were similar to the ones listed by Trotsky in "Art and Politics," namely, the crisis of capitalism and the decline of the ruling class' (NY: 33).

¹² It should, however, be acknowledged that for Clark the negations of modernism championed by Greenberg are symptomatic of this abdication on the part of the bourgeois of cultural (while, of course, not economic) hegemony, and to this extent, for Clark, the avant-garde for whose rescue Greenberg is calling in 'Kitsch' remains 'bourgeois art in the absence of a bourgeoisie,' as opposed to art which might challenge 'the notion that art stands only to suffer from the fact that now all meanings are disputable,' and work towards the contestation of those meanings on the part of 'those who stand to gain from their collapse' (1985: 59-60). As should be evident from the introduction, for Clark Abstract Expressionism is certainly not the latter kind of art, while in the second half of this thesis, I will essentially argue that it is.

literacy amongst the proletariat, so that the socialist culture which eventually emerged would sublimate rather than abstractly negate bourgeois culture.¹³ In the context of US capitalism in 1939, however, Greenberg contended it was precisely the universal literacy to which the industrial revolution had given rise in the West that had led to the demand for kitsch. The proletariat had learned to read and write ‘for the sake of efficiency’ but they lacked the ‘leisure and comfort’ which Greenberg contends is necessary to cultivate receptivity to ‘genuine culture’ (CEC1: 12). Nevertheless, feeling ‘entitled to [their] opinion,’ the proletariat were ‘hungry [...] for the diversion that only culture of some sort can provide’ (CEC1: 18; 12). Yet, for Greenberg, while the culture with which the proletariat were accordingly provided draws its stratagems from a ‘fully matured cultural tradition,’ it both dilutes this tradition and constitutively impedes its development, not least because it ‘has been capitalised at tremendous investment which must show commensurate returns’ (CEC1: 12-13). Here, we might infer an account of the culture industry not dissimilar from Adorno’s, the parallels of whose thought with Greenberg’s may be less than coincidental, as the two were warmly acquainted during Adorno’s time in America.¹⁴ Greenberg’s analysis is akin to Adorno’s in so far as for both the art produced by the culture industry is enmeshed in new modes of distribution, and attendant forms of consumption, all of which operate as forms of social and political control, thus reproducing the status quo.¹⁵ On the other hand, Greenberg

¹³ Accordingly, he, for example, celebrates the fact that Russia, a country whose population was largely illiterate, had expropriated 4,250,000 books from private libraries to make the collections of the Leningrad Public Library the largest in the world (LA: 89).

¹⁴ These parallels have certainly been noted by many scholars, as we will see throughout this thesis. On the specific subject of avant-garde art’s resistance to the culture industry, see Thomas Crow’s 1983 essay ‘Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts,’ specifically his discussion of how as ‘Greenberg does in the American critical tradition, so Adorno stands in his as the preeminent defender of removed, inward, self-critical and self-referential artistic practice’ (1984: 262, n.45); Francis Frascina, ‘Greenberg and the Politics of Modernism’ (1987), and Peter Osborne, ‘Aesthetic Autonomy and the Crisis of Theory: Greenberg, Adorno and the Problem of Postmodernism in the Visual Arts’ (1989). All of these accounts ultimately derogate Greenberg in light of his criticism’s subsequent apparent depoliticisation. As for the friendship between Greenberg and Adorno, Adorno claimed in 1962 that he knew Greenberg ‘very well from [his] American time and [thought] exceedingly highly of him.’ (EA: 360). Greenberg, for his part, recounts his acquaintance with Adorno by saying he ‘had high regard for him’ because ‘he was a nice man [...] not arrogant at all,’ and they ‘really had no basic differences of opinion’ (2003: 235-6; 224).

¹⁵ In his book *Political Aesthetics*, Crispin Sartwell contends that, thus, Adorno and Greenberg are both elitists who deride ‘art emerging from and aimed at “the people” or a people’ (2010: 21). Certainly, both

contends, similarly to Adorno, that avant-garde art is less pliable to the dominant mode of consumption in so far as its production entails, as Adorno puts it, ‘utmost consistency in the pursuit of [...] technical laws’ (2007a: 122). For Adorno, as I have already indicated in this chapter and will elaborate throughout this thesis, this is the source of autonomous art’s radical political *Gehalt*. On the other hand, Greenberg affirms in ‘Kitsch’ that avant-garde art is necessarily corrosive to capitalism in decline, although he does not draw a connection between the avant-garde’s autotelism and its supposed seditiousness. Nevertheless, it is clear that for Greenberg in 1939 the ‘demagogy’ of the culture industry conversely effects social and political control over the masses, whose immiseration at the tail-end of the Great Depression Greenberg presumably thinks may have otherwise precipitated revolution, bearing in mind his then-optimism about the ripeness of conditions for such an event.¹⁶

From this account, Greenberg draws a conclusion which could scarcely be closer to Trotsky’s theories on art as detailed above. That is, avant-garde art poses a threat to capitalism because the latter is in crisis, and yet, in no small part due to this crisis, the bourgeois patronage for avant-garde art has declined. Thus, in lieu of this patronage, Greenberg appeals to socialism to preserve avant-garde art rather than to devise a new culture, due to his confidence, following Trotsky, that a new culture would emerge with

Greenberg and Adorno ‘understood kitsch as commercialized, mass-produced, formulaic, standardised, and aesthetically and politically rearguard ersatz culture,’ as Richard Leppart assimilates the two (2002: 363). However, rather than attacking art ‘emerging from’ a people, Adorno’s critique is rooted in his conviction that the ‘customer is not king, as the culture industry would have us believe, not its subject but its object’ (1991: 85). Indeed, Adorno claims that ‘when art has allowed itself, without condescension, to be inspired by a plebeian element [it] has gained in an authentic weightiness’ (AT: 313). As Ben Watson points out, for Adorno, while the ‘folk’ music of industrialised countries was ‘a bourgeois fantasy of class reconciliation, evoking a patriotic never-never land,’ the music of the Transylvanian Gypsies from which Bartok drew ‘was a living tradition, an unsettling reminder of the marginalised and oppressed’ (2011: 157-158). Similarly, for Greenberg in ‘Kitsch,’ the culture industry only manages to throw up ‘something of merit’ when its products have ‘something that has an authentic folk flavour’ (CEC1: 13).

¹⁶ Guilbaut contends that ‘Kitsch’ and ‘Laocoon’ formalised the position of a contemporaneous avant-garde which ‘rejected revolutionary hopes that had still been strong only a few years earlier’ in advocating for a ‘nonrevolutionary approach’ in the wake of ‘the disqualification of the CPUSA and the impotence of the Trotskyists’ (NY: 34-5). However, as I have established, at the time of writing these essays Greenberg was certainly aligned with the latter – as is made clear by his essay ‘An American View’ published a year after *Laocoon*, in which he insists that ‘in order to keep democracy there must be a socialist revolution’ (CEC1: 39) – and was arguing for a nonrevolutionary approach to art in the service of extra-aesthetic revolution.

socialism. This conclusion is worth reproducing in full, because partial or selective quotation and paraphrase from it abound in secondary literature:

Capitalism in decline finds that whatever of quality it is still capable of producing becomes almost invariably a threat to its own existence. Advances in culture, no less than advances in science and industry, corrode the very society under whose aegis they are made possible. Here, as in every other question today, it becomes necessary to quote Marx word for word. Today we no longer look towards socialism for a new culture – as inevitably one will emerge, once we do have socialism. Today we look to socialism *simply* for the preservation of whatever living culture we have right now. (CEC1: 22)

Certainly, both the practicable logistics of this preservation and precisely how avant-garde art might pose a challenge to capitalism remain imprecise in this passage. However, the clarity of Greenberg's position in political terms renders claims by certain of the revisionists as to how 'Kitsch' directly informed the conditions which lead to Abstract Expressionism's co-optation by US imperialism erroneous, in so far as these writers contend that the essay advocates *for* the umbilical cord of gold attaching the avant-garde to its ruling class patronage.¹⁷ Particularly egregious in this respect is Frances Stonor Saunders, who admittedly only dedicates a chapter in her larger history of the US government's Cold War cultural propaganda to Abstract Expressionism. Stonor Saunders wholly ignores Greenberg's politics, which, as will be clear from my précis, are evident throughout 'Kitsch,' even without their explication in the final paragraph quoted above. Instead, Stonor Saunders simply frames 'Kitsch' as 'the definitive article of faith for the elitist and anti-Marxist view of Modernism' (1999: 258). On Stonor Saunders's telling, the essay is an exhortation for the ruling class to support avant-garde art, and it is thus where the 'really deep connection between Abstract Expressionism and the cultural Cold War can be found,' having provided 'the principle [by

¹⁷ Even a number of years later, in 1946, when Greenberg *does* claim that '[t]he future of art and literature will brighten in this country only when a new cultural elite appears with enough money and enough consciousness to counterbalance the pressure of the new mass market,' he makes sure to clarify that '[t]he other alternative is socialism, of course' (CEC1: 58).

which] the CIA, together with its private venture capitalists, operated' (Ibid: 258-9). Similarly, while acknowledging that Greenberg's position was informed by Trotsky, David and Cecile Shapiro claim that 'Greenberg says that the cream of the rich, educated class will support the new art' which his article precipitated (1985: 140). Jachec, on the other hand, acknowledges that Greenberg at this point held to his faith in revolutionary socialism – indeed, as we will see below, her central thesis is that the capitulation of the New York art world entailed a co-optation, rather than surrender, of radical politics. Yet, she claims that in 'Kitsch,' contrary to Trotsky, Greenberg abandoned the idea that art bore the 'capacity to destabilise a bourgeois society already in decline' and that instead art 'was given a tellingly passive role in the struggle for socialism [...] one that, ironically, was for an indeterminate period to be dependent on the bourgeoisie for its success,' two claims directly contradicted by Greenberg's conclusion quoted above (PPA: 25-6). However, for these scholars, the assertion that Greenberg is appealing to the ruling class to provide an economic base for avant-garde art, is coupled with the assumption, shared explicitly or implicitly by all the revisionist historians, that Abstract Expressionism, as the movement which emerged from the intellectual ferment cultivated by 'Kitsch' and 'Laocoon' to become the next instantiation of avant-garde art in the trajectory which these essays trace, was *itself* particularly amenable to co-optation by the State Department in collusion with the expansionist faction of the national bourgeoisie. In the next chapter, I will explore this in reference to the notion, broadly accepted by the revisionists, that a significant determining factor in these imperialist forces' promotion of Abstract Expressionism was the fact that the movement's ostensible rejection of extra-aesthetic content meant it did not threaten the status quo in the same way as had Social Realism, the politically-committed style which Abstract Expressionism supplanted as the dominant mode of US painting.

Chapter Two

Social Realism and Reification

While, as we will see throughout this thesis, the revisionists forward varied positive reasons as to why Abstract Expressionism was amenable to US imperialism, one negative reason broadly shared by the revisionists is that the supposed shift from Trotskyism to art for art's sake resulted in the Abstract Expressionists rejecting all elements of the formerly dominant socio-politically engaged art of left-wing variants of American Scene painting, notably Social Realism, in which idiom many of the Abstract Expressionist artists had previously painted, for example Clyfford Still, Franz Kline, de Kooning and, notably, Pollock, under the mentorship of the left-wing Regionalist painter Thomas Hart Benton.¹⁸ This theory is systematically explicated in David and Cecile Shapiro's 1977 essay 'Abstract Expressionism: The Politics of Apolitical Painting.' In that essay, the authors posit that the cooperation of the US government and MoMA in arranging exhibitions of Abstract Expressionism abroad which Eva Cockcroft had delineated three years earlier in her essay 'Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War' (1974), was due to the fact that, influenced by Greenberg's transfiguration of Trotsky's art theory, the Abstract Expressionists had developed a style which, in rejecting heteronomous ends for art, was not 'programmatically critical of capitalism,' unlike Social Realism, an art whose 'stated aim, in fact, is to serve as an instrument in the social change that will disestablish capitalism' (1985: 147). The Shapiros thus surmise that the 'extremely rich private collectors' who had founded and funded MoMA welcomed the emergence of Abstract Expressionism because they 'had no wish to preside

¹⁸ For synthetic accounts of these painters' roots in this idiom, see Chapter 2 in David Anfam *Abstract Expressionism* (1990). For an account of the influence of Benton on Pollock and comparative study of how both the paintings of Pollock and Benton were co-opted see Erika Doss *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism* (1991).

over the dismantling of the economic system that had served them so well,' and had accordingly been 'helped off a hot spot' (Ibid).

The Shapiros' revisionist account is the only one which is more or less explicitly partisan in terms of proselytising the cause of Social Realism, as Francis Frascina acknowledges (1985: 100). However, Eva Cockcroft was otherwise invested in Social Realist muralism as both a historian and practicing artist, in which capacity she painted paeans to the dignity of labour,¹⁹ and the other revisionist historians generally presuppose that a shift from Social Realism to Abstract Expressionism as the hegemonic style of painting in America, constituted a shift from art meaningfully aligned with the oppressed, to art aligned with the interests of post-war US capitalism.²⁰ Guilbaut, for instance, conspicuously notes that, in 1942 as the war effort intensified and MoMA placed its facilities 'at the disposal of the nation,' it did away with 'depressing images of the American countryside produced by social realist painters,' and definitively frames the development of Abstract Expressionism as an 'emptying out' of politics (NY: 88-9; 113). He identifies as pivotal a catalogue essay written by Barnett Newman for a 1943 show entitled *American Modern Artists*, in which Newman proclaims that he and the other participants in the show were attempting to 'free the artist from the stifling control of an outmoded politics' (SWI: 29). Despite Newman's lifelong commitment to anarchism – which Guilbaut writes off in a footnote as 'romantic individualism' (NY: 221, n66) – Guilbaut interprets this call for a sloughing off of 'outmoded politics' as the adoption of apolitical bipartisanship, and asserts that, in doing so, Newman is 'using some of Trotsky ideas but eliminating the political commitment associated with them,' and contrarily imploring artists 'to reject politics' (NY: 69-70). For Guilbaut, whereas previously 'artists

¹⁹ See Cockcroft's *New York Times* obituary by Myrna Oliver, 'Eva Cockcroft; Venice Muralist Who Used Art to Explore Social Themes' (1999).

²⁰ It might here be noted that in a recent article, Francis Frascina appears to presuppose the dichotomy between the presumed politicality of Social Realism and apoliticality of Abstract Expressionism in an argument *for* Abstract Expressionism's political significance. While not in reference to Social Realist painting, but instead the contemporary Social Realist fiction film by Ken Loach, *I, Daniel Blake* (2016), he posits an affinity between the Abstract Expressionists and Social Realists, in so far as both are concerned with 'representations of human integrity, the respect of their own and others' experience' (2016/7: 8).

had tried to develop styles that expressed the aspirations of the masses,' Trotsky's call for art free of heteronomous constraint was taken up by the artists who would become Abstract Expressionists to justify eschewing art which placed 'social concerns [at] the centre of attention' and developing 'individualised styles,' which resulted in these artists emphatically turning their backs on these 'masses' (NY: 75; 46). A similar trajectory is traced by Jachec, who takes it as given that Gottlieb and Rothko's move away from a Social Realist practice in the early 1940s prefigured an ideological realignment in their art which would accordingly better lend itself to the Cold War manoeuvres of US imperialism, as 'the idea of communicating with a mass audience [was] swapped for that of communicating with [individuals]' (PPA: 34-40).²¹ Both the significance of Abstract Expressionism's negation of paraphrasable content, and the notion that this development marked a shift from art which addressed collectives to art which concerned individuals, will be explored in following chapters. In this chapter, however, indeed in order to develop the context in which I will discuss these ideas, I will address the assumption that the discursive political content of Social Realism which ostensibly addressed the concerns of the oppressed, challenged capitalism in a way which meant Abstract Expressionism's negation of such content was a determining factor in its adoption by the US establishment at the expense of Social Realism.

The Shapiros imply that by the 1950s, US establishment forces had long determined that Abstract Expressionism was to be the only style that predominated. To exemplify just how dominant Abstract Expressionism became in such a short time, they cite the fact that MoMA had in 1946 gone so far as to show the work of the leading Social Realist painter Ben Shahn in 'a retrospective that established his reputation,' assuming that such an exhibition would have been unthinkable in the 1950s, when they argue Abstract Expressionism had become 'the only art acceptable on a wide scale' (1985: 147). However, at the 1954 Venice Biennale, the US Pavilion, which at the time was owned and controlled by MoMA, featured a Ben Shahn retrospective alongside a Willem de Kooning retrospective. This, then, is enough to

²¹ For an account of this development with respect to Rothko specifically, see Jonathan Harris, 'Mark Rothko and the Development of American Modernism: 1938-1948' (1988).

contest the revisionists' assumptions. Yet, I also want to contend that, furthermore, the way in which the Shahn retrospective was promoted shows that Social Realism's opposition *qua* opposition was that which invited its co-optation. That is, in so far as Shahn's art's solidarity with the oppressed amounted to exhortations for the amelioration of particular injustices – or simple affirmation of the dignity of those who suffer such injustice – within the realm of possibility circumscribed by prevailing relations of production, it failed to indict these relations of production and their accordant modes of subjectivation, and was readily adopted by a ruling class eager to express its concern for the working class.

While the Shapiros explicitly presuppose that Social Realism was more politically subversive than Abstract Expressionism because it was 'art with a "message"' (1985: 135), Adorno contends that 'the notion of a "message" in art, even when politically radical, already contains an accommodation to the world' (2007c: 193). The content in terms of *Inhalt* of discursively tendentious leftist art decries the epiphenomenal effects of capitalism, but by that very token its content in terms of *Gehalt* poses no fundamental challenge to capitalism, because such art necessarily argues on the latter's turf, denouncing particular injustices rather than the very identity-thinking and instrumental reason due to which these injustices occur (an account of which will be given in Chapter 5). That is to say, while it may be critical of them, such art affirms spectators' identification with familiar 'institutions, commodities, things, and relations' which Adorno asserts renders people 'incapable of perceiving their dependence upon processes at some distance from them, the actual objective processes' (2006: 77). Following Adorno, we might contend that this is particularly the case when the tendentious art in question employs 'realist' modes of representation, because 'art as integral replication' simply becomes 'the world over again, an ideological doubling, a compliant reproduction' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 18). Whereas in the previous chapter, I showed that Trotsky argues that the *socialist* realism mandated by the Soviet Union provided apologism for the status quo because its content was empirically false, for Adorno realist aesthetics *per se* tend to confirm and reproduce the status quo, in so far as, in 'regurgitating

tel quel whatever social material they treat and [counting] this metabolic exchange with second nature as the glory of art as social reflection,' they represent this reified second nature as if it were first, and disavow the possibility that it could be radically different (AT: 231). On Adorno's account, as Simon Jarvis succinctly puts it, the "reality" such art imitates 'is not reality *tout court*, but is entangled in a social context which is a real illusion' (1998: 122); art which 'duplicates existence [only does] justice to a reality which [...] suppresses its truth in favour of a merely classificatory order [...] passively accepting objects as they come' and, 'following the bidding of the alienated world [...] persisting obdurately in a state of reification' (2007b: 159-160).

It is, in part, because Merleau-Ponty contends that artistic verisimilitude's great breakthrough of Renaissance perspective entails this reification of the given – its 'culturally specific expressive register' masquerading as 'historically invariant sense data,' as Veronique M. Fóti puts it (2013: 28)²² – that he makes his case for painting bound up with corporeality which below I will deploy in elaborating Abstract Expressionism's challenge to reified consciousness. For Merleau-Ponty, as he elaborates in his 1961 essay 'Eye and Mind,' Renaissance perspectival art's presumption to have instituted a *perspective artificialis* which overrides lived perception and projects 'the existing world [in a manner] which respects it in all aspects and [deserves] to become the fundamental law of painting,' finds its historical analogue in Descartes's attempt 'to erect [space] into a positive being, beyond all points of view,' which in turn has culminated in the "'technized" thought' which reproduces the status

²² Indeed, to an extent, as Christopher S. Wood notes in his entry on 'Perspective' in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, Merleau-Ponty might be seen to precursor the critique of 'the conventionality of perspective [...] in the field of film theory' (1998: 480). This is notable here, because the latter discipline has systematically elaborated how Hollywood film reproduces and naturalises dominant norms (the definitive articulations of which were mainly elaborated in the post-1968 era, in journals such as *Screen* and *Film Quarterly*), and the increased admittance to European markets of Hollywood film was stipulated by the Marshall Plan as a condition of American aid. Thus, unlike the notion that Abstract Expressionism's aesthetic imposed US values, it is relatively uncontroversial to claim that Hollywood film did the same. As Fredric Jameson argues, 'the consumption of Hollywood film form is the apprenticeship to a specific culture, to an everyday life as a cultural practice: the practice of which commodified narratives are the aesthetic expression, so that the populations in question learn both at the same time' (2009: 443). As Jameson notes, the fact that apologists for US hegemony answer the claims that Hollywood breaks up 'old ways of life' and sets 'new ones [...] in place,' by claiming that 'these countries want that...,' implies that to desire US culture 'is in human nature; and further, that all history has been moving towards American culture as its apotheosis' (2009: 443).

quo as according to instrumental reason, or ‘operationalism’ as Merleau-Ponty terms it (PP: 135-138; 123). Now, the praxis of Ben Shahn and other significant Social Realist artists was certainly not uncoloured by the radical dislocation of Renaissance perspective since impressionism. Indeed, Greenberg himself admires Shahn to the extent that the figures in his paintings are placed before ‘flat [planes] uptilted sharply to [...] contradict the indication of deep space’ (CEC2: 173), and the paintings of other Social Realist artists are so stylistically diverse that in 1957 Shahn enumerated his fellow Social Realists Philip Evergood and Jack Levine in an attempt to claim that there were greater ‘variations in form, in the look of painting’ among the extant ‘avowedly figurative painters’ in the US than among the Abstract Expressionists (1957: 68). Nevertheless, the political force of these painters’ work whose negation on the part of the Abstract Expressionists the revisionists argue lead to the latter’s co-optation, is rooted in representing the lives of the oppressed (or, as was more often the case for Levine, oppressors) in discursively communicative terms from a third-person perspective. I will now show that, in the case of Shahn at least, the way in which this art was deployed by US imperialism seems to confirm the theoretical risks I have elucidated in reference to such aesthetic stratagems. Rather than indicting the dominant rationality which causes the suffering it portrays, Shahn’s work was presented as simply ‘certifying that [the proletariat] was beautiful humanity and noble nature,’ as Adorno contends realism dovetails with bourgeois ideology (AT: 230).

It is clear how the *ouvrieriste* dimensions of the work of a left-wing Regionalist such as Thomas Hart Benton might tend toward this dynamic. Despite Benton’s politics – which were reformist and liberal rather than radical, and in fact lead him to denounce Social Realist artists (Doss 1991: 115) – his paintings’ accordant focus upon the working class takes the mode of ‘a narrative style of upbeat content and dramatic form,’ as Erika Doss puts it (1991: 1). Thus, as Peter Wollen writes, Benton’s paintings often seem to celebrate ‘the process of production, the power of American capitalism, by representing it in action – heroic figures

working in symbiosis with powerful machines' (1993: 84).²³ Indeed, in 1933 Benton was taken to task for simply reproducing the status quo by John Kwait in the pages of the *New Masses*, a Marxist journal closely aligned with the Communist Party. Kwait asserted that '[t]he mere presence of such "social" elements in [Benton's painting] does not indicate any social viewpoint, since these elements are often treated [...] picturesquely without reference to a social meaning of the objects' (1973: 66). However, if we turn to the Shahn retrospective at the 1954 Venice Biennale, we can see that the work of an ostensibly more critical Social Realist also lent itself to such affirmation of the status quo, by way of the very elements which supposedly discursively condemned it.²⁴ Guilbaut contends that artists such as Shahn who 'wanted to continue, despite all pressures against it, an engaged painting, a realist work,' were convinced to 'drop their political stance of opposition in order to fit into a more central and less belligerent position' and after 1950 'treated in their pictures the plight of humanity rather than the plight of the working class.' (1990: 37). Yet, a few years after the Shapiros' essay was published, in 1981, Frances K. Pohl wrote an essay entitled 'An American in Venice,' in which she identifies precisely Shahn's treatment of the plight of the working class as crucial to its felicitousness for US imperialism. I will turn to the stratagems by which the US attempted to establish hegemony over Western Europe in the post-war era in Chapter 4. It suffices here, however, to note that Pohl shows that in 1954, there was a risk that many

²³ Moreover, For example, in a 1935 article in *Art Front* Stuart Davis claimed that Benton's 'gross caricatures' of African-Americans were similar to 'the body of propaganda which is constantly being utilised to disenfranchise the Negro politically, socially, and economically' (qtd. in Doss 1991: 118), and in a 1938 review of Benton's autobiography, Meyer Schapiro asserts that the 'exaggerated awkward energy' and 'lack of pathos' in Benton's painting is indicative of Benton's intolerance of 'effeminacy [...] in homosexuals,' which he 'cheaply [denounced] as a menace to [...] American culture' (ACC: 117).

²⁴ Also notable here is the fact that a Social Realist painting entitled *An American Tragedy* by Philip Evergood, which depicts the brutal quelling of a strike at a steel mill, was purchased by the millionaire investment banker Armand Erpf (Shapiro 1972: 3), a man who was likely as little inclined to preside over the dismantling of the economic system that served him so well as the trustees of MoMA, especially since he was 'reputed to be extremely right-wing' (Biddle 2001: 115). Evergood was a painter who in his own statements explicitly positions his art in (defensive) opposition to abstract art in terms of the 'sound ideology' by which he purports it might help to 'accomplish social betterment and change' (155-8), and *American Tragedy* certainly strives for this end in its depiction of 'injustice [done] to the working class [as] the result [...] of capitalist exploitation,' in the words of David Shapiro (1972: 3). However, one might surmise that Erpf's purchase of the painting was informed by the fact that he was wholeheartedly opposed to injustice done to the working class, while still fully in support of capitalist exploitation, as we might assume was also the case for many bourgeois clients who accounted for the majority of sales of Social Realist painting, as David Shapiro himself notes was the case (1972: 28).

people in Italy ‘had lost faith in the superiority of the American political system and way of life’ (1981: 86). Thus, deploying Shahn was a concerted effort in allaying a potential rise of communism by reassuring the Italian people that the rights of labour were enshrined in capitalist democracy. Pohl makes her case largely from two essays written by Alfred H. Barr Jr. and James Thrall Soby, both of whom were MoMA officials.²⁵ Barr’s essay was in the magazine *La Biennale*, and Soby’s was in the official Biennale catalogue and a smaller one published by MoMA. Pohl shows that both essays strive to emphasise how Shahn, and by extension the contemporaneous US administration, held the same values as working class Italians who may have been swayed by the Italian Communist Party.

To this end, Barr and Soby focus upon Shahn’s paintings of the people of Italy amidst post-war devastation, along with two series about injustices meted out to the working class in the 1920s US – one concerning the wrongful execution of the Italian-American immigrants and labour agitators Sacco and Vanzetti, a second concerning the trial of the wrongfully convicted labour leader Tom Mooney. However, Pohl shows that, while emphasizing Shahn’s sympathy with the poor and condemnation of the (past) flaws of US democracy, in his essay Soby explicitly stresses that Shahn did not question or doubt the basic tenets of capitalism, writing that Shahn’s ‘sympathies always have been with the oppressed, though he has vigorously repudiated the cure for their ills proposed by Communism’ (Soby, qtd. in Pohl 1981: 92). Rather than a challenge to the cause of their poverty, Shahn’s sympathy with the oppressed is represented as valorization: Soby writes that the Italian children in paintings such as *Liberation* appear ‘unquenchably imaginative [, exploring] the new ruins of ancient buildings,’ and Barr adduces a quote from Shahn in which the artist equates Sacco and Vanzetti to Christ, asserting that upon hearing of their execution in the late ‘20s he ‘realized

²⁵ We might note here that elsewhere both Barr and Soby seem to subordinate Social Realism in a way that supports the revisionist’s claims. For instance, in his introductory essay to the touring show of Abstract Expressionism of 1958-9 ‘The New American Painting,’ which will be discussed below, Barr makes sure to mention the fact that while many of the artists ‘had been naively attracted by Communism,’ they had since ‘grown disillusioned [...] with Socialist Realism’ (11). And, in an article in a 1951 issue of *Saturday Review*, Soby derides the fact that, for Benton, ‘the arbiter of taste in art [...] has been [...] the American public at large,’ which Doss adduces to reinforce the notion that ‘any art or artist geared toward the masses was viewed with suspicion in the post-war period’ (377).

[he] was living through another crucifixion. Here was something to paint!’ (Ibid: 91; 93). Furthermore, Pohl shows that reception of Shahn at the 1954 Biennale largely accorded to the account given by Barr and Soby, with a summary of European press reaction compiled by MoMA (which Pohl corroborates with evidence) stating that Shahn’s ‘understanding of poverty and tragedy and his sympathy with the oppressed struck an immediate responsive chord with the Europeans’ (qtd. in Pohl 1981: 95).

The notion that Abstract Expressionism lent itself to co-optation by US imperialism because it negated the political *Inhalt* of Social Realism is questionable, then, because political *Inhalt* is precisely what lent Social Realism to co-optation by US imperialism. Indeed, the impetus for such negation on the part of many of the Abstract Expressionists – their ‘horror of being easily understood’ as one among their number, William Baziotis, put it in 1949 (qtd. in Gibson, 1990: 196) – was in part rooted in convictions that aesthetic ‘realism’ was tantamount to reification. While Guilbaut and Clark both contend that the Abstract Expressionists ultimately failed in this effort, they each pithily acknowledge that the painters’ praxis often constituted an attempt to evade representations which simply served to reproduce the status quo: Clark writes that for the Abstract Expressionists ‘the “non-figurative” [happened] because the world no longer [fell] into an [...] order of images [...] not overlaid with lies’ and thus ‘no work of real concentration was possible without it being fired – superintended – by [...] some form of intransigence or difficulty in the object produced, some action against the codes and procedures by which the world was lent its usual likenesses’ (1999: 364), and Guilbaut claims that what united the Abstract Expressionists as an avant-garde was their ‘rejection of artistic options that seemed to them out of touch with the new post-war realities’ (1990: 37). He summarises the Abstract Expressionists’ attitude broadly as ‘to describe was to accept the unacceptable. It was to incorporate an object into an expressive system by means of a code that sapped all critical force and revolutionary significance’ (NY: 197). As David Anfam notes, in the case of the majority of the Abstract Expressionists this disavowal of representation should not be conceived as programmatic, since it was informed

by ‘the usual mixture of studio and bar talk, casual reading and sensitivity to the intellectual stimuli of the day’ (1990: 87). However, a number of the artists did elaborate the thinking behind their turn to a non-representational aesthetic, and generally it was founded in the notion that such an aesthetic had been forced by ‘the pressure of reality,’ as Robert Motherwell and Ad Reinhardt quote Wallace Stevens in their 1951 jointly-edited publication promoting American non-representational art entitled *Modern Artists in America* (MAIA: 40).²⁶ Rothko, for instance, asserts that ‘[t]he familiar identity of things has to be pulverised in order to destroy the finite associations with which society increasingly enshrouds every aspect of our environment’ (2006: 59). Still describes the ambition of his art as to evolve ‘an instrument of thought which would aid in cutting through all cultural opiates, past and present’ (qtd. in Sandler 1970: 150). Pollock famously claimed in an interview that ‘new needs call for new techniques,’ and thus the ‘forms of the Renaissance’ did not suffice to ‘express the present age of the airplane, the atom bomb, and the radio’ (NY: 246, n5). And Norman Lewis frames as the ‘most effective blow against stereotype and the most irrefutable proof of the artificiality of stereotype in general,’ his choice of an abstract aesthetic over the figurative modes which were expected of him as an African-American artist, namely “‘African Idiom,” “Negro Idiom,” or “Social Painting”” (2005: 134). Particularly relevant here, however, considering Guilbaut’s reference to Newman’s 1943 catalogue essay as emblematic of the Abstract Expressionists’ putative depoliticisation accordant with the rejection of Social Realism, is an unpublished essay by Newman drafted in 1942, in which he argues that all variants of American Scene painting are ‘founded on the bad politics of chauvinism’ (SWI: 23). This essay finds parallels with Adorno’s critique of realism as correlating with reified consciousness irrespective of its ostensible politics, in so far as ‘conformism, respect for a petrified facade of opinion and society, and resistance to impulses

²⁶ In addition to the editors, the Abstract Expressionist artists included were Gorky, Hofmann, Rollin Crampton, Weldon Kees, Mark Tobey, George McNeil, Pollock, Newman, Lewis, Rothko, Ralph Rosenborg, Tomlin, Fritz Butlman, James Brooks, Gottlieb, Baziotes, Still, Pousette-Dart, Sterne, de Kooning, Kline, Buffie Johnson, Theodoros Stamos, Balcomb Greene, Richard Diebenkorn, Philip Guston, James B. Dixon, Martha Hoskins, Mary Callery, Ibram Lassaw, Herbert Ferber, David Smith and David Hare.

that disturb its order or evoke inner elements of the unconscious that cannot be admitted' are inherent to its form (2007b: 179). As Adorno contends that 'hostility to anything alien or alienating can accommodate itself much more easily to [...] realism of any provenance, even if it proclaims itself critical or socialist' (Ibid), for Newman the predilection for 'home and homey' subject matter that 'good old straight-standing, straight-shooting, clean American folks [...] can understand' in American Scene painting, was counterpart to thinking which railed against modernism as 'foreign, degenerate [...] art appealing to [...] perverts' and created by 'a filthy, penny-pinching [...] drunken lot of foreigners' and a 'bunch of New York Ellis Islanders who aren't even fifty percent American, most of them communist' (SWI: 24).

As I noted above in reference to the work of Benton, to claim that Regionalism befitted an ossified mindset in this way was commonplace among left-wing artists and critics. However, Newman also summarily dismisses what he refers to as the 'leftist "revolt"' of Social Realism's endeavours 'to infuse American Scene painting with 'the introduction of class struggle' as doing nothing to subvert the basic chauvinism of the American Scene's presuppositions (SWI: 26). For Newman, while Socialist Realist art incorporates 'the Pittsburgh smelter alongside the Kansas farmer' into paintings of the American Scene, it nevertheless concurs with 'the fundamental [...] premise of painting America' (Ibid). We might here interpret Newman as indicting Social Realism for precisely the reason why Shahn's art could be assimilated as propaganda for capitalist democracy: the working class is represented, and yet the fundamental premises by which its conditions are perpetuated are not thrown into question. To draw another parallel with Adorno, in his discussion of the classical aesthetic category of the ugly, which in classical art's portrayal of subaltern figures is 'that element that opposes the work's ruling law of form [yet is] integrated by that formal law and thereby confirms it,' Adorno claims that modernist art 'must take up the cause of what is proscribed as ugly, though no longer in order to integrate or mitigate it or to reconcile it with its own existence' – as Newman seems to imply is the case with Social Realism – but rather to 'denounce the world that creates and reproduces the ugly in its own image' (AT: 49). In

Chapter 9, I will contend that Newman's account of Abstract Expressionism as 'metaphysical' has similar implications. However, it might be objected that Newman in 1942 is not calling for art which denounces the world in this way. Instead, he accuses American Scene painting's parochialism of impeding the development of an art which might befit the 'new political outlook' signalled by the recent intervention of the US into WWII, which he claimed boded well for the fomentation of a 'new philosophy of American politics and world society' (SWI: 28). Nevertheless, this projected society is misunderstood if it is elided with the 'apolitical' consensus which would emerge to legitimate the US capitalist expansion of the post-war era. As I acknowledged above, Newman was an anarchist, and David Craven thus stresses that any such readings of Newman's statements as active capitulations to imperialism miss the fact of Newman's opposition to nation-states whatsoever (ACC: 47). Furthermore, Craven demonstrates that the American society which Newman projects was to be inclusive of all inhabitants of the continental landmass and 'common hemispheric heritage' of the Americas, which Craven notes was an 'uncommonly progressive attitude' to hold at the time (Ibid).²⁷ Moreover, in the post-war era, Newman came to frame his praxis as conditioned by the 'terror' of scientific rationalism's nadir in Hiroshima, whose perpetration by 'an American boy' he notes (SWI: 169). Thus, unlike consciousnesses which after WWII Adorno writes 'clung to allegedly primordial phenomena [...] in the illusion of being able to begin anew without the transformation of society' (AT: 293), Newman maintained that the terror to which his work reacted was 'the product of civilisation,' and famously understood his praxis as prefiguring 'the end of all state capitalism and totalitarianism' (SWI: 169; 251).

²⁷ To reinforce this point, Craven cites how, when in 1943/4, when Newman enumerated artists who provided 'hope for American Art,' among them were Rufino Tamayo of Mexico and Roberto Matta of Chile, an attitude which, incidentally, it appears was also held by a young Clement Greenberg, who in a letter to Harold Lazarus describes the Mexican Diego Rivera, in all capitals, as 'THE FIRST GREAT NORTH AMERICAN ARTIST,' affirming that he is not only superior to his fellow American artists, but also Matisse, Picasso, and Braque (2000: 57-60). Here, it might also be noted that, while I can find very few references to Rivera in Greenberg's writing (although none derogatory), his prior passion for the artist surely further implies that Greenberg would have paid attention to Rivera's cosigned 'Towards a Free Revolutionary Art.'

Thus, while I showed above that Guilbaut adduces a 1943 catalogue essay by Newman to frame his affirmation of modernism as a depoliticisation of Trotsky's art theory, we might argue that if Newman's rejection of realist aesthetics was a development of Trotskyism, it was akin to the one made by Greenberg in 'Kitsch' as delineated in the previous chapter. That is, in so far as Trotsky's rejection of administered realism under Stalin or Hitler, and investment of political significance in art which follows its 'own laws,' becomes the rejection of reified realism *tout court*, and the investment of political significance in art which is ostensibly autotelic. In the next chapter, I will return to Greenberg's account, in order to show how his resultant championing of Abstract Expressionism *did* ostensibly become depoliticised. I will then in Chapter 4 show how, consequently, Greenberg's positioning of Abstract Expressionism at the forefront of the European modernist lineage to which he previously attributed political subversion, might convincingly be shown to have been a determining factor in Abstract Expressionism's deployment by US imperialism. However, I will then proceed to argue from Chapter 5 onwards that, nevertheless, understanding the movement in these very terms indicates how Abstract Expressionism, as Adorno writes of autonomous art, 'decries domination [...] and stands witness for what domination represses and disavows' by 'excluding through its language of form that remainder of affirmation maintained by social realism' (AT: 49).

Chapter Three

Determinate Negation Depoliticised

In a letter to Harold Lazarus written when he was nineteen, Greenberg proclaims that ‘art is for man’s sake not for art’s sake’ (2000: 2). This stands in stark contrast to his attitude sixty-six years later, when he refutes an interviewer’s observation that ‘in [his] early writing [he gave] art a critical function’ (2003: 224). He claims that this had never been the case, as it had always been his conviction that ‘Art is there for its own sake,’ and decisively asserts that ‘*l’art pour l’art*’ is his ‘theory’ (Ibid). Certainly, this did increasingly come to be Greenberg’s ostensible attitude. However, as I elaborated in Chapter 1, in ‘Kitsch,’ the essay in which he formulates the justification for this theory, he follows Trotsky in positing that art which progresses as according to inner-aesthetic laws is a threat to capitalism’s existence. Thus, we might say that for the Greenberg of ‘Kitsch,’ so long as it corrodes the society under whose aegis it is made possible, art-for-art’s sake *is* for humanity’s sake. Nevertheless, in ‘Kitsch,’ Greenberg does make clear that avant-garde art is not ‘inherently [...] more critical’ than kitsch, and the ill-defined threat he claims it poses to capitalism is premised more on the latter’s decline than avant-garde art’s corrosiveness (CEC1: 20). Indeed, by 1946, when the US economy was booming, while avant-garde art and socialism are still aligned for Greenberg, it is solely in terms of how avant-garde art needs socialism because the only way for it to be possible for the majority of people to have the requisite ‘security, leisure, and comfort indispensable to the cultivation of taste’ would be under socialism (CEC2: 64).²⁸ He

²⁸ The desire for such security leisure and comfort on the part of the lower middle-class Greenberg was likely the main impetus behind his commitment to socialism. A consistent motif in Greenberg’s youthful letters to Harold Lazarus is how the exigencies of wage labour inhibit his ability to engage in cultural pursuits, and conversely the notion that under socialism the latter would occupy all of his time. To take some examples: ‘I don’t think that I’ll ever study law nor will I ever be a successful business man. My heart’s not in anything but enjoying myself and I can’t get enthusiastic about things that haven’t any pleasure in them [...] Civilisation becomes so far away between 9 and 5 [...] There’s nothing as shabby and mean as Beauty after working hours. [Upon having taken a job as a travelling necktie salesman he has] surrendered these days’ freedom [...] working is rotten, and for me who can outrotten pretty rotten things, compulsion for the sake of money is, of all, the rottenest [...] I take my job too seriously. The seriousness wears me out. I don’t even read on the subway anymore [...] Working for a living means not living [...] Only from the suburbs can you discover the agonies of the metropolis. It’s almost socialism,

asserts that while he ‘may be a Socialist [...] a work of art has its own ends, which it includes in itself and which have nothing to do with the fate of society’ (CEC2: 66). The notion that socialism needs avant-garde art because the latter was somehow corrosive to capitalism falls from view, and eventually the recourse to politics in his writing on art diminishes almost completely. Indeed, in 1992 Greenberg himself claims that after the war his ‘Marxism began to get diluted, then it faded and had nothing to do with art’ (Burstow 1994: 33).

The upshot of this ostensible dissociation of avant-garde art from politics on the part of Greenberg is often taken to be the hypostatisation the former as an end in-itself, and dismissal of the ways in which it is mediated and conditioned by the latter, an assessment which the philosopher Graham Harman has recently surmised is at the root of extant hostility towards Greenberg.²⁹ This is not strictly the case. As is evident from a 1969 interview, Greenberg always conceded that ‘sociological and other extra-artistic reasons’ informed the development of art (CEC4: 304). However, whereas we might read ‘Kitsch’ as an attempt to figure art-for-art’s sake as ultimately in the interests of humanity, Greenberg came to explicitly disavow any such characterisation. As he claims in the 1969 interview:

There are, of course, more important things than art: life itself, what actually happens to you. This may sound silly, but I have to say it, given what I’ve heard art-silly people say all my life: I say that if you have to choose between life and happiness or art, remember always to choose life and happiness. [...] Art shouldn’t be overrated. It started to be in the latter 18th century, and definitely was in the 19th. The Germans started the business of asserting the worth of a society by the quality of art it produced. But the quality of art in a society does not necessarily – or maybe seldom – reflect the well-being enjoyed by most of its members. And well-being comes first.

except that the room gets a little too cold, but I’m willing to stand it. Thirty bucks a month [...] About my review. Under socialism I could write it the way you want, which now hardly anyone would understand.’ (2000: 16; 27; 28; 84; 156; 170; 180; 196). Indeed, in an interview from the year he died, 1994, by which time he was asserting that ‘the avant-garde and so forth is unpolitical for the most part,’ he concedes that it originally appealed to him as ‘dissent from the bourgeois order [of] his father’s world’ (2003: 238-9).

²⁹ Harman chalks up the opposition he has faced when presenting papers about Greenberg to art-world audiences to critics simply ‘still resentful of Greenberg’s long-ago Modernist stranglehold on criticism’ which, for Harman, seals artworks ‘off from their socio-political surroundings’ (2013: 100; 2014: 251).

The weal and woe of human beings come first. I deplore the tendency to over-value art. (CEC4: 314)

Here, then, Greenberg seems to be disclaiming any meaningful connection between art and the needs of humanity. Despite the fact that he had dedicated more attention to it than anything else over the preceding thirty years, it seems as if for Greenberg art is a circumscribed sphere of comparative irrelevance, separate from the needs of humanity, even if contiguous with and affected by society.

Indeed, surveying Greenberg's criticism over the preceding decades, contemporaneous to Abstract Expressionism's co-optation by US imperialism, while, as we will see in Chapter 7 he occasionally suggests art serves as a relief from the exigencies of modern life, it becomes increasingly easy to understand Greenberg's championing of Abstract Expressionism in this way. Nevertheless, as Caroline A. Jones notes, Greenberg's 'formerly Marxist dialectical mode' informed his faith in 'the fruitfulness of [determinate] *negation*' (EA: 82). While he no longer claimed that the dynamic of determinate negation furthered culture in a manner corrosive to capitalism, it anchored his identification of Abstract Expressionism as the pre-eminent US art movement in the 40's through the 50's. In the Abstract Expressionists, he found a group of artists whose radicalism was definitively not an abstract negation of prior styles. As the authors of *Art Since 1900* note, 'by the early forties, [the Abstract Expressionists had] accumulated a better first-hand knowledge of their immediate European predecessors than any other contemporary artists (and certainly better than anyone in Europe)' (2007: 349), and rather than emulate these predecessors they – as Rothko described his praxis – quarrelled with them as 'one quarrels with his father and mother, recognising the inevitability and function of [one's] roots, but insistent upon [one's] dissension (qtd. in Leja 1993: 32).³⁰ Irrespective of how the artists themselves characterised the result of this

³⁰ As evidence for their claim the authors of *Art Since 1900* enumerate 'the opening in New York of collector A. E. Gallatin's Museum of Living Art in 1926, that of the Museum of Modern Art in 1929, and that of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (then called the Museum of Non-Objective Painting) in 1939,' 'the multiple touring exhibitions of the collection (selected by Marcel Duchamp) of Katherine Dreier's Societe Anonyme in the twenties and thirties, and, last but not least, the militant activity of Peggy Guggenheim at

dynamic, aesthetically it manifested itself in an eschewal of the cultivation of illusory spaces. Greenberg thus claimed that the artists fulfilled the (now depoliticised) role of the avant-garde which he had projected in 'Kitsch' and 'Laocoon,' to the extent that what they dissented from was that which in prior painting had impeded apprehension of artworks *qua* artworks. He contended that the Abstract Expressionists were, as he wrote of Baziotes in 1944, 'deflected by nothing extraneous to painting' (CEC1: 240). This is evident in Greenberg's reviews of these artists' shows throughout the late '40s and into the '50s, particularly a 1948 review of an Arshile Gorky exhibition in which he claims that Gorky displays 'the processes of painting for their own sake,' surpassing his most proximate European antecedent, Miró, by 'identifying his background more closely with the picture's surface, the immediate, non-fictive plane on which the spots are placed' (CEC2: 219-20). And in his 1955 essay "'American-Type" Painting,' Greenberg provides a synthetic elucidation of the importance of this determinate negation to the Abstract Expressionists' praxis. From the outset of the piece, Greenberg affirms that the 'dismantling' of convention by which he contends the 'vitality of art' is maintained 'has its own continuity and tradition,' and it is necessary to have digested 'the major art of the preceding period, or periods' to

her "Art of This Century gallery, again in New York, from 1942 on' (2007: 349). Indeed, Annie Cohen Solal claims that it was not until Pollock visited the September 1939 exhibition *Picasso: 40 Years of His Art* at MoMA that he was 'dragged into the fully formed Picasso engine' (2007: 212). Recently, one of the authors of *Art Since 1900*, Rosalind Krauss, has dedicated a whole book, *Willem de Kooning nonstop* (2016), to the way in which De Kooning's work engages with questions of foreshortening and perspective inherited from the European tradition while negotiating the specificities of its medium, mainly in reference to the *Women* paintings, whose 'brilliance and success' Greenberg attributes to De Kooning continuing 'Cubism without repeating it' in these paintings (CEC3: 222), despite both Krauss and Clark claiming that Greenberg was dismissive of these works (Krauss, 2015: 40; Clark, 1999: 393). Certainly, there were those among the Abstract Expressionists who vociferously denied the notion that their work could be characterised in this way, most notably Still, who famously asserted that he had such 'contempt for the intelligence of' Greenberg that the latter was to be 'categorically rejected' (qtd. in Harris 2005: 8), and Newman, who proclaimed that 'the respectability modern art [enjoyed] with museum directors and professional art lovers' was due to the 'shrewd popularization of the big lie, that modern art isn't modern,' but instead heir to a tradition of easel painting (Newman qtd. Rosenberg, 1979: 27). However, in the latter's converse claim that 'we' were 'beginning from scratch,' Rosenberg notes that by 'we' Newman seems to be referring not only to his fellow Abstract Expressionists, but to 'the wide range of Modernist painters, from Cézanne and Matisse with their still lifes and nudes, to Picasso, Braque, and Gris with their Cubist musicians' (ibid: 27-8). That is to say, as John Golding notes, when Newman 'came to trace his line down the empty canvas with a view to creating a new "tabula rasa" for art, he did so with the advantage of insights gained from having cast his eye over three decades of highly sophisticated abstract art' (187), and similarly Still claimed he had 'worked his way through the Bauhaus, Dada, Surrealism and Cubism' before alighting upon the style for which he became known (Golding 2000: 170).

produce such art (CEC3: 217-8). Upon establishing how the Abstract Expressionists were particularly well placed in this respect in the late '30s – having ‘digested Klee and Miró [...] ten years before either [...] became a serious influence in Paris’ and bearing one among their ranks, Hans Hofmann, who was keeping the example of Matisse alive in New York when painters abroad were failing to recognise him (CEC3: 218)³¹ – Greenberg elaborates that they developed its trajectory by freeing themselves from Picasso’s ‘strictly demarcated illusion of shallow depth’ and ‘faired, more or less simple lines and curves’ towards ‘new possibilities of expression for abstract and quasi-abstract painting’ which Greenberg asserts relied less and less upon extra-aesthetic, and more upon medium-specific, elements (CEC3: 219-220). Accordingly, Greenberg writes that, for instance, Pollock rejects a ‘late cubist manner’ in order to achieve a denser and more immediate impact which entailed negotiation of ‘an emphatic physical surface’ (CEC3: 225); Newman and Rothko ‘suppress value contrasts’ resulting in ‘the more emphatic flatness of their paintings’ (CEC3: 232); and Still makes ‘contours [...] less conspicuous, and therefore less dangerous to the “integrity” of the flat surface’ (ibid: 233). It was due to this determinate negation that, for Greenberg, Abstract Expressionism transcended the ‘heightening or idiosyncratic twisting of ideas imported from Europe,’ of which Greenberg accused American painters who, prior to the emergence of the Abstract Expressionists, ‘accomplished more than a little’ and yet at most only ‘extended and refined various phases of French impressionism without [...] driving them towards the future’

³¹ Here, it is interesting to note that of all the Abstract Expressionists aside from Barnett Newman (whose rhetorical disclamation of influences can only be considered determinate negation, as I observed in the above footnote), Hofmann, as far as I can discern, is the only artist to distinguish ‘the young French painters and the young American painters’ on the basis of the former approaching ‘things on the basis of cultural heritage,’ and the latter approaching ‘things without basis,’ despite educating so many of the latter in precisely that basis (MAIA: 12). Indeed, Hofmann is also the only Abstract Expressionist whose statements ever seem to align ideologically with the triumphalism of US imperialism. He, for example, claims that ‘it is the privilege of a democracy like ours that it expects the artist to be, through his art the personification of its fundamental principles in being the highest example of spiritual freedom in his performance of unconditioned, unrestricted creativeness’ (qtd. in Seitz 1983: 111) and ‘when America adds a developed culture to its economic richness it will be one of the happiest countries in the world. Providing leadership by teachers and support of developing artists is a national duty, an insurance of spiritual solidarity. What we do for art, we do for ourselves and for our children and the future’ (1967: 58). Nevertheless, I will take recourse to both his accounts of his praxis and critical accounts of his work throughout this thesis in making the case that the experience of Abstract Expressionism contradicts such complacency with the status quo.

(CEC2: 160-1).³² In 1944, Greenberg was already claiming that ‘the future of American painting depends on what [Motherwell], Baziotes, Pollock, and only comparatively few others do from now on,’ (CEC1: 241). However, by the aforementioned 1948 Gorky review he was asserting that Gorky (who we can assume was one of the ‘others’ referred to in the above quote), was ‘among the very few contemporary American painters whose work is of *more than* national importance’ (CEC2: 219, my italics). And in 1949 Greenberg decisively identified an ‘American trend in contemporary art [...] that promises to become an original contribution to the mainstream and not merely a local inflection of something developed abroad’; hazarded that this trend, in which he enumerated Gorky, Pollock, de Kooning, Smith, Gottlieb and Motherwell, was ‘actually ahead of the French artists who are their contemporaries in age’; and proclaimed that Pollock was ‘one of the major painters of our time’ (CEC2: 287; 286).

Guilbaut implies that the artists shared and cultivated this sense that Abstract Expressionism was in a position of international pre-eminence (NY: 177). This is broadly demonstrably untrue.³³ Furthermore, on Greenberg’s account this pre-eminence *depended* on the artists not

³² In this category of artists Greenberg enumerates Washington Allston, Thomas Cole, Winslow Homer, Thomas Eakins, Albert Pinkham Ryder, Ralph Albert Blakelock, Robert Newman and James McNeill Whistler in the nineteenth century, and John Sloan, George Bellows, William Glackens, Maurice Prendergast, Arnold Friedman and John Marin (CEC2: 160-1). In the case of the latter two, in keeping with the high opinion he maintained for both throughout his criticism, he qualifies this judgement, stating that they are ‘perhaps’ exceptions (CEC2: 161)

³³ This is clear even in a quote from Adolph Gottlieb to which Guilbaut refers in order to prove that notions that American art was the European tradition’s logical culmination were prevalent in post-war New York, shared by artists and critics alike. Guilbaut cites Gottlieb’s claim that the French heritage which lends French painters ‘the benefits of tradition [and therefore allow them to] produce a certain type of painting’ is shared by Americans ‘just as much’; that ‘it is just as difficult for an American as for a Frenchman’ to deviate from this tradition, and thus if American artists do so ‘it is out of knowledge, not innocence.’ (MAIA: 12). However, Gottlieb here does not affirm the superiority of US artists. His attitude is in no way triumphal in terms of America’s role in the European tradition. Far from posing Abstract Expressionism as unequivocally the most advanced art of this Modernist lineage, Gottlieb here argues that Americans might participate in this tradition *just as much*. Gottlieb is positing no superiority, and is instead attempting to counter patronising attitudes towards American art which would dismiss it as de facto naive, conceiving any idiosyncratic developments in its style not as the artists’ response to tradition, but product of their obliviousness of it. This is not to say that the Abstract Expressionists did not consider themselves as pioneering; indeed, to remain with Gottlieb, in a 1973 he interview recalls how they felt ‘that they were in a vanguard and in the front line’ (qtd. in Craven, 49). However, not only did Gottlieb make this comment bemoaning the lack of (political) rebellion amongst then-contemporary young artists, whom he accused of being ‘young Republicans,’ there is ample first-hand anecdotal evidence to suggest that the majority of them did not feel this vanguard to be peculiarly American, as, for instance, Dore Ashton has argued. She writes that whenever there emerged any kind of acclaim linking their art to its

contriving to create the next instantiation of the modernist lineage by foregrounding painting's medium-specificity. As he puts it in a 1978 postscript to 'Modernist Painting' (1960), possibly his most schematic account of modernism's medium-specificity, despite identifying medium-specificity with quality, for Greenberg 'flatness and the inclosing of flatness' are not to be understood as 'criteria of aesthetic quality in pictorial art' in the sense that the further a work advances the self-definition of art, the better the work is bound to be' (CEC4: 94). For Greenberg it was crucial that the artists 'did not set out to be "advanced"'; they set out to paint good pictures, and they "advanced" in pursuit of qualities analogous to those they admire in the art of the past' (CEC3: 218). Indeed, when minimalism emerged in the late '50s and '60s and artists began to intentionally illustrate the ontological limits of the medium, Greenberg was dismissive of their efforts. As Thierry de Duve notes, when faced with such art, which 'so conveniently illustrated' his teleology, Greenberg did not give it his 'stamp of approval,' because these artists took the pursuit of medium-specificity to be 'prescriptive, even normative' (1996a: 204).³⁴ Below, the notion that, rather than illustrative of its medium-specificity, what Greenberg is indicating when he claims that the Abstract Expressionists' praxis was medium-specific, is the fact that it was developed in immanent reciprocity with its materials, will become central to my thesis. However, suffice it here to acknowledge that, by the 1950s, Greenberg was claiming that the Abstract Expressionists were at the forefront of European art on that art's own terms, and their artworks' medium-specificity was central to this supremacy.

nation of origin 'they winced' (2007: 24). They did so, Ashton recounts, whether this acclaim was Irving Sandler's book *The Triumph of American Painting*; Greenberg's phrase "American-type Painting"; or just generally 'critics [...] racking up the wins on the international front, going so far sometimes to make scorecards in which sacred figures such as Picasso and Miró and Matisse were demoted in favour of Pollock, De Kooning, and Kline' (ibid). Thus, as Ashton asserts, 'the triumphalism associated with the post-war florescence of artistic activity [...] did not derive from artists' (2007: 25)

³⁴ The minimalists were avowedly concerned with medium specificity, as is evident from the statement written by one of them, Carl Andre, on the work of another, Frank Stella, in a 1959 catalogue for a group show in which the latter was showing. Andre writes that Stella is interested 'in the necessities of painting' (qtd. in de Duve, 1996a: 200). Thus, he affirms that 'Stella's painting is not symbolic' and instead, the stripes on Stella's canvases are 'the paths of brush on canvas' which 'lead only to painting' (Ibid: 200-1). However, to attempt to evade symbolism in this way is to invite interpretation as 'illustrations, ideas about art rather than works of art in themselves,' as Jed Perl has recently written of Stella (2016: 10).

Indeed, as Caroline A. Jones notes, Greenberg shores up this position with selective ‘historical parameters’ which are ‘avowedly Western,’ generally dismissing the Abstract Expressionists’ relationship to ‘art of the past’ when it comes to the demonstrably manifest influence upon the artists of ‘the influx of abstract images, systems, and shapes from *non-European sources*’ (EA: 107).³⁵ When Greenberg does concede that the Abstract Expressionists’ art was informed by non-Western influences, he tends to downplay either the significance of the influence, or the significance of the art in question. In terms of the former, in a review of a Gottlieb show he acknowledges that the artist is informed by Native American art, but for Greenberg this is simply a fortuitous tributary serving ‘to stimulate ambitious and serious painting’ (CEC2: 189). In terms of the latter, upon noting that Mark Tobey is ‘under the influence of Oriental art,’ he asserts that the painter has ‘turned out to be so narrow as to cease even being interesting’ (CEC2: 165-6). Yet Tobey is not judged in this way due to any putative saturation of his art in non-Western influence, but contrarily since his art is too parochial, too ‘differentiatedly American’ (Ibid). How Greenberg comes to the conclusion that a Western artist ‘under the influence’ of Eastern culture has created work which is at fault due to its autochthony, can be illuminated if we turn to Greenberg’s 1948 essay entitled ‘The Necessity of the Old Masters.’ In this essay he argues that an easel painter cannot draw from a non-Western culture’s artistic tradition in a way which fundamentally affects their art:³⁶

Abstract art is still western European art; one still – even if only barely – paints easel pictures; one does not decorate Haida cloths or make sand drawings. An artist working in New York or Paris still cannot introduce Oriental, archaic, or barbaric elements into his work without modifying them radically to fit the terms of easel painting as established by a tradition that goes back to the Middle ages and is not yet

³⁵ For accounts of non-Western influences on the Abstract Expressionists, see Fred Rushing’s ‘Ritual and Myth: Native American Culture and Abstract Expressionism’ (1986), and Chapter 4 in David Craven’s *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique* (1999).

³⁶ This article was albeit written in reaction to modern painters’ indifference towards a show in New York of Old Masters from the Kaiser Friederich Museum.

dead. The greater the artist's awareness of those terms, the greater is his power of self-criticism [...] Modern art has not in actual practice repudiated [the past art of our civilisation] as much as many of us think. It is still necessary to be very much aware of it, if only to overcome it. And in so far as we still paint easel pictures to hang on walls, we still have more in common with that past, down at bottom, than with the art of Africa or the South Seas (CEC2: 250).

Below, I will recast Greenberg's characterisation of the easel picture in terms of its detachment from ritualistic or utilitarian function as a commodity and consequent dialectical resistance to the logic of exchange. Suffice it here, however, to note that these implications were scarcely explicated by Greenberg, and thus his convictions, when hypostasised, served to reinforce his positioning of Abstract Expressionism as the triumphal telos of a narrowly European avant-garde tradition. In this sense, then, as Philip Fisher has argued, Greenberg seems to cultivate a selective linearity which purports to exhaust the significance of artworks, and thus defines a given Abstract Expressionist painting as coterminous with 'its place in the sequence of art history which is itself seen as an explanation' (1991: 170). Tom Huhn counters Fisher by claiming that, while Fisher is correct as to the restrictive sequential linearity of Greenberg's account of art, 'it is not thereby any more determinative of what is taken to be past than other constructions of history' (2000: 13). However, in the next chapter I will elaborate how Greenberg's criticism served the deployment of Abstract Expressionism in efforts of US imperialism precisely *because*, if hypostasised, the modernist lineage towards medium-specificity by which he established the style's putative pre-eminence, mirrors the determinativeness of US imperialism's construction of history. That is to say, one of the major reasons why Abstract Expressionism was adopted by US imperialism was because the notion that it represented the telos of European Modernism provided artistic corroboration for the United States' claim as to its society's superiority. Similarly to the way in which Shahn's work was deployed to convince working class Europeans that the United States shared their values, Abstract Expressionism was instrumentalised in efforts to convince the middle classes

of Europe that the United States shared and had superseded their artistic culture on its own terms. Above, I noted that in 1969 Greenberg contrasted himself to German philosophers of the late 18th and 19th century when stressing that he posited no correlation between the worth of a society and the quality of its art, and Hegel surely numbers among these philosophers.³⁷ Yet, in the next chapter I will show that, in terms of how Greenberg's criticism informed the adoption of Abstract Expressionism by the US establishment, we might draw a comparison between Greenberg's genealogy of modernism and Hegel's apologism for the status quo, at least on Adorno's account. For Adorno, Hegel justifies or vindicates the point of view of historical victors by hypostasising dominant rationality independent of its supposed *terminus ad quem* in human beings, to whom its logic of equivalence actually does detriment (2006: 41-2; ND: 10-11). Analogously, while the ultimate *terminus ad quem* of the avant-garde's determinate negation in 'Kitsch' is the dissolution of capitalism, Greenberg's account of such determinate negation in Abstract Expressionism, ostensibly shorn of any relation to humanity's needs, served to justify the purported superiority and procrustean impositions of the United States' capitalist democracy, which had emerged as the decided victor of WWII. However, upon showing how this was the case, I will proceed from Chapter 5 to elaborate how Greenberg's account of this determinate negation has a rational kernel which attests to the way in which the experience of Abstract Expressionism undermines the capitalist triumphalism in the name of which it was deployed.

³⁷ Whereas, as we saw above, Greenberg ostensibly claims that art is irrelevant to the weal and woe of human beings, for Hegel the role of art is precisely to bring an object before consciousness in which humanity recognises in sensuous form 'the deepest interests of humanity, and the most comprehensive truths of the mind' (2004: 9). Below, this dichotomy between Greenberg and Hegel will be called into question, in so far as central to the second half of my thesis will be the notion that what Greenberg finds compelling in Abstract Expressionism registers precisely the unmet needs of humanity. However, it is *prima facie* the case in much of Greenberg's writing that, as Nicholas Calas notes, while we might trace back to Hegel the Greenbergian notion of art as 'conscious of its own self, that is, of its spirit,' for Greenberg, rather than manifesting the experience and historical development of human self-consciousness, this self-consciousness is figured inner-aesthetically (qtd. in Foster 1975: 23). This leads the Hegel scholar Stephen Houlgate to belittle both Abstract Expressionism and Greenberg's account of it, on the basis that the movement is founded on the assumption 'that what is distinctive about painting is the material process of creating visual effects on an openly two-dimensional surface, rather than the process of rendering human subjectivity concretely visible through the illusion of three-dimensional space' (2000: 74).

Chapter Four

Extremely Impure Ends

Many of the revisionist accounts work from the demonstrable premise that in the post-war period Abstract Expressionism was exhibited abroad by the United States Information Agency (USIA) and the International Council at the MoMA (IC), because there was evident discrepancy between the United States' manifest economic and military might, and its perceived cultural sophistication. The US had consolidated the former by the end of WWII, emerging with its territory untouched by war, but having enjoyed a booming stimulus from wartime production, its GNP doubling between 1938 and 1945. Accordingly, its ruling bourgeoisie – and specifically the then-recently dominant expansionist ‘business liberals’³⁸ – set about organising the world so as to put into effect the resultant ‘prospect of planetary power,’ as Perry Anderson puts it (2013: 5). In their account of post-war American foreign policy, Joyce and Gabriel Kolko succinctly summarise the US objectives in this respect:

Essentially, the United States' aim was to restructure the world so that American business could trade, operate, and profit without restrictions everywhere. On this there was absolute unanimity among the American leaders, and it was around this core that they elaborated their politics and programs [...] American business could operate only in a world composed of politically reliable and stable capitalist nations, and with free access to essential raw materials. Such a universal order precluded the Left from power and necessitated conservative, and ultimately subservient, political control throughout the globe. (1972: 2)

Western Europe was crucial to these efforts, not least as a bulwark against the possible Westward expansion of the Soviet Union, whose very existence as ‘not just an alternative

³⁸ Contra Noam Chomsky, who he quotes as claiming that the Cold War was a ‘marvellous device’ for ‘mobilising the domestic population in support of the aggressive and interventionist policies of America’s ruling class,’ in his essay ‘Footnote One: The Idea of the Cold War’ (1993), Fred Orton delineates how in this effort, at least initially, the US ruling class was not so homogenous, and those who set out to reconstruct the world so that US business ‘could operate and profit without restriction wherever it needed to’ were specifically the East Coast ‘business liberals’ dedicated to international investment and trade, as opposed to the isolationist “old guard” (1993: 179-183).

form but a negation of capitalism, intending nothing less than its overthrow across the planet,' could of course have been no more inimical to the aims of US imperialism (Anderson 2013: 18). To the end of ensuring Western Europe's co-operation, in 1948 the US government established an economic aid program, the Marshall Plan, which allocated 13 billion dollars to governments for recovery. This was necessary to fend off threats to capitalism since a Western European economic collapse risked turning the region towards socialism. It was also imperative if Europe was to provide an expanded marketplace to absorb US overproduction, and thus allow the US to maintain wartime levels of production and avoid stagnation. As Walter Laferber reports, in 1945 'leading US business groups warned that if Americans hoped to avoid a terrible post-war depression, they had to double their merchandise exports to the then-unbelievable figure of \$10 billion' (1994: 479). However, by 1947 Europe had a vast trade deficit with the United States. Thus, as Thomas J. McCormick notes, the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA), founded to implement the Marshall Plan, 'often blocked efforts to use [funds] for social welfare purposes it viewed as inflationary and therefore counter to the goal of cost efficiency,' forcing left-of-centre governments in Great Britain, France and Italy to 'reduce foreign debts, balance budgets, and keep a lid on wages – that is, to deflate as a means of making Europe price-competitive and able to reduce its dollar trading deficit' (1989: 78). Accordingly, as the Kolkos note, despite the Marshall Plan's ostensible largesse, the Western European nations 'treated the United States' concept of internationalism with profound suspicion' (1972: 329). The revisionist historians of Abstract Expressionism show that this suspicion was only compounded by the aforementioned widespread assumptions as to the United States' cultural philistinism, and the exhibitions sent abroad by the United States Information Agency and the International Council at the MoMA were concerted efforts to change these views.

To take France as an example, Guilbaut cites the American ambassador in Paris, Jefferson Caffery, as denoting France as the 'keystone of the European reconstruction' (1990: 38-39), and in 1947 the American Congress allotted \$150 million in interim aid to the country.

However, the prominent socialist and communist constituencies in France's coalition governments were heavily critical of the Marshall Plan, and the French people retained disdain for American culture. The French considered those 'to whom they [owed] their freedom, and to whom they [needed to] look for military protection as well as for economic recovery [...] intellectually [to be] their "inferiors,"' as Guilbaut quotes writer Andre Visson in the 1948 book *As Others See Us* (ibid: 40). This contempt was shared by other European nations whose governments had significant leftist representation, notably Italy, and did not abate through the early to mid-1950s. Because of this, as Jachec delineates, 'many Western European countries [which] had benefited from the European Recovery Act [...] were no closer to achieving the institutional outcomes hoped for by the State Department Policy Planning Staff' (PPA: 174). Accordingly, the populations of Western Europe needed to be persuaded that US culture was part of the 'same complex and cherished civilisation as the Europeans,' and Abstract Expressionism was central to these endeavours (Guilbaut 1990: 33).

Since the late 1940s, convincing the European people that 'cultural freedom' flourished in America had been a pressing concern for the State Department. Guilbaut points to an article published in 1948 in *The New York Times Magazine* by Stephen Spender, wherein Spender asserts that Europeans would be willing 'to resign themselves to the loss of internal political sovereignty' if they were convinced that this would not be to the detriment of culture (NY: 173). The notion that, assured of this, the Western European nations would happily capitulate to US capitalist hegemony, informed the passing in the same year of The Smith-Mundt Act, which expanded the State Department's Information and Cultural Program in order to present to the European people a positive image of US culture, and subsequently the establishment in 1953 to the same end of the USIA, which would go on to collaborate with MoMA on its international programme. However, as Michael Kimmelman stresses in reference to the latter, up until 1958 these efforts had been pluralist, and while often featuring Abstract Expressionism, by no means privileged the movement (2000: 297-301). Yet the decision to

mount the touring shows *Jackson Pollock 1912-1956* and *The New American Painting* in 1958 and 1959 in collaboration with the International Council at MoMA was likely rooted in the observation that this pluralism was impeding these exhibitions' propagandistic aims. European audiences were often unimpressed with elements of these exhibitions which did not emphasise American art's affinity with European modernism, and Jachec adduces a number of events which evidence that the institutions disseminating exhibitions abroad were receptive to this fact. For example, the exhibition *Modern Art in the United States*, which featured the Abstract Expressionists among many other artists, featured a large section on 'design and the applied arts.' Upon its opening in Paris, the critic Pierre Descargues wrote dismissively in the Communist weekly *Lettres Francaises* of how 'An extensive section has been given over to saucepans, lemon-squeezers, can openers, and plastic chairs [...] Only a Cadillac, a jet plane, and an H-bomb are lacking but will undoubtedly be included another time' (PPA: 187). When the show was exhibited elsewhere in Europe, this section was not included. Jachec also points to a special report from November 1953 which documented audience reactions to *The Printmaker's America*, a display of materials up to 1890, and *Beyond the Mississippi*, a collection of George Catlin's work in a pre-test in Washington. In the report, it is noted that Europeans' criticism was focused on these shows' 'artistic quality,' as they emphasised that it was necessary for the US to 'dispel "scepticism" about the value of modern American art and to demonstrate to the world that the US possesses 'spiritual values'' (PPA: 165). By 1958, then, Abstract Expressionism was deemed the best vehicle for these "spiritual values."

Above, I acknowledged that the accounts forwarded by the revisionist historians as to how formal aspects of Abstract Expressionism coincide with, or were amenable to, dominant ideology vary. In some instances these accounts seem simply to be variants on the notion that the paintings straightforwardly represent 'artistic free enterprise,' as Barr, with no doubt some level of cynicism, claimed in a letter to Henry Luce, the publisher of *Time*, *Life* and *Fortune*, in an attempt to convince him to give more favourable coverage to the Abstract

Expressionists (qtd. in Stonor Saunders 1999: 267). However, since the impetus of exhibitions such as *Jackson Pollock 1912-1956* and *The New American Painting* was to win over to US culture European citizens suspicious of US capitalism, framing the paintings as direct artistic analogues of the individual figured as *homo economicus* seems an unlikely stratagem. Instead, the more sophisticated of the revisionists' analyses tend towards the idea that the paintings somehow aesthetically affirmed individual experience against the backdrop of its deracination under late capitalism. In these accounts, to which we will turn in earnest in Chapter 6, the former surrenders meaningful opposition and functions as a reified negative moment serving to further entrench the latter, while nevertheless implying that Americans were concerned with 'spiritual values.' Guilbaut, for instance, suggests that the intimations of anxiety found in the paintings were forwarded as 'cruel tokens' of the freedom afforded by capitalism (NY: 202). And Jachec's central thesis is that the paintings were deployed to win over a mistrustful European left because they instantiated a 'critical nonconformism' which provided a counterweight to the massification of industrial society. Yet, it is also clear that exhibitions under the auspices of the State Department were informed by Greenberg's modernist genealogy, which I showed in the previous chapter was increasingly focused solely upon inner-aesthetic qualities of paintings in relation to their antecedents. Ostensibly, in the catalogue essay for *The New American Painting*, Barr opposes an account of the artworks which places primacy upon their formal qualities. In keeping with both Guilbaut and Jachec's readings, he stresses how the Abstract Expressionists' "anxiety," their "commitment," their "dreadful freedom" concern their work primarily,' characterizing them as 'defiantly' rejecting 'the conventional values of the society which surrounds them,' and disavows the notion that the artworks' significance lies in their 'aesthetics of "plastic values,"' at the expense of 'the emotions of fear, gaiety, anger, violence, or tranquillity which these paintings transmit or suggest,' even making disparaging reference to 'some of their followers who had been inclined to make an orthodoxy of abstraction' (10-13). Furthermore, Greenberg himself took a dim view of *The New American Painting*, claiming that it presented a distorted image

of Abstract Expressionism in its omission of Hofmann and ‘a number of highly questionable inclusions’ (CEC4: 67).³⁹ However, in what follows, I will contend that, in so far as it chimed with the ideology which undergirded US imperialism during the Cold War, an account of Abstract Expressionism as the apex of European modernism’s unilateral progressive linearity, of which Greenberg was the most conspicuous proponent, always underwrote these exhibitions.

To first address the ideology guiding US expansionism and intervention during the Cold War, it was rooted in the notion that its capitalism marked the pinnacle of the Enlightenment’s progressive maturation; a conviction epitomised by Assistant Secretary of State Spruille Braden’s declaration in 1946 that the ‘selective processes of society’s evolution through the ages have proved that the institution of private property [is] a bulwark of civilisation’ (qtd. in Kolkos, 13). Certainly, the Marshall Plan and other measures such as the Truman Doctrine and the National Security Council Report 68 established and maintained US hegemony in Western Europe.⁴⁰ Yet, this economic and military intervention was dictated by what Perry Anderson refers to as the United States’ ‘*complexio oppositorium* of exceptionalism and universalism’ (2013: 6),⁴¹ a dyad whose latter term is justified by its former: The world must be remade in the image of the United States, because the United

³⁹ It can be assumed that, for Greenberg, these questionable inclusions were Grace Hartigan, who in all of Greenberg’s collected essays and criticism is not mentioned once; James Brooks, who is afforded only one cursory mention, in a sentence accounting for latecomers to Abstract Expressionism in a retrospective essay written in 1965 (CEC4: 214), and Theodoros Stamos, who is mentioned once, when Greenberg dismisses his painting *Altar* as ‘sickeningly sweet, inept, and utterly empty’ (CEC2: 266).

⁴⁰ The Truman Doctrine of 1947 afforded the US government the unilateral ‘right’ to intervene in the domestic affairs of other countries - officially only Greece and Turkey at its inception, but subsequently informally extended to include any other nation - in an effort to prevent them from becoming part of the Eastern Bloc, and was celebrated as, to quote Perry Anderson, blowing ‘the bugle for a battle to defend free nations everywhere’ (2013: 24). The National Security Council Report 68 was a 58-page document drawn up by the United States Security Council in 1950 which expanded and reinforced these aims, committing to defend the Western Hemisphere and provide aid to allies.

⁴¹ Anderson roots this in ‘four ingredients’: On the one hand, The United States had an unparalleled advantage in terms of economy and geography, being a ‘settler economy free of any of the feudal residues or impediments of the Old World, and a continental territory protected by two oceans: producing the purest form of nascent capitalism, in the largest nation-state, anywhere on earth.’ On the other hand, its culture and politics were particularly suited to imperialism, with ‘the idea - derived from initial Puritan settlement - of a nation enjoying divine favour, imbued with a sacred calling; and the belief - derived from the War of Independence - that a republic endowed with a constitution of liberty for all time had arisen in the New World.’

States is exceptional in having realised the end of history. While Fredric Jameson wrote in 1990 that, upon the collapse of the Soviet Union, ‘the ideals of [...] market freedom [were] everywhere being celebrated as more advanced values than the conceptions of economic equality that were in fact their historical sequel’ (1996: 235-236), this hierarchy was never in question for the ideology which undergirded US imperialism during the Cold War. The avowal that the United States’ ideals of market freedom were the most advanced values comparative to those of state socialism fuelled the insistence with which it sought to expunge all that was not identical with these values. This is why, as Simone de Beauvoir observed when visiting the United States during the late 1940s and early 1950s, from the point of view of the US, imperialism was simply a case of ‘imposing on others that which is good’ (104). Indeed, Jessica T. Mathews, alumnus of both the State Department and National Security Council, recently made this clear when she favourably cited the wisdom that, since the 1940s, ‘open trade and investment’ to the end of growing markets for the United States operating ‘under a set of rules that [The United States wish] to live by’ has been for the mutual benefit of all nations (2017: 11).

In his account of the United States’ self-identification during the Cold War, Anders Stephanson summarises this dynamic well, delineating how ‘[w]hereas the Soviet Union, representing (it claimed) the penultimate stage of history, was locked in a dialectical struggle for the final liberation of humankind, the United States *is* that very liberation [...] it can have no equal, no dialectical Other’ (2011: 178). Faced with an opposing power which denied its status as thus, it was all the more urgent that the United States universalised its particularity. There could ‘be no difference between the United States [...] and what ought to be in the world at large’ because the United States embodied the ‘end of history as emancipated humankind’ (Ibid: 177). Whatever diverged from it was ‘only to be overcome and eradicated’ (Ibid: 176-7). As Adorno writes of dominant rationality more generally, the ‘demand for totality’ of the United States during the Cold War meant that which differentiated itself from it appeared ‘divergent, dissonant, negative’ (ND: 5-6). US imperialism during the Cold War,

then, found its legitimation in the notion that the United States marked the culmination of a universal history. As Adorno, following Walter Benjamin, asserts of universal history broadly, US imperialism was ‘based on the assumption that a particular idea [freedom] runs through history in its entirety and that the facts gradually come closer to it,’ an assumption which ‘justifies history from the standpoint of the victor’ but ignores the heterogeneity mutilated and discredited by its victory (2006: 87ff). In the next chapter, I will turn to the question of this subjugated nonidentity. Suffice it here, however, to note the *prima facie* homologousness between US imperialism’s historical justification, and Greenberg’s proclamations as to Abstract Expressionism’s supremacy. As detailed in the previous chapter, Greenberg’s championing of Abstract Expressionism often appears based on the assumption that particular perennials of the medium of painting run through history and the facts of Abstract Expressionism had come closer than any style before it to manifesting them. In this sense, Greenberg’s championing of Abstract Expressionism seems to depend upon the same ‘linear concept of historical development’ as ‘the-West-is-best thesis,’ as David Craven observes (ACC: 124). It appears to be ‘a manifest attempt at writing history from the perspective of victorious interests,’ as Benjamin Buchloh notes (Buchloh et al 2007: 31), and accordingly served as an artistic correlate to the United States’ self-conception as having realised the form of society in which the Enlightenment ideals of freedom and liberty could most flourish. As Kozloff puts it in his early revisionist essay, ‘the belief that American art [was] the sole trustee of the avant-garde spirit’ chimed well with ‘the US government’s notion of itself as the lone guarantor of capitalist liberty’ (1985: 108-109).

The fact that the notion that Abstract Expressionism was at the forefront of European modernism was central to the exhibitions sent abroad by the International Council, is evident in the way that de Kooning was promoted in his retrospective alongside Shahn’s at the 1954 Venice Biennale. Indeed, Pohl’s above-detailed account of Shahn’s co-optation is premised on the assumption that Shahn’s inclusion is puzzling in comparison with De Kooning’s presence, which she contends can easily be explained ‘by the fact that he represented what

was seen in America at that time as the most advanced art movement in the modernist continuum,' corroborating this by noting that in his catalogue essay, Barr points out de Kooning's similarity to Boccioni (1981: 80; 91). It is clear from numerous articles written by American critics which were disseminated throughout Europe during the '50s to coincide with the exhibitions that the Abstract Expressionists' European modernist pedigree was widely stressed in this way. For instance, as Jeremy Lewison notes in a recent essay, in the same year as *New American Painting*, the American art historian Robert Rosenblum wrote an essay published by *Aujourd'hui* in which he was 'keen to stress the European origins of [Abstract Expressionism], linking Pollock to Monet, de Kooning to Picasso, Kline to Mondrian [...] and Motherwell to the "Lucidity" and "elegance" of the French tradition' (2016: 69). Lewison also points out that in 1955, to coincide with *50 ans d'art aux Etats Unis*, an exhibition featuring a number of Abstract Expressionists which proceeded to tour Europe as *Modern Art in the United States*, Soby wrote an article for *Cahiers d'art* emphasising Abstract Expressionism's European heritage, 'seeing Monet's *Nymphs* reflected in the work of Rothko, stressing the Dutch origins of de Kooning and the importance of Hans Hofmann, who came from Germany, and the Chile-born artist Roberto Matta, who arrived from Paris' (2016: 61).

Lewison surmises that this article by Soby was 'perhaps an attempt to show that America was a fellow traveller [of Europe], neither a usurper nor an enemy, and that its values were European' (2016: 61). However, as I have established more broadly, it is safe to assume that Lewison's circumspection is misplaced. Indeed, Guilbaut quotes Soby explicitly asserting six years earlier that 'today we are engaged in a vital struggle to [...] persuade [the peoples of Europe] that we and they are committed to the same basic ideals,' and thus that it was necessary for the US to refute the notion that they were 'a nation not deeply concerned with the arts' with 'every means of communication' at their disposal (NY: 194). Moreover, the revisionist accounts show that, similarly to Greenberg's criticism, these efforts did not simply strive to demonstrate that Abstract Expressionism occupied the same tradition as European

art, but that it had superseded this tradition on its own terms. They may not have been intended to represent US art as the *usurper* of European modernism. However, to maintain the metaphor of a ruling lineage, the revisionist accounts establish that they were clearly intended to establish that American art was ‘the natural continuation and heir of European and specifically Parisian Modernism,’ as Hardt and Negri put it in their broader account of how ‘American hegemony over Europe which was founded on financial, economic and military structures, was made to seem natural through a series of cultural and ideological operations’ (2000: 382). In Cockcroft’s brief foundational revisionist essay, she surmises that ‘Abstract Expressionism constituted the ideal style for [...] propaganda activities’ because it could be characterised in this way, displaying ‘the United States as culturally up-to-date in competition with Paris’ (1985: 129), and Guilbaut and Jachec both affirm that, along with the aforementioned connotations which I will discuss in Chapter 6, the paintings were deployed in these terms; ‘associated with the modernist tradition (as defined by Greenberg),’ while responding to ‘modern anxieties’ (NY: 183). Guilbaut details how the ground was primed for the deployment of Abstract Expressionism as superseding the European modernist tradition on its own terms, by an exhibition organised by the French magazine *Preuves*, a mouthpiece for the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), a nominally anti-Stalinist advocacy group which in practice was covertly funded by the CIA and worked to combat neutralism and anti-Americanism in Western Europe. This exhibition, entitled *Oeuvres du Vingtième Siècle*, traced the major modern movements from Impressionism to Picasso, and was ‘specifically produced [...] to show that only free societies were able to create great art,’ demonstrating the United States’ commitment to that tradition, and tacitly paving the way, Guilbaut claims, for ‘the American avant-garde [...] to play its role on the international stage’ as inheritor of this legacy (1990: 74). And Jachec claims that Abstract Expressionism was chosen to exhibit overseas because it constituted ‘the United States’ best bet for making notable innovations within European practices,’ adducing the fact that the International Council favourably registered in their reports that when in *Modern Art in the United States* was sent to Frankfurt

in 1956, ‘the show was generally perceived, according to the reports, as marking continuity with, and departure from, the European modernist tradition,’ with especial focus upon Abstract Expressionism among the many variants of US modern art which were exhibited, resulting in the two subsequent exhibitions solely dedicated to the style (PPA: 192). Crucial to the decision to export Abstract Expressionism in order to win over a recalcitrant Western Europe, then, was its Greenbergian characterisation as ‘the logical culmination of a long-standing and inexorable tendency toward abstraction’ in the European tradition (NY: 177).

Above, I noted that Barr ostensibly rejects a formalist interpretation of Abstract Expressionism in the catalogue essay for *The New American Painting*. However, in his various positions at MoMA, Barr had done much to institutionalise the European modernist lineage towards abstraction of which ‘Kitsch’ and ‘Laocoon’ were politicised theoretical accounts.⁴² Indeed, when, eight years before, he was instrumental in exporting Abstract Expressionism, Barr claimed his curatorial choice to include Pollock, de Kooning and Gorky in the US pavilion for the 1950 Venice Biennale was due to their being members of a ‘predominant vanguard’ (qtd. in Krauss, 2015: 4). And the catalogue for *The New American Painting* does not contest the trajectory which positioned them thusly. Reproduced in the catalogue is a review of Franz Kline in *ARTnews* by Thomas B. Hess, which traces Kline’s work in a lineage from Velasquez through Mondrian (44). Furthermore, Greenberg is the only critic Barr identifies by name when discussing Abstract Expressionism’s rise to

⁴² Citing Barr’s catalogue for the 1936 MoMA show *Cubism and Abstract Art*, W. J. T. Mitchell stresses how Barr had already well prepared the institutionalisation of abstract art before Greenberg published ‘Kitsch’ and ‘Laocoon,’ emblematically with his genealogical diagram tracing the lineage of then-contemporary non-geometrical and geometrical abstract art (1994: 230). That Barr’s modernist criticism, which was reflected in MoMA’s multidepartmental organisational structure, is a direct antecedent Greenberg’s formalism is stressed by Sybil Gordon Kantor in her intellectual biography of Barr. Kantor illustrates this by adducing how Barr had, before ‘Kitsch’ and ‘Laocoon,’ noted how Cézanne was revered ‘for his abandonment of deep space and emphatic modelling, for a compact composition in which foreground and background are fused into an angular, active curtain of colour,’ and his description of synthetic Cubism as placing ‘an emphasis not upon the reality of the represented objects but upon the reality of the painted surface’ (1993: 322-3). Indeed, in a 1983 interview with Charles Harrison, Greenberg in fact asserts that the vociferousness of his claims as to the Abstract Expressionists’ position in the forefront of this lineage in the early ‘50s, was proportional to a reluctance at MoMA to purchase and promote the work of the Abstract Expressionists (2000: 184).

prominence, and Barr's denial that the paintings are preoccupied with form is not to dismiss the centrality of their medium-specificity:

Their flatness is [...] a consequence of the artist's concern with the actual painting process as his prime instrument of expression, a concern which also tends to eliminate imitative suggestion of the forms, textures, colours and spaces of the real world, since these might compete with the primary reality of paint on canvas (11).

The importance to US imperialism of Abstract Expressionism's position in the forefront of the European modernist tradition becomes all the more evident if we turn to the exhibitions of Abstract Expressionism exported by the State Department independently in the 1960s, for example the 1962 touring show *Vanguard American Painting*. In the 1960s, persuading left-leaning Europeans as to the value of US art was less of a pressing concern since capitalism had generally been stabilised in Western Europe. As Ralph Milliband put it, these post-war years saw 'the celebration of Western democracy, the free world, the welfare state, the affluent society, the end of ideology and pluralistic equilibrium' (1973: 239). The communist and socialist parties either lost support – as in France – or converged rightwards to a social-democratic economic norm – as in Italy and West Germany – and trade unionism constituted less an opposition to the interests of capital, and more a corporatist guarantor of stability.⁴³ Accordingly, exhibitions such as *Vanguard American Painting*, which featured all of the artists included in *The New American Painting*, with the addition of Hofmann, were more-or-less unabashed efforts in displaying the artistic supremacy correlative to the political and military supremacy of the United States. While Greenberg actively lectured on behalf of the State Department during a travelling exhibition of American art in Japan and India in the mid-60s, he was not consulted in the curation of *Vanguard American Painting*. This is

⁴³In terms of the former, 'by about 1960 even ideological differences between the Socialist and Conservative parties appeared to lose their significance, hence the talk of a "Grand Coalition" between the two main parties in Germany [and] of a Christian Democratic "opening of the Left" in Italy' (Young 1991: xv). In terms of the latter, as Ernest Mandel bemoaned in 1967, trade unionism had become 'a guarantor of "social peace," a guarantor to the employers of stability during a continuous and uninterrupted process of work and the reproduction of capital' (1973: 73).

evident in the selection of the younger artists Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg – about whose ‘neo-dadaism’ Greenberg was generally dismissive⁴⁴ – rather than the second generation colour-field painters whom Greenberg was then championing, such as Kenneth Noland and Jules Olitski (although the inclusion of Hofmann is notable, considering Greenberg’s aforementioned criticism of his exclusion from *The New American Painting*). Nevertheless, in H. H. Arnason’s catalogue essay for that show, as in Barr’s essay for *The New American Painting*, only Greenberg is named with respect to critics whose influence was decisive over the rise of Abstract Expressionism, and, unlike Barr’s essay, Arnason does not emphasise how the artworks affirm the individual against reification. Instead, while conceding that ‘no artistic movement, and least of all abstract expressionism, can be understood simply as an accumulation of influences,’ he is primarily concerned with how Abstract Expressionism provides a culmination of the European tradition. He stresses how the catalyst for the movement was ‘the presence in New York of many great European artists as a result of the war,’ and establishes Abstract Expressionism’s position at the forefront of the European modernist lineage with recourse to its medium-specific ‘assertion of the brush-stroke’ (n. pag.).

⁴⁴ It should be noted that Greenberg has something of a higher opinion of Johns, remarking approvingly in 1962 of how ‘the painterly paintedness of Johns picture sets off, and is set off by, the flatness of his number, letter, target, flag, and map images’ (CEC4: 127). However, as I noted in Chapter 3 is the case in terms of his attitude towards many artists of Johns’s generation, Greenberg caveats this approbation with the claim that the fact that ‘his art can be explained as has been explained here’ indicates the ‘narrowness’ of Johns’s work, and by 1969 he was claiming that ‘Johns is – rather was – a gifted and original artist, but the best of his paintings and bas-reliefs remain “easy” and certainly minor compared with the best of Abstract Expressionism’ (CEC4: 302).

Chapter Six

Artistic Abstraction Contra Societal Abstraction

In the previous chapter, I acknowledged that Adorno indicts the model of universal history which undergirded US imperialism, whose isomorphy with the Greenbergian modernist lineage I argued informed the State Department's deployment of Abstract Expressionism. Following Walter Benjamin, Adorno does so by pointing out that the progress narrated by such historiography, has always entailed the subjugation of that which is different and alien to the status quo ultimately legitimated by such historiography. For Benjamin, the linear progressivist historiography of the victors is thus to be rejected outright, as he famously illustrates with the image of the angel of history, who sees history's chain of events as 'one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage,' but is prevented from making 'whole what has been smashed' by the storm of 'progress,' which irresistibly propels him forward (1999: 249). Adorno, however, 'preferred an inverted historicism to Benjamin's outright rejection of historicism' (Rose 2014: 189), and in fact contends that Benjamin's explicit rejection of historicism objectively implies this inverted historicism: the permanence of catastrophe which Benjamin describes - the perennial disruption of life caused by progress – should be conceived as the continuity of discontinuity, as a negative identity of history forged by acts of subjugation and submission (2006: 92f).⁴⁵ Indeed, for Adorno, as will be crucial in subsequent chapters, the existence of progress (in the forces of production) and

⁴⁵ Benjamin, however, did not conversely hypostasize discontinuity, and both his rejection of historicism and Adorno's inverted historicism were in the name of the possibility of the same form of experience. Distinguishing between experience in the sense of *Erfahrung* - full, encompassing and comprehended experience - and *Erlebnis* - lived experience - Benjamin contends that late capitalism has rendered subjects incapable of integrating individual experiences into a historical continuum of memory, and thus experience remains at the level of *Erlebnis*. For Benjamin, it is the linearity of dominant historicism which prevents the equitable interrelation of cognitive, mnemonic, physical, libidinal and affective faculties necessary for the continuum of *Erfahrung*, in so far as dominant historicism's telling of events like beads on a rosary restricts these events to fixed significance in the interests of power, and disavows the multiplicity of linkages which might be drawn by cognition for which the past is not known solely in the epistemological terms of the victors. The secondary literature on Adorno and Benjamin's relationship is of course vast, and the most comprehensive account remains Buck Morss's *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* (1977)

consequent ‘possibility of worldwide freedom from want,’ is not to be denied (ND: 192). His is not a regressive philosophy of history, nor a transcendent critique of the status quo which progressive history legitimates. Rather, for Adorno thought must assimilate reflection on the ‘destructive side of progress’ so as to immanently critique the status quo in terms of the latter’s own ideals (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002: xvi).⁴⁶ Thereby, we must reorient our thoughts thus that cognition might ‘address itself to things [...] which fell by the wayside – what might be called [...] waste products and blind spots’ (2005: 151). That is, an inverted historicism traces that which is seemingly rendered irrelevant or obviated as ‘the systematic domination over nature has been asserted more and more decisively and has integrated all internal human characteristics’ (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002: 223); it recounts the obverse of ‘the unity of the control of nature, of progressing to rule over men, and finally to that over men’s inner nature’ (ND: 320).

As I detailed in the previous chapter, US imperialism during the Cold War was premised on the notion that the capitalist US had most fully realised the Enlightenment’s anti-feudalist trajectory. However, if that trajectory is given an axial turn, the dissolution of ‘the injustice of the old inequality of unmediated mastery,’ is revealed to perpetuate injustice ‘in universal mediation’ whereby objects and subjects alike are truncated (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 8). Adorno denotes the cognition befitting such truncation ‘identity-thinking,’ and elaborates how it operates in terms of the logic of unequal conceptual exchange in the service of the exigencies of unequal economic exchange. In this, Adorno follows Georg Lukács’s account of reification in *History and Class Consciousness*, first published in 1923, wherein Lukács

⁴⁶ With respect to this point, Simon Jarvis adduces the following revealing passage from Adorno’s discussions with Horkheimer when working towards *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

The meaning of Marx’s economics is much rather that he starts out from just that element in bourgeois political economy which is more than descriptive (fair exchange). And that he shows that the *society* which develops on the basis of such principles contradicts these principles, whilst the realization of these principles would sublimate [*aufheben*] the form of society itself. Marx does not want to show, as it were, positivistically, according to which laws exchange is ‘now actually’ conditioned; rather he takes from bourgeois society the measures of legality which it has itself constituted, shows that bourgeois *society* cannot fulfil them, and retains this measure at the same time as a negative expression of a right constitution of *society*. This is just what we need to do with respect to bourgeois categories like that of the individual’ (qtd in Jarvis, 50)

details how ‘commodity exchange together with its structural consequences’ has come to ‘influence the *total* outer and inner life of society’ (1971: 84). This concept of reification is premised on Marx’s distinction between use-value and exchange-value. As Marx shows in *Capital Vol. 1*, the owners of the means of production accrue surplus-value by way of the identification of commodities with their exchange-value as if the latter were a natural property, when in fact it is the quantitative expression of the socially necessary labour time it takes to produce a given commodity comparative to other commodities. Surplus-value is the difference between the exchange-value of labour-power, which workers are forced to sell to capitalists in order to survive, and the exchange-value of the commodities which this labour-power produces. As Marx puts it, commodities not only have ‘sensuous’ qualities but they also, in so far as they are exchange-values, have ‘suprasensible’ qualities (1975: 165), and in a society geared towards production for profit, use-values are tendentially subsumed by exchange-value, and everyday life is fundamentally determined by the latter.

In this, then, identity-thinking is a kind of exchange, in so far as the substitution of exchange-value for use-value - and all other identifications necessary for the social processes by which the former dominate the latter - are instantiations of unequal exchange themselves, wherein an object is exchanged for a concept, and all particularities of the former which are not calculable in terms of the latter, including subjects’ experience, fall to the wayside:

[I]n the process only this exchange relation of knowledge, that is, the effort, the exchange between the labour of thinking and the object which thought then appropriates, and the products of this process, namely the fact that the ideas *work out* – only this becomes the thing that endures, the lasting product’ (Adorno 2001: 27).

This cognitive subsumption whereby objects are made identical with concepts, is conceptual fetishism as the correlate (and corollary) of commodity fetishism: As institutions and social processes created through human activity stand opposed to their producers as second nature under capitalism, the object mediated through conceptual labour confronts perception as the object itself. Objects are rendered intelligible only in terms of the status quo - as what a given

object ‘comes under, what it exemplifies or represents and what, accordingly, it is not itself’ (ND: 149) - and somatic, affective, and libidinal elements of subjects’ experience are delegitimized, suppressed or cathected, as these subjects ‘must mold themselves to the technical apparatus body and soul’ (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002: 23). Indeed, in spite of US affirmations as to the freedom of the individual, Gabriel and Joyce Kolko establish that the application of American power during the Cold War demanded subjection to reigning universals in this way. It was, they write, dictated by ‘structural imperatives and limits’ which had taken on ‘independent characteristics’ so that the officials who administered it functioned ‘according to criteria established for them’ (19). Here, they may as well be paraphrasing Lukács when he describes reified consciousness as ‘the contemplative stance adopted towards a process mechanically conforming to fixed laws and enacted independently of man’s consciousness and impervious to human intervention’ (1971: 89).

The cognition of an inverted historicism which is to do justice to waste products and blind spots, then, must contrarily ‘be guided by what exchange has not maimed or – since there is nothing left unmaimed anymore – by what is concealed within the exchange processes’ (1998a: 253), and thus refute the concept’s supposed identity with its object. Notoriously, Adorno’s work is wilfully unparaphraseable.⁴⁷ However, if one were to summarise his lifelong central project, one could do little better than to define it as the effort to interrogate precisely that nonidentity. As he characterises his philosophy in his 1931 inaugural lecture to the University of Frankfurt, whose consistency with the oeuvre it preceded has often been commented upon (See, for instance, Buck-Morss, 1977: 24f; Jay, 1984b: 244; Jarvis, 1998: 1), it ‘no longer believes reality to be grounded in the *ratio*, but instead assumes always and forever that the law-giving of autonomous reason [understood as the cognitive correlate to societal reification] pierces through a being which is not adequate to it’ (1977: 132). As we

⁴⁷ This is the case to the extent that it is almost customary for the authors of even the most limpid guides to Adorno’s thought to preface them with disclaimers to this effect, see particularly Martin Jay’s *Adorno* (1984a), but also Jarvis’s claim that it is hard to explicate Adorno’s ‘body of work without doing some violence to it’ (1998: 3), and Zuidervaart’s insistence that his account can only be partial (1991: xvff).

will see throughout the rest of this thesis, for Adorno, such irreducibility of objects to dominant concepts is evident in the experience of artworks whose obstinate resistance of the reified facile discourse of communication allows them to do justice to repressed nature, understood as ‘the particular [...] to which the course of history did violence’ (Buck-Morss, 1977: 55). Thus, for Adorno authentic art is the ‘unconscious writing of history’ (AT: 192; 259). In Chapter 1 I suggested a comparison between Adorno and the Trotskyist Greenberg of ‘Kitsch’ which implies that, while Greenberg does not elaborate avant-garde art’s opposition to ‘capitalism in decline’ in these terms, Greenberg’s account indicates that avant-garde art might pose a challenge to identity-thinking, in that both stress that, conversely to mass culture, the then-avant-garde art’s autotelism had rendered it unamenable to prevalent modes of consumption. And in Chapter 2, I acknowledged that for many of the Abstract Expressionists, their renunciation of representation was certainly an attempt to escape complicity with the status quo in contradistinction with Social Realism’s doubling of the world reified in terms of dominant concepts.

However, I proceeded to show how Greenberg’s account of this renunciation on the part of Abstract Expressionism did much to invite its co-optation by US imperialism. I noted that even in ‘Kitsch’ Greenberg does not explicate a connection between the supposed challenge avant-garde art posed to ‘capitalism in decline’ which justifies his call for socialism to preserve avant-garde art, and avant-garde art’s intransigence in terms of dominant habits of consumption. I noted that the former was no doubt informed by Trotsky’s conviction that revolutionary art is created by the dedication to its ‘own laws,’ rather than by the abstract negation of preceding culture. And I acknowledged that he aligned the inception of the ostensible autotelism which lead to avant-garde art’s intransigence, with the Marxist rejection of society’s ‘prevailing standards.’ Yet, I showed that since he claims in ‘Kitsch’ that avant-garde art is not *necessarily* critical of the status quo, its subversiveness for him in 1939 was presumably narrowly conjunctural, a notion corroborated by the fact that he did not attribute a seditious role to avant-garde art once capitalism was no longer in decline in the ‘40s. I

elaborated how Greenberg instead came to disclaim any correspondence between art and the ‘weal and woe’ of human beings, and seemed to hypostasise the markers of Abstract Expressionism’s dedication to its ‘own laws’ in terms of hierarchical superiority, thus lending Abstract Expressionism to US imperialism’s imposition of capitalism. That is, rather than indicting with its dialectical underside the progressivist history which legitimated US imperialism, Abstract Expressionism served to corroborate this progressivist historiography in no small part *because* Greenberg conceived of Abstract Expressionism’s eschewal of figuration as the determinate negation of representational content. In so far as this negation affirmed the paintings’ medium-specificity, it represented New York’s triumphal supersession of Parisian modernism. To the extent that this was the case, the fact that Greenberg kept ‘his footing in the world of form’ and belittled ‘everything that seemed to deviate from this position’ – to take Dore Ashton’s articulation of the common characterisation of Greenberg (1973: 160) - buttressed US imperialism’s excoriation of anything which deviated from its position, as it remade the world in its interests. On this account, identifying Abstract Expressionist canvases in terms of their medium-specificity is an instance of identity-thinking serving to perpetuate injustice, by providing US culture’s claims to universal superiority with an artistic correlate. However, ever since his 1996 essay ‘The Death of Sensuous Particulars: Adorno and Abstract Expressionism,’ the philosopher J.M. Bernstein has been forwarding an Adornian case for Abstract Expressionism founded on the premise that to trace Greenberg’s genealogy of modernism’s medium-specificity - ‘its obsession with pigment and colour, line and shape, flatness and the delimitation of flatness’ (AVB: 17) – is precisely to trace a history of nonidentity. While Bernstein does not once acknowledge the revisionist historians, his case for Abstract Expressionism was originally leveled as an immanent critique of Clark’s account detailed in the introduction. As we saw, Clark identifies the artworks as manifesting the vulgar individualism of the post-war US petty bourgeoisie in an attempt to localize the movement in its historical moment, and thus free the art of the present from its hegemonic grip. For Bernstein, on the other hand, freedom from

Abstract Expressionism's 'long shadow' is not a salutary prospect so long as we live under capitalism, since this 'long shadow' might be chalked up to the movement being 'the last systematically successful project to sustain the claim of sensuous particularity against conceptual claiming' (AVB: 120).

I acknowledged above that Greenberg always maintains that his is not an account of art's inner-aesthetic development divorced from society, and Bernstein contends that Greenberg's account of how this development is conditioned by social forces indicates how the former opposes the latter. In 'Laocoon,' Greenberg affirms that he is not contending that abstract art is not conditioned by society, claiming that it, 'like every other cultural phenomenon reflects the social and other circumstances of the age in which its creators live, and that there is nothing inside art itself, disconnected from history, which compels it to go in one direction or another' (CEC1: 23). While in 'Laocoon' Greenberg explicitly brackets an investigation into these 'forces stemming from outside art' (CEC1: 28), Bernstein alights upon Greenberg's choice of the word 'hunted' in that essay to describe the avant-garde's limitation to medium-specificity – 'the arts [...] have been hunted back to their mediums, and there they have been isolated, concentrated and defined' (CEC1: 32) – to posit that Greenberg signals that 'recourse to the medium, delimiting the boundaries of painting by hugging to the shoreline of the medium itself' was a form of defence against 'an operation of brutal harassment' (AVB: 232). This brutal harassment, Bernstein identifies as that of modernity's 'rational mindedness,' which subsumes objects with concepts, and what Greenberg denotes as the isolation, concentration and definition of art, Bernstein asserts was an attempt to secure 'an opacity' against its reduction to concepts (AVB: 232-3). The lineage of such art, claims Bernstein, is the unconscious writing of history which 'forms the core of Adorno's aesthetic theory':

[T]he movement from representational painting [...] to modernist art [inscribes] a history [...] wherein different [...] arts and styles of art [...] become paradigmatic on

the basis of their [...] distance from or ability to resist the claims of determinate judgement and the social practices which forward those claims' (1992: 63).

As we saw in Chapter 1, in 'Kitsch,' Greenberg certainly claims that the avant-garde's dedication to medium-specificity is spurred by the dissolution of normative values, and indeed Bernstein cites Greenberg's claim in 'Kitsch' that society was becoming 'less and less able [...] to justify the inevitability of its particular forms' (1997a: 94). Yet, Greenberg is here referring to Marxism's denaturalisation of capitalism and the ideological confusion and violence of revolution, rather than, as Bernstein would have it, the deracination of norms by capitalist rationalisation. However, Greenberg does stress how, having internalised revolutionary ideas and accordingly defined the bourgeoisie as that which they were not (even while attached to it by the umbilical cord of gold), the avant-garde's dedication to medium-specificity was in opposition to the tendency of 'a rationalist and scientifically-minded city culture' to exploit 'the practical meaning of objects' rather than 'savoring their appearance' (CEC1: 27). Accordingly conceiving of the determinate negation of *Inhalt* which Greenberg describes as the fulcrum of the European modernist lineage, as constituting a *distancing from or resistance to* determinate judgements, then, indicates that Abstract Expressionism might be understood as opposing those social practices with which I showed the movement was deployed in conjunction, in no small part *because of* Greenberg's positing of Abstract Expressionism at the telos of the European modernist lineage due to its determinate negation of *Inhalt*.⁴⁸

Indeed, on Bernstein's Adornian account, it is precisely in so far as modernist painting's progress mirrors and parallels the historical progress by which US imperialism was legitimated, that Abstract Expressionism serves to indict capitalist reification. As I established above, the supposed objectivism of post-war US capitalism was founded on the notion that it realised the promise of the Enlightenment as humanity's maturation. As such,

⁴⁸ To read Greenberg's criticism in this way, is to problematise Ian McClean's conclusion in his 'Modernism and Marxism, Greenberg and Adorno' (1988) that, contrary to Adorno, there is no critique of the Enlightenment in Greenberg's modernism since he does not share the account of reification which the former inherited from Lukács (1988: 105).

we might say that its identifications in the interests of capital were understood as having achieved the displacement of myth's false animistic identifications, whose demythologisation and disenchantment as nothing but anthropomorphic projection the Enlightenment set in motion. Bernstein notes that the 'abstraction' of abstract painting is analogous, in so far as it dispenses with the anthropomorphic projections of figurative art in favour of the medium-specific elements enumerated above. As Greenberg put it, 'the best visual art of our time is that which [...] has least to do with illusions' (CEC2: 170). Yet, the 'abstraction' of this painting has radically different consequences than the abstraction of identity-thinking. The latter reverts to myth by delegitimising the particularity of both subjects and objects in accordance with capitalism's (irrational) identifications and macrostructural authority. On the other hand, the 'abstraction' of abstract painting, and especially its apotheosis in Abstract Expressionism, results in artworks which 'remain obstinately particulars that are not subsumable under any universal' (AVB: 152). Hence, Bernstein contends, Abstract Expressionist works demonstrate that particulars can be 'hypnotic objects of attention, apart from and in defiance of any form of identifying mechanism other than the one their sheer presence insinuates' (Ibid). That is to say, we are unable to abstract from Abstract Expressionist artworks, except with respect to what our inability to abstract from them might mean. For Bernstein, to abstract from Abstract Expressionist artworks with respect to what our inability to abstract from them means, is to understand them as vehicles for 'the demonstration of what is more than and beyond exchange' (2010a: 213). In so far as we cannot reduce them to concepts without remainder, and yet they are nevertheless undeniably cognitively compelling, Abstract Expressionist artworks reveal that identity-thinking's exchange of objects for concepts does not tell the whole story. On this account, Abstract Expressionist artworks have political significance precisely in so far as they are *not* discursively political. They do not criticise capitalism's symptoms in the manner whose recuperability *qua* criticism I discussed in relation to Social Realism in Chapter 2. Instead, and here we might recall Greenberg's insistence on the lineage of the easel picture, they resist

capitalism's abstract medium of exchange-value homeopathically, by way of the fetish character of the commodity. That is, in so far as it is as commodities, free from the demands of ecclesiastical or courtly patronage, that artworks might 'insist fetishistically on their coherence' and thus 'implicitly criticise the debasement of a situation evolving in the direction of a total exchange society in which everything is heteronomously defined' (AT: 226-8).⁴⁹

While he does not draw the attendant epistemological and political implications, the Abstract Expressionists' development in these terms is traced in the chapters on Newman, Rothko and Still in John Golding's *Paths to the Absolute*, the artist and art historian's 2000 survey of abstraction in twentieth-century painting. In these chapters, Golding details how all three painters negated figuration towards expressive particularity. Newman's praxis prior to the realisation of the first zip painting, *Onement I*, in 1947, is discussed as a 'very rational scraping bare of the pictorial *status quo*,' with Golding instancing the 1946 work *The Command* (1946), in which Newman quite literally scraped a layer of oil paint from a canvas with the surrealist technique of grattage (2000: 191) (figs. 1 and 2). Newman recounts that he ultimately produced *Onement I* due to the revelation that previously he 'had been emptying space instead of filling it.' However, if anything, *Onement I* fills space by emptying it further. Whereas the erosion of oil paint on the surface of *The Command* bears the connotations of the wooden surface upon which it was scraped, *Onement I* arrests the spectator's gaze with nothing but an almost implacable field of Indian red divided by a febrile line of cadmium red. Still's development is similarly traced by Golding in terms of reduction *qua* fecundity. He

⁴⁹ For good accounts of this dynamic, see Zuidervaart's discussion of how, for Adorno, autonomous artworks are 'defetishising fetishises' (1991: 88), and Stewart Martin's essay 'The Absolute Artwork Meets the Absolute Commodity' (2007). I owe the term 'homeopathic' in describing this dynamic to Anita Chari in her recent book *A Political Economy of the Senses* (2015). On this point, it might also be noted that Bernstein concedes to Clark that, due to this necessary entanglement with commodity fetishism, Abstract Expressionism's claims for particularity must 'transpire within the frame of petty bourgeois vulgarity, through canvases unable to rid themselves of the "telltale blemish" [Clark's phrase] of tackiness and kitsch' (AVB: 163). However, I do not think that this necessarily follows from an Adornian reading of Abstract Expressionism. Indeed, in marshalling Adorno to make this point, Bernstein cites his claim that works of art are 'in fact absolute commodities in that they are a social product that has rejected every semblance of existing for society, a semblance to which commodities otherwise urgently cling' (AT: 236). As we will see in Chapter 7, rather than tackiness being the price that artworks pay for this rejection, it is precisely when this rejection is rendered false by reification that it appears as kitsch.

puts it well when he writes that the artist's negation of imagery gives way 'to the independent life of the canvas, a self-subsisting entity' (Ibid: 184). This is particularly clear in terms of the patches of canvas which Still leaves bare. In works such as *PH-150* (1958) or *PH-1140* (1957) (figs. 3 and 4), to take two paintings which I have recently encountered, these patches seem less like a renunciation than an enunciation. Indeed, Still claimed that he did not 'intend to oversimplify' and instead revelled 'in the extra-complex' (qtd. in Golding 2000: 218). In the case of Rothko, Golding again describes a shift from figuration to abstraction in terms of 'scraping bare,' pointing to Rothko's adoption of wet techniques such as watercolour and gouache, for which 'the paint dries in such a way as to allow the luminosity of the ground or support to be always apparent' in paintings such as the 1944 work *Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea* (1944) (fig. 5) (161). Such paintings still portray figures in space, albeit with an indistinctness wherein both appear to 'partake of the same washed substance or ether' (162). Yet, Rothko proceeded to abandon the use of watercolours for runny oils, and developed a style in which 'recognisable imagery had been suppressed,' typified by the (posthumously titled) painting series *Multiforms*, for instance *Untitled* (1948) (fig. 6). Again, however, this negation affirms particularity: Golding cites Rothko's much reproduced 1947 essay entitled 'The Romantics Were Prompted,' in which Rothko describes the shapes in the *Multiforms* paintings as 'organisms with volition and a passion for self-assertion' which 'move with internal freedom' without conforming to 'any particular visual experience' or 'what is probable in the familiar world' (Ibid).

Both Golding's comparison of Still's canvases to autonomous entities, and Rothko's likening of his artworks to organisms while emphasising their lack of representational content, chime with the way in which Adorno marshals the Kantian analogy of art and nature to argue that art reveals the blind spots of identity-thinking through the determinate negation of *Inhalt*. A fuller account of Kant in relation to the central concerns of my thesis must be postponed until we address Greenberg's Kantianism in Chapter 8. However, suffice it here to establish that Bernstein rightly contends that Kant's grammar of aesthetics registers the

fundamental dynamics of the lineage of art's resistance to reification traced by Adorno, in so far as Kant delineates how, unlike determinate judgements which subsume things under concepts, 'aesthetic reflective judgements begin with the individual thing prior to (independent of) conceptualization and inquire into its intrinsic intelligibility' (Bernstein 2014: 1070). For Kant, if artworks are to escape saturation by ends to the extent that they are suitable for aesthetic appraisal in this sense, they must resemble nature. This is because, Kant claims, while natural things invite reflective judgements because they are free from conceptual determination, art is created through 'a determinate intention to produce something' (1987: 174). Accordingly, the latter need resemble the former if its standard is to be the reflective power of judgement. Thus, Adorno stresses that 'the Kantian conception of a teleology of art modeled on that of organisms' finds its truth in the way in which 'artworks escape myth, the blind and abstractly dominating nexus of nature' (AT: 140). Even in Kant, for whom there was no question of whether one could have an unmediated experience of natural beauty, it is unclear precisely what is meant when he asserts that 'fine art must have the *look* of nature' (1987: 174). However, as Rothko claims that the shapes in his *Multiforms* paintings do not represent the natural world as we know it, and yet are akin to the self-organisation of natural things, Adorno contends that in the age of natural beauty's total mediatedness – 'its critical edge blunted and subsumed to the exchange relation such as is represented in the phrase "tourist industry"' (AT: 68) – it is artworks which abjure the effort to recreate nature vis-à-vis *Inhalt*, which approach nature vis-à-vis *Gehalt*:

The more strictly artworks abstain from rank natural growth and the replication of nature, the more the successful ones approach nature. Aesthetic objectivity, the reflection of the being-in-itself of nature, realizes the subjective teleological element of unity; exclusively thereby do artworks become comparable to nature. In contrast, all particular similarity of art to nature is accidental, inert, and for the most part foreign to art. (AT: 77)

For Adorno, in its ostensible autotelism, such art speaks ‘according to the model of a nonconceptual, nonrigidified significative language’ which he aligns with the ‘language that is inscribed in what the sentimental age gave the beautiful if threadbare name, “The Book of Nature”’ (AT: 67). By claiming autonomous art has a language and likening it to the archaic religious concept of “The Book of Nature” – which in the Latin Middle Ages referred to nature, as opposed to scripture, as a source of divine revelation⁵⁰ – Adorno is positing that, unlike extra-aesthetic natural beauty, which is by now identified solely in terms that serve nature’s domination in reproducing the status quo, autonomous art provides an experience akin to natural beauty as it was theologically conceived: as the expression of something not made by humankind, which thus speaks a language that is undeniably significative but nevertheless cannot be subsumed by current concepts and detached from its particularity.

The Abstract Expressionists certainly often characterised their work as unparaphraseably linguistic. Hofmann, for example, claims that he speaks ‘through paint – not through words’ (1971: 84). Joan Mitchell asserts that it ‘seems very clear what [her painting] means’ in a way which she cannot iterate, but ‘the painting makes [...] clear’ (2012: 33). Motherwell claims that Abstract Expressionism is devoted to ‘a language of painting rather than the prevailing visions of man’ (1992: 81). And, while Kline repudiated the oft-made connection between his art and Japanese calligraphy,⁵¹ he was nevertheless reportedly influenced by his fellow Abstract Expressionist Bradley Walker Tomlin because the latter’s painting illuminated ‘how individual brush-strokes could come together to form powerful graphic signs without losing their character as painterly marks,’ informing his own compositions which he characterized as comprising of signs ‘you can’t read’ (Karmel 2007: 106; Kline qtd. in Anfam 2016: 46). Their critics and interlocutors, too, often alight upon this quality in their work. Harold Rosenberg, for instance, claims that Gottlieb’s paintings are separated from the (disenchanted

⁵⁰ In his *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (1953), Ernst Robert Curtius gives a good précis of this concept, citing the occultist Paracelsus, who opposed nature to written books, as the book “which God himself promulgated, wrote, set forth, and composed.” (2013: 232)

⁵¹ In 1962, for instance, Kline stated ‘I don’t think of my work as calligraphic’ (qtd. in Lieberman 1981: 64).

and reified) ‘universe of things’ by an ‘irreducible plus’ which is nonetheless inextricable from their ‘colour, texture, shape, and scale’ (1969: 192). And he characterises Newman’s aforementioned *Onement I* as ‘a pictorial statement that is absolute in itself, that is to say, that [...] is untranslatable into theoretical or associational references’ (1979: 49). In a series of paintings from 1946 to 1950 grouped as hieroglyphic which comprise tightly gridded characters, Lee Krasner almost thematises these dynamics, although not quite since these works are not reducible to illustration; still hold attention solely by virtue of their particularity. A work such as *Untitled* (1948) (fig. 7) is undeniably akin to ancient picture writing, and yet one cannot imagine its lines of white oil paint which snake across its surface, at once sinuous and rigid, standing for anything other than themselves, even while one cannot do justice to the painting by simply enumerating its material qualities. In her account of these paintings, Barbara Rose hits on the way in which they seem non-instrumentally significant when she asserts that ‘they hint at a dimension of metaphor’ but are ‘unquestionably non-objective works,’ resembling ‘ancient script’ in a way which ‘can neither be confused with rebuses nor literally interpreted’ (1983: 58-61).

However, the idea that Greenberg’s valorisation of medium-specificity is in fact a defence of Abstract Expressionism’s significant but nonsignifying language, is not an impression one would receive from the way in which his ‘formalism’ is broadly understood. Greenberg’s project is often characterised as one of conceptual identification, which extirpates a work’s enigmaticalness through analysis of its properties, as typified by Boris Groys’s recent assertion that for Greenberg the ‘ideal spectator of avant-garde art is less interested in it as a source of aesthetic delectation than as the source of knowledge, of information about art production, its devices, its media and its techniques’ (2016: 108).⁵² Certainly, as we have

⁵² It might be noted that for Groys, this is a mode of reception befitting Abstract Expressionism. He acknowledges that the works seem to suggest ‘a silent message, a particular intention to say something’ (2012: 220). However, rather than understanding this silent message as confounding prevailing concepts, he asserts that to understand Abstract Expressionism as showing ‘above all the concealed material properties of its medium’ bears ‘in mind the picture’s desire to speak’ allowing modern painting ‘to convey messages – perhaps not the messages of the world outside, but in any case the messages of its own material medium’ (Ibid: 225-6).

seen, Greenberg continually proclaims the Abstract Expressionists' superiority with recourse to the way in which their work makes evident the medium-specific elements of a painting. Yet, I have also acknowledged that for Greenberg this medium-specificity is not compelling to the extent that it is illustrative or programmatic. Contrarily, art generally seems to receive his praise in so far as it bears a distinct sense of meaning which nevertheless eludes the prevailing form of cognition – 'resting on rationality but without permitting itself to be rationalised' (CEC2: 168) – and he often formulates this precisely in terms of how artworks which renounce communication are comparable to language. As Bernstein notes, this is evident in Greenberg's construal of Pollock's *Cathedral* as a 'baroque scrawl' (AVB: 157). We might also point to how Greenberg refers to Motherwell's painting as 'handwriting' (CEC2: 241); lauds David Smith for his ability to 'say everything he has to say with the maximum of economy' (CEC2: 141); chides Gottlieb for repeating 'phrases of a single statement' rather than taxing himself to 'say more' (Ibid: 189); and in 1962 claims that that the New York School's turn towards abstraction occurred because the artists 'could see no other way in which to go in order to say something [...] worth saying' (CEC4: 121). Despite his rhetoric implying intentionality, it would be a mistake to understand Greenberg as conceiving of these enunciations as reducible to the painters' autobiographical lyricism: For Greenberg, as for Adorno, the language of modernist art is akin to the language of nature as something which is not made by human beings:

something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid, in the way a landscape – not its picture – is aesthetically valid, something *given*, increate, independent of meanings, similars or originals. (CEC1: 8)⁵³

Indeed, in 1947 Greenberg characterises Motherwell's painting in precisely the same way in which I showed above Golding retrospectively characterises the development of Still, Rothko

⁵³ See also his 1949 essay, 'The Role of Nature in Modern Painting' (CEC2: 271-275). Indeed, in a 1946 review of a book by A. Philip McMahon entitled *Preface to an American Philosophy of Art*, Greenberg takes the author to task for misunderstanding Kant's analogy between art and nature as legislating that art pictorially represent nature, rather than bearing its intrinsic purposiveness, writing that 'art, although it must look as though it *came* from nature, does not have to *resemble* any of the content of nature, anything already present in it' (CEC2: 66)

and Newman, when he writes that ‘Motherwell’s ambition, which is to simplify and to manipulate the results of the simplification into expression, is one that places him at the very centre of all that is serious and ambitious in contemporary painting’ (CEC2: 152). Following Bernstein, I contended above that we might understand this development as an extirpation of anthropomorphic projection in favour of particularity which counters identity-thinking’s extirpation of anthropomorphic projection in favour of reified value. However, I think that the linguistic quality of Abstract Expressionism’s particularity is perhaps best illustrated by anthropomorphically projecting onto Motherwell’s *Wall Painting No. III* (1953) (fig. 8) as follows: A black diamond shape at the far right of the canvas seems to be whispering something to the black vertical to its left, which in turn curves away from it, relaying the message to two other verticals, the second of which, voluminous with anticipation, finally delivers this message to an implacable black strip on the far left. As the final destination of the small diamond’s message, this strip seems pregnant with meaning, but this meaning appears as that which is not ‘interpolated human intention’ (AT: 78). This meaning may not be intelligible in terms of ‘current concepts and contexts,’ but because it nevertheless undeniably *means*, its unintelligibility serves to render the ‘usual intelligibility’ of these contexts and concepts ‘suspect as being shallow, habitual, reified’ (Adorno, 1992: 95). To understand Abstract Expressionist canvases as ‘syntactically articulated in themselves’ in this way (AT: 140), and thus, in spite of their discursive intransigence, ‘bindingly eloquent’ (AT: 143), is to understand them as ‘at once completely enigmatic and totally evident’ (AT: 122). The fact that, when pressed by Barr to categorise themselves, three of the painters suggested the terms ““direct,” “concrete,” and “self-evident”” does not mean that ‘these artists did not want to leave critics and historians any specific clues about the meaning of Abstract Expressionist painting,’ as Annette Cox claims (1). Instead, the enigmaticalness of the paintings’ unparaphrasable self-evidence – their semblance of being-in-itself in a world where everything is heteronomously defined – *is* the meaning of Abstract Expressionism. It is this which must be comprehended in what Adorno refers to as second reflection:

The truth of the new, as the truth of what is not already used up, is situated in the intentionless. This sets truth in opposition to reflection [...] and raises reflection to a second order, to second reflection. It is the opposite of its usual philosophical concept, as it is used, for instance, in Schiller's doctrine of sentimental poetry, where reflection means burdening artworks down with intentions. Second reflection lays hold of the technical procedures, the language of the artwork in the broadest sense, but it aims at blindness. (AT: 27)⁵⁴

Laying hold of technical procedures, then, is not a case of treating art as a source of information about art production, but rather of apprehending an artwork in its enigmaticalness. Because it is totally evident, this enigmaticalness cannot be dispelled by hermeneutical solution, 'only its form can be deciphered' (AT: 122). To decipher its form, is to understand it as an indictment of the reigning (real) abstractions according to which the status quo is reproduced in the interest of private profit irrespective of the cost for repressed nature. That is to say, second reflection gives '[i]nsight into the constitutive character of the nonconceptual in the concept' and thus ends, if only in semblance, 'the compulsive identification which the concept brings unless halted by such reflection' (ND: 12). To conceive of Abstract Expressionism in this way is also to oppose the widespread cliché that the artworks' taciturnity renders them 'open to interpretation' in the sense of being *tabula rasae* whose meanings await spectators' projections, all of which are supposedly equally as valid.⁵⁵ A variant of the latter assumption sometimes animates the revisionist historians, when they contend that the artworks' 'neutrality' rendered them 'peculiarly vulnerable to penetration by prevailing ideological trends' (Fuller 1990: 176). The Shapiros, for example, claim that '[i]t is ironic [...] that an apolitical art that arose at least in part as a reaction to

⁵⁴ Here, as will become important in Chapter 9, we might note a parallel with what Merleau-Ponty refers to as the 'hyperreflection' of painting, that is, 'an interrogative mood that remains sensitive to the silence of what cannot be said' (PP: 46).

⁵⁵ See Donald Kuspit's essay 'Symbolic Pregnancy in Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still' (1978) For the most sophisticated iteration of the notion that Abstract Expressionist canvases bear an 'completely arbitrary power of suggestion' (2005: 373).

didactic art, as an “art-for-art’s-sake” antidote to “art-as-a-weapon,” should have become the prime political weapon’ (1985: 148). And Guilbaut inconsistently makes this argument, at one point asserting that Abstract Expressionists’ avoidance of ‘direct political engagement’ allowed their art to be ‘re-worked, re-ideologised into the service of a cause not always in accord with their aspirations’ (1990: 36-37).⁵⁶ Certainly, as Adorno writes of art which does not accommodate itself ‘to sedimented subjective modes of response,’ Abstract Expressionism’s emphatic resistance to paraphraseability means it ‘lays itself open to the universal objection of subjective arbitrariness’ (1992: 95). However, as Kirk Varndoe writes in reference to Pollock, Abstract Expressionist artworks are undeniably more than ‘the various fabulations’ which they spawned, and thus ‘no matter how daunting the store of verbiage on art, there is always – if the subject is indeed art – a great deal (sometimes the core) left over, and only learnable first hand’ (1998: 19; 77). That is, to conceive of the paintings’ ostensible opacity, and thus lack of political tendentiousness, as meaning in excess of conceptuality, is to stress cognition’s (reciprocal) dependence on its object, rather than the self-sufficiency of signification. As I have already established, the identifications by which Abstract Expressionism was deployed in the service of US imperialism were not arbitrary ascriptions; its co-optation was instead underwritten by figuring as progress the very determinate negation driving the artworks’ legitimation of particularity. Indeed, at one point in Arnason’s catalogue essay for *Vanguard American Painting* he praises Abstract Expressionism in terms akin to, if more inchoate than, the way I have delineated this legitimation thus far, extolling the artworks’ ‘sense of symbolic content achieved through dramatic statement of isolated and highly simplified elements,’ a ‘sense of “presence”’ which he asserts ‘could be described as an “image” in the context of an abstract symbol rather than as a reflection or imitation of anything in nature’ (n. pag.). However, in the following chapters I will show that, overwhelmingly, if Abstract Expressionism was promoted by US

⁵⁶ As both Leja and Kimmelman note, throughout his work Guilbaut vacillates between claiming that Abstract Expressionist artworks were ideologically coterminous with the interests of the US ruling class, and claiming that their ‘sheer ambiguity’ lent them to co-optation by the same interests (Leja, 47; Kimmelman, 2000: 296).

imperialism in terms of its resistance to dominant rationality, it was in the sense of a ‘spurious irrational enclave,’ which does not obviate the way in which it nevertheless provides ‘the truth of society insofar as in its most authentic products the irrationality of the rational world order is expressed’ (AT: 84). In the next chapter, I will elaborate how Abstract Expressionism was deployed as such an irrational enclave via an immanent critique of David Craven’s critique of the revisionist historians. Craven suggests we might turn to the contemporaneous writing of Meyer Schapiro to recover Abstract Expressionism’s radicalism. However, I will show that Schapiro’s account of the works conceptually subsumes their irrationality in a way which was amenable to a US establishment eager to convince the people of Europe that freedom flourished under capitalist democracy. I will then in Chapter 7 return to Greenberg in order to further elaborate how, conversely, his criticism indicates how the supposed irrationality of Abstract Expressionism, by way of its immanent rationality, reveals and points beyond the irrationality of the rational world order.

Chapter Seven

Subjective Sovereignty and Social Democracy

That the Abstract Expressionists' (often, as we saw in Chapter 2, politically motivated) determinate negation of representational content bears affinity with Adorno's aesthetic theory is acknowledged in passing by David Craven as part of his truculent opposition to the revisionist historians' account of the movement, when he asserts that 'the fact that the work of [...] the Abstract Expressionists was often about negations' means 'Adorno's concept of progressive art [...] was closer to the position of the Abstract Expressionists than was the [...] conception of modernism codified by Greenberg' (ACC: 75). In the previous chapter, following Bernstein, I contended that Greenberg's account of the role of negation in the artists' praxis indicates how we might understand Abstract Expressionism as combating societal abstraction in an Adornian sense. However, Craven is utterly opposed to Greenberg's conception of Abstract Expressionism, which he wholly assimilates with the interests of post-war US capitalism. Despite claiming that he does not wish to 'argue that we have nothing left to learn from [...] orthodox formalists like Greenberg' (1996: 30), Craven seems to find little to salvage from Greenberg's theory. His antipathy towards Greenberg is premised not only on the way in which, as I explored in Chapter 4, Greenberg's positioning of Abstract Expressionism at the pinnacle of European Modernism lent itself to US triumphalism, but also on the capitulation and adaptation to the status quo supposedly implied by Greenberg's self-proclaimed 'positivism.' While a fuller consideration of the latter will concern us in Chapter 8, it will suffice here to establish that Craven contends that the fact that Greenberg founds his critical apparatus in 'medium self-criticism,' means that he frames Abstract Expressionist praxis in terms which utterly obviate its asymmetry with dominant ideology.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ It should be noted that Craven claims that he is not recovering this asymmetry in order to supplant the revisionists' account, but to establish that 'the signification of Abstract Expressionism involves an uneasy nexus of competing ideological values as well as aesthetic concerns, none of which enjoys absolute sway or unchecked sovereignty' (ACC: 3). In this, then, he ostensibly converges with the revisionists when, as I noted in the previous chapter, they argue it is precisely the arbitrariness of Abstract Expressionism's

According to Craven, Greenberg understands Abstract Expressionist praxis as ‘the consequence of predetermined formal problems,’ and inherent to this ‘technocratic view of modernism’ is an ‘automatic, even doctrinal, political conformity’ (ACC: 147-8). Following Leo Steinberg and Casey Blake, Craven contends that Greenberg’s supposedly dogmatic injunctions for the production of art commanded adherence to artistic laws in a manner which is fundamentally akin to the way in which capitalism enforces conformism. Drawing parallels between what they see as the prescriptiveness of Greenberg’s medium-specificity and the dictates of the contemporaneous Taylorist workplace, these critics claim that ‘Greenberg redefined the relationships between critic and artist [...] along lines parallel to the industrial division of labor between administrator and worker’ (Blake 1981: 42). For these critics, Greenberg took on the role of determining fixed criteria for the creation of art. Now, many of Greenberg’s (postmodern) critics of the ‘70s and ‘80s level similar accusations against Greenberg, in so far as his theory supposedly debarred or denigrated practices which could not ‘be discussed within the high-Modernist paradigm,’ as Craig Owens put it (1994: 299). However, because for such postmodern critics the practices which *could* be discussed with this paradigm are coterminous with it – for Owens, ‘Modernism had meant what Greenberg had said it meant’ (Ibid) – these critics are inclined to indict the artworks Greenberg championed as according to these dynamics. On the other hand, central to Craven’s project is of course the thesis that Abstract Expressionism is *not* selfsame with Greenberg’s account of it. That is, following Steinberg, Craven’s indictment ‘relates less to the pictures themselves than to the critical apparatus that deals with them,’ on the assumption that ‘there is obviously no affinity for industrialism in Pollock’ (Steinberg 1972: 79-80).⁵⁸

arbitrary signification which allowed it to be co-opted. As Annika Marie puts it, Craven’s ‘methodological commitments to the dialogical nature of art, to the sign as polyvalent and paradoxical’ draws ‘near to an attitude of liberal inclusiveness by which the playfully unruly sign or artifact steps over into a meaningless plurality’ (2006: 19-20). However, despite Craven’s methodological claims, I think his argument itself betrays his partisanship in favour of the notion that Abstract Expressionism was politically subversive, and conviction that its co-optation entailed an ideological distortion of this significance.

⁵⁸ While Steinberg says the same of Morris Louis, he also claims that industrialism characterises ‘an important aspect’ of Louis’s work, in so far as Louis’s stripe paintings ‘embody, beyond the subtlety of their color, principles of efficiency, speed, and machine-tooled precision which [...] tend to associate

As a better conceptual framework for understanding the challenge posed to the status quo by Abstract Expressionism's determinate negation, Craven suggests that of the, in his words, 'largely underappreciated' art historian Meyer Schapiro (ACC: 8).⁵⁹ Like Greenberg, Schapiro was personally close to many of the artists.⁶⁰ Unlike Greenberg, though, while Schapiro's practicable politics shifted from revolutionary to democratic socialism, Schapiro never denounced Marxism (see Wald 1987: 217), and Craven argues that the political horizon of communism persists in Schapiro's account of Abstract Expressionism, in so far as it illuminates how the movement prefigured disalienation. Drawing mainly from Schapiro's 1957 essay 'The Liberating Quality of Abstract Painting,' which Craven identifies as 'probably the single most incisive assessment written about the New York School by anyone in this period,' Craven posits that Schapiro shows how Abstract Expressionism served 'as an immanent critique from within of the overall logic and attendant ideological values of the corporate capitalist mode of production' (ACC: 34). On Craven's account, Schapiro's characterization of Abstract Expressionist artworks as hand-made manifestations of the artists' interiorities aligns the artworks with the possibility of political self-determination

themselves with the output of industry more than of art' (1972: 80). However, writers have argued that Pollock, also, bears direct affinity with Taylorism. Caroline A. Jones, for instance, claims that, rather than the genteel playfulness of Surrealist automatism – 'stimulant to the invention of motifs that could then be transferred to cabinet pictures or personal poems' – the repetitive automatism of Pollock 'was closer to *automation*' (EA: 232). For Jones, the 'sweeping records' of Pollock's movements replicate 'the internal discipline and external body techniques of an industrial line worker [...it is] a canvas produced by the large-motor labour of a body disciplined to repeat itself' (EA: 233). Clark has also made this comparison, describing Pollock moving 'up and down his canvas like a proletarian keeping pace with an assembly line' (1999b: 29). This is a thesis interrogated extensively by the art historian Barbara Jaffee, who in her article 'Jackson Pollock's Industrial Expressionism' (2004) traces a genealogy of standardised art training from the Civil War to Benton's 'Mechanics,' to argue that 'produced under the standardizing imperative of industrialism, Pollock's work is more like work-ordinary work-than art history has been able to acknowledge' (79).

⁵⁹ Craven is not wrong to claim that Schapiro is underappreciated. Schapiro is often referenced for his part in a debate with Heidegger, and subsequently Derrida, concerning the former's discussion of Van Gogh's painting of a pair of peasant shoes. However, despite Craven going some way to rectifying the situation when he edited a 1994 issue of *Oxford Art Journal* dedicated to Schapiro, very little secondary literature has been written directly on Schapiro. Of what exists, a 2007 doctoral thesis on Schapiro by Cynthia L. Persinger entitled 'The Politics of Style: Meyer Schapiro and the Crisis of Meaning in Art History' provides a good bibliography.

⁶⁰ Craven draws attention to Schapiro's conviviality with all first generation Abstract Expressionists, especially de Kooning, and role as teacher to Reinhardt in the '30s, and Mitchell, Hartigan and Frankenthaler in the '50s (ACC: 34).

through workers' control,⁶¹ and thus 'the unrealised potential inherent in capitalism' (ACC: 39). However, in what follows I want to argue that Schapiro's account of Abstract Expressionist praxis as disalienated lends itself to the hypostatisation of the artworks as disengaged private expression, which, as I indicated in Chapter 4 and will explore further below, served their neutralization in the interests of dominant rationality. Moreover, in Chapter 7 I will contend that to oppose Greenberg's model of Abstract Expressionist praxis with Schapiro's on the basis that the latter deems Abstract Expressionist praxis to be wholly determined by the artist *qua* autonomous subject, while the former characterises the Abstract Expressionist artist (of 'quality') as bound by heteronomous dictates, is to miss the rational kernel in Greenberg's account. That is, because these supposed dictates indicate how Abstract Expressionist praxis lends its materials binding expression as according to these materials' immanent logic, rather than subordinating these materials to subjective expression. This, then, lodges a claim for particularity against dominant rationality by means of rationality, which in turn, as I will argue in following chapters, prefigures genuine autonomous life all the more, by returning experience emphatically to the subject.

Like Greenberg, Schapiro was a friend of Adorno during the latter's time in America,⁶² and in 'The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art,' it is ostensibly in similar terms that he lauds the resistance to full discursivity of Abstract Expressionist artworks in the face of the total administration of 'a world of social relationships that is impersonal, calculated and controlled in its elements' (MA: 223). Schapiro writes that the 'media of communication which include the newspaper, the magazine, the radio and TV' aim 'at a maximum efficiency through methods that ensure the attention of the listener or viewer by setting up the appropriate reproducible stimuli that will work for everyone and promote the acceptance of the message'

⁶¹ In making this analogue, Craven repeatedly draws attention to Schapiro's close acquaintance with the council communist Paul Mattick (ACC: 74; 167).

⁶² Schapiro says in conversation with Craven, 'Adorno and I were close [from 1938 to 1941]. I saw him constantly and he was very friendly with me' (177). Adorno, for his part, in letters to Benjamin in 1938 repeatedly urged his friend, who was at the time hoping to make his way to New York, to meet with Schapiro, stating that the latter was 'in general [...] a well-informed and intellectually imaginative man' and 'at home in the same cultural climate' as he and Benjamin were (2001: 271).

(Ibid). Abstract Expressionist artworks, on the other hand, rid themselves of communicative means in resistance of this all-powerful system of communication:

[W]hat makes painting and sculpture so interesting in our time is their high degree of non-communication. You cannot extract a message from painting by ordinary means; the usual rules of communication do not hold here, there is no clear code or fixed vocabulary, no certainty of effect in a given time of transmission or exposure. Painting, by becoming abstract and giving up its representational function, has achieved a state in which communication seems to be deliberately prevented (Ibid).

As I explored in Chapter 2 was certainly the case for many of the Abstract Expressionists, then, Schapiro's account of Abstract Expressionism rests on the assumption that the artists' determinate negation of *Inhalt* 'implies a criticism of the accepted contents of the preceding representations as ideal values or life interests' (MA: 217). In Chapters 3 and 4, I showed that this negation of representations, in positioning Abstract Expressionism as the latest instantiation of European Modernism, resulted in works which were co-opted to serve the worldwide imposition of norms favourable to US capital. However, in Chapter 5, following Bernstein's Adornian account of Abstract Expressionism, I argued that the same negation of representations meant the artworks confound the identity-thinking attendant to these norms, objectivating the being-in-itself of nature in a world where all natural beauty is mediated by capital. For Schapiro, however, the Abstract Expressionists' negation of nature in representation – 'giving up landscape' as he puts it – was simply its renunciation, signaling that the artists no longer believed 'that nature can serve a model of harmony for man' (MA: 217). Instead, for Schapiro Abstract Expressionist artworks challenge identity-thinking by turning to 'problems, situations and experience' centred upon 'the exploration of the self' (Ibid). In this spirit, Schapiro champions Abstract Expressionism in its having 'become more deeply personal, more intimate, more concerned with experience of a subtle kind' (MA: 213). For Schapiro, 'the intrinsic power' of Abstract Expressionism's forms, colours and lines is due to their being 'feeling-charged' (MA: 215). Abstract Expressionist artworks issue

‘entirely from the hands and mind’ of their artists, and thus, if the artworks ‘do not communicate they induce an attitude of communion and contemplation [...] with the work of another human being, the sensing of another’s perfected feeling and imagination’ (MA: 224). As an active Trotskyist in the ‘30s, Schapiro was likely informed by Trotsky’s *Partisan Review* essays. We saw in Chapter 1 that, for the Trotsky of ‘Art and Politics in our Epoch’ and ‘Towards a Free Revolutionary Art,’ art is inherently on the side of revolution if it negates heteronomous dictates in dedication to its ‘own laws.’ I acknowledged that, for Trotsky, decisive for this is how such ostensible autotelism in art in fact concerns unmet human needs. While I will address this more fully in Chapter 9, suffice it here to note that for Schapiro this is the case in so far as modern art is ‘a liberator of human feeling from social and cultural repressions’ (Berman 1999: 225). Whereas in the previous chapter I sketched out the case that the power of Abstract Expressionist artworks’ nonfigurative forms lies precisely in the way that they appear as a language *without* semiosis, Gerardo Mosquera has referred to Schapiro’s ‘linkage of the non-figurative with [...] the interior world of the individual’ as ‘a semiology of the nonfigurative’ (1994: 78). For Schapiro, figurative content is not negated towards the affirmation of medium-specificity – however its significance is conceived – but the ‘affirmation of the self [...] against devalued social norms,’ and Abstract Expressionist artworks are accordingly championed to the extent that, as ‘hand-made personal objects,’ they ‘represent’ their creator, in contrast with commodities produced by alienated labour (MA: 217). Referring readers to Pollock’s *No. 26A: Black and White* (1948), Schapiro writes that, whereas in industry ‘accident is that event which destroys an order, interrupts a regular process and must be eliminated,’ Pollock’s willingness to allow the ‘random or accidental’ to provide the germ of his paintings’ order manifests ‘a feeling of freedom’ (MA: 221). In the next chapter, I will elaborate how Pollock’s praxis thus entails a dialectic of construction and mimesis, its rationality developing in reciprocity with its materials. For Schapiro, however, this dynamic is to be interpreted as manifesting the artist’s ‘liberty in [a] striking way,’ in protest at ‘a culture [...] increasingly organized through industry, economy and the state’

(MA: 222). He contends that Abstract Expressionist artworks call up ‘more intensely than ever before the painter at work, his touch, his vitality and mood, the drama of decision in the ongoing process of art. Here the subject becomes tangible’ (MA: 229).

The contrast between Schapiro’s account of Abstract Expressionism and the Adornian approach sketched out in the previous chapter is clear if we compare the following two passages, from Adorno and Schapiro respectively:

[T]he question of the meaning of life. [...] but inevitably [...] will fetch the answer that life makes whatever sense the questioner gives it. Not even a Marxism debased to an official creed will say much else, as witness the late Lukács. But the answer is false. The concept of meaning involves an objectivity beyond all “making”: a sense that is “made” is already fictitious. It duplicates the subject, however collective, and defrauds it of what it seemingly granted. (ND: 376)

What is a fact? According to most languages, it is a product of labour. Consider the word for fact in German, 'Tatsache' – which means 'thing done' – in French, 'fait' – which means 'made' – or even the Latin base for the English word 'fact' – which is the word 'factum' and is related to manufacture, which means 'made by hand' [...] What is the truth? The truth is what is made. (Schapiro qtd. in Craven, 1994: 43)

Following Bernstein, I suggested that Greenberg’s supposed formalist judgements, are in fact indicative of the way in which Abstract Expressionism expresses meaning in the terms of Adorno’s above quote; as an objectivity beyond all ‘making,’ resisting full discursivity and thus negating dominant rationality’s negation of nonidentity. Schapiro, on the other hand, was frustrated by Greenberg’s criticism – in his words, the critic’s ‘dogmatic formalism [...] his refusal to grant artistic intention [...] any place in his analysis’ (ACC: 42) – precisely because for Schapiro Abstract Expressionism’s negation of the prevailing negation of nonidentity occurs very definitively by way of ‘making,’ as the artist supposedly duplicates their unreduced subjectivity through labour upon their object.

Tellingly, whereas Craven aligns Schapiro with Engels's claim that '[l]abour [...] is the prime basic condition for all human existence' (ACC: 67), Adorno often refers to Marx's dictum in *Critique of the Gotha Programme* that 'Labour is *not the source* of all wealth. *Nature* is just as much the source of use values (and it is surely of such that material wealth consists!) as labour' (1960: 11).⁶³ For Adorno, while labour is the substance of exchange-value, art can only 'stand in for [...] stunted use-value' if it gives that which is repressed by labour its due, and accordingly aligns itself with '[n]ature, no longer oppressed by spirit' and freed 'from the miserable nexus of rank second nature and subjective sovereignty' (AT: 227; 197). For Schapiro, on the other hand, it is precisely by way of nature's subjugation to 'the sovereignty of the artist's mind [...] in the capacity to impose new forms on nature [...] corresponding to subtle states of mind' that abstract art performs a similar role (MA: 196).⁶⁴ Indeed, Schapiro cautions that Abstract Expressionist paintings' capacity to 'bring us closer to the activity of the artist' is what becomes eclipsed by exchange-value, as '[t]he enormous importance given to a work of art as a precious object which is advertised and known in connection with its price [...] stamps the painting as an object of speculation, confusing the values of art' (MA: 224). Of course, the subsumption of artworks' particularity by exchange-value is also of paramount concern for Adorno. He posits that the dominance of exchange-value has caused a 'regression' in consumption, whereby attention is tendentially blinded to artworks' actual qualities, and instead fixates upon the pseudo-uniqueness of an artwork's

⁶³ In *Negative Dialectics*, for example, Adorno cites this claim by Marx in order to argue that labour cannot be 'hypostatized in any form, neither in the form of diligent hands nor in that of mental production. Such hypostasis merely extends the illusion of the predominance of the productive principle' (ND: 177-8). As Jay notes, in this Adorno is positing that vulgar Marxism 'merely repeats the subject's domination of the object' (1984a: 68). Moreover, as Jarvis writes, Adorno is here reminding us that Marx does not offer us 'a theory of how *use values* are produced,' but rather an account of the systematic illusion that exchange-values are inherent to commodities, the intention of which is to undo this illusion without recourse to an 'immediate and dogmatic ontology of nature' (2004: 92).

⁶⁴ This claim was made not in 'The Liberating Quality' but in 'The Nature of Abstract Art,' an essay published in *Marxist Quarterly* in 1937 in which he prefigures many of the ideas he would elaborate in 'The Liberating Quality' twenty years later.

‘exhibition-value,’ which Adorno terms ‘an *imago* of the exchange process’ (AT: 45).⁶⁵ However, he contends that *this exhibition-value is often precisely the notion that the artwork brings us closer to the activity of the artist. Citing the examples of ‘films about Rembrandt [and] Toulouse-Lautrec,’ he asserts that the reduction of artworks to the psychology of the creative artist promotes ‘the neutralising transformation of cultural artifacts into commodities’ (1984: 154). Yet, ‘the feelings of the author’ which are thus ‘purportedly [...] to be [...] relived in the work,’ are ‘only a partial element in works and certainly not the decisive one’ (AT: 244), and the ‘person who stands behind the work’ back into whom ‘the objectivity of artworks’ is translated ‘is usually only the character mask of those who want to promote the work as an article of consumption’ (AT: 170). This dynamic is certainly true of Abstract Expressionist works, in whose popularisation as their artists’ personal expression Hans Namuth’s widely distributed 1950 documentary film of Pollock painting played a significant role. As Caroline A. Jones explores at length in the opening chapters of her *Machine in the Studio* (1996), the notion that Abstract Expressionist artworks represented their artists’ interiorities has been central in their circulation in the market and mass culture, ‘where the construction of authorship is crucial to commodity exchange’ (2ff). Or, as one of the Abstract Expressionist artists themselves, Elaine de Kooning, writes, the ‘trace of the personal’ in the artworks, which for her ‘invites false values,’ was ‘much prized by hucksters’ (1994: 203). That the concept of autobiographical lyricism is still central to Abstract Expressionism’s exhibition-value was particularly clear in the 2016 exhibition *Abstract Expressionism* at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, wherein not only Pollock’s paintings, but also Lee Krasner’s *The Eye Is the First Circle* (1960), were curatorially situated solely in reference to Pollock’s ‘energies.’ With respect to Krasner’s painting, rather than treated as a work in its own right, *The Eye Is the First Circle* was featured in the ‘Jackson Pollock’ section of the*

⁶⁵ For Adorno, as Stefan Brueur details, this is manifested ‘in the psychic organisation of the individual as replacement of object-libido by ego-libido’ (1985: 24). That is, the openness to experience typified by the former is foreclosed as affects and wishes are reified in terms of status and prestige. Indeed, at one point Guilbaut chalks up the rise in demand for ‘a more advanced, audacious, and modern art’ in the 1940s to the upper middle-class desire ‘to maintain a cultural distinction between themselves and this new middle class’ (NY: 95).

exhibition, and the exhibition guide framed it as the product of Krasner's struggle with Pollock's 'formidable ghost,' backhandedly acclaiming the work as 'among the most memorable tributes to Pollock's seismic achievement' (Anonymous 2016: 6-7).

This is not to say, however, that most of the artists rejected characterisations of their art akin to Schapiro's account. Indeed, decisive for Craven is the fact that the artists' statements as to the significance of their art often seem to corroborate Schapiro's account far more than Greenberg's. Adducing, for instance, Motherwell's claim that he does not 'want a picture to look "made," like an automobile or a loaf of bread in waxed paper' and instead agrees with Renoir 'who loved everything handmade' (ACC: 146), and Pollock's assertion that "[c]raftmanship is essential to the artist" for responding to "the aims of the age we're living in" (ACC: 152), Craven avers that the artists shared Schapiro's reading of Abstract Expressionism as 'a way of producing art that was fundamentally at odds with the capitalist mode of production' in so far as it 'symbolised above all a profound degree of self-realisation' (ACC: 136). Thus, for Craven Schapiro's account belies that of the revisionists, whom Craven accuses of simply reducing Abstract Expressionism to the 'reflection in the superstructural realm of petit bourgeois ideology' (ACC: 38). However, to oppose critics who accuse the style of complicity with dominant ideology by deploying Schapiro's account of Abstract Expressionism as an indictment of reification in this way, is to sidestep the accusation that it was precisely the characterisation of Abstract Expressionist works as expressions of their artists' disalienated 'feeling' that lent them to co-optation. It is to ignore the idea that, as Adorno writes of the notion that art bears an 'edifying lack of cogency,' it was such a characterisation which precipitated the way in which Abstract Expressionism was 'incorporated into and subordinated to bourgeois life as its antagonistic complement' (1992: 247).

It is a relative commonplace to claim that, as Grant H. Kester puts it, Abstract Expressionism's attempt to cultivate an 'organic and integrated expression of human creativity' in protest against societal rationalisation resulted in a 'disabling domesticity'

(1998: 9). Indeed, Craven ultimately comes to similar conclusions, contending that the intransigent opposition to society of many of the artists was tantamount to abstract negation, resulting in a fetishisation of alienation and ‘consequently, the call of these artists for profound change was at least partially undermined by the nature of the change that they proposed – one that went from seeming unlikely to being undesired’ (ACC: 164). Yet, as I noted in Chapter 4, Jachec’s central thesis is that Abstract Expressionism’s characterization as a humanistic antidote to reification not only rendered it powerless to resist, but also amenable to, assimilation by a US State Department desperate to quell hostility towards US culture among the Western European left intelligentsia. And, while Craven published his study prior to Jachec’s, this notion was not foreign to the preceding revisionist accounts. Peter Fuller, for example, notes that in order to evade a ‘decisive comparison’ between the ‘production of lies under rigorous control from above’ of Russia’s Socialist Realist art, and advertising in America, the ‘most perceptive apologists for corporate American capitalism’ gave cultural centrality to ‘the residual professional Fine Art tradition,’ which ostensibly toed no predetermined line in that it was ‘manifestly unregulated and imaginatively free,’ and thereby at liberty to express opposition (174). And Cockcroft contends that the Abstract Expressionists’ rejection of the ‘values of bourgeois society’ meant that its ‘dissent’ neatly fitted the CIA’s mission ‘to present a strong propaganda image of the United States as a “free” society as opposed to the “regimented” communist bloc’ (125-9).⁶⁶ In fact, in the revisionist accounts Schapiro is often afforded a pivotal role in Abstract Expressionism’s co-optation in this sense. Guilbaut alights upon ‘On the Aesthetic Attitude in Romanesque Art,’ an essay by the art historian from 1947 in which Schapiro asserts that ‘the expression of feeling’ in modern art renders it ‘strongly critical of contemporary life’ (1977: 1), and Jachec identifies the publication of ‘The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art’ in *ARTnews* in 1957 as emblematic of critical discourse which was paramount in the choice to export

⁶⁶ Cockcroft makes this point by attributing the claim that ‘dissenting opinions within the framework of agreement of cold-war fundamentals’ to an article entitled ‘I’m Glad the CIA are “Immoral” ’ by Thomas W. Braden, an official of both MoMA and the CIA. However, upon consulting that article archived online I cannot find this quote (Braden 1967, 20 May).

Abstract Expressionism with the exhibitions *Jackson Pollock 1912-1956* and *The New American Painting* in the following years (PPA: 181).

For Guilbaut, Schapiro's essay is exemplary in terms of how Abstract Expressionism was conceived as providing a 'last refuge' for resistance by 'leftist intellectuals who refused to reject Marxism' (NY: 200-1). He contends that this dovetailed with 'old-fashioned bourgeois individualism,' at that time typified by the liberal intellectual Arthur M. Schlesinger's *The Vital Center* (1949). On Guilbaut's telling, while designed to 'perpetuate the practice of painting without losing face, that is, without abandoning the vocabulary of radical politics' (NY: 158), discourse which characterised Abstract Expressionism as disalienated in its affirmation of subjective expression converged with Schlesinger's championing of the 'individualism and the willingness to take risks' of subjects whose anxiety was the price paid for living in the free society of the United States (NY: 200-2). That is, in contrast with '[a]uthoritarian regimes like Russia' where the choice was made for the individual 'who thus [traded their] freedom for tranquillity' and was 'planned and programmed and so [knew] nothing of the anxiety and alienation' intrinsic to living in a democracy (NY: 202). This resemblance is certainly germane. However, Guilbaut caricatures Schlesinger's position somewhat and thus misses the nuances of the way in which the account of Abstract Expressionism as individual expression in protest against reification was assimilated by the liberal ideology undergirding post-war US imperialism, of which I will show Jachec gives a better account. Certainly, in the *Vital Center* Schlesinger enthusiastically propounds that the 'crucial differences between the USA and the USSR [...] can be defined as basically the differences between free society and totalitarianism (1988: 7-8); champions the former, and, accordingly, while he vocally opposed McCarthyism, he might be argued to have supported its presuppositions in advocating vigilance against the 'clear and present menace' of Communism (Ibid: 218).⁶⁷ But Schlesinger does not forward an account of vigorous

⁶⁷ Indeed, responding to McCarthy's accusation in 1952 that he was a communist, Schlesinger claims he fought Communism and fellow travellers in universities 'long before McCarthy did,' drawing attention to

individualism, or hypostasize the anxiety felt by American subjects as a marker of their freedom. Contrarily, his claim that '[a]gainst totalitarian certitude, free society can only offer modern man devoured by alienation and fallibility' is an acknowledgement of how the 'free society' of 'modern industrial economy [had] worn away [...] protective securities without creating new ones' (Ibid: 55-7). Nevertheless, of the 'imperfect alternatives' provided by the Soviet Union and the United States, Schlesinger surmises that it was in the latter that democratic socialism still had a chance of being realised, precisely because discontent had not been forcibly quelled as it was in the former.

Thus, as was the case for much of the US erstwhile left intelligentsia, Schlesinger's rapprochement with the US status quo was conditioned by his rejection of the totalitarianism of the Soviet Union, under which the authority of the individual subject was supposedly negated. In this, his argument often superficially resembles Adorno's opposition to the institutionalisation of identity-thinking. For instance, as Adorno criticises Lukács for conceding that the Hungarian Communist Party 'was in the right, even though his ideas and arguments were better than the party [...] because it embodied the objective state of history, while his own position, which was more advanced both in his view and in terms of the sheer logic of the ideas involved, lagged behind that objective state of affairs' (2008: 17), Schlesinger claims that 'a Communist teacher, who imported [their] party views into the classroom, would be an incompetent teacher' since they would lack 'the freedom [...] to teach [their] subject according to their most responsible understanding of it, and not according to the ukase of a [...] political party' (1988: 207). Against such objectivism, Schlesinger projects a 'democratic society, based on a genuine cultural pluralism' (Ibid: 253). Yet, this pluralism is what Adorno refers to as the 'alleged social relativity of views [obeying] the objective law of social production under private ownership of the means of production' (ND: 37). That is to say, it is pluralism in the sense of 'the ideology describing the centrifugal tendencies of a

an article from 1946 in which he 'exposed and indicted the Communist conspiracy in America at a time when McCarthy was accepting Communist help in his effort to defeat that great anti-Communist Bob FaFullette in Wisconsin' (qtd. in Abrams 1952, 4 November).

society that threatens to disintegrate into unreconciled groups under the pressure of its own principles' and is nevertheless 'represented as if it were a state of reconciliation in which people lived together in harmony while in reality society is full of power struggles,' as Adorno identified the notion in the social democratic corporatism 1960s West Germany, the amenability of which to the United States I noted in Chapter 4 (2006: 95). Indeed, Schlesinger effectively admits as much, For Schlesinger, the fate of the USSR was decisive proof that any attempt to abolish private property and collectivise resources would lead to a class system in which the ruling strata went unchecked. He thus concluded that the role of the state should be to administratively mediate inevitable conflict between classes:

Economic conflict is essential if freedom is to be preserved, because it is the only barrier against class domination; yet economic conflict, pursued to excess, may well destroy the underlying fabric of common principle which sustains free society. I cannot imagine a free society which has eliminated conflict. So long as there is inequality in the distribution of property and variety in the nature of economic interests, so long will politics centre on economic issues; and so long the insurgency of the discontented will provide the best guarantee against the tyranny of the possessors. Yet this conflict must be kept within bounds, if freedom itself is to survive. (1988: 173)

Schlesinger, then, did not, contrary to Guilbaut's claims, advocate rugged individualism. On the contrary, for Schlesinger '[t]he individual requires a social context, not one imposed by coercion, but one freely emerging in response to his own needs and initiatives' (Ibid: 248). However, he posits that this society organised from below to above might be achieved within the framework of a reformist capitalism in which the interests of workers were adequately represented, while the division of labour and priority of private profit remained axiomatic.

As I explored in Chapter 2, it was according to this very ideology that the United States exported the Social Realism of Ben Shahn. Yet, from Schlesinger's references to art throughout *The Vital Center*, we might infer a defence of modernism akin to Schapiro's, and

to a greater extent than Guilbaut's loose homology indicates. Much like Trotsky and the Greenberg of 'Kitsch,' when discussing the totalitarianism of the Soviet Union, Schlesinger dedicates numerous pages to denouncing the prescription of *Inhalt* for art under Stalin (Ibid: 78-83). Schlesinger surmises that the converse Stalinist opposition to modernism was premised on the notion that modernism expressed subjective states which belied the Soviet Union's forced reconciliation between subjects and society, adducing Picasso as an example of an artist whose work reflects 'anxieties which are incompatible with the monolithic character of "the Soviet person"' (Ibid: 79). The parallels with Schapiro's thesis as to how an Abstract Expressionist artwork manifests the unreduced subjectivity of its artist otherwise suppressed by capitalist rationalisation should here be clear. And indeed, when in the final chapter of *The Vital Center* Schlesinger brooches the question of art and culture in his projected social-democratic United States, he assigns it the role of generating 'living emotional content, rich enough to overcome the anxieties incited by industrialism' (Ibid: 245). He opines that, while standardisation had 'certainly raised levels not only of consumption but of culture,' it had 'reduced life to an anonymity of abundance which brings less personal fulfilment than people once got from labour in their own shop or garden' (Ibid: 252). As a remedy to this malaise, Schlesinger suggests creative 'outlets for the variegated emotions of man' in order to 'restore meaning to democratic life' (Ibid: 253). While Schlesinger proposes these outlets would take the form of nebulously defined 'group activities,' Jachec rightly contends that this then-prevalent idea that creative activity should serve as individualistic expression within the context of industrial capitalism, of which Schlesinger's scholarship was a particularly conspicuous example, was adopted by the State Department in its enlistment of Abstract Expressionism in 'the international cultural propaganda campaign of America-style democracy as the repository of socialist values' (PPA: 130).

As I acknowledged above, Barr's catalogue essay for *The New American Painting* defined Abstract Expressionism not only as the telos of European modernism, but also in terms of the

artworks manifesting the artists' subjective interiorities, and Jachec identifies this notion as integral to the effort of winning over the European left intelligentsia. During the 1950s, due largely to revelations as to the extent of Stalin's purges and acts perceived as imperialist aggression on the part of the USSR, particularly the quelling of the Hungarian revolution of 1956, more and more of the European left were disaligning themselves from the Soviet Union, even in countries whose communist parties were strong such as France and Italy. Thus, there was a concerted effort made by the State Department's Policy Planning Committee to capitalise on this disaffection and emphasise the freedom of the individual within the United States in the terms that Schlesinger had framed it. Jachec notes that this was evident even prior to the decisive privileging of Abstract Expressionism in exported exhibitions in the late 1950s. For example, the 1953-4 touring show *Twelve Modern American Painters and Sculptors* featured only Gorky, Smith and Pollock from among the Abstract Expressionists, and yet Andrew Carnduff Ritchie's catalogue essay for the exhibition stressed how the formally divergent works were united by their shared 'emphasis [...] on the artist as an individual' (PPA: 184). However, Jachec shows that critical discourse, especially published in the magazine *ARTnews*, increasingly privileged Abstract Expressionism in these terms. In 1951, *ARTnews* published an editorial asserting that abstract artists had 'joined statesmen and philosophers in affirming the supremacy of the private worlds of human freedom' because 'the typically modern concern with the ethics of human expression is also fundamental to the aesthetics of the abstractionists,' and Jachec asserts that its publication of 'The Liberating Quality' six years later cemented the notion that among the variants of abstract art it was Abstract Expressionism which best gave voice to subjective interiority (PPA: 182). Accordingly, Jachec contends, the USIA and the IC circulated *Jackson Pollock 1912-1956* and *The New American Painting* in Europe in 1958, and she adduces critical responses to show that the art was received by many on the continent precisely as intended. For instance, reviews in the French independent left and liberal press to *Jackson Pollock 1912-1956* lauded Pollock on the basis that he, as was written in *Le Monde*,

revolted ‘against the oppression of mechanistic civilisation,’ and conversely, according to *Combat*, ‘went out to make all in his own feelings’ (PPA: 204). Thus, in reinforcing the notion that individual expression flourished within the context of US capitalism, Schapiro’s account of Abstract Expressionism as an enclave of disalienation chimed with the same ambitions of US imperialism to which I showed in Chapter 4 Greenberg’s account of the movement as European modernism’s telos was amenable. However, whereas I have argued in this chapter that Schapiro’s account served the artworks’ reification in terms of the exhibition-value of subjective interiority, in Chapter 5 I contended that Greenberg’s account bears witness to Abstract Expressionism’s resistance to such subsumption. In the next chapter I will return to Greenberg, in order to elaborate this further with recourse to his account of Abstract Expressionist praxis.

Chapter Seven

Making Things Of Which We Know Not What They Are

As I acknowledged in Chapter Three, by the 1950s Greenberg had ostensibly entirely dissociated avant-garde art from radical politics in his criticism. Indeed, in his 1959 essay ‘The case for Abstract Art,’ which Francis Frascina notes shares ‘common ground’ with Schapiro (2006: 25), Greenberg makes explicit that he is positing abstract art as an ‘antidote’ to the dominant rationality of capitalism (CEC4: 80). Accordingly, as Donald Kuspit asserts, it seems as if, for Greenberg, ‘artistic unity is not simply an end in itself’ because it ‘serves human life by affording a ready opportunity, in contrast to the opportunities nature and life afford, for aesthetic experience, which serves life by relieving it of the pressures on it’ (1979: 37). As further evidence for this, we might point to Greenberg’s favourable citation elsewhere of Matisse’s assertion that ‘he wanted his art to be an armchair for the tired businessman’ as a pre-eminent demonstration of ‘the sincerity and penetration that go with the kind of greatness particular to twentieth-century painting’ (CEC2: 134). For Adorno, this trope of the ‘tired businessman’ is paradigmatic of the instrumental attitude which ‘uses [art] as a massage’ (AT: 265), diminishing art’s ‘protest against the claim of the discursive to totality,’ and contrarily rendering aesthetic experience as ‘the reproduction of labour power’ (AT: 98). Greenberg, then, appears to expound and champion the very implications of conceiving abstract art as – to quote Frascina’s summation of the essay’s affinity with Schapiro – ‘an implicit critique of capitalism’s emphasis on automated production and mass consumer culture,’ upon which the revisionists alight to argue that Schapiro’s account served that very culture. However, whereas for Schapiro abstract art indicts such culture by affirming the preponderance of a subject over an object, for Greenberg abstract art provides compensation for instrumental reason by according precedence to the object. He writes that ‘pictures and free-standing sculpture – solo works of art meant to be looked at for their own sake and with full attention, and not as the adjuncts, incidental aspects, or settings of things

other than themselves' had emerged as 'a relief' in the US, whose society was 'given over as no other society has been to purposeful activity and material production' (CEC4: 77-80). That is, Greenberg focuses on the very aspects of abstract art which in Chapter 5 I showed allows us to read his account of medium-specificity through Adorno as indicative of how Abstract Expressionism exposes dominant rationality as irrational in its exclusions.

Indeed, it is of course not in the name of discursively political art that Adorno criticises the notion that art exists as an ersatz form of leisure serving solely to reproduce labour power. He in fact often takes recourse to the central dichotomy drawn by Greenberg in 'The case for Abstract Art' between aesthetic experience and the instrumental reason of the relations of production, in arguing for autonomous art's challenge to the status quo. For Adorno, art 'is more than praxis because by its aversion to praxis it simultaneously denounces the narrow untruth of the practical world' (AT: 241); it is 'a constant indictment of the workaday bustle and the practical individual' (Ibid); it is 'the critique of praxis as the rule of brutal self-preservation at the heart of the status quo and in its service' (AT: 12); it 'gives the lie to production for production's sake and opts for a form of praxis beyond the spell of labor' (Ibid). As should be clear from preceding chapters, however, decisive for Adorno is that art does not simply oppose instrumental reason by counterposing 'feeling' to it as its irrational other. As I have established, for Adorno the aconceptual and yet binding particularity of artworks exposes instrumental rationality's irrationality by appearing undeniably rational, and he posits that this is because art praxis dominates its object no less than instrumental rationality, but does so in the service of its object's particularity. For Adorno, art praxis 'carries out the correction of self-preserving reason, but not by simply setting itself in opposition to it; rather, the correction of reason is carried out by the reason immanent to artworks themselves' (AT: 306).

As I delineated in Chapter 5, Adorno mounts his opposition to the status quo as immanent critique founded on the fact that the Enlightenment's dissolution of myth – at the pinnacle of

which, pertinently for this thesis, the United States positioned itself during the Cold War – has resulted not in its aim of the liberation of human beings from subjugation to nature, but rather erected the second nature of capitalism, which represses not only outer nature, but also humans’ inner nature. For Adorno, the ‘evolution of the technical forces of production *in toto*’ was borne of ‘the material needs of human beings, of what they need for their preservation,’ and yet, in its indifference to particularity, it ‘dominates human labour processes as a method, as technical rationality’ (2006: 16). Thus, bourgeois society’s supposed ‘excess of rationality, about which the educated class complains and which it registers in concepts like mechanization, atomization, indeed even de-individualization,’ is in fact ‘a lack of rationality’ (1998a: 138). If it were truly rational, technical rationality would be ‘the ensemble of means for minimizing material necessity,’ but instead, ‘the ideal of full employment is substituted for that of the abolition of labor’ (AT: 319). In its technical procedures, art draws on this same rationality. However, as Peter Uwe Hohendahl notes, for Adorno it is ‘pure force of production [...] outside the fixed relations of production’ (2013: 29). Unconstrained by the relations of production, in art this rationality is attuned to particularity, and thus rational. For Adorno ‘[o]ppressed nature expresses itself more purely in works [...] which with regard to the level of the technical forces of production, go to the extreme, than it does in circumspect works whose *parti pris* for nature is as allied with the real domination of nature as is the nature lover with the hunt’ (AT: 209). Authentic art thus ‘makes itself like what is free of domination by the limitless domination over its material’ (AT: 288). According to Adorno, as Robert Hullot-Kentor puts it, [t]he ideal that inheres in [authentic artworks] is a transformed subjectivity that, rather than dominating its object, gives it binding expression,’ by adhering to ‘the technical obligation of the critical eye and ear [to follow] word, note, or colour “where it wants to go”’ (2006: 76; 20). Yet, in order to oppose domination and give the nonidentical its due, art praxis assimilates itself to the comportment of domination:

Art, the afterimage of human repression of nature, simultaneously negates this repression through reflection and draws close to nature. The subjectively instituted totality of artworks does not remain the totality imposed on the other, but rather, by its distance from this other, becomes the imaginative restitution of the other. Neutralized aesthetically, the domination of nature renounces its violence. In the semblance of the restoration of the mutilated other to its own form, art becomes the model of the nonmutilated. Aesthetic totality is the antithesis of the untrue whole. If art, as Valéry once said, wants to be indebted only to itself, this is because art wants to make itself the likeness of an in-itself, of what is free of domination and disfigurement. Art is the spirit that negates itself by virtue of the constitution of its own proper realm (AT: 288).

In the previous chapter, I showed that David Craven accuses Greenberg of legislating for art praxis and interpretation in a manner homologous with the technical rationality of capitalism, and suggests Meyer Schapiro's account as better suited to illuminating how Abstract Expressionism prefigures disalienation. I argued, however, that, in framing Abstract Expressionism as a refuge for irrational human feeling amidst capitalist rationalisation, and thus aligning it with precisely the complaints of the educated class enumerated by Adorno above, Schapiro's reading of Abstract Expressionism contributed to the movement's co-optation no less than Greenberg's. Moreover, I contended that Schapiro's subjectivism does so by paradoxically recapitulating identity-thinking, inviting the artworks' conceptual subsumption by exhibition-value. In what follows, I will argue that, on the other hand, Greenberg's account of Abstract Expressionist praxis as interrogation of medium-specificity, in spite of its ossification, indicates far better how Abstract Expressionism, as Lambert Zuidervaart paraphrases Adorno, 'provides models of reconciled labour' by contributing 'to the requisite shift in the subject-object dialectic' (1991: 120).

Adorno wrote very little on painting. However, in 1965 he published an essay, 'On Some Relationships Between Music and Painting,' in which, in a parallel with the former art-form, to which Adorno was more dedicated than any other, he elaborates in reference to painting the dialectic of spiritual construction and mimetic expression by which he contends authentic artworks take on the character of a nonconceptual, nonrigidified language. In this essay, in marked affinity with Greenberg, he argues that each medium does so 'only where each pursues its immanent principle in a pure way' (1995: 67). Yet, whereas commentators on Greenberg tend to interpret his approbation of 'purity' in terms of the foregrounding of a given medium's technical aspects, as typified by Groys's characterisation cited in Chapter 5, for Adorno it is clear in 'On Some Relationships' that to pursue a medium's 'immanent principle,' is to pursue the nonconceptual, and objectivate it in semblance. He claims that, at the time of writing 'On Some Relationships,' various media were converging in so far as they were emerging as language through the determinate negation of *Inhalt*. That is, their linguistic character is 'the opposite of [a language] of music or painting' if we understand language in terms of 'telling a story,' but rather a language 'by virtue of the way they are constructed' (71). As I have elaborated, for Adorno this construction entails domination of materials which nevertheless does not express 'the old synthesizing I, behaving as if it were in unbroken command of the material' (Ibid: 73). Instead, he writes, this domination works 'toward a changed form of the expressive' which echoes 'early mimetic behaviours' (Ibid). To understand what Adorno means by 'early mimetic behaviours,' it is necessary to take recourse to the speculative anthropology he delineates with Max Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. For the authors, mimesis preceded identity-thinking. In its first phase, it took the form of the adaptation by vulnerable humans to overpowering nature, whereby the latter's imposing severity was mimicked in reciprocal rigidity. This archaic mode of mimesis, Adorno and Horkheimer contend, developed into magic, as shamans warded 'off [...] danger with its likeness' (2002: 12). Whereas in archaic mimesis, humans were dominated by daunting forces of nature and mimicked them in resistance, in this magical phase, mimicry

was not purely defensive but an attempt to ameliorate the threat of these forces. However, while in these processes the mimicked object retained its particularity, such rituals gave way to instrumental methods by which the object could be controlled. The ‘manifold affinities between existing things’ was ‘supplanted by the single relationship between the subject who confers meaning and the meaningless object’ (Ibid: 10-11), the reification of which meanings as second nature under capitalism must, as I have discussed, be adapted to in much the same way as overpowering first nature formerly was.⁶⁸

For Adorno, then, art praxis recovers something of the mimetic behavior which preceded the polarity of subject and object, and whether we accept his speculative anthropology, it is undeniable that the production of art often seems to enjoin nonsubsumptive comportment; an absorption in making to the extent that one is ‘not reflexively aware, but still able to feel that what is happening makes sense,’ as Andrew Bowie notes, following Martin Seel (2013: 152). However, for Adorno the aforementioned role of domination in such praxis means it cannot be understood as romantic yearning for a prelapsarian return to ‘meaningful times’ (ND: 191). Instead, Adorno contends that artistic production ‘is neither immediately mimesis nor its repression’ (AT: 331). Rather, the nonconceptual, nonrigidified language of artworks is the result of ‘tension between objectivating technique and the mimetic essence of artworks [...] fought out in the effort to save the fleeting, the ephemeral, the transitory in a form that is immune to reification and yet akin to it in being permanent’ (AT: 219). That is, artworks ‘register and objectivate levels of experience that are fundamental to the relation to reality yet are almost always concealed by reification’ (AT: 310). As Adorno continues in ‘On Some Relationships,’ authentic artworks are thus ‘[g]raven characters’ which express mimetic impulses ‘without surrendering them to the seemingly objective rationality of the prevailing signs,’ and yet this ‘return of an undistorted mimetic moment’ is ‘in thrall’ to rationality, which Adorno contends in turn abandons itself to the mimetic impulse ‘by dint of its sovereign control over the natural material’ (1995: 73). In this, the authentic artwork is a

⁶⁸ For this lucid breakdown of mimesis into archaic, magical and industrial stages, I am indebted to Simon Mussell’s ‘Mimesis Reconsidered: Adorno and Tarkovsky contra Habermas’ (2013: 212-5).

‘whole [which] exists only for the sake of its parts’ (AT: 187). This is a notion echoed by Merleau-Ponty, to whom we will turn in following chapters, when he claims in his 1952 essay ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’ that ‘the meaning of the painting’ is ‘capable of demanding *this* colour and *this* object in preference to any other and [...] commands the arrangement of the picture just as imperiously as a syntax or a logic’ (PP: 92). Following Hegel, Adorno refers to the mediation of an artwork’s materials by artistic construction as ‘spiritualisation.’ For Hegel, however, this entails the harmonisation of an artwork’s sensory form with meaning by which ‘sensuous shapes and sounds present themselves not simply for their own sake and for that of their immediate structure’ (2004: 44). Hegel argues that a work of art

is a work of art only in as far as, being the offspring of mind, it continues to belong to the realm of mind, has received the baptism of the spiritual, and only represents that which has been moulded in harmony with the mind. (Ibid: 33)

For Adorno, conversely, spiritualisation is the mediation by which an artwork’s meaningfulness emerges *from* its particularity:

In artworks, spirit has become their principle of construction, although it fulfills its telos only when it emerges from what is to be constructed, from the mimetic impulses, by shaping itself to them rather than allowing itself to be imposed on them by sovereign rule. Form objectivates the particular impulses only when it follows them where they want to go of their own accord. (AT: 118)

Adorno, then, contends that authentic art praxis is paratactic rather than hypotactic. It entails the constructive synthesis of an expressive manifold which, unlike the extra-aesthetic synthesis of capitalist ratiocination, does not curtail the irreducible particularity of the manifold’s elements, and yet in its rationality renders them objectively binding.

Greenberg, on the other hand, is often accused of privileging the constructive axis over the expressive. I detailed in the previous chapter how Craven, following Casey Blake and Leo Steinberg, accuses the critic of complicity with the status quo due to his purportedly

autocratic imposition of rules for the production of art. As we saw, Craven argues that this is because Greenberg's notional prescriptions of medium-specificity are inimical to the artistic self-management wherein lies Abstract Expressionism's radicalism, fundamentally antithetical as it is to the total lack of self-management afforded to workers under Taylorism. For different reasons, Guilbaut, also, points to Greenberg's privileging of art's constructive element as important in Abstract Expressionism's co-optation. He adduces a 1947 essay by Greenberg entitled 'The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture' as characteristic of the critic's effort to position post-war US art as, in Guilbaut's paraphrase, 'the continuation of the modernist tradition' by calling for a 'balanced, antiexpressionistic art' which 'must be blasé and detached in order to be controlled and composed, fully developed on the canvas,' so as it might counter America's reputation for barbarism, and prove that 'American art was the logical consequence and extension of Parisian art, which had lost its sharp edge' (NY: 162).

Certainly, as I explored at length in Chapter 4, Greenberg's positioning of Abstract Expressionism as the latest instantiation of the modernist tradition served its deployment by US imperialism. And indeed, in 'The Present Prospects' Greenberg articulates his exhortation for the Apollonian in terms which ostensibly obviate the nonidentical, proposing that such art should bear 'contempt for nature in all its particularity' (CEC2: 168). However, if such hyperbole is understood in context, it attests less to formalist autocracy than the same dialectical dynamics which Adorno deems central to the production of authentic art. Greenberg makes his appeal in 'The Present Prospects' amidst a reiteration of the diagnosis of US culture developed in 'Kitsch.' While now conceding that 'the very fact of' America's 'experiment in mass cultivation' rendered it 'in several respects the most historically advanced country on earth' – with a pointed invidious comparison to Soviet Russia's supposed backwardness – Greenberg bemoans the way that the ratiocination that this cultivation entailed, contrived as it was 'in the direction of profit,' had been to the detriment

of avant-garde art (CEC2: 163).⁶⁹ As I have established, by 1947 Greenberg had abandoned the notion that avant-garde art undermined capitalism. Instead, in ‘The Present Prospects’ he affords avant-garde art the ameliorative role of founding ‘our sensibilities,’ and thus remunerating ‘us for those particular and necessary frustrations that ensue from living at the present moment in the history of western civilisation’ (CEC2: 168). I will return to the political implications of this in the next chapter. At this point, however, I want to note that in terms of art praxis Greenberg explicitly ascribes art this task as a corrective to art which serves as ‘an escape in transcendent exceptions and aberrated states’ (CEC2: 164).

Above, I elaborated how Adorno argues that, in a world where the forces of production could eliminate privation and yet are stymied by the relations of production, art challenges prevailing instrumental rationality by assimilating rather than counterposing itself to it. Similarly, in ‘The Present Prospects’ Greenberg asserts that ‘substantial art requires balance and enough thought to put it in accord with the most advanced view of the world’ obtaining at a time when humanity had ‘*in theory* solved the great public and private questions’ and the failure to solve these questions in practice had ‘become more problematical than ever’ (CEC2: 167). This is admittedly rather abstruse. Yet, it certainly implies that, contrary to Craven’s characterisation of him, for Greenberg the rationality of modernism is not selfsame with dominant rationality, but rather corrects it, and indeed in a 1950 essay entitled ‘Our Period Style,’ while appearing rather sanguine in the hope that social equilibrium could be technocratically achieved under capitalism, he claims that the art of the age was typified by an artistic rationalisation which, in refusing to ‘serve ends outside itself,’ modelled what the ‘frightening idea’ of ‘[r]ationalisation in the industrial sense’ could be were its ends and

⁶⁹ While Greenberg certainly no longer supported revolutionary socialism in the late ‘40s and ‘50s, the extent to which he conversely became an apologist for industrial capitalism has been overstated. For instance, in the introduction to Volume 3 of Greenberg’s *Collected Essays* John O’Brian cites another essay, 1953’s ‘The Plight of Our Culture,’ as typifying ‘an about-face’ in Greenberg’s thinking, as Greenberg appears to be making an optimistic reassessment of industrial capitalism (xxix). This is a reading which Sheila Christofides has recently disputed in her essay ‘Beyond Revisionism,’ in which she contends that, instead, and especially in its republication in *Art & Culture*, the essay remains true to the Marxist hope that the social relations of production might be reorganised so as the forces of production minimise labour for all, which may have been remote but for which liberalism was still nevertheless to be considered a ‘holding action’ (2015: 48-9).

means synchronised (CEC2: 326). Like Adorno, Greenberg is critical of ‘wild’ art which lends itself to reification as dominant rationality’s other. His advocacy of ‘balance, largeness, precision, enlightenment’ is accordingly a counteractive which would allow for ‘a much greater infusion of consciousness than heretofore into what we call the creative’ (CEC2: 168). For Adorno, as I have delineated, it is effectively such an infusion which allows art to stake a binding claim for particularity, insofar as art praxis enlists the kind of domination which holds sway extra-aesthetically in the service of the materials which it dominates. Craven contends that, contrary to Greenberg, Schapiro’s account of art praxis ‘did not necessarily entail a neo-Luddite rejection of technology per se but rather a critical appraisal of technology as not being an end in itself’ (ACC: 149). However, as I noted above, for Adorno this is precisely the task carried out by authentic art praxis, and I will now explore how Greenberg consistently characterised art praxis which he favoured in similar terms.

In 1960 Adorno posits his account of art praxis as a dialectic of spiritual construction and mimetic expression as opposed to ‘a widely accepted view of contemporary art: that the constructive tendencies – in Cubist painting and its derivatives – and the subjective-expressive tendencies – Expressionism and Surrealism – are mere opposites’ (1992: 106). However, Greenberg had effectively been arguing for this reciprocity since the late ‘30s. In ‘Laocoon,’ Greenberg makes clear that the construction of art which emphasises ‘the medium and its difficulties’ cannot be hypotactic, contending that this emphasis is hampered when the medium is overpowered ‘to the point where all sense of its resistance disappears’ (CEC1: 34). For Greenberg, the ‘gauge of achievement is not only the degree of unity or perfection of form – any piece of kitsch has that – but also the resistance of the material unified’ (CEC1: 115-6), and at one point he goes so far as to criticise Mondrian’s *New York Boogie Woogie* for falling slightly short of this gauge with a surfeit of construction (CEC1: 153).⁷⁰ Even in ‘Modernist Painting,’ Greenberg’s most schematic account of modernism’s medium-

⁷⁰ He writes that the ‘simplest way almost of accounting for a great work of art is to say that it is a thing possessing simultaneously the maximum of diversity and the maximum unity possible to the diversity. For lack of the first [*New York Boogie Woogie* by Mondrian] is, for all its sudden originality, something a little less than a masterpiece.’ (CEC1: 153)

specificity, the critic seems to characterise the formalist impulse of construction as dialectically reversing into expression. Shortly after he has asserted that risks are taken with a medium's norms 'not only in the interests of expression but also in order to exhibit them more clearly as norms,' he claims that artists carry out this process 'simply because the way to stronger, more expressive art lies through them' (CEC4: 89-91). While this is ostensibly contradictory, I think we might read it in terms of a distinction between conceptual and mimetic expression. That is, whereas 'the interests of expression' in the first quote refers to expression in the sense of instrumentalising artistic materials in the service of expressing something which these materials are not themselves, 'expressive art' in the second refers to the capacity of an artwork to command attention on the basis of its particularity.⁷¹ Thus, the subordination of materials necessary for the former gives way to the paratactical expression of the latter. Indeed, in his contribution to a 1953 symposium in the pages of *Art Digest* on the question 'Is the French Avant-Garde Overrated?', Greenberg declares the superiority of the US painterly abstraction of the New York School to the French *Taschisme* on the basis that its production is paratactical in this way, when he writes that for the Abstract Expressionists the 'canvas is treated less as a given receptacle than as an open field whose unity must be permitted to emerge without being forced or imposed in prescribed terms' (CEC3: 156).

The fact that Greenberg deploys this claim to the end of propounding the pre-eminence of US art should not detract from the stark parallels between this analysis and Adorno's of the paratactical nature of art praxis surveyed above. In what is little more than an aside, Thierry de Duve acknowledges this when he asserts that both Greenberg and Adorno have 'the same deeply rooted intuition of the avant-garde as working in a materiality that Greenberg calls respect for the medium and Adorno, the progress of the material' (1996b: 43). De Duve does

⁷¹ Greenberg delineates a similar distinction over a decade earlier, in reference to the work of Rufino Tamayo, whom he claims illustrates emotion, rather than expressing it in a manner inextricable from the embodiment of the work (CEC2: 133)

not elaborate upon this observation, but it is the case in so far as both thinkers trace the process by which, as I detailed in Chapter 5, modernist art takes on the task of resisting the determinate judgements of capital by countering exchange-value with its fetish character, as entailing mimetic comportment on the part of artists who are nevertheless in control of their materials. As Adorno characterises artists as working ‘in a kind of active receptivity, to that to which the materials are striving on their own’ (2002b: 125), on Greenberg’s view, as Charles Harrison puts it, ‘it is through the evidence of feedback from the work in process that [demands of a specific medium] are understood by the artist’ (1999: xvii). Thus, figured aright, the supposed formalist dictates by which Greenberg contends modernist artists work may be heteronomous to the artists who follow them, but they are not so in a manner homologous with the technocratic impositions of the post-war American workplace, but rather in a sense akin to what Adorno refers to as ‘the element of self-alienness that occurs under the constraint of the material’ (AT: 170). That is to say, the mode of artistic production which Greenberg describes is one for which the artist is guided by ‘consciousness of the nonidentical object [...] that which is open and as such familiar, that which is no longer dressed and prepared and thereby alienated’ (Adorno, 1992: 146).⁷²

This is also clear if we turn to the way in which both Adorno and Greenberg contend art praxis fails in this respect. Adorno posits that ‘[t]he more expression has been constrained by the semiotic system of aesthetics, in the form of conventions, the more profoundly art’s mimetic aspect is falsified. Kitsch is nothing but mimesis rendered false by reification’ (1995:

⁷² In this, then, I contend that Greenberg is speaking in good faith when he insists that he did not ‘lay down conditions for quality’ and that it would be ‘illegitimate to believe in, advocate, and prescribe’ such conditions (CEC4: 267). Nevertheless, if his criticism is ultimately not authoritarian in terms of imposing categorical standards of medium-specificity to which artists must adapt their praxis, anecdotal evidence suggests that, as his influence grew, he did become notorious in handing out edicts to painters whose work he felt was not, to adopt the Adornian terms in which I have framed his criticism, in the service of the non-identical. As Caroline A. Jones notes, Greenberg is reported ‘to have directed paint, suggested crop marks, or even determined the orientation of artists’ abstract canvases’ (EA: 5). As Naifeh and Smith recount, by 1952 artists had ‘had enough of [Greenberg] visiting their studios and “telling them what to paint”’ (1989: 173). The writers draw upon an anecdote from Milton Resnick, in which the painter describes how once in the Cedar Tavern he overheard Greenberg bragging ‘that he juried a show and gave somebody a prize on the condition that he turn the picture upside down because it looked better that way.’ He left the table, telling Greenberg he would never sit with him again; the other painters left with him, and ‘everyone who heard the story applauded’ (Ibid).

73). The obvious parallel here is with Greenberg's claim in 'Kitsch' that 'when enough time has elapsed,' kitsch loots avant-garde art 'for new "twists," which are then watered down' (CEC1: 12). Yet, he perhaps elucidates the obverse implications for avant-garde praxis most explicitly in a 1964 essay entitled 'The "Crisis" of Abstract Art.' This essay was again written as part of a symposium on the state of painterly abstraction, this time in the French magazine *Preuves*. In it, Greenberg, who by then was championing the second-generation of colour-field painters, argues that painterly abstraction had been superseded. This judgement, however, is not founded on the premise that elements of painterly abstraction which impeded emphasis upon medium-specificity had been negated by the "post-painterly" abstraction of Louis, Olitski and Noland, towards a further sharpening of focus on the ontological limits of painting. Contrarily, Greenberg derides the adoption of medium-specificity as a formula by artists, claiming that even a 'young chimpanzee' could by then create 'recognisable pictorial form as he paints by showing that he acknowledges the shape of the flat support' (CEC4: 180). Rather, for Greenberg in 1964 painterly abstraction was in crisis because it 'had turned by and large into an assortment of ready-made effects' with 'its second generation [producing] mannered, imitative, uninspired and repetitious art,' and thus painterliness was no longer 'at least for the time being [...] a means of releasing spontaneity for expressive ends in abstract art' (CEC4: 179-80). Greenberg contends, then, that by 1964 painterly abstraction no longer objectivated mimetic expression, having become a reified semiotic system, whose ossification he dates at 1955.⁷³ I will not at this point address the question of painterly

⁷³ In asserting this, Greenberg might be perceived as contradicting his earlier position on the matter of artistic forms' progressive redundancy when defending Abstract Expressionism in its nascence. Writing in reference to the Second Viennese School, Adorno asserts that '[w]hoever [...] claims that the new art is as beautiful as the traditional one, does it a real disservice; he praises in it what this music rejects so long as it unflinchingly follows its own impulse' (2002b: 181). Greenberg, on the other hand, appears to take a diametrically opposed tack. In a 1944 a review of a Baziotes show, for instance, he reassures his readership that '[t]wo or three of his larger oils may become masterpieces in several years, once they stop disturbing us by their nervousness, by their unexampled colour – off-shades in the intervals between red and blue, red and yellow, yellow and green, all depth, involution, and glow – and by their very originality' (CEC1: 240). And in a 1946 review of a Pollock show, he affirms that 'what is thought to be Pollock's bad taste is in reality simply his willingness to be ugly in terms of contemporary taste,' anticipating that '[i]n the course of time this ugliness will become a new standard of beauty' (CEC2: 74). However, to understand such assertions as setting Greenberg apart from Adorno is to presuppose that Greenberg conceives of prevailing 'standards of beauty' as authoritative, rather than the conventional, reified form of what was once vital.

abstraction's obsolescence, suffice to have established that the determinate negation of representational content for which Greenberg celebrated Abstract Expressionism in the '40s through to the mid '50s was never significant in so far as it served to define the elements which are essential to a medium, despite his claims to that effect. Rather, Greenberg was accounting for the rational cultivation of art's mimetic aspect.⁷⁴ Indeed, in "American-Type" Painting' he claims that the mid-50s work of Still and Newman was compelling in ways which, contrarily to more finely determining the ontological fundamentals of the medium of painting, threatened to outgrow it. He speculated that '[t]he easel picture [would] hardly survive [...] Newman's huge, calmly and evenly burning canvases,' whose style amounted 'to the most direct attack upon it so far,' and not because it was ruthless in its systematic dispensation of painting's conventions, but rather because it uncompromisingly followed its materials in a manner which was 'deep and honest, and [carried] a feeling for colour without like in recent painting' (CEC3: 232). As I will now explore, such rational cultivation of art's mimetic aspect was indeed precisely how the Abstract Expressionists appear to have worked.

In the case of Pollock, critics have often been quick to point to his constructive rigour to correct the notion that his work is reducible to contingent expressiveness. MoMA director William Rubin's exhaustive tracing of Pollock's modernist antecedents in his four-part series of *Artforum* articles in 1967 was undertaken in explicit opposition to the notion that Pollock 'surrendered decision making to mindless kinetic activity' (1999: 118). And Ellen G. Landau has made this argument in more recent decades. In her 1989 monograph on the artist she celebrates *Blue Poles* (1952) for the 'brilliantly conceived and executed overstructure' of eight angled rods which, for her, dominate the 'less coherent underlayers of the painting' and

⁷⁴ To understanding Greenberg in this way is to oppose Peter Osborne's distinction between Adorno and Greenberg, wherein the latter is differentiated from the former precisely because, Osborne claims, Greenberg does not recognise that the dialectic of modernism is driven by 'the progressive, socially determined redundancy of particular forms of artistic material [...] as a consequence of their neutralisation by the history of the reception of previous works' (1989: 44). Instead, Osborne characterises Greenberg as 'essentially a structuralist of mediums' (2013: 80). Thus, he claims for Greenberg 'the question of autonomy is essentially a question of the degree to which a work has "purified" itself of any aesthetic content extraneous to the formal properties of its particular physical medium' and thus denies 'any constitutive role to the "social" within the "aesthetic"' (1989: 41).

thus ‘triumphantly exert’ Pollock’s authority (1989: 222). And in 2014 she denigrated Ed Harris’s fictionalised film biography of the artist, *Pollock* (2000), for giving the impression that Pollock had ‘[n]o need to contend with fine craftsmanship, figuration, and other traditional [...] expectations of easel painting,’ and instead ‘simply [followed his] instincts’ (2014: 8). Furthermore, James Coddington, MoMA’s chief conservator, has x-rayed Pollock’s *Full Fathom Five* (1947) to corroborate the argument that the artist ‘understood much about traditional methods of painting, and incorporated this into his style’ (1999: 101). He posits that legible under the visible paint is a ‘rough figure’ built from piled impasto, in reference to which many elements of the work are structured, for instance, ‘the nails, tacks, buttons, key, etc [...] are placed in direct response to and elaboration of this shape [...] and the final paint application, of white and orange in the upper right corner, follow a similar logic’ (Ibid: 103).

However, such accounts tend to understate the extent to which Pollock’s ‘authority’ is mediated through a mimetic relationship with his materials. When making a similar point about Mozart as those surveyed above about Pollock, Adorno claims that while Mozart ‘played the role of the divinely gifted, capering prodigy,’ he was in fact ‘incomparably more reflexive than the popular profile of him lets on’ (AT: 337). Yet, Adorno affirms that Mozart was reflexive ‘not in the sense of a freely hovering abstract intelligence but in the compositional material itself’ (Ibid). The same was true of Pollock, as he himself expresses well in his 1947 artist’s statement featured in the sole issue of *Possibilities*, a magazine founded by Motherwell and Rosenberg, in which Rothko also published his above-discussed statement. In this statement, Pollock asserts that, rather than forcing his will upon his materials, he lets a painting’s ‘life of its own [...] come through’ and ‘it is only when [he loses] contact with the painting that the result is a mess’ (1947: 79). That is to say, if he disposes over his work with authority, it is authority which conforms to mimetic impulses. As Kirk Varndoe writes, Pollock’s praxis ‘required a disciplined focus on what the materials told him as he worked’ (1998: 54). And this bears out to the extent to which, as Thomas Crow

writes, the ‘new techniques’ accordingly invented by Pollock were not erratic but betray understanding of his materials’ ‘behaviour and durability’ to the extent ‘that his paintings have lost almost none of their original articulation,’ as Crow notes Coddington also acknowledged upon conducting a comprehensive examination of Pollock’s paintings coincident with a MoMA retrospective of 1999 (1999: 94).

The other Abstract Expressionists seem to have worked similarly. Hofmann claims that ‘[p]ictorial homogeneity of the composition – plastic unity – is developed by lawfully governed inner necessities’ (1967: 58). As Greenberg writes, Hofmann addresses ‘the picture surface consciously as a responsive rather than inert object’ (CEC4: 72). Hedda Sterne claims her paintings are ‘[p]reconceived only partly. Because as [she goes] the painting begins to function by rules of its own, often preventing [her] from achieving her original vision’ (qtd. in Seitz 1983: 96). Frankenthaler claims that while she is painting there is ‘a moment when all frequencies are right and it hits’ which she then follows ‘with a whole aesthetic vocabulary’ produced by the moment, hoping ‘to have the ability to let that moment guide [her] from there’ (qtd. in Belz 2003: 154). Motherwell asserts that ‘painting and sculpture are not skills that can be taught in reference to pre-established criteria’ but instead entail ‘a process, whose content is *found*, subtle, and deeply felt’ and describes this process of one of mimetic assimilation, as ‘a painter, in working a canvas, sensing it all over, watching it shift and change and slowly emerge’ (1992: 80; 66). De Kooning often gives the impression that his praxis is driven entirely by contingency, claiming for instance that he is opposed to ‘order’ because it ‘can only come from above. Order [...] is to be ordered about and that is a limitation’ (qtd. in Shiff 2011a: 247), and that he knows he has finished a painting when he ‘just stop[s]’ and ‘sometimes find[s] a terrific picture’ (1990: 228). However, notwithstanding his own statements, De Kooning’s praxis was certainly one of order from below. De Kooning’s opposition to order should be understood in the sense that Adorno writes that he has ‘never understood the so-called need for order [...] based on known systems’ because the ‘immanent, transparent laws that spring from freedom and the

capitulation to an invoked order are mutually incompatible' (1998b: 291-2). As Ben Watson writes of Adorno's argument here, De Kooning's opposition to order is not conversely a commitment to chaos, but instead models the 'informed and conscious elimination of all inherited hierarchies' which a genuinely rational society would achieve (2011: 20-1). John Elderfield and Terry Winters have elaborated how the notion that De Kooning's praxis entails 'willed de-skilling' is belied by the evidence of the paintings, whose marks are 'both willed and last-minute' (2011: 332). While De Kooning's control over his material is never in question, his facility is subordinated to 'the qualities of the material itself,' in so far as he resists convention in active reciprocity with the material. Elderfield and Winters exemplify this with the 1948 piece *Painting* (1948), upon which the 'paint was applied as treacle, which flattened out,' a development to which De Kooning accordingly adapted his technique (Ibid).

Of all the Abstract Expressionists, though, these dynamics common to each of the artists' praxes – the dialectic of construction and mimesis in the service of paratactical articulation – are perhaps typified best by Joan Mitchell, and especially her painting *Mandres* (1961-2). As Linda Nochlin notes, the expressiveness of Mitchell's painting (which Nochlin aligns with 'the notion of a feminine other – energetic, angry, excessive, spilling over the boundaries of the formless, the victimised, the gentle, and the passive'), would be nothing '[w]ithout Mitchell's unerring sense of formal rectitude' (2015: 268-9). Furthermore, the fact that this formal rectitude was developed in mimetic receptivity to an artwork as Mitchell worked it is acknowledged by Klaus Kertess, when he characterises her praxis as 'paint, step back, paint, step back deliberations' (1997: 20).⁷⁵ Nevertheless, Joan Mitchell's art is ostensibly an unlikely candidate for an Adornian reading. For Adorno, '[r]adical art [...] is synonymous

⁷⁵Kertess claims this disqualifies Mitchell from 'the ranks of Rosenberg's macho warriors armed with gesture' (20). However, in Rosenberg's most famous essay 'American Action Painters,' he appears to extol an account of Abstract Expressionist artworks as exercises in the artist's authority to decide 'to paint...just TO PAINT' (1962: 30), he elsewhere gives a more nuanced account of Abstract Expressionist praxis akin to the one detailed in this chapter. For example, he writes the following of Newman's working method: '[A]n original image or format begins to appear, becomes unmistakable, and is affirmed through conscious emphasis on its peculiar features and through elimination of incidentals [...] his identifying format arose out of a "genetic moment" (to apply the title of one of his early paintings) in his activity of painting. He did not "figure out" his format; it appeared, and he recognised it. (1979: 44)

with dark art; its primary colour is black,' because art which, conversely, 'childishly delights in colour' simply serves as consolation so long as the status quo reproduces itself on the back of senseless and preventable suffering (AT: 39). But Mitchell's paintings are often defined by their lively use of colour – their 'vibrant, thickly daubed surfaces [which] don't ever seem to settle or set' (Peiffer 2015: 203). As Michael Kimmelman writes in a 2002 review of a Mitchell retrospective at the Whitney Museum in New York, these surfaces can be 'so immediately intoxicating that a natural reaction is to distrust the art' on the basis that '[p]aintings this suave and sure-footed must be glib and manipulative' (2002 5 July). However, I do not think Adorno's prohibition of colourful art should necessarily be taken *à la lettre*. He writes that 'the ideal of blackness with regard to content [inhaltlich⁷⁶] is one of the deepest impulses of abstraction' (AT: 39). That is, he appears to be describing as tenebrous the determinate negation of affirmative content. Indeed, elsewhere he uses the metaphor of colour to make the same point, claiming that '[w]hat art, notably the art decried as nihilistic, says in refraining from judgements is that everything is not just nothing [...] Indelible from the resistance to the fungible world of exchange is the resistance of the eye that does not want the colors of the world to fade' (ND: 404-405). As I have shown, this is precisely the dynamic of the Abstract Expressionists' binding of objectivity to particularity, and Mitchell's paintings were demonstrably composed in this spirit. She explicitly details her praxis in terms of the determinate negation of reified elements when she claims 'I do not condense things. I try to eliminate clichés, extraneous material. I try to make it exact' (qtd in Nelson, 2007: 15).⁷⁷ Indeed, in his review Kimmelman proceeds to repudiate his *prima facie* judgement,

⁷⁶ Hulot-Kentor at this point does not include the original German in translating *inhaltlich* into 'with regard to content,' as he does when the distinction between content in terms of *Inhalt* or *Gehalt* is less clear. However, it is of course important to my argument that 'blackness with regard to content,' is here understood as negation of affirmative subject-matter. In the original we find 'Das Ideal des Schwarzen ist inhaltlich einer der tiefsten Impulse von Abstraktion' (66).

⁷⁷ Moreover, she shared a thoroughgoing artistic affinity with Samuel Beckett, whose work was emblematic of the synonymy of radical with dark art for Adorno, and to whom he intended to dedicate *Aesthetic Theory*. Mitchell and Beckett are reported to have regularly talked 'blackness and gloom' (Albers 2001: 269), and in 1959, the latter invited Mitchell to contribute watercolours to accompany his play *Embers*, a collaboration which was ultimately never completed, not due to incommensurability between the chromaticity of Mitchell's painting and the asceticism of Beckett's theatre, but because Mitchell

expounding that Mitchell's paintings bear a discursively inexplicable profundity. And Maggie Nelson identifies 'the blazing particularity of Mitchell's colours' as the 'celebration of the specific' (2007: 31). This is certainly the case with *Mandres*. Recently, on the occasion of the 2016 *Abstract Expressionism* show at London's Royal Academy of Arts, Peter de Bolla wrote the following of the painting, which was inconspicuously located in a section of the exhibition entitled 'Gesture as Colour'

Joan Mitchell created an astonishing summation of the various answers that had been proposed to the question of what the hell to paint. This is Abstract Expressionism's greatest late work. Form, structure and content are interrogated and transformed by so vast a repertoire of techniques of pigment application that you lose count: look up close and you will see paint squeezed, trowelled, flicked, smoothed. Mitchell uses and invests with absolute conviction the swirl, smudge, scrub, swipe, smear, swish, scribble, drip, drag, dribble, scrim, splatter, splash, squiggle, wash, wipe, blot, dab, stab. There's no painting I know like it. I doubt there ever could be one. (2016: 13)

In this, I contend that de Bolla hits upon what makes *Mandres* formally compelling, if not the significance of this fascination. It is surely striking to witness all the elements de Bolla enumerates seeming to jostle for pre-eminence and yet at the same time finding their precise place in an arrangement which appears to be determined by both centripetal and centrifugal forces while lacking an orientational axis; which utterly eschews both overall uniformity and a vanishing point or discernible proportion and yet is certainly not inchoate. However, rather than taken as a taxonomical exposition of Abstract Expressionist technique, that all these elements co-exist in the painting should be understood as indicative of the degree to which *Mandres* is a whole which exists for the sake of authorising its parts, lending the semblance of insistent bindingness to the claims of indigent particulars.

concluded that the *Gehalt* of the former was present in the latter without her illustration, 'deciding that the play was already visual enough "without a single visual description in it"' (Nelson 2007: 24).

Maggie Nelson speculates that Mitchell's purported 'scepticism about innovation' may be founded in the fact that, as a woman, she does not share her fellow male Abstract Expressionists' (Greenbergian) 'commitment to innovation qua innovation' (2007: 19). For Nelson, such investment in lineage presupposes 'a feeling that one's work will somehow *matter* in the scheme of things, that it will have a significant part to play in the course of art or literary history,' and she surmises that reticence on the part of Mitchell to take on this position might be chalked up to 'the historical fact of women's presumed irrelevance to those histories' (Ibid). Indeed, Mitchell had her first solo show in 1952, not long before 1955, the year in which Greenberg proclaimed painterly abstraction had been exhausted, and *Mandres* was completed seven years later. Accordingly, Mitchell was generally underrated and unmentioned by Greenberg, like so many other women painters, including Greenberg's acolyte and once (abused⁷⁸) lover Frankenthaler. Regardless, I have argued that Mitchell's work is quintessential with respect to the dynamics of Greenberg's medium-specificity, and, while I established in the Chapter 4 that the notion of Abstract Expressionism's modernist innovation qua innovation certainly facilitated its co-optation in the worldwide maintenance and imposition of capitalism, I have been arguing in this chapter that it is precisely those elements of Abstract Expressionism which Greenberg stressed as positioning the movement at the forefront of the European modernist lineage, which align it with all that has been presumed irrelevant to the history which legitimates capitalism. Whereas the latter is buttressed by determinate judgements according to concepts which subsume, truncate and reify particularity, Abstract Expressionism commands attention on the basis of particularity which resists determinate judgements.

In Chapter 6, I argued that approbation of Abstract Expressionist artworks as bulwarks against capitalist rationalisation on the basis that they supposedly articulate their artists' subjective interiorities, accords to the same logic by which the artworks were deployed in the

⁷⁸ Caroline A. Jones recounts, upon their breaking up, Greenberg "punching out" Frankenthaler's new lover(s), socking those who rubbed it in, and finally hauling off and slugging Helen herself' (425).

name of capitalist democracy. In this chapter, by reading Greenberg's account of Abstract Expressionist praxis through Adorno, I elaborated how, rather than subjugating materials in the service of expression, Abstract Expressionists praxis is a process of dialectical reciprocity which renders its materials bindingly eloquent. In the remainder of this thesis, I will argue that, if Abstract Expressionism concerns intense subjectivity, it is in terms of how this emphatic particularity necessarily leaves the spectator with recourse to nothing but their perceptual experience; their individual subjectivity. As Bernstein writes, to account for the artworks' bindingness in terms of the artists' lyrical expression conflates 'the issue of particularity [...] with the equation of art and lyric' (AVB: 153), and is ultimately an attempt to reduce to subjective projection a power which inheres precisely in the negation of 'all those elements that might with some justification be regarded as projections of the human on to the inanimate' (1997b: 205). We might understand Allan Kaprow's influential description of the experience of a Pollock canvas, detailed in his essay 'The Legacy of Jackson Pollock' (1958), as an oscillation between submission to the artwork's objectivity and identification with Pollock in the act of painting, to be symptomatic of this recourse to this category of the artist's subjectivity in an attempt to conceptually subsume this intensely subjective perceptual experience which eludes such subsumption and yet is nonetheless binding. As Bernstein puts it, the experience of Abstract Expressionism is an experience whereby '*in being beyond command* perceptual experience is returned to the subject,' and thus the thought of Abstract Expressionism as the record of their makers' personal expression can only be 'crude and misdirected' (AVB: 153; 276-277, my italics). In the following chapters, I will argue that, conceived mimetically in this way, the intense subjectivity elicited by Abstract Expressionism is inimical to the so-called democratic pluralism of capitalism. Instead, it indicts the latter by engaging the somatic and affective elements of experience which it delegitimizes and inhibits, and prefigures the self-conscious global subject whose emergence is necessary to transcend it.

Chapter Eight

Greenberg's Kantianism contra Greenberg's Positivism

Bernstein claims that his account of Abstract Expressionism establishes that, had Adorno turned his attention to painting, 'he would have, could have, only deployed the resources of Abstract Expressionism for his purposes' (AVB: 146). However, I have already acknowledged that Adorno *did* address painting, if as a secondary concern, and neither is it strictly true that Adorno never turned his attention to Abstract Expressionism, at least in terms of its characterisation by Harold Rosenberg as 'action painting.' There are two passages in *Aesthetic Theory* which refer to 'action painting,' about which Adorno is ambivalent:

If even as late as 1930 experimentation referred to efforts filtered through critical consciousness in opposition to the continuation of unreflected aesthetic practices, in the meantime the concept has acquired the stipulation that a work should have contents that are not foreseeable in the process of production, that, subjectively, the artist should be surprised by the work that results. [...] The risk is that of aesthetic regression. Artistic spirit raises itself above what merely exists at the point where the imagination does not capitulate to the mere existence of materials and techniques. Since the emancipation of the subject, the mediation of the work through it is not to be renounced without its reversion to the status of a thing [...] On the other hand, only stubbornness could deny the productive function of many "surprise" elements in much modern art, in *action painting* and aleatoric art, that did not result from being passed through the imagination. [...] In the experiment, the ego-alien must be respected as well as subjectively mastered (AT: 38).

Resignation vis-a-vis time and space gave ground to the crisis of nominalistic form until it was reduced to a mere point, effectively inert. *Action painting, l'art informelle,* and aleatoric works may have carried the element of resignation to its extreme: The

aesthetic subject exempts itself of the burden of giving form to the contingent material it encounters, despairs the possibility of undergirding it, and instead shifts the responsibility for its organisation back to the contingent material itself. The gain here is, however, dubious. Form purportedly distilled from the contingent and the heterogeneous itself remains heterogeneous and, for the artwork, arbitrary; in its literalness it is alien to art [...] This situation holds embedded in itself the figure of its own critique [...] The extremely objective critique of semblance incorporates an illusory element that is perhaps as irrevocable as the aesthetic semblance of all artworks. Often in artistic products of chance a necessity is sensed to subordinate these works to, effectively, a stylizing procedure of selection. *Corriger la fortune*: This is the fateful writing on the wall of the nominalistic artwork (AT: 220).

We saw in Chapter 5 that Rosenberg observes how Abstract Expressionist artworks bear an ‘irreducible plus’ by which they are separated from ‘the universe of things’ in a manner which chimes with Adorno’s claim that authentic artworks take on the character of a nonconceptual, nonrigidified language, and thus, as particulars unsubsumable under any universal, lodge a claim for repressed nature. As I elaborated in Chapter 7, for Adorno this character is realised through a praxial dialectic of construction and mimesis, whereby the subject who executes the artwork is guided by that which is not the subject, determinately negating ossified conventions in mimetic receptiveness with their materials. Thus, what appears ‘as the specific, unique, and nonsubstitutable quality of each individual work’ is always necessarily ‘a deviation from [a] genre’ which takes its orders from the artwork’s materials (AT: 204). However, as the quotes above make clear, while Adorno concedes that certain elements of ‘action painting’ instantiate the productiveness of that which is not the subject, he ultimately contends that the artist of ‘action painting’ eschews the effort of subjectively mastering that which is not the subject, and thus runs the risk of complicity with reification by regressing ‘to the barbaric literalness of what is aesthetically the case’ (AT: 103). That is, the artist renounces the dialectic of construction and mimesis and attempts to

valorise particularity by abstractly negating construction and leaving the artwork ‘blindly to itself,’ and what results is a ‘literal facticity’ which is ‘irreconcilable with art’ (AT: 220). As will become increasingly important in the following chapters, for Adorno ‘nothing counts in artworks that does not originate in the configuration of their sensual elements’ (AT: 87). Nevertheless, ‘the sensual in artworks is artistic only if it is itself mediated by spirit’ (Ibid). When this is not the case, the ‘difference between artworks and merely sensual qualities’ is negated and the artwork is ‘an empirical entity, nothing more than – in American argot – a *battery of tests*’ (AT: 264). Thus, Adorno contends such art is undifferentiated from the total mediation which reigns extra-aesthetically, where ‘everything experienced in primary terms is culturally preformed’ (1973: 131).

Now, I argued in Chapter 7 that Greenberg’s account of Abstract Expressionism makes clear that this was definitively not the case in terms of Abstract Expressionist praxis. Indeed, it is on similar grounds to Adorno’s critique of ‘action painting’ that in 1962 Greenberg wrote ‘How Art Writing Earns its Bad Name,’ a broadside against Rosenberg, whose account of Abstract Expressionism as ‘action painting,’ first articulated in his essay ‘The American Action Painters,’ had proven increasingly influential over the preceding decade. In ‘How Art Writing Earns its Bad Name,’ whether or not coloured by *ressentiment* – as Herbert Read would have it⁷⁹ – Greenberg decries Rosenberg’s account of Abstract Expressionism for rendering Abstract Expressionist artworks no different from the world of things. He bemoans the fact that Rosenberg’s concept of Abstract Expressionism had, especially in England, been so prevalently taken to be adequate to the object of the artworks that ‘most English art critics

⁷⁹ In a letter to the editor upon the republication of Greenberg’s article in *Encounter*, reprinted alongside the article in the fourth volume of Greenberg’s collected works, Herbert Read opens with the sentence, ‘[i]t is often difficult [...] to define the *ressentiment* that causes a critic to indulge in baseless attacks on his colleagues,’ although in the next sentence he makes clear that he thinks he has defined it, stating that the attack was because Rosenberg had ‘of late challenged Mr. Greenberg’s supremacy’ in the field of art writing (CEC4: 145). Indeed, Greenberg and Rosenberg had been engaged in a combative rivalry for decades prior to the publication of ‘How Art Writing Earns its Bad Name.’ This is evident as early as Greenberg’s letters to Harold Lazarus from the late ‘30s, in which Greenberg derides Rosenberg’s ‘desire always to be right,’ and claims that ‘this is why these guys, brilliant, don’t amount to anything in the end,’ and, upon the publication of ‘Kitsch,’ complains that Rosenberg had Dwight Macdonald ‘he liked [Avant Garde and Kitsch], with reservations, but won’t say a word about it in the postcards he sends me. What an egoism that can’t afford to give me the little salve of a compliment’ (184, 212). In her biography of Greenberg, *Clement Greenberg: A Life* (1997) Florence Rubinfeld provides a good overview of the two critics’ rivalry, see especially 165-71.

[reacted] to Mr. Rosenberg's explanation of the new American painting rather than to the painting itself' (CEC4: 139). According to Greenberg, in contradistinction with his own recognition of Abstract Expressionism's inheritance of the European tradition, Rosenberg's criticism renders Abstract Expressionist artworks 'the by-product of acts of sheer self-expression ungoverned by the norms of any discipline' in his contention that the 'covered canvas was left over as the unmeaning aftermath of an "event"' (CEC4: 136). Thus, Greenberg protests that Rosenberg's account conceives Abstract Expressionist artworks as more akin to extra-aesthetic objects and events than with works of art. Nevertheless, Greenberg's account of Abstract Expressionism is often understood as coterminous with the same 'positivism' of the status quo to which Adorno argues aleatoric art lends itself, not least because Greenberg claimed the term for himself. In what follows, I will first briefly outline Adorno's criticism of positivism, in so far as it legitimates the macrostructural determinants of everyday life to which the experience of individual subjects are subordinated. I will then show how Greenberg's self-declared positivistic account of Abstract Expressionism has been characterised similarly, not in terms of how Abstract Expressionism's supposed arbitrariness encourages passive acceptance of the status quo, but in terms of how it supposedly overrides subjective experience of the works with recourse to invariant criteria for the apprehension of art. I will then, however, proceed to argue with recourse to Greenberg's references to Kant that, in fact, that which Greenberg's supposed positivism registers in Abstract Expressionism runs counter to such capitulation.

The critique of positivism was integral to the way in which the first generation of the Frankfurt School staked out the difference between their critical theory and what Horkheimer, the institute's director, termed 'traditional theory.' As Raymond Geuss puts it, in this distinction 'a "positivist" is a person who holds (a) that an empiricist account of natural science is adequate, and (b) that all cognition must have essentially the same cognitive structure as natural science' (1981: 2). That is to say, for the first generation of the Frankfurt School, positivism is the application of the disembodied gaze of the natural

scientist to social phenomena. Accordingly, the latter are reified as second nature. The notion that they could be otherwise than mediated by capital, and meaningful interrogation of this mediation, is discounted, and phenomena are simply apprehended in terms of appearance. Equally, however, mediation by the empirical subject is dismissed as “only subjective,” as the latter contracts to a point of neutrality, which Adorno describes as ‘the reified apperception of the hypostatized’ (1976: 76).⁸⁰ As Simon Jarvis puts it, Adorno criticises positivism ‘not because it pays too much attention to experience, but because it is not attentive *enough*’ (1998: 88). I detailed in Chapter 5 that Adorno shows how the regression of enlightenment into myth entails the delegitimation of particularity. Sensory experience is thus denuded of authority in terms of fundamental societal determinants, which legislate for everyday life in the interests of capital. As Bernstein perspicuously summarises Adorno’s position:

As a context of guilt, the world inhabited is purchased through vice, albeit not explicitly moral vice, but the generalised vice of acting in accordance with principles and norms of reasoning that are themselves incommensurable with a proper regard for the sensuous particulars composing anthropomorphic nature to the extreme in which that nature has been lost to sight, and life reduced to having a contemplative stance toward it even when it is most vigorously pursued. (2001: 228)

For Adorno, then, the subject of positivism subserves the prevailing relations of production and sees them as no more revocable than a businessman who ‘calculates his options and takes his decisions [...] guided not by his character, but by calculations, his balance sheet, his budget and his plan for the next business cycle in which the objective elements of the situation are concentrated’ (2006: 70). As should be clear from this chapter thus far, Adorno argues that aleatoric art invites precisely this positivistic mode of reception. Adorno contends that, if artists surrender control over their materials, the ‘postulate of the particular has the negative aspect of serving the reduction of aesthetic distance and thereby joining forces with

⁸⁰ Adorno’s elucidates his criticism of positivism most clearly in the pieces ‘Sociology and Empirical Research’ and ‘On the Logic of the Social Sciences,’ both published in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* (1976).

the status quo' (AT: 204). He writes that, instead of forming an artwork with lability in regard to that which is formed, to defer to contingency is simply to accept 'materials which have been preformed by history' as 'realities in themselves' (1998b: 286). Rather than eliciting consciousness of nonidentity, it limits us to things as they are reified under capitalism. As Ben Watson summarises Adorno's criticism of aleatoric art, Adorno contends that aleatoric art's presuppositions are those of 'a philosophy summed up in the adage "wake up and smell the coffee," with all its positivist implications of refusing to imagine where coffee comes from and the life-iniquities imposed on the coffee trade' (2011: 30).⁸¹

For Adorno, then, if artists abdicate to chance, they run the risk of creating work which simply displays 'outwardly what cannot become art – canvas and mere tones (AT: 103). Art thereby becomes 'its own enemy, the direct and false continuation of purposeful rationality,' and thus 'immediacy of aesthetic comportment' converges with positivism as 'an immediate relationship to the universally mediated' (AT: 219). Similarly, Greenberg characterizes Abstract Expressionism as 'positivist' in so far as it 'thrusts a sheet of pigment at you with an immediate force proper only to the realm of material sensations' (CEC2: 250). However, for him 'positivism' is wholly a term of approbation. In 1944 Greenberg claimed that '[t]he taste most closely attuned to contemporary art [had] become positivist, even as the best philosophical and political intelligence of the time' (CEC1: 203). He defined his usage of the term in his criticism in a 1991 interview with Peter Fuller in terms of how he 'didn't allow for anything but the *thing*, the *res*' which for Greenberg was 'what Modernism since Manet came down to, regardless of what the artists themselves held to' (Saunders 1991: 20). As I noted in the previous chapter, in the late '40s, once he had renounced the notion that avant-garde art posed a threat to the status quo, Greenberg posited that avant-garde art might 'found' the sensibilities of modern subjects and accordingly 'remunerate' them for the necessary frustrations of life in industrial capitalism. In the previous chapter, I proceeded to contend

⁸¹ While Watson does not cite it, instead attributing the observation to the artist Gerry Fialka, this bears striking similarity to Marx's assertion in *Capital Vol. 1* that 'the taste of porridge does not tell us who grew the oats' (290).

that, in terms of the art praxis he favoured, this entailed a constructive corrective to ‘wild’ art readily reified as dominant rationality’s other. Bracketing this, however, it is easy to understand how it might be interpreted as a capitulation to the status quo when Greenberg claims in 1947 that Pollock had come closest to achieving such an art which ‘founds’ sensibility because the artist’s work constituted ‘an attempt to cope with urban life; it dwells entirely in the lonely jungle of immediate sensations, impulses and notions, therefore is positivist’ (CEC2: 166). That is, whereas Adorno argues that Abstract Expressionism figured as aleatoric in Rosenberg’s terms invites a positivistic mode of reception which capitulates to the status quo because its materials are unmediated, commentators have contended that Greenberg prescribes a positivistic mode of reception which *actively* accommodates itself to the status quo. That is, in the same way as we saw in Chapter 6 Greenberg’s supposedly fixed criteria for the creation of art are accused of selfsameness with Taylorism, Greenberg’s edicts for the reception of art are said to attune perception for the exigencies of capitalism.

This is the central thesis of the most comprehensive study of Greenberg’s thought in recent years, Caroline A. Jones’s *Eyesight Alone* (2005), in which she argues that Greenberg’s criticism mapped ‘the conditions of possibility for the seen,’ thus bringing empirical subjects in line with the orders of a reified transcendental subject which ‘subsumes the I and forgets the body that frames its every view’ (EA: 9). For Caroline A. Jones, this project is rooted in the Marxist ambition for art to create ‘not only an object for the individual, but also an individual for the object,’ as Marx affirms is the object of art in one of his many scattered comments on aesthetics (EA: 81). To trace this influence on Greenberg, Jones takes recourse to the *The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx* by Mikhail Lifshitz, the ideas from which were likely familiar to Greenberg since it was translated from the Russian and published by the New York Critics Group in 1938 (EA: 82-3). However, while I will not return directly to Trotsky’s influence upon Greenberg at this point, for Jones’s purposes she might have directed attention to certain of the former’s exhortations in the optimistic years following the October revolution:

What is man? He is by no means a finished or harmonious being. No, he is still a highly awkward creature. Man, as an animal, has not evolved by plan but spontaneously, and has accumulated many contradictions. The question of how to educate and regulate, of how to improve and complete the physical and spiritual construction of man, is a colossal problem which can only be understood on the basis of socialism. [...] To produce a new, “improved version” of man – that is the future task of communism. And for that we first have to find out everything about man, his anatomy, his physiology and that part of his physiology which is called his psychology. Man must look at himself and see himself as a raw material, or at best a semi-manufactured product, and say: “At last, my dear *homo sapiens*, I will work on you.” (Trotsky, qtd. in Figes, 447)

Jones contends that Greenbergian positivism served no less to ‘improve and complete’ the ‘construction of man.’ However, rather than creating subjects for the object of a future communist society, on Jones’s account the positivistic mode of reception which Greenberg contended Abstract Expressionist artworks necessitated ‘cleansed and reordered’ subjects so as they might function “‘efficiently” within the bureaucratic urban industrial scene’ (EA: 82).⁸² As Jones writes, rather than the Soviet ‘new man,’ this subject ‘was the bureaucratic professional of a democratic, industrial, positivist, technocratic state’ (EA: 117). For Jones, as per the Frankfurt school account of positivism, Greenberg’s positivism places an artwork’s spectator in the position of the natural scientist. Indeed, while Jones does not cite it specifically, Greenberg himself claimed in the aforementioned interview with Peter Fuller that by positivism in art criticism, he meant that the discipline should share ‘something with the best scientific experts’ in ‘being uncompromising, rigorous’ (Saunders 1991: 20), and

⁸² While I will return to the question of continuities between Trotsky’s and Greenberg’s accounts of avant-garde artworks’ mode of address, it might here be acknowledged that, in practice, ‘actually existing socialism’ eagerly enforced the disciplinary project of post-war US capitalism with which Jones identifies Greenberg’s criticism. As Hardt and Negri write, ‘Lenin’s renowned enthusiasm for Taylorism was later outdone by Mao’s modernization projects. The official socialist recipe for decolonization also followed the essential logic dictated by the capitalist transnationals and the international agencies: each postcolonial government had to create a labour force adequate to the disciplinary regime’ (2000: 248).

Jones details such uncompromising rigour on the part of Greenberg in terms of how the viewer of Abstract Expressionist artworks was to function as a “disinterested” objective observer [measuring] sense-data against testable criteria’ (EA: 105). In the previous three chapters, I argued that the determinate negation of representational content which Greenberg champions in Abstract Expressionism entailed the negation of identity-thinking’s negation of nonidentity. However, rather than because it marks the artworks’ resistance to the claims of capitalist ratiocination, Jones argues that the significance Greenberg accords to the determinate negation of representational content is due to the fact that it proffers ‘concrete material facts (flatness, the framing edge, and so forth) that an educated mass audience could use to tune their apparatus’ in a manner amenable to the status quo (EA: 134). Jones contends that ‘the conventions of modernism [...] carved out from the conventions of illusionist painting, as negations’ provided the criteria against which sense-data was to be tested, and accordingly dismissed if nonidentical with it (EA: 125). Recently, Jacques Ranciere has forwarded a variant of the argument that Greenberg quashed ‘politically committed art of the New Deal’ in his promotion of Abstract Expressionism, contending that, contrary to the latter’s focus ‘on its own materials and procedures,’ the former transcribed ‘feats of labour and the struggle of the oppressed’ by ‘matching the accelerated rhythms of industry, society, and urban life, and [...] giving infinite resonance to the most ordinary minutes of everyday life’ (2013: 262).⁸³ As is evident from Greenberg’s claims for Pollock’s positivism quoted above, Ranciere is wrong in asserting that Greenberg conceives Abstract Expressionism and the mode of reception it elicits as holding itself aloof from urban life. However, on Jones’s telling, this parallel between Greenberg’s positivism and urban life is in terms of the latter’s officiated topography, and thus in the service of demoting the affect of the ‘ordinary minutes of everyday life.’ That is to say, she argues that, with recourse to criteria of medium-

⁸³ Ranciere thus, it should be noted, overlooks the fact that certain of the Abstract Expressionists described their art as precisely attuned to the urban life in this way, for instance Gottlieb who claims that ‘there is a tempo in the life of New York which is exhilarating and I feel that this gets into one’s paintings [...] I’m not involved with the external appearance of the city; it’s the vibrations’ (1990: 269).

specificity, Greenberg sifted ‘hard observable facts’ from ‘misty, subjective preferences,’ and did so in a manner which was ‘pedagogically compact,’ inviting others to undertake the attendant ‘sensory training’ (EA: 78; 141). She thus contends that for Greenberg ‘[t]he mechanism of the eye [...] brought the body into sensory awareness, but only by restricting sensual flow’ (EA: 42). Jones posits that this primed subjects, not least erstwhile revolutionary socialists like Greenberg, to ‘make peace with the capitalist status quo’ (EA: 226). For Jones, Greenberg elucidates how, contrary to political art which rouses its spectators with ‘stirring narratives,’ the post-war work of the Abstract Expressionists provided ‘mute materiality’ to be ‘processed by detached perceptual schemes’ (Ibid). Thus, instead of addressing collectives, Abstract Expressionist artworks cultivated ‘the internally organised unit of the individual’ (Ibid). Above, I addressed the notion that Abstract Expressionists’ shift towards an individualistic art lead to their work’s complicity with the status quo. This was in terms of how the artworks supposedly manifest the subjective interiority of the artists, and thus provided a hypostasised counterweight of non-conformism to the administered society of post-war US capitalism. Jones, on the other hand, argues that the positivistic mode of reception attuned to Abstract Expressionism which Greenberg advocated, whips the sensorium into conformity with that society.

Generally, Jones supposes that (her reconstruction of) Greenberg’s concepts exhaust the artworks they conceive. To the extent that the Abstract Expressionists ‘adapted their work to the new values (abstraction, flatness, all-overness)’ codified by Greenberg, she claims that their paintings came to embody these values (EA: 67). She argues that Pollock became disciplined ‘even in the innermost recesses of his pictorial imagination [...] so internalised were the linguistic and visual orders of (Greenberg’s) cubist project’ (EA: 390). However, other critics over the past few decades who similarly accuse Greenberg’s positivism of complicity with the macrostructural determinants of the status quo – notably Rosalind Krauss, Briony Fer and Amelia Jones – have attempted to recover an Abstract Expressionism nonidentical with (this reading of) Greenberg’s account, by focusing upon the way in which

Abstract Expressionist artworks, particularly Pollock's drip paintings, engage the body that frames the spectator's every view, which Greenberg supposedly systematically excludes. As Michael Fried has characterised this trend, these writers deprecate Greenberg for his 'supposed failure to deal adequately with the works themselves' (1999: 97), in so far as they contend his criticism occludes the somatic appeal of Pollock's work. Possibly the most influential of these accounts – cited by Caroline A. Jones, Fer and Amelia Jones – is that of Greenberg's former acolyte Krauss. In an argument which she has iterated numerous times since first making it in *The Optical Unconscious* (1993),⁸⁴ Krauss contends that Greenberg adopts 'positivist science's [...] neutral observation' in contextualising Pollock's drip paintings in relation 'to tradition, to culture, to convention,' and that this entails a sublimation of these works which diverts them 'from the material, the tactile' which for Krauss is their proper domain (1993: 244-7).⁸⁵ While Greenberg's criticism presupposes the vertical posture of the viewing subject, Krauss argues that decisive for the paintings' engagement of otherwise culturally delegitimated bodily experience is the way in which Pollock's negation of the figurative in these works entailed a reorientation from verticality to horizontality, attested to by their puddles and evidently thrown fluid lines of paint, along with errant

⁸⁴ See also the entries on Pollock in her catalogue *Formless: A User's Guide* (1997), written with Yves Alain Bois, and her essay 'The Crisis of the Easel Picture' (1999).

⁸⁵ It should here be noted that, while Krauss conversely accuses Frankenthaler of complicity with what she conceives of as Greenberg's sublimation of Pollock's works, contending that Frankenthaler's adoption of Pollock's soaked line in so-called landscape works "'righted" Pollock's painting, declaring that the spumes and furls and sprays had all along been verticals' (1993: 290), Caroline A. Jones dedicates a chapter in *Eyesight Alone* to interpreting Frankenthaler's paintings as unruly towards Greenberg's notional dictums in soliciting somatic reception. Jones argues that 'the embodied trace of the body in [Frankenthaler's] work opposed itself to the discourse of disembodiment in [Greenberg's] work (EA: 307). As she does with Abstract Expressionism in general, Jones understands Frankenthaler's paintings as adhering to the Modernist paradigm laid down by Greenberg. However, she claims that Frankenthaler's works are 'intermittently resistant to his rules,' in so far as 'the body that had been banished from visual representation [appears] as altogether evident in some of Frankenthaler's pictures' (EA: 306-307). For Jones, the majority of Frankenthaler's work cannot 'be the basis for a properly detached and disembodied Apollonian regime,' because 'at least one strain of [it] crossed [the] bridge [into] terrain [...] Greenberg [was unwilling] to map' (EA: 328). In elaborating this, however, despite positing her account as 'self-consciously embodied' (EA: 337), she frames Frankenthaler's paintings as mobilising 'visual arguments about embodiment and the gaze' which decisively marshal conceptual subsumption (EA: 334): Jones contends that the splat of red paint which overlays Frankenthaler's *Scene with Nude* (1952) unifies 'female flow and masculine action' (EA: 328), and that Frankenthaler's *Two Live as One on a Crocodile Isle* (1959) is a 'a dance of equals constructed now as warmly contiguous but turning to "focus" elsewhere under the benevolent gaze of a tropical sun' (EA: 337).

elements such as the handprints in *Number 1A, 1948* or the miscellaneous items dropped onto *Full Fathom Five*. She thus contends that Greenberg's verticality effaces the paintings' radicalism by adopting the orientation of the distanced gaze of domination.⁸⁶ Briony Fer explicitly follows Krauss in her account, which centres on Pollock's *Out of the Web* (1949), one of Pollock's 'cut out' pieces, whereby the artist sliced segments from apparently finished drip paintings to reveal the masonite canvas underneath. Fer details how 'tangible touch' is thus palpable in *Out of the Web*'s 'hacked, remaindered surfaces where the paint has been cut away' (1997: 106), and for Fer, this means that the work defies what she sees as Greenberg's attempt to transcend Abstract Expressionism's corporeality in mastering the visual field. Amelia Jones, similarly, counters Greenberg's supposedly disembodied gaze by arguing for the somatic appeal of Pollock's work. As with Krauss and Fer, this appeal for Jones is down to the way in which the drip paintings serve to index their processes of production. Jones argues that the paintings, particularly in the context of Hans Namuth's photographs, are inescapably the work of a particularised subject, and accordingly engage the spectator as a particularised subject. In this, Jones recasts Pollock as a precursor to performative art practices which in some way involve an enactment of the artist's body and thus instantiate 'the dislocation or decentering of the Cartesian subject of modernism' (1998: 1). Understood in this way, Jones contends, Pollock's drip paintings problematise Greenberg's judgements of Abstract Expressionism 'as the triumphant climax of great European modernist painting' which she purports are founded in 'denial of the body, of subjectivity, of sensuality' (1998: 74).

⁸⁶ Prior to *The Optical Unconscious*, in her *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (1985), Krauss makes the case that a different reading of Pollock, that of art historian E. A. Carmean, falsified 'Pollock's working methods and [miscast] the meaning of the works' (224). Carmean interprets Pollock's black-and-white pictures as marking the decisive re-emergence of figuration into Pollock's practice. However, Krauss contends that, contrarily, Pollock's painting operates through a structure of oppositions, including 'the binary opposition of figure/nonfigure,' in order to generate the provisional identity of these oppositions, and thus, Krauss argues, 'nonspecific figuration' was a part of 'the linear matrix of even the allover paintings' (239). I will not concern myself with this characterisation of Pollock's paintings as rehearsing a Hegelian (by way of Mondrian) image of reconciliation, suffice to say that, while Krauss seems to have abandoned this account of Pollock in favour of reading his paintings as the repressed corporeal nonidentity of culture, in the proceeding sections I will develop an account of Abstract Expressionism for which it is precisely in so far as Abstract Expressionism rescues such nonidentity, which means it prefigures reconciliation.

For these critics, then, as for Caroline A. Jones, Greenberg's criticism delegitimizes errant subjective experience. The return of repressed sensuousness in Pollock's art is read in abstract opposition to dominant rationality, and Greenberg's account of his artworks is understood as an effort on the part of dominant rationality to batten down the hatches and neutralise this sensuousness. As Diarmud Costello has noted, albeit from a position critical of Greenberg, such rejections of Greenberg have often indicted his 'Kantianism' (2007: 221-222). This is certainly true of Amelia Jones. Without citing any of Greenberg's specific references to Kant, Jones claims the stakes of Greenberg's disembodiment are set out in Kant's distinction between the beautiful and the agreeable by which aesthetic judgements involving a subject's desire for an object are distinguished from disinterested aesthetic reflective judgements. For Jones, this marks a Cartesian disavowal of the sensate body and an imposition of a 'mode of logic through which "man" exerts control over the uncodifiable, asserting himself as one whose particular knowledge privileges him as a higher class of being, fit to enlighten the masses' (76). Jones thus asserts that, in following Kant, Greenberg occludes his embodiment 'precisely in order to veil [his] particularities, biases, and investments' in order that he might appear as 'an unquestioned arbiter of universal meanings' (76-77). However, in the remainder of this chapter, I want to contend that criticism such as Jones's attacks Greenberg as if his account of Abstract Expressionism were modelled on the cognitive judgements of Kant's first *Critique* — the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) — rather than the aesthetic reflective judgements of the third *Critique* — the *Critique of Judgement* (1790) — and that reading Greenberg's debt to Kant in terms of the latter, in fact indicates how Abstract Expressionism engages spectators in a manner which repudiates precisely the arbitration of meaning divorced from particular experience.

Possibly the most cited reference to Kant in Greenberg's work, is the analogy which Greenberg draws in 'Modernist Painting' between the 'self-criticism' which he identifies in the medium-specificity of modernist art, and the 'self-criticism' of Kant's epistemology:

I identify Modernism with the intensification, almost the exacerbation, of [the] self-critical tendency that began with the philosopher Kant [...] The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticise the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence. Kant used logic to establish the limits of logic, and while he withdrew much from its old jurisdiction, logic was left all the more secure in what there remained to it [...] Modernism criticises from the inside, through the procedures themselves of that which is being criticized [...] Modernism used art to call attention to art. The limitations that constitute the medium of painting – the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of the pigment [...] came to be regarded as positive factors, and were acknowledged openly. (CEC4: 85-6)

Rather than aesthetic reflective judgements which for Kant do not have recourse to a determinate concept, in this analogy Greenberg appears to be assimilating modernist art with cognitive judgements which *do* have determinate concepts. That is, as Robert Clewis writes, '[t]he claim that Modern art reveals and criticises the conditions of its production constitutes a plainly cognitive, not aesthetic, judgement' (2008: 7). Understood in this way, if Greenberg's criticism is Kantian, then it is in terms of Kant's assertion in the first *Critique* that 'thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind' (2007: 86). By 'intuitions,' Kant does not mean instinctual insights, but rather 'that through which [knowledge] refers to [objects] immediately' in sense perception (2007: 59). Conversely, for Kant concepts are representations under which these intuitions are subsumed by the categories of the understanding, via the recognition of that which objects share with other objects. The first *Critique* constitutes Kant's effort to delimit the transcendental principles by which concepts and intuitions are reciprocally determined, which have held for all, and will hold for all future, human cognition, enclosed 'by nature itself within limits that can never be altered' (2007: 251). However, the permanence of these limits for Kant means he in fact figures the supposedly reciprocal concepts and intuitions in an asymmetrical and 'deeply

hierarchical relationship, with the conceptual lording it over the empirical and the experiential in order to preserve the universality and necessity of thought,' as Michael Wayne writes (2014: 28). This dichotomous subordination of perception to pre-given forms is evident even in Kant's elaboration of the pure *a priori* intuitions of space and time by which the faculty of the understanding is provided with content. While Kant affirms that '[a]ll intuitions, as sensible, rest on affections,' that is, the capacity for an empirical embodied subject to be affected (2007: 97), he nonetheless claims that the principles of pure intuition 'instruct us prior to experience, not by means of experience' (2007: 67). Empirical intuitions are thus structured by pure *a priori* intuitions, even before their subsumption under the categories of the understanding by which these intuitions gain cognitive significance. For Kant, without these transcendental operations, 'experience would not be knowledge, but only a rhapsody of perceptions' (2007: 188). It seems, then, that the empirical, sensible intuitions apprehended by embodied subjects gain their authority entirely by being filtered through pre-given categories. As Chris Thornhill notes, because of this 'purificatory impoverishment of reason,' Kant has, since the contemporaneous critique of Johann Georg Hamann, consistently been criticised for his 'exclusion of all vital, natural and particular historical experience from reason' (2006: 100). Following the readings of his elder interlocutors Ernst Bloch, Siegfried Kracauer and Lukács, Adorno understands this exclusion as symptomatic of capitalist reification, which of course was in its ascendancy as Kant wrote in the late eighteenth century.⁸⁷ The homology between Kant's epistemology and Adorno's account of identity-thinking is particularly clear in the following passage from the *First Critique*:

⁸⁷ Of the three, in *History and Class Consciousness* Lukács delivers the most systematic account of the parallels between Kantian epistemology and the capitalist reification of consciousness in so far as for both 'the attempt to eliminate every element of content and of the irrational,' does an injustice not only to 'the object but also [...] the subject,' as the latter is transformed 'into a pure and purely formal subject' (128). However, Adorno attributes great influence to both Bloch and Kracauer on his reading of the first *Critique*. In reference to the former, Adorno accredits him with the insight, which we will see is crucial to Adorno's account of Kant, that the barrier Kant erects against transcendence is in fact 'the expression of bourgeois society's acquiescence in the reified world it has fabricated, the world of commodities, the world for the bourgeois,' and thus historically contingent (1980: 55). As for Kracauer, the teenage Adorno read the first *Critique* regularly with him on Saturday afternoons, and claimed that he owed more to these sessions than to his academic teachers precisely because Kracauer taught him to understand the work not as a

In subsuming an object under a concept, the representation of the former must always be homogeneous with the latter, that is, the concept must contain what is represented in the object to be subsumed under it. For this is the meaning of the expression that an object is contained under a concept. Thus, for instance, the empirical concept of a plate is homogeneous with the pure geometrical concept of a circle, whereby the roundness thought in the first can be intuited in the latter. (2007: 176)

As I delineated in Chapter 5, Adorno contends that the second nature of capitalism demands a similar snugness of fit between objects and concepts, and thus all elements of the former not present in the latter are ignored or delegitimated. Accordingly, for Adorno, ‘the abstraction characteristic of [the Kantian] transcendental subject is nothing but the internalised and hypostatised form of man’s domination of nature,’ which always ‘comes into being through the elimination of qualities, through the reduction of qualitative distinctions to quantitative forms’ (2001: 172-3). Adorno argues that Kant’s epistemology thereby corresponds to the ‘essential antinomy of bourgeois society in general,’ in so far as for both the effort to rationalise the world in relation to human beings resulted in the establishment of fixed regulative determinants estranged from human beings, to which human beings must adapt (2001: 115-6). As Susan Buck-Morss puts it, on Adorno’s account ‘[t]he universality of the transcendental subject ignored historical particularity and implied the interchangeability of every subject’ (1977: 83). Thus, for Adorno, ‘[t]he surplus of the transcendental subject is the deficit of the utterly reduced empirical subject’ (ND: 178).

Now, in the passage from ‘Modernist Painting’ above, Greenberg does not reference Kant in order to draw an analogy between Kantian epistemology and his own criticism. Instead, the parallel is between Kant’s delimitation of the former and the praxis of modernist art. However, in his explication of *this* parallel, Greenberg appears to imply that cognition befitting modernist art takes the form of Kant’s account of determinate knowledge and

conclusive analysis of epistemology, but rather ‘as a kind of coded text from which the historical situation of spirit could be read’ (1992: 58-9).

experience. As Kuspit writes in his eponymous monograph on Greenberg, citing Kant's assertion as to the reciprocity of concepts and intuitions, in identifying the affirmation of medium-specificity as the fulcrum of modernist painting, it seems as if Greenberg is engaged in 'the effort to reconcile general [concepts] about art['s medium-specificity] with particular intuitions of works of art' (1979: 9). Indeed, as Joseph Masheck notes (2011: 120), the assumption that Greenberg's methodology is Kantian in this sense is apparently reinforced by an earlier reference to Kant made by Greenberg, when he claims that

[i]n order to act as an agent and stir up good writing there must be some kind of positive notion [...] a bias in a particular direction, as to what this good writing of the future will be like. As Kant says, you only find what you look for' (CEC1: 46).

While Greenberg caveats this claim with the assurance that he does not 'mean by this that it is necessary to be dogmatic and to have fixed ideas against which everything is to be measured,' we have seen in this chapter that, similarly to Adorno's critique of Kant's transcendental subject, it is in terms of how Greenberg supposedly subsumes intuitions of art under pre-given concepts – and thus only finds what he is looking for – that critics have argued Greenberg, as Kuspit puts it subsequently in his book, 'seems to confirm preconceptions rather than to convey freshness or vitality of perception' allowing 'only for certain kinds of perceptions and certain kinds of statements' (1979: 173-4), and thus delegitimizing errant affective reception of Abstract Expressionism in a manner amenable to the status quo.⁸⁸

Certainly, in chapters 3 and 4 I have shown how, in so far as medium-specificity was hypostasised in terms of hierarchical superiority, Abstract Expressionism served US imperialism in its isomorphy with the United States' self-conception as the culmination of

⁸⁸ For further critiques of Greenberg's identification of his aesthetics as Kantian along these lines, see Ingrid Stadler 'The Idea of Art and Its Criticism: A Rational Reconstruction of a Kantian Doctrine' (1982) in which she accuses Greenberg's work of 'vacuously formal [...] bloodless abstractions' (1982: 195) and Dean W. Curtin, 'Varieties of Aesthetic Formalism' (1988), in which he contends that '[o]ften in reading Greenberg's work, one gets the impression that his analysis of taste owes more to the first Critique than to the third' (1988: 323).

universal history, by which the worldwide imposition of its economic norms was justified. However, central to chapters 5 through 7 was the argument that Greenberg's focus upon medium-specificity in Abstract Expressionism is in fact a focus upon particularity whose bindingness is delegitimated when life is fundamentally determined in the interest of capital accumulation. In this, I briefly discussed Adorno's claim that Kant's account in the third *Critique* of aesthetic reflective judgement for which there is no subordinating concept indicates how autonomous artworks escape the abstractly dominating nexus of second nature. Now, to return to Amelia Jones's accusations as to Greenberg's Kantianism, it is certainly the case that Kant claims that aesthetic reflective judgements of the beautiful, in lacking subordinating concepts, thereby do without recourse to all interests which delimit what knowing is, including sensual interests. Instead, Kant asserts that '*beautiful is what we like in merely judging it* (rather than either in sensation proper or through a concept)' (1987: 174). However, as Adorno points out, 'there is no liking without a living person who would enjoy it' (AT: 11). Accordingly, he contends, while the subsumption of objects under the universal transcendental laws of determinant judgements entails the reduction of the empirical subject, when addressing aesthetic reflective judgements 'Kant is compelled to consider the existing individual, the ontic element, more than is compatible with the idea of the transcendental subject' (AT: 11).

Already in his reading of the first *Critique*, Adorno understands Kant's refusal to do away with the notion of noumenal (as opposed to phenomenal) things in themselves which transcend the supposedly transhistorical circumscription of possible experience, as evidence against the transhistoricality of this circumscription, because it implies that our concepts are dependent upon objects which these concepts do not exhaust. Kant puts his account of noumena succinctly in his *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, first published in 1783, between the first and second editions of the first *Critique*:

[I]t would be an absurdity to hope to know more of any object than belongs to possible experience of it [...] But it would be an even greater absurdity on the other

hand to admit no things in themselves, or to declare out experience to be the only possible way of knowing things, our intuition in space and time the only possible intuition, our discursive understanding the archetype of every possible understanding, and to have the principles of the possibility of experience taken for universal conditions of things in themselves. (1953: 116-117)

That for Adorno the second absurdity outweighs the first should be clear from my summary of his reading of the first *Critique* above. If Kant's circumscription of 'possible experience' is in fact the historically contingent elaboration and legitimation of capitalist reification, then these other 'possible ways of knowing things' may not be blocked under changed historical circumstances.⁸⁹ For Adorno, then, it is crucial that Kant 'stubbornly defended the transcendent thing-in-itself' (ND: 184). This defence distinguishes Kant's epistemology from the positivism that currently holds sway, which of course disavows all notions of transcendence. Adorno claims that, in contrast with positivism and its injunction to 'stick to the "positive" facts, to the given realities [because] nothing further lies behind them,' the block on transcendence in the first *Critique* is a tacit admission that 'we have a situation in which knowledge is illusory because the closer it comes to its object, the more it shapes it in its own image and thus drives it further and further away' (2001: 176). For Adorno, the acknowledgement of things in themselves which are nonetheless unknowable is 'a kind of metaphysical mourning, a kind of memory of what is best, of something that we must not forget, but that we are nevertheless compelled to forget,' and thus an acknowledgement of those elements of the object which we have driven away (Ibid). As I detailed in the previous

⁸⁹ Albrecht Wellmer evocatively summarises Adorno's account when he writes that 'this thought opened a narrow crack in the door, through which a feeble glimmer of salvation fell upon the benighted world, enough to question Kant's claim to metaphysical agnosticism as the final word. "We cannot know it" is replaced by "we do not know it yet"' (1998: 190). Unfortunately, Wellmer proceeds to dismiss the notion, arguing that Adorno's conviction that 'the Absolute as reconciliation [...] could become a historical reality' is naive because 'we can already know *now* that we cannot anticipate as real that which we cannot even consistently *conceive* as real' (Ibid: 212). However, Zuidervaart ably counters Wellmer's argument by pointing out that Wellmer here 'assigns a constant and unchanging validity to "our" forms of consciousness' (2007: 139). Thus, unless Wellmer rejects the thesis that knowledge is ineluctably historically mediated, which he does not, his case against Adorno is untenable.

chapter, Adorno argues that the praxis of authentic art is precisely an effort in rationally salvaging something of the mimetic comportment which preceded humanity's shaping of the world in its own (reified) image. Indeed, when discussing such artworks' claim for repressed nature, Adorno asserts that what becomes perceptible in the experience of such artworks 'no more coincides with empirical reality than does – according to Kant's grandly paradoxical conception – the thing itself with the world of "phenomena," the categorially constituted objects' (AT: 66).

For Adorno, then, the 'disinterestedness' of the aesthetic reflective judgement of authentic art, in making sense of a thing as it appears rather than in accordance with the categories of the understanding, engages ontic elements of experience extra-aesthetically truncated by transcendental interests, whose contingency he claims Kant registers with the notion of things in themselves. Similarly, when Greenberg adduces arguments from the third *Critique* in his criticism, it is in order to elucidate the experience of modernist art as the experience of intuitions as cognitively binding without the mediation of extant determinate concepts. In 'Laocoon,' Greenberg claims that when experiencing avant-garde art one is disinterested in the sense that 'there is nothing to identify, connect, or think about,' and yet, precisely due to this bracketing, there is 'everything to feel' (CEC1: 34). For Caroline A. Jones, that 'desire "to feel"' should be consigned to Greenberg's early essays, prior to the critic's capitulation to the status quo, and accordant suppression or regulation of such 'feeling' (EA: 114). However, Greenberg's references to Kant after he abandoned his commitment to radical politics seem to approximate precisely this feeling. In 1943, Greenberg cites Kant's account of the beautiful to describe how 'the work of art that exposes to full view its inner workings, its means of effectuation' is compelling not because it thus lends itself to subsumption under determinate concepts of medium-specificity, but because its 'emphatic physical presence' invites one to 'linger on [...] it because it keeps arresting our attention' (CEC1: 161). In 1945, he asserts that Kant has 'shown how unamenable the methods of art [...] are to logical analysis' (CEC2: 28). In a 1947 review of a book by Philip Wylie he writes that 'according to

Kant (and this reviewer agrees with him) art gives one the sensation of a thing without necessarily including its meaning' (CEC2: 159). In 1955, in a disputatious exchange of letters with F.R. Leavis, he opposes what he characterises as Leavis's claim that 'one can so adequately exhibit in *words* one's grounds for an aesthetic judgement that agreement with it is compelled by the rules of evidence and logic' by challenging Leavis to refute 'in practice or theory' Kant's argument that 'one cannot prove an aesthetic judgement in discourse' and instead 'one can appeal only to the other person's *taste* as exercised through experience of the work of art under discussion' (CEC3: 216). In 1961, he takes recourse to Kant in claiming that discursive logic does not legislate for '[q]uality in art,' affirming that '[e]xperience alone rules in this area' (CEC4: 118); in 1964 he asserts that he concurs with Kant that 'nobody has yet been able to show [...] anything of essential quality in any kind of art that called on one's reasoning powers for either its appreciation or its creation' (CEC4: 201). In these proclamations, then, it is clear that, in terms of his criticism, Greenberg's self-identification as Kantian is grounded in his conviction that reception of artworks should be rooted in the intrinsic intelligibility of the given artwork resonates with a spectator independent of determinate categories. This, then, parallels the way in which I showed in Chapter 7 his criticism discerns in the production of Abstract Expressionist artworks the kind of rational construction guided by particularity which Adorno contends intimates the possibility that technical rationality might serve material necessity, rather than the expropriation of surplus value. In the next chapter, I will argue that, accordingly, rather than occluding the somatic appeal which the critics surveyed in this chapter rightly glean in Abstract Expressionism, Greenberg's account of the reception of Abstract Expressionism, in its inextricability from the artworks' particularity, registers precisely the way in which the artworks bindingly solicit the embodied and affective elements of experience of which a rationality worth the name would take account.

Chapter Nine

The Silent World of the Sensible

When discussing Caroline A. Jones's account of Greenberg above, I noted that she argues Greenberg's supposed efforts in bureaucratising the sensorium can be traced back to the work of early Soviet theorists for whom art was to serve the purpose of subject formation. While Jones accordingly speculates that Greenberg was informed by Mikhail Lifshitz, I suggested that, for the purposes of her argument, she might have adduced certain declarations by Trotsky as to how the production of new human beings was an exigency for communism. Indeed, in their account of how Trotskyism became art-for-art's sake on the New York art scene of the '30s and '40s, Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock contend that Greenberg mapped 'the steeping of painting in its own cause' not only on to Trotsky's 'claim for a special freedom for art,' as I discussed in Chapter 1, but also on to Trotsky's affirmation that art should act 'as a form of consciousness of the world and [...] a necessary precondition of the building of a new consciousness' (181). However, while the passage from Trotsky I quoted in the previous chapter implies the kind of disciplining of the senses of which Jones accuses Greenberg, if we return to Trotsky's writings on art, it is clear that for him art's role in the cultivation of new consciousnesses was rather to negate the prevailing negation of affective elements of experience. In Chapter 1, I showed that Trotsky asserts that for art to be revolutionary, it cannot abide prescribed content, as it was forced to under Stalin, and instead the artist must follow art's laws. Yet, as I briefly acknowledged, for Trotsky this freedom from heteronomous laws allows art to register elements of experience unmet or repressed by the status quo, which thus call for the latter's transformation. Trotsky contends that art is 'an expression of man's need for a harmonious and complete life, that is to say, his need for those major benefits which a class society has deprived him' (LA: 104), but this expression is not to be guided or managed in the manner of political strategy, while it might inform the latter, because it is largely unconscious on the part of the artist (LA: 76-77). For Trotsky, art does

not evoke such need discursively, but in so far as it engages ‘in some way [one’s] feelings and moods’ (LA: 67). In making this point in a speech given to the Press Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1924, Trotsky criticises Fyodor Raskolnikov for ignoring ‘in works of art [...] that which makes them works of art,’ and claims, contrary to his fellow Bolshevik, that Dante’s *Divine Comedy* was not of value simply as a historical document of the Florentine petty bourgeois of the thirteenth century, but retained puissance six centuries after its publication because Dante, living in a class society with ‘certain common features’ to the contemporaneous present, had lent ‘feelings and moods [...] broad, intense, powerful expression’ and thus the *Divine Comedy* could be approached ‘as a source of aesthetic perception’ *despite* Dante’s class position (LA: 67-8).

As I noted in Chapter 1, Trotsky is generally dismissive of art which is ostensibly non-representational. In a piece from 1926 entitled ‘Culture and Socialism’ – which Greenberg could not have read prior to the publication of his essays, as it went untranslated into English until 1962 – Trotsky goes so far as to condemn abstract art as reactionary, because he surmises it amounts to ‘a depreciation in art of the role of the intelligence in favour of a formless feeling,’ its expression refracted ‘through a person’s nerves’ to too great a degree (LA: 87). However, he consistently implies that the ‘feelings and moods’ invoked by authentic art are bound up with somatic affect. As early as *Literature and Revolution*, against reducing art to a one-to-one superstructural expression of a society’s economic base, Trotsky compares ‘the need for art’ to ‘the need for food and warmth’ (LA: 36-7). This somatic appeal of art for Trotsky is especially clear in the 1938 *Partisan Review* essays ‘Art and Politics in our Epoch’ and ‘Towards a Free Revolutionary Art’ which I showed in Chapter 1 most likely directly informed ‘Kitsch’ and ‘Laocoon.’ While in ‘Culture and Socialism’ abstract art is derided for its refraction through the nerves, in ‘Art and Politics’ he proclaims that art ‘is basically a function of the nerves and demands complete sincerity,’ and in ‘Towards a Free Revolutionary Art’ he and Breton assert that, to serve the revolution, an artist must ‘subjectively assimilate [...] social content’ to the extent that they ‘feel in [their]

very nerves its meaning and drama' (LA: 106; 120). Furthermore, in a letter to Breton which was published in *Partisan Review*, Trotsky figures art's role in definitively corporeal terms, affirming that 'truly independent creation cannot but be revolutionary by its very nature, for it cannot but seek an outlet from intolerable social suffocation' and anticipating that the FIARI would provide such an outlet by oxidising 'the atmosphere in which artists breathe and create' (LA: 124). This phraseology is not simply metaphorical. As Raymond Spiteri notes, it was Trotsky and Breton's contention that 'the artistic imagination was a sensorium that rearticulated the relation between mind and body' (2016: 126). Thus, it seems as if for Trotsky following art's laws entails the objectivation and engagement of affective experience hitherto stymied by class society.

It is in this spirit that Trotsky writes 'the new man cannot be formed without a new lyric poetry' borne of the poet, having internalized the lessons of the bourgeois art of the past, feeling 'the world in a new way' (LA: 32). And it was through a 'radical reconstruction of society' so as its fundamental determinants did not ride roughshod over or dismiss the feelings thus registered, that with Breton Trotsky claimed authentic art would 'allow all mankind to raise itself to those heights which only isolated geniuses have achieved in the past' (LA: 117-118). For Adorno, too, 'there is no human being, not even the most wretched' who, if what they are for society and their material bodily existence were reconciled, 'has not a potential which, by conventional bourgeois standards, is comparable to genius' (2002a: 132-133). And, while Adorno notoriously averred that to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, he repeatedly qualified this as an expression of the antinomious situation of art after WWII, wherein art, like all culture, rang hollow after the systematic murder of millions in a supposedly civilised society, and yet nevertheless to accordingly do away with art would be to surrender to the reigning logic of exchange whereby people are made identical with their concept for society, which in its extreme manifestation allowed for their annihilation as specimens (ND: 362-3; 2007c: 188; 2002a: 110). As should be clear from the preceding chapters, for Adorno, art resists this logic not in addressing 'itself to human beings [and

giving] something to them,’ but rather ‘by *not* thinking of them [and] being purely and consistently formed within itself’ (2002a: 118-119). In Chapter 5, I established that Greenberg’s account, despite serving the co-optation of Abstract Expressionism, bears witness to the way in which the artworks oppose the status quo in these terms, because they are particulars which are undeniably authoritative, while exceeding and defying prevailing universals. At the close of Chapter 7, I proleptically adumbrated how this particularity, cultivated through mimetic comportment on the part of the artist, invites from spectators a similarly mimetic response which, in its assimilation to the nonconceptual, lends authority to affective elements of subjective experience. And in the previous chapter, I began to develop this claim, by arguing that Greenberg takes recourse to Kant’s third *Critique* in an attempt to elucidate such a response to art, in spite of the consistent accusations from critics over the past few decades that Greenberg occludes or regiments affective experience in the service of the status quo. As should be clear, this experience of affect elicited by art ‘consistently formed within itself’ should not be conceived in discursive terms whose easy instrumentalisation by identity-thinking I elaborated in Chapter 6. Instead, as Adorno writes of aesthetic feeling, this affect is borne of ‘astonishment vis-à-vis what is beheld rather than what it is about’ as the spectator is ‘overwhelmed by what is aconceptual and yet determinate’ (AT: 164). It contests the diremption of sensuality and intellect not with catharsis, but with ‘a constitutive relation of the subject to objectivity’ whereby the subject is covered in ‘goose bumps’ (AT: 331).⁹⁰ In this chapter, I will further elaborate how Greenberg’s account of Abstract Expressionism registers this affect, and thus, even when his

⁹⁰ Here, we might note that an account of being ‘overwhelmed’ by Abstract Expressionist canvases, specifically those of Barnett Newman, is elaborated in Jean-Francois Lyotard’s essay ‘Newman: The Instant,’ first published in 1989. In this essay, Lyotard describes the experience of *Onement I* as that of being confronted with an event which eludes rules and categories, opening the viewer to radical indeterminacy. As we have seen, Adorno similarly understands the experience of art as an experience which undermines conceptual reification. However, as Espen Hammer notes, whereas Lyotard is ‘agnostic’ about what this experience involves, ‘remaining mainly at a formal level,’ for Adorno such aesthetic experience reverberates with ‘primordial experience that, during the process of rationalisation, is supposed to have been repressed and virtually forgotten’ (2015: 69). In chapter 7 I elaborated how we might understand Abstract Expressionist artworks as objectivating the latter, and in this chapter I will contend that, accordingly, we might identify the radical conceptual indeterminacy which Lyotard identifies in Newman’s paintings with affective elements of experience delegitimated by rationalisation.

theory was ostensibly depoliticised, indicates how the movement fulfilled the task which Trotsky sets for art, while the world it thus calls for is yet to be realised.

Now, as I noted in the previous chapter, in ‘Laocoon,’ an essay which we can assume was written under the immediate tutelage of Trotsky’s *Partisan Review* articles, Greenberg is explicitly concerned with the role of ‘feeling’ in the apprehension of avant-garde art. He writes that, in its rejection of bourgeois society, avant-garde art’s striving for self-sufficiency resulted in an ‘emphasis [...] on the physical, the sensorial’ as art became abstract in the sense of being ‘almost nothing else except sensuous’ and, in the form of ‘pure painting and pure sculpture,’ sought ‘above all to affect the spectator physically’ (CEC1: 32-3). Nevertheless, as I also acknowledged, Caroline A. Jones dismisses this focus on ‘feeling’ as antecedent to Greenberg’s commitment to regulating the senses. It is often argued that Greenberg’s attendant denigration of undifferentiated sensation and imposition of a transcendental consciousness befitting the status quo is evident in his apparent ocularcentrism. Martin Jay exemplifies this subordination of the ‘corporeal and omnisensual’ in favour of ‘pure visuality, concerned solely with formal optical questions’ by contrasting Greenberg’s account of Cézanne with Merleau-Ponty’s account of the painter, in which Cézanne’s work is lauded as exemplary of art which returns consciousness to its inextricability from the somatic (1993: 160). However, in what follows I want to contend that, not only can Greenberg’s account of Cézanne be read to cohere with Merleau-Ponty’s in terms of the response both thinkers claim is invited by Cézanne’s painting, but furthermore that this is precisely the response invited by Abstract Expressionism’s rational objectivation of mimesis in particularity, which I argued in Chapter 7 provides the substratum compelling Greenberg’s emphasis on medium-specificity. To first address Merleau-Ponty’s account, in ‘Cézanne’s Doubt’ (1945), the first of the philosopher’s three essays on painting, Merleau-Ponty indeed argues, drawing from the artist’s writing and correspondence, that in his work Cézanne lends binding authority to the kind of affective perception I showed in the previous chapter Greenberg is accused of delegitimizing in favour of pregiven visual schemata. As Galen A. Johnson summarises

brilliantly, in ‘Cézanne’s Doubt,’ Merleau-Ponty details how, rather than orienting his painting from a ‘univocal, planimetric perspective,’ Cézanne places ‘emphasis on the lived perspective as the visible world arises in relation to [his] living body,’ and ‘the primacy of the solidity and constancy of the secondary, lived qualities of the visible world, especially colour and tangibility’ (1993: 13). In this, Merleau-Ponty contends, Cézanne’s art constitutes something of a recovery of the nonidentical. That is, whereas in habitual perception we forget ‘the viscous, equivocal appearances, go through them straight to the things they present,’ for Merleau-Ponty, Cézanne ‘recaptures and converts into visible objects what would, without him, remain walled up in the separate life of [his] consciousness’ (PP: 68). Merleau-Ponty, then, argues that in disregarding the polarity of subject and hypostatized object, and distinctions between touch and sight, Cézanne ‘does not try to use colour to *suggest* the tactile sensations which would give shape and depth,’ but rather portrays objects as simultaneously present to all his senses, and thus attempts ‘to make *visible* how the world *touches* us’ (PP: 65; 70).

On the other hand, Greenberg’s 1951 *Partisan Review* essay on Cézanne effectively traces how the painter’s work constitutes a stage in the Modernist determinate negation of *Inhalt*, whose contemporaneous instantiation for Greenberg was of course Abstract Expressionism. However, this is not to say that Greenberg demotes sensual apprehension of Cézanne’s canvases with recourse to categories of medium-specificity, and in fact the proximity of Greenberg’s and Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions of Cézanne’s working methods imply that the former was informed by the latter (‘Cézanne’s Doubt’ was first translated and published in *Partisan Review* in 1946). To be sure, unlike for Merleau-Ponty, Greenberg argues that Cézanne’s achievement is not selfsame with the artist’s stated and conscious ambition. Instead, Greenberg claims that Cézanne’s attempt to render with solidity his preconceptual apprehension of objects resulted in paintings for which ‘every sensation [...] was equally important once its “human interest” was excluded,’ and thus inadvertently Cézanne’s work does justice less to primordial perception, than to the ‘flat surface’ of the canvas (CEC3: 87).

Yet, while he writes that, in Cézanne's attempt to directly represent the distance from his eye of every object, the painter disregarded 'the texture, the smoothness and roughness, hardness and softness, the tactile feel of objects [in] seeing colour exclusively as a determinant of spatial position,' this for Greenberg reverts to tactility as 'the picture surface [receives] its due as a physical entity' (CEC3: 86-7). According to Caroline A. Jones, such references to physicality in Greenberg's criticism confines physicality 'to a display on the part of the canvas, to be consumed by the disembodied eye rather than felt by a kinaesthetic body' (EA: 17). However, quite contrary to a disembodied taxonomical gaze, Greenberg describes the experience of a Cézanne painting as 'indescribably racy and sudden' (CEC3: 85). That is, he accounts for it precisely in terms of kinetic empathy.

All of this is surely to describe the experience of Cézanne's painting in similar terms of sensory miscegenation as does Merleau-Ponty. That is, for Greenberg, Cézanne's emphasis on painting's 'flat surface' is not in the last instance a display of medium-specificity to be optically apprehended and subsumed by accordant categories. Instead, Greenberg contends that Cézanne's negation of objectivist *vraisemblance* (for Cézanne, of course, in the service of greater *vraisemblance*), means that rather than illusorily *suggesting* tactility, Cézanne's work elicits a mode of response for which the apprehension of its physical tactility by an equally inescapably corporeal spectator is paramount. This, I will argue, is precisely the response invited by Abstract Expressionism, whose negation of illusionism did not result in it becoming, as Peter de Bolla put it recently, 'less and less material, moving from objects, things, stuff in the world towards essence, spirit, Platonic form,' but 'instead, it [dematerialised] only to rematerialise as itself' (2016: 13). Gilles Deleuze succinctly identifies this dynamic in Greenberg's criticism.⁹¹ He claims that when 'American critics who took the analysis of abstract expressionism very far' (he does not cite these critics by

⁹¹ Deleuze albeit makes this observation in order to subordinate Abstract Expressionism to the work of Francis Bacon in what Paul Crowther has referred to as his 'hierarchical and essentialist' account of painting (2012: 201).

name, but one can safely assume he means Greenberg and his acolytes, particularly Michael Fried), detail how ‘pictorial space lost [...] the imaginary tactile referents which, in classical three dimensional representation, made it possible to see depths and contours, forms and grounds,’ they are not describing ‘the creation of a purely optical space, exclusively optical,’ but rather accounting for how the eschewal of illusory palpability refuted the ‘relative subordination of the hand to the eye, of the manual to the visual’ expressed by ‘these tactile referents of classical representation’ (2003: 107).⁹² Indeed, in the discussion following a lecture by Greenberg entitled ‘State of Art Criticism’ given in 1981, Greenberg indicates that his claims for abstract art’s opticality should be understood in this sense, when he affirms that ‘[y]our whole being is involved in aesthetic intuition. You don’t look with your eye alone’ (1990: 116). With respect to Merleau-Ponty in ‘Cézanne’s Doubt,’ then, Greenberg differs from the philosopher not in terms of his account of the response invited by a Cézanne painting, but instead in so far as for Greenberg, as Adorno writes of authentic artworks’ ‘indispensable sensual element,’ Cézanne’s canvas is not corporealised ‘through any special content [Inhalt]’ by which the artwork ‘[flees] into concretion’ (AT: 135). Whereas in ‘Cézanne’s Doubt,’ although not, as we will see, in later essays on art, Merleau-Ponty contends that Cézanne engenders embodied perception through such ‘special content’ by faithfully portraying his conceptually unsaturated apprehension of things, Greenberg contextualises this experience in terms of Cézanne’s (unconscious) negation of reified techniques which were impeding somatic apprehension of his paintings in a manner which anticipates Abstract Expressionism.⁹³ I have already established that Greenberg does not

⁹² Ironically, Laura U. Marks accuses Deleuze of failing precisely to make this distinction in his film theory, when she affirms that the philosopher’s ‘focus on filmic images of hands’ in terms of film evoking haptic sensation, is to conceptualise film doing so through identification, which leads him to miss how art might engender perception which ‘bypasses such identification and the distance from the image it requires’ (8).

⁹³ Here it is certainly notable that, while, as far as I can find, Adorno never mentions Cézanne, Hullot-Kentor adduces Cézanne’s painting as exemplary of an artwork inviting mimetic comportment from its spectator in an Adornian sense. He asserts that ‘something other than human intention’ is ‘evident in the dense, rhythmical groupings of Paul Cézanne’s brush stroke, composed so that the way into the brushwork never permits exit by the path of entry. Instead, elusive gates continually open transitions between the bunched strokes so that the eye passes consecutively, plane to plane, beyond its own intelligence, at every pointy coherently arriving where the eye would never have had in mind to go on its

seem to value the medium-specificity which he so often approvingly attributes to Abstract Expressionism as an end in-itself, but more as a precondition of apprehending artworks as *without* a pre-given conceptual framework, and for Greenberg it is often clear that such reception engages the viewer corporeally.

In 1948, for instance, when Greenberg describes Gorky's work as celebrating and displaying 'the processes of painting for their own sake,' it is with 'unproblematic voluptuousness' and 'sensuous richness' (CEC2: 219). In the same year he identifies Pollock's concentration on 'texture and tactile qualities' as central to his painting's effect, citing the 'overpowering surface [...] stalagmited with metallic paint' of *Phosphorescence* (1947) (CEC2: 202). In a 1953 foreword to a de Kooning exhibition, he praises the 'physical force' of the painter's work (CEC3: 122). And, when in 1962 he describes Still as 'one of the greatest innovators of Modernist art,' he asserts that 'there is no question that the tactile irregularities of his surface, with their contrasts of matt and shiny, paint coat and priming, contribute to the intensity of his art' (CEC4: 129-130). Even Greenberg's 1952 description of Kline's work as restrained, which Caroline A. Jones alights upon as exemplary of Greenberg's efforts to regulate feeling, has to be tactically falsified for her to make her point. Greenberg writes that

Kline's large canvases, with their blurtings of black calligraphy on white and gray grounds, are tautness quintessential. He has stripped his art in order to make sure of it – not so much for the public as for himself. He presents only the salient points of his emotion. Three or four of the pictures in his two shows already serve to place him securely in the foreground of contemporary abstract painting, but one has the feeling that his gifted and accomplished artist still suppresses too much of his power. Perhaps, on the other hand, that is exactly the feeling one should have. (CEC3: 104)

As is typical with Greenberg, in this assessment of Kline, authoritative declaratory assertions as to quality in hierarchical terms, accompany oblique attempts to account for the

own, catching its breath while the relentlessly static object insists that the activity is entirely its prerogative' (64).

nondiscursive affect which compels such qualitative judgements. Jones, however, in quoting this passage, conspicuously replaces the word ‘perhaps’ with the non-synonymous ‘but,’ and italicizes what follows. She accordingly casts Greenberg’s commendation of Kline in terms of the artist’s work providing an object lesson in comportment for the modern subject; Kline’s judiciousness eliciting ‘exactly the feeling one should have’ because it aims at ‘targeted perception reflex’ rather than ‘generalised, nonspecific and undifferentiated ‘feeling’ (EA: 52). However, for me it seems clear that, contrarily, what Greenberg registers in this account of Kline’s work is the way in which it bindingly engages somatic response in a manner which refutes any delegitimation of feeling. As I noted in Chapter 5, Kline’s ambition in his work was for it to convey a sign’s sense of signification, while nevertheless prohibiting the work’s translation into discourse independent of the work itself. This is evident in the paratactical composition which sets his paintings apart from the calligraphic writing whose resemblance to Kline’s ‘blurring’ black strokes is undeniable. As Greenberg’s reference to both might imply, these black strokes are not in a hypotactic relationship with the paintings’ ‘white and gray grounds.’ Instead, as Dore Ashton points out, Kline’s paintings ‘break a profound visual habit of regarding white as background and black as figure,’ with the ‘vast and overwhelming steppes’ of the former being just as methodically worked as the latter, resulting in ‘paintings in which white is the equal of black’ (1990: 300-1). This is evident especially in a painting such as *Untitled* from 1952, the year in which Greenberg made the above-quoted assessment (fig. 10). In *Untitled*, the white sections are laid on with impasto, both colours have clearly been overpainted with the other multiple times, and there is thus no reason to consider one subordinate to the other. Yet, this is not a peaceful coexistence. As Elaine de Kooning notes, ‘Kline’s blacks and whites jostled each other for position in a tense, unrelieved conflict’ (1994: 198). That the white sections of his paintings receive as much attention as the black sections does not detract from the way in which, in Ashton’s words, the ‘lunging marks’ of the latter ‘quicken the pulse of the spectator’ (1990: 300). Kline’s paintings thus bear a kind of pregnancy which invokes in the spectator a

reciprocal tensing of muscles, and I think this dynamic is what Greenberg is referring to in his ambivalence over Kline's paintings. Far from discrediting feeling in the name of the understanding, the sense that the painting entails a suppression of power indicts the dividedness of feeling and understanding, and the subordination of the former to the latter. It attests to how, while emphatically more than simple stimuli, Kline's compositions bear a tension which, while undeniably meaningful, evades subsumptive comprehension, and can only be intuited somatically.

Admittedly, while I showed in chapters 5 and 7 that Greenberg makes certain suggestive assertions throughout his criticism which imply that avant-garde art both indicts the reifications of capital, and prefigures a rationality which would do justice to particularity, Greenberg certainly does not claim that the nondiscursive elements of experience which the artworks engage call for a transformation in the relations of production as Trotsky asserts the 'feelings and moods' invoked by artworks do. In 1948, when discussing the paratactical nature of the 'all-over' style which Pollock, following Tobey and Janet Sobel, had recently adopted, Greenberg claims that its 'dissolution of the picture into sheer texture, sheer sensation [...] seems to answer something deep seated in contemporary sensibility' (CEC2: 224). However, he says nothing conclusive as to what this might be. Even in 'Laocoon,' where his Trotskyist commitment to revolutionary socialism exists alongside an emphatic stress on the somatic appeal of modernist artworks, he does not draw a connection between the two, despite maintaining a nebulously defined affinity between avant-garde art and the abolition of capitalism. Thus, it is easy to see how his self-declared positivism is interpretable as a phenomenological correlate to his stated conviction, surveyed in Chapter 3, that after WWII avant-garde art no longer worked towards transcending the status quo, confirming the notion that the Abstract Expressionists, as Annette Cox puts it, 'had forsaken utopian elements in their art' (1982: 31). This is especially clear when Greenberg approaches the matter of spectators' embodiment in terms strikingly similar to those for which he criticises Rosenberg's account of the movement as 'action painting,' by affirming that the determinate

negation of illusionism renders artworks nothing more than things among things. He claims, for example, that that ‘the physical fact of the [abstract] canvas itself’ enters ‘the actual presence of the spectator on the same terms, and as completely, as do the walls [and] the furniture’ (CEC1: 140), and asserts that the abstract picture is ‘an object of literally the same spatial order as our bodies,’ and thus ‘returns [the spectator] to that space in all its brute literalness’ (CEC3: 191). It is due to assertions like this that a critic such as Ann Gibson surmises that Greenberg reduces Abstract Expressionist artworks ‘to the in-itselfness of observed fact’ (1990: 205). However, I want to argue that the terms in which Greenberg contends Abstract Expressionist artworks return the spectator to the spatial order of their bodies, implies that this solicitation of the gaze on the basis of physicality is radically different from the way in which we generally relationally perceive objects such as the walls and furniture. Indeed, in 1959 when surveying Hofmann’s oeuvre, and by extension Abstract Expressionism, Greenberg accounts for the movement’s significance precisely insofar as the artworks actively differentiate themselves from their surrounding environs. He writes that the movement, for all its divergences, was distinguished by the works’ ‘liveness of surface,’ pioneered by Hofmann’s paintings, which ‘*breathe* as no others do and open up to animate the air around them’ (CEC4: 73), a description which does not generally apply to walls or furniture.⁹⁴

As I showed in the previous chapter, Greenberg characterises his methodology as ‘positivist.’ As I also elaborated, Adorno conceives of positivism as the acceptance of the world as given, preformed in the interests of capital. Thus, and likely referring to his unhappy experiences on the Princeton Radio Project when in exile in America,⁹⁵ he asserts that a positivistic approach to art understands artworks simply as organised systems of stimuli. For

⁹⁴ It is notable here that breathing was precisely the metaphor adopted by Betty Parsons, gallerist for many of the Abstract Expressionists, in privileging somatic response to their paintings, when she claimed that, in providing open space and thus giving the artworks ‘space to breathe,’ her gallery was the first ‘to require physical engagement from [its] visitors’ (Davidson 2016: 90).

⁹⁵ For a good account of Adorno’s criticism of the positivistic approach of this project, which analysed the role of the radio in listeners’ lives, see Rose, 2014: 122-132.

Adorno, then, a positivistic approach towards art is true to the extent that ‘without the experience of art nothing can be known about it and there can be no discussion of it’ (AT: 265), which I acknowledged is indeed what Greenberg intended in terming his criticism positivist. However, Adorno contends that, in disregarding how responses to art are mediated by the dictates of exchange-value, a positivistic approach ignores the distinction between a spectator simply using an artwork ‘as a backdrop for all kinds of [socially conditioned] psychological projections,’ and a spectator understanding ‘a work by submitting to the work’s own discipline’ (AT: 265). For Adorno, the latter is how one must approach authentic art. He asserts that ‘[o]ne does not understand a work of art when one translates it into concepts [...] but rather when one is immersed in its immanent movement [...] when it is [...] repainted by the eye’ (1992: 97). Accordingly, positivism is incapable of distinguishing between ‘the knowledge that is art from conceptual knowledge’ (AT: 125). Yet, it is precisely in terms of submitting to a work’s discipline that Greenberg describes aesthetic experience. As I delineated in Chapter 7, for Adorno ‘progressive rationality has reduced [mimetic comportment] to a marginal value’ (Ibid). However, just as he posits that art praxis recovers something of mimetic comportment, for Adorno the resultant artworks require mimetic comportment from spectators, as ‘only those who imitate them understand them’ (Ibid). As we have seen, Greenberg’s account of medium-specific praxis has affinity with the dialectic of construction and mimesis which Adorno contends is central to the production of authentic art, and Greenberg similarly implies that apprehension of authentic art entails assimilation to otherness. In ‘The Case for Abstract Art,’ for instance, Greenberg differentiates between abstract painting and (reified) representational painting on the basis that the former ‘drives home’ what he refers to as its ‘at-onceness’ with ‘greater singleness and clarity’ (CEC4: 81). For Greenberg, to apprehend an artwork’s ‘at-onceness’ is to be

summoned and gathered into one point in the continuum of duration. The picture does this to you, willy-nilly, regardless of whatever else is on your mind; a mere glance at it creates the attitude required for its appreciation, like a stimulus that elicits an

automatic response. You become all attention, which means that you become, for a moment, selfless and in a sense entirely identified with the object of your attention (CEC4: 81)

As Andrew Bowie notes, there is a distinction to be made ‘between the empiricist sense of immediacy, where – immediate – “sense data” are construed as arising from direct causal impacts on the organism and are used as the foundation of cognitive claims, and the sense [...] which has to do with the ways in which we are always already in contact with an intelligible world even before we conceptualise it,’ exemplary of which for him is ‘Merleau-Ponty’s insistence on the embodiment of mind’ (2013: 61). Now, Greenberg’s analogical rhetoric in the above quote seems to portray spectatorial receptivity in the terms of the former sense of immediacy. However, as I have indicated, his notion of the ‘at-onceness’ elicited by Abstract Expressionist artworks in fact implies the latter sense of immediacy, which Bowie observes Adorno does not dismiss as based on false immediacy so readily as the first, instead recognising it as registering ‘something that needs to be understood’ (ibid: 61-2). As I will now elucidate with recourse to both Adorno and Merleau-Ponty, what are registered in Greenberg’s notion of the ‘at-onceness’ of Abstract Expressionist artworks, and need to be understood, are precisely the affective elements of experience which his criticism supposedly subordinates in the service of the status quo.

Peter Dews has observed an affinity between Merleau-Ponty and Adorno, in so far as both, as fellow readers of Husserl,⁹⁶ reject the latter’s conviction that transcendental subjectivity is determinable through ‘eidetic’ reduction, whereby one brackets any contingent or accidental considerations from acts of consciousness. Instead, Dews writes, the philosophers share a concern ‘to uncover the reef of facticity on which any transcendental enquiry must run aground’ by moving “downstream” towards an account of subjectivity as emerging from and

⁹⁶ Husserl was undeniably Merleau-Ponty’s most significant philosophical influence, while Adorno wrote his doctoral dissertation on Husserl, and years later developed its critique into the monograph *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie* (1956), subsequently translated as *Against Epistemology* (1982).

entwined with the natural and historical world' (1987: 16-19).⁹⁷ As should be clear from the previous chapter, for Adorno this is not simply an epistemological issue. According to Adorno, transcendental subjectivity reflects and legitimates the disregard for the corporeal particularity of subjects by the norms of capitalist second nature. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty argues that idealism buttresses the sedimentation of regressive social institutions under capitalism. He consistently stresses how the oppression and exploitation by which capitalism is reproduced is justified with recourse to the idealist categories of classical liberalism, '[t]he purity of [whose] principles not only tolerates but even requires violence' (1969: xiii). While maintaining critical support for the Soviet Union in 1947, he evidences how '[r]espect for law and liberty has served to justify police suppression of strikes in America [and] military suppression in Indochina or in Palestine and the development of an American empire in the Middle East' (Ibid). And when he subsequently abandoned his hope in the emancipatory potential of the Soviet Union, it was on the basis that it, too, legitimated oppression on idealist grounds and, accordingly, he stressed that his rejection 'in no way [implied] acceptance of the eternal laws of the capitalist order or any *respect* for this order' (1973: 227).

Whereas idealism ignores the natural and historical particularity of subjects, for Merleau-Ponty, as should already be clear, art provides a locus where carnal self-awareness is paramount, and the same is true of Adorno, for whom, as I showed in the previous chapter, aesthetic reflective judgment should be understood as engaging the empirical surplus of the transcendental subject. Crucial to this, for Adorno, is the fact that authentic art is not 'an arbitrary system of signs, as if it merely reproduced the world without claiming to possess the same immediate reality' (2007b: 159), but instead is qualitatively other than the world precisely *because* of its immediacy. That is to say, because authentic artworks are spiritualised not in harmony with the artist's sovereign mind, but rather in mimetic

⁹⁷ In spite of the affinities between the thinkers, which we will see have also been noted elsewhere, the only recorded encounter between them I can discover is Merleau-Ponty expressing 'a heartfelt wish to stop what he took to be a scandal' when, in a lecture at the College de France, Adorno 'publicly vituperated' Heidegger (qtd. in Gordon 2016: 122).

reciprocity with their materials, their ‘sensuousness [...] shines forth as spiritual’ (AT: 15). While this ‘spiritual content’ is not reducible to ‘what is individually, sensually given,’ as if an enumeration of the artwork’s physical properties could do justice to it, it is nevertheless ‘constituted by way of this empirical givenness’ and could not be expressed without it (AT: 129). As Sebastian Truskolaski summarises well, for Adorno, when an object is perceived as mediated by dominant rationality, ‘it is *reflected* [...] as relative to its conception of what knowledge is,’ and thus the ‘material moment of sensation [is designated as] purely a link in the chain of cognitive functions,’ and there remains not captured an ‘excess of physicality’ which concerns ‘the human body itself’ (2014: 17-20). On the other hand, Adorno contends that the experience of art solicits this excess of physicality in its resistance of dominant rationality by way of its irreducible particularity. He asserts that the artwork’s ‘irruption of objectivity into subjective consciousness,’ whereby the subject must submit to the work’s discipline mimetically rather than take recourse to reified schemata to understand it, occurs ‘precisely at the point where the subjective reaction is most intense’ (AT: 245). Whereas when an object is ‘an object of cognition, its physical side is spiritualized from the outset by translation into epistemology,’ when the object takes precedence, as it does in the experience of authentic art, it is clear that there is no sensation – ‘the crux of all epistemology’ – without ‘a somatic moment’ (ND: 192-3). As Zuidervaart puts it, Adorno argues that ‘[t]he object’s precedence’ in art ‘means that conscious cognition cannot do without sensation, a preconscious and corporeal feeling,’ and thus ‘the corporeal emerges as the ontic core of subjective cognition’ (1991: 108). For Adorno such mimetic behavior, which entails an ‘adjustment to something extra-mental,’ engages ‘an impulse that is in a sense a bodily impulse that has not yet been subjected to the centralising authority of consciousness’ (2006: 213). That is to say, as Jay writes, ‘[i]n more passively assimilating itself to the other, the subject of mimesis [...] preserves the sensuous, somatic element that the abstractions of idealist reason factor out of cognition or sublimate into a higher rationality’ (1997: 32). In Adorno’s work, however, focused as he is far more on production than reception of art,

description of this experience in the face of artworks is sparing. Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, apportions far more attention to the phenomenal experience of art, and I will now show that in his writing on painting subsequent to ‘Cézanne’s Doubt’ he elucidates it in very similar terms.

As Stephen Watson notes, Merleau-Ponty finds affinity with Adorno in that both privilege ‘the nondiscursive and indemonstrable character of art’ (2009: 12). As Paul Crowther has acknowledged, both accordingly ‘adapt description to the irreducible concreteness of the art object’ emphasizing that the artwork ‘*shows* rather than says’ (2009: 5). In Merleau-Ponty’s second essay on painting, ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,’ he stresses that this showing rather than saying allows painting to render visible the ‘voices of silence’ – the precariousness of the silent forms of expression’ – upon which language is dependent (PP: 115-7), whose corporeal intuitability he further elaborates in his third essay on painting, ‘Eye and Mind.’ I have cited these essays twice in the thesis thus far in terms of their affinity with Adorno’s aesthetic theory. In Chapter 2, I took recourse to ‘Eye and Mind’ to show how Merleau-Ponty draws a parallel between Renaissance perspective and reification, and in Chapter 7, I briefly cited ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,’ to show that, like Adorno, he conversely elaborates an account of art-making wherein an artist does not impose form upon materials, but is rather processually guided by their materials. Merleau-Ponty illustrates this most lucidly by recounting a film of Matisse in which the painter is shown in slow-motion meditating before laying his brushstroke – trying other movements while hovering over the canvas, or brushing it lightly. Merleau-Ponty claims that to conclude from this that Matisse was equivocating over an infinite amount of gestures in order to ‘eliminate all but one’ is to falsify his praxis, because Matisse did not paint in slow-motion, but rather he, ‘within a human’s time and vision, looked at the still open whole of his work in progress and brought his brush toward the line which called for it in order that the painting might finally be that which it was in the process of becoming’ (PP: 83). For Merleau-Ponty, a painting such as Matisse’s thus similarly invites its spectator ‘to take up the gesture which

created it and [...] to rejoin, without any guide other than a movement of the invented line [...] the silent world of the painter, henceforth uttered and accessible' (PP: 88). As I will now elaborate, to do so for Merleau-Ponty, is to be brought back to the inseparability of cognition from corporeality.

As in 'Cézanne's Doubt,' for Merleau-Ponty the 'silent world of the painter' which is accessible to spectators who submit themselves to a work's discipline, inscribes the painter's preconceptual perception of things. This has led to accusations that Merleau-Ponty, as Günther Figal asserts, 'misses the decisive point,' in that he 'does not sufficiently pay attention to the painting as such,' forgetting 'the exteriority and the objective character of art,' and neglecting the fact that 'paintings are so obviously *over there* for the contemplator,' emphatically inaccessible without 'sensual presence' (2010: 39). Yet, while Merleau-Ponty was ambivalent towards abstract painting in much of his writing,⁹⁸ in 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence' and 'Eye and Mind,' he does not contend that this 'silent world of the painter' is conveyed so much through the re-presentation of this preconceptual perception, as through the rescue in semblance of a primordial relationship to objects without regression akin to Adorno's account of mimesis. For Merleau-Ponty, while modernist painters 'want nothing to do with a truth defined as the resemblance of painting and the world,' they still intend 'to signify something' (PP: 94). However, unlike Schapiro's account of modernist art, which I showed in Chapter 6 served the appropriation of Abstract Expressionism by US

⁹⁸ As I briefly discussed in Chapter 2, Merleau-Ponty criticises Renaissance perspectivalist painting on the basis that it presents 'a world dominated and possessed through and through' (PP: 87). However, as Fóti writes, at the time of 'Cézanne's Doubt' a converse 'appreciation of abstract painting' was impeded by his approaching painting 'as a proto-philosophical investigation of the constitution of visibility, in the service of a theory of truth' (1996: 165). Singling out two Abstract Expressionist works contemporaneous with Merleau-Ponty's writing, Pollock's *Lavender Mist* (1950) and Newman's *Cathedral* (1951), and concludes that it is 'difficult to imagine what satisfaction such a quest could possibly find [in such] paintings' (ibid). Indeed, in his second essay on painting, 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,' Merleau-Ponty writes that abstract art constitutes 'a negation or refusal of the world' and testament only to 'a shameful or despairing life' (PP: 93). His examples are admittedly geometrical surfaces and infusorians and microbe-esque forms, but, as Fóti writes, he was more than likely familiar with Abstract Expressionism, as in 1952 there were two very significant exhibitions of abstract art in Paris, one group show featuring work by both Americans and Europeans entitled 'Un arte autre,' and a solo show by Pollock (2013: 29). In 'Eye and Mind,' however, while still not discussing painting which eschews all figuration he turns to quasi-representational works by de Stael and Klee and asserts that the distinctions he had previously drawn between abstract and representational art were 'wrongly posed [since] no painting, no matter how abstract, can get away from Being' (PP: 147).

imperialism by subsuming the works under the exhibition-value of personal expression, Merleau-Ponty asserts that ‘the fact that modern painting seeks to be a creation’ rather than the arrangement of a pre-given system of signs, does not mean that it should be interpreted as signifying, in lieu of external reality, ‘a movement toward the subjective and a ceremony glorifying the individual’ (PP: 88). Instead, Merleau-Ponty claims, what modernist painting signifies is that which ‘still must be done in order to restore the encounter between [the] glance and the things which solicit it’ (PP: 94). That is to say, whereas instrumental reason, whose increasing prevalence I acknowledged in Chapter 2 Merleau-Ponty bemoans in the first section of ‘Eye and Mind,’ ‘manipulates things and gives up living in them,’ modernist painting brackets our comprehension in terms of manipulability. As Mikel Dufrenne notes, for Merleau-Ponty, the painter ‘is not interested in [...] what Adorno calls the administered world, in which fruit bowls are machine-turned and mountains explored by geographers’ (260). As opposed to the administered world’s quantitative abstractions, Merleau-Ponty stresses how painting engages us in a way which ‘forbids us to conceive of vision as an operation of thought that would set up before the mind a picture or representation of the world’ and renders inescapable the fact that ‘the world is made of the same stuff as the body’ by returning us ‘to the “there is,” to the site, the soil of the sensible and opened world such as it is in our life and for our body’ (PP: 121-125). Central to this, for Merleau-Ponty, is the way in which painting ‘awakens powers dormant in ordinary vision’ (PP: 142). As is the case for Adorno, for Merleau-Ponty this awakening of dormant powers is not so much prelapsarian yearning, as it is the attempt to save fleeting, ephemeral and transitory experience. Merleau-Ponty typifies that which ‘the painter seeks’ by describing the experience of looking at a swimming pool, in which so-called secondary qualities seem as objectively binding as the measurable properties to which the swimming pool could be quantitatively reduced:

When through the water’s thickness I see the tiled bottom of the pool, I do not see it *despite* the water and the reflections; I see it through them and because of them. If

there were no distortions, no ripples of sunlight, if it were without that flesh that I saw the geometry of the tiles, then I would cease to see it *as it is* and where it is. (PP: 142)

It is notable that Merleau-Ponty chooses an aqueous image here, because in a 1972 exchange with Rosenberg when discussing the perceptual experience of painting, de Kooning defends the notion that, when one places a stick in the water to create the optical illusion that it is broken, ‘it’s broken while it’s in the water’ (2007: 147). He asserts this to make the analogous point that there is no such thing as an optical illusion in painting. Against Rosenberg, de Kooning argues that to override the subjective perception of artworks with recourse to measurable properties is precisely to ignore ‘the very strength of painting’ (Ibid). For de Kooning, this is far from ocularcentrism. As Richard Shiff observes, de Kooning’s self-description as a ‘slipping glimpser’ was rooted in his ‘directly material and physical’ attunement to the imbrication of the perceiver in the perceived world; to the way in which ‘eyes really did slip in the light’ (Shiff, 2011a: 248).⁹⁹ Such a synesthetic conflation of sight and touch, as which I noted above Deleuze insightfully suggests Greenberg’s emphasis upon opticality should be understood, was not uncommon among the artists and associated critics. For instance, Motherwell claims that when he looks at his painting ‘as detachedly’ as is possible, it appears to him ‘as warm, sensual [...] and felt’ (1992: 58); David Smith affirms ‘I touch with the eye’ (qtd. in Krauss 1971: 63); and in spite of my above assessment of his account, Schapiro at one point asserts that ‘the sensitive eye, which is the painter’s eye, feels the so-called abstract line with a [...] deep response that pervades the whole being’ (MA: 230).

⁹⁹ Pertinently, Shiff elsewhere suggests that Merleau-Ponty might have chosen de Kooning, rather than Cézanne, as an artist in whose work we might sense ‘the physical and emotional interconnectedness or “carnality” of life and all creation’ (2011b: 9). Indeed, Wayne J. Froman has developed such an account, although I would contend that he characterises de Kooning as *portraying* this interconnectedness rather than instantiating it. He writes that de Kooning’s work manifests the ‘space that sub-tends the spatiality of [things]’ by making visible on the canvas ‘the overlap of the field of vision and field of motor projects’ which is constituent of vision figured not from an objectivist perspective, but from ‘the seer’s location in the field of the visible, that is, the seer’s visibility’ (1993: 344). De Kooning’s paintings, claims Froman, ‘mark tensive points in the specifically visual schema of the field of overlap between the visual and motor fields’ (1993: 346).

While not directly in reference to painting, Merleau-Ponty perhaps elucidates this conflation best in the final completed chapter of his unfinished and posthumously published *The Visible and the Invisible*. Near the end of this chapter, to describe the moments of mimetic relationship with the world to which in ‘Indirect Voices’ and ‘Eye and Mind’ he claims painting attempts to hold fast, Merleau-Ponty cites Proust’s account of notions which are “without equivalents” and yet undeniably meaningful – Proust’s examples are “the notions of light [...] of relief, of physical voluptuousness” (VI: 149). Merleau-Ponty writes that such carnal ‘notions,’ ‘unlike those of science, cannot be detached from the sensible appearances and be erected into a second positivity’ (VI: 149). They ‘would not be better known to us if we had no body and no sensibility’ because ‘they could not be given to us *as ideas* except in a carnal experience’ (VI: 150). Such ‘notions’ accordingly make clear the ‘marvel too little noticed that every movement of eyes [...] has its place in the same visible universe that I itemise and explore with them,’ and thus that ‘the palpation of the eye is a remarkable variant’ of ‘tactile palpation’ (VI: 133-134). For Merleau-Ponty, then, these carnal ‘notions’ which provide the impetus for artistic production and which artworks instantiate, render inescapable the corporeality of perception. Now, the examples Merleau-Ponty reaches for in ‘Eye and Mind’ are not de Kooning, Pollock, Mitchell, Krasner, Rothko and Still, but Giacometti, Cézanne, de Stael, Matisse, Klee, Richier and Rodin.¹⁰⁰ However, it is in remarkably Merleau-Pontyan terms that Bernstein describes the mode of reception elicited by Abstract Expressionism on his Adornian account.¹⁰¹ For Bernstein, Abstract Expressionism’s opposition to societal abstraction by the affirmation of particularity through artistic

¹⁰⁰ While Veronique Fóti acknowledges the fact that abstract painting seems to typify these carnal ‘notions,’ she expressly does *not* draw on Abstract Expressionism, because she wants to deploy the sheer evidence of abstract painting ‘without a preconceived theoretical framework, allowing the theoretical implications to suggest themselves from out of the images themselves’ (1996: 138). I, on the other hand, am arguing that precisely the ‘preconceived theoretical framework’ of Greenbergian formalism implies how Abstract Expressionist artworks exemplify these carnal ‘notions.’

¹⁰¹ I can find nowhere where Bernstein has discussed Merleau-Ponty to any meaningful extent. However, in his first book, *The Philosophy of the Novel* (1984), he expresses approbation of Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness* (273, n24) and, crucially, in an endnote to *Against Voluptuous Bodies*, without elaborating whatsoever, he cites Merleau-Ponty’s notion of ‘flesh’ as a reconfiguration of the Adornian mimesis (376, n4).

abstraction, forces the ‘eye [...] to take [its] corporeal embeddedness as a condition for [its] intellectual doings’ and thus ‘makes somatic silence articulate and unavoidable’ (AVB: 63; 157). As he writes of Pollock’s *Lavender Mist* (1950), its tactility

has the effect of embodying the eye of the viewer, of making the experience of seeing the painting an experience of being embodied as a condition of viewing without the painting at any point or moment denying its condition of being a surface. That a sensuous, fragmented *surface*, a surface that robs the viewer of perspective and orientation with respect to it, like [de Kooning’s *Excavation* (1950)], can nonetheless hold the (embodied) eye gives back to sensuous immediacy a potential for statement as such. (AVB: 155)

Thus, Bernstein writes, Abstract Expressionism ‘engages us on the ground of our bodily mortality, which the reigning universals eclipse as a condition for meaning’ by calling back and voicing ‘sensuous reality in its mortal coils’ (AVB: 163). Whilst, as I showed in Chapter 5, Bernstein argues that Greenberg’s championing of Abstract Expressionism is compelled by the movement’s defence of (the semblance of) immanent meaning against the heteronomy of exchange-value, he ultimately contends that the critic ‘abstracts the human eye from the human body, seeing from touching, the optical from the tactile’ (AVB: 125). However, I have argued in this chapter that in Greenberg’s descriptions of Abstract Expressionist artworks during the course of his day-to-day criticism, his focus on the former term in each of these couplets always implies its inextricability from the latter.

While Greenberg’s criticism fails to account for the political significance of this challenge to the epistemological division of sensuality and cognition, I want to contend in the remainder of this chapter that to find an emphatic, if inexplicit and unsophisticated, acknowledgement of how the experience of Abstract Expressionism as described in this chapter indicts the abstractions of capital, we must turn instead to the ‘metaphysical’ accounts of the movement espoused by artists such as Gottlieb and Newman, which Greenberg consistently opposed. The ostensible disagreement between Greenberg and these

artists is often noted. Anfam, for instance, writes that Rothko and Gottlieb ‘quite contradicted’ ‘Laocoon’ on the question of ‘whether aesthetic form should come before feeling’ (1990: 78). And the revisionist historian Michael Leja affirms that ‘Greenberg’s serious and challenging appraisal’ of Abstract Expressionism ‘in formal terms’ eschewed “‘metaphysics”” (1993: 325). Leja asserts, correctly, that this ‘was a source of great frustration for the artists, who felt that their achievement was [thus] misrepresented by their critical supporters’ and accordingly Rothko, Newman and Still were all inclined ‘to “chew Clem Greenberg’s head off” now and then’ (Ibid: 34). Yet, as is common, Leja understands this as a genuinely insuperable rift between Greenberg’s and the artists’ readings of the art. For Leja, Greenberg’s account obfuscates the fact that Abstract Expressionism is ‘simultaneously spiritual and material,’ placing the accent entirely on the latter (Ibid). However, Leja himself never properly accounts for this simultaneity. As Krauss notes, Leja’s reading of Abstract Expressionism is ‘resolutely representational,’ based on an art-historical model of intentionality whereby artists ‘express an idea through “pictures” of it’ (1993: 324), and his book is an investigation into the way in which these ideas chimed with the dominant discourse of the era. Thus, for Leja, the metaphysical nature that the artists ascribe to their artworks is something to be read out of the artworks discursively, and Greenberg’s failure to do so simply marks his inability to grasp these facets of the art. Conversely, I want to contend that the artists’ accounts of their art as metaphysical, are attempts to account for the same mimetic aspect which I have argued is the real referent of Greenberg’s acclaim, and to do so I will now turn to an example of one of these artists ‘chewing Greenberg’s head off.’

In 1947, invited by Greenberg in his capacity as art critic for *The Nation*, Newman delivered an (ultimately unpublished) riposte to Greenberg’s review of a Gottlieb show, in which Greenberg grouped the artist among Rothko, Still and Newman as ‘a new indigenous school,’ and belittled ‘the importance this school attributes to the [...] “metaphysical” content of its

art' (CEC2: 189).¹⁰² Newman's rebuttal is hyperbolic and impressionistic. However, I contend it nonetheless invites a reading in the terms governing my account of Abstract Expressionism thus far. From the outset, it is clear that Leja's conception that the supposedly metaphysical nature of the paintings is to be discursively interpreted is not in keeping with the way in which Newman conceives of this metaphysical nature. As Yve-Alain Bois notes, 'if it is the meaning of his art that is [Newman's] essential concern, this meaning does not lie in anything prior to its embodiment in a painting' (1993: 190). Newman takes umbrage at the implication he gleans from Greenberg that 'the artists are working from a set of a priori mystical precepts and are using their art for metaphysical exercises' (SWI: 162). Instead, Newman claims the only reason why he had ever written about the art, was not to lay down a programme or prescriptions, but rather because the work so radically evades the contemporaneous 'framework of established notions' (SWI: 162). For Newman, the Abstract Expressionists were set apart from preceding European abstract art by the fact that, whereas the external referents of the latter are still evident, even if only in terms of geometry, the Abstract Expressionists employ 'a kind of personal writing without the props of any known shape' (SWI: 164). Thus, contrary to their antecedents' 'base in the material world of sensuality,' the Abstract Expressionists' work 'can be discussed only in metaphysical terms' (SWI: 162-3). Now, it is evidently not the case that the Abstract Expressionists had expunged all 'known shape' from their work, and indeed in the next chapter I will turn to the importance of their vestigial elements of representation. Nevertheless, I think Newman should be understood here as emphasising how reception of the artworks does not depend on the identification of imaginary tactile referents. His claim that the paintings can only be addressed in metaphysical terms is not an appeal to the spectator's consciousness as if it were disembodied, elevating 'interpretation to a cosmic [...] level beyond the [...] concrete' as

¹⁰² Peter de Bolla prefaces his remarkably sensitive and astute account of Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* with the assertion that, 'Newman himself made all sorts of claims for the art he and his fellow abstract expressionist painters created, but these claims, interesting as they are in relation to a cultural history of modern painting, are nothing in comparison with the claims made by the painting itself' (2001: 33). I, on the other hand, will argue that Newman's defence of the metaphysics of Abstract Expressionism certainly explicates the claims made by the painting itself.

Annette Cox surmises from Newman's statements (1982: 9). Instead, as he puts it in his oft-cited essay 'The Sublime is Now,' for Newman the 'revelation' provided by Abstract Expressionist artworks is 'real and concrete' (SWI: 173). Or, as he affirmed in conversation with Thomas B. Hess, when Newman says that his painting is metaphysical, what he is also saying is that his painting is physical (SWI: 280). Indeed, it has often been noted that the physicality of Newman's paintings' surfaces is far from inconsequential. Carol Mancusi-Ungaro has recently stressed the importance of such tactility with recourse to an anecdote. She recounts how, subsequent to Gerard Jan van Bladeren's 1986 vandalism of Newman's *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue III* (1967-68) in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the painting was sent to the US for its surface to be repaired and completely repainted. However, she writes, what resulted was an effective obliteration of 'Newman's staggeringly beautiful and carefully crafted layers of painting [because] it was accomplished by a restorer who seemed to be responding more to the widespread misinterpretation of Newman's large and unprecedented colour than to the reality of his nuanced surfaces' (2011: 340).¹⁰³ Newman himself entreated spectators to adopt a micrological gaze attuned to these nuances when he tacked a sheet of notepaper to the wall of the Betty Parsons Gallery during his second one-man show to inform visitors that his pictures were 'intended to be seen from a short distance' (SWI: 178), and when thus observed, to adopt a claim made by Rosenberg of Gottlieb, even in the case of Newman's most implacable and imperceptibly worked canvases "'action" is quietly there,' and, accordingly, 'unique effects occur' (1969: 195).

This begs the question of what it means to say that the physicality of Abstract Expressionist artworks, and the 'unique effects' thereof, are at the same time metaphysical. To return to Newman's rebuttal of Greenberg, to characterise the metaphysical nature of Abstract

¹⁰³ Carol Mancusi-Ungaro has also written of how crucial nuance is to Rothko's painting. She refers to the 'visual eminence' which accentuates the surface's 'difference in paint layers' (1998: 287-288), elaborating how Rothko explored 'the impact of every facet of his painting in terms of the physical object' (Ibid: 283). She claims this is evident in the how 'he used the colour, transparency, viscosity, and reflectance of paint in a relentless pursuit of [...] refined surfaces' and deplored 'the use of varnish, which would diminish or even obliterate certain [of these] effects' (Ibid: 283-284), and quotes Rothko himself, in his claim that his paintings 'are *here*. Materially. The surfaces, the work of the brush and so on' (Ibid: 289).

Expressionist artworks the artist appeals to ‘the idea that the realisation by Cézanne of his complete and pure sensation of his apples adds up to more than the apples’ (SWI: 163-4). Now, I have argued in this chapter that if something essential about Cézanne’s transcribed sensation is shared by Abstract Expressionist artworks, this is the case in so far as the artworks are attempts to save the fleeting, ephemeral and transitory promise of a mimetic relation to the world which Cézanne sought to depict, and that thus Abstract Expressionist artworks invite spectatorial assimilation in a manner which renders cognition emphatically inextricable from corporeality. Indeed, as Newman declares that his nuanced surfaces should be seen ‘from a short distance,’ Adorno claims that it is experiences attuned to the infinitesimal that provide ‘a haven for the mimetic element of knowledge, for the element of elective affinity between the knower and the known’ (ND: 45). To understand why such a haven might be understood as ‘metaphysical,’ we need only recall how, as I elaborated in the previous chapter, for Adorno it is of paramount importance that Kant maintains that there exist metaphysical things, of which Kant claims human beings cannot have possible experiences. Adorno understands this as a tacit acknowledgement of the fact that that our concepts are dependent on, and do not exhaust, the objects they conceive, and accordingly, if we take Kant’s transcendental conditions of experience to be historically contingent, a tacit acknowledgement that our experience of objects could be different under changed historical circumstances. If metaphysics is understood in this way, to denote the experience of art as metaphysical is not to elevate this experience to an otherworldly realm, but contrarily to claim that it concerns that which capitalist reification debar as orientational for praxis in the material world.

For Adorno, as I acknowledged at the outset of this chapter, the event of Auschwitz, as an extreme figure of the dialectic of Enlightenment, forces such metaphysical speculation. And similarly, as I noted in Chapter 2, Newman frames Abstract Expressionism as conditioned by the event of Hiroshima which, along with Nagasaki, Bernstein affirms to be as good an actualisation of instrumental reason at its worst as Auschwitz, ‘perhaps better since the ease

with which we accepted the immediate erasure of hundreds of thousands of innocent lives speaks more emphatically to the racism and provincialism that has systematically accompanied Western universalism throughout its history' (2001: 393). These events, then, mark the nadir of a world of radical immanence in which 'individuality [is] about to vanish as a form of mental reflection' (ND: 365). And the notion that the embodied cognition which I have argued in this chapter is engaged by Abstract Expressionism, intimates a rationality which transcends this immanence, is for Adorno negatively corroborated by these events. This is because our outrage at such atrocities is rooted in a 'practical abhorrence of the unbearable physical agony to which individuals are exposed' (Ibid). Adorno contends that it does not suffice to condemn such events with reference to a general law of moral philosophy which subjects must obey as if they were interchangeable. This is not adequate because our aversion to the horror of these events is rooted precisely in the particularity of subjects. Rather than by appealing to pure ideas, the 'metaphysical principle of the injunction that "Thou shalt not inflict pain" – and this injunction is a metaphysical principle pointing beyond mere facticity – can find its justification only in the recourse to material reality, to corporeal, physical reality' (2002a: 117). For events such as Auschwitz and Hiroshima to be possible, then, it is clear that this somatic moment must be negated, and this renders emphatic the negation of ends dictated by affective experience and sensuous particularity in the name of capitalism's irrational imperatives by which our lives are reproduced. As I have shown throughout this chapter, in the experience of Abstract Expressionism, cognition is inextricable from corporeality. Thus, it invites a mode of rationality for which this negation is negated. It is in this, that the micrological view advocated by Newman, as Adorno writes, 'cracks the shells of what, measured by the subsuming cover concept, is helplessly isolated and explodes its identity,' and is thus united with metaphysics at a time when it appears as if all transcendence has been eliminated (ND: 408).

In 1928, while elaborating his conviction that art should be ‘for man’s sake not for art’s sake,’ which I acknowledged in Chapter 3, the nineteen year old Greenberg wrote the following in a letter to Harold Lazarus:

There always were the oppressors and the oppressed. And the downtrodden always sent up a wail for justice – if in the past their wail hasn’t taken the form of art, it doesn’t presuppose that their present and future wail shouldn’t. (2000: 3)

There is a striking resemblance between these lines and Adorno’s proclamation in *Negative Dialectics* forty years later that art must go on because ‘[p]erennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream’ (ND: 362), and, while by the time Adorno wrote these words Greenberg had of course long abandoned the idea that the wail of the suffering might take the form of art, in this chapter I have argued that his account of Abstract Expressionism bears witness to how the art lends voice precisely to that stratum of experience whose disregard by the fundamental determinants of everyday life perpetuates suffering. Despite the fact that Greenberg disclaimed ‘metaphysical’ accounts of Abstract Expressionism in favour of his self-declared ‘positivism,’ the latter identifies how Abstract Expressionist artworks engage perception in a manner which transcends the world as circumscribed by the capitalist identity-thinking with which his criticism is predominately read as homologous. While capitalism renders all subjects fungible, Greenberg’s account of Abstract Expressionism in fact alights upon the way in which the artworks bindingly engage subjective particularity. In Chapter 5, I argued that, despite the fact that the modernist lineage of which Greenberg proclaimed Abstract Expressionism to be the contemporaneous instantiation lent the artworks to deployment by US imperialism in its formal isomorphy with progressive historicism, it also traces art’s unconscious writing of history. In this chapter, I have argued that Greenberg’s account of the phenomenal experience of the affirmation of medium-specificity which for him was the fulcrum of this lineage indicates how this unconscious writing of history engages elements of affective experience which capitalism delegitimizes as fundamental determinants for society. Accordingly, subsequent to the

ostensible depoliticisation of Greenberg's criticism, the way in which he conceives of Abstract Expressionist artworks nevertheless aligns them with the 'feelings and moods' negated by bourgeois society which Trotsky affirmed should concern revolutionary art. However, in the next chapter I want to argue that it is not simply in negating this negation that Abstract Expressionism opposes the status quo. I will show how it also, by the same movement, anticipates a future state of reconciliation in which the needs it registers would be fulfilled.

Chapter Ten

Denunciation and Anticipation

In the revisionist historians' accounts, the notion that Abstract Expressionism somehow anticipates a reconciled society, if acknowledged, is ultimately framed solely as serving the movement's neutralisation. Guilbaut characterises Abstract Expressionism's utopian prefiguration primarily with recourse to Motherwell and Rosenberg's editorial for the sole issue of their magazine *Possibilities*, which features artist's statements from Baziotes, Smith, Rothko and Pollock, the latter two of which I cited in previous chapters. In the brief and rather gnomic piece, Motherwell and Rosenberg assert that they have founded their publication to represent artists who work in 'an attitude of expectancy' with the 'question of what will emerge [...] left open' (1947: 1). Such artists, Motherwell and Rosenberg write, are free from 'academic, group or political formulas,' guided as they are only by 'their own experience' (Ibid). Nevertheless, Motherwell and Rosenberg claim that, contrary to 'organised social thinking' which is supposedly "more serious" than such art praxis, but simply manipulates 'the known elements of the so-called state of affairs,' this art praxis necessitates 'the extremest faith in sheer possibility' (Ibid). For Guilbaut, this editorial provides superficially politically radical justification for the Abstract Expressionists' retreat from politics. He surmises that, finding it 'impossible to act, to transform social life or the world itself,' artists were to project themselves 'into the future, to think about "possibilities," to fulfil his potential by escaping the confines of the present moment' (NY: 157). Guilbaut contends that the editorial implies that the 'new kind of art' which the artist was thus to develop 'in order to breathe, in order to gain some freedom of manoeuvre, however minimal' was one which 'served the goal of personal liberation' (NY: 156). However, Guilbaut surmises, citing in addition to the editorial a catalogue essay from a Kootz Gallery group show of Abstract Expressionism by Rosenberg reproduced in *Possibilities*, the artist had to be alienated from society, because such a state of isolation 'allowed for individual analysis and

introspection and preserved some “personal essence” through which it was possible to envisage the creation of another world, a world without alienation’ (NY: 159).

Guilbaut proposes that it is not by fortuity that this claim for the radical politicality of art guided by individual experience rather than political programme coincided with the collapse of state funding for the arts and, supposedly, the attendant solidarity between artists which had proliferated during the 1930s and early ‘40s. In Chapter 2, I noted that many of the Abstract Expressionists were formerly engaged in Social Realism or Regionalism. This was in no small part because the artists had been employed in public projects set up to help art students and early career artists as part of the New Deal, such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which generally favoured art celebrating the dignity of manual workers (without, of course, throwing the division of labour into question).¹⁰⁴ However, as the US economy recovered during the war, the WPA was dissolved and the private market for art grew. Guilbaut contends that, consequently, ‘artists found themselves alone on the marketplace, in competition with other artists’ and thus, ‘[w]hereas the target had once been the masses [...] the target became the elite’ (NY: 159; 46-7). However, Guilbaut’s presupposition that the turn towards an abstract aesthetic marked a turn towards the taste of private collectors is questionable, because, as Cox notes, ‘to the American artists of the 1940s it was not readily apparent that following the Modernist path would lead to great wealth,’ and with the exception of Pollock, who was fortunate enough to enjoy the patronage of Peggy Guggenheim, the majority of the Abstract Expressionists lacked financial security until the 1950s (31). Indeed, in 1955, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of her gallery,

¹⁰⁴ It should, however, be acknowledged that, as Cox notes, while the purpose of the Federal Arts Project was ‘to stimulate the creation of a national art that was authentically American and easily accessible to the masses [...] they actually hired artists on the basis of need rather than style or politics,’ and prescription was often withheld (24). Indeed, in 1955 Greenberg asserts in retrospect that he doubts whether the Abstract Expressionists could have developed as they did ‘without the opportunities for unconstrained work that the WPA Art project gave most of them in the last ‘30s’ (CEC3: 219). Exemplary of this are the preparatory drawings for a mural which Krasner was commissioned to execute on the WNYC radio building. This project was never realised, because, as Krasner notes in an interview with Dorothy Seckler in 1964, the war effort necessitated the termination of the WPA before it was started. However, the studies clearly prefigure her mature style (Seckler 1964, 2 November). This is evident in one from 1941 particularly, in which a curved looping black line heads towards the top left hand corner, seemingly trying to escape from the otherwise geometric composition.

Greenberg lauded Betty Parsons for having shown ‘artists like Pollock, Hofmann, Still, Newman, Rothko, Ferber, Lipton at a time when they could bring her little prestige and even less money’ (CEC3: 256). Rather, if the shift towards abstraction was a shift towards the commodity form, it seems far more that the impetus lay in the freedom from heteronomy afforded to artworks as commodities, which I have shown Adorno contends allows an artwork to confront the existence for-another of exchange-value with the immanent determination of its fetish character. For example, Guilbaut himself quotes Elaine de Kooning’s claim that many artists opted to quit the WPA when they got the chance because they would rather not ‘make posters which is what they were asked to do’ (NY: 216, n. 114). And Jimmy Ernst affirms that he ‘would much rather be unattached to any part of society than to be commissioned to carve a picture of Mr. Truman’ (MAIA: 16).¹⁰⁵ Moreover, while it is certainly true that, as the Abstract Expressionists garnered acclaim and fortune in the ‘50s and ‘60s, increasing antagonism and rivalry was fomented amongst them,¹⁰⁶ in 1947 certainly, as the very existence of *Possibilities* attests, there seems to be little erosion in what David Smith refers to as the ‘unity,’ ‘friendship,’ and ‘collective defensiveness’ fostered between the artists while on the rolls of the WPA (qtd. in Cox, 24).¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, it is Guilbaut’s contention that the editorial for *Possibilities* typifies how the artists retained the sense that their work, in prefiguring a future reconciled society, was politically radical, even while ‘[c]ooperation gave way to “every man for himself”’ in the New York art scene (NY: 159).

¹⁰⁵ Ironically, considering Elaine de Kooning’s above-quoted disdain for making posters, she subsequently undertook a commission to paint John F Kennedy in 1962, a story told in Simona Cupic’s essay ‘JFK by E de K’ (2005).

¹⁰⁶ Notable here is Reinhardt’s hostility towards almost all of his former close friends from the mid-‘50s onwards for what he indeed characterised as their opportunistic capitulation to the market, which perhaps found its nadir in Newman taking Reinhardt to court for defamation, well documented by Cox (113ff); the acrimony between de Kooning and Pollock, exacerbated as a proxy for the above-mentioned rivalry between Rosenberg and Greenberg, which is well documented by Naifeh and Smith (1989: 713ff); and the incredibly aggressive public dispute between Newman and Motherwell in the pages of *Art International* (SWI: 225ff).

¹⁰⁷ A succinct account of this solidarity has recently been written by Carter Radcliffe in his ‘An Improvised Community’ (2016).

For Jachec, on her part, as should be foreseeable from Chapter 6, the notion that Abstract Expressionism prefigures a disalienated society not only allowed the artists to maintain a superficial political radicalism, but also fostered the movement's co-optation in the sense that, as we saw, characterisation of Abstract Expressionist praxis as disalienated in an otherwise alienated world, as typified by Schapiro's account, was easily assimilable with the self-identification of the United States as 'democratically pluralist.' Like Guilbaut, Jachec claims that 'because the present intellectual climate accepted industrialisation as a permanent feature of modern life, alienation now meant freedom from having to participate in mechanised means of production [and] to indulge in utopian imaginings' (PPA: 148). Jachec contends that the emergence of the first-generation Abstract Expressionists' 'signature styles' in 1947 and 1948, the development of which I traced in section 5 as the determinate negation of *Inhalt* and affirmation of particularity, marked the development of an art alienated in this way. Against the massification of society, she writes that Abstract Expressionism was 'expressly for individuals' in an attempt to redefine knowledge subjectively rather than empirically, as prerequisite for an ideal society (PPA: 89-91). In this, she in fact credits the influence upon the Abstract Expressionists of Merleau-Ponty's account of painting as preconceptual in 'Cézanne's Doubt,' acknowledging the aforementioned publication of its translation in *Partisan Review* in 1946. In the previous chapter, I characterised the affinity between Abstract Expressionism and Merleau-Ponty's account of Cézanne in terms of how Abstract Expressionist artworks emphatically urge as primary the so-called secondary qualities of colour and tactility, and I will address the notion that this dynamic anticipates reconciliation below. Jachec, on the other hand, synthesises various statements by the artists, including the *Possibilities* editorial, to conceive of the notion that Abstract Expressionism addresses 'individual perception' in terms of some kind of unmediated intersubjective communication. Jachec contends that the Abstract Expressionists strove to cultivate a 'utopian vision' in so far as in their artworks 'aspects of the objective phenomenal world [were] selected, transformed and improved by the subjective vision of the artist' (PPA: 145).

For Jachec, this is typified by Motherwell's 1954 essay 'The Painter and the Audience.' In this essay, the artist asserts that, since the artworks are imbued with 'integrity, sensuality, sensitivity, knowingness, passion, dedication, sincerity,' the aesthetic judgements elicited by Abstract Expressionist artworks are fundamentally ethical (1992: 107). I will return to this essay below, suffice it here to note that, for Jachec, the fact that it was disseminated across Europe by the International Council is evidence that the dynamics in the artworks for which Motherwell is attempting to discursively account, rendered Abstract Expressionism entirely compatible with the State Department's promotion of the rights of free expression in the United States (PPA: 153-6).¹⁰⁸

Yet, I will contend in this final chapter that everything I have argued throughout this thesis about the complexion of the praxis and reception of Abstract Expressionism, means that the utopianism to which these statements by Motherwell attest, if understood aright, is neither assimilable by the status quo, nor a spurious projection which leaves the latter untouched. Instead, Abstract Expressionism models reconciliation in the same movement by which, as I elaborated in the previous chapter, it testifies to the unreconciled, in a manner which calls for a complete transformation of the reigning relations of production. For Adorno, reconciliation is not to be affirmatively defined as a concept in identity with which society must be formed. Rather, he contends that a state of reconciliation would be substantiated by people

¹⁰⁸ Jachec in fact at some points seems to be arguing that Abstract Expressionism frames mid-century social democratic capitalism *as* utopian. Taking recourse to the taxonomy of utopianisms enumerated by the political historians Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor, Jachec argues that the utopianism of Abstract Expressionism can be identified as the utopianism which Goodwin and Taylor characterise as the '[j]ustification of the present by reference to a hypothetical present,' paradigmatic of which, for Goodwin and Taylor, is John Rawls's theory of justice, in so far as it 'sets out to hypothesize what form an ideally just society, viewed abstractly, would take, and arrives at an abstract, idealised account of Western liberal democracy' (PPA: 148-9). Jachec's manoeuvres in drawing this parallel, however, are somewhat disarticulated and hard to follow, and from what I can glean she does not in fact justify this characterisation. Granted, she adduces the fact that a number of the Abstract Expressionists were briefly members of the American arm of the CCF (without mentioning, however, that they likely had no knowledge that it was covertly funded by the CIA, as Sheila Christofides notes (2012: 46)). She also points to de Kooning's assertion that he had the right in the United States to force 'his attitude upon this world,' and Gottlieb's celebration of 'the impressive body of creative work this side of the iron curtain' (PPA: 148-52). Yet, as I noted in the first chapter, there was by no means a uniform political shift rightwards among the Abstract Expressionists during the Cold War. Indeed, we have already seen that the FBI held files on Gottlieb, and in the quote above he is in fact expressing surprise at the fact that such a body of work was being created in an alienated society.

assimilating their material interests by reflection into their relationships, and through this surpassing these material interests (2005: 45). Adorno claims that, since the technical forces of production had by the mid-twentieth century reached a stage which could eliminate material want, and yet such elimination had not occurred, it had become more evident than ever that we must attribute extant suffering ‘to the forms of social production, the relations of production, not to the intrinsic difficulty of meeting people’s material needs’ (2006: 144). Accordingly, Adorno claims, what is necessary is that ‘humanity’s own global subject becomes sufficiently self-aware to come to its rescue after all [...] through the rational organisation of society as a whole in a manner befitting humanity’ (2006: 143-4). In the previous chapter, I argued that Abstract Expressionism elicits reception on the very somatic and affective stratum of experience which would be sated if society were organised thusly. Indeed, despite both Guilbaut and Jachec adducing his writing as emblematic of how Abstract Expressionism’s utopianism marked the movement’s capitulation to the status quo, in a 1950 lecture, Motherwell identifies ‘the social implications’ of Abstract Expressionism as ‘protest against the suppression of feeling, above all of protest to the falsification of personal concrete experience’ which amounts to ‘a kind of dumb, obstinate rebellion *at how the world is presently organised*’ (1992: 78, my italics). Thereby, it might be argued that Abstract Expressionism anticipates reconciliation in so far as it invokes ‘a world-for-us, neither the “objective” world described by mathematics or physics nor a kind of mythic space that one could describe in the past tense, that one could thematise with symbols and ideographs,’ as Bois puts it in his Merleau-Pontyan account of how Newman’s work engages us on the preconceptual level of our corporeal imbrication in the world (1993: 195).¹⁰⁹ That is, rather than, as Guilbaut and Jachec appear to have it, because the artworks somehow objectivate their artists’ subjective interiorities, the reception elicited by Abstract Expressionism projects ‘a world-for-us’ in so far as, to quote Claude Lefort on Merleau-Ponty’s ‘exploration of [...]

¹⁰⁹ Curiously, Bois draws only from *Phenomenology of Perception* in his reading, applying Merleau-Ponty’s early phenomenology to the experience of Newman’s painting, rather than taking recourse to Merleau-Ponty’s writing on painting.

the sensible,' the experience of an Abstract Expressionist artwork emphatically 'does not allow us to forget its connection with the seer, the sentient who grasps it' (1990: 6).

This is often stressed by the artists. Rothko, for instance, claims that his painting 'lives by companionship, expanding and quickening in the eyes of the observer' (Rothko, qtd. in Anfam, 1990: 154). And Richard Pousette-Dart affirms that his aim is to force spectators to 'just look [...] and try to find their own experience' (MAIA: 14). Neither has the importance of the subjective experience of the spectator, rather than the paintings' supposed depiction of subjectivity, gone unnoticed by critics. William Seitz, for instance, writes contemporary to the movement that an Abstract Expressionist artwork 'completes itself only by the experience of the spectator' (1983: 152). And in *Paths to the Absolute*, Golding claims that he is 'seized with the strange and irrational but overpowering sense that a Rothko, when not being looked at, somehow ceases to exist,' imagining that 'when the doors of the art galleries shut at night,' Rothko's paintings remain 'suspended in some nebulous half-world until the first visitor arrives to confront them the following morning' (2000: 221-2). However, I want to contend that it is not simply by engaging perception on the basis of subjective experience which is usually dismissed or delegitimated, that Abstract Expressionism anticipates reconciliation. It does so in so far as it solicits such perception dialectically. To characterise the artworks as existentially dependent upon spectatorship as Golding does in the quote above, is to place *too much* weight on the subject in the experience of viewing an Abstract Expressionist artwork. As I have stressed throughout, Abstract Expressionist artworks command attention by way of their irreducible particularity. To the extent that they project a 'world-for-us' as Bois contends, it is via an 'in itself' which, as Bernstein writes, 'opposes the universal "for us" of rationalised society' (AVB: 152).¹¹⁰ Adopting Aristotle's definition of humans as beings among beings who need society in order to realise *eudemonia*, or human

¹¹⁰ Indeed, in an account which certainly chimes with my experience of the painting, Bois describes viewing Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (1950-1) in terms of being perpetually guided by the artwork. He writes that 'in looking at a zip we are solicited by another one farther away, hence are constantly in the process of adjusting and readjusting the fundamental figure/ground opposition, never finding a moment of repose when the structure could coalesce' (1993: 203).

flourishing, Adorno asserts that the self-exteriorisation this in-itself demands ‘determines the person who experiences art and steps out of himself as a ζῷον πολιτικόν [political animal]’ (AT: 243). In what follows, I will argue that this is the case not only because the assimilation to the other in the experience of Abstract Expressionism renders binding affective experience which would not be negated in a world oriented to the end of *eudemonia* for all. Furthermore, this assimilation to the other models the comportment which would obtain in such a world, and is necessary to bring this world about.

In the previous chapter, I posited that Greenberg’s conception of abstract art’s ‘at-onceness’ is indicative of how an Abstract Expressionist artwork returns experience to the subject by way of its particularity. Kuspit recognises something of this when he claims that Greenberg’s use of dialectic is ‘loosely Deweyan,’ in so far as Greenberg gives subject and object ‘equal weight in aesthetic experience’ (1979: 28-9). Kuspit does not elaborate upon this parallel, and Greenberg scarcely cites John Dewey in his writing. However, we might note that Adorno acknowledges his own affinity with Dewey, whom he describes as ‘unique and truly free’ (AT: 335). As Jay observes, both thinkers share ‘a belief that some sort of experimentation pointing toward the renewal of [unregimented] experience [is] possible even in [capitalism’s] totalising system of domination’ and ‘aesthetic experience in particular [is] its privileged laboratory’ (2004: 139). Accordingly, Adorno cites Dewey in elaborating how philosophical aesthetics must ‘sacrifice [...] each and every security that it has borrowed from the sciences’ in an openness which does not ‘judge art from an external and superior vantage point’ (AT: 345). In the previous chapter, I stressed how it is in this repudiation of a superior vantage point in the experience of Abstract Expressionist artworks that the empirical subject stakes its claim against constitutive subjectivity. However, just as crucial is the way in which this comportment moves ‘with its object, listening to it and remaining open to the object’s speaking and asking’ (Guzonni 1997: 34). Indeed, de Duve has argued that, for Greenberg, the experience of modernist art ‘consists above all in *surrendering* to an irreducible otherness’ (1996b: 49). Yet, it is de Duve’s conviction that what is primarily at stake in this

surrender to otherness is the question of whether artworks are artworks. For de Duve, the addressee of modernist art takes up ‘the challenge of renegotiating the technical-aesthetic conventions of the medium by acquiescing to the broken or abandoned convention, that is, by sealing a new pact around the broken one’ (Ibid: 66). De Duve vaguely ascribes liberal political implications to this dynamic, speculating that ‘art lovers with a taste for such challenges have [...] an ethical respect for the social *differend* as such’ (Ibid).¹¹¹ Conversely, however, I want to contend that understanding this surrender to an irreducible otherness as providing (the semblance of) unrestricted experience, aligns it with a far more radical political horizon. As I adumbrated in Chapter 5, allowing cognition to be guided by that which the exchange process between concept and object conceals, affirms not only the particularity of subjects, but also objects. The refutation of reigning universals in the name of the somatic and affective experience of subjects lays emphasis on the fact that these subjects, as Lisa Yun Lee writes of Adorno’s materialism, ‘are not abstract universal beings,’ but instead exist in reciprocity with objects (2005: 141). Adorno often formulates this in terms of the subject being brought to its objectivity, ‘as an object among objects’ (ND: 183). As he elaborates,

An object can be conceived only by a subject but always remains something other than the subject, whereas a subject by its very nature is from the outset an object as well. Not even as an idea can we conceive a subject that is not an object; but we can conceive an object that is not a subject. To be an object also is part of the meaning of subjectivity; but it is not equally part of the meaning of objectivity to be a subject (Ibid)

¹¹¹ In a recent essay on Frankenthaler’s ‘50s paintings, Shepherd Steiner has similarly suggested that Greenberg posits the relationship of a spectator to art as a model for extra-aesthetic relationality to otherness *qua* otherness. He cites Greenberg’s claim in 1962 that ‘openness’ is ‘not only in painting [...] the quality that seems most to exhilarate the attuned eyes of our time’ (CEC4: 131), and asserts that for Greenberg the term consequently ‘has very little to do with formalism’ and instead speaks ‘the language of civil rights as articulated from the unique perspective provided by the generalised problem of prejudice, centering on combating anti-Semitism, inclusive of the racial divide’ (2014: 16).

Of course, this is not to affirm naïve positivist realism. Contrarily, Adorno contends that the fact that the subject shares objectivity with objects means subjective mediations are ‘no longer a subtractible addendum to objectivity,’ and instead ‘[a]t times subject, as unrestricted experience, will come closer to object than the residuum filtered and curtailed to suit the requirements of subjective reason’ (1998a: 253). In such unrestricted experience, which we have seen Adorno contends authentic art provides, ‘[k]nowledge of the object is brought closer by the act of the subject rending the veil it weaves about the object’ (1998a: 254). This veil, then, is not rended by objectivistic reduction, but rather Adorno contends that, if the subject passively entrusts itself to its own experience of the object, what ‘shimmers through [is] that in the object which is not a subjective addition’ (Ibid).

A more sustained account of the relationship of subjects to objects once an external and superior vantage point has been repudiated is given by Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible*. As Jay parenthetically notes their affinity, both Adorno and Merleau-Ponty attempt to ‘avoid the extremes of separating subject and object too drastically or reconciling them too completely,’ but instead conceive of them as reversible but not totally coincident (1984b: 381, n.92). As opposed to ‘philosophy that is installed in pure vision, in the aerial view of the panorama’ for which ‘there can be no encounter with another,’ Merleau-Ponty calls for perception which ‘receives its incitement’ from its content and is thus ‘implicated in the movement and does not view it from above’ (VI: 77; 90). In this, Merleau-Ponty details a general intercorporeity, which he terms ‘the flesh,’ in which subjects are also objects; in which those ‘who [see] cannot possess the visible unless [they are] possessed by it,’ that is, ‘unless, by principle, according to what is required by the articulation of the look with the things [, they are each] one of the visibles’ (VI: 134-5). Thus, Merleau-Ponty contends that a subject who perceives should be characterised as ‘a *sensible for itself*,’ in that they are ‘a set of colours and surfaces inhabited by a touch, a vision’ (VI: 135). It is as a ‘two-dimensional being’ in this way, as a subject which is also an object, that Merleau-Ponty writes we might be brought ‘to the things themselves, which are themselves not flat beings but beings in

depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey the from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world' (VI: 136). In this, the subject does not 'hold [objects] as with forceps or [...] immobilise them as under the objective of a microscope, but [lets] them be and [witnesses] their continued being' (VI: 101).

Now, Merleau-Ponty's account of 'the flesh' is often understood as a philosophical correlate to his contemporaneous disillusionment with revolutionary socialism in his political theory and consequent turn to a vaguely sketched reformist parliamentary politics, which he referred to as 'new liberalism' (1973: 225-227). In this interpretation, the elaboration of a general intercorporeity of which human existence is simply a variant is taken for a fundamental ontology, and thus to imply that, as Sonia Kruks puts it

[t]he multiplicity of cultures, socio-economic systems, political systems, etc, can only be multiple expressions of a fundamental unity. Class divisions and struggle must thus become secondary phenomena, of little significance in comparison with the fundamental unity of human being. (1981: 121-2)

This is not the place for a comprehensive account of Merleau-Ponty's political trajectory.¹¹² Nevertheless, suffice it to say that he made the shift to 'new liberalism' compelled by similar developments as those which I noted in Chapter 6 lead much of the 1950s European Left to denounce the USSR as imperialist (for Merleau-Ponty, lacking knowledge as to the catalytic role of the US in the conflict, the definitive moment was the Korean War), a mass ideological apostasy which I showed the State Department's Policy Planning Committee took as an auspicious moment for the proliferation of Abstract Expressionism as evidence that, contrary to the USSR, the freedom for personal expression flourished in the United States. However, quite aside from the fact that Merleau-Ponty's disaffection with revolutionary socialism was

¹¹² Probably the most succinct account of the development of Merleau-Ponty's politics can be found in the chapter "Phenomenological Marxism: The Ambiguities of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's Holism," in Martin Jay's *Marxism and Totality* (1984). Whole Monographs on the topic which I have also found useful are Sonia Kruks, *The Political Philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty* (1981); Kerry H. Whiteside, *Merleau-Ponty and the Foundation of an Existential Politics* (1988), and, from a conservative perspective but nevertheless containing a wealth of research, Barry Cooper, *Merleau-Ponty and Marxism: From Terror to Reform* (1979).

emphatically not a defection to capitalist imperialism, I do not think that Merleau-Ponty's account of 'the flesh' should be understood as a legitimation of the status quo at all. Rather, I would suggest that the chiasmatic intercorporeity between subjects and objects which he describes might be read more fruitfully as a prefiguration of reconciliation extrapolated from unregimented experience. As I showed in the previous chapter, for Merleau-Ponty, it is the carnal 'notions' of aesthetics, which I contended Abstract Expressionist artworks typify, that return us to the site and soil of the sensible by stressing so-called secondary qualities otherwise dismissed by instrumental reason. In this, they not only engage otherwise delegitimated elements of somatic and affective experience, but also maintain substantiality irreducible to this relationality. As Adorno asserts that the subject's objectivity means that it is when it is at its most subjectively contingent that subjective perception rends the veil by which reification shrouds objects, Merleau-Ponty claims that, due to the subject and object's shared corporeity, by enveloping things, the subject's look 'does not hide them,' but contrarily 'unveils them' (VI: 131). Thus, Merleau-Ponty writes in 'Eye and Mind' that art, as opposed to predominate operationalism, 'awakens and carries to its highest pitch a delirium which is vision itself, for to see is *to have at a distance*' (PP: 127). The exceptionalism of such a delirium surely does not encourage passive capitulation to a status quo fundamentally determined by instrumental rationality in the interests of private profit, but rather provides what Marjorie Grene has termed 'the horizon toward which we can hope to move,' borne of the glimpse unregimented experience provides of the way in which 'in our very distance from things we are near them' (1993: 232).¹¹³ Indeed, in a strikingly similar

¹¹³ Indeed, readings of Merleau-Ponty's concept of the flesh which understand its implications as politically radical have been made. For an early, explicitly Marxist account see Dick Howard, 'Ambiguous Radicalism: Merleau-Ponty's Interrogation of Political Thought' (1973). Howard contends that the notion that subjects are objects, that we are each 'a thing in the world of things, the flesh of the world and the world of the flesh' brings us to an awareness of our 'being-with-others in an intersubjective world which we codetermine and which determines us in return' and thus it provides 'a horizon of historical intentionality' premised on a legitimation of corporeal experience (1973: 157-8). For a far more recent account of the flesh as projecting a future society see Paul Mazzochi's 'Politics A L'Ecart: Merleau-Ponty and the Flesh of the Social' (2015). In this essay, Mazzochi claims that the flesh discloses an intercorporeity in which 'different perspectives, meanings and identities need no longer be conceived of as irreconcilable and in need of coincidence' and thus 'demands that we judge societies on the basis of the relations they attempt to create between [...] the self and others' (2015: 79). Indeed, while in 1956

formulation to Merleau-Ponty, Adorno contends that aesthetic contemplation provides ‘the source of all the joy of truth’ amidst the domination of identity, asserting that ‘he who contemplates does not absorb the object into himself: a distanced nearness’ (2005: 89-90).¹¹⁴

A sense of distanced nearness is particularly emphatic in many Abstract Expressionist paintings, due to the optical dynamics which Seitz identifies as the artists’ shared ‘flatness-in-depth,’ instancing the examples of ‘Motherwell’s objective overlap [...] Tobey’s impressionistic vibration, de Kooning’s flat landscape [and] Hofmann’s [...] deep push-and-pull’ (1983: 151). We might understand these dynamics as that which is preserved of the perspectival elements of representational painting after what Adorno refers to as ‘the transformation of communicative into mimetic language’ (AT: 112), that is, after the negation of conventions impeding experiential openness on the part of the perceiving subject. To take Pollock as an example, Landau has noted that the ‘stratification of forms [which] create a feeling of deep space’ in his paintings might be attributed to the influence of his former mentor Thomas Hart Benton (1989: 222), whose work Pollock proclaimed as ‘important as something against which to react very strongly’ (qtd. in Doss 1991: 3). Indeed, this aspect of Pollock’s paintings, despite their palpable corporeality, is often noted. In 1946, Greenberg writes of the ‘infinity of dramatic movement and variety’ in Pollock’s work (CEC2: 76); Leja has acknowledged how allusions to webs proliferated in 1950’s writing on Pollock, due to the metaphor’s ‘distinct formal advantage over sky and sea in its ability to combine the articulation of a plane with a view through to a space beyond’ (310); and in his recent monograph on *Mural* (1943) (fig. 11), and Anfam describes how the painting’s ‘convulsive rhythms look to bound into the third dimension’ (2015: 110).

Merleau-Ponty claims that we should ‘relativise the Marxist idea of a pre-history which is going to give way to [...] the complete, true Society in which man is reconciled with man and Nature,’ he is asserting that ‘there is no force in history which is destined to produce it,’ but nevertheless maintaining that such a state of reconciliation ‘is indeed what our social criticism demands’ (1964: 131).

¹¹⁴ The affinity between Adorno’s notion of ‘distanced nearness’ and Merleau-Ponty’s late philosophy has also been acknowledged by Alastair Morgan in his *Adorno’s Concept of Life* (2007), in an analysis far less sympathetic to Merleau-Ponty than my account (81-85).

Of course, this sensation of distance is precisely what was at stake in Adorno's debates with Benjamin concerning the 'aura' of artworks. Where Benjamin understands the latter's erosion by technical reproducibility as democratising, Adorno forewarns against revoking 'the reification of a great work of art in the spirit of immediate use-values' (2007a: 123). The reasons for this should be clear from the first half of Chapter 8. Adorno contends that to repudiate art's autonomy in the name of immediacy is to surrender to the mediation of capital. Thus, he asserts that, instead of 'adapting itself to them in their degraded condition,' the enigmaticalness of immanently determined autonomous art 'respects the masses by presenting itself to them as what they could be' (AT: 240). I think we might understand this claim in terms of how, as I delineated above, for Adorno the semblance of distance in aesthetic contemplation whose supplantation by distraction Benjamin celebrated, is inextricably bound up with subjective perception in reciprocity with its object in a way that art which caters to reigning needs is not. As Merleau-Ponty posits that in the intercorporeity of the flesh we might let things be and witness their continued being, Adorno surmises that the state of reconciliation would be neither

the undifferentiated unity of subject and object or their hostile antithesis: rather it would be the communication of what is differentiated. Only then would the concept of communication, as an objective concept, come into its own. The present concept is so shameful because it betrays what is best—the potential for agreement between human beings and things—to the idea of imparting information between subjects according to the exigencies of subjective reason. In its proper place, even epistemologically, the relationship of subject and object would lie in a peace achieved between human beings as well as between them and their Other. Peace is the state of differentiation without domination, with the differentiated participating in each other. (1998a: 247)

In so far as they invite assimilation which nevertheless does not exhaust its object, but rather is precisely the process by which this inexhaustibility is revealed, then, Abstract Expressionist artworks, as Bernstein writes, 'open a possibility of responding and relating to

objects (including other subjects) that is not presently available' (1997b: 198). Here, we might recall the fact that, as I noted in the introduction, for Clark our inability to make Abstract Expressionism a thing of the past is an impediment to modernism's task of imagining modernity otherwise. Against this, Bernstein contends that the response and relation whose possibility is opened by Abstract Expressionism provides 'all the evidence we possess' that modernity could be otherwise (AVB: 192). However, he concedes that this epistemological success is marred by its 'lack of an adequate social basis' (Ibid). If attention to suppressed particulars is to orient political action, he contends, it can do so only in terms of 'a negative politics of avoiding the worst' (2010b: 51). Yet, while this is not the place to interrogate the prospects for collective political action, I would stress that the political horizon of such a response and relation nevertheless makes emphatic the intolerable insufficiency of anything less than a total transformation of society. We might note here that Adorno, routinely attacked for political quietism late in life,¹¹⁵ maintained that the hope of 'completely unshackled reality [remained] valid' and the world contained 'opportunities

¹¹⁵ The accusation that Adorno was, as activist students put it in a leaflet of 1968, 'critical in theory, conformist in practice' (qtd. in Leslie 1999: 118), is largely premised on his reluctance to unreservedly support the more aggressive action of the student movement, to the egregious extent of calling the police when activists occupied the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research in 1969. However, Adorno's attitude towards the student movement was not premised on a defence of the status quo so much as his conviction that the students' protest was reified antagonism and took no account of objective conditions. As he put it, '[b]arricades are ridiculous against those who administer the bomb' (1998a: 269). For a recent account of Adorno's late politics see the sub-section 'Accommodations' in Chapter 4 of Andrew N. Rubin's *Archives of Critical Theory* (2012). Pertinently to my thesis, Rubin recounts how during the 1950s Adorno contributed a number of essays to *Der Monat*, the German journal covertly supported by the CIA via the CCF. However, not only would I contend that the implications of his philosophy cannot be reconciled with capitalism; indeed, it is in one of the articles published in *Der Monat* which Rubin alights upon as particularly anticommunist, a rebuke to Lukács later translated as 'Reconciliation Under Duress,' that Adorno details most lucidly the critique of aesthetic realism which I marshalled in Chapter 2 to indict the complicity of Ben Shahn's Social Realism with *capitalist* reification. Furthermore, as Rubin notes, whether or not he was aware of the CCF's source of funding, Adorno subsequently stressed how 'slogans of struggle against Bolshevism have always served to mask those who harbor no better intentions toward freedom than do the Bolsheviks themselves' (1998a: 94).

enough for success' (Adorno and Horkheimer 2011: 36).¹¹⁶ In keeping with this notion, in the discussion which followed a 1958 lecture, he stressed the following:

We are not only spectators looking upon this predominance of the institutional and the objective that confronts us; rather it is after all constituted out of us, this societal objectivity is made up of us ourselves. In this [...] surely lies precisely also the possibility of perhaps changing it (1998a: 298).

I would contend that, while the emphatically reciprocal mediation of subject and object in the experience of Abstract Expressionism is only semblance, it nevertheless intimates and rehearses precisely this possibility of changing things. It is an experience which does not discount the myriad mediations of corporeal subjects in favour of reigning universals, and thus provides a monadological place-holder for a self-conscious global subject, in a world whose subjection to these reigning universals means life 'purely as a fact will strangle other life' (ND: 364). This chimes with how Newman claims his art anticipates a non-coercive society, when he expresses hope that the experience of his paintings would lend a spectator a feeling of their 'own separateness [and] individuality,' moving 'in relation to other selves' (SWI: 257-258). However, crucially, this experience does not reduce objects (including the corporeality of these subjects) to the contingent needs of these subjects. Thus, the global subject projected by this experience would avoid, 'in the name of morality [, establishing] society itself as a vast joint-stock company for the exploitation of nature,' as Adorno avers against, in keeping with his insistence, noted in Chapter 6, that labour should not be hypostasised as the sole source of use value (2000: 145).

To return to the essays which Guilbaut and Jachec adduce to characterise Abstract Expressionism's utopianism as a facilely politically radical legitimisation of the artists'

¹¹⁶ Adorno makes these comments in discussions with Horkheimer in which Horkheimer reveals himself to be far more of a pessimist than Adorno, rebutting them with the assertion that '[i]n the long run things cannot change [...] We can expect nothing more from mankind than a more or less worn-out version of the American system.' (Adorno and Horkheimer 2011: 36).

capitulation to the status quo, we might thus read Motherwell and Rosenberg's affirmation of one's 'own experience' in defiance of 'organised social thinking' not as a retreat into interiority complicit with the status quo, but rather as experience attuned to its object in a way which is impossible so long as the status quo is determined by the exigencies of capital. Consequently, we might interpret Motherwell's claims in 'The Painter and his Audience' as to the ethical nature of Abstract Expressionism, as the art which results from such experience, in terms of how the categorical anticipations of an ethical world emancipated from the exigencies of capital inhere in the distanced nearness of the works. Indeed, in 'The Painter and his Audience,' Motherwell stresses the ethical nature of Abstract Expressionism in counterposition to a world where 'the possibility of collaboration between men on "ultimate concerns"' is foreclosed by the needs of 'big business,' which 'in the end [...] determine everything, including how [people] think about reality' (1992: 106-7). Now, while Jachec is surely correct in her claim that this essay's dissemination by the International Council marks an attempt to neutralise oppositional discourse through assimilation, I argued in Chapter 6 that, in terms of the artworks themselves, this neutralisation depended upon the identification of the artworks with the exhibition-value of personal expression. However, the expressiveness of the artworks' distanced nearness resists the conceptual subsumption necessary for such identification. While I showed that the latter was modelled on cultural pluralism within the pre-given co-ordinates of existent society, whereby, in Schlesinger's term, 'variegated emotions' are imparted between subjects within the horizons delimited by the exigencies of capital, the artworks' distanced nearness attests to the potential for agreement between human beings as well as between them and their Other, which could only be achieved were experience not governed in accordance with these exigencies.

All of this is particularly pertinent if we turn to Norman Lewis's *City Night* (1949) (fig. 12), which is perhaps the one Abstract Expressionist painting most emblematic of this flatness-in-depth, this obstinate planarity which nevertheless intimates more. An oil painting on wood, the work mainly consists of lengthy dark vertical brushstrokes. In the centre of the picture,

however, the strokes are lighter and more urgent, and form two illuminated pillars which appear to emerge and recede simultaneously without rupturing the inescapable corporeality of these strokes. *City Night* thus engages spectators on the grounds of embodied perception, while nevertheless maintaining a sense of unassimilable pregnancy. In Chapter 2, I briefly noted that Lewis, as the only African-American in the first generation of the New York School, made explicit that his choice to be an abstract painter, rather than represent the plight of African-Americans in his art, was on his account not an abandonment of the latter, but rather a refutation of the stereotypes which Social Realist art instantiated. His extra-aesthetic biography certainly bears out this commitment. While he was well-acquainted with his fellow Abstract Expressionists, especially Reinhardt but also Rothko, Smith, Kline, Pollock and Newman; took part in their seminal discussions at Studio 35; and exhibited alongside many of them when represented by the Willard Gallery, he was also dedicated throughout his life to collectively organising with, and promoting the work of, fellow black artists. Before the war he had been a member of the '306 Group,' the collective of black artists founded in the Harlem Art Workshop, and treasurer of the Harlem Artists Guild, and he went on to co-found both the black artists collective Spiral, and the Cinqué Gallery, whose mission was to exhibit the work of young black artists, named for Joseph Cinqué, the leader of the 1839 Amistad slave ship mutiny.¹¹⁷ In a 1968 interview with Henri Ghent, he recounts why he nonetheless moved away from representing African-Americans in his art:

I used to paint Negroes being dispossessed, discrimination, and slowly I became aware of the fact that this didn't move anybody, it didn't make things better and that if I had the guts to, which I did periodically in those days, it was to picket. And this made things better for Negroes in Harlem [...] But [the] kind of protest paintings that I was trying to do never solved any situation. I found the only way to solve anything was to go out and take some kind of physical action. And that painting, like music,

¹¹⁷ For art historical accounts of Norman Lewis's aesthetic and political trajectory, see Anne Gibson, "Norman Lewis in the 'Forties' (1993), and David Craven, 'Norman Lewis as Political Activist and Post-Colonial Artist' (1998).

had something inherent in itself which I had to discover, which has nothing to do with what exists, it has another kind of reality, that which is inherent in painting in those four sides; in sculpture which is around. So that with this kind of awareness naturally you really get with yourself and you wonder what can I say, what do I have to say that can be of any value, what can I say that can arouse someone to look at and feel awed about. (Ghent 1968, 14 July)

Now, in a 1947 letter, Lewis claimed that he had come to such painting ‘which has nothing to do with what exists’ by approaching it ‘as a true Marxist’ (1989: 64). However, when elaborating upon such political grounds he often seems to appeal to a notion of abstract universalism. In a statement written in 1946, for instance, he asserts that his ambition is for it to be possible for an African-American artist ‘to be publicly first an artist [...] and incidentally, a Negro,’ and anticipates that an abstract aesthetic would allow for this, in so far as African-American artists could contribute ‘to a universal knowledge of aesthetics and the creative faculty which [...] exists [...] in all men’ (2005: 134). Framed in this way, Lewis’s shift to abstract painting has been criticised by Richard J. Powell as a ‘willingness to subordinate blackness and all that was associated with it’ for the sake of integration into ‘a larger, wider and, ultimately, whiter art world’ (1997: 102). For Powell, however, Lewis’s work never fully suppresses his particularity, because his paintings remain based on social themes, revelling in an aesthetic that ‘while camouflaged by artistic overtures to Abstract Expressionism,’ retains reference to ‘a Harlem-inspired art’ (Ibid: 103-5). Analogously to the critics of Greenberg surveyed in Chapter 8, then, Powell here conceives of the ‘purity’ of Abstract Expressionism as effacing particularity (in this case, blackness), and takes recourse to referents in Lewis’s paintings which belie this effacement. However, if we conceive of this ‘purity’ in the terms in which I have framed it throughout this thesis, a painting such as *City Night* does justice to particularity in so far as what Powell refers to as a ‘camouflaging,’ is in fact a transformation of communicative into mimetic language; if the distanced nearness of Abstract Expressionism affirms embodied subjective experience in a manner receptive to its

object, Lewis's abstract painting refutes external yardsticks and is united with the pickets and physical action which he found more effective for social change than Social Realist painting. That is, in rendering embodied affect emphatically binding in a reciprocal relationship with an object, and through this providing an experiential horizon of reconciliation, Abstract Expressionism is aligned with concrete struggle in the interests of the corporeal subjects and their Other by whom and which the world is reproduced, as opposed to the laws of capitalism as according to which these subjects are forced to reproduce the world, the total dissolution of which laws through the global socialisation of the means of production in a sustainable metabolic relationship with (inner and outer) nature, would be necessary to realise Abstract Expressionism's promise. In this promise, Abstract Expressionism's determinate negation of *Inhalt* still augurs the determinate negation of unfreedom.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have argued that, while it is certainly true that Abstract Expressionism was adopted by the US establishment in the 1950s as revisionist historians have demonstrated since the '70s, the artworks' *Gehalt* is intransigently opposed to the ends to which they were thus enlisted. While they were deployed in championing the pre-eminence of US capitalism, I have argued that the artworks register precisely that which exchange-value's dominance delegitimizes, suppresses and debars. Moreover, I have made this case, not by uncovering forgotten or unheeded aspects of the artworks, but with recourse to what Greenberg celebrates as 'quality,' the approbation of which as marking Abstract Expressionism as the pinnacle of European Modernism I showed in no small part informed the artworks' deployment as indices of the United States' cultural superiority. I have done so, by arguing that the referent of Greenberg's acclaim is not so much the determinate negation of dispensable artistic conventions and affirmation of medium-specific elements. Instead, I have posited that in his judgements Greenberg is in fact tracing the determinate negation of reified conventions and affirmation of art's mimetic language. Thus, I have argued that critics miss the mark when they dismiss Greenberg's 'formalism' as homologous and complicit with dominant rationality because of its supposed subordination of subjects' somatic and affective particularity to optically apprehended categories of medium-specificity. Instead, I have posited that the substrate of that which Greenberg celebrated in Abstract Expressionist artworks engages precisely this somatic and affective subjective particularity. I argued that this engagement of intense subjective experience differs from the way in which the revisionist historians demonstrate that the identification of Abstract Expressionism with subjectivity facilitated its co-optation by US imperialism. I showed that this contention is convincing in so far as this intense subjectivity is understood in terms of the Abstract Expressionists somehow manifesting their subjective interiorities in their artworks, and thus

supposedly attesting to the freedom for individual expression under capitalism in the United States. However, with recourse to the Abstract Expressionists' accounts of their working methods, and phenomenal accounts of their art, I have argued that to contend Abstract Expressionist artworks objectivate subjective interiority in this way, is to falsify the experience of the works, and that instead the artworks engage subjective experience by inviting a relationship of openness to otherness which is extra-aesthetically unsustainable.

Analogously to Trotsky's characterisation of the *Divine Comedy*, then, we might account for Abstract Expressionism's enduring enigmatic power by the fact that experiential openness remains prohibited by the subsumption and determination of use-value by exchange-value. It is truer than ever that the forces of production could sustainably free the world's population from want. However, this appears even less likely now than it did in the mid-century, due to persistent contradictions between the exigencies of profit and the needs of the corporeal subjects (and the nature of which they are a part) from which this profit is extracted.¹¹⁸ Moreover, that an artistic locus of resistance might take the form of a nonconceptual, nonrigidified significative language becomes all the more evident as all subjective qualities which *can* be conceptually subsumed have been put in the service of capital, and the accordant revolutionary opportunities for the international body politic to 'organize itself otherwise and discover an alternative to the global political body of capital,' which Hardt and Negri, the most conspicuous expositors of this process, predicted would emerge immanently from labour and society thus having to 'informationalize, become intelligent, become communicative, become affective' have not occurred (2004: 189; 109). Whereas in Lukács's account of reification under industrial capitalism, the Fordist work-process made 'the human qualities and idiosyncrasies of the worker appear increasingly as *mere sources of error*' (1971: 89), since the rise of post-Fordist communicative capitalism, while somatic and affective elements of experience are still delegitimated as fundamental determinants of society in favour of the interests of capital, human qualities and idiosyncrasies have been

¹¹⁸ For an excellent recent account of how the 2008 financial crisis was a crisis of profitability, which has not been resolved, see Michael Roberts's *The Long Depression* (2016).

ever further colonised by the latter. This is explicit in workplaces, especially the service sector, in which, as Ann-Marie Stagg, chair of the UK Call Centre Management Association has candidly put it, ‘employers are increasingly demanding that their employees deep act, work on and change their feelings to match the display required by the labour process’ (qtd in Couldry, 76). Yet, the extent to which ‘free-time’ also subserves the exigencies of profit is more obvious than ever. In 1946, Adorno observed how ‘[f]ree time remains the reflex-action to a production rhythm imposed heteronomously on the subject, compulsively maintained even in the weary pauses’ (2005: 175). Today, however, ‘free-time’ is unambiguously a site of capital accumulation, as ‘[s]tylistic choices, communicative networks, affective engagements with others, the expression and fulfilment of personal desires all contribute directly to the information economy, the construction and consolidation of which has been facilitated by the spread of social media’ (Bewes 2016: 54).

Yet, if the extant fascination of Abstract Expressionist artworks can be chalked up to the continued need for that which is not reducible to the determinate judgements of capital – ‘something in reality, something back of the veil spun by the interplay of institutions and false needs’ (AT: 18) – this of course does not mean that this something finds its expression in abstract painting any longer. While this is not the place to substantiate this claim, I would contend that for the last few decades this something has found emphatic expression less in painting than in, for instance, underground experimental music.¹¹⁹ Indeed, in Chapter 7 I acknowledged that Greenberg declared that, by the late ‘50s, painterly abstraction had hardened into mannerism. Greenberg continued to champion painters, such as Noland and Olitski. However, over the subsequent decades abstract painting, and Abstract Expressionism especially, has increasingly taken the form of self-consciously conceptual work which dramatises ‘the false promises and ignominious deliquescence of the genre, pushing gestural abstraction to its stained, ripped, debased, and de-skilled limits,’ or concerns itself with ‘one more cool, laid-back critical feint in the supposed endgame of painting,’ as Michelle Kuo

¹¹⁹ For an Adornian reading of Japanese noise music along these lines, see Nicholas J. Smith, ‘Why Hardcore Goes Soft: Adorno, Japanese Noise and the Extirpation of Dissonance’ (2001).

writes (2011: 314). As exemplary of such work, Kuo highlights David Hammons's 2011 series of Abstract Expressionist paintings which he obscured with trash bags. Such work's pointed disenchantment of Abstract Expressionism does away with Abstract Expressionism's enigmaticalness, to the extent that this enigmaticalness is acknowledged and dismissed as amounting to 'metaphysical aspirations,' as the press release of a 2015 show of 1980s paintings by Günther Förg at White Cube Gallery in London differentiated the artist's work from 'the aesthetic legacy of Modernism [...] in particular [...] the painting of Mark Rothko [...] and Barnett Newman' to which his painting formally indebted (Anonymous n.d.) (fig. 12). Yet, as I argued at the end of Chapter 9, if Abstract Expressionism is metaphysical, it should be understood as thus in the sense that Adorno contends that we must repurpose the concept of metaphysical transcendence in materialist terms, and thus the 'metaphysical aspirations' of Abstract Expressionism entail the binding eloquence (in semblance) of the particularity of subjects and objects. I would suggest that the loss of this enigmaticalness, and thus the loss of their promise of reconciliation, is what Harry Cooper, the curator for modern and contemporary art at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, is attempting to account for when he laments that the 'ambiguous homage' of Christopher Wool, Martin Kippenberger or Josh Smith 'does not do the trick' for him, in so far as it

does not bring back what I imagine or fantasize to be the ethos of the AbEx era. I miss the old contradictions (as opposed to their latter-day cartoon version), the loose ends, the overreaching. The agony of victory and the thrill of defeat. Painting today (forgive me) is too stylish, too self-conscious. Give me more of what Philip Guston, in one of his rare essays, called "Faith, Hope, and Impossibility" (1965). If possible, that would be a nice legacy. (2011: 319)

Since the millennium, however, while, as I acknowledged in my introduction, in scholarship and criticism Abstract Expressionism is often still marked with the stigma of its supposed co-optation by US imperialism, artists have increasingly, as Isabelle Graw has noted, taken to painting 'without feeling any need to justify their decision, whereas artists who made the

same choice from the 1960s through at least the early 1990s had to face pressure for turning to a medium deemed problematic' (2016: 260), and much of this new painting is abstract. Yet, as I will now show, such ostensibly unmediated abstract painting praxis generally tends to result in works for which there is no tension whatsoever between the artworks in their particularity and their exhibition-value, whether as arbitrary decor or autobiographical lyricism.

In terms of decor, the artist and critic Walter Robinson has coined the term 'zombie formalism' to describe the kind of ostensibly 'straightforward, reductive, essentialist' painting such as the work of Jacob Kassay, Aaron Aujila, Chris Duncan, or Lucien Smith which functions 'well in the realm of high-end, hyper-contemporary interior design' (2014, 3 April) (fig. 13). For Robinson, such art 'brings back to life the discarded aesthetics of Clement Greenberg' (Ibid) However, I of course would argue that, if 'zombie formalism' is indeed reducible to its medium-specificity as paint applied to a support (which, in my experience, it often is), then it lacks precisely that to which Greenberg's judgements in fact referred. Indeed, this is evident in Greenberg's critical assessment of Jules Olitski, whose spray painted pictures are not unlike much 'zombie formalism,' for example *Patutsky in Paradise* (1966) (fig. 14). About these works, Greenberg claims the following:

The grainy surface Olitski creates with his way of spraying [...] contrives an illusion of depth that somehow extrudes all suggestions of depth back to the picture's surface; it is as if that surface, in all its literalness, were enlarged to contain a world of colour and light differentiations impossible to flatness but which yet manage not to violate flatness. (CEC4: 230)

That is, he explicitly describes these pictures in terms of a distanced nearness which is absent from the 'straightforward, reductive and essentialist' work of the contemporary painters enumerated above.

In terms of autobiographical lyricism, on the other hand, working from the premise that Greenberg's identifications of painting's medium-specificity have been obviated by history,

Graw claims that painting can instead be defined as ‘a production of signs that is experienced as highly personalized’ (2012: 48-50). She has speculated that painting’s capacity to thus function as ‘a physical manifestation of its absent author’ is what makes it particularly appealing at our current historical conjuncture, when value is ‘extracted from cognitive and affective capacities’ (2016: 260-1). Graw marshals a vertiginous array of references in the essays and lectures in which she makes this case, and rather than elucidating her line of argument, this renders it somewhat oblique. However, it is clear that pivotal to her case is a misappropriation of Marx’s labour theory of value. She asserts that ‘[a]ccording to Marx’s labour theory, value can only be generated in a material thing if labour (and therefore life) has been stored in it,’ adducing Marx’s definition of value as ‘labour in its congealed state,’ to affirm that ‘for him value is the material realization of human labour’ (2016: 261). Of course, in all the references to value above, Marx is not referring to value per se, but exchange-value. Yet, Graw is apparently unaware of the difference between use-value and exchange-value, and seems to conceive of the distinction between abstract and concrete labour not as the distinction between economically valuable work time and particular useful activity, but between the latter and its concealment in reified commodities (2012: 55). Consequently, Graw does not understand why the labour theory of value would not apply directly to artworks, for which socially necessary labour time of course does not exist, and whose economic value is entirely determined in circulation.¹²⁰ Instead, she writes that painting’s appeal lies in the fact that it makes the source of its value in labour evident, claiming that ‘[u]nlike most commodities, which obscure labour power, the art commodity – painting in particular – functions by emphasizing and cultivating the impression of labour’ (2016: 261). Furthermore, the historically conjunctural relationship Graw is attempting to

¹²⁰ Graw is of course aware that artworks’ economic value is determined in circulation, but she asserts that this makes Marx’s theory of value theory *more* applicable to them. She writes that Marx ‘emphasized that no commodity is valuable in itself, that value is a “purely social” phenomenon,’ and stresses that ‘this is also true for artworks’ because ‘[n]o artwork is valuable per se – its value is the result of an ongoing and never-ending social negotiation’ (2012: 55). However, Marx’s claim that value is a ‘purely social’ is of course not the claim that value is intersubjectively determined, but rather that exchange-value is determined by socially necessary labour time rather than use-value.

posit between the appeal of painting's consequent appearance as 'literally saturated with the life of its author' and the extraction of value from life under post-Fordism is underdeveloped and unclear (Ibid). Nevertheless, she undeniably identifies the exhibition-value of much new abstract painting which cannot be categorised as according to Robinson's definition of 'zombie formalism.' That is, while Graw is not describing how painting makes evident that its value is labour in its congealed state in a Marxist sense, she *is* describing how the exigencies of exchange-value necessitate that certain new paintings *appear as* congealed labour. A good example of this is the work of Oscar Murillo, whose paintings, full of vigorous markings, are often discussed in terms of the artist's autobiographical background as a working-class Afro-Columbian migrant, and became incredibly popular amongst collectors around 2014, appreciating in price by 3,000 per cent in two years (figs. 15 and 16).¹²¹ However, as I discussed in Chapter 6 in reference to Schapiro's account of Abstract Expressionism, if artworks are of interest solely as the supposed manifestation of an artist's autobiographical expression, their dynamics are effectively homologous with the conceptual subsumption of identity thinking. Indeed, one writer claims that Murillo's affirmation of subaltern identity displays 'disregard for the [...] class ridden art world,' and yet adduces as evidence of this purported radicality an eminent example of its assimilation by bourgeois gallerists, asserting that Murillo's 'private views become traditional Colombian food

¹²¹ This figure is taken from an article in *Vulture* by Carl Swanson entitled 'Oscar Murillo Perfectly Encapsulates the Current State of the Contemporary Art World' (2014, 3 July) It is evident from almost all the literature on Murillo that Murillo's autobiography is crucial to his work, in both commercial and critical terms. Murillo's biography on the website of David Zwirner, the commercial gallery by which he is represented, stresses how his paintings are 'tied to a notion of community stemming from the artist's cross-cultural ties to diverse cities and places in which he travels and works, and Colombia, where he was born in 1986.' In the catalogue for a 2014 group show of new African and South American art at the Saatchi Gallery, by Gabriela Salgado – who oddly writes uncritically in her introduction of the fact that 'artists based outside of the West are often required to display a sense of native belonging and specific cultural codes in order to be considered by an increasingly global art market' (2014: 5) – Murillo's use of 'recycled materials and mediums' is interpreted as informed by the 'gestures of adjustment that [he] seems to have acquired from his border experience: born in Colombia and emigrating to London as a child, he had to adopt language, customs and cultural codes, being inescapably transformed by the unending process of migration' (Ibid: 115). A review in *Art in America* of Murillo's 2014 show at South London Gallery by James Cahill affirms that 'Murillo has sought to make art out of the unlovely or overlooked stuff of life—specifically his own life, as a Colombian-born immigrant to London' (2014: 163). A review by Agnieszka Gracza in *Frieze* of a Murillo show at Carlos/Ishikawa in 2013 notes how Murillo's 'Colombian origins are often emphasized in his painterly [...] practice' (2013: 228).

gatherings that do away with the sterility of white cube cocktail rituals' (Salgado 2014: 115).¹²²

The exhibition-value of the digital paintings of the so-called post-internet artist Petra Cortright, which superficially resemble gestural Abstract Expressionism, might also be understood in terms of autobiographical lyricism, especially in light of the fact that self-portrait webcam videos make up another significant strand of her praxis. Yet, I want to end by suggesting that, contrarily, more than any other contemporary painter of which I am aware, Cortright places her work in the service of the nonidentical. Cortright's paintings are made using the raster graphics editor Adobe Photoshop. To produce the paintings, Cortright sources her colour palate by browsing the internet, especially websites such as the image-sharing network Pinterest. She then creates a raster layer for every brushstroke she makes, and her paintings consist of hundreds of such layers, which are added and retracted before a combination is printed onto a substrate, such as linen, silk, aluminium or paper. In a recent critical account of Adorno's aesthetics, Julianne Rebentisch concedes that the 'dynamic in artistic production in which the internal logic of "the thing itself" surpasses the artist's intention,' which I have argued the Abstract Expressionists' praxis bears out, is still 'corroborated by the self-description of artists who organize their own material' (112). This is certainly true of Cortright. Cortright describes her artistic process as aconceptual and yet binding.¹²³ She claims that she 'actively' tries not to think when she chooses the images which provide her colours, or digitally paints with these colours. Yet, the presuppositions of this self-characterisation are surely borne of identity-thinking's diremption of sensuality and intellect, wherein only the latter qualifies as cognition, because, on her account, Cortright's working method is far from an abandonment of rational construction to the aleatory. This is

¹²² This is rendered all the starker with the knowledge that, as Agnieszka Gracza reports of a fundraising dinner for Carlos/Ishikawa, 'the artist's relatives who cooked *tamales* for us sat at their own table' (2013: 228).

¹²³ The quotes from Cortright are all taken from two interviews, one with Charlotte Jansen of *Artsy* entitled 'Petra Cortright is the Monet of the 21st Century' (2016, 13 May) and another with A Will Brown of *Studio International* headlined 'Petra Cortright: "I wanted to raise questions about the way we view women in a digital landscape"' (2015, 23 September)

evident in her claim that her attempt to not think is *active*. Rather than framing ‘not thinking’ as simply the negation of thought, she describes it as something which she ‘taps into,’ and in this, I would suggest, she is describing a praxial openness to nonidentity whereby cognition is not forsaken, but rather guided by its object. Indeed, unintentionally deploying Kantian terminology, Cortright confirms that her process escapes discourse in a way which is not arbitrary but directed by sensory encounter, when she asserts that ‘it’s very hard to articulate – something will just catch [her] eye – it’s very intuitive.’ And the same holds for her choice of substrate, whose reciprocal tension with the digital image as a palpable material surface she stresses is crucial.¹²⁴

In this, Cortright makes clear that she does not want to ‘hide or remove’ elements of the digital, but instead ‘they are celebrated.’ This is decisive to her paintings’ rescue of the fleeting and ephemeral at a time when abstract painting’s form has otherwise reified as regards that which it forms. In a 2007 interview with Joan Waltemath in *The Brooklyn Rail*, Bernstein expresses his anxiety about the implications of digitisation for art’s ability to stake a claim for the particular. Without medium-specificity, he posits, there is no sensuous particularity. Without sensuous particularity, there is no assimilation to the other, and somatic silence stays silent. However, Bernstein identifies the large-scale photographs of Jeff Wall as work which, nevertheless, gives him hope that this is not the case, because Wall ‘lets the concrete image carry autonomous significance’ and thus, ‘despite every possible form of mediation and construction,’ his art lives ‘through and on a moment of immediacy’ (Waltemath 2007, 4 September). Yet, I would contend that Cortright’s work lives through and on immediacy not in spite, but by way of its mediation. The pseudo-immediacy of ‘zombie formalism’ and contemporary autobiographical lyricism, no matter their sensuousness, is always-already mediated, as decor in terms of the former and conceptually (and as decor) in terms of the latter. The evident mediatedness of Cortright’s paintings, on the

¹²⁴ As she says, ‘Working with physical materials has got me thinking a lot about how digital content translates depending on the surface – screen v silk v aluminium, etc. Everything we see on a screen is contextualised with light, so I look for physical materials that hold light in different ways.’

other hand, is what allows for their immediacy. As we have seen, the Abstract Expressionists painted in the language of repressed nature by determinately negating representational content, and consequently Greenberg, who recognised this language, often discussed it in terms of ‘the irreducible essence of pictorial art’ (CEC4: 131). Similarly, Cortright’s determinate negation of that which impedes mimetic comportment results in work whose *digital* ‘medium-specificity’ is evident. I would even go so far as to say that her paintings’ ‘brushstrokes’ do not appear as simulacra of lines of pigment applied to a support with an implement topped with bristles at all, but rather as entities in their own right, especially in recent works such as *nude drawing model in Eisenhower bibliography spine (2016)* (fig. 17). Due to this, for me at least, the aesthetic affect of Cortright’s work is markedly different to the above-discussed currents in contemporary abstract painting. In the face of Petra Cortright’s work, I experience the same exhortation to submit to the work’s discipline, and consequent somatic exhilaration and kinetic empathy as in the best works of Abstract Expressionism.

Twenty-six years ago, in his *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Fredric Jameson famously posited the difference between Van Gogh’s painting of peasant shoes and Andy Warhol’s *Diamond Dust Shoes* (1980) as microcosmic of the difference between modernism and postmodernism. While he does not put it in these terms, this account essentially hinges on his identifying in the Van Gogh painting the nascent determinate negation of communication and affirmation of mimetic language which I have argued is what, rather than medium-specificity, found its apotheosis in Abstract Expressionism.¹²⁵ Jameson posits that, conversely, Warhol’s painting, far from ‘producing a whole new Utopian realm of the senses,’ is flat, depthless and superficial ‘in the most literal sense’ (6-10). For Jameson, this waning of affect is due to organisational bureaucracy’s dissolution of the centred subject who could express things. Thus, an artwork such as Van Gogh’s is rendered unfeasible in postmodernity, and ‘stylistic innovation is no longer

¹²⁵ Indeed, it should be noted that, twelve years before, in an essay entitled ‘Towards a Libidinal Economy of Three Modern Painters’ (1979), Jameson made an almost identical case for De Kooning’s art.

possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles' (1985: 115). However, to claim this is to work from a model of artistic intentionality which, in terms of Abstract Expressionism, I have opposed throughout this thesis. That is to say, I have posited that the expressiveness of Abstract Expressionist artworks should not be understood as the outward expression of the artists' subjective interiorities, but rather that such a conception serves to neutralise the artworks. Instead, I have argued that, precisely by *not* subjecting their materials to the sovereignty of their subjectivities, but neither molding their materials in accordance with the abstractions which rule extra-aesthetically, the Abstract Expressionists objectivated fleeting, ephemeral and transitory moments when it appears as if the fundamental determinants of everyday life *could* go through the perceptual experience of the extra-aesthetically decentred subject, in reciprocity with other subjects and objects. While, as I have explored throughout this conclusion, it is certainly the case that the majority of contemporary painting is flat, depthless and superficial, I would contend that Cortright's paintings do something similar. This is of course very provisional, and would require more elaboration to fully justify it, but it seems to me as if, without reverting to the reified semiotic system of Abstract Expressionism, but instead following mimetic impulses where they want to go of their own accord, Petra Cortright has created paintings which refuse to cede Abstract Expressionism's promise.

Bibliography

- Abrams, George S. (1952, 4 November) 'McCarthy Again Blasts Schlesinger Over Radio' *The Harvard Crimson* retrieved from <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1952/11/4/mccarthy-again-blasts-schlesinger-over-radio/>
- Adorno, Theodor W (1970) *Ästhetische Theorie* Ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
- (1997) *Aesthetic Theory* Trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. London: Routledge
- (1973) *Negative Dialectics* Trans. E.B. Ashton London: Routledge
- (1973) *The Jargon of Authenticity* Trans. Knut Tarnowski, Frederic Will. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- (1976) 'Sociology and Empirical Research' *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* eds. Adorno, Theodor W.; Albert, Hans; Dahrendorf, Ralf; Habermas, Jürgen; Pilot, Harald; Popper, Karl R, trans. Glyn Adey, David Frisby. London: Heinemann. 68-87.
- (1977) 'The Actuality of Philosophy.' *Telos: A Quarterly Journal of Critical Thought* 31. 120-32.
- (1980) 'Bloch's "Traces": The Philosophy of Kitsch.'" *New Left Review* I/121 49-62
- (1984) 'Essay as Form' trans. B. Hullot-Kentor, F. Will, *New German Critique* 32, 151-71
- (1991) *The Culture Industry* ed. J.M. Bernstein, London: Routledge.
- (1992) *Notes to Literature Vol. 2* Trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen New York: Columbia University Press.
- (1995) 'On Some Relationships between Music and Painting' trans. Susan Gillespie *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (Spring) 66-79
- (1997) *Aesthetic Theory* Trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. London: Routledge
- (1998a) *Critical Models* trans. Henry W. Pickford. New York: Columbia University Press.
- (1998b) *Quasi Una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music* trans. Rodney Livingstone, London: Verso.
- (2000) *Problems of Moral Philosophy* Trans. Rodney Livingstone. ed. Thomas Schroder. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- (2001) *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* trans. Rodney Livingstone, ed. Rolf Tiedemann. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- (2002a) *Metaphysics: Concepts and Problems* Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Ed. Thomas Schroder. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- (2002b) *Essays on Music* ed. Richard Leppert trans. Susan H. Gillespie. Berkeley:

University of California Press.

--- (2005) *Minima Moralia* trans. E.F.N. Jephcott. London: Verso

--- (2006) *History and Freedom* trans. Rodney Livingston, ed. Rolf Tiedemann Cambridge: Polity Press.

--- (2007a) 'Letters to Walter Benjamin' trans. Rodney Livingstone. *Aesthetics and Politics*, Ronald Taylor ed.. 110-133

--- (2007b). 'Reconciliation under Duress' trans. Rodney Livingstone. *Aesthetics and Politics*, Ronald Taylor ed. 151-76.

--- (2007c) 'Commitment' trans. Rodney Livingstone. *Aesthetics and Politics*, Ronald Taylor ed. 177-195.

--- (2008) *Lectures on Negative Dialectics: Fragments of a Lecture Course 1965/1966* Trans. Rodney Livingstone. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann. Cambridge: Polity press

Adorno, Theodor W.; Horkheimer, Max (2002) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. trans. Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

--- (2011) *Towards a New Manifesto*. trans. Rodney Livingstone. London: Verso.

Albers, Patricia (2001) *Joan Mitchell: Lady Painter* New York: Alfred A. Knopf

Anderson, Perry (2003) 'Imperium' *New Left Review* 83. September-October. 5-111.

Anonymous (n.d.) 'Günther Förg Lead Paintings 3 June – 11 July 2015' *White Cube* retrieved from http://whitecube.com/exhibitions/gunther_forg_masons_yard_2015/

Anonymous (2016) *Abstract Expressionism Large Print Guide* London: Royal Academy of Arts retrieved from https://royal-academy-production-asset.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/e30a9b0b-b211-49cb-896a-0bf08f2db43e/Full+Works_merged.pdf

Anfam, David (1990) *Abstract Expressionism*. London. Thames and Hudson.

--- (2015) *Jackson Pollock's Mural: Energy Made Visible* London: Thames & Hudson.

--- (2016) 'An Unending Equation' in *Abstract Expressionism* ed. David Anfam. London: Royal Academy of Arts.. 14-50

Arvon, Henri, (1974) *Marxist Esthetics* London: Cornell University Press

Ashton, Dore (1973) *The New York School* London: Penguin.

--- (1990) 'Franz Kline' in *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record* ed. David Shapiro, Cecile Shapiro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 300-304.

--- (1996) *About Rothko* New York: Da Capo Press.

--- (2007) 'Implications of Nationalism for Abstract Expressionism' *Abstract Expressionism:*

- The International Context* ed. Joan Marter. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. 19-28.
- Author, Elissa (2004) 'The Decorative, Abstraction, and the Hierarchy of Art and Craft in the Art Criticism of Clement Greenberg' *Oxford Art Journal*, 27, 3. 339-364
- Barr, Alfred H. (1959) 'Introduction' *The New American Painting* London: Tate Gallery. 9-13
- Belz, Carl (2013) 'Helen Frankenthaler and the 1950s', *Painted on 21st Street: Helen Frankenthaler from 1950-1959* ed. John Elderfield. New York: Abrams. 142-157.
- Benjamin, Walter (1999) *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zorn. London: Pimlico.
- Berman, Marshall (1999) *Adventures in Marxism* London: Verso.
- Bernstein, J.M. (1984) *The Philosophy of the Novel: Lucaks, Marxism and the Dialectics of Form* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- (1992) *The Fate of Art* Cambridge: Polity Press
- (1997a) 'Against Voluptuous Bodies: Of Satiation Without Happiness' *New Left Review* I/225 89-104
- (1997b) 'Why Rescue Semblance?' *The Semblance of Subjectivity* Lambert Zuidervaart, Tom Huhn eds. Cambridge: MIT Press. 179-209
- (2001) *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- (2006) *Against Voluptuous Bodies: Late Modernism and the Meaning of Painting* Stanford: Stanford University Press
- (2010a) "'The Demand for Ugliness": Picasso's Bodies' *Art and Aesthetics After Adorno* Berkeley: University of California. 210-249.
- (2010b) 'Suffering Injustice: Misrecognition as Moral Injury in Critical Theory' *Language Without Soil: Adorno and Late Philosophical Modernity* ed. Gerhardt Richter. New York: Fordham University Press. 30-51
- (2014) 'Blind Intuitions: Modernism's Critique of Idealism' *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 22:6, 1069-1094.
- Bewes, Timothy (2016) 'Take That, Frankfurtists' *Radical Philosophy* 200 54-57
- Biddle, Flora Miller (2001) *The Whitney Women and the Museum they Made: A Family Memoir* New York: Arcade Publishing
- Blake, Casey (1981) 'Aesthetic Engineering' *democracy* 1 37-50
- Bois, Yve-Alain (1993) *Painting as Model* Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Bois, Yves-Aain; Buchloh, Benjamin H.D, Foster, Hal; Krauss, Rosalind (2007) *Art Since 1900* London: Thames & Hudson

- Bois, Yve-Alain, Krauss, Rosalind (1997) *Formless: A User's Guide* New York: Zone Books
- Bowie, Andrew (2013) *Adorno and the Ends of Philosophy* Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Braden, Thomas B (1967, 20 May) 'I'm Glad the CIA is Immoral' *Saturday Evening Post* retrieved from http://www.cambridgeclarion.org/press_cuttings/braden_20may1967.html
- Breuer, Stefan (1985) 'Adorno's Anthropology' *Telos: A Quarterly Journal of Critical Thought* 64 15-31
- Brown, A Will (2015, 23 September) 'Petra Cortright: "I wanted to raise questions about the way we view women in a digital landscape"' *Studio International* Retrieved from <http://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/petra-cortright-interview-women-in-a-digital-landscape>
- Buchloh, Benjamin H.D (1984) 'A Concrete History of Abstract Expressionism,' *Art in America*, Vol. 72 No. 3. 19-21
- Buck-Morss, Susan, (1977) *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* Hassocks: The Harvester Press Ltd
- Burstow, Robert (1994) 'On Art and Politics: A Recent Interview with Clement Greenberg' *Frieze: Contemporary Art and Culture* Issue 18 33-35
- Cahill, Holger (1956) 'American Painting and Sculpture in the Twentieth Century' in *Modern Art in the United States* London: Tate Gallery.11-28.
- Cahill, James (2014) 'Oscar Murillo' *Art in America*, Vol.102 No. 3 162
- Cernuschi, Claude (1999) 'Review: The Politics of Abstract Expressionism: Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique: Dissent during the McCarthy Period by David Craven' *Archives of American Art Journal*, Vol. 39, No. 1/2. 30-42.
- Chari, Anita (2015) *A Political Economy of the Senses: Neoliberalism, Reification, Critique* New York: Columbia University Press
- Christofides, Sheila (2012) 'Beyond Revisionism: Reconsidering Clement Greenberg's Cold War Politics' *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* Vol. 12 Iss. 1 42-57
- Clark, T.J. (1985) 'Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art' *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* ed. Francis Francina. London: Paul Chapman 47-65.
- (1999a) *Farewell to an Idea*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- (1999b) 'Pollock's Smallness' *Jackson Pollock: New Approaches*. eds. Karmel, Pepe; Varndoe, Kirk New York: The Museum of Modern Art.. 15-29
- Clewis, Robert (2008) 'Greenberg, Kant and Aesthetic Judgements of Modernist Art' *Canadian Aesthetics Journal / Revue canadienne d'esthétique* Volume 14.
- Cockcroft, Eva (1985) 'Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War' *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* ed. Francis Francina. London: Paul Chapman 107-125

- Coddington, James (1999) 'No Chaos Damn it' *Jackson Pollock: New Approaches*. eds. Karmel, Pepe; Varndoe, Kirk. New York: The Museum of Modern Art. 101-117
- Cohen-Solal, Annie (2007) 'The Ultimate Challenge for Alfred H. Barr, Jr: Transforming the Ecology of American Culture' *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context* ed. Joan Marter. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 196-214
- Cooper, Barry (1980) *Merleau-Ponty and Marxism: From Terror to Reform*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Cooper, Harry (2011) 'Splatter and Daub' *Artforum* Vol. 49 No. 10. 316-319
- Corris, Michael (2008) *Ad Reinhardt* London: Reaktion Books.
- Costello, Diarmuid (2007) 'Greenberg's Kant and the Fate of Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Theory' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 65 No. 2 217-228
- Cox, Annette (1982) *Art-as-Politics: The Abstract Expressionist Avant-Garde and Society* Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press
- Craven, David (1993) 'Clement Greenberg and the "Triumph" of Western Art' Vol. 7 Issue 25
- (1994) 'Meyer Schapiro, Karl Korsch, and the Emergence of Critical Theory' *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 17 No. 1 42-54
- (1998) 'Norman Lewis as Political Activist and Post-Colonial Artist' *Norman Lewis: Black Paintings* Stephanie Solomon ed. New York: Studio Museum in Harlem
- (1999) *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique: Dissent During the McCarthy Period* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Crow, Thomas (1985) 'Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts' *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* ed. Francis Frascina. London: Paul Chapman 233-266
- (1999) 'Moving Pictures' *Artforum* Vol. 37, No. 8 90-97
- Crowther, Paul (2009) *Phenomenology of The Visual Arts (even the frame)*. Stanford: Stanford University Press
- (2012) *The Phenomenology of Modern Art*. London: Continuum..
- Cupic, Simona (2015) 'JFK by E de K' *Elaine de Kooning Portraits* New York: Delmonico Books
- Curtin, Dean W. (1982) 'Varieties of Aesthetic Formalism' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 40 No. 3 315-326
- Curtius, Ernst Robert, (2013) *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Davidson, Susan (2016) 'Feminism for the Most Masculine: How Two Women Launched an Art Market' *Abstract Expressionism* ed. David Anfam. London: Royal Academy of Arts. 86-

De Bolla, Peter (2001) *Art Matters* London: Harvard University Press..

--- (2016) 'At the Royal Academy' *London Review of Books* Volume 39. Number 24. 15 December 12-13.

De Duve, Thierry, (1996a) *Clement Greenberg Between the Lines*. Trans. Brian Holmes. Paris: Dis Voir.

_____ (1996b) *Kant after Duchamp* Cambridge: MIT Press

De hart Matthews, Jane (2000) 'Art and Politics in Cold War America' *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate Second Edition* ed. Francis Francina London: Routledge 155-181

De Kooning, Elaine (1994) *The Spirit of Abstract Expressionism: Selected Writings* New York: George Braziller.

De Kooning, Willem (2007) *Works, Writings, Interviews* ed. Sally Yard. Barcelona: Ediciones Poligrafa.

Deleuze, Gilles (2003) *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* trans. Daniel W. Smith. London: Continuum.

Deutscher, Isaac (1963) *The Prophet Outcast, Trotsky: 1929-1940*. London: Oxford University Press.

Dews, Peter (1987) *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* London: Verso.

Doss, Erika (1991) *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dufrenne, Mikel (1993) 'Eye and Mind' *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting* ed. Galen A. Johnson, Michael B. Smith. Evanston: Northwestern University Press 256-262

Elderfield, John; Winters, Terry (2011) 'Depth Charge' *Artforum* Vol. 49 No. 10 328-335

Evergood, Philip (1973) 'Sure, I'm a Social Painter (1943)' *Social Realism: Art as a Weapon* ed. Shapiro, David, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co. 152-158

Fer, Briony (1997) *On Abstract Art*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Figal, Gunter (2010) 'Merleau-Ponty and Cézanne on Painting' DeRoo, Neal; Semono, Kascha eds. *Merleau-Ponty at the Limits of Art, Religion, and Perception* London: Continuum 30-40.

Fisher, Philip (1991) *Making and Effacing Art* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Foster, Stephen C. (1975) 'Clement Greenberg: Formalism in the '40s and '50s' *Art Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 1. 20-24

- Fóti, Veronique (1996) 'The Evidences of Painting: Merleau-Ponty and Contemporary Abstraction' ed. *Merleau-Ponty: Difference, Materiality, Painting*. New York: Humanity Books.. 137–168.
- (2013) *Tracing Expressionism in Merleau-Ponty: Aesthetics, Philosophy of Biology, and Ontology* Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Fuller, Peter (1990) 'American Painting During the Last War' *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record*. ed. David Shapiro, Cecile Shapiro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 169-181
- Frascina, Francis (1985) 'History: Representation and Misrepresentation. The Case for Abstract Expressionism' *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* ed. Francis Frascina London: Paul Chapman 89-91
- (1987) 'Greenberg and the Politics of Modernism,' *Art Monthly* 111 November 6-11
- (1994) 'Frascina on Greenberg' *Art Monthly* No. 178, July-August 18-19
- (2000) 'Looking Forward, Looking Back: 1985-1999' *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate Second Edition* ed. Francis Frascina London: Routledge 1-29
- (2003) 'Institutions, Culture, and America's 'Cold War Years': The Making of Greenberg's 'Modernist Painting' *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 1 71-97
- (2016-7) 'After Pollock' *Art Monthly* No, 402 December-January.. 5-8.
- Fried, Michael (1998) *Art and Objectivity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press..
- (1999) 'Optical Allusions' *Artforum* 37, No. 8. 96-101; 143-146
- Friedman, B. H. (1972) *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson,
- Froman, Wayne J. (1993) 'Action Painting and the World-as-Picture' *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting* eds. Galen A. Johnson, Michael B. Smith Evanston: Northwestern University Press 337-348.
- Geuss, Raymond (1981) *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Ghent, Henri (1968, 14 July) 'Oral history interview with Norman Lewis' *Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution* retrieved from <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-norman-lewis-11465>
- Gibson, Ann (1990) 'Abstract Expressionism's Evasion of Language' *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record*. ed. David Shapiro, Cecile Shapiro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 195-213
- (1993) 'Norman Lewis in the 'Forties' *American Abstract Expressionism* Ed. David Thistlewood, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. 53-76.
- (1997) *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Golding, John (2000) *Paths to the Absolute* Princeton: Princeton University Press

- Goodnough, Robert ed. (1951) 'Artists' Sessions at Studio 35' eds. Motherwell, Robert; Reinhardt, Ad, *Modern Artists in America* New York: Wittenborn Schultz 8-24.
- Gordon, Peter (2016) *Adorno and Existence* Cambridge: Harvard University Press..
- Gottlieb, Adolph (1990) 'My Painting' *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record*. ed. David Shapiro, Cecile Shapiro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 261-264.
- Guzzoni, Ute (1997) 'Reason' in *The Actuality of Adorno* ed. Max Pensky Albany: State University of New York Press 23-43
- Guilbaut, Serge (1983) *How New York Stole The Idea of Modern Art* trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- (1985) 'The New Adventures of the Avant-Garde in America' *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* ed. Francis Frascina. London: Paul Chapman 153-167.
- (1990) 'Post-war Painting Games: The Rough and the Slick' *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris and Montreal 1945-1964* ed. Serge Guilbaut Cambridge: MIT Press. 30-85
- Gratza, Agnieszka (2013) 'Oscar Murillo' *Frieze: Contemporary Art and Culture* Issue 156. 228
- Graw, Isabelle (2012) 'The Value of Painting: Notes on Unspecificity, Indexicality, and Highly Valuable Quasi-Persons,' *Thinking through Painting: Reflexivity and Agency beyond the Canvas*, Isabelle Graw, Daniel Birnbaum, and Nikolaus Hirsch. eds. Frankfurt am Main: Sternberg Press 45-59
- (2015) 'The Economy of Painting - Notes on the Vitality of a Success-Medium'. Filmed . YouTube video, 1:19:23. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JDthDEcmAs>
- (2016) 'The Economy of Painting: Notes on the Vitality of a Success Medium and the Value of Liveliness' *Expression in the Information Age* ed. Manuela Ammer, Achim Hochdörfer, David Joselit. London: Delmonico Books 260-261
- Greenberg, Clement (1961) *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press
- (1986) *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Volume 1*. Ed. John O'Brian. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press
- (1986) *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Volume 2*. Ed. John O'Brian Chicago: The University of Chicago Press
- (1990) 'State of Art Criticism' *Twentieth Century Theories of Art* ed. James M. Thompson. Ottawa: Carleton University Press. 102-118
- (1993) *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Volume 3*. Ed. John O'Brian Chicago: The University of Chicago Press
- (1993) *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Volume 4*. Ed. John O'Brian. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

- (1999) *Homemade Esthetics* Oxford: Oxford University Press
- (2000) *The Harold Letters: The Making of an American Intellectual* ed. Janice Van Horne. Washington: Counterpoint.
- (2003) *Late Writings* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
- Greenberg, Clement; Macdonald, Dwight (1941) 'Ten Propositions on the War' Volume VIII, No. 4. (July-August), 271-279
- Grene, Marjorie (1993) 'The Aesthetic Dialogue of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty' *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting* ed. Galen A. Johnson, Michael B. Smith. Evanston: Northwestern University Press 212-233
- Groys, Boris (2012) *Introduction to Anti-Philosophy* trans. David Fernbach. London: Verso.
- (2016) *In The Flow* London: Verso
- Hammer, Espen (2015) *Adorno's Modernism: Art, Experience and Catastrophe* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hardt, Michael; Negri, Antonio (2000) *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- (2004) *Multitude*. New York: Penguin.
- Harman, Graham, (2013) *Bells and Whistles*. Winchester: Zero.
- (2014) 'Greenberg, Duchamp, and the Next Avant-Garde' *Speculations: A Journal of Speculative Realism* V. 251-274.
- Harris, Jonathan (1988) 'Mark Rotho and the Development of American Modernism: 1938-1948' *Oxford Art Journal* Vol.11, No. 1 40-50
- (2005) *Writing Back to Modern Art* London: Routledge
- Harrison, Charles (1999) 'Introduction: The Judgement of Art' Clement Greenberg *Homemade Esthetics* Oxford: Oxford University Press. xiv-xxx
- Hegel, G.W.F. (2004) *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* trans. Bernard Bosanquet, ed. Michael Inwood. London: Penguin Books
- Hofmann, Hans, 'Artist's Statement' (1971) *The New York School: Abstract Expressionism in the 40s and 50s*. Thames & Hudson. 83-84.
- (1967) *Search for the Real: And Other Essays* Cambridge: MIT Press
- (1990) 'Texts and Lectures by Hans Hofmann' *Hans Hofmann* ed. Cynthia Goodman, Munich: Prestel-Verlag. 1990. 163-178
- Houlgate, Stephen (2000), 'Presidential Address: Hegel and the Art of Painting' *Hegel and Aesthetics* Albany: State University of New York. 61-82
- Howard, Dick (1973) 'Ambiguous Radicalism: Merleau-Ponty's Interrogation of Political Thought' *The Horizons of the Flesh: Critical Perspectives on the Thought of Merleau-Ponty* ed. Garth Gillan. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press. 143-160.

- Huhn, Thomas (2000) 'A Modern Critique of Modernism: Lukács, Greenberg, and Ideology' *Constellations* Volume 7, Issue 2, June 178–196
- Hullot-Kentor, Robert (2006) *Things Beyond Resemblance* New York: Columbia University Press
- Jachec, Nancy (1998) 'Adorno, Greenberg and Modernist Politics' *Telos: A Quarterly Journal of Critical Thought* 110. 105-118
- (2000) *The Philosophy and Politics of Abstract Expressionism 1940-1960*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Jaffee, Barbara (2004) 'Jackson Pollock's Industrial Expressionism' *Art Journal*, Vol. 63, No. 4 68-79
- Jarvis, Simon (1998) *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* Cambridge: Polity Press
- (2004) 'Adorno, Marx, Materialism' *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*. ed. Huhn, Thomas Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.79-100.
- Jay, Martin, (1984a.) *Adorno*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press,
- (1984b) *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* Los Angeles: University of California Press,
- (1993) *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* London: University of California Press.
- (1997) 'Mimesis and Mimetology: Adorno and Lacoue-Labarthe' *The Semblance of Subjectivity* Lambert Zuidervart, Tom Huhn eds. Cambridge: MIT Press.29-55
- (2004) 'Is Experience Still in Crisis? Reflections on a Frankfurt School Lament' *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*. ed. Huhn, Thomas Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jameson, Fredric (1979) 'Towards Libidinal Economy of Three Modern Painters' *Social Text* No. 1 189-99
- (1985) 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster. London: Pluto.111-125
- (1991) *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* London: Verso.
- (2007) *Late Marxism: Adorno or the Persistence of the Dialectic* London: Verso.
- (2009) *Valences of the Dialectic* London: Verso
- Jansen, Charlotte (2016, 13 May) 'Petra Cortright Is the Monet of the 21st Century' *Artsy* retrieved from <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-petra-cortright-is-the-monet-of-the-21st-century>

- Johnson, Galen A. (1993) 'Introduction to Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Painting' *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting* ed. Galen A. Johnson, Michael B. Smith. Evanston: Northwestern University Press 3-35
- Jones, Amelia (1998) *Body Art: Performing the Subject* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota
- Jones, Caroline A. (1996) *The Machine in the Studio* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- (2005) *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Kant, Immanuel (1953) *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics* trans. P. Gray Lucas Manchester: Manchester University Press
- (1987) *Critique of Judgment* trans. Werner S. Pluhar Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- (2007) *Critique of Pure Reason* trans. Marcus Weigelt London: Penguin Books.
- Kantor, Sybil Gordon (2002) *Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Kaprow, Allan (1993) *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* ed. Jeff Kelley. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press.
- Karmel, Pepe (2007) 'Franz Kline Nijinsky' *Abstract Expressionism and Other Modern Works: The Muriel Kallis Steinberg Newman Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* ed. Lisa Messinger, Gary Tintero 104-112
- Kertess, Klaus (1997) *Joan Mitchell* New York: Harry Abrams Inc..
- Kester, Grant H. (1998) 'Ongoing Negotiations: *Afterimage* and the Analysis of Activist Art' *Art, Activism and Oppositionality* ed. Grant H. Kester. Durham: Duke University Press.. 23-51.
- Kimmelman, Michael (2000) 'Revisiting the Revisionists: The Modern, its critics, and the Cold War' *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate Second Edition* ed. Francis Frascina New London: Routledge. 294-307.
- (2002, 5 July) 'In Joyous Colors, a Hint of Joys Lost' *New York Times* retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/07/05/arts/art-review-in-joyous-colors-a-hint-of-joys-lost.html>
- Kolko, Joyce and Gabriel (1972) *The Limits of Power: The world and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954* New York: Harper & Row
- Kozloff, Max (1985) 'American Painting During the Cold War' *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* ed. Francis Frascina. London: Paul Chapman 107-125
- Kuo, Michelle (2011) 'Acting Out: The AbEx Effect.' *Artforum* Vol. 49 No. 10. 314-315

- Kuspit, Donald B. (1979) *Clement Greenberg, Art Critic* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press
- (1990) 'To Interpret or not to Interpret Jackson Pollock' *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record*. ed. David Shapiro, Cecile Shapiro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 382-391
- (2005) 'Symbolic Pregnance in Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still' *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique* ed. Ellen G. Landau. New Haven & London: Yale University Press. 361-383
- Krauss, Rosalind (1971) *Terminal Iron Works: Sculpture of David Smith* Cambridge: MIT Press
- (1986) *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge: MIT Press
- (1993) *The Optical Unconscious* Cambridge: MIT Press
- (1999) 'The Crisis of the Easel Picture' *Jackson Pollock: New Approaches*. Karmel, Pepe; Varndoe, Kirk, eds New York: The Museum of Modern Art. 155-179
- (2015) *Willem de Kooning Nonstop: Cherchez la femme* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Kruks, Sonia (1981) *The Political Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty* Sussex: The Harvester Press.
- Kwait, John (1973) 'John Reed Club Art Exhibition (1933)' *Social Realism: Art as a Weapon* ed. Shapiro, David, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co. 69-74.
- Laing, David (1978) *The Marxist Theory of Art* Hassocks: The Harvester Press..
- Landau, Ellen G (1989) *Jackson Pollock* London: Thames and Hudson,.
- (2014) 'Still Learning from Pollock' *Mural: The Transitional Moment* Los Angeles: The J Paul Getty Museum 7-31
- Lefort, Claude (1990) 'Flesh and Otherness' *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*. eds. Galen A. Johnson; Michael B. Smith Northwestern University Press 3-13
- Leslie, Esther (1999) 'Introduction to Adorno/Marcuse Correspondence on the German Student Movement' *New Left Review* Vol. 1, No. 233 (January/February) 118-122.
- Leppert, Richard (2002) 'Commentary: Music and Mass Culture' Theodor Adorno *Essays on Music* ed. Richard Leppert trans. Susan H. Gillespie. Berkeley: University of California Press. 327-373
- Leja, Michael (1993) *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Laferber, Walter (1994) *The American Age: US Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad* New York: W.W. Norton and Company

- Lewis, Norman (1989) 'Letter to James Yeargans' *Norman Lewis: From the Harlem Renaissance to Abstraction* ed. Corrine Jennings New York: Kenkeleba Gallery 64
- (2005) 'Thesis, 1946' *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique* ed. Ellen G. Landau. New Haven & London: Yale University Press. 133-135
- Lewis, Jeremy (2016) "'A New Spirit of Freedom': Abstract Expressionism in Europe in the Aftermath of War' *Abstract Expressionism* ed. David Anfam. London: Royal Academy of Arts. 50-70.
- Lieberman, William S. (1981) 'The New American Painting and Sculpture' *American Choice: The Muriel Kallis Steinberg Newman Collection* New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. 52-108
- Lukács, Georg (1971) *History and Class Consciousness* London: The Merlin Press..
- Lyotard, Jean-Francois, (2011) *Discourse, Figure*.Trans. Mary Lydon and Anthony Hudek. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press..
- (2012) 'Newman: The Instant' *Miscellaneous Texts: Contemporary Artists* ed. Herman Parret. Leuven: Leuven University Press. 425-444.
- Mandel, Ernest (1973) *An Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory* New York: Pathfinder Books.
- Mancusi-Ungaro, Carol (1998) 'Material and Immaterial Surface: The Paintings of Rothko' Weiss, Jeffrey ed. *Mark Rothko* New Haven and London. Yale University Press.. 282-302.
- (2011) 'Landmarks Preservation' *Artforum* Vol. 49 No. 10. 340-341
- Marks, Laura U. (2002) *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* Minneapolis/ London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Marie, Annika (2006) *The Most Radical Act: Harold Rosenberg, Barnett Newman and Ad Reinhardt* Unpublished PhD Thesis
- Martin, Stewart, (2007) 'The Absolute Artwork Meets the Absolute Commodity' *Radical Philosophy* 146 15-25
- Mathews, Jessica T. (2017) 'What Trump is Throwing Out the Window' February 9-February 22, 11-13.
- Marquis, Alice Goldfarb (2006) *Art Czar: The Rise and Fall of Clement Greenberg* Aldershot: Lund Humphries.
- Marx, Karl, (1960) *Critique of the Gotha Programme* Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- (1976) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One* trans. Ben Fowkes. London: Penguin Books.
- Mazzochi, Paul, (2015) 'Politics A L'Ecart: Merleau-Ponty and the Flesh of the Social' *Thinking Radical Democracy : The Return to Politics in Post-war France* ed. Martin

- Breaugh, Christopher Holman, Rachel Magnusson, Paul Mazzocchi, Devin Penner. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 60-89
- Masheck, Joseph, (2011) 'On Kuspit, Kant, and Greenberg' in David Craven and Brian Windenweder eds. *Dialectical Conversions* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.. 119-136
- McLean, Ian (1988) Modernism and Marxism, Greenberg and Adorno, *Australian Journal of Art*, 7:1, 97-111
- McCormick, Thomas J. (1989) *America's Half-Century* London: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1964) *Sense and Non-Sense* trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus, Patricia Allen Dreyfus. Evanston: Northwestern University Press,
- (1964) *Signs* trans. Richard C. McCleary. Evanston: Northwestern University Press
- (1968) *The Visible and the Invisible* trans. Alphonso Lingis Evanston: Northwestern University Press,
- (1969) *Humanism and Terror: The Communist Problem* trans. John O'Neil. Piscataway: Transaction Publishers.
- (1974) *Adventures of the Dialectic* trans. Joseph Bien. London: Heinemann
- (1993) *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting* eds. Galen A. Johnson, Michael B. Smith Evanston: Northwestern University Press
- (2002) *Phenomenology of Perception* trans. Colin Smith London: Routledge,
- Milliband, Ralph (1973) *The State in Capitalist Society: The Analysis of the Western System of Power* London: Quartaed Books
- Mitchell, Stanley (1974) 'From Shklovsky to Brecht: Some preliminary remarks towards a history of the politicisation of Russian Formalism' *Screen*, Volume 15, Issue 2, 1 July 74–81
- Mitchell, Joan (2012) 'Interview with Yves Michaud.' *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*. eds. Peter Selz, Kristine Stiles Berkeley: University of California Press, 32–34
- Mitchell, W.J.T. (1994) *Picture Theory* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Morgan, Alastair (2007) *Adorno's Concept of Life* London: Continuum
- Mosquero, Gerardo (1994), 'Meyer Schapiro, Marxist Aesthetics, and Abstract Art' trans. David Craven and Colleen Kattau *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 76-80
- Motherwell, Robert (1992) *The Collected Writings of Robert Motherwell* ed. Stephanie Terenzio Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Motherwell, Robert; Reinhardt, Ad eds. (1951) *Modern Artists in America* New York: Wittenborn Schultz.

- Motherwell, Robert; Rosenberg, Harold (1947) 'Editorial' *Possibilities I 1*
- Mussell, Simon (2013) 'Mimesis Reconsidered: Adorno and Tarkovsky Contra Habermas' *Film-Philosophy* 17.1. 212-233.
- Naifeh, Steven; Smith, Gregory White (1989) *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* London: Barrie & Jenkins
- Nelson, Maggie (2007) *Women, The New York School, and Other True Abstractions* Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- Newman, Barnett (1990) *Selected Writings and Interviews* ed. John P. O'Neill. New York: Alfred A. Knopf
- Nochlin, Linda (2015) *Women Artists: The Linda Nochlin Reader* ed. Maura Reilly. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Oliver, Myrna (1999, 9 April) 'Eva Cockcroft; Venice Muralist Who Used Art to Explore Social Themes' *Los Angeles Times* retrieved from <http://www.articles.latimes.com/1999/apr/09/local/me-25678>
- Orton, Fred; Pollock, Griselda (1985) 'Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed' *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* ed. Francis Francina London: Paul Chapman Publishing 167 -178
- Orton, Fred (1993) 'Footnote One: the Idea of the Cold War' ed. David Thistlewood, *American Abstract Expressionism* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. 179-193
- (2013) 'Action, Revolution, and Painting: Resumed' eds. Carter, Warren; Haran, Barnaby; Schwartz, Frederic J. *Renew Marxist Art History* London: Art Books Publishing Ltd. 333-362.
- Osborne, Peter, (1989) 'Aesthetic Autonomy and the Crisis of Theory: Greenberg, Adorno, and the Problem of Post-Modernism in the Visual Arts' *new formations* No.9
- (2013) *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*. London: Verso.
- Owens, Craig (1994) *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, Critique* Berkeley: University
- Partisan Review Editors, (2007) 'Editorial Statement (1957)' *The New York Intellectuals Reader* ed. Neil Jumonville New York: Routledge 59-63.
- Peiffer, Prudence (2015) 'Joan Mitchell' *Artforum* Vol. 53 No.9. 203.
- Perl, Jed, (2016) 'In the Sculptor's Studio: Calder & Stella' *New York Review of Books*. Volume LXIII, Number 2, February 11 – February 24,. 8-11.
- Persinger, Cynthia L. (2007) *The Politics of Style: Meyer Schapiro and the Crisis of Meaning in Art History* Unpublished PhD Thesis.
- Plass, Ulrich, (2012) *Language and History in Adorno's Notes to Literature* London: Routledge.

- Pohl, Frances K. (1981) 'An American in Venice: and United States Foreign Policy at the Venice Biennale or Portrait of the Artist as an American Liberal,' *Art History* 4 80-113
- Polcari, Stephen (1988) 'Abstract Expressionism: "New and Improves"' *Art Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 3 174-180
- Pollock, Jackson (1947) 'My Painting' *Possibilities* 1 79
- Powell, Richard J. (1997) *Black Art and Culture in the Twentieth Century* London: Thames and Hudson
- Puchner, Martin (2006) *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Garde* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Rampley, Matthew (1996) 'Identity and Difference: Jackson Pollock and the Ideology of the Drip' *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 2 83-94.
- Ranciere, Jacques (2013) *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* Trans. Zakir Paul. London: Verso
- Ratcliff, Carter (2016) 'An Improvised Community' *Abstract Expressionism* ed. David Anfam. London: Royal Academy of Arts. 70-86.
- Rubin, William (1999) 'Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition' *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles and Reviews* ed. Pepe Karmel New York: Museum of Modern Art 118-176
- Rubin, Andrew N. (2012) *Archives of Authority: Empire, Culture and the Cold War* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Rebentisch, Juliane (2012) *Aesthetics of Installation Art* Trans, Daniel Hendrickson; Gerrit Jackson. Berlin: Sternberg Press
- Roberts, Michael (2016) *The Long Depression: How it Happened, Why it Happened, and What Happens Next* Chicago: Haymarket Books
- Robinson, Walter (2014, 3 April) 'Flipping and the Rise of Zombie Formalism' *Artspace* retrieved from http://www.artspace.com/magazine/contributors/see_here/the_rise_of_zombie_formalism-52184
- Rose, Gillian (2014) *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* London: Verso.
- Rose, Barbara (1983) *Lee Krasner: A Retrospective* New York: The Museum of Modern Art.
- Rothko, Mark (2006) *Writing on Art* ed. Miguel Lopez-Remiro New Haven: Yale University Press
- Rosenberg, Harold (1962) *The Tradition of the New* London: Thames and Hudson.
- (1969) *Artworks and Packages*, London: Thames and Hudson

--- (1979) *Barnett Newman*, New York: Abrams..

Rubinfeld, Florence (1997) *Clement Greenberg: A Life* New York: Scribner

Rushing, W. Jackson (1986) 'Ritual and Myth: Native American Culture and Abstract Expressionism' *The Spiritual In Art: Abstract Painting, 1850-1985* ed. Maurice Tuchman New York: Abbeville Press 273-295

Stadler, Ingrid, (1982) 'The Idea of Art and Its Criticism: A Rational Reconstruction of a Kantian Doctrine' *Essays in Kant's Aesthetics*, eds. Ted Cohen and Paul Guyer, The University of Chicago Press 195-218

Sandler, Irving, (1970) *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism* New York: Harper & Row

--- (2009) *Abstract Expressionism and the American Experience: A Reevaluation* Lenox: Hard Press Editions

Salgado, Gabriela (2014) *Pangaea: New Art from Africa and Latin America* London: Saatchi Gallery.

Sartwell, Crispin (2010) *Political Aesthetics*. London: Cornell University Press

Saunders, Linda, ed. (1991) 'Clement Greenberg with Peter Fuller' *Modern Painters*, Vol 4, No 4, 19-20.

Schapiro, Meyer (1977) *Romanesque Art* London: Chatto & Windus

--- (1982) *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries*. New York: George Braziller

Schlesinger Jr., Arthur M. (1988) *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* New York: Da Capo Press

Seckler, Dorothea (1964 2 November) *Oral history interview with Lee Krasner* retrieved from <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-lee-krasner-12507>

Seitz, William C. (1983) *Abstract Expressionist Painting in America* Cambridge: Harvard University Press

Steinberg, Leo (1972) *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* London: Oxford University Press.

Stephanson, Anders (2011) 'Kennan: Realism as Desire' *The Invention of International Relations Theory* ed. Nicolas Guilhot New York: Columbia University Press 162-182

Shahn, Ben *The Shape of Content* (1957) Cambridge: Harvard University Press

Shapiro, David (1973) 'Social Realism Reconsidered' *Social Realism: Art as a Weapon* ed. Shapiro, David, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co. 3-39

Shapiro, David; Shapiro, Cecile (1985) 'Abstract Expressionism: The Politics of Apolitical Painting' *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* ed. Francis Francina London: Paul Chapman Publishing 135-151.

- Shiff, Richard (2011a) *Between Sense and de Kooning* London: Reaktion Books Ltd.
- (2011b) *The Figure: Movement and Gesture* London: The Pace Gallery
- Siegel, Paul N (1970) 'Introduction' Leon Trotsky *On Literature and Art*. New York: Pathfinder Press 7-26
- Smith, Nicholas J. (2001) 'Why Hardcore Goes Soft: Adorno, Japanese Noise and the Extirpation of Dissonance' *Cultural Logic* Vol. 4, No. 2 Retrieved from <https://clogic.eserver.org/4-2/smith>
- Spiteri, Raymond (2016) 'Surrealism and the Question of Politics, 1925–1939' *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism* ed. David Hopkins Chichester: John Wiley & Sons 110-131
- Steiner, Shepherd (2014) 'Occupy 21st Street! Helen Frankenthaler at Gagosian' *Afterall*, Issue 35 5-21
- Stonor Saunder, Francis (1999) *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* London: Granta Books
- Storr, Robert, (1990) 'No Joy in Mudville: Greenberg's Modernism Then and Now' *Modern Art and Popular Culture: Readings in High and Low* eds. Kirk Varndoe, Adam Gopnick New York: The Museum of Modern Art. 160-191
- Street, Ben (2016) *Abstract Expressionism: Exhibition in Focus* Royal Academy of Arts.
- Sylvester, David (1990) 'Adolph Gottlieb: An Interview' *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record*. ed. David Shapiro, Cecile Shapiro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 264-269
- Swanson, Carl (2014, 3 July) 'Oscar Murillo Perfectly Encapsulates the Current State of the Contemporary Art World' *Vulture* retrieved from <http://www.vulture.com/2014/06/oscar-murillo-perfectly-represents-contemporary-art-world.html>
- Thornhill, Chris (2006) 'Adorno Reading Kant' *Studies in social and Political Thought*, (12). 98-110
- Trotsky, Leon (1970) *Literature and Art* ed. Paul N. Siegel London: Pathfinder
- (2005) *Literature and Revolution* trans. Rose Strunsky Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Truskolaski, Sebastian (2014) 'Adorno's Imageless Materialism' *Studies in Social and Political Thought* Volume 23 14-23
- Varndoe, Kirk (1998) *Jackson Pollock* New York: The Museum of Modern Art
- Wald, Allan M. (1987) *The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press
- Waltemath, Joan (2007, 4 September) 'Conversation with Jay Bernstein' *The Brooklyn Rail* Retrieved from <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2007/09/art/berstein>
- Watson, Ben (2011) *Adorno for Revolutionaries* London: Unkant

- Watson, Stephen H. (2009) *Crescent Moon over the Rational* Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Wayne, Michael (2014) *Red Kant: Aesthetics, Marxism and the Third Critique* London: Bloomsbury
- Wellmer, Albrecht (1998) *Endgames: The Irreconcilable Nature of Modernity* trans. David Midgley. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- White, Gabriel 'Foreword' (1959) *The New America Painting* Tate Gallery. London.. 6.
- Whiteside, Kerry H. (1988) *Merleau-Ponty and the Foundation of an Existential Politics* Princeton: Princeton University Press,
- Wistrich, Robert, (1979) *Trotsky: Fate of a Revolutionary* London: Robson Books,
- Wollen, Peter (1993) *Raiding the Icebox: Reflections on Twentieth Century Culture* London: Verso
- Wood, Christopher S. (1998) 'Perspective' *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Kelly, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3: 477-81
- Young, John W. (1991) *Cold War Europe 1945-1989: A Political History* London: Edward Arnold.
- Yun Lee, Lisa (2005) *Dialectics of the Body: Corporeality in the Philosophy of T.W. Adorno* New York; London: Routledge
- Zuidervaart, Lambert (1991) *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion*. Cambridge: MIT Press
- (2007) *Social Philosophy after Adorno* Cambridge: MIT Press

Figures



Fig. 1 Barnett Newman, *The Command*, oil on canvas, 1946, Collection of Öffentliche



Fig. 2 Barnett Newman, *Onement I*, oil on canvas, 1948, collection of Museum of



Fig. 3 Clyfford Still, *PH-150*, Oil on canvas, 1958, Collection of The Clyfford Still Museum, Denver



Fig. 4 Clyfford Still, *PH-1140*, Oil on canvas, 1957, Collection of the Clyfford Still Museum, Denver



Fig. 5 Mark Rothko, *Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea*, oil on canvas, 1944, Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York



Fig . 6 Mark Rothko, *Untitled 1948*, oil on canvas, 1948, Collection of Fondation Beyeler, Riehen



Fig. 7 Lee Krasner, *Untitled*, oil on panel, 1948, Caryn and Craig Effron



Fig. 8 Robert Motherwell, *Wall Painting No. III*, Oil on canvas, 1953, Private Collection

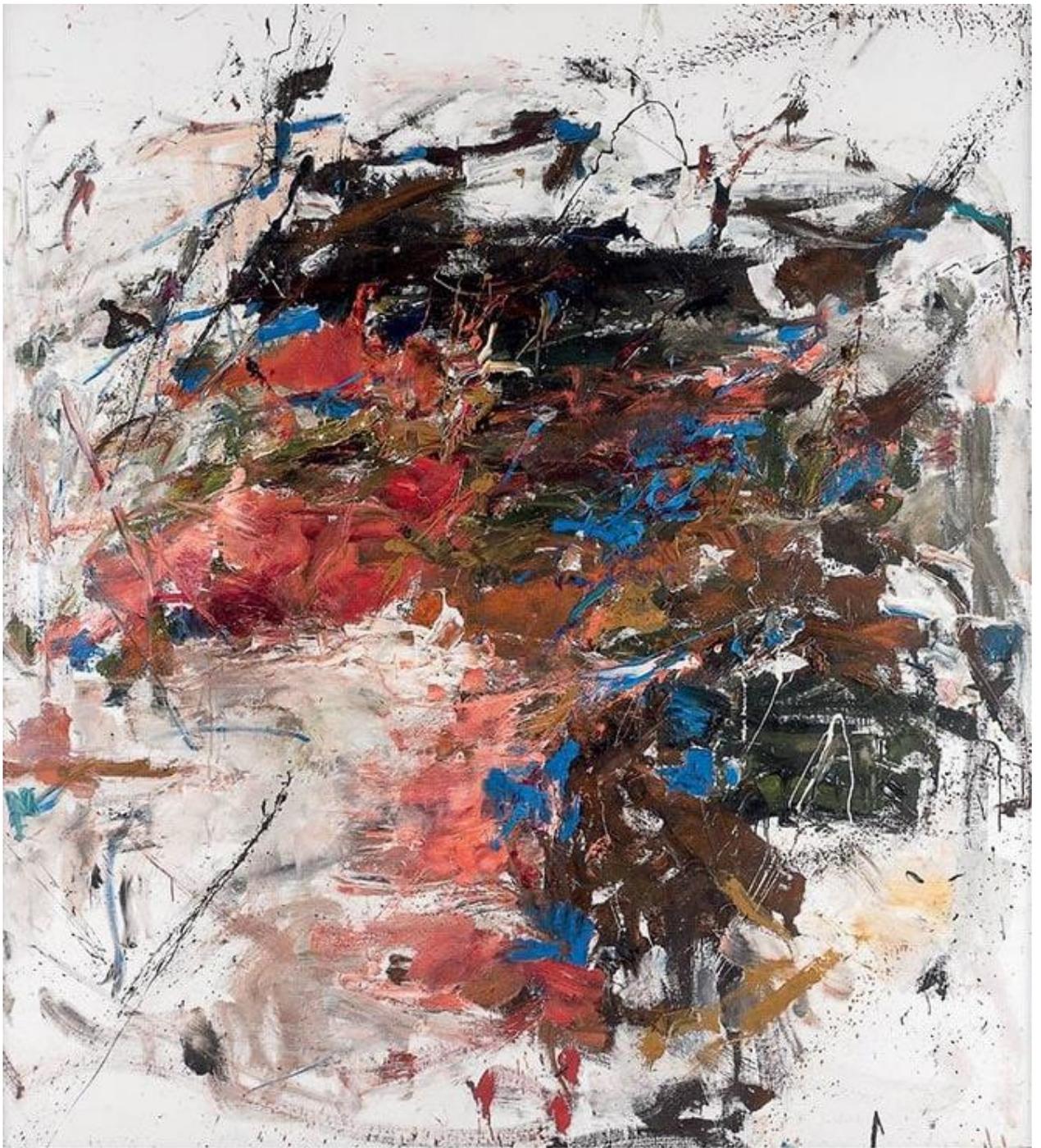


Fig. 9 Joan Mitchell, *Mandres*, oil on canvas, 1961-62, Private Collection



Fig. 10 Franz Kline, *Untitled*, enamel on canvas, 1952, collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art. New York



Fig. 11 Jackson Pollock, *Mural*, oil and casein on canvas, 1943, collection of The University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City

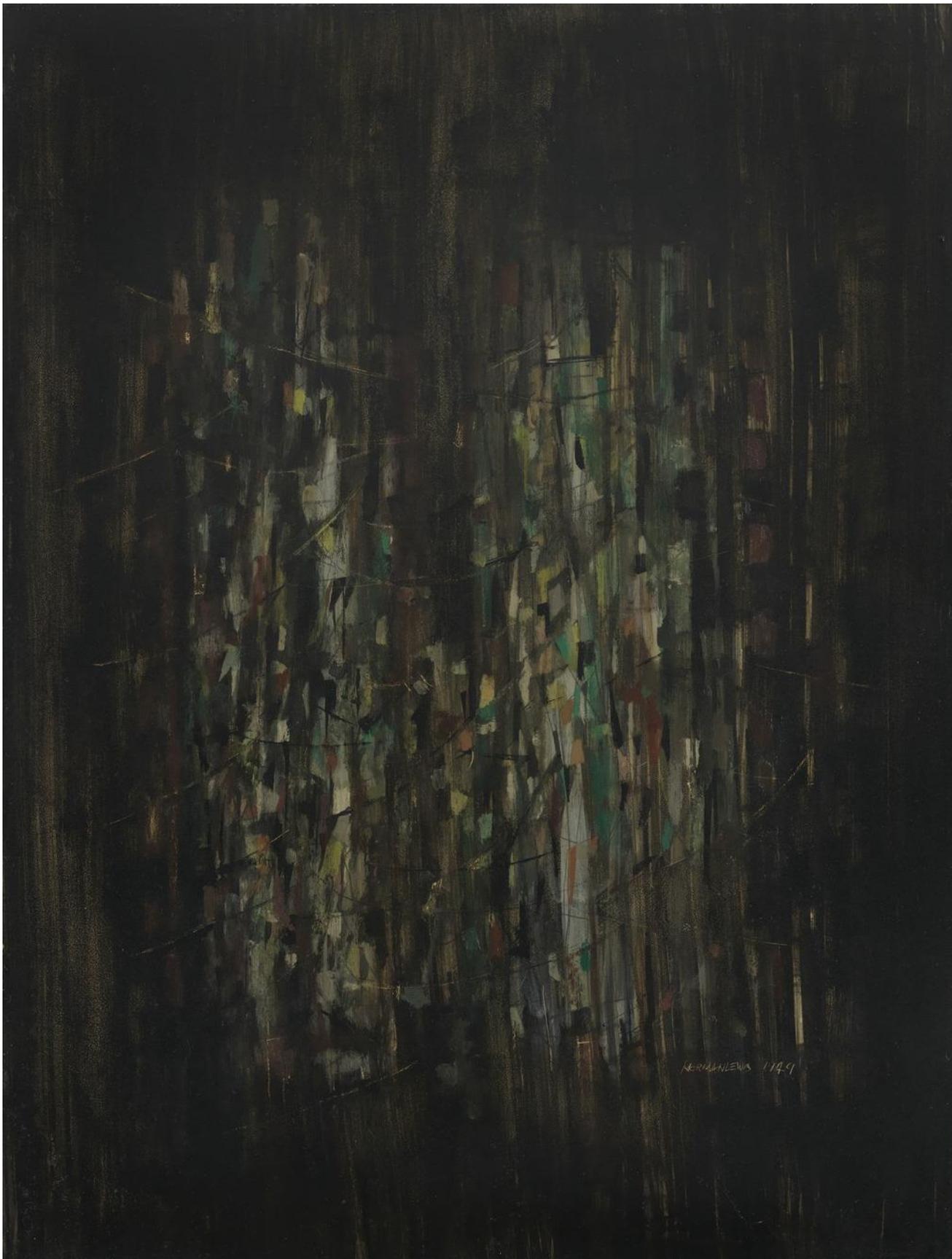


Fig. 12 Norman Lewis, *City Night*, oil on wood, 1949, collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York



Fig. 13 Günther Förg, Lead Paintings, Exhibition View. White Cube, Mason's Yard, London. 2015.

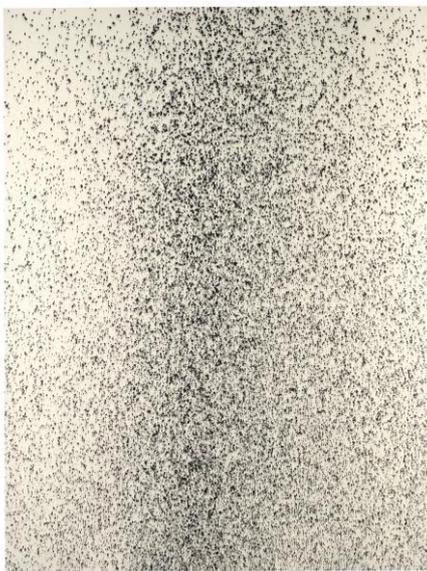


Fig. 13 Lucien Smith, *Two Sides of the Same Coin*, acrylic on unprimed canvas, 2012, private collection



Fig. 14 Jules Olitski, *Patutsky in Paradise*, acrylic on canvas, 1966, collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario



Fig. 15 Oscar Murillo *Untitled*, 2014, Private Collection

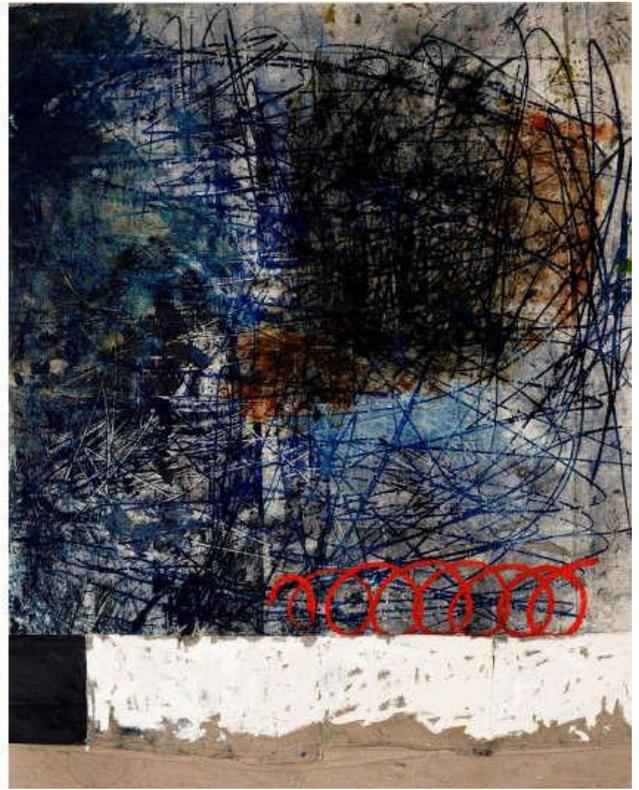


Fig. 16 Oscar Murillo *1/2*, 2014, Private Collection

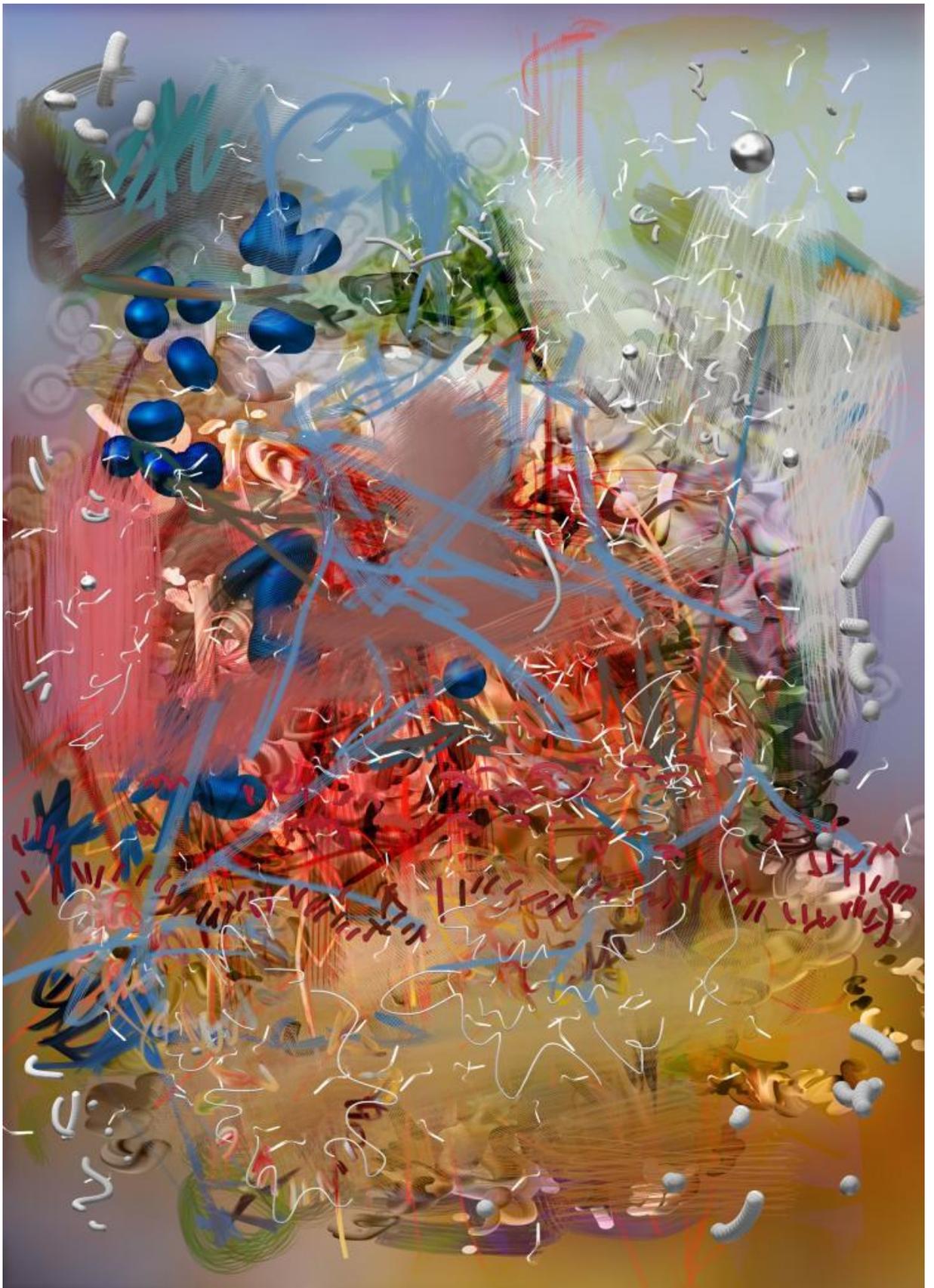


Fig. 17 Petra Cortright, *nude drawing model in Eisenhower bibliography spine*, 2016, Private Collection