

Jackson Pollock Number 32, 1950

Painting as Presence

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(Übersetzung: Katrin Kolk)

[S.5]

Action instead of composition?

»At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act - rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze or ›express‹ an object, actual or imagined.«¹

With these words, art critic Harold Rosenberg coined the term ›action painting‹ in 1952, which is nowadays mainly associated with the work of Jackson Pollock. As an ›Action Painter‹, Pollock became the leading figure of the first genuine American avant-garde, ending the French hegemony in the realm of modern art, which had lasted for 200 years. Contemporary comments, accompanying the early success of a type of painting which seemed to break with all norms of artistic composition, sound quite ambivalent. Rosenberg's essay also includes the evil notion of the »apocalyptic wallpaper«²; in *Life*, Pollock's art, placed among colorful adverts, made headlines as early as in August, 1949, due to its unusual and thus scandalous manner of production; and the story of Pollock's wild paintings being allegedly created thanks to a permanent alcohol delirium, is a commonplace in literature.³

For today's viewing habits, as well, the Düsseldorf work ›Number 32, 1950‹ is still a challenge, due to the moments of suspicion of a merely decorative or provocative meaning. Intertwined in multiple ways, partly entangled, partly loosely scattered black forms reveal at first sight that they are not painted in a conventional sense. Pollock neither worked with an easel [S.6] nor used brush or palette; instead, he dripped common enamel over the canvas, which was placed on the ground, during several work steps. ›Number 32, 1950‹ belongs to the few large scale formats of the classic ›Drip

¹ Rosenberg 1952, p. 76.

² Ibid, p. 82.

³ Cf. Corlett 1987 concerning the controversial comments on Pollock's paintings.

Paintings*, which were created by Pollock between 1947 and 1950. Despite all reservations they became the epitome of painting after the Second World War. Being Pollock's only main work accessible in Europe, ›Number 32‹ has relatively often been discussed in German art historical research.⁴

Pollock owes his ambivalent popularity to his monumental use of dripping, which is, compared to traditional painting, in no way less complicated. The color stream can be regulated by the consistency and quantity of the absorbed pigment, but mainly by means of the hand's and arm's fast movement. The degree of drying of single color layers also belongs to the realm of aesthetic decisions. However, ›Number 32‹ shows that not all color traces were created deliberately. Relinquishing a direct contact between the tool of painting and the canvas, coincidence has apparently been given a crucial role in the creative process. Although drip painting is insolubly linked to Pollock's name, it did not appear out of nowhere. The yearning for an abolition of the ›tyranny of the brush‹, combined with the idea of an impulsive way of painting stems from the modern tradition of ›anti-art‹. Marcel Duchamp as its founder renounced academic technique as early as in the days of the First World War, with his ready-mades*. Being similarly rebellious, Francis Picabia renounced bourgeois art tradition, but also the aesthetic [P.8] canon of cubist* avant-garde, christening an inkblot ›La Sainte Vierge‹ in 1920 (Ill. 1). This was not a one-time anarchical gesture, as the revised version of the inkblot in Picabia's magazine ›391‹ shows.⁵

Contrary to its anti-artistic self-conception, the Dadaist movement, to which Picabia and Duchamp belonged to, has been integrated into modernist art; an aesthetic alternative to the consciously composed painting, as we find it in Pollock, already took shape here. Besides the renouncement of a direct contact with the canvas, liquefaction of color played a crucial role for Picabia's ›La Sainte Vierge‹ as well as for Pollock's ›Number 32‹, since by means of it, gravitation and the colors' flow behavior obtained a decisive role in the creative process.

[P.9] In more limited ways, Jean Arp likewise included ›the laws of coincidence‹ in his work. Using a pencil, he drew outlines in a gestural, impulsive manner, which only

⁴ The following authors dedicate themselves extensively to the Düsseldorf painting which was acquired in 1964: Kambartel 1970, Putz 1975, pp. 214-250 (with extensive comments on the literature); Hepp 1982, pp. 60-98; Verspohl 1991, pp. 515-526; further literature references in O'Connor/Thaw, vol. 2, p. 11, and Werner Schmalenbach: Bilder des 20. Jahrhunderts. Die Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen Düsseldorf, München 1986, p. 400f.

⁵ Unknown collection, reprinted in the dada-journal ›391‹, Paris, no. 12, March 1920; see also William A. Camfield: Francis Picabia. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 1970, p. 28, ill. 10.

partly served as a template for the planes which were willed with India ink. His ›Automatic Drawing‹ (Ill. 2) already hints to the surrealist postulation of an immediate record of the unconscious, which was formulated by Andre Breton in 1924.⁶ Like him, most members of the European avant-garde immigrated to New York during the Second World War, which led to a bustling exchange of ideas. Through the dominating surrealism, Dadaism was rediscovered in the late 1940s.⁷

Compared to the Düsseldorf work of Pollock, the differences are [p. 10] obvious here. Picabia's inkblots appear like mysterious living creatures, an impression which is intensified by the radiating, small sprinkles. Arp's ›Automatic Drawing‹ and the untitled composition by Salvador Dali (Ill. 3) develop a basic vocabulary of organic forms, which we also encounter in some artists' works of the New York School*, most visibly maybe in the oeuvre of Arshile Gorky. His painting ›The Leaf of the Artichoke is an Owl‹ (Ill. 4) recalls poetic metaphors through its soft, slurring forms and a watercolor-like pale use of colors, similar to how Arp's drawing evokes associations of animal- or plant forms, or human organs, without being palpable. An erotic meaning of these biomorphic [P. 11] forms, for example as a ›phallic finger‹ has not only been emphasized by Dali. New York artist Robert Motherwell, also known as art historian and theoretician, described very plastically, the sexual associations of Joan Miró, whom Pollock admired deeply.⁸ ›Number 32‹, however, refuses such a decyphering into vital elements; not even single forms, which could be described as detached from the whole, can be recognized here. This is also true for the small work on paper (Ill. 5), which is closer to the medium of the comparative examples. A distinction between the genres painting and drawing can only be achieved through the used material, canvas or paper, no longer through a differentiation of artistic means into ›painterly‹ or [P.12] ›graphic‹.⁹

⁶ Breton 1924, p. 11-43, esp. p. 26. Apart from Picabia's inkblot, Pollock's dripping was preceded by numerous attempts of other artists to work with liquid and/or dripping paint. See for example Miró, Hans Hofmann or Arshile Gorky. For a comparison with Max Ernst's ›drip paintings‹ see Putz 1975, pp. 221-223. For the antecedents in general, see Rubin IV, p. 28 f.; Landau 1989, p. 150.

⁷ Robert Motherwell published the anthology ›The Dada Painters and Poets‹ in 1951, after extensive preparations. He was convinced that Rosenberg's ›action painting‹ was inspired by the battle cry of the German dadaist Richard Huelsenbeck. Literature was supposed to ›be action... with a gun in your hands‹ (Naifeh/Smith, p. 703).

⁸ Exh.cat Salvador Dali. Retrospektive 1920-1980. Gemälde, Zeichnungen, Grafiken, Objekte, Filme, Schriften, (Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris 1979/80), München 1993, p. 57; Robert Motherwell: The significance of Miró, in: Art News, Mai 1959, S. 65, quoted in detail in William S. Rubin: Dada und Surrealismus, Stuttgart 1968, p. 155 f.

⁹ Cf. Rose 1969, p. 78, concerning the monumental character of Pollock's ›Drawing‹.

The familiar categories no longer work. Pollock's work also seems more inaccessible than an ›Improvisation‹ (Ill. 6) by Wassily Kandinsky, although the latter seems to be related to the definition of Action Painting quoted in the beginning. Kandinsky thought »mainly unconscious, sudden expressions of inner processes«.¹⁰ His emotional abstraction was seen as anticipating new American painting, which aimed at distancing itself from French rational painterly tradition by remembering German expressionism*.¹¹ If we, however, compare Kandinsky and Pollock as ›abstract expressionists',¹² there are, apart from the non-geometrical dynamics, far more differences than mutual characteristics. By means of its small format, Kandinsky's oeuvre holds an intimate character, turned towards a contemplative viewing, which is renounced by Pollock's large scale format. Although not bound by object description, the color in Kandinsky's works [p. 13] is organized by formal order, vaguely resembling a landscape. The title ›Improvisation Flood‹ strengthens the iconographic specification of regarding the image. Pollock's painting not only lacks any theme, the spatial fluidum which Kandinsky makes use of in diagonal aligned painterly planes is also missing here. The restriction to black also does not give a suggestion for a spatial-hierarchical outline, as the academic painterly tradition intended for chiaroscuro*. If Kandinsky's work demonstrates a difference between the compositional outline and the application of paint, Pollock's work shows the identity of color and composition; there is no concept of composition anymore which stands for itself, e.g. in a sketch. Thus, an aspect transgressing the material elements is lacking here. In Pollock, we are confronted with the painterly means themselves – the black enamel, the ungrounded, yellowish white canvas. The painting is bare presence, referring to nothing more than the material itself in its arrangement. Its disconcerting presence is increased by the wet, shiny spots on the surface, where the enamel has not been absorbed by the canvas.¹³ The problem of

¹⁰ Kandinsky 1912, p. 142. Another translation and publication of Kandinsky's writings in New York 1946 and 1947.

¹¹ Concerning abstract expressionists' reference to Kandinsky see Clement Greenberg: Kandinsky (1948, 1957), in: Greenberg 1961, pp. 111-114, esp. p. 112 and Greenberg 1955, p. 212.

¹² Alfred Barr: *Cubism and Abstract Art*, Harvard University Press Cambridge, Massachusetts 1936, p. 64, was the first to coin the term ›abstract expressionism‹, referring to Kandinsky, Klee, Marc, Feininger, but also Arp. Possibly, the term's transfer to the American avant-garde stems from Barr, who supported these artists. Greenberg 1955, p. 209, note 1, mentions Robert Coates, from the ›New Yorker‹, as ›inventor‹ of the specific American Abstract Expressionism. Concerning the earlier German history of the term, see Seitz 1983, p. 1, note 1. Cf. also Irving Sandler: *Der Lärm des Verkehrs auf dem Weg zum Walden Pond*, in: *Exh.cat. Amerikanische Kunst*, p. 89(-96).

¹³ Cf. Verspohl 1991, p. 516, concerning the contrariness of the ›fresh‹ impression. The notion of ›un-freshness‹, coined by Krauss, 1993, p. 248, seems even more fittingly here. Her comparison of the enamel

abstract art, as it was founded also by Kandinsky, with its renouncement of a visible painterly subject and the resulting questioning of an adequate understanding, has been enriched by a new facet, since ›Number 32‹, represents, as a critic once stated, «nothing: no facts, no ideas, no geometrical forms».¹⁴ Pollock himself on the one hand emphasized his interest in the surrealist idea of painting out of the subconscious [p.14], yet denied, on the other hand, any randomness,¹⁵ without being able to name a content the painting would have to represent. The reproach of his works being too mazy, missing any structural order, harmony and technique, was countered by him with an irrevocable »No chaos damn it!«.¹⁶ A critic's complaint of his paintings having neither beginning nor end was appropriated by Pollock as a positive feature of his art.¹⁷ Aesthetic order is, therefore, necessarily linked to a sense of disorder in Pollock's view. We need to search for the meaning of the painting in this dialectical correlation.

[p. 14]

The order of disorder

Above and below are no longer fixed parameters gained through observation in the Düsseldorf work. It is only by signing, in this case on the back of the canvas, that Pollock designated the painting's alignment, claiming it to be finished. Due to the subsequent fixing of the canvas, the color traces in the work's outer edges have been cut. Photographs of Pollock's studio (Ill. 7) show how color often splashes beyond the

skins with the skin that forms on stale milk, illustrates the contrast between the pastos applied oil paint, which always evokes light and space. Cf. also Gehlen 1960, pp. 195-200, the aesthetic of the ›usedness‹.

¹⁴ Quote by Bruno Alfieri, critic of the Venedig biennial. ›Chaos, Damn It‹, in: Time, November 20, 1950, p. 71. Alfieri's comment is pushed into a polemic direction here through abridgements. Cf. Corlett 1987, pp. 89-91.

¹⁵ In 1944, Pollock states, with the aid of Howard Putzels from the gallery ›Art of this Century‹: »I am especially impressed by their (the Surrealists, R.P.) concept of the source of art being rooted in the subconscious. I am particularly interested in this idea as a painter, since the two artists I admire most, Picasso and Miró, still live abroad.« (Putz 1975, p.37) Again and again the following quote from 1947/48, with which Rosenberg was allegedly of help (Naifeh/Smith, p. 551), has been quoted: »If I am in my painting, I am not conscious of my actions. It is only after a sort of ›becoming acquainted‹ that I realize, what I just did«. Quoted from Putz 1975, p. 62. In an interview in 1950 Pollock states: »I think...with enough experience it seems possible to control the flow of the color and... I don't need randomness - since I negate randomness.« (ibid, p. 80). Concerning the divergence of opinions in the circle of Matta, who came to New York in 1939 as first surrealist painter, see Landau, p. 99. The relationship between abstract expressionism and surrealist automatism is thematized by Buettner 1981, p. 77-80.

¹⁶ Jackson Pollock: Letter to the Editor, in: Time, December 11, 1950, p. 10. Pollock reacts here on the aggressive polemic of the magazine (see note 14).

¹⁷ Pollock (see quote from the back cover) in an interview of the ›New Yorker‹, August 5, 1950, published as »The Talk of the Town«, quoted in O'Connor 1967, p.51.

canvas onto the ground, blurring the border between image and ›non-image‹ at this state of the work production. Thus, Pollock controverted the idealist understanding of the work of art as a closed, hermetic order. The traditional problem of the adequate frame, linked to the conventional notion of painting as brushstroke painting, [p. 16] is no longer of importance, which gives rise to the fundamental question whether one can still speak of a ›painting‹ in this case at all.

The internal structure initially seems to confirm the negation of the work's boundaries, established within the production process. Homogenous condensation of the color material articulates the picture plane, rendering it impossible to focus one's view. The small-sectioned color network is ›non-relational‹, its forms appear without definite relation towards the size and proportion of the image format. Such a harmonious matching of the single parts and their collective subordination to the totality of the composition had been a valid norm of the work of art since the renaissance, still being of primary importance to Kandinsky.¹⁸

In the 1940s, art critic Clement Greenberg established the notion ›all-over‹ for this artistic innovation,¹⁹ which, however, shares with the ›non-relational‹ the one-sidedness [p.17] of catchy keywords, since an arbitrary pattern of the whole picture plane resp. an amorphous tangle are thus suggested.²⁰ Compared to the small-sized works of Mark Tobey with their chiseled impression (Ill.8) as well as to early experiments of Pollock²¹, the all-over of the ›classic‹ drip paintings appears as a prominently ›poly-focally‹²² picture plane which is structured by various foci. Moreover, in comparison with related tendencies in European painting, essential differences are obvious, despite all commonalities. With Wols (Ill. 9), informal* painting of the 1950s takes its beginning; yet just like Georges Mathieu (Ill. 10) who is still closer to Pollock's style, Wols did not

¹⁸ Kandinsky 1912, p. 78: All parts of the picture have to be subordinated to the authority of the whole, which is composed according to the »principle of the inner necessity«. For Kandinsky's conservatism and the approach to the all-over within constructivism cf. Honisch 1977. For the term of the non-relational resp. non-relational art see Max Imdahl: ›Is it a flag, or is it a painting?‹ Über mögliche Konsequenzen der konkreten Kunst, in: Bildautonomie und Wirklichkeit. Zur theoretischen Begründung moderner Malerei, Mittenwald 1981, pp. 69-96, pp. 114-119, with reference to Pollock, p. 73 a. p. 75.

¹⁹ See Greenberg 1948 and others.

²⁰ Cf. Putz 1975, p. 261f. and Hepp 1982, p. 60, note 4, on the criticism of the notion of the all-over.

²¹ See e.g. [Over all Composition], 1934-38, reproduced in Landau 1989, p. 41.

²² Term by Kambartel 1970, pp. 15-24.

dispense with a gestalt-like centering of the color material. [p.18] The radical all-over is an American phenomenon.²³

Within the small format, the principle of diffusion yet remains limited due to the centering effect of the frame. In the decisive year 1947, Pollock's all-over compositions, e.g. ›Comet‹ (Ill. 11), display, moreover, a thick, covering layer of color. Here, Pollock predominantly worked with oil paint and only used isolated ›drip‹ accents using Duco, a synthetic enamel. Only little by little he succeeded in spanning the picture plane exclusively with splashed threads of color, and it is only by means of this loosening of the color application that the picture plane is ›unleashed‹, creating the abrupt brusqueness which is part of ›Number 32‹. By its mere size, Pollock increased, just like Clifford Still, Mark Rothko and, particularly in his later works, Barnett Newman (Ill. 12) the lack of clarity of the picture, which appears to transform into a wall-like object, into an independent reality, since it no longer forces a perspective upon the viewer. [p. 20] The fact that ›Number 32‹ is installed in Düsseldorf on a free-standing white movable wall strengthens this ambivalence, in contrast to earlier presentations, which over-emphasized either the wall-like or the picture-like character of the work. In the exhibition at Betty Parsons (Ill. on the back cover), the huge drip paintings [p.21] are installed next to each other in a dense, crowded manner, reaching from the floor to the ceiling, thus appearing *instead* of the wall, so to speak; and so confirmed the misunderstanding of their character as a decorative setting, which gave occasion to the magazine *Vogue* using this for a fashion show.²⁴ At documenta II in Kassel, ›Number 32‹ was prestigiously installed at the angular point of a large axis (Ill. 13), thus returning, by means of the contrasting background of the wall, the frame to the work and creating the appearance of a traditional panel painting rather than a spatial incision into the wall. In its current presentation, Pollock's work unequivocally and almost dissonantly appears in front of the wall. In its yellowish white, the canvas is far too tangible in front of the homogenous white of the wall and thus incapable of establishing

²³ This is not to affirm any kind of nationalism. One needs to differentiate between artistic accomplishments, which, while of international significance, develop in a certain place at a certain time, and their exploitation by political interests. The fact that, in the face of its ideological usage, art itself is often denied its own content will prove to be a main problem of interpretation.

²⁴ On March 1st, 1951, *Vogue* published photographs by Cecil Beaton, which showed models presenting the latest fashion in front of Pollock's works in the gallery of Betty Parson. Reproduction of a model in front of ›Number 32‹ in: Exh.cat Pollock 1982, p. 279. Cf. Clark 1991, p. 174f. and Brüderlin 1993, p. 101. In 1952, a fashion imitating the ›drip style‹ was designed; see Erika Russ: Benton, Pollock and the Politics of Modernism. From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism, The University of Chicago Press 1991, p. 412f., Ill. 6.10.

the suggestion of a deepening or interruption of the wall's surface. The Düsseldorf work belongs to the series of the earliest monumental drip paintings, which also mark the peak of [p. 22] Pollock's oeuvre. ›Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950‹ (see Ill. 32) and ›One: Number 31, 1950‹ (Ill. 14) unmistakably show similar formal correspondences. Yet ›Number 32‹ takes in a special position; none of the other ›classic‹ drip paintings is monochrome and imparts so much weight to the textile ground of the painting. After 1951, the ›Black Paintings‹, e.g. ›Echo‹ (Ill. 15), aim once again at surrealism's biomorphic forms [p. 23], particularly reminding one of André Masson. In part, Pollock returned linear functions to the color black, thus again allowing figural associations. The partial uncovering of the hardboard which serves as pictorial carrier in the Stuttgart work ›Out of the Web: Number 7, 1949‹ (Ill. 17) has the same function. The forms, cut out from the layer of color, the so-called ›cut outs‹, with which Pollock probably [p. 24] hinted at Matisse, create a scenic dominance in contrast to the drip painting, which tends to become a kind of background. On the contrary, ›Number 32‹ treats color and ground as equal material, which of course is only fully evident in front of the original. Every reproduction levels surface structures, creating the false impression of the color of the canvas as a neutral background of a color complex homogenous in itself. [p.25] It is only through direct confrontation with the picture that heterogeneous surfaces unfold their effects. What can be seen remains hard to grasp in verbal terms, although ›Number 32‹ has a distinctive character, the crossing points of its color network are not distributed in a random manner but related to each other in a complex way, being quite similar in their gestalt. »In contrast to a blotted picture or random stains on a wall with coincidental outlines, Pollock's forms negate ... the contouring as such without losing their form character, that is, they do not dissolve into a mere mass of colors.«²⁵ Despite numerous color traces surpassing the edge, the all-over presents itself as whole; »the infinity character of the network articulates itself as work specific.«²⁶ The paint application becomes lighter towards the edges, [p. 26] although less pronounced than in ›One, Number 1931‹ (Ill. 14), which, for this reason, obtains a stronger plastic effect. Yet the provocative effect of a coincidental production remains, particularly in the Düsseldorf work, since the color structure not only appears as an artificial structure, but also puts forth the behavior of color itself in its confrontation and pervasion with the textile ground. At the spots where the enamel [p. 27] has been absorbed by the textile, it

²⁵ Hepp 1982, p. 61.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 72.

appears to have sunken in in a greyish black color, almost an immersion. The centers of the color thickening, on the other hand, show a deep black, glossy and wavy dried up surface. The consistent spatial effect of the reproduction, locating the black ›in front of‹ the picture plane, as if from a far sight, gives way to a changing spatial effect depending on perspective and incidence of light when facing the original from a close range.

[p. 29]

The mythical gesture

›Number 32‹ triggers an unfamiliar, thus unsettling visual experience, since it eludes all previous knowledge included in comprehension. Harold Rosenberg offered a way out of this confusion by channeling the view away from the work towards the artistic ›action‹ itself. »What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event.«²⁷ Since the viewer, however, cannot be part of this creative act and since an event as such cannot be hung on a wall, this choice of words was merely an attempt to bestow a meaning upon the forms of color, to render them legible as traces of life so to speak. Contrary to Pollock, who was skeptical towards surrealism, Rosenberg allowed himself to be guided thoroughly by the ideas of his friend Breton who absolutized the forces of the unconscious.²⁸ For him, the uncontrolled, ›automatic‹ gesture was not only the starting point of a work of art, the latter was supposed to evolve from irrational urges beyond all rational control. Certainly, Rosenberg also orientated himself towards Hans Namuth's impressive photographs and film shots of the working artist (Ill. 18 and 19). Namuth's visual and Rosenberg's literary stylization of the canvas as a ›stage‹ created the myth of Pollock²⁹, which became formative for popular processing of avant-garde art in the age of mass media. By the end of the 1940s, Pollock's dripping technique had been ironized spitefully; now, through Namuth's camera direction, it appeared to have become a mythical act: Although it could not eliminate doubts whether Pollock's method was

²⁷ Rosenberg 1952, p. 76

²⁸ Cf. Melken 1976, p. 9f, on the incompleteness of the surrealist reception of Freud.

²⁹ On the influence of Namuth's photographs and films on Rosenberg's concept of ›action painting‹ see Barbara Rose: Namuth's Photographs and the Pollock Myth, Part 1: Media Impact and the Failure of Criticism, in: Rose 1980. On the intrinsic interpretative pattern of the photographs see Rosalind Krauss: Reading Photographs as Text, *ibid.* It is rightly stressed here that Namuth's staged pictures served to underline the idea of aesthetic experience and artistic work being similar to an immediate event. The photographic staging of a mergence of artist and work often uses the view from above, such as the photograph of Burckhardt shows (Ill. 7).

actually an artistic procedure, it nourished the existentialist [p.30] zeitgeist.³⁰ The studio, covered, even wallpapered by the large scale formats ›Number 32‹, ›Autumn Rhythm‹ and ›One‹ becomes the stage for the self-absorbed artist, devoting himself to his vital impulse. These paintings testify to the fact that Pollock worked under great physical and emotional strain. They certainly do not reveal that Pollock's works evolved as much from reflection as from this seemingly intuitively inspired act. Even while he thought about beginning or continuing a work, the painter was ›in action‹, and there were often long periods of planning in between the single phases of working. Apart from that, Pollock left each layer of color to dry before he applied another one, a procedure which contradicted the painterly-abstract and impulsive attempts of the surrealists.³¹ In Namuth's photograph, a certain fuzziness evokes the impression of a breathtaking dynamic, sharp snapshots of the artist suggest – comparable to the filmic close up – the sight of the inner conflicts which would detonate the next instant and during the following action. The photographs instigate or at least encourage a psychological interpretation of the work. Pollock accommodated this public staging of his oeuvre with his austere statements by claiming to be 'in' the picture and to work ›directly‹.³² Rosenberg more eloquently, added: »The act-painting is of the same metaphysical substance as the artist's existence. The new painting has broken down every distinction between art and life.«³³ Yet how is one, as a viewer, supposed to behave in front of such an ›action painting‹? Rosenberg proposes the following: »Since the painter has become an actor, the spectator has to think in a vocabulary of action: its [p.32] inception, duration, direction – psychic state, concentration and relaxation of the will, passivity, alert waiting.«³⁴ This, however, is not possible in the case of ›Number 32‹. The painterly act seems to be revealed to a large extent by the ungrounded canvas and the relatively parsimonious application of paint. Yet the limitation to only one color prevents any

³⁰ Verspohl 1991 attempts to substantiate Pollock's proximity to the »existentialist world experience« (p. 522) by means of the artist's famous statement »I am nature«, (see Naifeh/Smith, p. 486) which yet only justifies his refusal of a mere imitation of nature.

³¹ Towards the end of the 1930s, the ›Coulage‹, a mostly passive method, related to Picabia's ink spots, was used in surrealist circles. The seemingly marbled interlacing of enamel ›conjured‹ figures and spatial effects, which are foreign to drip painting. Cf. Rubin part IV, p. 29f.

³² Pollock 1947/48 (cf. Note 15); idem 1950, p. 80f. The ›direct‹ working refers to the non-use of sketches, thus the treatment of both drawing and painting as originals.

³³ Rosenberg 1952, p. 78.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 79.

insight into the temporal succession of the single steps of procedure.³⁵ The displayed ›choreography‹ dissolves again and again, the traces of color evade an isolating viewpoint which aims at separating the gestures which created them in the first place. The painterly elements »as information material on the artist's mental state remain neutral while painting.«³⁶ Neither can a Rorschach-test* be performed here. No form in Pollock's painting can be super- or subordinated to another, which probably creates the most confusion. All traces of enamel are part of several ›drip-actions‹ and correspond via direct connection, similarity of gestalt or a related structure of the surface with all the other elements of the picture's surface. Neither can the directions of the dripped color be interpreted as expressive gestures. The large scale format, traditionally associated with the monumental expressiveness of the public wall painting, adds to the difficulty of approaching the work. Despite this discrepancy, Rosenberg's transformation of painting into an existentialist act has widely influenced the reception of Pollock's drip painting. Semiotician* Umberto Eco perceived an example of the ›open artwork‹, »a way of painting which owns the freedom of nature«, which leads »us back to the creator's intention«.³⁷ Art history as well subordinated action painting [p. 33] under the theme of the identity of art and life.³⁸ While this reading offers promises it cannot deliver, it still documents an expectation which is brusquely dismissed by Pollock's work in truth. Thus, one can – by analyzing this interpretative pattern – trace the suppressed qualities of the work. Expecting to discover those through immediate experience would mean to neglect the fact that our vision is always bound to certain attitudes.

Only by understanding these pre-conscious, putatively self-evident conventions of perception, the way is cleared for their abolishment.³⁹ Rosenberg brought up a thought pattern rooted in German romanticism which was continued by neo-romantic avant-

³⁵ Cf. Putz 1975, p. 217, who, however, does not consequentially follow up this observation, cf. Hepp 1982, p. 65.

³⁶ Verspohl 1991, p. 520. Even when he was working with Matta on automatist experiments, Pollock himself had refused to interpret his color sprinkles. Cf. Landau 1989, p. 96.

³⁷ Eco 1977, p. 182. On a criticism of Eco's approach see Hepp 1982, p. 36.

³⁸ Hofmann 1978 indeed describes the borderline situation of art and ›non-art‹ (p. 137), yet only to generalize the latter within the rhetoric of the ›coming to pass‹ (p. 438) of painting. Similarly, Haftmann 1987, vol. 1, p. 380, sees in Pollock's art the »drama of contemporary existence again being placed within the theme of modern art«. His comment on documenta II (1959, p. 19) is even more sonorous: »Like a dancing dervish, Jackson Pollock walks around on his often vast canvasses, drawing, with a dripping can of color, the desperate choreography of his life's trace...«.

³⁹ Cf. Peter Bürger: Zur Kritik der idealistischen Ästhetik, Frankfurt 1990, p. 9

garde movements in the early 20th century and revived by American artists in the 1940s. The widespread opinion the concept of 'action painting' pertained to was directed against modern art's isolation, the enigmatic objects and abstract figures of which lacked any direct social reference or, perceived to be even more offensive, seemed to merge with daily life. Thus, one attempted to interpret alienation and abstraction as a depiction of a pristine nature beyond the sensuous surface. From this alleged independence of society, the artists gained a revolutionary self-concept which also carried a religious lineament at times.

Similar to early modernism, Barnett Newman, intellectual head of the New York art scene, referred to the model of primitive cultures in order to prove the claim that »the aesthetic act always precedes [p.34] the social one«⁴⁰ By so proclaiming the new American abstraction to be a magic way of appropriating the world, he also related it to early thought patterns of art history. Wilhelm Worringer, for instance, deduced the abstract ›Kunstwollen‹ from the fear of the primitive who takes refuge from the enigmatic change of natural phenomena in ›eternal virtues‹ and therefore repudiates spatial, nature-oriented depiction.⁴¹ This anxiety, here understood as the root of artistic creation is identified by Newman as the role model function of primitive art, which was born out of »helplessness in the face of the void«.⁴² And similar to how Worringer's concept helped expressionist art on the road to success in Germany, since it made the abstract tendencies – which generally were perceived as a provocation – appear to be ascribable to a primordial religiousness, Newman now, forty years later, cleared the way for abstract expressionism with a related concept. Of course this was in neither case intended as a marketing strategy. In an idealistic manner, Newman rather attempted to turn the artists' actual isolation into something positive. With the era of the New Deal, a governmental art policy had ended, which had fostered realistic painting limited specifically to American themes by support programs. Pollock as well benefited from these measures up until 1942. With his program, Newman attempted to gain a social relevance, which until then seemed to have been reserved for the illustrative nationalism of the regionalists*, for the new abstract art which was not at all appreciated by the New

⁴⁰ Newman 1947, p. 59. Cf. Heynen 1979, pp. 56-59.

⁴¹ Wilhelm Worringer: *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (1907), Munich 1987, p. 49. The motive of the ›primitive fear of space‹ can be traced back to the ›tactical-objective‹ *Kunstwollen*, reclaimed by Riegl for ancient Roman culture. Alois Riegl: *Spätromische Kunstindustrie* (1901), Vienna 1927, p. 29ff.

⁴² Newman 1947, p. 59.

York public. With the 'sublime' impact of his large, barely structured color fields he associated mystical-anarchistic concepts of liberty, with which he also [p. 35] prized Pollock as a revolutionary.⁴³ Pollock's contender Willem de Kooning also reinforced the concept of painting as a non-conformist lifestyle, only within which its specific form was founded.⁴⁴ Art-historian Meyer Schapiro, having pronounced, from a Marxist perspective, abstract art to be ineffective in 1936, now, in 1957, celebrated the 'liberating force' of American avant-garde.⁴⁵ When Harold Rosenberg elevated the creative act to an existential moment, he thus met with a thought pattern already established by abstract expressionists themselves, which opposed modern society's materialism as well as purely aesthetic perspectives, hence claiming ethical values for abstract art. The originally anti-American criticism, which particularly related to the German ideology of ›inner values‹ in order to oppose technical civilization had now gained a foothold in America.⁴⁶ Objection to Rosenberg's metaphysical glorification of painterly action has been articulated numerous times, yet without its existentialist character ever having been questioned in its foundations.⁴⁷ Greenberg already criticized

⁴³ In his most famous text ›The sublime is now‹ (in: Tiger's Eve, 1, No.6, December 1948, pp. 51-53), Newman puts the artistic recommencement of American artists in the tradition of the ›sublime‹, which is equipped with particular ethical values. - the close distance of spectator and large-scale format was to establish an overwhelming immediacy, while within the perception of the picture plane as a reality, alienation was to be abolished. Newman thought this to be a genuinely American accomplishment, although Mondrian and van Doesburg had already attempted to explain their abstract reality in philosophical terms. - On Newman on Pollock see Heynen 1979, pp. 126-128.

⁴⁴ Willem de Kooning: What Abstract Art Means to Me, in: The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin, vol. 56, no. 3, Spring 1951.

⁴⁵ Meyer Schapiro: The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde, in: Art News, vol. 56, no. 4, Summer 1957, pp. 36-42; reprinted as ›Recent Abstract Painting‹ in: Modern Art, 19th and 20th Centuries: Selected Papers, New York 1978. pp. 213-26. On abstract expressionists' self-conception which tends to be critical of culture and anti-capitalist, see David Craven: Abstract Expressionism, Automatism and the Age of Automation, in: Art History, 13. 1990. No. 1, pp. 72-103.

⁴⁶ On the ideology of inner values in relation to a hostility towards the US and anti-modernism cf. Andreas Schüler: Erfindergeist und Technikkritik. Der Beitrag Amerikas zur Modernisierung und die Technikdebatte seit 1900. Stuttgart 1990, pp. 153-157 (note by Konrad Vollmann). The fact that one referred to a culturally conservative modernism is also illustrated by the notion of the gothic with which the works of Pollock and Stil were described. Cf. the titles ›Gothic‹ and ›Cathedral‹. At least the latter probably goes back to Greenberg. See Naifeh/Smith, p. 553.

⁴⁷ Rubin 1967 initiated an art-historical examination of Rosenberg's theses. Cf. their correspondence in: Artforum, April 1967, p. 6f. On the criticism of ›Action Painting‹ cf. Putz 1975, pp. 254-260. The so far most differentiated analysis of ›Number 32‹ against a background of a critique of semiotic patterns of interpretation by Hepp 1982 finally still leads into the vision of a »solidarity of work and life« (p. 175), originating in a stylization of the process of reception into an event. Responsible for this is likely the adherence to Max Imdahl's model of the »absolute« or »abstract« trace (p. 66, note 2), which, similar to Rosenberg's popular concept, is committed to the modernist myth of ›pure vision‹, or in Imdahl's words the ›seeing vision‹. Criticism of this concept of immediacy is the foundation of a large-scale revision of modernity from a psychoanalytical perspective by Krauss 1993 (on Pollock pp. 243-329). The decisive

the introduction of the catch word 'action painting' as a scheme to gain recognition for Pollock under the presumption of it not being art but rather a phenomenon of life.⁴⁸ These lines of reasoning confirm, of course with reverse judgement, the comments of popular press and particularly the cartoon jokes interpreting the ›mythical act‹ in a distinctively trivial manner, namely, far from the history of artistic creation, as an expression of juvenile ›traumas‹ (see Ill. 26), marital disputes or criminally violent tendencies.⁴⁹ A caricature by Abner Dean (Ill. 20) mirrors this insinuated aggressive character of action painting, which replaces any contemplation [p.36] with a raw force of nature, in the angry ›action‹ of the observing critic. He resembles Pollock's teacher Benton, who seems to punish his renegade student.⁵⁰ Simultaneously, the similarity between the dynamic lineament of the easel painting and the curved landscape pattern which quotes Benton's style, refers to an inner relatedness. The stone's throw of the shirtsleeve regionalist* does not so much refer to an art-immanent opposition of the conservative towards an avant-garde art, since that alone would not be funny; the actual punchline rather consists of the fact that his provincially violent temper appears as an adequate content of action painting. We will later return to this ambivalent making of a myth in the context of the drip painting, to which Pollock's known alcoholism, his short-tempered character and his masculine self-stylization contributed. [p. 37]

Weapons of the Cold War

The fact that mockers and apologists alike rather focused on Pollock's approach to work than on his paintings leads to a common front line. By means of the stylization of artistic working as action or event, the notion of an ›absolute‹ painting merely following its own laws, thus only being comprehensible within this self-defined frame, was opposed both in the name of the artists themselves and conservative critics of abstract art. Rosenberg, who did not appreciate Pollock at all, also pursued a personal strategy due to the intense rivalry between him and Clement Greenberg, whose ›formalist‹

criterion for Krauss, however, is the picture's ›horizontalization‹, interpreted as an existentially aggressive action, corrective to its ›sublimating‹ verticalization, which is assigned to a gestalt-like perception.

⁴⁸ Clement Greenberg: How Art Writing Earns its Bad Name, in: Encounter, New York, Vol. 19, no. 6, December 1962, pp. 67-71.

⁴⁹ A cartoon published in the magazine ›Punch‹ on May 20th, 1959, shows a furious man, who, in a fierce ›action‹, ›pelts‹ the picture of his wife tacked on the easel with color and cement. The translation of action painting into the pathological is exemplarily characterized by the nickname ›Jack the Dripper‹ given to Pollock by Time magazine in 1956.

⁵⁰ My thanks for this hint to Michael Nungesser; cf. also Landau 1989, p.222.

position he could now successfully shake off.⁵¹ The latter had, above all, acknowledged the all-over as an artistic innovation of the American artists; Rosenberg pointed out to him, in the name of Newman, that abstract painting is not abstract due to aesthetic aims but rather since nothing should disturb the act of painting, since it is a moment of life which returns to painting everything which concerns life. Psychology, philosophy, history and mythology were supposed to reenter the discourse on art, which in its abstraction had fully abstained from any evocative relation to life. With the aid of Namuth's pictorial politics the abstract work seemed to be re-transformed into a historical painting. The artist himself now became his acting hero. »The theme of Jackson Pollock's abstract paintings ... is the automatic gesture and what it stands for.«⁵² According to Rosenberg's and Newman's concepts, this primal moment of life also included a liberation of all ruling moral, political and aesthetic [p. 38] ideas. »The lone artist did not want the world to be different, he wanted his canvas to be a world.«⁵³ It is particularly this release of the artistic gesture from time and space as well as its release from an artistic context which created, even before Rosenberg's programmatic verbalization, the foundation for an exploitation of Pollock's ›traces of life‹ by the American cultural policy. Pollock's appearance, equipped with the flair of the new proletarian cinematic heroes James Dean and Marlon Brando⁵⁴ was suitable to offer a projection surface for a genuine American self-conception. His dog Gyp and the Model A-Ford, replacing horse and gun, could be used as attributes of the life of an artistic pioneer. Again and again, Pollock's origins from Western farm life were stressed.⁵⁵ In 1949, Life displayed Pollock in the manner of a cowboy with crossed arms, a cigarette in his mouth and [p. 40] with snidely narrowed eyes, standing in front of his painting

⁵¹ Naifeh/Smith, pp. 701-715 show Pollock to be the source for Rosenberg's article and thus disclose the intrigues which led to Willem de Kooning being linked with the text. In his essay, Rosenberg expressed his animosity towards Pollock by contriving an ideal action painter and secluding him from the mere charlatan, who does not project his existentialist problems onto the canvas ›seriously‹ but rather produces ›apocalyptic wallpapers‹ or simply his own brand. While Pollock at first thought Rosenberg's dramatization of the ›act of painting‹ as 'action painting' to be a misunderstanding, Lee Krasner responded sensitively to the hidden reproaches, which finally led to the artist couple's isolation from the group, while de Kooning came to be the scene's new guiding star. For sources to the critics' feud cf. also Shapiro 1985, p. 139, note 9.

⁵² David S. Rubin: A Case for Content: Jackson Pollock's ›Subject was the automatic Gesture‹, in: Arts Magazine 53, March 1979, p. 103 (-109).

⁵³ Rosenberg 1952, p. 79.

⁵⁴ For these contemporary connotations see Corlett, pp. 94-97, and Landau 1989, pp. 14-19.

⁵⁵ Lee Krasner in an interview: »Jackson's work is full of the West ... That's what makes it so American.« [B. Rouché]: Unframed Space, in: New Yorker, 26, August 5, 1950, p. 16.

›Summertime: Number 9A, 1948‹ (Ill. 21), suggesting, by means of the microscopic view on the structure of a drip painting, the meanderings of a dangerous character, who nevertheless embodies the sublime ideals of boundless individual freedom.⁵⁶ While Rosenberg and the press secretly regarded Pollock merely as a childish alcoholic,⁵⁷ the psychological defects of the artist could easily be integrated into the shining picture of the ›primitive‹, who embodied the American virtues as the virtues of the ›free West‹. With the help of the exhibitions organized by the Museum of Modern Art, the United States presented themselves as a trustworthy victorious power, propagating Europe's western orientation by means of a politico-cultural Marshall Plan.⁵⁸ The reason for Cold War ideologists to take to the difficult domain of abstract expressionism, which before had been suspected of communist tendencies, can hardly be held against this style of painting but rather results from the described ideological elements serving romantic anti-capitalism just as well as the glorification of market economy.⁵⁹ During the McCarthy era, dominated by the specter of the ›red flood‹, the condemnation of socialist realism, accompanying the revaluation of abstract art, also counted as a proof for an anti-Nazi attitude.⁶⁰ Greenberg's theory of an ›American type‹ painting, being only patriotic in the sense of offering an originally American contribution to modernism, thus postulating equality towards Europe, offered a welcome base for the political

⁵⁶ The decisive article for Pollock's success and ›image‹ does not depart from a sneering attitude but confines itself to naming antagonistic opinions, factual sales counts and exhibition successes in order to prove the charisma of the person. One year later, at the exhibition at Betty Parsons, where ›Number 32‹ was shown as well, visitors gathered, curiously about the painter who had become a star, whereas the sales count naturally remained low, and reviews were rare. Naifeh/Smith, p. 656.

⁵⁷ See Naifeh/Smith, p. 701. Rosenberg denied being dependent on anyone in his conception, least of all on Pollock himself. Instead, he approached the numerous jokes on contemporary art with the remark of Pollock painting like an ape (ibid, p. 712), being unable of a permanent intellectual effort (ibid, p. 704).

⁵⁸ »Cultural liberty and the freedom of the individual within a political system influenced from the outside are among the most pressing questions in contemporary Europe. Europeans are actually ready to accept the loss of political sovereignty if only they are still capable of enjoying such liberties.« Stephen Spender: We can Win the Battle for the Mind of Europe, in: New York Times Magazine, April 25, 1948, p.35, quoted after Guilbaut 1983, p.173.

⁵⁹ Newman's vicinity to Rosenberg and the turn towards the rhetorics of the Cold War is illustrated by the following remark: »Almost fifteen years ago Harold Rosenberg challenged me to explain what one of my paintings could possibly mean to the world. My answer was that if he and others could read it properly it would mean the end of all state capitalism and totalitarianism. That answer still goes.« Barnett Newman: ›Frontiers of Space‹. An Interview with Dorothy Seckler, in: Art in America, 50. 1962, Nr. 2, p. 87. On the rhetorical preparation of action painting by Newman see also Naifeh/Smith, p. 703. On the parallel strategy of McCarthyism and abstract expressionist anarchism cf. Shapiro 1985, p. 144.

⁶⁰ In an article from 1952 published in the New York Times (›Is modern art communist?‹), Alfred Barr condemned ›socialist realism‹ in the Soviet Union as well as in Nazi Germany. Cf. Eva Cockroft: Dazu Eva Cockroft: Abstrakt Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War, in: Frascina 1985, pp. 125-133, especially p. 131.

assimilation of abstract expressionism.⁶¹ With the background of the described [p.41] tradition of thought, Greenberg's refusal to offer concrete contents and take sides could be converted into the message of subjective and universal freedom. American abstract artists, among them, prominently, Pollock with ›Number 32‹ (Ill. 22, 13), dominated the documenta II in Kassel, 1959, not as representatives of American art, but rather as a »model of human culture«. ⁶² By means of the opportunity to partake in an all-encompassing culture of limitless individuality beyond all systems, if only via a ›vital‹ style of clothing (Ill. 23), the political dependency of the European countries on the US could be disguised and consolidated at the same time.⁶³

Art or Nature – On the Problem of the Iconological Interpretation

The characterization of Pollock as a ›noble savage‹ directly links to the primitivism of the European avant-garde, which found its first hero in Gauguin. However, it also orientated itself towards the national significance of untamed nature, a preferred motive in 19th century American landscape painting, which experienced a modern renaissance in the regionalism of the 1930s. In his early oil painting ›Going West‹ (Il. 24), which stylistically tells of his dependence on his teacher Benton, Pollock himself had paid his respects to the theme of ›sublime‹ nature, which was still later referred to by art-historical research as a source of interpretation for the drip paintings. As the traditional teacher of the arts, nature itself once again came to the fore via the notion of the sublime, propagated by Newman; since this term originally was not linked to art but rather [p. 42] to the fear-laden experience of uncontrollable nature.⁶⁴ The ›attachment to

⁶¹ Detailed depiction of Greenberg's patriotic efforts in Guilbaut 1987, pp. 168-172. From this perspective, which is solely dedicated to the ideological patterns, American avant-garde art appears as nothing more than a mere weapon of propaganda. Cf. note 23.

⁶² Haftmann 1959, p. 14. Cf. Kurt Winkler: II documenta '59 – Kunst nach 1945, in: Exh.cat. Stationen der Moderne. Die bedeutendsten Kunstaustellungen des 20. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland, Berlinische Galerie, Berlin 1989. pp. 427-435.

⁶³ See note 8. Concerning the notion of internationalism cf. Guilbaut 1983, pp. 173-175. Opposing Guilbaut's argument, the problem introduced by Christos M. Joachimides within the context of the America exhibition in Berlin in 1993, namely that, despite a massive export in terms of exhibitions, American avant-garde was up until then not very familiar in Europe and even less profitable, does, however, not nullify the function of this art as a weapon during the Cold War. Aesthetic and ideological layers are once again leveled here, leaving aside the fact that the myth of Pollock is actually based upon the misunderstanding of the oeuvre itself, being effective without it. Interview by Marius Babias in: Kunstforum International 123. 1993, pp. 382-384.

⁶⁴ For Robert Rosenblum, the missing depictive relation to nature is reestablished by the »sublime mysteries« of galactic and nuclear worlds, which opened up by gazing through telescopes and microscopes. Robert Rosenblum: The abstract sublime, in: Art News, Febr. 1961, pp. 39-41, 56, quote p. 56. - On the history of the notion of the »sublime« and its use on Pollock's oeuvre cf. Kambartel 1970, p.

the ground of Pollock's working method⁶⁵ and his move from New York to Long Island, which apparently created favorable conditions for the development of the drip painting, were interpreted as a thematic interest of the artist in his scenic surroundings.⁶⁶ Titles referring to natural phenomena, such as ›Autumn Rhythm‹, ›Full Fanthom Five‹ or ›Lavender Mist‹, were also drawn upon for this, although it is known that Pollock actually disclaimed titles and finally, as in our painting, switched to simply numbering his works in order to prevent any content-related references which could have influenced the viewer's contemplation of the picture. One was particularly fond of interpreting Pollock's abstract works as depictions of nature's dynamic energies,⁶⁷ or even as the expression of fear of the nuclear threat, which convinced, according to a survey result in 1952 [p. 43], about 70 percent of Americans of an impending new world war.⁶⁸ This understanding of the abstract form as a symbol modifies and confirms the conventional emblematic character of traditional art for non-figural art.⁶⁹ With this interest, Paul Klee also had justified abstraction programmatically with the following statement: »Art does not depict the visible but rather makes visible.«⁷⁰ The artwork's

14f.; idem. 1973, p. 276; Regine Prange: »Jack the Dripper‹ or Pollock and ›The American Sublime‹, in: kritische berichte, 1.1993, pp. 17-42.

⁶⁵ Many compared the artist's relationship to the canvas with a farmer's relationship to his land. See Naifeh/Smith, p. 540f. This imagery can be traced back to the turn of the century, when it served as a justification for the 'new ornament'. Cf. Emile Gallé: Der Symbolismus des Dekors. Ein Vortrag (1900), reprint in Philippe Garner: Emile Gallé, München 1979, pp. 153-161, p. 154: »Jeder Akt menschlichen Bemühens...ist zusammengefaßt in der Gebärde des Sämanns. Unbesonnen oder in überlegter Absicht ist auch der Entwerfer in seinem Tun ein Sämann.« The line of tradition which is indicated here will be followed up upon further below.

⁶⁶ Microcosm and macrocosm could be bundled within in the ›inner‹ nature of the artist, who, as his art, is »one with the constant movement of nature, its stagnation and changes, as he discovered and imbibed it in the grass, the dunes and the sea near Easthampton.« Ellen Johnson: Jackson Pollock and Nature, in: Studio 185, June 1973, pp. 257-262, quote p. 260. Similar, once again, Cernuschi 1992, p. 135.

⁶⁷ In a note which is part of his estate, Pollock himself wrote about »energy and motion made visible« (O'Connor/Thaw IV, p. 253). Despite a more differentiated problematization of the relation of theory and practice, Putz 1975, p. 194, follows this pattern of interpretation when he sees the depiction of objects being replaced by their »underlying forces«. Cf. B.H. Friedman: Jackson Pollock, Energy Made Visible, New York 1972; Matthew L. Rohn: Visual Dynamics in Jackson Pollock's Abstractions, Ann Arbor, Michigan 1987. With reference to the latter, cf. its critique in Krauss 1993, p. 328. Polcari 1991, pp. 255-258, correlates, as Hofmann 1978, p. 438, did, this energetic flow of movement with Henri Bergson's concept of vitalism.

⁶⁸ James Aronson: The Press and the Cold War, Boston 1970, p. 82; cf. Guilbaut 1983, p. 168.

⁶⁹ To this effect, Clark 1991, p. 240, also states that the issue at stake in Pollock's art as well as in abstract art in general is always the desire to return to a primitive state where the symbol had been born (»representing came into being«). Cf. critique in Krauss 1993, p. 325.

⁷⁰ Paul Klee: Contribution to the anthology ›Schöpferische Konfession‹, ed. by Kasimir Edschmid, Berlin 1920, reprinted in Christian Geelhaar (ed.): Paul Klee. Schriften, Rezensionen und Aufsätze, Köln 1976, p. 118(-122).

transcendence thus seemed to be conserved within the 'optical unconscious'⁷¹. The hardly bearable ambivalence of artistic entity and unwrought nature->work<, which we observed in ›Number 32<, which effects its ›speechlessness<, is antagonized by the interpreters, among them artists themselves, who aim at suspending it. The profit of such a reinterpretation is obvious. By granting a metaphysical proximity to nature, other domains were once again valued in terms of content interpretation, as was demanded by iconology*, the institutionalized interpretative norm of classic art.

Just like art historian Erwin Panofsky found the crucial hint for the comprehension of a painting by Titian in a passage from Ovid, the more recent Pollock research looks for documents outside the works, which are supposed to help to decipher its message.⁷²

Since, however, Pollock does neither illustrate nor provide symbols, these iconological interpretations always need to theoretically transform the aesthetic structure itself. The term ›symbol< stems from ›to link< or ›to tie<. To create a symbolic meaning means to render the picture transparent for contents lying behind. The foreshortened pictorial space of modern painting transformed this metaphorical transcendence also into an illusionistic one by rendering the picture carrier ›invisible<, and even Kandinsky [p. 44] treasured the representative tasks of abstract painting by means of an intangible pictorial spatiality. ›Number 32< utterly breaks with this tradition. Pollock no longer idealistically defies textual reality. To the same extent as he created, he also reacted: »It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take...«, he said.⁷³ The possibility of failure was thus always present, the necessity of aesthetic quality connotations therefore being on the part of the work's beholder. The canvas was no empty space for projection for decipherable ideas, but an active opponent. It was precisely this materialization of the picture, dissolving its representative function, which one aimed at undoing. Namuth filmed Pollock through a glass panel (Ill. 41), which served as a picture carrier instead of the canvas, and the artist himself enthused over the possibilities of using glass painting in an architectonic context.⁷⁴ The installation of this filmed glass painting within landscape was particularly

⁷¹ Krauss 1993 attempts to draw upon this ›notion< in a positive sense against the topos of ›pure vision<, which was exemplarily declaimed by Klee.

⁷² Cernuschi 1993, p. 134, strives for a reconciliation of the artist's meaning and the significance, independent from the latter, analogous to Panofsky's model of iconology.

⁷³ Pollock 1947-48, p. 4f.

⁷⁴ Pollock 1950, p. 9. On the model for Haesart's film ›Visite à Picasso<, which was shot in 1949, see Krauss 1993, p. 301.

appreciated due to the aspect of transparency, the visualization of landscape and the comparability with its elements.⁷⁵ ›Number 32‹ with its relatively large ›empty‹ planes has frequently been linked to Pollock's glass paintings. The claim that the viewer tends to »perceive the unprepared canvas as if it did not exist«, as if it had the »transparency of a glass panel, in front of or behind of which painting«⁷⁶ was located is valid for reproductions of Pollock's works at best. The common idea that Pollock did not so much draw on the canvas itself but rather into the air above it, disposes, notionally, of the picture plane in favor of the idea of Pollock's gestures [p. 45] having a figural, symbolical content which does no longer appear within the picture itself.⁷⁷ These strategies which attempt to render the picture transparent in favor of an iconological interpretation show how drip painting has unhinged a deep-rooted pictorial understanding. The separation of form and content, signifier and signified, self-evident in everyday use, can in no possible way be reconstructed for ›Number 32‹ without neglecting crucial qualities of the picture. Besides abstraction, the transformed pictorial spatiality contributes to the failure of conventional explanation approaches. The colored forms can neither be separated from each other nor do they stand out against a background, as, for example, printed characters assert themselves as significant carriers against the paper ground. Moreover, the frequently exerted correspondences to calligraphy and the particularly for ›Number 32‹ reclaimed graphic character only reflect the desire to be able to 'read' Pollock's work. The indisputable spatial effect, which is vital for such a literal character of the picture, does in fact not exist at all. As

⁷⁵ From this established relation between drip painting and landscape, Cernuschi 1993, p. 136, derives the possibility of an emblematic significance of abstraction. This intention is served (as in many other publications) by close-ups of ›Number 32‹, which simulate a gestalt-like independence of the colored elements, thus visually contradicting the all-over (ibid, pp. 119-121, Ill. 47-49).

⁷⁶ Kambartel 1970, p. 18, picks up on a remark by Michael Fried here. The glass painting's real transparency serves a fictive expansion of 'Number 32' to a limitless continuum, »which stretches to all directions and simultaneously beyond factual dimensions...« (ibid.). In order to negate the work character to that extent, Kambartel is forced not only to have the canvas disappear, but also to claim the obligatory status of the close-up, which prevents the visual comprehensibility of the picture. Cf. critique in Hepp 1982, p. 69f.

⁷⁷ According to Lee Krasner, Pollock never stopped being a figural painter, yet his figures were of ›aerial shape‹, only existing for a moment's time. Rather than dissecting the object, as cubists did, Pollock had actually saved it, only using the 'trick' of leaving the final pictorial appearance to gravity, as Paul Brach noted. See Naifeh/Smith, p.539. - Lee Krasner also handed down Pollock's notion of ›blurring‹ the picture as a first step towards the drip painting. Ibid, p. 536f. Krauss 1993, p. 263, confirms this genesis and relates it to the movement diagrams of Breton. Although Cernuschi 1992, p. 140, notes that Krasner only correlated these blurred figures with the time before the drip painting, he nevertheless generalizes this ›interpretation‹ based on the figural drip paintings.

was described above, it changes according to position and distance, and therefore does not enforce categories and standards of judgement independent of the viewer.

High and Low or: Loss of the Center

Similar to their defendants, pronounced opponents of modernism claimed nature to be the benchmark for art, while also lamenting the excess of ›real‹ nature, i.e. a nature no longer refined by superior [p. 46] values within contemporary painting. The diagnosis of art historian Hans Sedlmayr, who argued that modern art should be interpreted as a symptom of a decaying society, can be invoked as an exemplary statement here. The kind of painting which deformed the human figure or even abandoned it completely was a proof of moral instability, of a ›loss of the center‹ in Sedlmayr's view. He accused surrealism of exalting the irrational, or even »the lead-up to insanity« as a leitmotif, thus creating disorientation and chaos instead of idealistic values.⁷⁸ But it was only in 1947, the same year in which Sedlmayr published his famous pamphlet, when Pollock, as the line of argument could be continued, discovered an effective means for the »systematization of confusion«⁷⁹ with his invention of the drip painting. The ›loss of the center‹ is aesthetically realized in the ›give and take‹ of the picture: The omnipotent, creative subject of the artist has resigned. The main point of Sedlmayr's lamentation, which claims that painting has lost itself within the depths of everyday life, being a »chaos of total garbage«⁸⁰, is in a certain sense also fittingly when it comes to the provocative objecthood of the Düsseldorf work. It is not only the enamel used for ›Number 32‹ which stems from every day industrial production, but also the pictorial ground, which does not consist of valuable ›canvas‹ but of plain nettle cloth. Sedlmayr's observations lead to the core of the repressed – Pollock's refusal to work on an idealization, which constitutes any conventional art. In classicist art theory, it was only the ideal, present within artistic imagination, which bestowed the necessary spiritual value upon the representation of nature, and it was particularly supposed to be expressed in drawings, in the ›disegno‹. Color, on the other hand, represented the ephemeral, [p. 47], material and incidentally female connotated element, merely designated for the sensuous visualization of the ›male‹ idea.⁸¹ After classic modern art pushed the

⁷⁸ Sedlmayr 1948, p.135.

⁷⁹ Salvador Dali, after a quote of Sedlmayr 1948, p. 136.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 135.

⁸¹ Max Imdahl: Farbe. Kunsttheoretische Reflexionen in Frankreich, München 1987, pp. 31-34.

emancipation of the plain color value from its tie to linear outline, Pollock now liberates color in its materiality which no longer has a special meaning in opposition to its background. The black no longer stands within the context of an elementary canon of colors but instead displays, in opposition to delicate color harmonies, its ›cheap‹ origins of mass fabrication.

If we, hereupon, understand Pollock's paintings with the philosopher Arnold Gehlen as »art of industrial society«,⁸² we follow, unawares, Eco's as well as Sedlmayr's concept of the symptom, which is led by an only outside of the painting to be found and documented »knowledge on the personal world of the artist or on a cultural background, which is included within the patterns of design«. ⁸³ Gehlen insofar understands the all-over as a symbolic form of the »uncontrollability of the entirety« within modern society.⁸⁴ Hence, ›Number 32‹ would be nothing more than a bleak confirmation of what is displayed within everyday awareness anyway. Incomprehensibility can also be established by television news or by gazing at a newspaper frontpage, it can as such not be aesthetically shaped or rendered experiencable. Condensed within a work closed in itself, ›the loss of the center‹ rather refers to the destruction of a preset order which is being replaced by a manifold whole lacking any constraints of a system. With regard to the twelve-tone technique, Greenberg evaluated the all-over in its ›egalitarian‹ sense:

»Just as Schönberg makes every element, every sound in the composition of equal importance – different but equivalent – so the ›all-over‹ painter [p. 48] renders every element and every area of the picture equivalent in accent and emphasis. ... The ›all-over‹ may answer the feeling that all hierarchical distinctions have been, literally, exhausted and invalidated ... It may express a monist naturalism for which there are

⁸² Gehlen 1960, p.188.

⁸³ Eco 1977, p. 185.

⁸⁴ Gehlen 1960, p.191. What follows, turned against biographic readings, is the evaluation of the drip painting as an equivalent to industrial production, within which there is »no detachment of the execution«, any more, »the work... being restrained within the circular process, no longer being capable of opposing« (p. 192). This perspective, as well, favors process rather than the work itself when it aims at disposing of »the great existential language« (p. 191) of modern artists. It should be recalled here that Pollock himself characterized the abstract painting as a confrontation, which, in the following critic's ›compliment‹, stating that his pictures had neither beginning nor end, does not refer to the insinuated circular movement, (as, e.g. Kambartel 1970, p. 19, and Putz 1975, p. 119) but rather to the movement of protest. Pollock's statements are not at all, as Krauss, 1993, p. 322, hints at, ›externally controlled‹ nor insignificant.

neither first nor last things, and which recognizes as the only ultimate distinction that between the immediate and the un-immediate.«⁸⁵

Here, Greenberg brings a positivist attitude into play, which gave rise to searching for an understanding of Pollock in the philosophy of Wittgenstein.⁸⁶ The revocation of painting into texture, the dissolution of the picture by means of the facticity of color and canvas was paralleled with the famous sentence »The world is everything the fall is«⁸⁷. With regard to the conventional tasks of art, namely, to embody transcendence and to trace conception back to an ›actual‹, this impossibility of transcending the material state of ›being‹ is an affront which cannot be measured by referring to Wittgenstein's early observations on the image relation between language and world. Hence, let us attempt to grasp the work's spirit of contradiction in a sharper sense.

[p.50] In Sedlmayr's denouncement, the aesthetic particular seemed to be preserved in a less disfigured manner than within the approving interpretations, even though it only considered the artistic developments preceding Pollock.⁸⁸ It is apparently not affirmation but transgression which defines the breach of taboo reclaimed also by cartoons and caricatures on action painting. Since Freud, it has been undoubted that the funny punchline bears a moment of truth within the releasing laughter, which can be used for analysis here. Seen as a phenomenon of commentary, the caricatures as well as Sedlmayr's pamphlet promise to offer insight into modernism's aesthetics since they thematize within their rejection its fear-laden potential and the moment of terror. These

⁸⁵ Greenberg, 1948, p. 157, leaves the aesthetic arguing here by regarding the all-over as a mere reflection of the prevailing. His positivism corresponds with Rosenberg's vitalism at this point. An alternative interpretation, acknowledging art's potential to protest, would have to pick up on the revolutionary self-conception of Russian avant-garde in the 1920s, which consciously linked the homogeneity of compositional elements with the anticipation of a new society. Cf. Honisch 1977, p. 1/6. On the conservative tendency of Greenberg's definition of art see Krauss 1993, p. 321.

⁸⁶ Cf. Robert Steiner: *Toward a Grammar of Abstraction. Modernity, Wittgenstein, and the Paintings of Jackson Pollock*, The Pennsylvania State University Press 1992.

⁸⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Tractatus logico-philosophicus. Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung*, Frankfurt 1963, p. 11, I.

⁸⁸ Cf. Willibald Sauerländer: *Hans Sedlmayr's ›Verlust der Mitte‹*, in: *Merkur* 47. 1993, pp. 536-542, esp. 539f. Sedlmayr is given credit here for »the icy gaze of the distant despiser«, who is able to perceive »many phenomena of modernism in a sharper sense than the apologists could have.« What is excluded here, however, is the decisive true core of the polemic. Sauerländer, who believes that confrontation with the art work needs to be ceased as a subjective factor in favor of the »positivist causality of history«, denies that art, particularly in its secular-abstract gestalt, could incite a terror, to which a scientist, rooted within monarchist thinking patterns and familiar with Jasper's psychopathology, would still be able to respond to. Sauerländer follows Eco by transferring the work's objectivity to ›factual history‹, and thus no less than Sedlmayr but merely in a more complete sense mobilizes an idealist defense against angst. - The missing response to the English translation of Sedlmayr's text (›Art in crisis‹) in 1957 (see *ibid.*, p. 541) is revealing since it proves Rosenberg's et al. successful strategy of assimilation.

were originally also grasped in the thrill of the ›sublime‹, which was deprived of any acidity in favor of mystical concepts of unity in the theory of abstract expressionism. Only within jokes and polemics, the shock is still recognizable.

[S.51] The dripping of liquid color created a savory field of associations which always has the blending of art into life as cardinal point. For example, an unimpressed art connoisseur secretly dripping a glass of unloved wine onto a painting (Ill. 25) demonstrates how only unappetizing stains with unknown and arbitrary ingredients are left of the once high art of painting. The fact that Pollock rejects all rules of artistic technique is often depicted as acting out of an infantile disorder. Hence, ›Jackson Pollock's Mother‹ (Ill. 26) is the topic of a postcard which ›explains‹ drip painting from a child's view on the mother's stained apron, thus embellishing an early critic's malignity, which likened Pollock's works to scalloped macaroni.⁸⁹ The oedipal background to ›Pollock's Mother‹ was recently delivered by a voluminous biography of Pollock, which presents the conflict of childhood as empirical core of the drip painting in a differentiated manner.⁹⁰ After all, the provocative opposition to oil painting becomes visible in these biological, everyday meanings of diluted color. Yet, as in its elevation to a sublime and cosmic vortex, the artistic character of the drip painting has again not come to the fore here. The extreme authenticity of a painting which can neither be copied nor reproduced,⁹¹ is ironized by the cartoonist to the effect that any lowbrow cyclist is a potential creator of the all-over, and that the whole process resembles a sandbox game, as shovel and bucket unmistakably hint at (Ill. 27). The ›historical‹ perspective of the art critic emphasizes the hedonistic »here and now« of the painterly action by means of the comical contrast. [p. 52]

Flatness as a theory?

The work retreated behind the image of the artist in the media. The art-historical context of the drip painting was lost sight of. Yet it becomes visible only in this context that in ›Number 32‹, a developmental law of modern painting comes to its radical culmination

⁸⁹ Parker Tyler in ›View‹ 1945 reprinted in O'Connor 1967, p.37.

⁹⁰ Naifeh/Smith, pp. 540-542. Pollock's bedwetter and impotence problems are presented as pivotal for the dripping technique here. This technique had, so to speak, allowed him to distance himself from his mother's apron, enabling him to identify with his father. In his studio, Pollock had been able to 'control the flow' and, simultaneously, by actively and passively shaping his materials, become one with his mother.

⁹¹ Cf. Rubin's critique of Greenberg's baffling statement, anyone today could master the dripping like Pollock with a little exercise. Rubin Part IV, p. 32f.

and thus prepares a fundamentally altered pictorial understanding, which is still defining our contemporary art.

Robert Rosenblum interpreted Pollock's drip painting as the peak of a romantic ›northern path‹ of painting, thus following the metaphysical premise of action painting and its anti-French tendencies.⁹² However, there is no doubt that Pollock's artistic achievement is based upon all traditions of classical modernism, which necessarily includes the French line. Pollock's relation to surrealism has already been noted here. The heritage of cubism* is at least as important as the latter. In contrast to the ›abstract expressionist‹ Kandinsky, Braque and Picasso systematically destroyed the homogenous pictorial spatiality in their works between 1910 and 1912. The sujet's fragmentation into numerous geometrical facets allowed reminiscences of natural space – ground, horizon, sky – only in a limited manner, thus the picture plane came into awareness as a designed plane. Here, Greenberg discovered the historical approach to the all-over and simultaneously emphasized cubism's conservative tendency, which was only shaken off by American postwar painting.⁹³ The said traditional moment consists of the chiaroscuro* which was used by academic painting to model figures and objects and to create spatial illusion. Picasso's nude of 1910 (Ill. 28) [p. 54] indeed interlaces figure and ground in a geometrical structure of facets and thus underlines, different to Kandinsky's floating forms, the picture plane. Nevertheless, the hatchings and cross layers of the ink strokes convey light and shadow in a conventional way, although any unambiguousness of spatial relations is lacking here. In his preoccupation with cubism, Piet Mondrian was likely the first to radically dissolve ›natural‹ space and to establish homogeneity between all four sides of a picture by, as [p. 55] ›Composition with Line‹ of 1917 (Ill. 29) shows, releasing the abstract interior order from its organic rooting in the lower section of the picture. The picture loses its anthropomorphic constitution which is analog to the human body here, facilitated by the ›horizontalization‹ of the canvas during the process of painting. Mondrian predominantly worked at a table, using the easel only for examining the painting's effects.⁹⁴ At this point, however, the panel

⁹² Robert Rosenblum: *Modern Painting and Northern Romantic Tradition*. Friedrich to Rothko, London 1975, pp. 203-205.

⁹³ Greenberg 1955, p. 218. Apart from the cubists, he also sees Turner and the later Monet as preparers of the all over (ibid., pp. 221-224). This art-historical classification is elaborated on in Rubin Part I-III.

⁹⁴ Seuphor 1956, p. 160, concerning Mondrian's time in Paris. Interestingly enough, this verification is canceled when it comes to the large-scale drip paintings. Pollock exclusively acted as a producer, without adopting the spectator's position.

painting as an artistic genre entered a state of crisis since the loss of human scale went along with the question of an alternative, superordinated context. Shared by both Pollock and Mondrian, the ideas of a mystic, universal connection⁹⁵ as well as the, aimed at with more or less theoretical effort, attempted integration of painting into architecture are symptoms and approaches to a solution of this said crisis. Mondrian died in 1944 during his New York exile. His works were present and were received by American artists no less than Picasso's or the surrealists' art.⁹⁶ Although ›Number 32‹ sharply contrasts with the mellow frugality of Mondrian's compositions, the consequence drawn from cubism seems to be comparable with Mondrian's. However, Pollock's path is ultimately different. His intense preoccupation with European tradition was always in line with his fondness for dynamic curvatures. Pinkham Ryder, creator of lyrically romantic landscape paintings, was the only American painter he was ever interested in. The same preference for vibrating rhythms helps explaining Pollock's preoccupation with the murals of the ›Mexican Goya‹, Jose Clemente Orozco, and his apprenticeship with Benton,⁹⁷ both of which, however, persisted in the narrative implementation of this vital moment.

[p. 56] The parallel artistic problem of Mondrian and Pollock is substantiated by an anecdote of Mondrian, New York's grey eminence, 'discovering' Pollock. The painting ›Stenographic Figure‹, which Peggy Guggenheim found to be ›lacking discipline‹, turned the scale for Mondrian, who looked at it for a long time, to Guggenheim's astonishment, and finally claimed it to be the most interesting painting he had so far seen in America.⁹⁸ A grotesque nude in the style of Picasso⁹⁹ can be, although only

⁹⁵ Both artists were closely tied to theosophy and followers of Krishnamurti. In his youth, Pollock identified with this new Messiah (Naifeh/Smith, pp. 128-131, 137-144), remaining open-minded towards mystic ideas throughout his life, as the proximity to Jung's theory of archetypes illustrates. Mondrian, whose favorite term was 'evolution', carried Krishnamurti's book with him all through his life (Seuphor 1956, p. 58).

⁹⁶ It is revealing to see the ethical turn in the reception of Mondrian in a letter from Newman to Greenberg, who initiated the ideologization of abstract expressionism in 1947. Printed in Thomas B. Hess: Barnett Newman, New York 1969, pp. 36-38. Here, Newman credited himself and his fellow painters with the merit of pure abstraction, which was no longer in need of the »geometrical equivalent of the perceived landscape« (p. 37) and thus fulfilled art through the »metaphysical act« (p. 38); annotation in Heynen 1979, pp. 52-54.

⁹⁷ Cf. Polcari 1991, p. 252, on the relation to Benton's rhythm, which is, however, justified in an idealistic rather than a formal manner here. See also Krauss 1993, with illustrations of Benton's movement diagrams, p. 263.

⁹⁸ Landau 1989, p. 105. For a detailed documentation and description see Naifeh/Smith, p. 444f. Difficult to comprehend, Mondrian's praise is explained by a strategic attitude, which supposedly aimed at seeking Peggy Guggenheim's support for his artist friend Harry Holtzmann.

allusively, traced as a figural outline. The curvatures can be understood as abbreviations for corporeal forms; they correspond with the diagonally swinging yellow and red planes, which themselves are contrasted by vertically ordered blue and black color ribbons approximately legible as background in the upper segment of the picture. Yellow, white, black and orange ›graffiti‹, strayed all over the picture plane, form a third layer of diffusion which is loosening up the cubist structure and yet does not remain without any relation, since the signs answer to the corporeal forms, translating the figure's gesture into a poetically-scattered scribble.

›Mural‹ (Ill. 31), a commissioned work for Peggy Guggenheim, painted in 1943 during one night, Pollock summarized his heterogeneous stylistic sources in a manner which already forebodes the character of the drip painting. In its glistening colorfulness and gestural rhythm, Pollock's largest work exudes an aggressiveness which seems to have veered away from the demure cubists for good. Nevertheless, this tradition can still be sensed in the relief-like materiality. However, standing close in front of the painting, the compact spatiality yields to a mere ›seeing of stains‹. The consequences, with regard to the all-over's strengthened flatness, of Pollock's [p. 57] decision to work with liquid enamel on the floor can be visualized by a comparison. Since the canvas has been worked at from all four sides, ›Number 32‹ is ›bottomless‹, while vertical dynamics are dominating. The lambent bendings in 'Mural', too, develop a multitude of accents without offering a resting point; nevertheless, the drip painting radicalizes the articulated homogeneity of the picture plane. While the color black is partly used as a contouring line in the mural, enclosing white color planes [p. 58] and allowing, from the distance or on reproductions, the association of moving figures setting to dance, any viewing of a gestalt is lost within the materialized patches of color and cloth in ›Number 32‹.¹⁰⁰ The already mentioned polychromatic works ›Autumn Rhythm‹ (Ill. 32) and ›One‹ (see Ill. 14) show the cocoon-like densification of the color material in contrast to ›Mural‹ even clearer, while also demonstrating that this effect is reached at the expense of the color effect. The effused color remains too fragmented and fibrous in order to unfold a radiance of its own. Black and white own as much strength as the numerous other used colors. It is not as much the pure color value [p. 59] than the respective consistency, as it appears in the mixture or overlapping with other layers of

⁹⁹ For possible models see Landau 1989, p. 106. Incidentally, Pollock referred to the picture as ›painting‹ at first.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Kambartel 1970, p. 17.

color, either blurring and sinking into the textural ground or sharply contoured above it. In ›Autumn Rhythm‹, the levelling of color values is strengthened by the consistent brown coloring of the textural ground. The indifference towards the color tone logically results in the possibility of a completely black drip painting. Apart from that, ›Number 32‹ stands within the context of the New York School's general – culminating around 1950 – preference for the color black, which is deprived of all painterly values.¹⁰¹

Black is the color of the shadow, of the [p. 60] impenetrable depths of space, used, e.g., by baroque portraiture in order to emphasize the dominion of light, of the preciousness of ruffles, jewelry, flesh tone, of portentous mimic and significant gestures.¹⁰² In our picture, the range of variation – following the tradition – is also established by light itself, only the real light of the gallery space no longer corresponds with the [p.61] lighting structure within the pictorial space.

From its subordinated existence, only serving the illustration of light, black has become a real color, due to the provocative equivalency of enamel color and picture carrier, which one has to value again in this context. A spatial effect is not created, as one would expect on the basis of the reproduction, by means of the *chiascuro* but rather depends on the spectator's distance and movement. From a close side glance, the color seems to sink into the ground, while from a distance, this impression is turned around. Depending on the incidence of light, the glossy parts stand out against the sunken pale color, while an instant later, within changed surroundings, they appear in yet another spatial constellation or dissolve completely into the picture plane. A consistently cohesive effect can no longer be established. ›Number 32‹ even aggravates the artistic theme of the polychromatic works, where the interlacing of the different layers is carried out less by the antagonism between color and picture carrier, but rather by the colors themselves amongst each other.

While cubism thematized the picture carrier's two-dimensionality through the geometrical atomization of the picture plane by means of a neutral coloration, Pollock's

¹⁰¹ Most comparable are Clifford Still's almost completely black oil paintings, which, similar to Pollock's works, force a close up view and movement in front of the picture since otherwise, the structure of the rough surface would not become visible. With Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning and Robert Motherwell, black has a different function, since it is contrasted with white here. Cf. Motherwell's reception of Miró in his essay ›Black or White‹ (1950), in: *The Collected Writings of Robert Motherwell*, ed. by Stephanie Terenzio, Oxford 1992, p. 71f.

¹⁰² Cf. Max Raphael: *Die Farbe Schwarz. Zur materiellen Konstituierung der Form*, ed. by Klaus Binder, Paris 1984.

Düsseldorf painting shows and evaluates it as such, i.e. no longer mediated by color, but rather interlacing with it.

This ›skeletal structure‹ of the drip painting, achieved through the confinement to black yet also describes a limit, maybe of painting in general. Mondrian also strived for the same goal by attempting to push back the framing effect of the vertical and horizontal lines¹⁰³ and, during his time in New York, finally stimulated his pictorial concept by renouncing the structuring black, thus approaching the effect of the all-over. An impressive objectification of painterly means, already preceding Pollock, can be observed in a number of unfinished paintings, e.g. ›New York City II‹ (Ill. 33). Similar to Pollock's work, this painting seems to reveal its production process. Instead of outlining single phases of the framework of lines [p. 63] as he used to do, Mondrian now tested their constellation by shifting and interlacing colored paper strips, yet without reaching a final order which could be implemented painterly. The drip painting's cocoon is laid out in its geometrical preform as it were. Working with ready-made paper strips¹⁰⁴ directly on the canvas seemed to render the painterly realization redundant, although Mondrian doubtlessly still pursued it. The rough effect of the layers of strips, which literally seem to bandage the picture carrier, resemble the effect of Pollock's work, which, due to the large crude areas of the canvas also gave rise to the question whether it was merely a draft.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ »In order to abolish the manifestation of planes as rectangles, I reduced my color and accentuated the limiting lines, crossing them one over the other. Thus the planes were not only cut and abolished, but their relationships became more active.« Piet Mondrian: *Toward the true vision of reality, 1942*, in: Holtzman/James 1993, pp 338-341, quotation p. 340. - This dissolution of the pictorial surface is comparable to the intention of the drip painting, which created ›lines‹ which functioned »no longer as frames of a plane« (Rubin I, p. 20). Pollock's figural attempts with the dripping technique show how this avoiding of spatial ›edges‹ of the paint material itself, first observed by Greenberg, not only depends on the technique. On the relation of the artistic intentions of both Mondrian and Pollock cf. Yves-Alain Bois: *Painting as Model*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, England 1993, p. 168, 180-182, 249.

¹⁰⁴ Artist friend Charmion von Wigand spoke of ›tapes‹ which Mondrian came to know in New York. Exh.cat. Piet Mondrian 1872-1944. Centennial Exhibition, The Solomon Guggenheim Museum, New York 1971, pp. 77-86, esp. p. 79. Cf. also Mondrian's comments on ›removable color‹ within the context of his architectural ideas in: Holtzmann/James 1993, p. 355. Hint by Susanne Deicher.

¹⁰⁵ Landau 1989, p. 190 refers to photographs of Burckhardt and Namuth in order to prove his hardly valid claim that Pollock had ceased working on ›Number 32‹ after a first ›preliminary‹ process step in order to work at ›One‹ with ›close visual contact‹ to ›Number 32‹, which implies the function of a sketch. Cernuschi 1992, p.143 argues similarly, with reference to Carmean, claiming that ›Number 32‹, ›One‹ and ›Autumn Rhythm‹ which were created successively, could be understood as different layers of one single picture.

With this limitation of the picture as a flat object, the limit of reasoning, which aims at explaining Pollock's work as an evolvement of cubism, has been reached as well.¹⁰⁶ Here, the »principle of flatness«¹⁰⁷ does not lead any further. Greenberg's concept of the all-over reduced drip painting too much to the idea of uniformity, which he himself thought to be »anti-aesthetic«.¹⁰⁸ This view depends too exclusively on painting as a valid scale for artistic work. Even though ›Number 32‹ can be understood by means of the intrinsic logic of development of modern painting, its full historical significance seems to be recognizable only today, as painting has finished playing its dominant role as avant-garde art. In ›Number 32‹, painting reaches its maximal subjectivity; and by means of this extreme authenticity, it pushes the original character of the work far beyond itself into an anonymous objectivity.

Perhaps Greenberg's and Rosenberg's antithetic evaluations of Pollock's iconoclastic pictoriality could open up an alternative approach offering a way out of the dichotomy which still dominates the more recent research on Pollock. The quoted alternative critics' positions had always aimed at grasping the aspect of movement and temporality. The existential ›action‹ of the artist on the one hand and the reflective movement of the spectator having lost his fixed position due to the wall-like all-over, on the other hand are confronted with each other here.¹⁰⁹ The latter notion of temporality has proved to be the more adequate one. Pollock's aesthetics demands a reception which no longer rests in itself [p.65] but unfolds within reflection. In the myth of pure action and its related mode of perception, temporality diminishes into a visualized moment, fixed within the picture. Therin, the self-concept of modern painting per se is addressed. To understand the transformation of the temporal character in ›Number 32‹, one will have to face this. With the invention of the illusionistic pictorial space during the Renaissance, the temporal dimension of the painting had already become one of the major artistic problems; thus a first distancing step was made from Christian painting's sacral

¹⁰⁶ Greenberg 1948, p. 157, brought this historical problem to a head by arguing that painters like Pollock, who unfolded the inner law of modern painting towards the extreme all-over, were about to destroy painting as such.

¹⁰⁷ Tom Wolfe: *Worte in Farbe. Kunst und Kult in Amerika*, München 1992, p. 46.

¹⁰⁸ Greenberg 1948, p.157.

¹⁰⁹ While pictorial space appeared as an extension of real space within the traditional panel painting, thus ›fixating‹ the spectator, Pollock's large scale format is defined by the factual, flexible distance between spectator and picture plane, the illusionist spatial experience is replaced by the actual spatial experience. On the activation of the spectator, see the detailed analysis of pictorial space and spectator space in Hepp 1982, pp. 74-98.

pictoriality and its revealing of an infinite dogma. While traditional historical and genre painting's ambition lay in the depiction of the temporal moment as a quasi real movement within space, in the late 19th century movement as a vital element was emancipated from its former task of representation and became a part of the pictorial means themselves. The ornament is the ›critical form‹ within which this attempt to assign 'naturalness' to abstract forms by means of an organic dynamization took place. With this background, the relation between movement and ornament, which more or less consciously dictated the perception of Pollock's work, needs to be addressed here. [p.66]

Ornament as postmodern heritage

The common misunderstanding of Pollock's ›drip painting‹ as decorative fabrics is in accordance with Sedlmayr's judgement, applied already in classic modernism, stating that abstract art regresses towards the empty pattern.¹¹⁰ Depending on the viewpoint, this reproach could be used in a caricaturing manner as either an integration of Pollock's works into the world of fashion or as punchline according to the motto ›children's hands besmear table and walls‹ (Ill. 34). The contempt of the ›merely‹ decorative is, then again, the reverse of the utopian appreciation of the ornament in early modernism. The verdict against abstraction as an empty pattern, returning in many jokes and comments on Pollock, goes back historically to the experience of the imitated ornament, with which industrial mass production covered items of daily use in arbitrary styles and techniques since the mid-19th century. The avant-garde's consciousness [p. 67] constituted itself, coming from a reform of the arts and crafts, as a protest against the consequences of industrialization, which undermined the artisanal-individual character of artistic production. In the form of a ›new ornament‹, one hoped to find a contemporary formal language, which was to embody the ›true‹ human contents, far from historical patterns. Art nouveau*, progressive and regressive likewise, aimed at vitalizing the pure line towards a symbolic figure of vital forces.¹¹¹ Thus, a coincidence of ornament, image and sign, as it is characteristic for an early cultural stadium – think

¹¹⁰ Sedlmayr 1948, p. 138.

¹¹¹ «The total subjective relation of the forms to the »life of the soul« differentiates art nouveau from all former meanings of ornament and hints to expressionist beliefs. Dolf Sternberger: *Jugendstil. Begriff und Physiognomik* (1934), in: Sternberger: *Über Jugendstil*, Frankfurt 1977, pp. 20-40, quote p. 25.

of the hieroglyph – was updated hereby.¹¹² Otto Eckmann's vignette for the journal ›Pan‹ (Ill. 35) is an example for the dominating use of herbal motives, which nevertheless do not become an actual theme. Pedicels resembling goosenecks, flames, ribbons and undulating girls' hair only are visualized only by the energetically curvatures, which have found their configuration by themselves, without reminiscences of the real.¹¹³ Perceiving itself as critical of culture, the uprising of the ›pure form‹ as a vessel for ideal life entered, also in its preference for curved lines, into theoretical conceptions of abstract modernism, which, thus, searched for a practical context far from real social conditions within an ideal nature. The melting of artistic forms with forms of daily life was still understood as realization of a ›true‹ decorative art in a utopian sense by Mondrian,¹¹⁴ abstraction was already established as ›global ornament‹, before [p.69] this yearning for ›the one‹ style resulted mundanely in doormats with a Mondrian design and clothes à la Pollock. Surrealism was even closer to the historical starting point of the modern idea of ornament. The concept of automatism as well as the biomorphic vocabulary, which was continued with the ›organic ornament‹ of the 1950s, are both rooted in the arts and crafts movement of the late 19th century. A portrait of Emile Calles working at a glass vase (Ill. 36) shows the artist gripped by hypnotic ecstasy. The surrealist informed concept of action painting with its ornamental, expressive gesture ascribed to Pollock is already shaped here. In fact, the evaluation of the curvatures and asymmetries as outlet of psychic tensions during the fin de siècle is not far away from Pollock's early work, and the dance-like drama of the ›Mural‹ (see Ill. 21) still shows something of that oscillating line. ›Summertime‹ (see Ill. 21) and, although only partly, the Stuttgart ›Drawing‹ (Ill. 37) both appear arabesque as well. Frieze-like formats support such a decorative effect. Without aiming at constructing a direct dependence, Pollock's affinity to the stylistic art of the fin de siècle [p.71], which he encountered through Benton's concept of formation, is hard to ignore. According to the latter, Pollock analyzed the dynamic structures in works by Brueghel, Rembrandt,

¹¹² Cf. Holz 1968.

¹¹³ Cf. Frank-Lothar Kroll: Probleme des Ornaments in Theorie und Praxis der Jugendstil-Kunst, in: Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft, 34/1. 1989, pp. 90-102, esp. p. 95f.

¹¹⁴ Piet Mondrian: Die neue Gestaltung der Malerei, (1917), in: Hagen Bächler und Herbert Letsch (Hrsg.): De Stijl. Schriften und Manifeste zu einem theoretischen Konzept ästhetischer Umweltgestaltung. Leipzig/ Weimar 1984, p.63. The pejoratively decorative is renounced in the notion of ›new formation‹. The symbol is replaced by the ›gestalt‹ (see Theo van Doesburg, Der Wille zum Stil, 1922, ibid, p.167). See Brüderlin 1993 for the conceptualization of the ornament.

Signorelli and El Greco in the early 1930s.¹¹⁵ By means of the abstracting appropriation of this compositional technique – Benton chastised the neglect of the drawing – Pollock also gained the possibility to radically criticize the modern idea of the ornament and its implied design of a unity of life and art. Regarding the genesis of the dynamic fin de siècle line may lighten up progression and regression in Pollock's ›fever of curves‹.

Early avant-garde could only propagate a new ornament by invoking the historically last original form of the ornament in art history: the rocaille.*¹¹⁶ In it, we discover the prototype of the huge arcs and turns of ›Mural‹ and ›Gothic‹ (Ill. 38), a tradition which connects Pollock with Mondrian, for similar to how his vertical and horizontal lines always thematize the picture frame, the rocaille's form of a shell is an ornament of the edge, which itself turns into a motive.¹¹⁷ A work by Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier (Ill. 39) illustrates the beginnings of this autonomization of the shell structure, which not only transforms the rectangular frame into curled curves, but also becomes pictorial architecture. Here, the contrary tendencies of avant-garde are already established: art's self-reflection within the rocaille's transformation into a picture and the attempt to transfer it into life by monumentalizing it – e.g. in grottos, in the decoration of churches or in fantastical pictorial architectures.¹¹⁸ Quite often, the rocaille, as in this example, is linked with moving water, which, as it were, rigidifies within the form of the shell, as the curve in itself stands for an abbreviation of the elementary.¹¹⁹ The plant as a constitutive element of art nouveau décor as well as the rocaille's form of a shell come from a place of origin, defining a direction of growth or flow, which, even though the

¹¹⁵ Cf. Landau 1989, p. 28f. A christmas card from 1905, created by Benton at the age of 16, shows his beginnings, committed to the fine line of art nouveau, which can still be felt in the monumental, extra long figures of the Regionalist. Henry Adams: Thomas Hart Benton. Drawing from Life, New York 1990, p. 47, Ill. 37.

¹¹⁶ On the renaissance of rococo in the 1880s see Debora L. Silverman: Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France. Politics, Psychology, and Style, Berkeley, Los Angeles/London 1989, p. 229ff.

¹¹⁷ This is the definition of the rocaille given by Bauer 1962, p.11.

¹¹⁸ On the rocaille's character of reality see *ibid.*, pp. 41, 58-63.

¹¹⁹ Bauer 1962, *ibid.*, p.1 quotes J.B. Robinet's thought, written down in 1768, that »the shells are nothing else than the Creator's drafts for the single parts of the human body and the organs of developed life«. The shell as an abbreviation of natural and artistic creation therefore precedes the erotic cosmos of the surrealists. - Based on Sedlmayr's theory of the gestalt, Bauer's analysis leaves the correspondence between shell and femininity out of consideration, which exposes the fictitious character of the holistic ideal of nature linked to the idea of creation. The underlying suppression of heterosexuality becomes evident in the bachelor's eroticism of surrealism; cf. Metken 1976, p. 13f.

human figure is missing, nevertheless calls upon it in an indirect manner.¹²⁰ The rococo ornament – and within this lies its intrinsic ›avant-gardist‹ significance – has lost its historical substance, its relation with architecture,¹²¹ and it is only on the ground of this loss that it can ›grow‹ autonomously, overgrowing picture frame and spatial edges, becoming ›artistic nature‹.

[p.72] In his successful abstract works, and the Düsseldorf painting belongs to those without a doubt, Pollock has repealed the organic interpretation of the ornament and classical modernism's backward yearning to an expression which embodies both art and life. The drip painting not only lacks the serial uniformity of a pattern, but also and, most crucially, the figural unambiguousness of the ornament [p.73] which has been abstracted from its carrier and aims at autonomy.¹²²

The described attempts to ›transcend‹ ›Number 32‹, to have the canvas vanished theoretically, to reestablish its traditional character as a background, the desire to retrieve the conditions of the ornamental and with it its organic and semantic qualities as signs of elementary life can be seen. Here, we face the actual core of the ›arena‹ metaphor, which characterized the opening quote: When the movement within the picture congealed, and Pollock's arabesque gesture got lost in his works, between 1947 and 1950, the Pollock myth of the mass media took over this task. The artist's personality was represented in movies and photographs, thus compensating for its vanishing from the picture. The artist, volatilizing as a looming veil, as we see him in Namuth's photographs, expresses the movement which negates the picture.

As a record of movements, ›action painting‹ also stands in the tradition of chronophotography. Developed in the late 19th century, this linear visualization of movements within space by means of an electric light source which was bound to body or hand, was basically the technical, empirical foundation for the dynamic ornament. Published in the US in 1948, Siegfried Giedion's book ›Die Herrschaft der Mechanisierung‹ describes and reproduces these abstract records of movements as an instrument to analyze and improve working processes in the context of mechanical assembly-line production and, surprisingly, interprets them as authentic, holistic vital expression, with the aid of

¹²⁰ Cf. Holz 1968 on the ›tectonic‹ anchorage of the ornament in contrast to the decor. Elsewhere, Holz misunderstands Pollock's drip painting as a delightful wall plaster due to his lack of distance towards the utopian idea of the ornament; cf. Kambartel 1973, p. 272, note 14.

¹²¹ Bauer 1962, p.47. By means of a quote by Sedlmayr, it becomes, indirectly, clear that the modern idea of the ornament is based on the historical rococo ornament and its developing decorative character.

¹²² Those foundations of the ornament are discussed in detail in Holz 1968.

allegedly similar diagrams of movements by Paul Klee and Joan Miró.¹²³ [p.74] The photographs of Picasso's painting hand as light trace (Ill. 40) picks up this suggestion, the artistic ›action‹ appears as immediate self-disposition, which is not affected by alienation. [S.75] The visualization of the artistic act through photographic reproductive techniques shows the painting as ornamental expression of the painter, who simultaneously appears within the portrait. Numerous portraits of Pollock in front of his paintings aimed at the same effects, as well as, most crucially, the already mentioned painting on glass (Ill. 41). The »whirling scraps of color«¹²⁴ seem to merge into calligraphy in a visual connection with the author. What cannot be done in front of the work, namely to decipher it as a trace of life, is then fulfilled by the film's simulated position of the eyewitness.¹²⁵ Chrono-photography and ›action painting‹ was, by the way, also used in commercial advertising (Ill. 42). In this trivial form, the idea of a gestural documentation of existence completely exposes its emptiness, since the housewife's hands aim at proving its opposition, the most effective removal of ›life traces‹, of dirt.

›Number 32‹ baffles the viewer by its pure presence. The act of creation and the work itself are forever separated from each other, whereas in the past, the gestural trace of the brush or other marks of the painter's tool illustrated the technical process, thus combining past and presence in the viewer's gaze.¹²⁶ Precisely due to this new objectivity, the picture gains aura. It is, in Benjamin's words, the »unique appearance of a distance«¹²⁷. However, this distance is neither the artist's individuality nor the sacred

¹²³ Siegfried Giedion: *Mechanization takes command*, New York 1948; dt. *Die Herrschaft der Mechanisierung. Ein Beitrag zur anonymen Geschichte*, hrsg. von Henning Ritter, München 1987, p. 126-138.

¹²⁴ Haftmann 1987, vol. 1, p.480.

¹²⁵ The comparison of dripping with Indian sand paintings (Pollock 1947/48) holds on to the transitory moment, since the aim of this magical practice was not the work itself, but the witchcraft, the magical effect. While Rosenberg attributed a ritual character to Pollock's art, with a quite polemic intent (›The Mythic Act‹, 1969, in: Shapiro 1992, pp. 375-381), the same comparison often served as a serious interpretation of Pollock's art. - Allan Kaprow's deduction of the happening from ›Pollock's heritage‹ thus is closer to Rosenberg than Pollock (›The Legacy of Jackson Pollock‹, *Art News*, October 1958, partly reprinted in Johnson 1982, p.57f).

¹²⁶ This is also supported by Hepp remarking that the erection of the canvas articulates the difference between the situation of the artist and the situation of the spectator (1982, p. 65). Cf. Note 84. Such a specification of horizontal and vertical lines in reference to the aesthetic material is lacking in Krauss 1993 (cf. Note 47).

¹²⁷ Walter Benjamin: *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, Erste Fassung. *Gesammelte Schriften*, hrsg. von Rolf Tiedemann und Hermann Schweppenhäuser, Bd. 1 (2), Frankfurt a. M. 1991, pp. 431-469, quote on p. 440.

authority of the Christian cult. It is the concrete, the real, which ultimately shatters the idealist omnipotence of thoughts, and thus is terribly ›sublime‹. The notional detachment of the enamel texture from its carrier, visually staged by the painting on glass, is motivated by the desire to once again reveal the picture's presence within the distanced, [p. 77], the in-visible and the bygone; thus – even in the trivialization of painting as a stain – reestablishing its symbolic, intangible character of a trace.

Another of Benjamin's aphorisms tells of the underlying defense due to anxiety: »Within the trace, we get hold of a thing, within the aura, it gets hold of us.«¹²⁸ Moreover, the all too narrow art-immanent interpretation, leaving behind Dadaist tradition in favor of cubist or surrealist models, proves to be inadequate when it comes to the secular presence of the picture. The picture's materiality, only recognizable in the caricaturing analogy of drip painting and common stains (see III. 25, 26, 34), foreshadows the beginning of a new concreteness beyond the genre of painting itself, culminating, as of yet, in the oeuvre of Joseph Beuys. [p. 78]

Derivations of the drip painting from the isms of classical modernism are too narrow an approach to take as long as they assume a closed continuum of painting, yet flinch from the next historical step in its aesthetic consequence, even refusing it outright: Pop art*.¹²⁹ Having been established as the new avant-garde around 1960, it is usually understood as a counter-movement to abstract expressionism. Its defendants thought it to be a departure from the pathos of abstraction, opponents on the other hand called it an adoration of the trivial, thus lacking any culture. However, the historical significance of ›Number 32‹ can be only understood by the answers of this successive generation, since they consciously continued working on the problem of the ornament.

With the background of the previous argument, the foundation of the classic modern self-conception within the organic ornament can be understood as a basically

¹²⁸ Walter Benjamin: *Das Passagen-Werk. Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. V (1), p. 560 (M 16a, 4). The connection between aura and sublimity is established within this aphorism, while Benjamin himself did not discuss that in his essay on the art work. A revision of his concept of the aura, which cannot be further discussed here (which I followed in my earlier assumption of the loss of aura in the drip paintings, see note 64, p. 37) should most of all include the ninth historical-philosophical thesis, which refers to the terror of the ›Angelus Novus‹ in the face of the ruins of history.

¹²⁹ However, the direct succession of Pollock by the abstract painters Helen Frankenthaler, Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland and Larry Poons, who understood themselves as his students, is in no way to be questioned here. On the radical renewal of the drip painting in the ›graffiti‹ of Cy Twombly see Krauss 1993, pp. 256-267. On the further development of the all over in Stella's ›shaped canvas‹ see Kambartel 1970, p. 9f.; on the context and post-history in general see *ibid.* 1973. - The discussion of the historical consequences of drip painting does not imply its degradation to a mere ›pre-stage‹. Rather, the current position (which defines any retrospective observation anyhow), to which pop art as a starting point for many contemporary phenomena belongs to, should deliberately be used as a source of knowledge.

conservative persisting in a monotheistic-feudal idea of order. As an expression of universal unity, abstraction, mediated by the individual creative act, was adapted to this tradition. However, the picture's ›give and take‹, as Pollock realized it in his artistic work, dissolved the myth of creation and simultaneously the concept of the autonomous subject as well. The genius's ›twilight of the gods‹ is the foundation of the second modernity. Pictures are no longer, as it is emphatically called, created, but rather quote and defamiliarize what is already there. While Pollock destroyed the brushstroke's individuality and thus its universal significance by means of the dripping technique, Roy Lichtenstein follows a similar intention by anonymizing the brushstroke to a monumental [p. 79] comic (Ill. 43), referring to art nouveau's »allegorical line«.¹³⁰ The concept of the virtuoso creative act as a quasi-divine creation is undermined here once again, although in an ironically detached manner. The vital contents, which are referred to in the motive of the brushstroke as well as in its ornamental stylization, split up in the quote of the reproduction, the screen dots of which Lichtenstein uses in an ornamental sense. While Pollock had abandoned the decorative and with that any academic technique by materializing the painterly means, the new avant-garde devotes itself to the ornament again in order to reflect the history and the expectation of modernism. To put it with Greenberg, the ornament is turned against itself.¹³¹ This ornamental inflection of the drip painting becomes obvious in Claes Oldenburg's ›Bedroom Ensemble‹, [p.81] which contains wall decorations in the style of Pollock (Ill. 45, 46). ›Number 32‹ returns here as a rapport, as an ›empty pattern‹, seemingly confirming Sedlmayr's preventive judgement. Yet the quote's message is far more complex than it might seem at first. The ornament, namely its trivial topicality within commodity aesthetics, proves to be the general theme of the ensemble.

Similar to Lichtenstein, who breaks the genuinely individual of the ›master hand‹ within the medium of the pattern and the dynamic line, monumentalizing it within this breaking, Oldenburg, too, quotes mass media's reproduction techniques as an aesthetic moment. The exaggerated dynamically foreshortened distortion of furniture advertising (Ill. 44) is literally objectified. Not only the inscription ›private‹ but the bedroom itself

¹³⁰ Cornelius Gurlitt, quoted from Bernhard Kerber: Roy Lichtenstein. Ertrinkendes Mädchen, Stuttgart 1970, p. 14. By his own account, Lichtenstein referred to Abstract Expressionism, particularly to Willem de Kooning, in his brushstroke paintings. Cf. interview with John Coplans, in: Artforum May 1967, p. 36. Art historical literature often insinuates the brushstroke paintings' ironic attitude towards abstract expressionism, which, however, might only be valid for the ideology of the latter.

¹³¹ Clement Greenberg: Milton Avery (1958), in: Greenberg 1961, pp. 197-202, here p. 200.

as an exemplary place of intimate retreat thematizes personality, only to elevate it as a ›monument‹ by negating it. The imitated decors, from a zebra's fur to the drip style are densified together [p. 82] with the aligned perspectives of the advertising aesthetics to an integrated work of art, which belies modernism's dream of life, since the formalization of art and daily objects visibly devalues all tangible practical values. The furniture is no less ›pure form‹ than the wall decorations are. Oldenburg demonstrates how »the market's mechanisms of utilization and its aesthetic instruments (advertising and product design) ... seized and trivialized avant-garde's stylistic demands«,¹³² how the ›language of humanity‹ of abstract expressionism degenerated into a simple lifestyle. The aesthetic of the drip painting is not degraded by the ornamental duplication of the mural into a serial pattern; instead Pollock's critique of the ornament is continued here. His method of an anti-pictorial overlapping and interlacing of color and texture is now applied to the critical condensation of form quotes; the emptiness of the ornament and absence of expression are still the issue here. Pollock's drip painting has replaced the picture as a substitution for the ›in-visible‹ with the presence of the picture itself; he has rendered it visible and thus unclosed the second modernity, which no longer focusses on the invention of the new, but rather on the insight into the already familiar.

¹³² Brüderlin 1993, p. 106. with reference to the utilization of Mondrian's oeuvre as packaging and marketing design and Pollock's works as fashion-decor.