Raiding the Icebox **presents an alternative version of the history of twentieth-century art and culture. Focusing on the rise and fall of modernism, Peter Wollen deconstructs the "antinomies that constituted the identity of modernism ... functional/decorative, useful/wasteful, natural/artificial, machine/body, masculine/feminine, west/east."**

Beginning with an analysis of the role of Diaghilev and the Russian Ballet, Wollen argues that modernism has always had a hidden, suppressed side which cannot easily be absorbed into the master narrative of modernity. He suggests, through considerations of Matisse's Moroccan paintings and the work of the great fashion designer Paul Poiret, that the history of high art cannot be written separately from that of performance and design. Wollen reviews the expectations of artists and critics fascinated by both Henry Ford's assembly line and the Hollywood dream factory, expectations that culminate in Guy Debord's caustic dystopian vision of an all-consuming "Society of the Spectacle."

Finally, Wollen chronicles the emergence of a subversive new sensibility in the underground films of Andy Warhol and explores new forms of cultural expression adopted by non-Western artists as modernism enters into crisis and the century draws to a close. These artists, indeed, are raiding the icebox of the West.

Peter Wollen, Professor of Film at the University of California, Los Angeles, has directed independent feature films and has been curator of a number of international art exhibitions. He is the author of *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* and *Readings and Writings*.

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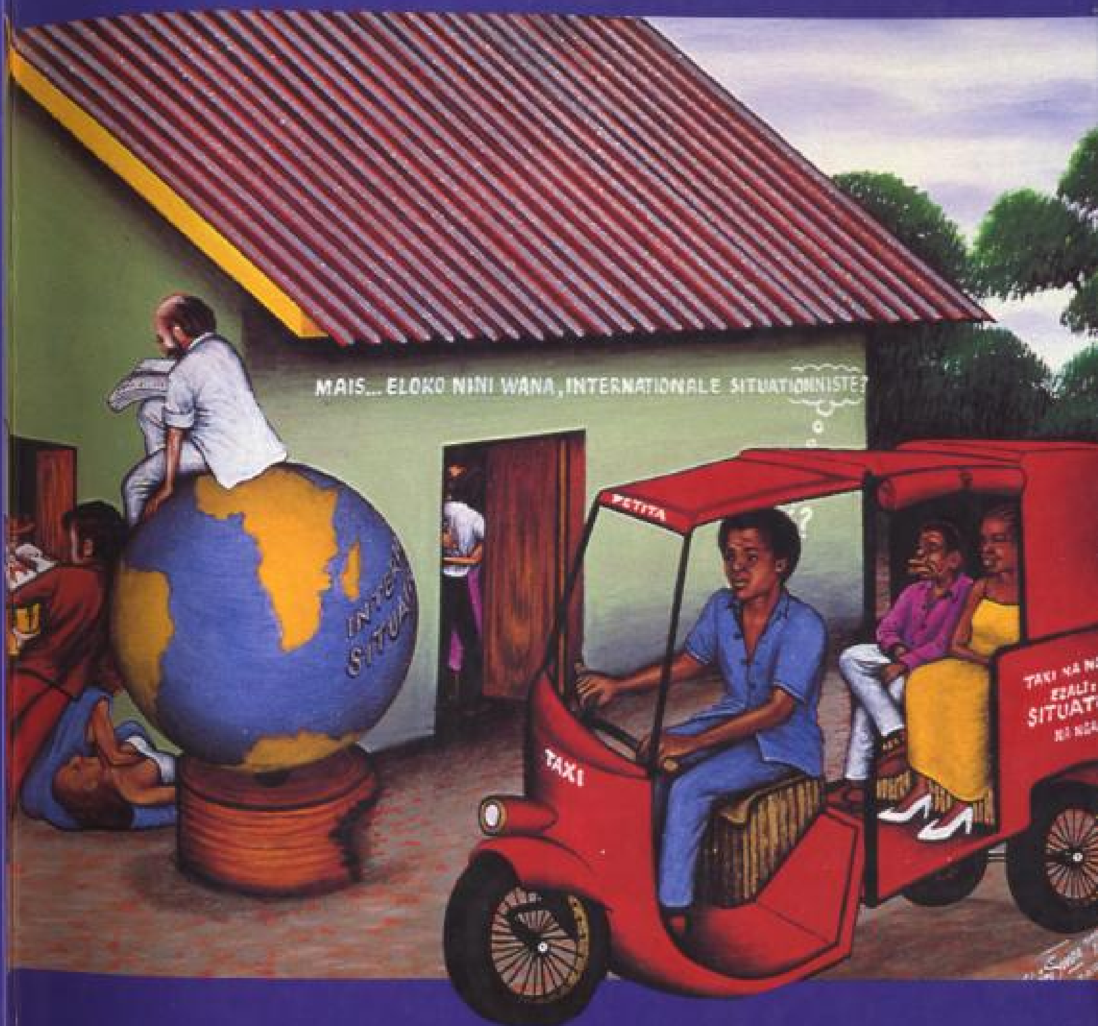

RAIDING THE ICEBOX

REFLECTIONS ON TWENTIETH-CENTURY CULTURE

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CHAPTER THREE

THE TRIUMPH OF AMERICAN PAINTING: 'A ROTTEN REBEL FROM RUSSIA'

1. Solitude is at the Heart of all Creation

The triumphs of American painting after the Second World War were predicated on the greatness of Jackson Pollock. Once Pollock was recognized, the way was cleared for the consolidation of the New York School, whether around the idea of 'action painting' or, alternatively, 'abstract expressionism'. Yet Pollock had very little in common with the 'colour field' painters who made up the main body of the abstract expressionists. On the contrary, it is much more enlightening to see Pollock as an artist whose work ran parallel to that of Francis Bacon in England and Jean Dubuffet in France, other artists whose paintings, in Clement Greenberg's phrase, were 'not afraid to look ugly'.[1] Both Bacon and Dubuffet can be seen as exceptionally powerful but idiosyncratic painters who were formed in the darker recesses of the surrealist penumbra. None of them were Surrealists in the strict sense of the word, but each of them was crucially influenced by surrealist theories and practices: the importance of images drawn from the unconscious, the value of chance procedures and 'psychic automatism', a distrust for over-polished technique (which could extend to an admiration for the art of the naif, the child or the madman), a pronounced taste for horror and disintegration, an apocalyptic cast of mind.

Bacon shared with Pollock a fascination with metamorphosis, the ways in which one image could transmute into another, a fascination with the cancellation and obliteration of images during the process of painting. Pollock traced a dense web of spattering and cascading paint in a series of multiple 'passes' over the canvas, each one changing and, as Pollock put it, 'veiling' what had gone before. Bacon used a very big brush, overloaded with paint, and tried to suppress his 'conscious will' as he worked, painting and over-painting, then sponging and smearing images out with a rag when they

looked too facile or realistic, in order to see what new 'appearances' would emerge from the magma. Like Pollock, Bacon saw painting as being 'mediumistic'.[2] He sought to paint in a state of trance – whether through being drunk or preoccupied or angry at his own work – to create images that, through accidental effects, through 'non-rational marks', would 'come across directly onto the nervous system' rather than 'tell you the story in a long diatribe through the brain'. Both Bacon and Pollock were directly influenced by surrealism, by André Breton's celebration of the creative role played in art by accident and by the unconscious. Pollock was invited to participate in Breton's First Papers of Surrealism show in New York, but declined. Bacon, then unknown, submitted work to the London exhibition of surrealism in 1936 but it was rejected, after a studio visit by Roland Penrose.[3] As far as I know, Pollock was completely unaware of Bacon's painting. Bacon, of course, knew Pollock's work, after his international success, although he criticized it on the grounds that Pollock did not return to the image in the end, using chance procedures, trance and the unconscious to produce indecipherable marks and trails, rather than following through to the discovery of new, unpremeditated images, created by the paint itself.

Bacon lived in Paris during the thirties, where he acquired copies of Georges Bataille's journal *Documents*.[4] As Dawn Ades points out, Bacon dwelt on the same imagery as Bataille, the slaughterhouse and the screaming mouth, images of disturbing monstrosity. Bacon's recasting of surrealism was similar to Bataille's. It was materialist, honouring the mole grubbing in the earth, rather than the eagle soaring above, which Bataille associated with Breton's visionary romanticism. It prized the *informe*, the shapelessness which characterizes excrement and putrefaction. Not only the rational self but, in Martin Jay's phrase, 'the integral form' of the human body, paragon of Renaissance art, was laid open to 'anti-idealizing distortion'.[5] Bacon was also a friend of the dissident surrealist ethnographer and writer, Michel Leiris, whose portrait he painted. Leiris became a colleague of Bataille and contributor to *Documents*. Leiris's article on Picasso, illustrated by reproductions of Picasso's most surrealistic paintings was followed immediately by Bataille's own article on 'Freaks', accompanied by engravings of Siamese twins. Leiris called his writings *biffures*, or 'scratchings-out', and this idea too has an affinity with Bacon's own cancellation of the image in an effort to conjure the paint into reshaping itself as something unpremeditated and other.[6] Bacon,

like Pollock, never used a preliminary sketch, but melded sketching and painting into one continuous process.

Dubuffet was never a surrealist, but his fascination with *art brut* (or 'outsider art') echoed the surrealist preoccupation with the art and writing of the insane and the untrained. Dubuffet collected outsider art and aimed to transpose its rawness and brutality into his own painting, through his use of graffiti and children's drawings. As Greenberg noted, there was something *lumpen* about his work, an assault on hierarchy from beneath.[7] Dubuffet stressed that the search for a personal means of expression was in no way dependent on culture, skill or instruction. Totally untrained and academically unskilled artists could produce work that was exceptional in its force, fanaticism and idiosyncracy. Dubuffet himself had been to art school, as had Pollock (although Bacon had not) and, when he returned to painting after working as a wine merchant, Dubuffet saw his academic training as a negative rather than a positive benefit, as when Pollock spoke of his years under the sway of his own teacher, Thomas Benton, as 'something against which to react very strongly, later on'.[8] Similarly, like Bacon and Pollock, Dubuffet saw his paintings as emerging from their materials and their textures. He left 'mistakes' in his work and treasured clumsy effects that 'spoiled' the picture. He believed in the effects of 'profuse serendipity', of trying to stay 'on the borderline of the foulest and most wretched daubing and of the little miracle'.[9]

Pollock was keenly aware of Dubuffet's work. Although they never met, there were personal ties between Dubuffet and Pollock, mediated through their mutual friend Alfonso Ossorio, a Filipino artist from a rich family who collected their work and became a close friend of both.[10] It was Pollock himself who first suggested to Ossorio that he should contact Dubuffet on a visit to Paris in 1949. Ossorio, in turn, spoke about Pollock's work with Dubuffet, just as he had discussed Dubuffet's with Pollock. Pollock admired the Dubuffet paintings that Ossorio owned and in 1951 he saw Dubuffet's latest New York show and wrote to Ossorio that he 'was really excited'. Each knew and respected the work of the other, although when Ossorio brought Dubuffet to meet Pollock, Pollock decided it was better to disappear for the evening.[11] Pollock was surely influenced by Dubuffet's fascination with surface textures (walls, the ground, table tops) and non-painterly materials, mixing sand, gravel, tar, varnish, coal dust, pebbles and broken glass with enamel paint. Works using these techniques were exhibited in Paris in May,

1946, under the name, Mirobolus, Macadam & Co, and a selection was shown in New York in early 1947, where it was favourably reviewed by Greenberg, who noted the similarity of these paintings in some respects to Pollock's work. Pollock himself began to add found materials to paint, the results of his beachcombing, as in *The Wooden Horse* (1948), which includes a wooden horse's head, and *Number 29* (1950) which includes pebbles, string, shells and wire mesh. Like Dubuffet, Pollock was fascinated by the 'counter-current' and 'polarization' between materials, with their own 'body', and images, which through painting were given an alien body, with either a destructive or a revelatory effect.[12]

In November 1949, Pollock stayed in Ossorio's New York apartment, which was hung with Dubuffets and Ossorio's own work, densely packed paintings in wax, ink and watercolour, often classed as surrealist, but tending towards the grotesque and *art brut*. The French critic Michel Ragon categorizes Ossorio's work as 'visceral surrealism'.[13] Ossorio had already bought *Number 5* (1948) and later bought a number of other Pollock paintings, including one of the most famous, *Lavender Mist* (1950), the only one sold in his 1950 show. Ossorio wrote the catalogue essay for Pollock's 1951 'black and white pourings' show, and organized his first exhibition in Paris for him, through friends of Dubuffet. From 1952 on, Ossorio housed the famous collection of *art brut* assembled by Dubuffet, Breton and others. He was now Pollock's neighbour in Long Island and Pollock must have seen the work frequently on his visits to Ossorio's home. This was the collection shown in Paris in 1949 under the title, Art in the Raw Preferred to Cultural Arts. There were over a thousand pieces, including mediumistic drawings, paintings by the insane, shell masks, drawings of kitchen refuse, every kind of strange carving, automatic drawing and mystic nightmare, created by shoemakers, postmen, hairdressers, etcetera. Ossorio began to turn his house into a museum–shrine of bizarre found objects, which reminded visitors of the Watts Towers or the Palais Idéal of the postman Cheval. Ossorio saw the affinities between the art of the 'outsider' and that of increasingly established artists such as Dubuffet, Pollock and himself, working in the field of chance, compulsive dream and assemblage.

Pollock was himself a strange hybrid of professional and outsider. Deeply disturbed, driven by raging drives and obsessions, alcoholic, abusive to women, violent to the point of endangering life, confused about his own sexuality, determined to be an artist while unable to draw with any facility or

expertise, verbally inarticulate and a lifelong rebel, Pollock had some affinity with those untrained or demented outsider artists who cover every inch of the drawing surface with intricate doodles and endless curlicues. Greenberg later noted similarities between Pollock's work and that of the naive artist Janet Sobel.[14] As David Maclagan has pointed out, the doodle (Pollock's own word to describe his work) is connected with 'many of the crucial features of modernism – psychoanalysis, abstraction and Art Brut, to name but a few.'[15] He traces this nexus in the relationship between the 'meta-doodles' of high art, outsider art and art therapy. The 'meta-doodle' gives a public dimension to a form that is essentially private, an expression of the solitude that, Maclagan observes, 'is at the heart of all creation'. It intensifies the paradoxical relationships 'between solitude and communication, automatism and non-intentionality and the inarticulate and the figurative'. It is not too difficult to see Pollock's work within this nexus, with its debt to the surrealists and Klee, its therapeutic dimension and its echoes of the deranged artists featured in Prinzhorn's famous collection Artistry of the Mentally Ill, the starting point for Dubuffet's own interest in the art of the insane.

Pollock, on the other hand, was also a trained painter, who had enjoyed a particularly heterogeneous and vivid set of experiences as a student or disciple, a devil's brew that had either to make or to break him. Pollock came from Los Angeles, where he studied art, and most of his life he remained close not only to his elder brothers, who also struggled to become artists, but also to a group from his generation of school friends: Philip Guston (then Goldstein), Harold Lehman, Reuben Kadish and Manuel Tolegian. In New York, where Pollock continued his studies, he aligned himself with the thirties' mural-painting movement, both through his teachers, Thomas Hart Benton, Job Goodman and David Alfaro Siqueiros, and through his own admiration for Mexican mural painting in general, especially the work of José Clemente Orozco. Eventually, he broke out from the influence of the Mexicans and of his teachers, through the impact of surrealism. The Chilean surrealist Roberto Matta Echaurren served as yet another mentor, but one whose influence released rather than constrained Pollock. When he found himself as a painter, it was after years of humiliation and, throughout the Depression thirties, gruelling poverty and recurrent crises of confidence. If there was an American analogue to the career of Pollock, it was that of Louise Nevelson, who similarly struggled for years without recognition and underwent, as a woman artist, even more hurtful humiliation.[16] If he was dismissed as a drunken

bum, she was considered a party girl. She too wanted at first to be a mural painter, under Rivera's influence. Her breakthrough circus sculptures of the forties, provoked by her own interest in outsider art, were insulted at the time, and it was not until the fifties that she was finally accepted. She was the only other American artist admired by Dubuffet, a compliment she too was happy to return.

2. 'A Rotten Rebel from Russia'

At the time of the Great Crash, Jackson Pollock was seventeen years old. Born in 1912, he was considerably younger than most of the abstract expressionists with whom he was later grouped, even though he was the first to be nationally and internationally acclaimed, the first to 'break the ice', as de Kooning was to put it.[17] For his generation, the Great Crash and the subsequent Depression dominated their early adult years. Pollock came from a troubled and nomadic family, one of the many which left the heartland state of Iowa because of the collapse of the agricultural economy and headed west to California.[18] His father, Roy, was a lifelong socialist, a supporter of Eugene Debs and the Wobblies, who celebrated the victory of the Russian Revolution. Roy Pollock eked out a precarious living in a series of transient jobs. He was happiest working as an independent smallholder in Arizona, growing alfalfa and keeping dairy cows on a twenty-acre plot, but was forced out of this occupation too by his business inadequacies and the shift from alfalfa to cotton in the local economy. Soon afterwards the marriage split apart, and in 1924 his wife Stella took the five boys (Jackson was the youngest) and set up home on the outskirts of Los Angeles. Roy drifted from job to job but continued to send money to support the family. Jackson's eldest brother, Charles, ten years older than him, was already enrolled at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles, from where he sent copies of *The Dial* back to his family, containing, for instance, the first publication of *The Waste Land* and reproductions of work by Picasso, Matisse and Brancusi. In 1926 he left for New York to pursue his career as an artist.

In Los Angeles, Pollock became a student at Manual Arts High School, but his education was stormy and troubled. In 1929, he was twice expelled (for leading a school uprising and for coming to blows with the football coach) and twice readmitted. During his time out of school he went to Communist Party meetings and to sit at the feet of Krishnamurti, the theosophist sage, in his

community at Ojai, in the nearby mountains. As he noted, 'The whole outfit [at school] think I am a rotten rebel from Russia. I will have to go about very quietly for a long period until I win a good reputation.'[19] But Pollock never went about quietly. Throughout his life he got involved in various kinds of radical and disruptive activity and endless fist-fights and brawls, as well as retaining an interest in the occult. After a brief stint at Otis Art School, he left Los Angeles to join his elder brothers in New York, where both Charles and Frank were studying painting under Thomas Hart Benton. The impetus came principally from the obviously gifted eldest son, Charles, who provided the model of a career as an artist for his siblings, first Frank, then Sande, then Jackson. Similarly, all the Pollock brothers became involved in labour politics, one of them in the Communist Party. Right to the end, Pollock's immediate family could not grasp how it happened that Jackson, and not Charles, became the great painter.

Charles's choice of Benton as a teacher followed logically from his background and his political interests. (Charles later became an artist for the Auto Workers' journal in Detroit during their heroic period of militancy towards the end of the thirties, the period of sitdown strikes and pitched battles which forced the anti-union automobile bosses, even Ford, into capitulation). Benton came from the Midwest and he was the closest thing the United States had produced to a muralist in the Mexican tradition. At the end of the First World War, Diego Rivera, then in Paris, had broken with cubism and returned to Mexico; there he, Orozco and Siqueiros, *los tres grandes*, had launched the movement of mural painting that became known as the Mexican Renaissance. Stylistically, the Mexican painters combined European, pre-Columbian and Mexican vernacular influences to express the spirit of national resurgence and the revolutionary aspirations of the new regime. They returned in an antiquarian spirit to the early Italian tradition of fresco painting, which they associated with the newly discovered Mayan frescoes at Chichen-Itza and the street murals painted, like inn signs, on the walls of *pulqueria* bars. At the same time they fused these influences with European modernism to create an accessible contemporary style. All three were on the left politically and both Rivera and Siqueiros helped to found the Mexican Communist Party.[20]

When he left Los Angeles for New York in September 1930, Pollock already knew that Benton was working on a series of murals which he had been commissioned to paint, along with Orozco, at the independent New School

for Social Research. This was an adult education centre, founded after the First World War by a group of progressives and radicals, such as Thorstein Veblen, John Dewey and the historians Charles and Mary Beard. The impetus came from the firing of professors at Columbia University who had been accused of subversion and disloyalty during the First World War. The New School for Social Research was intended to provide an independent haven and forum for radical and nonconformist ideas. The college had made plans to transfer to a pioneering new building in the modern style, the first in the city, designed by the architect and stage designer Joseph Urban, and completed at the end of 1930. Alvin Johnson, the director of the college, asked each painter to 'paint a subject he regarded as of such importance that no history book written a hundred years from now could fail to devote a chapter to it'.[21] Benton chose the theme *America Today*, and planned an epic depiction of the development of productive forces throughout the United States in ten panels. He took nine months to paint them and they were formally finished in January 1931. Benton was a former Marxist and Communist voter who, at this time, was still a socialist. Whatever his relation to orthodox Marxism, *America Today* was painted within a militantly collectivist–productivist framework, both in its ideology and in its iconography.

Immediately after completing the New School murals, which remain his major work, Benton did the illustrations for a book by his close friend Leo Huberman, a socialist history of the United States called *We, the People*.[22] Huberman went on to become an editor of the Marxist *Monthly Review*, along with Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, and was a leading figure on the Marxist left throughout the sixties. In the New School murals, which presumably reflect Huberman's thinking, the United States is divided into regions, each with a different historical trajectory and a specific socio-economic structure: Deep South, Midwest and Changing West on one wall and, opposite, different facets of the North – City Building, Steel and Coal. Huberman's book similarly divided the United States into the South, the North, the Frontier and the Far West, each with its own pattern of property relations, sectors of production and forms of labour. Benton's murals celebrate the productive energy of labour combined with technology, but also depict the misery and hard conditions of work for dirt farmers or miners. Significantly, Benton's native Midwest is depicted most optimistically, as closer to nature, its workers more confident; the final panels devoted to New York show a demoralized city absorbed in leisure and fun (burlesque shows, boxing

matches, Coney Island, movies, speakeasies, the Salvation Army, crowded subways) rather than productive labour. Soon after their collaboration, Huberman broke with Benton after a political disagreement and never spoke to him again. Benton's slide to the right was underway, aggravated by his pugnacious boosting of the Midwest as the real America and his increasing, near-pathological distaste for the corrupted city.

In September 1930, while Benton was still working on these murals, Jackson Pollock arrived from Los Angeles along with his brothers Frank and Charles, who were returning to New York after a visit home. All four brothers were personally close to Benton, not only taking his classes at the Art Students League but also mixing with him socially out of class hours. Benton found Charles a job teaching art at the progressive City and Country School, where Jackson worked as a janitor, and Charles's wife Elizabeth is portrayed in the last panel of the New School mural, where she can be seen in a cinema watching a movie. Jackson also posed for the mural, but as a model rather than a portrait subject, posing as a hillbilly musician playing the harmonica. (Benton was a great country music enthusiast and formed a group, The Harmonica Rascals, featuring himself, as well as Charles and Jackson, who played the mouth harp.) Soon Jackson was virtually adopted by the Bentons, who found ways to support him financially and treated him like a family member. When Benton finally left New York for Kansas City in 1935, Pollock broke down and embarked on a frenzy of heavy drinking. His old Los Angeles friend and fellow Harmonica Rascal, Manuel Tolegian, wrote to Benton that, 'when you and Rita left New York, he took to heavy drinking, even spoke to me of suicide a number of times'.[23]

Pollock's interest in mural painting was already well established before he came to New York. California was the first beachhead in the United States for *los tres grandes*, who wanted to carry their revival of the art of mural painting in Mexico north of the border, and enthusiasm for mural painting was consequently strong in Los Angeles from an early point. Pollock had read the special number of *Creative Art* on the Mexican muralists in 1929 (recommended to him by Charles), and had been out to Pomona College to watch Orozco at work on his *Prometheus* in the spring of 1930. In New York he would keep a reproduction of *Prometheus* pinned to his studio wall. Later he went to watch both the other great Mexican muralists at work: Siqueiros in Los Angeles in 1932 and Rivera at the Rockefeller Center in New York in 1933. In 1936, Siqueiros came to New York for a prolonged stay and Pollock joined

his Experimental Workshop, where with Reuben Kadish, Harold Lehman and Pollock's brother, Sande, he worked on fresco projects. Sande had already worked with Siqueiros on a mural in Los Angeles in 1932, along with Philip Guston and Reuben Kadish, Jackson's old schoolfriends. Guston and Kadish themselves went down to Mexico to paint a mural in Morelia in 1934, and Guston in time became one of the most successful Federal Art Project muralists in the United States.

3. Art for the Millions

Whereas in Mexico the mural movement reflected the revolution, in the United States it was precipitated by the Great Crash, which destroyed the expanding art market of the twenties and drove artists into the ranks of the unemployed. The Great Crash and the subsequent Depression destroyed beliefs that American technology was immune from the contradictions of capitalism. Indeed, liberal capitalism on the American model was soon challenged globally both by the alternative Stalinist model of centralized five-year plans and by the rise of Nazism in Germany, with its promise of a dynamic corporative-statist regime. In the United States itself, the discrediting of Hoover and the election of Roosevelt in 1932 led to the epoch of the New Deal and a series of inconclusive experiments with central planning, corporate consolidation and eventually Keynesian welfarism.[24] Not until the Second World War, more than thirteen years after the Great Crash, did the American economy recover its dynamism. The thirties led to an increased politicization of artists and, at the same time, an increased polarization between realist and modernist artists. Political differences became interlocked with struggles to obtain public commissions and to influence or resist official art policies, as the Roosevelt government became increasingly involved in art patronage.

The battle over realism versus modernism was complicated by its confusion with a parallel and itself much more intricate battle over the concept of the 'American scene'. Only three months after Roosevelt came to power, in May 1933, he was approached by George Biddle, an old schoolfriend (Groton and Harvard), with the suggestion that the government should employ muralists to adorn its public buildings.[25] Though a patrician with top-level political connections, Biddle was also an artist, who had studied in Paris. However, his main inspiration came from the muralists of the Mexican Renaissance, and he

envisaged an 'American Renaissance' along the same lines. Biddle was encouraged by the president's response and formed a group of artists, including Benton, to draw up guidelines for the project. However, Biddle was more interested in painting than in administration and control of the new programme eventually passed to Edward Bruce, a lawyer, banker and Washington lobbyist, who had himself given up a successful career to become an artist and muralist, before being invited back into government service at the Treasury. Bruce had clear ideas about the aesthetic guidelines under which the programme should run. Artists enjoying government patronage should be chosen on criteria of quality rather than need and, as far as concerned style and subject matter, they should paint the 'American scene' in a contemporary realist style. Thus the project would rule out not only beaux-arts neo-classicism, allegorical and mythological figures, etcetera, but also international modernism and abstraction.

But Bruce was only able to get funding initially from the Civil Works Administration, which saw its role as one of creating work for artists as a form of relief, rather than as enlightened patronage leading to an American Renaissance. As a result, a series of crossed wires led to conflicts between administrators appointed by Bruce and unemployed artists eager for income and employment, as well as protests from modernists who were excluded. Eventually the situation was resolved when the Works Progress Administration, which replaced the CWA, set up its own programme, explicitly a relief programme, with no exclusionary artistic policy. Bruce retained his own programme, called the Section, directly under the Treasury, with the old 'American scene' requirement. The first commissioned work, for the Post Office and Justice buildings in Washington, went to a group of artists that included not only Biddle but a number of allied painters, including Benton. Eventually, however, Benton withdrew, because he did not like the idea of government supervision of his work. Indeed, there was a chronic problem of censorship. Bruce had already forced the removal of a hammer-and-sickle image from the Coit Tower murals in San Francisco, and later incidents involved the censoring of a Rockwell Kent Post Office mural for its support of Puerto Rican and Native American political rights and a struggle over a 'modern' mural in New London, Ohio, which somehow slipped through the net. Philip Guston, though still working within the Mexican tradition, was asked to make his figures more realistic in a mural for the Social Security Building in Washington.

Conflict developed along two main fault lines. Essentially, rival realist parties, which became identified politically with Midwestern regionalism (on the right) and socialist realism (on the left), were struggling for the vanguard role in a populist art movement bringing 'art to the millions' through the government-sponsored form of mural painting and turning its back on the ivory tower of twenties modernism. The two opposed camps fought it out politically, attacking their adversaries with the rhetoric of anti-fascism or anti-communism, each representing themselves as true democrats. On the other hand, the modernists defended their position too, against both groups of realists. Their most prominent spokesman, Stuart Davis, fought hard to retain for modernism the vanguard role it had enjoyed in the previous decade, when the artistic revolution against the academy was seen as paralleling the political revolution against the *ancien régime*.[26] Davis, in arguing defiantly for modernism as the appropriate form for a socially progressive art, drew especially on Fernand Léger's concept of a 'new realism'. Léger argued that modernism was more rather than less realistic than traditional art, because it expressed the new complexity of perceptual experience that typified a dynamic and multifaceted urban mass society. Abstraction, Davis added, was necessary for art that was to come to grips with new social phenomena, rather than retreating with the populists into illustration and the contingency of immediate appearances.

Léger had set out his agenda programmatically in the lecture he gave in 1935 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, during a visit he made to America with Le Corbusier.[27] In this text he argued for an art based on montage and close-ups of commonplace objects, following the precedent of avant-garde film (his own *Ballet Mécanique*, René Clair's *Entr'Acte*). Paintings would be composed according to the laws of colour and geometric form, freed from an illustrative relationship to the world and perceived as each 'a reality in itself'. Such an art would be neither purely representational nor purely abstract. Any object might serve – a pile of rope as well as a human face – but its value lay not in its reference to the world, but in its role in the composition of the painting. Davis published Léger's talk in *Art Front*, of which he was then editor. Léger described the 'new realism' he advocated as beginning with his own painting *The City* (1919) which was currently being exhibited in New York for the first time. As depicted there, life in the modern city did not present unified wholes but, as in a film, series of juxtapositions of isolated objects, seen in random or rhythmic sequence, which the painter had to bring

together, according to the logic of post-cubist space and colour, into a new configuration.

Unlike Benton, who celebrated, in his New School murals, the process of production, the power of American capitalism, by representing it in action – heroic figures working in symbiosis with powerful machines – Davis painted the products themselves: cigarette packs, salt-shakers, eggbeaters, radio valves. Benton was much closer to Rivera, whose 1932 Detroit murals are dominated by the giant presses and serpentine belts of the River Rouge Ford plant.[28] Similarly, at the centre of his Rockefeller Center mural of 1933, destroyed by the Rockefeller family's contractors, stood the overwhelming image of a technocrat at the controls of enormous dynamos whose reach stretches out far into the cosmos and deep into the microscopic realms of atom and cell. In Rivera's murals, the natural fecundity of the earth and its resources are symbolized by figures of women, the human effort of science and labour by figures of men. Benton's murals, similarly, are dominated by male workers, farmers and frontiersmen. Among women it was only the wife and mother who really counted for Benton. 'Surely she is about as close to life as anyone gets. She creates it. And she too deals with things – not with symbols.'[29] On the other hand, 'the college girl, or better, I might say, society girl, has the most vapid face of all. The working girl's face is more interesting, even though it belongs to a girl who does nothing more exciting than answering the telephone.'

After the New School murals and his subsequent break with Leo Huberman, Benton cut his ties with the New York left, although he continued to support Roosevelt and the New Deal, combining this with an unpleasant 'nativism', forming new alliances with racists and isolationists. In his Whitney Museum murals of 1932 he caricatured and calumniated 'the intellectual ballyhoo' of Greenwich Village radicals with cartoon-like images and inscriptions that were not simply abusive, but racist and homophobic. Benton's depiction of blacks in this mural was particularly offensive. It was at this point that Davis began to attack Benton publicly, inaugurating an artistic and political feud that continued for decades. Davis was not alone in condemning Benton over this: Benton also lost a large number of his students, including all the blacks. Benton actively discouraged gays and women among his students, and in due course he came to see himself as the victim of some kind of leftist–homosexual conspiracy, against which he hit back blindly. He began to identify New York as a source of corruption, a place where symbols

counted for more than things, and to turn his mind towards regionalism as the right course for art. In 1934 *Time* magazine put Benton on its cover and carried a long essay lauding regionalism and denouncing modernism. The next week Davis launched the first of many apoplectic counterattacks on Benton, accusing him of drifting dangerously towards fascism. The next year, Benton finally abandoned the city for his native state of Missouri, just as the year before, in Germany, Heidegger had rejected Berlin for a hut in the Black Forest, closer to the soil, to real work, and to the authentic Germany.[30]

Throughout this period, Pollock remained close to Benton both personally and artistically. Moreover, when Pollock came finally to reject Benton's influence, he did not turn to Davis's style of modernism, with its areas of flat colour and geometric shapes. Instead, he helped to create an entirely new kind of abstract art, breaking with the 'classical' modernist system of cubism and De Stijl. After Benton, Pollock studied briefly with Job Goodman, himself a former Benton student, with who he also worked on a Federal Art Project mural, and then transferred to Siqueiros's workshop, which was organized as a revolutionary syndicate and worked on commissions for the Communist Party, producing floats for the May Day parade and other such events. Although Pollock was no more than an assistant to Siqueiros, as he had been to both Benton and Goodman, this was an important period for him retroactively, because Siqueiros, who created a weird personal combination of Mexican muralism with baroque modernism, introduced Pollock to industrial paints, working with a paint spray and industrial panels instead of canvas, like an automobile worker, and even experimenting with random poured shapes and spatters. Harold Lehman, an old schoolfriend of Pollock back at Manual Arts in Los Angeles, was also in the workshop and noted that Siqueiros had two main aims: 'The Workshop should (1) be a laboratory for experimentation in modern art techniques; (2) create art for the people.'[31] This meant 'experiment with regard to tools, materials, aesthetic or artistic approach' and work in a range of media from the poster to the mural.

Throughout this period Pollock was militant in the Artists' Union (of which Stuart Davis was the president) which had been formed to protect artists' jobs, wages and artistic freedom, as well as to protest against fascism abroad and, incipiently, at home. The union mainly represented artists working in the Federal Art Project, painting in a variety of different styles. A friend of Benton from Kansas City, Dan James, remembered looking Pollock up in New York on Benton's advice:

> Tom Benton had started Jackson painting. But there came a time – it was just about the time I was in New York, in '36 and '37 – when Jackson was breaking out of this chrysalis. He was torturing the Benton shapes beyond, much beyond, anything that Benton did to them. It was a time when Jackson was terribly unsure of himself. He was destroying one lithographic stone after another. He was working on the Arts Projects. He was involved in all the Artists Union strikes at the time. Between strikes he would get drunk and go out and fight cops. He was a very strong powerful guy, and he could usually beat one cop, but there would always be two. So poor old Jackson would be in and out of jail a good deal, beaten up. He hated his own work.[32]

Pollock's painting was still based on Benton's vision of the 'American scene'. Like Benton he produced work based on sketches he had made on cross-country trips, to Los Angeles and back. He was supported however, not by private commissions, as Benton was, but by the Federal Art Project, which finally brought him out of economic dependence on Benton, though hardly out of poverty.

Siqueiros had originally come to New York as part of the Mexican delegation to the American Artists' Congress, which launched the Popular Front cultural policy in New York, bringing communists together with other anti-fascist artists, whether realist or modernist.[33] He was accompanied by Orozco, who had a commission to paint a mural cycle, *Epic of American Civilization*, at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, which Jackson later drove up to see with a group of friends, including his brother Sande and Philip Guston. Pollock was deeply impressed by Orozco's new work, as he had been years earlier by the Pomona mural. Siqueiros supported himself, and his workshop, by means of the patronage of George Gershwin, but after a year, in spring 1937, he left for Spain to fight on the Republican side in the Civil War. Pollock was left without a mentor or a work structure and began to succumb to chronic alcoholic bouts. He failed to complete the work expected from him by the Federal Art Project and had to be covered for by a sympathetic supervisor. At Christmas that year he went out on a Greyhound bus to Kansas City to stay with Benton, but the trip was a personal disaster. On his return to New York he entered an even worse cycle of drinking, brawling and self-degradation, which finally ended with him being dumped off the street at Bellevue Hospital, after which, in June 1938, his brother Sande committed him to a mental asylum.

In later years, Clement Greenberg, the critic who launched Pollock on his

triumphal career as an abstract expressionist, saw the explanation for the turn to abstraction in a general revulsion against socialist realism after the Moscow show trials and mass purges of the late thirties and the Hitler–Stalin Pact of 1940. 'Though that is not all, by far, that there was to politics in those years: some day it will have to be told how "anti-Stalinism", which started out more or less as "Trotskyism", turned into art for art's sake, and thereby cleared the way, heroically, for what was to come.'[34] This version of events may explain Greenberg's trajectory, but it does not convincingly account for Pollock's, although, of course, the two were to converge. Pollock was not notably anti-Stalinist. In late 1940, he was fired from the Works Progress Administration as a Communist sympathizer (though he was reinstated later) and after that he was still defending Siqueiros to his future wife, Lee Krasner. Krasner was a Trotskyist sympathizer and an abstractionist, who disliked Siqueiros for both political and artistic reasons: Siqueiros, after all, had recently led an assassination attempt on Trotsky himself, in a criminal act of flamboyant Stalinism. The influences on Pollock were quite different and, at first sight, directly opposed to all Greenberg stood for. In the mental asylum Pollock encountered psychoanalysis and his art began to change. Above all, the experience opened him, however reluctantly, to the influence of surrealism. It was this that unlocked Pollock's thwarted talent.

4. 'Beauty shall be CONVULSIVE'

The first analyst Pollock encountered at the hospital was a Freudian, for whom as part of his therapy he made copper plaques and bowls decorated with allegorical male figures. At the end of September he was released, but continued to pay outpatient visits to his analyst. But Pollock had a second breakdown in January. This time he was referred to a Jungian analyst to whom he began to bring Orozcoesque drawings and paintings for interpretation. He also began to use Jungian symbolism in his ongoing work. The analyst, in an unintended way, seems to have struck the vein of occultism that had been hidden in Pollock since his teenage Krishnamurti days, expressed now, however, in terms of the unconscious rather than esoteric religion. During this same period, from January 1939, Picasso's great mural *Guernica* was brought to New York for exhibition in a desperate attempt to rally support for the doomed Republican cause in Spain and for Republican refugees and exiles. Pollock returned over and over again to study *Guernica* and especially the

accompanying suite of sketches, which showed the development of the painting through a series of metamorphoses. *Guernica* combined political commitment and mural art with Picasso's own private mythology, based on the archetypal imagery of the bullfight and the myth of the minotaur. Together with his play *Desire Caught by the Tail*, it was the culmination of Picasso's own encounter with surrealism in the thirties.

Surrealism was the principal branch of the avant-garde in the visual arts to thrive during the thirties, precisely because it was not linked to a productivist ideology.[35] Indeed, the surrealists were deeply opposed to the instrumental rationality of industrial society and specifically of Fordism. They saw the Great Crash not simply as evidence of the failure of capitalism, but as casting doubt on the more general phenomenon of Fordism and instrumental rationality. During the thirties, surrealism evolved from a movement of poets into a movement of artists. Foremost, of course, was Salvador Dali, who rejuvenated surrealist painting with his 'paranoiac-critical' method derived from the work of the young analyst Jacques Lacan. Although he was the most famous, Dali was only one of a number of artists who rallied to surrealism in the thirties. The Surrealist Exhibition of 1938 in Paris featured work by seventy artists from fourteen countries. America, however, the heartland of Fordism and instrumental reason, was not high on the surrealist agenda. On the contrary, Breton regarded Mexico as the surrealist country *par excellence*. The surrealist map of the world, produced in 1929, simply omitted the continental United States, which vanished into the void between Mexico, Alaska and Labrador. Breton saw much more hope in Latin and Francophone America, in Martinique, where he admired and encouraged the work of the poet Aimé Césaire, and in Haiti, where in 1945 his public lecture in a Port-au-Prince cinema galvanized the radical intelligentsia and, after the banning of a special surrealist number of *La Ruche* and the jailing of its editors, led to student riots, a general strike and the overthrow of the hated Lescot dictatorship.[36] A revolutionary in his politics, Breton believed that 'beauty shall be CONVULSIVE or it shall not be at all'.

Pollock's path towards surrealism was unusual. First came his interest in psychoanalysis, both Freudian and Jungian, set in a personal and therapeutic context. Second came a renewed concern with so-called primitive art, encouraged by the authority of John Graham, an émigré artist and art theorist from Russia. Graham had left Russia as a counter-revolutionary exile, who fought in a Circassian regiment of the white Savage Division, but he had since

turned to Marxism. He was also a devotee of occultism, who had recently been converted to Jungian ideas, as well as an avid collector of pre-Columbian art. Pollock initially came in contact with Graham when he read an article of Graham's, 'Primitive Art and Picasso', in 1937 and wrote an admiring letter to him.[37] Eventually this led to his entry into Graham's circle of protégés. Pollock gradually shifted away from his old milieu of ex-Benton students and friends from Los Angeles towards what turned out to be a much more central position in the New York art world. At the same time, he began to take an interest in contemporary surrealist painters who were exhibiting in New York, such as Ernst, Tanguy, Miró and Matta. Above all, he started looking at Native American art with new intensity. Pollock already owned several volumes of the Smithsonian Institute's classic *Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, which he bought secondhand and kept under his bed,[38] and he was a frequent visitor to the Museum of Natural History, especially the Northwest Coast Collection of Kwakiutl and Haida art. He had a longstanding interest in Navajo sandpainting, which was further encouraged by his Jungian analyst, himself an enthusiast for Native American art. The role of the shaman as therapeutic artist clearly became linked in his mind to the therapeutic sounding of the unconscious through art encouraged by his psychoanalysts.

Around the same time, Pollock became close to the surrealist painter William Baziotes, with whom he visited surrealist art shows. Baziotes had discovered the French symbolist poets in Pittsburgh where, according to a friend, Baudelaire's *My Heart Laid Bare* became his bible.[39] In 1938, soon after arriving in New York, he met Matta and the English surrealist Gordon Onslow-Ford at a loft party. Baziotes became the central figure in a small group of American painters (himself, Peter Busa, Gérome Kamrowski, Pollock) who actively pursued an interest in surrealist art at the beginning of the forties, even experimenting together with 'automatic painting'. Baziotes, Kamrowski and Pollock collaborated on a collective painting that used *coulage* directly from the can and flipping and spattering paint from the palette knife. They then tried to interpret it for found images. Busa recalls how Pollock linked this extension of the longtime surrealist technique of automatic writing to the psychoanalytic concept of free association.[40] Pollock also maintained that it was related to Siqueiros's ideas about chance and found images, although Baziotes disputed this with him. In Pollock's mind, free association was also connected to the idea of 'metamorphosis', which he took

from Picasso and then from Northwest Coast art. Baziotes too frequented the Natural History Museum, and based work on pre-Columbian art, although his interest was more in the strange forms of extinct saurians and curious aquatic creatures (the paper nautilus, the giant squid, sea anemones, pond life, etcetera).

Finally, Pollock's direct entry into surrealist circles came in 1942 when he was recruited into a group organized by the Chilean surrealist Roberto Matta Echaurren. Matta had been accepted into the surrealist group in 1938 but very soon afterwards he left Paris for New York to avoid the coming war. However, after Breton's own arrival in New York two years later, Matta decided to try and set up his own American-based surrealist *groupuscule* in emulation, and perhaps revival, of his mentor. He approached Baziotes for a list of names of artists who might be interested and Baziotes suggested himself, Busa, Kamrowski and Pollock. They were all formally approached by Robert Motherwell, whom Matta had met independently and with whom he had visited Mexico, and in 1942 the group began to meet regularly in order to experiment together with automatic painting at Matta's studio. For Pollock this was, in some ways, a repetition of his experience with Siqueiros, but on a more equal and genuinely collaborative basis and now within a psychoanalytic rather than a political context. He also started attending a salon at Matta's home, where the group and their wives or girlfriends would play surrealist games,[41] as Breton did at his salon, and compose collective poems using the Exquisite Corpse technique, writing lines in turn on a folded-over sheet of paper, without knowing what others had written before, and then unfolding the sheet to reveal the finished poem.

The arrival of the European surrealists in exile transformed the American art world. Although Pollock, unlike Baziotes, Kamrowski and Motherwell, declined to participate in their first exhibition in October, 1942, he soon entered the circle of surrealists based around the collector and impresario Peggy Guggenheim, who had also arrived from Europe and was then living with Max Ernst. Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery became the centre for surrealist art and it was there that Pollock enjoyed his first exhibition success and, soon afterwards, in 1943, his first one-man show. Pollock was sponsored principally by Guggenheim's assistant, Howard Putzel, a protégé of Onslow Ford, and Putzel's recommendation was laconically endorsed by Marcel Duchamp (*'Pas mal!'*). Pollock's paintings at this time combined images drawn from childhood memories and unconscious fantasies with

ambient stenographic doodles and notations, reminiscent of automatic writing. Pollock continued to maintain contact with surrealist experiment through his attendance at S.W. Hayter's workshop, where he tried to transpose automatic drawing to the etching plate, but was thwarted by the resistance of the copper to the tools. Gradually, the element of automatic writing in his paintings grew until it completely 'veiled' the images and eventually merged into image-making, when Pollock would draw in the air, letting paint drip and spatter into indecipherable coils and whorls.

Pollock never described himself as a surrealist, and tended to minimize the influence surrealism had exerted at the crucial conjuncture in his career as he finally threw off the yoke of Benton and found his way towards a new mode of abstraction. Of the group around Matta, he was probably the most chary of formal identification with the movement. Baziotes was widely identified with surrealism and Kamrowski continued to regard himself as a surrealist for the rest of his career, Indeed, he was the one artist from the group whom Breton singled out for praise, for the 'panoramographs' he created in 1943, graphic assemblages of found imagery, printed texts and idiosyncratic drawings.[42] Busa moved on to the Indian Space or Semeiology movement of artists, who sought to combine Northwest Coast Indian art with European modernism, melding the flat, cursive symbolic forms described by Boas in his epochal study *Primitive Art*, with a vocabulary of pictographic glyphs derived from Picasso and Miró.[43] Pollock, on the other hand, combined influences from Native American art with the central current of surrealist automatism, in a context conditioned by his psychoanalytic experiences, and by his earlier participation in Siqueiros's experiments with new ways of applying paint. In fact, rather than abstract expressionism, his work would be more accurately described as 'American automatism'.

5. 'Towards a Newer Laocoon'

It was when Jackson Pollock started to exhibit at Peggy Guggenheim's surrealist-oriented Art of This Century gallery that Greenberg first noticed his work. Greenberg's great achievement was that he recognized that of all the New York painters of his generation, Pollock was the only one who could effectively be cast as the founder of a new art movement of more than local significance. This was true even though Pollock did not fit at all conveniently with the model that Greenberg already had in mind. For one thing,

Greenberg abhorred surrealism. He had explicitly attacked the movement in his ground-breaking essay, 'Towards a Newer Laocoon', published in *Partisan Review* in July–August 1940, which was more or less his manifesto. There he charted out an ideal trajectory for painting and asserted that 'orthodox surrealism' had 'turned back to a confusion of literature with painting as extreme as any of the past' instead of advancing towards a self-reflexive 'abstract purism'. Greenberg freely adapted Lessing's *Laocoon* to argue that the ontological distinction between literature and painting was not, as Lessing had proposed, between a time-based and a space-based representational art, but between two arts, neither of which was intrinsically representational and both of which, in their modern form, rejected representation as extrinsic to their aesthetic essence.[44]

Painting must emancipate itself totally from literature, Greenberg insisted, a process begun in the nineteenth century but not yet completed. Even poetry should discover its own essence, free from literary representation of the world. This essence, in the case of poetry, was the creation of emotions by the evocative and associational power of words. Words should be freed from the semantic constraint of exact denotation, and used to approach the 'brink of meaning', while never falling over it into specificity of reference. Painting, on the other hand, was an art of pure optical sensation, whose effects were produced entirely by the disposition of line and colour on a flat surface, avoiding the least hint of figuration, in a way analogous to the purely acoustic sensations produced by music. Painting should not illustrate music, but should adopt its method, one of unrelenting formal research into the ontological grounding of its own material (acoustic sensation), purged of any extrinsic, outward-looking reference or allusion. This purist programme for painting, Greenberg argued, had entered a new phase with cubism and had been pursued after that by post-cubist artists such as Arp and Miró and, above all, by the abstractionists whose achievement culminated in the work of Mondrian.

Greenberg's dismissal of surrealism as inherently reactionary, because of its extrinsic, literary subject matter, led to a disparaging riposte from Breton's protégé, Nicolas Calas, in the October number of the new magazine *View*, and subsequently further attacks and counterattacks in *Partisan Review* from Greenberg and from *View*'s associate editor, Parker Tyler.[45] *View* had been founded partly to provide an alternative to the high seriousness of *Partisan Review*, drawing instead on the tradition of French magazines like Breton's

Minotaure and aiming 'to combine luxury with the avant-garde'. As one of its key contributors, Paul Bowles, observed, 'ideologically *View*'s policy adhered fairly strictly to the tenets of the Surrealist Manifesto',[46] although it extended its range to cover magic realism and neo-romanticism. *View* published a special 'Surrealist Number' (and another specifically on 'Belgian surrealism') as well as issues devoted to individual artists and to such themes as 'Vertigo', 'Narcissus', 'Americana Fantastica' and 'Tropical Americana'. It carried writing and visual art from both professionals and non-professionals, by world-famous poets and artists as well as by a child or a convicted murderer who sent poems from jail. Many of its poets and writers, including Paul Bowles (in his short story, 'The Scorpion', for instance) and the editor, Charles Henri Ford, had experimented with automatic writing, and they were evidently open to the idea of automatic painting as well.

Among the artists whose work *View* published was Pollock, who was also represented in Breton's own New York art journal, *VVV*. For Greenberg, at that time, this was a discouraging factor. However, although he remained unalterably opposed to the use of unconscious or fantastic imagery as subject matter for painting, he began to rethink his position on automatism as a method. Even so it was not until 1944 that Greenberg tackled the issues raised by surrealism head on, instead of sniping away with disparaging *obiter dicta* in the form of asides. The occasion was an article spread over two weeks in *The Nation* (12 and 19 August), where Greenberg regularly reviewed art exhibitions. The same article was reprinted the following January in the British magazine *Horizon*, so it received an international readership.[47] Greenberg had already noted the promise of Pollock's first show for Peggy Guggenheim's gallery in November 1943; he had seen and been deeply impressed by Pollock's *Mural* commissioned by Peggy Guggenheim and completed in January 1944. In May, Greenberg reviewed a group show at the gallery and hailed Baziotes's work for making him 'more curious about his particular future than about that of any other painter present' (including Motherwell and Pollock, who were both mentioned). In November 1944, he had high praise for Baziotes's one-man show, linking him with Pollock, and encouraging words for Motherwell too. He affirmed that on these three primarily ('and only comparatively few others') 'the future of American painting depends'. Greenberg had clearly decided that he had to come to terms with Matta's group.[48]

The significant new development in Greenberg's essay 'Surrealist Painting'

was his reassessment of automatist procedures in painting. He continued to reject the main current in surrealist art as 'literary' and 'antiquarian', likening the movement to that of the Pre-Raphaelites in the nineteenth century, with Breton, by implication, playing the role of William Morris, laudable in many ways, positive for literature, but negative for painting. Greenberg divided surrealists who used automatism into those for whom it was a primary factor and those for whom it was only secondary, a way towards the discovery of new images. For the first group, chance associations were used as pretexts for the artist's purely 'painterly' imagination. 'Here the reliance upon the unconscious and the accidental serves to lift inhibitions which prevent the artist from surrendering, as he needs to, to his medium.' 'Complete automatism', Greenberg noted, would tend 'in the direction of the abstract'. In effect, Greenberg's argument was that the production of 'identifiable images', academic and illusionist in their essence, was similar to the regulation of the unconscious in language by 'meter or rhyme or logic'. Flying in the face of Freud's view that the unconscious, as demonstrated in dreams, was a reservoir of images, drawn from repressed memories, Greenberg argued that, for painters, unconscious doodling would produce, at most, shapes and colours with a 'schematic' (that is, flat and abstracted), rather than a 'realistic' resemblance to 'actual phenomena'. At the limit, such doodles could be completely abstract.

In this essay, Greenberg at no point mentioned any contemporary American artist. His main targets were Dali, Ernst, Tanguy, Magritte and others, who simply painted a new realm of subject matter in an old naturalistic style. On the other hand, he had some favourable words to say about Picasso and Klee, who had been welcomed by the surrealists, and about Miró, Arp and Masson, the three surrealists who came closest to abstraction. Nor did he mention Matta, whose work he seems to have particularly disliked, comparing it more than once to comic strips and denouncing its 'biomorphic' and 'sculptural' qualities which 'gave the elements of abstract painting the look of organic substances'. Matta, perhaps, was too close to Breton himself, who had drawn on Matta's work as illustration of one of his own crazier ideas, 'les grands transparents', mythic and radically alien creatures which Breton imagined coexisting with humans without being perceived, due to their perfect camouflage.[49] Greenberg wrote to Baziotes the week after the final part of his article had come out in *The Nation*, asking him for his reactions to it. 'I'm waiting for lightning to descend, or hoping rather that it will

descend, for it may not at all. The Surrealists have probably got too tired.'[50] He was right. There was no response. In retrospect, it is clear that Greenberg had missed his opportunity. His article would have had much more effect if he had invoked the names of Baziotes, Motherwell and Pollock directly rather than Picasso, Miró and Arp, established European artists from a previous era. To do this, however, would have been to acknowledge their surrealist provenance openly, a point that Greenberg was never prepared to concede.

6. 'It Needed Mental Cases to Show the Way'

Despite his aversion to surrealism, I believe that Greenberg was attracted to Pollock in particular because of his own interest, as a critic and a collector, in amateur art, primitive art (that is, painting by untrained artists) and outsider art, although, naturally enough, he never acknowledged this explicitly. In fact, Greenberg reviewed exhibitions of (and books about) work by non-professional American artists almost as extensively and much more favourably than he did those of professionals. The reason for this is laid out with great clarity in his April 1942 review of an exhibition '150 Years of American Primitives', in which he observed that the show seemed 'to support my contention that the best American art has been, and perhaps still is, primitive or naive. These pictures have a first-hand quality, an immediacy, which cultured American painting lacks. This quality alone is not enough for great art, but there is no great art without it.' He was particularly fond of work by the self-taught Joseph Pickett (who ran a shooting gallery in a carnival and who Greenberg considered was 'not surpassed by the greatest of the academic American painters'), Arnold Friedman (who worked as a post-office clerk and painted in his spare time, becoming 'one of the best painters this country has ever produced'), and Louis Eilshemius (whom he described as 'deranged' and also 'one of the best artists we have ever produced').[51]

Indeed, as well as believing that the absence of any academic tradition or background was an advantage for American artists, Greenberg agreed that 'those who maintain that modern art was started by mental cases would seem to be right'.[52] The Douanier Rousseau ('psychotic'), Cézanne ('a little barmy') and, of course, Van Gogh were his prime examples. Greenberg argued that their psychotic tendencies gave them the necessary impetus, and fanaticism, to break with 'the practical reality of the bourgeois world' and undertake the task of changing the whole concept of representation. Picasso and Matisse

took the final, irrevocable step, but 'it needed mental cases to show them the way, to cut through to the ultimate truth of life as it is lived at present'. This astonishingly bold vision of the origin of modernism surely relates to Greenberg's later fascination with the work of both Dubuffet and Pollock. Dubuffet, of course, was openly evangelical about *art brut*, the painting of children and the deranged, as well as about urban graffiti. As Greenberg put it, he gave 'an aesthetic role' to 'the *lumpen* art of the urban lower classes', just as 'Marx discovered and gave the proletariat a political role'.[53] But, as Greenberg also pointed out, Dubuffet, though self-taught and originally non-professional, was none the less an extremely sophisticated painter who was appropriating outsider imagery for his own purposes. Pollock, in contrast, one might say, was a trained professional, but certainly uncultivated and 'a little barmy', if not indeed psychotic, fit to be placed alongside Rousseau, Cézanne and Van Gogh.

The article that decisively launched Pollock's reputation, and made possible the subsequent ascent of the New York School, was published in *Horizon* in October 1947. It was titled 'The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture' and singled out Pollock as 'the most powerful painter in contemporary America and the only one who promises to be a major one'. This claim, made to a European audience, was noted and taken up in America by *Life* magazine, which decided to run a feature article on Pollock.[54] Whilst, shortly before, it had done the same for Dubuffet and trashed him, it treated Pollock with respect and cautious enthusiasm. It gave him an image and made him a success. In his *Horizon* article Greenberg used an uncharacteristically vivid vocabulary to describe Pollock's art: 'morbid and extreme', 'radically American' in its 'violence, exasperation and stridency', dwelling 'entirely in the lonely jungle of immediate sensations, impulses and notions', marked by 'paranoia and resentment', 'spasmodic', 'Dionysian'. Historicist as always, Greenberg looked forward to an Apollonian art of the future, an art of balance and 'intense detachment', which would be 'in accord with the most advanced view of the world obtaining at the time' (presumably a coded reference to a future version of Marxism) rather than an art, such as Pollock's, 'in which passion [must] fill in the gaps left by the faulty or omitted application of theory' (presumably, again, current Marxist theory).

In the meantime, Pollock was the best hope for a resurgence of modernism, set this time in America. He was being cast for the same role as 'the more or less deranged' triad of Cézanne, Van Gogh and Rousseau, opening the way for

the cool and hard-headed generation that was still to come. Pollock was able 'to cut through to the ultimate truth of life as it is lived at present', as they had been able to half a century or more before. Like them, he was driven by demons over which he had little control. But, for Greenberg, though perhaps contingently necessary to Pollock's success, this was incidental to his essential achievement. What really mattered was his contribution to the advancement of abstract art, his development of a new 'all-over' type of abstract painting, which went beyond the geometry of the old tradition that culminated in Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* and *Victory Boogie Woogie*, yet still emphasized the flatness of the picture surface. Like Mondrian's, Pollock's painting could be presented as art without extrinsic subject matter, art about art, concerned simply with optical sensation and the materiality of paint. The personal turbulence that Pollock brought with him would pass and give way to a new art of order, harmony and rationality. As Greenberg put it, 'All profoundly original art looks ugly at first.'[55] Thus Greenberg maintained his purism by putting the 'ugly' side of Pollock into parenthesis, while insisting that he belonged within the correct modernist tradition, unblemished by such accidental influences as Benton, the Mexicans, surrealism 'and whatnot'.[56]

Greenberg's strategy can be seen at its most audacious in his treatment of Pollock's breakthrough painting, the large mural commissioned by Peggy Guggenheim. In 1943 Pollock was asked to produce a painting, eight feet by twenty feet in size, for the foyer of the duplex apartment she shared with Kenneth MacPherson. In July, he tore out an interior wall in his studio to make room for this work and banished his brother Sande to a temporary workspace. Originally, the mural was intended to be the centrepiece for Jackson's first one-man show at the Art of This Century gallery in November, but he missed the deadline and Peggy Guggenheim then asked him to finish it in time for a large party that was being given in her apartment in January. The day before the deadline Pollock was still staring at a blank canvas. Some time that evening, he at last began to paint and was finished by nine the next morning, in time to get the mural transported and erected, with some difficulty, in Peggy Guggenheim's foyer before the party began. He later explained what had happened separately to Peter Busa and to Reuben Kadish.[57] Apparently he had a vision of a stampede, based on childhood memories of seeing horses running wild on a trip to the Grand Canyon. He painted hordes of animals charging across the canvas, then, in a continued frenzy, obliterated them all again with swirling lines, finally filling in the

spaces between with broad, spattering brushstrokes. Whilst the painting retained the momentum and rhythmic dynamism of the original conception, the subject matter was completely lost to view. The sensation of energy, panic and wildness was preserved in a sublimated form.

Whichever way you consider it, this was not the work of an artist primarily preoccupied by the formal problems of his art. The formal innovativeness of *Mural* was the result of Pollock's unreflective and trancelike conjuring up of images based on childhood memories (or screen memories) and his subsequent secondary suppression (conscious censorship) of these intensely cathected images with 'automatic' scrawlings-through and overpainting. Thus the 'all-over' composition and the 'flatness' of the work come from the act of obliteration, which is total and calligraphic, an extension of two-dimensional doodling. It is significant that this work was a mural, a form Pollock had long dreamed of working in as he sat posing for Benton or performing menial tasks for Siqueiros. And the hidden subject matter – the American West – has clear echoes of Benton's regionalist preoccupations, whilst the cinematic intensity of the work recalls Siqueiros's theories on the dynamism of space, which originated from his conversations with S.M. Eisenstein in Mexico. It should also be noted that Pollock reversed both Siqueiros's and surrealist practice, in that he used accidental effects to obliterate rather than to suggest images (though these images were themselves drawn from the unconscious).

Pollock remained attached to the project of mural painting. His paintings became monumental in scale and he responded enthusiastically to repeated suggestions by architect and patron friends such as Peter Blake, Alfonso Ossorio and Tony Smith that he paint murals for buildings they would design or help to commission. These included a range of imaginary sites, including private homes, a chapel and a 'museum without walls', meaning that mural paintings would themselves serve as the interior walls. This project was to be designed by Mies van der Rohe but, like the others, it came to nothing. In Pollock's 1947 application for a Guggenheim Fellowship, which followed Peggy Guggenheim's departure for Paris and the closing of her gallery, he wrote thus:

> I intend to paint large movable pictures that will function between the easel and mural. . . . I believe the easel picture to be a dying form, and the tendency of modern feeling is towards the wall picture or mural. I believe the time is not yet ripe for a *full* transition from easel to mural. The pictures I contemplate

> painting would constitute a halfway state, and an attempt to point out the direction of the future, without arriving there completely'.[58]

Actually, the 'time was not ripe' simply because none of the projects proposed to Pollock ever came to fruition. Pollock himself, however, had seized on the idea of combining his old wish to paint largescale mural paintings with a subject matter that was intensely private rather than public, and that he could 'veil', to use his term, through the method of automatism.

Shortly afterwards Greenberg noted that 'there is a persistent urge, as persistent as it is largely unconscious, to go beyond the cabinet picture, which is destined to occupy only a spot on the wall, to a kind of picture that, without actually becoming identified with the wall like a mural, would *spread* over it and acknowledge its physical reality'.[59] The 'all-over' picture, then, was seen by Greenberg precisely as such a 'halfway state', suspended between easel and mural painting, neither clearly delimited upon the wall nor fully identified with it. The 'quest for the irreducible and primary elements of the art of painting' which Mondrian had led was encountering the alternative, even antagonistic tradition of mural painting. For Greenberg, a crucial step had been taken beyond the entire cubist tradition of which Mondrian had been the end point, a step which he himself could never have taken, though Greenberg felt that his last paintings, *Broadway Boogie Woogie* and *Victory Boogie Woogie*, showed that Mondrian knew there was a need to go further. Greenberg announced the impending death of easel painting and the appearance of a new type of mural painting, 'a living modern form', in contrast to 'the archaeological reconstruction of Puvis de Chavannes, Rivera, and the WPA projects'.[60] Mural painting, though a public form, would be free from both subject matter and ideological programmes of any kind, except those restricted to the aesthetic realm itself, the programme of art for art's sake.

7. As Trotskyism Turned into Art for Art's Sake

Greenberg's aesthetic position can be seen as a displacement of his political position: a radical, independent Trotskyism, which led him to oppose support for the Allies in the Second World War and to prefer Luxemburg's ideas on party democracy to those of Lenin and Trotsky.[61] His dislike of subject matter in art reflects, first, a radical extension of the modernist rejection of academic realism to include every kind of representation; second, the vanguardist idea

of a band of revolutionaries, united by purity of principle, transposed from the political reality of the hopelessly divided Trotskyist movement to an idealized avant-garde of abstract artists; third, and perhaps most significant, a deep distrust of the cultural preferences of 'the masses', whom Greenberg saw as easy prey for commercialized kitsch just as, in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, they had proved unable to resist political demagogy. The Russian Revolution, Greenberg believed, had been 'premature'. His political perspective became one in which an isolated and tragic group of politically cultured militants must strive to keep a revised Marxist theory alive and developing, while they waited for capitalism to reach the level of abundance necessary for socialism to succeed. Not until then could the masses hope to attain the cultural level that was a condition for the democratic exercise of popular power.

Greenberg had a similar outlook for the arts, except that there he seems to have been more optimistic. He felt more confident that the dead end represented by Mondrian could be surpassed than he was about that represented by Trotsky. When Trotskyism failed to develop, as he saw it, and seemed fated to an 'Alexandrian' decadence, he became more and more disenchanted politically with the left. Eventually he reached a point where, despite his commitment to personal liberty and his distrust of state power, he was unwilling to agree that it was now a priority to take a public stand against McCarthyism. As Trotskyism turned into art for art's sake, it thereby cleared the way, ingloriously, for the activities of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom. The model for this classical Cold War organization was the short-lived Committee for Cultural Freedom founded in 1939 by the right-ward-moving Marxist philosopher Sidney Hook. At that time, the committee was fiercely opposed by the editors of *Partisan Review*, including Greenberg, who supported the rival League for Cultural Freedom and Socialism. This had been created by a group of Trotskyist activists and intellectuals in the aftermath of the famous meeting in Mexico between Trotsky, Breton and Rivera and the publication, in *Partisan Review* of Autumn 1938 of their joint manifesto, 'Towards A Free Revolutionary Art'. Both organizations soon fell apart, but the committee was relaunched by Hook and others after the pro-Soviet Waldorf World Peace Conference, held in New York in 1949. This time it was joined by the *Partisan Review* group, who no longer saw a need for 'Cultural Freedom' to be coupled with 'Socialism'.

In March 1952, the novelist James Farrell (also an ex-Trotskyist, but a

contributor to *View* rather than *Partisan Review*) proposed in a CFC conference resolution that 'the main job *in this country* [the United States] is fighting McCarthyism'. He argued that European intellectuals would be encouraged in their fight against Stalinism if they saw Americans tackling McCarthyism head on. Greenberg, unlike his old colleagues from the *Partisan Review* group, Dwight Macdonald and Philip Rahv, declined to take a stand and found reasons to object to this position. At the conference, an anti-McCarthy resolution was ruled out of order by the chair, Lionel Trilling, and the matter was dropped. There was no majority for a general condemnation of McCarthy, which it was felt would only detract from the struggle against communism. A generation of ex-Trotskyists, whose political formation was crucially dependent on their reaction to Stalin's show trials and Hitler's Degenerate Art exhibitions, was not unduly perturbed by the spectacle of film-makers being dragooned in front of government tribunals, interrogated about their political beliefs, blacklisted, jailed or (perhaps worse) forced into degrading confessions, which they spent the rest of their lives defending, repressing or regretting. Nor, while Pollock was built up into a monument of American freedom, and endorsed as such by the State Department, did they pay much heed to the purges taking place in the movie industry and the flight to Europe, directly or indirectly caused by McCarthyism, of artists such as Brecht, Chaplin, Huston, Losey and Welles.[62]

The reasons for this silence lay, I believe, not only in their political drift to the right, but also in their dislike for the popular arts and their inability to take them seriously. Wedded to a purist version of high modernism, intellectuals such as Greenberg had already consigned Hollywood cinema to oblivion, along with magazine illustrations, ads, comics, Tin Pan Alley and tap-dancing. So what did it matter if Gene Kelly joined Sidney Bechet in France?[63] The fact that Jackson Pollock would plainly have been liable to McCarthyist persecution if the spotlight had ever turned intensely onto painting seems to have been completely discounted. Not only Pollock, of course: a whole generation of painters had been involved in the Popular Front and the Artists' Union, just as a generation of scriptwriters, actors and stage directors had been involved in parallel organizations. Of course, it was paradoxical that one set of artists should be promoted into the official spotlight, as exemplars of American liberty, just as their former comrades were being cast into outer darkness. One set, however, was seen to represent high culture and the other low. The important thing for Greenberg was to

preserve high culture within an elite until the United States, then the world's most dynamic capitalist power, entering the second consumerist stage of Fordism, had reached the breakthrough point at which such a culture could become generalized through the whole of society. In the interim, Greenberg remained hostile not only to Stalinist culture, but also to the new middlebrow values at home which, he felt, simply promoted 'an ingratiating pseudo-advanced kind of painting', more threatening than the straightforward kitsch he had warned about a decade before.[64]

For Greenberg, kitsch became the enemy, the artistic accomplice of totalitarianism, just as it was in another sense for Adorno. Whereas Greenberg saw kitsch as fundamentally Stalinist, Adorno saw it as fundamentally Nazi.[65] In each analysis, the particularity of democratic, capitalist societies was occluded. And each analysis, too, led to the endorsement of abstraction, ultra-modernism and art for art's sake. Schoenberg was Adorno's Mondrian. But whereas Adorno continued to write as a fierce and sardonic social critic, Greenberg gradually allowed social criticism to lapse. Modernism simply displaced Marxism. Modern art, Greenberg argued, was a form of pastoralism, a retreat from the discouraging reality of actually existing society into a self-contained aesthetic realm, innocent of any political or ideological entanglement. Ironically, William Empson had described proletarian realism as a form of pastoralism, a romanticized vision not of Arcadian shepherds, but of class-conscious workers.[66] For Greenberg, however, pastoralism involved a complete retreat from involvement in society and a total commitment to art as such and only as such. The banishment of subject matter in art was a necessary precondition for this policy of heroic isolation because, in Greenberg's view, all subject matter – all reference to the world, whether the real world of nature and history or the unconscious world of fantasy and dream – was inevitably tainted with ideology and threatened to engage artists politically and thus instrumentalize their art.

Among the future abstract expressionists, many openly opposed Greenberg's views. In 1940, for example, Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb, along with the Trotskyists, left the Popular-Front-based American Artists' Congress in protest against the Hitler–Stalin Pact and the Soviet invasion of Finland, and set up the rival Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors. When the work they exhibited at the federation's third annual show in 1943 was attacked by the *New York Times* critic, they collaborated with Barnett Newman (himself an anarchist) on writing a joint manifesto as a riposte,

which was published on the front page of the *New York Times*. There they denounced 'American scene' painting and asserted their commitment to 'flat forms' and 'the picture plane', but they also invoked the 'world of the imagination' and affirmed that 'there is no good painting about nothing. We assert that the subject is crucial and only that subject matter is valid which is tragic and timeless. This is why we profess spiritual kinship with primitives and archaic art'. This group became known as the Myth-makers.[67] In 1947 Newman helped to organize an exhibition of Northwest Coast art, titled The Ideographic Picture, with work from the Museum of Natural History and from Max Ernst's collection, asserting in the catalogue that the Kwakiutl had influenced a new generation of American painters 'who are not abstract painters, although working in what is known as the abstract style' and claiming their work not as 'the esoteric exercise of a snobbish elite' but 'the normal, well-understood tradition' of their people.[68]

The next year, in the late autumn of 1948, Clyfford Still, another key abstract expressionist, approached Mark Rothko with the idea of starting an art school, which they agreed should be called Subjects of the Artist. As Motherwell noted, the name of the school 'was meant to emphasize that our painting was not abstract, that it was full of subject matter'.[69] Still, always a loner, withdrew and went to California, but Rothko persisted with the help of Motherwell, who brought in Baziotes and David Hare, another protégé of the surrealists. Motherwell slanted the school towards 'psychic automatism' and other surrealist ideas. The first three public meetings, in January and February 1949, offered screenings of early fantasy films (by Georges Méliès and others) from Joseph Cornell's collection, a lecture by John Cage on 'Indian Sand Painting' (as noted earlier, also an interest of Pollock's)[70] and a talk by Richard Huelsenbeck on 'Dada Days'. In 1949 Rothko persuaded Barnett Newman to join the faculty as well. Thus the 'Subjects of the Artist' school brought the Myth-makers together with Baziotes and Motherwell from the Matta American Surrealist group, in defence of subject matter and in opposition to purist abstraction.

Yet for Greenberg art became, in contrast, a kind of monastic discipline. Artists must devote themselves to an other-wordly pursuit, rejecting not only the crude temptation of kitsch but also the more subtle temptation of subject matter. Greenberg had argued that, in previous epochs, subject matter had been simply a pretext for art, which was dropped, for the sake of aesthetic economy, when the doctrine of 'art for art's sake' was formulated. Yet the

affirmation of art for art's sake does not necessarily deny that art has any subject outside itself. The absolute reflexivity Greenberg demanded came at a cost. It led to a denial of any involvement of art with discursive thought and the figurative imagination, a denial that was in fact completely fictive and, in a sense, fraudulent. Abstract art itself was rooted in ideas about the world and even images of it. Mondrian, for instance, came to abstraction by way of theosophy, and his painting reflected a kind of mystical hermeticism. Others sought to discover a Neo-Platonic geometry in nature, reduced from the messiness of contingent detail to the clarity of essential form. Greenberg himself was not an idealist but, judging from his own writings, a positivist: hence his conclusion that 'optical sensation' was the basic material of art. This did not mean that Greenberg was a 'sensualist'. In argument with Herbert Read, who believed that art should appeal primarily to the senses, he made it clear that the senses should be subordinated to reason.[71] Indeed, part of his hostility to surrealism sprang from his belief that it was based on an irrationalist view of the world. But Greenberg's own rationalism itself presupposed an ideological position, the reflection of which Greenberg then looked for in the art of others.

8. *The Seven Lively Arts*

The history of modernism is caught between two poles of attraction: on the one hand, a visionary utopianism, built around an ideal of mass production, rational organization and machine technology harnessed to an aestheticized sense of civic purpose; on the other hand, a fascination with the urban vernacular, with the entertainments, environments and lifestyles that grew up in the unplanned and chaotic milieu of the modern city. These conflicting drives often coexisted in the same artist: thus, we can see Fernand Léger swerving between the urban vernacular influence of Blaise Cendrars and the futuristic purism of Le Corbusier, between the proletarian dance hall where young workers spontaneously invented the stunning new 'whirlwind dance' and the Radiant City where healthy sports took place in the orderly framework of a totalizing vision.[72] The conflict of attitudes was one that crosscut differences in political philosophy. The urban crowd could be construed as the organized masses, the hysterical mob or the consumerist public; the idea of planning, founded in practical terms on the model of wartime mobilization, could be seen as serving left, right or centre. Thus Léger ended up in the

Communist Party, Le Corbusier working for Vichy.[73] Similarly, the idea of a future just and free society, based on material abundance sufficient for all, could lead to a utopian activism, as with Herbert Marcuse, or to a complicit quietism, as it did with Greenberg.

Léger, like Greenberg, who believed that the great majority of people could not 'develop esthetic awareness – until they are free from want and insecurity', consistently argued for the importance of increased leisure as the basis for popular creativity and taste. But Léger saw the signs of this advanced popular taste already existing around him in the urban vernacular forms created and enjoyed by ordinary people.[74] Not only did he look for creativity in the way in which ordinary people used their free time, inventing new dances, transforming language through slang or, like his hero and friend the Douanier Rousseau, painting according to their own vision, but he also loved jazz, movies, the circus and, indeed, the chorus line. Like many artists of the twenties, he was a devotee of what Gilbert Seldes, writing in Paris about New York, described in his book of 1924 as 'the 7 lively arts'.[75] Managing editor of the avant-garde journal *The Dial* and partisan of Picasso and Stravinsky, Seldes also celebrated Mack Sennett and the Keystone Cops, jazz, Ziegfeld, journalism, the Four Marx Brothers, comic strips, clowns, Vernon and Irene Castle, the anonymous dancers of the java and the maxixe, Tin Pan Alley, Pearl White, Cole Porter and a host of other popular and performing artists. Above all, he singled out Charlie Chaplin and George Herriman, creator of Krazy Kat, as the two great geniuses of American art. (The first, it should be noted, was a Cockney orphan from the Elephant and Castle, and the second was black, a New Orleans creole who, like so many jazz musicians, fled his native city.) Léger too had celebrated Chaplin in his own film *Ballet mécanique* and in a number of surrounding artworks, Picasso was an ardent devourer of American comic strips and Stravinsky, like the composers of 'Les Six', had borrowed from popular music, especially black music.

In *The 7 Lively Arts*, Seldes titled his chapter on jazz 'Toujours Jazz' as a pointed rebuttal to Clive Bell's chapter heading 'Plus de Jazz' in his book *Since Cézanne*.[76] Clive Bell was a modernist neither in the 'machine aesthetic' nor the 'urban spectacle' sense, but was in many ways, with his doctrine of 'significant form', a precursor of Greenberg. He saw twentieth-century art developing along lines laid down primarily by Cézanne, whose fundamental interest, Bell supposed, was in the formal qualities of his art. Subject matter, Bell thought, may be 'conditioned by an artist's opinions and his attitude to

life' but 'such things are irrelevant to his work's final significance. Strange as it may seem, the essential quality in a work of art is purely artistic. It has nothing to do with the moral, religious or political views of its creator.' Although Bell himself pulled back from endorsing abstract art, this was plainly a possible corollary of his argument. Jazz, for Bell, was contemporary but impudent and immature – like America – whereas real art – European art – was the product of long centuries of aesthetic and intellectual maturation. The battle was not simply between an insurgent modernism and a neoclassical call for order, but between upstart America and wise old Europe. But now, after the Great War, Europe was shattered and impoverished. How could America possibly rise to the challenge, if the best it could produce was jazz? Plainly Americans must learn from Europe, learn discrimination and the need for the highest standards, and, of course, seriousness.

Yet Seldes's book was written in Paris. It was actually European artists, refugees from the war like Gleizes, with his paintings of Brooklyn Bridge, or Picabia, with his machine drawings, who had first brought modernism and thus Americanism to New York. It was after the Armory Show that American artists like Charles Demuth and Stuart Davis began to reassess their concept of art and to develop a specifically American programme for modernism, based on the urban vernacular around them. It was in Paris that the American editors of *Broom* learned to look at America and New York in the way that Cendrars or Léger looked at Paris, as the site of a modern, metropolitan spectacle. Paradoxically, American modernism first began as an assimilation of European Americanism. In the end even Mondrian, the purist of the pure, came to New York as a war refugee and revealed his Americanism in his startling last paintings, perhaps the most vivid 'American scene' paintings ever made in their invocation of the Manhattan grid, the V for Victory and, of course, boogie-woogie. Stuart Davis recounted with irony an occasion on which he played rare jazz records from his collection for Mondrian and how Mondrian 'pronounced certain examples of boogie-woogie to be "Pure" or "The True Jazz"; as for the rest it was worthy, provided an inferior status be granted'. (According to Mondrian, it should be noted, neoplasticism was to cubism as boogie-woogie was to jazz.[77])

A new generation grew up in New York which saw art as the means of celebrating, rather than redeeming, the specifically American city in which it lived and worked. Pioneers like Stieglitz had struggled to build the basis of an American modernism, but his followers went much further than their

mentor. An American national art, they felt, could not be neoclassical, or even post-impressionist like that of France. On the contrary, it must begin with its own materials, its own contemporary life and popular actualities – jazz, skyscrapers, movies, billboards – and build on those. Dancing-palaces, which Bell belittled, were precisely the right places at which to begin. Thus was born the specifically New York movement that Wanda Corn has dubbed that of 'the new vulgarians'.[78] Its adherents brought back European Americanism from Paris and set about creating a brand-new American art, rooted in the urban vernacular. Charles Demuth's *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold*, painted in 1928, is based on a poem by William Carlos Williams describing the sensation of seeing a huge number 5 on a red firetruck rumbling down a city street at night, gong clanging and siren howling. At the same time, the painting is a 'portrait poster' of Williams, one of a series made by Demuth with friends as subjects. Demuth adopted the aesthetic of the poster, the advertizing art form of the street, to represent a contemporary street scene, to which he added poster-style lettering: the word 'BILL', a pun on billboards and William Carlos Williams, and the middle name 'CARLOS' in lights like a Broadway theatre sign.

The most complex, assiduous and long-lasting of this group of artists was Stuart Davis. Davis began as an American realist of the Ashcan School, but became fascinated by European avant-gardism as a result of the notorious Armory Show held in New York in 1913. Davis was then twenty and had already started to paint street scenes with signage, vaudeville theatres, saloons, jazz bars and dance halls. Gradually he assimilated the lessons of cubism and Matisse and made his crucial breakthrough after the First World War, in 1921. This was the year in which he decorated the walls of a soda fountain and candy store in Newark, New Jersey: Gar Sparks's Nut Shop, whose proprietor was both a friend and a fellow-artist. Davis covered the walls with 'letters of every colour, letters of every shape and size [reading 'BAnaNA rOyaL', 'HOuSE sOda', etc], looking at first like a pied form in a lunatic's print shop'.[79] Davis was familiar with Apollinaire's 'calligrammes' and the use of found lettering in cubist collages. One of his closest friends, Robert Brown, was an 'image-poet' and, after the Second World War, Davis seems to have followed lettrism with interest.[80] Indeed, his postwar paintings, full of commercial logos and cursive signatures, can be seen as running in parallel with the use of signs and glyphs by the Indian Space painters or, indeed, the stenographic notation adopted by Pollock.

Davis visited Newark often, not only to enjoy the Nut Shop, but also to listen to black music. He reminisced later about the days when he was

> particularly hep to the jive, for that period, and began listening to the negro piano players in Newark dives. . . . The pianists were unpaid, playing for love of art alone. In one place the piano was covered on top and sides with barbed wire to discourage lounging or leaning on it and give the performer more scope while at work. But the big point with us was that in all of these places you could hear the blues, or tin pan alley tune turned into real music.

Jazz was a lifelong enthusiasm for Davis and one of his goals as a painter was to capture the quality of the music he loved. At the Armory Show he felt 'the same kind of excitement I got from the numerical precisions of the negro piano players in the negro saloons, and I resolved that I would quite definitely have to become a "modern" artist'. More than twenty years later, he wrote:

> . . . some of the things which have made me want to paint, outside of other paintings, are: American wood and iron work of the past; Civil War and skyscraper architecture; the brilliant colors on gasoline stations; chain-store fronts and taxi-cabs; the music of Bach; synthetic chemistry; the poetry of Rimbaud; fast travel by train, auto, and aeroplane which brought new and multiple perspectives; electric signs; the landscape and boats of Gloucester, Mass.; 5 & 10 cent store kitchen utensils; movies and radio; Earl Hines hot piano and negro jazz music in general, etc. In one way or another the quality of these things plays a role in determining the character of my paintings. Not in the sense of describing them in graphic images, but by predetermining an analogous dynamics in the design, which becomes a new part of the American Environment.[81]

Jazz was important to avant-garde white artists in America for a number of reasons. First, it was a striking element of the 'American scene', especially the topical, urban scene, from which artists could borrow and which they could represent visually, perhaps through aiming to invent some equivalent in terms of colour or pattern. Second, white artists could look to jazz as an art form that provided them with a model of a 'usable American past' which they could counterpose to the all-too-available 'usable European past'. In the search for the authentically American, black music could be mobilized against 'European' music and viewed as a potential source for a new, alternative aesthetic, which could somehow be used as a can-opener to break with the obviously European norms of acceptable white art. Evidently, this often involved exaggerating and distorting the nature of the real African substrate

of jazz, which had survived right through slavery, and minimizing its European-derived aspects, often through appealing to the 'primitive' and 'wild' stereotypes of African-ness. Third, though probably this was not uppermost in the minds of either performers or listeners at the time, jazz did not simply provide subject matter for artists or even an influence or a model, but itself instituted a reorganization of the whole field of art between 'high' and 'low'.

9. 'It Don't Mean a Thing if it Ain't Got That Swing'

Jazz brought together phenomena that had previously been kept apart (or at least considered unconnected: folk art; urban vernacular art; popular entertainment; mass commercial art; and, last but not least, a marginalized form of 'art for art's sake' (or 'jazz music for jazz musicians'). At each level, jazz retained traces of the other levels and also absorbed a range of different outside influences. Moreover, the 'function' of jazz, to use Adorno's term, varied from level to level. Jazz could be found in the street, in the barrelhouse, in church, in the dance hall, in the nightclub, on the theatre stage, in the sound film, in the recording studio, on the radio, at rent parties, at the Aeolian Hall, at funerals and in the back room after hours. Its function clearly varied from situation to situation and the same musicians and bands could be found playing across a range of situations, though adapting or varying their music to suit different audiences. Jazz was thus quite different from any other type of music. Jazz was not tied to recording or to broadcasting. Rather, it provided an early and dynamic example of the way in which modern art forms might be expected to develop, not as fixed entities with well-defined borders, but as practices that underwent complex mutations and crossovers as they pursued trajectories through very different situations and aesthetic levels. Jazz was able to penetrate the realm of high art while retaining its connections with vernacular culture and developing its own avant-garde. Plainly, this was made possible by the historic origins of jazz when slavery was overthrown. For example, in the specific situation of New Orleans, formerly free creole ('mixed race') musicians, often highly trained musically, were thrown together with newly urbanized former slaves as white society reorganized itself to exclude anyone with the least touch of black descent – a much stricter *apartheid* than had prevailed before the Civil War, when creoles could even be slave-owners.[82]

Not only did this crossover between two hitherto distinct sections of what was now lumped together indiscriminately as the 'black' population take place in a large city, but the end of slavery also meant that black musicians of many different types could now professionalize themselves. This involved changes in the character of jazz and also the spread of jazz outside the black community and its eventual recognition as a national music. First, black musicians conquered vaudeville, introducing the cakewalk and tap, driving out the racist minstrel and coon shows that had flourished there. Next, they brought jazz to dance halls and Tin Pan Alley, where ragtime and jazz triumphed as the music of choice for the dance crazes that swept America from the turn of the century onwards (the Turkey Trot, Fox-Trot, Charleston, etcetera), reflecting enormous changes in American urban lifestyle and leisure activity, especially among youth and women. Finally, in the 1930s, building on the accomplishments of earlier black arrangers such as Don Redman, musicians such as Duke Ellington, along with white bands, made significant inroads into radio. Jazz, already established in clubs and on records, now reached a nationwide mass domestic audience in the newly evolved form of swing. In 1932 Davis painted the words 'It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing' down the side of his *American Painting*. Duke Ellington, whose words Davis was citing, later played at a mini-concert held at the opening of Davis's 1943 one-man show, an occasion that also allowed Piet Mondrian to enjoy some fine boogie-woogie piano.[83]

Jazz became associated with modernity, with the whole dynamic of the period in which the United States industrialized and then, from the beginning of the Fordist epoch on, began to overtake Europe. It was the epoch in which the skyscrapers were built and in which the United States established its dominance within the mass media (Hollywood) and industrialized consumer culture. In the 1920s and 1930s, jazz became an integral part of America's Great Leap Forward, even though the black community in general was left behind. Black painters also took jazz as their point of reference. Aaron Douglas, the outstanding visual artist of the Harlem Renaissance, whose mural *Aspects of Negro Life* in the 135th Street (now Countee Cullen) Library remains an outstanding monument of the Federal Art Project, used images of musicians as the main motif of his painting and clearly tried to find a pictorial equivalent to jazz in his stylized silhouettes and undulating bands of colour intersected by concentric circles and narrow cones of light. The iconography of the mural moves from the drums in Africa, through the banjo on the slave

plantation, to the trumpeter during Reconstruction and then, finally, to the saxophonist surveying an urban landscape of smokestacks and skyscrapers.[84]

A decade earlier, Douglas had done the cover and the illustrations for *Fire!!*, the avant-garde journal that Langston Hughes first suggested one evening in Douglas's apartment, whose contributors celebrated and drew from black vernacular culture, including jazz and the blues. Langston Hughes's article in *The Nation* in 1924 (the year Louis Armstrong came to New York as lead soloist for Fletcher Henderson) served as a manifesto for the group that gathered around *Fire!!* There Hughes called out:

> Let the blare of Negro jazz bands and the bellowing voice of Bessie Smith singing Blues . . . and Jean Toomer holding the heart of Georgia in his hands, and Aaron Douglas drawing strange black fantasies cause the smug Negro middle class to turn from their white, respectable, ordinary books and papers to catch a glimmer of their own beauty.[85]

Aaron Douglas surmised that music, rather than the plastic arts, had been in the forefront of black culture because of the iconoclastic nature of the Protestant religion that was imposed on Afro-Americans during slavery. Jazz, on the other hand, 'had dominated the form and direction of modern popular music' and jazz dance (from the Cake Walk, through Balling the Jack and the Lindy Hop to the Shim, Sham, Shimmie and Trucking) had 'not only kept the dance alive, but in a spontaneous, revolutionary, creative state'. Douglas noted that 'the Negro artist, unlike the white artist, has never known the big house' and consequently, was bound to suffer from the lack of a popular, visual culture.[86]

Modern painting in Europe, in contrast, began at the top, as one of the beaux-arts. The period of expansion of modernism, in the 1910s and especially the 1920s, saw a determined move into the field of the popular and performing arts: posters and advertising art, stage design, industrial and costume design and even, through the constructivists, the Bauhaus and Esprit Nouveau, an alliance and attempted integration with architecture. Although painting tried to incorporate elements of photography, it never succeeded in entering the mass media. Léger, Moholy-Nagy and Dali were almost alone in making films and none of them succeeded in penetrating the industry. In the 1930s this movement collapsed completely under the impact of the Great Crash, political repression and the corporate consolidation of the mass media. Indeed, a counter-tendency of purism soon emerged, seeking to restrict painting on two fronts, first by bringing it back firmly into the fine art

tradition and, second, where it had moved into design and applied arts, by attacking the 'pseudo-modern' and the 'modernistic'. In architecture, for example, buildings such as the Chrysler Building were denounced as spurious, even though they broke completely with the academic beaux-arts style. The Chrysler Building's architect, William Van Alen, had returned from Paris 'without a box of architectural books' and announced, 'No old stuff for me! No bestial copyings of arches, and colyums [*sic*] and cornishes [*sic*]! Me, I'm new! *Avanti*!'[87] None the less the building was denounced as a 'stunt design', characterized by 'meaningless voluptuousness'. Van Alen was immortalized as 'the Ziegfeld of architecture'. Indeed, this was also a tactic that Adorno applied to jazz, attacking it as pseudo-modern, as 'eccentric' and 'purposeless' in its deceptive 'sex appeal'.[88]

This tendency culminated in Greenberg's doctrine of modernism. On the one hand, Greenberg had taken a leaf from Benton and demanded an end to the hegemony of Paris, the lingering effete influence of Europe. But on the other hand, rather than falling back on isolationism and heartland populism, he had out-trumped Paris by backing a new and more dynamic version of abstract art. American painting, he argued, finally went beyond the limits imposed by the cubist aesthetic, beyond the *terminus ad quem* represented by Mondrian, now dead and buried in Brooklyn. High culture was in safe hands, where bohemia, a cultivated intelligentsia and an enlightened leisure class met in New York. Art would henceforth evolve within its own autonomous social space, its own ivory skyscraper. Outside, in the 'American scene', kitsch would reign supreme. Yet, in the end, Greenberg's efforts to combat kitsch in the name of a purified avant-garde were doomed to failure. The repression of subject matter and figuration was too harsh to survive. The monstrous spectacle of pop art sprang up to replace abstract expressionism and colour field painting, in a massive return of the repressed.

Pop went back to the basics that had been lost during the Greenberg years. It attempted once again to find a way to reinscribe the 'American scene' into the main tradition of modernism, to remake a link with the generation of Duchamp, Léger and indeed Davis. These may seem old issues now, yet I doubt that they have yet been fully worked out. Critics of Davis, with Pollock in mind, often describe him as having gone down a dead end. But perhaps it was Pollock rather than Davis who went down the dead end, threatening to deliver American painting, in its moment of triumph, into the very academicism and 'Alexandrianism' that Greenberg dreaded and which, when it came,

took the form of the abstract purism he himself promoted. Pop art, at the very least, rescued it from that sad fate. After Pollock, painting desperately needed to re-establish contact with the vernacular, even while retaining its long allegiance to formalism. Victor Shklovsky described the process of filiation in art history as like that of a 'Knight's Move'.[89] Perhaps this is how we can best see the relationship between Davis and Pollock. If we take the key issue to be that of the occult relationship between painting and writing, which surfaces early on in the history of modernism, in Lautrec's posters and in cubist collages, and continues up to the present, then we can see Pollock as displacing the logos, advertising graphics and signatures that fascinated Davis, enlarging them to fill the whole canvas and reducing them to calligraphic scrawls and *biffures*. In pop art, legible words reappear, now in the form of cartoon bubbles or newspaper headlines.

In the same way, Davis's homage to jazz reappears unexpectedly when critics make an analogy between Pollock's automatism and the improvisations of Charlie Parker or Thelonious Monk. Of course, there are basic differences between the two. Jazz improvisation consists of virtuoso embroidery around a given theme or rhythm, breaking it up, complicating it, pushing it to its limits. Pollock's automatism starts out with a void and then fills it with its own web of forms. But both have a mediumistic aspect, both threaten to dissolve into abstraction and chaos, both are forms of signifying, of searching for new, highly personal modes of utterance. As a psychiatrist friend of Pollock observed:

> I know people speak of his dancing in his paintings, but to me it's more like talking. I think there was a process – the old, primitive process – of the need to utter. Jackson took in a lot of experience, relations with people and with ideas; he'd seen therapists and all, and since he was a philosopher he had to ask 'What does it mean?' I think he had trouble saying it – a lot of people might understand him better if he had been a writer – and I think as a philosopher the best he could do was an approximation. There's an utterance there, but it's a lot like trying to understand brain-damaged people or those with an autistic or dyslexic factor, or psychotics, or somebody in an altered state of consciousness. Jackson the philosopher liked to talk, but he had trouble expressing what he saw and in that sense he was inarticulate.[90]

Much the same could be said of Monk. Both reached the point where, one starting from high, the other from low art, they each approached a kind of autistic rococo, creating meta-doodles of extraordinary virtuosity.[91]

The basic point here is the danger of purism, which is best seen simply as a closing off and cancellation of options and possibilities. Purist aesthetics attempt to channel art towards a single, overriding, conscious goal. To that end, accidental and unconscious influences, distracting compulsions and strange affinities are eradicated or denied. In the end, purism leads toward stasis, even when it is conceived of as an endless Sisyphean task. Pollock was followed by a period dominated by bland, vacuous, grandiloquent canvases, which, whatever their metaphysical pretensions, ended up as decorative adjuncts to corporate lobbies, monuments to fashion and to charm.[92] Worst of all, he was crowned the king of American painting in a triumphalist wave of nationalism and political manipulation of art. The 'ideologically innocent' art desired by Greenberg was inverted into an art of imperial propaganda. It was a strange and tragic fate for a great artist, who spent nights on the street in a drunken stupor, fought with the cops on demonstrations, haunted the Museum of Natural History in reverence contemplation of the art of Native Americans, scoured the beach for detritus to fling down onto his paint-encrusted canvas, loved the work of El Greco and Goya, played Exquisite Corpse in a surrealist salon, was thrown off the Federal Art Project as a Red, and wrestled all his life with childhood memories and philosophical conundrums that remained convulsive to the last, resistant to containment, regulation and good order.

Notes

1. Clement Greenberg, reviewing Jackson Pollock's second one-man show at the Art of This Century Gallery in *The Nation*, 7 April 1945, reprinted in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 2, *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).
2. For Bacon's observations on his own work, see David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: interviews with Francis Bacon* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985).
3. Dawn Ades and Andrew Forge, *Francis Bacon* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1985).
4. *Documents* (Paris), vols. 1 & 2, 1929, 1930.
5. Martin Jay, 'The Disenchantment of the Eye: surrealism and the crisis of ocularcentrism', in *Visual Anthropology Review*, vol. 7, no. 1 (spring 1991). See also, in the same issue, James Clifford, '*Documents*: a decomposition'.
6. Michel Leiris, *Biffures* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948). The autobiographical texts in this book, which plunge back into childhood memory and explore the 'spider's web' of language and its mysterious power, were written between 1940 and 1947.
7. Clement Greenberg, in 'Jean Dubuffet and "Art Brut" ', *Partisan Review*, March 1949, reprinted in Greenberg, *Collected Essays*.
8. Jackson Pollock, 'A Questionnaire', *Arts and Architecture*, no. 61, February 1944.
9. Jean Dubuffet, cited in Michel Ragon, *Dubuffet* (New York: Grove Press, 'Evergreen Gallery Book 1', 1959).

10. B.H. Friedman, *Alfonso Ossorio* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, n.d.).
11. Ossorio's recollection, cited in Jeffrey Potter, *An Oral Biography of Jackson Pollock* (Wainscott, NY: Pushcart Press, 1985). Ossorio comments that 'Jackson decided that life would be simpler if he and Dubuffet didn't meet.' He also notes that, although 'they looked at each other's work with extreme attention and understanding', Pollock thought that 'Dubuffet didn't go far enough' and Dubuffet thought that 'Jackson was too easy'.
12. For Dubuffet, see also Georges Limbour, *Tableau Bon Levain à vous de cuire la pate* (Paris: René Drouin, 1953).
13. Ragon.
14. Greenberg, 'Arrogant purpose', where he twice makes the comparison between Sobel and Pollock. Sobel, like Pollock, was counted as a surrealist in Sidney Janis, *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1944).
15. David Maclagan, 'Solitude and Communication: beyond the doodle', *Raw Vision*, no. 3 (summer 1990).
16. For Nevelson's career, see Laurie Lisle, *Louise Nevelson: a passionate life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990). Nevelson personally persuaded Alfred Barr to exhibit a decorated shoeshine stand, made by the self-taught bootblack Joe Milone, in the Museum of Modern Art lobby at Christmas 1942, an incident that led to Barr's dismissal. She began 'to see almost anything on the street as art', in a spirit she felt derived from her sense of social injustice. The other exceptional woman artist shamefully ignored at this time was Louise Bourgeois, who came to New York from Paris, where she had been strongly affected by Breton and surrealist ideas.
17. De Kooning is cited in Irving Sandler, *Abstract Expressionism* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1970).
18. For Pollock's life, as well as Jeffrey Potter, see also especially Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: an American saga* (New York: Harper, 1991) and B.H. Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: energy made visible* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1972). Potter was a friend and neighbour of Pollock in Easthampton, Friedman was an early collector of Pollock's work. Both these authors have a vivid and informed personal viewpoint. Naifeh and White Smith won the Pulitzer Prize for their monumental and minutely researched biography, which, for me, is marred by their patronizing tone towards many of the characters in their fluent narrative. Even Pollock himself is treated with an edge of contempt, concealed behind the veil of adulation.
19. Naifeh and White Smith.
20. The standard introduction to the Mexican Renaissance is Jean Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1963). For the expeditions of the Mexican muralists north of the border, see Laurence P. Hurlburt, *The Mexican Muralists in the United States* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989). This is an outstandingly sympathetic, acute and well-researched treatment.
21. On the New School murals, see Emily Braun, *Thomas Hart Benton: the 'America Today' murals* (Williamstown: Williams College Museum of Art, 1985). On Benton's career in general, see Henry Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton: an American original* (New York: Knopf, 1989), which is thorough and detailed, though strictly limited to a fine arts approach, and, worse, falls over itself trying to put the best possible interpretation on Benton's outbursts and 'originality'. Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollock and the Politics of Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) is much more wide-ranging and provocative. It takes pains to place Benton and Pollock in their cultural context, but over-eggs its pudding, highlighting every possible aspect of continuity. On the origins and role of the New School for Social Research, see Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals* (New York: Noonday, 1987) and, on the architecture, Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987).
22. Leo Huberman, *We, The People!* (New York, Harper, 1932).
23. Henry Adams.
24. On the New Deal see, perhaps, Paul P. Conkin, *FDR and the Origins of the Welfare State* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1967). I have not been able to find a satisfactory overview of the New Deal.

25. For a personal account, see George Biddle, *An American Artist's Story* (Boston: Little Brown, 1939) and, for a more general treatment, Richard D. McKinzie, *The New Deal for Artists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973) and Belisario R. Contreras, *Tradition and Innovation in New Deal Art* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1983). For the problems of censorship, see also Karal Ann Marling, *Wall-to-Wall America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982) and for muralists in New York City, Greta Berman, *The Lost Years* (New York: Garland, 1978), which is a volume in their series of reprints of 'Outstanding Dissertations in the Fine Arts'.
26. On Stuart Davis, see especially Lowery Stokes Sims, *Stuart Davis: American painter* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992). Cécile Whiting, *Antifascism and American Art* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1989) is useful on Davis's political activities as an artist.
27. Reprinted in Fernand Léger, *Functions of Painting* (New York: Viking, 1963).
28. On Rivera's United States murals, see Hurlburt.
29. Henry Adams.
30. See Michael E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity* (Bloomington: University of Indiana, 1990). When Davis and others accused Benton of drifting dangerously towards fascism, it is clear why they thought this convincing at the time, while both the trajectory of the New Deal and of Benton were still unclear. However, in retrospect, we can see that Benton was something more like a nativist and chauvinist social democrat than an anti-democratic proto-fascist. He supported Roosevelt throughout. His social-democratic ideas, however, were strongly coloured by the Midwestern agrarian populism that underpinned much regionalist ideology, whose other adherents often displayed an isolationist indifference to the dangers of fascism abroad.
31. Hurlburt.
32. Henry Adams.
33. See Matthew Baigell and Julia Williams, *Artists Against War and Fascism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986). In his address to the congress, Siqueiros stressed a movement away from mural painting set within official buildings towards 'graphic art' accessible to people in the street.
34. Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).
35. The standard introductory work on the history of surrealism remains Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968). This, however, was first written in France during the Nazi occupation and was never subsequently updated. Recent books that raise vital issues for our assessment of surrealism are Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985) and Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990).
36. See René Depestre, *Bonjour et adieu à la négritude* (Paris: Seghers, 1980) for an account by a Haitian who was present at the lecture and went on to be a leading poet and theorist of *négritude*.
37. John Graham, 'Primitive Art and Picasso', *Magazine of Art*, April 1937. Jung, it may be relevant to note, believed that elements of the Amerindian unconscious were inherited in some occult way by Euro-Americans.
38. According to his brother Charles, he bought these in used bookstores on Fourth Avenue, between 1930 and 1935, but according to others he stole them from the City and Country School library. See Friedman.
39. On Baziotes, see Barbara Cavaliere, 'An Introduction to the Method of William Baziotes', *Arts Magazine*, no. 51 (April 1977).
40. See especially Jeffrey Wechsler, *Surrealism and American Art* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Art Gallery, 1977). This work is invaluable for a clear understanding of the options open to American artists.
41. For surrealist games, see Mel Gooding (ed.), *Surrealist Games* (London: Redstone Press, 1991), compiled and presented by Alastair Brotchie. This is the best available introduction to the emancipatory methods of surrealism and crams an amazing amount of research into a very small space.
42. André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting* (New York: Harper & Row, 1947). A panoramograph by Kamrowsky was published in Breton's magazine *VVV*, March 1943. The most prominent American surrealist was Dorothea Tanning.

43. See Sandra Kraskin and Barbara Hollister (eds.), *The Indian Space Painters* (New York: Baruch College, 1991), the catalogue of a pioneering exhibition at the Sidney Mishkin Gallery, and Ann Eden Gibson, *Issues in Abstract Expressionism: the artist-run periodicals* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990), which focuses on the journal *Iconograph*, which was associated with the group. The achievements of Robert Barrell, Gertrude Barrer and Peter Busa, and indeed many other artists associated with the Indian Space movement, have been shamefully overlooked. Gertrude Barrer's exceptionally interesting work developed in the direction of abstract expressionism and was noted by Greenberg, but of course she was a woman and this counted against her. There is an underlying connection between the American fascination with Kwakiutl art and that of the surrealists. Breton, Ernst and the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who was close to the surrealists at that time, were all collectors of Northwest Coast art while they were in New York, and in 1943 Lévi-Strauss wrote for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* an article, 'The Art of the Northwest Coast at the American Museum of Natural History', which was a forerunner of his classic *The Way of the Masks* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1975).
44. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon* (London: Dent, 1930). For an excellent commentary on *Laocoon*, see David E. Wellbery, *Lessing's Laocoon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Goethe's 'Observations on the Laocoon', which reflect his critical reading of Lessing, are available in English in Gert Schiff (ed.), *German Essays on Art History* (New York: Continuum, 1988).
45. Nicolas Calas, '*View* Listens', *View*, no. 2 (October 1940); Clement Greenberg, 'The Renaissance of the Little Mag', *Partisan Review*, January–February 1941; Parker Tyler, 'Letter', *Partisan Review*, May–June 1941.
46. Cited by Catrina Neiman in her Introduction to Charles Henri Ford (ed.), *View: parade of the avant-garde* (New York: Thinder's Mouth Press, 1991). This is a compilation of articles and illustrations from *View*, 1940–47, with a full contents index.
47. Clement Greenberg, 'Surrealist Painting', *The Nation*, 12 and 19 August 1944, reprinted in *Horizon*, January 1945.
48. Greenberg reviewed Pollock's first Art of This Century show in *The Nation*, 13 November 1943, the salon show at the same gallery in the issue of 27 May 1944, and Baziotes's and Motherwell's shows in a joint review, 11 November 1944.
49. For Matta, see Nancy Miller, *Matta, the First Decade* (Waltham: Brandeis University, 1982) and for Breton's suggestions, André Breton, 'Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto or Not' (1942), reprinted in André Breton, *Manifestos of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969).
50. Clement Greenberg, letter to Baziotes.
51. Clement Greenberg, 'Review of the Exhibition *150 Years of American Primitives*', *The Nation*, 11 April 1942. On Pickett, see 'Primitive Painting', 10 October 1942; on Friedman, first reviewed 15 April 1944, see 'An Obituary of Arnold Friedman', 1 February 1947; on Eilshemius, see the exhibition review of 18 December 1943. Pickett is mentioned in three reviews by Greenberg, Friedman in eight, Eilshemius in five. By way of comparison, the abstract expressionists Newman and Still were mentioned in one, Reinhardt in two, Rothko and De Kooning in three, Baziotes in four, Gottlieb in nine, Motherwell in ten, Gorky in twelve, Pollock in many more. Incidentally, Louise Nevelson was a friend and major collector of Eilshemius.
52. Clement Greenberg, 'Henri Rousseau and Modern Art', *The Nation*, 27 July 1946.
53. Clement Greenberg, 'Jean Dubuffet and *Art Brut*', *Partisan Review*, March 1949.
54. 'Jackson Pollock: is he the greatest living painter in the United States?', *Life*, 8 August 1949.
55. Clement Greenberg, in his review of Pollock's second Art of This Century show, *The Nation*, 21 April 1945. In his review of Pollock's third show, Greenberg continued in the same vein, noting that 'in the course of time this ugliness will become a new standard of beauty' (*The Nation*, 13 April 1946). Then, in a review of Arshile Gorky's work on 4 May, he compared Gorky adversely with Pollock, adding that if Gorky acquired 'integral arrogance' then he might possibly 'begin to paint pictures so original that they will look ugly at first'.

56. Review of Pollock's first show, *The Nation*, 13 November 1943. Actually, Benton and surrealism were what Greenberg meant by 'and whatnot'.
57. Naifeh and White Smith.
58. Cited in B.H. Friedman, *Jackson Pollock*.
59. Clement Greenberg, 'The Situation at the Moment', *Partisan Review*, January 1948.
60. Clement Greenberg, 'Obituary of Mondrian', *The Nation*, 4 March 1944.
61. For Greenberg's political positions see the *Collected Essays and Criticism*, and Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1987). This is an outstanding work, a thorough and politically informed account of the steady rightward drift of revolutionary Marxist intellectuals such as Greenberg. Terry A. Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1986) is also particularly valuable.
62. For these events, see Wald; Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: abstract expressionism, freedom and the Cold War*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Jacoby; and from the copious literature on McCarthyism, Victor Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York: Viking, 1980).
63. John Cogley, in *Report on Blacklisting*, vol. 1, *Movies*, notes that Kelly was 'so harassed that he went off to Europe' at the end of 1951. While he was away both *An American in Paris* and *Singin' in the Rain* were listed in the *American Legion Magazine* as films made by communists or 'collaborators'. Kelly returned to Hollywood in July 1953 when a deal was cut with Roy Brewer, head of the film technicians union IATSE, a notorious broker of clearances. Kelly's wife, Betsy Blair, did not get off the black-list till she was cast in *Marty* in 1955. See also Peter Wollen, *Singin' in the Rain* (London: BFI, 1992).
64. As early as 1939 Greenberg had noted that: 'Kitsch is deceptive: it has many different levels, and some of them are high enough to be dangerous to the naive seeker of true light.'
65. See Theodor Adorno, 'Perennial Fashion-Jazz', in *Prisms* (London: Neville Spearman, 1967).
66. William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935).
67. See Guilbaut. Rothko favoured ancient Greek myth, particularly the tragic saga of the Oresteia, while Gottlieb and Newman were enthusiasts for pre-Columbian and Native American art. Rothko's approach to mythology involved, in his own words, 'a pantheism in which man, bird, beast and tree – the known as well as the knowable – merge into a single tragic idea'. Polcari, in *Arts*, no. 54, September 1979, suggests persuasively that Rothko's famous horizontal bands of colour derive from the coloured bands in the charts of geological strata, illustrating the fossil record and the development of human culture, which he presumably saw at the Museum of Natural History. Gottlieb, throughout the forties, painted a series of 'pictographs': 'I disinterred some relics from the secret crypt of Melpomene [the Muse of tragedy] to unite them through the pictograph, which has its own internal logic.'
68. Barnett Newman, *Northwest Coast Indian Painting* (New York: Betty Parsons Gallery, 1946).
69. Barbara Cavaliere and Robert C. Hobbs, 'Against A Newer Laocoon', *Arts Magazine*, no. 51, April 1977.
70. Naifeh and White Smith.
71. Clement Greenberg, 'Ideal Climate for Art', *New York Times Book Review*, 4 May 1947.
72. For the 'whirlwind dance' see Fernand Léger, 'Popular Dancing', in *Léger and Purist Paris* (London: Tate Gallery, 1970).
73. On Léger's politics see Sarah Wilson, 'Fernand Léger, Art and Politics 1935–1955', in Nicholas Serota (ed.), *Fernand Léger* (London: Prestel-Verlag, 1987) and for Le Corbusier's politics, see Robert Fishman, 'From the Radiant City to Vichy: Le Corbusier's plans and politics, 1928–1942', in Russell Walden (ed.), *The Open Hand, Essays on Le Corbusier* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1977).
74. See, for instance, 'Art and the People', in Fernand Léger, *Functions of Painting* (New York: Viking, 1973), where he talks about slang, Rousseau, children's drawings, choosing a necktie, and jazz, as well as noting that 'more leisure time must be created for the workers. Contemporary society is very harsh, and the workers do not have the indispensable freedom to see, to reflect, to choose.'

75. Gilbert Seldes, *The 7 Lively Arts* (New York: Harper, 1924).
76. Clive Bell, *Since Cézanne* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1922).
77. Stuart Davis, 'Memo on Mondrian', in Diane Kelder (ed.), *Stuart Davis* (New York: Praeger, 1971).
78. Wanda Corn, *In American Grain* (Poughkeepsie: Vassar College, 1991).
79. Unsigned, 'Even in Grinnich There's Nothing as Odd as Emblazoned Walls of "Nut Shop" Here', *Newark Evening News*, 16 May 1921, cited in Lowery Stoke Sims, *Stuart Davis: American painter* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991).
80. See Lewis Kachur, 'Stuart Davis's Word-pictures', in Sims.
81. Quotations from Stuart Davis, 'Autobiography', 1945, and 'The Cube Root', *Art News*, vol. XLI, no. 1, February 1943, cited in Kelder.
82. See Leroy Ostransky, *Jazz City: the impact of our cities on the development of jazz* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1978) for a brave attempt to trace the complex development of jazz in its institutional context.
83. The jazz at Davis's one man-show, held at the Downtown Gallery in 1943, was organized by John Hammond and William Steig, the *New Yorker* cartoonist. Among those who played were W.C. Handy, Red Norvo, George Wettling, Duke Ellington and Pete Johnson. Hammond was a close friend of Joseph Losey, who took a collection of jazz records assembled by Hammond to the Soviet Union in 1935.
84. See Charles Miers (ed.), *Harlem Renaissance Art of Black America* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987).
85. See Arnold Rampersand, *The Life of Langston Hughes*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).
86. See Aaron Douglas, 'The Negro in American Culture', Douglas's address to the First American Artists' Congress, 1936, reprinted in Matthew Baigell and Julia Williams (eds.), *Artists Against War and Fascism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1986). Marshall Stearns, in his classic *The Story of Jazz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3rd edn, 1958) points out that New Orleans, the cradle of jazz, was distinctively Catholic and Caribbean in its history and culture, in contrast to the Protestant regime of the slavery South in general.
87. Cited in Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987).
88. Theodor Adorno, 'On Jazz', in *Discourse*, vol. 12, no. 1 (fall–winter 1989–90). It is important to remember that Adorno's text was written and published in Europe in 1936, which gave him a very restricted and distorted view of his subject. The great French critic Hugues Panassié was limited in the same way when he published *Le Jazz Hot* in Paris in 1934. Panassié, however, had the grace to apologize in 1942, in his *The Real Jazz*, where he noted, 'I had the bad luck, in a sense, to become acquainted with jazz first through white musicians. . . . I did not realize until some years after the publication of my first book that, from the point of view of jazz, most white musicians were inferior to most black musicians.' Adorno never retracted his condescending view of black musicians.
89. V. Šklovskij, *La Mossa del Cavallo* (Bari: De Donato, 1967), translated from Sklovskij, *Chod Konja* (Berlin: Helicon, 1923).
90. B.H. Friedman, *Jackson Pollock*.
91. The best source on Thelonious Monk is a film rather than a book: *Thelonious Monk: Straight No Chaser*, dir. Charlotte Zwerin, prod. Clint Eastwood, for Monk Film Project/Malpaso Productions, 1988.
92. Pollock's old friend Philip Guston went through a period of painting truly dreadful 'abstract expressionist' canvases. it was not until the 1960s that he recovered to paint his amazing late paintings, which drew on comic strip imagery and his own earlier work.